

Who owns the trauma? A Kleinian perspective on the dialogue between child protection social workers and the media

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ABSTRACT

The present paper makes use of the developmental model of movement between mental positions that was formulated by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, aimed at understanding the dialogue that takes place between the media and social workers in the field of child welfare, centring around incidents of murder within the family. The basic concept in the paper is that when working with children who are victims of abuse and with their parents, and when reporting on them as well, the feeling of personal control is severely undermined, being associated with the loss of the hallowed social value known as 'unconditional love of a parent for his child'. The paper illustrates these theoretical ideas by describing two cases that took place in Israel and recommendations are made regarding ways of promoting the dialogue between the professions.

INTRODUCTION

Incidents of violence towards children within the family have forever hit the headlines because of the human drama they involve, a chief component of which is the shock elicited by violation of the basic value of 'unconditional love', by parents, towards their children (Grabosky & Wilson 1989). Despite the general public and media awareness that child protection involves difficult, stressful and at times even dangerous work (Goddard & Sounders 2001), social workers – particularly in cases where they are unsuccessful in protecting children from parental violence – are often portrayed in the media one-dimensionally, as a threat to children's lives, one that is at times even greater than that of the violent parents themselves (Franklin & Parton 1991). The negative image of child protection social workers is cultivated by the use of expressions that depict them on the one hand as bullies – child stealers and abusers of authority – and on the other as incompetent, indecisive and reluctant to intervene (Ayre 2001).

A fairly large number of papers have been written to date on this subject, most of them documenting 'media

frames' of such incidents (Kitzinger & Skidmore 1995), in which the media is instrumental in creating a public atmosphere of fear, blame and lack of confidence regarding the job done by social workers in the sphere of child protection (Ayre 2001); in describing the way social workers perceive their public image in the media; in criticizing their tendency to react defensively when they do not succeed in protecting children (Tower 2000; Zugazaga *et al.* 2006); and even in offering practical advice on how to face the media in a firmer manner (Ayre 2001; Rosental-Gelman & Tosone 2010). Eileen Munro's report (Munro 2011) on the British child protection system and the reforms she proposed therein refer, among other things, to the importance of developing a dialogue between social workers and the media. Cooper (2014) refers to these recommendations from a socio-psychological perspective and suggests that the emotionally indigestible facts of child torture and murder may be associated with a difficulty in establishing a secure discourse in society in general.

At the same time, no attempt has been made, to the best of our knowledge, to understand the unconscious psychological process that leads to the difficulty in

establishing a secure discourse between the two professions – the media on the one hand, and social workers in the field of child welfare on the other.

The present paper makes use of a developmental model constructed by Melanie Klein (1946), and is aimed at gaining an understanding of the verbal discourse that takes place between the professions. It should be noted that although the model constitutes a frequent tool for diagnosing and evaluating interpersonal relations in a wide range of stressful life situations (Baum 2005), no use has been made of it to date, to understand the relationship between professions in general, and between social workers and the media in particular. The paper maintains that if we view the dialogue between social workers and the media as analogous to the process that Melanie Klein and some of her followers have identified in the infant's first year of life (Segal 1979; Ogden 1990a) we should be better able to understand not only the nature of this dialogue, but also the manner in which a different type of dialogue could develop. Following a short review of the theory, two cases that took place in Israel, which illustrate these theoretical ideas will be described.

KLEINIAN THEORY OF DEVELOPMENT

Melanie Klein (1940, 1946) presented a developmental model of movement between two mental positions. The first she called the paranoid–schizoid position and the second the depressive position. In the schizo-paranoid position, which according to Klein is characteristic of the first stage of life, the infant experiences anxiety over his very existence around possible physical and mental fragmentation. This anxiety results in a need to protect the good parts that make up the self and discard any mental experience that is perceived as a potential danger to the self's integrity. It is what underlies the use of defence mechanisms such as splitting, projection, denial and projective identification. When the infant who functions in this mental position feels unsatisfied, the object caring for him is experienced as bad, cruel and frustrating; when the infant feels satisfied, the object caring for him is experienced as good and nourishing. In other words, the infant acting in the framework of a schizo-paranoid position does not experience a relationship with an object that has both frustrating and satisfying traits, but rather with a split object – one who is either entirely good or entirely bad. In parallel, a split also exists in the infant's experience of self. Splitting as a defence that is typical of this stage is

accompanied by the massive use of projection as a defence. Every negative self experience, such as anger, aggression, greed and destruction, is projected onto the object experienced as bad.

A defence mechanism having a unique role in the framework of the schizo-paranoid position is projective identification. This is a defence means used by the infant in early life to discard intolerable mental experiences by projecting them onto the mother. For example, an infant who feels hate projects that feeling onto the mother and then experiences her rather than himself as being dangerous. Later theoreticians, such as Bion (1962) and Ogden (1990b), who pursued Klein's theoretical concepts, emphasized the fact that projective identification could potentially serve not only as a means for removing intolerable mental experiences, but also for communication between the infant and his mother, to whom the projective content is directed. In a normal state, in which the infant projects his own insupportable experience onto the person of his mother, she can sense his distress or, in Bion's (1962) words, absorb the toxic matter into herself, allow the matter to dwell in her person without being overcome by the terror that could be associated with it, and enable the infant to feel that the element threatening him from within is no longer inside him, but is now contained in her. After the mother recovers from the terror that was embedded in her, she is expected to process the experience and return it to the infant in a form that is no longer toxic. This process allows the infant over time to learn to take proprietorship over his unbearable mental experiences and contain them, without needing to project them onto the mother, thus paving the way to a more mature psychological position – referred to by Klein as the depressive position.

Klein (1946) suggested that the combination of more maturing natural elements and the accumulation of positive experiences with the object (the mother) is what allows the infant to rely more on reality and less on his own harsh fantasies. As part of this process, the infant projects less toxic elements onto the object. Once the object is experienced as less threatening, the infant's aggression towards it decreases. Even the need to split between positive and negative parts of the self and the object lessens and the infant shifts to a more integrative perception (Temperley 2001). The depressive position thus involves an increasing ability to perceive the self and the other as complex objects, except that this knowledge leads the infant to realize that when he attacks the mother's bad parts, he is liable to harm her good parts as well and consequently lose her. And

the anxiety over losing the object leads to an effective reaction of depression. The central experience characterizing this position is that perception of reality is not one-dimensional, but depends on the interpretation given it by the infant.

One of the basic principles in the Kleinian theory is that position is not only a developmental stage, but a set of senses and emotional states through which we experience, colour and relate to ourselves, to the object and to the world. A switch from one position to another takes place all the time, every minute of the day and throughout a lifetime.

APPLICATION OF KLEINIAN THEORY TO THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SOCIAL WORKERS AND THE MEDIA

Incidents of violence towards children within the family in general, and those that end in murder in particular, are traumatic events that contain all the vital elements for functioning from a schizo-paranoid position. Social workers are helpless in the face of the feeling that they have failed to protect children from violence on the part of their parents. And media authorities are at a loss when confronted by the need to grant helpless victims a voice while giving expression to the feeling of helplessness on the part of the victims' relatives and the general public. Media figures attempt to discard feelings of helplessness and terror – perceived as a potential danger to their physical and mental integrity – by projecting them beyond their personal and professional turf and defining through 'media frames': who is the victim, who is the attacker, who must be supported and who must be denounced (Goddard 1996). These 'media frames' exacerbate the split between the victim (the good guy) and the media figures who are letting his voice be heard (the good guys) on the one hand, and the injurious parent (the bad guy) and the social workers in the field of child welfare who did not safeguard the children from parental violence (the bad guys) on the other. These frames are reinforced through statements such as: 'They failed when they let him see the child'; 'They did not heed the cries of the mother'; 'They are defending themselves against attacks by the family'; 'Where were the welfare services when the children did not have anything to eat?' Or in statements such as: 'Social workers always blame the lack of budget, they never take responsibility'.

This review is also of a nature that can create fertile ground for professional relations between the media and social workers based on projective identification.

The feeling of oppression experienced by social workers is intensified when they are attacked by the media after being struck by the trauma of their charges, preventing them from processing the toxic matter that was projected onto them and returning it to the media and the public domain it represents in a bearable manner, or in the words of Bion (1962), through containment. Instead, the reaction of social workers generally ranges on a scale from bowing their heads in the face of the attack and defeated acceptance of being stigmatized as the ones who failed in their duty; through an attempt to get rid of the badness projected onto them and direct it to other elements; to a failure to react based on the expectation that the anger will die down in a few days and the media will busy itself with its next newsworthy story.

This is most evident in media interviews with social workers in the immediate wake of a murder in the family, when the interviewer asks: 'Where were the welfare services?' The social worker replies: 'I did my best – home visits, reports, I did not imagine that this is what would happen'. Paradoxically, this reaction endorses the negative professional image of social workers. In other cases, they react by projecting the toxic matter beyond the boundaries of their professional self, e.g. 'We were not the ones who allowed the father to see the children, it was the psychiatrist'. At times they react with disengagement, but it is their initial reaction that reinforces the negative image of social workers in their own eyes and in the eyes of the public, although it does allow a certain breather with respect to the media, which has identified a container in which to project the terror experienced. The two reactions mentioned earlier, characterized by non-assimilation of terror-evoking matter, intensifies the anger of the other party, which increases its attacks on the social workers.

In order to shift to the more mature depressive position, both the media and the social workers must take responsibility for their horrifying experiences, name them and grant them recognition; only then will it be possible to mitigate the intensity of the emotion, to realize where they erred in their respective spheres by failing to act or report, without erasing the good parts. According to Klein (1940), this is an important moment, difficult and hurtful; even more significantly, however, it is a moment of communicative dialogue. Such dialogue cannot take place in the eye of the storm, but only after a certain period of time has elapsed from the event, when the need to split between the bad and the good – a mechanism that helps in situations of unbearable anxiety – dulls in

favour of a more integrative vision. However, in contrast to the dialogue that takes place between people overcome with strong emotions in other walks of life, such as couples going through a divorce (Baum 2005), the dialogue between the media and social workers generally takes place when the human drama is at its height. Once the curtain closes on the scene, there is no longer any discourse: reality dictates the return of the social workers to their difficult routine, which is less riveting from the point of view of coverage, and the media switch to the next news story. Moreover, when there is virtually no dialogue between the professions based on a balance between pleasant and less pleasant experiences, no history of discourse is created founded on mutual respect, empathy and acceptance of responsibility for the experiences and their interpretation. This paradoxical reality results in the repeated reconstruction of a one-dimensional dialogue without the ability to move easily between the positions described by Klein.

What follows is a description of two different types of dialogue between social workers and the media, through which we attempt, using concepts from Kleinian theory, to explain the factors inhibiting dialogue between the professions from a depressive position and those factors that could advance such dialogue.

The two dialogues took place in Israel in 2010. That year marked a string of six difficult years in which 36 children were murdered by their parents. The first dialogue between the professions took place after a father killed his three children as an act of revenge against his divorced wife, and was characterized as being fixed in a schizo-paranoid position. The second dialogue between the professions took place after a mother strangled her two daughters to death, and this dialogue was characterized by a clever switch from the schizo-paranoid to the depressive position.

DIALOGUE 1: MURDER OF THE BEN-DROR CHILDREN – DIALOGUE FROM THE SCHIZO-PARANOID POSITION

One of the more traumatic incidents involving the murder of children by their parents occurred in Israel in July 2010. Itay Ben-Dror (38) stabbed to death his three children, Omer (10), Roni (8) and Or (5), in the early hours of the morning. The children were at the time staying with their father while their mother, Lilach, Itay's divorced wife, was celebrating her birthday. The shocking incident took place on a Saturday, a

day on which public services in Israel do not operate, so that the welfare services had only skeleton staff on duty to attend to emergency cases and no spokespersons. On receiving the news of the murder the staff that day were required to attend to the family and at the same time respond to the tough questions put to them by the media. Responses to the media questions had to be worded not only hastily, but also under the restriction of the Social Workers Law that information on social workers' clients is classified. The media was being fed with a barrage of information on the unfolding of events, both from the mother's family and from other professional agencies involved in handling the case, including the police and Red Magen David (the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross), to which no restriction of confidentiality applied. Thus the first voices that were heard following the factual reporting on the incident were those of the mother's family. They were quoted by Israeli journalists as having said: 'The welfare workers are to blame for everything. They pressured her about the father having the right to see the children, even though the writing was on the wall' (Aschenazy & Nahmani 2010).

It was only later that day that a response was received from the Welfare Department of the Kfar Yona Local Authority stating: 'The Kfar Yona Local Authority expresses its profound shock and regret over this criminal act. The social services workers have laboured intensively in caring for the mother and children. The children met with their father in coordination with the mental health system and under the supervision of social workers' (Aschenazy & Nahmani 2010). This laconic announcement was drowned by the feeling of terror and shock that had gripped the family and the public in general. At this stage, there was clear finger-pointing at the guilty parties by the major media establishments in Israel. The headlines in the daily newspaper Maariv screamed: 'And they let him look after the children' (Prisko 2010). The daily newspaper Yediot Aharonot posed the following question without adding a question mark: 'How did they let him be with them'. The response of the welfare staff was relegated in the same newspaper to two paragraphs on the obituaries page' (Prisko 2010). The website 'ynet', the online version of the newspaper Yediot Aharonot, reported that: 'The welfare services were trying to defend themselves by insisting that they had done their duty during the course of their care on the case, claiming that they had relied on a psychiatric opinion received from the hospital in which the father had been treated' (Ben Zur 2010a). The daily Israel Hayom, the paper with the widest circulation in the

country, printed the most quoted response from the welfare services: 'We acted in accordance with the law' (Ezer *et al.* 2010).

On the very same day, the media began speaking on behalf of the victims, as seen in the statement by a Maariv reporter: 'What Omer, Roni and Or went through in the moments they were being stabbed to death only Itay Ben-Dror, their father, can know. He is the only one who knows if they woke up, if they screamed for help, tried to resist, perhaps begged to have their lives spared. Why, he is their father. He is supposed to listen to his children's pleas. What do they know, these little children, about his mental illness? About the fact that their mother tried to scream their scream and convince the Kfar Yona Welfare Department not to allow him to be alone with the three children? But nobody listened to her' (Paz-Melamed 2010).

Later that day, when the welfare services stood silent in the face of the media attacks, it was announced that against the backdrop of a complaint lodged by the police and the mother's family, according to which the welfare services had failed in caring for the family – causing Itay Ben-Dror to murder his three small children – the Minister of Welfare issued an order to set up a committee of inquiry to investigate the conduct of the welfare services, with members picked from various disciplines, including professionals in other fields. Heading the committee would be the Director General of the Ministry. The minister made it clear that the committee would be asked to submit its conclusions within a short period of time, adding that full transparency would be ensured in bringing its findings to the attention of the public. According to him, 'The children of Israel woke up this morning to a day harsher than ever in the wake of the serious and shocking incident and the severe anxieties that accompany it' (Gadot 2010). When the welfare staff visited the mother in her home, the feeling among the public was that the father who had committed an act of madness in a moment of insanity might have been the murderer, but those who had defaulted by not preventing him from carrying out the act were the social workers.

The murder of the Ben-Dror children is an example of how anxiety and a feeling of loss of control when confronted by a violation of the basic value of unconditional love of parents for their children can lead to the need to define through media frames who is the victim, who is the attacker and who must be denounced. When the social workers did not respond in a timely manner to the attacks by the family on the

welfare staff who had failed in their job, the media continued to sharpen its focus by means of splitting and projection mechanisms on the aggression, violence and evil beyond the boundaries of its profession; it did so through the headlines it chose, through creation of a disproportion between the story told by the family and the response of the social workers who had been involved in handling the case, and through the attempt to serve as a mouthpiece for the little victims who were no longer alive. When the social workers, who were themselves traumatized, tried to say that the father's soundness of mind, enabling him to meet with his children, had been determined by the psychiatrist who had treated him, they were perceived as attempting to project the unbearable terror on another entity and aroused even greater anger on the part of the media, who portrayed them as being on the defensive. The dialogue soon became one based on projective identification, with the Minister of Welfare announcing the setting up of a committee of inquiry. Even if in fact the intention was to ask objectively if there was a failure in the way the welfare services had handled the case, in practice this initiative was perceived as an acceptance of the responsibility and blame that was being projected onto the social workers. It is important to note that at a certain stage, the Ministry of Welfare staff were assigned a spokesman on behalf of the Union of Social Workers in Israel to guide them in facing the media. However, by this time, the initial impression had already been consolidated and the dialogue, which had begun from a schizo-paranoid position, did not succeed in developing to a position of a more communicative nature.

DIALOGUE 2: MURDER OF THE ALONI FAMILY GIRLS – FROM SCHIZO-PARANOID TO DEPRESSIVE POSITION

Just four months after Itay Ben-Dror murdered his three children, Michal Aloni (40) killed her two daughters, Natalie (6) and Roni (4). She phoned the father of the girls, from whom she had been divorced, in the afternoon, informed him that she has strangled her daughters to death and requested him to come to her apartment. The initial reports in the media had Amos Aloni, the father, confronting the social workers and calling them 'manure', claiming that he had telephoned the Welfare Department in Raanana local authority, on the morning of the murder and alerted them to the deficient care that the mother was giving his daughters. About the Welfare Department he said:

'It's just another office' (Channel 2 2010a). His voice, which echoed the words 'Why, why', was juxtaposed in the initial moments following the murder against the figure of the Director of the Welfare Department, who took responsibility, stating: 'The incident is a shocking one, a serious one. The family is indeed known to the welfare staff, was cared for with the utmost dedication and received every assistance. Members of the ministry and the municipality are at present by the side of the family and supporting them' (Ben Zur 2010b). But assuming responsibility in this way only exacerbated the attacks on the part of the family, with the electronic media quoting one of the female family members as saying that a committee of inquiry must be set up to investigate the conduct of the welfare services: 'They simply acted carelessly and did not see the danger', she said. 'All the warnings were on the wall. All the warnings were sounded, but the officers and welfare workers took no notice. The ones who are now paying the price are the two little girls, who are lying helpless' (Channel 2 2010a). In parallel, the media quoted the words of Lilach Shem Tov, the mother of the three children who had been killed by their father only four months earlier, who said, among other things: 'The people who are responsible for children's lives are not doing enough. Every murder can be prevented – there are no two ways about it, it is outrageous powerlessness, a clear social red light. Something fundamental must change' (Channel 2 2010a). Alongside this were heard the voices of parents whose children studied in the same school and kindergarten as the murder victims: 'The mother always appeared strange to us' (Channel 2 2010b), said the mother of a girl in the school. 'The girl too was not part of a group, and the mother herself was this kind of outsider. Something in her behaviour was not normal. Something about her distanced her from the company of adults' (Channel 2 2010b).

Marking of the 'media frame' was clear here too: the mother was not normal/was strange, the father and his family had warned that the girls were at high risk with her, and the social workers had once again failed in their job. The verbal expressions that were used for the social workers were at one with the hugeness of the terror that had overwhelmed the family and society, and clearly the media as well, which on their behalf screamed headlines like 'The father of the girls who were killed – "I warned them but nobody took any notice of me"'. Apparently the fate of the social workers, perceived as one large, amorphous body, had in this case too already been sealed, but once they had recovered somewhat from the trauma and the ensuing

media attacks, they decided to respond. They embarked on a well-thought out media battle that opened with the following statement:

The family was cared for in an intensive manner, at times daily, by social workers in the Social Services Department, against the backdrop of economic problems and problems relating to parental conduct on the part of the mother Michal, who at times did not send her daughters to school, kindergarten or after-school facilities. At this stage we are first and foremost directing our efforts at assisting the family, and all the relevant agencies are providing them with the necessary help.

Welfare personnel added:

During visits by social workers to her home, the mother behaved normally. Only two days ago she accompanied her daughter Natalie on a class outing, and no unusual events were noted during the course of the outing. In about ten days a professional meeting was due to be held with welfare and education authorities to examine the kind of care given the family.

Welfare staff also stated that after Michal and Amos were married, they lived with the grandmother in her home in Raanana, where the murder had taken place. They ended their statement by saying that 'despite the daily efforts made by social workers in the sphere of child welfare they have no way of knowing what goes on in the mind of a person and are certainly not able to prevent a moment of madness in which a parent decides to snatch his children's lives' (Goren *et al.* 2010).

The above response was an example of the manner in which anxiety and terror projected onto the social workers underwent a process of containment, or in other words, how projective identification became a means of communication between the media and social workers. In the first stage the social workers grasped the distress and accompanying intensity of emotion, let the distress dwell in their minds, and after recovering somewhat, verbalized the nameless terror in a manner that could be assimilated by the media and the public voice it represented. In responding the way they did, the welfare authorities took responsibility for the care they had given the family, related what they could in the framework of the confidentiality incumbent upon them about the extent of the mother's danger in their estimation, while at the same time mentioning that the mother did not live alone, but with her own mother and brother. They also referred to their limited capacity for control and the fact that they had no way of knowing what thoughts a person can harbour. This reaction set the stage for presenting a more complex image of the social

workers, as also that of the mother and the family: social workers are not irresponsible individuals who did nothing in the face of the alarms sounded by the family, but are professionals who had gone to great lengths to see that such an incident would not occur, although they had no way of predicting a moment of madness in which the mother decided to strangle her daughters to death. Paradoxically, the response was instrumental in conveying a more complex image of the killer mother too – it is true that she did not always send her daughters to school and kindergarten, but during home visits, she behaved normally, which was also the case when she accompanied the girls on an outing two days before the murder. The family, representing the voice that warned of danger in the initial media reports, was portrayed in the reaction of the social workers as including members who lived with the mother in the same house, prompting the question of whether they could not, in light of the danger they sensed, try to safeguard the girls more effectively. This reaction facilitated not only a more complex perspective of the personalities involved, but also pointed to the fact that it is not always possible to foresee traumatic events.

The above reaction was elicited only in the first stage of the media battle waged by the Welfare Department. A few days after the murder, the Director of the Welfare Department in Raanana, the local authority where the murder had taken place, initiated a request to Channel 2, Israel's largest commercial television channel, to appear during the evening news on Friday – a programme with a particularly high rating – and tell of the Sisyphean work put in daily by social workers, and the trauma and secondary traumatization with which they had to contend on a daily basis. This initiative and the report that was broadcast in its wake caused a complete turnaround in the attitude of the media and the public to the murder. It represented a total switch from the schizo-paranoid position that had characterized the starting point of the media coverage to the more mature depressive position.

The moderator opened his broadcast thus:

When something terrible happens we always look for the guilty party, and this is apparently part of human nature. This week, after Michal Aloni strangled to death her daughters, 6-year-old Natalie and 4-year-old Roni, in a narrow and shiningly spotless apartment in Raanana, everyone remarked almost automatically that the social workers in the municipal Welfare Department were to blame. Where were they, how did they not take notice, why did they not sound the alarm (schizo-paranoid position)? Except that these social workers have names and faces, and nobody trained them to prevent

murders. In general, how exactly did we want them to prevent the next murder when they are surrounded by mountains of files piling up on their desks and waiting outside their rooms is a long line of cases that never ends? (switch to the depressive position) (Channel 2 2010c).

The said report led to the initial signs of a dialogue between social workers and the media, and for the very first time, the media asked questions while also allowing the social workers their answers. The report evoked not only empathy, but also a certain sense of blame for the tendency on the part of the public to identify, through 'media frames', social workers as bearing sole responsibility for every murder that takes place. It may be said that the two responses described earlier led for the first time to what Klein called the depressive position.

DISCUSSION

The present paper makes use of the developmental model of movement between mental positions that was formulated by psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, aimed at understanding the dialogue that takes place between the media and social workers in the field of child welfare, centring around incidents of murder within the family. The basic concept in the paper is that when working with children who are victims of abuse and with their parents, and when reporting on them as well, the feeling of personal control is severely undermined, being associated with the loss of the hallowed social value known as 'unconditional love of a parent for his child'. Consequently, the starting point for a dialogue between social workers and the media is the schizo-paranoid position.

The terror that overruns the media leads to the determination of frames that define who is the victim, who is the attacker and who must be denounced. In their inability to contain the attack by the public and the media, the social workers project it onto another entity, say, the psychiatrist in the murder of the Ben-Dror children. Alternatively, they ignore the projected matter until passions cool. At times, social workers accept the blame that is heaped on them, as what ultimately happened in the case of the Ben-Dror murders, where the blame was pinned so firmly on the social workers that the Minister of Welfare decided to set up a committee of inquiry to examine their conduct. In such cases, a dialogue characterized by projective identification develops. The use of this defence mechanism, as also splitting and projection, are apparently inevitable in the initial stage following the trauma. It is the way in which parties succeed in

protecting the physical and mental integrity of the personal and professional self, but just as an infant must advance from the schizo-paranoid position to the depressive position, based on construction of a history of varied experiences with his mother, in order to fulfil his developmental potential, so also a switch to a more mature position based on a history of common experiences is necessary for relations between social workers and the media to develop. At the very least, relations between social workers and the media are not generally characterized by a switch between positions, and the passage of a few days after a murder within the family sees the media proceeding to the next story and the social workers returning to their routine. This situation, described in the first dialogue, fixes relations in the schizo-paranoid position.

The second dialogue described also began from the schizo-paranoid position, but as the social workers were ready to open up their inner domain and experience the pain and terror that were projected onto them, they transformed the immature mechanism of projective identification that had characterized the dialogue with the media directly after the murder into a mechanism of containment based on two-way communication. Through this process of containment, they succeeded in presenting to the media more complex facets of their work, of the killer mother and of the family. The initiative of the Director of the Welfare Department to appear on electronic media and relate the story of the Sisyphean work performed daily by the social workers led not only to the fact that the social workers acquired faces and names, but also that the media had become a receptacle for the huge load weighing down on the social workers. It afforded them recognition, and as a mediator between the social workers and the public, it succeeded in evoking feelings of empathy and perhaps even guilt for the disproportionate attack directed against social workers. It is important to state in this context that apart from the fact that the statement by the social work agency challenged the media and the public to truly move to the depressive position by accepting the reality that not every murder can be predicted, it is possible that another factor that enabled a switch to this position was the creation of what Cooper (2014) called a public symbolic framework to make sense of and mediate child murder and torture in our society.

The present paper has a number of limitations. The first is the fact that it is based on a theoretical model that was constructed in the context of relations between mothers and infants. Relations between social workers and the media are adult-based and an exact

correspondence does not necessarily exist with respect to the intensity of the anxieties, the defence mechanisms and the object relations described. Second, the paper is in principle theoretical and is based on claims regarding two dialogues, only as interpreted from the subjective viewpoint of the authors. In the future, it is worth trying to investigate the nature of the relations between social workers and the media through interviews with professionals or through structured questionnaires. Finally, despite the fact that the process described in the paper is universal and characteristic of relations between the media and social workers throughout the Western world, the examples described are taken from the Israeli reality. In the future, it is worth examining concepts that have been developed in other countries as well, as for example, the comparison made by Andrew Cooper, who examined how professional anxiety in child protection work can be understood as a function of the overall system in which the work takes place, illustrated by research results from a comparative study of the French and English systems (Cooper 1992). Owing to the similarity between the British and Israeli legislative systems (indeed, the Israel system is modeled on the lines of the British system), it would be interesting to examine the similarities and dissimilarities between the two countries regarding the system in which day-to-day welfare services are rendered. In addition, it would be interesting to compare the cases that are described in the present paper with severe cases of child murder in Britain, such as those of Peter Connelly from Haringey or Hamzah Khan from Bradford – cases that also evinced a media storm and the placing of blame on the welfare authorities, while also prompting a state report on the subject (Munro 2010, 2011).

Despite the limitations described, the paper proposes a new theoretical angle with which to view relations between the media and social workers – one that could promote a different dialogue between the two professions.

It may therefore be concluded that factors promoting the establishment of an accommodating dialogue between social workers and the media constitute an initial recognition of the feeling of acute terror that overcomes the professions when a traumatic event takes place involving injury to children by their parents. They also lead to an understanding that the use of defence mechanisms such as splitting, projection and projective identification represents the first stage in reacting to the trauma. Second, in the world of multichannel media, when a traumatic event on the lines of child murder by parents occurs, a ‘power

struggle' ensues willy-nilly between the entities involved: family, welfare, police, Red Magen David.

Everyone wants to tell their story, and it is important that social workers respond speedily and mark their territory at the outset in order for them to be significant players in later stages as well. Third, in line with the reforms proposed by Eileen Munro (2011), social workers, especially those employed by local authorities, must try to initiate closer dialogue with the media during normal times instead of in emergencies only. Routine discourse must take places in which both the parties succeed in seeing each other in a more complex light and not through a schizo-paranoid position. Finally, it is important that social workers learn how to use both the formal and informal media to serve their needs. This can be done by dedicated university and in-service courses.

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