

COMMUNITY CONFLICT: ITS ABSENCE AND ITS PRESENCE IN NATURAL DISASTERS*

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INTRODUCTION

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of Wisdom, it was the age of Foolishness. It was the Spring of Hope, it was the Winter of Despair.” This, of course, is the famous opening passage from Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* (1946) that deals with the French Revolution. The balancing phrases capture well the dual theme that both literary writers and scholars assert characterizes personal and group behavior at times of great social stress.

That community-wide stress brings out both the “good” and “bad” in humans, that it evokes “positive” and “negative” features in group responses is an old theme in human history. Literary writers – be it Boccaccio writing on the 14th century plague in Florence, Defoe or Chaucer writing on similar catastrophes in England – have frequently and graphically depicted the dual nature of the response. In a more scholarly way, the same pattern is depicted by the ancient Greek historians, Thucydides and Herodotus, and much more recently by the

British historians Teggart (1941) and Toynbee (1947).

Among sociologists, Sorokin is the one that has most explicitly stated the dualistic nature of the response at the time of great stress. In one of his lesser known works, *Man and Society in Calamity* (1942: 227), he observes that catastrophes evoke “saints” and “sinners” insofar as human and group behavior is concerned. Sorokin notes that calamities produce polarizations in effects, with individuals and societies reacting in diverse ways: “Some become brutalized, others intensely socialized. Some disintegrate – morally, mentally, and biologically; others are steeled into an unbreakable unity. In adversity some lose their sense of honor; others are ethically and spiritually reinforced . . . This diversification and polarization of effects upon the mentality and conduct of various units of the population, as well as upon sundry fields of culture, manifests itself in practically any calamity” (1942: 159).

Stated in such general terms, what the writers of fiction and what the social scholars depict is a commonplace observation and almost certainly true as a general statement. We need no further illustration of the possible dualistic response to sudden, severe stress. While the frequency and intensity of the phenomenon may still be a problematical issue, its existence as such seems beyond ques-

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tion. Instead, what is required is a specification of which response occurs under which conditions. When will human beings be "saints" and when "sinners", when will groups engage in cooperative and altruistic efforts and when will they be rent by dissension and conflict? Relatively few sociologists have addressed themselves to this problem. The two major exceptions, Fritz (1961) and Barton (1970), have been severely handicapped in their analyses since for the most part they have had to depend on secondary analysis of relatively few cases.

Recent research at the Disaster Research Center (DRC) at The Ohio State University has allowed a sharper focus on the problem. Field studies have been conducted of over 100 different natural disaster situations (for summaries of some studies, see Quarantelli and Dynes, 1970a). While our research has not been directed primarily to the problem involved, nevertheless the data gathered permit us to specify more clearly the conditions under which conflict and the conditions under which cooperation emerge at times of major emergency. We have first-hand data on many cases, allowing us to make a more intensive analysis than earlier students of these problems were able to do [1].

The research focus of the center has been on the urban community and the major organizations and groups likely to be involved in the collective response to a large-scale disaster. Not only has the immediate emergency period been examined, but some attention has also been given to longer-run responses during the relief and rehabilitation periods in the aftermath of disasters. Thus, we have been in a position to observe both short-run and long-run community conflict and cooperation in such stress situations.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

There are three general observations that we can make on the basis of our studies.

(1) There is considerable variation in the presence or absence of community conflict following a natural disaster. (2) To the extent that there is any pattern, it is one of relative absence of conflict in the emergency period and its relative presence in the post-emergency period. (3) The presence or absence of conflict is functional or dysfunctional depending upon a series of other conditions. Let us examine these observations in more detail.

Common sense would seem to argue that severe stress situations should, if not create conflict, at least amplify existing social cleavages within a community. Several logical although not necessarily empirically valid reasons might be advanced for such a supposition. Given the sudden destruction of existing resources which occurs in a disaster, the competition for scarce resources might seem to move normal competition towards more open conflict. A caricature of this is the primarily literary fiction of victims fighting over food [2]. Often, too, there exist opportunities for the assessment of blame of some kind in many severe crisis situations, thus creating or magnifying the social division involved in any sort of scapegoating process. Here the caricature is of mob action against officials seen as incompetent in carrying out their community duties in the emergency. Then, too, the fluidity of most disaster emergencies would seem to lend itself to different kinds of opportunism and selfishness. The caricature image here is that of Mr. Hyde taking over from Dr. Jekyll when social control is less possible.

Whatever the logic of this position, the empirical evidence suggests a somewhat more complicated picture, strongly correlated with time. The emergence of conflict is rather rare in the immediate emergency period following disaster impact, nor are there many indications that social cleavages which existed prior to the event are amplified during that time period. However, it is true that if there is a pattern, it reflects the absence of conflict in the emergency period and its presence in the post-

emergency period. This in fact appears to be the most likely sequence following any major community disaster.

This does not mean that there is perfect harmony in a community during the emergency period and open warfare during the post-emergency period. The degree of community conflict present is always a relative matter. It is relative to the degree of conflict present both in the pre-disaster community situation, and that present in the emergency period; there is more relative to both in the post-emergency period. Thus, when we speak of presence or absence of community conflict in disasters, the prefatory term "relative" should always be understood as being implied.

Furthermore, exceptions to the pattern of "little early" and "much later" community conflict in disasters can be found. Strong disagreement, if not conflict, appeared very early in some of the Gulf Coast communities of Mississippi after Hurricane Camille struck the area. Neither is it true that community conflict always appears in the longer-run time period when relief and rehabilitation is being undertaken, rather than just emergency response. But such instances are rare, and they are explainable in terms of certain pre-disaster social conditions. The general proposition stated above is generally true.

One reason we suspect that community conflict is expected more than is actually the case and is more noticed [3] when it does occur in disasters is because it is generally seen as being inappropriate in an emergency situation. In layman's terms it is viewed as "bad", or if we conceptualize it in the sociological vocabulary, conflict is seen as dysfunctional for the maintenance or survival of the social system in which it occurs. Certainly at a common sense level, conflict would not seem to make for efficiency and effectiveness in community disaster responses.

However, is this really necessarily the case? Is conflict always dysfunctional? Sociologists such as Simmel (1955), Coser (1956), and

Oberschall (1973) have pointed out in detail some of the functional consequences of conflict in different areas of social life. We suggest and will try to illustrate briefly later on that community conflict in disasters is also not always dysfunctional. In more general terms, there is nothing inherently "good" about the absence of conflict, or inherently "bad" about its presence in post-disaster situations.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ABSENCE OF CONFLICT

There are at least seven factors that are associated with the absence of community conflict in a natural disaster situation. These, of course, can and do differ both quantitatively and qualitatively in any given crisis, and can reinforce one another in very complex ways. For analytical purposes, however, we will discuss each factor separately and as if each operates in isolation from all others.

1. Natural disasters involve an external threat. The disaster agent comes from outside the community system. Many other stress-producing agents do not, as for example in the case of civil disturbances, mass purges, or drastic currency devaluation. Members of the larger community or its organizational components are usually the sources of such crises and are accordingly foci for possible conflicts. But since disasters come from outside the community system, they do not lend themselves as readily to amplifying existing community cleavages or creating new internal conflicts.

Furthermore, as sociologists have long noted, one way to create solidarity within a social system is to face that system with an attack from the outside. In a sense, a natural disaster agent is an attacker from outside the system. In fact, disaster victims not infrequently personalize disaster agents so that they are talked about almost as if human agents were attacking the community. Such kinds of external threats mute existing con-

flicts and discourage the emergence of overt differences.

2. In almost all natural disaster situations, the disaster agent can generally be perceived and specified. It is the wind and funnel associated with a tornado cloud, the land movements associated with an earthquake, the rain associated with a hurricane, etc. There is something which can be seen and to which labels can be attached. Many other types of community crises are situations where it is not easy to isolate and to identify the agent involved. To some extent, certain currently popular environmental problems fall into this ambiguous category.

The importance of this general point, for our purposes, is that an identifiable threat makes it easier to mobilize for action. It provides a focus and a point around which a coordinated response can be made. Vague sources of crisis, because of their very ambiguity, leave unclear the course of action to be followed for resolution; in fact, they tend to suggest alternative responses, thus allowing community polarization around different possibilities. The myriad suggestions advanced on how to deal with campus disturbances is a recent case in point.

3. There is high consensus on priorities in natural disaster situations. In general, it is not only relatively clear what should be done, but more important, in what rough order crisis-related activities should be carried out. Yutzy (1969), in an analysis of this problem has in fact detailed the general priorities attached by communities to their emergency responses. As might be expected, the saving of lives takes precedence over anything else.

Thus the development of an emergency or disaster consensus places high priority on the activities which benefit the "total" community and low priority to segmental "selfish" interests. Considerable social pressure exists to avoid actions which can become sources of

social division. This contrasts with other community crises, such as civil disturbances, which are manifestations of open conflict between different parties in the locality (see Quarantelli and Dynes, 1970b). Such crises exhibit the very lack of consensus on community priorities that shows itself in natural disaster situations.

4. Natural disasters almost by definition create community-wide problems that need to be quickly solved. The problems created by disaster agents are often immediate and imperative — e.g., rescue, debris clearance, medical care, food, and shelter, etc. — and the reasons why solutions are necessary are fairly apparent. The very existence of community life presupposes a minimal handling of such problems. In many other community crises, individuals and groups will often have not only different and conflicting definitions of the nature of the problems but also of the reasons why they should be solved.

When problems are immediate and imperative, there is less likely to be conflict in solving them. This is especially true if, as in disaster situations, the necessary solutions are relatively apparent to all. In other types of crisis situations the community can often afford the luxury of "waiting for another day", and arguing about possible solutions particularly if these are not obvious to all.

5. Disasters lead to a focusing of attention on the present. At least in the emergency period, the past and the future are temporarily laid aside. In this respect a disaster provides a degree of liberation from many everyday concerns, which does not always occur in other kinds of large-scale stress situations.

During normal times in a community, people are preoccupied with the past and the future, as well as with the present. They worry about past conflicts with others and their future ability to meet responsibilities and goals which might be a source of disagreement with others. A disaster, however, produces a present

orientation which minimizes previous memories of and future possibilities for conflict. Worries about the past and the future are unrealistic in comparison to the realities of the moment. People thus concentrate attention on the immediate day-to-day, if not hour-to-hour needs. In a disaster situation, this perspective speeds up the decision-making processes and provides a degree of satisfaction in acting directly and seeing accomplishments quickly. In general, cooperation rather than conflict is encouraged by a present time focus.

6. There is a leveling of social distinctions in disaster situations. Whereas many stress situations accentuate status and other differences, natural disasters democratize social life. Existing social distinctions are minimized in the emergency period of disasters in the sense that all groups and statuses within the community may be indiscriminately affected. Since the threat comes from "outside" and affects "all" community members, this produces a temporary breakdown in class, ethnic, and other status distinctions. A general democratization of social life is further facilitated by the fact that danger, loss, and suffering become a public phenomenon.

In other crises, people can often point out discriminating injustices. Even in most accidents or personal life crises, the victim often feels discriminated against since there are others who have been spared. And the necessity to explain why a particular person or category of individuals has been singled out for special punishment or suffering can heighten existing community cleavages. In general, community stress situations not accompanied by social leveling are likely to lead to conflict; natural disaster situations usually provide just the opposite context.

7. Disasters strengthen community identification. They do this (a) creating a dramatic event in the life history of the community; and (b) allowing wide opportunities for parti-

cipation in community-relevant activities.

(a) Disasters have been compared to a drama which facilitates group identification by gripping people's imagination and heightening the sense of importance of collective human action. This is a very valid observation. Disasters do not involve mundane matters, but often the very issue of human life itself. In addition, the drama is not played out in private and with only a few participants. A disaster is a public event widely shared by community members. Furthermore, many initial emergency reactions are at the level of human beings responding to one another as human beings. For example, while initially there is considerable anxiety about the welfare of family members and other relatives, much rescue activity is directed toward those whose social tie is simply that of being another human being in trouble.

As a consequence, all those who share in the experience are brought together in a very powerful psychological sense by their common participation in such a dramatic event. To victims, the disaster is "our" disaster, an experience that is important in the collective memories of the affected community almost as soon as impact is over. While some other community crisis events may be equally as dramatic, few can match disasters in highlighting the sense of having undergone a common and a very human experience.

(b) Disasters also provide very wide opportunities for participation in activities for the "good" of the community. After initial rescue activities, there are subsequent opportunities for participation in community activities, either as a volunteer or as an organizational member. Such activities are centered on emergency tasks created by the disaster, so that many of the elements of community conflict which exist prior to the event are no longer relevant. In contrast, pre-impact, day-to-day activities are often carried out in conditions of opposing community interests and in situations which often engender hostility rather than cooperation.

Participation in disaster activities is also frequently undertaken in social contexts that give a person great latitude or choice in the determination of what and how certain things should be done. Earlier rules which might have been felt as restrictive, previous procedures which encouraged routine, as well as standardized situations which make for repetition, tend to disappear. The emphasis is on adaptation and innovation. But others with whom the person is involved are faced with not different but similar situations, so interests become common rather than conflicting. Also, the individual efforts are relatively easy to evaluate and therefore a person can easily see his own contribution to the "good" of the community. This, in turn, strengthens his own identification with the community. That person has become a contributing member – a person with something to offer who can now show concrete and positive accomplishments.

FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL ASPECTS

While such enhancement of community morale has obvious positive consequences, there is another side of the coin which tends to complicate the communities' relationships with "outside" help and with extra-community organizations. The increase in solidarity within the community is accompanied by an increase in hostility towards outsiders. This is true even when those outsiders come to give aid. This reduced tolerance has certain distinctive features. First, it does not apply to all who are outsiders in a geographical sense, since in particular situations members of organizations that are not locally based are welcomed. Second, the determination of "who" is an outsider is not necessarily related to whether the individual is performing a useful function during the emergency period. Personnel from organizations who play critical roles in the emergency period are often the target of direct hostility. In effect, the determination

of "who" is an outsider seems to be based primarily on giving the appearance that they share the sentiments of the insiders. For example, the Salvation Army workers who seem to express sympathy and share the "feelings" of local community victims are often considered insiders while other welfare workers, such as Red Cross personnel, who maintain a more professional stance, are often considered outsiders (Stoddard, 1969; Adams, 1970).

The dimensions just mentioned – external threat and identifiable danger, the development of an emergency consensus, the facing of immediate problems, a present orientation, the leveling of social distinctions, the expansion of opportunities for participation, the strengthening of community identity, and the generation of hostility towards outsiders – have been sometimes conceptualized in the disaster literature as creating a "therapeutic community" (Fritz, 1961: 684). This seems a useful way of thinking about the phenomena. The process *is* therapeutic at both the individual and social level both in its nature and in its effect, in the sense that it:

1. Tends to resolve and ameliorate pre-existing personal and social conflicts that could endanger the continuity of social life.
2. Tends to attenuate or prevent disorganizing individual and social responses which could emerge in conditions of danger, loss and deprivation.
3. Tends to reduce or prevent self-aggressive and anti-social behavior arising from the losses imposed by the disaster.
4. Tends to remotivate individuals within the community system to devote their energies to socially constructive and regenerative tasks.

There is another aspect of the function of this "therapeutic" community which is of particular importance in reference to the subsequent patterns of community organizations. Turner (1967) has suggested that some degree of consensus on values within a community is

necessary in order that an effective division of labor develops and carries out the tasks created by the impact. Upon impact, the existing division of labor within the community becomes less effective, since it cannot handle many of the new tasks created. But prior to the development of a new and more effective division of labor within the community, agreement on priorities has to be reached. This consensus, then, is necessary for the re-establishment of the division of labor.

Turner has also suggested that the enactment of solidarity within the community during the emergency period is necessary since each person in the developing division of labor must neglect other essential tasks in order to perform new tasks. Consequently, there is need of assurance that the neglected tasks will be performed by others. The enactment of solidarity during the emergency period reaffirms the importance of individual community members' contributions to the total group effort and, in turn, motivates them to contribute. Thus, a period of enactment of community consensus is necessary to recreate the continued assurance of agreement on the priority of values. Once this assurance is "given", then a new division of labor can emerge. Until this assurance is "given", the adaptations necessary, in the form of a new and appropriate division of labor, will not be made. In effect, we have suggested that increased solidarity within the community during the emergency phase is a necessary condition for the development of the division of labor needed to cope with the various crises. In this sense, this solidarity is "functional" during this "phase" of disaster activity.

There is, of course, no clear demarcation between the emergency and the rehabilitation period. Neither is there a standardized period which can be called the "emergency", as such. The extensiveness and severity of disaster impact are major factors which create variations on the "emergency" theme. For one commun-

ity in one context, it may be 36 hours, and for another it may be four or five days. There are certain common social indicators, however, which can provide clues to a line of demarcation. These indicators point to a period of transition from the focus on immediate disaster-related problems back to a focus on long-range community problems, disaster-related or otherwise. A rather constant transitional signal is what we call "white shirt" day. One morning, spontaneously and without prior discussion, most of the individuals involved in the emergency move back to normal dress patterns. Municipal officials become "white collar" workers again. Men don suits and ties, and women reappear in skirts. This "white shirt" day tends to coincide rather closely with the re-establishment of activities considered unnecessary during the emergency period. A number of activities are re-established which were abandoned or ignored during the previous period. Schools, bill collection agencies, fur stores and movies announce that they are re-opening and ready for business.

Not all segments of the community end the emergency period at the same time, however. The police may go back to regular shifts while the municipal public works department is still working overtime. But usually within a relatively short period of time, all the signals point to a new state of "normalcy". There may still be difficulties — power failures, telephone malfunctioning, heating problems and make-shift work conditions — but these are seen as part of the game: uncomfortable, but normal. This new normalcy also provides the setting for the emergence of conflict. Certain aspects of the conflict which do emerge are traceable in part to some of the changes which have occurred during the emergency period. In other words, the solidarity which was produced during the emergency period provides part of the basis for conflict.

ASPECTS OF CONFLICT

Focusing now on this rehabilitation period, it is possible to raise a number of questions. First of all, if conflict develops, what is it about? Secondly, who becomes involved? Thirdly, what factors mute or amplify the conflict?

First of all, it is our observation that two major themes tend to become the focus of conflict during the rehabilitation process – the allocation of blame and the allocation of resources for rehabilitation. The allocation of blame is found primarily in “man-made” disasters (see Drabek and Quarantelli, 1967) but certain aspects may be found subsequent to “natural” disasters. As we indicated earlier, one of the factors minimizing conflict in natural disasters was the fact that the precipitating agent came from outside the community system. That such agents are seen as “acts of God” tends to reduce their potentiality as a source of conflict. However, there are certain aspects, even of these acts of God, which can give rise to conflict. These are most likely found in those disaster events brought about by agents which allow time for warning and consequently, for pre-impact action. Among the disaster agents normally having these characteristics are hurricanes and floods. There are three problematic aspects of such agents. (1) The correct interpretation of environmental cues has to be made – in other words, the direction and speed of the disaster agent have to be determined. (2) Warning has to be provided for those who are in the area where impact will occur. (3) Specific action such as evacuation may be required of certain segments of the population. Each of these aspects can become the focus of conflict after the emergency period and blame can be directed toward the official agency most immediately involved. In the United States, for example, the National Weather Service is primarily responsible for the interpretation of environmental cues but warnings tend to be the responsibility of vari-

ous governmental agencies within the community, as are efforts to implement pre-impact preventative actions. Thus, in Wilkes-Barre after the flood, criticisms were made of the Weather Service’s alleged failure to clearly indicate the danger of flooding, as well as the supposed inaction or inadequate response of civil defense and police agencies in the area.

The potentialities for blame in these situations are relatively high, primarily because organizational officials find themselves confronted with uncertain choices. The interpretation of environmental cues is usually couched in terms of probability (Simpson, 1973). Given a low probability of impact, social control and governmental officials are sometimes reluctant to warn populations because they feel that the population may “panic” (Quarantelli, 1960). Another source of reluctance is that the officials think that warnings with low probability will undermine the confidence the population has in them in future warnings in situations of higher probability (McLuckie, 1970). This is most clearly seen in the lack of legal power to enforce evacuation. (It should be noted that with experience, social control officials in areas of recurrent disaster impact often develop extra-legal methods, such as threats of arrest for other offenses, to encourage compliance with evacuation orders.)

A second major focus of conflict often centers around the allocation of resources for rehabilitation. This arises because communities are often faced with many more options than they normally would have, and they often have *in toto* more resources than they had available prior to impact. This was most apparent in the rebuilding period in many villages, towns and cities in the aftermath of the Alaskan earthquake. Previously unthought of options and massive outside assistance from state and federal agencies set the stage for bitter interorganizational disputes and community conflict. This also happened in Wilkes-Barre after the flood, and in Xenia after the tornado had struck.

What is surprising in these situations is not that conflict breaks out, but that it takes as long as it does to surface openly and that the parties involved sometimes seem taken aback by the ferocity with which the struggle is waged. The slow realization is probably related to the time it takes at the local community level to recognize that the often-massive inflow of state and federal assistance is slowing down, if not stopping. The growing awareness that the outside world is becoming less concerned with the local disaster and is unlikely to continue funnelling in resources often leads to precipitous efforts among different community organizations to "grab" whatever seems left of the declining pool of money and supplies flowing in from the outside. It would require a very unusual set of conditions not to have this kind of community conflict emerging during the rehabilitation phase of a major disaster.

Interestingly, the conflict over the allocation of resources often centers around procedural steps in obtaining available resources. This focus of conflict can be understood by looking back to the emergency period. During this period, many resources pour into the community. Fritz and Mathewson (1957) have called this "convergence behavior". Information, personnel and material goods converge in on the community. While much of this is not needed, and in fact often diverts from the more critical activities during the emergency period, it is difficult to refuse and almost impossible to control. The important point here is that resources are available and are "freely" given, with only minor questions raised about procedural niceties and organizational responsibilities. However, during the rehabilitation period these procedural niceties again become important and usually take a bureaucratic form. Questions of need, financial responsibility and intended utilization all become relevant. To members of the impacted community who have experienced the inconvenience and suffering of the emergency period, these questions

seem unnecessary and irrelevant. Relief agencies which earlier were dispensing help without question now become more formal and more bureaucratic and, in the view of community members, heartless. Various government agencies ask questions which in another context would be routine, but now appear as prying. Local agencies find that state, regional and federal organizations no longer seem willing to cut the "red tape"; if anything, procedures appear to be more complicated, complex, detailed and time-consuming than seemingly similar pre-disaster activities.

The second question we posed about who gets involved in conflict is not as simple as might appear at first glance. There is a difference between individual or household disaster victims and local community organizations (at least, after a certain time period). At the individual or family level there is a great tendency for hostility to be directed toward the "outside" organizations which have continued responsibility during the rehabilitation period. In the United States, this generally means various state and federal governmental agencies and a few relief agencies with national ties. The cohesiveness which has been created within the community during the emergency period carries over and forms a "united" front. Since local residents are more likely to have direct contact with relief groups, much of the hostility is directed there. Since various community officials have more direct contact with other governmental agencies, they are more alert to problems in these areas. Criticisms of the various organizations are often expressed in local newspapers and through the emergence of informal groups of aggrieved citizens (see Forrest, 1972), some of which achieved a degree of almost national notoriety such as in the Wilkes-Barre flood and the Buffalo Creek dam disaster. The ventilation of feelings within the local community are often provided an unanticipated forum by some governmental committee, which investigates and holds hearings. While the intent of these investigations

is often to expedite aid (and sometimes to advance the political ambitions of certain committee members), they also provide a forum for complaints.

The important point here is that the emergency period produces cohesiveness which leads to conflict with "outside" agencies, which in turn leads to greater cohesiveness. Those in the impacted community always have the moral advantage since they speak from a position of suffering, and those in the outside organizations are thus placed on the defensive. This in-group—out-group feeling is also seen in another context. Considerable sums of money may be raised voluntarily for relief purposes and committees are often placed in charge of distributing these funds. In such situations, one can almost be certain that members of the local community will raise objections to the appointment of "outsiders" on such a committee. Such appointments are seen as political ones. In general, members of the local community will reject any "outside" attempt to control resources which they feel should be properly in their control.

Even in the allocation of blame, the attempt to attribute it to local officials is resisted and resented. In the event of an apparent delay in warning where Weather Service officials may become logical targets, there is a tendency to minimize the culpability of local bureaus and to focus on higher levels of administrative authority as the source of bureaucratic inefficiency. What is true of the National Weather Service is also true of other organizations within the community which have ties to state and national jurisdiction. State and National Civil Defense may be criticized, but local CD officials are praised for their work. State and national governmental units are found fault with; but their local representatives are "excluded" from this criticism.

However, the united front of the locals (individuals and organizations) against "outsiders" eventually tends to break down as already indicated, particularly in terms of the

local groups. The local community organizations can afford to cooperate with one another as long as it seems that outside groups are going to provide almost unlimited assistance. But once outside organizations start to withdraw, and indicate that their help is starting to come to an end, the stage is set for competition among local agencies. The struggle, as we have already indicated, often appears to be about procedural steps required to obtain outside resources. But the ever-increasing bureaucratic steps, of course, demand more and more explicit explanations and defenses of need, responsibility, intended utilization, etc. With clearly shrinking incoming assistance facing them, some organizations eventually reach the point of arguing that they have more need, it is their greater responsibility, or they will better utilize the possible help than some other local groups. At this point, the community conflict is often interorganizational, with the competing agencies falling back on using whatever power base and sources of influences they have in the local community. (At the individual or household level, the disaster victims even in the rehabilitation stage seem less likely to be competitive with one another, possibly because a person who has directly suffered in a disaster appears to be able to make a moral claim for help that an organization as an impersonal entity cannot make.)

Three factors seemingly tend to amplify conflict: the addition of a political, ideological or vested interest dimension. In a few instances, the in-group—out-group lines of conflict are reinforced by political dimensions [4]. For example, the local community officials may be from one political party, but state and national officials may represent another. The conflict, then, tends to take on a political tone. From the local community vantage point not only are those outside of the community causing trouble; but they are "motivated" for political as well as bureaucratic reasons. (This can also occur to some degree if the officials within the community and those outside the

community belong to different factions within the same political party.)

A second factor which serves to amplify conflict is what might be called an ideological component. This has occurred rather infrequently so far in the aftermaths of disasters in the United States. But as values change in society, there are some indications that ideological conflict may appear more often in future American disasters.

For example, there have been accusations following several recent disasters that relief and rehabilitation administration has discriminated against various disadvantaged groups such as blacks or working class segments of the population. A conspicuous example of this was the charge leveled by several national groups, such as the N.A.A.C.P. and the American Friends Service Committee, that post-disaster relief efforts in Hurricane Camille were highly discriminatory. The effect of such charges, whether warranted or not by the facts of the case, is often to amplify the in-group–out-group cleavage. The reason for this is that the accusations are likely to be made about outsiders. If these charges are believed by any segment of the local victim population, they are more likely to be believed if the complaints are about “outside” agencies. Therefore, national organizations such as the Red Cross and the Small Business Administration become the target of any local hostility that develops, while community organizations remain aloof and are protected by the reinforced cohesion of the local community.

Finally, a third factor that may operate to intensify conflict is the surfacing of vested interests. As we have discussed elsewhere (Dynes, Quarantelli and Kreps, 1972), the demands of a disaster situation frequently lead to the emergence of new local groups who attempt to cope with the increase in normal tasks as well as new tasks and requirements posed by the community emergency [5]. (In some instances, already-existing community agencies extend their activities and respon-

sibilities into new areas.) For a while, as massive outside aid is brought into the community, there is unlikely to be much open conflict between the more established organizations and the new or extended groups in the disaster community. There is enough to do for everyone, and as already mentioned, there is usually more than enough outside help to share or to divide up in a non-competitive way.

But as the non-local aid dries up for the reasons indicated, competition will emerge between the newly-emergent and the more established organizations in the community. This competition will be particularly facilitated if the more established groups believe or perceive that their vested interests are threatened. This can easily occur if in the course of responding to the disaster, the emergent or extending groups have taken over some traditional tasks or responsibilities of established community groups. Conflict can then develop in the rehabilitation phase not only over the proper sharing of the ever-reducing flow of outside help, but also over who has the legitimate right to undertake certain tasks – the traditional established organizations or the newer groups who emerged or who extended their activities into non-traditional tasks at the time of the emergency and at the beginning of the rehabilitation phase? This kind of conflict is additionally facilitated by the disappearance of outside agencies as possible targets of attack and hostility. The inside–outside cleavage no longer helps to maintain the united front of the local community groups since in one sense, the outside organizations disappear as possible foci of attention.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

What are the long-range consequences of conflict? We would argue that the conflict which does occur during the rehabilitation period tends to reinforce the community cohesion which is produced during the emergency period. One fear which is often expressed

by community officials early in the emergency period is that the severe blow to the community system may result in the loss of community members who might become discouraged at the complex tasks ahead. Therefore, there is a great deal of attention given in the emergency period to developing and sustaining community morale. We have suggested that the conflict that does develop during the rehabilitation period can be seen as taking an in-group—out-group form, which is both an expression of the cohesion which exists and a constant reinforcement of it.

Conflict can, of course, be dysfunctional. Political conflict may lead to cessation of outside help, although this very rarely happens in American society (although the degree and speed of assistance may be affected). The net effect of ideological conflict such as manifested in charges of unjust distribution of relief aid may, by deflecting the criticism on outside organizations, make it more difficult for them to work within a cohesive local community (although in actual fact we have not seen this on any large scale). And as already indicated, the interorganizational conflict may emerge over what are seen as important vested interests. To the extent that this occurs, it can also drain attention, energy and resources away from rebuilding the local community. In this way, the conflict could be extremely dysfunctional for the community as a whole.

Nevertheless, our impression is that such conflict may not be as important or significant as it might seem to the particular contending parties. Often the post-disaster rehabilitation conflict that emerges is little different from the pre-disaster disputes, cleavages and disagreements that prevailed in the community, although some of the clashing groups may be different. A certain degree of interorganizational conflict is a normal characteristic of everyday American community life. In a way, the reappearance of overt conflict is a sign that the disaster-impacted community has returned to “normal”. It also means that the conflicts

are being worked out through the usual interplay of contending parties using whatever influences and power they can call upon, be these citizen support, mass media assistance, mobilization of special interest groups; and the whole panorama of processes that Coleman (1957) notes are usually operative in standard kinds of community conflict, be they about fluoridation, urban renewal, freeways, school integration, juvenile delinquency, or what have you.

Having observed the varying degrees of conflict in communities during the aftermath of a disaster, and looking at these same communities several years later, we can draw several conclusions.

1. The major post-impact activity has typically centered on restoration. Generally, economic recovery has been relatively rapid and the initial fears of the possibilities of economic ruin have been dissipated. Whatever conflict there has been has seldom interfered much with the long-run recovery.
2. Relatively few social structural changes occur in local organizations and communities after disasters. Our longitudinal post-disaster studies of Anchorage, Indianapolis, Topeka, New Orleans and Wilkes-Barre after they underwent major disasters uncovered relatively few changes in organizational structures and in such functional matters as disaster planning. Most of the changes that occurred were in the acquisition of additional resources (see Anderson, 1969, and Weller, 1973). The relative lack of this kind of change did not seem to be associated with community conflict.
3. The changes that did occur were primarily in the direction of continuing pre-disaster trends. The rehabilitation period conflicts, no matter how argued, seldom bring about drastic changes. The community is not quite the same after a major disaster, but then it is not really that different in most cases. Existing trends

are speeded up by a disaster, so if some organizational changes and modifications were under way, the disaster has usually served to accelerate their coming into being (see Blanshan, 1975).

4. A high level of morale is left in these communities as a result of their experience during the emergency and rehabilitation phases. The event itself has become part of the community history, and has taken on an important symbolic meaning. The disaster event is now used to demark time and to differentiate phases in the life of the community. Intense pride is evidenced in interpersonal relationships by recalling the role each member played in the emergency and the rehabilitation process. This high morale is also intensified by the recollection of the difficulties the local community had to contend with, not only from natural forces, but from "outside" groups. There is a residue left from interorganizational and community conflicts, but it appears to be relatively insignificant compared with the high morale generated from having overcome extra-community hostile elements, natural or human.

One final note is perhaps necessary here. While the earlier observation of the lack of community conflict during the emergency period is derived from observations on disasters in American society, we feel that it would have generalizability cross-culturally, since it is based on a common reaction to crises. However, the nature of conflict which emerges during the rehabilitation period would show a great deal of variation cross-culturally. Perhaps the major variable conditioning such conflict would be the relative involvement of different governmental and non-governmental organizations in various phases of disaster activity. In the United States, responsibility for disaster activities is generally located at the level of the local community. This results in conflict between the local community and outside agencies. This particular structuring is somewhat unique. In most other countries,

the national government has much more responsibility, supplanting both local and non-local private agency responsibility in times of disaster. Because of this heightened national involvement, conflict during the rehabilitation period is much more likely to take on a national political dimension. The party in power is held responsible and opposition parties tend to use a disaster incident as an opportunity to assess blame (see Quarantelli, 1963). In some cases the heavy use of military units in these societies may mitigate this political dimension, since the military is sometimes able to maintain a position of neutrality. Perhaps the key dimension here is the notion that conflict follows responsibility. In the local American community, responsibility and involvement result in cohesiveness which is generally functional in the rehabilitation process, but also contributes to the focus and direction of conflict that does appear.

Finally, the similarity of community conflict to conflict in other than natural disasters is something that is of importance. Some of our observations, as already noted, are quite similar to those of Coleman, for example, in his book on community conflict which deals with other than major community crises (1957). Thus, the study of community conflict in natural disasters and the stress involved, should be seen as a means of studying in clearer fashion a social phenomenon which is an integral part of everyday life (see Smith, 1971).

NOTES

1. Examples and illustrations otherwise not referenced in this article are taken from unpublished data in the DRC files.
2. In extremely rare instances in disasters outside the western world, isolated instances of such behavior have occurred.
3. The noting of conflict is also common among journalists, who will elaborate on the drama inherent in conflict, but ignore the more harmonious situations. See Waxman, 1973, for an account of radio and television station reports during disasters.
4. For a discussion of the political aspects of disaster situations, see Brown and Goldin, 1973: 66-105.
5. A theoretical discussion of emergent groups is presented in Weller and Quarantelli, 1973.

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