

# EXEGETING THE WOUNDS OF SCRIPTURE

Dr Julian Thompson, Newbold College

# Reading the Bible through the lens of trauma

## An emerging field

The application of trauma theory to the Old Testament is a new and emerging area of research in the field of Biblical Studies.

## Trauma Literature

This presentation will explore how the Old Testament encodes and gives witness to trauma in the ancient world.

## Implications

Finally, we will reflect pastorally on the dynamics of engaging biblical trauma narratives for processing trauma and developing resilience.

# Note

I am not a Counsellor,  
Psychologist, or Traumatologist.

# Theodicy

Theodicies offer a framework for understanding religious perspectives on God's nature and human suffering, but they often fall short when it comes to effectively addressing and alleviating suffering. Although they may provide explanations, it's uncertain how much these explanations contribute holistically to the healing / re-making process.

# Defined

Trauma is notoriously difficult to define.

“...an emotional response to a terrible event”

**American Psychological Association**

“Trauma is what does not go away. It persists in symptoms that live on in the body, in the intrusive fragments of memories that return. It persists in symptoms that live on in communities, in the layers of past violence that constitute present ways of relating. It persists in the symptoms that fuel present wars.”

**Shelly Rambo (2010)**

“...anything that causes emotional or physical pain and leaves its mark on a person as life moves forward.”

**Dr Paul Conti (2021)**



# Continuum of trauma responses

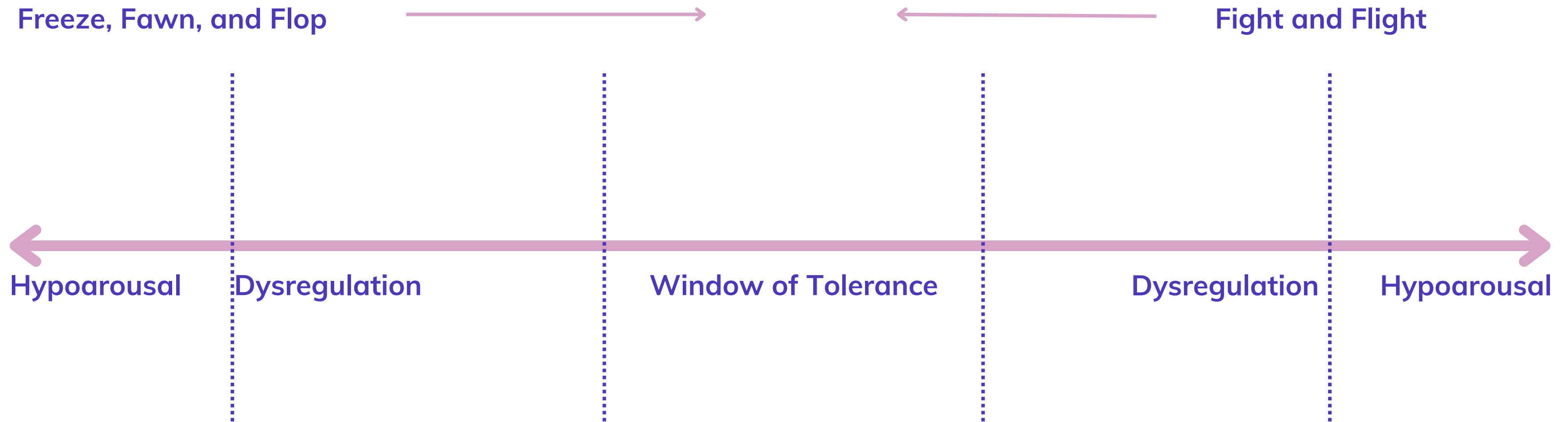
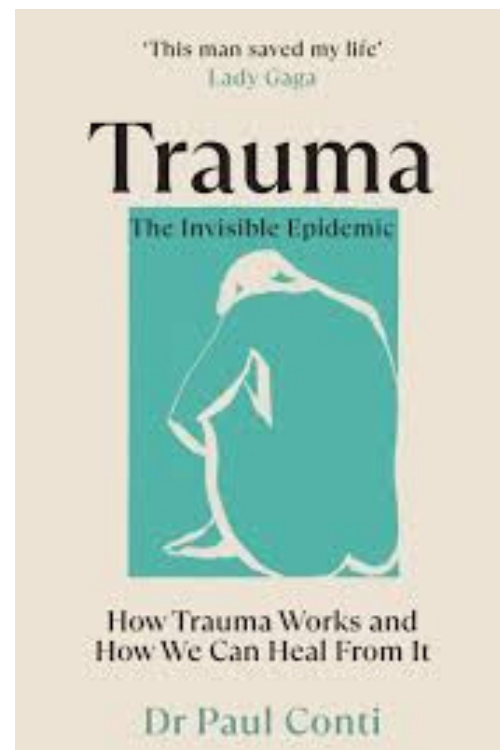


Figure 1.1 Continuum of Trauma Responses. Source: Alexiana Fry; this is readapted for the audience based on The National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM): [www.nicabm.com](http://www.nicabm.com), 2017. The window of tolerance concept is specifically coined by Dan Siegel. in Fry, Alexiana. Trauma Talks in the Hebrew Bible: Speech Act Theory and Trauma Hermeneutics (p. 30)..

# Popular Culture



## Dr Paul Conti

An invisible epidemic?



## Lady Gaga

"This man saved my life"

# The Myth of Normal ?



# Milestones

Biblical Studies

*A Theology of Liberation by Gustavo Gutiérrez*  
*Claus Westermann, The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament,”*

**1970s**



Trauma and traumatization: Biblical studies and Beyond  
Conference

**2012**



Bible through the lens of Trauma

**2016**



Hebrew Bible as ‘Survival Literature’

# Trauma Hermeneutics

## Psychology

Explores the effects of trauma on the **individual** and on the processes that facilitate survival, recovery and resilience.

## Sociology

Focus on the **collective** dimensions of trauma

## Literary/Cultural Studies

The Examination of **the role and function of texts** as the encode and give witness to traumatic suffering and, construct discursive and aesthetic spaces for fostering recovery and resilience.

## **INDIVIDUAL**

Actions, Speech, Agency

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## **THE BODY (TEXT) REMEMBERS**

Instrumentalisation? Commercialisation? Fetishisation?  
Judges 21:25

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## **RESPONSE-ABILITY**

Texts do things

# Judges 19

The Levite's Concubine

# Critical Empathy

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

“Save for a note in the preface, my tone throughout the book was distant, even clinical. This was a coping mechanism, a way of maintaining an emotional and critical remove from the distressing content of the chapter I was writing on. I realise on reflection that it is harmful to remain critically detached when engaging with distressing biblical primary evidence. We scholars have an ethical duty not to turn off our emotions. In my chapter for this volume I will admit that in the past my tone in writing was deeply problematic. Academic work is never finished, in my view, so now I feel I need to return to Judges 21 and try to show what a difference it makes to engage the text with a mixture of intellect and emotion.”

Katherine Southwood, “Introducing the Contributors to ‘The Bible and Violence,’ – Katherine Southwood and Dominic Irudayaraj,”

# 2 Kings 25:1-12

The destruction of Jerusalem

## **COMMUNAL/ LITERARY**

The destruction of Jerusalem was, perhaps, the single most affective event in the OT/HB

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## **THE BODY (TEXT) REMEMBERS**

What voice(s) do we hear in the text?

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## **THE FAILURE OF HISTORY?**

How are events remembered, interpreted and theologised?

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## **SOCIAL / COMMUNAL NARRATIVES**

A source of healing?



## **INDIVIDUAL / LITERARY**

Actions, Speech, Agency

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## **THE BODY (TEXT) REMEMBERS**

How does Lamentations remember ?

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## **RESISTANCE & REMAKING**

Individual Trauma vs Collective Social Narratives

# Lamentations 1

The destruction of Jerusalem

**“When you enter certain worlds, they do not let you go. My work as a theologian does not take me into courtrooms, but studying trauma has changed the way I move in the world. I feel the fragility of the world more acutely than I did ten years ago. I view persons as more vulnerable in it, and the earth more wounded by our heavy footprints. I feel its weight. I have come to believe that we are connected in ways that we cannot account for and constituted by much that we do not know.”**

Rambo, Shelly. Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining (2010)

# Reflections

Pastoral and Theological

## **Theology**

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A healing discourse?

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## **Affectiveness**

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Texts impact us

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## **With-nessing**

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How do we empathise appropriately?

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## **Response-ability**

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What do we do with these types of texts?

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## **Ethics**

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We have an ethical responsibility to the text in the sense that our interpretations matter and have a current-day effect.



# Info.

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[JThompson@newbold.ac.uk](mailto:JThompson@newbold.ac.uk)

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[newbold.ac.uk](http://newbold.ac.uk)

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PGCert Counselling