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Introduction
Waiting for a Better World: Critical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Intercountry Adoption

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Consider a social phenomenon which for over sixty years has seen the increasingly systematic and organised (but involuntary) expatriation, migration and resettlement of around one million children around the globe (Selman, 2012). In most cases, this expatriation entails the complete severance of ties with home countries, communities and families of origin; the provision of new families and citizenship; a legal change of identity that may include the issuing of new birth certificates; and, for many, a life among people from whom they remain visibly different just as they remain culturally and linguistically different from the communities in which they were born but from whom they are removed at an early age.

Consider also that the direction of this migration is almost invariably one way: with children from the global south moving to the relatively affluent global north. There are notable (but insufficiently analysed) exceptions to this, including the children of the poor and marginalised in the United States being expatriated to places such as Canada, the Netherlands and France; and, until recently, the persistence of intercountry adoption from South Korea, now a modern industrialised nation and well beyond the war-time emergency which established it as the proto-type of state-sanctioned intercountry adoption.

Intercountry adoption fiercely divides opinion. Advocates promote it as the salvation of children otherwise doomed to lives of penury, disadvantage, institutionalisation or homelessness. Critics decry it as neo-colonial, exploitive of the poor and disadvantaged, generating both the commodification of children and incentives to their trafficking, and primarily serving the interests of affluent westerners and their desires for family formation. Others occupy positions between these poles and consider intercountry adoption to be a less than ideal but necessary intervention to ensure better outcomes for children who have been failed by their own national governments, global imbalances in power, poverty or disaster. In a better world, it is suggested, we would have no need for intercountry adoption, but in *this* world it plays a part in the global care of children. As such, it must be well regulated by international authorities to ensure that the practice is free from corruption and trafficking, and promotes the interests of children in all its processes. The articles in this special themed section bring new critical and historical research to bear on intercountry adoption as a social practice: the forces driving it; its connections with other forms of adoption; its implications for those who are adopted, those adopting them and the families and communities from whom they are removed; and its uncertain future.

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About the articles

The articles were first presented at the two-day symposium 'Interdisciplinary perspectives on intercountry adoption in Australia – history, policy, practice and experience' held at Monash University in Melbourne in 2010, funded by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) (Cuthbert, 2010). The aim of this special themed section – which continues the aim of that symposium – is to frame searching questions about intercountry adoption as a field of social practice and policy, and to draw on the perspectives and approaches of a number of disciplines within the social sciences to do so. Articles published here come from history, sociology, social work, demography, anthropology and psychology. With the exception of Peter Selman, who is based in the United Kingdom, the researchers whose work is published here are all Australian-based. There is, as a result, a distinctively Australian slant to their work, which nonetheless approaches intercountry adoption as a transnational phenomenon requiring attention from an international audience. Thus, this themed section represents a counter-balance to the bulk of research on intercountry adoption which comes from North America.

The first article is by Peter Selman, 'The Global Decline of Intercountry Adoption: What Lies Ahead?', which continues his research into the demographics of intercountry adoption that has informed the intercountry adoption research community and policy community for a number of years (Selman, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2012). Selman documents the complex factors which appear to herald the end of intercountry adoption as it has been practiced and understood in the late twentieth century with dramatic shifts in the numbers of children available for adoption, the source countries providing children for adoption and the kinds of children – now generally older, in sibling groups, or with special needs – being offered for adoption. This combined with what has been described as the 'expanded demographic' (Pringle, 2004) of individuals seeking to adopt has contributed to a 'crisis' in which the number of children available for adoption from Hague approved countries falls far short of demand. While acknowledging the risks in this situation for the illegal procurement of children for adoption and questionable practices in circumstances such as the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, Selman's determinations are cautious. Current trends indicate a significant decline in intercountry adoption, but the recent emergence of Ethiopia as a major sending country highlights the dynamic nature of this phenomenon: as one market closes, another opens, and this dynamism has marked the history of intercountry adoption over many years. While perhaps too early to announce the end of intercountry adoption, Selman considers that the continuation of the practice into the twenty-first century is likely to be on different terms with respect to the kinds of children made available. As he indicates, in the early twenty-first century, the hunger for babies looks set to be satisfied through other means, with surrogacy, especially offshore commercial surrogacy in places such as India, now emerging as a source of children for family formation. While surrogacy may satisfy baby hunger, it does nothing to address the still pressing needs in many parts of the world for family care for children. If, Selman concludes, the current decline in intercountry adoption heralds its demise, it is to be hoped that it will be replaced by child-focused alternatives, including incountry adoption programs as in Korea. A world without intercountry adoption and with no adequate alternatives to it will see many children around the globe relegated to lives of need, neglect and institutionalisation.

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Selman's survey of intercountry adoption trends which shows how the global market in children shifts in response to supply and demand is followed by an article by Shurlee Swain, 'Market Forces: Defining the Adoptable Child, 1860–1940', that presents an analysis of historical data collected from Australian newspapers documenting a market trading in children. Swain's thesis – that both in its pre-legislated form and post-legislation, adoption constitutes a market in children which can be read via advertisements placed by 'buyers' and 'sellers' of children in Australian newspapers – is compelling. Her analysis reveals mutually constitutive narratives and representational strategies in this market place as sellers seek to position and frame their goods in terms most attractive to buyers, while buyers seek to present themselves as worthy parents of the children available. Swain's work highlights the degrees to which sentimentality and ideas of children's welfare are mobilised to mask the operation of this market in children which formal legislated adoption, introduced into Australian states and territories from 1924 (with the exception of Western Australia which had legislated adoption in the late nineteenth century) sought to eliminate. Swain's article reveals how the forces of the market shift understandings of what constitutes an 'adoptable' child in a dynamic interplay of supply and demand. Legislation prohibited open markets in children and placed the formal adoption of children within the realm of law, serviced by adoption professionals, primarily social workers. Nonetheless, market forces persist to the present where they are currently being played out in both intercountry adoption and what looks to be its likely successor, the emerging market in surrogate births. Swain notes the persistence of sentimental narratives of child rescue and the alluring orphan myth in intercountry adoption – once again, masking the demand of buyers and dressing it in the clothes of child welfare and benevolence. Swain's historical research suggests that a better world – in which the care of children in need can be assured without their commodification – which has long been the aim of legislators and policy makers appears as far off as ever.

Swain's work is followed by ''[W]e Find Families for Children, Not Children for Families', an incident in the long and unhappy history of relations between social workers and adoptive parents' by Marian Quartly. Quartly focuses on the tense interplay between adoptive parents and social workers, whose professional expertise and authority were greatly bolstered in the twentieth century through the role accorded this profession through adoption legislation. Quartly's historical case study derives from the early days of intercountry adoption in Australia in the 1970s and its overlap with the stirrings of the reform of local adoption. Examining events which took place in the course of deliberations of the reformist Victorian Standing Committee on Adoption, Quartly's article details the conflicting perspectives on the role of adoption of representatives of the social work profession, government officials, and representatives of parents' organisations. Fired by the rights-based politics of the period, which included the emerging conceptualisation of parents as 'consumers' of social services (if not the children they sought to adopt), the work of the committee became bogged in a dispute which highlighted the incommensurabilities of the perspectives and interests of those around the table. Quartly's work makes a valuable and rare contribution to studies of adoption through its focus on social workers – arguably the fourth side of the many-sided triangle of adoption (Marshall and McDonald, 2001) – and their attempts to negotiate the changing structures of authority under which they practiced.

'History Repeating: Disaster-Related Intercountry Adoption and the Psychosocial Care of Children', by Patricia Fronek and Denise Cuthbert, subjects to critical scrutiny

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the historical and continuing connection between intercountry adoption and disaster. Through a brief overview of key twentieth-century disasters and the development of intercountry adoption as a 'humanitarian' response to children in disaster, the authors argue that the connection between intercountry and adoption is as selective as it is strong. That is, not all disasters are equal: not all prompt the evacuation of children for foreign adoption. Reflecting the flow of children from the under-developed to the developed world, it is disasters in poor countries (in which intercountry adoption agencies are in operation) that see children at risk of this removal. Disasters in developed nations – in the United States, in New Zealand or Australia – see different approaches to the management of children in the post-disaster period in which the children's ongoing presence and participation in disaster recovery are considered necessary for their wellbeing and that of their communities. Examining the growing body of literature on the psychosocial care of children in emergencies, Fronek and Cuthbert note that key findings from this literature – particularly those centred around the 'continuity principle' which posits continuity as crucial to the wellbeing of children – are at odds with the practice of permanently removing children from disaster zones for adoption. Fronek and Cuthbert conclude that more work is needed at the international level to ensure that the forces of the market in children do not prevail over evidence-based considerations of their best interests. The idea of humanitarianism needs to be uncoupled from adoption in the case of the management of children in disaster zones. This work will also entail efforts to (re)educate prospective parents about the needs of children in disaster and to understand that their immediate and longer-term needs are more likely to be met within their own families and communities than through expatriation and adoption.

Swain, Fronek and Cuthbert highlight in their articles the persistence and seductiveness of the 'orphan myth' and the role it plays in enabling and justifying intercountry adoption. In his article, 'Intercountry Adoption and the Inappropriate/d Other: Refusing the Disappearance of Birth Families', Damien Riggs extends the consideration of the 'orphan myth' by looking at the representational strategies which lead to 'disappeared' birth families in adoption discourses. Riggs analyses three representative texts in the growing sub-genre of children's stories designed to frame the intercountry adoption of children by gay and lesbian couples. Riggs' analysis finds that the act of parenting outside the hetero-reproductive norm does not necessarily exclude normative assumptions operating within narratives about gay- and lesbian-parented households and families. The writers of the children's stories under analysis 'normalise' the intercountry adoption by same-sex couples and give this mode of family formation the same validity as families formed by heterosexual couples. One casualty of such normalisation narratives is the 'disappearing' of the children's birth families (and their birth cultures as well) which amounts to a form of discursive 'orphaning' of the adopted children in these stories. In foregrounding adoption as an act of love and choice, and adoptive parents as its primary agents, the children's stories tend either to remove the birth parents entirely or to frame them as deficient/deviant and unfit to care for their child who is much better off being adopted. In some stories, where the possibility of connection with birth families is raised, it is relegated to some vague and abstract future. Is there a way forward, asks Riggs? Can we develop progressive, inclusive accounts of intercountry adoption which 'refuse' the disappearance of the birth families of adopted children and allow for the continued presence of birth families and communities in the lives of adopted children? Riggs turns to the work of postcolonial theorist Trinh Min-Ha to offer a theorisation of intercountry

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adoption which allows for the inclusive framing of birth and adoptive families alongside the adopted child.

While it is children who are adopted, the experience of being adopted is one which persists beyond the childhood of adoptees and remains with them for life. The experiences of adult intercountry adoptees are examined in Jessica Walton's article, 'Supporting the Interests of Intercountry Adoptees beyond Childhood: Access to Adoption Information and Identity', which highlights the importance of access to information and adoptees' continuing challenges with identity. Drawing on rich ethnographic data from adult intercountry adoptees and policy analysis, Walton focuses on one of the key issues which distinguishes the practice of intercountry adoption from those that increasingly prevail in domestic adoption. Intercountry adoption remains essentially closed, while domestic adoption in many jurisdictions is practised with varying degrees of openness in terms of access to information about family, including medical histories, and contact, either real or virtual with birth families. The differences between two forms of adoption have led some commentators to suggest that adoption practices diverge depending on whether the children being adopted are citizens or born overseas (Cuthbert *et al.*, 2009). Walton's analysis of key policy documents on intercountry adoption highlights the prevalence of bias in favour of adoptive parents and the construction of adoptees as perpetual children. Adoption policy and practice – particularly adoption support services which are once again geared to the needs of parents – need to acknowledge that adoptees are not frozen in time, but grow to adulthood and their needs change accordingly. A pressing need for adult adoptees is access to information.

This section also includes a review of literature, focusing on the sociological literature on intercountry adoption by Indigo Willing, Patricia Fronek and Denise Cuthbert. The analysis of research published between 1997 and 2010 finds a preponderance of literature from the United States, reflecting its place as a major receiving country and a focus on adoption experiences organised by reference to the adoption triad: adoptive parents, adoptees, birth families. Further reflecting the power imbalances in intercountry adoption, the voices and experiences of adoptive parents dominate the literature. There is an emerging literature generated by researchers who are intercountry adoptees, while birth families remain almost invisible in this literature. A further gap identified in this review is work which provides macro-analyses of intercountry adoption as a global social practice and research which critically examines policy pertaining to intercountry adoption both in receiving and sending countries.

To supplement the literature presented in the review and the lists of references provided by each of the authors, a further resource, 'Some Useful Sources', has been compiled by the editor. These sources, on line submissions and verbal testimonies presented to two major Australian parliamentary inquiries in 2005 and 2011–12, represent a unique, current and ethnographically rich source of social data on both the politics of intercountry adoption in a developed receiving country, and the legacy of past practices in domestic adoption. It is hoped that readers of *Social Policy and Society*, who may not otherwise be aware of these accessible sources, will find them useful.

Given its distinctive profile as a family formation practice which also entails migration and resettlement within the broad arena of children's welfare – all of which should ring bells for sociologists and those concerned with social policy – the lack of sustained attention to intercountry adoption by sociologists and those with a policy focus remains puzzling. A common theme running through the papers in this collection is the need for

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better education about intercountry adoption in receiving countries, better services and welfare provisions in sending countries, and better services post-adoption, especially for adult adoptees. Community education, services and policy all require a strong research base. It is hoped that the articles published here will provoke debate and prompt other researchers to take up these issues.

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