

# Trails of Tears, and Hope

**T**HE HAMLET OF Alkali Lake, about 100 miles north of Vancouver, is home to one of a handful of surviving Shuswap bands of Native Americans in British Columbia. Nearby villages include Dog Creek, 70 Mile House, Horsefly, and Likely. In many ways, the history of the 400 Indians living there resembles that of many other indigenous peoples.

Starting in the 1850s, thousands of Euro-Canadian miners and settlers began pouring into the Shuswap territory, eager to take the Indians' ancestral land. The tribe made easy prey. Diseases that Europeans had introduced during the previous half-century of contact had already reduced their numbers by two-thirds. In 1860, the Canadian government

started seizing the native peoples' lands for the settlers, herding the Indians onto much smaller reserves that shrank steadily over the decades. Beginning in 1891, the government forcibly removed Shuswap children from their families for three generations and enrolled them in the Williams Lake Residential Boarding School, 20 miles away, run by Christian missionaries. Its pedagogy involved harsh punishments for speaking the Shuswap language, as well as relentless indoctrination about the inferiority of Indians' culture and heritage. Conditions there, according to a University of British Columbia anthropologist, included hunger, spoiled food, whippings and beatings, public humiliations, and sexual abuse.

By the 1960s, the tribe's social and cultural fabric had unraveled. Unemployment was so high, the vast majority of residents subsisted on government payments. Child abuse



“Collective trauma” takes a ferocious toll on human societies—yet there are pathways to healing.

and neglect, suicide, domestic violence, and hunger were epidemic. Drinking binges had become the dominant social activity. Tribal members sometimes found on their doorsteps the corpses of fellow Indians who had frozen overnight after collapsing in a drunken stupor. Children often quaffed alongside their parents at parties that roared through the weekend and spilled over into the following week. Not drinking meant exiling oneself from community life. By 1972, one researcher estimated that 93 percent of the Alkali Lake population aged 16 and older were heavy drinkers. Locally, they were known as “the Indians of Alcohol Lake.”

In the summer of 1971, two heavy imbibers, Andy and Phyllis Chelsea, left their seven-year-old daughter, Ivy, with her grandparents to go off on yet another weekend

binge. When they returned, Ivy adamantly refused to go home with them. This stunned Phyllis Chelsea, and she determined to give up alcohol. Her husband followed suit a week later, and the next year, the Alkali Lake band elected Andy Chelsea its chief. He had campaigned on an anti-alcohol platform.

Even so, sobriety isolated the Chelseas from the band's social life, so they escaped to hockey tournaments and rodeos on weekends. But they also invited a trained counselor in to run “alcohol awareness” sessions that evolved into Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. The Chelseas prohibited neighboring ranchers from trading cases of wine for haying rights, set up sting operations for bootleggers, and took steps to end the practice of Indians “drinking up” their assistance checks. Phyllis Chelsea began teaching Shuswap language classes and created dancing, drumming, and song groups, while

reviving such traditional practices as the use of sweat lodges. The Chelseas also tapped into contemporary ideas like the California-based “Lifespring” human-potential seminars, which by the early 1980s had enrolled and trained the majority of the band’s adult members.

Despite powerful opposition, the band elected Andy Chelsea as chief again and again. Growing numbers of sober adults began to establish a new set of social norms. By the mid 1980s, sobriety had become the rule, as it remains today. The 1986 film *The Honour of All: The Story of Alkali Lake* documents this astonishingly rapid transformation of a devastated people into a model for other native communities throughout North America.

THE SOCIAL CATASTROPHE that ravaged the Shuswap band embodies an extreme form of “collective trauma,” says Sousan Abadian, A.M. ’87, M.P.A. ’88, Ph.D. ’99, who

has spent time at Alkali Lake and in dozens of other indigenous communities in New Mexico, Arizona, Montana, Minnesota, Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba since she began studying this phenomenon in 1994. In her doctoral dissertation, Abadian used that term for the pervasive consequences communities suffer when powerful external forces violate their physical and/or sociocultural integrity.

Such forces can be as random as a one-day tsunami or as systematic as the Holocaust; collective traumas can kill millions in war or genocide or enslave generations. The phenomenon can be

## Indian Boarding Schools, Then and Now

IN 1906, the U.S. government sent cavalry onto Hopi land in Arizona, “determined to send these people to boarding school,” says Gregory Schaaf, director of the Center for Indigenous Arts & Cultures in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and author of the multivolume *American Indian Art Series*. “Why? Underneath the Hopi land was a billion dollars’ worth of coal and oil, and a large aquifer. The U.S. government wanted to lease the rights to these resources to private companies and the Hopis wouldn’t sign the papers. So the job was to convince people to be loyal to the dominant culture—to produce some people who *would* sign. Send them to boarding schools.”

Indian boarding schools were blunt tools: they rank among the most heavy-handed institutions of socialization, indoctrination, and even brainwashing ever seen in North America. From the late 1800s through the twentieth century, scores of such schools throughout the western United States and Canada enrolled Indian students, generally against their will.

Scholars have described the residential boarding schools as “labor camps,” or experiments in modified slavery, run in the grueling, regimented manner of military schools. “My grandparents were taken from their homes and put in boarding schools,” says Daniel Moya, of the Pojoaque Pueblo outside Santa Fe. “Whenever they spoke their native language, they were beaten and made to eat soap.” Emotional and physical abuse was routine, and the curriculum explicitly indoctrinated students with the idea of the superiority of the dominant culture and the inferiority of native traditions.

Over the decades, the educational philosophy of the boarding schools did slowly evolve. Zia Pueblo, an Indian tribe about 20 miles southwest of Santa Fe, had no public schools of its own in the 1940s; all the Indian students went to boarding school, if they were in school at all. When tribal member Sofia Medina enrolled at St. Catherine’s Indian School in Santa Fe at age 12 in 1944, she knew only two English words, “yes,” and “no,” but the Roman Catholic nuns who ran the school did not



a fairly short-lived event with lasting consequences, such as the Rwandan genocide of 1994, or it can extend over centuries—as with American Indians, whose numbers dropped from an estimated 10 million before Columbus landed to 250,000 by the turn of the twentieth century; disease brought by Europeans, and sometimes intentionally spread by colonizers, claimed the vast majority of those native lives.

Though Abadian's concepts are applicable to a broad array of scenarios, from antebellum slavery in the U.S. South to the disappearing aborigines of Australia, she has focused her empirical



research on American Indians. “I don’t like to compare traumas,” she said, speaking to tribal leaders and members of the Mashantucket Pequot Nation in Connecticut last June, “because whether you are drowning in five feet of water or 10 feet, you are still drowning. But the kinds of traumas that native North American peoples have experienced are among the worst; the fact that they have survived at all speaks to their resilience.”

In a later interview, Abadian, a multidisciplinary independent scholar who is writing a book on collective trauma and its healing in American Indian communities and other postcolonial societies, notes, “The most extreme types of collective trauma are sociocultural: it’s not just an aggregation of individual traumas, but disruption of the fundamental institutions of society, and of its ‘immune system’ that can restore people and repair a culture. Whenever I go to a dinner party in Cambridge and talk about my work, the response almost always is, ‘Well, my people were trau-

**Native American girls (far left) and teenage boys (left) on arrival (top) at a boarding school in Hampton, Virginia, and 14 months later (below). From the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology collections.**

had no interest in the pueblo. My sister got mad at me because I would not participate in the dances.”

After Sofia married, her father-in-law explained native spiritual traditions to her—“Why the cornmeal, why the feathers,” she says. Now she goes to traditional ceremonies and shares her knowledge with younger

Indians if they ask. “It is hard to understand, because Indians do not write about God on paper, like the white men do,” she says. “It is all up to each person, how they are going to take it.”

Sofia’s son Fred Medina attended two Indian boarding schools before graduating from Jemez Valley High School. He also completed technical studies at Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute, and has a career as a lab technician. In the boarding schools he experienced, there was “no shaming of us for being Indians,” he says. “Wounded Knee [the 1973 protest by American Indian Movement activists at Wounded Knee, South Dakota] turned around a lot of things for all Indians. We recognized ourselves as not being second-class, but up there with everybody else.” But the native language has been slipping away. Though Zia Indians were fluent in their native tongue in the 1970s, Fred says Indian children today are bilingual only until about sixth grade, after which English wins out. Today’s youth live out the converse of his mother’s experience: “Now, kids know how to say only ‘yes’ or ‘no’ in the native language.”

Sofia’s granddaughter (and Fred’s niece) Kim Toribio enrolled at the highly regarded Santa Fe Indian School from seventh grade until eleventh grade (1983 through 1989), then completed her senior year at a public high school in Albuquerque. Kim came home to Zia every weekend from her boarding school. The staff was entirely Native American. “They cared about you,” she says. “They’d bend over backwards to get you scholarships,” and many in her graduating class of 23 went on to college. Kim herself earned an associate’s degree in business administration and now has an administrative job working with office automation software. “Santa Fe Indian was a good school,” she says. “I have no complaints.”



punish the girls for speaking their native tongue. Tuition was \$50 per year, and even that was a severe strain on Medina’s parents. She came home only once a year, in August.

St. Catherine’s was essentially a parochial school. “I was more or less brainwashed with the Catholic religion,” Medina says. “The nuns taught us that all our dances and traditions were ‘false gods.’ After I dropped out of school in the eleventh grade, I

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE TOP: © PEABODY MUSEUM, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, PHOTOGRAPH 2004.24.30439A, 2004.24.30440A, 2004.29.5636, 2004.29.5637

matized, too, and we're doing fine now. The Germans, Japanese, and Koreans were traumatized during World War II and the Korean War, so why were they able to get on their feet, and not native peoples?"

Events that are more intense, last longer, affect a greater proportion of a community, and damage vital reparative institutions are deadlier, she says. "After the Holocaust, for example, Jewish immigrants to the United States still had synagogues, rabbis, and their Torah. Jews residing in places like North America and the Middle East provided a comparatively stable refuge that preserved essential Jewish traditions and eventually fueled postwar Jewish healing and renewal processes.

"But native peoples had no equivalent of an 'America' to which they could escape and create a new base—ironically, North American governments were their tormentors," Abadian continues. "Here, as a result, the collective traumas of colonization affected nearly 100 percent of indigenous peoples. Healthy child-rearing practices were disrupted or warped by involuntary boarding schools. Native spiritual practices and traditions were banished, and missionaries often replaced them with foreign reli-

"Sousan was a beam of light for us," says Donna Hicks, an associate of the Weatherhead Center who was deputy director of PICAR for nine years. "Our goal was to look at all the research on trauma—but Sousan had *done* that already. She directed the discussions for months. At the end of this grappling, we realized that this was the direction conflict resolution had to go in—the direction of healing trauma. It wasn't something anyone was talking about at the time—it was too hot to touch. People don't want to expose emotional wounds."

SUCH WOUNDS are both deep and widely shared in a traumatized society, and, in Abadian's analysis, they are typically the fundamental reason why such cultures cannot develop economically, socially, or politically until they address collective trauma and begin to heal it. "[D]efeating a people has as much to do with destroying their sense of purpose—their confidence in their world-view and meaning system—as it does with physical conquest," Abadian writes, adding that traumatic stressors "engender in the victim characteristic feelings of deep violation and hopeless impotence in the face of violation."

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gious forms that tore apart the community's social cohesion. It is like an epidemic hitting a society when its doctors and healers have been exterminated. No one escaped the ravage."

Abadian's theory of collective trauma is "a very illuminating and unexplored way of looking at the problems of Native Americans," says Lamont University Professor Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics, who calls himself "fortunate" to have advised her dissertation at the Kennedy School of Government (KSG). "Sousan has a huge combination of imagination, intelligence, and concern for empirical data. The literature on trauma is quite well developed and has been extensively used in other contexts, and the problems of Native Americans are also well recognized. The connection of the two is where her work has made a difference."

Although Abadian's theories have not yet been applied to development studies around the world, "There are enormous prospects of that happening," says Sen, noting their relevance to posttraumatic conditions in impoverished regions like Rwanda, South Africa, and in the area around Assam and Manipur in northeast India, where intercommunity civil wars have led to social collapse and a high prevalence of alcoholism, drug use, and AIDS. "Those are three examples," Sen declares. "I can give a hundred others. It is pioneering, highly original work that can be used to understand traumas elsewhere."

Take regions of chronic international conflict, for example. From 1999 until 2001, an informal group of 16 scholar-practitioners met each Thursday morning at the Program on International Conflict Analysis and Resolution (PICAR) in Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. The group, which included people native to "hot spots" like Sudan, Israel, Colombia, and Sri Lanka, sought to discover why attempts to resolve international conflicts so often failed, to identify what was lacking in the field of conflict resolution, and to investigate the role trauma plays in perpetuating conflict.

One severe example is the description of the profoundly traumatized Ojibwa of Grassy Narrows in northwestern Ontario, quoted by Yale sociologist Kai Erickson in his seminal 1994 book on social traumas, *A New Species of Trouble*:

I could never escape the feeling that I had been parachuted into a void—a drab and lifeless place in which the vital spark of life had gone out....It wasn't just the poverty of the place, the isolation, or even the lack of a decent bed that depressed me....What struck me most about Grassy Narrows was the numbness of the human spirit. There was an indifference and listlessness, a passivity that I could neither understand nor do anything about. I had never seen such hopelessness anywhere in the Third World.

This degree of demoralization involves a loss of identity as a people. "Most Native Americans have to piece together their Indian-ness from many different sources. I know a female Indian who took an Indian studies class at Stanford and learned more about the history of Fort Peck [a tribal reservation in northeastern Montana] than she had by living there!" says Dennis Norman, faculty chair of the Harvard University Native American Program (HUNAP) and associate professor of psychology in the department of psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) and Harvard Medical School (HMS); Norman himself is of Cheyenne, Choctaw, and Anglo extraction.

Most of the social problems that characterize American Indian life may be rooted in historical trauma. Norman notes that rates of suicide, poverty, domestic violence, injury by accident, substance abuse among youth, and unemployment are all significantly higher among American Indians than among the general population. "How do you best explain all these social, economic, and health issues?" he asks. "No one can contest that there is historical trauma; the question is what does it mean, how is it manifested now, and what can we do now?"

"The social and economic conditions we are seeing—the vio-

lence, suicide, addictions, endemic poverty, alcoholism—are to a large extent the *symptoms* of trauma,” Abadian says. “If you attack symptoms separately without attending to the underlying condition, other symptoms will show up. Right now, in many parts of the world, people are doing bits and pieces of what needs to be done to address poverty and violence. But because they come from particular specialties, few take an integrated approach, and almost no one also recognizes the incidence and the effects of trauma. Monetary assistance, housing, better schools, reforming political and legal institutions, are all essential for improving native people’s lives. But all these efforts will fall short if you aren’t also channeling resources into addressing trauma.”

The Mashantucket Pequot Nation, the Native American tribe that is a principal owner of one of the world’s largest, most lucrative gambling complexes, the six-casino Foxwoods resort in southeastern Connecticut, is living proof that prosperity alone cannot eradicate the social ills that Indians suffer. Even today, the relatively prosperous Pequot tribe, like many other Indian tribes, struggles with substance abuse, child neglect, and community and domestic violence, according to Markos Samos, special assistant to tribal council member Charlene Jones. “The underbelly of violence,” Abadian points out, “is trauma.”

Underlying trauma may also explain why the social disorders of affected communities seem so intractable. “When there is trauma that hasn’t been dealt with, trying to move a society forward is like driving a car with one foot on the accelerator and one foot on the brake,” Abadian explains. “It lurches forward, then stops, stalls, sometimes swerves into a ditch—it’s uneven, uncontrolled. Something is stuck.”

Traumatized people suffer from a deeply damaged sense of trust. “Unless they are severely traumatized, humans have a pretty significant ‘positivity bias,’” explains Catherine Ayoub, associate professor of psychology at Children’s Hospital, MGH, and HMS, who studies the effects of trauma on children. “We trust that we’ll get through the day OK. When we go out on the sidewalk, we don’t assume, ‘Someone out there is out to get me.’”

“But early traumas, whether from violence, sexual abuse, or other violations, can disrupt the embedding of this positivity bias,” Ayoub continues, “and the earlier this derailment happens, the less opportunity you have to build that...foundation of trust. What do we do if we have repeated experiences that tell us the world is dangerous? Toddlers subjected to repeated maltreatment have developed a ‘negativity bias’ as young as age two. To the traumatized, life feels like war, 24/7.”

“Trauma tends to throw individuals into a state of crisis—a

crisis of faith: ‘How could this have happened to me?’” says Abadian. “‘Why couldn’t I have stopped it? Where were my protectors—parents, police, authorities, God—when I needed them?’ Traumatized people lose their trust in themselves, in other people, and in God. People who have been traumatized can be deeply pessimistic about the world. It has social, economic and political ramifications when an entire society experiences severe collective trauma and loses trust.”

Furthermore, parents can pass down mistrust and trauma to their children over generations. Cultures that undergo enduring collective trauma raise their children in a traumatized environment, often communicating a sense of hopelessness and futility to the young, but conveying little sense of one’s power to change life circumstances. “Native peoples talk a lot about sovereignty: economic and political sovereignty,” says Abadian. “Those are necessary but insufficient. You also need *personal* sovereignty to put economic and political sovereignty to good use. I am using



‘personal sovereignty’ as a way to underscore the additional importance of healing and wellness.”

“I COME FROM a colonized people,” says Abadian, “people who survived against all odds.” Born in Tehran, she understood historical trauma on a personal level from an early age: she is a Zoroastrian. Descendants of ancient Persians who once numbered in the millions, Zoroastrians have suffered relentless persecution since the Arab invasion of Persia 1,400 years ago; they now total only an estimated 150,000 worldwide. “When my parents were young, they weren’t allowed to touch anything in the markets because the Muslims considered Zoroastrians—like Jews and Baha’i—to be unclean,” she (please turn to page 85)

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recalls. “Zoroastrians weren’t allowed to ride horses or wear colorful clothes, and were exorbitantly taxed and legally discriminated against. I knew about all of this, but I never personalized it. I thought people in other countries suffered more.”

Abadian’s father, Bahman Abadian, earned his economics doctorate in India, where Gandhi’s example influenced him deeply. He came to Harvard in 1963 as a Mason Fellow in international development and, after joining the World Bank, moved his family to Washington, D.C. “As

eled to India and other places, I had seen that village doctors would cure a child of typhoid and the child would go home and get typhoid again. The real problems were systemic issues—public health.”

The late David Maybury-Lewis, then Henderson professor of anthropology, recruited her to Harvard for an experimental one-year master’s program in the anthropology of social change and development. She earned her A.M. in 1987, writing a thesis on the link between the status of women in Bangladesh and their reproductive behavior. Soon thereafter, the KSG accepted her into its doctoral program in political economy and government.

own doctoral research. On the tribal reserves, Abadian tried to absorb as much as she could about indigenous and alternative forms of healing. “Most of them, I’ve tried on myself,” she says. “I’ve also extensively explored Western therapies and healing modalities.” These experiences suggested to Abadian that there are ways to treat “soul wounds” like those collective trauma inflicts.

“WHEN PEOPLE ENGAGE in genuine healing,” Abadian says, “they become more accountable, and in touch with reality. Healing generates compassion and tenderness. To heal collective trauma,

“Zoroastrians were exorbitantly taxed and legally discriminated against. I knew about all of this, but I never personalized it.”

the daughter of a World Bank economist, I traveled widely and did not think it unusual to have dinner-table conversations on the benefits of rural electrification in the Philippines, or World Bank president Robert McNamara’s stance on eliminating poverty,” she writes in her forthcoming book. Abadian attended the acclaimed Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, Maryland. “It was a true world community in Washington,” she says. “I never saw boundaries.”

Yet along with this cosmopolitan upbringing, Abadian also had deep ties to rural Iran. Accompanying her father on a development project, she met tribal peoples there, who once gave her a lamb. “I loved the freedom that these nomadic peoples represented,” she says, “as well as their generosity, even though they had very little.” She also returned several times, as a child, to her mother’s village of Ahrestan, near Yazd in central Iran. There she fetched water from a cistern, ate fresh fruit from orchards, slept on the roof under thick quilts, and rose at 4:30 A.M. with her older cousin to take the goats and sheep out to graze. Instead of televisions and radios, there were card games and fortunetellers.

For a long time, Abadian prepared to follow in her father’s footsteps and work in international development. She earned her bachelor’s degree at Swarthmore in sociology, anthropology, and economics. She took courses in Farsi, trained as an emergency medical technician, and was interested in medicine, but “having trav-

She also earned an M.P.A., traveling in 1986 to Bangladesh to analyze income-generating activities for the poorest of the world’s poor: Bangladeshi women. One day Abadian followed such a woman through her daily rounds. The woman had just sold some handcrafts she had made and consequently had money in her pocket when she ran into her husband, who was sitting under a tree, gambling. The husband spoke roughly to his wife, grabbed her sari, took the money from her, and resumed gambling. “It hit me,” Abadian recalls, “that it’s not enough for these women just to be able to make money.” Such experiences caused her to wonder about the real obstacles to economic development. She began to ask if the deepest barriers to moving forward might be not on the physical plane, but rooted instead in the human mind and emotions.

Then, with the birth of her first child in 1988, Abadian, who had always traveled extensively, was suddenly grounded. “It was a great gift to be at home,” she says, “because instead of traveling outwardly, I started to explore the inner landscape.” Over the years, she learned to meditate and began to participate in shamanic retreats; spiritual teachers introduced her to “power animals,” drumming, and indigenous practices, such as the use of sweat lodges. “Many of these teachings resonated with Zoroastrian traditions,” she says. “It was like going home.”

Eventually she began traveling again, to native communities throughout the American West and Canada, funding her

you must heal the individual; healthy individuals give birth to healthy institutions and cultures. It’s circular, of course, and ideally you intervene at both macro and micro levels at once.”

Several facilitators with Harvard ties have been applying these principles to help heal traumatized individuals and their relationships. Father Leonel Narvaez, M.T.S. ’01, for example, a Colombian Roman Catholic priest, has been creating “Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation” in Colombian cities and villages to reduce domestic violence and pacify civil strife among warring militias. He applies an eclectically derived model that involves creating a safe environment, sharing one’s traumatic narrative with others, and “re-socializing” the traumatized person away from a victimized/vengeful narrative toward “a crazy thing, which is mercy and compassion,” Narvaez says. “It is irrational. But against the irrationalities of violence, we propose the irrationality of reconciliation.” Former PICAR deputy director Donna Hicks has used a different approach that she calls “reconciling with dignity” to help victims and perpetrators of the conflict in Northern Ireland reconcile after years of violence, as part of a 2006 BBC television series she made with South African archbishop Desmond Tutu, LL.D. ’79. Hicks is writing a book, “The Power of Dignity,” about this healing work.

Tamar Miller, M.P.A. ’93, a clinical social worker trained to work with traumatized individuals and families, says,

“Abadian offers a new lens by insisting that we go beyond the individuals to the collective, particularly in dealing with intractable conflicts.” As the former executive director of the KSG’s Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East and founder of PeaceBeat, whose motto is “Some good news, some of the time,” she is working to reshape the polarized public conversations among Muslims, Jews, and Christians, primarily in the Middle East. Miller is on the board of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, a growing coalition of 50 citizen-diplomacy organizations in Israel and the

Palestinian territories. “People-to-people peace building offers the opportunity for relationships that engender hope in a despairing region,” she says. “Hope is a fundamental requirement of healing collective trauma.

“At the end of each political, sociological, or economic analysis [of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict], inevitably there’s a sentence that reads, ‘And both peoples are traumatized,’” Miller continues. “There is never a second sentence after that. No one knows what collective trauma really means, what it does to groups and nations, or how to intervene

to heal it. Sousan offers a crucial part of that road map.”

In 2003, Miller and the Institute for Middle East Peace and Development, a New York-based nonprofit, organized an interfaith summit that convened a group of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish leaders and theologians from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United States to reflect on the challenges of religious leadership. The KSG’s Center for Public Leadership hosted the gathering, which included some of the highest-level clerics in Egypt and Jordan. Abadian told the group about the Native American experience of colonization and trauma, distinguishing between individual and collective traumas. “Everyone seemed to identify with [that] experience of oppression and trauma,” says Miller. “Sousan was so compassionate and clear; people understood—but more important, *felt*—that the pain and violence in the Middle East are not a deficiency in themselves, their nations, or their religions, but in part a universal human response to collective trauma.” Abadian recalls, “In the middle of the talk, one Muslim theologian banged on the table and said, ‘We must heal our children! We must heal our children!’”

But collective healing involves much more than healing individuals and relationships, Abadian says. She also advocates a selective revival of traditions and cultural elements, and the generation of new ones. “Cultural renewal isn’t about bringing back wholesale everything from the past,” she cautions. “Some practices may have to be adjusted, or jettisoned altogether. In the context of native peoples, some Pacific Coast tribes practiced slavery and polygamy, for example. And communities may adopt cultural elements from outside that they find meaningful. Communities that didn’t traditionally practice sweat lodges and sun dances have adopted them.” Furthermore, new or revived life-affirming ceremonies can take the place of dysfunctional coping mechanisms like drinking binges. Traditional dances, drumming and singing circles, quilting groups, and even weaving porcupine-quill baskets may occupy the social space formerly held by drug use or violence.

Cultural revival can spur controversy. When the Eastern Pacific gray whale went off the endangered-species list in 1994, young people of the Makah tribe in

## Trauma and Social Injustice

“THERE’S ACTUALLY BEEN no institutional relationship between personal healing and social justice,” says professor of psychiatry Richard Mollica, M.D., director of the Harvard Program on Refugee Trauma (HPRT) at Massachusetts General Hospital. “For example, look at the experiences of witnesses in the Bosnian tribunal at The Hague: it’s very clear that many did not experience social justice as therapeutic.” South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission set several goals, including apology, punishment, compensation, and reconciliation, but its chair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, LL.D. ’79, clearly stated that the commission would not be able to heal most victims of the atrocities of apartheid.

Mollica has spent more than 30 years helping victims of many kinds of trauma around the world. His recent book, *Healing Invisible Wounds: Paths to Hope and Recovery in a Violent World*, argues that people have an inherent ability to heal themselves and focuses on the relationship between personal healing and the healing of collective wounds—which may or may not include the legal and institutional remedies that are aspects of social justice. Mollica and his colleagues at HPRT have developed a global training for post-conflict recovery, and set up an on-line global dialogue on the prevention of all forms of human violence (see their blog: [healinginvisiblewounds.typepad.com](http://healinginvisiblewounds.typepad.com)).

No society has a good definition of social healing, Mollica says, and ironically, social justice—prosecuting perpetrators of crimes against humanity, for example—“can actually make the individual and/or the situation worse for the survivors of violent crimes. Look at the aftermath of acquittals in The Hague—people felt betrayed, and felt that their ongoing social and economic crises were not addressed. Many survivors felt the courts were primarily politically motivated.” Furthermore, “A lot of people were destroyed or psychologically damaged by giving or hearing testimony at the international tribunal,” he says. “It is traumatic in itself for a South African mother to learn via testimony that her son was barbecued by police agents.” Yet vivid testimony of this kind strengthens the prosecutors’ case, Mollica says. “The more vivid it is, the more injured the victim is, the more it helps the prosecutors.”

Though he believes that social justice can contribute to the healing process, Mollica points out that “there is such a thing as a toxic trauma story. Telling the brutal facts that generate high emotions can be very negative and anti-therapeutic. A trauma story needs to be associated with survival and healing—then it becomes a teaching story, as in the lives of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and ordinary survivors as well. Societies need to collect and share these stories. We’re not doing a good job of this internationally, or with the people of New Orleans or Iraq, or soldiers returning from the Iraq War. We don’t have good personal data from Native Americans on their personal reactions to the ethnic cleansings they experienced. Stories like this can help both social healing and personal healing.”

Neah Bay, Washington, at the extreme northwestern tip of the continental United States, began preparing to resume the Makah's 3,500-year-old practice of whaling. Under the tribe's 1855 treaty with the U.S. government, the Makah ceded extensive tribal lands but "retained the right of access to natural resources, including whales," says Janine Bowechop, executive director of the Makah Cultural and Research Center. "The whale-hunting clause didn't exist in any other Indian treaty." During the mid 1990s, the International Whaling Commission and U.S. courts approved the Makah's right to hunt whales, despite legal attempts from animal-rights organizations to stop the hunt. Another case is now in progress.

In 1999, with extensive live television coverage, several young Makah men paddled a sacred canoe (with a powerboat in support) into the Pacific Ocean and harpooned a whale, finishing it off with a rifle shot. They had prepared for the whale hunt with an extended period of fasting, prayer, and ritual bathing, and

Sioux nations, says that there are four primary ways of dealing with oppression: assimilation ("taking on the form of the oppressor"); resignation ("giving up—alcoholism, apathy, drug use"); violent conflict ("adversarial politics"); and co-creating together ("working with the dominant culture to create a new future while keeping tribal values and traditions alive"). Lane advocates this "fourth way" of working together as the best choice for empowering indigenous peoples throughout the world. "We each need to understand that we are a sovereignty," he says, "ancient, imperishable, and everlasting."

That fourth way is guiding the process of cultural healing at the Pojoaque Pueblo, located about 12 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The 385 Pojoaque tribal members live where their ancestors have resided for a millennium. But by the early twentieth century, most of the tribe had left the pueblo and non-Indians were taking the land; the pueblo nearly vanished. Since the early 1990s, however, new income from gaming and a tribal

enue to the pueblo. This year, the tribe expects to open its \$300-million Buffalo Thunder Resort, in partnership with Hilton. Extensive exhibit space for pueblo art, and such features as a custom-woven carpet that depicts weavings by Pojoaque artists, drove up the budget by \$20 million, but, as Rivera explains, "It's not only about gaming, it's about experiencing the pueblo culture."

Other indigenous communities in the United States, and even one in Brazil, have looked to the Pojoaque as a model of how to preserve and revive native culture while navigating a modern economy. "One thing that works for us is taking out the individual agenda," Rivera says. "We view money not just as something to put in your pocket and spend, but as a tool to make positive changes in your way of life and to have impact in the community in a way that works for generations to come. If it were just about getting wealth for yourself alone, it wouldn't work."

Places like the Poeh Center help make cultural renewal permanent, says Aba-

**"We each need to understand that we are a sovereignty, ancient, imperishable, and everlasting."**

had to remain alcohol- and drug-free during their two-year training, according to Edward E. Claplanhoo, a former Makah tribal council chair. "A whale hunter who carries the spirit of animate beings can usher the spirit of the whale into the next world in the right way," says Makah tribal council member Micah McCarty, who trained for the 1999 hunt but returned to college before it occurred. The whale hunt seemed to stimulate interest in Makah traditions, he says: "Afterwards, younger kids wanted to know more about our culture and to participate in it." Claplanhoo thinks that "one whale a year would be enough. If we could get young people interested in their culture, the alcohol would go out the window."

Claplanhoo chairs the board of the Seattle-based United Indians of All Tribes Foundation ([www.unitedindians.org](http://www.unitedindians.org)), which works broadly to serve cultural, educational, and community development needs of indigenous peoples. Its chief executive officer, Phil Lane Jr., a member of the Chickasaw and Yankton

cultural revival have begun to help the Pojoaques rebound.

George Rivera, who was elected governor of Pojoaque in 2004 (after serving as lieutenant governor for 13 years), isn't a typical political leader: he's an accomplished, active sculptor whose works decorate the tribe's government building. As a young man, he spent years studying art in Europe, noticing how those cultures carefully preserved their heritage and used it to attract travelers from around the globe. The Pojoaques' own construction firm built the Poeh Cultural Center (*poeh* means "pathway" in Tewa, the local native language). "We knew we couldn't build something of steel, glass, and cinder blocks with hard edges," Rivera explains. "We wanted it to have the touch and feel of native architecture, so that when native students came here to study, they would feel at home." The complex includes classrooms, studios, and workshops in addition to a museum that houses artworks collected from eight nearby Tewa-speaking pueblos.

Meanwhile, gaming has brought rev-

dian, because they institutionalize healthy life ways, weaving them into daily routines. The social "intervention" gives way to a changed society. "There used to be a wise man in the tribe," she says. "Perhaps he disappeared as a result of trauma. But you can recreate that role—call it a mediator, if you like. You want the role to become part of everyday culture."

"There are a lot of wonderful experiments in healing taking place, but also there's a great deal of resistance to the notion of healing trauma," she continues, while warning against the pitfall of replacing "the stereotype of the 'drunken Indian' with a new stereotype of the 'traumatized Indian.'"

Abadian sees exciting possibilities. "We're living in an incredible era," she says. "Future generations may look back on this as the time when the great healing began. Humankind has never done this before. Many communities have become laboratories for conscious evolution." ▣

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