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# Voicing Imperial Order, Identity, and Resistance: The Singing of British Child Migrants

In June 1890, shortly after her arrival in Canada, young Annie Taylor<sup>1</sup> sent a letter to her matron back in England:

Dear Madam I am always thinking of you [ . . . ] and all the distant friends I have left behind, from morning till last thing at night I am singing hymns, but above all the one you taught the girls, God be with you till we meet again that is one of my favorite's [sic].<sup>2</sup>

Annie Taylor was one of over 100,000 children<sup>3</sup> sent to the British settler colonies without an adult family member between 1869 and 1970.<sup>4</sup> In setting up government-supported child migration schemes, the British child rescue movement of the late nineteenth century drew on earlier, scattered examples of child migration. Child rescuers saw the emigration of socially and economically disadvantaged children as a remedy for social problems in Britain, a method to cope with labour shortage in the colonies, and a way to open up both spiritual and material opportunities for the children, making them productive citizens of the Empire. In Childrens Homes and farm schools, private farms and households, children trained as farm labourers and domestics. Child migration to Canada dwindled in the 1920s, but the Fairbridge scheme continued to send children to Vancouver Island until the early 1950s. Programmes bringing children to Australia lasted until 1970.<sup>5</sup>

Historians of childhood, in the words of Rodolph Leslie Schnell, “study one of the conspicuous mutes of history”.<sup>6</sup> Yet, children seem mute only to the ears of the historian. Contemporaries hear children gibber, laugh, cry, and sing. In an attempt to hear these historical voices, this chapter analyses the singing practices of children

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1 Given the Together Trust's privacy restrictions, 'Annie Taylor' and 'Jane Lewis' are pseudonyms.

2 Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuges, Emigration Reports and Letters, Girls: 1889–1893, 1889, folder 30, GB127.M189/7/4/2, Manchester Archives (MA).

3 The legal and social definition of 'child' changed during the period studied here, and it is often impossible to identify an individual's age from the sources. My analysis focuses on individuals sent by agencies emigrating mostly youngsters between the ages of 6 and 16, and usually supervising them up to age 21.

4 Harper / Constantine, 2010, 248.

5 For a dense overview see e.g. Harper and Constantine, 2010, chap. 9; for the end date see Lynch, 2021, 146.

6 Schnell, 1982, 204.

sent to Australia and Canada under the British child migration schemes. In the Subaltern Studies tradition, research on marginalised actors' voices tends to understand "voice" metaphorically, focusing on its narrative dimension.<sup>7</sup> Attending to children's singing draws attention to the sound dimension. Sound can express more than words alone, and singing allows for different ways of framing and archiving children's voices.

I analyse the framework in which child migrants raised their voices in singing, in which these voices were recorded and archived, as well as the mindset with which I excavate them today. All of these processes, I argue, define the "voices" we can – or cannot – find in history books. Analysing voices in both their narrative and sound dimension, as well as their social frameworks makes "voice" a fertile epistemological concept to study the experiences of those who have been deemed "mute" in history. I caution against what I call the "resistance trap" and explore the limits of the dichotomy between active resistance and passive submission, thereby challenging myself to cast aside preconceived categories and personal sympathies.<sup>8</sup> Rather than searching for voice as an authentic expression of the self or a democratic metaphor for agency and empowerment, I am interested in the complex web of social forces behind and interpretations of children's voices and vocal practices. This concept of "voice" allows insight not only into individuals' experiences, but also into broader social dynamics. Rather than elevating the historian through the gesture of "giving back voices" to the marginalized,<sup>9</sup> it historicizes the gesture itself. Children's singing is accessible through different sources – almost exclusively unsounding writings. This chapter relies on lyrics and reports about singing, both contemporaneous and retrospective.<sup>10</sup>

Among childcare agencies such as the Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuges (Refuges), which had cared for Annie Taylor and sent her to Canada, singing was a popular tool to instil imperial ideals and religious faith into the children

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7 E.g. Spivak, 1988; Arista, 2009; Dusinberre, 2017.

8 Thank you to Janice Schroeder, who provided valuable feedback on this point.

9 Greg Dening, 1998, 145, for example, described his ambition as 'fill[ing] [. . .] the silence of those who [. . .] had no voice'; Martin Dusinberre, 2017, 144, countered that 'I do not think it is the role of historians to counter silence by "giving" anything,' and '[e]levation should not be for the global historian'.

10 Besides viewing various child migration agencies' published material and government files, I was granted access to the Together Trust's files of the Refuges (GB127, MA), some of The Prince's Trust's Fairbridge Farm Schools files (D296, University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives [UOL]), and, under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, Sec. 126, to some of the Canadian Duncan Fairbridge Farm School files (MS-2444, MS-2045, MS-2121, BC Archives [BCA]); Charlotte Alexander's records are publicly available at the Library and Archives Canada (MG29 C8, Library and Archives Canada [LAC]).

in their care. They also used children's singing in their public outreach. Children like Taylor knew that a good singing voice and an affinity for music was social capital, allowing them to gain the approval of their adult caretakers. For uprooted children, music could become a way to (per)form their identity. It provided an acoustic home and a community. Besides, some children expressed their everyday struggles in *contrafacta*, resisting the adult order.

## Voicing Order

Singing is a cultural instrument and social ritual.<sup>11</sup> Since the Early Modern period, English charitable institutions used music education of the poor and/or criminal as a pedagogical and fundraising tool.<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth century, when the first child migration agencies were founded, music became a widespread tool to form children into devout Christians, patriotic citizens, and cultivated offspring. Schools began to teach singing,<sup>13</sup> congregational singing began to play a vital role in religious services,<sup>14</sup> and domestic music became a valued part of middle-class life.<sup>15</sup> Music was part of everyday life in the institutions run by the child migration agencies, both in Britain and overseas. Lilian M. Birt's assertion that "most" of the children her agency sent out with its 99th party to Canada in 1922 "have learned to play some musical instrument and are also good singers"<sup>16</sup> shows how widespread music training was in British childcare institutions at the time, as Birt took children from multiple agencies throughout Britain. Many agencies had boys' brass bands, which have attracted more scholarly attention than the agencies' choral music.<sup>17</sup> They were, however, not part of the institutions' everyday soundscape. Singing, in contrast, was the most common form in which child migrants of either sex heard and performed music.

Getting lower-class children not just physically but spiritually and culturally "out of the gutter" was a central goal of the child rescue movement. Lower-class music, non-religious entertainment music popularised in music halls, was regarded as degenerated and dangerous, prompting numerous attempts to regulate it during

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11 Attali, 2004, 11.

12 MacKinnon, 2015, 239–256.

13 On the teaching of music in British schools during the nineteenth century see Johnson-Williams, 2019.

14 Tamke, 1978, 2.

15 Budde, 1994, 134–141; Scott, 2002, 69.

16 Lilian M. Birt, Letter to F. James, July 15, 1922, 1, RG 76, Volume 64, file 3081, part 3, LAC.

17 E.g. Parker, 2016; Sheldon, 2009.

the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Music training, noted Thomas Barnardo, founder of the Barnardo's Homes, was a way to provide the desired sort of entertainment: "Children will sing, and the only question is, how shall they sing, and what shall they sing? Teach them good music wedded to innocent, sweet, noble words, and you give them a priceless heritage of beauty, of culture, of abiding spiritual possession".<sup>19</sup> In 1955, the Molong Fairbridge Farm School in Australia still listed music as one of several hobbies, which "should be carefully supervised".<sup>20</sup> Children could not be silenced. Instead, their expressions had to be guided and controlled. Music was a means to that end.

Children's public musical performances demonstrated the child migration agencies' aims: raising physically and spiritually disciplined Christian citizens for the Empire.<sup>21</sup> With the children of the poor seen as a threat to social order, displaying acoustic order was important to placate benefactors.<sup>22</sup> In 1887, Rev. H. D. Barrett described the singing voices of children leaving for Canada under the Church of England's Waifs and Strays Society to depict the children as strong, healthy, and God-fearing: "It was touching to hear the childish treble and the strong tones from lustier lungs bent, under such circumstances, in the strains of the old familiar hymn, 'Sun of my Soul'".<sup>23</sup>

Claiming privacy concerns, most agencies' files are inaccessible to researchers.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, sources about the everyday use of music and its changes over time are scarce. Public reports and later recollections indicate that the use of music changed relatively little throughout the decades. Most differences in style and use were organisation- rather than time-specific. Here, the Fairbridge Farm Schools are a case in point. Founded as the "Society for the Furtherance of Child Emigration to the Colonies"<sup>25</sup> in 1909, the agency had a strong imperial agenda. Its goal was to raise colonizers, physically strong and willing to work. In his founding speech, Kingsley Fairbridge explained: "In the first place, it is essential that the children should have sound health and strong bodies. For this purpose a

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18 Picker, 2003, chap. 2; Bailey, 1978, chap. 7.

19 Barnardo and Marchant, 1907, 134.

20 Memorandum Re: Education and Training, September 1955, 3, D296 J3/2/18, UOL.

21 Ash, 2016, 55.

22 Cunningham, 1991, 18–20, 38–45.

23 "Our [Emigrants] (Letter from the Rev. H. D. Barrett)", *Our Waifs and Strays* 39 (New Series) (July 1887): 2f. [https://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/publications/waifs\\_and\\_strays/188707\\_1\\_1.html](https://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/publications/waifs_and_strays/188707_1_1.html).

24 For exceptions see fn 10.

25 The agency was renamed Fairbridge Farm Schools in 1935 and Fairbridge Society in 1949; it was dissolved after merging with The Prince's Trust in 2013.

primary place in the curriculum will be given to the claims of physical culture”.<sup>26</sup> While the agency’s 1937 annual report asserted that “[i]mportance of music in the training of children is recognised at Fairbridge,”<sup>27</sup> the establishment of choirs or bands at its schools in Canada and Australia depended on individual staff members’ voluntary efforts. Patriotism and imperialism coloured the songs sung at the schools. Songs expressing loyalty to both the British crown and the respective Dominion framed events at the agency’s schools. The programme of the 1936 Christmas Concert at the Duncan Farm School in Canada, for example, “commenced with ‘The Maple Leaf,’ sung by the school and audience. [. . .] ‘God Save the King’ closed the programme”.<sup>28</sup> Such framing also aimed at connecting the children with their new home. In 1939, the agency’s London Committee advised the principal of the Molong Farm School in Australia: “Effort should be made to detach the children from their English roots and to give Australian colour to all their work and paly [sic]. They should, for instance, sing Australian songs”.<sup>29</sup> The results of such efforts were mixed, as I will show later.

Most agencies’ repertoire was dominated by Christian hymns. By moulding children’s voices in singing, the agencies hoped to form their minds and souls.<sup>30</sup> Hymns’ metre and verse made religious teachings more memorable,<sup>31</sup> tunes added an emotional dimension. In this regard, hymn singing responded to the emergence of a new theological focus on individual emotion in the Christian experience.<sup>32</sup> In the 1880s, children at the Refuges sang *We’ve Sighted the Golden Gate*.<sup>33</sup> The hymn expresses feelings of joy and gratitude (“Our hearts are filled with joy today”, “Our God, with grateful heart to thee”).<sup>34</sup> In 1940, the Duncan Fairbridge Farm School chapel choir sang *On Our Way Rejoicing*.<sup>35</sup> The hymn expresses (“On our way rejoicing”) and rejects (“Is there grief or sadness? / Thine it

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<sup>26</sup> Kingsley Fairbridge, *The Emigration of Poor Children to the Colonies: Speech Read Before the Colonial Club at Oxford, October 19, 1909*, 6, <https://archive.org/details/emigrationofpoor00fair>.

<sup>27</sup> Fairbridge Farm Schools (Inc.), *Annual Report 1937*, 18, NW 630.717 F165, BCA.

<sup>28</sup> “Enjoy Concert At Fairbridge”, *The Cowichan Leader*, December 31, 1936, D296 K1/1/5, UOL; for an example from the Australian Molong Fairbridge Farm School see Dorothy Smethum, “Annual Meeting and Prize Giving”, *Fairbridge Family Chronicle* 2, no. 1 (Summer 1941), D296 J3/5/2/3, UOL.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon Green, Letter to R. R. Beauchamp, January 1939, 1, D296 K1/3/2, UOL.

<sup>30</sup> MacKinnon, 2015, 245.

<sup>31</sup> Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, 26f., 58f., 127f.

<sup>32</sup> Dibble, 2017, 388f.

<sup>33</sup> Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuges, *Emigration Reports and Letters, Girls: 1885–1888*, folder 32, GB127.M189/7/4/1, MA.

<sup>34</sup> Whittle, 1885.

<sup>35</sup> “Bishop H. E. Sexton Dedicates the New Fairbridge Chapel”, *Daily Colonist*, April 21, 1940, D296 K1/4,UOL.

cannot be!”) different emotions.<sup>36</sup> In the collective ritual of hymn singing, the children practiced emotional norms.

Recently, emotions have come into focus among historians of childhood.<sup>37</sup> The sound dimension holds clues about individual children’s emotions, but recordings of this type are rare. One example is Annie Macpherson’s description of a goodbye scene in Montreal, the boys being about to leave for their different placements: “[F]or the last time as a little band singing, as we looked over the city, the sweet hymn, ‘Shall we gather at the river?’ In parting many of their voices became like my own – very choking”.<sup>38</sup> About to leave the group they had travelled with for several weeks for unknown places, several boys’ emotions affected their voices and compromised the hymn’s otherwise light-hearted, optimistic sound.

Institutions’ anthems – short and easy compositions for all children to memorise – drew on music’s power to create and demonstrate community. The Australian Northcote Farm School’s anthem, the *Northcote Song*, written by two cottage mothers, exemplifies not just the school’s but also the students’ use of such anthems to both bond and segregate. When the wartime suspension of child migration led to a decline in student numbers at the Northcote and the Fairbridge Farm Schools in Australia, all Northcote children transferred to the Molong Farm School in December 1944.<sup>39</sup> One way in which the Northcote children coped with this situation was by clinging onto each other and things they knew from their previous school. When the *Fairbridge Family Chronicle* printed the *Northcote Song*’s lyrics in its 1946 Christmas edition, it noted: “The Northcote party of children often sing it among themselves”.<sup>40</sup>

Other songs written by child migration agencies for the children in their care focused on the children’s role as members of the community of the British Empire. *Songs of Christian Life and Work*, a songbook compiled in 1877 by Thomas B. Stephenson, founder of the National Children’s Homes, included *Far, Far Upon The Sea*.<sup>41</sup> Stephenson added two stanzas to Charles MacKay’s ballade, which described the children’s journey to Canada. The second stanza depicts the British Empire as a unity under one monarchy (“Our good Queen pure and true / Rules the old land and the new”) and one God (“The Sabbath songs are sung / By the old

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<sup>36</sup> Monsall, 1863.

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, 2015, 123; Olsen, 2017; Vallgård et al, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Macpherson, 1870, 25.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon Green, Letter to the Dominions Office, January 1945, DO 35/1138/4, National Archives.

<sup>40</sup> J. Thorogood and V. Odgers, “The Northcote Song”, *The Fairbridge Family Chronicle* II, no. 2 (Christmas 1946), D296 D4/6/2, UOL.

<sup>41</sup> Stephenson, 1877, no. 84.

land and the young.”). Fostering the bond between the motherland and the Dominions was one of the purposes of child migration.<sup>42</sup> Child migration organizers’ personal experiences with the British Empire – moving within the eclectic circle of imperial English elites – may well have been one of unity. Many child migrants’ stories and their choice of music, on the other hand, account for the children experiencing alienation and exclusion, homesickness and loneliness. Music, however, could mitigate such feelings.

## Voicing Identity

In singing, adults tried to control children’s voices; but in singing, children also raised their voices on their own terms. Scholarship has struggled to bring these poles together. Alisa Clapp-Itnyre portrays singing as a source of empowerment for children.<sup>43</sup> While her work is an indispensable contribution to the research on children’s hymn singing, it gives little insight into children’s perspective on and specific uses of singing.<sup>44</sup> Analysing British childcare institutions’ brass bands, Nicola Sheldon found that “music provided the opportunity for creativity and self-expression”.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, Sheldon does not reflect on the framing of her sources – letters the boys wrote after leaving the institutions, published in the institutions’ public reports. Modern historians tend to consider resistance as more authentic behaviour and more worthy of study than norm-conforming behaviour.<sup>46</sup> I try to avoid this resistance trap by not only analysing child migrants’ adversarial uses of singing but also uses in line with adults’ expectations.

I do not search for children’s voices as an authentic expression of childish selves.<sup>47</sup> External and self-motivation build a complex web of forces, central to the being of any social individual.<sup>48</sup> When child migrants participated in musical

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42 In 1915, the Fegan Homes wrote about child migration: “From a patriotic standpoint it is very important that we should strengthen the ties between Canada and the Motherland in every way possible” (The Red Lamp 9 [1915], in Fry and Stratford-Devai, 2003).

43 Clapp-Itnyre, 2014, 75–114; Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, chap. 2 and 5.

44 The body of contemporary writings by children and adults’ recollections, which Clapp-Itnyre uses to underpin her findings, is very limited: Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, 254–268.

45 Sheldon, 2009, 756.

46 E.g. Smith, 2019; cf. Chappell, 1995.

47 David M. Rosen, 2007, shows how the search for the “authentic” child is coloured by researchers’ notions of childhood.

48 On “The myth of the individual child”, cf. Oswell, 2013, 263f. My thanks go to the anonymous reviewer who recommended this book to me.

performances, they did not necessarily believe in or emotionally feel the lyrics. Something, however, motivated them to play along. Flo Hickson remembered that the girls in her cottage at the Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School in Australia gave singing and dancing performances for their cottage mother, who had promised them toffees for it.<sup>49</sup> The modern understanding of agency as rational and independent decision making runs counter to a conception of children as irrational and dependant. Few, however, would argue that aiming for sweets was an inauthentic behaviour for a child, or that singing in order to get them was irrational. Yet, the social hierarchy between the girls and their cottage mother is undeniable. It is not my intention to say that the girls' behaviour was authentic, rational, or exhibited agency, but that binary categories are of little epistemological value to understand children's experiences.<sup>50</sup>

Several former child migrants have happy memories of the pastime and prestige their involvement in bands and choirs provided. Walter Henry Miles described it as "a welcome change" when he was chosen as a choirboy for the local church while at a Home run by the Waifs and Strays Society prior to his emigration to Canada in 1913.<sup>51</sup> Roderick Donaldson, a Duncan Fairbridge Farm School student in the 1940s, recalled that "you did everything you could to get involved in that [the band] because that meant that you could get away".<sup>52</sup> Besides diversion, being in a choir or band gave the children prestige among adults and children alike. Gaining adults' favour was particularly important in settings where numerous children fought for caregivers' attention, or where child migrants competed with their employers' biological children. John H. Atkinson, who came to Canada from one of the Barnardo's Homes in 1910, recalled: "My school marks and my ability to sing at public functions and in church made my foster family proud of me".<sup>53</sup> In turn, the rejection of one's musical expressions could be particularly hurtful. Patricia Skidmore wrote about her mother Marjorie Arnison's experiences at the Duncan Fairbridge Farm School: "[D]uring choir practice, her teacher had said, 'You don't have a very good singing voice, Marjorie. Why don't you just mouth the words?' [. . .] Ever since then, her voice was stuck and she could not sing at all".<sup>54</sup> Arnison was denied adult recognition and excluded from the children's singing community. Dilys Budd, who grew up at the Catholic Nazareth House in Wales before emigrating to Australia in 1947, recalled in an interview: "[O]ne of the

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49 Hickson, 1998, 59f.

50 On "The myth of the social agent", cf. Oswell, 2013, 269f.

51 In Harrison, 1979, 168.

52 21 November 2018, Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, 2020, 29.

53 In Harrison, 1979, 121.

54 Skidmore, 2018, 69.



girls who came over with me [to Australia] [. . .] used to sing as flat as a tack. And they'd never let her in the choir. Well, we used to pick on her for that. You know, the, that was, that was something that . . . uh, you're not much good, 'cause you can't sing".<sup>55</sup> Particularly in Catholic Homes, hymn singing constituted an important part of everyone's religious duty, and if a child's voice did not conform to the ideal of the sweet voice, it was a serious taint.<sup>56</sup>

After leaving the Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School in 1935, Hickson remembered filling "many lonely moments" singing carols she had learned at the School.<sup>57</sup> While many child migrants cherished singing as a pastime, strict regimes could restrain such a use. Annie Cairns remembered singing popular songs on her journey to Canada from the Middlemore Home in 1928, but the first family she was placed with did not allow such amusements: "I was [. . .] not allowed to sing popular songs, just hymns. [. . .] when I would be scrubbing the floors, I would start to sing them but that was soon stopped".<sup>58</sup> Hickson also recalled that the Fairbridge children sang "crude cockney songs" on their journey to Australia, adding, "woe betide us at Fairbridge if we were ever heard singing aloud those words".<sup>59</sup> The children knew the appropriate ears for different songs in their repertoire. I will explain how this has shaped the historical record below.

While forbidden fruit often tastes the sweetest, songs approved by their caretakers could also have an important meaning for child migrants. Hymns could speak to children's spiritual needs. Hickson remembered enjoying hymn singing, as she felt "an affinity with this spiritual life".<sup>60</sup> The belief that "God be with you till we meet again" could be a great comfort for child migrants like Annie Taylor, feeling lonely and alienated. Child migrants also found comfort in the sense of acoustic belonging certain songs instilled in them. Music helped others settle into their new homes. Frank Kennedy, a former Molong Fairbridge Farm School student, credited the school headmaster for "play[ing] a big part in getting us over our initial homesickness through his ability to get us interested in our new country. The first song he taught us was *Waltzing Matilda*, so we quickly learned the

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55 Dilys Budd, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*, interview by Ann-Mari Jordens, March 9, 2010, 1st session, 00:29:22, ORAL TRC 6200/7, NLA.

56 The idea of children's "sweet" voices echoed biblical angels' singing: Göttert, 1998, 174.

57 Hickson, 1998, 111.

58 In Staples, 2003, 73.

59 Hickson, 1998, 14.

60 Hickson, 1998, 76.

meanings of jumbuck, sway, swaggie, billabong etc”.<sup>61</sup> Singing helped Kennedy build a vocal connection with Australia.

Many children, however, favoured songs they had learned back in Britain. Letters like Annie Taylor’s, quoted in the introduction, suggest that the children cherished such songs as acoustic memories. Child migrants knew that their letters’ recipients at the agencies would appreciate their interest in these songs. However, music also served an important function for the individual child. Music can connect individuals to their roots and help them (per)form their identity.<sup>62</sup> While child migrants had to leave behind their material home and belongings,<sup>63</sup> they could take the songs along with them. Music evoked memories of home and could console those feeling homesick. In 1887, Jane Lewis wrote a letter to the Refuges. Despite writing that “I have got such a good home [in Canada], and such a kind Master and Mistress”,<sup>64</sup> Lewis expressed feelings of homesickness: “I do love having letters from all my dear friends who are so far far away [ . . . ] O to think that I may never see you again so far away”. Besides asking for photographs as visual keepsakes, Lewis wrote: “O I often sing that song which we learned at the dear old Refuge”.<sup>65</sup> John Lane recalled that the boys at the Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School sang popular English, Scottish, and Irish songs in their free time.<sup>66</sup> The boys’ choice of music ran counter to the agency’s plan to bring the children closer to their new home through the singing of Australian songs. Facing prejudice and alienation, the songs child migrants had learned back in Britain or during their time in an institution abroad could remind them that they were nevertheless part of a community. This connecting power of music could last decades. Budd described that when she got together with friends from Nazareth House, “at the drop of a hat, we can sing the songs that we sang in the home”.<sup>67</sup>

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61 Frank Kennedy, “Obituary: Gordon Dodd”, Old Fairbridgians’ Association Summer Newsletter (December 1984): 6, D296 D4/6/4, UOL.

62 Istvandity, 2017, 232; DeNora, 2000, 46.

63 On child migrants’ agony about leaving behind personal belongings, see e.g. Patricia Carlson, *Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project*, interview by Susan Marsden, September 29, 2010, 1st session, 00:51:34. ORAL TRC 6200/23, NLA; Hickson, 1998, 13.

64 Censorship by the child’s employer could have shaped this account. On the prevalence of censorship affecting child migrants’ letters in Canada, see Parr, 1980, 72–74.

65 Manchester and Salford Boys and Girls Refuges, *Emigration Reports and Letters*, Vol. 1: 1883–1885, folder 9 (emphases in original), GB127.M189/7/3/1+2, MA.

66 Lane, 1990, 99, 141f.

67 Budd, 2010, 3rd session, 00:06:33.

## Voicing Resistance

In acknowledging and analysing the variety of factors motivating children to sing in line with adults' expectations, I have tried to avoid the resistance trap. This does not mean that children's advisarial use of singing should be neglected. Sung resistance was an equally important strategy in children's repertoire of coping mechanisms. Resistance voiced in singing could take different forms. Singing could change its meaning depending on the social setting. As "sound out of place", singing could be noise.<sup>68</sup> Singing would become an act of rebellion, even if adult caretakers otherwise approved of the songs sung. Hickson remembered that during the weekly film nights at the Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School, the film usually broke down once or twice. During the ensuing pause, the impatient children teased the adults: "[T]he fun was in the noise we made waiting for it to start again, such as singing. Our noise often became too much for the adults running the show and we were made to stop".<sup>69</sup> Staying silent when singing was construed as a rebellious act.

Another adversarial form of singing was children's contrafacta. Some child migrants took well-known tunes and added their own lyrics. Contrafacta has a long history,<sup>70</sup> and child migrants likely knew the practice from religious hymns,<sup>71</sup> nursery rhymes,<sup>72</sup> and popular songs.<sup>73</sup> Such contrafacta usually developed and survived where several children stayed together for some time, as they did in childcare institutions. In their contrafacta, the children expressed themselves, shared their anger, and defied adults' expectations. The majority of contrafacta I found revolve around food, indicating that it was a major issue on these children's minds. Children at Nazareth House in Wales made up a song celebrating the ritual of buying treats with the pennies stolen from the corpses, which the nuns of the Home took care of.<sup>74</sup> Mostly, however, food was an issue because of its absence, its bad quality, or because it signified the hierarchical difference between staff and children. All such contrafacta I encountered use the tune *Happy Land*. The hymn *There is a Happy Land* praises God's "bright" kingdom,<sup>75</sup> making the parodic character even more

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<sup>68</sup> Echoing Mary Douglas' definition of dirt as "matter out of place", Peter Bailey, 2004, 23, defines noise as "sound out of place".

<sup>69</sup> Hickson, 1998, 66.

<sup>70</sup> McIlvenna, 2015, 48, fn 5.

<sup>71</sup> Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, 105, 114–119; Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, 261–263, also found evidence of children parodying the hymns they had learned.

<sup>72</sup> Opie and Opie, 1962, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Bailey, 1978, 31f.

<sup>74</sup> Budd, 2010, 1st session, 00:50:25.

<sup>75</sup> Young.

apparent. Since *Happy Land* was a particularly popular tune,<sup>76</sup> its repeated use could be a coincidence. It is possible, however, that children from one institution brought the idea and the tune with them as they moved to another institution. Two of the contrafacta are from the Middlemore Homes, in which many children resided prior to their emigration to the different Fairbridge Farm Schools, where such contrafacta were also known.

While the contrafacta from the Middlemore Homes focus on the lack of food (“eggs we never see / that’s why we’re fading / gradually fading away”;<sup>77</sup> “eggs and bacon we never see / life is short of misery”<sup>78</sup>) the contrafactum developed at the Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School addresses the discrepancy between the children’s and the staff’s meals:

There is a Dining Hall not far away,  
Where all the Matrons sit three times a day,  
Oh you should see their eyes when they see the pudding rise,  
Oh you should hear their cries: ‘I want some more.’<sup>79</sup>

At many child migration agencies’ institutions, the staff ate their meals separately from the children and were served different food.<sup>80</sup> The caretakers were, of course, not supposed to hear such mocking songs. Hickson remembered that the children “always knew it was safe to do so [sing such songs] when they were eating”.<sup>81</sup> The secrecy surrounding the contrafacta was also a means of distinction between children and adults, strengthening the students’ sense of community. The secrecy prevented children from recording the songs at the time. As much of children’s culture, they were only transmitted by word of mouth.<sup>82</sup> Fortunately, several contrafacta survived in individuals’ memories, but individuals and their memories are mortal. From the earliest decades of the child migration schemes,

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<sup>76</sup> Clapp-Itnyre, 2012, 71; Clapp-Itnyre, 2016, 250–252.

<sup>77</sup> The song was passed on to the Australian Child migrants oral history project by former Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School student John Cooper and quoted in Rosalind Crawford, Child migrants oral history project, interview by Rob Willis, October 19, 2006, 00:06:17, ORAL TRC 5746/3, NLA.

<sup>78</sup> Neil Morrison, Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project, interview by Rob Linn, August 25, 2011, 1st session, 00:46:05, ORAL TRC 6200/92, NLA.

<sup>79</sup> Hickson, 1998, 28.

<sup>80</sup> Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, Parliament of Australia, 2001, sec. 4.51; on Pinjarra Fairbridge Farm School in particular: Caroline Kelly, Child Migration: A Survey of the Australian Field, 1944, 34, A436, 1945/5/54, National Archives of Australia (NAA); former Pinjarra student Marcelle Duquette O’Brien’s testimony in 28 February 2017, IICSA Inquiry, 2017, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Hickson, 1998, 28.

<sup>82</sup> On children’s oral culture in Victorian Britain, cf. Jordan, 1987, 196–198.

few memories were recorded. While child migrants' recollections enable us to hear otherwise unrecognizable silences in the archives, they are also selective in their existence, content, and perspective. They offer an adult's perspective on childhood memories.<sup>83</sup> Usually, memories are semantical, not verbal.<sup>84</sup> Linking words and sounds, however, songs can be remembered and recalled verbatim even decades later.

## Excavating Voices

Singing, as this article has argued, was a way in which children raised – and were made to raise – their voices, and a way in which their voices left an imprint on the historical record. To analyse child migrants' singing as an expression of their voices, historians need to analyse how it became part of the historical record: the contexts in which child migrants sang, in which their singing was recorded and archived, as well as the circumstances under which it is excavated by historians today. I was in danger of stepping into the resistance trap. I found the rebellious *contrafacta* more intriguing and expressions of discontent easier to believe than sung expressions of religious faith and patriotism. However, this must not lead me to brush aside sources indicating children's joy in performing under adult direction or comfort found in hymn singing. Furthermore, I must not overestimate my ability to understand these children. Romantic notions about the universality and transcendent nature of music can be tempting, but are misleading.<sup>85</sup> Precisely because music evokes emotions and memories in all of us, we must not forget that these differ across time and space, and from individual to individual.

Child migration agencies understood that children could not be silenced, so guiding and controlling children's expressions became a constant effort. Singing exemplifies child migration agencies' attempts to form the sound and narrative dimension of children's voices to instil religious faith and imperial order into them. For the child migrants themselves, singing could be spiritually comforting; songs became cherished memories, expressions of community and identity. At the same time, some child migrants used the convention of singing to resist, to express themselves against adults' expectations in their *contrafacta*, through the strategic use of singing as noise, or through silence. Analysing child migrants'

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<sup>83</sup> On memory and oral history in research about institutionalized childhoods, cf. Swain, 2015; Murphy, 2010; Edwards, 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Neisser, 1981.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Hall, 2009, 417f.

singing enables historians not only to learn more about the social construction of the child, but to listen to children's voices, to learn about their culture, their notions of home and belonging, and what they cared about.

## Abbreviations

BCA	BC Archives
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
MA	Manchester Archives
NLA	National Library of Australia
UOL	University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives
NAA	National Archives of Australia

## Archives

BC Archives, Victoria, B.C., Canada  
 Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ont., Canada  
 Manchester Archives, Manchester, UK  
 National Archives, Kew, UK  
 National Archives of Australia, Canberra et al., Australia  
 National Library of Australia, Canberra, Australia  
 University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives, Liverpool, UK

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