

Child protection in the UK (and a point on France situation).

Florence Bellone's presentation - NCHR Symposium, Gothenburg, 9 Sept. 2017

It's only a few decades ago that women started to be able to choose when they would become mothers. In the UK, this is actually when forced adoption took a new speed, because abandoned babies were becoming very rare. Further, at the end of the 20th century, Tony Blair started a financial incentive programme to reward the local authorities according to the number of children they would collect for adoption. Foster care or adoption agencies started to bloom, like Foster Care Associates, founded by a social worker and a foster carer in 1994, today an international business called Core Assets Group Limited and operating in ten countries including Sweden. The two owners pocketed record dividends of 12.7 millions d'euros through their holding company in 2013, yet the company didn't become the property of a private equity firm like most of its competitors.

In 2013, James MUNBY, the then new president of the Family Courts, was very shocked by the number of cases where children should not have been separated from their parents or wider families. He criticised the government policy which included new measures to remove children younger and get them adopted faster. Of course babies are the most wanted by potential adopters, and they are also much easier to adapt as they do not remember traumas. 20% of adoptions fail, mostly with older children, according to official statistics. The government proposed to put them in foster care directly with their future adopters so that they won't have to adapt to several foster carers before being adopted. And it demanded that the whole court process won't last more than six months, from removal to adoption. Needless to say that with only six months, the chances of the birth family to fight in court are cut short. James MUNBY reminded that the English law "states that a child should only be separated from its parents in extreme circumstances." He also relieved part of the gagging orders conditions for medias when it comes to tell the victims story, which contributed to raise awareness about forced adoption. From 2015 to 2016, the rate of national adoptions decreased by 12%, from 5360 to 4690 adopted children. The number of children taken into care only increased by 1% the same year but the child protection practice is still the same.

The problem lies in three points in my view : First, parental incompetence is treated with a vacuum cleaner rather than educating deficient people on the matter. It's like the difference between a premeditated murder and killing

someone by accident. It should not be the same sentence. And severing children's birth family link is a life sentence. Another serious issue is the so-called prevention. Imagine that you are arrested and jailed for life because it is likely that with your weak character or difficult childhood, you are going to commit a murder. It's exactly what happens in the British family courts. They remove a child or baby at birth because of a "risk of emotional harm for this child in the future". The third point is decadency of justice when it comes to enquire on a suspected abuse: the evidence to be presented doesn't have to be hard evidence. It doesn't have to come from police enquiry but from experts' opinions and sometimes social workers' opinions. They have created a full range of fake science through a variety of assessments but assessments, to put it simple, are not evidence. Moreover, police having a doubt about a family has to refer it immediately to social services. But if social services refer a family to the police and that police concludes that no crime was committed against the children, the social services are still gaining in court the removal of such children.

Strangely enough, the most horrible cases of cruelty on children are only known with the discovery of a child's dead body. The official statistics on murdered children are very unreliable, ranging from 1 to 4 children per week and showing that the government is actually unable to know how many children are murdered and how many are murdered inside the family. Statistics don't say if children were killed by a stranger or a parent. On the top of it, the notion of murder is now very confused and some state organisations include children dead as a result of parental incompetence and others, not. Finally almost every organisation admits that the authorities are probably not aware of many murders of children which means that the UK has no clue about many children are living in the country. It is also showing that there is little focus on catching murderers compared with the focus on taking away children in case the parents would end up killing them.

Interestingly, all the famous murders of children where parents were proved to be the murderers with hard evidence and which made headlines during months, sometimes years, have two things in common: the first one is that murderers were known from social services but not from police. The second one is that the murdered children had been to school at some point and sometimes to the day of their death. They had been in the community and that same community eager to denounce loads of parents for a bruise or a cry had missed them, no matter how emaciated or terrified they looked. This alone should be enough to put down the system.

One too frequent source of child murder is also the fear and despair triggered by social services. Parents of all ages, all backgrounds have killed their children

and committed suicide after being pressured by social services. You could say that such parents are simply not strong enough or too selfish to have children. But it is still a very inefficient method of people education and child protection, the one which consists in preventive punishment and pushes parents to despair.

So, coming back to the evidence presented in family courts : it comes from social services or court experts mandated by them, often experts in psychiatry or psychology. Some of them have never worked other than in the court field. In Norwich, East of England, there is a little business called “Psychology Clinic”. It was set up at 500 metres from the Crown court by two female psychologists just graduated from the local university and the husband of one of them, as the director. The accountability of the enterprise shows that all revenues come from courts between Norwich and Cambridge. All the reports I’ve seen by the two psychologists tell the same story : mothers suffering Borderline personality disorder or ADHD. Mothers who were dealt with by one of the two ladies told me that no attention was paid to them at all, the psychologist being busy to tick cases. Moreover, parents facing the loss of their children are exposed to depression and all signs of mental struggle for obvious reason. This is also playing against them. I am not adverse to psychology as long as it is made to understand and help, but I could see that in family courts, psychology and psychiatry are mostly a way of creating evidence where it is missing.

It is rare that a judge would cast a doubt on an expert unless he is backing the innocence of the parents. Experts come also from exact sciences. If, for exemple, they are certain that their medical examination shows that no abuse has happened when social services argue the contrary, they face losing the lucrative court business which can bring more than 2000 euros for a day in court. It can be worse. Two years ago, a neuropathologist from Oxford university, Waney Squier, who, after years of work on children’s brain, disagreed with the mainstream theory of Shaken Baby Syndrom, was charged for lying in court because she was often supporting parents. No scientific evidence against the validity of her work and conclusions was shown but she was fired by the General Medical Council. After one year of fight, she finally won and was acquitted in Court of Appeal. But the theory continues to dominate expertises. I met Waney Squier and some of her colleagues who had come to similar conclusions but they couldn’t give me formal interviews because they would be sacked by the General Medical Council and maybe dragged to court.

The UK is maybe the only country to be self-sufficient in terms of adoption. It is a minor actor in terms of international adoptions compared to other western countries. In 2010, fulfilling the conditions to be accepted as an adopter was still quite difficult. Yet international adoptions would only count for 10% of all adoptions and the number of adopted foreign children was ten times less than in

France, for an equivalent population. Today, statistics on international adoptions in the UK are not even published. There is a lot of advertising in the medias for adopting British children, from newspapers pages to TV spots. As it is not enough to dispose of the stock, if I can say, the government created incentives like the priority for adopters to choose a school. The choice of a school is an old problem for British families because state schools go from worse to excellence depending of the area. Families have been moving to be able to pretend to one school rather than another. So the priority for adopted children is a real privilege. Adopters also receive a financial package according to their own resources such as 11.000 euros to move to a bigger house. For foster families which are equally aggressively recruited, agencies offer 3300 euros “golden hello”. Local authorities can manage foster families but they increasingly entrust agencies even though it is twice costly : agencies charge a commission roughly equal to the foster carer’ salary. National adoption and fostering in the UK is a complete business and one with future. As advised an accountant for the foster agency Core Assets to a couple wishing to open their own agency, “There will always be children and they will remove more and more of them.”

If money is a nasty driver when it comes to child protection, the mentality of controlling the individual free will is another one. The power of commanding the way of thinking and people’s most personal choices is a concerning trend in the British society. British critics call it the “nanny state”.

This summer there was a tragic story which gained worldwide media attention, such that Donald Trump and the Pope offered their help to a British family, even if there is a fair dose of politics in both their compassion. At first sight, the story has nothing to do with forced adoption, it was never question of removing a child from the care of his parents. But if the little Charlie Gard had not been affected by a fatal illness, it could have been otherwise. In many cases where parents allow themselves to disagree with the NHS (British Public Health), a sick child is removed from his family. I guess everybody saw this story in the papers but just in case : baby Charlie Gard suffered a serious congenital genetic illness with no known cure. The main hospital for children in London, the GOSH, decided that the boy should be let to die. The parents managed to raise 1.4 million euros to finance an experimental treatment in the United States. All they asked for was to try and if it would fail, they would let Charlie go. The hospital went to court, quoting that “When parents do not agree about a child’s future treatment, it is standard legal process to ask the courts to make a decision.” Then parental responsibility is overridden by a judge who will decide where is the best interest of the child. And in this case, the judge agreed and commented : "In this country children have rights independent of their parents." But for a baby obviously unable to express himself, what does it mean ? Parents can be wrong but that a judge can decide what is the best interest of a child like not to try a potentially life saving treatment is a clear message that if children

are not parents' possession, they belong to the state. Court proceedings lasted 8 months. The parents finally got permission to have the American doctor in charge of the experiment travelling to London to examine Charlie. His verdict was clear : too late. 8 months against a galoping illness were wasted in court proceedings. Then the last wish of the parents was to have their son's last moments at home. Again the GOSH said no and went back to court and obtained that Charlie would be brought to an hospice where, for some reason, it would be better dying. The NHS accepts referrals of children age 3 to change sex but it doesn't stand parents trying everything to save their children's life or just parents contradicting their opinion. According to rebel doctors, its legal fees budget would be far bigger than the medical one.

The case of Ashya King also made headlines. In 2014. This 5 year old boy was suffering a brain tumor. The NHS wanted to continue chimiotherapy but its secondary effects were destroying the boy. His parents enquired all over the world and concluded that protontherapy had to be tried. Protontherapy is targeting a tumour without burning the brain all around. The NHS refused for a good reason, the protontherapy was not available in the UK because expensive. As usual, the doctors refused that the boy should be treated abroad. The parents just took him and fled the country. They got caught in Spain and jailed but the Spaniards quickly sided with them and released them. The parents started a media campaign and the Czech Republic offered to treat the child. It worked. Today, Ashya is cancer free and goes to school. The hospital never stopped to state that the parents did wrong and endangered their son's life.

Another case is Anna's story. Anna was 15 when she started to suffer sort of chronic fatigue. The NHS found every psychological reason and incriminated the mother for insisting in finding a cause. A private doctor advised Anna's mother to bring her to Belgium and consult Dr Hertogue, endocrinologist and president of the International Hormone Society. Dr Hertogue diagnosed the teenager with a hormone imbalance and gave a prescription to Anna's mother. She bought the treatment in a pharmacy in Bruxelles and to her relief, Anna's health came back to normal. But the NHS doctor noticed...He sent social services and police to Anna's home. Social services took Anna away and police charged her mother for "attempted murder and hormones possession". She was acquitted but only after 8 months in jail. The same amount of time was later needed to get Anna out of care. Anna had lost again her health and suffered a severe depression as a result of the whole experience.

One of the medical plagues for families are babies' and toddlers' fractures. Sometimes it happens because of a defficiency in Vitamine D that the mother transmits to her baby through breastfeeding, which causes rickets and brittle bones. I cannot count the "Vitamine D forced adoptions" that I have seen,

included a mother for whom it was admitted in court that the medical expert could have been wrong and the parents could be not responsible for the fracture. But the judge explained that there was no funding for a new expertise and that the little girl had already been presented to her future adopters. To give her back to her parents, according to the judge, would be breaching the adopters human rights. The adopters human rights is a recurrent argument in court to not reunite a family.

Adoption is irreversible even if hard evidence of miscarriage of justice is made. In 2005, a judge allowed the publication of the facts related to such a miscarriage of justice in the medias and apologised to the parents for “this tragic mistake”. But he left the kids with their adopters and put a gagging order on their names and faces. A few years later a similar story was proven to be not a “tragic mistake” but the result of fabricated evidence by social services. The Courtnage are a middle class family from South-Africa. When they brought their youngest son, still a toddler, unwell, in hospital, they were told that they had hit him as he had a skull injury, possibly a fracture. Social services took him away and his older brother as well. It’s only after their were both adopted that two facts were discovered. The first one is that the mother suffers from Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and might have transmitted it to her youngest son. This disease gives fragile bones and joints. The second one is worse. John Hemming, an ex MP dedicated to fight family courts and a journalist, Ted Jeory, got hold of the original medical report after the Courtnage had brought their son to the hospital. It was not written “fracture” but “fissure” and it was explained that this fissure was a birth defect having caused the skull injury and that it was not a fracture. It proved impossible to obtain that a judge would acknowledge that social services had fooled the court.

The humblest families are often framed through so-called mental issues. Whatever the problem started with domestic violence, use of drug or alcohol, difficult pregnancy, depression or just a conflict with neighbours, the poorest are quickly labelled with mental troubles or even learning difficulties. Here we are in a pure eugenic vision of the society and social workers have the power of deciding who is intelligent enough to raise children. Countless first time pregnant mothers had their baby removed at birth because deemed too stupid or too vulnerable to be a mother. This is generally the case for the women who were themselves raised into care. I witnessed a social worker telling a young woman that because she had suffered sexual abuse when in foster care, she could never choose a partner who won’t be a violent man. They took her 4 babies at birth, one after another, on a 6 years period, all from the same father, who had no issues with the mother. He had a troubled past as a young burglar but his probation agent had certified he was fully rehabilitated.

The UK is also taking foreign children whose families are living or spending time there. A Latvian MP has counted 140 Latvian children taken in the UK in 3 years and never seen again. In 2014, it was already 1000 Polish children taken away and swallowed in the care and adoption system. No doubt that Eastern European children with physical characteristics close to the English ones are very welcomed on the adoption market.

But just the once will not hurt :

40 days ago, Eli, 6, was transferred to a French court, something which had never happened before. Without telling this long story, I would like to point out an episode which is recurrent in foreign children cases. A social worker went to France to assess all the family members who were named by the parents as candidates for Eli's custody. She (the social worker) went there with an interpreter without asking permission from British courts, French authorities, without a licence to work in France, just as a tourist, working illegally. The first person she met was one of Eli's aunts, 56 years. She just told her: "you are too old for raising another child". She refused every other candidate on different pretexts, all but one cousin because she had not met her as she was living very far from the other ones. And maybe that was Eli's chance. Without directly incriminating the social worker, the judge decided that this cousin could be the right person but that only French social services were habilitated to assess her. This particular judge respected recent guidelines on jurisdiction made by James Munby.

The French social workers were not overly sympathetic to a family criticising their UK counterparts. But they admitted that the cousin with her partner and their children would offer a good family to Eli. A French psychologist involved in the procedure was quite nasty to Alice. She wrote that Alice was overwhelmed with emotion about Eli's fate and that it would make her an unsuitable carer. She recommended that Eli would be adopted in the UK. This psychologist, I checked, is not on the professional register, she's employed only by social services. Again the difficulty was overcome by the judge in the UK who was satisfied with the sole good report from French social services and forgot about the psychologist opinion. She ordered the transfer of the case to the French jurisdiction. From then, it's hard to say who was less helpful for organising this transfer, the UK social services or the French consulate. Eli waited almost two years before setting a foot in France. I don't think that without the help of the ex-French MP Christophe Prémat's team, Eli would be in France today. Finally, a French judge called everybody to court, including Eli and his British social worker. At some point, the judge sent everybody out to interview Eli, then 6, and Eli confirmed that he wanted to live with his cousin. This never happened in the UK, where children who have been taken away from their parents are represented but not heard in court. There is a fair dose of

uncertainty about the procedure in France as it happened for Eli because no French judge had faced such a case before. We don't know if such experience will be repeated and successfully repeated.

In France, forced adoption is illegal. But for how long is the question. Under the previous two governments, there have been new laws to redefine the notion of "legal abandon" which are an open door to potential forced adoptions. One key in French law is that one family member opposing an adoption is enough to avoid it. But isolated vulnerable mothers can be forced to relinquish their children by many ways like making sure that they can't attend supervised visits to their child, planning visits during the parents work hours, changing the appointment at the last minute, cancelling visits under different pretexts or keeping the child far way from parents having no money to afford regular transportation. Like in the UK, social workers have a power of causing immense suffering and some of them are driven by their darkest side. A French social worker who is all the contrary of this and despairs in secret about the bad practice, said of some of his colleagues : "I couldn't keep myself from picturing them in our so sad concentration camps history and I thought, what would they do there if they had their present status ?"

France has actually twice more children in care than the UK. "For the 140 000 children taken into care, there is no ill-treatment but parents experiencing temporary or constant difficulties with their parental responsibilities", according to the judge Jean-Pierre Rosenczveig, ex-president of a French family Court and a critic of the system. And a report by the General Inspection for Social Affairs quoted : "For every age, the number of children who are kept into care is always bigger than the number of children given back to their parents. Magalie Scaramuzzino, the child protection responsible in a Catholic charity helping vulnerable families states that : "For many social workers, going to Court to obtain a certificate of legal abandon is not asking for a measure of protection but admitting a failure." The social worker I previously quoted (but cannot name for his job safety) I couldn't name reminds in his criticism of the system that good social work means to be able to maintain the most difficulties families together, not to split them.

All tactics to remove children from their parents are in fact very similar in France and the UK. The principle of giving children from vulnerable families to childless wealthy people is gaining momentum. There is a spirit of devaluing the birth family among some politicians. Through laws like allowing adoption for same sex couples, the biological parents are becoming only an option among others. Another aspect of the problem is defined by the judge Jean-Pierre Rosenczyeig in these words : "Faster and more often adopted, children would be less costly for public finances...". Annie Bouyx, First Inspector for Sanitary and

Social Action, and Alain Vogelweintn, judge, write in a common essay : “Before anything else, some want to satisfy their voters, adults wishing to adopt, by giving them the role of helper of the child they dearly miss.”

Finally, in France, it is fair to say that the statistics about adoption lack transparency. For exemple, the Ministry of Justice includes the vast majority of foreign adoptions into the total number of adoptions. France also has a form of adoption called simple adoption (in opposition to plenary adoption) which is not severing the child’s birth family link. This measure is seen as a solution against a too drastic measure but there are no studies on how potential adopters consider an adoption with a birth family in the background. Simple adoption is strongly advocated by government responsables but is it not against nature for childless people wishing to adopt ? And here again, the statistics for simple adoption include all the adoptions happening in a same family like a child adopted by the new partner of a widowed parent. So it’s very hard to get a real picture of how many children legally abandoned under duress could have been adopted in France.

Social work abuse is not happening only in the UK and France but just about everywhere, even in the countries where family used to be sacred like Italy. Several cases of forced adoption made headlines in Italy.

It is a matter of fact that the UK heads toward a dystopic society very similar to the one described in the 1932 novel : “Brave New World”, by British author Aldous Huxley. Children but also elderlies, disabled people and so-called mental people are increasingly becoming not only the state’s property but a ressource for the society. And it is a matter of fact that the anglo-saxon care policy is becoming a well coveted system in Europe.

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