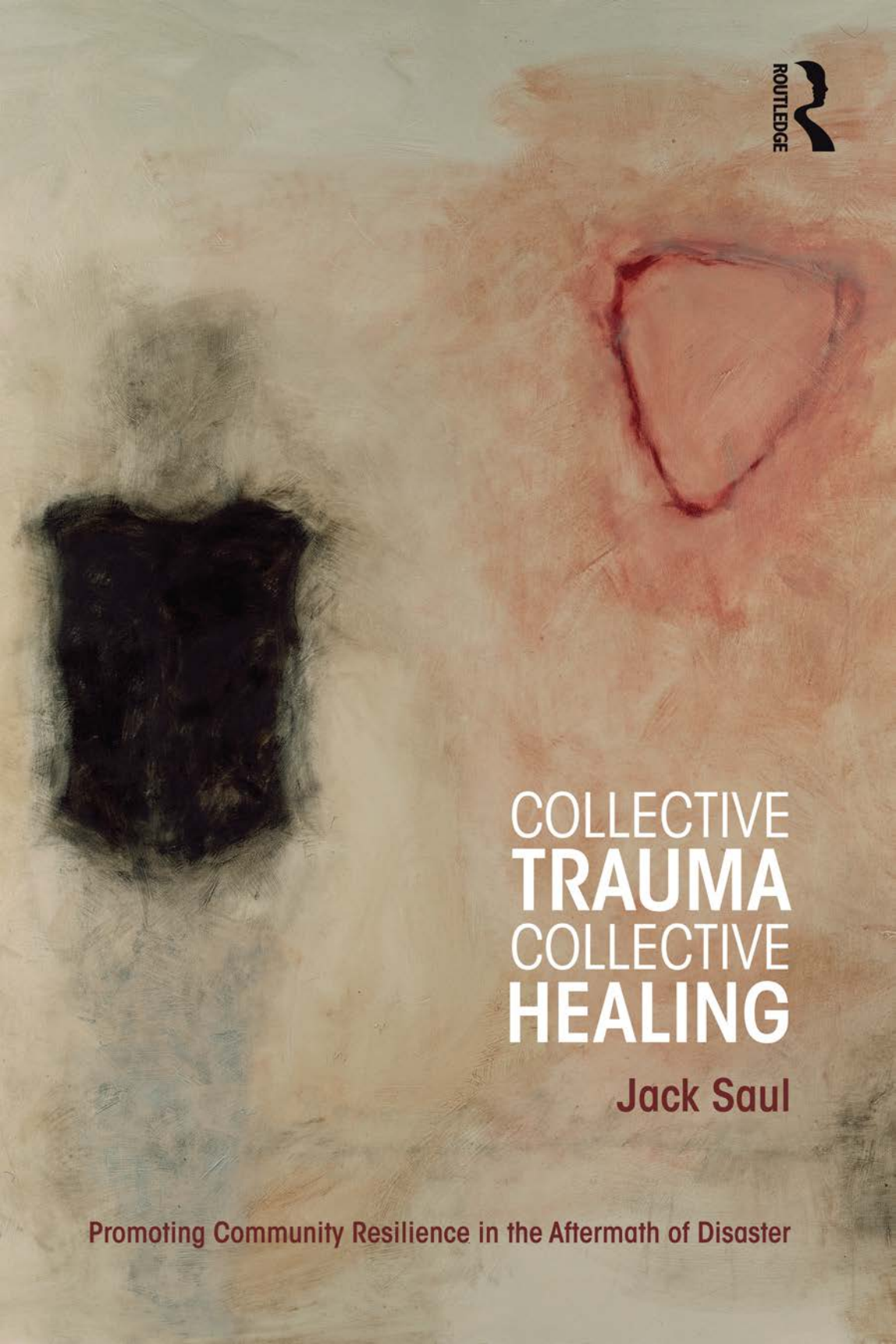
ROUTLEDGE
COLLECTIVE
TRAUMA
COLLECTIVE
HEALING
Jack Saul
Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster

"Jack Saul invites us to join him in his exploration of territories of torture, helplessness, and destruction—a dark continent of inhumanity—and to experience with him the healing capacity of communities. Looking at scenarios as diverse as Kosovo, lower Manhattan on September 11, and the Liberian refugees on Staten Island, he describes how a group of systems thinkers, armed with an extraordinary trust in the power of social connections, joins in partnership with communities in search of justice, reconciliation, and resilience. Written with attention to the small details of survival, an understanding of the power of cultures in history, and the healing capacity of art and theater, Saul shows us the effort and endurance necessary to reconstruct life and restore sanity in societies that have experienced chaos. It is a powerful testimony."

—Salvador Minuchin, MD, founder of the Minuchin Family Center and author of *Families and Family Therapy*

"Jack Saul's book is terrific and truly compelling for professionals who work with traumatized people. With first-hand stories, he artfully describes a range of out-of-office interventions to help families, neighborhoods, and communities in the aftermath of disaster. Dr. Saul is never better than when he writes about using the arts to understand the complexities of human trauma and resilience. Yes, even improvisation!"

—Pauline Boss, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota, and author of *Ambiguous Loss* and *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience*

"With compassion and insight, Jack Saul shares his own journey through the aftermath of September 11 as witness, participant, and healer, chronicling the power of collective narrative to transform traumatic experience into communal recovery."

—Alice Greenwald, director of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum

"In *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* Jack Saul takes us through a masterful journey of his healing work addressing the ongoing tragedy of social and political traumas around the world. His work is creative, rich, sensitive, and deeply felt. His writing gives rare glimpses into how science and wisdom must be coalesced to treat the wounds of torture, loss, and devastation. Psychological science, art, and anthropology are so thoughtfully integrated in his work and writing to provide both a history of his intervention work and a guidebook for those brave enough to treat the collective wounds that both nature and humans too often cause. With this volume, Dr. Saul contributes meaningfully to repairing our world."

—Stevan E. Hobfoll, PhD, the Judd and Marjorie Weinberg Presidential Professor and chair of the department of behavioral sciences at Rush University Medical Center

"Jack Saul's clear and compelling narrative, based on his immersion in several catastrophes, offers practical knowledge on community resilience strategies for responding to collective trauma that will be highly informative for practitioners across many disciplines."

—Stevan Weine, MD, professor of psychiatry at the University of Illinois at Chicago and author of *Testimony After Catastrophe*

"In *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing,* Dr. Saul provides a detailed documentation of what it takes to recognize, develop, and sustain a community environment that promotes healing from mass disaster. Throughout the multiple examples in the book, including personal challenges to his own community in the wake of September 11, the author emphasizes the importance of going beyond individual approaches to mount

a public health response after any disaster. Dr. Saul has a deep respect for systems and how they work, while never denying the inevitable tensions that occur and the competing agendas that can easily sabotage recovery efforts. As man-made and natural disasters increase in frequency and intensity, few of us are prepared by our professional training to know what to do when faced with the kind of social challenge that Dr. Saul describes. This book, with all the lessons learned, becomes a must-read book for public and private managers."

—Sandra L. Bloom, MD, co-director of the Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice at the Drexel University School of Public Health

"Jack Saul is a dedicated healer whose deep understanding of systems therapy has taken him to the aid of injured communities around the globe. Yet it was September 11 that literally brought these lessons home, making him an insider to catastrophe. This blend of outsider knowledge and insider wisdom makes this *the* book on collective recovery. It will transform our practice."

—Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD, professor of clinical psychiatry and socio-medical sciences, New York State Psychiatric Institute at Columbia University

"Most books simply espouse principles or ideal goals, telling us what to aim for, but not how to get there, and almost never do they walk us through the messy process of working in the wake of conflict. Saul's book not only breaks critically important fresh ground in setting out the critical role that collective resilience plays in allowing individuals and communities to transform themselves after traumatic events: he also takes us with him on the journeys he travelled to make the discoveries he can now share. The various stories in his book convey the critical message that we cannot know the answer before we begin, at the same time as providing us with a toolkit of indispensible principles and resources for action."

—Danielle Celermajer, PhD, associate professor and director of the Torture Prevention Project at the University of Sydney

"Jack Saul's compelling book is a major achievement in the literature on trauma and recovery, nudging the discourse from the individual to the community. This must-read for mental health professionals and creative arts therapists blends psychotherapy and expressive therapy, reflection and action, featuring communities of dialogue front and center, capable of re-building destroyed edifices of the city and the soul."

—Robert Landy, PhD, professor and director of the drama therapy program at New York University

"Jack Saul brings to this book years of outstanding contribution and experience addressing the psychological needs of those exposed to many different types of disaster. As governments at all levels seek better ways to make communities resilient, this book offers much needed practical guidance for policy and practice. It is a unique contribution to an emerging field that is understanding that early intervention is always better, but that it's never too late to offer help in culturally appropriate ways."

—Michael Ungar, PhD, professor of social work at Dalhousie University and co-director of the Resilience Research Centre

Collective Trauma, Collective Healing

Collective Trauma, Collective Healing is a guide for mental health professionals working in response to large-scale political violence or natural disaster. It provides a framework that practitioners can use to develop their own community-based, collective approach to treating trauma and providing clinical services that are both culturally and contextually appropriate. Clinicians will come away from the book with a solid understanding of new roles that health and mental health professionals play in disasters—roles that encourage them to recognize and enhance the resilience and coping skills in families, organizations, and the community at large.

The book draws on experience of working with survivors, their families, and communities in the Holocaust, post-war Kosovo, the Liberian civil wars, and post-9/11 Lower Manhattan. It tracks the development of community programs and projects based on a family and community resilience approach, including those that enhance the collective capacities for narration and public conversation.

Jack Saul, PhD, is assistant professor of clinical population and family health at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and director of the International Trauma Studies Program. As a psychologist he has created a number of programs for populations in New York City that have endured war, torture, and political violence including the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture, REFUGE (Refugee Resource Center), Theater Arts Against Political Violence, the Post-9/11 Downtown Community Resource Center, and African Refuge. He consults with organizations on staff welfare in response to trauma-related work and has a private practice in Manhattan.

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Collective Trauma, Collective Healing

Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster

Jack Saul

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Series Editor's Foreword

As series editor of the Psychosocial Stress Series I would like to welcome *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing: Promoting Community Resilience in the Aftermath of Disaster* to the book series. The purpose of the book series is to provide busy professionals with useful and timely information to guide their work with those seeking help in facing and overcoming significant adversity. Like the first book in this series, *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research, and Treatment* (Brunner-Routledge, 1978), *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* is an extraordinary contribution to the field of psychological trauma that focuses on ways of enhancing community resilience following disaster.

The author, Dr. Jack M. Saul, is a well-known trauma psychologist who is the founding and current director of the International Trauma Studies Program, affiliated with Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Professor Saul's work in New York and around the world is well known by both researchers and practitioners.

The idea for this book emerged from discussions with Dr. Saul several years ago. We talked over coffee at the Mille-Feuille Bakery Café, a popular spot squeezed between upscale condos and trendy Manhattan boutiques close to New York University's main campus. It was nearly ten years before this that Jack and I had first met, along with several dozen of his colleagues, days after the 2001 terrorist attack that changed his city, and the United States, forever. He makes reference to this meeting early in his book.

Over coffee, he talked of his many humanitarian efforts of the last 20 years, why he established the International Trauma Studies Program, and a new paradigm for promoting resilience in communities—one that would not simply focus on crisis intervention and PTSD-prevention in the wake of disasters. He discussed how 9/11 energized his trauma program and his colleagues to move toward this new paradigm of pragmatism. They began to focus on the fundamental principles of working with collective trauma that

can lead to collective healing. His writings, lectures, and training emphasized the importance of culture, meaning, and hope.

In this book, Dr. Saul lays out guidelines and practices for psychosocial responses to various types of catastrophes. At the same time, he establishes a framework that practitioners can use to develop their own community-based, collective approach to treating collective trauma and providing and timing clinical services that meet precise cultural expectations and requirements.

This book emerged over the last three years through reviewing more than 300 hours of video and other data gathered from more than a decade of work around the world and throughout the United States. It is also a distillation of a two-year disaster-response workshop series and discussion group with mental health professionals. Moreover, to grasp the significance of collective trauma interventions, Dr. Saul interviewed many dozens of community members who participated in community-based recovery work and leading professionals worldwide who are currently engaged in family and community resilience approaches to massive trauma, which included good and bad examples of effective trauma resilience efforts.

The book is a beautiful collection of the wisdom of human collective behavior, the philosophy of helping, and a blueprint for approaching, fitting in with and assisting the traumatized community of survivors. Like the first book in this series, *Collective Trauma, Collective Healing* will quickly become a classic and highly referenced text because it challenges the current approaches to trauma response and, in doing so, significantly improves our chances of forging significant and sustainable healing.

Charles R. Figley, PhD
Series Editor
New Orleans, January 2013

Preface

This book is the story of my professional and personal journey over the last 15 years working with survivors of political violence, their families and communities. I started working as a psychologist in clinics in New York City and moved to the streets, schools, churches, theater studios, and community centers to work as a collaborator with refugees who were rebuilding their lives. It was not only a geographical move, but also a conceptual shift in which I grew to appreciate the role of social context and the collective capacities in families and communities to recovery from massive psychosocial trauma and loss. My personal story is inseparable from the story I tell here, for just weeks after returning from Kosovo, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center took place in my neighborhood, having a tremendous impact on me personally as well as on my family, my community, and my country. I found myself in the role of an insider practitioner after having collaborated with many who had played that role in contexts where they themselves had endured major catastrophe. I realized I had learned a great deal from these and other colleagues about how I could help promote a process of collective recovery in New York City. After working with my own community, I applied that experience to a community resilience project with the underserved Liberian refugee community across the Hudson River in Staten Island.

Today, we often hear the term resilience in the context of disaster—which usually refers to an individual's capacity to rebound or bounce back following adversity. Researchers and practitioners have increasingly come to see that the resilience of an individual does not exist in a vacuum—it is a function of one's social and cultural context. It is commonly referred to today as community resilience—we are looking at the collective capacities in families, communities, organizations, and society at large that are more than the sum of individual capacities. We have come to recognize today that community resilience is a crucial factor in recovering from adversity, and in preventing

long-term mental health and social difficulties (Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz, & Kaniasty, 2002; Padgett, 2002).

This book is for mental health professionals working in the aftermath of disaster as well as emergency management professionals. It will be especially useful for insider practitioners from affected communities as well as community members who have decided to take an active role in promoting a process of collective recovery in their own neighborhoods, communities, or cities.

I received a great deal of guidance and support from the community research writing group at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, which urged me to spend a lot of time first documenting in detail the narrative unfolding of my experience working on these projects. Then, with a team of research assistants, we reviewed and analyzed more than 300 hours of videotapes of interviews, community meetings, and implemented projects, in order to better understand how the process of collective recovery unfolded. During the process, it forced me to relive without avoidance some of the most difficult experiences I lived through with my family in the months following 9/11. As a result, it has also more firmly anchored my understanding of collective recovery in my experience carrying out these projects.

Acknowledgments

In writing this book I drew upon many connections with teachers, colleagues, and friends from many disciplines. Hillel Klein and Elie Wiesel set the stage in graduate school for my professional work on collective trauma. Salvador Minuchin, Randy Gerson, Jorge Colapinto, Carlos Sluzki, Peter Fraenkel, Pauline Boss, Froma Walsh, you have been important teachers and colleagues in the field of systemic family therapy. A special thanks to Judith Landau, who provided the framework and mentorship for many of the projects described in this book. Soeren Buss Jenson, my co-founder of the International Trauma Studies Program (ITSP), I value your ongoing support. Steven Reisner, Nancy Baron, Deborah Munczek, Madelyn Miller, Saralee Kahn, Donna Gaffney, Marsha Shelov, Nancy Wallace, Saliha Bava, and Sonali Sharma have been my trusted fellows at the International Trauma Studies Program. To the actors and directors of Theater Arts Against Political Violence: Abigail Gampel, Lucy McLellan, Carlos Caldart, Meagan Auster-Rosen, John Burt, Garretson Sherman, Arianne Zaytzeff, and Robert Gourp—thank you. The ITSP has been blessed by the contributions of noted colleagues and friends, among them Melinda Meyer, Bessel van der Kolk, Sandra Bloom, Stevan Hobfoll, Fran Norris, Yael Danieli, Alastair Ager, Winnifred Simon, and Robert Jay Lifton. My colleagues from the Kosovar Family Professional Education Collaborative: Ferid Agani, Stevan Weine, Shukria Statovci, Shqipe Ukshine, Afrim Blyta, Jusef Ulaj, Mimosa Shahini, Ellen Pulleyblank-Coffey, Corkie Becker, John Sargeant, Mellisa Elliot, John Rolland, Jim Griffith, Kaethe Weingarten, and Jane Ariel—our work together may soon continue. From the Chilean immigrant community in New York City, Ernesto and Maryanne Castillo, Victor and Nieves Torres, and Emelio Banda, you have been a great inspiration. To those who were instrumental in promoting the post-9/11 community resilience work in New York City—Claude Chemtob, Jack Rosenthal, Carol Prendergast, Linda Mills, Esther Cohen, Liz Margolies, Hally Breindel, Fred Wistow, and the many staff and participants of the Downtown Community

Resource Center. To Jacob Massaquoi, Gene Prisco, Serena Chaudhry, Ernie Duff, Juma and Gerald Brumskine, Ilene Reilly, Janice Cooper, Bob Jacobs, Reverend Phillip Selwranye, Rufus Arkoi, Esther Sharpe, Cheryl Nadeau, Annemarie Dowling-Castronovo, Nilafor Naqvi, and Brandon Brockmyer, our work with the Liberian community in Staten Island is now approaching the end of its first decade. And special thanks to Liberian TRC Commissioners Massa Washington and Jerome Verdier, for their contributions. To my colleagues in the field of journalism and trauma—Frank Ochberg, Bruce Shapiro, David Handshuh, and Adam Lisberg. I want to also acknowledge Brandon Hamber and fellow members of the INCORE project on Trauma, Peace-building, and Development—you have been a tremendous source of inspiration to me during the writing of this book.

I am truly grateful for the contributions of the research team at the International Trauma Studies Program—Nat Pinkerton, Ali Rodriguez, Rachel Lev, Amanda Goodman, Perry Nagin, Cyril Benounna, Lauren Cubelis, Laura Merryman, Julia Richter, Vanessa Smith-Levine, and Nira Shah—this was truly a collective endeavor. And to those who have contributed as editorial advisors: Jennifer Dworkin and Victoria Horowitz; and to the book's editors in its final stage, Jennifer Wholey and Griffin Shea. A special thanks to Rocio Rodriguez, my artistic mentor, for offering her painting for the book's cover and to Zohar Nir-Amitin for the cover design. A special acknowledgment to Mindy Fullilove and the Columbia University writing group—Lourdes Hernandes, Ann Burack Weiss, and Helena Hanson—who provided the shape and encouragement for this project. And thank you to Charles Figley for the invitation to write this book and to Anna Moore, my editor at Routledge. My deepest appreciation goes to my family, who not only supported me but also contributed to the book—my sons, Noam and Adam, and my wife Esther Perel.

Introduction

Collective Trauma, Resilience, and Recovery

In recent years, it seems we have faced increasingly frequent natural disasters, conflicts, and other major catastrophes. As I am completing this book in New York City at the end of 2012, we are just recovering from super-storm Sandy, which left thousands of people along the northeast coast with their homes, businesses, and property ruined from the floods of a surging ocean. The civil war in Syria rages on with more than 40,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands displaced in and from a country that has seen such destruction that recovery will take decades. Weeks ago the conflict erupted again between Gaza and Israel, exacerbating tensions that now make peace seem farther off than ever. And just before the winter holidays, one of the worst school shootings in U.S. history took place in Newtown, Connecticut.

Disasters, whether their causes are natural or man-made, strain the ability of local systems to respond to needs. They bring an array of stressors to populations—from direct threat to life, physical injury, exposure to the dead and dying, bereavement, loss, societal and community disruption, and ongoing hardship (Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz, & Kaniasty, 2002). The mental health consequences of disaster are many and include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical health problems, chronic problems in living, interpersonal relationships, and financial stress, as well as the loss of resources such as actual and perceived social support. In their study of 142 disasters, Norris et al. (2002) found the disasters that had the greatest impact were those in which two or more of the following were present: extreme and widespread damage to property, serious and ongoing financial problems, a deliberate human cause, and impact associated with previous traumatic events such as injury, loss of, or threat to life. An inevitable consequence of natural and human-caused disaster is what we refer to as "collective trauma," the shared injuries to a population's social, cultural, and physical ecologies.

This book describes how communities strive to recover from collective trauma and the ways that practitioners both outside the events and within them may assist in that process by promoting resilience and well-being. Over the last 15 years, I have worked as a family systems-oriented psychologist with populations that have endured genocide, torture, ethnic cleansing, terrorism, civil war, and forced migration. The situations vary in terms of the severity, duration, and impact of violence and destruction as well as the communities' social and material capacities to recover. This book tracks this work in a number of different community contexts in which my role shifted from that of an outside to inside practitioner: my work with immigrants and refugees in New York and with war survivors in Kosovo, strengthening resilience in my own neighborhood in Manhattan following the September 11 terrorist attacks, and then again collaborating with the Liberian refugee community in Staten Island, New York.

For some time now, I have been interested in collective contexts and capacities for recovery, particularly the importance of public spaces and communal activities. In this light, I have focused on collective narration as an important process in recovery, and thus many of the projects that I have developed utilize narrative, testimony, the arts, and theatrical performance as collaborative social interventions. Like many people working in this field, I have a family history of relatives having survived persecution, political violence, and migration. My grandfather survived the anti-Semitic pogroms in Kishinev in present-day Moldova at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Saul, 2003). My wife's parents were the sole survivors of both their large extended families and their towns in Poland during the Holocaust of World War II. My interest in the human capacities for recovery following major adversity is certainly derived from my family experience.

The major thesis of this book is that recognizing and strengthening the adaptive capacities or "resilience" in families and communities promotes collective recovery after mass trauma. These capacities for recovery may be enhanced through the structure and support provided by outside practitioners, may be initiated from within communities themselves, or may be driven by various insider/outsider collaborations. Adaptation following massive traumatic events requires both flexibly responding to changing circumstances over time and at the same time developing a positive vision of recovery. Thus, collective recovery is a creative and emergent process; its content and form are constructed over time through cycles of collective action, reflection, and narration.

Collective Trauma

Collective trauma refers to the impact of adversity on relationships in families, communities and societies at large. This includes natural and human-caused disasters as well as the cumulative effects of poverty, oppression, illness, and displacement.

American sociologist Kai Erikson, in a report on the Buffalo Creek disaster of 1972, a terrible flood that wrecked a hollow in Appalachia, made the distinction between "individual trauma" and "collective trauma." To quote him:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively. This is what clinicians normally mean when they use the term, and the Buffalo Creek survivors experienced precisely that. They suffered deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and, as so often happens in catastrophes of this magnitude, they withdrew into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone.

Erikson 1976, pp. 153–154

Erikson continues:

> By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma." But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared.… "I" continue to exist, though damaged and maybe even permanently changed. "You" continue to exist, though distant and hard to relate to. But "we" no longer exist as a connected pair or as linked cells in a larger communal body.

Erikson 1976, p. 154

Erikson pointed out that people might experience either individual or collective trauma in the absence of the other. But it is common that after a cata-