

Minors' Welfare and Bureaucratic Violence in Israel

Introduction

The welfare policy in Israel concerning children and teenagers at risk is mainly based on disqualifying parents' custody of their children and transferring it to the state. When children are removed from their homes they are mostly placed in closed institutions, under the care of the welfare services, and a smaller number are transferred to foster families. In the article I examine this policy and point out some of its consequences, in particular the institutionalized violence towards children and their parents which accompanies it. I will also argue that placing children in closed institutions contradicts the declared ideology of the welfare system, namely its 'concern for "minors' wellbeing"'. In practice, this policy exposes the children to ongoing risks, and causes severe outcomes for their future prospects. I suggest that this policy and its continuing expansion can be explained by the personal, organizational, professional, and gender- and class-related interests which lie behind it. Institutions for children who have been removed from their families enjoy generous budgets, allocated for the employment of numerous field workers and ensure well-paid jobs for senior officials. The budgeting of institutions is based on the number of 'heads' in them, which indirectly reveals that the children serve as a resource in the barter system of purchasing government support.

This article is based on my experience as both a social activist and a social anthropologist. Since the early 90s onwards, I have been involved in accompanying parents in their struggles against removal of their children from their custody and placing them in welfare institutions and in foster homes. During this period I listened to hundreds of parents' and children's stories, participated in numerous encounters between parents and social workers, attended court hearings, talked with politicians, journalists and officials in various state agencies and NGOs, and was exposed to lots of relevant documents. The critical analysis, based on the

extended case method (Burawoy 1998), offered in the article, continues my anthropological study on welfare practices and policies since the beginning of the 90s (Hertzog 1991, 1996, 2004, 2009). Its basic line of argumentation follows various analytical perspectives: sociological and anthropological, discussing bureaucratic behavior (Weber 1948, Marx 1976, 2009; Handelman, 1987; Bauman 1989), law studies with regard to human rights (Gilat 2008; Ronen 2008; Shuz 2008), and gender studies (Swirsky 1984) concerning structured power-relations among women. However, as the welfare system is at the focus of the analysis, several critical studies on social work are discussed (Frost & Stein 1989; Mass 1996; Wosner 1996; Hasenfeld 2000; Slonim-Nevo & Lander 2004; Davidson-Arad 2005).

Analysis of the procedures and events which I studied and some of which I attended, suggests that the “outside-home placement” policy involves the use of coercion, violence, and severe harm to the minors and their families. Ideological discourse, embedded in concepts of concern for the minors, serves to conceal aggressive and even violent conduct, on the part of the welfare services and supporting systems, towards children and their parents. The decisions and procedures for removing minors from their parents' custody are presented by the welfare services as being essential for ‘the child's wellbeing’. The involvement of other State bodies, such as the courts, the police, psychiatric hospitals, and schools, in assisting the welfare mechanisms increases the organized and legal use of force, coercion, and violence employed by the state against children and their parents. People in these organizations, who fulfill roles of ‘caring for minors’, adopt a professional discourse, which ‘normalizes’ the use of violence and use violence towards children and their parents as a matter of course.

This article continues the critical research on bureaucratic organizations, the welfare bureaucracy in particular, focusing on the removal of minors from their parents’ custody and its transferral to the State. It contributes to the critical studies relating to life in welfare residence (especially the exposure to abuse) and to the outcomes of being treated by the

welfare services, in terms of inmates' future prospects (See for example: Kendrick 1998, Stanley, Manthorpe & Penhale 1999, Vinnerljung, Öman & Gunnarson 2005, Shimoni and Benbenisti 2011). In this context Handelman's (1987) problematization of the State's intervention in child's welfare is compelling. He argues: 'It is incumbent on us to ask whether the state and its organs can really substitute for the members and services of what is understood in Western society as an organic family unit' (373). The Stockholm Declaration (2003) offers much support to Handelman's approach. It contrasts all residential care with family settings and states as follows: 'There is indisputable evidence that institutional care has negative consequences for both individual children and for society at large. These negative consequences could be prevented through the adoption of national strategies to support families and children...'¹

In the article I will discuss the role of coercion and violence in the conduct of the welfare bureaucracy² in processes of removal of minors from their parents' custody and their transferral to institutions and foster families. I shall also elaborate on how people in these organizations, mainly the welfare officials, adopt an ideology of legal use of violence, and even identify with it. I will argue that the humane-professional ideology serves instrumentally to justify decisions and actions which often contradict the declared professional ideology of the welfare system and its employees. Thus, I shall discuss the issue of moral-human behavior of the individual in the organization who complies with its procedures relating to the use of violence towards minors and their parents. Officials inevitably operate as they are expected to, even when decisions and acts are involved which contradict their general moral world-view. Realizing the grave moral implications involved in this phenomenon Weber (1948) wrote:

The honor of the civil servant is vested in his ability to execute conscientiously the order of the superior authorities, exactly as if the order agreed with his own conviction. This holds even if the order appears wrong to him and if despite the civil

servant's remonstrances, the authority insists on the order. Without this moral discipline and self-denial, in the highest sense, the whole apparatus would fall to pieces (ibid: 95).

Bauman (1989) and Marx (1976, 2009) also argue that violent behaviour is embedded in the bureaucratic reality. Marx indicates (2009) the poor moral limitations on organizations' conduct and writes as follows: 'there are few moral restraints on organizations, and no limits on the scale and degree of violence they may employ' (ibid). Moreover, he argues that violence is routinely practiced by states and other organizations. Marx contends that 'States customarily legalize their most heinous and unjust violent crimes. As these deeds are prohibited to ordinary citizens, the agents and allies of the state describe them in understated neutral terms that disguise their violent nature' (ibid).

Thus, institutionalized, organized, violence is not perceived as acts of violence but as legitimate acts of organizations with ruling authority. Violent behavior in the bureaucratic context of care for minors is of particular interest in view of the heavy moral weight given in Israel, as in Western society at large, to care of minors.

Examples of State Violence in Cases of 'Children in Need' or 'Minors at Risk'

The rate of minors who are removed by the welfare authorities from their homes and placed in 'outside-home placement' in Israel, affiliated with the welfare ministry is 3.3% of all children and teenagers aged 0 to 17³. In 2010, 11,356 children and teenagers at risk were in welfare outside-home placements (Weissblei 2011). Of these, 790 were children up to the age of five, around 4,000 were aged six to 11 and around 6,600 were aged 12 to 17. Some 80% of those in the Welfare's residence were in institutions and some 20% were in foster families. Compared to other countries this is a relatively low rate, about half of that in the U.S. and less than a third of that in countries such as Canada, Denmark, and France. However, the comparison is

misleading.⁴ Firstly, because the welfare authorities in Israel do not publish accurate, reliable data; secondly, in data relating to other countries no distinction is made between placement in foster families and placement in welfare institutions. For instance, in the U.S. 'outside-home placement' takes place only in foster families and not in closed institutions. Thirdly, 'outside-home placement' in Israel is employed in a relatively limited extent in the Arab and ultra-orthodox populations (who together constitute over 30% of the population). Therefore, forced removal of children from their families takes place mainly among the Jewish-secular population.

In the following examples I will show how legitimacy for the use of violence by government officials towards children and their parents is established. I shall illustrate how violence, which is revealed during forced removal of children from their parents and their placement in foster families or institutions, is exercised through the use of legal authorization, in well-ordered bureaucratic procedures. The use of violence involves inter-organizational cooperation between the police, the courts, the welfare and educational systems. I will also relate to the violence used by workers in the daily life of welfare institutions towards the children and teenagers in their care. It appears that socio-economically weak groups, who have limited economic resources and a vulnerable social status, are more easily exposed to the consequences of bureaucratic violence. It also appears from these examples that State agencies make manipulative use of fundamental social-humane values in order to gain public support for their violent behaviour. Attempts by the media and the public to intervene, often encounter threats and intimidation on the part of the welfare bureaucracy.

Idan and Batya: The Case of the Minor and his Blind Mother

In this case, which occurred more than 17 years ago, Idan, aged 11, was taken from his single mother, an impoverished, blind woman, and transferred to state-controlled institutions, over a

period of one and a half years – initially to an ‘emergency shelter’ for ‘children at risk’ and later to an institution for ‘care of children at risk’. The affair began when Batya, the mother, conducted a struggle against the head of the city education department over her request to transfer her son to a different class. When Batya approached the local press to complain about the way the matter had been dealt with, things gradually worsened, for her and for her son. The use of violent and illegal means, which the local municipality used through the education and welfare departments, assisted by the police, accompanied the proceedings. An eavesdropping device was found in Batya's telephone. For three years Idan stayed home, while the head of the education department prevented his acceptance to the schools in the region to which the mother applied. Her complaints to the Minister of Education, the State ombudsman, ‘child welfare’ organizations, and to ‘human rights’ organizations, did not get her any real help. These appeals, and also her contacts with the media, resulted in punitive and vengeful reactions by the head of the education department and the town's mayor. They warned Batya that her son would be taken away from her if she did not stop her public struggle. When she continued with her battle, the social workers recommended to the juvenile courts that Idan should be taken to a shelter for children at risk. Their main claim was that the mother was ‘smothering’ her son, that she was dependent on him, and was hindering his development. The court provided the procedure with legal backing and approved, as happens in most cases, the social workers’ recommendation. The judge, Avraham Melamed, ruled to remove Idan from his mother’s custody and to send him, against his will and against his mother’s will, to an emergency center. Idan was there for 11 months. He ran away 20 times. When he was caught he was sometimes beaten by the police. Idan was subsequently moved to a welfare institution in Jerusalem, far from his mother’s home in the north of the country, where he stayed for seven months.

Applying personally to the social workers produced an agreement with the town's welfare department, which was approved by the courts. Idan was moved to my home, as a foster family, with Batya's consent. According to Idan, in the two institutions in which he stayed, he and other children were occasionally hit; means of control such as forced confinement in an isolation room for several days and cold showers were used routinely by the staff. In one of the many recordings made by Batya during her telephone conversations with her son he can be heard screaming as his head is hit against the wall. When he fainted the counsellor brought him water. Idan was then 12 years old, thin and physically weak. A photograph from the period during which he was in the emergency center, which was presented to the judge of the juvenile court in the North, shows 'blue bruises' on Idan's body. When Batya showed the judge the photograph as evidence of the physical violence used against him by the people responsible for the shelter, he dismissed the claims by explaining that the use of physical force is permissible, and even recommended, in order to 'protect' the child from himself and protect others from him. Judge Melamed justified his approach and the acts of violence by the staff of the institution by relating to the concept of 'holding'. According to this approach, it is permissible to hold the misbehaving child under his arms and to sit or lie on him in order to prevent him from harming himself or others around him, even though this sometimes causes bruises or marks on the body (from the summary of judgment in the Haifa juvenile court, 30.3. 1997). If so, it appears from Judge Melamed's decision that physical abuse of young people in institutions can be justified on grounds of protection for themselves and their peers. Batya complained to the police on several occasions about the violence on the part of the institution's staff towards Idan, but time and time again she was told that 'everything's alright' and that the boy was in good hands. She received similar reactions from senior police officials and Knesset members who were asked to intervene. The efforts to acquire media coverage in the newspapers and on radio and television for the cries of help from Idan and others were

thwarted many times by threats made by the Ministry of Welfare. In one instance the case was publicized in the *Haaretz* newspaper (18.2.2000), after the newspaper's legal adviser charged the court to remove immunity. The case was tried by the same judge who had previously, following the welfare authorities' request, completely forbidden publication of the case (even if the minor's identity and that of his mother were concealed). Melamed rejected the request. Only after the newspaper's legal adviser appealed against the decision and turned to the district court, Judge Salim Joubran permitted publication of the story (*Maariv*, 27.12.1998). This case illustrates the violent foundations necessarily embedded in the interactions between the welfare system and its clients, in particular the weakest among them. These become, unwillingly, 'captive' clients in a power struggle which, from their point of view, is lost from the start. This particular case shows the bureaucratic violence routinely used through extensive cooperation between officials in positions of professional, bureaucratic, and political power; in this case a mayor, the head of the education department, social workers in the local welfare department, and judges. Comprehensive support for these procedures was provided by the national and regional supervisory units of the Ministry of Welfare, the legal system, the police, and other agencies. The example demonstrates the potential of State violence, particularly against individuals lacking political-economic power, such as single-parent mothers, from low socio-economic backgrounds and their children.

As the welfare authorities are well aware of the media's power, the ruthless reaction of the local authority to the mother's appeal to the media is not surprising. The efforts of the media, to report and criticize the welfare system's functioning with regard to minors' removal from their parents' custody and their situation in welfare institutions threaten the unrestricted control of the welfare system. They reduce its ability to act without public criticism and undermine the invulnerability essential for its unquestioned control. The media can play a critical role in reporting and criticizing the practices of the welfare system. It carries the

potential of undermining the public consensus concerning the welfare authorities' monopoly over social ideology and over professional caring.

Shiri and Jane: The Case of the 'Teenage Girl at Risk'

In another case, a 14 year old girl named Shiri was moved to an institution for girls at risk. It was brought to my attention by the secretary of the girl's school, who asked me to intervene, with the aim of preventing Shiri's removal from the school. According to the secretary, it was unclear to her and to the rest of the staff why the welfare officer wished to remove the girl.

The secretary reported to me that the welfare officer had been to the school and had spread rumours about the girl's 'wanton' behaviour and about the need to move her to an institution for girls at risk. Shiri was born to a mother who was a drug addict and had abandoned her.

The baby moved between foster families until at the age of a year and a half she was taken to the home of Jane, a woman who had already successfully brought up five children of her own, and cared for another 12 deprived children who were placed in her care by the Ministry of Welfare. Jane adopted the girl when she was five years old. She was a devoted mother to her, as she was to all of her other children. When Shiri was 13, physically developed for her age and in the care of the mental health services in her place of residence, the welfare officer wanted to remove her to Tzofia, an institution for 'girls at risk'. The community policeman supplied reports and information that Shiri had been seen wandering bare-chested around a building site where Arabs worked. The welfare department turned to the courts in order to 'save' Shiri from herself, to distance her from the town, to put her in a closed place, and to 'act for her protection in a place where she will be set boundaries and protected' (from the welfare officer's report presented to the Netanya juvenile court, 20.4.98), because she was 'a runaway' [and a whore...]. Persistent rumours were spread, that she had been seen sleeping with Arabs who 'queue up to sleep with her'. Even the gynaecological examination that Jane

initiated, which proved that Shiri was a virgin, did not convince the welfare officer. The officer maintained decisively that the girl's home and her mother were unable to protect her or to assist in her 'rehabilitation'. In the conclusion of her report, the welfare officer admitted that Shiri had fitted in well in her new school, but nevertheless: 'We receive the impression that there are extreme disparities in her personality... there is an aspect of extremely deviant behaviour of acting out which places her in actual danger'. Her relationship with her mother, she continues, is 'complex – on the one hand there is love and a relationship, but on the other hand they cooperate in complete and worrying denial of her severe problems. Also the mother is unable to set the minor boundaries'. The need for legal aid and psychological examinations, which were necessary for presentation in court, further worsened the already difficult financial situation of Jane and her (single-parent) household. Of course Jane's and Shiri's mental states also worsened. Against this background and as a self-fulfilling prophecy, Shiri ran away from home. When she was caught, she was sent to a psychiatric hospital. She also ran away from there, in an attempt to return to her mother, and was then raped. This time, when Shiri was caught, the court immediately acceded to the welfare officer's demand and moved the girl to the closed institution for girls at risk, Tzofia. From there, the welfare officer probably assumed, she would be unable to run away, and her 'uncontrolled' sexual behaviour would be properly assessed and restrained. Shortly afterwards, Shiri attempted suicide by taking pills, an act which was interpreted by the welfare officer as a 'cry for help'. After she was treated in hospital, she was returned to Tzofia. Later she was moved to the Abarbanel psychiatric hospital, where she remained for a year. When she left the hospital, she was a different person, broken, very obese, lifeless, and drugged because of the medication she had to take. No argument and no proof could change the welfare officer's attitude or her decisions. Even definite proof that the community policeman had written a false report about Shiri's 'wanton' behaviour, did not cause the welfare officer and her colleagues to question themselves (and

certainly not the policeman, who some years later was dismissed from the police force for drug offences).

In this example, the major role of professional rhetoric, in the process of welfare officials' gaining control of minors and removing them from their parents' custody, is conspicuous. The psychological terminology, or "psychologistic thinking" used widely by welfare officers (Handelman 1987: 359), serves to gain support for their evaluation and recommendations in the court. The judges rely heavily on the assumption that the welfare officers' professionalism and objectivism is beyond doubt. Terms such as 'denial', 'setting boundaries', 'acting out' ('...which places her genuinely in danger'), 'extreme splits in her personality' and so on, are the foundations of the inter-organizational discourse, in which the welfare system and the courts are central, within the process of disqualifying the legitimacy of parents' custody of their children. In this specific case, concepts such as 'danger' (she endangers herself) and 'vagrancy', serve both the welfare system and the police, as associating with Arabs implies danger in the police-security sense (and unveils racist attitudes at the same time). Also, 'protection' of teenage girls from endangering themselves, in the sense of having sexual intercourse at a "premature" age, reflects the social workers' typically conservative gender attitude. Teenage boys are not sent to institutions because they had sexual intercourse at a young age. The ongoing intervention and coercion by the welfare officer, backed up by the local welfare department, the local authority, the regional supervisor, and the national supervisor, illustrate well the absence of any mechanism which can confront the welfare officers' practices. No factor within the system or in its environs served as a power-brake on the 'slippery slope'. The social mandate over 'minors' wellbeing' served the welfare officer in the witch-hunt of the girl and her mother. The coercive intervention in Jane's and Shiri's lives also illustrates the comprehensive cooperation among state agencies employed against powerless individuals. The limited cracks which the mother's struggle and mine created,

mainly by means of turning to the media, were quickly blocked and any chance of ending the abuse was prevented.

The structured, inevitable power-gap between the welfare officer and his/her 'client' has been clearly established by Mili Mass, an Israeli senior lecturer and researcher in social work. Mass claims (1996) that the social workers act in the name of the strong, with the help of their values and beliefs, from within the power systems. She explains,

Most of the parents whom we approach with demands, in the name of the principle of the child's wellbeing, belong to poor social classes ... The demand addressed to these parents, to obey our demands with no actual attempt to change their living conditions, turns the parents, who live on the margins of society, into beggars ... (ibid: 422).

Mass also maintains further that 'Glorifying specialized knowledge gives the expert great powers, ... The use of the expert's robe, which invokes an archaic myth intended to influence the judges' feelings and in this way distort their decision, is nothing but abuse of the power ...' (ibid: 425-426). Mass indicates clearly that, 'the social worker's true mission as a tool (or a stick) to supervise the weak ... The social worker's expertise, his understanding of the human condition and his relationship with marginal groups, serve today as a tool in the hands of society, to supervise the underprivileged' (ibid: 426).

Similar claims were suggested by Yehezkel Hasenfeld (2000), a highly regarded senior social work researcher. He writes about the work of the social service departments with single mothers: ' ... viewing the poor as deviants and 'others'... and upholding the moral code about family values, gender, and ethnicity by degrading the poor. No matter what specific organizational forms welfare departments institutionalize over time, these basic moral values have remained their guides' (ibid: 348-349).

Barbara Swirsky, an Israeli sociologist, has pointed out the gendered perspective of the structured conflict within the patriarchal state, among groups of women. The most conspicuous class confrontation is found between poor, migrant, single-parent women and female social workers. Swirsky claims (1984) that through her superior power over her clients the social worker gains her 'sense of importance on account of other women ... the more important she is the less important they are. The power position of the social worker corrupts her as a human being and a woman' (ibid: 207-208). These understandings are relevant to Jane's and Shiri's cases but also to many other cases that I have witnessed.

As in the case of the boy and his blind mother, the Ministry of Labour and Welfare used every means to prevent publication of this story in the media. A local newspaper published the story, ignoring the Ministry of Welfare's threats. When a journalist in a public radio station tried to raise the subject, the Ministry of Welfare's representative arrived at the station, and succeeded in preventing the broadcast. It was only after the girl attempted suicide in the Tzofia institution that the matter was broadcast, in spite of the Ministry of Welfare's protests (claiming that if the story would be exposed to the public it would harm the girl's wellbeing). Although the mother gave her consent in writing to publish the story (obviously with identifying details removed), only after the programme's editors realized that the threats were fictitious, did they agree to deal with the issue.

I have often encountered the blocking of desperate parents' access to the media, after their children have been forcibly taken from them and put in institutions by the welfare authorities and the courts. For instance, a television talk-show, named *Popolitika* to which I was invited, intended several times to address the issue of removal of children from their homes. Each time the editors had to waive broadcasting the programme, due to intervention by the Ministry of Welfare's legal adviser. When I discussed removal of children from their homes by the welfare authorities on a women's radio magazine, *Ishi Nashi*, which I edited and presented on

local radio (between the years 1997 and 2000), a complaint was made against me by the Ministry of Labour and Welfare's spokesperson. He wrote to the station's director that I was suspect for 'breaking the law [prohibiting the exposure of identifying details of minors who are involved in legal procedures, E. H.], in a radio programme in *Emtza Haderekh* (25th August 1998)'. The letter of accusation was sent also to the heads of the 'Authority for Television and Radio'. Its exposure as being unfounded demonstrates how the Ministry of Welfare actively threatens the media, even its minor channels, in order to prevent critical discussion, which might cause public doubt regarding the welfare system's reliability and professionalism in 'caring for minors'.

Another example of blocking any media intervention is an article in the newspaper *Makor Rishon*, under the heading 'The authority for child removal' (27.3.98). The journalist, Kalman Libskind, related to an appeal to the court, in which the welfare officer asked to prevent a mother, whose child had been removed from her custody, from exposing the story to the public. In her appeal she explained that the mother manages to 'arouse journalists' empathy' and therefore she 'asks to prevent all subsequent publicity – including publicity without the minor's name, for the sake of the minor's wellbeing and the prospects of the treatment procedure'. Libskind added that often he is prevented from publishing parents' complaints about 'severe acts of vengeance by welfare officers after they were defeated in court, confinement of children for many hours to their room in the institution and so forth...'. The Chief Child Welfare Officer was asked by the journalist: 'Why do you resolutely object when families whose children have been taken from them turn to the media?' She replied,

There are people who are incapable of receiving help, and all they can do is fight by every possible means. In such cases they go to the press and we have to face attack.

People whose parental ability is poor turn to the media, and all that remains for them

is to turn to the newspaper. We prefer to prevent publicity because the publication harms the family and the minor.

To the question 'And if the family wants publicity?' she answered, 'We give everything we have to help the children, and afterwards we're attacked in the media and all we get from the public is criticism – why do you take children away from these poor families?'

Rinat's Case: Blaming the Mother for Teenage Boys' sexual abuse of her Daughter

In June 2010 the juvenile court, in the north of Israel, accepted the recommendations of the welfare officers and instructed the forcible removal of Rinat (a fictitious name) to an emergency centre. Rinat was sexually abused when she was 11 years old, while she was in an after-school club run by the local welfare department. The social workers in the department claimed that the girl was at high physical and emotional risk because of 'lack of a supervising and protecting parental presence'. Although the abuse took place outside the home, and was not caused by a member of the family, the mother, poor, single, and a new immigrant from Russia, was defined as incapable of protecting her daughter. In December 2011 Rinat was transferred to a Welfare institution, while the abusers carried on with their lives. With her meagre resources the mother applied to the High Court in order to save her daughter and bring her home. From a social and psychological assessment of the girl's state, after two years away from home and living in institutions, it appeared that 'the minor is in an extremely difficult emotional state and is at risk of sexual abuse. It appears that she has acquired a huge emotional burden in the past two years...' According to the report, Rinat had been physically harmed in the institution. Her repeated attempts to run away conveyed her distress. However, the institute that provided Rinat's diagnosis recommended leaving her in the welfare institution. This institute, which cooperates with the Welfare Ministry, justified its recommendation by claiming that the mother 'is unable to guarantee her daughter's safety',

because she (allegedly) was responsible for what happened to her daughter. Moreover, the failure of the 'treatment' in the institution was also blamed on the mother, as she had not 'cooperated with those responsible for the treatment'. The judges chose to ignore the recommendation of Prof. Eli Zomer, a prominent Israeli clinical psychologist, who recommended returning the girl to her mother. The three high court judges, headed by Judge Edna Arbel, decided that a further sitting would take place in six months' time. Rinat's fate is likely to be similar to that of many of the girls cared for by welfare institutions: vagrancy, prostitution and drugs.

Rinat's 'case' well illustrates what happens to teenage girls who are sexually abused and to their mothers. When a girl is sexually abused she is labeled as a 'victim' at best and as 'promiscuous/prostitute' at worst; the mother is labeled as 'lacking in parental ability', in other words as a maternal failure and as 'guilty' of what has happened. Generally, the abusers are treated as under the age of criminal responsibility, and/or as 'kids from good homes' who have strayed, and they return to their routine (and presumably also continue to abuse underprivileged girls). When the mothers are labelled and denied the right and the responsibility to care for and defend their daughters, the girls come under the care of the welfare system, and become an easy target for abuse and an accessible resource of the institutional care system.

As in many other cases, the judges assume (in good faith or under constraint) that it is unquestionable that the welfare authorities are driven by ulterior motives, and that the children's wellbeing is their foremost consideration; they perceive the social workers as carrying out 'invaluable work'; they believe that the welfare institutions are always better (even when abuse of children in care takes place in them) than a home in which the mother, allegedly, is unable to protect her daughter; they prefer to rely on diagnosing and treating institutes that cooperate with the welfare authorities, such as the one mentioned above, which

constantly recommend institutionalization as a preferred solution for children and teenagers 'at risk'.

It therefore appears that 'Instead of hunting the "wolves" in the forest', in the words of Judge Menahem Klein (in his ruling in the case of a retarded girl, 8.12.11), 'All the "Red Riding Hoods" are placed in welfare institutions', where there is no guarantee that 'Red Riding Hood won't fall into the hands of another wolf', and which serve as quarters for further abuse. In other words, the welfare system, supported by the courts and based on expert assessment, play the role of a 'wolf', as an agent which enables organized abuse of teenage girls.

Conclusion and Discussion

The article discussed the violence of the welfare authorities and of other State authorities towards minors and their parents in the context of removing minors from their parents' custody and placing them in 'outside-home' frameworks, supervised by the state. I argued that the procedures involved in this welfare policy entail covert and overt use of force by the authorities, abuse of basic human rights, use of threats and physical violence towards parents and minors who resist the authorities' decisions and use of enforced incarceration in mental institutions. Also, inside the institutions, frequent use is made of violent means such as blows, isolation, threats, enforced psychiatric medication and so on, by the staff, as a means to preserve the institutions' routine and discipline.

I suggest that violent behaviour of officials and organizations which use the state's organized power of coercion against minors and against their parents is linked to personal, organizational, and political motives. Yochanan Wosner, a senior researcher of social work suggests (1996), in a similar vein that:

The lobby of the institutions' establishment is fundamentally interested in the livelihood of tens or thousands of people which is connected or sometimes even

dependent on the existence and expansion of institutional arrangements. This population includes various institution employees and the professional administrative systems, which are employed in supplying resources to the institutions: buildings, manpower, supplies, wards, and so forth. Reduction of the number of institutions would cause the closure of several departments and services and a shortage of positions for psychologists, social workers, teachers, cooks, managers, counsellors, security guards, and maintenance workers.

The use of abundant means of coercion, in order to overcome resistance of parents to taking away their children and placing them in institutions, is an important element in preservation of social resources for political barter in Israel. As a country characterized by extensive state bureaucracy and a centralized welfare policy, Israel can provide its welfare officials with legitimate means of coercion, such as laws promoted by the government according to their needs, court decisions in accordance with their recommendations and the engagement of the police in order to ensure the enforcement of these decisions. The professional and ideological rhetoric, alongside legal procedures, provide a significant part of the justification for the coercive behaviour of the state's agencies in matters of parent's custody of their offspring. Coercive means also serve the welfare officers at the informal spheres and through veiled practices. Among these, for example, are use of threats towards parents and use of physical force against minors in institutions.

The intense centralization of the Israeli political system produces closely supervisory systems which are interdependent. These systems work to prevent public criticism of the modes of use of their far-reaching authority. The centralized power systems are based on a hierarchical chain of dependencies in which individuals and groups participate in control of resources. The hierarchized structure guarantees far-reaching coordination, cooperation and loyalty among its employees at all levels. In this structure minors serve as a resource in the process of

constructing spheres of control and authority, offering the officials means of reward for their loyalty and support of the government. In other words, placing minors in state frameworks plays a role in strengthening government support.

The social work system is an important means by which the state intervenes in families and achieves control of children, women and the weak, as Mili Mass (mentioned above) maintains. This control strengthens the existing social order, serves to preserve the hegemonic power centres and enables benefits for the groups which support the government, mainly from the middle classes.

Taking children from their parents, placing them in state institutions, and leaving them there for as long as possible; all these necessitate the use of organized coercion by state officials.

This welfare bureaucracy needs 'industrial peace'; it is interested in working without disturbance, on the part of the children, the parents, the media or anyone else. Legal coercion serves to achieve this 'peace' for the welfare system and the organizations which cooperate with it. Public criticism of the coercive means used by the state officials against parents or of violent behaviour of staff against children in institutions would be likely to undermine the complete, routine control.

'The minor's wellbeing' and 'protection of the minor' are central terms in this reality, as the ideological discourse from which they are drawn is widely accepted and is based on the public legitimacy of the welfare officers' control of this field. Using concepts like 'the minor's wellbeing', which are anchored in the social workers' monopoly on the 'care' of 'minors at risk', enables silencing of criticism. Children's complaints about their painful experiences in the institutions and in foster families are treated as unreliable. Moreover, as they are placed far away from the public gaze, the welfare system and the courts can easily ignore their pleas and wishes.

I also maintained that violent behavior is nurtured by the inter-organizational cooperation between the governing power systems. This organized coercive behaviour exposes the concealed strength of state agencies, and enables officials to act without feeling responsible for the consequences of their conduct and without paying their price. I argued that bureaucratic violence emerges from a context in which performing unjust and destructive actions does not entail taking responsibility for their consequences, and there is no need to worry about socio-economic reprisal for harming people.

The examples presented in the article clarified that the welfare system acts as a centralized, bureaucratic machine, which relies on close cooperation of 'overlapping' systems. Hence, it appears that in the encounter between the welfare client and the welfare and legal systems' professionals, the first is confronted with a powerful bureaucratic alignment. When the state's legitimate coercion operates against a parent there is no real chance of avoiding his/her defeat and grave outcomes for him/her and the children. The article raised, by implication, the issue of personal-moral choice, entailed in participating in procedures of removing minors from their families. It seems that officials, who do not comply with the system's expectations and try to avoid using coercion and violence, in cases of removal of minors from their parents' custody and in cases of violence against dependents in institutions, cannot endure within the system.⁵ Thus, the people who remain in the system act, inevitably, as they are expected to and comply with the system's expectations. They carry out their roles and hence contribute to reinforcement of the power alignment in which they operate and from which they gain various advantages.

¹ <http://www.cyc-net.org/cyc-online/cycol-0903-stockholm.html>

² In an article from 1996 I suggested distinguishing between the ‘welfare state’ and the ‘welfare bureaucracy’, maintaining that the bureaucratic welfare mechanisms control and absorb the resources intended for needy individuals and groups, preventing in practice the implementation of the welfare state's declared objectives, the essence of which is distribution of public resources on equal and universal terms.

³ The percentage of all youth in 'out-of-home' residence is 9.4% of all youth in Israel (Shimoni & Benberisti 2011). This group includes, apart from those in welfare frameworks, youth in boarding schools of the Ministry of Education and in religious and orthodox boarding schools (*yeshivot*).

⁴ Various researchers emphasized the methodological limitations involved in comparative study of residential care, the difficulties involved in attaining comparable cross-national statistical information and the availability of empirical literature (see, for instance: Colton and Williams 2002, Davidson-Arad 2005, Pelton 2008, Courtney & Iwaniec 2009).

⁵ One example is a case in which a local welfare officer was fired, following her refusal to comply with the national welfare officer's decision to remove a two years old girl from her mother's care to an emergency centre, because the girl refused to meet with her father. Several conversations I had with youth-guides who worked for short periods in welfare institutions for teenagers and left because they could not comply with the situation there and felt powerless to change it, supports my claim further.

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