War through the lens of psychotherapy

Exploration of collective aggression and the unconscious

By

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Submitted to the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) for the degree MA in Psychotherapy from Dublin Business School, School of Arts

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June 2025, Department of Psychotherapy

Dublin Business School

Abstract

This theoretical thesis explores war as a psychological and symbolic phenomenon, focusing on how individual and collective unconscious processes contribute to large-scale violence. While acknowledging political, historical, and economic factors, the central argument of the thesis is that war cannot be fully understood or prevented without addressing the deeper psychic structures that shape human aggression and destructiveness.

Drawing on psychoanalytic, Jungian, and neuropsychoanalytic theories, the thesis investigates how aggression is an intrinsic part of the human psyche. Freud's concept of the death drive, Sabina Spielrein's idea of destruction as transformation, and Lacanian ideas about ambivalence between love and hate offer insight into how violence can be both repelling and intoxicating. Jungian psychology further expands this inquiry through archetypes, shadow projection, and collective unconscious dynamics, which help explain the mythic, symbolic, and often ecstatic dimension of war. The symbolic ideas of the warrior, the enemy, and the scapegoat are analysed in both, ancient myth and modern political context.

Neuropsychoanalysis bridges unconscious processes with brain-based emotional regulation systems, viewing the human body as a vessel for the unconscious. Trauma, stress, and unresolved loss can compromise top-down regulatory mechanisms, making individuals and groups more susceptible to primitive defenses, emotional contagion, and dehumanization. These dynamics are magnified in group settings, where regression to black-and-white thinking and basic assumptions, such as fight or flight, can spread and escalate. Drawing on Bion, the Tavistock tradition, and contemporary group psychology, the research highlights how collective processes such as splitting,

projection, and idealization of leaders foster mass violence, often under the guise of moral necessity or national identity.

The role of family and early childhood experiences is explored, drawing on the work of Alice Miller and others to trace how authoritarian parenting and emotional repression foster submission to destructive ideologies. Films, such as *The White Ribbon* and *Groundhog Day*, are the modern form of storytelling, representing cultural narratives and used in the thesis symbolically, to illustrate how unresolved trauma and repetition compulsion manifest in individual and collective behaviour.

Rather than proposing a utopian solution, the thesis argues for a psychological deepening of peacebuilding that includes shadow integration, symbolic thinking, storytelling, and emotional containment. Therapy, both individual and group, is seen as a vital container for processing collective trauma and fostering a more integrated moral consciousness. While the unconscious is always at work, and the risk of war may never be fully eradicated, awareness of its psychological underpinnings is a necessary step toward looking at it through a different lens.

This work contributes to the growing interdisciplinary field at the intersection of depth psychology and conflict studies. It ultimately invites to consider that the roots of war lie not only in the external world, but also in the landscapes of our own inner lives.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have shaped and inspired this work in ways both seen and unseen.

First and foremost, I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Monica Errity, for her encouragement, guidance and insightful feedback throughout the research process.

I also wish to thank all lecturers and the library team at Dublin Business School, for their academic and administrative support.

Special thank you to my therapist Sofya who encouraged me to take a risk and challenge myself.

To my late grandfather, a partisan and survivor of the 2nd World War and mass deportations in Lithuania - his stories were lessons in human resilience. He undertook the quiet, courageous work of grieving and restoring his vulnerability. He inspired my search for meaning.

This thesis would not have been possible without each of you.

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Introduction

‘*Someone who is perennially surprised that depravity exists, who continues to feel disillusioned (even incredulous) when confronted with evidence of what humans are capable of inflicting in the way of gruesome, hands-on cruelties upon other humans, has not reached moral or psychological adulthood. No one after a certain age has the right to this kind of innocence, of superficiality, to this degree of ignorance.’* S. Sontag (2003).

In a time marked by global instability, re-emergent authoritarianism and armed conflict, understanding the psychological roots of collective aggression has never been more urgent. While much of the discourse around war focuses on geopolitical, economic and legal aspects, these explanations often leave out the deeper emotional and unconscious forces that determine collective human behaviour. This thesis argues that war is not only a political event, but also a psychic phenomenon - one that arises from the collusion of individual and collective unconscious processes, and is sustained by deeply embedded drives, archetypes, shadow projections, and group defences.

Drawing from personal, cultural, and historical resonances, this work seeks to engage with the moral and emotional complexities of war beyond binary narratives of victim and perpetrator. It draws on psychoanalytic and Jungian frameworks to explore how aggression, violence, and ‘othering’ are not merely social products but rooted in psychological structures that, when unacknowledged, can lead to destruction on a mass scale. The question is: what in the human psyche makes war so enduring, seductive, and collectively rationalized?

Jungian analyst in Ukraine, S. Shevchenko, remembers a Ukrainian marine, who, upon return from captivity and torture, had temporarily lost his ability to speak. When he received some support, his first words were these: why is there so much evil in the world? How can people be so cruel to each other? (Shevchenko, 2025).

Shevchenko (2025) states, that war and cruelty has been a near-constant presence in human society, with true global peace being exceedingly rare. Archaeologist Lawrence H. Keeley (1996) presents evidence that warfare was common among prehistoric societies and that 90–95% of known societies engage in war. Keeley's research suggests that the inclination for conflict is deeply rooted in human history, even predating modern civilization. A 1965 ‘TIME’ essay highlighted that in 5,560 years of recorded human history there have been 14,531 wars and only ten generations have known peace.

The psychological tendency toward aggression - humans’ capacity for violence and cruelty - affects groups as well as individuals, especially during this troubling time of global conflict and division. Vamik (2025) states that after spending decades studying people in group psychoanalysis and bringing together enemy representatives of opposing collectives, such as Israelis - Palestinians, Russians - Estonians, Serbians - Croats, for unofficial dialogues, arrived to the conclusion, that all large groups, regardless of their country of origin, are essentially the same in wating to either kill, or love one another. Under special circumstances these groups can bring a lot of destruction.

Methodological Orientation

Methodologically, this thesis adopts a hermeneutic and conceptual approach rooted in psychodynamic and depth psychological theory. It synthesizes psychoanalytic thought, Jungian psychology, neuropsychoanalysis, and group-relational perspectives to

construct a multi-layered understanding of collective aggression. The material is drawn from scholarly literature, myth, cultural narratives, and symbolic representations in media and history.

Rather than testing a hypothesis, the aim is interpretive: to explore how psychotherapy can help illuminate the unconscious forces that perpetuate war and aggression, and to offer a psychologically informed language for reflection.

Aim and Objectives

This thesis will explore deep psychological aspects of collective conflicts, even though it does not disregard the economic, criminal, political, legal factors which are at play.

Aim:

Exploring the role of individual and collective aggression in the phenomena of war.

Objectives:

1. Researching existing perspectives on war within the field of psychotherapy and evaluating what they can offer.

2. Exploring individual and collective unconscious processes in the context of collective aggression.

Structure of Chapters

The thesis is organized into five core chapters:

‘Chapter 1: The Origins of Violence’ explores evolutionary, biological, and psychological roots of aggression through experimental psychology and early psychoanalytic insight.

‘Chapter 2: Psychoanalysis and the Death Drive’ investigates the role of unconscious drives (particularly Thanatos), ambivalence, and the interplay between creation and destruction in psychoanalytic theory and neuropsychoanalysis.

‘Chapter 3: Jung and the Archetypal War’ discusses archetypes, the shadow, collective unconscious, the unconscious masculine complex, and alchemical transformation as frameworks for understanding the symbolic nature of war.

‘Chapter 4: The Unconscious Group’ examines group dynamics, regression, scapegoating, and collective defence mechanisms that shape mass psychology in times of conflict. This chapter also looks at how leaders function as containers for group anxiety, how enemies are constructed through projection, and how early relational trauma contributes to adult complicity in violence.

‘Chapter 5: Is War Inevitable?’ considers therapeutic, symbolic, and cultural insight toward transformation and containment of collective aggression.

Scope and Limitations

This thesis is a theoretical inquiry into the psychological dimensions of war. It does not offer an exhaustive account of military history, international relations, or real-time conflict resolution strategies. Instead, its scope is deliberately focused on symbolic, unconscious, and affective aspects of collective violence, using psychotherapeutic theories as a lens through which war can be interpreted. While references are made to real-world conflicts (such as Ukraine - Russia, Israel – Palestine conflicts, First and 2nd World Wars), these are treated illustratively rather than through empirical case studies.

The limitations of theoretical approach include a reliance on secondary sources, broad theoretical generalisation, and the absence of clinical or field research.

However, the richness of depth psychology lies precisely in its ability to speak to patterns and symbols that recur across time and cultures.

Chapter 1. Origins of violence

Volkan (2025) writes about several kinds of aggression: defensive aggression (self-preservation via going into the fight response), parental aggression (protective of the offspring in humans and animal kingdom), predatory aggression (historically required to hunt and pursue meat), display aggression (used to achieve dominance in hierarchy and in pursuit of mating partners). Due to human cognitive abilities and cultural contexts, these types of aggression in humans are complex and contain high level of symbolism.

Research into obedience and situational aggression has significantly contributed to understanding the psychological mechanisms that underlie individual and collective violence. The Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo, 1971), although it arose ethical concerns, demonstrated how ordinary individuals, placed in a simulated prison setting and given roles of guards or prisoners, rapidly adopted aggressive, authoritarian behaviours. The study revealed how quickly people internalize roles and how environmental and social structures can elicit cruelty and dominance in an individual.

Similarly, Milgram's (1963) obedience experiments showed that individuals were willing to administer what they believed were painful electric shocks to another person when instructed by an authority figure. Participants continued to obey commands even when clearly distressed, highlighting the powerful role of authority and conformity in overriding personal moral principles.

In addition to that, in his ethically updated study, Burger (2009) implemented safeguards such as a lower voltage ceiling (150 volts) and thorough psychological screening yet still found that 70% of participants were willing to continue administering shocks past the critical point, even when the learner expressed discomfort. Despite heightened awareness of Milgram's original findings and decades of ethical debates, participants still displayed a troubling readiness to comply with authority, especially under the influence of situational pressures and role expectations. Burger's work accentuates that obedience and aggression are not relics of a past era, but persistent traits in human psyche, that can be easily activated under specific social conditions.

These findings are relevant to understanding the psychological foundations of violence, where hierarchical structures, dehumanization, and collective processes often override individual conscience, allowing aggression to escalate on a mass scale. These studies are particularly relevant in the context of war, when propaganda, military hierarchies and group conformity can facilitate acts of violence that individuals might otherwise seem to find morally unacceptable. They suggest that understanding and mitigating war-related aggression would require not only structural changes but also deeper insight into the psychical and unconscious mechanisms that drive compliance, violence and suppression of empathy in group situations (Zimbardo, 2007).

Ukrainian Jungian analyst S. Shevchenko (2025) suggests, that all the efforts of United Nations, peace talks and international agreements have failed to prevent wars, because they did not address the origins of human violence existing on a deeper level - in our psyche.

Chapter 2. Psychoanalysis and the death drive

Death drive

War correspondent Anthony Lloyd stated: *'there can be few instances in life that a man is lucky enough to feel so at one with his time and place. It would have been a good moment to die. I cannot apologize for enjoying it so. It was like falling in love again, a heady sensual rush that I wished only to clasp unquestioningly'* (Marciano, Stewart, Lee, 2022)

In his writings, Freud reflects on the profound disillusionment that he experienced at the beginning of the First World War. He highlights how quickly civilized nations can turn on one another with hatred, revealing a disturbing readiness among citizens to support a ruthless desire for power disguised as patriotism (Freud, 1915/2001).

As Freud explores the dynamics of hatred and death, he notes that even those we love carry elements of otherness - parts of them that can feel foreign, unfamiliar, or estranged - which can become the focus of our hatred. This idea is further developed in Lacan's later concept of '*hainamoration'*, the ambivalence and entanglement of love and hate (Freud, 1915).

Sabina Spielrein provided a psychodynamic foundation for understanding self-destructive and aggressive tendencies as intrinsic elements of the psyche, a theme central to theories of collective violence. Spielrein, a colleague of Freud, introduced the concept of a destructive impulse in her seminal paper '*Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being*' (1912). Spielrein proposed that within the human psyche lies an

inherent tension between creation and destruction, where the impulse toward dissolution is not merely pathological but serves a regenerative function.

Spielrein described this duality as fundamental to human development, especially in sexual and reproductive processes where destruction (e.g., orgasm, ego dissolution) precedes new creation (Spielrein, 1912). Freud later elaborated on this idea in his theory of the *death drive* (1920) and did not credit Spielrein's contribution (Covington, 2003).

Freud (1933) explores the psychological roots of human conflict and sheds light on the futile death on a global scale. Freund and Einstein exchanged their ideas about war and whether it is possible avoid it. Freud argues that the potential for war and violence is not simply a social or political phenomenon, but something deeply rooted in human nature. Freud identifies an innate aggressive drive, what he calls the death drive, (*Thanatos*), as a key force behind the recurrence of war. This drive, he suggests, is ever-present and latent within individuals and societies, only needing the right conditions to be activated.

Moreover, as Freud writes to Einstein, '*There is no likelihood of our being able to suppress humanity's aggressive tendencies, they are a part of his instinctual nature*' (Freud, 1933, p. 211). Freud pessimistically posits that in their animalistic nature, humans settle their conflicts of interest by using violence. Freud adds, that civilization can only manage and sublimate these aggressive instincts, but not eliminate them entirely, making the threat of war a constant undercurrent in human existence throughout history.

Furthermore, in *Why War?* Sigmund Freud (1933) explores the psychological foundations of human conflict by proposing a dual-instinct theory centered on Eros and the death or destructive instinct. Eros represents the life instinct, encompassing love,

cooperation, and the drive to build and preserve relationships and communities. In contrast, the destructive instinct - also known as Thanatos - is directed toward aggression, domination, and ultimately, death.

Freud (1933) argues that both, Eros and Thanatos, are fundamental and coexist within the human psyche, constantly interacting and shaping behaviour. War, in this framework, is not merely a political or social phenomenon but an expression of the human struggle between these opposing forces. Freud suggests that while civilization seeks to sublimate destructive impulses through law, culture, and communal values, these efforts can only partially restrain the inherent aggression embedded in human nature (Freud, 1933).

In addition, Freud (1933) discusses the complex nature of human motives, particularly in the context of conflict and aggression. He observes that people often present socially acceptable or rational explanations for their actions, while concealing underlying motives. These hidden impulses - such as resentment, fear, or a desire for power - may not only go undeclared but may also be unconscious even to the individual themselves. Freud suggests that much of what drives human behaviour, especially violent or destructive actions, lies beneath the surface of awareness, shaped by instinctual forces and psychological defence mechanisms (Freud, 1933).

Freud posits, that people are not '*gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love, who simply defend themselves when they are attacked, but that a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment*' (Freud, 1930, p. 111). Freud elaborates, that sublimation brings a sense of discontent, and states, that the opposite is true - acting on aggressive instinct can bring us vile pleasure.

Neuropsychoanalysis

Neuropsychoanalysis is an emerging interdisciplinary field that brings together psychoanalytic insights into the human mind with the latest neuroscientific research. Its central aim is to understand how unconscious mental processes, emotional regulation, and interpersonal dynamics are rooted in the structure and function of the brain. This integration offers a unique lens for analysing the psychological origins of conflict and aggression.

At the heart of neuropsychoanalysis lies the recognition that the brain is a complex system of interacting regions, each responsible for different aspects of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. The prefrontal cortex, for example, is crucial for impulse control, decision-making, and emotional regulation, while the limbic system, especially the amygdala, plays a key role in processing threats and generating emotional responses such as fear and anger (Kessler & Wang, 2008; Blair, 2016). When these systems are in balance, individuals can manage their emotions, resolve conflicts constructively, and maintain healthy relationships. However, when regulatory mechanisms are compromised, due to trauma, stress, or neurodevelopmental issues, people become more susceptible to impulsive aggression and destructive conflict (Blair, 2016).

Neuropsychoanalysis provides a nuanced account of the origins of human aggression and its escalation into inter-group conflicts such as war, integrating neurobiological, psychological, and social perspectives. Aggression emerges from the interplay between subcortical brain regions responsible for emotional reactivity (such as the amygdala and hippocampus) and higher cortical areas involved in impulse control and emotion regulation, including the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex

(Fields, 2019; Cupaioli, 2021; Bion, 1961). When top-down regulatory mechanisms are weakened or overwhelmed by stress, trauma, or social context, individuals become more prone to impulsive and reactive aggression (Blair, 2016; Kessler & Wang, 2008).

Supporting this, a large-scale meta-analysis has shown that aggression is consistently associated with altered structure and function in a network of brain regions involved in emotion, reward, and self-regulation, with the amygdala, hippocampus, basal ganglia, and prefrontal cortices playing central roles (BioRxiv, 2025). Dysfunction in these circuits leads to an imbalance between bottom-up emotional drives and top-down control, making aggressive responses to perceived threats or provocations more likely. This neurobiological vulnerability is further amplified by psychosocial factors, such as group identification and social reinforcement, which can erode inhibitory control and intensify aggressive tendencies (Volkan, 2020).

When these processes are scaled up to the group level, the likelihood of inter-group conflicts, including war, increases. Neuropsychoanalysis suggests that group identification and social contagion can override individual rationality, making people more susceptible to primitive defense mechanisms like splitting and projection (Bion, 1961; Jung, 1954). Neurobiological changes during group conflict, such as reduced activation in the fusiform gyrus and mirror neuron system, can decrease empathy and heighten the perception of threat, further facilitating dehumanization and violence (Johanson et al., 2020; BioRxiv, 2025).

From this perspective, the roots of human aggression lie in the interaction between innate neurobiological vulnerabilities, trauma and social contexts that reinforce aggressive behaviour. The escalation to inter-group conflict is driven by disrupted emotion regulation, group identification, and the projection of internal conflicts onto

outsiders, as supported by converging neurobiological and psychological evidence (Volkan, 2020; Cupaioli, 2021; BioRxiv, 2025).

Psychoanalytic theory has long emphasized the role of unconscious processes and defense mechanisms in shaping behaviour. Mechanisms such as splitting, projection, and identification are not only psychological phenomena but also have neurobiological correlates. For example, neuroimaging studies have shown that conflict-related themes activate brain regions associated with emotion processing and conflict monitoring, such as the anterior cingulate cortex (Schmeing, 2013). This suggests that conflict is deeply embedded in our neural architecture and psychological development.

The interplay between brain and mind becomes even more complex in group and societal contexts. Psychoanalytic theorists, Bion (1961) and Volkan (2020), have argued that group identification can trigger regression to more primitive emotional states. This regression leads to ‘black and white’ thinking and primitive defense mechanisms that fuel collective aggression and scapegoating. Neuropsychoanalysis explains how, under the pressure of large-group dynamics, social and emotional pressures can override individual rationality, making people more susceptible to suggestion, conformity, and emotional contagion (Allcorn, 2022; Volkan, 2020). This is especially pronounced during times of stress or threat, when the brain’s threat detection systems are hyperactivated and higher cortical control is diminished.

Large-group identification, as described by Volkan (2020), can result in the externalization of internal conflicts and anxieties. Groups may project their own unacceptable traits - such as aggression, vulnerability, or irrationality - onto outsiders, creating ‘enemies’ who serve as repositories for the group’s disowned aspects. This process is both psychological and neurobiological: during intergroup conflict, the brain’s mirror neuron system and empathy networks may be downregulated, reducing

empathy and increasing the likelihood of polarization, hostility, and violence (Tooby, Cosmides, & Sell, 2018).

Neuropsychoanalysis also highlights the role of trauma in perpetuating conflict. Traumatic experiences, whether individual or collective, can disrupt the brain's regulatory systems, making people more reactive and less able to manage their emotions. This can create a vicious cycle in which trauma leads to aggression, which in turn leads to further trauma (Kernberg, 1992). In societies with a history of violence or oppression, these vulnerabilities can be passed down through generations, perpetuating cycles of trauma, conflict and revenge (Volkan, 2020).

Understanding the neuropsychoanalytic basis of conflict has important implications for de-escalation of collective conflicts. Effective strategies must address both the neurobiological and psychological dimensions of aggression. For instance, pharmacological treatments that stabilize mood and reduce limbic irritability can help manage impulsive aggression (Blair, 2016). Psychotherapeutic approaches that foster self-awareness, emotional regulation, and the integration of split-off aspects of the self are also essential for breaking cycles of conflict (Kernberg, 1992; Levy & Schonbar, 2012).

Moreover, interventions at the group and societal level must consider how group dynamics can override individual rationality and perpetuate destructive patterns. Psychoanalytic group work, as described by Allcorn (2022) and others, can help groups become more aware of their unconscious processes and defense mechanisms, enabling them to reclaim projected aspects of themselves and reduce the likelihood of scapegoating and violence.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory further enriches this view. He argued that when internal conflicts, such as the struggle between instinctual desires and societal

constraints, are not adequately managed, aggression may be directed outward toward others or inward toward the self. This helps explain why both individuals and groups may regress to primitive, aggressive states under stress, as the death drive seeks expression (Freud, 1921). Neuropsychoanalysis aligns with this by showing how disruptions in brain-based regulatory systems can result in diminished impulse control and heightened aggression, especially when emotional conflicts remain unresolved (Kessler & Wang, 2008; Blair, 2016).

Chapter 3 Jung and the Archetypal War

Archetypes – war is universal

Mythology across the world is filled with gods and goddesses of war, each embodying the archetypal, superhuman, and autonomous nature of conflict. Figures such as Athena, Mars, and Ares in Greek and Roman mythology, and the Morrigan in Celtic lore, illustrate how deeply war is woven into the human imagination. The Morrigan, for example, symbolized not only the circle of life and death but could appear in a warrior's dreams, washing his bloody armour as a premonition of his fate. She was believed to influence the outcome of battles, inspire fear in enemies, and instil courage in her followers - sometimes even joining the battles herself (Connolly Cove, 2024; Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022). S. Shevchenko, a Jungian analyst living in Ukraine, urges us to investigate the phenomena of war without bias, calling for a collective effort to understand the archetypal determinants that repeatedly draw humanity into conflict (Shevchenko, 2025).

These archetypal patterns are not confined to ancient myths but also appear in fairy tales, where characters often embody split emotions, with few figures shown as complex individuals possessing both positive and negative traits. The mother figure, for instance, is typically divided into a benevolent fairy godmother or idealized deceased mother and a malevolent stepmother, while sisters are depicted as either wholly virtuous or enviously wicked. According to Bruno Bettelheim (1976), these stories help children process challenging emotions by externalizing and simplifying internal conflicts (Wallach, 2011). The collective imagination continues to demand representations of conflict and war, as seen in the millions who watch videos of contemporary genocides and wars on social media. Myths live on by inspiring modern creators - for example, the myth of

the Amazons has given rise to the modern 'Wonder Woman', and the gods of war have inspired romanticized heroes in uniforms (Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022).

There is something about war that makes it bigger than any individual or society. While we universally condemn its horrors, war remains a constant throughout human history. Alongside the suffering, there are accounts of complex, even euphoric feelings experienced by those caught in the maelstrom of battle. Greek and Roman writings describe a spirit of ecstasy that possesses warriors, and veterans often speak of an intense sense of aliveness amid conflict. It is only after the war ends, when the archetypal forces have run their course and our humanity returns, that we are confronted with the destruction we have wrought - as if we were mere instruments of these archetypal energies (Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022).

James Hillman (2005) observes that war is always latent in humans, emerging according to circumstances. Once ignited, it spreads like wildfire. Humans are susceptible to 'psychic infections' and can be easily stirred by leaders who spread propaganda (Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022). This susceptibility is exemplified by Hermann Göring's statement at the Nuremberg trials:

'*Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country'.*

Destruction, paradoxically, has its place in the human experience. In the Hindu pantheon, Shiva is revered as the destroyer of illusions. This necessity of destruction supports Freud's theory of the death instinct. Jung, too, saw wars and revolutions as '*psychic epidemics*' and occurrences of '*madness'* that can erupt at any time. He wrote, '*Man himself is man's greatest danger to man, for the simple reason that there is no adequate protection against psychic epidemics*' (Jung, 1957). Importantly, archetypes are

not isolated entities but are contaminated, interwoven, with one another. The Latin root of '*contaminated' (contaminare*) means '*interwoven'*. Our minds function as webs of associations, especially in the realm of emotions and imagination. Through practices like active imagination, we weave a psychic fabric in which unconscious fantasies shape human destinies (Von Franz, 1972/1999, p. 70).

Elsner (2024) suggests that our current religious and political landscapes are dominated by unfulfilled symbols, angels or demons, heroes or villains, turning politics into a kind of fairytale scene driven more by archetypes than by the nuanced complexities of human nature. Ultimately, what we call 'politics' is a boiling container of projected personal and archetypal psychology, a projection screen on which we experience and defend our core values and hopes, as well as our deepest fears. Elsner paraphrases Einstein's observation that problems cannot be solved on the same level of consciousness that created them (Elsner, 2024).

Neurosis, as Jung (1969) describes it, is a state of being at war with oneself, arising from internal conflicts and divisions within the psyche that demand integration. For new ideas and possibilities to emerge, the human psyche must be able to tolerate the war of opposites within itself. We must hold the tension between opposing forces without collapsing into one extreme or the other. It is in this space of tension that the unconscious can give birth to a new idea - the '*third thing'*. But if we succumb to extremes, the tension collapses, and transformation is thwarted (Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022).

Shadow – the internal enemy

'*The wickedness of others becomes our own wickedness because it kindles something evil in our own hearts'* - this insight from Jung (1946/1970, p. 75) captures a profound truth about human nature and the dynamics of conflict. Jung's reflections are not merely theoretical, they are born from the lived horrors of 2nd World War, which

forced humanity to confront the depths of its own capacity for evil. In his essay *After the Catastrophe*, Jung contemplates how encountering evil in the world can awaken the same potential within ourselves - unless we become conscious of it (Jung, 1970).

Jung's writing, reflecting on war, is filled with sobering questions: '*Do we seriously believe that we would have been immune? We, who have so many traitors and political psychopaths in our midst? It has filled us with horror to realize all that man is capable of, and of which, therefore, we too are capable. Since then, a terrible doubt about humanity, and about ourselves, gnaws at our hearts*' (Jung, 1964, p. 200).

Indeed, Jung notes that, during 2nd World War, millions of Germans would not have been so easily and completely convinced, with only slight opposition, if Hitler's hysterical neurosis had not mirrored the collective German hysteria (Jung, 1970, p. 204). This reflection points to a broader psychological principle: war and political tension, in Jung's view, stem largely from shadow projections. Elsner (2024) elaborates on this, stating that power, greed, and lack of empathy are shared human problems – the collective shadow. The characteristics of shadow projections differ for political groups, as the shadow always embodies the direct opposite of a group's consciously held values.

Jungian analyst Barbara Hannah (1981) recounts a conversation with Carl Jung regarding the possibility of a 3rd World War. Jung believed that such a catastrophe could be averted if individuals took responsibility for their own unconscious projections and bore the internal tension of opposing forces within themselves. He emphasized that the fate of humanity hinged on the capacity of individuals to integrate these opposites rather than projecting them onto perceived enemies (Hannah, 1981, p. 14). In another reference to the threat of atomic war, Jung told Hannah that it would depend on how many people could tolerate the tension of opposites within themselves and integrate those opposites. If enough people could achieve this integration, humanity might escape

the worst. Otherwise, civilization would perish, as so many have before (Jung; Hannah, 1981, p. 8).

Importantly, Elsner (2024) suggests that Jung's antidote to socio-political *madness* is the process of taking back shadow projections. When we become honest with ourselves, we work on both our own transformation and the transformation of society. This is easy in theory but profoundly difficult in practice. As an example, Elsner considers dream analysis to be a powerful means of integrating the individual shadow. He recalls a liberal political figure who had a sobering dream, where he was fishing in a boat with Dick Cheney, a man who, for him, embodied the dark side. In the dream, they were together, in the same boat. Another example is a sniper from the Gulf War, who dreamt after his service that he was in battle and, looking through the scope of his rifle, saw his own brother. Such compensatory dreams are shocking when they reach us, revealing what we do not know and do not want to learn, yet what we absolutely need to know for our own growth and the healing of society.

Collective unconscious

Jung (1957, as cited in Freeman, 1959) famously stated that '*the only real danger that exists is man himself*', underscoring the urgent need for psychological understanding of the human psyche. This insight forms the foundation for his concept of the shadow - the unconscious container of the darker aspects of the psyche, such as aggression, fear, and envy. Notably, while Jung initially applied the idea of the shadow to individuals, he later extended it to collectives, suggesting that groups, societies, and even entire nations can harbour a collective shadow. When this collective shadow goes unacknowledged, it is often projected onto other groups or nations, resulting in scapegoating, dehumanization, and conflict (Jung, 1954/1969).

To illustrate this process, Jung observed that Americans have historically projected their collective shadow onto marginalized groups, such as Black and Indigenous populations, as well as onto perceived external threats, such as Communists during the Cold War. Such projections allow societies to externalize internal conflicts and justify aggressive policies or actions against these ‘others’ (Youvan, 2024).

Jungian followers have further explored how collective shadow projection functions as a defense mechanism: by attributing undesirable traits or intentions to another group, a society avoids confronting its own shortcomings. This process often leads to the demonization of the ‘other’, which in turn facilitates justifications for aggression or war. When a nation projects its shadow onto another, it not only dehumanizes the other but also incites its own population to support aggressive actions, believing them to be morally justified (Elsner, 2023).

A striking historical example of this dynamic can be seen in Nazi Germany, where the regime projected its collective shadow onto Jewish people, attributing societal problems to them and thereby rationalizing their persecution. This mass projection was instrumental in uniting the inner circle against a common enemy, despite the moral atrocities committed (Youvan, 2024). These examples highlight the powerful interplay between individual psyches and the collective unconscious, and they underscore the importance of introspection on both, individual and collective levels. Only through such integration can we hope to mitigate the destructive consequences of projection.

Importantly, Elsner (2024) reflects on Einstein’s idea that problems cannot be resolved at the same level of consciousness that created them and encourages us to think symbolically. Elsner suggests that we work with collective dreams that respond to group events, as these can reveal hidden dynamics and prompt new understanding. By facing

our own unconscious, learning to think symbolically, and listening to how our dreams react to world events, we might begin to engage with collective conflicts on a different dimension of consciousness, one that transcends the limitations of the mindset that gave rise to them in the first place.

Constructing the idea of the enemy

Whether on the playground or the battlefield, violence is always seen as coming from someone or somewhere else. Discussing the war between Israel and Palestine, J. Rose (2023) reminds us of a childish argument, that the opposing side always started the conflict, which turns every war into an act of retaliation or self-defence.

Additionally, J. Rose (2023) writes about the avoidance of accountability for Israeli state violence by avoiding reflection on the state's choices, and displacing the blame entirely on the enemy's perceived intentions and actions instead, which is essentially encapsulated in the logic '*you made me do it'*.

Fornari (1975) posits that war is a defence mechanism against inner anxieties and fears that resulted from collective pain and loss and refers to Israel and Arab countries as an example. Fornari states, that groups and individuals cope with these feelings and avoid unprocessed mourning, by projecting them into an external, imagined, enemy. When the underlying unconscious pressure to start war is unresolved, on a large scale it can be acted out as one collective's violence against another. Fornari posits, that the state serves as a maternal archetype, maternal object, which offers safety and identity, protects its citizens, while avoiding the psychological work of grieving, by directing these feelings into war, authorised under ideological disguise. Byles (2003)

adds that warfare is an externalised product of shared unconscious defenses and fantasies of the collective.

Neumann (1954) stated that shadow projection is the mechanism through which we create an enemy. Humans split off something in themselves that they do not like or do not want to know about, and attribute it to other. We do this interpersonally and on the collective level, so that the '*evil empire'* of the Soviet Union, for example, holds all the values which are in the shadow of the United States of America (authoritarianism, conformity, collectivism, atheism, repression, surveillance, fanaticism, moral rigidity, expansionism, dehumanization). Soviet Union projected its own shadow on to the United States of America (individualism, imperialism, greed, exploitation, corruption, materialism, racism, hypocrisy, cultural domination). This is how we feel justified in going to war.

The unconscious masculinity complex

Freud (1913) frames primal patricide as the origin of both patriarchal law and collective guilt. Patriarchy and war share an evolutionary symbiosis. Anthropological evidence suggests that the rise of patrilineal inheritance systems coincided with organized warfare, as control over women's sexuality became tied to territorial conquest (Christ, 2013).

While war emerges from unresolved unconscious conflicts, societal conditioning, and group regression, patriarchal systems institutionalize these dynamics by idealising masculine aggression, suppressing emotional awareness, and legitimizing violence as a tool of control. 73% of state defense contracts exploit gender equality rhetoric while supplying patriarchal regimes (O'Reilly, 2023).

Jungian archetypes, anima and animus, are present in all people to varying degrees, regardless of biological sex or gender identity (EBSCO, 2025; Applied Jung, 2023). Anima is the unconscious feminine aspect more prominent in the psyche of men. It represents qualities such as emotion, intuition, receptivity, and relatedness, and serves as a bridge to the unconscious and a guide in the process of individuation. Jung emphasized that integrating the anima is essential for psychological growth, as failure to do so can result in the anima causing '*petrification and psychic death*' instead of life-giving development (Jung, 1959).

The animus, conversely, is the unconscious masculine aspect more prominent in the psyche of women. It embodies traits such as logic, assertiveness, rationality, and authority, and similarly plays a guiding role in a woman's individuation and relationship with her unconscious (Jung, 1959). Animus carries a shadow side that can manifest as aggression, domination, and emotional detachment when left unintegrated (Asgari, 2024).

Jung's concept of the '*unconscious masculinity complex*' refers to the idea that masculinity is an archetypal force within the collective unconscious that shapes behavior, identity, and social dynamics (Asgari, 2024; Williams, 2024). According to Jungian theory, when societies or individuals repress and deny unconscious masculine energies, often due to rigid gender roles or cultural expectations, these energies are projected outward, sometimes fuelling collective aggression, violence and war (Williams, 2024; Verywell Mind, 2009).

This repression leads to what Jung described as a split between the conscious ego and the unconscious, resulting in destructive patterns and mental health issues (Williams, 2024). Jung argued that true psychological growth, or individuation, requires consciously integrating these shadow aspects, allowing for a balanced expression of

both masculine and feminine qualities (Asgari, 2024; Verywell Mind, 2009). The '*unconscious masculinity complex*' is not inherently pathological, but becomes dangerous when it is denied, disowned, or projected onto others, contributing to cycles of violence and the perpetuation of patriarchal structures (Williams, 2024; Asgari, 2024).

While 32% of Thai paramilitary recruits refer to '*protecting manhood*' as enlistment motive (Cohen & Karim, 2022), Jung's shadow archetype manifests in patriarchy as systemic devaluation of the feminine. Militarized societies externalize vulnerability onto women, then wage war to 'protect' this projected weakness.

Suppressed male vulnerability resurfaces as group aggression (Bly, 1990). Patriarchy sustains war by institutionalizing psychic splits between Eros and Thanatos, Shadow and the Self, Individual and Collective. As Jung warned us, *'the unconscious masculinity complex'* (Jung, 1954) will perpetuate violence until societies confront their gendered shadows.

Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz (1977) states that the unconscious animus oppresses women, not only the patriarchy in the external world. Von Franz suggests, that in seeking balance, women should disidentify from their inner aggressive, masculine animus, stop being influenced by the conditioning by men's projections of their anima, and engage in creative work, tapping into their whole archetypal feminine principle. This is the journey of individuation, striving to understand and integrate woman's individuality within the collective unconscious. In South India, women live in a matriarchal structure, and they are confident in their whole femininity, without having to compensate for the neglected animas of the men and react by succumbing to the negative animus.

Statistics show, that 56% of men, subscribing to traditional masculine norms, view psychotherapy as threatening to masculine identity (Levant, 2014), linking emotional vulnerability to perceived weakness, which correlates with lower therapy uptake among men, therefore, the men's anima is neglected in individuals, families and the collective, further deepening the problem of war. Authoritarian discipline in military families predicts heightened compliance with authority figures, even in morally ambiguous contexts, therefore paternal restrictiveness amplifies susceptibility to hierarchical commands. Research shows, that veterans with authoritarian fathers exhibit 32% higher obedience to violent orders (Parker, 2019).

Neumann (1954) proposed the idea that unconscious aggression becomes constructive when institutions provide '*containers for consciousness*', whether it is achieved through democratic family policies, or metaphor-mediated therapy rather than perpetuating cycles of suppression and destructive release. For example, Sweden's '*Equal Childhood*' initiative disrupts the intergenerational transmission of authoritarian parenting and generational trauma through parental leave reforms that promote egalitarian caregiving and replacing coercive discipline with emotional attunement, correlating with a reduction in youth violence by 33% (Trüschel; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023). Another example is Canada's sports-metaphor therapy which frames mental health through athletic teamwork concepts and reframes vulnerability as strategic resilience, this way increasing support-seeking among men by 29% (McGale, 2011).

Nigredo, Albedo, and Rubedo

Sabina Spielrein's (1912) groundbreaking work offers a profound understanding of the psychological roots of collective violence. In her influential essay *Destruction*

as the Cause of Coming into Being, she posited that within the human psyche lies an innate tension between creation and destruction, where the impulse toward dissolution is not merely pathological but serves a regenerative function - dissolving the old self in preparation for new psychic structures (Spielrein, 1994). Spielrein argued that destruction is a necessary precondition for transformation, an idea that anticipates both Freud's later theory of the death drive and Jung's alchemical model of psychic individuation. Within this framework, war and mass violence can be viewed not only as political phenomena but as collective enactments of a repressed psychic drive - an unconscious compulsion toward cyclical breakdown to enable potential rebirth. This dialectic mirrors Jung's concept of Nigredo, the initial alchemical stage, in which the ego undergoes symbolic death, descends into chaos, and confronts the unconscious shadow (Jung, 1968).

Spielrein's vision was both tragic and hopeful: while she recognized that unmanaged destructiveness could lead to annihilation, she also believed that confronting and integrating these impulses could give rise to new forms of life and meaning. When applied to authoritarianism, her theory suggests that societies with unresolved trauma or rigid structures may unconsciously seek violent collapse as a means of psychic release and transformation. In this light, the processes of particular collectives can be understood as expressions of deeper psychic dynamics - mirroring the same cycles of death and rebirth that play out within the individual psyche.

Jungian depth psychology further elaborates on this process through the alchemical stages of Nigredo, Albedo, and Rubedo, which represent phases of psychological transformation relevant to both individual development and collective unconscious processes during times of crisis and violence. Jung saw Nigredo as a necessary collapse that precedes integration. This stage, often referred to as the blackening, signifies the descent into chaos, fragmentation, and the confrontation with the shadow - the repressed

and destructive aspects of the psyche. In times of war or collective aggression, societies may undergo a Nigredo phase, where moral disintegration and the projection of the shadow onto an enemy 'other' culminate in violence and dehumanization (Jung, 1953/1968). This is evident in authoritarian systems and genocides, where denied aspects of a group's own psyche are disowned and violently externalized.

The next phase, Albedo, or whitening involves a dawning awareness and purification - symbolically washing away denial and integrating the shadow. In a therapeutic or post-conflict context, Albedo represents the painful acknowledgment of complicity, guilt, and the need for moral reckoning (Edinger, 1985). Finally, Rubedo, or reddening, is the culmination of individuation - a transformative synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements that allows for authentic moral agency and wholeness. While rarely achieved at the societal level, Rubedo represents a potential for post-traumatic growth and collective healing when truth, justice, and reconciliation processes are engaged (Stein, 1998).

From this perspective, war can be seen as a regressive outbreak of the collective shadow, while peace requires a psychologically informed process of integration. The wisdom of psychotherapy, both individually and collectively, serves as a modern alchemical vessel for this transformation, enabling individuals and collectives to confront their inner darkness and move toward more mature consciousness. Volkan (2025) adds that technological advancements should not be the sole measure of a civilization's progress; rather, progress should be judged by socio-political systems that effectively manage aggressive outbursts in the community and foster a shift in thinking toward peaceful goals.

In both Spielrein and Jung's perspectives, healing and moral regeneration, on both individual and collective levels, are only possible if destructive impulses are

brought into consciousness and processed, rather than acted out unconsciously through violence. Thus, therapy, whether individual or group-based, becomes a vessel for transformation, potentially guiding societies from fragmentation (Nigredo) to integration (Rubedo).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, working within the Jungian tradition, expands on the symbolic and mythological dimensions of psychological transformation, offering valuable insights into the collective psyche during times of violence and authoritarian collapse (Estes, 1992). Estés describes the descent into suffering and the confrontation with the shadow as a necessary stage in the maturation of the psyche, mirroring Jung's Nigredo stage as a transformative force. Through myth and fairy tale, Estés illustrates how the soul must often pass through symbolic death, moments of collapse, betrayal, or moral disintegration, before integration and rebirth can occur (Estes, 1992). Her stories echo the structure of Jungian alchemy: first a dissolution of the false self (Nigredo), followed by insight (Albedo), and finally, the emergence of a new, integrated identity (Rubedo). This symbolic structure can be seen not only in individual healing but also in historical moments of collapse and regeneration - such as the aftermath of war, genocide, or authoritarianism - when a collective must face its shadow to evolve. Estés (1992) writes that psychic rebirth is possible only through the integration of the dark, repressed forces within.

Chapter 4 The unconscious group

Even if our childhood development allows us to develop psychological patterns that lead to a happy and healthy future, becoming part of the group, especially large group, can make people regress into primitive or even pathological, at the cost of any individual member's psychological functioning. Collectively humans think in polarities. Some of the factors that ignite the phenomena of war are primitive group defence mechanisms, the qualities and type of a particular group and identification with a large group (Seth Allcorn, 2022; Volkan, 2025).

The interactions between group members, the leaders and members, and the group with others outside of the group, puts members under psychodynamic pressure, which in turn affects their ability to regulate the expression of affect. Primitive collective defence mechanisms (splitting, projective identification), similarly to the defence mechanisms of narcissistic and borderline personalities (Volkan, 2025).

Freud's ideas of the superego, repression, and instinctual drives are foundational to understanding how moral conflict and aggression are negotiated at both the individual and collective levels. Freud (1930) warns of how repressed aggression within civilizations can lead to eruptive violence - an idea reiterated in Tavistock's emphasis on the danger of unprocessed group emotion.

Obholzer and Roberts (1994) extended these ideas into organizational contexts, observing that groups often project internal conflicts onto individuals or subgroups, who then become scapegoats for the collective's anxiety. This projection temporarily restores a sense of control, but ultimately leads to fragmentation, blame, and systemic

dysfunction. This idea aligns with Jung's idea, that when groups deny their shadow, the repressed parts of the psyche, these disowned elements are projected outward, often onto an imagined 'enemy' (Jung, 1954).

For example, unresolved trauma or institutional stress can manifest as irrational hostility, bureaucratic rigidity, or avoidance of accountability - defenses against underlying fears (Stokes, 1994). These insights have relevance beyond the family or the workplace, offering a framework for understanding larger societal or political phenomena, including how nations or collectives may defend against trauma and anxiety by constructing enemies or engaging in group-based aggression.

Basing her work on psychoanalytic and open systems theories and the ideas of W. Bion, T. Wallach posits, that even through rational approaches are essential in addressing conflict, effective conflict work also requires recognizing and integrating the strong, often unconscious emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger that are commonly triggered by conflict and can intensify it. Emotions that remain unexpressed or are too difficult to articulate do not simply vanish - instead, they often emerge in subtle or even harmful ways, not only starting conflicts, but potentially escalating existing conflicts and undermining group cohesion (Wallach, 2011).

Conflict manifests at multiple levels, ranging from internal struggles within individuals (intrapsychic conflict) to disputes between groups and even nations (Deutsch, 1973). These conflicts can be overt and conscious or hidden and unconscious, and events at one level inevitably influence and mirror those at others. Individuals are shaped by their group environments (families, communities and nations), while these groups themselves are formed by the individuals within them (Miller & Rice, 1967; Rice, 1965). Conflicts can transfer across levels, such as when, through an unconscious process of splitting, personal conflicts are projected onto others or onto larger groups.

Similarly, the collective stories and myths of societies are reflected in individual experiences. For effective conflict transformation, it is essential to be aware of one's own ideas, emotions, assumptions, beliefs, biases and values (Wallach, 2011).

Splitting can also occur around other emotional and character traits. For instance, individuals or groups may polarize around themes such as strength versus vulnerability, victim versus perpetrator, kindness versus criticism, happiness versus sadness, optimism versus pessimism, and laziness versus ambition. The specific nature of these splits depends on the personal affect of those involved and the broader context in which they exist (Wallach, 2011).

All individuals belong to various groups - some chosen, such as work teams or professional organizations, and others assigned by birth, like family, ethnicity, gender, or age (Bion, 1961; McCollom, 1990). Membership in these groups evokes mixed emotions, as people simultaneously desire to belong to something greater than themselves and strive to maintain their unique identities.

Conflict often reflects the natural ambivalence inherent in balancing individual and collective life, and it may also point to specific challenges that groups must confront during particular times (Heifetz, 1994; Smith, Berg, 1987). Just as individuals use defence mechanisms such as splitting and projective identification, groups, organizations, and even nations employ defenses to shield themselves from overwhelming emotions and unconscious anxieties (Menzies, 1997). Additionally, groups may manage anxiety and evade difficult decisions by replacing direct engagement with the issue at hand with routines or rituals.

The group functions as a container for the diverse projections of its members, and through these dynamics, it develops its own distinct identity and energy. Consequently, individuals often act not only for themselves but also represent the needs

of the larger group or system. These underlying processes collectively shape the group's unconscious - its 'group-as-a-whole' psyche - which emerges as an entity with its own character and influence, surpassing the sum of its individual members (Bion, 1961; Wallach, 2011).

A group that finds it difficult to acknowledge its own aggression may unconsciously project these aggressive impulses - or other unacceptable traits - onto a particular member or subgroup. By attributing the intolerable characteristic to an individual, the group can scapegoat that person, thereby distancing itself from the troubling aspect and preserving its self-image (Bion, 1961; Wallach, 2011).

By scapegoating a particular individual, the group maintains an indirect connection to the aspects of itself that it has split off and disowned, without having to acknowledge or take responsibility for those traits. This process allows the group to avoid the anxiety that would arise from confronting its own contradictions or problematic qualities. As Smith and Berg (1987) observe, '*The deviancy is informing the group about aspects of its nature of which it would prefer to remain ignorant'* (p. 91).

Members of a specific ethnic group within a society may be perceived by other groups as embodying particular characteristics, for example, aggression or heightened sexuality, that are considered unacceptable or threatening to the dominant culture. These stereotypes often serve to project and externalize qualities that the dominant group finds intolerable within itself (Ghavami, Peplau 2017).

To address group conflict, it is essential to recognize that conflicting individuals and subgroups are embedded within a larger system. Understanding the meaning of the conflict for the system as a whole involves identifying the adaptive challenge the group must confront. This includes discerning what difficult conversation

the group needs to engage in collectively and what fears, needs, or emotions are being avoided and instead projected onto specific members or subgroups. As with interpersonal conflict, transforming group-level conflict requires the group-as-a-whole to reclaim and re-own these projections, thereby fostering greater self-awareness and resilience within the system (Vallacher, Coleman, Nowak 2011; Sustainability Directory, 2025).

When a society experiences destabilizing events such as economic collapse, terrorism, or political unrest, it may unconsciously enter what Bion (1961) described as a *basic assumption mode*, most commonly known as fight/flight/freeze states.

In this regressed psychological state, a nation may seek to project its internal fears and conflicts onto an external enemy, creating dichotomies of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ that reduce complexity and justify hostility. This projection not only simplifies geopolitics but also temporarily unifies the in-group under a shared emotional logic of fear and aggression (Bion, 1961).

Groups under threat often unconsciously adopt a stance of attack or retreat (fight or flight), which mirrors the behaviour of nations at war. This can explain reactive nationalism, militarization, or scapegoating of ‘enemy’ groups. Collective anxiety or fear on a national level gets transformed into militaristic aggression or withdrawal from diplomacy (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Groups often use the splitting defence and divide the world into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (us vs. them) and project their unwanted traits (e.g., aggression) onto external enemies. In war, this dynamic plays out when countries demonize others to maintain a self-image of moral superiority. This basic assumption offers a lens to interpret dehumanization and propaganda, foundational tools in warfare and colonialism (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

For example, V. Putin's negative statements about Ukrainians can be interpreted as projections of anxieties and internal conflicts within Russia as a whole. Putin frames aggression as 'protection', a pattern observed in 78% of modern conflict narratives (Lizote, 2021). V. Putin, when speaking to his nation, has framed the invasion of Ukraine as necessary to '*protect*' Russian-speaking populations from what he described as Ukrainian '*bullying*' and '*genocide*', and has repeatedly accused the Ukrainian government of being run by '*drug addicts and neo-Nazis*' - a characterization that is widely seen as a gross misrepresentation of Ukraine's leadership and society. In his televised addresses, Putin has also claimed that the goal of the war is to '*demilitarize and denazify*' Ukraine and has accused NATO of attempting to establish a presence that threatens Russia's security. These statements can be interpreted as projecting Russia's own anxieties - such as paranoid fears of Western encirclement, internal instability, or challenges to national identity - onto Ukraine and its people.

This aligns with the psychological and group dynamics literature, where a group (or nation) may project its own unacceptable or anxiety-provoking traits onto an external 'enemy' to avoid facing internal conflicts or contradictions (Wallach, 2011; Smith & Berg, 1987). Putin's rhetoric about Ukraine, therefore, can be seen as an example of such projection, attributing to Ukrainians qualities, such as aggression, extremism, or being a puppet of external forces, that Russian leadership may be avoiding to acknowledge within Russia itself.

By attributing unacceptable or 'evil' qualities - such as imperialism, fundamentalism, irrationality, or vulnerability - to external enemies, groups avoid confronting these same traits within their communities, or their nations. This process of projection protects people from the anxiety of self-examination and the discomfort of change. In the context of war, this dynamic is particularly noticeable: nations and communities often externalize conflict and aggression, framing them as originating

outside their own borders or identities. From the perspective of group psychology, the psychological origins of conflict and aggression are rooted in the difficulty of acknowledging and reclaiming these projected aspects of the collective. The challenge of transcending aggression involves making these painful projected characteristics bearable and learning to recognize and humbly retract them. This process of re-owning projections is essential for transcending conflict (Bion, 1961; Smith & Berg, 1987; Wallach, 2011).

Only by tolerating and reflecting upon the uncertainties and anxieties that arise from conflict can new possibilities emerge. Clarity and resolution become possible only when we acknowledge and address the ways in which we respond to the discomfort of difference (Wallach, 2011; Smith & Berg, 1987).

Groups committed to preserving a specific self-image or identity often enforce conformity to their norms and expectations, pressuring members to behave in ways that uphold the group's collective view. Deviating from these established norms or speaking out against them can put individuals at risk of being scapegoated or excluded by the group (Smith & Berg, 1987; Wallach, 2011).

Under conditions of collective stress, groups and organizations may displace anxiety by identifying scapegoats - individuals or subgroups blamed for broader dysfunction (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). At the national level, this pattern often precedes or accompanies ethnic violence, genocidal campaigns, or the vilification of immigrants and rival states. The psychological function of scapegoating is to unite in-group structure by purging projected anxieties, thus enabling systemic violence to emerge under a disguise of necessity.

Additionally, Tavistock-informed approaches explore how institutions develop defensive structures to manage collective anxiety, such as rigid hierarchies, ritualized

behaviour, or denial of painful truths (Menzies Lyth, 1988; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). At the level of the state, such defenses may take the form of bureaucratic inertia, escalation of military engagement, or the systemic denial of atrocities. These psychological mechanisms allow violence to become normalized within the state apparatus, shielding individuals from the emotional charge of complicity.

The Tavistock model, particularly its emphasis on unconscious group defenses resonates with Hannah Arendt's (1963) analysis of the banality of evil. Arendt argues that systemic violence, such as the atrocities committed under Nazi bureaucracy, often emerges not from evil individuals but from ordinary people willingly conforming to institutional roles without reflective thought or moral resistance. This parallels Tavistock's view that uncontained anxiety and rigid institutional structures allow individuals to dissociate from empathy and conscience, leading to collusion with dehumanizing systems.

These theories suggest that conflict resolution efforts must address not only political systems but also the unconscious group processes that perpetuate war and inhibit the capacity for collective reflection and accountability.

Leader as a container

An individual and the social environment are interconnected. Individuals may perceive the state Super Ego as their ideal, which can be projected onto the leader, embodying this and shaping state's morals. During war, the society expects the leader to address their psychotic anxieties, split and projected onto the perceived enemy (Volkan, 1988). All societies that are involved in or characterized by high conflict behaviour are entangled in this psychical apparatus, however, only one society can be one-sidedly involved in the same mechanism during the genocides (Byles, 2003).

Erich Fromm (1941, 1973) highlights how social character structures and authoritarian dynamics foster a psychological need for submission or domination, which can culminate in destructive obedience. Fromm differentiates between benign aggression and malignant aggression - the latter arising when people are alienated, anxious, and drawn to authoritarian ideologies. This resonates with Tavistock insights into how unresolved collective anxiety can fuel destructive social formations, particularly when leadership fails to contain or reflect it (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

Freud (1921) explored the psychological mechanisms that influence individuals within groups and mass movements. He examined how group dynamics and unconscious processes shape people's behaviours and identities. Freud posits that groups regress to primitive psychological states through identification with a leader and libidinal ties between members. Freud highlighted, that this process dissolves individual superego functions into collective aggression, transforms personal guilt into socially sanctioned violence and explains how wartime inverts moral codes and makes killing virtuous.

In his theory of basic assumption groups, Bion suggested that when a group is overwhelmed by anxiety, it may unconsciously operate on primitive, survival-based assumptions - fight, flight, dependency, or pairing - rather than engage in rational task-focused work. These dynamics often result in the idealization of the leader, the vilification of outsiders, or a collective regression into more basic and emotionally charged behaviour. Such defenses serve to protect the group's fragile sense of identity but can distort perception and hinder effective functioning (Bion, 1961).

Through the dynamics of projective identification, an individual group member or subgroup may be unconsciously assigned a specific role to fulfill the group's unspoken needs. In this way, the group preserves its overall sense of well-being by

externalizing and attributing its problems to a particular individual or subgroup, thereby avoiding collective self-examination. Conversely, when a group is troubled by anxieties about its own abilities, it may unconsciously project all its perceived competence onto a single member or leader. In this way, the group comes to depend on that individual to manage its concerns and ensure its success, rather than developing shared responsibility or confidence in its collective capacity (Bion, 1961; Wallach, 2011).

In international politics, examples of splitting and projective processes are common. Many leaders have invoked external enemies to unite public sentiment and divert attention from internal group conflicts. For instance, as previously mentioned, in 1980 U.S. President Ronald Reagan labelled the Soviet Union as the '*Evil Empire'* to rally support for his Strategic Defence Initiative (Heifetz, 1994).

In Israel, right-leaning politicians often emphasize the threat of Palestinian terrorism, thereby shifting focus from tensions within the Israeli Jewish community. Similarly, political leaders in several Arab nations blame Israel for regional problems, while denying internal issues. The former Yugoslavia saw leaders stoking hostility between previously harmonious ethnic groups, rather than addressing the adaptive challenges posed by the Soviet Bloc's collapse. More recently, phrases such as '*axis of evil*' and '*evil doers*' were used to describe Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, with implicit associations to the attacks on the World Trade Center (BBC News, 2003; State of the Union Address; BBC News, 2002).

Lazar (2002) argues that the Bush administration's decision to wage war in Iraq was, in part, a way to divert public attention from pressing internal issues such as the economic downturn, national debt, unemployment, increasing income inequality, and the health care crisis. He further stresses that for leaders to help their followers function effectively, it is crucial that they provide a '*containing function'* - offering stability and

support to help the group manage its anxieties and conflicts constructively. When the leader of a work group can provide sufficient containment for the group, the troubling elements - such as anxiety, conflict, and uncertainty - can be effectively managed and processed by the group as a whole (Bion, 1961; Wallach, 2011).

Furthermore, leaders function as psychological containers for group anxiety (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). When leadership succeeds in metabolizing and reflecting group tensions, destructive presentations may be avoided. Accompanying this is the idealization of national leadership and a tendency toward dependency on strong authority figures, as the population seeks containment for overwhelming anxiety (Bion, 1961). Freud (1921) posits that the individual and a group can regress to a state of infantile dependence on a 'leader' who will resolve all their (and the group's) problems.

In contrast, when leaders are unable, or unwilling, to contain collective distress, these anxieties are more likely to be acted out through violence, authoritarianism, or warfare. War-time leaders often exploit fear or collude with it rather than soothe it, amplifying the potential for large-scale aggression.

Followers and the role of the family

In his correspondence with Freud, titled 'Why War?', Einstein referrs to the 'psychosis of destruction' and asks a profound question, based on his observations: '*How is it possible', for a small group of people craving for political power, to bend the will of the majority, who stand to lose and suffer by a state of war, to the service of their ambitions?*' (Freud, 1933, p.200)

Jung describes the disturbing sight of a nation, cut off from its instincts of self-preservation, under the spell of a false sense of security, surrendering personal

responsibility to a leader like Hitler. Jung observes that the welfare state, by robbing people of individual accountability, can transform them into '*infants and sheep*', making them vulnerable to manipulation by dictators and susceptible to '*any wind that blows*' (Jung, 1970, p. 201).

Death drive is an unconscious effort to return to the state of bliss, however, Thanatos also drives aggression, repetition-compulsion and self-destruction. Humans tend to re-create traumatic experiences, even though they are painful, as an attempt to gain control of the past experiences. Hannah Segal (1993) stated that violence towards others is the process of projective identification and serves to deflect Thanatos from self-destruction (Volkan, 2025).

In an underlying process, repetition compulsion and unconscious re-creation of harm in relationships is a result of the process of projective identification and is set up by the person who projects. People, who develop pathology in their personalities, due to destructive childhood experiences, tend to project aggression and hostility on others. In their experience, the line between internal and external worlds becomes blurred. If the projector can activate their own intolerable feelings of shame, powerlessness, fear in others - their own suffering because of these feelings is alleviated. When an abused child becomes an adult, they will project their internalised abusive parent onto others, by either abusing them, or perceiving them as abusers (Kernberg, 1992; Waska, 2000).

Michael Haneke's controversial film '*The White Ribbon'* (2009) is a modern cautionary tale that presents a chilling portrayal of a pre-First World War German village where authoritarian parenting, rigid moral codes, and ritualistic corporal punishment shaped a generation of children into obedient, repressed adults. The film implies a psychosocial continuity between these childhood experiences and the later rise of Nazism, suggesting that the children subjected to punitive discipline and forced

submission became the adults who blindly followed authoritarian leaders and participated in systemic violence against Jews.

This portrayal is supported by psychoanalytic theories that emphasize how early traumatic experiences with punitive authority figures can create compliance and repetition of aggression in adulthood. As the children internalize oppressive authority, they either mirror this aggression onto others - often their peers, as overtly portrayed by Heneke - or repress it, leading to latent obedience and susceptibility to totalitarian ideologies (Freud, 1930, 1961).

The transmission of violence from parent to child, and subsequently from child to peer, reflects what Alice Miller (1983) termed the '*poisonous pedagogy*', a dynamic where early abuse fosters both submission and the compulsive need to exert control over others. The film's implication that authoritarian family structures helped condition the psychological ground for fascism confirms research in psychotherapy that links early relational trauma to later authoritarian personality traits (Adorno, 1950; Stolorow, 2007).

Alice Miller's work offers a compelling psychoanalytic framework for understanding how early childhood abuse and authoritarian upbringing contribute to an individual's later participation in violent collectives and submission to oppressive regimes. In her work, *For Your Own Good* (1983), Miller argues that when children are raised in environments where obedience is enforced through fear, humiliation, and corporal punishment, they are conditioned to suppress their authentic emotions - particularly anger and resistance - toward their caregivers.

Miller (1983) adds that repression of authentic emotions and healthy responses leads to a dissociation from one's own moral compass and a reliance on external authority for guidance and identity. According to Miller, such children often grow up

with a latent need to please authority figures, even when those figures support destructive ideologies.

Individuals, raised in punitive households are more likely to develop an *authoritarian personality* - a structure marked by conformity, submission to authority, and aggression toward out-groups. Harsh parenting fosters repression of hostility toward parents, which is later displaced onto socially approved targets (e.g., minority groups). This dynamic helps explain why individuals who were raised with authoritarian parenting style may later become complicit in atrocities or follow authoritarian leaders without questioning them. Miller terms this intergenerational transmission of trauma and submission as a system, fostering psychological conditions susceptible for ideological manipulation. (Adorno, 1950, Miller, 1983).

As portrayed by Michael Haneke, children's internalization of cruelty and suppression not only enables their future conformity but also manifests in their sadistic, vengeful behaviour toward peers, revealing their potential for future violence authorised by the state. As Miller (1983) notes, '*the totalitarian system feeds on people who were humiliated as children and deny this fact*' (p. 61), highlighting how unresolved early trauma becomes a tool of authoritarian power.

Many people justify violence, because of the parental complexes and the archetype of the self, being obedient to an internal image (Marciano, Stewart, Lee, 2022). The dynamic Alice Miller describes as '*poisonous pedagogy*' can also be understood through the psychotherapeutic concepts of collusion and confluence. In Gestalt therapy, confluence refers to the loss of personal boundaries and the merging of one's own thoughts, feelings, or values with those of others, often to avoid conflict or abandonment (Perls, 1951).

Children raised in authoritarian families are conditioned to suppress opposition and internalize the values and expectations of punitive caregivers, leading to a lifelong tendency toward confluence. As adults, they may unconsciously gravitate toward authoritarian figures or ideologies that replicate the structure of their childhood environment, mistaking control for safety and submission for virtue (Perls et al., 1951).

Collusion refers to the unconscious cooperation between individuals to maintain dysfunctional patterns or beliefs, particularly those formed in early relationships (Schmidt, 2005). This helps explain how entire communities can collectively deny the violence within their social order, while enabling systems of abuse to flourish. The submission to collective violence or authoritarian rule is not merely political, but deeply psychological rooted in early relational trauma, enforced through repression, and perpetuated by a shared, unconscious agreement to avoid confronting pain and truth (Miller, 1983; Stolorow, 2007).

Chapter 5. Is war inevitable?

‘*Reason has proved itself completely powerless, precisely because its arguments have an effect only on the conscious mind and not on the unconscious’* (Jung, 1957).

In February of 2022 World Council for Psychotherapy (WCP) submitted a statement to the Russian Government in which it stated that invasion does not achieve any intended aims creates destruction that can reverberates through several generations. This damage includes deep trauma of both individuals and families at somatic, mental and emotional levels. The statement outlined, that psychotherapists condemn war and are dedicated to peaceful negotiation and dialogue in conflict resolution. The WCP call upon the aggressor, Russian Government, to end the war and restore peace through diplomacy. The statement expresses hope that the ‘*highest principles of the human spirit will prevail’.* (World Council for Psychotherapy, 2022).

‘W*hatever fosters the growth of civilization works at the same time against war*’ (Freud, 1933).

J. Rose (2023) states, that the unconscious cannot be ‘*dreamed away’*. Politics is shaped by what happens in the unconscious. This includes denying responsibility, splitting between the good and evil, and projecting our unconscious guilt onto the enemy. These mental habits grow over time and lead to real conflict. To break out of this cycle, we need to include psychoanalytic understanding as part of the fight for justice and peace talks. One thing is certain: these deep psychic patterns will not disappear just by ignoring them. We cannot simply ‘*dream the unconscious away’ (*J. Rose, 2023)

One of the valuable insights of psychoanalysis is that it acknowledges aggression as a part of human experience and explores how this aggression is redirected or sublimated in socially acceptable ways. Volkan (2025) states that it is partially due to human ability to cooperate, use imagination and delay gratification, these abilities allow people to sublimate our urgent needs to achieve something better in the future.

Neuropsychoanalysis offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological and neural origins of conflict and aggression. By bridging the gap between mind and brain, it provides new insights into why individuals and groups are prone to destructive conflict and how these patterns can be interrupted. This perspective highlights the importance of addressing both neurobiological and psychological roots in efforts to resolve large-scale conflict.

The movie *Groundhog Day* (1993), can be viewed as a cultural allegory for transformation through repetition and confronting the human shadow, could be considered when thinking about the cyclical nature of collective conflicts. The protagonist, is condemned to relive the same day over and over until he evolves beyond his narcissism, entitlement, and emotional disconnection. The repeatedly asked question: will the groundhog emerge from his burrow, and will we, or will we not, see its shadow? The protagonist eventually faces his shadow and engages the Eros instinct by creating good for his community and integrating his Anima.

This narrative arc mirrors the human tendency to repeat cycles, including that of violence, until the change in self-awareness takes place, and psychological maturity to face our shadow is developed (both individually and societally). Humanity might need to reckon with its unconscious drives before escaping the cycle of recurring collective conflicts (Faust, 2012).

This transformation reflects a sublimation of aggressive and self-serving impulses into behaviours grounded in empathy and love. The way out of destructive impulsivity and repetition - personal or collective - is through embracing the Eros instinct: cultivating meaning, ethical responsibility, and authentic human connection. Humanity needs to confront the unconscious roots of aggression, lest we remain trapped in cycles of suffering (Freud, 1930/1961; Jung 1946).

Elsner (2024) states, that human soul is a '*reptile and a butterfly'* at the same time. The animalistic layers of human nature are within us all, and they can be dangerously aggravated if we have too much naive faith in the power of rational thought, compassionate preaching and good intentions. Is this perhaps coming down to Christianity's teaching, that each one of us must bear their own cross.

Notably, Freud identifies *Eros*, the life instinct, as a counterbalancing force oriented toward love, connection, and the preservation of life. In his correspondence with Einstein, Freud (1933/2005) emphasizes that the impulse toward war must be counteracted not by denial of its roots in human nature, but through the redirection of aggressive energies into cultural, communal, and affectionate ties. While the intellect must remain solid in its recognition of humanity's destructive potential, the will can act affirmatively nonetheless, by choosing to cultivate solidarity, empathy, and nonviolence. This conscious alignment with *Eros* offers a moral and psychological stance of hope in the face of the direst circumstances.

Importantly, by enhancing human connection through empathy and shared identity, Freud (1933/1964) envisions a path toward reducing the likelihood of war. Although Freud believed that unconscious aggressive impulses are part of us and are, in fact, necessary, he explores the possibilities for mitigating violent conflict by diverting aggressive impulses into non-destructive forms, so that they no longer find expression

through war. He discusses indirect methods of combating war, particularly through the strengthening of emotional bonds among individuals.

Drawing on the concept of Eros - the life instinct - Freud posits that the development of emotional ties, such as those fostered by identification with others, can counterbalance destructive impulses. Christian religion's idea '*love thy neighbour as thyself*' suggests that identification - the ability to see oneself in others - is a crucial mechanism in promoting solidarity and reducing innate human hostility (Freud, 1933/1964).

S. Shevchenko (2025), a Jungian analyst living in Ukraine, suggests, that personal and collective experiences of disasters are inevitable and require symbolisation. Shevchenko suggests that talking to each other, storytelling and art are some of the ways to symbolise these isolating experiences and facilitate shadow integration. Additionally, Shevchenko highlights the importance of sharing personal stories from war zones, so that war is not associated with statistics, rhetorics about victories and flags, but rather with human suffering. This process connects the survivors to the humanity of others (Shevchenko, 2025).

Furthermore, M. Scott Peck (1978) presents a fundamentally hopeful view of human nature, emphasizing that despite the inevitability of suffering, individuals possess an inner drive toward growth, healing, and integrity. He describes this force as a spiritual energy - an intrinsic resilience - that pushes people to confront pain, solve life's problems, and strive toward development rather than give in to despair or passivity. According to Peck, this inner strength has a transcendent quality, a kind of grace or spiritual momentum that enables individuals to rise above adversity. '*It is this force that is the essence of the human spirit*', he writes, suggesting that our persistence in the face of suffering is evidence of something deeply life-affirming within us (Peck, 1978, p.

122). This view supports the existentialist idea that, even in the face of aggression, loss, or existential difficulties, people are capable of choosing the path of growth, connection, and love - aligning with what Freud described as the *life instinct* (Freud, 1930/1961).

Humanity does not need any more sophisticated or complex ideas, Elsner (2024) states, however, what we do need is a growing capability to experience the application of existing theory, confront our unconscious and have the strength to bear it. It may seem like a drop in the ocean, however, it is a realistic contribution and one we each truly can accomplish.

Gabor Mate (2024), when asked about current political tension and ward in the world during his visit to Ireland, quoted an idea of Romain Rolland, later elaborated by Antonio Gramsci. The phrase *'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'*, encapsulates the tension between recognizing the harsh realities of human nature and maintaining a committed belief in transformative action. Therefore, going to therapy and working on our individual consciousness, even though it might feel like a drop in the ocean, is the most important and attainable task to focus on.

'And if we really believe, we will begin to love. And if we love, naturally, we will try to do something. First in our own home, our next-door neighbour, in the country we live, in the whole world.' (Mother Theresa, 1979).

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that war cannot be fully understood without addressing its psychological roots. Drawing from psychoanalytic, Jungian, neuropsychoanalytic, and group-relational perspectives, it has presented war as a manifestation of unconscious drives, unresolved trauma, collective anxiety, and symbolic archetypes. Far from being purely a political or strategic phenomenon, war also reflects deep inner conflicts within individuals and societies.

The thesis examined the evolutionary and psychological bases of aggression. Volkan (2025) distinguished among different types of aggression - defensive, parental, predatory, and display - which, though adaptive, can become destructive in symbolic or collective contexts. Experiments by Milgram (1963), Zimbardo (1971), and Burger (2009) demonstrated that ordinary individuals could engage in violence under specific social pressures, highlighting the ease with which aggression emerges under hierarchical and emotionally charged conditions.

As Shevchenko (2025) observed, peacebuilding efforts often fail because they ignore the unconscious dimensions of violence. Psychological containment and symbolic processing are essential if we are to address these deeper forces.

Freud's (1920/1955) concept of the death drive, Thanatos, and Spielrein's (1912/1994) earlier ideas about destruction as a prelude to transformation offer a framework for understanding how violence can become psychologically seductive. War is not only traumatic but often experienced as ecstatic, and even meaningful (Marciano, Stewart, & Lee, 2022).

Neuropsychoanalysis supports this view, linking dysregulated aggression to compromised emotional regulation systems, particularly in traumatized individuals (Blair, 2016; Kessler & Wang, 2008). These findings suggest that violence emerges from a failure of both personal and collective containment.

Jungian psychology views war through the lens of the collective unconscious. Jung's (1954) concept of the shadow explains how societies project unwanted traits onto enemies, thus legitimizing violence. Archetypes like the warrior and the destroyer are deeply embedded in myth, media, and political discourse (Estés, 1992; Connolly Cove, 2024), suggesting that war is not solely a strategic choice, but a symbolic expression of collective unconscious forces.

Transformation, according to Jung, requires confronting these archetypes consciously. The symbolic alchemical process - Nigredo, Albedo, and Rubedo - offers a psychological model for stages of breakdown and integration that individuals and collective go through (Stein, 1998). As Shevchenko (2025) notes, until we symbolically metabolize war, we remain bound to its repetition.

The unconscious masculinity complex highlights how patriarchal systems institutionalize collective aggression by idealising masculine dominance, suppressing emotional expression, and externalizing vulnerability through violence (Jung, 1954; Asgari, 2024; Williams, 2024). Rooted in Freud's (1913) theory of *primal patricide* and supported by anthropological links between patriarchy and warfare (Christ, 2013), this psychic split sustains cycles of war through neglect of the qualities associated with Anima, such as empathy and emotionality, which, when unintegrated, become projected on women and seen as weakness.

Militarised societies often frame war as protection of the feminine, while simultaneously devaluing it (Cohen & Karim, 2022; Bly, 1990). Suppressed male

vulnerability feeds authoritarian parenting, group aggression, reinforcing authoritarianism and obedience to violent systems (Parker, 2019; Levant, 2014).

Jung warned us, that peace and true psychological growth depends on integrating these unconscious forces through introspection, which can be aided by psychotherapy and dream-analysis (Jung, 1959), and without doing so, collective violence remains an archetypal compulsion. Addressing these dynamics is essential if societies hope to move beyond patriarchal conflict toward individuation.

Group processes amplify unconscious dynamics at work. In large groups, anxiety and fear often lead to primitive defenses like splitting and scapegoating (Allcorn, 2022; Volkan, 2025). Bion's (1961) theory of basic assumption groups shows how rationality breaks down under collective stress, while Freud (1921) highlighted how individuals surrender moral agency to group ideals.

Alice Miller (1983) connected this phenomenon to authoritarian parenting, arguing that children subjected to humiliation and fear often grow into adults who conform to violent ideologies. The group thus becomes a container for disowned emotions, and conflict becomes an unconscious repetition of earlier relational trauma.

Freud (1933) and Jung (1957) acknowledged that aggression is part of human nature, but both believed that reflection, culture, and sublimation offer ways of mitigating its destructive impact. Rose (2023) highlighted, that psychological insight must inform political action if peace is to be sustainable.

Psychotherapy, storytelling, dream-analysis and symbolic practices are some of the tools for integration, as World Council for Psychotherapy (2022) calls for collective healing in the face of war's trauma. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) spoke of transformation through symbolic death and rebirth Gabor Maté (2024), building on Gramsci's ideas, emphasized the paradoxical interplay of rationally understanding

where the collective consciousness is at, and quiet determination to lean on the Eros instinct, when he spoke about '*pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will*'. It is realistic, grounded hope rooted in humbly continuing the inner work through psychotherapy, even if it feels like only a small drop in the ocean.

This thesis concludes that war is not simply a failure of diplomacy, but a failure of integration - of shadow, of emotion, and of generational trauma. When our inner conflicts go unacknowledged, they are projected outward in destructive and socially sanctioned ways. If we want to interrupt this cycle, we must look within.

Jung (1970) warned that the real danger lies not in external enemies, but in the parts of ourselves we refuse to confront. By bringing the unconscious into awareness, we may reduce the compulsion to act it out through violence. Psychotherapy is a humble but radical act of resistance against the unconscious forces that perpetuate war.

Peace may never be guaranteed, but the inner work of integration and individuation offers a path toward it. This thesis invites a deeper understanding of collective conflict and reimagining of peace not as absence of war, but as the presence of awareness, symbolic understanding, and emotional responsibility towards self, each other and our collectives. In this sense, this thesis is an invitation to reflect on our individual and collective shadow.

The work of peace is slow, often invisible, and rarely conclusive. But to ignore the unconscious is to remain trapped in cycles of destruction. If we are to evolve beyond war, we must make space not only for policies, but also for dreams, reflection, mourning, and brave shadow work. This is the task of psychotherapy - not to save the world, but to deepen our awareness of the forces that shape it, and to plant seeds of healing where destruction emerges.

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