Studying Voluntary Associations as Adaptive Mechanisms: A Review of Anthropological Perspectives

by James Nwannukwu Kerri

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1940s, anthropologists have given serious consideration to the many aspects of the incidence of voluntary associations. This paper is an attempt to review these studies, indicating strengths and weaknesses as well as concerns and their resolutions. The purpose is to show how voluntary or common-interest associations have been studied as adaptive mechanisms in situations of social, cultural, ecological, and technological change, especially in change involving rapid urban growth and large-scale migrations of rural populations to towns and cities. A review of this nature is needed because of the theoretical relevance of voluntary or common-interest associations for the formation of social groups and the paramount role they play, because of their flexibility, under conditions of change. With increasing modernization, industrialization, and urbanization and the concomitant large-scale rural-urban migrations, social scientists have found that kinship and territory are no longer effective means for the organization of new social groups or the reorganization of existing ones. Common interests of all sorts—from occupational and professional to recreational and spiritual—have emerged as the bases for the organization and re-

1 I wish to express appreciation to Simon Ottenberg, Robert Anderson, Edward Norbeck, Kenneth Little, and Michael Banton for responding to my requests for information. Anthony Layng worked very diligently as my assistant in putting together some of the materials used in this paper. Needless to say, I am alone responsible for its final shortcomings. In preparing this review I have borrowed heavily from a manuscript I have prepared for the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars and from the introductory chapter I have written for a book of readings on voluntary associations.

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2 Since this paper was especially prepared for publication as a bibliographic review article, I found it necessary to impose certain restrictions on its coverage. The review is limited to (a) anthropological perspectives, (b) studies of voluntary associations in situations of change or modernization, and (c) studies that have viewed voluntary associations as an adaptive mechanism.

In addition to the above limitations, I have chosen to organize the review in terms of geographic areas rather than content. This style, although objectionable to some readers, has been found most useful in terms of cross-cultural comparison, an objective that underlies the production of this paper. Arranging the paper into geographic divisions also has ample precedent, not only in anthropology, but also in most of the other social sciences.

Another very important restriction is that the paper is intended to be selective rather than exhaustive. It is likely, therefore, that some readers will find left out some materials they consider important. I would argue that the importance of a reference is calculated on the basis of its relevance to the topic of discussion and, more important, the perspective of the person using it; this perspective is ideally based on objective standards, but is not completely free of subjective bias. I have, therefore, left out some materials simply because I do not consider them significant relative to those included. I have also excluded some materials that are peripherally related to the topic of this paper and its limitations as discussed above.

Because of the subject-matter orientation of this review, early anthropological studies of the incidence of voluntary associations in preliterate societies are not covered, except in instances where they receive treatment as adaptive strategies in modernizing situations.

This review is limited, as indicated above, to anthropological perspectives; those interested in sociological studies can obtain useful references from my bibliography (Kerri 1974a).

Very general treatments of associations, such as those contained in several introductory anthropology texts or journal articles, are not included because they are too broad and too generalized to contribute to the specialized coverage intended here.

In spite of all these delimitations, there may be some materials that ought to have been included, but were not, either because of oversight or because of the remoteness or obscurity of the media in which they appear.
organization of social groups to meet the demands of our fast-changing world.

Why are voluntary associations more pliable than kinship and territorial units of social organization? Why have they become increasingly attractive (assuming, of course, that we have valid measures to demonstrate this)? To answer the first question, we have to consider the structural features of voluntary associations. Based on voluntary participation and commonality of the interests of members, voluntary associations generally lack the rigidity that may characterize kinship or territorial organizations.

People are born or (less often) adopted into kin groups. Even in instances of adoption, the individual is treated as a fictive biologically recruited member. There is, therefore, little or no choice or volition in kinship group membership. Although it can be renounced, such renunciation is often attended with sanctions; where it is allowed, the recognized procedures for legally, and perhaps peacefully, achieving it are complex and difficult. Kinship group members need not have common interests, except, of course, where ownership of land, duties and obligations, social exchange and reciprocity, etc., are prescribed and recognized as well as defined on the basis of kinship. Because of these features, new types of kinship-based groups are not easily formed, and existing types are not as easily manipulated and adapted to deal with new domains of experience. This is where voluntary associations, usually formed by people interested in problems of mutual concern and on their own volition, have become more useful, in adaptive terms, than kinship groups. (This argument should not and need not be construed to imply that voluntary associations perform more significant adaptive functions than kinship-based groups.)

Similarly, territorial units, because of their political organization, have much more definite, but again much more rigid, features than voluntary associations. We all know how difficult it is in modern state systems to effect changes through our governments, whether at the local, state or provincial, or national level. Those of us who share the privilege of dual membership in tribal and modern state systems can also attest to the fact that change is no more easily attained in traditional societies.

It is for these reasons that I maintain that voluntary associations are more pliable than kinship or territorial units in situations of social, cultural, and technological change, and it is partly because of this pliability that they have become increasingly attractive. Their attractiveness is also based in part on the emergence of interests that crosscut existing group boundaries.

An ever-present problem for the social scientist is finding a definition of "voluntary association" that will include the diverse ways in which research workers have viewed it. I have myself elsewhere (Kerri 1972:44) adopted a definition of voluntary association as "any private group voluntarily and more or less formally organized, joined and maintained by members pursuing a common interest, usually by means of part-time, unpaid activities." Anderson (1964:175-76) has also addressed himself to this problem:

In dealing with voluntary associations the social scientist finds himself confronted with ambiguities of definition. Some investigators do not include churches and unions while others do (Bacheluk and Thompson 1962:648). Some consider voluntary associations to be only those groups with completely voluntary membership participation and absolute independence of formal governmental contract (Rose 1954:52; 70; Axelrod 1957:723). Others note that volition is a relative concept which cannot distinguish associations from other institutions in any consistent way (Piddington 1950:206; Norbeck 1962:76). Norbeck attempts to avoid these definitional obstructions by taking "common interest associations" as his subject (Norbeck 1967).

In agreement with Anderson, I think that Norbeck's is the best working definition to date. However, because most anthropologists have emphasized the voluntary aspect of associations, voluntary association is viewed for the purposes of this review as a type of common-interest association.

The adoption of the common-interest approach eliminates the ambiguities surrounding volition as a criterion for designating certain groups as voluntary associations. It implies, therefore, that groups categorized as voluntary associations represent a special type of common-interest group that satisfies two conditions: (1) it is based on common interests; and (2) membership is entirely voluntary in nature. This review therefore covers both voluntary and other types of common-interest associations. We need, however, to qualify the sense in which "common interest" is being used.

When a group is designated as a common-interest association, two basic distinctions are implied. One is that the group is not formed primarily on the basis of consanguineal or affinal ties. A second is that the group is not formed primarily because of territorial or political-geographical considerations. Let me immediately add, however, that although common-interest groups are not synonymous or coterminal with descent or territorial groups, this does not mean that the interest held in common cannot be derived from descent or territorial considerations. For example, a few years ago I observed the formation of a short-lived common-interest group in a middle-class neighborhood in Winnipeg (Canada). The group was formed to oppose a new bus route through the neighborhood. It was not the fact of common territory (neighborhood) that led to the formation of the group, as some persons in the neighborhood did not participate or join; rather, it was the common interest in opposing the establishing of the bus route (although this interest arose partly as a result of their being residents of the affected area).

It is therefore very important, in discussing common-interest associations, to make a distinction between the aspects of human experience from which an interest is derived and the interest itself. The confusion of the interest and its source has often led to difficulty in distinguishing common-interest groups from others. The discussion of ethnic associations in the literature illustrates this ambiguity and confusion. Although we may find that in an urban area the members of an association belong to the same ethnic group, this does not automatically mean that the bond of ethnicity is what brought them together. It is their interest in survival in the midst of the complexities and strangeness of the urban area, and not their ethnicity per se, that accounts for the formation of the association. When a group is formed solely for the purpose of promoting ethnic considerations (i.e., the diacritics that account for the formation, persistence, and distinctiveness of the group), it is appropriately an ethnic association. When the group is formed for some other reason, although it may draw its membership from the same ethnic group, it is not an ethnic group or an ethnic association, but a common-interest association.

The distinction between voluntary associations and common-interest associations should not be treated lightly. Common-interest associations cover a very wide field and may sometimes include nonvoluntary organizations. For example, we make students pay their student-union and activity fees whether they intend to participate in extracurricular activities or not. Some students never (and, in fact, only a few, from my limited experience, ever) use the facilities provided with such funds, yet they are members of a supposedly free association.

In essence, sometimes we may find that membership in an organization is not voluntary, although participation may be voluntary, with or without any clearly defined and enforced sanctions for nonparticipation. Even in some of the erroneously classified "ethnic" or "tribal" associations of West African cities, membership is compulsory while participation is voluntary, though sometimes nonparticipation (such as absenteeism
cupy mostly marginal environments, having been pushed out of more fertile regions by both agricultural and industrial communities.) There is also no reason to assume that the emergence of preindustrial states would lead to a decline in the incidence of common-interest associations. One would expect that as man experimented with the organization of the state he was, perhaps for the first time, giving serious thought to formation of groups on the basis of common interest; for was it not for economic survival and for security and protection, in addition to other interests, that men first grouped together in satellike organizations? We simply do not have concrete evidence for or against any type of evolutionary development of common-interest or voluntary associations.

Anderson and Anderson (1962a) had earlier introduced a new concept, that of the "replicate social structure," for the study of the role of voluntary associations in social change. The idea was that associations become "organized bodies that reinforce and supplant the historical institutions" of the community, at least in part, with the result that the traditional social structure persists but is overlain by a duplicate associational structure, the replicate social structure. Replication, the Andersons contended, has two secondary structural advantages: (1) the multiplication effect, by which the union of smaller groups increases the efficacy of small-group action, and (2) the reduction effect, by which an association, drawing its membership from indigenous community-wide groups, separates those individuals who are highly motivated for a particular goal from those essentially disinterested. The replicate-social-structure model, in the view of the authors, has its limits, as it may be less useful in the proto-urban stage, when only a few associations are found.

The replicate model is a significant addition to the existing models used in the study of the structural characteristics and growth of associations. It is surprising that not many researchers have applied it. When used with Rose's (1954) expressive social-influence model and Chapple and Coon's (1942) tangency model, it should yield substantial research dividends. It makes sense to identify the ways in which common-interest associations are integrated into or coexist with traditional social structure. It should be noted, however, that the result of the formation of a common-interest association need not always be a replicate social structure. Instead, the traditional social structure, or segments of it, may be totally replaced by a new structure. The replicate social structure is bound to be very effective in a transitional period, during which a modernizing population is experimenting with new strategies for accomplishing new or old objectives.

Banton (1968), in an overview of anthropological aspects of voluntary associations, argues that an evolutionary approach is very valuable for constructing a testable theory of voluntary associations. He asserts that "voluntary associations become more common and significant as societies advance in technology, complexity, and scale" and that these changes are accompanied by changes in the functions these associations perform. In primitive societies associations stress recreation and identification of rank, whereas in more complex societies the emphasis is on adaptive and integrative functions. Banton's speculations are insightful, although most of his illustrative examples are drawn from West Africa. It should be pointed out, however, that there is no such direct link between complexity and scale of economic activities and the incidence of voluntary

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THEORETICAL AND CLASSIFICATORY CONSIDERATIONS

In a well-documented article, Anderson (1971) discusses the historical evolution of voluntary associations. He sees voluntary associations as having been virtually nonexistent in the Paleolithic and Mesolithic periods because man then lived in bands formed on the basis of kinship or territory rather than common interest. The emergence of horticultural villages during the Neolithic gave rise to common-interest associations. With the development of preindustrial states, common-interest associations were replaced by the organization of the state. Then, with modern urban-industrial growth, associations again proliferated at all levels of society, assuming a rational-legal character, supplementing and complementing the bureaucratic organization, and aiding their members to cope with change.

The strength of Anderson's discussion lies in the perspective it introduces and in its quality as a summary of a vast topic. Many of his arguments and evidence remain conjectural, since concrete substantiating evidence seems to be unavailable. Even at the level of conjecture, however, there remain a number of important questions. There is no clear reason to assume that the needs of hunting-and-gathering man were totally taken care of within groups formed on the basis of kinship and/or territory. At the same time, there is no evidence that common-interest groups were formed by our hunting-and-gathering ancestors. (Although today's or contemporary hunting-and-gathering societies do not provide us with the evidence we need, one should be cautious in using them as examples of what historic and prehistoric bands looked like. Contemporary bands oc-

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1 I must admit my biased familiarity with the African area because it is both my geographic area specialization and, of course, my place of birth. The reader will therefore probably note that less weight is given to the other geographic areas. It is my intention to accord "equal opportunity" to all areas, and I hope that the objective has been reasonably well attained.

2 According to Rose, "expressive groups" are those which act to satisfy or express members' interests relative to themselves, while "social influence groups" are formed to achieve some condition or change in society beyond the membership. Chapple and Coon see voluntary associations as always being formed at the point of tangency of several institutions or subsystems within an institution.
associations as Banton asserts. Increase in economic activities leads to an increase in the number of interests manifested by the members of the population. It is this increase in interests and the inability of existing structural arrangements, social or ideational (cultural), to cater to them that leads to the formation of special-interest groups.

On the whole, very few theoretical and generalized considerations of common-interest groups have appeared in the anthropological literature. Some of those that exist have been tied to the discussion of the incidence of voluntary associations in a specific geographic area (see, for example, Little 1965). This makes it difficult to find theoretical or methodological models and typologies that can be utilized in cross-cultural studies and in the development of empirical and lawlike generalizations about the nature, causes, functions, consequences, and range of structural variations of common-interest associations or of voluntary associations. Geertz’s (1962) generalized account of rotating-credit associations, discussed in detail below, represents a fairly legitimate attempt to provide an explanation that is not limited to a specific geographic area. We need such generalized coverage and identification of the structural variations of common-interest or voluntary associations in different populations in different environments and at different levels of techno-environmental efficiency and sociocultural integration if our understanding of this domain of human experience is to advance beyond the level of mere speculation.

AFRICA

Kenneth Little’s pioneering work on voluntary associations in West Africa has been a dominant influence in the anthropological study of associations for over two decades. In one of his earliest writings, Little (1949) examines the role of secret societies in cultural specialization. He discusses how secret societies among the Mende of Sierra Leone and Liberia affect sanctions on behavior in nearly every sphere of the common life and extend their influence to the contemporary scene. These secret societies lay down various rules of conduct, proscribe certain forms of behavior, and act as the sole agency capable of remitting certain sins. These controls and regulations, however, are departmentalized in various societies, with particular fields of the cultural life and their regulation falling within the exclusive province of specific societies. Little summarizes the combined effects of these secret societies in four main categories of secular life: (1) general education (social and vocational training and indoctrination of social attitudes); (2) regulation of sexual conduct; (3) supervision of political and economic affairs; and (4) operation of various social services, ranging from medical treatment to entertainment and recreation. He concludes by pointing out that these secret societies have survived as the main repository of the traditional ways of life in Sierra Leone in spite of opposition from the government and the Christian missions, although their prestige has been weakened.

Here and elsewhere, Little uses illustrative examples as evidence for his statements and generalizations. This approach has the weakness that for every example that supports one viewpoint there is always a chance of finding a counter-example. This problem has been confronted by social scientists via the rejection of alternative plausible hypotheses—something Little fails to do, although his analyses are insightful and informative at the descriptive level.

In discussing the organization of voluntary association in West Africa, Little (1959) points out that as the tribal institutions imported by the migrants to the city disintegrate, “there arise new organizations, born out of the spontaneous desire of groups of migrants to cater for some common economic, religious or other need” (p. 284). These new associations provide their members with mutual aid and protection as well as companionship and assist them in the adaptation to urban life by imbuing them with new standards in dress and personal hygiene and by teaching them habits of thrift and how to use their money to the best advantage. They also offer, especially to the younger migrants, opportunities for prestige and leadership denied to them in the tribal system. Further, they provide a means whereby personal difficulties and quarrels can be handled without the trouble and expense of modern litigation, as well as setting a pattern of cooperation across ethnic and tribal lines which has implications for the wider integration of the African community. Little distinguishes three types of associations: traditional, Christian, and new.

This article overlaps and in some respects contradicts a later article (1962a) in which Little examines the urban role of tribal association in West Africa. He makes three important assertions: (1) that in the new West African towns and cities, instead of weakening tribal consciousness, life in the new urban environment tends to make it stronger and that, except for a handful of college- and high-school-educated migrants, town dwellers retain most of their traditional practices and much of their traditional organization; (2) that the family is an important exception, retaining much of its traditional meaning, but losing its functional significance as a source of mutual assistance and moral support; and (3) that this does not create a social vacuum, because kinship is not the only basis for cooperation in traditional culture; nonkinship associations, such as age-sets, secret societies, and so on, are replicated in the urban area to serve extended functions.

The strength of these two articles lies principally in the way they attempt to explain the persistence of traditional institutions in new urban centers. Little’s arguments bear a striking similarity to Anderson and Anderson’s (1962a) replicate social structure. His description, however, gives perhaps an unintended impression that traditional institutions in urban areas retain their original forms. This is not the case, and is an issue Little deals with later (1965). Also, it would seem that he should have concerned himself with why other types of adaptive mechanisms were not adopted, a topic he discusses in a subsequent paper (1967). Further, in the first article we are given the impression that urbanization destroys or at least renders less effective the adaptive quality of tribal institutions, while in the second the view expressed is that tribal institutions not only persist, but increase in strength. In both cases the author claims that voluntary associations perform useful functions, either in helping to substitute for the disintegrating tribal institutions or in strengthening them in the face of neglect by a handful of educated migrants. It is true that Little makes an exception of the family, whose traditional mutual-assistance and moral-support functions he assigns to voluntary associations. The major problem with such a functional analysis is that it rests on illustrative materials that were not collected in such a way as to make the conclusions valid and reliable. One finds, therefore, that in spite of the richness and clarity of the information that Little provides, his analyses of the relationships between urban situations and traditional institutions, on the one hand, and urban situations and voluntary associations, on the other hand, remain weak. Another shortcoming of Little’s articles is that they overlap a great deal and often repeat the conclusions reached separately in one or more instances, making it difficult to see the significant contributions of each. One is left with the impression that once one has read the first few, one has read all the rest.

The most cited of all of Little’s publications is his classic discussion of the role of voluntary associations in West African urbanization (Little 1964). Here again, he attempts to demonstrate the role of voluntary associations in the adjustment of African migrants to West African towns and cities. He distinguishes four non-mutually-exclusive types of voluntary as-
Little (1967) adds a new dimension to his perspectives on voluntary associations when he discusses the role of voluntary associations in urban life in terms of differential adaptations. Here he addresses himself to the question of why, in a rapidly changing situation, voluntary associations appear among some groups and not among others. He is of the view that this differential response depends upon the presence or absence of particular structural factors. He examines the incidence of voluntary associations among Mende and Temne migrants to Freetown, Sierra Leone, and concludes (pp. 164–65):

What . . . the present analysis does confirm is that the adaptation of tribally reared people to urban conditions is not a simple process of acculturation. It varies for each social situation, and this, in turn, is the product of factors deriving from the traditional structure as well as the urban industrial system. Basically, it is the interplay of these factors that determines the manner in which adaptation is made.

The strength of this contribution derives from the fact that it introduces an inductively derived and important hypothesis about the differential incidence of voluntary associations in situations of rapid social change. It is now left to future researchers to formulate this hypothesis more concretely, operationalize its various aspects, and then subject it to empirical test. Although Little's arguments seem convincing, we have no way of claiming with confidence that the factors he postulates are the actual causes of the differential occurrence of voluntary associations in this case or of knowing whether these differences might not equally be explained by other factors as yet unthought of.

Little (1972) examines the role of voluntary associations in the social mobility of West African women. He argues that in contemporary West African urban areas, political position, occupation, income, and education are criteria for socioeconomic status. Previously, most women had to be content with a traditionally prescribed position, but in the contemporary situation many women seek achieved forms of status as well. Women attain social mobility through (a) identification with their husbands’ positions; (b) membership in voluntary associations; (c) trade and commerce; and (d) prestige which accrues to them from their educated sons or from marriage to educated men. Voluntary associations, Little claims, help in the social mobility of women through providing mutual-benefit schemes, counteracting feelings of loneliness and insecurity, and providing the capital, contacts, and necessary information for trading. This discussion is interesting, though it fails to recognize the role of the traditional position of women in the contemporary scene; traditionally, women had positions of prestige, and these were no doubt influential in what happened in the urban contexts.6

Banton, another pioneer in this field, examines in one of his earliest works (1956) the adaptation and integration of Temne immigrants in Freetown, Sierra Leone. He argues that, other things being equal, the more devolution of authority there is in the tribal society, the more rapidly do contractual associations emerge in the urban area.

Later, Banton (1957) attempts to show that because of the increasing discontent with the administration of traditional headmen in the cities, the Temne formed young men’s “companies” which have become the most active common-interest associations in Freetown. These voluntary associations serve a number of functions ranging from mutual aid to recreation and entertainment. Banton argues that since the traditional system

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6 I have given an unusually extended discussion of Little’s publications because of the central role he has played in popularizing anthropological studies of voluntary associations and because of the recognition he has been accorded by others.
of ascribed status has become inappropriate in the urban setting, these voluntary associations aid the transition that the migrant must make if he is to adapt to an achievement-oriented society. A correlation between devolution of authority and the development of a tendency to form contractual associations seems plausible at first. Caution should, however, be exercised in drawing such a conclusion; the possible influence of a third factor has to be ruled out, not by argument, but by a well-designed test using reliable and valid measures. For much the same reason, one should not jump to the conclusion that the formation of young men’s “companies” was the result of their discontent with the administration of traditional headmen in the cities. One could argue that the young men, because of their greater urban exposure and greater educational attainments and aspirations, had become more aware of alternative strategies for dealing with urban problems than the more conservative headmen, and that this awareness was the proximate cause of the formation of common-interest associations.

Beidelman (1970) discusses two triballistic movements in a Tanganyikan chiefdom, viewing them not as reactions against change but as organizations formed to meet the difficulties of modern conditions. Both organizations advocate tribal unity while seeking change through approved channels. Beidelman suggests that they are “intermediate and perhaps even necessary stages toward larger nontribal organizations,” a training ground for political manipulations. He does not, however, provide sufficient evidence to support this contention.

Clement (1956), discussing the diversity of voluntary associations in Kisangani, distinguishes two types of voluntary associations: (a) those which attract mainly “traditional” Africans and stress sociability, mutual aid, and recreation, and (b) those which attract “advanced” (educated) Africans and stress intellectual concerns, moral and professional standards, and mutual aid. Clement notes that although the primary motivation for joining these voluntary associations is to obtain assistance in adaptation to the urban environment, some join because of the prestige that accrues from membership in such organizations. He does not, however, provide us with anything but examples to validate these contentions.

It is nevertheless important to note the similarity of the conclusions reached independently by Beidelman and Clement. Like Little and Banton before them, both see voluntary associations as constituting a strategy that urban Africans utilize to deal with the changing situations to which they are exposed. Both refer, directly or indirectly, as do Banton and Little, to the prestige that the Africans see accruing to them from their membership and participation in voluntary associations. Such an interpretation raises the “emic-etic” controversy. Are the authors claiming that urban Africans see prestige as a result of voluntary-association affiliation? Or are they noting latent consequences of action of which the actors are not necessarily aware? The data provided by these authors are not explicit enough to make this distinction.

When Combhaire (1955) discusses the role of secret societies and prophetic movements in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire), he falls into the same mistakes made by those before him. Indigenious associations like the secret societies, according to Combhaire, existed in the Congo before the prophetic movements that emerged under the influence of Christianity. With the advent of colonialism and the aftermath of World War II, tribal associations declined and prophetic movements became increasingly centralized. Combhaire offers a very brief ethnographic account of the secret societies and their replacement by prophetic movements. He omits details that would have aided the understanding of this transition, and he fails to show what evidence there is that prophetic movements emerged as a result of the influence of Christianity. A conclusion such as this could be mistakenly branded ethnocentric, not because it is, but because of the lack of supportive evidence. It could be argued that Combhaire, a Westerner and a Christian, can only see the response of urban Africans in terms of features of his own culture. This is an unfair accusation, but one that could easily be made because of the faulty logic and lack of clarity in his writing.

Hamer’s (1967) discussion of voluntary associations as structures of change among the Sidamo of southwestern Ethiopia is a marked improvement in the level of interpretation of voluntary-association functions. Hamer introduces his discussion this way (p. 290): “I wish to show how developing associations among the Sidamo of southwestern Ethiopia are providing the structures for adaptation to a cash crop economy and a centralized Ethiopian state system.” To explain the involvement of voluntary associations in the process of adaptation, he considers the economic and other social reasons for the emergence of these associations as well as their structure and function. He maintains that the introduction of coffee as a cash crop and the demands of coffee harvesting (which requires a work group larger than the extended family, but smaller than other traditional work groups), and an awareness of the existence of formal associations in other parts of Ethiopia provided the basis for the emergence of Sidamo work associations. According to Hamer, mission churches also “played a part in encouraging work associations, since the exclusion of Sidamos who joined the missions from the traditional work groups prompted these converts to form their own work groups.”

Hamer further maintains that once these associations were established, their members became aware of further complexities in a cash economy and sought through cooperative effort to tackle these problems. The result was that these associations assumed intended and unintended economic, political, educational, and motivational functions and shifted from an emphasis on self-interest to one on social influence. Hamer hypothesizes “that there are two prerequisites for the utilization of voluntary associations as means for bringing about socio-economic change: historic tradition for group cooperation and a national policy that sanctions the growth of voluntary associations into more inclusive structures.” The first of these structures Hamer found in operation amongst the Sidamos.

Hamer’s contribution is significant in several respects. It addresses itself specifically to problems of economic change and the effects of such change on other social spheres. It deals with a geographic region in which very little information on voluntary associations exists. The arguments and the logical development are excellent. The analysis remains primarily descriptive, however, and the evidence we are given in support of his explanations is mainly illustrative.

In a monograph on voluntary associations in Bamako, Meillassoux (1968) discusses village traditional associations, which organized cooperative work groups and entertainment, and other associations which emerged during colonialism. The latter were suppressed by the government after independence because they tended to perpetuate regionalism and competed for loyalty with the national political party. The government organized the “pionniers” as a substitute, but some of the preexisting associations persisted. Meillassoux’s striking conclusion that not all voluntary associations are appropriate for adapting to urban life sheds some light on the overemphasis that anthropologists have placed on the eufunctional aspects of voluntary associations.

We also observe new insights in Ottenberg’s (1955) discussion of the operations of improvement associations among the Afikpo Ibo of southern Nigeria. These associations combine the modern and the traditional and are dominated by younger men, often salaried employees of the government. Some of these voluntary associations cut across village boundaries, but most are specific to one village and reflect the tradition of village autonomy. They are all very active in a variety of activities, sponsoring social events, the building of schools, roads, and hospitals, scholarships, funerals, and so on, but all stress village improvement. Ottenberg suggests that perhaps the traditional inter-
village rivalry of the past, which involved warfare, has evolved into a modern form which stresses educational and economic rivalry. His account is very informative, although he does not provide us with adequate data for constructing statements that explain why these associations served these functions and displayed these characteristics.

Parkin (1966), in considering urban voluntary associations as institutions of adaptation, hypothesizes that urban migrants from uncentralized tribes may attempt to reconcile conflicting egalitarian (tribal) and hierarchical (urban) systems by establishing a hierarchy of associations within a traditional framework, while migrants from centralized tribes tend to continue to act within their traditional hierarchy, or at least find little difficulty in integrating this with the urban status system, and so have no need to establish associations. Parkin studies the Ruanda Hutus and Tutsis and finds that the Hutus, coming from an egalitarian tribal system, formed voluntary associations, while their Tutsi overlords, with a hierarchical system, did not. Parkin maintains that the two major factors which explain adaptation and the formation of voluntary associations in urban African settings are (a) commitment, on the part of the migrant, to urban prestige and status systems, and (b) the cultural background of the migrant. Parkin's account serves a very useful function as descriptive data, but it does not demonstrate the relationship it asserts between urban adaptation and the factors which explain it. Parkin is careful, however, not to claim any conclusive validation of his hypothesis as Ruel does (1964) in examining "clan unions" among the Banyang of the West Cameroons. Ruel suggests reasons for the rise and fall of clan unions during the period 1953 to 1958. He maintains that although these associations retain many traditional elements, they are mainly responses to the cultural change brought about by migrants returning from the urban areas. The goals of these associations include uniting the village community to make joint action possible and aiding the economic development of the community.

A lot of work has been done in the study of voluntary associations in Africa, especially in West Africa. These studies are very important for anthropology because they represent pioneer work not only in the area of voluntary association but also in that of urban adaptation. They are additionally significant because they provide very rich data which, though mainly descriptive, have proved very useful as guidelines in approaching and understanding the dynamics of African urban life. The interpretations and analyses are couched in functional terms, and the studies are based on situations of social, cultural, and technological change. Thus, in spite of their weaknesses, these studies represent an awareness of the authors that Africans are a fast-changing population, in both their cultural and social manifestations, and not a static group as is often conveyed by studies that focus on traditional structures.

ASIA

The Asian continent has a lot in common with the African, especially in that the two regions constitute the world's largest concentrations of developing societies and so have been, since World War II, undergoing massive and unprecedented changes in their social, cultural, demographic, and technological patterns. Thus we find that studies of voluntary or common-interest associations in Asia, like those in Africa, have emphasized the adaptive features of these organizations for the populations in which they are found. I will return to this point after consideration of a number of voluntary-association studies selected to highlight some of the major trends in the region.

Anderson's (1964) discussion of voluntary associations in Hyderabad (India) is mainly concerned with the diffusion to Hyderabad of both Western formal organizations and the models of such associations used to structure purely Indian groups. Anderson also recognizes situations in which intrusive institutions syncretize with indigenous ones, though he does not give these detailed consideration. He concludes "that the intrusive form of the formally organized voluntary association tends to maintain its formal structure relatively unchanged, but to syncretize with indigenous institutions in the patterning of informal structure." He finds that one of the consequences of the acculturative process is inadequate leadership and suggests that this could be remedied by training programs and better salaries for professional leaders. The corrupt, unreliable leadership that characterizes these associations Anderson broadly attributes to the ambiguity of leadership roles—formal and informal roles that differ in their appropriateness to the social structure of an industrial city, a preindustrial city, or a peasant village. In summary, Anderson finds (p. 187) a tendency for the Western type of voluntary association to be adopted as the model for the formal structure of groups in Hyderabad. The informal structure tends to perpetuate indigenous customs of social organization. The data suggest that in the crucial matter of leadership, such an acculturative process leads to a specific kind of role ambiguity: the coexistence of traditional and modern bases for interaction.

Further, Anderson states that "social planning places great hope upon the success of various types of voluntary associations. In this, India reflects the plans of developing nations in many parts of the world. These hopes seem to be based upon the success such associations have had in the West" (p. 188). Anderson's analysis and conclusions are thought-provoking, though limited in scope. However, the study on which the paper is based is itself very tentative and too narrow in scope to allow for the kinds of generalizations that the author makes. His evidence is mostly illustrative, no particular hypothesis is stated or tested, nor are any propositions made for further, more intensive study. In spite of these shortcomings, the paper offers a vivid ethnographic description and some tentative analysis of the role of voluntary associations in an acculturative situation.

Kulp (1953) describes six different types of social groups in Phoenix village, South China, that he claims are of an "artificial or intentional character." The membership of such groups is based on "similarity of attitudes with reference to the objectives or values commonly recognized by the members." According to Kulp, such associations are formed "to meet a clearly recognized need, which may be present and temporary or in the nature of a future contingency" and "in practically all of them sociability appears quite definitely during their meetings and assemblies." He claims that "all these associations are really cooperative societies organized to pay the expenses either by cash, by labor or by kind, of carrying on the activities of the members. The economic nexus runs like a red thread through a string of beads, binding practically all the groups into a fundamental unity of function and purpose." Kulp's work is mostly descriptive, though well illustrated. He exercises some caution in generalizing from such a limited base.

Norbeck (1961), in considering postwar cultural change and continuity in small rural communities in northeastern Japan, and as a follow-up on his earlier (Norbeck 1955) discussion of age-grades in Japan, examines the assumption by nonkin associates of many of the functions formally performed by kin and neighbors. In his view, the most important function of these associations is acting as a medium for cooperation, especially in matters related to financial and technological management and education. Norbeck avoids the use of the term "voluntary" in designating some of these associations, because in
his view the pressures from the Japanese national government and communities make membership in some organizations "virtually obligatory." Describing them instead as common-interest associations, Norbeck notes that they "have a plasticity that gives them an advantage in a changing society over kin groups. They can adjust with less difficulty to take care of needs and problems that arise, and they may be created or dissolved when necessary or desirable with no effect on familial or community membership." Norbeck here very effectively, though in a limited manner, demonstrates the role of associations in the economic and other social changes in rural Japan.

By maintaining that membership in some organizations is virtually obligatory, Norbeck highlights some of the issues raised above in the introductory section. It should not be forgotten, however, that obligatory membership, or for that matter any other type of membership, does not necessarily imply obligatory participation; participation can still be voluntary and more or less flexible. A more important question than this is which makes for more effective participation—compulsory or voluntary membership? Compulsory membership is very likely (by its nature) to compel less interested persons to join such organizations, and their participation is bound to be ineffective. Voluntary membership, because of the freedom it allows, operates to weed out the uninterested and retain the interested members. If membership is voluntary, it is very unlikely that uninterested persons will join, unless they do so for purposes of sabotaging the objectives and operations of the associations or spying on the activities of the members. (Such "sabotage"—or "spy"—oriented membership is not unusual, as witnessed recently by the infiltration of the American Indian Movement by an Amerindian who later publicly declared himself as an FBI [U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation] informant.)

In another publication, Norbeck (1962) gives a more thorough and detailed consideration of common-interest associations in rural Japan, of which some are more than 600 years old. He sees modern rural common-interest associations as agents of change and as adaptations to change. They are best understood as contributing to the declining importance of kin-based groups and the growing impersonality of interrelationships and as substitutes for kinship and personal ties in the maintenance of social solidarity. The author examines farmers' cooperatives in some detail. Compared to voluntary associations in other areas of the world, he concludes, Japanese associations are more associated with rural populations, are most prevalent where kinship is still strong, and have less interest in social reform.

In discussing the way associations promote democracy in Japan, Norbeck (1967) argues that since the end of World War II common-interest associations have assumed increased importance in rural Japan and, together with governmental institutions of social welfare, have taken over many of the functions formerly performed by kin or through personalized relations with others. The democratic nature of these associations remains in doubt, however, because the functions performed by the most important associations are precisely those which the government urges on them and implements by nationalization and other types of encouragement. Membership in these associations, although theoretically voluntary, in fact cannot be so described, for truly independent associations with aims of social reform seem at best rare. In essence, "the associations of rural Japan seem to be principally reflectors rather than creators of postwar democratic trends. So long as they remain centrally organized on a national scale and under governmental guidance, democracy in them will continue to battle bureaucratization and authoritarianism" (p. 200).

In both these articles, Norbeck emphasizes the nonvoluntary aspects of membership in common-interest associations while at the same time assigning them an effective role (though hindered by bureaucratization and authoritarianism) as adaptive mechanisms in changing Japan. Unlike other writers (Little, for example), Norbeck sees no major contradiction in the prevalence of kinship and the prominence of common-interest groups or in the occurrence of these organizations in rural as opposed to urban situations. This latter point is important because it helps us to understand that changes in developing areas are not the monopoly of urban centers—that rural residents are as innovative as their urban counterparts in seeking new adaptive strategies in changing circumstances.

Norbeck (1972) later examines what he calls some questions and issues related to the general nature of associations. He argues for (1) the use of the term "common interest associations" as a general name under which "voluntary associations" appear as a subclassification; (2) a view of common-interest associations as egalitarian, malleable, and both indicators and instruments of change; (3) the extension of a view of associations as urban phenomena to include nonurban areas in which cultural changes are also observed; (4) the examination of the possibility of a correlation between types of societies and the presence, absence, and degree of development of associations, and (5) the inclusion of religious groups as common-interest or voluntary associations, depending on the nature of membership of such groupings. Norbeck's work here is significant because it attempts to deal with general issues related to the nature of voluntary associations. There are indeed very few such general considerations available in the literature, as most writers on this topic tend to rely heavily on their own work and that of others in the same region.

Data on the incidence of voluntary associations in Asia remain scant. More work obviously needs to be done in this region before general regional characteristics can be identified. The very few studies cited here are chosen to give some overall impression of the incidence of voluntary and common-interest associations in the Asiatic region. They show that in Asia as in Africa these associations emerged as a result of, and as adaptive strategies for, situations of social, cultural, and technological changes.

WESTERN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

In examining anthropological studies of voluntary and common-interest associations in Western Europe and North America, we face a problem arising from anthropology's traditional focus on studies of non-Western "primitive" societies. Whether we like it or not, the majority of studies of voluntary and common-interest associations in the Western world has been done by sociologists, social workers, historians, and other nonanthropological scientists (see Kerri 1974). In addition, when anthropologists began to express interest in the incidence of voluntary associations in the West, most of the studies focused on immigrant groups or native associations. As a result, the coverage of their work is limited. It is largely for this reason that I have grouped Western Europe and North America under the same subheading, and it is to a consideration of selected studies of voluntary and common-interest associations in these areas that we now turn.4

In reporting their field study of culture change in a Danish village, Anderson and Anderson (1959) attempt to show that

4I am currently working on another paper that focuses on the role of voluntary and common-interest associations in Amerindian and Afro-American civil rights movements in the United States and Canada. Since most of the earlier materials on Amerindian and Afro-American populations were not focused on situations of change, except implicitly, and because most of those dealing with the Afro-American populations were done by nonanthropologists, I have not concentrated on these studies as much as I would want to. In addition, some of the newer materials on these populations are not yet in print or otherwise available.
when the total social structure is used as the frame of reference, voluntary associations show a preeminence in mobilizing social forces which is shared only with political bodies. They maintain that this is so in spite of the findings of recent studies that the role of voluntary associations in urbanization is less prominent than previously thought. From their fairly rich data and with supporting evidence, the Andersons make a few generalized statements about voluntary associations. First, they argue that the voluntary association is extremely pliant: “easily founded, it is free to adjust with amoeba-like fluidity to a flood of problems beyond the scope or ken of other institutions or any combination of them” and “its job done, it can go out of business without consequences beyond projects at hand.” Voluntary associations also, in their view, “meet the exigencies of change by uniting people for action on the basis of any shared interest, whether the resultant union coincides with other groupings or cuts a swath through them.”

The Andersons further hold that voluntary associations may be responsive to special needs that are either normally beyond the concern of governmental agencies, not yet important enough to warrant active governmental intervention, or inadequately controlled by the government or other institutions. This is why the authors state that because voluntary associations “had existed in the village for at least a couple of generations, were established with pride, and successfully maintained and directed social participation,” they “were seized upon as a traditional social device to cope with the extra-institutional problems that arose with the village’s twentieth-century economic and cultural revolution.”

In concluding, the Andersons point out that it does not necessarily follow that voluntary associations have proliferated essentially as a result of the weakening of the family and the face-to-face community and other adverse effects of urban assimilation. The main thrust of this paper derives from its penetrating analysis of the structural variations and functional implications of voluntary associations in situations of change. It would have been useful if the Andersons had compared their data to those in other areas to see whether the same or different conclusions could have been drawn. On its own merits, however, the article adds further credence to the cautious statements made earlier to the effect that voluntary associations should not be seen as always emerging to supplant traditional institutions and organizations and that sometimes voluntary and common-interest associations emerge in close association with traditional ones.

In another instance, Anderson and Anderson (1962b) discuss voluntary associations among Ukrainians in France. In this very stimulating and thought-provoking article, they attempt “to provide a new perspective on the role of voluntary associations in urbanization by taking as the basis of analysis the kinds of bonds which unite individuals into social groups.”

Three kinds of bases of social bonds are distinguished: kinship, locality, and shared interest. The Andersons find that voluntary associations in villages in the Ukraine include a strong basis in residential unity, whereas in urban France associations of Ukrainians draw their members from a larger, undefined territory and cease to be local groups comparable to the original peasant community. In addition, associational interaction in France ceases to incorporate kinship forms of address, which are quite common in the villages.

In examining the three bases for establishing social ties, the Andersons find that shared interest permeates the other two; hence the social bonds might more accurately be described as being kinship-shared interest, residence-shared interest, and shared interest per se. This distinction makes it clearer why voluntary associations are so prevalent in urbanization,” for they can unite urbanites for shared interests which on the peasant scene are inherent in locality or kinship groups. The Andersons write (p. 168):

In short, the ability to unite on the basis of shared interest per se is the key to institutional survival in urbanization. Institutions not ordinarily regarded as voluntary associations in peasant Europe, such as the Church and the age grades, have equal survival value with voluntary associations insofar as they are able to function as simple shared interest groups. Kinship institutions for their vulnerability in urbanization, since probability is slight that wider ties ascribed by a kinship system will continue to reflect shared interests.

In yet another publication, the Andersons (1962c) find that voluntary associations, among other structures and institutions, give an indirect structure to the hierarchy of social strata in European villages. These associations are present in these villages “in part because they are capable of fitting into the rural social structure with a minimum of disorganization” and “even function to reinforce and bolster the existent social system by providing a further indirect means for structuring the indigenous hierarchy of classes” (p. 1023). In addition, these associations “provided new occasions for the meeting of class-segregated groups” (p. 1023) for which they also served as deliberative bodies. It was in these ways that “the social strata utilized voluntary associations to meet the very problems that were introduced concomitants of associations” (p. 1025).

This article makes a very broad and bold attempt to discuss a structural feature of voluntary associations on a regional basis as a mechanism for dealing with both local affairs and the interrelations of villages with urban centers. There is, however, no clear logical and empirical demonstration of how voluntary associations serve in these indirect structures. What we are given are good examples of associations in these villages, but little evidence is provided to show how they arose or how they serve as indirect social structures. In spite of these shortcomings, the paper remains fairly strong in its insights and the new area it explores.

In their monograph on the transformation of a French village, the Andersons (1965) are primarily concerned with the process by which rational and legal institutions, including voluntary associations, emerge in competition with customary institutions like the family and the church. The Andersons consider this to be the major finding of their study (p. 229): “Formal associations can function in a relatively small, partially urbanized community to reinforce and adapt traditional institutions by providing a rational-legal, hierarchical structure for the older groups.” In other words, by changing the social organization by what they call “structural replication,” traditional institutions are preserved by adapting to changing social conditions. This monograph is well documented and presents a very clear picture of the changing structure of French village, though the focus remains primarily descriptive and the conclusions overlap with earlier ones by the same authors.

Drucker (1958), in his monograph on modern intertribal organizations on the Northwest Coast, describes in detail the history, structure, and goals of the Alaskan Native Brotherhood and the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia. Less concerned with analysis than with description, and expressing no interest in the literature of voluntary associations, Drucker provides us with ethnographic descriptions of two associations which he suggests are unique to North America. These associations have centralized leadership and local community chapters. In Drucker’s view, the initial purpose of these associations was to further acculturation and to insure both citizenship and native rights. Although he is admittedly in sympathy with the leaders of these associations, he believes that their failure to realize these goals is, in large part, due to their naïveté. They realized the necessity of education, but neither gave it adequate support nor came to any specific conclusions regarding what kind of education they needed. Also, they
failed to appreciate the incompatibility of insisting on both citizenship rights and native rights. In dwelling on their failures, Drucker does not appear to appreciate fully the role of these associations as adaptive mechanisms. He does not consider in detail how these associations helped to provide corporate identity to their members. He does not consider to what extent they were reactions to discriminatory public and governmental practices. He does not see the relation between ethnic identification and the potential for effective competition for resources. Drucker’s work is at best descriptive, but even at that level the omission of some very basic considerations greatly limits its value.

Kerri (1972) discusses the functions of voluntary associations in a new, rapidly growing, single-enterprise-based community in Canada to test inductively the following hypotheses (p. 43):

... that voluntary associations play a more decisive role in new, rapidly growing, single-enterprise-based communities than in older, more stable, and more economically diversified towns and cities. In the latter sort of more established communities, other types of formal and informal organizations and relationships may tend to reduce the influence and role of voluntary associations. In new and/or rapidly growing communities, informal relationships and friendship groups tend to be less frequent per capita than in more established communities, mainly because most residents are new to the town and hence strangers to each other. Under these circumstances, voluntary associations tend, in part, to be viewed by townspeople as especially important ways of getting to know other people as well as ways of getting things done.

Further, in small towns that are dominated by a single enterprise, there tends to be only a rudimentary independent development of other kinds of business and even governmental organizations. In this kind of situation, voluntary associations tend to take on special importance as potential mechanisms for countervailing the otherwise monolithic power of the dominant enterprise.

From an intensive study of six representative associations in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Kerri enumerates a number of positive functions performed by these associations: (1) they act as political pressure groups, seeking from decision-making bodies legislation and decisions that will promote the interests of their members or the interests they purport to articulate; (2) they act as a means of distributing power by getting many people involved in the making of decisions; (3) they perform “deliberative” functions in the sense that they often act as a basis for bringing people together to discuss issues considered of interest to the participants and, sometimes, directly or indirectly of interest to the whole community in which they are found; (4) they act as points of articulation with official political units at the local, provincial, and federal levels; (5) they carry out economic functions by seeking the recognition, the protection, and the promotion of the economic interests of their members; (6) they provide leisure-time activities through the voluntary and unpaid participation of members; (7) they provide their members a means by which they may effectively learn new behavioral techniques for coping with a changing social system, and they also carry out activities with feedback effects of an educational nature; (8) they perform integrative functions to the extent that they provide new occasions for the meeting of class-segregated groups, or groups segregated on other social bases (e.g., ethnicity, race, language, etc.); (9) they perform “mediative” functions by bringing together conflicting groups under a common platform based on interest in a larger, more inclusive and overall concern, thereby helping to mitigate conflicts at lower levels of interaction; (10) they facilitate the adjustment or adaptation of their members to their new social environment by providing them with a sense of security and a feeling of social identity otherwise not easily attainable; and (11) they provide their members with a means of obtaining greater prestige and social recognition by distinguishing them as the concerned and interested citizens.

Much of the work on voluntary associations in North America, as indicated earlier, has been done by sociologists. Anthropologists, as latecomers to the field of urban studies in Europe and North America, have only recently begun to make significant contributions in this area. There is indeed a need to compare the data and findings on common-interest associations in non-Western societies with those of Western societies. It is, however, important to note that voluntary and other common-interest associations in both Western and non-Western regions have functioned as adaptive mechanisms in situations of change and other exigencies. What is even more important is that in spite of the very complex and advanced political systems in the Western world, voluntary and common-interest groups still play a significant role in undertaking to serve the interests of their members. The point that remains to be resolved is whether the incidence of certain types of voluntary associations in the non-Western world can be accounted for in terms of the influence of Westernization. Since this is a matter of empirical investigation and test rather than scholarly debate, studies focusing on this issue would contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of voluntary and other common-interest associations.

**ROTATING-CREDIT ASSOCIATIONS**

Special consideration is due the “rotating-credit association” because of the attention it has received in the recent literature. Again, as in previous sections, selected cases will be used to identify major trends of thought and analysis.

One of the earliest contributions in this area is Bascom’s (1952) discussion of the *esu*, a credit institution of the Yorubas of southwestern Nigeria. Bascom defines the *esu* (p. 63) as “a fund to which a group of individuals make fixed contributions of money at fixed intervals; the total amount contributed by the entire group is assigned to each of the members in rotation.” The *esu*, in Bascom’s view, differs from a social club in that many such groups hold no meetings and the members frequently are not known to one another. Also, “the number of contributors, the size of the contributions and the length of the intervals at which they are made vary from one group to another.” He describes how *esu* groups are formed and terminated, the types and requirements of membership, division into subgroups, the system of fund collection and payments, and procedures for dealing with defaulters or withdrawals. Bascom feels that the *esu* has played an important role in the Yoruba economy and that it shows no signs of declining under the increasing influence of Europeans. He discounts the view that it may be the result of European influence. Bascom’s work is a good beginning and presents not only a well-written descriptive account but also one that is properly detailed and documented. His findings show that even in “primitive” economic systems, rational formalistic patterns were systematically applied to recurrent as well as new and unanticipated problems.

In an attempt to deal with the general features of rotating-credit associations, Geertz (1962) examines them as a “middle rung” in development. According to Geertz (p. 242), the rotating-credit association is an “institution which can act as an educational mechanism for a people moving from a static economy to a dynamic one, at the same time as it operates to bring about the restriction of increased consumption such a transformation implies.” His description and analysis of this institution draw examples from a wide range of societies in underdeveloped and semideveloped countries stretching from Japan through Southeast Asia and India to Africa. Geertz explains (p. 243) that the “basic principle upon which the rotating credit association is founded is everywhere the same; a lump sum fund composed of fixed contributions from each
member of the association is distributed, at fixed intervals and as a whole, to each member of the association in turn." In conclusion, he argues (p. 260) that rotating-credit associations are intermediate institutions,

a product of a shift from a traditionalist agrarian society to an increasingly fluid commercial one, whether this shift be very slow or very rapid. . . . An educational mechanism in terms of which peasants learn to be traders. . . . The theoretical as well as the practical interest of the association lies in its ability to organize traditional relationships in such a way that they are slowly but steadily transformed into non-traditional ones, as an institution whose functional significance is primarily to facilitate social and cultural change in respect to economic problems and processes.

He suggests that the rotating-credit society is a "middle rung" in the process of development from a largely agrarian peasant society to one in which trade plays an increasingly crucial role. It is also self-liquidating, ultimately being replaced by more rational types of credit associations. It seems likely, in his view (p. 263), "that the rotating credit association is merely one of a whole family of such intermediate 'socializing' institutions which spring up in societies undergoing social and cultural change, not only in the economic, but in the political, religious, stratificatory, familial, and other aspects of the social system as well." Geertz's work has been well received and remains one of the well-written and properly illustrated discussions in this area. Its only weakness is that most of the generalizations are inductively arrived at and supported only by illustrative materials the antitheses of which have not been shown to be nonexistent.

Ardener (1964) has also attempted to provide a comparative analysis of studies of rotating-credit associations. She offers, as an improvement on Geertz's definition, the following (p. 201): "an association formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation." She claims that the elements of rotation and regularity are essential criteria for distinguishing these associations from the whole range of mutual-benefit clubs and cooperative undertakings. She reviews the distribution of such associations in Asia, West Africa, Central and East Africa, South Africa, the West Indies, and the Americas, and Europe. Recognizing that rotating-credit associations do not offer equal advantages to all members, she also discusses the origin and structural characteristics of these associations in considering the variables of membership, organizational types, contributions, size, methods, and transferability of funds, and sanctions used to obtain conformity. She further considers the functions of rotating-credit associations, their relations to other institutions, and their place in the general economic and social patterns of the societies in which occur. Ardener's paper is rich with references, but suffers from oversimplification and lack of the details necessary for an in-depth understanding of the issues she raises. The strength of her work lies principally in the outline and checklist it provides for researchers in this domain of experience and in the clarification it lends to Geertz's work.

Anderson (1966), referring to Geertz's work, discusses rotating-credit associations in India, where he distinguishes three types: simple, commission, and business. With supporting evidence, he shows how the business and, to some extent, commission types function to socialize individuals to modern business life in that they call for the application of universalistic, affectively neutral, and achieved principles in dealings with others. The simple type, which does not emphasize universalistic principles, he sees as not serving this purpose. The analysis is of considerable interest, although the derivation of the study on which the paper is derived is not long enough to allow for the delineation of secondary and latent functions, which in my experience are not very readily apparent.

Ottenberg (1968) examines the development of credit associations in the changing economy of the Afikpo Ibo. His main argument is that amongst the Afikpo Ibo, where a market (cash) economy is gradually evolving and replacing a previous subsistence-based economy, there is usually a need for new sources of capital and that credit (loan) organizations based partially on indigenous social relations arose in response to this need. He describes four types of non-rotating credit associations: the village union, patrilineal and matrilineal groupings, and age-sets. He concludes that it is uncertain whether these loan groupings will remain in the future or be replaced by other capital-securing devices. The strength of this paper lies principally in the structural arguments used to explain the emergence of these associations and their absence in other situations.

The analyses of Bascom, Geertz, Ardener, Anderson, and Ottenberg have a lot in common, although they cover almost a 16-year span. The authors all, implicitly and explicitly, see rotating-credit associations as a special common-interest association based on a rational system of mutual support and geared primarily towards economic assistance in the form of capital development and provision of short- and long-term loans and credit. There is also a general agreement among them that rotating-credit associations are adaptive, either in a traditional setting, in which no formal economic institutions like banks and other lending avenues are available, or in non-traditional, transitional situations, in which the population is undergoing change from a noncash to a cash economy. Further, the authors see such credit systems as temporary and transitional, eventually to be superseded by more formal credit institutions like those observed in Western economies. This latter point remains doubtful in some respects, because in places like West Africa credit associations and formal credit institutions coexist, neither showing any sign of decline in the face of the other. No doubt, further studies of the dynamics of such associations need to be done before more conclusive statements can be made.

CONCLUSION

In this review, the primary purpose has been (1) to indicate the range and types of studies done by anthropologists on common-interest and/or voluntary associations and (2) to assess them briefly in terms of their primary foci, contributions, strengths, and weaknesses. In doing this, no doubt my bias has entered at various points. It is still safe to conclude, however, that anthropological investigations of voluntary associations, in particular, and common-interest associations, in general, have yielded substantial research dividends. It is only appropriate, therefore, that the review should end with some consideration of these dividends as well as proposing problems that need to be further investigated. These conclusions should not be viewed as in any way exhaustive, for obviously the reader who has been exposed to this and other reviews of the field will have views that are not covered here. Indeed, it was partially to stimulate divergent (and perhaps also convergent and parallel) views that this review was prepared.

There is a general agreement about the existence of common-interest associations in both preliterate and literate societies at various stages of sociocultural integration and technological complexity. Common-interest associations are not solely the result of industrialization and urbanization. The evidence does overwhelmingly support, however, the hypothesis that industrialization and urbanization, in particular, and social, cultural, and technological change, in general, lead to the pro-

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liferation of new common-interest associations, some reflecting preexisting traditional forms and some complete innovations or borrowings from other cultures and societies. Common-interest associations, therefore, while not a monopoly of the urban area, still constitute in significant ways an urban phenomenon.

The literature again is overwhelmingly in support of a very general hypothesis that common-interest associations serve a number of functions, most of them acting as adaptive mechanisms in situations of change. It is in this regard that the study of voluntary associations has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the relation of individual and culture, one that sees culture not only as an adaptive mechanism, but also as one of the things to which we as individuals and sometimes as groups must adapt. The acculturation viewpoint that dominated anthropology for several decades and viewed culture as something one simply acquires as a result of being socialized in it has gradually given way to a more sophisticated view of individuals attempting to adapt to their culture and introducing innovative pathways to overcome the obstacles it raises. The introduction of various types of common-interest associations has been in some cases the result of both group and individual efforts to deal with problems for which existing pathways had been found ineffective.

There are basically three points that need to be resolved here. The first and most general is the question “What causes individuals and/or groups to resort to the use of common-interest associations as mechanisms for dealing with adaptive problems?” I do not have the answer to this question, but it must be investigated to identify to what extent cultural, social, and psychological traits, as well as environmental factors, observed in individuals and/or groups serve as causal or limiting factors for the formation of certain types of associations. If we can delimit the causal or limiting factors that account for the establishment of certain forms of associations, our understanding of them will be much advanced. The second point is what types of alternative forms of adaptive strategies are available from which a common-interest strategy is chosen. Earlier, I indicated that some of the functions performed by these associations were ones that in some respects were undertaken within a kinship-type or territorial-type organization. It seems, therefore, plausible that other strategies exist and that when common-interest associations are adopted it is because of a belief that they will be more effective in serving the interests being articulated. A third issue is whether the interests and adaptation are those of individuals or those of groups. The literature has not been useful in resolving this last point, because while some writers (e.g., Little, Anderson, Ottenberg, et al.) write as if they were discussing group interests and adaptation, they also provide analysis at the individual level.

Common-interest associations have also been viewed as constituting instruments of change; they are sometimes created for the express purpose of introducing or opposing change or providing alternative ways of dealing with it. It is perhaps in this connection that we often view associations as being democratic, egalitarian, and pliable. Common-interest associations, because of the nature of their membership, one based sometimes on free will, seem to be ideal for promoting egalitarianism, and because they are formed for specific purposes they are easily molded, changed, or terminated and are not as conservative as other types of social groups.

We also have fairly common agreement on what should or should not be called a common-interest association. I think that most scholars accept the use of the term “common-interest association” as a general umbrella and “voluntary association” as a special type of common-interest association in which voluntarism is a dominant feature. Anything that is called a common-interest association must, however, as a minimum be based on bonds created through common interest rather than ones created through kinship or territoriality. As urbanization increases throughout the world and people find themselves in non-kinship-oriented social networks, we will find increasing numbers of social groups based on common interest and a de-emphasis of kinship units in social and cultural anthropological studies. This is already taking place in some subdisciplines of social anthropology, notably in urban anthropology, where in the last decade the social network approach has gained substantial acceptance.

In viewing the dynamics and other features of voluntary and other common-interest associations in different regions of the world, it is striking to notice the extent of the similarity among them. We have observed in the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions of the various writers that these associations serve adaptive functions, are found in situations of change, and are being utilized at various levels of technological and political development in a diversity of human populations and settlements. It is these features that make it all the more important and urgent that comparative studies of the type attempted by Geertz (1962), be encouraged.

In spite of the extensive literature on voluntary and common-interest associations, there is still a lot that we do not know about and need to do. Our methods are still weak. The facts that we use to support our explanations or interpretations are primarily illustrative; equally convincing illustrations could be adduced for the antitheses of our explanations. We need to be more problem-oriented than we have been in the past. Our problem orientation so far is diffuse and lacks specificity in several directions. There is need to demonstrate the relationship between a number of factors. What is the relationship between urbanization or industrialization and the emergence, decline, or proliferation of common-interest associations? Does urbanization or industrialization give rise to certain types of common-interest associations, and why? What structural features favor the emergence of voluntary associations in certain specified situations and not in others? In what ways do associations act as adaptive mechanisms, and how can these be empirically demonstrated and verified? What is the range of structural, functional, and organizational variations of common-interest associations? These and many other questions call for further investigation utilizing well-designed research paradigms and employing both deductive and inductive reasoning. Our performance in the past permits hope that future work will yield a lot of desirable results, results that will (1) give us an accurate descriptive knowledge of the features of common-interest associations; (2) allow us to account for the context(s) in which common-interest associations occur and the factors with which they co-occur or co-vary; (3) allow us to account for the factors which cause or determine or limit the forms and contents of associations; and (4) allow us, with some degree of exactness, to say when and how and in what form common-interest associations will or will not occur.

ABSTRACT

In this paper an attempt is made to review selected anthropological studies of voluntary associations, in particular, and common-interest associations, in general. The aim is to show how these groups have been studied as adaptive mechanisms in situations of social, cultural, and technological change, especially in those types of change involving rapid urban growth and large-scale migrations of rural populations to towns and cities. The review is organized in six sections: the first deals with some general theoretical considerations of the nature and types of associations; the second, third, and fourth focus on a review of studies in three geographic areas (Africa, Asia, Western Europe and North America), while the fifth section deals primarily with studies of rotating-credit associations; the sixth
RÉSUMÉ

Cet article tente de passer en revue les études anthropologiques sur les associations volontaires, en particulier, et les associations d'intérêts communs, en général. Le but en est de montrer comment ces groupes ont été étudiés en tant que mécanismes d'adaptation à des situations de changements sociaux, culturels et technologiques, particulièrement à ce genre de changement impliquant une croissance urbaine rapide et la migration à grande échelle des populations rurales vers les villes. Cette revue est divisée en six parties: la première comprend quelques considérations générales théoriques sur la nature et le genre des associations; les seconde, troisième et quatrième sont centrées sur l'étude de trois zones géographiques (Afrique, Asie, Europe de l'Ouest et Amérique du Nord) tandis que la cinquième partie s'occupe principalement d'études d'associations de crédit-tournant; la sixième partie apporte quelques conclusions et suggestions pour des études subséquentes.

RESUMEN

En este trabajo se intenta revisar estudios antropológicos de asociaciones voluntarias, en particular, y de asociaciones de intereses comunes, en general. El objetivo es mostrar cómo estos grupos han sido estudiados como mecanismos adaptables en situaciones de cambio social, cultural, y tecnológico, especialmente en aquellos tipos de cambio que involucran un rápido crecimiento urbano y migraciones a gran escala de poblaciones rurales a pueblos y ciudades. El repaso está organizado en seis secciones: la primera tiene que ver con algunas consideraciones teóricas generales sobre la naturaleza y tipos de asociaciones; las partes segunda, tercera y cuarta se concentran en un repaso de los estudios en tres áreas geográficas (Africa, Asia, Europa Occidental y América del Norte), mientras que la quinta sección trata principalmente de estudios de asociaciones de crédito-rotatorio; la sexta sección incluye algunas observaciones, conclusiones y sugerencias para estudios posteriores.

РЕЗЮМЕ

В этой статье сделана попытка дать обзор антропологических исследований групп, содержащихся на добровольные взносы, в частности, и групп взаимопомощи в общем. Главная цель исследования направлена на то, чтобы указать каким изменениям подверглись эти группы в процессе приспособления во время общественных, культурных и технологических перемен, и в особенности тех видов перемен, которые произошли при быстром росте городов и крупной миграции сельского населения в города. Обзор состоит из шести частей: первая занимается общими теоретическими рассуждениями о характере и типах групп; вторая, третья и четвертая занимаются обзором исследований в трех географических районах (Африка, Азия, Западная Европа и Северная Америка) в то время как пятая часть занимается, преимущественно, изучением групп использующих возобновляемый кредит; некоторые заключительные замечания и пожелания для последующих исследований содержатся в шестой части.

Comments

by Tsuneo Ayabe

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This is one of the most excellent papers I have ever read on the study of voluntary associations. However, Kerri has so far referred only to English data. As a result, he has neglected, for instance, the important classic study of Schultz (1902) on the origin and function of men's clubs or age-groups and secret societies. Furthermore, analysis of the relationship between economic history and clublike associations in Europe should be developed. For instance, the function of men's clubs in the process of the disorganization of the traditional community in Europe should be examined, and a study of the relationship between men's clubs and the advent of merchants' or manufacturers' guilds would reveal one of the most important aspects of voluntary associations as adaptive mechanisms.

by P. K. Bhovmick

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I must congratulate Kerri on his performing a useful but difficult task, i.e., presenting a cross-cultural comparison of the working of voluntary associations on the basis of the literature available. While I share some of Kerri's views, as evinced in the analysis and conclusion of his article, I would at the same time mention that his account of voluntary and/or common-interest associations in India and countries like India leaves out much that should be taken into consideration.

In a country like India, anthropologists should keep in mind, in examining the working of voluntary and/or common-interest associations, the different aspects of culture, or different sub-cultures, prevailing in Indian society. Thus one may discern different levels on which such associations function as adaptive mechanisms: (a) caste—intra-caste and inter-caste levels; (b) tribe—intra- and inter-tribe and tribe-caste levels; (c) village and town/city—rural-urban level; (d) religion—intra- and inter-religious-group levels; (e) language—intra- and inter-linguistic-group levels. New voluntary and/or common-interest associations are emerging and playing an effective role in the socio-cultural dynamics of modern India by bridging the hiatus existing between one section of the community and another.

As is clear from this picture, the situation in a country like India is really complex, and, naturally, variety in the organisation of voluntary/common-interest associations is noteworthy. One may mention here various missionary and other types of non-governmental associations devoted to the improvement of conditions and/or to the articulation of interests of the backward communities. The Samaj Sevak Sangha at Bidisa, Midnapore, West Bengal, is one example; here action anthropologists are engaged in helping the Lodhas, a denotified tribe stigmatised by the British government as criminal, to adapt to the new life promised by the Constitution of independent India. A peculiarity of these cases is that while they are voluntary in character, they include not only the members of the community to whose welfare they are devoted, but also individuals who are not members of that community. Though the interests of the two sections within the association are not conflicting, they are at the same time not identical.
by Lodewijk Brunt

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Kerri’s review seems to me a rather useful one: it covers much literature, poses some interesting questions, and draws conclusions which are central to the theme.

With regard to his section on Western Europe and North America, however, I would like to add a few remarks. Kerri states that the majority of studies of voluntary and common-interest associations in the Western world has been done by non-anthropologists. This may be so, but what criterion does he employ to distinguish anthropologists from others? In what respects are their research data or theoretical interpretations different from those of sociologists, historians, etc.? He could have elaborated this point, for, as he (rightly) asserts in his concluding section, we need to be more problem-oriented than we have been in the past. Problem-orientedness implies interdisciplinary co-operation in fieldwork and in theorizing.

For example, more than ten years ago, an excellent article on the past, present, and future of Dutch common-interest associations was published (Abma 1962). The author linked the development of these associations with the development of 19th-century technique and transport and the various phenomena directly or indirectly related to these. Moreover, he presented a rather thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of both the overall development of the phenomenon of common-interest associations in the Netherlands and its internal differentiation. Most of Kerri’s observations are covered in this article, but Kerri doesn’t seem to be aware of its existence. In this case, of course, he is excused, for one cannot expect him to be able to read Dutch. The point is, isn’t there any Anglo-Saxon literature on the subject written by “non-antropologists” which is worth mentioning (or summarizing) in a review like his?

In France also, some very interesting research has been done on voluntary associations. The Paris associations of migrants from Auvergne and Rouergue, for example, combine elements of ethnic, professional, territorial, cultural, linguistic, and kinship ones. Kerri does not mention them, although they are rather well-known (see Béteille 1972, 1973a, b, 1974; Chodkiewicz 1973; and, very recently, Slot 1975). I wonder about this omission: their problems are very relevant to Kerri’s argument. Is it because the students of these French associations are geographers, sociologists, or, not anthropologists?

One last remark: Kerri stresses the adaptability of voluntary associations and contrasts this with the “rigidity” of kinship groups. Maybe, under certain conditions within some societies, kinship groups are rigid, but rigidity may be a feature of some voluntary associations, under certain other conditions and within some societies, as well. I would plead for much more research on that issue. The study of kinship groups, certainly those in pre-industrial Europe, is usually tainted with an overdose of ideology and very meagre empirical data (see, for instance, Laslett 1972). At least one study (Anderson 1971) suggests that rigidity was not a central feature of kinship groups in the early stages of English industrialism.

by Henry F. Dobyns

Indian Tribal Series, 1124 E. Linden St., Tucson, Ariz. 85719, U.S.A. 11 IX 75

The CA¥Y review that inventories publications on a topic as well as evaluates them has proved uniquely valuable. Kerri has not written one; his selectivity diminishes the utility of his analysis, especially in excluding New World studies which treat precisely the theoretical matters on which he touches. Mangin (1959) describes adaptive functions of urban regional associations or common-interest groups (CIGs) with membership based on birth in the same territory prior to migration. Thus, South American research on CIGs enjoys an antiquity equal to the African. Mangin (1967a, b) later analyzes squatter settlements as distinctive forms of CIG. Doughty (1972) touches on at least two aspects of regional clubs of theoretical import: urban migrant choice of affiliation among multiple CIGs based on the same ascribed status and choice as to intensity of affiliation.

In a rigorous design, Maynard (1964) tests for correlation between provincial settlement population magnitudes and creation of certain CIGs and other institutions. Mangin, Maynard, and Doughty (1964) identify CIG members promoting rural development and lobbying government agencies. Doughty (1970) stresses urban migrant CIG organization of lower-class weekend recreation.

Latin American research offers abundant cases of transitions from kinship- and territorially based social organizations. For example, Dobyns (1964) reports Peruvian instances of material achievements by “voluntary” labor parties in a type of settle-

by D. Douglas Caulkins

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Kerri’s bibliographic review is a useful preliminary to a thorough and systematic examination of possible interrelations among the various conceptual frameworks which could be applied in the anthropological study of voluntary and common-interest associations (see Amis and Stern 1974 and Tomeh 1973 for recent critical surveys of the sociological literature). Kerri correctly notes that little cumulative development has been achieved in this area, although Brown (1974) provides a promising resolution of some definitional problems.

A multitude of meanings and levels of analysis is concealed by the limp generalization that voluntary associations are adaptive mechanisms in the context of modernization and change. Jongkind’s (1974) provocative study of regional associations in Lima, Peru, provides one corrective for this kind of broad interpretation. (Why does Kerri’s cross-cultural survey omit any discussion of the extensive literature on voluntary associations in Latin America?) It is no longer analytically productive simply to catalog adaptive functions of associations, as Kerri does, without discriminating among types of associations, their structural characteristics, developmental phases, levels of participation, access to resources, political environment, and other organizational and community variables.

The data may be in hand (Caulkins 1975) for a test of Kerri’s hypotheses concerning the functions of associations in single-enterprise-based communities and economically diversified communities, although some elements of the hypotheses (“more decisive role,” “other types of formal and informal organizations and relationships”) require greater specificity before a test is possible.

Kerri’s concern with factors which limit the development of voluntary associations (see also Drake 1972 and Jones 1972) and with alternatives to voluntary associations (see also Jacobson 1973) is well placed.

Finally, let me urge that we avoid a parochial approach to this topic. Local historians (Ropeid 1973) and other social scientists often address the same research problems which engage us. The heuristic value of the research, rather than the disciplinary affiliation of the author, ought to be the most important criterion for inclusion in a critical survey of the literature.
ment registered by central government as preserving a communal land base. Doughty and Doughty (1968) detail how a 1920s corvée labor law meshed with labor-exchange customs to produce post-1930 community work forces building roads, power lines, etc.

Drucker (1958) hardly seems an adequate sample of studies of Native American CIGs. Hirabayashi, Willard, and Kemnitzer (1972) report U.S. pan-Indian urban participation in CIGs parallel in form and function to African and Latin American ones. They distinguish between formal and informal associations, the latter often operating in bars like the dominant-group informal CIGs that Richards (1964) has described in New York City. Hirabayashi, Willard, and Kemnitzer characterize churches as formal organizations with a wide range of informal relationships. Several anthropologists have explored Christian churches as CIGs among post-tribesmen. Richard's (1974) Wisconsin Oneida ethnohistory notes the key role clerics played in reserved-land losses, on the one hand, but the preservation of the language for hymn-singing, on the other. Dobyns (1971) outlines shifting White Mountain Apache denominational allegiances. Basso and Anderson (1973) detail how a Western Apache religious movement prophet propagates literacy in the Apache language among devotees.

In economic affairs, Dobyns (1951) analyzes informal CIG requirements to operate a flood-irrigation work introduced to Papago Indians. Sasaki and Adair (1952) describe a Navajo kindred as a CIG on an irrigation project. A specific type of CIG, the cooperative, has been analyzed as an adaptive mechanism by Graburn (1969) and Dobyns (1969) at a propositional level. Analyses by rural-development specialists citing Foster (1965) on the concept of limited good make clear that adequate conceptualization of CIGs demands study of conditions which interdict or inhibit them as well as conditions which encourage them.

By GERALD L. GOLD

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G1K 7P4. 6 to 75

Working on the assumption that common-interest associations are highly adaptive, Kerri suggests that the anthropologist should identify the "special structural features" of associations. I agree with the objective, but I have reservations about the manner in which Kerri sets out to accomplish this task as well as some doubt about his geographic divisions and his criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of various studies.

Structural characteristics of associations are not as clearly identified in this article as in Brown's (1974) more general study of corporations. Kerri does usefully distinguish between voluntarism and common interest, but he does not define what an association is and what it is not. We might ask whether non-corporate groups can be common-interest associations. Such a question would be significant for students of the Mediterranean or of Latin America, two areas omitted from the review article.

There are problems in organizing such a review according to geographical and ethnological regions, and this shows up in the author's own study of Fort McMurray. Kerri's research is not an isolated contribution to the study of associations in Canada. It also does not seem to differ from the sociological analysis that has been undertaken with essentially anthropological methods. The two disciplines have long shared a common tradition in Canada in their study of non-aboriginal institutions. Therefore, of considerable comparative importance is the work of Lucas (1971), who has written a comprehensive report on institutions and their adaptive roles in single-enterprise communities. I would also add Burnet (1951) and Willmott (1962) on the Prairie Provinces, Jackson (1973) and Westhues and Sinclair (1974) on the role of associations in community conflicts in Ontario, and Hughes (1943) and Gold (1973) on the adaptive roles of associations in agricultural service centers undergoing industrialization.

Significantly, Kerri's own research appears to be as functionalist and as deductive as the African studies he singles out for critical commentary (e.g., Little). Furthermore, while Kerri points to "positive functions" of Fort McMurray associations, he does not dwell on their dysfunctions. Here I turn to Lucas, who also comments on associations as a counterbalance to the dominant role of a single industry, but places mobility and prestige within the constraints of the economic context: "Although club membership or community office holding and the like may enhance status, such activities do not change it... the effective but simplified system of stratification rests basically upon the sole community industry" (1971:151, emphasis mine). Lucas demonstrates that in Minetown, company cooptation can prevent associations, with their overlapping memberships, from being effective agents of social action (pp. 168-69).

Also missing from Kerri's variables is the whole dimension of ideologies and values, which seem to fall into the category of "new behavioral techniques." As I have shown in French Canada (Gold 1973, 1975), associations become a means of affiliation for new rational elites to the national middle and upper class. Externally, they can act as agents of legitimation; internally, they provide an agency of social control within which takes place an exchange of information for the upwardly mobile. I would like to have seen more commentary by Kerri on associations and mobility. This fits in well with Drucker's analysis of Native American associations that "helped create corporate identity."

By DON HANDELMAN

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Kerri has done an able job of reviewing significant contributions to this field; and CA should be commended for launching these bibliographical essays. If Kerri's summations are representative of anthropological inquiry in this area, its overall thrust is deficient in organizational analysis.

The voluntary association is a form of social organization. Therefore a major task is to study its structure, the organizational forms from which it derives, and its place within the range of forms that together constitute the wider social structure. A concern with the structure of association inevitably leads to the dynamics of association. In turn, these concerns should make relevant the following kinds of questions: What are the processes of recruitment to associations? What is the structure of affiliation between members and associations, and how does this relate to the viability of associations? What are the natural life-cycles of associations, and how does this affect their stability?

Only when the nature of associations is delineated can the anthropologist chart their adaptive functions. To this end the simplistic glasses of "common interest" or voluntarism are insufficient to carry the load. In this review the gloss of "adaptive" seems to be connected to the idea of "social change," so that all change calls forth adaptation. The danger of the gloss is that it obscures a multitude of social variations. This enables the discerning researcher to read as "adaptation" those organized activities that suit his investigative predilections. Furthermore, taking for granted the referents of "adaptive" obscures the integral connection between the meaning of association and the social context within which it exists.
Moreover, what the association “does” can change. “Interests” change, and one finds organizational vehicles in search of goals to legitimize their operation. Further, internal dynamics can generate changing interests that subvert the overt goals of the association (cf. Handelman 1967). In short, a knowledge of what voluntary associations contribute to a given social structure must be predicated on the recognition that how they operate affects what they can do. Termining associations “adaptive mechanisms” obscures this connection.

Anthropologists would do better to concentrate first on the organizational bases of association. One approach, which borrows from Boisevain (1968), is to locate “association” along the developmental continuum of organizational forms that include the dyad, network, action-set, quasi-group, and corporate group. For example, the esuru, described by Bascom, might be analyzed more fully, in “adaptive” terms, as a relatively dense network, or as an action-set, rather than as an association. The organizational implications of such an analysis would point more fully to the adaptive potentials of this form of association within the wider social structure. In this sense, organizational forms, including the association, have different adaptive capacities that are intimately linked to their structures. Only when these are identified can the anthropologist specify the adaptive functions of associations for their memberships and within the wider social structure.

by David I. Kertzer
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As Lowie pointed out many years ago, voluntary associations (or “sodalities”) are a residual category, a grab-bag of social groupings not encompassed by some other, more precise term such as church or business, labor union or marriage. For this reason Lowie claimed that they “defy logical classification” (1948:295). Whether or not they are in fact taxonomically intractable is an open question. Kerri basically avoids the issue in this article, following many other authors in pursuing an intuitive definition of what is to be included in the range of discourse rather than listing a set of criteria which can confidently be used by other analysts with the same result.

Kerri makes a good point in distinguishing between membership and participation in voluntary associations. However, his assumption that if membership is voluntary “it is very unlikely that uninterested persons will join” is either tautological or essentially meaningless. Certainly there are numerous associations in which membership is truly voluntary yet only a small minority of members could be termed active participants (e.g., the Audubon Society). A heuristic typology of voluntary associations might employ such a diacritic.

Turning to the central thrust of Kerri’s article, the discussion of voluntary associations as adaptive mechanisms, I found that his review did not take sharp enough focus on the central issue: what roles do voluntary associations play in the context of social change? His conclusion that the literature “overwhelmingly” supports the hypothesis that most common-interest associations act as “adaptive mechanisms in situations of change” is remarkable, since he selected the literature on the basis of just this criterion. I would not want to characterize many of the tens of thousands of associations in the United States in such a way, nor has it been demonstrated that such a characterization is valid anywhere else. In this regard, it is difficult to understand Kerri’s total omission of Latin America, where numerous studies on the role of voluntary associations in the urban adaptation of rural migrants have been made.

If we are to understand the nature of voluntary associations in the context of social change, it must be emphasized that “adaptation” need not entail a one-way path away from traditional forms to “modernity.” As some of the evidence cited by Kerri has demonstrated, voluntary associations may play a largely conservative role in the context of social change, serving to reafirm tribal or village identity, for example, as a means of maintaining the interest of urban migrants in hometown life (see also Mangin 1969, Doughty 1970, Orellana S. 1973). Voluntary associations thus play a complex and dialectical role in social change. Ideally, investigation of the research questions listed by Kerri will lead to a clearer understanding of this dialectic.

by Kenneth Little

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Kerri’s exposition requires and deserves careful comment. However, present space being limited, I will confine myself to the following three points:

1. I agree with Kerri’s implication that for the social theorist voluntary associations have most interest as “vehicles” or “agents” of change in urbanization and other forms of social transformation. Why they should be “functional” in this regard in some situations and not in others needs to be studied comparatively, working throughout with the same set of factors and variables.

2. The notion of “adaptation” itself needs to be refined. Voluntary associations can help migrant groups directly to “adapt” to a new urban environment. For example, they may provide such groups with experience in handling and saving money or encourage them to wear modern clothes and practise modern hygiene. They may even furnish fresh religious dogma and rituals better suited to the cosmopolitan ethos of the city and its different occupational, health, and other hazards. But there are other urban situations in which—as Bruner (1959, 1961, 1963, 1973) has explained in his studies of Toba Batak migrants in Sumatra—the migrants’ “adaptation” is made on a basis of ethnicity and kinship. In this case, the part played directly by voluntary associations is small. Apparently, what these Batak associations “do” principally is to strengthen and underpin ethnic and kinship ties, thereby enabling kinship itself to be an extensive and effective instrument of adaptation.

Also, when in the interests of modern industrial growth a developing country must place more value on achieved as opposed to ascribed forms of status, voluntary associations may come into existence as media of prestige. By emphasizing, for instance, factors of “class,” these voluntary associations may thus facilitate a traditional social system’s “adaptation” to new social and economic needs.

3. Some of the organizations mentioned in Kerri’s discussion seem to be somewhat at variance with his own definition of voluntary associations. For example, although flattered by his citation of my analysis of secret societies in “cultural specialization,” I must point out that membership in the two major associations concerned—the Poro and the Sande—is virtually compulsory. Nor, in particular, is the Poro “voluntarily” organized. Its existence is in indigenous belief ordained by “God”; and rather than being adaptive in any of the above senses, the aim of Poro activities appears to be steadfastly to maintain traditional ideas and customs.

by Grant McCall

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The author’s n. 2 effectively quashes a conventional function of CA^? comment—the provision of additional reference
material that often makes such contributions to this journal useful summaries of a body of literature. Nevertheless, I hope that I shall be forgiven if I refer to my own work on overseas Basque communities for some of my points (McCall 1968, 1969). I confine my comments to migrant associations with an ethnic cast to them.

A fault in voluntary-association research not confronted by the author’s geographical summary is that quantitative data are frequently lacking, so that it is difficult to assess how important an association is to a given community. For example, the number of persons of Basque descent in Mexico City is quite large, yet only a very small percentage of those eligible by ethnic criteria is active in the existing Basque centres in that city.

The author seems to play down the importance of ethnicity as the foundation for migrant voluntary associations. More precisely, it seems that the referent for such groups is locale of origin, or being a “same place man” (Embre 1939:406). It happens that ethnicity and same place of origin most often are isomorphic for the migrant. So, in Montevideo, there are two Basque centres—one for Basques from provinces in France and one for the same (broadly speaking) ethnic group coming from the Spanish side. In Buenos Aires, on the other hand, there is a French Basque centre, a Navarran Basque centre, a centre for Spanish Basques, and a “Basque Corner (Ezko Txoko),” a splinter group separated from the others by its political beliefs. In areas where the numbers of Basques are small, such as São Paulo, Bogotá, or Lima, there is only one Basque centre. For similar reasons of size, many communities with Basque populations in the American West have only one operating Basque centre (e.g., Douglass 1973). Most of these centres perform similar functions: they promote Basque ethnicity through dance and sporting groups; they are meeting places with restaurant and bar facilities for social intercourse; they offer credit or other mutual-aid facilities to their members.

It is not surprising that migrants—either from another continent or even another country—should wish to form associations to aid them in their new environments. This may be particularly so when the host area fails to provide support institutions for newcomers. The two questions that should be of prime interest to both anthropologists and planners involved with such populations are (1) why some migrants join a voluntary association and others do not and (2) why such associations should be formed along ethnic or “same-place” lines.

The first point calls for research into adaptive strategies and the parameters for choice making recognised by migrant minorities. Implicit in such an investigation is a consideration of adaptation to what. Such detailed, but fundamental, concerns apparently were beyond the restricted and sometimes arbitrary scope of this paper.

The second major research orientation has implications for the understanding of friendship and, ultimately, for coming to terms with that abiding anthropological concern, kinship. What seems to be the case with voluntary associations with an ethnic or “same-place” basis for membership is what Fortes (1969:231–32) terms the “axiom of amity.” It is the basic assumption for kinship association and, as a result of tacit agreement among the participants in the voluntary association, is the basis for migrant mutual trust. So, when individuals with similar origins (and relative homogeneity of behavioural dispositions) believe themselves in need of collective assistance, they form their mutual-aid group from persons whose interests and loyalties are presumed to be known and understood. I say “presumed” because such assumptions of amity and trust need not necessarily be objectively true in order to be influential on voluntary-association behaviour (see Richards 1969).

Ultimately, an understanding of voluntary associations, friendship, and kinship has its evolutionary significance, for it may offer us clues for the discovery of how human beings came to erect that great, elaborate system of kin relations and normative behaviour that so irrevocably distinguishes us from other animals. Voluntary associations, by their artificial nature, have much to offer to such an inquiry in terms of contemporary empirical evidence. George Devereux (personal communication) says: “Man is not a social animal, but a gregarious one.” This distinction, sometimes emphatically denied by the despot and the dictator, is a crucial one for understanding how Homo became sapiens.

by ALEXANDER FRANCIS MAMAK

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The author is to be congratulated for stressing the existence of associations other than those based on kinship and territory. Recent studies in the South Pacific indicate that the importance of the latter type of grouping is declining while associations which cut across traditional group boundaries are becoming prevalent (Mamak 1974; see also Mamak and Bedford with Hannett and Havini 1974). The concept of “common-interest association” is useful because it directs our attention to these alternative types of organizational strategy.

I doubt, however, that we will increase our theoretical understanding of common-interest associations by pursuing the distinction between kinship/territorial groupings and other types of grouping much further. The distinction reminds me of the race-versus-class approach to industrial relations in colonial and neo-colonial societies. I have recently argued that both types of differentiation must be taken into account simultaneously; any attempt to separate race factors from aspects of class and ethnic relations will fail to explain the significance of either (Mamak and Bedford 1975). This goes for Kerri’s distinction too. I am not entirely convinced by his argument that kinship and territorial groupings are more difficult to organize, more rigid and conservative, and less effective than common-interest associations under conditions of change. The flexibility of kinship and territorial groupings is confirmed even in Kerri’s own review of the literature. Furthermore, while he rightly emphasizes the need to identify the real interest which binds the members of an association together, the bonds based on ethnicity and those based on “common interest” are not always easy to separate. Ethnicity, far from being irrelevant, plays a vital role in some common-interest associations because it can be easily mobilized for various purposes. It is also easily identifiable and permits members of an association to act as a unified group. In addition, ethnic identity often provides the basis for the development of common interests, as when members of an ethnic group form a trade union to protect their commonly threatened economic interests. The significance of ethnicity may be reduced in some cases, as in some parts of the Zambian Copperbelt where the system of tribal representation provided a basis for the development of trade unionism which cut across tribal boundaries (Epstein 1958). Both examples, however, indicate the close relationship and interaction between kinship or regional groupings and common-interest associations. Further studies of this type are needed, including an examination of demographic and socio-cultural variables which help to explain the persistence and viability or demise of ethnic/regional associations.

In studying associations and adaptive mechanisms in colonial and neo-colonial societies, we should not forget the environment in which these associations evolved. Many may be regarded as reactions to a system of exploitation and dependence, but many more (e.g., work and improvement associations, mutual-aid organizations) reflect a people’s state of margin-
ality as a consequence of life under such a system. Under these conditions we may well ask: "Adaptive for whom?"

by DONALD MESSERSCHMIDT

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Kerri's study gives us a useful compendium of important theoretical and descriptive studies and a significant refinement of the definition of voluntary associations as highly variable phenomena existing within the rubric of "common-interest groups." Does not the preponderance of African literature, however, mislead us concerning the wealth of voluntary association phenomena elsewhere, especially in Asia? And might not a great deal more be learned by also investigating instances where alternative strategies are adopted and voluntary associations are ignored, although a clear model of the latter is known to exist?

Looking to South Asia in particular, the literature is not as scant as one might assume, but much of it is very recent and not easily accessible. Also, with a few exceptions, it is weak on theoretical analysis.

An important work is Owens and Nandy's (1975) study of voluntary associations in industrial Howrah, West Bengal, India, where they are prolific and historically rich. The authors encountered 131 associations within or near one ward of the city, an approximate area of 3 sq mi, and one association documented has a written history dating it to 1843. They discuss social, economic, political, and psychological correlates of membership; educative, integrative, and mobility-facilitating aspects of participation; leadership roles; and the effects of government attitudes toward such institutions. In a forthcoming work by the same authors (n.d.), voluntary associations are discussed within the broad context of changes associated with urban entrepreneurship. This work is worth serious attention.

From tribal South Asia there are several good studies of socialization-oriented associations. One of the best is Elwin's (1947, 1968) account of the Central Indian Muria Gonds' youthful ghotul dormitory society, which he unequivocally characterizes as "the most highly developed and carefully organized in the world." (1968: vii). Fürer-Haimendorf's (1938, 1969) description of the Konyak Naga youths' morung dormitory societies in Assam is also important.

In the Himalayan region, at least two dormitory associations have received attention: the rang-hang of Almora, North India (Srivastava 1953) and the rodhi of central Nepal (Andors 1974, Messerschmidt 1975a). Associations also exist to support relations and the social, ritual, and financial well-being of Himalayan society. The Newar guthi temple associations of Kathmandu Valley (Nepali 1965, Greenwoold 1974) remain a rich source of data not yet fully explored. The Tibetan kudo has been described in its primary setting within Tibet and the Himalaya (Miller 1956) and as the prototype for adaptation by Tibetan immigrants in the United States (Messerschmidt 1975a).

The dhikur of central Nepal closely fits Ardener's (1964) model of rotating-credit associations and has held primary importance in the financial ascendance of Thakali entrepreneurs in both rural and urban contexts. Although the dhikur is well known among neighboring ethnic and caste groups, the Thakalis have developed it to its highest level of sophistication, giving it a strong ethnic flavor besides its primary financial orientation. More interesting is that many Gurungs and Newars, who are ethnically and situationally related to the Thakulis, as well as the caste groups of Brahmin and Chhetri, have opted for other strategies of adaptation to modernization and change, although they are intimately familiar with the dhikur system and have seen its utility among their Thakali associates and neighbors (Messerschmidt 1973, Messerschmidt and Gurung 1974, Füer-Haimendorf 1975, Doherty 1975).

Focus on voluntary associations under influences of urban growth and rural-urban migration is important, but an investigative strategy to answer why, in some instances (perhaps more widely than we suspect), such associations do not develop, given many of the same cultural and situational variables, is also rewarding. The answers should not only enhance our understanding of voluntary associations per se, but increase our appreciation of both Cultural Variation and Cultural Adaptation writ large.

by DOUGLAS K. MIDDETT

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The promise of this review of literature, "to show how voluntary or common-interest associations have been studied as adaptive mechanisms in situations of social, cultural, ecological, and technological change," is largely unfulfilled, and this failure is unfortunate, for such a review, properly conceived, has considerable potential value. Because Kerri has issued a long disclaimer explaining the limitations he put on the extent of this survey, I shall refrain from carping about his choices—with a single exception. At one point he indicates that he will cover "both voluntary and other types of common-interest associations." The latter are not dealt with, and in view of the stated intention, the absence of any consideration of the literature on labor unions is a particularly glaring omission.

Kerri's difficulty in providing us with a more enlightening essay is at least partially attributable to two problems. The first concerns simply the procedure he has employed in reviewing the literature. Because he has chosen to consider one author at a time and the work of each in chronological order, the discussion rarely illuminates dominant themes. Moreover, because he has imposed this order of convenience on the works under review, Kerri is at times led to confusion about sequences. Thus, Comhaire is said to fall "into the same mistakes made by those before him," although the article was published in 1953, prior to others under discussion. On another occasion Kerri misplaces Little's initial article (1957) on West African voluntary associations, and, discussing a reprinted version (1964), cites "further repetition of conclusions of earlier publications," when, in fact, he is dealing with the earliest of Little's succession of works on the topic.

The second point concerns one focus of the review, the issue of adaptation. The concept has been used so often recently that it has taken on the status of a code word, i.e., when I say "adaptation" or "adaptive mechanism," read "how it is that poor and powerless folks (the kind anthropologists most often study) are managing to survive." I am not sure that Kerri has this notion in mind, but it remains that no discussion of adaptation or adaptive mechanisms can have meaning in the absence of a thorough consideration of contextual factors. As Kerri never attempts this consideration, the proposed focus on adaptation is not realized.

Finally, I have been skeptical for some time that the preoccupation with treating voluntary associations as entities amenable to structural and comparative analyses demonstrates misplaced emphasis. The inclination in such studies to split hairs in deciding what groupings rightfully belong to the category under investigation results in a great deal of unrewarding effort. Kerri's distinction between "ethnic" and "common-interest" groups seems to be a particular example of this. If the emphasis is to be on adaptation, particularly in situations of urbanizing or Westernizing pressures, the distinctions between innovative uses of kinship (Schildkrout 1975) or ethnic affilia-
tion (Cohen 1969, 1974) and some other common-interest basis for creating groups are of minimal importance in understanding that adaptive process. Kerri's essay could have contributed toward this understanding, but because he has failed to come to grips with the issues he sets out, the result is unsatisfying.

by Eugene Muehlbauer

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Kerri's article provides a much needed review of the anthropological literature on "voluntary" or common-interest associations. Strong points include the methodological tack taken in discussing the various studies of common-interest associations, especially in light of the conceptual hazziness which has marked much of the previous investigation of the topic. Kerri rightfully calls for deductively inspired, cross-cultural studies which ideally will yield a clear-cut view of an important social structural form which flourishes in periods of social change.

Also laudable is the discussion of Anderson and Anderson's "replicate social structure," a concept I have found extremely useful in my own research. Certainly one very prominent feature of common-interest associations has been the mediating, interfacing role they play in preserving traditional institutions and supplying the structural links necessary for mutually beneficial contact between the institutions of the modern nation-state and the traditional institutions of small, rural communities.

I would disagree with Kerri on several issues. Common interest versus territorial or kinship basis for groups is a murky distinction. Territorial and kinship-based groups are normally groups with a bundle of common needs or interests, of which economic production and the consolidation of resources for productive activity are major types. Their rigidity—in fact, their very existence—is a function of their ability to meet these various needs. As Kerri notes, and as is pointed out by Wolf (1966:83-94), common-interest associations are initially formed in response to a single need or interest which is beyond the effective scope of traditional multi-interest groups. It is not uncommon, however, for various secondary functions to develop (Wolf 1966:84), in which case the rigidity found in other types of social aggregates may very well set in. One factor which may differentiate territorially based and particularly kinship-based multi-interest groups from common-interest associations is the prominence of the status "member" in the latter, as opposed to a great variety of different, complementary statuses in the former (Silverberg n.d.).

Finally, I must take issue with Kerri's assertion that common-interest associations are more likely than traditional institutions to be democratic. As Wolf (1966a:94) and Anderson and Anderson (1962a) have demonstrated, and as I have discovered in my own research, such associations may be just as susceptible to manipulation by an elite in a generally nonegalitarian setting as other forms of social organization. Kerri's dedication that voluntarism in associations somehow makes them more democratic does not necessarily follow, since in many societies certain kinds of patron-client relations are considered valuable and are sought after. In such a case, even truly voluntary associations may be utilized as avenues to the establishment of such relationships.

by William L. Partridge

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Kerri increases the utility of the concept of voluntary association by emphasizing the common-interest focus and deempha-
on conceptual and theoretical approaches to the phenomenon under study. After a careful reading of Kerri's article, one is sadly disappointed in all four areas.

Kerri circumscribes the scope of his review by his insistence on considering voluntary associations as “adaptive mechanisms.” I seriously object to such arbitrary circumscription, for he never discusses the process whereby voluntary associations become (or are) adaptive mechanisms. One may well ask “adaptive to what? environment? goals? (and, if so, whose?).” A consideration of any cultural phenomenon as adaptation (cf. Cohen 1968) generally involves discussion of the circumstances under which that adaptation is expected to occur. Kerri does not ask under what circumstances, or at what level of sociocultural integration, voluntary associations develop. If they are indeed adaptive mechanisms (which they may very well be), it should be possible to develop a typology of such associations and to formulate hypotheses regarding their genesis and processual development.

The author's attempt at a historical survey of the literature is halfhearted at best. For example, he does not mention Lowie's (1916, 1948) pioneer attempt at discussing associations, such as age-societies and secret societies, which cut across traditional kinship and territorial boundaries or Hammond's (1972) careful analytic survey of historical and contemporary discussions of associations (including voluntary ones).

I agree with Kerri concerning the structural features of voluntary associations: they do indeed lack the rigidity that generally characterizes kinship or territorial organizations. Furthermore, I accept the premise that voluntary associations are not necessarily (and in most cases simply are not) based on or derived from kinship and/or territorial principles. But are voluntary associations the only “constellations of people” that meet these structural criteria? What about networks, factions, and other forms of “quasi-groups”? Kerri offers not a single reference to the recent work on networks and other quasi-groups in different parts of the world.

According to Kerri, voluntary associations develop as adaptive mechanisms in situations of sociocultural change brought about by industrialization, modernization, urbanization, etc. So far so good. But networks and quasi-groups, factions and entrepreneurial relationships, and patron-broker ties also emerge in so-called complex societies when they are confronted with such pressures. It seems to me that any discussion of voluntary associations in the 1970s simply cannot overlook the important contributions, both empirical and theoretical, in the areas of network analysis (B. Adams 1967; Barnes 1968, 1972; Epstein 1961; Hanmer 1967; Gutkind 1965a, b; Mayer 1962; Mitchell 1969; Sharma 1969; Stebbins 1969), of quasi-groups, entrepreneurial ties, and patron-broker relationships (Mayer 1966, 1967; R. Adams 1970; Chiaromonte 1970; Paine 1971), and of kinship in complex and urban societies and urbanization itself (Bott 1971, Mitchell 1966, Wolf 1966).

The extensive literature on factions and factionalism, in India and other parts of the world, has significantly contributed to the understanding of the process of formation of these quasi-groups and their roles in local-level politics and interpersonal as well as intragroup and intergroup interaction. In this field there are too many significant works to list; Silverman's (1973) paper on the role of factionalism in political encapsulation among East Indian villagers in Guyana will illustrate my point. Factions are not recruited along caste, kinship, or territorial lines; they frequently cut across these traditional criteria for group formation, and they are generally “more pliable than kinship and territorial units of organization” and play a “paramount role” in the community “because of their flexibility under conditions of change.” Thus in many ways, both structurally and in terms of adaptation to change, they are quite similar to what Kerri discusses under the label “voluntary associations.” The same would apply to the great majority of networks. Kerri has omitted some very important theoretical and empirical works which have direct bearing on the topic of his discussion.

Beyond these rather general, though serious, criticisms, I would like to make some observations on Kerri's definition of voluntary associations. One of the main attributes of Kerri's definition is “commonality of interest.” Just what this phrase means is not clearly spelled out. “Commonality of interest” from whose point of view, one may ask (at the risk of reopening the old emic-etic debate). At a superficial level, perhaps all members do aspire to some common “good,” but surely Kerri cannot assume that all members of a voluntary association have the same goals in mind when they join. Indeed, the processual analysis of networks and of many quasi-groups (viz., factions) in recent years strongly warns us against accepting such structural pigeonholing of any institution or quasi-institution.

Furthermore, I do not understand what Kerri means by “more or less formally organized.” Does this refer to a voluntary group or a voluntary network? I think a case might be made for a great many voluntary associations' being unions of individuals more in a network-type sense (a loose “web of affiliations”) than in the sense of an institutionalized, structured, and chartered group (cf. Barnes 1972). Kerri never really raises the basic questions: Are voluntary associations groups? If they are not, why not? What criteria distinguish the two? If they are not groups, what are they? Quasi-groups? If so, how are they different from factions and networks?

According to Kerri, one of the characteristics of voluntary associations is that their “membership is entirely voluntary in nature.” I disagree with the use of the adjective “entirely.” Voluntary implies different things to different individuals. How does one objectively determine volition? What about individual self-interest (which in many instances may become a significant motive for joining an institution)? For example, in the United States during the war in Vietnam, some people felt that if they enlisted in the army “voluntarily” they would receive different treatment from those who were drafted. The end result, however, was probably the same, whether you volunteered or were drafted: you ended up in Vietnam. Thus, was there really any element of volition in this case? Furthermore, I fail to understand why Kerri thinks that a voluntary association is not formed because of political considerations. Probably he has a very different conception of “political” than I do, but what about voluntary associations formed for the purpose of canvassing during an election?

Kerri draws what he considers a key distinction between voluntary associations and common-interest associations, and he goes on to make a further distinction between common interest and ethnicity. I agree that ethnicity is not the sole criterion for membership in an association in an urban area even though all the members belong to the same ethnic group. He goes on to say, however, that “it is their interest in survival in the midst of the complexities and strangeness of the urban area and not ethnicity per se that accounts for the formation of the association.” He would call this not an “ethnic association,” but “a common-interest association.” Since he is using “association” in the same way I would use “network,” I must disagree. In a recent article on immigrant Pakistanis living in very crowded conditions in industrial cities of Britain, Dahya (1974) concludes that they actually prefer this type of accommodation to government-subsidized, low-rental units. For a Pakistani arriving in Britain, a logical place (probably the only affordable one) in which to stay is a house owned by a fellow countryman. Such a decision, together with the resulting network (i.e., association), is common-interest. It is also ethnic in that no individual of any other ethnic affiliation could (or probably would want to) take up residence in the same house.

While purporting to deal with voluntary associations, Kerri's article actually focuses on a very specific type of voluntary association, the common-interest association. Kerri claims
that voluntary associations are a subcategory of common-interest associations, but he nowhere proves this to be the case. I believe the reverse is true. At one point, Kerri notes that voluntary associations are not as conservative as other types of social groups. Aside from the fact that the two (association and group) might not be comparable in a logical sense, few people would argue that such right-wing groups as the Minutemen in the United States, the John Birch Society, or the Orangemen are quite conservative in their outlook.

This brings me to a final point: While talking about common-interest associations, voluntary associations, etc., Kerri does not indicate how and when, in his frame of reference, these associations "graduate" to the level of groups, at which point membership may be based very little on voluntary joining and more on selective invitation and screening. In other words, while the thought of joining such an association may be voluntary for an individual, the formalization of membership may be far from it.

Kerri has relied very heavily upon the theoretical work of Little, who has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the study of voluntary associations. Probably because of this reliance, Kerri's interpretations of the phenomenon of voluntary associations are strictly structuralist. He should not be criticized for this. However, his review would have benefited from consideration of the significant literature on networks, factions, and other quasi-groups, which is strongly oriented towards a processual-analytical approach.

by Leslie E. Wildesen

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Kerri's paper disturbs me for several reasons. First, it is much wordier than necessary, yet despite its bulk it remains primarily an annotated bibliography rather than an analysis of anthropologists' contributions to the literature of voluntary associations. Each publication cited is summarized at length, but there is little attempt to show trends, controversies, or the evolution of an individual's or a discipline's theoretical viewpoint. Thus, I am still confused as to what the "anthropological perspectives" are and how they differ from sociological or historical perspectives.

Second, the limitation on subject matter leads to circularity: by examining studies of associations formed during social transitions, we find that such associations form during social transitions. The triviality of the "substantial research dividends" Kerri cites from past research is overwhelming; anthropologists apparently agree that common-interest groups exist; they are in "fairly common agreement" on what the term "common-interest association" means (are you ready? an association "based on the bonds created through common interest"); and "these associations serve adaptive functions." This is science?

Of course, Kerri dismisses these previous studies as "functional," "inductive," or "merely illustrative," but his "set of propositions for future research" is in fact a list of questions to answer with more data, in more societies/circumstances, of the functional, inductive, illustrative sort. Calling something a problem-oriented research design, or a hypothesis, or a "research paradigm" does not make it so, as anyone who is bold enough to use those words should know.

Finally, I wonder at the purpose of the article. Review articles are most valuable for two groups of readers: professionals, for whom the topic is not their major field of specialization, and students, for whom the article can serve as an introduction or guide to a new subject area. Kerri's introduction promises us a discussion of the "relevance" of his subject matter to other studies of social change, as well. Yet none of these purposes is served in the ensuing verbiage. Perhaps most disconcerting are (1) the interspersing of personal opinion in otherwise helpful summaries of the literature and (2) the inclusion of a "case study" which bears little relationship to what precedes or follows it. In fact, the article reads very much like an introduction to a book of readings—from which, apparently, its substance was cribbed—and I am left with an impression of shallowness of discussion and eagerness to get on with the rest of the book and grapple with its subject matter.

Reply

by James Nwannukwu Kerri

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Most of the comments (but notably those of Ayabe, Bhowmick, Brunt, Caulkins, Dobyns, Gold, Kertzer, McCall, Messerschmidt, and Sharma) are very critical of the criteria for inclusion and the exclusion of materials they consider relevant to the topic of the review. Both in the body of the article and in n. 2 I have dealt with this problem in what I consider sufficient detail. It is interesting to note, however, that the awareness of most of the commentators of what was left out of the review is in most cases limited to their own work or that of others in their geographic or topical area of interest, specialization, and research. This trend is significant, because it shows the underlying difficulty facing an author who aspires to such global coverage as I have attempted in writing this review.

Furthermore, when I examined the references suggested for inclusion, I found that most of them fell into one or more of the following types: (1) foreign-language publications, often not available in U.S. libraries and not easily obtainable through interlibrary loan, in addition of course to the difficulty and cost of obtaining a translation into English; (2) publications in obscure local journals, often unavailable and unknown to librarians asked to search for them; (3) publications by non-anthropologists, which, as I explained in n. 2, were legitimately excluded because the review dealt specifically with anthropological contributions; (4) recent publications, publications in press, and unpublished materials, which for obvious reasons could not have been included; and (5) references to voluntary associations embedded in publications dealing with larger ethnographic descriptions, of which one would of course be unaware unless one were interested in the larger problem of their focus.

In spite of these shortcomings, I do find some of the suggested additional references (notably those suggested by Dobyns and Gold) pertinent to the topic under review. However, the short time between my receiving these comments and the deadline for my response did not allow me to examine these references and comment on their usefulness.

Gold, Midgett, and Wildesen are concerned about the "geographic" as distinct from the "topical" approach used in presenting the reviews. Perhaps they failed to read n. 2, where I explained this preference.

In a culturally pluralistic society, the differential impact, appearance, and structural organization of voluntary associations and their adaptive roles, as Bhowmick has observed in India, do indeed constitute a useful area of investigation, the findings of which would no doubt shed more light on the variable emergence of common-interest associations.

Although I argued that kinship- and territorial-based
organizations are more rigid than those based on common interest, this should not be interpreted to mean that in any and all circumstances in which these types of organizations are observed common-interest associations are bound to be more flexible. Brunt, Mamak, and Muehlabauer seem therefore to have misinterpreted my remarks.

Gold expresses interest in seeing more commentary on associations and mobility. In my own work (Kerr 1972) and in that of others cited in the review (e.g., Little 1972, Drucker 1958), specific references are made to the role of voluntary associations in enhancing the upward mobility of their members. The fact that membership in voluntary associations is sought by some partly because of the prestige which accrues from such membership is reason to believe that some correlation exists in some instances between association membership and upward mobility. This is an area that should be further studied, perhaps deductively.

Handelman, Little, Midgett, and Sharma comment on the adaptive role assigned to voluntary and common-interest associations. When a voluntary association is referred to as acting as an adaptive mechanism, this simply implies that such an association assists its members in dealing with changes in their environment—changes that may be cultural, social, psychological, or ecological in nature. It is used as a tool for confronting new problems, for defining these problems, and for proposing solutions to them. It is therefore right to assume, as Handelman does, that different circumstances are going to manifest different adaptive capacities. Whether such differential adaptive capacities must be identified first, before specifying the adaptive functions of associations, is, however, open to question. I think that these tasks can be done concurrently or separately. It should also not be maintained that voluntary associations play adaptive roles only in situations in which change is from the traditional to the modern. They can also assist their members to maintain traditional ideas and customs, as Little has rightly pointed out. Hence Midgett’s and Sharma’s point that contextual factors must be taken into account in discussing the adaptive role of associations is well taken and of course reflects my own concern when I discussed “contextual” statements in another publication (Kerr 1974).

Kertzer seems to be confusing “participation” with “membership” when he argues that “there are numerous associations in which membership is truly voluntary yet only a small minority of members could be termed active participants.” Indeed, this is the essence of my argument in the article. Even if uninterested persons join associations, it is likely that they will do so in smaller numbers than those who are interested, and it is even more likely that the participation of the uninterested members is going to be considerably less than that of those who are interested. These are all speculative statements. One would have to test them empirically to be sure what the trends are.

The fact that associations are claimed to be more democratic than traditional institutions does not mean that they are free of political manipulation by an elite, as Muehlabauer suggests. The extent to which such manipulations are tolerated, however, is bound to be much less in an association in which membership is voluntary than in one with mandatory membership.

I do not know where Partridge read that “the review concerns only change towards Westernization” (emphasis mine). No such information was directly or indirectly communicated. Also, it seems to me rather absurd for him to argue that persons “must form corporate groups in order to accomplish common-interest objectives.” The emergence of common-interest objectives and their accomplishment do not necessarily require a corporate identity. Also, I would point out that, contrary to Midgett’s criticism, some non-voluntary common-interest associations (e.g., the ones Norbeck studied in modern Japan) were discussed.

Sharma’s contention that it cannot be assumed “that all members of a voluntary association have the same goals in mind when they join” merits some attention. It is not necessary that they have the same goals in mind when they join, for most associations serve multiple interests, some of them unintended and even unrecognized. Sharma also seeks clarification of the political role of voluntary associations. Voluntary associations that exhibit political action as lobbies are not the same as groups organized for purposes of controlling the territorial political machinery. Such territorial political groups are structurally different from voluntary associations, which may lobby such groups in order to protect or foster their interests. Sharma also confuses the interests that draw members together into an association and the base they use to form a group to cater to such interests. The base can be common ethnic identity, but the interests usually served are far from being ethnic or even ethnically derived. This is the sort of distinction I intended and implied.

It has been a rewarding experience for me to write this article and attempt to respond to the many constructive and well-intended criticisms that have been generated by the comments. Obviously I know a lot more now about voluntary associations than I did when I first began the writing of this article, and I owe this to all who have participated in this endeavor.

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Serial Publications

- Adena: A Journal of the History and Culture of the Ohio Valley is a biannual academic journal that will begin publication under the sponsorship of Kentuckiana Metroversity in Spring 1976. Named for the ancient mound builders of the Ohio Valley, Adena will publish articles on the prehistoric, historic, recent, and present cultural geography, anthropology, history, and culture of the area drained by the Ohio River between Pittsburgh, Ohio, and Cairo, Illinois. The goal of Adena is to define the area we call the Ohio Valley as a viable cultural and historical entity by exploring its internal history and culture and its role in the larger history and culture of the nation. In addition to scholarly work, the journal will publish creative writing on the area. Adena is seeking both contributors and subscribers. Please write: William E. Grant, Editor, Department of English, University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky. 40208, U.S.A.

- Dialectics and Society is a new monograph series edited by Lawrence Krader of the Freie Univerisit ät Berlin and published by Royal Van Gorcum of Assen, the Netherlands. Books in the series will deal with anthropology, sociology, social philosophy, history, and economics. The first volume, by Krader, is now in press and deals with the history of the Asian mode of production. Further volumes will take up the questions of moral toleration and crime, the relation of Marxism to Calvinism and Kantianism, the issues of symbol and society, and new ways in semiotics and semantics. Interested authors and readers are invited to communicate with the editor in care of Royal Van Gorcum Ltd., 58 Weerderand, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

- The Foundation for Latin American Anthropological Research is publishing a series of 11 monographs on the pre-Columbian archaeology of Guatemala and Mexico. These large-format publications feature full-color photographs of extraordinary Olmec, Teotihuacana, and Maya ceramics and sculpture. Each monograph contains a full bibliography of the subject as well as a complete catalog of all known artifacts of the class discussed, including unpublished examples in museum study collections. For example, The Escuintla Hoards: Teotihuacana Art in Guatemala contains more than 110 photographs of 4th-6th-century-ad art recorded during the past six years with the help of a National Science Foundation grant and a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This report provides fresh information on the nature of Teotihuacan influence on the art of coastal Guatemala (Tiquisate), highland Guatemala (Kaminal Juyu), and the El Petén Maya heartland (Tikal, Uaxactun, Yaxha). Advances in Studies of Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing is based in part on research supported by a small grant from Dumbarton Oaks Trustees for Harvard University. More than 80 large photographs present Classic Maya vase paintings which portray scenes of human sacrifice, religious ceremonies, and the first pictorial evidence of females participating as priestesses in rituals.


- Seven years ago last summer The Human Context first saw the light of day. In a sense it was an illegitimate birth: the journal was not the progeny of established groups whose institutional interests it was to represent and protect. It was free from formal and inferior group ties, from the prescriptions of schools of thought or doctrines. It professed parsimony for a philosophy of human experience—phenomenology—but without any strings attached to participation.

Surrounded by the still dominating traditions of British empiricism, The Human Context took the view, as Whitehead did before, that the overemphasis on “clear and distinct ideas” had more to do with the survival of Puritan ethics in language and imagination than with the answers of a self-assured pure empiricism. Independence and the total absence of any corporate power influence was and remains the aim to the end. There was, of course, a lesson to be learnt. Independence did (continued on p. 154)