

# **Finding a place for working with children in South African communities**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores community based psychoanalytic and psychodynamic work with children and families and the professional framework within which it functions in South Africa. The perspective is that of a UK based child psychotherapist who spent a year providing supervision of supervisors, individual clinicians, interns and professional groups, all working with children in NGOs and private practice. Appreciation of the growth and creativity of South African psychoanalytic and psychodynamic communities is balanced against an examination of the unconscious forces that can impede their development. It is argued that South Africa's legacy of apartheid and its colonial past skews the relationship to formal authority as it manifests in everyday life, between and within institutions, and in the consulting room. A case is made, drawing on South African clinical literature, that the enduring failure to provide for the needs of the majority population is experienced as a disruption of maternal and paternal function. It is argued that, in the face of such individual and cultural trauma, psychoanalytic theory can be used defensively as a substitute for a sense of a safe, institutional order. It follows that there is a pressing need for a training structure and a regulated professional environment for work with children and families.