

Voices in the Field:  
A Critical Approach to Reusing Archived Oral History Interviews with the *Forgotten  
Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*

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## Abstract

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Whereas there exists a plethora of studies that engage with the ethics, theory, and methodology of oral history interviewing, the same cannot be said about working with existing oral history collections. This study turns to the *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History* (FAFCM) Project (2010-12), spearheaded by the National Library of Australia. Borne out of advocacy and transitional justice efforts, this collection showcases the life stories of British, Maltese and Australian children who grew up either in institutional “care” or with foster families. As this thesis argues, by reconstructing the ecosystem(s) of large-scale oral history projects – including their conceptual underpinnings, methodological approaches, institutional frameworks, and interview praxis – we can critically and ethically engage with existing oral history collections *as* oral history. Indeed, it is imperative that we develop frameworks and protocols to this end, given the countless oral history collections that are preserved, if rarely listened to, in local, state, and federal archival repositories. This study explores three principal pathways through which to reconstruct the ecosystems of the FAFCM collection: first, by foregrounding the experiences of curator Dr. Joanna Sassoon, alongside internal project documentation; second, by interviewing the interviewers, who conducted fieldwork across Australia; and third, by offering a close reading of archived oral history interviews with former British child migrants that speak of resilience, trauma, and shared rites of passage. By mobilizing both metadata and local knowledge of interview contexts, researchers working with archived oral histories can honour the intellectual labour invested in the creation of collections, capture interview dynamics in the field, and explore the subjective and intimate knowledge that resides in oral life stories.

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## Introduction

“An interview, then, is a moment in a relationship between times: the time of the events, the time of the telling, and, when we factor in the archive, the time of listening.” – Alessandro Portelli<sup>1</sup>

The *Oral History Review*, one of the premier journals in the field, features a plethora of studies that engage, in self-reflective and often innovative ways, with the interview process. By contrast, the process of conducting oral history interviews in large-scale oral history projects that employ a host of interviewers is rarely examined in depth. This is also true for collections rooted in transitional justice, and interviews or collections we reuse but have not conducted been involved in ourselves.<sup>2</sup> One of the key aspects to reusing archived oral history interviews conducted by others is to gain insight into the contexts in which they were created. Indeed, an interview is shaped not only by the questions posed and their responses, but by the dynamics at play at the moment of the interview and surrounding it. This encompasses the project’s goals and framework, interviewers’ approach, personal and/or professional backgrounds as well as the interviewee-interviewer rapport to name only a few considerations. Published findings based on interviews can act as doorways into both a project’s context and the context of individual interviews.<sup>3</sup> However, when said publications are lacking, researchers must turn to other avenues to gain insight into these contexts.

In a 2007 article pertaining to the reuse of qualitative data in sociological studies, Niamh Moore argued that all data “are ‘situated knowledges’ which can only be understood

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Portelli, “Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience,” *Oral History Review* 45, no. 2 (2018): 246.

<sup>2</sup> Further discussed in chapter 1. The United Nations describes transitional justice as varied efforts to come to terms with legacies of various types of violence, “OHCHR: transitional justice and human rights.” *United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice> (accessed February 1, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Examples include Daniel James, *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Steven High, *Oral history at the crossroads: Sharing life stories of survival and displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).

as and through ‘partial perspectives’.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, accessing the initial context in which interviews were created in its entirety is impossible. For one thing, much communication is conveyed nonverbally and through intonation, gestures, and body language, aspects that are challenging at best to access with an audio-visual recording and near impossible to do with only an aural recording. As Steven High states, “storytelling,” like memory, “is an embodied act.”<sup>5</sup> Arguably so is the whole interview process, where the various means of communications at play can be misunderstood, misinterpreted or altogether go unseen by either party, even those present at the interview. In addition, seemingly innocuous details such as the weather, the state of the interview space, the interviewee’s demeanor and health, even logistics along with off-the-record interactions add to interviewers’ overall understanding of and relation to the interview, interviewee and the project. These aspects colour the resulting conversation and research.<sup>6</sup> As such, if interviews are indissociable from their context, so too are they from the interviewer who conducted the conversation. The interview is a cocreated moment, a conversation informed by both the interviewer’s and interviewee’s respective experiences. Alessandro Portelli aptly describes this complex process:

The interview, then, is a historical and social event that creates a bivocal dialogical linguistic construct and wreaks significant changes both in the narrator and in the interviewee. The document—the tape or sound file or video recording—that is generated in the interview is something else: a text that we may work with, read, and interpret just as we can do with any other archival document. What makes it different is its history: while archival documents are there for us to find, the document of the interview would not exist if we had not generated it. In the interview, we are the coauthors, the cocreators of a document that, to some extent, is about us as well as about the persons we interview.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Niamh Moore, “(Re)Using Qualitative Data?” *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 2 (2007): 7. Libby Bishop makes a similar argument in her “A Reflexive Account of Reusing Qualitative Data: Beyond Primary/Secondary Dualism,” *Sociological Review Online* 12, no 3 (May 2007): 43-56.

<sup>5</sup> Steven High, “Going beyond the ‘Juicy Quotes Syndrome,’” in Elizabeth Miller, Edward Little, and Steven High, *Going Public: The Art of Participatory Practice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018): 110-129, 120. For sensory memories see Paula Hamilton, “Oral History and the Senses,” in *The Oral History Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 104-116.

<sup>6</sup> See also Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, eds., *Oral History Off the Record: Toward an Ethnography of Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Portelli, “Living Voices,” 247.

The conversation that unfolds in its recorded form is possible in that specific iteration only because of the parties involved. Therefore, we cannot remove an interviewer's voice from the exchange and focus only on the interviewee's narration, for as Portelli further states, "when the researcher's voice is cut out, the narrator's voice is distorted."<sup>8</sup> How, then, can researchers not involved in the interview access these dynamics, at least in partiality?

The idea that the interviewee-interviewer relationship and its resulting conversations and subjectivities are at the core of oral history was central to Portelli's important intervention "What Makes Oral History Different?" that shed the discipline's defensive air as early as 1979.<sup>9</sup> As historians such as Alessandro Portelli and Steven High have argued, oral history interviews are deeply rooted in the development of a trusting rapport and the negotiation of an interviewer's and interviewee's respective backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> However, these inquiries are always set in the context of interviewing rather than reuse. As such, at the core of this study is the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the often-subtle dynamics at play in these conversations in the context of reusing interviews we have not conducted ourselves.<sup>11</sup>

Since the inception of oral history after the Second World War, discussions pertaining to the practice as a methodological approach and field have evolved to include topics ranging from ethical principles and interview strategies to shared authority and the nature of the

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<sup>8</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 55. This article was first published as "Sulla specificita della storia orale," *Primo Maggio* 13 (Fall 1979): 54-60.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. See also Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "Who's Afraid of Oral History? Fifty Years of Debates and Anxiety about Ethics?" *Oral History Review* 43, no. 2 (2016): 340.

<sup>10</sup> Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). See also Alessandro Portelli, "These Signs Shall Follow Them," in *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 70-92 and Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, "Who's Afraid of Oral History? Fifty Years of Debates and Anxiety about Ethics?" *Oral History Review* 43, no. 2 (2016): 340. According to Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, it was "feminists and progressive scholars" that first turned away from the Positivist practice of using interviews to extract factual details, seeking instead to level power differentials and to understand the various levels of communicative interplay present in the interview, especially pertaining to the interviewer-interviewee relationship.



interviewer-interviewee relationship mentioned above. Portelli's aforementioned intervention on the subjectivity of oral history as its strength shifted the nature of the field significantly.<sup>12</sup> Yet, despite a growing number of richly detailed interviews and collections available to researchers, often left to gather digital or physical dust in archives, oral historians have not had equivalent discussions concerning methodological practices pertaining to the ethical and fruitful reuse of interviews we have not conducted ourselves. What are the implications of reuse? What ethical questions require discussion? Which insights do we require to ensure our analyses do not distort narrators' voices?

Significant forays into the reuse of oral history interviews braid together with existing discussions in sociological studies stretching back to the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> Of note in oral history is Steven High's contribution on the challenges, benefits and concerns pertaining to reuse.<sup>14</sup> As interviews are "tied to the context in which they were produced," High warns against an "extractive approach" and the common practice of carving a quote out of context to enhance one's research, erasing said context as well as the intellectual labour invested in the conceptualization of research projects, the development of interview questionnaires, and the curation of the interview space itself.<sup>15</sup> Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack equally

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<sup>12</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," 48-58.

<sup>13</sup> Compounded by the advent of qualitative data banks in the 1990s, early debates in sociological studies centered on the (im)possibility of reusing qualitative data with a focus on research gains and contexts. On one hand, Odette Parry and Natasha Mauthner, and Martyn Hammersley argued that resulting data and analysis were intrinsically tied to the initial researchers' relationship to their interviewee with said researchers possessing first-hand knowledge that could not be reproduced. Contrarily, Niamh Moore held that contexts only ever partially existed. Moore further called for a cross-disciplinary approach to find ways of working with partial contexts. In history research, these debates are rendered somewhat mute by the very nature of historical inquiry. See Martyn Hammersley, "Qualitative Data Archiving: Some Reflections on Its Prospects and Problems," *Sociology* 31, no. 1 (1997): 131-42.; Odette Parry and Natasha S. Mauthner, "Whose Data Are They Anyway? Practical, Legal and Ethical Issues in Archiving Qualitative Research Data," *Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2004): 139-52.; Natasha S. Mauthner, Odette Parry, and Kathryn Backett-Milburn, "The Data Are Out There, or Are They? Implications for Archiving and Revisiting Qualitative Data," *Sociology* 32, no. 4 (November 1998): 733-45.; Mike Savage, "Using Archived Qualitative Data: Researching Socio-Cultural Change," in *Understanding Social Research: Thinking Creatively About Method*, ed. Jennifer Mason and Angela Dale (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2013), 169-80. The most recent scholarship on the topic includes Kathryn Hughes and Anna Tarrant, *Qualitative Secondary Analysis*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> High, "Going beyond the 'Juicy Quotes Syndrome'."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

emphasize the need to turn our analysis away from data gathering and towards “interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject’s viewpoint.”<sup>16</sup> In underlining the importance of contextual details, High echoes sociologists Sarah Irwin and Mandy Winterton’s statement that providing contextual details which “enhance understanding of the salience of contextual diversity in lived experience” is a “central” strength of oral history interviewing.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, harking back to Natasha Mauthner’s argument that secondary analysis is “potentially unethical” since reuse renders initial researchers’ intellectual labour invisible, High ponders whether an external researcher can “truly understand the complexity and nuance of an interview experience.”<sup>18</sup> Joanna Bornat offers a nuanced answer to this question, agreeing with Niamh Moore’s perspective that original contexts can only be reconstructed in partiality, while at the same time criticizing the “limits” this view places on “what can be known and shared about the data.”<sup>19</sup> Bornat argues in favour of reuse, stating as a benefit evolutions in fields and theories over time and reminds us that temporal distance can add to our understanding of the initial interview context.<sup>20</sup> In turn, Bornat cautions against going beyond expected and appropriate analysis as this may “risk over-interpretation and a distancing of the interviewee from his or her own words.”<sup>21</sup> She additionally questions the ethics of reuse pertaining to consent forms, highlighting the fact that, though interviews may

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<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses,” in *The Oral History Reader, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 190.

<sup>17</sup> High, “Going beyond the ‘Juicy Quotes Syndrome,’” 121. Sarah Irwin and Mandy Winterton, “Qualitative Secondary Analysis and Social Explanation,” *Sociological Research Online* 17, no. 2 (2012): 4.

<sup>18</sup> High, “Going beyond the ‘Juicy Quotes Syndrome,’” 119, 110.

<sup>19</sup> Joanna Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions: The Reanalysis of Emotion in an Interview,” in *The Oral History Reader, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 436. Bornat’s work sits at the crossroads between oral history and sociology: a sociologist by training, Bornat describes herself as an oral historian, though her sociological training is evident in her analyses.

<sup>20</sup> Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions,” 440, 441. Bornat spoke from experience, having revisited her own work several years and even decades after conducting the original interviews.

<sup>21</sup> Bornat, “Remembering and Reworking Emotions,” 436.

be available for future researchers, interviewees may not have agreed to all manners of analytical foci, a yet unresolved dimension of reuse.<sup>22</sup>

The implications of turning to interviews conducted by others as primary sources for our research are far-reaching. Temporality is a key factor in reuse. As Libby Bishop suggests, researchers reusing interviews should consider both the point in time of the original interview and the moment of reuse.<sup>23</sup> Within both ‘moments,’ Bishop argues, “there are at least three levels of contexts: the interaction, the situation, and [the] cultural/institutional.”<sup>24</sup> How, then, can we access these experiential, sensory and embodied parts of a narrative? To what extent can researchers reusing archived sources understand the dynamics at play in an interview? How can future researchers contextualize sources while also giving credit to the initial researchers’ intellectual labour?

In their respective work, Michael Krohn and April Gallwey both explore ways of accessing contexts through metadata for existing collections. When reusing Susan Daly Heller’s interviews from 1983 with her farming neighbours on Roxham Road in St-Bernard-de-Lacolle, Krohn reached out to Heller to examine how her own experiences partially shaped the interviews.<sup>25</sup> As Krohn suggests, Heller’ viewed her neighbours’ farming life through her own idealized view of growing up on a hobby farm in rural England, starkly contrasting with her neighbours’ respective working farm reality.<sup>26</sup> As a counterpoint, Krohn

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<sup>22</sup> Joanna Bornat, “Secondary Analysis in Reflection: Some Experiences of Re-Use from an Oral History Perspective,” *Families, Relationships and Societies* 2, no. 2 (July 2013): 309–17. For more on the ethics of reuse, see Joanna Bornat, Parvati Raghuram, and Leroi Henry, “Revisiting the Archives - Opportunities and Challenges: A Case Study from the History of Geriatric Medicine,” *Sociological Research Online* 17, no. 2 (June 2012): 1-12 and Libby Bishop, “Ethical Sharing and Reuse of Qualitative Data,” *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 44, no. 3 (2009): 255–272.

<sup>23</sup> Bishop, “A Reflexive Account of Reusing Qualitative Data,” 48. Joanna Bornat also addresses temporality in her “Crossing Boundaries with Secondary Analysis: Implications for Archived Oral History Data,” presented at the ESRC National Council for Research Methods Network for Methodological Innovation, 2008, Theory, Methods and Ethics across Disciplines. University of Essex (September 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Bishop, “A Reflexive Account of Reusing Qualitative Data,” 48.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Krohn, “Listening to the Rhythms of Rural Life, 1920–1940: Oral History and Childhood Agency,” in *Our Rural Selves: Memory and the Visual in Canadian Childhoods*, ed. Claudia Mitchell and April Mandrona (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019): 62, 66. The interviews form part of the Roxham Road Interview Collection, housed at the Archives Hemmingford.

<sup>26</sup> Krohn, “Listening to the Rhythms of Rural Life, 1920–1940,” 65-66.

notes that Heller was aware her experience was not “typical.” This notion imbued her desire to partake in and promote local history.<sup>27</sup> Heller equally shared metadata through “detailed notes, drawings, and personal research on the people and places spoken about in the interviews, which provide visual and textual components to the collection,” and additional context for Krohn.<sup>28</sup> In turn, finding no interviewees to speak with about her PhD research, April Gallwey turned to the Millennium Memory Bank (MMB), an existing collection created by the BBC and the British Library to document “change across the twentieth century.”<sup>29</sup> Weaving together history and sociology methodologies, Gallwey looked to oral history interviews as a source of factual data and documentary evidence rather than to explore their subjectivities. Decrying the lack of metadata beyond interview summaries, she stated there was “no literature to explain [the collection’s] original purpose and context.”<sup>30</sup> To remedy this shortcoming, Gallwey spoke with Joanna Bornat and Rob Perks, two instrumental figures in the creation of the collection, to understand its creation, with a focus on process and intended functionality.<sup>31</sup> Perks’ project files in particular shed light on the nuts-and-bolts aspects of the MMB’s creation. However, whereas Krohn’s insights serve to contextualize the subjective interplay between interviewer-interviewee, Gallwey’s analysis leans heavily on aspects important to sociology: factuality, transparency and the ability to reproduce the research.<sup>32</sup>

Taken together, the respective works of the scholars cited above sketch lines of inquiry that inform how we can explore archived oral history interviews ethically and faithfully. As a starting point, we can delve into a collection’s creation processes, both

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 63; see also 77, footnote 2.

<sup>29</sup> April Gallwey, “The Rewards of Using Archived Oral Histories in Research: The Case of the Millennium Memory Bank,” *Oral History* 41, no. 1 (2013): 40.

<sup>30</sup> Gallwey, “The Rewards of Using Archived Oral Histories in Research,” 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

conceptual and procedural. Interviewing individuals involved in said processes reveals often undocumented nuances. In turn, speaking with interviewers directly can shed light on their work and life experiences, their approach, or any other detail which may have partially shaped the interview. Last, if we heed Anderson and Jack’s call to follow “the dynamic unfolding of the subject’s viewpoint” rather than listening only for keywords and thematic prompts, we can, perhaps, get closer to the original interview experience.<sup>33</sup>

This study turns to the *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project* collection (2009-2012, FAFCM), housed and led by the National Library of Australia.<sup>34</sup> Borne out of advocacy and transitional justice efforts, the collection showcases the life stories of British, Maltese and Australian children in institutions or out-of-home ‘care’ situations.<sup>35</sup> For this study, I will focus on interviews with former British child migrants.

From the 1920s to 1967 approximately 6,000 British Children, aged five to fourteen, were sent to Australian ‘care’ institutions as part of an organised child emigration scheme.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Anderson and Jack, “Learning to Listen,” 190.

<sup>34</sup> *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project#> (access March 15, 2023). Accessibility for research purposes was central to the collection’s interviews. This was written into the consent form, therefore rendering null Joanna Bornat’s concern for reuse.

<sup>35</sup> I follow Shurlee Swain and Nell Musgrove’s stylistic choice to place the word ‘care’ in inverted commas. As they outline, the term care was used to identify “programs for children who needed to be accommodated apart from their parents.” A useful umbrella that encompasses programs ranging from foster care to care institutions, the authors have highlighted the fact that many ‘care’-leavers have objected to the word “because they received very little that was actually caring in their daily lives.” See Shurlee Swain and Nell Musgrove, “We Are the Stories We Tell About Ourselves: Child Welfare Records and the Construction of Identity amongst Australians Who, as Children, Experienced out-of-Home ‘Care,’” *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 1 (March 2012): 4–14. Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding similarly capitalize the word; my stylistic preferences tended towards using inverted commas, the latter authors’ status as ‘care’-leavers notwithstanding. See Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, “Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (March 2016): 93–109.

<sup>36</sup> Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline of the British World, 1869-196*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3. This sustained childhood emigration program occurred within a century-long outpour during which an estimated 80,000 to 100,000 Caucasian British children emigrated to Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Southern Rhodesia during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Boucher presents an exquisite inquiry into the motivations behind the child-rescue rhetoric and child migration schemes, the process of child migration, and the children’s experiences. See also Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire: The Untold Story of Britain’s Child Migrants*, (London: Unwinded Hyman, 1989) out of print.

Coming mostly from orphanages in poor or working-class neighbourhoods, only some were orphans. Most were either born out of wedlock, removed from their families as a preventative ‘care’ measure or because their parents could no longer care for them. Inadequate welfare support for poorer families also caused struggling parents to turn to orphanages as a temporary solution.<sup>37</sup> Parents were unaware that by signing their children over to institutions, even if only temporarily, they “were also consenting to the possibility of their son's or daughter's emigration.”<sup>38</sup> Shepherded by religious organisations and sanctioned by commonwealth governments, their migration served to consolidate the imagined British imperial identity abroad, provide labour and guard against the perceived threat of foreign – i.e. non- white British – immigration in Australia, all while curbing anxieties related to the potential civil unrest among the working class in the late Victorian era.<sup>39</sup> Child-rescue agencies construed these children as both vulnerable to the moral failings of their parents or guardians and in danger of being morally corrupt themselves.<sup>40</sup> This vulnerable/dangerous binary cast them as being in need of moral reform and justified the forced cutting of familial ties where they still remained and “a treatment regime which was cold, harsh and uncaring.”<sup>41</sup> “Transplantation” into an environment that presented them with so-called proper emotional, moral, civil and religious education to turn them into upright British citizens was seen as the

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<sup>37</sup> Boucher, *Empire's Children*, 51-52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. For migration and memory, see Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, eds., *Remembering Migration: Oral Histories and Heritage in Australia* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 27; Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 27; and Boucher, *Empire's Children*. For more on children as contested agents of nation and empire, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Karen Vallgård, *Imperial Childhoods and Christian Mission: Education and Emotions in South India and Denmark*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and M. Colette Plum, “Inscribing War Orphans’ Losses into the Language of the Nation in Wartime China, 1937-1945,” in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 198–220.

<sup>40</sup> Swain and Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire*.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 35.

only possible solution for reforming these children.<sup>42</sup> From the cottage or dormitory systems to the vocational training they received – girls were trained to be domestic servants and boys to be dairy farmers—, the strict routines they were meant to follow, and the harsh punishment they received for even the slightest infraction, their experience was shaped by forces of gender, class, and race.<sup>43</sup> In the long run, these practices deeply affected former British child migrants’ and those closest to them.

Answering a question I posed on methods for reusing archived oral history interviews at a panel in the 2021 History of Experience conference, Alessandro Portelli stated that, though these were aural sources, he approached them as archival documents, sound documents specifically, but archival documents, nonetheless.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, I argue in this study that while the reuse of archived oral history interviews shares much with historical inquiry rooted in documentary evidence, we must nonetheless account for the subjectivities and intimate interactions found in oral history interviews, as well as our role in the continued shaping of narratives, and find methods that help us tease out nuances and dynamics. As such, using the FAFCM collection as a case study, this thesis seeks to examine how we can access original interview contexts and metadata when reusing archived oral history interviews, while also

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 129. For more on the causes of children’s organised migration, see Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children: Child Emigration, Welfare and the Decline of the British World, 1869-196*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For more on life in institution, see Nell Musgrove’s scholarship and collaborations, notably Nell Musgrove and Deidre Michell, *The Slow Evolution of Foster Care in Australia* (New York: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2018); Nell Musgrove, “Locating Foster Care: Place And Space In Care Leavers’ Childhood Memories,” *Journal of the History of Childhood & Youth* 8, no. 1 (2015): 106–22; Nell Musgrove, *The Scars Remain: A Long History of Forgotten Australians and Children’s Institutions* (Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013). See also Shurlee Swain, “Institutionalized Childhood: The Orphanage Remembered,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 1 (2015): 17–33.

<sup>43</sup> Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children*. Some exceptions to this vocational training include former British child migrants Ron Critoph and Bert McGregor, both of whom received scholarships in Australia to receive further education. Critoph became a doctor, and McGregor a priest and teacher. See interview with Ron Critoph, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/44, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 14 February 2011; Interview with Bert McGregor, conducted by Caroline Evans, ORAL TRC 6200/24, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 1 October 2010. For scholarship on space, memory and emotions see Jane Hamlett, “Space and Emotional Experience in Victorian and Edwardian English Public School Dormitories,” in *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives*, ed. Stephanie Olsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 119–38.

<sup>44</sup> “Agency & Oral History,” *Fourth Annual HEX conference*, University of Tampere, Finland, March 9, 2021.

gaining insight into the dynamics at play shaping individual interviews. Only by situating collections in their original contexts can we hope to create an analysis stemming from them. As a counterpoint to the FAFCM collection, throughout the sections I reference the *Montreal Life Stories Project*, a contemporary collection similarly “investigating the life stories of Montrealers displaced by war, genocide, and other human rights violations.”<sup>45</sup> That the collection was shepherded by a group made up in equal numbers of community and academic members rather than a memory institution such as the National Library of Australia significantly impacted the structure and approach of the collection.

Chapter 1 seeks to identify the ecosystem(s) in which the collection operated and to reconstruct its origins, frameworks, intent and conceptual layers. Using interviews I conducted with the FAFCM project manager, Joanna Sassoon, I will discuss the interviewer and interviewee selection processes in an attempt to understand the impetus that drove the project and what aspects may have directly and indirectly shaped the interviews. In turn, chapter 2 is concerned with the subtle nuances of human interactions and their role in shaping interviews. Pulling from my conversations with four interviewers on the project, I will examine their respective interview approaches, experiences and backgrounds as well as the challenges of witnessing difficult stories while looking at how the conceptual layers were ‘implemented’ on the ground. I also seek to explore what we can learn from deeply engaging with existing oral history sources.

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<sup>45</sup> High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 6. The book provides an in-depth examination of the inner workings and thought process that informed and shaped the *Montreal Life Stories Project*.



## Chapter 1

### Exploring the scaffolding: frameworks, goals and conceptual layers

“The Australian Government was the legislated guardian of the children but then transferred responsibility for their care to State Governments. In turn, the State Governments transferred responsibility to receiving agencies. The responsibility was transferred, but in many cases the duty of care and protection was not.” – Prologue, *Lost Innocents* Senate report, 2001<sup>1</sup>

#### Transitional justice

On November 16, 2009, former British child migrants Patricia Keleher, Maurice Crawford-Raby, and Michael Snell sat in the audience of Parliament House in Canberra to listen to Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd deliver his apology to British, Maltese and Australian individuals placed in institutions or out-of-home ‘care’ in Australia as children.<sup>2</sup> Keleher, Crawford-Raby and Snell, all three former British child migrants, sat amongst other former child migrants and Forgotten Australians — white Australian-born individuals placed in institutional or out-of-home ‘care’ in Australia.<sup>3</sup> In total, close to one thousand individuals attended the apology in person, an apology meant to recognize and amend the extraordinary hardships, abuse and distress caused to them during their time in ‘care.’

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<sup>1</sup> Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record - Report on Child Migration* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> “Australia ‘sorry’ for child abuse,” *BBC News*, November 16, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8361389.stm> (accessed September 8, 2022). According to the National Museum of Australia “By 2001 all [Australian] state and territory governments had issued apologies. Only the Australian Government, under John Howard, demurred.” See “National Apology: 2008 National Apology to the Stolen Generations,” *National Museum of Australia*, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/national-apology> (accessed September 12, 2022). Apologies to children separated from their families were cornerstones of the Rudd administration’s 2007 election campaign. Making good on his promise, Rudd issued an official apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on his first day in office on February 13, 2008, a controversial decision at the time. Katherine Murphy, “Kevin Rudd was advised against opening parliament with apology to stolen generations,” *The Guardian*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/feb/06/kevin-rudd-was-advised-against-opening-parliament-with-apology-to-stolen-generations> (accessed September 3, 2022). British prime minister Gordon Brown followed suit on February 24, 2010. “Gordon Brown apologises to child migrants sent abroad,” *BBC News*, February 24, 2010. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8531664.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8531664.stm) (accessed 14 March 2023).

<sup>3</sup> British and Maltese individuals who were sent to Australia as children through emigration programs are often called “former child migrants.” This is to indicate that they are no longer children.

Along with the apology, Prime Minister Rudd voiced his administration's commitment to facilitating and supporting 'care'-leavers' access to retracing their personal history and family members.<sup>4</sup> This support included ease of access to their personal files and migration details, which had, until then, been challenging for some and impossible for others to access, as well as the opportunity to tell their story.<sup>5</sup> The Rudd administration announced their support for projects that would record 'care'-leavers' experiences to "provide future generations with a solemn reminder of the past" and "ensure not only that [their] experiences are heard, but also that they will never ever be forgotten."<sup>6</sup> One of the resulting projects was the FAFCM collection.

The 2009 apology itself and the Rudd administration's pledges of commitment formed part of transitional justice efforts, defined by the United Nations as "cover[ing] the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past conflict, repression, violations and abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation."<sup>7</sup> According to Johanna Sköld, these reparation efforts fit in a global political trend beginning in the early 1990s and lasting at least until the 2010s when nations worldwide, especially in the western world,

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<sup>4</sup> "Transcript of address at the apology to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants, Great Hall, Parliament House, 16 November 2009," *Prime Minister of Australia*, 16 November 2009. <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20091116070312/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/110625/20091116-1801/www.pm.gov.au/node/6321.html> (accessed February 1, 2023). Amongst other services, the government funded the *Find and Connect Services* which includes a website database that hosts information about institutions and offers support to help 'care'-leavers locate their records. "Find & Connect: history & information about Australian orphanages, children's Homes & other institutions," <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/> (accessed 13 March 2023). For information about other Find and Connect Services, see "Find and Connect Services and projects," *Australian Government Department of Social Services*, <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/find-and-connect-services-and-projects> (accessed 13 March 2023).

<sup>5</sup> The Rudd administration also pledged funding for child migrants to visit certain living relations, under some conditions. Travel funds were provided through organizations such as the Child Migrant Trust. See *Lost Innocents* report; Child Migrant Trust, Family Restoration Fund, <https://www.childmigranttrust.com/services/family-restoration-fund> (accessed March 15, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Rudd, "Transcript of address at the apology to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants."

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed version of the United Nations' definition of transitional justice, see "OHCHR: transitional justice and human rights," *United Nations, Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice> (accessed 1 February 2023).

came to terms with their country's legacy of abuse of children in 'care' in particular.<sup>8</sup> On one hand this global political trend, argues Sköld, through "regret, apologies and redress reinforce[d] political legitimacy," even as, on the other hand, governments faced added pressure to partake in these reparation efforts.<sup>9</sup> Sköld further argues that similarities between global reparation endeavours suggest that countries closely followed and learned from each other's reparation efforts. The 2009 apology and FAFCM collection thus are firmly rooted in redemptive efforts for social and political change.<sup>10</sup>

When looking at a collection, it is essential to understand the context in which it was created and to identify the social, political and emotional ecosystems that shaped it. I argue that only by so situating an interview collection – that is, by understanding its nature, impetus and intended goal(s) – can we reuse such collections in meaningful ways and in turn create interpretations that are faithful to the integrity of the collection in both its whole and its parts. As such, this chapter will examine the process by which the *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Collection* was created, with a particular focus on its advocacy origins, goals, and curatorial framework, with an eye on reusing interviews with former British child migrants in particular. To do so, I will first examine the historical context in which the collection was created. What led to the 2009 apology and the collection? What impetus(es) drove it? Who was involved in the process? For whom was the collection created? Second, I will look at the collection's goals, approach, and makeup that were the underlying principles that informed and shaped the creation of the FAFCM collection at the National Library of Australia. How did project manager Joanna Sassoon work within these

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<sup>8</sup> Johanna Sköld, "Apology Politics: Transnational Features," in *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in "Care": International Perspectives*, ed. Johanna Sköld and Shurlee Swain (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 13 and 25. See also Malin Arvidsson, "Contextualizing Reparations Politics," in *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in "Care"*, 70-82.

<sup>9</sup> Sköld, "Apology Politics", 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 and 15. Sköld notes that "[t]he South African truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1995-2002) was particularly relevant to the inquiries initiated in Australia, Canada and Ireland in the 1990s."

institutional parameters? How were interviewees selected? Last, I will explore how these insights serve in the reuse of the collection's archived oral history interviews.

Project manager Joanna Sassoon, an experienced oral historian who brought to her work her deep familiarity with restorative justice projects, has herself reflected on the theoretical, methodological, and ethical underpinnings of the collection. Her study “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” published in 2010, a year into the project, speaks directly to the collection's framework and its theoretical and conceptual layers while providing fine-grained details pertaining to the project's implementation. It highlights processes from its challenges to relationships with advocates, and from its goals to its considerations.<sup>11</sup> In turn, her article “Phantoms of Remembrance,” published in 2003, highlights some of the broader theoretical principles behind the collection, specifically the role of archival institutions in the production of memory.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these studies reveal much about the collection's ethos and guiding principles. Additionally, where metadata is unavailable or lacking, interviews can serve to illuminate the collection's framework and historical context. I will thus use interviews I conducted with Sassoon about the project in the summer of 2021 to go further in-depth and explore the organic dimensions of the collection and its creation process.<sup>13</sup>

The Rudd administration's reparation efforts responded to former child migrants' two main concerns identified in the Senate report *Lost Innocents* (2001) – a report on the inquiry into the experiences of former British and Maltese child migrants sent to Australian institutions – that is, “their loss of identity and their need to have the opportunity to tell their story, be heard and believed.”<sup>14</sup> The apology was a direct recommendation made in both the

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<sup>11</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories’: Remembering Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants,” *Archifacts* (October 2010): 25–34.

<sup>12</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance: Libraries and Archives as ‘the Collective Memory,’” *Public History Review* 10 (2003): 40–60.

<sup>13</sup> Due to the global circumstances at the time, the interviews took place online. Sassoon and I were in our respective homes in Perth, Australia and Montreal, Canada. The interviews were conducted on 1 June, 9 June and 30 June, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Lost Innocents*, prologue. Amongst other salient details, the report found that agencies and institutions responsible for sending and receiving the children regularly

*Lost Innocents* (2001) and *Forgotten Australians* (2004), the seminal report that shed light on the experiences of Australian-born children who had grown up in institutions or out-of-home ‘care’ in Australia.<sup>15</sup> These reparations had been years in the making and represented the result of decades of advocacy efforts.

The apology elicited mixed responses from former British child migrants. For some, such as Maurice Crawford-Raby, who arrived in Australia in 1952 at age ten and subsequently trained as a dairy farmer, the apology was a deeply needed acknowledgment of the wrongdoings they had been subjected to as children.<sup>16</sup> Mavis Appleyard, who was sent to Australia in 1937 at age nine or ten and later trained as a domestic worker, was grateful the public now knew what had happened to them.<sup>17</sup> In turn, Michael Snell, sent to the infamous Bindoon in 1950 at age 15 and who, deemed too old for school, was immediately put to work on the institution’s dairy farm, did not ‘care’ for Rudd’s apology, remembering the apology by opposition leader Malcolm Turnbull’s as far more genuine.<sup>18</sup> “It did so much for me,” stated Snell in his interview which took place the day after the apology, “to finally have someone

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changed the children’s names or birthdates. At the time, children had no access to their migration or personal details and in most cases were unaware of their parents’ situation.

<sup>15</sup> Both reports had been issued by the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee. See Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-Of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004). In *Lost Innocent*, the Committee recommended that the government issue a formal statement of acknowledgement, sorrow and regret (*Lost Innocents*, 227). By contrast, the *Forgotten Australians* report advocated for “a formal statement acknowledging, on behalf of the nation, the hurt and distress suffered by many children in institutional care, particularly the children who were victims of abuse and assault; and apologizing for the harm caused to these children” (*Forgotten Australians*, 197). Other recommendations from both reports included granting ‘care’-leavers access to records from government branches and receiving agencies that housed the children, providing support to find their families and funding to visit families or graves (for child migrants specifically), counselling support, remedial education services, and the granting of automatic citizenship to former child migrants (for those who wished it). Notably, recommendation 36 in the *Forgotten Australians* senate report stated the need for the creation of an oral history collection that would highlight the life-stories of “former residents in institutional and out-of-home care.” (*Forgotten Australians*, 336, recommendation 36, 11.48).

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/18, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, 12 August 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Mavis Appleyard, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/26, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, 15 October 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Michael Snell, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/2, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, 17 November 2009. Children over the age of fourteen did not have access to school and were put to work immediately. Because he arrived in Australia aged fifteen, Michael Snell was not allowed to go to school except on rainy days, something he was very bitter about. Instead, he was put to work on the very day he arrived.

stand up and say, 'Yes, it was wrong'."<sup>19</sup> For others, prime minister Rudd's apology was seen either as disingenuous — such was the view of May Chandler, who arrived in Australia in 1938 at age nine and who received an invitation for the apology in Canberra but refused to go — or as “tokenism.”<sup>20</sup> Tony Holmes, who was sent to Australia in 1954 also aged nine with his older brother and who later became a Major in the Australian army, stated in an interview one year after the apology: “it didn't mean much. Kevin Rudd's words were well chosen. They sounded good at the time but they ... they haven't really translated into much action.”<sup>21</sup>

For years prior, advocacy associations had lobbied for acknowledgment and reparations. A 2001 online brief, issued by the Parliament of Australia, mentioned the financial support offered to the Child Migrant Trust, an advocacy organisation, in Australia by the British and Australian governments.<sup>22</sup> The Christian Brothers and Sisters of Mercy, two orders that had run homes for child migrants, had issued apologies in 1993 and 1997 respectively.<sup>23</sup> In 1999 they set up a confidential database to make former child migrants' institutional records, personal and migration details available to them.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Michal Snell. Several other ‘care’-leavers felt Turnbull's apology was more genuine and captured the sentiment better, see interview with Tony Holmes conducted by Hamish Sewell, ORAL TRC 6200/35, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 21 December 2010. For a video of Turnbull's apology see: “National Apology to the Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants,” *Parliament of Australia*, 16 November 2009, [https://parlview.aph.gov.au/mediaPlayer.php?videoID=314492&operation\\_mode=parlview#/3](https://parlview.aph.gov.au/mediaPlayer.php?videoID=314492&operation_mode=parlview#/3) (accessed 3 September 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Interview with May Chandler, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/187, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 19 July 2012. Interview with Tony Holmes, conducted by Hamish Sewell, ORAL TRC 6200/35, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 21 December 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes. Tony Holmes also attended British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's apology at the British Consulate in Brisbane, which he found to be lackluster and insincere.

<sup>22</sup> “Child Migrants from the United Kingdom,” Social Policy Group, electronic brief, Government of Australia, October 2001 [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Publications\\_Archive/archive/ChildMigrantUK](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/ChildMigrantUK) (accessed 1 June 2022).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* The database was called *PHIND: Personal History Index*, Christian Brothers Ex-Residents Student Services, <https://cbers.org/archive/phind.asp.htm> (accessed 10 February 2023). In 1998, Western Australia, similar apologies were made to child migrants who suffered ill treatment in institutions. Two years prior, in 1996, the Western Australian Legislative Assembly had created the Committee into Child Migration, meant to investigate child migration in Western Australia between 1900-1967. Senate Community Affairs References Committee, “Lost Innocents,” 3.

Ease of access to personal records was a crucial step forward for ‘care’-leavers who often met resistance when wishing to access their files. As Nell Musgrove has stated, ‘care’-leavers were often “provided censored versions, or denied access altogether,” and thus denied parts of their identity even while researchers could access archival files for research purposes.<sup>25</sup> These personal files were “a rare surviving fragment of [a ‘care’-leaver’s] earlier self,” yet held much more than the potential to inform on missing personal data.<sup>26</sup> Leaning on psychologist Jerome Bruner’s work, Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding argue that, since our identity is rooted in our personal narratives, the disorientation and erosion resulting from a child’s placement in ‘care’ has the potential to create a “disruption of one’s sense of self.”<sup>27</sup> For ‘care’-leavers, this disruption was especially compounded when children’s experiences both mundane and more dramatic were disbelieved, thus, creating an effect similar to gaslighting. For, as Wilson and Golding state, “a basic tenet of the narrative-based model of identity is that the individual must have faith in their narrative(s).”<sup>28</sup> Files could potentially offer proof of certain experiences, thus confirming anything from punishments received and illnesses endured to placement in and movement between various ‘care’ facilities, or even the existence of family where they had been told they had none.<sup>29</sup> As such,

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<sup>25</sup> Nell Musgrove, “The Role and Importance of History,” in *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in “Care”: International Perspectives*, 147-158, quotation on page 149.

<sup>26</sup> Swain and Musgrove, “We Are the Stories We Tell About Ourselves,” 7.

<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Z. Wilson and Frank Golding, “Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze,” *Archival Science* 16, no. 1 (March 2016): 96-97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9255-3>. Wilson and Golding are both Australian born ‘care’-leavers. A Frank Golding was interviewed for the collection; it would not be a stretch to assume this is the same individual as the author. See interview with Frank Golding, conducted by Rob Linn, ORAL TRC 6200/12, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 15 June 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson and Golding, “Latent Scrutiny,” 97.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson describes the catharsis and “vindication” she felt when reading her file; the document confirmed many details of her own and her sibling’s placement(s) that she believed to be true, but had been disbelieved or denied by various authority figures. These details offered concrete confirmation where doubt had previously resided. For a study on the emotional impact of returning to the archive for Aboriginal ‘care’-leavers, see Fiona Murphy, “Archives of Sorrow: An Exploration of Australia’s Stolen Generations and Their Journey into the Past,” *History and Anthropology* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 481–95.

records had the power to help ‘care’-leavers reinstate coherence in their personal narratives, and by extension, in their identity.<sup>30</sup>

Yet the personal file also had a potential to harm. Records were kept for bureaucratic purposes to facilitate the movement of children through the ‘care’ system, rather than to facilitate the changes for the children themselves, and often held derogatory details pertaining to said children.<sup>31</sup> Far from being neutral documents, Wilson and Golding argue that the “storyteller” – such as a social worker or ‘care’ official – “had virtually unimpeded power over what was recorded and what was not.”<sup>32</sup> Often including fallacious details, or details pertaining to a child’s behaviour that were taken out of context, these markings in the file built on themselves and coloured how institutional and ‘care’ officials treated children.<sup>33</sup> The files were intended as a means of internal conversation which prevented the children from responding; they were never intended for the eyes of ‘care’-leavers and their family.<sup>34</sup> Thus, reading one’s file could often reopen old wounds. While the files referred to above pertain mostly to Australian ‘care’-leavers in particular – including institutional and foster ‘care’—several former British child migrants mention similar anecdotes. While Maurice Crawford-Raby recalls being told he had “no records” during his time in institution, Mavis Appleyard found out only years later that she was being punished for “silent insolence.”<sup>35</sup> Mavis realized then that she was being punished for a defense mechanism she developed; when, after several occasions where she was wronged and no one believed her, Mavis chose to be quiet when questioned.

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson and Golding, “Latent Scrutiny”, 96-97. Here the authors refer to Wilson’s own experience as a ‘care’-leaver reading her file to illustrate their point. Their article presents potent examples of the minute details pertaining to the value of personal files and the role of ‘care’ officials in children’s treatment.

<sup>31</sup> Swain and Musgrove, “We Are the Stories We Tell About Ourselves,” 7.

<sup>32</sup> Wilson and Golding, “Latent Scrutiny,” 97.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Swain and Musgrove have argued that files should additionally function as a memory album of sorts for ‘care’-leavers. They also argued for ‘care’-leavers’ “right of reply” to set their record straight and provide context where pertinent. Swain and Musgrove, “We Are the Stories We Tell About Ourselves,” p.5.

<sup>35</sup> Interviews with Maurice Crawford-Raby and Mavis Appleyard.



By the late 1990s, the British child migrants' experience of migration to Australia had increasingly come into the general public's eye. Several first-hand accounts were published in the 1980s and 1990s. A variety of documentaries, films, mini-series and media reports also helped increase public awareness.<sup>36</sup> Beyond financial compensation and access to personal records, 'care'-leavers demanded public recognition and an opportunity to share their experiences and be believed to ensure such 'care' practices would never happen again.

It was only in June 2000, after Senator Andrew Murray — himself a British child migrant sent to Rhodesia at age four — proposed a motion for an inquiry into the “issue of child migration” that the Australian Senate tasked the Community Affairs References Committee with the inquiry.<sup>37</sup> This inquiry began three years after the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997) which had investigated the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their families.<sup>38</sup> While the Committee conceded that the child migration scheme was a product of its time and had good intentions, it found overwhelming evidence of neglect, abuse — physical, psychological, and sexual — and even fraudulent actions that led to the separation of families.<sup>39</sup> Said fraudulent actions included changing children's personal details – including their name and date of birth – and withholding parents'

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<sup>36</sup> Examples include David Hill, *The Forgotten Children: Fairbridge Farm School and Its Betrayal of Britain's Child Migrants to Australia* (Sydney: Random House, 2007); Philip Bean and Joy Melville *Lost Children of the Empire: The Untold Story of Britain's Child Migrants* (London: Unwinded Hyman, 1989); Margaret Humphrey, *Empty Cradles* (London: Doubleday, 1994); and Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire: The Shocking Story of Child Migration to Australia* (Sydney: Millennium Books, 1997). See also *Lost Children of the Empire*, directed by Joanna Mack (1988) a television documentary broadcast by the ABC in 1989 and *The Leaving of Liverpool*, directed by Michael Jenkins (1992), a mini-series broadcast by the ABC in 1994. For additional examples, see “Watching the Past in the Present – films, tv & documentaries,” Find & Context web resource blog <https://www.findandconnectwrblog.info/2018/06/watching-the-past-in-the-present/> (accessed 15 March 2023). Charles Wheeler's four-part radio show (BBC 4) aired in 2003, two years after the Committee's inquiry. “The Child Migrants,” *BBC Radio 4*, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/child\\_migrants.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/child_migrants.shtml) (accessed 14 March 2023).

<sup>37</sup> *Lost Innocents*, 1. Several investigations into the welfare of children in “institutional and other forms of care” took place in the 1980s and 1990s. For a list of these investigations, see *Lost Innocents*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> The main findings listed above pertain to children from the United Kingdom. For findings on Maltese child migrants to Australia, see *Lost Innocents*, 42-45.

letters intended for their children, which made it difficult and sometimes impossible for family members to find each other, not to mention the fact that it cut the children off from any love and emotional connection to their parent(s).<sup>40</sup> These discrepancies, the Commission stated, went “far beyond the imperfect record keeping characteristics of the time.”<sup>41</sup> The Committee also found that parental consent for sending children to Australia was generally lacking. While some parents had agreed to sending their children to Australia and some institutions had been unable to contact parents, the Committee found that “[i]n other instances it is clear that the whereabouts of parents were known and their views were not sought or were even rejected.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in his interview, Peter Bidwell stated his migration form listed no father though his birth certificate did.<sup>43</sup> Since it was the mother superior of Nazareth house who signed the migration forms rather than his own mother it is likely his mother was never consulted in the process. Having her son admitted to Nazareth house, she may have signed her parental rights away, whether she knew it or not.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the Committee deemed the “circumstances now faced by many former child migrants as the collective responsibility of all the governments and agencies involved in the schemes.”<sup>45</sup> It was only in August 2009, after an inquiry into the Government’s progress regarding recommendations made in the *Lost Innocents* and *Forgotten Australians* reports respectively that the Australian Government announced its plan for an apology to both groups.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Lost Innocents*.

<sup>41</sup> *Lost Innocents*, 169.

<sup>42</sup> *Lost Innocents*, 60. For an example of a mother who fought multiple administrative layers to regain custody of their children, see interview with Tony Holmes.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Peter Bidwell, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/90, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, 19 September 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Peter Bidwell. Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869-1967* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 51-52.

<sup>45</sup> *Lost Innocents*, 115.

<sup>46</sup> Government of Australia, “Media Release – Australian Government to apologise to Forgotten Australians and Lost Innocents,” *Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*, 30 August 2009 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia).

The *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project* collection was part of a National History project which also provided funding for exhibits about ‘care’-leavers’ and child migrants’ experiences in Australia at the National Museum and the Australian National Maritime Museum respectively.<sup>47</sup> As such, the collection was the direct result of a recommendation made in the *Forgotten Australians* Senate report (2004), echoing former child migrants’ need to tell their stories.<sup>48</sup> The National Library of Australia (NLA) was tasked with the project. The institution had already conducted the *Bringing Them Home* oral history project (1998-2002), a large-scale collection inquiring into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from their families, and housed a smaller interview collection with former British child migrants conducted by two of their seasoned interviewers between 2001 and 2006.<sup>49</sup> The NLA sought to document a “rounded history” of ‘care’-leavers’ experiences and document the life-long impact being in ‘care’ had on ‘care’-leavers, their loved ones and subsequent generations.<sup>50</sup> As such, similar to the *Bringing Them Home* collection, the NLA conducted interviews not only with former child migrants and Forgotten

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<sup>47</sup> These projects were funded by the department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), File NLA09/148 Folio R13/60475 “Quarterly Report to FaHCSIA,” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*, National Library of Australia (Canberra, April-June 2013): 14 pages. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27260, “Notes for [FAFCM] interviewer training,” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*, National Library of Australia (Canberra: August 2010): 4 pages, 1. See “On their own – Britain’s child migrants,” *Sea Museum*, <https://www.sea.museum/explore/online-exhibitions/britains-child-migrants> (accessed October 20, 2022). The National Museum Australia similarly has a web page providing a brief overview of the experiences of Forgotten Australians and former child migrants, “National Apology to Forgotten Australians and former child migrants,” *National Museum Australia*, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/national-apology-to-forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants> (accessed 20 October 2022).

<sup>48</sup> *Forgotten Australians* report; *Lost Innocents*, prologue.

<sup>49</sup> The FAFCM collection began in 2009, ten years after the beginning of *Bringing Them Home*. Rob and Olya Willis, a wife and husband interviewer team, both contributed to the collection. As Rob Willis’ skill and expertise in oral history interviewing was widely respected at the National Library, they were granted much leeway in their work. They interviewed a handful of former British child migrants before deciding that they required a more robust set of guidelines as well as a substantive ethical framework. The interviews (2001-2006) are available on-site at the National Library of Australia. I interviewed Rob and Olya Willis about their involvement and will address our interview in chapter 2.

<sup>50</sup> *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project#> (accessed 15 March 2023). Author interview with JS, June 1, 2021; *Bringing Them Home Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, <https://www.nla.gov.au/collections/what-we-collect/oral-history-and-folklore/bringing-them-home-oral-history-project> (accessed 15 March 2023).

Australians, but also with their family members, advocates and “associated professionals” including institutional staff members, administrators and welfare officers.<sup>51</sup> Today, the FAFCM collection includes interviews with over 200 individuals – former child migrants, Forgotten Australians, their families and professionals alike – many of which are available online.<sup>52</sup>

The NLA hired historian and archivist Joanna Sassoon as project manager to oversee the creation and development of the oral history collection. Sassoon’s decades-long experience working in archival institutions and helping ‘care’-leavers – Forgotten Australians, former child migrants and Aboriginals alike – trace their families and at times face the impossibility of finding family members gave her a unique understanding of the “psychological impact of being in care” and the “desire for storytelling” often born from such experiences.<sup>53</sup> In that capacity, Sassoon was involved in developing tools to help Aboriginal people find their families.<sup>54</sup> Sassoon had also worked in state government “managing the research process for an [...] inquiry relating to the control of Aboriginal people’s money” and later conducted research on compensation schemes for women and men who had been in ‘care’ as children.<sup>55</sup> As such, she was familiar with the bureaucratic aspects of transitional justice endeavours.<sup>56</sup> These prior work experiences offered her an in-depth understanding of the inner workings of archives, their role both as institutional memory keepers and in the creation of collective memory, as well as the obstacles individuals separated from their families might face in their search for their records.<sup>57</sup> As Sassoon developed the conceptual frameworks for the project,

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<sup>51</sup> *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia. <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project#> (accessed 15 March 2023). Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>52</sup> *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia. <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project#> (accessed 15 March 2023).

<sup>53</sup> Author interview, with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 4.

she kept representatives from the governmental funding department and advocates – often referred to as ‘stakeholders’ – abreast of the project’s progress through quarterly meetings and reports, even writing a project update for a publication issued by one of the larger ‘care’-leaver associations.<sup>58</sup> Sassoon was the lynchpin between stakeholders which included the Australian government, the National Library of Australia, advocates and advocacy organisations, and other narrators including ‘care’-leavers who were also advocates. She negotiated stakeholders’ needs, desires, and goals all while educating them on the goals and intentions of the overall project. She created a ten-interview pilot phase so that ‘care’-leavers involved in advocacy efforts could understand experientially what the collection was meant to be.<sup>59</sup> While Sassoon worked alone for the first leg of the project, the NLA eventually hired a second-in-command when it became apparent the workload was too heavy for a single individual.<sup>60</sup>

The FAFCM oral history collection was meant to be many things. For advocates, it offered a platform through which to finally tell their story and ensure their experiences would “never happen again.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, several interviewees commented on the cathartic nature of the project which allowed them to tell their whole life story, instead of focusing solely on their experiences of abuse as was the case for those who had testified in Senate inquiries.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, June 1, 2021. File NLA09/148 Folio R13/60475 “Quarterly Report to FaHCSIA” (Canberra: April-June 2013): 14 pages. Joanna Sassoon additionally published a project update in the Care Leavers’ Association Network (CLAN), see Joanna Sassoon “Update on Oral history Project at National Library of Australia,” *Clanicle*, no 72 (Australia: June 2012): 17. Project updates were also shared in the FAFCM project’s newsletter through the National Library’s and the Oral History Association SA/NT’s newsletter. See *Forgotten Australians & Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, project newsletter (Canberra: May 2011): unpaginated; *Forgotten Australians & Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, project newsletter (Canberra: November 2011): unpaginated; Joanna Sassoon, “The National Library Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project update,” *Word of Mouth*, no. 62, (Australia: June 2012): 14 and 18.

<sup>59</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021. Incidentally, Michael Snell’s interview with Rob Willis on 17 November 2009 was part of the pilot phase. At the time of the interview, Snell was also an advocate, a member of CLAN which lobbied for reparations and recognition. See interview with Michael Snell.

<sup>60</sup> Sassoon worked as project manager until nine months before the end of the project due to difficulties with the institutional nature of the project discussed off the record. Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>61</sup> *Lost Innocence*, prologue.

<sup>62</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

Politically, the collection was firmly embedded in its transitional justice roots. From an archival perspective, the goal of the project was to document the plurality of experiences, and, as mentioned above, the inter-generational and life-long impacts of being in ‘care’.<sup>63</sup>

For Sassoon, there were two additional goals for the project. True to her social history background, Sassoon wanted to create a collection that could effect changes in policies surrounding children’s welfare, thus echoing and taking action on advocates’ desires and expectations. “What I wanted to do” commented Sassoon during one of our interviews “was to create a set of interviews, [which] if policymakers ever had the time, they could go and listen to the patterns of what people said worked and what people said didn’t. That was one of my goals.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, one of the target audiences she had in mind during the creation process were professionals — policy-makers, social workers, academics, etc. — who had the power to change ‘care’-giving legislation or influence its practices.<sup>65</sup> Of course, as Sassoon stated, all of the goals she proposed were sanctioned by the NLA. “I didn’t have a free hand in anything,” she stated.<sup>66</sup>

From the outset, Sassoon also wanted to “include[e] yet mov[e] beyond” the narratives of trauma and abuse that had thus far dominated ‘care’-leavers’ stories.<sup>67</sup> Testimonies shared for advocacy or social justice purposes had tended to showcase the “worst cases” in terms of horror and abuse.<sup>68</sup> As Sköld has stated, through the inquiry process, such narratives tend to be “transformed [...] from individual to national traumas”.<sup>69</sup> By capturing the plurality of ‘care’-leavers’ experiences, Sassoon sought to expand the narrative to allow for the complex

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<sup>63</sup> “Transcript of address at the apology to the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants, Great Hall, Parliament House, 16 November 2009”; Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for memories,’” 26.

<sup>64</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 32.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33. See also author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Sköld, “Apology politics,” 15.

nuances of life-stories to shine through, especially resilience and agency, a narrative which had not yet been investigated.<sup>70</sup>

To allow for this expansion of narrative templates, interviews were conducted using a life story approach where the focal point was placed on a person's whole life, as opposed to the testimonies mentioned in the Senate inquiries.<sup>71</sup> Testimonies are often used in transitional justice efforts as a way of documenting factual details surrounding specific, often harrowing, events and assessing their veracity.<sup>72</sup> In his own work exploring the use of testimonies to document Holocaust survivors' experiences, Tony Kushner found this interview approach to be prohibitive for interviewees. Since testimonies often focus on a specific set of traumatic moments – for example 'care'-leavers' harsh treatment while in institutions— they require interviewees to recount often trying experiences without allowing space for them to reflect or even come to terms with these experiences.<sup>73</sup> Nor do they, as Kushner states, allow for interviewees' narratives "to have space to reveal [their] own internal dynamics, especially in relation to the rest of the person's life story."<sup>74</sup>

A life story approach offers a clear departure from the testimonial format of inquiries while respecting one of the key tenets of oral history to do no harm, or where impossible, to minimize it.<sup>75</sup> A life story narrative allows interviewees the space to recount and reflect on their life as a whole and imbues them with the authority and decisive power to determine

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<sup>70</sup> Sassoon, "Memories for justice," 32-33. In our interview, Joanna Sassoon stated "the two words I used constantly were 'resilience' and 'agency.' Because in the end, if it was a study about the life-long impact of being in care, then it's ultimately a study of resilience, because only the resilient survive being in care." Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>71</sup> A poignant example of a life story narrative is Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Indeed, in the case of Holocaust testimonies specifically, historian Tony Kushner found that post-war testimonies were used as proof of Nazi terror, at a time when the very existence of the Holocaust was questioned. Tony Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony, Ethics, and the Problem of Representation," *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 275–95.

<sup>73</sup> Sean Field speaks of the "regenerative" possibilities of storytelling, which I will explore further in chapter 2. See Sean Field, "Beyond 'Healing': Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration," *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 31–42.

<sup>74</sup> Kushner, "Holocaust Testimony," 276 and 280.

<sup>75</sup> Erin Jessee, "The Limits of Oral History: Ethics and Methodology Amid Highly Politicized Research Settings," *The Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (September 2011): 287–307.

what they do, or do not, want to share. An oral history interview is as much about the present, Alessandro Portelli argues, about how individuals make sense of their life experiences and how these experience have shaped their present self, as it is about the perception and recounting of past events. In an oft-quoted passage, Portelli has stated that “[o]ral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did.”<sup>76</sup> As such, while placing the experience of living in institutions or out-of-home-‘care’ in the context of one’s lifetime, this approach affords interviewees with a space to recount and reflect on who they had become and how they negotiated their experiences.

Since the collection showcased ‘care’-leavers from several walks of life, including prominent business people, academics, politicians, high-ranking military officials and other professionals – not to mention individuals such as Maurice Crawford-Raby, a plumber who loved his life, family and profession – the collection also destabilized a more insidious collective narrative, one that suggested that ‘care’-leavers were at a disadvantage in life and that they would amount to nothing.<sup>77</sup> In their respective interviews, Tony Holmes and Tony Costa, who was sent to Bindoon in 1953 at age twelve, recall reading such notes in their institutional files.<sup>78</sup> In both cases, the note could not be farther from the truth. In his interview, Tony Holmes reflected on this note in his file: at the time of his interview he had a successful career as a management consultant which followed a twenty-year career in the

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<sup>76</sup> Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” 52.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby; interview with Tony Holmes; interview with Tony Costa, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/13, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 10 May 2010. In their respective works, Ellen Boucher, and Margot Hillel and Shurlee Swain address the poor circumstances these children often came from, as well as the types of obstacles they faced. See also Ellen Boucher, *Empire’s Children*; Margot Hillel and Shurlee Swain, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850–1915*, 1st edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> Though Tony Costa and Michael Snell both went to Bindoon in the same decade – Michael Snell arrived in 1950 and Tony Costa in 1953 – since Snell was 15 upon his arrival and would have left shortly after, it is unclear if the two crossed paths.



army where he made it to the rank of Captain and then Major.<sup>79</sup> In turn, as a social justice activist, amongst other titles Tony Costa held a position as a representative in the Railway workers' union and was the Mayor of Subiaco, a suburb of Perth.<sup>80</sup> Along with “musicians and professionals,” Sassoon stated they “interviewed judges, doctors, lawyers, you name it,” thus providing ‘care’-leavers with examples – or role models – for alternative life paths they could take.<sup>81</sup>

Sassoon’s article “Phantoms of Remembrance” offers important insight into the structural layers informing the FAFCM collection, and in some sense, acts as a theoretical and, to some extent, an ethical roadmap for the collection. Sassoon argues that, far from being passive repositories of documentary evidence of our collective past, archives “actively create rather than passively reproduce meaning.”<sup>82</sup> These resulting collective narratives are shaped both through curatorial decisions pertaining to documentation (what to keep and what to reject) and influenced by the structural and social makeup of the curatorial group itself which historically has “privilege[d] certain types of memories over others” that reflected their own social standing and interests.<sup>83</sup> These decisions, in turn, influence not only the “memory and remembrance” of a society, and ultimately its history, but also “the kinds of histories that can now be written.”<sup>84</sup> Archives, argues Sassoon, are in fact “socially constructed sites of struggles and contestation.”<sup>85</sup> Sassoon uses the metaphor of memory to describe archival institutions, agreeing with Pierre Nora’s statement that, in lieu of oral modes of transmission or the use of mnemonic devices to transmit knowledge of the past, “modern western

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Tony Costa.

<sup>81</sup> This was also one of Joanna Sassoon’s hopes for the collection.

<sup>82</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 41. Here too, Fiona Murphy’s “Archives of Sorrow” provides a similar exploration of archives as a site of return and negotiated emotions.

<sup>83</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 41,

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42. In so doing, Sassoon effectively turns the conversation which, according to her, is mostly reserved for monuments and museums towards the archive.

communities have transferred the responsibility for remembering to the archive.”<sup>86</sup> Building on Maurice Halbwachs’ work, Sassoon further uses the concept of archives as collective memory to both analyze and problematize the role of archival institutions in the creation of our collective understanding of the past.<sup>87</sup>

As a solution to this documentary nepotism, Sassoon calls for active curation, the critical assessment of material while simultaneously ensuring curatorial acquisitions are made beyond and outside said curator’s network(s) so that collections reflect the communities whose memories they seek to mirror, rather than the curators themselves and their networks.<sup>88</sup> She additionally emphasizes the need for a higher level of transparency regarding archival institutions’ internal structures, and documenting discussions surrounding acceptance or rejection of material.<sup>89</sup> For, as Sassoon states, “in order to understand the archives as the collective memory it is important to ask who these memory individuals are and what their role is in shaping the kinds of memories held within institutions.”<sup>90</sup> Archives, then, argues Sassoon, are “meta-objects” resulting from a series of “active choices that lie behind the nature of the memories that are preserved.” Echoing archivist Verne Harris, Sassoon posits that archivists are activists rather than “impartial custodian[s].”<sup>91</sup>

In writing “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” Sassoon answered her own call for transparency in archival practice while also describing how she actively curated the FAFCM collection. Published in the early stages of the project in 2010, the article acted as meta-documentation for the collection. Sassoon outlined the theoretical frameworks shaping the collection, notably a braiding together of memory theory and macroappraisal, a technique

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<sup>86</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 44.

<sup>87</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 43-44. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper Collins Books: 1980).

<sup>88</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 53.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Sassoon, “Phantoms of Remembrance,” 55 and 41. Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 25; Verne Harris, ‘Jacques Derrida meets Nelson Mandela: Archival Ethics at the Endgame,’ *Archival Science* 11, no 1-2 (March 2011): 113-124.

allowing for a “big picture” assessment of documentation needed for the collection’s purpose(s).<sup>92</sup> The NLA began by ‘mapping’ existing documentation pertaining to child migrants and Forgotten Australians – from government policies and official histories to personal files and records. Interestingly, Sassoon noted, similarly to Musgrove, that ‘care’-leavers’ files were written *about* rather than *for* ‘care’-leavers.<sup>93</sup> In addition, she addressed the project’s goals and challenges, notably navigating both the expectations of social change placed on the collection through the project’s advocacy origins and the monolithic narrative of trauma and abuse established over time in Australia’s collective memory through the inquiry and advocacy processes.<sup>94</sup> Since one of the main instructions Sassoon received was to ensure that no complaints pertaining to the project made their way to the ministry, she meticulously detailed each step of the project, thereby providing a layer of archival transparency.<sup>95</sup> These documents notably described the clear, “rigorous and defensible selection criteria and processes” established to cut through the complex and often emotional nuances involved in creating an oral history collection borne out of transitional justice and advocacy efforts.<sup>96</sup> In short, the NLA wished to ensure they could successfully justify why certain individuals were not selected to be interviewed on the project. The article also informed academics and professionals susceptible of reading the publication of both the framework Sassoon used and the very existence of the collection.

Creating space and documenting more nuanced experiences was, to Sassoon, a form of justice for ‘care’-leavers’ memories.<sup>97</sup> “Justice for memories” thus became one of the core tenets of the project and arguably its ethos.<sup>98</sup> The term is a play on South African archivist

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<sup>92</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 28.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice,’” 26.

<sup>95</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 28.

<sup>97</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for justice’ or ‘justice for memories’: Remembering Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants,” 32.

<sup>98</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories’.”

Verne Harris' "memory for justice" which described the impetus behind the need for documentation in post-apartheid South Africa, which both aided and was a symptom of "social transformation [...] to balance the dominant narratives of the oppressive regimes."<sup>99</sup> Moving beyond the dominant narrative surrounding 'care'-leavers' experiences additionally required understanding the social structures of remembering that upheld said narrative and could influence the tone of the collected life-story narratives even at the outreach stage.<sup>100</sup> Sassoon noted that "even before national advertising of the project, the Library has received a large number of expressions of interest from people who have self-selected to tell their story".<sup>101</sup> These self-selected individuals were often part of 'care'-leaver networks and therefore would often have "bad experiences."<sup>102</sup> In creating both a framework for the collection and developing a recruitment process, Sassoon was aware that "the ways people hear about the project may also shape the kinds of stories that are told."<sup>103</sup> She invested much thought into who was being included and excluded from the collection and how the recruitment process could attract individuals with as varied narratives and experiences as possible while being mindful of including individuals with varying levels of literacy. This meant including stories from people who had not shared their experiences for inquiry purposes, or perhaps ever, and "who'd never heard about the project but who had been in 'care', whose lives might have been disrupted."<sup>104</sup>

In this case, "moving beyond" the dominant narrative did not mean looking for people who had never experienced trauma and abuse while in institution. "The story about 'care' is not only about rape and horror and abuse and then social and cultural economic

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 25

<sup>100</sup> Sassoon, "'Memory for Justice' or 'Justice for Memories,'" 29.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>103</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021 and Sassoon, "'Memory for Justice' or 'Justice for Memories,'" 29.

<sup>104</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

disadvantage,” stated Sassoon.<sup>105</sup> Indeed the very nature of the FAFCM collection is rooted in reparation politics to right wrongs done to children while in ‘care’; the interviews include difficult stories filled with trauma. Rather, moving beyond the dominant narrative meant creating space for other facets of ‘care’-leavers’ experiences to surface.

The theories and structures of thought present in both articles permeate the FAFCM collection. Transparency through project documentation and efforts to actively curate the collection are especially visible in the recruitment process centered on “Expression of Interest” forms. These documents offered interested ‘care’-leavers an opportunity to share their experiences in ‘care’ and asked of them to provide information pertaining to the institutions they were placed in and whether they had told their story before, to name only two examples.<sup>106</sup> The “Expression of Interests” additionally served to provide demographic data which, in turn, Sassoon used in the interviewee selection process to ensure an equal representation of both former child migrants and Forgotten Australians in the collection.<sup>107</sup> The size of each group interviewed was proportionally identical to the number of individuals who were part of the group. Whereas an estimated 6,000 child migrants made their way to Australian institutions through child migration schemes in the twentieth century, around 500,000 Australian children had been placed in ‘care.’<sup>108</sup> As a result, 70 per cent of the interviews were conducted with Forgotten Australians while 15 per cent were conducted with former child migrants –from both the United Kingdom and Malta— and another 15 per cent with employees, professionals and family members.<sup>109</sup> In an effort to account for illiteracy,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Unpublished project documentation “Map of Expressions of interest as at [sic] 31 December 2011.”

<sup>107</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 2, 9 June 2023.

<sup>108</sup> File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010),” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia (Canberra, 2010): 23 pages. Slides 8-9.

<sup>109</sup> NLA File 10/147 Folio R10/41443 *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project Academic Advisory Group held 25 February 2010 [Minutes]*. 5 pages. In our interview, Joanna Sassoon noted that it was difficult to interview ‘care’-leavers’ children as most did not want to, in Sassoon’s words, “rat out” their parents. It is unclear how many, if any, children were interviewed. Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

“Expression of Interest” were available as paper documents or through a direct, free phone line for those who “could not read or write.”<sup>110</sup> In these cases, Sassoon or her colleague would fill the paperwork on behalf of potential interviewees.<sup>111</sup> In being mindful that ‘care’-leavers could be “emotionally fragile” due to their traumatic experiences in institution (and, we may add, as a way of protecting the NLA), the National Library sought to limit the potential to reopen such wounds by clearly stating on the document that not all who sent in their stories would be interviewed, effectively managing ‘care’-leavers’ expectations.<sup>112</sup>

Circulated through carefully chosen advertising channels, “Expression of Interest” documents were a means through which to ensure active curation, effectively expanding recruitment efforts outside of advocacy organizations and similar networks. Examples of these advertising channels include pensioners’ newsletters, a 3 a.m. talk-back community radio program, and rural and regional press and radio stations.<sup>113</sup> “I had the image of the man living alone in the bush with a caravan. I wanted us to interview him” stated Sassoon illustrating her desire to interview people the NLA and advocates had never heard of.<sup>114</sup> Interviewees were selected based on four overarching themes: where they were in their life at the time of the interview, the impact their time in institution had on them, the institutions into which they had been placed, and the range of their experiences prior to and whilst in ‘care’.<sup>115</sup> Due to the project’s mandate of documenting the lifelong and intergenerational impacts of being in ‘care,’ Sassoon was particularly interested in selecting narrators based on where they were in their lives at the time of the interviews. As Sassoon observed in our conversation, “in Australia quite a lot of politicians have been in care as children” as have professionals,

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<sup>110</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021; session 2, 9 June 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021; session 2, 9 June 2023.

<sup>113</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 27. Unpublished “Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project Communications strategy” (Canberra: undated).

<sup>114</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

academics and military personnel.<sup>116</sup> Capturing various ranges of experiences, the project interviewed individuals who had been in ‘care’ anywhere between six weeks and several years.<sup>117</sup> Notably, Ron Critoph spent only a short time in Mowbray Park, a Barnardo’s Farm School in Picton, before obtaining a bursary to study at Hurlstone Agricultural Boys High School due to his high achievement in school, contrarily to individuals such as May Chandler or Maurice Crawford-Raby who spent several years in institutional ‘care.’<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, the documentation created throughout the interview recruitment and selection process also acted as a “sort of survey” of the life-paths taken after leaving ‘care’ institutions.<sup>119</sup> The project did end up interviewing a man living alone in a caravan out in the bush.<sup>120</sup>

It was apparent from my interviews that Sassoon had been pleased with the project’s goals, framework and rigorous documentation, though much of the more nuanced sentiments she shared with me about the project were communicated off-the-record. In addition, since Sassoon left her role as project manager of the collection nine months prior to the end of the project (for reasons also stated off the record), she was unable to oversee the project’s transition to the archives. As such, it is unclear whether certain pieces of documentation she had planned to include in the digital and physical archive in effect made their way into it.<sup>121</sup> Regardless, the insights gathered through my interviews with Joanna Sassoon when coupled with her two articles mentioned above provide substantial metadata for future researchers to understand and help situate the project. This metadata is crucial, since we can glean very little about the inner workings of the project from the collection’s web pages alone.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, while the NLA provides a brief overview to contextualize the FAFCM – it lists the 2009

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<sup>116</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with May Chandler; Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

<sup>119</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon session 2, 9 June 2021, and session 3, 20 June 2021.

<sup>122</sup> *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project#> (accessed 15 March 2023).

apology as the projects' origins, and briefly details the background of the main groups of people interviewed, the accompanying booklet and collected materials – little is mentioned about the inner workings of the creation of the collection.<sup>123</sup>

When placed in counterpoint to a contemporary collection of a similar scale such as the Montreal Life Stories project, the ecosystems in which the FAFCM operated become apparent. The collections were rooted in collaborations of a different kind. Whereas the Montreal Life Stories project was born out of a collaborative partnership between community and researchers, the FAFCM collection represented a collaboration between stakeholders, the Australian government, and 'care'-leavers mediated through the National Library which acted as a central pillar also firmly rooted in advocacy origins and situated in the social history and transitional justice ecosystems. The frameworks, goals, interviewee recruitment process, though developed by Joanna Sassoon, were vetted at the institutional level by higher ups at the NLA. While Sassoon was accountable to stakeholders and worked closely with some of them to ensure the project met their needs and desires wherever possible, oversight of the collection was centralized within the NLA. Despite these institutional constraints, Sassoon was able to exert considerable influence in shaping the creation of this collection, insisting, for instance, that the recruitment process be taken beyond the NLA's and advocacy organizations' immediate networks. These insights represent crucial information for future researchers.

Notable in its absence is any trace of a discussion on race. Aside from the fact that the NLA conducted the *Bringing Them Home* collection, no other mention of the racial practices of colonial organizations and institutions responsible for children's migration were discussed in any substantive manner in the FAFCM collection. Nor do parallels seem to have been

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<sup>123</sup> This is true even when using platforms such as the Internet Archive to view past iterations of the webpage: *InternetArchive - Wayback Machine*, <https://archive.org/web/> (accessed 14 March 2023).



drawn between both collections, save for their architectural makeup. And yet, as Ellen Boucher, Margot Hillel and Shurlee Swain have demonstrated in their respective bodies of work, children's migration schemes were set along starkly racialized lines as the twentieth century wore on.<sup>124</sup> Yet not once were former child migrants asked about the experiences of Aborigine children and youth, forced into "care" in Australia. An anecdote from May Chandler's interview stands out. When speaking with Rob Willis about her thoughts on the apology, she recalled an encounter with an aboriginal woman:

I know they said sorry to the Aboriginals, but it's all Aboriginals, the forgotten people, the forgotten people, the forgotten people, we're the Lost Innocents, that's what we're known as, the lost innocents. I tried to tell one Aboriginal lady, who I did make some cards for, [...] she tried to sell me a ribbon, and I said, Rhonda, you know I'm in the same situation as you, I said Barnardo's, I said we were sent out here [imitating lady's speech] 'oh nothing like ours' I said you never left Australia, she wasn't one of the ones, she wasn't taken away, I said you never left Australia, I said, we did, and she just walked away from me. She walked away from me.<sup>125</sup>

The sentiment expressed by May Chandler that the former child migrants seem to have been sidelined in the apology was a sentiment expressed by several former child migrants in their interviews.<sup>126</sup> Hugh McGowan, a child migrant who does not seem to have been interviewed for the FAFCM collection, stated he felt that "we child migrants were attached to the apology as an afterthought."<sup>127</sup> It is possible that race was not addressed within interviews to avoid shedding light on issues and emotions that were, and still are, a sensitive matter. The FAFCM collection was not meant to help the country come to terms with its racial legacy, but rather, in siloed collections, to come to terms with abuse and neglect of children. In this way, any conversation on race could be circumvented even as the respective groups, the

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<sup>124</sup> Boucher, *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869-1967*. Hillel and Swain, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: Child Rescue Discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915*, 1st edition.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with May Chandler.

<sup>126</sup> Notably Michael Snell expressed this sentiment in his interview in 2009.

<sup>127</sup> Kim Tao, "Reflecting on the child migrant apology," *Sea Museum*, 16 November 2020, <https://www.sea.museum/2019/11/16/reflecting-on-the-child-migrant-apology> (accessed 6 February 2023).

Stolen Generation on one side and the Forgotten Australians and former child migrants on the other, were granted the space to tell their stories.

When diving into the collection's creation process, an intrinsic contradiction emerges: the oral history collection that was meant as a reparation effort for the abuse and neglect individuals experienced while in institutional and out-of-home 'care' as children was run by an institution, the National Library of Australia. At times the NLA's mandate as a memory institution and its desire to protect itself from potential complaints, and even legal matters, seemed to pull at the more intimate and emotional experiences that took place within the interviews. Central to the project were the reparation efforts and the need for transparency at an institutional level; curatorial decisions were made along these lines. While the project framework was designed to protect both potential interviewees from disappointment and the NLA from potential discontent, it is possible that using "Expression of Interest" as a recruitment tool did cause pain to 'care'-leavers who sent in their story but were not retained for interview.

That the collection was funded by the government meant the creation process needed to be transparent and could easily be audited by governmental agencies; in other words, a positivist mind-set undergirded the creation of this collection.<sup>128</sup> As such, the collection's structure seems to have been dictated by various levels of politics, intent on ensuring an equal representation of both groups. The project's advocacy origins and the local and global contexts of its creation further reveal the collection as a platform on which to come to terms with some of the consequences of Australia's child welfare policies *and* as a means of healing through which 'care'-leavers could finally be heard and share their stories. A closer

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<sup>128</sup> As a counterpoint, see Carol Payne, "'You Hear It In Their Voice': Photographs and cultural consolidation among Inuit youths and elders," in *Oral History and Photography*, edited by Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 97-114.

examination of the interview experience in the field is necessary to better understand the dynamics of the FAFCM collection as a whole.

## Chapter 2

### Interviewing the interviewers: conversational approaches and experiences

In a recent article, published in *The Oral History Review* in 2018, Alessandro Portelli argues that the trust present in an interviewee-interviewer relationship offers a sense of safety bridging the difference between both parties speaking “across” their respective backgrounds: “what the interview is about is the distance we have to cross in order to speak to each other. Similarity makes the interview possible; difference makes it meaningful.”<sup>1</sup> According to Portelli, difference enables a dialogue, with each interlocutor seeking to understand the other. From our differences, we create a bond of trust that enables us to reach deeper and reveal more than if the trust was rooted in similarity.<sup>2</sup> These types of conversational and relational modes of negotiation do not always take place verbally but can instead manifest in various other communication channels not always picked up by the microphone.

This chapter seeks on one hand to stitch together a ‘partial perspective’ of the context in which interviews for the FAFCM collection were created by examining the experiences, approaches and training of four interviewers from the project, and on the other hand, to explore what we can glean of the interviewee-interviewer relationship from conversations with interviewers. At the heart of this chapter is an exploration of the moment of the interview in the ‘field’ and the transition from project conceptualization to recorded conversation between two individuals. No matter how well thought out project goals and frameworks can be, the moment of the interview is shaped by the individuals involved. While in chapter one I argued for the need to ‘situate’ an oral history collection into its larger ecosystems, this chapter explores the individual interviews that make up the whole. I argue

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<sup>1</sup> Alessandro Portelli, “Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience,” *The Oral History Review* 45, no. 2 (August 2018): 241 and 242. Portelli also examines the rich interplays between memory, temporality and conversation present in an interview.

<sup>2</sup> Portelli, “Living Voices.”

that only by understanding the microcosm of individual interviews and the dynamics at play within as well as each interview's relationship to the collection as a whole can we reuse archived oral history interviews in ways that are faithful to the labour and creativity invested into the conceptualization of the wider research project and the interview process itself, as well as to the meaning interviewee's sought to convey through their narratives.

To this end, drawing upon interviews I conducted with four interviewees, this chapter will first introduce my interviewees and provide insight into how they were trained on the project and prepared for interviews with 'care'-leavers.<sup>3</sup> How were interviewees selected? What project goals were shared with them and how did this influence their approach? What knowledge pertaining to growing up in institutional 'care' and to child migration, if any, did they have going into the project? Second, this chapter will bring into conversation both interviewees' reflections on the interview process and an analysis of the interviews they conducted. How did they prepare for interviews and forge a connection with interviewees? How did they cultivate a space for storytelling that allowed for the retelling of a wide range of experiences? How did they witness challenging stories and navigate their own emotional responses in their role as interviewer? And how, to quote Portelli, did interviewees seek to speak across differences and build a dialogical bridge?<sup>4</sup> This chapter will also speak to the short and long-term impact this project had on the interviewees who listened to difficult and emotionally charged stories. I will further examine the type of support they received during the project. Lastly, this chapter will explore the types of narratives that emerge when narrators are afforded an opportunity to reflect on their life-story as a whole rather than focusing solely on traumatic experiences. What kinds of experiences, anecdotes, and

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<sup>3</sup> Ideally, I would have also spoken with interviewees. I chose against this due to their advanced age at the time of the interviews—several have passed away since the interviews—and to avoid reopening stories they potentially did not want to revisit. Additionally, I wanted to avoid an 'extractive' interview simply for the sake of research; an interview with me would most likely have offered them little.

<sup>4</sup> Portelli, "Living Voices."

reflections on one's own experiences surface when narrators are given space to recount their life-story?

In the summer of 2021, I conducted interviews with two women and two men who had worked on the FAFCM project: Virginia Macleod, Hamish Sewell, and husband and wife team Rob and Olya Willis. I was able to connect with Rob Willis, Olya Willis and Virginia Macleod through the National Library of Australia, while Joanna Sassoon put me in contact with Hamish Sewell.<sup>5</sup> Due to travel restrictions at the time, we spoke online. My questions, and our discussions, pertained to their interview experience as well as the training and directives they had received for the project. My role as an interviewer shifted depending on my interlocutor(s) and the moment in the interview. I was at times a graduate student interviewing them, and at others, a peer interviewer, a conversationalist, or someone simply allowing my interlocutor space for reflexivity. In my interview with Rob and Olya Willis, as I would later reflect, I was both a fellow conversationalist witnessing their experience and an oral historian in-the-making speaking to experienced oral historians who were imparting knowledge to the next generation.

I reached out to Rob Willis since I particularly appreciated his conversational approach to the interviews and the deep attention he granted his narrators.<sup>6</sup> His wife and interview partner Olya Willis remained mostly silent during the recordings, as she focused on the technical aspects of the interview process while also helping Rob keep track of pertinent questions or points of discussion. I was lucky to be able to speak with both together. Rob Willis's oral history career began as a side project in the 1970s through a keen interest in

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<sup>5</sup> I refer to my interviewees by their first and last names instead of observing the established practice of referring to them by their last names only. Since I spend a considerable amount of time conversing with my interviewees, and in some cases continue an epistolary relationship with them to this day, this choice feels the most respectful one. The only exception to this is Joanna Sassoon whom I refer to as Sassoon, much as I do in the case of the many other scholars with whose work I am engaging in this study.

<sup>6</sup> I discuss the interviewees in the chronological order in which I spoke with them: Rob and Olya Willis, Virginia Macleod and last, Hamish Sewell.

preserving musical folklore traditions around Australia. It eventually captured his attention full time. His “gift of gab” and keen ability to listen were immediately noted by project manager Joanna Sassoon who, due to his uncanny ability to get individuals to open up, paired Rob Willis with interviewees who were somewhat apprehensive about sharing their life stories.<sup>7</sup> To date, Rob Willis has recorded interviews with over 900 individuals across Australia.<sup>8</sup> Some of these recordings are available through the ever-growing Willis Collection at the National Library which currently boasts “856 hours of playing time.”<sup>9</sup> Olya Willis, a schoolteacher at the time, now retired, has assisted Rob when possible over the years, and more regularly since her retirement.

Rob and Olya Willis’ first brush with the topic of British child migration to Australia took place around 2001. The Willises mentioned that they began interviewing former British child migrants of their own accord shortly after concluding their interviews on the *Bringing Them Home* project, their position as seasoned interviewers at the NLA allowing them some initiative.<sup>10</sup> They had not encountered the topic of child migrants in the media at that point. Indeed, at the time, results from the 2001 *Lost Innocents* report had not yet reached the general population. They could have easily missed the *Leaving of Liverpool*, a fictional mini-series that followed the experiences of British child migrants in the 1950s, which aired on ABC in Australia in July of 1992, before the advent of streaming services.<sup>11</sup> After visiting a Fairbridge Farm School near Sydney and finding out more about the nature of the institution, Rob and Olya Willis connected with a former British child migrant through a mutual

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<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021. Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021.

<sup>8</sup> National Library of Australia (NLA), Willis Collection, accessed 26 September 2022 <https://www.nla.gov.au/collections/guide-selected-collections/willis-collection>. These numbers continue to grow as Rob and Olya Willis conduct interviews.

<sup>9</sup> NLA, Willis Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 27 May 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Press release ABC “ABC Special, The Leaving of Liverpool,” *ABC Program Highlights*, DR9006H001 and DR9006H002. The mini-series aired on two different days: part 1 aired on 8 July 1992 and part two on 9 July 1992.

acquaintance.<sup>12</sup> “The network grew from there,” Rob Willis said as he described an organic expansion of his interview base which differed from the more active curating approach Sassoon would implement in the FAFCM project several years later.<sup>13</sup> On the FAFCM project, Rob and Olya Willis conducted a total of twenty-one interviews across the six Australian states and in the Australian Capital Territory. They spoke with child migrants, Forgotten Australians as well as family relatives.<sup>14</sup> Some of the interviewees Rob Willis spoke with – including May Chandler and Michael Snell – were individuals the Willises had connected with before the FAFCM project even begun.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, Virginia Macleod’s gentle but rigorous approach caught my attention as I listened to the recorded interviews in the FAFCM collection. No doubt mindful of the project’s goals of reframing the narrative surrounding former child migrants and Forgotten Australians, Virginia Macleod often redirected the conversation to get more detailed answers. She was the only interviewer to speak with a “cluster” of narrators – interviews with a ‘care’-leaver and their relatives respectively – and to do so outside Australia. She conducted interviews with Peter Bidwell, a former British child migrant who had returned to England, as well as his wife and cousin; all three interviews took place in the family home back in England.<sup>16</sup> In total, Virginia Macleod spoke with eight individuals on the FAFCM project,

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<sup>12</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya, 25 May 2021

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. This first wave of interviews with former British child migrants (2001-2006) are archived at the NLA and available on location in Canberra. These interviews are separate from the FAFCM collection, though in some cases interviewees were re-interviewed in the context of the 2010-2012 collection. On 17 November 2009, the day after the apology, Rob Willis was able to conduct a second interview with Michael Snell whom he had previously interviewed in 2006, alongside Snell’s spouse, Bobbie Snell. See Interview with Michael Snell and Bobbie Snell conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 5484/90, Child Migrants Oral history project, 25 August 2006,

<sup>14</sup> Since some of the interview recordings and transcripts are available on location in Canberra only, it is unclear whether Rob and Olya Willis also interviewed any policymakers or institutional staff.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with May Chandler, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/187, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 19 July 2012. At the beginning of his interview with May Chandler, Rob Willis describes their encounter a few years prior to the interview. Interview with Michael Snell, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/2, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 17 November 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Peter Bidwell, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/90, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 19 September 2011; Interview with Jasmine Bidwell, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/89, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral



Forgotten Australians and former child migrants, men and women alike, throughout the Australian states of Victoria and New South Wales and in London, England.

Unlike Rob and Olya Willis, Virginia Macleod first encountered former British child migrants' stories in the media, stating "there had been quite a bit of publicity in the papers I think, you know, gradually the stories began to break about what had happened to children in institutions in Australia, so I was aware of that already, probably because of the Senate Inquiry."<sup>17</sup> Initially drawn to the project because of her love for oral history and the project's social justice roots, Virginia was also interested in migrant communities which she attributes to her own migration story.<sup>18</sup> Born in England, Virginia Macleod migrated to Australia with her husband in 1978. A physiotherapist by training, she subsequently re-trained as an oral historian. Before working as an interviewer for the FAFCM collection, Virginia Macleod had participated in an oral history project pertaining to stories of migration centered on objects of memory.<sup>19</sup> The project included interviews with around twenty individuals. From this project sprang a book, a second round of interviews a year later which included video recordings to gain access to interviewees' "whole context," and finally, an exhibit in 2009.<sup>20</sup> The experience seems to have been a powerful one. As Virginia Macleod recalled: "when I went to that [book] launch and I saw [...] how people looked at the book and saw their story in the book and the objects they had chosen, I realized how important it was and you know how it

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History Project, 19 September 2011; Interview with Barbara Henderson, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/90, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 5 September 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on the oral history project *Liverpool Migration History Project* (ca. 2009) see "Liverpool Migration History Project," Migration Heritage Centre, New South Wales <https://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/projects/migration-history-project-liverpool-city-south-western-sydney/index.html> (accessed 18 April 2023). The project included an exhibit, which, as Virginia Macleod mentioned in one of our email exchanges, took place at Casula Powerhouse in 2009, and centered on objects of memory significant to the interviewees' migration story; and a book, see "Liverpool Migration History," Migration Heritage Centre, New South Wales <https://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/publications/liverpool-migration-history-project/index.html> (accessed 18 April 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

really kind of completed that part of the project because they understood what we were doing.”<sup>21</sup> Working on the FAFCM collection further contributed to Virginia Macleod’s approach and work experience. Indeed, Virginia Macleod recalls an interviewer on a subsequent project who did not wish to discuss her childhood during her life-story interview. In this case, Virginia Macleod’s training for the FAFCM project, which had provided her with tools to navigate similar situations with ‘care’-leavers, allowed her to navigate the moment with ease.<sup>22</sup> During our interview and subsequent e-mail exchange, Virginia Macleod mentioned two oral history conferences linked to the FAFCM project that took place in 2012 and 2013 which she organized in her capacity as president of the oral history association in New South Wales.<sup>23</sup>

In turn, Hamish Sewell came from a journalistic background, having worked primarily on radio documentaries for ABC Radio National.<sup>24</sup> Before working as an interviewer for the FAFCM collection, Hamish Sewell had been involved in a project for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, collecting individuals’ stories about their involvement and connection to the river system.<sup>25</sup> He was used to the various facets of interviewing, including using recording equipment, connecting with individuals and, as he put it, “getting [people’s] permission to go in and interview them about things and they can range across a breadth of topics from sort of fairly inane through to, you know, very deep and powerful [...] and sort of dearly held secrets”.<sup>26</sup> Realizing most of the work he did had close ties to oral history, Hamish Sewell sought to further explore this aspect of his work.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

I was put in contact with him by Joanna Sassoon. Our interactions allowed me to get a better sense of how he expressed himself and gain a deeper understanding of his approach to interviewing former child migrants. Hamish Sewell was “chuffed” at having been selected for the project, though recalled being a bit nonchalant about it. In one of several refreshingly candid moments, he described finding out he had been selected for the project: “I’m probably a little bit arrogant sometimes and I didn’t think it was too big a deal, but I was also kind of chuffed, I was chuffed to be chosen and just sort of interested to sort of see how it went and all and probably I needed the money as well.”<sup>28</sup>

Hamish Sewell, too, remembered the 2009 apology and the project’s link to the Stolen Generations and the *Bringing Them Home* collection. He knew little about former child migrants and Forgotten Australians but recalled having a keen interest in learning more: “I think once I started reading up about it and doing a bit of research on it, I became quite fascinated by it really.”<sup>29</sup> He conducted eight interviews across Queensland and New South Wales: one with former British child migrant Tony Holmes, and seven with Forgotten Australians. All his interviewees were male, which he remarked “was probably a good thing,” though whether it was because he was more comfortable engaging with men only, or whether he believed his approach was more suitable for male interviewees – or because of another reason altogether – is unclear.<sup>30</sup>

Since interviews were to be conducted throughout Australia, interviewer positions were advertised nationwide and hired for across the country.<sup>31</sup> Chief qualities sought in applicants

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27602 “FAFCM Action Plan; Project Outline,” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, (Canberra, December 2009): 12 pages, 7. Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. Virginia Macleod recalls seeing a hiring advert in the national newspaper. Meeting minutes documenting early discussions pertaining to the hiring process also suggest the NLA was considering recruiting through certain associations and online fora though, it is unclear whether or not such channels were utilized. These included H-net’s “ANZAU”, “Oral History”, and “Public” groups, the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), the Australian Historic Association (AHA), the Oral History Association of Australia (OHAA), and the Professional Historians Association (PHA).

were “maturity, experience, wisdom and resilience.”<sup>32</sup> The team would eventually grow to include thirty-seven individuals: practiced oral historians either professionally trained or well-seasoned through experience, NLA ‘favourites’ – interviewers who had worked closely with the NLA before and whose work was appreciated by the institution— and individuals from journalistic, social working and academic backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> These mixed backgrounds were intentional on Sassoon’s part as she wanted to bring together professionals with a variety of intellectual and experiential backgrounds.<sup>34</sup>

Interviewers selected for the project were invited to a two-day training session which took place in each state.<sup>35</sup> The training was multi-layered. While designed to provide the interviewing team with an in-depth overview of the project as well as the tools needed to help bring the project’s carefully developed aims and conceptual frameworks to life in the ‘field,’ the training also enabled Joanna Sassoon to brief everyone on the oral history approach and introduce the project’s more sensitive and emotional nature.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, the training sessions enabled interviewers and the project leadership to get to know one another,

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Networking through interviewers associated with the NLA was also discussed as a potential recruitment route. For more details, see file NLA 10/147 Folio R10/41443 meeting minutes, “Academic advisory meeting,” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, (Canberra, 25 February 2010): 5 pages, 4.

<sup>32</sup> NLA 10/147 Folio R10/41443 “Academic advisory meeting,” 4.

<sup>33</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “The National Library Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project update,” *Word of Mouth*, no. 62 (Autumn 2012): 14 and 18, 14. Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 9 June 2021.

<sup>35</sup> While interviewers met only those present at their training, they nonetheless formed an interviewer network of sorts. The NLA also used the trainings to expand its interviewer network by “recruit[ing] and train[ing] a core group of suitable interviewers to conduct interviews in each state” and begin fostering “long term relationships” with certain interviewers. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27602 “FAFCM Action Plan; Project Outline,” 7.

<sup>36</sup> Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021. NLA 10/147 Folio R10/41443 meeting minutes, “Academic advisory meeting,” 5. Also covered in the training were administrative tasks related to interviewers’ employment – contracts and other related documents – how to operate the NLA’s recording equipment, and logistical details pertaining to the project such as how to create and upload a timed summary, file an expense report, etc. See “Training Kit Table of Documents, Training Programme for Melbourne” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, (Canberra, undated): 2 pages. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010),” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, (Canberra, 2010): 23 pages. Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

effectively creating the basis for an informal support network present throughout the project, a topic discussed later in this chapter.<sup>37</sup>

Much of the training covered material detailed in Sassoon’s article “‘Memories for Justice,’” discussed in chapter one.<sup>38</sup> Notably, Sassoon addressed the project’s origins, aims and status. The training traced the project’s origins back to the Senate inquiries and advocacy efforts which led to the 2009 apology and, ultimately, the government’s creation of a National History project; it also addressed the project’s parallels with the *Bringing Them Home* collection.<sup>39</sup> Sassoon shared the project’s status and goal of documenting the life-long impact of being in ‘care’ by conducting interviews with 250 to 350 individuals.<sup>40</sup> At the time of the training, the collection boasted ten pilot interviews, three of which had been conducted with advocates, including former child migrant Michael Snell, interviewed in in 2009 by Rob Willis.<sup>41</sup> Other facets of the project were also discussed, including the life-story approach and its departure from the Senate inquiries’ testimonial approach, theories on the social construction of memory and the interviewee selection process, as well as the conceptual frameworks and means through which to implement them on the ground.

My respective conversations with Joanna Sassoon and Virginia Macleod added to my understanding of the training they received. Notably, and to my surprise, Sassoon was very transparent about the advocacy origins of the project and advocates’ “interest and [high]

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<sup>37</sup> Interviewer Virginia Macleod remarked this was something unique about this project; author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. Unlike the Montreal Life Story project which, in its first year of interviewing hosted regular facilitated “debrief” sessions for interviewers to exchange ideas and experiences, the FAFCM support was more informal, though no less appreciated. For more on the Montreal Life Story project support system and project details, see Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), especially “Interviewing Survivors,” 33-65.

<sup>38</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “‘Memory for justice’ or ‘Justice for memories’: Remembering forgotten Australians and former child migrants.” *Archifacts* (October 2010): 25-34.

<sup>39</sup> File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010),” slide 2. Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>40</sup> The final collection includes roughly 210 interviews. Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, June 1, 2021. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010).” File NLA09/148 Folio R13/60475 “Quarterly Report to FaHCSIA” *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*, (Canberra, April- June 2013): 14 pages, 2.

<sup>41</sup> NLA 10/147 Folio R10/41443 meeting minutes, “Academic advisory meeting,” 2. Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2023.

emotion” concerning the project.<sup>42</sup> She also addressed the challenges both groups faced. Although former child migrants and Forgotten Australians shared some experiences of ‘care,’ they represented two distinct groups.<sup>43</sup> Former child migrants’ media image – doe-eyed children with big suitcases – and cohesive advocacy organizations helped create a relatively cohesive group identity, whether they identified with it or not.<sup>44</sup> They also shared similar experiences – all had travelled to Australia by boat and been placed in institutional ‘care.’ Once in Australia, they were separated from their living relatives, home countries and often even their siblings. By contrast, the Forgotten Australians represented a strikingly diverse group.<sup>45</sup> Some had been placed in institutions, foster ‘care’ or out-of-home ‘care’ situations. Others had grown up in stable ‘care’ arrangements. Yet others had been moved across different places and even states.<sup>46</sup> They also lacked a clear media image and had several advocacy groups making a group identity more challenging.

Sassoon was keen on impressing upon interviewers the power they held in shaping their interviewees’ storytelling through questions and listening and invited them to reflect on their relationship with the interviewees. The training included discussions on suggested themes and the questions Sassoon hoped interviewers would address as well as instructions on how to navigate challenging moments in the interview. Special consideration was given to the question of “beginnings”: whereas life-story interviews normally use a narrator’s childhood as the starting point of conversation, ‘care’-leavers might remember this stage in their life-course as a contentious and difficult one.<sup>47</sup> The training also included a short talk by a

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<sup>42</sup> “Training PowerPoint (2010),” slide 5, 8, 9. Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021. Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 33-32. “Training PowerPoint (2010),” slide 5, 8, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Sassoon, “‘Memory for Justice’ or ‘Justice for Memories,’” 33-32.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010).” See “Bringing Them Home,” *National Library of Australia*, accessed 31 October 2022, <https://www.nla.gov.au/collections/what-we-collect/oral-history-and-folklore/bringing-them-home-oral-history-project> and the “Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project,” *National Library of*

counsellor on the psychological impacts of being in ‘care’; for, as Sassoon stated, she sought to bring everyone on the same page and foster understanding and empathy for ‘care’-leavers’ experiences amongst interviewers.<sup>48</sup> Sassoon also included a plethora of studies on the topic in the supplementary resource kit for interviewers.<sup>49</sup> In sharing these studies with interviewers, Sassoon sought to situate the FAFCM collection into a larger, international context:

So, right from the start when we were training interviewers, I gave them a pack of readings about ... the psychological impact of being in care and some of the major studies, particularly the Canadian Duplessis studies which you probably know a lot about. They’re very, very good studies done by psychiatrists and psychologists. ... I wanted my interviewers to understand that they were part of a bigger set of research that was going on worldwide ... that this wasn’t just your ... standard oral history project.<sup>50</sup>

This angle provides an additional lens through which to listen to the FAFCM collection, further entrenching it in its transitional justice roots. On a more practical note, Sassoon remembered sharing tips on how to dress during interviews to avoid looking too formal, and therefore somewhat inaccessible.<sup>51</sup> She recalled specifically ensuring that no staff members from their team wore black and white during an organized visit for ‘care’-leavers and advocates to the NLA; they did not want their clothing to be reminiscent of the habits worn by nuns and priests.<sup>52</sup> As Virginia Macleod suggested, these training sessions also afforded Sassoon with a good a sense of an interviewer’s personality and interview style, which helped

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*Australia*, accessed 31 October 2022, <https://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/forgotten-australians-and-former-child-migrants-oral-history-project>.

<sup>48</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010).”

<sup>49</sup> “Training Kit Table of Documents, Training Programme for Melbourne”; File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27267, “Training PowerPoint (2010)”; Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. Readings also covered topics such as institutionalization, and growing in ‘care’, and recent advocacy and apology efforts. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27260, “Introduction to the project,” notes for *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project*, National Library of Australia, (Canberra, 2010): 4 pages.

<sup>50</sup> Author interview with Dr. Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2023; session 2, 9 June 2023.

<sup>52</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2023; session 2, 9 June 2023.

her match interviewers with interviewees.<sup>53</sup> After these two days, and after having read the documentation available in their resource kits, interviewers would have had an excellent understanding of both the external factors at play and the influence of their own role in the shaping of the collection as well as how to best support interviewees throughout the interview.

Since the project focused on documenting ‘care’-leavers’ experiences, most of whom had endured some level of trauma and distress, a number of counselling sessions were provided to interviewees in need of them.<sup>54</sup> A similar support was also extended to interviewers.<sup>55</sup> As Liz H. Strong has illustrated in a recent article, witnessing challenging stories can take its toll on interviewers.<sup>56</sup> Interviews can trigger interviewers’ own trauma and can expose interviewers to “vicarious trauma, burnout, and compassion fatigue.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, referring to her interview notes on her discussion with Peter Bidwell, interviewer Virginia Macleod recalls having strong feelings and anger about institutions; these feelings are in no way apparent to the listener nor did they seem to have coloured her subsequent questions.<sup>58</sup> Beyond potentially traumatic encounters or the emotional weight of listening to challenging stories, Strong states that interviews can be challenging “even if nothing’s wrong.”<sup>59</sup> In such cases, Strong suggests turning to various networks of support to ensure interviewers’ well-being: professional (therapy or legal counsel), personal and community support as well as the help

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<sup>53</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. As mentioned in chapter 1, interviewees were included in the project either by sending in an Expression of Interest to the NLA, were directly contacted by NLA staff or were referred to the project through third parties. For more project statistics see File NLA09/148 Folio R13/60475 “Quarterly Report to FaHCSIA,” 2.

<sup>54</sup> Interviewees were made aware of this support at the moment of the interview and possibly before. The project budget totalled \$1.6 million AUS, where \$ 500,000 AUS were allocated for interviewer and interviewee counselling support. File NLA13/651 Folio R13/27602 “FAFCM Action Plan; Project Outline.”

<sup>55</sup> In addition, interviewers could mention if there were certain types of stories they preferred not being exposed to. Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, session 1, 1 June 2021; author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. While undoubtedly effective to some extent, this way of protecting interviewers would have been fallible, especially in the context of a project where narrators tell stories perhaps for the first time.

<sup>56</sup> Liz H. Strong, “Shifting Focus: Interviewers Share Advice on Protecting Themselves from Harm,” *The Oral History Review* 48, no. 2 (July 2021): 196–215.

<sup>57</sup> Strong, “Shifting Focus,” 199.

<sup>58</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Strong “Shifting Focus,” 199.



of mentors.<sup>60</sup> Strong additionally suggests self-care where other support networks are unavailable.<sup>61</sup> In his own work, Sean Field emphasizes the importance of practicing “sensitive introspection” so as to be able to “sustain empathic listening to stories of extreme trauma.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite stating that several interviews had an impact on them, none of the interviewers I spoke with mentioned taking advantage of counselling support. Instead, they preferred reaching out to Sassoon and peer interviewers. These informal support networks felt organic and had been fostered during training sessions.<sup>63</sup> Both Virginia Macleod and Hamish Sewell reached out to Sassoon for different reasons. After interviewing Mavis Appleyard, the first interview Virginia Macleod conducted for the FAFCM project, Macleod felt she had not done right by her interviewee.<sup>64</sup> Reflecting on Sassoon’s support, Macleod stated that this was “special about this project. Mostly when you’re doing oral history interviews, you go out on your own and [...] you don’t actually have anyone else to talk to about it and Joanna was always there.”<sup>65</sup> With an eye on solutions, Sassoon stated Macleod could always speak to Mavis Appleyard again if need be.<sup>66</sup> In turn, Hamish needed help after a particularly “haunting” interview with a Forgotten Australian referred to later in this chapter.<sup>67</sup> By providing guidance and a listening ear, Sassoon acted as a mentor to the members of the interviewer team.

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<sup>60</sup> Strong, “Shifting Focus,” 203-208.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Sean Field, “Beyond ‘Healing’: Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration,” *Oral History* 34, no. 1 (2006): 31–42, 39.

<sup>63</sup> A bullet point in the ‘recruitment and training of interviewers’ section of the “FAFCM Action Plan (Dec 2009)” stated as much, though whether mutual support between interviewers was encouraged or not during trainings is unclear. See NLA REF: R13/27602 “FAFCM Action Plan (Dec 2009),” *National Library of Australia*, Canberra, Australia, 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> In the end, Virginia Macleod did not speak again with Mavis Appleyard; as Virginia Macleod stated, either it was impossible to do so, or she came to terms with the interview.

<sup>67</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

In turn, Rob and Olya Willis preferred to debrief with each other, simultaneously acting as what Strong has called personal – family – and community support.<sup>68</sup> “We’re in the fortunate position that we have each other,” Rob Willis commented during our conversation. Had either been working on their own they too might have felt the need to reach out to peer interviewers.<sup>69</sup> Virginia Macleod was similarly able to connect with fellow interviewers she met at the two-day training, some of whom she had known previously. She felt that “with the other interviewers [...] you were on a common ground and you knew that, of course we [oral historians] don’t always get it right you know, that was helpful.”<sup>70</sup> The group met informally, three or four times over the course of the project to debrief, offer support and exchange tips.

The resulting interviews depended not only on the project framework, but also on interviewers’ respective approaches; how they connected with interviewees and fostered a space for storytelling informed the types of narratives that came to light. The following sections address interviewers’ preparations for the interviews: What lies at the heart of their respective approaches? How did they foster a space for storytelling? And how did they conceive of the interview space? While the interviewers I spoke with all had access to the same training, their interview styles differed considerably.

“I am the master of useless information,” Rob Willis stated, describing his first contact with interviewees, usually over the phone.<sup>71</sup> Those bits of “useless” information, coupled with Rob Willis’s ability to connect with individuals, were instrumental in fostering a relationship with his interviewees. In these initial phone conversations, Rob would go over the details of the project, answer interviewees’ questions, and simply chat and get to know the narrators. Presence, deep listening and fostering a relationship with the interviewee are central to Rob and Olya Willis’s interviewing approach. Olya commented on the importance

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<sup>68</sup> Strong, “Shifting Focus,” 204-205.

<sup>69</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

of seemingly innocuous conversation by stating: “To me it’s making that connection, not necessarily on the topic that is at hand, [...] but something that just is that connection that allows them to think ‘ah yeah, I’m happy to share my life story or part of my life story with this person whom they’ve never met.’ It’s basically just a phone conversation, and it could be couple of phone conversations.”<sup>72</sup>

In addition to participating in the project’s formal training sessions, Rob and Olya Willis expanded their research to consult other reading material. Margaret Humphreys’s *Empty Cradles* had a marked impact on Rob Willis in particular; it was the first book to introduce him to the history of British child migrants.<sup>73</sup> The book describes Humphreys’s efforts as a social worker in Nottingham to assist British child migrants in retracing their families where possible, shed light on the organized migration of British children to Australia and the involvement of religious organizations in the process, all while advocating on behalf of British ‘care’-leavers for recognition and reparation.<sup>74</sup> In lieu of a list of questions, Rob and Olya Willis created a “shopping list,” one-liner sentences to jog their memory during the interview.<sup>75</sup> These questions followed a loosely chronological order beginning with childhood, always allowing for segues and heeding the narrator’s lead. This tried-and-true personal strategy dovetailed with the themes and questions Sassoon and the project’s leadership wanted interviewers to cover.

On the day of the interview, Rob and Olya Willis would generally share a conversation and cup of tea with their interviewee to establish a sense of trust.<sup>76</sup> As Olya Willis stated, this

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Margaret Humphreys, *Empty Cradles* (London: Doubleday): 1994. The book was first published in 1994 and was made into a movie adaptation called *Oranges and Sunshine* directed by Jim Loach in 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Humphreys eventually set up the Child Migrant Trust, which received governmental funding over the years to continue helping British ‘care’-leavers. Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record - Report on Child Migration* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2001); Senate Community Affairs References Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians Who Experienced Institutional or Out-Of-Home Care as Children* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

exchange also allowed them to get to know their interviewee's body language better.<sup>77</sup> Only after this informal visit, which could last up to an hour, would the recording begin.<sup>78</sup> Whereas Rob Willis, in his prior interview practice, had often turned to childhood memories to encourage interviewees to open up – childhood memories often being recalled with fondness – he found music was a “wonderful thing” when said memories were more sensitive.<sup>79</sup>

In the interviews of the FAFCM collection, we often hear Rob Willis asking ‘care’-leavers about “ditties,” musical rhymes the children invented and sung while in institution. When I asked Rob Willis about these, he confessed being fascinated by how folklore, in this case in the shape of a song, acted as a doorway into individuals’ feelings about certain memories and could “lead to further stories.”<sup>80</sup> In addition to being a coping mechanism, or “gallows humour,” as Rob Willis called it, these ditties provided important contextual and situational details.<sup>81</sup> One such example can be heard in the Willises’ interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby when the latter recalled a ditty about one of the priests from his time at Boys Town in Hobart, Tasmania: “There was [one] about Father O'Sullivan, who was ruthless” Crawford-Raby recalled, continuing with the ditty in a sing-song voice:

“Father O'Sullivan is a very good man.

He goes to church on Sundays.

He prays to God to give him strength to bash us kids on Monday.’

And that's how it was,” he added.<sup>82</sup>

In reflecting on his interview approach, Rob Willis stated that he placed a prime importance on deep listening, characterizing it as “a one-way conversation”.<sup>83</sup> He sought to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/18, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 12 August 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

give the interviewer as much space as possible, letting them take the story where they wanted to and gently redirecting or clarifying details: “Listen, listen, listen [...] I think the key is listening [...] not establishing who you are, you’re insignificant. We as interviewers are only a conduit between a person’s story and an archive if that makes sense, ok [...] The less number of questions; the less spikes I have on my particular [audio] track the happier I am. Because they are the ones doing the talking.”<sup>84</sup> In this sense, Rob Willis’s approach emulates Henry Greenspan’s statement that a “good interview is a process in which two people work hard to understand the views and experience of one person: the interviewee.”<sup>85</sup>

The connection Rob Willis establishes with interviewees is challenging to translate in a single interview excerpt, though near palpable in the aural recordings. It is a texture that colours the interview where interviewees seem to feel at ease. An example of this ease of conversation present in Rob Willis’ interviews is his banter with May Chandler – or “lovely May” as he called her during our own conversation – whom he had met prior to the FAFCM project. At the opening of their interview Rob Willis stated:

**Rob Willis:** Rob and Olya Willis, this is a recording for the National Library of Australia in the very important Forgotten Australians project, we’re in Peak Hill, New South Wales, the date is the nineteenth of July two-thousand twelve and I’ve finally caught up with May Chandler. Now, Mrs. Chandler, may I call you May?

**May Chandler:** you *may*  
Both laugh.<sup>86</sup>

Flattened by the process of transcribing the spoken word into writing, as Alessandro Portelli would say, the transcript does not carry the humour in Rob Willis’ voice when he asks May Chandler “Mrs. Chandler, may I call you May?” and the banter in May Chandler’s

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Praeger: Westport, 1998), xvii.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with May Chandler.

voice when she delivers her response, a testament, no doubt, to a connection developed prior to the recording.<sup>87</sup>

Knowing what Rob and Olya Willis' interviews are built on – cups of tea and engaged discussions – it is apparent that Rob Willis' interviews are the recorded segments of a conversation that unfolds within a larger context of interactions. The opening segment of Tony Costa's interview, for instance, harkens back to a previous conversation:

**Rob Willis (RW):** Rob and Ollie Willis, we're in Subiaco, Perth, Western Australia. The date is the eleventh of May, two-thousand-and-ten, and, uh, this is a recording. Now, I'll ... I'm, I'm, I'm gonna say this and then I'm gonna ask for you for your comment

**Tony Costa (TC):** Sure.

**RW:** for the Forgotten Australians

**TC:** Yeah.

**RW:** and Child Migrants

**TC:** Sure.

**RW:** Project. And I'm talking with Tony Costa, that's C-O-S-T-A, uh, and thanks for this. Now, the title, the Child ... uh, when we were talking on the phone you said

**TC:** Sure.

**RW:** Forgotten Australians is not ...

[...]

**TC:** I resent such a title. It's a patronising ... and, to me, it's insulting. The fact that I was sent to Australia as a child migrant, I'm very proudly Australian.<sup>88</sup>

For Rob and Olya Willis, no interview stood out as being particularly challenging, though some stayed with them more than others. They kept in touch with most interviewees, notably with Michael Snell. In our conversation, they expressed some concern over the fact that they had not heard from him in a while. "He usually calls," they said, their concern obvious.<sup>89</sup>

In turn, during our conversation focused on her interviews with British child migrants, Virginia Macleod recounted how she prepared for interviews, doing both general research for context and personalized research for each of her interviewees.<sup>90</sup> She looked at the Senate

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<sup>87</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader 3rd Edition*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 48-58.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Tony Costa, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/13, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 10 May 2010

<sup>89</sup> Author interview with Rob and Olya Willis, 25 May 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Virginia Macleod mentioned reading 'care'-leaver David Hill's autobiography *The Forgotten Children: Fairbridge Farm School and Its Betrayal of Australia's Child Migrants* (Sydney: Random House, 2007) and other articles written by 'care'-leavers.

inquiries and the interviewees' 'Expression of Interest' documents that were generally shared with interviewers – these offered biographical and other details about 'care'-leavers' experiences – as well as other reading materials provided along with the interviewer training.<sup>91</sup> She also sought to get a sense of the broader history of child migration. As she stated: "I read generally about social attitudes to child migration in Britain, social attitudes to institutional upbringing in Britain and in Australia."<sup>92</sup> She also researched each interviewee: "there's heaps today on the internet, you can find almost everyone." This is how she learned about Mavis Appleyard's autobiography, a copy of which is held at the library of New South Wales.<sup>93</sup> Proving interesting, the autobiography was also "a bit of a pitfall" for Virginia Macleod.<sup>94</sup> In our conversation she mentioned finding it "much harder to focus on what they're telling me" if she knew too much about an individual.<sup>95</sup> She made initial contact with interviewees over the phone. The conversation allowed them to set a date and answer any questions interviewees may have had. The recordings were always preceded by a conversation, and often a cup of tea or a bite to eat.

If the Willises' interview style was immersive, Virginia Macleod's approach was more investigative. In the recordings with former British child migrants her questioning is gentle and respectful, but also quite persistent. Macleod frames and directs the conversation with questions resulting in richly detailed accounts. In this sense, Virginia Macleod's interview style serves to drill down into the topics, allowing for a rich collection of data. When Peter Bidwell recounted how some boys went to Sunday lunch with individuals outside the

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<sup>91</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021. In her interview, Mavis Appleyard stated writing was a release for her; she also published *Ballads of a Bush Bride*, a short book of humorous poems pertaining to life in the Australian Bush that was self-published. Mavis Appleyard, *Ballads of a Bush Bride* (Warren, N.S.W.: M. Appleyard, 1995), 44 p.

<sup>94</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 27 May 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

institution, Virginia Macleod asked a question that circled back to life in Nazareth house before moving on to another topic:

**VM:** can you remember, were there lots of children, or was quite small or?

[...]

**PB:** in Nazareth house?

**VM:** in Nazareth house yes

**PB:** I think there were quite a few um, if I had to guess right around a hundred, um,

**VM:** and was it all boys?

**PB:** no they were all boys<sup>96</sup>

Her interviews are also peppered with interjections – ‘mm’ and ‘yeah’ are frequent. This seems to be one of the ways Virginia Macleod indicated her deep listening and interest in her stories and was perhaps even a way of encouragement as evident in the first moments of her interview with Mavis Appleyard:

**Virginia Macleod (VM):** Now, Mavis, you grew ... were born in England, in London, I believe.

**Mavis Appleyard (MA):** Yes.

**VM:** Can you tell me what you remember about your early life there?

**MA:** Um, in London we lived in a ... the ... uh, one-up-one-down sort of place.

**VM:** Yes.

**MA:** And, uh, uh, it was in, um, Ealing.

**VM:** Mm.<sup>97</sup>

Keenly aware of the recordings’ invisible audience – i.e. eventual ‘listeners’— Virginia Macleod ‘translated’ for the microphone what took place in the interview, at times clarifying answers communicated nonverbally or that the microphone would not have picked up.<sup>98</sup> At other times, she narrated for listeners what was taking place: when asking Ron Critoph about the location of the home he had lived in with his family in England before being placed into ‘care,’ we hear light shuffling and a noncommittal mumble followed by Virginia Macleod

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Peter Bidwell.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Mavis Appleyard, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/26, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 15 October 2010.

<sup>98</sup> This is most evident in her interview with Mavis Appleyard and Ron Critoph, both of whom sometimes either mumbled an answer or presumably gave one nonverbally. See Interview with Mavis Appleyard; Interview with Ron Critoph, conducted by Virginia Macleod, ORAL TRC 6200/44, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 14 February 2011.



saying: “Yes, you want to show me a picture?”<sup>99</sup> We hear more shuffling and Virginia Macleod’s comment: “Just to say that Ron has an album that his family have made, with family history.”<sup>100</sup> These interjections help to further immerse the listener in the conversation, helping us to keep apace of the various levels of communications at play in the interview.

In our own interview, Virginia Macleod recalled wanting to give narrators as much space as possible to tell their story. When listening to the interviews in the order Virginia Macleod conducted them in, we notice that she increasingly settled into the rhythm of the interviews with ‘care’-leavers. Whereas her interview with Mavis Appleyard is peppered with engaged listening responses, in her interview with Peter Bidwell and his family in September 2011, Virginia Macleod gives more space to the narrators to take the stories where they want to take them, occasionally taking care to clarify certain details.

My initial interpretation of Virginia Macleod’s interviews with Mavis Appleyard changed dramatically after my conversation with Macleod. When I first listened to the interview, I had in mind Lenore Layman’s study of silence as a form of agency.<sup>101</sup> Layman identified four types of reticence: “that which did not fit narrators’ purpose in agreeing to the interview, that which did not fit within narrators’ bounds of social discourse, that which was painful or disturbing to discuss, and that which did not fit with public, commemorative memory.”<sup>102</sup> Mavis Appleyard’s presumed reticence could have fallen into any of these categories. As such, my initial interpretation of the interview revolved around the concepts of resistance and

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Ron Critoph.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Lenore Layman, “Reticence in Oral History Interviews” in *The Oral History Reader, 3rd Edition, The Oral History Reader 3rd Edition*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 234-252. On silence and communication in interviews, see Alexander Freund, “Toward an Ethics of Silence? Negotiating Off-the-Record Events and Identity in Oral History,” in *The Oral History Reader 3rd Edition*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 253–266; Daniel James, “Listening in the Cold: the Practice of Oral History in an Argentine Meatpacking Community,” in his *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 2000): 119-156; Henry Greenspan, “The Unsaid, the Incommunicable, the Unbearable, and the Irretrievable,” *Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (2014): 229-43.

<sup>102</sup> Layman, “Reticence in Oral History Interviews,” 237.

agency. Yet, what I heard as Virginia gently probing Mavis to provide more specific details about her experience and interpreted as Mavis' resulting reticence was nuanced by three things Virginia Macleod shared in our interview. First, knowing that Mavis was unwell and waiting to go into hospital when they conducted the interviews, Virginia had sought to minimize her "intrusion" in Mavis's life at that moment. Second, given that this was Virginia's first interview on the project, she was quite nervous. Third, Virginia pointed to her efforts to have Mavis go beyond the memories recounted in her autobiography.<sup>103</sup> In the hope of soliciting new stories and anecdotes, Virginia mentioned having read Mavis's autobiography in the second interview. This, however, did not seem to change the latter's storytelling.

This desire to hear "untold stories" speaks to a larger impetus behind oral history interviews. Perhaps, when an interviewee recites nearly verbatim their written autobiography, it defies the "process of legitimation" which resides in the act of remembering in the present moment.<sup>104</sup> Yet, the desire to move beyond the autobiography would not have been as strong had the narrative not been committed to paper.<sup>105</sup> The memory moves further away from what Portelli has called "an active process of creation of meanings" and into the realm of recitation instead.<sup>106</sup> Equally possible, as Barbara Lorenzkowski has suggested, in writing her autobiography, Mavis Appleyard had already made sense of her experiences and settled on a manner of narrating them that served to contain memories' emotional weight. Little wonder, then, that her oral account echoed her writing; this did not make her memories any less "authentic."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Author interview with Virginia Macleod, 25 May 2021

<sup>104</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," in Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson, eds., *Narrative and Genre* (New York: Routledge, 1998): 23-45, 29.

<sup>105</sup> Portelli, "Oral History as Genre," 24.

<sup>106</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in *The Oral History Reader, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (New York: Routledge, 2016): 54.

<sup>107</sup> Barbara Lorenzkowski, "Charting the Social Spaces of Childhood in 1940s Halifax," in *Small Stories of War*, ed. Barbara Lorenzkowski, Kristine Alexander, and Andrew Burtch (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023), 285-287.

In one instance, I interpreted the fact that Mavis ignored one of Virginia's questions, instead following the narrative she wanted to tell, as a form of resistance and agency on Mavis's part:

**Virginia Macleod (VM):** And what happened to your brother? You said he was expelled, or ...?

**Mavis Appleyard (MA):** Well, he, he had to go and work in the dairy on the farm and all that.

**VM:** Mm. Mm.

**MA:** Th ... that ... that was normal.

**VM:** Mm.

**MA:** That wasn't punishment or anything.

**VM:** Mm.

**MA:** And, um, he, um, I didn't see him much ...

**VM:** Mm.

**MA:** ... because he was right across the other side of the dining hall. And, um, there was about ...

[Here Virginia cuts Mavis off to ask her questions]

**VM:** So, he didn't get expelled for complaining to the principal?

**MA:** Eh, there was about a hundred and fifty kids by then. So ...

**VM:** Yeah.

**MA:** ... he was a fair way across the ...

**VM:** Mm.

**MA:** ... dining hall from me, and we weren't encouraged to have anything to do with the boys. And, um ...<sup>108</sup>

When Virginia asks Mavis whether her brother was expelled for complaining to the principal when he found out Mavis was sexually abused, Mavis seemingly ignores that question and its repetition. A few moments later, Virginia interrupts Mavis to pose the same question again. Once again, the question goes unanswered. It is quite possible Mavis never heard the question or did not understand it. It is also possible that my initial interpretation was correct and that Mavis deliberately chose to ignore the question because it did not fit the narrative she wanted to craft, perhaps even in reaction to Virginia's investigative interviewing style. By that point in the interview, Virginia had already redirected the conversation through questions, notably when they spoke about Mavis' ship voyage from

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Mavis Appleyard.

England to Australia.<sup>109</sup> In that particular segment, Mavis had wanted to jump to the moment she arrived in Australia whereas Virginia insisted on questions pertaining to the voyage's timeline, material culture and processes surrounding the trip to Australia in the 1930s.<sup>110</sup> In this instance, Mavis' brightly tone of voice quickly dulled, seemingly in annoyance with Virginia, who was preventing Marvis from 'arriving' in Australia in her narrative. As such, it is possible that later in the interview, in the excerpt included above, Mavis decided to ignore Virginia's questions as a way of pushing back. Here, we encounter one of the limits of reusing archived oral history interviews: without a visual recording and without having participated the conversation, it is impossible to tell what motivated Mavis to avoid answering Virginia's question. Indeed, such knowledge may be beyond our reach even if we had been present at the moment of interview.

Hamish Sewell's first contact with his interviewees took place over the phone, a conversation which, similarly to Virginia Macleod's approach, served to set up the interview and answer any questions the interviewee might have. The interviews were preceded by the obligatory cup of tea or informal conversation to make both parties at ease. The recorded conversation with former child migrant Tony Holmes's took place in the latter's home on the sunshine coast. On another occasion, Hamish Sewell conducted separate interviews with four Forgotten Australians in his hotel room. The interviews took place after he had accompanied a group of them to a reunion at Gill Home in Goulburn, the institution they had attended.<sup>111</sup> The feeling of kinship that had developed over the several days-long trip was such that, according to Hamish Sewell, interviewer and interviewees were at ease with holding the interview in a hotel room.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

In preparing for interviews, Hamish Sewell recalls carefully going through a large amount of reading material from the training.<sup>112</sup> In addition to his interviewees' 'Expression of Interest' documents, Hamish Sewell sought to "dig down" to find out more about the individuals he would speak with.<sup>113</sup> Much like an investigative journalist would have done, Hamish Sewell preferred going into the interview knowing as much as possible about his interviewee and whatever "facets of their story" might come up in conversation. To do so, he conducted in-depth research on the individuals he was about to interview by turning to advocacy organizations and other such groups interviewees' might have been affiliated with. He also found institutional records helpful, be they religious or state-run.<sup>114</sup> At the same time, Hamish Sewell did his best to avoid making assumptions about how the interview might unfold or what narratives might surface.<sup>115</sup> During his interview with Tony Holmes, for instance, Hamish Sewell suggested they begin the interview "wherever seem[ed] appropriate" for Holmes.<sup>116</sup> No doubt he did so in order to allow space for Holmes to direct the interview. He may also have heeded a suggestion he received during the training on how to navigate childhood memories:

**Tony Holmes (TH):** so, you start wherever you like. Um, do you want to ask me questions or do you want me to say 'I was born in' ...

**Hamish Sewell (HS):** I think we can start wherever seems appropriate.

**TH:** Okay.

**HS:** What do you think?

**TH:** That's good. Um, okay, well I was obviously born in England. Um, my brother is two years older than me, and we left England in nineteen-fifty-four. I was born in nineteen-forty-five, um, and basically we came into the Fairbridge Farm School system at Pinjarra, because our mother couldn't look after us.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes, conducted by Hamish Sewell, ORAL TRC 6200/35, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 21 December 2010.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

While Tony Holmes did begin by stating his place of birth, he immediately contextualized this opening by linking it to the circumstances in which he and his brother had arrived in Australia. In passing, he also mentioned his mother, a key character in his narrative.<sup>118</sup> To me, this subtle nuance in narration indicated that he took ownership of the interview by bringing us into his experience.

During the recorded conversation, Hamish Sewell sought to follow the interviewee's direction and used active listening strategies by reflecting part of interviewees' responses back to them:

[...]I felt like my job was to be of service to them, to listen to them, to give them the opportunity to step through with this story slowly to make them feel that they were being listened to and that it was being done with dignity and invite them to reflect on parts of the story that I think were needed to be fleshed out more or were important [...] I really tried to take everybody sort of at face value and not kind of go in with preconceived ideas.

It seems this strategy served both to clarify and deepen certain topics, as is apparent in his interview with Tony Holmes:

**Hamish Sewell (HS):** So, you mentioned the word resilience. And I guess at any one of these, you know, um, crossroads, you know, whether you're being punched in the nose or going and getting the twigs. Or you've just arrived and the dream's turned into a bit of a nightmare. I guess there's choices as to how you negotiate that. And you seem, um, uh, obviously able to have found some sort of way of getting through that without, uh, turning it into a, a bigger problem.

**Tony Holmes (TH):** Mm.

**HS:** Do you want to talk about that?

**TH:** Yeah, uh, but it's probably what the kids call these days being streetwise.<sup>119</sup>

Here, Sewell summarizes several themes and answers Holmes gave, carefully using the vocabulary his interviewee utilized, thereby setting the stage to inquire about more subtle and sensitive topics. He then uses this stage as a springboard into his question, all while leaving the space wide-open for Holmes to take direction of the narrative.

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes. Incidentally, his mother's inability to take 'care' of her children seems to have been at the heart of his narrative; she eventually made her way to Australia, battled authorities for twelve months to regain custody of her two boys and eventually did win.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

While my thesis focuses on interviews with former British child migrants, due to the impact the experience seems to have had on Sewell, it is nonetheless crucial to mention Hamish Sewell's visit to Gill Home with a group of Forgotten Australians. What stands out in particular is the experience he had with individuals outside the interview setting. The recorded interviews with the four Forgotten Australians, all attending the Gill Home reunion, built on an existing interviewer-interviewee relationship and formed part of a broader conversational exchange. Sewell described his visit in terms of interpersonal connections: "it was an amazing sort of window into their lives and how they sort of play themselves out to be with this [...] quite large group of men who were sharing stories and talking, talking with me outside of the sort of formal interview situation."<sup>120</sup> He recalls he was with approximately twenty men "who had all been incarcerated there [...] from the 1950s on."<sup>121</sup>

This comparison between 'care' and carceral institutions echoes something former British child migrant and advocate Michael Snell mentioned in his interview with Rob Willis: when describing how 'care'-leavers inquired about which institutions each had lived in, he recalls they would ask each other "where did you do your time?"<sup>122</sup> An institutional town with a prison, 'care' institution, police station and training station, Sewell describes life in Goulburn in simple terms: "you were either locked up or you were locking people up."<sup>123</sup> The children at Goulburn had a marching band and would sometimes play for prisoners.<sup>124</sup> As Sewell believes, the children felt a connection with the prisoners:

These guys [the 'care'-leavers] were young criminals in the making, I mean the only way they could sort of break out of the conventions, these really kind of cruel and incriminating [...] reprehensible lives that they were often under [in institutions] was to sneak out and break. Some of them tried to runaway [...] and they would invariably be caught and sometimes beaten so they saw a real relationship with prisoners.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Michael Snell.

<sup>123</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

During the several-days long trip in Goulburn, Hamish Sewell recalls how Clem Apted and Ralph Doughty, two Forgotten Australians with whom Sewell was “good mates at this stage,” wanted to show him the Goulburn Correctional Centre. At the time, the Centre was already a maximum security prison for men.<sup>126</sup> They drove to the building, a “cold castle, derelict, spooky institution” and parked in front of a sign that stated: “you are on camera, do not take pictures, maximum security prison.”<sup>127</sup> With a tone of youthful defiance in his voice that spoke to both his relationship with the two other men, Sewell recalled:

We were obviously parked across the road and we were obviously, you know, checking the place out and we drove around it and then I think we started taking some pictures and some of the [...] guards basically came running out at us and they were yelling at us ‘hey mate you can’t take that’ and I think Ralph or [Clem] just gave him the finger and just laughed at them we just drove off and I really felt like we were quite invincible because [Ralph and Clem] just, they just knew all the rules, they just knew how to play these systems, you know someone telling them that you couldn’t do something, you know it really didn’t have a lot of meaning for them, or they were really used to being told that as kids and knowing it was a crock of shit.<sup>128</sup>

While no doubt an unusual experience for interviewers working on the FAFCM collection, Sewell’s encounter demonstrates the degree to which the tenets of oral history theory can strain against the experience lived in the field. Moving far beyond the polite distance Sewell affected in his interview with Tony Holmes, his relationships with several of the Forgotten Australians inched towards friendships and were coloured by their shared encounter at the Gill Home Reunion and in the days they spent together. Sewell was able to get a glimpse into these ‘care’-leavers’ lives and the ways in which they navigated the liminal

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<sup>126</sup> Goulburn Correctional Centre, Government of New South Wales, accessed 24 February 2023, <https://correctiveservices.dcj.nsw.gov.au/csnsw-home/correctional-centres/find-a-correctional-centre/goulburn-correctional-centre.html>. Interview with Clem Apted, conducted by Hamish Sewell, ORAL TRC 6200/73, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 10 July 2011; Interview with Ralph Doughty, conducted by Hamish Sewell, ORAL TRC 6200/72, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 10 June 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.



spaces offered to them. In his words, they felt “invincible.”<sup>129</sup> Most importantly, this encounter illustrates the often-porous nature of boundaries where, in certain situations the conceptual layers and frameworks are shed, as are professional titles, and a deeper human connection emerges. Undoubtedly, Sewell’s emotional bond with these individuals shaped the four interviews he conducted and his view of their narrators in ways we can only fathom.

Despite the challenging emotional nature of the visit to Gill Home, Sewell seems to have remembered the experience in a positive way over a decade after its occurrence, no doubt due to the bond he developed with the men whom he accompanied. Hamish Sewell shared that he had no trouble hearing difficult stories and felt “honoured” when individuals spoke so candidly about their lives.<sup>130</sup> Rather, what he found challenging was when individuals looked to him to “fill a big hole in their heart that hasn’t been filled.”<sup>131</sup> In his capacity as oral historian, though he was there to listen and prompt, he was not “able to address the chasm of sort of grief or loss or sadness or pain that’s kind of, that’s still with them.”<sup>132</sup> Hamish Sewell’s comment speaks to the sometimes blurry boundary between the role of oral history interviewer and counsellor; while oral history interviews may deal with deeply emotional issues and create equally deep reactions, as Sean Field has stated, oral historians “are researchers recording and analysing information and processes, and are not trained to attend to the psychological problems of ‘patients’ as are counsellors and psychotherapists.”<sup>133</sup>

Hamish Sewell recalls one particularly “haunting” interview with a Forgotten Australian that left him feeling unable to create distance between himself and the story. It was a “tinder box dry” day, unbearably “hot.” At night, in his excruciatingly hot motel room, insects would thump against the window in the heat of the night, further adding to the haunting

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Field, “Beyond ‘Healing,” 37.

experience.<sup>134</sup> After listening to a particularly challenging segment of the interviewee’s story, Hamish Sewell asked if they could take a break. While they paused the recording, the interviewee followed him around the home, continuing the story. “He wouldn’t stop talking” Hamish Sewell recalled.<sup>135</sup> It felt heavy.

Interviews with former child migrants were often quite charged even as the tone of each interview varied; some of the experiences are painful to even listen to. Stories shared in interviews document children’s harsh treatment while in institution – at the hands of ‘care’-takers, individuals from religious orders, external parties, and even other children – and how unprepared young people were, financially, emotionally and where trade skills were concerned, for life beyond the institutions’ walls.<sup>136</sup>

In keeping with Joanna Sassoon’s goal of moving beyond stories of hardships, I wish to pay attention to some of the less jarring narratives that surface when given space. In the following segment, I would like to ‘spend time’ with the interviewees and their narratives and shed light on the more subtle stories that existed within and beyond harsher experiences.<sup>137</sup> As such, this section serves as a short memory mosaic of sorts that stitches together similar threads of experiences shared by former child migrants who may, or may not, have known each other.

Several of the former British child migrants recall the six-week sea voyage with fondness, their narratives featuring stories of resilience and moments of play. Bookended by

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<sup>134</sup> Author interview with Hamish Sewell, 18 August 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Several ‘care’-leavers mention suddenly being told that they were leaving the institution the next day and in some cases were given very little money and support to make their way to the employment that had been arranged for them, without their choice, knowledge, and agreement. See interviews with May Chandler, Michael Snell, Mavis Appleyard, Maurice Crawford-Raby, Tony Holmes, Tony Costa, and interview with Len Magee, conducted by Jennifer Barrkman, ORAL TRC 6200/143, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 20 March 2012.

<sup>137</sup> Several scholars have explored creative methodologies to “hear” children’s voices through documentary evidence, in their records, correspondences, etc. Notably, Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove and Carla Pascoe Leahy have edited a collection dedicated to this purpose, see Kristine Moruzi, Nell Musgrove, and Carla Pascoe Leahy, eds., *Children’s Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

institutional life in England and their ‘new’ lives in Australia, these narrators describe the sea voyage as a moment suspended in time where they enjoyed good food, structured and unstructured play, and freedom, a sharp contrast to the regimented and often austere life in institution. “That was the best time of my life” said Michael Snell who was fourteen when he travelled to Australia in 1950. “It was just after a war and the, the food, we weren't rationed anymore. We didn't have any more powdered milk, powdered eggs. We actually got ... food. No more black bread. And that was the best.”<sup>138</sup> May Chandler recalls the trip and the crew fondly and with a nine-year-old child’s sense of wondrous fascination. She recounts the various ports they stopped at, notably the Suez Canal and berthing in Sri Lanka, which she stated was called Columbo when she travelled in 1938.<sup>139</sup> She also remembers seeing a snake charmer and children swim toward the ship in the ports. As passengers threw coins into the surf, the children dove after them.<sup>140</sup> Though he was seasick and never found his sea legs, Tony Holmes nonetheless recalls the boat ride positively. To him, it was “just an adventure, full of fun, that's what life was.”<sup>141</sup>

In turn, Maurice Crawford-Raby recalls being in the cabin with nine other boys he made friends with before their departure; they had the “run of the boat” and wreaked havoc and mischief.<sup>142</sup> He recalled fondly how “our cabin was the only cabin that I can remember that wasn't allowed off the boat until we got to Fremantle [...] The Captain knew our cabin well,” he laughed.<sup>143</sup> The mischief Crawford-Raby describes can be described as a transgression of expected behaviour. Yet, the fact that Crawford-Raby remembers no punishment more severe than being prohibited from leaving the boat before their arrival in Australia suggests these

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<sup>138</sup> Interview with Michael Snell.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with May Chandler.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

transgressions were tolerated in the liminal space of the journey.<sup>144</sup> In other words, that the children played and made mischief was expected on the boat; the boys were neither held to the rigorous standards of institutional life nor punished.

The group of boys became close friends and ended up in the same institution in Boys Town, Hobart in Tasmania. Beginning on the boat in 1952 when Crawford-Raby was ten years old, this friendship lasted their whole life and provided an informal support network.<sup>145</sup> Maurice Crawford-Raby stated: “And from there, of course, we formed a very, very close bond, because I assure you, you were on your own.”<sup>146</sup> At the time of the interview in 2010, the ‘boys’ were still friends.

Stories of resilience are central to the interviews. As Joanna Sassoon stated, “in the end [...] if it was a study about the life-long impact of being in care, then it’s ultimately a study of resilience, because [...] only the resilient survive being in care.”<sup>147</sup> Maurice Crawford-Raby’s group of friends was most likely one of the reasons why he seems to have fared so well in his life after the institution. While he experienced his share of abuse and neglect, he considered his life to have been well lived. While this no doubt had to do with his resilience and personal attitude which he speaks little of, he readily mentions the boys: “we always stuck together, like, the boys were always together.”<sup>148</sup>

In turn, May Chandler chose to laugh. She spoke of her affection towards her fellow “Barnardos” as she calls them – other child migrants in ‘care’ with her – and of how openly she demonstrated her feelings through her hugs. She did this precisely because she had never received any affection as a child. As she stated: “to me...I just love everybody, you know what I mean? Because I never had it. I can show it. I want to show it because I was deprived

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<sup>144</sup> Vallgård, Alexander, and Olsen, “Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood,” 20-22, 25.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Author interview with Joanna Sassoon, 1 June 2021.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

of it, you know.”<sup>149</sup> This positive attitude shines through in the remainder of the interview. Speaking of her first home with her husband and children with fondness, she recounts how she cooked on an open fire until her husband was able to purchase a stove, how there were holes in the wall of the house the size of a fist, and an unlined corrugated roof full of holes above their heads. Acknowledging the state of the house, her tone nonetheless remains light. “It was home!” she answers to Rob Willis’ question on her feelings about the place. “It was home to me. First home I ever had [...] I was happy! Of course, I was. We had five acres!” she laughs. While, as Hans J. Ladegaard suggests, May Chandler’s laughter could be a coping mechanism in the face of adversity, it can also be attributed to owning something of her own.<sup>150</sup> This is a sentiment Maurice Crawford-Raby shares in his own interview: “once I got married I-I got everything in life that I ever needed. I had my wife, my family, I owned my own home. I don't owe anyone anything. Everything I've got is mine. I worked for it and worked hard for it.”<sup>151</sup> A place and sense of belonging seems to have provided roots and support for both May Chandler and Maurice Crawford-Raby.

For some, the reality of institutional life made it challenging to connect emotionally with others. Tony Holmes describes himself as emotionally distant due to his experience in ‘care’. He speaks of his love for his mother when they were finally reunited after her twelve-month custody battle with Australian institutions as a “Fairbridge type of love.”<sup>152</sup> He learned to keep his emotions secret while he navigated the prison-like protection system he experienced in institution where older children, often sexual abusers, would protect the object of their interest.<sup>153</sup> Michael Snell also speaks of how he kept emotionally distant from his children as

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with May Chandler

<sup>150</sup> Hans J. Ladegaard, “Laughing at Adversity: Laughter as Communication in Domestic Helper Narratives,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 32, no. 4 (December 2013): 390–411.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

<sup>152</sup> Where social support networks were near-inexistent, individuals often temporarily placed their children in ‘care’ while the parents’ situation was stabilized. Such was the case for Tony Holmes’ mother who made her way to Australia when she found out where her boys had been sent.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

a roundabout manner of protecting them; in his experience, individuals who showed affection often had ulterior motives.<sup>154</sup> Both men adopted an attitude of leaving the past behind. “I’ve made it a point in my life just to move on,” states Holmes “because I guess I had that mental attitude that said there’s more things in life.”<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Michael Snell stated he preferred not to dwell on the past, especially when meeting other ‘care’-leavers: “[You] don’t go into sad details about their stories or anything else. You just say to the guy, ‘Where did you do your time?’ Or the lady, ‘Where did you do your time?’ Just in case you might have crossed paths. And that’s all you ask. You don’t, you don’t sit there for an hour and say, ‘What did the bastards do to you?’ And this, that and the other. ‘And I copped this and I got...’ no. That’s in the past. But you never forget.”<sup>156</sup>

Tony Holmes nonetheless recalls moments of levity. He speaks of moments where he could escape and go “rabbiting” in the woods or explore the various water holes where he learned to swim.<sup>157</sup> Though he had to let the ‘care’-takers in institution know where he was going, he could get lost in the “few hundred acres” where the institution was located. Though not without its challenges – he learned to swim “by getting thrown off the top of the [thirty-foot] cliff by the big kids, into the water” – these moments did offer some escape.<sup>158</sup> Maurice Crawford-Raby similarly recalls going on walks to Mount Wellington every Saturday when he and the boys would chat.<sup>159</sup> When these stories surfaced, they were typically juxtaposed with accounts regarding the severity of institutional life. Accounts of resilience and trauma were entangled in a complex web of emotional and physical experiences.

While agreeing with Libby Bishop’s and Niamh Moore’s respective arguments that recreating context always results in a “partial perspective” of the dynamics at play in the

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Michael Snell.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Tony Holmes.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Maurice Crawford-Raby.

interviews, accessing any type of contextual details is crucial to the reuse of archived oral history interviews.<sup>160</sup> This chapter has offered several examples where my conversations with the interviewers provided crucial data that shaped and at times even shifted my interpretation of the interviews. Ideally, reflections written by interviewers would have been included alongside each interview as a way of providing some sort of access to the granular details of human interactions.<sup>161</sup> Providing such self-reflective spaces within projects such as the FAFCM and within memory institutions such as the National Library of Australia would go a long way in facilitating the reuse of oral history collections.

The anecdotes illustrated above all the more so demonstrate the importance of archiving interviewers' reflections about their interviews. While Virginia Macleod's anger at the institutions in Peter Bidwell's interview did not set the tone for the remainder of the interview, her empathetic response nonetheless most likely shaped the interview in subtle ways. The same is true of Rob and Olya Willis' interactions and relationships with their interviewees off the recording, and as has been described above, in Hamish Sewell's interactions with the men at the Gill Home reunion. These experiences, while not accessible through the interview recordings, shaped the interview dynamics. As previously stated, while it is impossible to capture all the nuances of an interview, even while being in the interview room, providing contextual data for the relationship between interviewer-interviewee – within the realm of what both parties feel comfortable sharing – is crucial in reuse. Such systematic archiving of interviewers' experiential data would deeply enrich the reuse of oral history interview. Still, there are limits to archiving this level of contextual data along with

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<sup>160</sup> Niamh Moore, "(Re)Using Qualitative Data?," *Sociological Research Online* 13, no 2 (2007): 7. Libby Bishop, "A Reflexive Account of Reusing Qualitative Data: Beyond Primary/Secondary Dualism," *Sociological Research Online* 12, no. 3 (2007): 43-56.

<sup>161</sup> The Montreal Life Stories project required interviewers to publish a short blog post within twenty-four hours of the interview. As Steven High stated, these served to "further encourage a culture of reflexivity in the project," and explored questions such as "What patterns did you see? What stood out? What would you have done differently?"

See High, *Oral History at the Crossroads*, 46.

recorded interviews. If anything, the anecdotes mentioned above stretch, strain, and in some cases cross the established boundaries of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. As such, a much-needed reflective practice within institutions should be developed to provide metadata for future researchers while respecting the sanctity of the interviewer-interviewee relationship.



## Epilogue

### What happens after the archive?

Even while one of the collection's aims was to change the focus from trauma and abuse to agency and resilience –and the collection did showcase such stories– it remains that the FAFCM collection was rooted in transitional justice efforts and the memories shared did include abusive situations of various kinds. Whereas some interviewees shared wide-ranging experiences, others focused on the abuse they suffered while in institutional “care” and reflected on the inter-generational transmission of traumatic experiences.

While the Australian government's reparation efforts did act as a salve for some ‘care’-leavers, it requires more than the creation of an oral history collection or a National History project, no matter how rich and well crafted, to prevent the abuse of children in institutional ‘care.’<sup>1</sup> Effecting concrete changes in ‘care’ practices requires accountability.<sup>2</sup> As Joanna Sköld posits: “where are these processes of redress and politics of apology leading?”<sup>3</sup> Sköld highlights the impact one country's transitional justice efforts has on others, since “methods of inquiry and redress packages are copied from previous processes of transitional justice, either domestic or abroad. The longer the history of transitional justice aimed at historical child abuse becomes, the greater the influence international forerunners will have on newly established inquiries and redress processes.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the introduction, several individuals, such as Maurice Crawford-Raby, Mavis Appleyard and Michael Snell, were grateful to have a platform to share their stories on. Joanna Sassoon also recalled several interviewees found the experience cathartic, though she did not mention specific names

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the slow changes in practices, see Nell Musgrove and Deidre Michell, *The Slow Evolution of Foster Care in Australia: Just Like Family?* Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Johanna Sköld, “Apology Politics: Transnational Features,” in *Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in “Care”: International Perspectives*, ed. Johanna Sköld and Shurlee Swain (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 26.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

It is unclear whether policymakers and others with the power to enact change in ‘care’ practices were made aware of the FAFCM collection and whether the Australian government used the interviews as a reference tool to help shape more supportive and *caring* practices. Ensuring the collection was mobilized in such generative ways should have been part and parcel of the Australian government’s transitional justice endeavours, lest these efforts run the risk of being labelled as political tokenism.

In her concluding comments in “Memories for Justice,” Sassoon stated: “while there may be therapeutic outcomes for individuals telling their stories, this project is also part of a broader national healing through understanding in similar ways to the reconciliation movement.”<sup>5</sup> Arguably, Sassoon’s role was also dictated by these intrinsic contradictions. On one hand, the FAFCM collection represented a documentary tool in the service of governmental and advocacy mandates to ensure a brighter future of ‘care’ practices in Australia. On the other hand, the individual experiences found within the interviews strained against the conceptual framework underpinning the collection. These fracture lines beg the question, who was the collection created for after all? Whose – or what – needs primarily dictated the structure of the collection and ultimately the experience of the interviews?

When compared to other large-scale oral history projects such as the Montreal Life Stories Project that was built on principles of shared authority, learning *with* the communities interviewed and the regenerative possibility of storytelling, the FAFCM collection’s transitional justice and institutional nature stand in stark contrast.<sup>6</sup> What would have happened if, along with a focus on documentary evidence, the FAFCM collection had sought to curate spaces for community conversations, an opportunity for the nation to heal together as a whole, and bridge the divide between these siloed ways of knowing and being? Granted,

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<sup>5</sup> Joanna Sassoon, “‘Memory for justice’ or ‘Justice for memories’: Remembering forgotten Australians and former child migrants.” *Archifacts* (October 2010): 33.

<sup>6</sup> Steven High, *Oral history at the crossroads: Sharing life stories of survival and displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 262.

the Montreal Life Stories Project and the FAFCM collection were of a fundamentally different nature. The former was rooted in a “community-university collaboration” meant to help Montreal communities come to terms with their own experiences; shared authority was the guiding force and armature of the project.<sup>7</sup> In turn, research and documentation were at the heart of the FAFCM collection; narrators knew this from the start as consent forms were shaped by these principles. What would have happened if May Chandler and the aboriginal woman she argued with about the gravity of their respective situations were able to speak together in “sustained conversations” and “across” the divide Portelli reserved for the interviewee-interviewer relationship?<sup>8</sup> Reparation should not only be about helping the nation to come to terms with a harsh chapter of its history, but also about helping individuals come to terms with their experiences and help foster community conversations.

The interviews do showcase stories of resilience, agency, humour, and friendship. However, to change a narrative in a nation’s collective memory requires bringing these narratives into the public’s awareness. This can be done through various channels of memory work including museum exhibits, community discussions, or walking tours, to name a few avenues.<sup>9</sup> Another way would be to ensure researchers’ access to a project’s various levels of metadata, in this case the administrative, conceptual and experiential layers. In our conversations, Sassoon mentioned creating a plethora of documentation and notes to ensure every step of the project was transparent and to keep track of the intentions associated with key decisions. However, even when I requested specific documentation which I knew existed – and that did not contain any personal data – through the National Library of Australia’s

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<sup>7</sup> High, *Oral history at the crossroads*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> High, *Oral history at the crossroads*, 40. Alessandro Portelli, “Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience,” *The Oral History Review* 45, no. 2 (August 2018): 241.

<sup>9</sup> See notably Elizabeth Miller, Edward Little, and Steven High, *Going Public: The Art of Participatory Practice* (UBC Press, 2018); Elizabeth Miller, “Going Places: Helping Youth with Refugee Experiences Take Their Stories Public,” in *Oral History Off the Record*, ed. Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 113–27; and “Part 2: Curating Life Stories” in Steven High’s *Oral history at the crossroads*: 193–290.

Freedom of Information Act, I received only a small cache of documents.<sup>10</sup> Ensuring better access to the ephemera collected, which are currently challenging to locate or even know about on the FAFCM website, would have helped contextualize the project.<sup>11</sup>

Further discussions on the ethics and practice of reuse are crucial if we are to treat these growing numbers of oral history collections with as much respect as the interviewers put into their creation. We need to ask ourselves: what are the limits and implications of reuse? What do we need access to in order to ensure the ethical reuse of sources in a way that respects their wholeness and narrators' wishes while also ensuring the careful dissemination of the knowledge these recordings contain? The answers to these questions should affect how we create and archive new oral history interviews and collections. In other words, we must find ways to balance honouring the knowledge imparted by our interviewees by "activat[ing]" stories – and thus ensuring their continued life after the recorder has been switched off – and ensuring access to context within the limits of shared authority.<sup>12</sup>

It is time we treat reuse as an intrinsic part of the oral history ecosystem. It is my hope that other oral historians will continue this discussion so that we may discover the limits, points of tension, and parameters of this approach.

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<sup>10</sup> I was additionally told the NLA had a limited number of hours awarded to each query, something that seems to go against FOI guidelines.

<sup>11</sup> For example, we know from his interview that Michael Snell donated the diary he kept of his institutional years. Yet, this diary is not linked to his interviews, nor is it easy to locate in the NLA's database. Interview with Michael Snell, conducted by Rob Willis, ORAL TRC 6200/2, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants Oral History Project, 17 November 2009.

<sup>12</sup> High, *Oral history at the crossroads*, 283. See also Linda Shopes, "After the Interview Ends: Moving Oral History Out of the Archives and into Publication," *The Oral History Review* 42, no. 2 (September 1, 2015): 300–310.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Certificate of Ethics 2021-2022



#### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Melissa-Anne Ménard  
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\History  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: Hearing Voices: Childhood Memories, Identity and  
British Child Migrants in 20th Century Australia  
Certification Number: 30015335  
Valid From: August 03, 2021 To: August 02, 2022

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard DeMont".

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Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

## Appendix 2 – Certificate of Ethics 2022-2023



CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY  
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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Name of Applicant: Melissa-Anne Ménard  
Department: Faculty of Arts and Science\History  
Agency: N/A  
Title of Project: Hearing Voices: Childhood Memories, Identity and  
British Child Migrants in 20th Century Australia

Certification Number: 30015335

Valid From: July 20, 2022 To: July 19, 2023

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. Waddington", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Dr. David Waddington, Vice-Chair, University Human Research Ethics  
Committee