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**A LOCALITY-ORIENTED PUBLIC WELFARE AGENCY: A CASE STUDY OF  
BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

Boundary maintenance activities are studied in a public welfare agency as a means of establishing the relationship between the nature of these activities and the essential character of a formal organization. Assaults on the agency are observed through a period of social change, in this case an extreme of racial succession among the staff and administration of the agency. Conclusions point to congruence between the character of the organization and its boundary maintenance activity. Skewed or incongruent boundary maintenance produces disorganization and confusion among participants. In the context of racial succession, universalistic patterns are recommended as a solution to the confusion.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to develop the concept of boundary maintenance through a case study. Boundary maintenance is defined as the sum total of efforts to defend the character of an organization against influences from the outside which would alter the character of the organization.<sup>1</sup> It is an analytic tool which is useful for studying social change as it applies to bureaucracies, or any other type of social organization. If boundary maintenance is the preservation of the character of an organization, then the breakdown of its boundaries will presumably result in the change of its fundamental character. The study of boundary maintenance is, therefore, central to the study of social change among bureaucracies and other social organizations.<sup>2</sup>

The case study is focused on the Shalimar County Department of Public Welfare in the State of Woodland, USA. The Department is in process of extreme turnover which may be called "racial succession."<sup>3</sup> Three instances of assault on the boundaries of this agency are observed through secondary sources and construct interviews. The new

black director of the Shalimar DPW, Mary Hamilton, initiated one assault prior to her directorship, and two assaults resulted from her efforts to establish locality-oriented policies as director in the agency. Hence, the study is an example of the "deviant case" which invites analysis of the mechanics of boundary maintenance and change. By exploring the deviant case, the researchers are able to identify variables and hypotheses which predict the maintenance or breakdown of boundaries. Such variables may not be obvious in routine situations. The identification of these conditions should contribute to the development of theories explaining social change in bureaucracies and other social organizations.

First, the research methods will be presented, and the social context of the events will be described. The events of the case study will be reported in chronological narrative form. This narrative will be followed by an analysis of the principles of boundary maintenance, in the context of social systems theory.

#### Research Methods

The research design utilizes the traditional organizational field study, with a single case.<sup>4</sup> Events surrounding three critical incidents, or organizational assaults, are the focus of data collection. Data collection includes use of secondary materials, interviews with internal personnel, and interviews with external informants. In a fluid situation, boundary maintenance is not a routinized, standardized activity. Standardized interview schedules were not constructed.

Secondary sources include local newspaper accounts of welfare board actions, letters to the editor complaining about the agency or its director, and feature articles on agency services. The researchers perused letters used in preparation of a legal suit by the state chapter of the NAACP. Internal agency reports were also studied. Grievance documents by staff against the director, compilations of service statistics, and state office evaluation materials filed against the agency director were examined.

Four intensive interviews were held with the agency director. Factual statements made by her were cross-checked in interviews with three social work staff members who had opposed her, two neutral staff members, and one staff member who openly supported her. Conversely, factual statements made by staff members were cross-checked with the director and other informants. Four interviews were held with external informants: two swing members of the welfare board, one member of the county commission, and one state official. Brief interviews were held with three community leaders. One interview was held with the state Executive Director of the NAACP.

All respondents were informed of the researcher's scholarly interest in the agency. However, to avoid reverberations in the community or in the state bureaucracy, only staff members and board members were told about the focused research project. Most of the latter were told that the researchers were interested in the difficulties of maintaining agency functioning while personnel were charged with incompetence. Only the director was informed of the focus on boundary maintenance activity.

The researchers distinguished between implicitly factual, emotive or global statements, which could not be confirmed, and specific descriptive statements which remained unconfirmed from opposing or neutral quarters. Only one respondent, a board member, reacted cautiously with cryptic answers to questions. At the close of the interview, he expressed the fear that he would be asked to testify in court. Nevertheless, his answers confirmed the general outlines of the study. All other respondents were fluent and informative.

Context: The Shalimar Department of Public Welfare

Mary Hamilton joined the Shalimar Department of Public Welfare as a B.A. level social worker in March of 1970. Shalimar is a small community which is over 60 percent black. A number of economic institutions in Shalimar are managed by blacks, so there is a mood of independence and self-determination in the black sector of the community. Social and educational programs are actively developing and they are usually run by blacks. However, in 1970 the Department of Public Welfare was directed by an elderly white person who was admittedly prejudiced against blacks. Earlier, she had cooperated with Woodland State officials in their reluctance to employ black professionals. When that policy changed, the director reluctantly employed two blacks at the level of Social Worker, out of a total of seventeen workers in the agency.

Blacks and white liberals alike described an oppressive social atmosphere in the agency during that period.<sup>5</sup> The director told race jokes among staff. White liberals and blacks were separated in the agency structure, and they were advised not to fraternize with each other. Established staff members refused to spend time with the new black staff on breaks or lunch periods. Blacks were not given staff training.

Hamilton's first assignment was as an intake worker, where she had contact with clients only when they entered the agency for the first time. She asked for a transfer to a service position allowing for ongoing service to clients, and she was denied this request. Instead, her role was expanded to include transfer of information to

eligibility forms. It was early in this period that she noticed some irregularities in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) payments which were frequently below the State allotment. Also, she noticed that many eligible citizens were not on the roll.<sup>6</sup>

Hamilton became frustrated by her lack of service opportunities. She soon aspired to become a supervisor in the agency, so that she might have some impact on its operation. In order to qualify for such a position, she applied for educational leave to a graduate school of social work. A scholarship for educational leave was granted. She attended a black-oriented school of social work for two years and obtained the Master's Degree. During this period, she maintained a relationship with the Shalimar director, returning to work in the summer between her first and second years of school. Anticipating her permanent return, she held several interviews with the director during the second academic year to negotiate a supervisory position. She was referred to the state office for guidance.

Under court order to facilitate the employment of blacks, officials of the Woodland State Department of Welfare advised her to take all of the civil service examinations for supervisory positions, including the directorship examination. Significantly, they also advised her to seek employment in other counties. The Shalimar County DPW director's desire to minimize employment of blacks was respected in the State office in spite of the court order to integrate.<sup>7</sup> Hamilton passed each of her examinations in order, although the directorship examination was not given until September 1973.

#### Narrative: Assault I

Upon returning to the Shalimar County DPW in June 1973, Hamilton found that all significant supervisory positions had recently been filled. She was assigned as child care specialist with one black worker under supervision. There ensued for three days a heated argument between the director and Mary Hamilton, with the latter pointing out that her two years' training had not been oriented to her new position. She also pointed out that whites with lesser qualifications held more advanced positions than she did.

As a result of this debate, she was given two whites to supervise, in a new position designed for her. She would supervise day care centers and do research among rural neighborhoods on the need for rural day care programs. This position came as a result of her threat to sue on the grounds of racial discrimination. Hamilton was still dissatisfied with the opportunities to have an impact on total agency operations. Nevertheless, she accepted the compromise.

Hamilton's activities of the next three months consisted of the following:<sup>8</sup>

1. Visiting day care centers and making subsequent reports.
2. Organizing rural parents interested in day care.
3. Studying the hiring, evaluation, and promotion policies and experiences.
4. Studying and documenting total agency record-keeping procedures and service practices.
5. Gaining acquaintance with community leaders and soliciting their support for changes in the agency.
6. Taking the State Civil Service examination for directorship positions in accordance with the State's earlier advice.

The study of agency record-keeping procedures was an assignment given to two of the white supervisors as a result of criticism by Hamilton. She then joined them as a co-worker. In this study, it was documented that only ten percent of active service cases had been visited within six months, while state and federal regulations require all to be visited. Only four percent of the active service cases yielded a "case plan" in the file. The study produced resentment from the director, as well as from other staff members.

In early September 1973, the director solicited letters from staff, complaining about Hamilton's role as a supervisor.<sup>9</sup> This was an apparent attempt to support a negative probationary evaluation which would lead to her dismissal from the agency. In response, Hamilton requested annual leave, and it was granted. During her leave, she gathered support in the community for a rebuttal to her forthcoming negative evaluation. On September 11, she called a meeting of community leaders, including the executive director of the State NAACP, complaining of discriminatory employment and promotion practices in the agency and defending her own performance as a staff member. Six community leaders also filed letters citing the inability of local black community members to obtain employment interviews with the director; indicating the high rate of employment of whites from other counties; and complaining of the director's unwillingness to support social service proposals by other agencies within the county.<sup>10</sup>

The NAACP filed complaints with the State Department of Public Welfare and with US-DHEW in anticipation of a federal suit. The

Shalimar County Commission was also asked to investigate charges of discrimination in employment and promotion. The State Department did not ever respond to the charges. The County Commission, with a white chairperson, interviewed the agency director and publicly announced its rejection of the NAACP charges. HEW sent an investigator whose report was in process when the following events transpired:

1. The executive director of the NAACP and Mary Hamilton met on October 16 and November 5 with the agency director and three State officials to present their allegations.
2. On November 6, the agency director resigned, unexpectedly, and was transferred by the State Department to another county.
3. The Shalimar County Welfare Board requested the State Merit "register" for names of people qualified for the director's position.
4. On November 10, the NAACP director met with the County Welfare Board and discovered that they had not been informed of their legislated powers in the State system and did not know they had the final authority to select a director.<sup>11</sup>
5. On November 27, the County Welfare Board met officially to consider a negative evaluation report on Mary Hamilton and to select a new director from the State Merit listing.
6. Hamilton's name appeared on the listing of qualified candidates for the director's position; the Board rejected her negative evaluation and appointed her as the new director.
7. Three white board members resigned, leaving the majority of four black board members.

Six months after her return from graduate school, Mary Hamilton was offered the opportunity to direct total agency operations. She accepted.<sup>12</sup>

#### Narrative: Assault II

There followed an unusual intervention by the State Department of Public Welfare. As soon as Hamilton was appointed, 21 white workers requested transfers to neighboring counties. These transfers were granted within three weeks, although the agency had a total of only 33 workers. The transfers were extra-procedural, perhaps even illegal according to NAACP charges.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the transfers

were effected and the agency was depleted of a majority of its work force, including all supervisory personnel.

Hamilton's first job was to bring agency service records into compliance with state and federal guidelines by meeting the six month case review deadline for all active cases and by filing proper fiscal reports. Federal pressure was increasing. The new director was hampered in her efforts by the following barriers:

1. There were few local people on the State Merit listing; examinations were delayed until April, a four month delay; positions remained unfilled and work could not be accomplished.
2. The County Commission failed to fill Food Stamp service positions under its jurisdiction until public pressure mounted, a delay of three months.
3. The remaining staff persisted in working according to its previous norms, which did not require thorough record-keeping; there were no supervisors to support new record-keeping habits.

In the Spring of 1974, the State Department prepared to file a negative evaluation on the new director because of the failure to keep a full staff at work. She obtained the help of the NAACP and other local figures in identifying local people who were qualified and willing to take the State Merit examinations for positions in the agency. She utilized the local radio station to castigate the County Commission for dragging its feet, accusing the chairperson of racial bigotry. Staff resistance was handled in a disciplinary manner through negative evaluations and termination. A few black individuals from outside the county were employed; they had passed the State examination and could be accepted as "locals" because of their racial identification. Attempts were made by Hamilton to identify the new people as her employees, because she had personally hired them, as a means of developing a loyalty to her around new disciplinary norms. Former employees maintained contact with some of the new ones, and a rebellious mood was maintained in both groups. Accordingly, Hamilton made some effort to prevent sociability among new and former employees.

She won the battle with the County Commission. However, she accused some of the new employees of inefficient performance and hostile attitudes. Overall discipline became worse rather than better, and 30 percent of staff positions remained vacant. In May 1974, six months after her appointment, State field representatives gave Hamilton a negative probationary evaluation which, if accepted by

the County Welfare Board, would have prevented her from achieving permanent status in her position.

The State Commissioner of Public Welfare completed this stage of the conflict in an unusual manner as it had begun. Telegrams were sent to the NAACP director, the members of the Shalimar County Commission, the Mayor and City Council of the county seat, and the members of the Welfare Board, inviting them to a meeting with the State Commissioner to discuss welfare and food stamp problems. Hamilton was not invited. The Commissioner reported in the meeting the contents of the State evaluation of Hamilton, pointing to her inefficient management, and asking if they would allow the State Department to replace her. The Mayor, the director of the NAACP, and the chairperson of the Welfare Board led the response by pointing out that: (1) Hamilton should have been invited to a meeting concerning her reputation; (2) they wanted to maintain a black director; and (3) local people could solve local problems. In other words, they repudiated the assault. Subsequently, the County Welfare Board rejected the negative evaluation of Mary Hamilton and placed her on permanent status.

#### Narrative: Assault III

On June 18, one month later, the agency in Shalimar filled all of its positions with a fresh group of 11 social workers, many of them local people. At an orientation meeting, the director made a special effort to establish discipline. She declared that of the 11, probably two would not survive the six month probation period. Later, dissident staff complained that they lived in constant fear of their jobs.

In this period, Hamilton gave more structure to the agency by promoting some of her trusted and relatively more experienced workers to acting supervisory status. The task of bringing the agency's records up to standard was now more clearly anticipated. Regular reporting patterns were established.

Discipline continued to be a problem, however. Lines of conflict solidified. The director identified individuals whom she believed she could not trust. Terminations continued. Individuals took staff time to do their laundry, reporting that they were out on service calls. Supervisors were asked to check up and report back on staff behavior. Later staff complained about the turnover, the terminations, the "spying", and a punitive attitude on the part of the director. The following reasons for this conflict may be cited as probable causes:

1. Lax norms of discipline and effort persisted from the time

of the previous director through individual staff and friends of previous staff.

2. Hamilton's promotions did not reflect local community norms of status and prestige.
3. Hamilton's declared locality orientation encouraged the expectation of lax norms of discipline, which did not match her actual expectations.

As a result, Hamilton failed to persuade staff of the requirements of efficiency in service and record-keeping. Staff perceived her as an arbitrary, "dictatorial" individual with no warmth of personality and, therefore, unworthy of her position.

Meanwhile, the Shalimar County Commission realized they had never filled the three board vacancies created in November 1973 by the resignations of three whites. They proceeded to fill the vacancies with individuals who would scrutinize the director's performance. In one case, the new member communicated directly with dissident staff members and supported a staff rebellion.

Efforts by the director to defend herself were increasingly ineffectual. Staff members refused to read the State manual. Reports were turned in with inadequate detail, sent by staff directly to the State Department without being seen by the director. Hamilton was held responsible for their inadequacies. Shalimar County was identified as one of the counties which was not in compliance with federal requirements. Letters-to-the-editor appeared in the Shalimar newspaper condemning the dictatorial methods of the director. These letters were written by former employees who participated in private meetings of staff with the new board member. Hamilton confined her defenses to explanations to the board, especially the chairperson, and to the State field representatives.

The internal rebellion took shape on October 10, 1974. Mrs. Hamilton had denied a special staff request for a leave day, pointing to a deadline for reports which would require continuous effort. Instead, most of the staff spent its time drawing up a grievance petition. The dissident staff group declared that chaos had been created by the director's action. The State Department was called to seek information on the feasibility of transfers.<sup>14</sup>

On November 6, at the next meeting of the welfare board, the new board member invited all staff members to present their grievances. He also invited state representatives and other community personages to be present. The chairperson of the board and Mary Hamilton were

unaware that the confrontation had been arranged. Grievances were presented by staff and supported by state representatives and others. No opportunity for rebuttal was given. The board was overwhelmed. When one of the new members made a motion for Hamilton's dismissal, the motion carried without significant discussion or opposition. Twelve months after the previous director's resignation under pressure, the new director was removed from office, also in the midst of public controversy.

#### Postscript to the Assaults

Hamilton moved quickly to retain a lawyer and to prepare for a civil suit over her position in the agency. The suit was to be based on due process. In December, the County Attorney advised the Board that she had a good case. The State Department of Public Welfare, consistent with its prior actions, advised that the dismissal procedure was proper and legal. The Board chose its local advisor over the State Department; Hamilton was reinstated.

The dissident board member who had negotiated with the State Department over a new director and arranged the confrontation was censured by the Board for acting as an individual without the Board's awareness. At the end of the year, the County Commission got a new chairperson, a black person. The Welfare Board also got a new chairperson. The Board has decided to support Hamilton's authority actively within the agency. She, in turn, has committed herself to improving staff relationships.<sup>15</sup> However, the controversy continues.

#### Analysis of Boundary Maintenance Activities

As discussed by Roland Warren, boundary maintenance is a necessary function in any social system in distinguishing between the social system and its environment.<sup>16</sup>

A bureaucracy must clearly differentiate its expectations for patterns of interaction from external expectations. Such differentiation establishes the "character" of the bureaucracy. Boundaries delineate the nature of expected relationships of organizational character to the characteristics of the environment. If organizational character is well established, participants will naturally defend it against contrary expectations, either planfully or unconsciously. If organizational character is not well established, the organization is vulnerable to assault. Boundary maintenance activity must then be organized.

Organizations have various environments which require various types of relationships. Using the social systems approach of Talcott

Parsons, Warren distinguishes between "vertical" relationships with external bureaucracies and "horizontal" relationships with local groups and organizations.<sup>17</sup> Vertical relationships are usually oriented to instrumental expectations and procedures. Horizontal relationships tend to be expressive in nature. Hence, every local bureaucracy must resolve the potential contradiction between instrumental expectations emanating from a superordinate bureaucratic system and the expressive expectations arising from local and personal relationships. In the language of the Parsonian "pattern variables", vertical expectations are likely to be universalistic; while horizontal expectations are likely to be particularistic.<sup>18</sup>

The narrative description of the assaults on the Shalimar Department of Public Welfare reveals a mixture of universalism and particularism in both horizontal and vertical realms. A confusion of expectations from both realms produced ambiguity in the character and boundary maintenance activity of the agency. In this context, the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship of boundary defenses to organizational character. To complete the empirical analysis, it is necessary to identify the character of the organization and the nature of the assaults on its character, in relation to boundary maintenance activity.

#### Assault I

**Character:** The Shalimar Department of Welfare relies on a network of personalized relationships which supports fiscal conservatism, restraint in payments to welfare recipients, laxity in office procedures, and white control.

**Assault:** The state office of the NAACP, with information provided by Mary Hamilton and others, brings charges of discrimination against the director, informs black members of the local board of their powers, and seeks an evaluation by the county government. Federal procedures and federal law are cited.

#### Boundary Maintenance Activity:

1. Charges of discrimination are ignored as being meaningless by the director and by state officials.
2. County commission representatives support the personal judgement of the director.
3. Hamilton is socially isolated, even ridiculed, by staff members.

4. White Welfare Board members seek to replace the director with applicants from outside the county; when Hamilton is employed, they resign in a demonstration against the rupture of white control.

The defense of boundaries against the external threat posed by the NAACP is designed to maintain the essential character of the agency, primarily in its relation to the particularistic network of white-oriented state relationships. Ultimately, these efforts prove weak against the alignment of particularistic pressures and universalistic federal forces. For the first time in the State of Woodland, state-oriented white control is abrogated.

#### Assault II

Character: The Shalimar Department of Welfare becomes locality-oriented. Whites from the outside are not employed to fill vacancies. Focus on the issue of efficient office procedures is hampered by lack of personnel, lack of clarity in structure, and hostility among hold-over staff.

Assault: Experienced workers, including supervisors, are withdrawn from the agency. The Civil Service examination is delayed. County officials also delay staffing in the Food Stamp Program. State officials present a negative evaluation of the director. Local community leaders are called into the State office for the purpose of persuading the local board to reinstitute State control.

#### Boundary Maintenance Activity:

1. The director concentrates on providing the local board with information on state and federal guidelines.
2. Local leaders are reminded that the director has delayed staffing in order to employ local people, in accordance with the norms of many local citizens.
3. Efforts are made to prevent old and new staff members from sharing their resentment of the new director.
4. Internal operations are focused on compliance with state and federal regulations.
5. Dissident and blatantly inefficient staff are terminated.

The Assault is rebuffed. Boundary maintenance activity is successful, but not because of strict compliance with regulations.

Staff are not trained, nor are they cooperative with the director. Rather, the defense is successful because local leaders and board members understand the locality focus and the intention of following regulations, a mixture of particularistic and universalistic patterns.

### Assault III

**Character:** The agency retains its locality orientation and focus on regulations. Staffing is completed, largely with local blacks. The rift between staff and director crystalizes.

**Assault:** The County Commission appoints new board members who collaborate with the staff in seeking to remove the director. The State offices report failures to comply with regulations and encourage planning for a new director. Local newspapers are bombarded with complaints by former staff members, and formal grievance is brought to the board.

#### **Boundary Maintenance Activity:**

1. Hamilton's efforts to inform the board continue.
2. Internal operations are structured with supervisory promotions, in an effort to enhance efficiency and adherence to regulations.
3. Terminations continue, on grounds of inefficiency.
4. Due process is invoked in the retention of the director's job.

Boundary maintenance breaks down completely in this period because attention to universalistic regulations and the locality orientation are incompatible. The previous director had not required strict attention to regulations. The new director has committed herself in principle to the employment of local people, but local norms of procedure have not been followed. Promotions and terminations have not complied with particularistic expectations.

When a local person is terminated, local friends and relatives are offended. When staff members are passed over in promotion, their friends and relatives are also offended. Staff are repeatedly reminded to process forms and to quantify the organization of tasks. They prefer to respond to cases on a personal basis. As a result, the cumulative effect of dissatisfaction among disgruntled local citizens reaches many of the community leaders who have earlier defended the new director. Political leaders withhold their support. The stage is

set for rebellion.

A number of board members are caught in the mood of the rebellion and yield to the final drive for removal in a board meeting reported to be emotional and one-sided. Only "due process" saves the director and gives the board the time and leverage it needs to return to its original position. Currently, the newly constituted board is invoking the traditional respect for hierarchy to build support for the director and the regulations. Locality orientation has been de-emphasized in favor of efficiency.

### Boundary Maintenance and Social Change

In a short period of 18 months, the Shalimar Department of Welfare goes through two essential changes. Initially, the agency is correctly described as a particularistic, non-merit bureaucracy. Its restrictive, custodial service orientation is shaped by state norms and state-oriented personal relationships. Mary Hamilton attempts to develop a locality-oriented particularism and expanded service goals. The hostility she encounters in the state is predictable. To defend herself against it, she takes the professional stance that agency records and service requirements must be kept with strict regularity. Efficiency and merit employment would be upheld. This latter policy produces a breakdown of boundary maintenance activity.

Although the director is not removed, an essential change in orientation can be clearly detected. Locality-oriented particularism is replaced with universalistic employment policies. The contradiction between merit and local particularism is resolved in favor of merit. The Shalimar Department of Welfare is joining mainstream bureaucratic America.

In the context of these changes, the relationship between the mechanics of boundary maintenance and social change is especially pertinent. Summary characterization of these mechanics is in order:

Assault I. The response of the County Commission, the punitive social isolation of Hamilton, the effort to find another white state choice for the directorship, and even the failure of the state to respond to charges all fit the essential character of the agency. They are state-oriented, personalized, restrictive, and custodial responses.

Assault II. Hamilton responds to this Assault by educating the local board, explicitly identifying with local norms of employment, attempting to prevent social ties between old and new staff members, striving to comply with regulations which had been previously ignored,

and mixing loyalty and merit in personnel actions. Again, these activities flow directly from Hamilton's mixed policies of locality orientation and efficiency.

Assault III. As the reaction of local citizens and leaders builds up, Hamilton finds locality-oriented defenses increasingly ineffective. Consequently, she resorts more and more exclusively to bureaucratic defense mechanisms. Communications within the agency are structured heirarchically. Efficiency of staff is emphasized in defense of terminations presented to the board. Hamilton keeps her job by invoking "due process". The failure of the policy of locality orientation to mix with the practice of universalism in agency operations signals the breakdown of boundary maintenance, and the director is forced to change her essential policies and reconstitute the agency under the new board.

A grounded postulate emerges from these observations: Organized boundary maintenance flows from the essential character of an organization. Conversely, skewed boundary maintenance activities, which fail to reflect all essential policies, signal a breakdown of the constitutive order of an organization.<sup>19</sup>

### Discussion

The Shalimar Department of Welfare is a classic case of the branch agency, which Blau and Schoenherr say is routinely overprotected by the boundaries established under a vertical "roof organization", in this case, the Woodland State Department of Welfare.<sup>20</sup> Such superimposed boundaries are typically impersonal. In the case of charges of racial discrimination combined with lax operating procedures, the agency proved highly vulnerable to the alignment of federal and local pressures. Particularistic boundary maintenance procedures are vulnerable to breakdown in the face of higher order, universalistic machinery, when excluded groups develop the power to employ that machinery.

If the breakdown of boundaries readily occurs in the context of larger order social change, it is by no means easy to build strong locality-oriented boundaries in the face of the hostile forces of a vertical "roof organization". A number of factors mitigated against the rapid construction of strong new boundaries in Shalimar:

1. The same federal bureaucracy which brought Hamilton within reach of the directorship also demanded drastic changes in efficiency after she got there; staff then realized they preferred the lax, personalized approach of the previous director.<sup>21</sup>

2. The staff experienced a sensation of the isolation from authority such as that described by Warner and Low in the shoe industry. They could no longer depend on the personal connections of the director to support their roles in the agency. In fact, they knew that their new director had earned the hostility of the state bureaucracy. Insecurity and anxiety resulted.<sup>22</sup>
3. Once conflict is started, it is more likely to reach the level of sustained rebellion in a community which is small and socially separated from its environment, as Shalimar has been because of its racial character.<sup>23</sup>

Initially, Hamilton's strongest mechanism of boundary maintenance was her attention to locality-oriented norms. She symbolized local decision-making and commitment to local particularism, by virtue of her own black identity and her local hiring policy. Her early defense was successful on that basis. Her failure to harmonize federal guidelines and local norms quickly destroyed that defense. As staff became aware that she represented more consistently the impersonal orientation of bureaucratic procedure rather than any of their particularistic and personalized norms, they moved quickly to undermine her solid line of defense in the community.

Boundary maintenance in a locality-oriented agency requires great skill in the face of superordinate bureaucratic requirements. Particularistic and universalistic patterns are not compatible. Hence, it is necessary to manage an internal separation of local practices and the vertical supervision of the roof organization. Hamilton faced unusual hostility in the roof organization and an absence of personnel trained and willing to perform dual roles as efficient bureaucrats and personalized local public servants at the same time. She and the board have now jointly determined to de-emphasize the locality orientation and build staff relationships around norms of efficiency. Once these norms have been established, then the combined goals of efficiency and personalized service may be feasible. In the context of her succession, Hamilton had been able to satisfy neither goal, and her boundaries had broken down on all sides.

### Conclusions

An exploratory study of boundary maintenance activities in the Shalimar Department of Welfare reveals evidence for a number of observations:

1. The shift from bureaucratic particularism to universalism is still alive in a small, isolated community.

2. Federal regulations can be invoked to support local particularism in a predominantly black community, however.
3. The universalistic norms of the federal bureaucracy and particularism in a locality-oriented agency must be separated in daily operations; they are contradictory orientations.
4. Organized boundary maintenance flows directly from the essential character of an organization.
5. Skewed boundary maintenance activities reflect a breakdown in the constitutive order of an organization.
6. Special efforts to align staff with their constituted authority are necessary when the agency is faced with hostile external forces.
7. Mismatched expectations by staff and the constituted authority will destroy the effective alignment; boundary maintenance will disintegrate.
8. In the context of social changes from particularistic to universalistic patterns, confused expectations between roof and branch organizations are likely; boundaries of each are in jeopardy.
9. In a small, isolated community, assertive racial succession in the constituted authority poses severe boundary maintenance problems for the branch and the roof organization; universalism is the likely solution.

The concept of the boundary maintenance is an heuristic analytic tool for the analysis of administered policies toward social change. The complex of relationships between local citizens, state officials, federal officials, local staff, and local administration is revealed in an analysis of boundary maintenance. Efforts to end discrimination, enhance scope and efficiency, and develop positive personal service orientations are issues in local social welfare agencies throughout the United States. The dynamics of boundary maintenance will continue to be crucial in attempts to promote change or to prevent it.

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>The definition of boundary maintenance is the authors'. It

derives from a lecture by Guy Swanson on a definition of "social system" (University of Michigan, February 17, 1964); also Frensesca Cancian, "Functional Analysis of Social Change," American Sociological Review, Vol. 25, No. 6 (December 1960), pp. 818-827; Roland Warren, Community in America (Rand McNally and Company, Chicago, 1963), pp. 142-143 and 153-156; and Phillip Selznick, "Critical Decisions in Organizational Development," in Amitai Etzioni, ed., Complex Organizations: A Sociological Reader (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., New York, 1962), pp. 355-361.

<sup>2</sup>Most studies of social change among bureaucracies do not refer to issues of boundary maintenance, although mechanisms of boundary maintenance are evident to the reader. Examples are: Richard H. McCleery, Policy Change in Prison Management (Governmental Research Bureau, Michigan State University, 1957); Phillip Selznick, TVA and the Grassroots (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1949); Burton Clark, "Organizational Adaptation and Precarious Values," American Sociological Review, Vol. 21, No. 3 (June 1956), pp. 327-336; and Martin Rein, "Organization for Social Change," Social Work, Vol. 9, No. 2 (April 1964), pp. 32-41.

<sup>3</sup>The term "racial succession" is familiar in studies of residential neighborhoods. Here we refer to turnover in a bureaucracy.

<sup>4</sup>One of the classical instances of this type of research design is found in McCleery, op. cit. The critical incident technique as applied to social change among formal organizations is seen in Ray MacNair, "Social Distance Among Kin Organizations: Civil Rights Networks in Cleveland and Birmingham" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology and School of Social Work, University of Michigan, 1970).

<sup>5</sup>The following observations were documented in a letter of complaint by the agency's first black social worker to the U. S. Department of Justice in January 1969.

<sup>6</sup>Many reasons can be cited for the absence of significant numbers of eligible people on the roll, including (1) general reluctance of people to take charity, (2) lack of information regarding eligibility, (3) belief that eligibility cannot be documented properly, and (4) perception on that bureaucrats, especially whites, are discourteous and demeaning of applicants. However, Hamilton's observation also refers to an observed fiscal conservatism enforced informally by the state which caused social workers to actively prevent payments from being rendered to all eligible people.

<sup>7</sup>The policy of the State Department of Public Welfare to support

the director against encroachment by blacks in the Shalimar community was documented in an interview with one of the top State Department officials.

<sup>8</sup>These are background activities for the first Assault. Hamilton worked systematically to build her case for changes in the County Department. Data for these observations came primarily from interviews with Hamilton during that period.

<sup>9</sup>The white social workers under Hamilton's supervision complained that she required too much work of them, not required by other supervisors of their social workers. Hamilton countered that her requirements were written in state and federal regulations. They were law. The strategy of soliciting letters of complaint was reported to Hamilton by her supervisees. It was confirmed in the final evaluation document.

<sup>10</sup>The six letters were sent by the director of the Community Action Program, the sheriff, the chief of probation services, the board of an established, local civil rights organization, the director of a school poverty program, and representative of the local Model Cities Program. They are on file with the state office of the NAACP.

<sup>11</sup>The board had never met to deliberate over decisions which were pending. They met only to ratify decisions already made by the director and signed, when necessary, by the chairperson of the board. This situation was reported factually in interviews with two board members and the director of the NAACP.

<sup>12</sup>The preceding sequence of events is documented in the local newspaper: "County Welfare Director Resigns," The Shalimar Gazette, Vol. 108, No. 36 (November 8, 1973), p. 1. Also, "Hamilton New Welfare Director," The Shalimar Gazette, Vol. 108, No. 39 (November 29, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>State procedures for employee transfers require consultation with the director and the director's signature for the release of the employee to another county. Hamilton was not consulted. The NAACP charged the State Department with racially discriminatory practices in the transfers.

<sup>14</sup>These events are cited in a document entitled "Grievances to the Shalimar County Director of Welfare" (October 10, 1974).

<sup>15</sup>These events and changes are reported in detail in the local newspaper: "Hamilton Rehired, 16 Want Transfers," The Shalimar Gazette, Vol. 109, No. 40 (December 19, 1974), p. 1; "Welfare Director Praised," The Shalimar Gazette, Vol. 110, No. 12 (March 27,

1975), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Warren, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., Chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>18</sup>Talcott Parson, The Social System (The Free Press of Glencoe; New York, 1951), pp. 62-63.

<sup>19</sup>The author does not interpret the breakdown as evidence that universalism and particularism are totally incompatible. In fact, these patterns are mixed to some degree in most, if not all, modern bureaucracies. Rather, it is argued that boundary maintenance is skewed when it does not reflect all essential characteristics of a bureaucracy. In this case, local particularism and federal universalism are included. It is therefore concluded that successful boundary defenses in such cases must separate accountability strategies in the realms of vertical and horizontal relationships. A similar point is made by Eugene Litwak, "Models of Bureaucracy Which Permit Conflict," The American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 67 (September 1961), pp. 177-184.

<sup>20</sup>Peter M. Blau and Richard Schoenherr, The Structure of Organizations (Basic Books, Inc., New York, 1971), p. 235.

<sup>21</sup>In the author's language, particularistic service orientation is predicted in small communities in Edwin J. Thomas, "Role Conceptions and Organizational Size," American Sociological Review, Vol. 24, No. 1 (February 1959), pp. 30-37.

<sup>22</sup>Hence, the Shalimar County Department of Welfare conflict is predicted by W. Lloyd Warner and J. O. Low, The Social System of the Modern Factory (Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1947), pp. 152-158.

<sup>23</sup>Sustained, participatory conflict is predicted for small, isolated communities by Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Inter-industry Propensity to Strike--An International Comparison," in Arthur Kornhauser, et al., Industrial Conflict (McGraw Hill, New York, 1954), pp. 189-212.