

War, Religion, Gender and Psyche: An Irish Perspective

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Could the sacred be, whatever its variants, a two-sided formation? One aspect founded by murder, and the social bond made up of murder's guilt-ridden atonement, with all the projective mechanisms and obsessive rituals that accompany it; and another aspect, like a lining, more secret still and invisible, non-representable, oriented toward those uncertain spaces of unstable identity, toward the fragility—both threatening and fusional—of the archaic dyad, toward the non-separation of subject/object, on which language has no hold but one woven of fright and repulsion? ¹

Introduction

The nuclear threat, and the willingness of suicide bombers, pilots and many others to sacrifice their lives to achieve political objectives pose ever-increasing dangers to world security. Never before in human history have we had the capacity (in both conventional and terrorists hands) to make the earth a wasteland. Why have we not achieved civilized means of resolving conflict? Why are our attitudes toward war so ambivalent? Under what circumstances do religions support or undermine violent imperatives? Can gender studies offer anything new to our study of these dynamics?

In this paper, I first explore psychoanalytic perspectives on human and social development, focussing on the work of Melanie Klein. I will then outline the background to the last thirty-five years of armed struggle in Ireland. I go to suggest that Klein's perspective on the human psyche would support contemporary theorist's perspectives that women are not more peaceable than men: indeed, claims to that effect serve to reinforce female inactivity, or male prejudice toward powerful women.

I will suggest that the Irish experience indicates that, although women are not *naturally* more peaceful than men, the entry of women into the political process can undermine some of the deeply unconscious fantasies that contribute to war. Moreover, the entry of self-conscious feminists, can potentially offer new variables, perspectives and strategies on conflict resolution.

Religious discourse permeated the Irish conflict. Using Kleinian categories, I will suggest that the relationship between religion and violence is complex, but not intractable. Religious practitioners are now morally obliged to begin to understand the

unconscious mechanisms at work in religious groups, and actively to deconstruct their violent imperatives.

The Irish civil war that took place over the last thirty-five years potentially provides a fertile bounded field of analysis. A great deal could be written about several parties to the conflict, but here I will focus almost entirely on Irish Republicans. This article is not intended to comment in any way on the legitimacy of any struggle or the personal integrity of those involved. Horrific atrocities took place in Ireland, and those involved in the current *Peace Process* now express deep regret for the barbarism to which they sometimes descended. This analysis is intended to extract some theoretical goodness from that horror to help facilitate future intervention in vicious cycles of violence.

Melanie Klein

The most up to date review of literature regarding gender and war has been compiled by Joshua S. Goldstein in his book *War and Gender*.² In Goldstein's analysis, many of the familiar hypotheses, especially "violent men and peaceful women" are destroyed. Gender shapes war, and war shapes gender, he concludes, but cannot elaborate on how this happens.

Goldstein pays little attention to psychoanalytic perspectives despite the fact that Sigmund Freud wrote several works attempting to understand war: "Thoughts for the Times in War and Death" (1915); *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) his major work on the death drives; and *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1929) where he revised his work on the drives. His final work on war was written in 1933 in the form of a letter to Albert Einstein: *Why War?*³ Goldstein cites Freud in various places: however, his thesis that killing does not come naturally to men and that they have to be socialized or compelled to engage in war, flatly contradicts Freud. For Freud, and for many European critical theorists, not war but civilization deserves explanation.

Goldstein does not cite directly the work of one of Freud's successors, Melanie Klein. Yet, Kleinian perspectives can throw light on the social and gendered construction of the sacred and on the lethal links between violence, war, terror and religion. Whereas Sigmund Freud worked at the interface of psyche and politics, Melanie Klein confined herself, almost exclusively, to the psychic realm. Possibly for these reasons, her work is only now beginning to be explored for its political implications. Some introduction to key concepts will be necessary.

Melanie Klein's work builds on the work of Sigmund Freud but significantly complicates his perspectives on gender. Taking her lead from Freud's observation of his grandchild (recorded in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*), Klein began her psychoanalytic work analysing children and observing the infant/mother dynamic. Briefly here are Klein's findings: italics indicate key Kleinian terms.

Klein observed that infants develop their consciousness in relation to their first *object*: the mother's breast (or whatever might substitute for the breast). In reality, their first object is the womb, but the relationship to the breast is what enables infants to come to conscious awareness of their individuality. Cast out from the security of the womb

(a Garden of Paradise) where all its needs have been met, a baby depends totally on its mother (or parental substitute) for feeding, warmth and psychic security.

Klein argues that the baby loves and hates its mother both because of instinctual endowment and also because of psychic processes. At first, the infant considers the mother to be a mere extension of itself, but gradually realises that the same mother who provides such security is also the one who withdraws it, or does not offer it on infant demand. *Splitting* now occurs between a *good mother* who offers the breast and a *bad mother* who appears to withhold it arbitrarily.

The infant ego is fragile. It cannot hold onto the strength of its feelings of hate whose severity threatens to tear the infant apart. The infant is constantly involved in a process of holding onto its *good objects* and expelling its *bad objects*. The infant *evacuates* its feelings of destruction into the mother, who then appears to hate the baby. Expelling faeces symbolises this process. This is followed by *introjection* of the good and bad mother back into the infant psyche, leading to a sense of *persecution* that the child projects into the mother. The infant ego is formed, not just by *repression* as Freud has argued, but by the conflict between these two internalised objects.

Infant's night-time terrors derive from phantasied attacks on the mother's body who deliberately *withholds* her goodness from the infant. The infant fears that it might have destroyed the good object as well as the bad. Furthermore, the infant, whose morality is *an eye for an eye* fears retaliation. Infant reparation for the hurt it might have caused follows, and the vicious cycle resumes. At their height, these dynamics are called *paranoid/schizoid*. The infant *superego* arises from these dynamics and accounts for excessive feelings of guilt infants experience prior to the Oedipal complex. Such feelings, according to Klein's observations, were way out of proportion to the infant's actual experience.

An infant's first real crisis is that of separation causing the infant to become frustrated, anxious and then furious. Fantasies of *omnipotence* arise as the infant tries to control the mother. Klein considered that these mechanisms — omnipotence, projection, introjection, splitting, and persecution — underlie the development of human consciousness.

When parents can *contain* their infant's ambivalence, terror, and fury, a child enters what Klein calls *the depressive position*. Ideally, the infant eventually realises that it is the same mother who both gives and withholds. The infant gives up its *omnipotent* fantasies that it might control the mother. The term *depressive* arises from the fact that when the child experiences the mother, not as part-object, but as whole person, it now experiences guilt for its phantasied attacks on the mother. The child *mourns* its primitive unity, but embraces the challenges of individuation and culture. In some situations, however, unresolved issues lead to various forms of illness manifest throughout their later years.

Klein acknowledged Freud's Oedipal complex, but places it earlier. She argues that the pre-Oedipal complex precedes it, and that the pre-Oedipal, rather than the Oedipal complex give rise to the severity of the superego. Whereas Freud focussed on repression, Klein focuses on anxiety. Furthermore, not only sexuality, but also aggression needs to be repressed or sublimated.⁴

Klein's work gave rise to the *object relations* school of psychoanalysis, which, through the work of R. E. Money-Kyrle,⁵ Wilfrid Bion,⁶ Donald Winnicott,⁷ and the Tavistock Institute in London extended its brief into a study of group dynamics. Contemporary theorists working out of variations of Kleinian theory include Hanna Segal and Jacqueline Rose both of whom have applied her insights to war.⁸ Julia Kristeva augments Klein's insights with perspectives derived from political theorists and philosophers and has specific interests in the relationship between violence and religion.

Kleinian Group dynamics

Fascinated with the dynamics he had encountered in the world wars, Kleinian theorist, Wilfrid Bion, applied her findings to groups. Groups are not merely collections of individuals: they become entities in themselves and effectively recreate the archaic mother.⁹ Despite what individuals might achieve in their own psychic development, often in large social groupings, people regress to the paranoid/schizoid position in the form of in-group and out-group fantasies.

As Hanna Segal has argued:

Groups can have features, which, if present and acted on in an individual would qualify that individual as mad, or psychotic. Groups are usually narcissistic, self-idealizing and paranoid in relation to other groups. Conflict within the group and guilt about aggression can be dealt with by projection onto an outside group. In our private lives we have to content with a superego, which puts a check on destructiveness. If we vest the individual superego in a joint group superego, we can apparently guiltlessly perpetrate horrors which we couldn't bear in our individual existence.¹⁰

Here is where religions can play a lethal role. Under normal conditions religions can help promote Klein's *depressive position*. The words of hymns such as the *Salve Regina*, sung in Christian monasteries every night at Compline are worthy of note: *to thee do we cry poor banished children of Eve*. The depressive position is characterised by guilt, reparation, independent thought, and the ability to take responsibility for one's action. One *mourns* original psychic unity, and looks forward to regaining such unity upon one's death.

However, under threat, religions can equally promote the *paranoid/schizoid position*: splitting, denial, introjection, paranoia, delusion, fantasies of omnipotence, inability to mourn previous actions, and projection of all evil onto others.

In both the paranoid/schizoid and the depressive position, women are disadvantaged, albeit in different ways. Furthermore, in the legitimating strategies of both conventional and terrorist regimes, especially where they seek legitimation through the socially constructed patriarchal sacred, gender plays a major role. We will turn to the dynamics of religious groupings presently.

The Sacrificial Social Contract

The primitive violence of psychic separation from the archaic mother has ongoing repercussions. The social contract is gendered; indeed, in the words of Julia Kristeva, it is *a sacrificial social contract*.¹¹ Women are excluded as active subjects.¹² In Western culture, chaos and order are presented in mythological, psychoanalytic, and religiously contrived dualisms that typically appear as follows:

Mythological Dualisms

Nature	Culture
Maternal	Paternal
Chaos/Eve/Pandora/Serpent/Furies	Order/Yahweh
Cyclical Tragic Vision	Eschatological Linear
Immortality	Mortality
Myth of Endless gratification	Taboos
Garden of Eden	Delayed gratification/ afterlife
Sacred	Profane

Possibly because in Western culture women are prohibited from re-entering the sacred, it is often assumed, not least by feminist theorists, that the *sacred* appears on that side of the dualism traditionally associated with hierarchy, power, law and order. On the contrary, according to this schema, *the sacred appears on the same side as the maternal*. The sacred world is, as Julia Kristeva argued *two-sided*. It is exciting and dangerous, compelling and repulsive, fertile and death-giving. Here is where we can begin to find the lethal connections between gender, war, and terrorism.

The Sacred and War

For Freud, civilization is fragile and precarious and brought about by the forced repression of instincts in the interests of human sociality. The profane world is the world of law and order. Injustices are covered over by a veneer of legality, and anti-social impulses are repressed by legal, social and religious institutions. Such repression costs us dearly and humans appear to need occasions when the pressure can be lifted, however temporarily.¹³ Klein focuses more on *positions* than on repression and disputes some of Freud's other assumptions. Nevertheless, the implications for war are parallel.

War brings horror, death, and destruction, but war writers and theorists acknowledge the excitement, suspense, thrill, and sense of community. Ignominious men achieve noble stature by their willingness to risk their lives. Ignominious housewives suddenly enter the public world, and are usually reluctant to leave it again when peace descends.

A spurious quest for omnipotence — both exciting and heroic — lies at the heart of these enterprises. Peacemaking is mundane, boring, or even *depressive*. Small wonder then that humankind has found little reasons to develop what William James called *the moral equivalent of war*.¹⁴

Furthermore, repressions and law can only hold the social order together; they cannot regenerate it.¹⁵ Freud implies that we re-enter the primitive state for the sake of mastery and regeneration. Ideally, he envisaged that, once renewed, we return to civilisation.

Freud was unaware of the gendered nature of that movement, but in Klein's work these dynamics become apparent. When war breaks out, the contrived dualisms collapse, and the maternal/sacred body becomes the symbolic field where the social order is renegotiated. In other words, we return symbolically for regeneration (rather than sexual access) to the body of the mother, but in doing so, re-encounter our infantile trauma. We re-enter the world of the sacred, that realm where all the infant dynamics — omnipotence, persecution, projection, introjection, splitting, denial — again come into play.

The struggle for omnipotence begins all over again, but this time the arena is the battlefield. In wartime, we split between Good and Bad Mothers, idealization and envy. We displace onto the enemy all unresolved maternal conflicts: omnipotence, unmediated intimacy (rape?). We fantasize the enemy (or even a new uncolonised territory) as the repository of the Good Breast, unlimited quantities of oil, or whatever natural resources now represent, symbolically or actually, basic life necessities.¹⁶ Primitive fears are re-awakened, and primitive defences mobilized, leading to a combination of terror, omnipotence and helplessness.¹⁷

The secure point of origin, the maternal body provides an overarching metaphor. Metaphors of birth, re-birth, and Motherland run riot. A tyranny of origins ensues: myths of entitlement, lost or divided lands, pristine origins derived from the Holy Book — these all serve to fuel the conflict. We renounce our individuality and the psychic health that may have attended it, suspend all ambivalence toward *Others*, and enter the paranoid/ schizoid dynamics of the group where denial, splitting, and projection hold sway.

The group itself is the Ideal Object/Mother which must be defended: ambivalence or complexity becomes impossible; all evil belongs to the bad (M)Other upon whom we can now evacuate faeces, through weapons of elimination. We project all our own murderous fantasies and ambitions onto the enemy, who then also *becomes* an enemy as a result of our projections, a dynamic that gives new meaning to simplistic theories of cause and effect. As Nietzsche formulated the problem in relation to war: "Ye say it is the good cause that halloweth every war? I say unto you: it is the good war that halloweth every cause."¹⁸

We develop cogent metaphors to justify our position, preferably those that allow us access to the high moral ground. In the ultimate omnipotent stand, we fight on God's behalf. In other words, we leave the profane world of law and order where the state takes upon itself the exclusive right to kill,¹⁹ to enter the ambivalent sacred world where repressions are lifted, enabling drive energies — destruction, murder, envy, hate — to run riot. Disowning our own personal negativity, we can identify with Super-Ego Ideal Objects, and collapse responsibility to them. Religious symbols and theologies can play a lethal role, an issue to which we will return.

Conventional and Terrorist Wars

Western governments usually portray terrorists as sub-human, absolutely *Other*. However, in many instances, *legitimate* regimes use terrorists to achieve their own political ends (Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Angola). But while conventional warriors and

terrorists differ in their methods and possibly objectives, they share many of the underlying assumptions contributing to warfare. Despite their similarities, the stance they take differs profoundly, especially on the issue of *containment*.

According to Klein, a parent's responsibility is to *contain* omnipotent struggles without retaliating or collapsing under its weight until such time as the infants can face reality and enter the *depressive* position. In conventional warfare the rules and regulations of battle also play a major role. Even among bitter enemies, such agreements as the *Geneva Convention* regulate military action.

Conventional warriors and fundamentalist terrorists each attempt to re-enter the maternal/sacred where semiotic energies are interred, but this attempt carries serious implications. Depending on where one is socially located, the method of re-entry will be different. One will either be a highly protected religious officiant or armed military man or soldier, or else a highly vulnerable (if no less lethal) suicide bomber or terrorist.

The state draws on the maternal/sacred arena to exert legal violence against its enemies, but surrounds itself with powerful mechanisms to prevent *violent contagion*, or the violence spilling out into *normal* life. In conventional warfare soldiers actively *risk their lives* but usually hope and expect to emerge from the war/sacred unscathed, their violence quarantined, and better able to serve the social contract. Fearing the "return of the repressed" (like priests preparing to sacrifice) they must establish, either in religious or warrior training, that they are immune to and armoured against whatever maternal energies they might encounter, violent or seductive. For instance, in a post-Vietnam situation, perpetrators of violence or other behaviour permitted in wartime, will be prosecuted by the full rigours of the law.

All traces of dependence on the mother/origin must be quickly erased in the interests of psychic health.²⁰ Ritualised drilling erases individual identity and forges a new collective military identity. Under the cover of the group, abdicating any personal responsibility, individuals commit murderous acts, normally forbidden by the state, with impunity.²¹ Pornography, rape, sexual atrocities and the feminisation of enemies all play their part as though to celebrate the triumph of the male body over the maternal/sacred.

Men must prove, not only that they are men, but also that they are *Not/Women*. The armoured male *risks his life* only to return home a hero, having passed the ultimate male initiation rite — overcoming mother/death — he is fit to pass into the realm of the fathers and to rule above the earth.

Conventional warriors enjoy the privileges of both Church and State which symbolically blesses and legitimises the weapons as they proceed to war. They are armed on the side of power — law, order, and the social contract — underpinned by divinity. Insofar as they are *obliged* to depart from the normal rules of civilization — killing or maiming — they will do so with ostensible profound regret. Rape is a different matter altogether. Enemies must be feminised, symbolising the omnipotent mother now once again under control.

If conventional warriors are hyper-masculine, terrorists, especially suicide bombers adopt a female posture, often going metaphorically naked into combat knowing they will not return. Exploring the Irish situation will throw further light on these dynamics.

Irish Political Struggle

Since the twelfth century, England had attempted to colonise Ireland. However, given the strength of the indigenous culture and legal system (that incidentally protected women's rights), in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries English monarchs decided that only the whole scale re-plantation of Ireland could guarantee allegiance to the English crown. Vast numbers of Scottish Presbyterians were transplanted to the North of Ireland and most of the remaining indigenous Irish political leadership fled to Europe.

By the 18th and 19th centuries the Anglo-Irish population, both North and South, had become a political entity in its own right and begun to seek independence. Drawing on Celtic and Germanic mythology, various cultural movements arose that sought to underpin the legitimacy of the struggle. However, mostly Protestant, they confined themselves to the *word*. Not until 1916, with the rise of an educated Catholic population, in the middle of the First World War, did anyone attempt to *perform* (sacramentally, as it were) the salvation mythology inherent in these myths. At Easter, 1916, an assorted group of poets, writers, schoolteachers and socialist leaders invaded the General Post Office in Dublin in what became known as the Irish Easter Rising.

Militarily, their actions did not succeed (some would say, *could not have* succeeded). But the sacrificial discourse generated before, throughout, and after the Rising, and especially after the execution of the leaders, testified to what some called the *triumph of failure*.²² The political struggle did not come to end. Hunger strikers regularly re-ignited the sacrificial dynamics unleashed in 1916. Finally, the English Government partitioned Ireland in 1920. Twenty-six of the original thirty-two counties would eventually form the Irish Republic. The remainder comprised the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.

Struggle for Ulster

An extraordinary mix ensued in the North. On the one side are those loyal to the Queen, called Loyalists, mostly Protestant, Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland. They seek legitimacy through a combination of the British Crown, the Protestant Reformation, and the sacrifice of their young men in the First World War. Loyalists support Britain's retaining the Six Counties, effectively partitioning the island of Ireland.

On the other are those loyal to Mother Ireland, Republican Nationalists, mostly Roman Catholic. They seek legitimacy through the original integral unity of Ireland, the sacrifices of the men of 1916, and of those who died in the Irish Civil Wars following the partitioning of Ireland. Republicans seek to re-integrate the island of Ireland.

The original Ulster province comprised nine counties, and had the British agreed to that original division the Loyalist population would have been outnumbered. The artificial split ensured that the Loyalists would control the province, and they did so ruthlessly. Discrimination in jobs, housing, and local government was widespread. Electoral boundaries were created to ensure Loyalist supremacy even in areas where the republican nationalist population was dominant.

The Republicans made several attempts to dismantle the political constitution of Ulster, but their efforts had little effect until 1968 following the international Civil Rights Movement, and the emergence of an educated Northern Catholic middle class. The Civil Rights Movement was brutally suppressed by the Loyalist police force and its auxiliaries. The latent Republican Movement gained momentum and reinvigorated the nationalist struggle together with the non-violent Socialist and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), comprising the remnants of the Civil Rights Movement.

From 1968 to 1971, thousands had been killed in the struggle, and many more left seriously disabled or orphaned. Eventually, in 1971, most of the Republican leadership and many Republicans were interned (jailed without trial). Prisoners appeared to adjust to prison and used their time to further their education, but the violence continued. Finally, political status was removed from new political prisoners. This last move was a bridge too far for those whose very *raison d'être* depended on their identity as Irish soldiers fighting for Mother Ireland.

Reducing such prisoners to common criminals dragged them unceremoniously into the profane world of law and order, destroyed their sacred identity and, by implication, any legitimacy left in their struggle. Regaining *political status* literally became an issue of life or death.

Re-entering the Sacred: The Powerless

Conventional warriors are surrounded by mechanisms of *containment*, but when aggrieved parties lack all constitutional means of addressing their grievances, and when no return to *normal* life appears possible, legal containment becomes irrelevant. They are not party to international agreements given international failure or inability to recognise its cause.

Terrorists seldom enjoy legitimacy, or any readymade containment. Civilization, as they know it, holds no appeal. For the powerless such containment becomes meaningless: their very purpose is to undermine, rather than renew, the social order. Bombs can be exploded in buses, cars and airplanes. Often, however, their most lethal weapon is their own body, strapped with explosives, ready to enter anywhere: both civilians and the military become legitimate targets.

Conventional warriors appeal to international law. Terrorists resort to a higher court of appeal: nothing short of direct access to the maternal/sacred, which appears on the side of death. The journey into the sacred/maternal offers no return: there is little or no hope of emerging unscathed. Terrorists have no wish to participate in the realm of the fathers, a realm in which they are powerless and that has become intolerable. A terrorist is more like a mother who gives birth to a whole new order. Mothers usually survive, but terrorists who die hope to give birth to new nations.

Abjection

Feminist scholars in religion are well aware of the *body politics* used by female mystics, or holy anorectics. Lacking any legitimate or autonomous route to empowerment, female mystics fought wars *inside* their own bodies in a form of devious dominance.²³ Stories of contact with *abject* objects —cat vomit, leper's sores — are strewn through their lives.

Significantly, whereas religious rites usually stress the importance of *purity* (to prevent violent contagion when entering the *sacred*, those refused legitimate access to the culturally endorsed sacred wallow in abjection/impurity. Abject objects are those, mostly bodily excretions, (mucus, faeces, menstrual blood) which exclude from our *clean and proper bodies* as a condition of psychic integrity and mental health. If the powerful repudiate abjection or the reminders of abjection/death in order to re-emerge from the sacred realm alive, the powerless wallow in abjection in a desperate effort to draw on the valencies of the maternal/sacred, even if it costs their lives.

So too, in the prison H-Blocks, lacking any instrumental means to achieve their objectives, their own bodies — the only weapons the internees now had left — became the sites on which struggles for power were played out.

The Irish prisoners responded to the withdrawal of *political status* initially by refusing to wear prison clothes. For six months they were left naked in their cells, but were eventually provided with blankets. They communicated with the outside world through messages written on cigarette or toilet paper they concealed in their bodies and smuggled out of prison. Eventually, however, they began to engage in a “dirty

protest”. Both men and women refused to wash and streaked their excrement and urine across the walls of their cells. They lost whatever remaining privileges they had held, and often for twenty-four hours of the day they remained in filthy cells. Harrowing accounts of those times have been written.²⁴

The *dirty protest* lasted for four years and yet the British Crown refused to budge on the question of their *five demands*. These were as follows: the right to wear their own clothes, to refrain from prison work; to have free association with other prisoners ...; to organize recreation and leisure activity — with one letter, parcel and visit allowed per week; and to have remission lost, as a result of the blanket protest restored”.²⁵

In ancient Ireland, *fasting against the enemy* was the means the powerless used to exert pressure on the powerful to concede their rightful demands. A non-violent tactic, the willingness to fast, became a testimony of innocence against the abuse of power. But the Republican prisoners were not innocent: many had been convicted of horrific killings. Likewise, the government of the United Kingdom had established and sanctioned a deeply unjust regime in Northern Ireland. Each had failed to achieve political resolution. Political stalemate ensued.

Role of Theology

The internees now faced radical defeat: their *dirty protest*, rather than eliciting horror, served their further degradation. Stripped of all political and military means, their final weapon was the threat of death. On March 1st 1981, the fifth anniversary of the date the British Government had started to phase out *special category status* and, against the wishes of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) leadership outside the prison, one by one, ten Republican male prisoners went on hunger strike. Significantly, the IRA refused permission to women prisoners to do likewise.

In essence, the imprisoned paramilitaries (whether conscious or unconsciously) now re-entered the maternal/sacred to appropriate the symbolic religious capital for an alternative political order or political means. By extension, they sought to challenge the claims of others (Catholic priests, Protestant paramilitaries, or British and Irish constitutional governments) who strove to quell the violence by appealing to Catholic religion, Christian ethics, and constitutional legalities.

Bobby Sands was the first to go on hunger strike, and as he prepared for his ordeal he wrote in his diary, (a scrap of toilet paper) *I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world... May God have mercy on my soul.*²⁶

It has been argued that the paramilitaries were abusing Christian theology. At the same time, paramilitaries required a kind of perverse recognition of theological authorities for their action to under gird their struggles. Nowhere is this more evident than in recorded encounters between Catholic priests and paramilitaries.

Catholic priests, although clear in their denunciation of paramilitary violence, were usually ambivalent toward the hunger strikes, as though mesmerized by the sacrificial mechanisms to which they appealed.²⁷ The ensuing contemporary and historical reflections served to expose the incapacity of traditional theological paradigms to analyse the underlying psychodynamics.

Fr. Dennis Faul (nicknamed by Republicans as “Dennis the Menace”), a noted campaigner for civil rights who had also consistently opposed Provisional IRA tactics went to see him. He pleaded with him to abandon the hunger strike, knowing the consequences that would ensue upon his death, but Bobby Sands “threw scripture at him: “Greater love than this hath no man than that he lay down his life for his friend’ . Father Faul said resignedly: “Bobby, there’s no answer to that’ .²⁸

Unable to deconstruct the logic of sacrifice, Dennis Faul claimed later: *I really felt these men were beating us at our own game.*²⁹ He went on to say *theologically we can justify the hunger strikes but you have to be an Irishman to do it.*³⁰

Funerals

One by one, in the full glare of the international media, and in harrowing personal circumstances, ten men began the fast to death. During the hunger strikes, preparations were being made for the funerals and inevitable disorder that would follow their deaths.³¹

Most of the international media viewed the hunger strikes as symbolic acts of defiance against British imperialism. Streets were called after Bobby Sands³² (the first hunger striker to die), and the Irish situation received international attention seldom accorded to the Northern struggle. The hunger strikers continued, with men lining up to take the place of each one who had died. Many women, men and children were killed in the street-riots that followed the funerals, some attended by 100,000 people.

The poet, William Butler Yeats, had written in his poem, “Easter 1916”: *Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart / O when may it suffice?*³³ Religious language, and that of sacrifice, in particular, had now been pushed to an extreme. Breaking that logic now became imperative.

Too long a Sacrifice

Academics critiqued the sacrificial mechanisms as abuses of Christian theology.³⁴ Poets, playwrights, and several comedians launched devastating satirical tirades against sacrosanct religious themes (especially atonement, redemption and sacrifice) used in the struggle. Elsewhere in Europe, their work would have been considered blasphemous. But perhaps women, and some fairly unlikely women at that, would eventually pose the greatest challenge to the sacrificial social order.

Maternal themes and dynamics pervaded Irish Republican mythology. Good Mother Ireland generated poems, murals, songs, and political rhetoric. In one song, she had lost one of her *four green fields*” (the Ulster province) but her sons would recover it for her. Even if they died in the attempt, *their sons had sons as brave as were their fathers*. Republicans ignored the entreaties of the legitimate Mother Ireland in the Twenty-Six Counties to revert to constitutional means.

The British Prime Minister at that time was Margaret Thatcher (her nickname was *Tinknickers*”).³⁵ Thatcher was Athena personified, a woman who could and would outstrip any man in her capacity to uphold the law regardless of the consequences. Especially during the hunger strikes, she personified the withholding mother: *Maggie*

you bitch, you dirty witch whose deeds would shame a devil in hell was the line of one such song, sung in the pubs of Ireland.

If Thatcher was the Bad Mother, she stood over against the Good Mothers, the Mothers of the Hunger Strikers. The Republican propaganda machine constantly valorised the women who *stood by them*. A nuanced reading of the discourses of the time would suggest that the paramilitaries were deeply worried about what they euphemistically called *the families*. Could they be trusted not to give orders for drip-feeding (once the prisoners were unconscious) in the face of death? Evidence exists that some families were by no means in favour of the hunger strikes.³⁶ However, powerful pressures were exerted upon them not to publicly undermine the life risking of their sons or husbands. If someone tried to persuade a hunger striker to stop, Republicans were quickly present reading from what were *family letters* of possible dubious origin.

The hunger strikes ended when, after eight men had died, some family members, supported by local clergy, intervened and allowed the force-feeding of their relatives. These family members, often at great cost to themselves, challenged the sacrificial mechanisms. They succeeded, where the whole might of the British Government had failed.³⁷

Whether or not we agree with their diverse reasons, a female Prime Minister and a couple of ordinary Northern Irish family members had held the boundaries of their respective roles, as guardian of the law or as parents or lover, refusing to collapse their own agency in the face of threat. The hunger strikers had attempted to rejuvenate the social order through sacrifice, but given that they had been convicted of causing horrendous deaths, the splitting between good and evil, tenuously held to date, now fell apart. The Bad Mother/Good Mother psychic fantasies and splits no longer held. The symbolic economy had been pushed to its limits: the denizens of sacrifice had been faced down.

The consequences for all those who died were horrific, but who could predict what the ongoing consequences might have been had such sacrificial threats been allowed to continue being held over politics in Northern Ireland?

The collapse of the hunger strikes led inevitably to the *Peace Process*. The *Peace Process* was also helped by the fact that, in the midst of the hunger strikes, Bobby Sands stood for election (and was elected) to the British Parliament. Some would argue that this also marked a momentous shift in nationalist's attitudes toward the electoral process. To this day, nationalists elected to the British Parliament refuse to take their seats.

Implications

Studying the Irish experience of 30 years of terrorist warfare, and the subsequent *Peace Process* would yield valuable lessons that might usefully be learned and applied to contemporary threats, nuclear and terrorist, currently hanging over our world today. Religion and gender played a major role, and Klein's theoretical elaborations on Freud, applied to warfare, can yield very valuable, if complex, insights on the relationship between war, gender and religion. Focussing on psychic

issues is not intended to minimise or undermine underlying issues of injustice, exploitation or power; it is simply an attempt to throw further light on political strategies and their effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

This analysis has barely touched the surface of the possibilities that Melanie Klein's work, together with that of her successors, can offer to social and political critique.³⁸ Several issues arise immediately and deserve further investigation: the distinction between religious beliefs and religious groups; the need to reclaim abjection/projections; the question of training for religious leadership; the role of feminism; the interrelationship between religion, war, gender and fundamentalism; the question of representation; and the urgent need to theorise the *maternal debt*.

1. Religious beliefs and groups

Scholars of religion and violence often focus on religious *beliefs*. They argue about their origins, validity, or historicity, or assert that the misappropriation of religious language or texts serves violent ends. But in the analysis here, religion plays an enormous part in violent relations, not strictly because of religious *beliefs* but because religious *groups* enable psychic processes to take political form.

Kleinian theorists hold that groups can both contain or legitimise omnipotent fantasies. However, religious groups uniquely enable the boundary between fantasy and reality to be obliterated. In the struggle for omnipotence we establish a new mother, the quasi-religious group that provides the *groupthink* or herd instinct under whose shelter atrocities now become possible and lethal. We no longer need to mourn our primitive unity with the real mother: if anything, we displace such mourning onto the Virgin Mary. Given such an ideal, real women become irrelevant, and contemporary knightly crusaders can ride roughshod over the bodies of women and children in war.

Kleinian theorist, Wilfrid Bion, distinguished between *work groups* and *basic assumption* groups: some groups contain features of both. Work groups are oriented toward pragmatic achievement of positive aims. Basic assumption groups are often more focussed on issues of identity and, therefore, more liable to develop paranoid/schizoid features when this identity is under threat. As Hanna Segal argues:

I think that the degree of dehumanisation we encounter in such group practices as genocide we would see in an individual only in the psychotic or the criminal psychopath. When such mechanisms get out of hand, the groups, instead of containing psychotic functioning, put it into practice and we get such irrational behaviour as wars and genocide.³⁹

When individuals become part of *basic assumption groups* many of the original dynamics with early parental figures often come into play. Fear, idealization, envy, splitting, gratitude, projection dynamics can run riot. Individuals within the group, and the group itself re-creates or re-awakens primitive fears or fantasies.

Work Groups ideally are directed toward achieving particular concrete aims, but often *basic assumptions* (religious mythologies or unconscious fantasies) get in the way of

the explicit aim or project. Group dynamics experts try to untangle the mess, re-direct the members toward their original focus, and enable them to distinguish between their unconscious fantasies and the actual aim of the particular group entity.

Religious myths and beliefs *personify* enemies and provide *legitimate* targets. They also legitimise the search for *purity of origins*. Groups often appear to *need* enemies. As Kleinian theorist, Franco Fornari, wrote (echoing Nietzsche): 'war serves to defend ourselves against the "Terrifier" as an internal absolute enemy...in this manner we arrive at the incredible paradox that the most important security function is not to defend ourselves from an external enemy but to find one'.⁴⁰

Religions often provide instant, readymade identities focussing on *origins*, or synthetic egos, myths of entitlement, or a sacred duty to defend or protect — all of which short-circuit an integrated psychic route. Desperate attempts to establish secure origins, inhabit particular lands, claim definitive texts, or appropriate pristine belief systems testify to a ruthless, if tortured, quest for security. Under threat, such religions become lethal as fragmented egos search for containers to hold or assert identity. As Julia Kristeva asserted:

People who turn back to origins are people who don't know how to metabolise or sublimate their hate, they are wounded people, depressed people; and because they no longer have ideals--religion does not satisfy them, nor does Marxism, and not other providential ideology can come to their rescue--they turn towards the archaism of the origin.

The exaltation of origins and of archaic folk values can take violent forms because one wants an enemy; ...the enemy will be the other: the other ethnic group, the other nation, the scapegoat and so on.⁴¹

Religion offers outlets for omnipotence, by providing the high moral ground (it unifies a fragmented ego) that then enables participants to engage in atrocities of which they might not otherwise be capable. When psychic unity is the goal, and gendered renegotiation is the means, myths of redemption and salvation become lethal. Ambivalence or complexity is renounced, and the paranoid/schizoid position is adopted.

All our own negativity is projected into the enemy, justifying whatever measures we take. Denial of responsibility, refusal of complexity (splitting), and contempt for *Others* becomes normative. We *fragment* into compartments, such as military and *domestic* and accord different ethical standards to each. We indulge omnipotent fantasies such *making the earth safe*, or *cleansing it from evil*. We set up (or agree to our governments setting up) *paranoid defences* even though in a nuclear and terrorist world, no defence is realistic or possible. As in perversions, we turn a blind eye to the outcomes of our activities, or to those military manoeuvres carried out on behalf of our *values, democracy*, or whatever other legitimating words we use to cover atrocities. When these are coupled with the military means to achieve objectives the vicious circle is complete.

For all these reasons, religious practitioners who remain unconscious of their own and their congregation's violent propensities can be extremely dangerous. As we will see below, the *Peace Process* in Ireland moved forward only when a radical shift took

place from *principles* to *pragmatism*. Religious practitioners, anxious to deconstruct imperatives toward violence, must learn the necessary skills required to direct their people from basic assumption dynamics to formulating a *positive aim*, typical of work groups.

Basic assumption groups often focus on the *why* of traditional theodicies, and comfort themselves with precipitous answers to complex questions concerning meaning, life and death. While these are never irrelevant, work groups focus not on *why* but on *what*.

Focussing on the practical aims particular communities wish to achieve can serve radically to undercut psychic fantasies that run riot and focus instead on immediate issues of justice and community well being. In that sense, work groups often echo the prophets exhorting their people to comfort the widows and orphans and to take the nasty smells of burnt sacrificial offerings out of their nostrils.⁴²

Academics must also take scholarly risks in the attempt to understand the complexity of the variables involved. Feminist scholars in religion, who deconstruct the most sacrosanct theological texts and doctrines to subvert their potential for violence against the earth, women and children, are already engaged in this process.

The analysis of theological motifs is intended to be at a phenomenological rather than ontological level. In other words, the critique is not of divinity as such, but of the patriarchal sacred as it serves the mechanisms of patriarchal power. Such analysis cannot stop at *beliefs*. The *performance* of unconscious psychic issues, especially as they take shape in religious form must also become the focus of investigation.

However, Kristeva's critique of *origins* is crucial. Theology faculties spend enormous amount of time and resources excavating *pristine origins*. Like basic assumptions groups, they focus on the past. The Irish situation only moved forward when the main players began to focus, not on the past, but on the future. Likewise, religious studies must shift to asking how the visions of their founders can best be realised in contemporary circumstances, especially insofar as they embrace the challenge of peace making.

2. Reclaiming Abjection

Religions often specialise, through cultic rituals, in dealing with *abjection*, bodily or psychic. Hierarchical power depends on keeping separate worlds apart: the profane from the sacred; the pure from the abject. However, abjection is often displaced onto our enemies, who become *dirty, impure, uncivilized* as a result of our projections.

Yet for generations, Hebrew and Christian prophets have cried out for *mercy* not *sacrifice*. Mercy, (as we see in the Christian gospels) actively deconstructs the scapegoating imperative, not least as it operates against women. The essence of *mercy* is that of reclaiming abjection.

The Northern Irish paramilitaries were clearly abject, and the success of the Peace Process necessitated the reclaiming of projected abjection onto the *Others*. Acknowledging complexity, and reclaiming abjection became imperative.

Hanna Segal, one of Klein's main interpreters, claims that, *we are all only partly sane* and placed in certain circumstances primitive mechanisms can erupt.⁴³ Likewise, whereas Freud had drawn sharp lines between health and psychoses, Klein developed a more integrated model of analysis where health and illness are on a continuum: one or the other becomes possible under specific circumstances.⁴⁴

For the constitutional governments of Britain and Southern Ireland, entering the *Peace Process*, and negotiating with those formerly considered *totally abject*, entailed recognizing the horrific circumstances that had led to such desperate measures. *Circumstances* would have to be put alongside *principles* if movement was to take place.

Bridges would have to be built and some outstanding clergy and politicians played a major role. Several Roman Catholic priests who spearheaded the *Peace Process*, like the prophets before them, reached out those who were considered *abject* and the result of their efforts was momentous. An outstanding politician, John Hume, a democratic nationalist and one of the founders of the Social and Democratic Labour Movement of Northern Ireland (SDLP) played a major (if furtive and dangerous) role in mediation. His work led to a meeting where Gerry Adams (Sinn Féin leader) was in the same room as the President of Ireland. At that meeting, President Mary Robinson *shook the hand* of Gerry Adams. Her action unleashed political fury all over Ireland, but symbolically, it *redeemed* Adams' state of abjection and enabled further dialogues to take place.

Political commentators tend to respond to terrorist atrocities in language that further serves the *Othering* of enemies and simply continues the cycle of violence. Those involved in conflict resolution need to be aware of the mechanisms of abjection/projection, and actively seek for means to intervene, both politically and symbolically.

Women who traditionally have been *abject* must recognise these processes and intervene, deconstruct and complicate the picture. Likewise, reclaiming abjection (primarily of women's bodies) has been an important part of feminism. Reclaiming social abjection through active feminist cultural labour, wherever it is manifested, is but a logical next step.⁴⁵

3. Religious leadership

As we have seen, some religious officials had difficulty challenging the language of the hunger strikers, possibly because this would also have radically undercut the theological assumptions of the sacrificial social contract. Their inability could also be attributed to the roots of such language in their own infant trauma of which they had yet to become conscious.

Religions often provide potent *defence mechanisms* against conscious awareness. They also sublimate and mediate psychic trauma to enable apparently normal functioning. However, given the potency of religion in war situations, such unconsciousness on the part of religious officiants is now morally problematic.

Even if terrorisms feed on fundamentalist religious themes and mythologies, in this paper I have argued that the underlying psychic processes are more extensive than religion and will not be diminished with religion's demise. Religions have not invented the dynamics of violence, guilt, or misogyny. If anything, ethically based religion can often provide the ethical container countering group excess. In advanced secular capitalism, such containers are often absent and the naked quest for control of land and resources goes unchecked. As Roger Money-Kyrle argued, reflecting on the rise of Nazism: *Now it can be no accident that a decline in religion has been accompanied by a recrudescence of political ideologies, each promising if in a less exaggerated and more prosaic form, a restored and better world.*"⁴⁶

The relationship between religion and warfare, therefore, is not simple, but nor is it innocent. A vital part of training for religious practitioners must now become that of understanding their own unconscious processes and also understanding group dynamics in their congregations and offering strategies of intervention once communities perceive themselves threatened and begin to adopt the paranoid/schizoid position.

4. The Role of Feminism

Joshua Goldstein claims that no evidence exists that women are any less violent than men in war situations, and the evidence from Northern Ireland supports his contention. For both men and women, unconscious fantasies take over and literally run riot. Often in war situations when communities are under threat, women collapse the claims of feminism to those of ethnicity or nationalism. In the First World War, for instance, many feminists abandoned the claims of feminism in favour of those of nationalism. Likewise, whereas men split between good and bad mothers, women also split, but the *good mother* for women is often a uniformed heroic man who embodies her own thwarted desire for agency.⁴⁷

However, self-conscious women *can* make a difference. The recent *Troubles in Northern Ireland* coincided with the recent wave of feminism since 1968. Women's groups in Derry and Belfast were formed to deal with common problems in a war context. The groups had various levels of political awareness but with the formation of the *Women's Coalition* in 1996 and the election of two members (one from each side of the traditional divides) to the legislative assembly, feminist input into the political arena became a real possibility. In Marx's terms, many women moved from being *women in themselves* to becoming *women for themselves*.⁴⁸ In this process, it would be hard to underestimate women's roles in challenging the old divisions, undermining seemingly principled rigidities, and effectively, further undermining the legitimization strategies of both sides.

Republicans had long contested the legitimacy of the Northern Irish State: likewise, the refusal to grant *political status* effectively contested the legitimacy of the

Republican struggle. In order to move forward, both the British and Irish Governments (although, seldom explicitly) had to come to the same conclusions.

To maintain legitimacy, a sacrificial social contract depends on maintaining the illusion of moral rectitude underpinned by rigid principles, preferably those inscribed into law (even those laws achieved by prior violence). Underlying such apparent objectivity and aperspectivity (as feminists know well) often lie deep injustices.⁴⁹ Such apparent *principled* rigidity can be a form of legal omnipotence, and lead to political stalemate.

One incident in Northern Ireland, carried out by dissident Republicans, threatened to bring down the Peace Process. All the *legitimate* government agencies called for legal principles to be upheld and the *Peace Process* to be collapsed. The then British Secretary (and feminist), Dr. Mo Mowlam, (supported by the Women's Coalition and a small radical Loyalist party (Progressive Ulster Unionists) famously announced that (despite this dissident aberration) the Agreement had been honoured *in the round*. Her stance endorsed what observers had recognized was a shift from rigid principles to pragmatism, this time at the highest level of constitutional government.

Dr. Mowlam was widely denounced, not least by those whose *principles* had ensured unjust conditions in Northern Ireland. But her statement marked another momentous political change understandable in Kleinian terms.

Parents know that an infant's omnipotent struggle is not easily alleviated. Squashing a child leads to long-term resentment rather than maturity: negotiation becomes the only way forward. Secondly, much as parents use *intuitive identification* to understand an infant's anguished cries in the night, (does it want to be fed, changed or comforted?) intuitive identification with the other, rather than playing Scrabble with legal principles often becomes the only way forward.

Dr. Mowlam knew the radical osmosis that had taken place among Republicans and other former paramilitaries. She knew of the best efforts being made by the leadership to maintain progress. In Kleinian terms, (whether consciously or not) she used maternal *containment* to enable the process to move forward.

Klein's work highlights the fact that childhood, far from being an idyllic pastoral scene, is often fraught with trauma, conflict, envy, jealousy, murderous aggression, and intractable oppositions. Merely to survive, parents have to develop the most sophisticated conflict resolution skills. The experience of Northern Ireland would suggest that theorising such skills and applying them in the public world might offer enormous insights into the political process.

5. Religion, Gender, and War

Women may not be *naturally peaceful* as early feminists had hoped or claimed, but in this analysis, we can see that war is not gender neutral. On the contrary, as well as the countless numbers of women and children who now constitute the prime victims of warfare, warfare actively re-inforces and rejuvenates male political hegemony, the sacrificial social order.

For many feminist scholars war is simply 'politics by other means'. The recent editors of a collection on *September 11th*, asked such question as, *when does the war begin?* Does it begin when the Taliban lock Afghani women up in their homes, or in *domestic violence*? Does it only begin when armies invade a foreign territory? In Northern Ireland, although women campaigned to have their male relatives released from prison, they also expressed dread at the thought of their coming home where the often-violent marital relations would be resumed.⁵⁰

Related to this is the question, *what counts as war?* Throwing a terrorist bomb into a crowded street visibly kills people and can be represented on international media. Whole populations slowly starving, or the daily deaths of innocent children from grinding poverty and ill health does not count as war. As the editors ask: *who is doing the counting?*⁵¹ What are the gendered implications?

Mythological studies show us that at the heart of Western identity there is a scapegoat, the (M)Other against whom I forge my Self and at whose expense identity is achieved. Given Klein's version of our psychic history, we can see that the primary *Other* will usually be female, or represented as female (feminised enemies). Under certain conditions, all the mechanisms of omnipotence, projection, introjection, and splitting come into play and the externalised *Other* becomes the legitimate target of my hatred.

In Northern Ireland the sadistic hyper masculine posture of conventional warfare was replaced with a masochistic hyper feminine posture of the prisoners. With few exceptions, sexual war crimes played no part in the last thirty years of political and armed struggle. Interned political prisoners agreed that there would be no pornography in jail.

The sacred world, the semiotic, is the psychic field of the Mother. Therefore, whereas killing or maiming the enemy is inevitable, terrorists usually uphold strict rules of sexual conduct. Terrorist legitimacy derives from their desperate efforts to establish their righteous relations within this field. Control of *their* women usually accompanies terrorism, underpinned by the most fundamentalist interpretations of religious texts.

In terrorist warfare, underpinned by mythologies of *self-sacrifice*, especially where cultures have been subjected to colonial or imperial humiliation, masculinity is often damaged or much less secure. Establishing a high moral ground, or secure point of identity becomes the aim which is achieved effectively by controlling the bodies of women, and by denigrating and persecuting anyone (homosexuals) who threatens rigid gender boundaries. Sexual purity rather than sexual triumph is normative.

In conventional warfare sexual triumph over women is the norm and is explicitly celebrated. But since the strategies of religious and political fundamentalists are essentially *female*, fundamentalist regimes usually enforce the subordination of women, and the denigration or persecution of anyone (homosexuals) who threatens rigid gender boundaries. Securing such boundaries by controlling female bodies both symbolises and establishes a grammar of fundamentalism that is inter-religious and international.

Fundamentalist regimes often attempt to uphold their regressive practices toward women on the grounds of *ethnicity*, *religious freedom* or *human rights*. In addition, religions often enjoy immunity from equality legislation, probably because of the unconscious awareness of how such religions legitimate the patriarchal assumptions at the heart of statehood. Feminist legal scholars must now be assisted in their efforts to explore and deconstruct the connections.⁵²

6. The Question of Representation

Melanie Klein spoke of reparative strategies typical of the mother/infant relationship. The infant engages in attacks, phantasied or otherwise, on the mother's body, but, fears disintegration or retaliation. Unconscious guilt, and the strategies of reparation that accompany it play a major role in this dynamic, and often remain with us for the rest of our lives, feeding various religious fantasies.

In Christian theology, according to Julia Kristeva, such reparation is directed toward God the Father, enabling the unconscious erasure of the mother from salvation history, and achieving the foundation of paternal law.⁵³ The strategy enables the paternal law to supersede the dangerous maternal semiotic energies, but also succeeds in permanently exiling women from culture, except insofar as they serve to uphold the status quo, preferably by becoming *as men*.

Since the sacrificial dynamics and legitimating strategies of both conventional and terrorist warfare foster and depend on mythological religion, not surprisingly, in religious traditions based on sacrifice, women are not permitted to be religious officaries. The exclusion of women from significant participation in all the major religions has widespread implications that go way beyond church practice. Political and religious agencies often work hand in hand. Furthermore the strategies outlined here point to a grammar of political relationships that is inter-religious and international.

The presence or absence of women in systems of representation does not automatically correlate either with the liberation or denigration of women: the variables are extremely complex. Nonetheless, given the analysis here, the effects of exclusively male systems of representation (such as an all male Trinity) must be interrogated for their psychic effects as they impinge upon the possible agency of sexed subjects.

7. The Maternal Debt

Patriarchal culture thrives on the defiance of death and on spurious means to transcend death. Meanwhile, the weapons of mass destruction threaten the future of civilisation itself.

The various quests for omnipotence are also attempts to supersede what theorists Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva refer to as the *maternal debt*. In different ways, traditional political theory, psychoanalysis, and philosophy has left Plato's cave (as it were) with never a backward glance or an attempt to theorize the maternal container, to honour the earth on which we stand, or to pay the maternal debt.⁵⁴ One commentator on the Irish situation formulated the issue as follows:

Hunger striking, when taken to the death, has a sublime quality about it; in conjunction with terrorism it offers a consummation of murder and self-sacrifice, which in a sense can legitimise the violence, which precedes and follows it. If after killing — or sharing in a conspiracy to kill — for a cause one shows oneself willing to die for the same cause, a value is adduced which is higher than that of life itself. But the obverse is also true: To scream for mercy at the foot of the gallows — or nod at the saline drip as kidneys and eyes collapse and the doctor warns of irreversible damage — is to affirm that there is no higher value than life and none more worth of condemnation than those who take it.⁵⁵

The Irish hunger strikers had attempted to supersede any maternal debt, any reliance on *mere life* (in Hegel's terms) for the sake of their political objectives. As another commentator wrote:

Martyrdom forged an organic connection between succeeding generations of heroes; separatism was apotheosised as the national aspiration. National identity was endowed with transcendent attributes. It was not something utilitarian that could be traded in the marketplace of politics, it was a "spiritual thing" the nation "a thing inviolate and inviolable, a thing that a man dare not see or dishonour on pain of eternal perdition."⁵⁶

In the economy of sacrifice, violent chosen death always supersedes that of mere ordinary mothers. According to theorist, Nancy Jay:

The only action that is as serious as giving birth, which can act as a counterbalance to it, is killing. This is one way to interpret the common sacrificial metaphors of birth and rebirth, or birth done better, on purpose and on a more spiritual, more exalted level than mothers do it.⁵⁷

The Northern Irish situation has shown that sacrificial dynamics can be deconstructed. It remains, however, for us to replace such death oriented cultural projects with those based on natality, a project first outlined by Hanna Arendt.⁵⁸

Conclusions

The current struggle in Ireland has lasted since 1968. Over 3,500 women, men and children, have been killed and thousands more have been maimed. The Provisional IRA are now part of the Peace Process and have changed from seeing themselves only as victims to becoming active agents; from mythical ideals, they pursue strategic objectives; from reaction they now take pro-action; from confrontation, they have moved into *management*; from rigid beliefs based on the past, they are now beginning

to imagine a new future. Collectively they could be said to have entered Klein's *depressive position*.

However, the Provisional IRA are now, in turn, being undermined by the *Real IRA*, those holding out for a United Ireland, if necessary, to be achieved through violent means. Not surprisingly, instead of the maternal debt, the gift of life itself, they regularly appeal to the *debt we owe to the hunger strikers* to legitimate their cause. In recent elections, significant shifts again took place when two former extremist parties now found themselves with majorities in the Assembly. Former bitter enemies, Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), trading on their heroic and intransigent reputations, now hold majorities, a fact that is (ironically) further enabling psychic change from victim to agent.

Huge lessons can and have been learned in the process, one in which both the British and U.S. Governments played crucial roles. Sadly, however, they appear to have learned little from that experience. In Ireland they had little to lose and much to gain by enabling the Peace Process to move forward. Could it be now that the Eastern oil rich fields, or the threat of the withdrawal of such a crucial breast, pose such a psychic threat that in their current activities in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere they appear to have regressed once again to the paranoid/schizoid position?

Should this be the case, the work of cultural and religious theorists becomes ever more necessary and vital: moreover, the work of conscious feminism has hardly even begun.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*. (Paris: Seuil, 1980) trans. Leon Roudiez as *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.58.

² Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ See collection in *Civilization, War and Death* ed. John Rickman, (Hogarth Press, 1968).

⁴ See *The Writings of Melanie Klein*. 4 vols. (New York: Delacorte/Syemour Lawrence, 1975). Vol. 1 *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works, 1921-1945*; vol. 11 *The Psychoanalysis of Children* trans. Alix Strachey; vol. 111 *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963*; vol. IV *The Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of Psychoanalysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten-Year-Old Boy*. See Julie Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* trans. Ross Guberman (Columbia: 2001), for full bibliography.

⁵ R. E. Money-Kyrle *Psychoanalysis and Politics: A Contribution to the Psychology of Politics and Morals* London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1951.

⁶ W.R. Bion, *Experiences in Groups and Other Papers* (New York: Basic Books, 1961).

⁷ D. W. Winnicott, *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958).

⁸ Hanna Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972-1995* ed. and introd. John Steiner, London: Routledge, 1997; Jacqueline Rose, *Why War? Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Blackwell, 1993).

⁹ Cf. W. Bion, "Group dynamics — A Review," in eds. M. Klein et. Al *New Directions in Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1956, 1977). Maria Grazia Minetti, "In search of the mirror: fusion and differentiation in women's groups," in *The Lonely Mirror: Italian Perspectives on Feminist Theory*, Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono eds. London: Routledge, 1993. Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*. Trans. by Gillian C. Gill. New York: Columbia University Press. *Sexes et Parentés*. Paris: Minuit. 1987; Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. by Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. London: Athlone Press. (*Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* Paris: Minuit, 1984, 1993).

¹⁰ Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War*, p.147

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, "Woman's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). pp. 187-213, trans. Alice Jardine, and Harry Blake, p.200.

¹² Cf. Nancy Hartsock *Money, Sex, and Power* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983); Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford,CA: Stanford University Press, 1988).

¹³ "The primitive stage can always be re-established; the primitive is, in the fullest meaning of the word, imperishable. "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" in Rickman ed, p.11

¹⁴ William James, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (New York: Longman, Green, 1943).

11. Roger Caillois argues that "Taboos are demonstrably powerless to maintain the integration of nature and society. They are unable to restore it to its early youth. Rules do not possess any inherent principle capable of re-invigorating it. It is necessary to invoke the creative quality of the Gods, to return to the beginning of the world, and to resort to the powers which at that time transformed chaos into cosmos." Roger Caillois, *L'Homme et le Sacré* (Paris: Gallimard, 2nd ed. 1950), translated by Meyer Barash as *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, ILL: Free Press of Glencoe, 1950), with three added appendices on Sex, Play, and War. p.103, cf. also p.96.

¹⁶ Cf. Catherine Keller, "The Breast, the Apocalypse, and the Colonial Journey," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, (Spring 1994), vol.10, no. 1 . pp. 53-72

¹⁷ Cf. Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972-1995*.

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* cited in Ernst Jones, "War and Individual Psychology," in *Essays in Applied Psychoan-Analysis* vol. 1 (1915: London: Hogarth and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1951), p.67.

¹⁹ Freud argues that "the state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desired to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco." "Thoughts for the Times" p.4.

²⁰ Cf. Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred* trans. Jane Marie Todd, (Columbia University Press, 2001), p.8.

²¹ As Freud commented, the state does not forbid violence: the state simply monopolises its use in its own favour. "*The state has forbidden to the individual the practice of wrong-doing, not because it desired to abolish it, but because it desires to monopolize it, like salt and tobacco. ~the warring state permits itself every such misdeed, every such act of violence, as would disgrace the individual man.*" "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" pp. 4-5.

²² Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Patrick Pearse: The Triumph of Failure* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979).

²³ Cf. Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexics* (Chicago, 1985); Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

²⁴ Tim Pat Coogan, *On the Blanket: The H-Block Story* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1980).

²⁵ Cf. David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead: The story of the 1981 Irish hunger strike* (London: Grafton Books, 1987), p.41

²⁶ Beresford, *Ten Men Dead*, p.84

²⁷ Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave: The Irish Hunger Strikers and the Politics of Despair*, (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), pp.23-25

²⁸ Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* p.77.

²⁹ Martin Dillon, *God and the Gun: The Church and Irish Terrorism* (London: Orion, 1997), p.108; Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* p.77.

³⁰ Dillon, *God and the Gun* p.110. Cf. ff. 110-113.

³¹ Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* pp. 122-126.

³² Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* p.131-133.

³³ W. B. Yeats, *The Poems of W.B. Yeats* ed. Richard J. Finneran, (New York: Macmillan, 1983), p.181

³⁴ Cf. Richard Kearney, "Myth and Terror," *Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Hederman, (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982); Joseph O'Leary, "The Riddle of Sacrifice," in *Crane*

Bag Book of Irish Studies ed. Richard Kearney and Mark Hederman, (Dublin: Blackwater Press, 1982); Francis Shaw S.J. "The Canon of Irish History—a Challenge," *Studies* vol. 61, no. 242 (Summer, 1972), pp.113-153.

³⁵ Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* p. 130

³⁶ Cf. Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* 72, p.138ff, O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave* pp.120-127.

³⁷ O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave*, pp. 118-127.

³⁸ Cf. Kristeva, "The Politics of Kleinianism," in *Melanie Klein* pp.213-247.

³⁹ Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War*, p.147-148

⁴⁰ Franco Fornari, *The Psychoanalysis of War* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1975), p.xvii, Cited in Rose, *Why War?* p.34.

⁴¹ Julia Kristeva, Interview with Richard Kearney, in *Visions of Europe* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1992), p.100-102.

⁴² Hosea 6: 1-6; 1 Samuel, 15: 22-23; Matthew, 9:13.

⁴³ Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War* p.150.

⁴⁴ "Where Freud had proposed that, to produce the psychoses, the neuroses must be closed off or regressed from, Klein sees a spider's web of direct lines between normal ego development and psychosis. In Klein's theory the ego works with both the death and the life drive, fending off annihilation, moving towards integration; expressing envy, feeling gratitude. While in all senses using Freud's development of psychoanalysis, Klein changes the terrain and thereby changes the task". Juliet Mitchell, *The Selected Melanie Klein* (London: Penguin, 1991), p.32

⁴⁵ Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press, 1991).

⁴⁶ Cf. Money Kyrle, *Psychoanalysis and Politics*, p.175.

⁴⁷ Sometimes women split their *good mother* onto an idealized father figure whose rationality offers relief from the swings of despair. Men can identify with father figures who promise to place limits on the omnipotent fantasies attached to the mother. See Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Random House, 1988).

⁴⁸ On women's groups in Northern Ireland, see Marie Hammond-Callaghan, "Doing Women's Peace History in Northern Ireland," *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies* vol. 5. nos. 1 & 2 (2003): 63-76.

⁴⁹ Cf. Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰ See Eileen Fairweather, Roisin McDonagh and Melanie McFadyean, *Only The Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland: The Women's War* eds. (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

⁵¹ Cf. *September 11, 2001: Feminist Perspectives* eds. Susan Hawthorne and Bronwyn Winter, (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002).

⁵² See Mandhavi Sunder, "Piercing the Veil," *The Yale Law Journal* Vol. 112, April 2003, no. 6 pp. 1399-1472.

⁵³ Julia Kristeva argues that the Christian myth, "lays claim to the father, without wishing to know what he shared in common with his mother. The Kleinian child, phobic and sadistic, is the inner double of this visible and crucified man, his painful inside that is consumed by the paranoid fantasy of an omnipotent mother. That fantasy is one of a killing mother who must be killed, of an incarnate representative of female paranoia in which we discovered the projected paranoid schizophrenia of our primitive and feeble ego. The subject is nevertheless able to free himself from this mortifying depth, provided, that is, that he can work through it indefinitely until it becomes the only value we still have: the depth of thought. Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* trans. Ross Guberman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) pp.246-247.

⁵⁴ Cf. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1974), translated by Gillian C. Gill as *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁵⁵ David Beresford, *Ten Men Dead* p.39.

⁵⁶ Padraig O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave*, p. 137-138.

⁵⁷ Nancy Jay, "Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman", in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985): pp.283-309.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hanna Arendt *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), p.247