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Some children matter more than others

Issues prompted by Roy Parker's study of the shipment of poor children to Canada, 1867–1917

Roy Parker's book *Uprooted*¹ charts the events that led to 80,000 children being shipped to Canada by the Poor Law and voluntary bodies during the 50 years following confederation in 1867. **Michael Little** discusses the issues raised by this historical study for current policy and practice and charts the conditions that allow for government and children's services to collude with potentially damaging interventions in children's lives.

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At Stormont, the Northern Ireland parliament, many years ago, after a presentation about youth justice, an Ulster MP asked me for some advice. He sat on the board of a training school, a residential establishment for young offenders. When a boy absconded a hooter was sounded. Generally speaking the runaway would be apprehended but the elderly in the surrounding community became distressed. Was it a good idea to have a hooter, asked the politician? What did the evidence say?

The conversation reflected one of many absurd collusions that dog children's services. It was evident then, and is well known now, that placing young offenders in closed groups does not deter antisocial behaviour; in fact it generally makes it worse. It was well known that most absconders would run home to their parents, so there was no real need for a hooter. A collusion manufactured a question not intended for answer. It diverted attention away from the fundamental issue of why invest in the manifestly absurd proposition of detaining young offenders in closed groups.

The hooter in the training school is one illustration. Others abound. The easy targets are mostly in youth justice. A 'short, sharp, shock', or detention in

stringent conditions for a few weeks, was introduced after the Second World War and tried again by several successive governments. It sounds enticing but it too increases offending. In the United States they take antisocial youngsters on prison visits where the inmates see that they are 'scared straight'. Experimental evaluations and economic analyses reveal that while this costs under \$50 a head to deliver, so damaging is the intervention that it eventually costs the tax payer about \$11,000 for every young person involved.

The absurdities continue today. In 2002, the UK government decided that 'choice protects' young people in care, a proposition supported by little evidence and backed up by no proper evaluation of the policy. This came hard on the heels of ASBOs, one of a range of orders telling children, young people and parents what to do. Telling people with problems what to do sounds sensible up to and until the point of proper reflection or a glance at evidence on human behaviour. In this case rigorous evaluation would be pointless.

Between 1867 and 1917 about 80,000 poor children were shipped, unaccompanied by parents, to Canada where they were given a 'fresh start' mainly on farms, in other forms of domestic service and elsewhere in the labour market. Canada was just one destination. Later, others went to South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and what is now Zimbabwe. The UK was not alone in the practice. The United States created 'orphan trains' that transported poor separated children from the east coast to new opportunities in the west. As well as taking in what were called 'Home' children, the British colonies

¹ *Uprooted: The shipment of poor children to Canada, 1867–1917*, Bristol: The Policy Press, 2008

and dominions displaced indigenous populations, effectively creating hundreds of thousands of orphans by placement in residential care and servitude.

Much of this, certainly the sending of the UK children and the breaking up of aboriginal families, carried on until about 40 years ago. The idea seems absurd now but it did not then. Roy Parker's book *Uprooted* charts the collusion that allowed such a remarkable emigration of children from Britain.

■
As I sat in a Galway youth club in 2006 trying to comprehend how the 14-year-old Nigerian girl next to me could have travelled unaccompanied and survived independently for two years until she was granted asylum the month previously, I laboured under the impression that I had encountered something new. But only the mode of transportation changes. Boats, trains and now planes are fundamental to this phenomenon. Movement is part of the fabric of life. As people move, they learn. People have long used going away as a solution to their problems. The difficulty arises when we are asked to move by someone else. 'On yer bike,' said Norman Tebbit in response to the cries of the unemployed in the 1980s. From an economic perspective he may have been right. But movement incurs many consequences, not all of them intended. Allowing people to move is one thing. Obliging them to do so is quite another.

We often overlook our mobility. It only shines through when we are placed out of context. A drive down a road in rural sub-Saharan Africa throws the phenomenon into relief. The roads are crowded not with cars or trucks but with travellers, young and old, on foot, their animals and possessions in tow. In the north of the planet we travel ever greater distances to work, to school and for holidays. It has suddenly become old-fashioned to consider only the neighbourhood school for one's child and we no longer take for granted the idea that the local hospital will provide for all our health care needs.

Movement is routinely used as a remedy for ills. But the counterfactual, of not moving, also has its challenges. Research shows how families' inability through lack of knowledge, money or transport to get to the help that they need disadvantages their children. Disaster victims suffer most when they cannot escape and aid workers cannot reach them. Immigration has always been a politically charged issue but there is a general recognition that hospitals and, these days, social work departments would hardly function without workers from abroad, and despite all the disquiet about the global economy most of us in the North would be financially far worse off without it.

The trains and boats that facilitated the mass migration of the 19th century transported ideas as well as people. One of the catalysts for the emigration of poor children from our shores came from child experts seeing what was happening in North America. In the 1870s, Andrew Doyle, a local government board inspector, visited Mettray in France and became much enamoured with what he saw. Mettray housed 'families' of 40 boys supervised by two men, ideas formed during trips to the United States by the founder Frédéric-Auguste Demetz and later reflected in the English borstal system and the Philanthropic Society's Redhill Farm School. Once at the cutting edge, Mettray closed in 1937, broke and discredited. Redhill closed in 1988 and the Philanthropic Society was incorporated into the Rainer Foundation, now Rainer Crime Concern. The borstals became young offender institutions and are bursting at the seams, apparently undeterred by even Jean Genet's evocative descriptions of the pleasures and pains during his time in Mettray's 'delinquent colony'.

So, movement is ubiquitous and arguably more beneficial than harmful. But the migration of people and ideas described so far has been voluntary. What happens when it is enforced? What about decisions to move 'other' people? One of the greatest crimes has

been slavery, with 12 million Africans dispatched to the Americas alone. The uprooting, the trans-shipment, the emigration, the shifting of poor and already displaced children can be traced back to the 17th century when they were used to meet demand for labour on plantations in Virginia. Slavery met that need so the practice waned. But then came the transportation of felons to Australia, including children until 1850, by which time 1,500 boys had made the journey. The voluntary organisations got in on the act from about 1830 with a plethora of small schemes such as the Philanthropic Society's posting of residents from its residential farm. But trans-shipment was not ubiquitous until it was strengthened in the 1870s by push factors, including a rise in poverty, and pull factors, such as the changing demand for farm and domestic labour.

At the end of the Civil War (1861–1865) the United States, a country born of migration, rapidly developed an expertise in the area. Charles Loring Brace of the Children's Aid Society in New York City, often referred to as the 'father of foster care' in his country, started sending poor children from the east coast to the west of the country. The model of orphan trains greatly attracted the early advocates of child emigration in Britain and Ireland. It also captured the imagination of the locals. Mrs John Jacob Astor III sponsored over a thousand seats on the train. A theologian who knew how to work the system, Loring Brace was the catalyst for systems that transported 200,000 poor children until they were derailed in 1929. The 'West' was not a fixed point; some New Yorkers got off the trains in rural Ohio; a few miles away, the Cleveland children were being dispatched to Indiana, which in turn embarked its own poor for Nebraska. Since there was not much further to go in those days, Nebraska's luckless kids stayed where they were, some in the perhaps aptly named 'Home for the Friendless'.

Movement begets movement. Children uprooted from Britain and Ireland

were sent to distribution homes in Canada. From there they were allocated to families. At least a fifth did not work out and they returned to their initial staging post in Canada. Some were tried in new families; some went back across the Atlantic and some drifted into other parts of Canadian society. Whether by association or chance, the emigration of British and Irish children to the colonies coincided with the removal of aboriginal children into residential care within Canada. They too were being saved from assumed pernicious influences at home. The social and psychological impact of such change often masks socio-legal handicaps. Were the British children British or Canadian? Were the indigenous Canadian children Canadian? As will be seen, the rights of the birth parents were often swept aside, effectively creating the 'orphans' whom the intervention set out to save. The émigré children were supposed to be bound to the families in which they were placed. Once uprooted, however, they soon became rootless.

II
Collusion demands people. Parker draws the protagonists strongly. Readers will wince when they recognise themselves, a century or so ago. Shipping children required entrepreneurs and socially minded business people who gave something back by taking children away. Emigration was mainly the product of the leaders of the newly emergent voluntary sector. Its growing strength partly rested on the outlet of transporting children abroad. Senior policy makers in Whitehall and Canada also played their part, the former regarding the process, the latter promoting it. Less well defined were the equivalent of today's local authority managers and those who led the local poor law boards and industrial schools and reformatories who agreed to their children being taken. Politicians and trade unions also had their say. Needless to say, there were strongly competing views among the individuals, but over time interests coalesced so that most people got as

much of their way as possible. But it was the adults' way that won through. It was not about the children.

In a way, the process was started and then maintained by entrepreneurs or agents who facilitated the children's passage, the 'emigrationists' as Parker calls them. Maria Rye was an energetic, apparently well-off but financially insecure, mistrusted (by the male establishment) maverick spinster who claimed to fear God. A reasonably successful businesswoman, she was concerned to improve opportunities for middle-class women. She established a law stationers enterprise and gave jobs to some while assisting the emigration of others. But demand abroad for the kind of teaching and governess jobs for which her women were suited fluctuated. The real need was for domestic servants. So Rye turned her attention to working-class girls and young women. In the late 1860s she became embroiled in a fight involving the poor law guardians of Wolverhampton and William Dixon, the leading Canadian immigration agent, whose job was to sift out the desirable newcomers from the undesirable. Reading Parker's account, one senses that whatever the principles of the matter, Rye was determined to win. And win she did. This was just the start. From there she side-stepped legislation, built political support in Canada and at home and acquired a reception home for her charges. The floodgates opened.

The strongest characters created the voluntary agencies and an enduring legacy. Edward Rudolph established the Waifs and Strays Society, today known as The Children's Society; the Reverend Thomas Stephenson set up what we now call NCH. Towering above them all was Barnardo. Then there was Leonard Shaw, like Barnardo a Protestant Dubliner who, with Richard Taylor, set up the Manchester and Salford Boys' and Girls' Refuges and Homes, which today is the Together Trust. There was rags-to-riches William Quarrier from Glasgow, who set up Quarrier Homes, and John Middlemore, a Baptist from

Birmingham, whose emigration interests were eventually incorporated into Fairbridge. In Liverpool, it was Father Nugent who created the Liverpool Catholic Reformatory Association and launched the reformatory ship, *Clarence*. His legacy is Nugent Care, one of this group still providing residential services.

Together, they evolved a series of common strategies as they wheeled and dealt themselves through their changing objectives. Their initial motives were often modest and bound up with the Ragged School Movement providing education to the poor. This led to establishing a variety of shelters for children defined as 'homeless' (some were) and later 'orphans' (most were not). They were driven by the idea of saving children using a single solution for many problems, whether pauperism, destitution, moral degeneracy or vicious parents. Severance was one means to this end and what better way to achieve it than to send the children across the Atlantic? They brought business leaders and other notables onto their boards, providing respectability and money. They possessed business leaders' concern for efficiency. Their initial focus was the home labour market but as recession bit and the population increased in the late 1880s, they turned their attention abroad. They worked hard to secure 'employment' for their children while at the same time achieving the desired severance from degraded parents and deprivation. And in the process they protected their organisations and personal reputations.

These leaders were mostly denominational and, as a result, highly competitive. Father Nugent saved children not only from the streets but also from the absence of a Catholic education. He was anxious to keep his children away from the anti-Catholic Maria Rye and those whom he sent to Canada were protected from Protestant influences by placing them in French Catholic Québec. Barnardo's anti-Catholicism drew him into lengthy and costly litigation, Rye's into conflict with John Lambert, the

Catholic civil servant at the head of the Local Government Board. Sectarian rivalry reached its peak at the turn of the 20th century, by which time the size of parties of children dispatched overseas had become a barometer of the voluntary sector's success.

But the tactics used to compete with one another allowed them to negotiate, bypass and overcome opposition from government and public. They were masters of using networks of influence. Most were energetic travellers, popping across the Atlantic and back at the drop of a hat. They knew how to raise money that permitted operations unhindered by government regulation. They carried community support through public lectures, newspapers and books. They wrote regularly in *The Times*, *Glasgow Herald*, the religious press and other newspapers in Canada. There were public sendings off of the children, including marches to the station or docks accompanied by fife and drum bands.

Above all they were masters of self-publicity. Cliché was added to cliché. The public was given a vision of the 'flower of the flock' being sent to the 'fireside circle of the Canadian farmhouse'. They pioneered the use of straplines. Barnardo's 'No Destitute Child ever Refused Admission' paved the way and is persistent in his legacy. 'Believe in Children' urges Barnardo's UK today, as if there were an option not to believe; 'Children Come First' for Barnardo's New Zealand, not forgetting, we hope, those who come second, third and fourth. In Ireland, Barnardo's proclaims 'No Child gets Left Behind', notwithstanding the fact that they serve less than half of one per cent of the nation's children. Down under, Barnardo's is 'Caring for Australia's Children', or putting it more clearly, just a few of them. Barnardo and the organisations that sprang from his work are not alone in the practice. In England, the Government tells us that 'Every Child Matters' when its policies towards today's migrant minors, unaccompanied asylum seekers, indicate that some

children matter more than others.

Barnardo dominated the scene. He sent more children to Canada, nearly 25,000 between 1882 and 1915, argued more forcibly and played less fairly than all the rest put together. It is impossible in a book, never mind a review, to capture the full range of good and harm that Barnardo encompassed. Parker gets as close as any when he says:

He believed he was divinely called to the work of child salvation and this conviction merged with his autocratic and ambitious personality to create an abiding sense of self-righteousness, a resistance to criticism, an often reckless disregard of the law and a desire to occupy the foremost position in the field of child welfare. (p 67)

Were the others any better? James Fegan is one of the few to emerge with credit. Today, a Baptist lay preacher concerned about the plight of street children would be submerged by requests from Criminal Records Bureau for information about themselves. But at 21, Fegan gave up his job, got the backing of a rich benefactor, Lord Blantyre, and opened a non-denominational home only for boys. He started to take some of them to Canada from the mid-1880s. In several respects his approach was different. He gave his charges the opportunity to get away from the city and become farm labourers. He built a replica of a Canadian farm in Kent to prepare boys for their future. He encouraged his charges to pay back at least some of the cost of the journey and saw eventual reunification as a possibility. While not a distinct vision of child rescue, at least Fegan entertained certain reservations, such as objections to girls being sent.

All this ego, enterprise and guile helped to mask the constant whiff of scandal. Everybody involved could smell it, but the entrepreneurs of emigration made sure it never overpowered. They used a combination of skill and arrogance employed with similar effect by the Roman Catholic Church to cover the stench of

maltreatment by the clergy a century later. To take one example, in 1900 Alfred de Brissac Owen, Barnardo's representative in Canada, was accused of the sexual exploitation of girls in his care. But nothing was done until 1919 when Owen confessed to living with a Barnardo's émigrée. Even then he was never convicted. It was managed.

III

How should government have responded to such enterprise? It had two options. It could tamper with it or stop it altogether. There were good reasons for the British government to stop it: the fetor of scandal, the muffled cries of unhappy parents, and occasionally the children. But then, as now, government was not joined up. It comprised many local and a number of national jurisdictions in Britain as well as the provincial and federal authorities in Canada. Furthermore, diplomatic relations between the two countries were not well defined and communication was often confused and erratic. But then, as now, it would not have mattered had all the government protagonists shared the same office. It was the absence of a common purpose regarding the children that posed the greatest obstacle to a reasoned response to the emigration lobby. So, they did not stop the enterprise. They enquired, they inspected and, gradually, they legislated. They tampered and, in so doing, they colluded.

This was the period during which legislation began to define poor families as distinct from better-off ones. During the 50 years described in Parker's book, there was a gradual erosion of parental rights and a greater encroachment of the state into family life. Legislation formalised what had become informal practice with respect to poor families. Then, as now, poor parents were seen as having a pernicious influence on children and well-meaning voluntary organisations ganged up to encourage government to make it easier for them to intervene. For the most part, the state acquiesced while putting in place checks

and balances that effectively rubber-stamped the requests of the voluntary organisations. Most parents assumed they had no rights and their failure to act was liable to be taken by the authorities as agreement or symptomatic of a lack of interest in their children.

The middle classes, minds clouded by hearsay, passed laws that applied to poor families that they would never have contemplated for more than a second for their own. The 1889 Poor Law (Amendment) Act allowed poor law and later local authorities to assume parental rights over children placed with them voluntarily by their parents. This legislation facilitated emigration and continued to wreck the lives of poor families for a century. The 1891 Custody of Children Act limited the rights of parents placing children with voluntary organisations to get their children back, thus further easing the shipment process. The 1891 Reformatory and Industrial Schools Act abolished the rights of parents to recover their children after a period of detention, adding another ready supply for parts of the Empire.

The children's legal status was varied and ambiguous. The term 'orphan' simplified matters. We feel sorry for and like to support orphans, but most children described as such over the last 150 years have had at least one and often two living parents. Throughout the 19th century, parents made most of the applications for places in orphanages. Looking at the files of orphanage residents in the US mid-west in the 60 years prior to 1930, Cmiel found that between 92 per cent and 97 per cent had at least one living parent. Most orphans remained in contact with their families and, in the US context, two-thirds went back to relatives within six months of separation. Some orphanages put aside space for parents to stay and the majority were located in the communities from which children were drawn. The root of the dictionary definition of orphan, the late Latin or Greek *orphanos*, suggesting 'uncertain affinity', is probably the closest to the

empirical experience of that broad group of children that has been called 'orphans', including those shipped to Canada and elsewhere. Too often those seeking to offer support have produced the uncertainty of the affinity.

Once in Canada, the uncertainty was magnified. The children were indentured workers or replacement labourers, but often underpaid or even unpaid altogether. Technically they were Canadian citizens (until 1947 Canadians were considered British subjects) but over time some were 'deported' back to Britain. Many arrived in Canada without birth certificates, making it difficult for them to establish their identity, get passports and claim inheritances.

The Canadian legal context was rapidly evolving. At first the shipments were handled and financially supported by the Department of Agriculture. Later the Department of the Interior took over. This change, in 1892, helped to formalise previously informal relationships with the UK advocates and haphazard inspection of placements. As the scandals and public interest increased, child protection legislation was introduced in Ontario, first in 1893 and then specifically for British child emigrants in 1897. In 1900 an Inspector of Child Immigration was appointed. While these changes appeased the labour movement and UK government, there is not much evidence of impact on the well-being of the children.

But overall, the tampering meant that the emigrationists did not have it all their own way. Several moratoria were introduced by the Local Government Board on the emigration of children in the care of poor law guardians, including one in 1874 that lasted nine years. Thresholds were introduced. At first, girls over 12 years could not be sent for fear they would be placed in moral danger. Later it was decided that children under seven could not go, betraying an arbitrariness similar to that applied more recently by the British boarding school system, placement in which now rarely occurs before the age of nine years. Preparation in poor law schools

was seen as a necessity, and the children had to be medically fit. Reports on the well-being of children from Canada were requested. As Parker states, it is not only remarkable how many children were sent to Canada, it is also surprising that the numbers were not higher. The collusion found a level that worked for most of the adults.

IV

Maybe all of this can be described and explained by the context of the time. The turn from the 19th to the 20th centuries was in so many respects different from the turn from the 20th to the 21st. In Britain, the industrial revolution was well established, bringing urbanisation, wealth and poverty. The economy was prone to recession during which the poor got poorer. The number of children in the care of the poor law – equivalent to state care today – increased from 40,000 to 60,000 in the 1860s, and poor relief – broadly analogous to family support – was dispensed to 400,000 children. Poverty was more visible than today and it offended the middle-class eye. It was accompanied from 1859 onwards by an evangelical revival that extended to saving children from themselves and their parents, and society from them.

In the era covered by Parker's book, infant mortality was 20 or more times higher than today. Life expectancy was about 30 years less. At the turn of the 20th century the UK was a net exporter of people; at the turn of this century we were a net importer. In 1876 the Registrar General found that 16 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women could only sign their name with a mark. Today, local and central government expenditure accounts for about half of gross domestic product but at the start of the 20th century this ratio was somewhere between ten and 15 per cent. There was a considerable amount of need but much less state intervention to meet it.

Canada was just coming into being. The Constitution Act 1867 created a single Dominion with four provinces of

Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The other provinces and territories were slowly added and the country gradually assumed control over its own affairs. But independence did not come until the 1931 Statute of Westminster. A constant was immigration and population growth, from 3.6 million in 1870 to 5.3 million at the turn of the century and 8.0 million in 1915, when Parker's book draws to a close. The country is huge and telecommunications were limited. Informal dealings were the order of the day.

Canada was a country made possible by advances in transport and it sustained itself by maintaining those advances. These included the development of railways and canals; for example, three thousand miles of track were laid in 1882 alone. The distances covered by the newly arrived children were immense. At the age of nine, due to my mother's chronic illness I was uprooted from Liverpool to strangers but family members in Glasgow. The five-hour journey by car is my strongest childhood memory. Eight decades earlier Rose Standish, also from Liverpool, found herself, thanks to the helping hands of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, placed with Mrs Biddeson in Roaring River, 250 miles north west of Winnipeg, a journey I can hardly begin to comprehend.

We knew less then than we do now. The causes of syphilis, a disease that transfixed the anti-emigrationists in Canada, was not understood until 1905 and a test for its presence was not available until the following year. It was another 35 years before effective treatment came on stream. The now disproven but even then implausible genetic threat posed by immigration was reported in reputable medical and public health journals. Mental health was seen as organic. There was little sense that interventions, such as wrenching children from their home communities and exporting them several thousand miles away, could cause mental illness. Hitting children was viewed as neither unusual nor harmful.

But was the planet so different then that the collusion surrounding the emigration of poor unaccompanied children across continents can be explained away? I think not.

V Emigration was not about the children. It was about the adults. It was about the need for labour and domestic servants in parts of the Empire. It was about responding to a middle-class moral panic about the feckless poor. It was about efficiency and managing systems and making sure state and voluntary organisations prospered. It was about the status and ego of the principal players. This intervention cannot be explained in terms of reducing impairments to children's development. But it can be explained in terms of the deals that were struck along the way.

In the 1860s, as Britain and Ireland suffered economic depression, Canada was expanding. In Ireland there was a plentiful supply of young girls and not much demand for servants. So it was in some parts of England, but not in Lancashire and Cheshire where there were shortages of girls for domestic labour. Consequently, when Rye and others came looking, some poor law boards of guardians were more accommodating than others.

In addition to calculations about moral risks, the preference for younger children was partly explained by the price of passage. Rye (whose pecuniary interests in emigration were frequently questioned) charged £12 per head for shipment. Another agent, Annie Macpherson, took the cost of the adult fare from Liverpool to Canada, which was under £7 (about £500 at today's prices). Both knew that children under eight years travelled half price. The Doyle Inquiry in 1874 reckoned the agents could be making as much as £5 per head. But all the parties wanted the best deal. At first, Nova Scotia offered incentives – \$5 for younger children, \$10 for older children – while Ontario provided \$6 for somewhat longer. The federal government then paid \$2 for

each child the emigrants brought in. In total, the investments were considerable but recoverable and could be defended.

Since the deals were about labour and not children some of the organisations sought the best product. Harriet Ward found that the Waifs and Strays Society decided against emigration for some of its charges because they were too small, had poor eyesight, were incontinent, 'backward' or simply 'could not be trusted'. When they found a good prospect, steps were taken to circumvent parental opposition: Ward calculated that 12 per cent of those emigrated by the Society were sent 'precipitately'; for example, to prevent parents from obstructing what others believed to be best for their child.

The supply met the particular demand for labour on small Canadian farms run by aspirant families. In the early part of the 20th century full-time education became increasingly common, although not mandatory in Québec until 1942. Not only did education deprive the farm parents of the much needed help of their own children, but it also encouraged their offspring as they grew older to move away. The net result was that only one or two children would stay and contribute. It was not economic to employ full-time adult help, so low- or no-wage children provided a reasonable alternative; and, in the rural areas it was easy for them not to be sent to school or to attend fitfully.

As well as solving a problem abroad, the émigrés resolved a problem at home. Systems for children in need are like tanks of water. They fill up. Emigration was a pipeline running children from the bottom of the reservoir, making more room at the top. (It is unfortunate in our age that so few local authorities providing a poor service to too many looked after children do not think in these terms. For quite different reasons Barnardo certainly did, referring regularly to the 'outlets' and 'tributaries' of his organisation.)

Many of the forces that sustained the uprooting of children were contradic-

tory, so the image of the children was adapted. To begin with they needed to be saved from their parents, from their home communities, from the poor law institutions and from their lack of opportunity. They were potential paupers who could become producers and consumers. They were innocents who could become corrupted. They were the threatened who might turn into threats. It was the parents who were vilified as inimical. Subsequently, the offspring became orphans ripe for saving.

But once children were in Canada the arguments changed. As Parker observes, the children were needed but not wanted. They became the modern-day hoodie. Opposition started with the trade union movement, concerned about the over-supply of labour and the undercutting of wages and employment opportunities. But soon the police, doctors and politicians were weighing in. The transportation of children became a party political issue with the left (Liberals) siding with the labour movement against child immigration and the right (Conservatives) siding with employers. However, the dividing lines were blurred and became hazier. The emptiness of the arguments is brought into relief by the fact that many of those against the shipping were at ease employing immigrant girls as servants.

The discussion was base. The girls were going to lead their employers astray and produce illegitimate children while the boys would feed the prison population. Many first-generation immigrants started to worry about the gene stock of their new country. They worried about syphilis in the way many commentators worried about AIDS soon after the syndrome was discovered. Bringing children from poor UK cities was tantamount to injecting syphilis into each citizen's arm. The language became extreme. Dr Ferguson, a doctor MP in the Canadian parliament, told the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonisation that 'the majority of these children are the offal of the most deprived characters in the

cities of the Old country'. (One presumes he was using the political part of his intellect and not the medical.)

VI

In the last resort, however, it was all about the children. So how did they fare? We cannot know for sure. Too much of the research, like contemporary studies of children in care, is based on case files and retrospective recall by self-selecting respondents. (Parker's tireless excavation uncovers my pet hate, a postal survey with a predictably poor response rate.) What little has been discovered has often been assembled despite rather than because of the voluntary organisations. As a result, evidence is meagre and tells us more about negative than about positive events. Still, by piecing together letters, archive material, a doctoral thesis here and there alongside evidence presented to the House of Commons in the 1990s, *Uprooted* paints a plausible picture.

The starting point, the separation, is chilling. John Middlemore, the Birmingham Baptist gives a good account of it. It is reminiscent of films of death penalty prisoners meeting family members before taking their last meal. He describes it as:

... pathetic as life could present. After tea had been served, and a few simple speeches had been made, the parents and children were left together ... fare-well kisses were exchanged, and the life-long separation was effected. (p 32)

Much more is known about what happened on arrival. Once it got going, inspection found children to be mostly in good physical health. Heads, chests and heights were measured. Based on her reading of case files, Joy Parr reckoned that physical health appeared to improve after arrival while mental health deteriorated. She also estimated that eleven per cent of the girls became pregnant, a rate eight times higher than for Canadian children. Sexual relations between children and their employers were, like so much of this story, subject

to a rarefied language. Some employers were arrested for seduction but rarely for rape. However described, few were successfully prosecuted.

Relatively few 'Home' children went to school; there was little incentive for their sponsor families to encourage them. Parr estimates that 70 per cent of those aged 13 plus never went to school, and 30 per cent of 10–13-year-olds missed out also. But inspectors often remarked favourably on the performance of those who did go. And the literacy of some of the children is evident in their letters home and to their sponsoring organisations. They wrote in search of their parents or with a desire to help them. (There were also parents writing in search of their children and offering to pay their way back.) Not only did the children miss their parents but some also felt homesick for their residential and foster homes in Britain from where they were plucked. Some sent money back to their sponsor organisations.

Then there was maltreatment. Parr estimated that nine per cent of the boys and 15 per cent of the girls were excessively punished. The House of Commons Health Committee, using the recollections of adults shipped to Australia as children, concluded that between 20 and 25 per cent suffered physical abuse and 16 and 24 per cent were victims of sexual abuse. As has been seen, scandal was omnipresent. As Parker records, Annie Thompson, aged ten, was placed in solitary confinement, given only bread and water, beaten with the back of a brush and left out all night in the cold of a Canadian winter. Charlotte Williams was 'seduced' by her family's 19-year-old son and evicted. Alice Gee was hospitalised in Ontario due to 'ill usage'. George Green, lame, knock-kneed, shortsighted and dim-witted, was saved by Barnardo only to be murdered by his Canadian owner, who was later acquitted. The entire review could be made up of such sentences, each capturing a blighted life.

For those who survived, the picture afterwards is hazier still. Movement was a constant. Few children became a part

of the families with whom they were placed. Their labour gave them a different, less permanent status. They could be returned if they didn't shape up, and many were. Impermanence and its risks were the children's characteristic lot. For example, since they were not regarded as full members of the farm family, girls in particular were not protected by the usual taboos that prevail among family members.

When asked by the Local Government Board to calculate the breakdown rate, Rye volunteered that about a fifth of the 786 children she had taken out over a four-year period returned from their placements to her reception home in Canada. Parker observes that 60,000 people were deported from Canada prior to the Second World War and among their number would have been some of the emigrant children, including many of the girls who fell pregnant. Why were these children taken from their home country and some then sent back? In part, it reflects the incapacity and unwillingness of the Canadians to support those who became dependent on the state as well as the absence of developed welfare services. And was the reunion a planned affair? Almost certainly not. As with so many of these ventures, there is a rush to work out how to get children away and hardly a second thought about how to get them back.

The absence of success stories is striking. When I studied Milton Hershey School in Pennsylvania, the largest residential school in the world and dedicated to rescuing poor children, they celebrated their alumni successes: the leading medics, footballers, educators and even spies who graduated over the past century. These cases tell us nothing in research terms since the successful alumni might have done better still without their residential sojourn. But at least there are some dazzling careers. When *Fortune* magazine describes CEOs of leading

companies who are dyslexic, one almost wishes for a reading disorder. But there appear to be few saving graces among the child émigrés to Canada.

In 1989 Phillip Bean and Joy Melville prepared a documentary and book called *Lost Children of the Empire* about children shipped to Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In 1997, the House of Commons Health Committee took up their theme, and widened the enquiry to include children exported to Zimbabwe. Members of the Committee visited the former colonies and dominions and examined 250 submissions from adults who had been emigrated as children. They reckoned that two-fifths of the women and nearly half of men had emotional problems consequent on the intervention and that these persisted well into adulthood. The Bean and Melville book contains so much damage it is hard to read. What shines through most strongly is the pain of lost identity. So when he came to give evidence to the House of Commons Committee, the then Chief Executive of Barnardo's, Roger Singleton, apologised for the behaviour of his organisation. 'It was barbaric' he said. 'It was dreadful. We look back on it in our organisation with shock and horror'.²

VII

How often do we close a history of human catastrophe with the sigh 'never again', only for the episode to be repeated. War. Ethnic cleansing. Human trafficking. These afflictions do not go away. We are slow learners. Could we get back into the business of exporting children? In the time it took to send children from these shores to Canada we could today send them to the moon. As the technology changes, will we collude again? The ability to travel at a reasonable cost was fundamental to the uprooting described by Parker. So too was a dominion that needed labour. The religious revival that led to a bevy of saving – from the dangers of alcohol,

² House of Commons, Select Committee on Health, *Examination of witnesses*, 11 June 1998, para 258

from the ravages of poverty and from the corrosive influences of family – also played its part. We might reflect that our secular society is a fashion easily reversed. In the United States my non-religious friends look on uneasily at their church-going, sometimes bible-bashing offspring. Think also of the resources pumped by the US government into programmes, largely advocated by religious leaders, that encourage adolescents to abstain from sexual intercourse. Experimental evaluation shows what should have been blindly obvious – that the strategy does not work. Also crucial to the emigration enterprise was an over-supply of clever, marginalised people with an evangelical zeal, a phenomenon likely to recur as government scales back funding for children's services and research.

What can we do to stop absurd collusions of all kinds? Developing a common purpose for all children could be an important starting point. It is reasonable for us to have policies about children that are not solely focused on improving their health and development; for example, to reduce crime, boost the productivity of society or reduce costs. But such initiatives should not be dressed up in the name of children. Ending the separation of services for poor children from other children would also help. We still visit interventions on the economically disadvantaged that we strive at all costs to avoid for our own. Having to defend the logic underpinning the policy or service would do much to avoid future disaster. Expecting parents to do as they are told by the state is not a logical strategy when we know children do not do as their parents tell them. When a massive intrusion into a child's life is contemplated in the form of a policy, it should be considered a hypothesis to be tested by rigorous evaluation. Only when thoroughly evaluated should we roll it out more broadly. We could start making policies and designing services that demand analysis, data and examination of the 'what works' evidence, and that listens properly to children, family members and other

interested community leaders. Could such an approach replace wheeler-dealing?

There will be some readers of Parker's book who will conclude that emigration was not a disaster. That as bad as it was, it could have been worse. To them I ask, Why were these policies dressed up in terms of children's well-being? Where was the logic in shunting children from care to indenture and from one continent to another? Why was this reserved for poor children? Why not the children of the emigrationists? How did the advocates maintain their certainty that it was the right course of action for so long? And what would the children have said, had they been asked. Or their parents? What would an experimental evaluation have shown?

For the readers of this journal I would ask, Can we think of other services that falsely claim to be about children's well-being, that have doubtful logic, are the preserve of the poor and that have never been subject to rigorous evaluation? Is some of our work an absurd collusion?

As we ponder our aspiration 'never again', we might also bear in mind our language. Parker's book tells us that cliché is a risk for children. The émigrés were anything but their epithet of 'Home' children. Calling them so was a signal to be concerned. Could the same be said about 'looked after' children today?

We will likely soon be entering an era when the cost of bureaucracy will again be questioned. But we would do well to remember that the bureaucrats at least put a brake on the shipment of children. Left entirely to their own devices, what horrors would Rye, Stephenson, Barnardo and the others have visited on the vulnerable? Bureaucracy is a necessary irritant when senior policy makers do not have the will to act courageously.

We can never say 'never again' to the movement of children. It is a common phenomenon. It is all around us. But Parker's study gives us clear pointers for the future. We should not readily get into the business of moving other

people's children. It carries risks as well as opportunities. These are calculations for families, children included. After reading one of the foremost studies of the migration of children unaccompanied by parents, one is struck by how little is known about risks and resilience in these contexts. What is the impact on health and development at successive stages of life? How should we respond to unaccompanied minors? How should we treat the 14-year-old worldly-wise Nigerian girl whom I met in the youth club in Galway? We do not know, yet we act so decisively.

One important, increasingly overlooked contribution to our understanding is history. Parker's is exceedingly well researched, beautifully written and dispassionately told. In preparing this review I have paid homage to his structure and style. His essays and book chapters are inimitable: generally five to seven sections, each about a 1,000 words in length, comprising seven or eight cogent points, well supported by evidence and illustration. I cannot mirror his quality or his conservative approach to the data. Maybe in time I

will learn his great gift of asking a question without asking a question. He knows how to embed an idea in the text so that it becomes both invisible but unavoidable. Roy Parker does not need to ask, 'Is this happening now?' or 'Could this happen again?' Without saying a word about anything that happened after 1950 he leaves the reader in no doubt that it is, and it could.

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³ Other citations in this article can be found in the reference section of *Uprooted*.