



Damage after the earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2009.

Global Disaster Management and Therapeutic Governance of Communities

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The Haitian earthquake in 2010 was one of the most devastating of modern disasters. The appalling loss of life and destruction, which mobilised people globally to donate to disaster relief, has raised questions about global disaster management. Disasters have been a core prism through which Western populations have related to the developing world over the last half-century, from the Biafran war in the 1960s to the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s, the Rwandan genocide in the 1990s or the Asian tsunami of the last decade. Western countries have also seemed more vulnerable to mass disasters than they have been for decades, whether to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 or natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina.

This article considers changing views on disasters and disaster-affected communities and their translation into global disaster management and therapeutic governance of communities. The article discusses how Western views shifted from optimistic sociological approaches to human agency in disasters to pessimistic ecological models of human pathology in disasters. I particularly draw upon changing frameworks of communal meaning among the British, which have both reflected and influenced changing international disaster approaches and responses to crises in the developing world. Traditional humanitarianism treated emergencies as being caused by natural disasters and the community as innocent victims. The recipient community in international aid was therefore not portrayed as culpable, but it was infantilised. In the last two decades a new humanitarianism has emerged around the concept of complex emergencies, which problematises affected communities as requiring therapeutic governance to break the vicious cycles of psychosocial dysfunction.

Changing historical approaches towards disasters

Disasters have assumed fundamental significance historically for human populations and the human condition. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods or comets have been seen as portending momentous events alongside their direct physical destructiveness. Disasters' elemental character may encourage communities to suspend temporarily personal or public divisions and may engender a sense of common humanity, unrecognised in non-emergency conditions (Fritz 1996: 23). Our common humanity is expressed in traditional humanitarian principles, which assert the neutrality and impartiality of aid, irrespective of existing political, national, racial, ethnic, religious or social affiliations (ICRC, undated). Nevertheless, disasters are experienced within historically specific social paradigms, notwithstanding disasters' trans-historical elements and how disasters shake up ordinary cultural expectations.

The downtown core shows the damage after the earthquake measuring 7 plus on the Richter scale rocked Port au Prince, Haiti, January 12, 2010.



Disaster studies, following Quarantelli's typology (1978, 1998), have identified three broad, historical understandings of disasters: acts of God, acts of nature and acts of humanity. The three understandings of disasters are associated respectively with the traditional pre-Enlightenment condition, the modern Enlightenment condition and the postmodern condition. Indeed, disasters have marked watersheds in human history: the 1755 Lisbon earthquake accelerating the Enlightenment, and the Holocaust and Atomic bomb stimulating post-Enlightenment thinking. These understandings are associated respectively with presumptions about disaster-affected communities and humanity in general: stoicism towards acts of God, agency in response to acts of nature, and pathology in relation to human acts.

Disasters from ancient times have had terrifying religious significance. Early antiquity often represented disasters as consequences of the gods' malicious sport – as in the Greek myths about Poseidon, the god of the sea and the 'earthshaker'. Later antiquity, especially the monotheist religious traditions, viewed disasters as God's punishment for human wickedness. Yet disasters struck the good, not only the wicked. Disasters became represented as tests of faith. The Biblical and Koranic story of Job affirmed religious steadfastness under suffering.

Religious interpretations were profoundly shaken by the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, which occurred on the Catholic Feast of All Saints and killed between 30,000 and 40,000 people as well as destroying many buildings. The Lisbon earthquake prompted debates across Europe, raising questions about a providential religious order and promoting secular Enlightenment thinking (Braun 2005; Kendrick 1956). Famously, Voltaire's *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster* called for enlightenment and for humanity to understand both itself and the natural and social world better (Voltaire 1911). Overall, public responses to the Lisbon earthquake encouraged a view of disasters as acts of nature, notwithstanding continuing religious interpretations. Importantly, the Portuguese authorities conducted one of the first scientific disaster enquiries and inspired scientific interest across Europe, underpinned by new confidence in the human potential to improve the world. Speaking of his ambitious plans for the city's reconstruction, Portuguese Prime Minister Pombal defiantly asserted that one day they would be considered 'small' (New World Contributors 2008). This spirit of confident defiance was repeatedly demonstrated in the 19th and 20th centuries. Optimistic responses prevailed in disasters such as the devastating 1871 Chicago fire, after which reconstruction expanded the city and stimulated its economic growth (Rozario 2007). Venture and stoicism in the face of disaster was culturally affirmed – whether in the American pioneering spirit

mythologised in works such as Laura Wilder's *Little House* series, or the British colonial spirit in Kipling's writings.

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The 20th century human-created disasters of world war and extermination led people to question the Enlightenment-inspired humanist confidence that human science would be used for humanity's benefit. The potential for nuclear destruction raised the spectre of catastrophes on a previously inconceivable scale – extermination of whole human groups and destruction of the planet itself. Right-wing political thinking had already been shaken by the First World War and the Russian Revolution, while the Holocaust, Hiroshima and the Soviet Gulags shook left-wing political confidence in social progress and human agency, expressed in works such as Robert Lifton's *Death in Life* or Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*. Critical theorists Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer drew pessimistic conclusions about the whole Enlightenment project in their study, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the full enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1976: 1).

Social pessimism fostered ecological concerns from the 1960s onwards, which were taken up later in sociological risk studies such as Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society* and Anthony Giddens' *The Consequences of Modernity*, and influenced global disaster approaches.

Until the 1980s, social pessimism was largely limited to elite or intellectual circles and the earlier optimistic humanist thinking prevailed in international disaster responses. For it was not automatic that the Holocaust or Hiroshima should undermine active humanist and reformist approaches. Indeed, creating the United Nations, reconstructing Europe and Japan, international revulsion against the Holocaust and formally delegitimising racist theories all demonstrate active humanist and reformist aspirations. Other developments undermined social optimism. I next consider how progressive politics encouraged optimistic sociological approaches, emphasising communal meaning and responses, and how its demise encouraged pessimistic ecological approaches, emphasising communities at risk.

Modern active and reformist communal meanings

Sociological approaches to disasters have historically emphasised communal meaning and communal responses. Religions may interpret disasters as warnings to humanity to return to religious faith and may encourage fatalism or stoicism in the face of danger. The Enlightenment humanist meta-narrative, premised on a belief in human progress, saw disasters as indicting unenlightened practices and testifying to the imperative for social improvement. Disasters were seen as avoidable or mitigatable in the long term through improved public infrastructure and interventions.

These Enlightenment ideas were intertwined with the rise of modern politics and nationalism, which further mediated how disasters were understood and were responded to. Left-wing responses to disasters were significantly associated with critiques of existing power relations and social inequalities and represented the humanity of the common man. They affirmed ordinary people's mutual support, stoicism and dignity in the face of poverty, harsh working conditions and economic ruin as part of demanding social change (Steinbeck 1951: 177-184). The political potential generated by disasters was specifically represented in Marxist and other left-wing crisis theories. As disasters destabilised the existing political and social order, oppositional political movements could use the opportunity of crisis conditions to push for political and social change.

Conversely, conservatives tended to deplore political divisions, which they saw as socially divisive, and appealed to a common national identity. Consequently, conservative approaches tended to suppress divisions in disasters and sought to reaffirm social relations and social responsibilities (including responsibilities towards the poor) potentially destabilised during crises. Reaffirmation of the existing social order also potentially affirmed ordinary people's reactions to new political forces. Right-wing theories were more likely to draw pessimistic conclusions from disasters where they shook established social norms. Crowd studies such as Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* and literary works such as T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* following the First World War reflected the elite's fears for civilisation and culture in the face of the of the mass society.

Post-war US and international disaster studies were influenced by observations of the British population's reactions during the Blitz (Fritz 1996: 48-50). The catastrophic Second World War experience, requiring the population's mobilisation to defend itself, affirmed ordinary people's

responses, marginalised negative views and bridged political divisions, appealing to both a common national identity and a social reform agenda. The Blitz spirit, or courage and resolve under aerial bombardment, became the popular representation of wartime responses, and informed optimistic post-war expectations of ordinary people's communal, altruistic, stoical responses to disasters up until the 1980s. Behaviour counter to the Blitz ideal, where people panicked or were selfish, was marginal in mainstream accounts (Jones *et al.*, 2004). Both conservative and left-wing wartime narratives typically showed people heroically working together as a community, transcending their social differences. Significantly, the key slogan of post-war reconstruction was 'homes fit for heroes', affirming ordinary people's wartime heroism. Positive public representations on both sides of the Atlantic were reinforced through popular films and music like Aaron Copland's music *Fanfare to the Common Man*, celebrating ordinary people's heroic wartime sacrifice.

Disasters, temporarily suspending existing social divisions, illustrated the potential for changing social relations beyond the disaster. The sociologist Richard Titmus's *The Gift Relationship* (1970) studied the development of blood donor and transfusion services in Britain following the Second World War and its significance for underpinning socially altruistic relations towards strangers in modern society. The gift of blood affirms our common humanity and our common human needs. Blood donation involves not only the individual donors' altruism,

Overall, the prevailing heroic wartime narratives of the victorious allies were active and reformist and influenced international development ideals and aid practice. Major international disaster organisations such as Oxfam came out of the Second World War – as did the UN itself.

United Nations Fight for Freedom – Boy Scouts in front of Capitol, They help out by delivering posters to help the war effort [1941 July?]



but also their belief in others' altruism towards strangers. Donors were acknowledging 'the universal stranger', people beyond their own family or group, and this concern for the unknown stranger underpinned the social welfare ideals of the post-war state (*ibid*: 268). Overall, the prevailing heroic wartime narratives of the victorious allies were active and reformist and influenced international development ideals and aid practice. Major international disaster organisations such as Oxfam came out of the Second World War – as did the UN itself.

Sociological disaster management approaches: therapeutic communities

Sociological disaster studies have examined communal meanings during disasters, exploring the interaction between disasters and cultural understanding, and developing secularised interpretations of older religious moral lessons from adversity. They have suggested disasters allow societies to transcend modern anomie, at least temporarily. Emile Durkheim's classic 19th century sociological study *On Suicide* had observed war temporarily mitigated modern anomie and decreased individual civilian psychosis and could develop people's sense of social responsibility (Durkheim 2006). Optimistic thinking prevailed in post-war disaster responses linked to wider belief in social progress, which saw disasters as natural occurrences to be overcome through human action. The broadly optimistic view about the capacity to deal with the physical impact of disasters was accompanied by similarly optimistic cultural expectations of people's responses to disasters. And crises seen through the lens of socially progressive outlooks reinforced imperatives for social support.

Sociological accounts documented the spontaneous creation of therapeutic communities (Barton 1969; Fritz 1996; Kreps 1984; Saunders and Kreps 1987). Leading post-war US disaster expert Charles Fritz was struck by the fact that large-scale disasters produced 'mentally healthy conditions' (Fritz 1996: 9). His 1961 study *Disasters and Mental Health* argues that 'disaster-struck communities and societies naturally develop therapies that quickly and effectively overcome the losses, traumas and privations of disaster – without the intervention of mental health care professionals' (*ibid*: 25). Fritz contests 'overworked metaphors of pathology', although he warns of different responses if 'outside forces or authorities intervene in spontaneous community processes of adjusting to the disaster' (*ibid*: 27–28). Against negative predictions, the study suggests that panic and hysteria are rare, people exhibit self-control and concern for the welfare of others, and reports of looting are typically exaggerated (*ibid*: 18). Fritz questions the value of extrapolating from 'routine crises or small-scale accidents to larger-scale disasters', arguing

that their enormity shakes up cultural norms and everyday behaviours (*ibid*: 23). Significantly, disaster-affected communities may cross existing social, racial, minority divisions (*ibid*: 40–42) and ‘most of the behavioural pathologies of everyday life fail to increase or actually decline in disaster’ (*ibid*: 27).

Positive expectations of communal responses were exhibited in the appalling 1966 Aberfan mining tragedy in Wales, where 144 pupils and teachers were killed by a coal tip landslide (Furedi 2005). Cultural responses affirmed the community’s heroic stoicism, strength and moral capacity to recover without outside intervention. The surviving children returned to school within two weeks. Outside intervention was rejected. No legal claims were initiated by the Aberfan relations – the idea was rejected as bowing to vengeance (*ibid.*). However, such responses, especially from the mid-1980s, were professionally and culturally questioned.

Disasters, social pessimism and risk consciousness

Individual countries’ national demoralisation was reinforced by a succession of international setbacks, including the end of the post-war economic boom, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the failed promise of 1968 radicalism, political repression and violent conflict in developing countries, and stasis or regression in international development.

In recent decades, both conservative and left-wing thinking has become more negative about humanity, seeing disasters as embodying human pathology and expecting dysfunctional or antisocial responses. Significant frameworks of meaning, notably belief in social progress and social welfare, had kept pessimistic critiques marginal and largely confined to conservative or left-wing cultural elites, until significant national frameworks of meaning eroded. It is possible to identify specific national tipping points as a result of which countries began to adopt more pessimistic professional and cultural outlooks. Pessimistic critiques gained wider cultural resonance in the United States in the 1970s, nationally demoralised over the Vietnam War and Watergate (Engelhardt 1998; Lasch 1984). In Britain, pessimism became more apparent a decade later, following the defeat of the year-long miners’ strike in 1985 and the demise of a working class movement. Individual countries’ national demoralisation was reinforced by a succession of international setbacks, including the end of the post-war economic boom, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the failed promise of 1968 radicalism and the Non-Aligned Movement, political repression and violent conflict in developing countries, and stasis or regression in international development (Laidi 1998).

The erosion of national morale led to a heightened cultural sense of risk and vulnerability; this was reflected in sociology, where the focus of interest shifted from social class to victimhood and risk (Bauman 1991; Beck 1992; Lasch 1981) and the professional expectations and cultural resonance of post-traumatic stress disorder, formally codified in 1980



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(Bracken 2002; Scott 1990; Young 1995). The cultural shift involved the rise of social regulation through risk prevention, displacing traditional morality or political ideologies (Castel 1991). Risk governance involves identifying risks, prevention policies making individuals aware of risks and supporting individuals to modify their behaviour, and monitoring mechanisms and targets to reduce risk.

Victimhood and pathology rather than heroism resonated with the demoralised Western cultural mood. Disasters themselves, especially the Holocaust, became more central to the Western imagination with the demise of other frameworks of meaning (Hammond 2007; Laidi 1998). Disasters did not simply register as individual tragedies but came to be linked together culturally, reinforcing a pervasive sense of vulnerability and risk. At the same time disaster studies have become more pessimistic about the responses of disaster affected-communities, along with the erosion of previous frameworks of meaning, their associated communal relations and a sense of community mediating adverse experiences.

Ecological disaster management approaches – communities at risk

In recent decades, ecological accounts have displaced sociological accounts in disaster management literature. Ecological accounts or agent-specific approaches focus on the scale and causes of disasters, and communities' vulnerabilities to external risks. They argue that technological disasters involving human error foster 'corrosive communities' rather than therapeutic communities, because of the way that disputes over culpability divide communities (Erikson 1994). Furthermore, the disasters attributed to human agency have expanded, as have the concepts of disasters, including toxic disasters (Furedi 2005). Ecological or agent-specific approaches associate human agency with pathology or culpability for disasters, and focus on vulnerability to disasters as opposed to the capacity to recover from disasters and make progress (*ibid.*). Populations tend to be approached dualistically as perpetrators or as victims at risk of trauma and dysfunction in the absence of expert interventions. Moreover, by the late 1980s, predictions of community dysfunction and long-term mental health problems were being applied to natural as well as technological disasters (*ibid.*). So whereas earlier sociological accounts saw the spontaneous creation of 'therapeutic communities', the new tendency in policy-making was to presume the need for therapeutic governance of disaster-affected 'corrosive' communities.

Risk consciousness, as it was absorbed into cultural norms, came to shape views of appropriate and inappropriate responses, including official models of functional and dysfunctional behaviour. Indicative of changing cultural expectations was the new attention given to emotional damage, and professional and cultural expectations of mass trauma from disasters. The vulnerability and trauma models were disseminated in media reporting. It became standard for UK media reports on disasters to refer to how the traumatised victims were receiving counselling. It also became standard for disaster reports or social problem documentaries to be followed by an announcement about a helpline for counselling or information available for anybody affected by the issues discussed. Cultural expectations of vulnerability were universalised socially. Thus in the UK it was automatically assumed any crisis-affected group, including farmers in rural communities previously associated with good support networks and traditional stoical attitudes, would need external therapeutic support (*ibid.*). Cultural vulnerability was also universalised globally.

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UN Photo/Kibae Park

Historically, however, human-created disasters, including Hiroshima and Aberrant, have not necessarily caused community corrosion (Fritz 1996; Furred 2005). Since the 1990s the new risk consciousness has been revising the cultural histories of disasters like the 1966 Aberfan mining disaster. Victims of these past disasters, interviewed about their experiences in contemporary documentaries or oral history projects, appear to be revising their memories according to today's cultural expectations of vulnerability and psychological trauma.

Terrorism threats and the return of resilience

Critiques of professional trauma and vulnerability models and interventions followed, particularly prompted by the explosion of global psychosocial programmes in the 1990s (Bracken 2002; Summerfield 1999). Such critiques questioned the medicalising of normal reactions, the presumption of personal and communal vulnerability rather than personal and communal strengths, interference with community and personal recovery, and the orientating people into individualised, professional relationships. They emphasised personal and communal strengths and values in mitigating the impact of disasters. Their impact was limited in the 1990s but attracted more official policy interest following the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US and the 2005 terrorist attacks in Britain. Interest revived in sociological studies documenting historical agency and productive communal responses to disasters (Fritz 1996; Furedi 2005; Rozario 2007; Solnit 2005). Ecological approaches have also become interested in resilience.

Crucially, critical security analysis pointed to the danger that the vulnerability paradigm amplified the negative impact of terrorist threats (Durodie 2008). Analysts advised that counterterrorism strategies needed to be re-orientated around resilience, and affirmation of communal values and relations. The revised counterterrorism policies have influenced crisis management more broadly. Since the mid-2000s there has been new emphasis on strengthening leadership and affirming communal values and positive social responses in the face of disasters, at least at the formal level. The very title of the UK government's Civil Contingencies Secretariat and UK Resilience Section shows policy recognition of promoting community resilience (Civil Contingencies Secretariat 2009). These changed policies have also been evident in revised media reporting of disasters, which are refocusing on community spirit and activity.

However, the new resilience model is distinct from stoicism and does not necessarily mean a return of trust in people's responses. The new resilience paradigm tends to replicate the assumptions of the vulnerability paradigm, which involves top-down approaches relying on professional interventions to make people resilient, instead of encouraging communities to act independently and build their resilience (Furred 2005). Importantly, the new resilience model has similar expectations of individual pathology without external governance. Communal civil values are affirmed at the formal level, but the expanding regulation of individuals continues, inhibiting spontaneous personal or communal responses.

Addressing disasters in the developing world

Western governments, organisations and individuals have increasingly sought meaning in international disasters or foreign conflicts as domestic sources of meaning have eroded since the 1980s (Hammond 2007; Laidi 1998). How have Western views of and interventions in disasters in the developing world evolved? Modern international aid began under the United Nations and in the climate of international rivalry to win the hearts and minds of the newly independent states. The new UN agencies and Western aid organisations shifted from assisting refugees in post-war Europe to the populations of newly independent countries. These aid organisations superseded earlier European colonial charity and missionary work. Foreign missionary organisations continue to be significant in aid work, US Christian organisations now competing with Islamic organisations. Indeed the numbers of foreign missionaries are larger than during colonial times (Hearn 2002). Secularised themes of salvation have persisted in global aid relations.

International emergency aid responses were to supplement international development approaches, whose original modernising industrial models aspired to overcome recurring natural disasters through the building of modern public infrastructure to prevent droughts, floods and disease, and social welfare systems to address poverty and health needs. A green revolution was to transform agriculture, increase food production and prevent famine. Political regimes could fall if they failed to address disasters. Some social progress was made after independence, but political instability increased, as development was uneven. Development studies repeatedly criticised the inadequacies of international development policies based on economic growth, and demonstrated that international economic relations and structural adjustment programmes exacerbated crises in the developing world and overlooked the basic needs of the poor.

Traditional humanitarianism represented emergencies as being caused by natural disasters and the community as innocent victims to be saved by international aid; thus the community was not held culpable but was infantilised (Burman 1994). Development education undertaken by NGOs sought to challenge Western stereotypes of the developing world, including those of NGO fundraising campaigns, which represented developing populations as dependent on external charity.

An important contribution to disaster analysis was made by the economist Amartya Sen's entitlement approach to famine, building on the basic needs literature and critiques of economic growth strategies (Sen 1981). The entitlement approach suggested famines could occur



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when food was available, and therefore that increasing food production or focusing on warning systems was inadequate. Famine prevention strategies needed to address households' ability to secure commodities for survival. Loss of labour power or wages and purchasing power contributed to famines; public works creating wage-based employment, along with welfare security systems and the provision of 'unconditional relief', helped prevent famines (Dreze and Sen 1990). The political will to address household food security was therefore crucial. Famously, Sen argued that democracy prevented famine in India (Sen 1981). Modifying Sen's conclusions, Alex de Waal (1989) proposed disease as the greatest danger in crisis conditions, and observed that populations had active coping strategies which mediated disasters and aimed to protect future household or community livelihoods, although they might not be able to protect all members. Furthermore, political violence and conflict undermined these coping strategies (*ibid.*). Other researchers argued that Sen downplayed the importance of India's infrastructure, contrasting it with Africa's poor infrastructure, which exacerbated transport problems and local food shortages (Kumar 1990).

Surviving the global development crisis?

Over the decades aid critiques have repeatedly advocated shifting from emergency relief to development to prevent disasters. But the 1980s' debt crisis and structural adjustment meant that infrastructure and welfare systems were strained in developing countries. Furthermore, the World Bank's free-market economics was opposed to public works and food subsidies, believing they lowered incentives to increase production, including food production. International development strategies became reorganised around selective basic interventions, maximising populations' survival capacities, and are now embodied in the Millennium Development Goals and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, which have replaced the earlier structural adjustment programmes (Duffield 2007). These strategies make sense as crisis management but abandon earlier aspirations to close the economic gap between developing and Western countries.

Sen's entitlement approach captured the imagination of policy-makers and supplemented sustainable development thinking against dwindling belief in social progress through material development, but its concern with inequalities became interpreted in ways that supported the retreat of public employment and welfare provision. Development strategies became focused on empowering households to secure their own livelihoods and welfare through traditional small agricultural holdings or urban microenterprise (Duffield 2007). A life-cycle poverty model has now been adopted, effectively turning political economy into a natural

economy (*ibid.*). Under a homeostatic concept of development, poverty reduction polices target particular groups considered vulnerable within life cycles – such as widows or female-headed households – to enhance survival as opposed to bringing about significant economic improvement (*ibid.*). A population's material security is envisaged essentially around customary livelihoods and living standards, but customary (gendered) divisions of labour are treated as dysfunctional and re-socialisation is required so that the economic insecurities of petty trading or subsistence farming, arising from the risk of crop failure, drought or floods, can be redistributed. So, insecure communities are somehow expected to experiment with post-industrial (gender) norms in a context of material stasis, in which their traditional way of life is considered 'natural' on the one hand, but pathologised on the other.

Contradictions of global disaster management and therapeutic governance

If development strategies now resemble crisis management and populations effectively have to depend on self-reliance, what happens to disaster strategies? The cyclical re-naturalised sustainable development model is in tension with global disaster management's shift from approaching emergencies as natural disasters to on-going complex emergencies. A complex emergency is commonly defined by international organisations as 'a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single and/or ongoing UN country programme (IASC 1994). The concept of complex emergencies sees the causes of disasters and conflicts as multiple, which allows it to be interpreted flexibly and used by different actors, both radically and conservatively (Duffield 2007). The concept merges emergency, development and political analysis and is influenced by social psychological theories. It encompasses internal and external causes, but its policy application effectively marginalises external causality emphasised in earlier development theories, or transforms it into an imperative for external intervention. Global policy tends to focus on populations' cultural norms and their internal social and political inequalities, rather than the international political economy. Yet, local political war economies have involved conflicts over profitable routes into the international political economy, and war-affected populations' welfare indicators have not necessarily been the worst in the developing world, for local political war economies involve relations of obligation (Duffield 2001).

Complex emergencies are conceptualised as cycles of poverty and dependency, trauma and violence, in which affected populations become pathologised as corrosive communities and traumatised victims are deemed at risk of psychosocial dysfunction and therefore potentially of becoming future perpetrators (Pupavac 2002). Thus, inherent within global disaster management is the contradiction that communities require governance to break cycles of poverty, trauma and violence, and also require governance to support re-naturalised cycles of communal reproduction. Meanwhile, material aid to disaster-affected communities is substantially the same as four decades ago and most people survive disasters through family and communal support (Duffield 2007).

Security concerns risk slowing down the rate at which disaster relief reaches communities, as in the case of the 2010 Haitian earthquake.



UN Photo/Marco Dormino

Above: Cases of water destined for the victims of Haiti's earthquake arrive in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. 18 January 2010

Significantly, evolving global risk management now affects aid workers, who are also considered at risk of psychosocial dysfunction (Pupavac 2004). Risk management policies are leading aid workers to be accommodated in secured camps, and inhibiting informal unregulated contact with affected communities (Duffield 2010). Therapeutic governance of aid workers is evolving to ensure their safety and psychosocial wellbeing (for example, by making provision to encourage a good work/life balance). Personal relations between aid workers and communities receiving disaster relief risk are becoming more attenuated and community engagement is taking more formal superficial forms. Furthermore, risk

management is creeping into academia, and research into crises in developing countries may be conducted on a narrower base in the future. Security concerns risk slowing down the rate at which disaster relief reaches communities, as in the case of the 2010 Haitian earthquake. Heightened security concerns over the potential risks posed by locals to aid workers (or academic researchers) reinforce negative presumptions of communities as pathological and requiring external governance. Yet both global sustainable development and disaster strategies to address complex emergencies are tacitly premised on the need for intensive external cultural and psychosocial programmes. However, psychosocial interventions to break cycles of poverty, trauma and violence may increasingly take the form of incursions into communities whose ways of life are to be substantially maintained. Consequently, although global disaster management has greater potential technologies at its disposal, there are serious tensions in its governance of disaster-affected communities. Global disaster actors should ask what material aid they actually give communities and, recalling past sociological disaster studies (Fritz 1996), whether their risk models are jeopardising disaster relief and disrupting spontaneous therapeutic communities of mutual support.

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