

Posttraumatic embitterment in the South African context

Dr Barbara Louw  
Inter Trauma Nexus



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Background of initial research

Purpose of the study is to find way in which trauma and posttraumatic embitterment can be demystified in a manner that can make a positive difference to the quality of people's lives



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Posttraumatic Embitterment Disorder is a distinct subgroup of adjustment disorders in which the trigger event is not an anxiety-provoking and life-threatening stimulus, but an exceptional, but normal negative life event.  
(M Linden)



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Embitterment is correlated with aggression, fatalistic attitudes, help-and hopelessness and feeling being attacked and persecuted. Actions which arise from this emotion can be protest and open aggression, but also passiveness, isolation, and retreat. In contrast to depression, emotional modulation is unimpaired.



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The term trauma is appropriate in PTED, because the assumption is that the individual experience and perceives the violation of basic beliefs as traumatic.

- There is a mismatch between the individual's belief and value system and the violation of these beliefs by the event.
- The meaning of the event is not defined objectively.
- This threat to deep seated beliefs manifests as a powerful psychological shock upon the individual.



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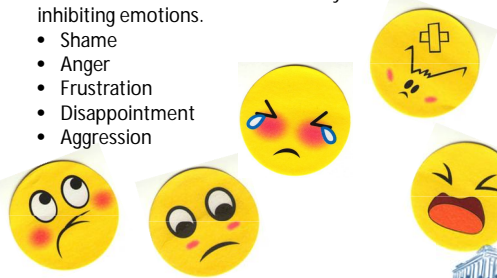
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Embitterment can be described as a complex emotion with a blend of several contradictory and mutual inhibiting emotions.

- Shame
- Anger
- Frustration
- Disappointment
- Aggression



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### Posttraumatic Embitterment

- Summary

- Trigger can be a single exceptional, normal negative life event
- Person know about event
- Perceive event as cause of illness
- Experience as unjust, as an insult and as a humiliation.
- Feelings involve **embitterment, rage and helplessness**



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### Posttraumatic Embitterment

(Cont.)

The event is experienced as traumatic due to a violation of basic beliefs;  
Can include, but not limited to:

- Workplace conflict
- Unemployment
- Death of a relative
- Divorce, experience of loss or separation
- Severe illness



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### The Hope Factor



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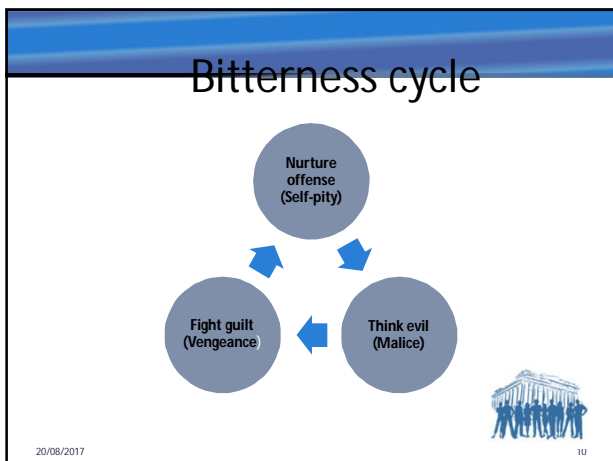
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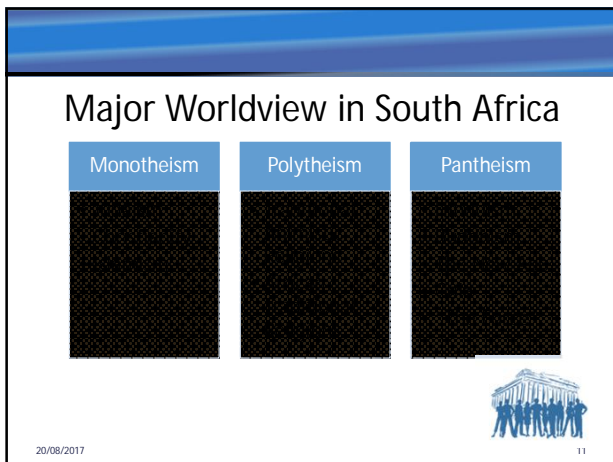
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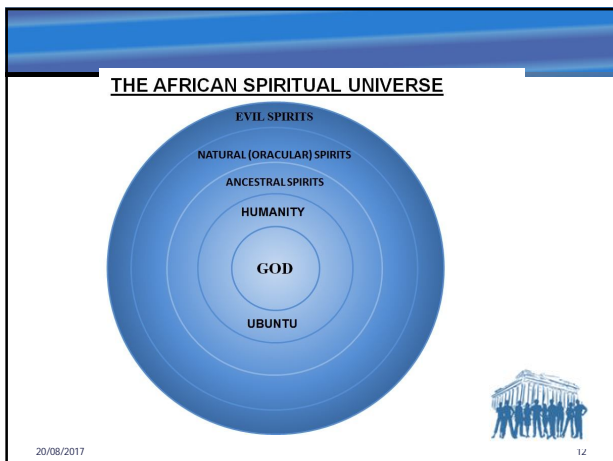
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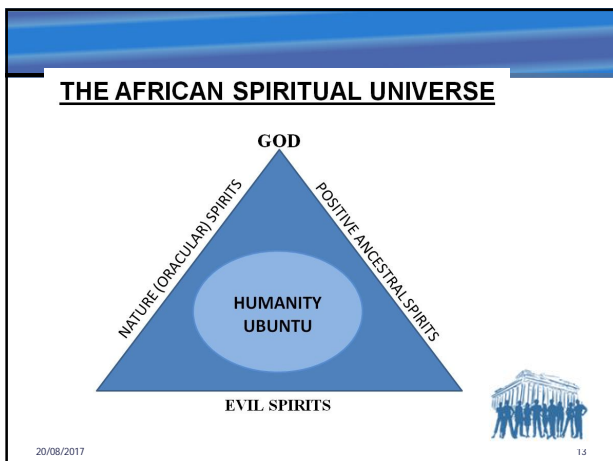
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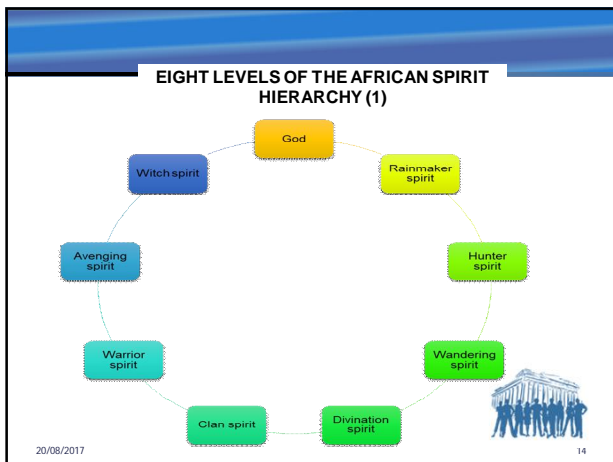
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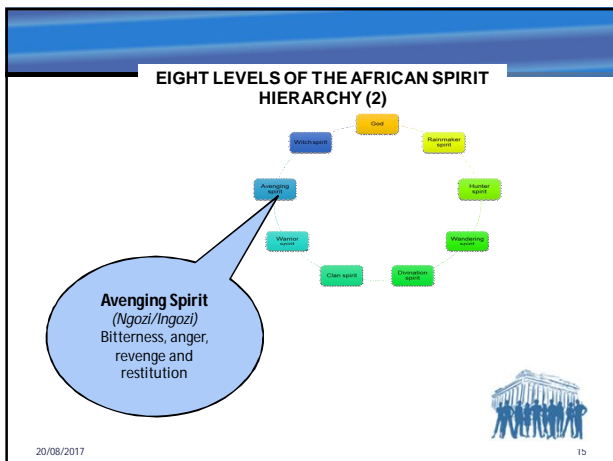
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The embittered individuals see the **critical, unjust event** as the **cause** of their present state and of a persistent negative change in their well-being.

They perceive themselves as **victims** of a specific event that **caused frustration, downgrading, or humiliation.**



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### The Role of Christian Counselling in a South African Context



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### Posttraumatic Wellness Coaching Model

Wellness Meter

0 20 40 60 80 100

**Wisdom**

- Life style
- Body & physical health
- Mind & thoughts
- Mood, feeling & emotions

**Renewal**

- Social interaction
- Intimacy
- Life goals
- Finances
- Work & exercise
- Religious practices

Mastery | Openness to experience | Reflective attitude | Emotional regulation | Spirituality

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### Proposed Outcome

- Early intervention model
- A 'wholistic' wellness approach away from biomedical diagnoses
- Highlights impact of 'wholistic' wellness options
- Transferability of 'wholistic' wellness model

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