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‘HIS HAPPY GO LUCKY ATTITUDE IS INFECTIOUS’

Australian imaginings of unaccompanied child refugees, 1970s–80s

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In 1976 one welfare officer working at the Enterprise Hostel – a migrant holding centre in Springvale, Victoria – produced a set of descriptions of the refugee children living there.² Of one it was noted that: ‘This girl is attractive and very shy, at school she is withdrawn and rarely speaks up’.³ Of another was written an extensive note documenting her family’s life in Timor and noting that: ‘All of their property was occupied by various Army forces during the war, and resulted in considerable loss of property’.

1 This chapter was researched and written with funding provided by the ARC Laureate Research Fellowship Project FL140100049, ‘Child Refugees and Australian Internationalism from 1920 to the Present’.

2 For recent histories of migrant hostels and holding centres, see, for example, Alexandra Dellios, *Histories of Controversy: The Bonegilla Migrant Centre* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2017); Catherine Kevin and Karen Agutter, ‘The “Unwanted” and “Non-Compliant”: “Unsupported Mothers” as “Failures” and Agents in Australia’s Migrant Holding Centres’, *The History of the Family* 22, no. 4 (2017): 554–74, doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2017.1302891; Sara Wills, ‘Between the Hostel and the Detention Centre: Possible Trajectories of Migrant Pain and Shame in Australia’, in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with ‘Difficult Heritage’*, ed. William Logan and Keir Reeves (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2008), 263–80, doi.org/10.4324/9780203885031; *Hostel Stories: Life in S.A. Migrant Accommodation*, University of Adelaide, available at: arts.adelaide.edu.au/history/hostel-stories/.

3 No author, Report on child, National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): B925, V1978/60922 PART 1. To try to ensure anonymity, I have removed the names of the children.

Since her arrival in Melbourne, she had been found to be ‘shy to the extent that she was unable to say her name’. This report concluded by noting that:

At the hostel M socialises well. The only time M and her family were upset, was during the time when her uncle Mr SW was under a deportation order – This however has now been withdrawn and the family hopes that permanent residence will be given.

M has applied for permanency and nominated her parents to come to Australia.

Comment: This family could serve as a model in many ways.⁴

Maintaining refugee settlement services in Australia has, over the years, resulted in a vast bureaucracy and paper trail, with many of these types of reports that describe those who were ‘settled’ being produced. Oftentimes it has been social workers who played an integral role in facilitating and documenting the lives of refugees living in holding centres – the sites where refugees would first live after arrival in Australia – as they began the process of settling into their new lives. The records from the 1970s and 1980s that these workers left behind in their files, now held in the National Archives of Australia – our national repository of government documents – provide a vital window through which we can catch a glimpse of the ways that governments, and those who help create and implement government policy, thought about the people whose lives they were describing, and controlling.⁵

Looking at some of these writings presents an opportunity to think about the ways in which a category of person – that of the ‘refugee child’ – has been constructed by and through Australian public policy. This category of person has a long, transnational history, and is importantly understood as historical: like any other legal, social, cultural or political category of person, it is not one that naturally occurs. By confining children in particular places and writing about them in certain ways and with specific vocabularies, government bureaucracies can create a body of knowledge around a population, or a category of person. In this chapter I am interested in thinking about what makes this group of people a visible category, or a defined group, at a particular moment in time, that of the

4 F Wositzky, Report on child, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

5 See Kevin and Agutter, “The “Unwanted” and “Non-Compliants””.

late 1970s and early 1980s, and in a particular place, Australia. This is a group that is largely defined around their location in the world – that they are travelling, or have recently travelled fleeing violence and persecution, and seeking a different home – and by their relative age. By exploring the role that bureaucracies, lists and descriptions of people composed by welfare officers, social workers and government department workers play in creating this differentiated group, we can understand the ideas of refugee children that are created. In this chapter, files that predominantly describe and organise Vietnamese and Timorese children will be explored. Through an examination of a set of documents that were created by the bureaucracies surrounding their settlement process, I will explore the ways that these refugee children are understood as a group to be managed. As described by anthropologist, historian and critical theorist Ann Laura Stoler, this is a crucial part of a government's descriptive project: a group is described as a necessary part of the project of managing them.⁶ Similarly, historian and political theorist Mahmood Mamdani has asserted that 'the management of difference is the holy cow of the modern study of society, just as it is central to modern statecraft'.⁷

The project of managing people who cross the nation-state's borders is a fundamental part of the Australian national project, and has been integral to Australia's sense of itself since before Federation.⁸ By understanding the ways that the bureaucracy describes, controls and produces in order to manage, we get a glimpse of the ways that borders are maintained and populations are controlled. The practices of government that control those who move exist as part of a project of, to use Jennifer Hyndman's phrasing, 'disciplining displacement'.⁹ They are a way of governmentally organising people who are on the move. This is part of a broader ideology that determines that the movement of people across borders is something that requires governmental control. Indeed, the notion that the movement of people should be controlled and administered by governments is a

6 See Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

7 Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 2.

8 Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139794688; Claire Higgins, *Asylum by Boat: Origins of Australia's Refugee Policy* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2017). More generally see Hagar Kotef, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

9 Jennifer Hyndman, *Managing Displacement: Refugees and the Politics of Humanitarianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xx.

historical one, rather than one that is necessary or natural, even though it may have attained such normalcy in our society as to seem natural and inevitable. On the flip side, could we imagine, for instance, a world in which people move across borders without control: what new languages and forms of government would that produce? What would Australia look like, for instance, without the *1901 Immigration Restriction Act* as a founding document? What would relationships between people look like if they were not being produced through the violence of these modes of description?

In the descriptions that I will explore in this chapter there is some overlap between what we will see and the ways that adult refugees and/or citizen children have been described by social workers. The social workers whose words we are looking at here are part of a long history of social workers in Australia conducting similar work, as Shurlee Swain has documented.¹⁰ Moreover, as I will go into more detail about below, there is overlap in the ways that other racialised populations – in particular Aboriginal children or non-child refugees – have been described by Australian welfare workers. These overlaps arise as a result of a broader history of migration, settler colonialism and racialisation within which the particular documents I am considering here sit. But, as we will come to see, there are important particularities to the words used and the stories told about these refugee children. Understanding that these words and stories serve as a means to control a group living in a particular space and having a certain age is vital to understanding the work that these accounts do. So while language might be borrowed from or shared with other fields of governmental knowledge, and circulate amongst social workers in recurring ways, the words used here do particular work to produce certain meanings and certain outcomes. When coupled with an understanding of the work that the bureaucracy does when it comes to sit in the archive – as I will explore below – we can gain an understanding of how this language works as part of the governmental project of constructing and producing the category of the refugee child. I am looking here at this category as a governmental and bureaucratic one, working to understand how it takes shape as such.

10 See, for example, Shurlee Swain, 'Beyond Child Migration: Inquiries, Apologies and the Implications for the Writing of a Transnational Child Welfare History', *History Australia* 13, no. 1 (2016): 139–52, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2016.1156212. See also Fiona Davis, 'Put Down Your Knitting: Unpicking Social Welfare Professionalisation in 1970s Australia', *Journal of Australian Studies* 41, no. 2 (April 2017): 222–36, doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2017.1308420, and R J Lawrence, *Professional Social Work in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), doi.org/10.22459/PSWA.02.2016.

The stories of themselves that these child refugees would narrate, or that their friends or parents or doctors or, indeed, social workers, would tell, would most likely be vastly different. In this chapter, one story – a small part of a much larger historical story – will be told.

Refugee children, guardianship and documentation

The descriptions of refugee children from the migrant holding centres in Victoria in the 1970s–80s, which sit within the archive of the government bureaucracy, were produced for a number of reasons: as part of reports by government workers arguing for more funding or explaining the workings of the holding centres; as part of the process of keeping track of the children's lives, behaviours, schooling and finances; and as general case file notes. Much of this bureaucracy resulted from the process of documenting the people whose lives were being cared for by the government under the structures of the *Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act*.¹¹

This Act first came into action in 1946 to provide the measures necessary for the minister for immigration to act as guardian for the British boys who had been brought to Australia during World War II.¹² While it has always applied to immigrant children in general, the Act has also applied to child refugees, most particularly since the beginnings of the mass arrival

11 For an overview, see Tamara Blacher, 'Resettlement of Unattached Refugee Children in Victoria, 1975–1979: Placement Alternatives' (Multicultural Australia Paper No. 7, Melbourne: Clearing House on Migration Issues, 1980); Robert Bennoun and Paula Kelly, *Indo-Chinese Youth: An Assessment of the Situation of Unaccompanied and Isolated Indo-Chinese Refugee Minors* (Melbourne: Indo-China Refugee Association of Victoria, 1981).

12 The full name of the Act was 'An Act to make provision for and in connexion with the Guardianship of certain alien children'. It was changed to 'alien' from 'Children outside Australia' in the amendments of 1983, available at: www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2004A02801. Its origins in the management of child migrants can also be seen in the report produced by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record – Report on Child Migration*, 30 August 2001, esp. 11–45, available at: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/child_migrat/report/index. For longer histories of this Act see Jordana Silverstein, "'The Beneficent and Legal Godfather': A History of the Guardianship of Unaccompanied Immigrant and Refugee Children in Australia, 1946–1975", *The History of the Family* 22, no. 4 (2017): 446–65, doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1265572; Jordana Silverstein, "'I Am Responsible': Histories of the Intersection of the Guardianship of Unaccompanied Child Refugees and the Australian Border", *Cultural Studies Review* 22, no. 2 (September 2016): 65–89, dx.doi.org/10.5130/csr.v22i2.4772.

of unaccompanied refugee and asylum seeker children in the 1970s.¹³ While in recent years this Act has proved highly contentious – with some labelling it as providing for the minister to be ‘both the jailer and the legal guardian’ of children – in the late 1970s it was seen as predominantly a bureaucratic instrument by politicians.¹⁴ Indeed, for some people working in the Immigration ministry and Department of Immigration, it was not of any great significance.¹⁵ The public debate that has occurred about it since the early 2000s, and which occurred in the late 1940s, stands in stark contrast to this era of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this era, it seems, it was at the level of the social workers, undertaking the face-to-face work with the children in the hostels and group homes, that the workings of the Act were most visible. Ian Macphee, the minister for immigration and ethnic affairs from 1979 to 1982, noted in an interview I conducted with him in 2017, that while he could not remember doing the work of being a guardian under the Act, he was:

sure that whatever happened if anyone had recommended to me that action be taken in accordance with that I would have, of course, gone along with that. In fact, I would have gone out of my way.

He and other senior officials, he said, took time ‘to investigate and weigh up what was in the best interest of the person’ because ‘they cared. The senior officials cared and I cared’. It was, Macphee remembered, ‘just a process based on our humanity’.¹⁶ One of the senior officials of whom Macphee spoke, John Menadue, the secretary of the Department of Immigration from 1980 to 1983, commented in an interview with me in 2017 on the single boys who were ‘selected’ by Australian immigration officials and brought from displaced persons camps in Vietnam, noting that ‘frankly’ he did not ‘know how well they settled. I don’t know’, he said.¹⁷

13 Note though that the 1994 amendments changed the legislation so that the minister was no longer responsible for children entering Australia for the purposes of adoption. Senate, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, ‘Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Amendment Bill 1993: Explanatory Memorandum’, available at: www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/bill_em/iocab1993427/memo_0.html.

14 Sarah Hanson-Young, ‘Motion—Convention on the Rights of the Child’, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), Senate, 14 March 2012. See also, for example, Chris Evans, Testimony at Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs—Immigration and Citizenship Portfolio—Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Senate Estimates Committee, CPD, 21 October 2008; and Julia Gillard, ‘Ministerial Statements—Managing Migration’, CPD, House of Representatives, 3 December 2002.

15 Interview conducted by author with Ian Macphee, 3 August 2017, Melbourne. Interview conducted by author with John Menadue, 11 September 2017, Sydney.

16 Interview with Macphee.

17 Interview with Menadue.

The Act has been amended numerous times, but the key provision that the immigration minister is the guardian of all children who are governed by the Act has remained. These children have included those who were under 21 (or, since 1983, 18), were not Australian citizens, and were not accompanied by a parent or a relative over the age of 21 who was to act in the role of a parent or guardian.¹⁸ The minister's guardianship obligations were considered to have ended when the child reached adulthood, when they became a citizen or when they left Australia permanently. The minister has also always been able to delegate some of the responsibilities of guardianship and has regularly done so, particularly to the departments of Social Service or Community Service, or similar bodies.¹⁹ These departments have also been responsible for providing support for refugee and asylum-seeking children who have come to Australia as part of families, and as part of the general settlement services with which they were provided.²⁰ And it is the workings of the people who conducted these services that will be explored in this chapter.

The guardianship produced by the Act has also provided for the categorisation of refugee children into a number of different groups. From the 1970s, all children governed by this legislation were known as 'isolated'. Under the umbrella term 'isolated' they fell into one of two groups: 'unattached', which meant that they had no relative in Australia to look after them, or 'detached', which meant that they had a relative who was over 21, but who was not a parent. These different categories translated into different funding schemes, housing arrangements, and modes of care from the government and social services, and this was always debated as a problem by those responsible for the day-to-day care of these children.²¹ Regardless of the precise term being used, all of these

18 The children governed by the Act were initially referred to as 'immigrant' children, and in an amendment in 1983 this was changed to 'non-citizen'. For all versions of this Bill see Australian Government, ComLaw, 'Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946', available at: www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/C1946A00045.

19 This delegation has, at times, required clarification. In response to a minute asking for confirmation of whether the immigration minister's authorisation was required before a child who was governed by the Act was allowed to marry, a memo issued by D J Rose, Senior Assistant Secretary, Constitutional and Financial Branch, Advising Division, Attorney-General's Department, on 2 June 1977 makes clear that 'this power of delegation only extends to the Minister's powers and functions under that Act', and that the minister (or acting minister) must provide consent 'in person', NAA: A432, A1977/3319.

20 For a discussion of this by someone working in the field, see Confidential Report by the A/Director Regional Services, Ivan Beringer, addressed to the Deputy Director-General, 30 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

21 A Working Party on the Problems of Unattached Refugee Children was formed in 1978 to try to deal with some of these problems. It contained representatives from all states, as well as the Commonwealth. See NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1 and PART 2.

descriptors position the child in relation to family and lack of family, and ensure that the guardian is seen as providing a form of family. These refugee children are produced and comprehended as a group through the description of their relation to a caregiver and their relative perceived vulnerability. The descriptions of them contained in the reports I am exploring in this chapter are a further testament to this positioning. Minute detail regarding their behaviour is recorded, indicating that it was thought that they required both care and surveillance, housing and monitoring, schooling and documenting. Guardianship, in this formulation and in these documents, enacts a certain control, at the level of the everyday.

This control came as a result of the vast majority of the refugee children coming to Australia in the late 1970s – children predominantly from Vietnam and Timor, coming normally after having been ‘selected’ in a refugee camp somewhere in Asia – being housed in migrant hostels on arrival. These were spaces that would provide access to housing, food, English classes and medical care, and would act, as Sara Wills has framed it, as ‘frontiers of assimilation’, ‘hold[ing] together’ ideas of Australianness and creating, as Glenda Sluga has made clear, sites of ‘material and cultural *discomfort*’ for many.²² While in these hostels, the unaccompanied children would have their lives documented.²³ There were a series of instrumental reasons for this. Firstly, governments were unaware of how many unaccompanied children were in Australia and in each city. Reports on children at each hostel thus functioned as a type of census exercise. Secondly, while the immigration minister was the guardian of these children, responsibilities of guardianship were delegated to the local Department of Social Services, and the departments believed that they required certain information about each child to be known in order for services to be provided. Thirdly, there was the question of funding: as each child was recorded, their funding needs and pensions provided were noted.²⁴

22 Wills, ‘Between the Hostel and the Detention Centre’, 268. Quote from Glenda Sluga, and emphasis, in Wills.

23 Indeed, for a number of reasons, the hostels were a key site for the gathering of information. For one child it was noted that the family with which he was living ‘left Midway Hostel before case studies were completed and the information on hand is minimal. The Welfare Officer will attempt to home-visit the family as soon as possible, and information gained will be forwarded’. Mary Ralph, Welfare Officer, Migrant Services, 23 August 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

24 A note from M L McCready, Executive Officer, Settlement, to all Settlement Officers, dated 29 August 1979, titled ‘Isolated Refugee Children’, explains that ‘It is extremely important that [reports about the children are] done as Community Welfare Services is relying on these details to have an up-to-date picture of refugee children, isolated or at risk. It also assists Community Welfare Services in submissions for staff to cope with long-term casework demands of this group’, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 2.

The government policy framework being used, however, was unclear for many of the workers. In July 1976, the associate director of regional services wrote to the deputy director-general of the Department of Immigration and argued that 'There would appear to be a fairly urgent need to clarify a range of policy issues related to defining responsibility and effective case planning for refugee children'.²⁵ It was not until 1985 that a cost-sharing agreement between state and federal governments was established – an agreement that remains in place, unaltered, to today.²⁶ Before this period, arrangements were generally ad hoc.

While some workers at the hostels would provide simple lists, at other times stories about the children were told by welfare and settlement officers. Some of these were full-page reports, containing information such as name, sex, place and date of birth, address, nationality, ethnic origin, 'natural' father and mother, financial support, relatives in Australia, relatives in country of origin, relatives elsewhere, current situation and sections for an expanded background and comment. Others were short paragraphs, headed by a name and birthdate. Of recurring focus throughout the reports were questions of finance, housing and the temperament of the children. Throughout these reports, the voices of the workers dominate, with the chance rarely, if ever, provided for the children to report about themselves. What we learn from these reports, therefore, is not how the children were living their lives, or undertaking their own settlement process, or understanding themselves; instead, we get a glimpse of the discourses and structures of governmental bureaucracy at work. We gain a sense of the ways the social workers and administrators imagined and catalogued the task of managing the migration and settlement of refugee children in Victoria. Through these bureaucratic writings we find just one of the ways in which the category of the 'child refugee' was created. Indeed, this bureaucratic production sits within a long set of histories and practices of governments creating and defining populations, and of international law and instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child – which would come later – providing guidelines that

25 Confidential report by the A/Director Regional Services, Ivan Beringer, addressed to the Deputy Director-General, 30 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

26 The cost-sharing agreement is available in NAA: A14039, 2520: Cabinet Memorandum 2520 – Immigration and Ethnic Affairs – 1985–1986 Budget – new policy proposal – cost-sharing program for care of refugee minors – Decisions 5059/ER (Amended) and 5667.

national governments variously follow or ignore.²⁷ In Australia, this forms part of a broad settler-colonial project of control and assimilation, which works to differentiate, often in racial terms, this population.²⁸

Descriptions of the children

Within the surveys of the children, there were continued reports on their present and future housing situations. This began before the children arrived in Australia, with cables being sent from officials in Canberra to the Department of Immigration branch in Melbourne noting the settlement officers' decision as to where the children should be placed upon arrival.²⁹ While children could express a view on where they would live, the ultimate decision rested with settlement officials. As one cable noted, 'confirming' a previous cable regarding three siblings who were 'unattached refugee minors' and were living in 'Singapore having been rescued at sea': there was a 'distant cousin' living in Springvale, who could not 'accommodate' them. The corresponding official wrote that:

we would wish to send them to Victoria to at least give them some family tie but we would also wish them to be retained as a group in hostel accommodation after initial period in migrant centre.

The 'urgent views' of officials in Melbourne was 'appreciated'.³⁰

Once in Australia, the housing arrangements were under constant scrutiny and discussion. Of one child it was reported that:

He would be happy to live in a large communal house if his friends were also living there, if this cannot be arranged he has a twenty year old friend ... [in Oakleigh] with whom he could live.³¹

27 For histories of children's rights and international law, as well as Australia's relationship to this law, see, for example, Mary Crock and Lenni B Benson, eds, *Protecting Migrant Children: In Search of Best Practice* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2018).

28 See, for example, Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016).

29 There are many examples of these cables in NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 4.

30 Cable sent from Tarbath to Melbourne, 20 March 1981, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 4.

31 'Timorese Children', no date, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

Another boy was reported as 'prefer[ring] living with his sisters to any other accommodation arrangement'.³² Of a set of siblings it was written that a settlement officer from Midway Hostel together with a worker from the department 'agreed that the best solution is to try to obtain a flat for them, but we believe that economically they cannot afford to pay for one'.³³ In this way, housing and financial concerns from the department often intersected. Similarly, in an April 1976 report on Timorese unaccompanied children at the Midway Hostel it was noted that the situation with a group of boys was:

fairly stable. They have caused no problems. They are the boys who are receiving \$4.80 per week after the hostel tariff is paid. Financially their situation is inadequate because from \$4.80 they need to pay school requisites, clothing, other personal items and medical expenses.³⁴

This focus on the financial position of the children recurred throughout the reports, as social workers documented how much money the children had, needed and earned, and what this would mean for their living situation. Some children, it was written, 'reject any form of communal living' and sought employment to support their desire to live together, while others were described as 'not presently receiving any financial support'.³⁵ In the lists of the children, careful notes were made to explain precisely which government 'benefits' were received.³⁶

As social workers tended to do, these workers were also keen to describe the behaviours of the unaccompanied children. In the description of one child it was noted that:

the Welfare Officer feels that [she] has suddenly been allowed too much freedom and needs welfare follow-up. It would also be beneficial if she found lasting friendships outside of the hostel in the community.³⁷

32 Ibid.

33 Victoria Undurruga, Settlement Officer, Midway Centre, to Ms Margaret McCready, Executive Officer, Settlement Unit, 21 December 1979, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 3.

34 Assistant Director, Settlement Services Section, 'Report on Timorese Refugees. "Isolated Children"', 14 April 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

35 J Zaia, Welfare Officer, Migrant Services, 'Reports on Timorese Without Parents (Midway)', 7 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1. The report begins by noting that 'These reports are only factual – they will be followed-up with recommendations and suggestions for the children's future'.

36 NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 2.

37 'Progress Report on Welfare of Isolated Timorese Children at Enterprise Hostel', 9 April 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

Another child was described as being bound to:

have many problems settling in Australia. She is functionally illiterate. She has little or no concept of time, and combined with a very short concentration span, she has great difficulty in keeping appointments and performing any kind of organised work. [expunged section ...] Many efforts have been made to help and support her. Catholic Family Welfare had arranged for her to live in a hostel with five girls, but she rejected this, she also has rejected any other form of alternative accommodation. [She] has always lived a 'free life', not bound by any restriction. I do not believe institutional care is the answer, but I am unable to offer any other alternative.³⁸

This girl's description ends there, with the last sentences 'expunged', presumably by the archivist at the National Archives of Australia, where these documents are now housed.³⁹

These expungements give pause, compelling the historian reading these archival papers to note the potential ongoing force of the documentation of these children's lives. Through these lists, as I have indicated, information is acquired, and certain forms of knowledge produced, about these children and where they do and can live within society. Where once these names and descriptions sat within confidential government files, today they sit in the archives, publicly accessible. This notation, described above, was created on 7 July 1976, relatively recently, and we can thus presume that this girl, or people who know her, remain within Australia, able to access this description. This description is saturated with racialised ideas of 'appropriate' migrant living and settlement, and also contains expunged sentences. Some descriptors are, it would seem, judged too sensitive to be available to the public. Others are deemed suitable to be made available.

38 J Zaia, Welfare Officer, Migrant Services, 'Reports on Timorese Without Parents (Midway)', 7 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

39 From looking at the pages in the archives, it appears that certain sentences are covered over with tape reading 'expunged', and the page has then been photocopied before being re-placed in the archival file. In the NAA's Recordsearch facility, the file is noted as being 'Open with exception' for reasons under the *Archives Act 1983* (Cth) para 33(1)(g): would 'unreasonably disclose information about the personal affairs of a person'. See 'Why we refuse access', NAA, available at: www.naa.gov.au/help-your-research/using-collection/access-records-under-archives-act/why-we-refuse-access.

Indeed, this expunging is part of the process of racialisation of these children, wherein certain descriptors remain public while others are withheld from view. It is important to note that the archival records of citizen children are withheld from public access for 100 years.⁴⁰ The files and papers that I am exploring in this chapter are possible to view, I would guess, because they sit within the record-keeping of immigration, rather than of social services. And while archivists might repeatedly inform me that anything to do with personal, medical or sexual information is withheld from public viewing under the Archives Act of 1983's exemption reason 33(1)(g), the presence and public availability of these types of information suggests that this is not always true.⁴¹

While we cannot know the mindset of the archivist who ruled this open – and indeed documents like this, which tell the histories of refugee children in Australia, remain viewable throughout the archives – the fact that the file remains publicly accessible requires us to ponder the layers of ethics in using them to write these histories. As I utilise them, then, I am forced to sit with an ambivalence over their usage. Perhaps this ambivalence is essential to the work of the historian – for in colonial archives we can often find materials that describe people without their consent, and that have been made public without their ongoing consent – but in this present political moment, when refugees remain a political battleground within Australian politics, it takes on a particularly potent feeling. These are affective archives, we could say. As I put them to work to craft a narrative, they do emotional work within me, and within the Australian nation.⁴² There is a discomfort attached to them. But the historians' discomfort is, of course, beside the point. An ethical usage of these documents and descriptions then, one can only suppose, arises from their use in the service of the seeking of migrant and refugee justice. It lies further in the constant remembering that these are people, with lives, histories, memories and futures, who are being described. Their humanity sits not in these documents but in the lives they have lived.

40 I am grateful to Professor Shurlee Swain for alerting me to this point.

41 Medical information is often freely available in these archives, and has appeared in almost every NAA file that I have seen which holds documents dealing with the implementation of this Act.

42 See, for example, Trish Luker, 'Decolonising Archives: Indigenous Challenges to Record Keeping in "Reconciling" Settler Colonial States', *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no. 91–92 (April 2017): 108–25, doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2017.1357011.

Additionally, I am compelled to wonder, does the public availability of these documents tell us something vital about how the various arms of government imagine, and manage, refugees and their place within Australian society? These documents, it would seem, testify to an idea of these child refugees as being outside the realm of citizenship. If citizen children's archives are kept from public view for longer than non-citizen children's, and difference is not neutral, then these differences can be understood to demonstrate a conception of the personhood of child refugees as being substantively different to that of child citizens. While this might be obvious when considered as a question of legal categories – of course a citizen is different to a non-citizen, some may say – I am interested in what it means when thought through the lens of a history of bureaucratic writing, or governmental practices, or interpersonal relations.⁴³ What can this tell us about how these children are imagined, and their lives noted down, described and understood? It produces simultaneously both an outsidership to citizenship and a life lived under government control and surveillance. This is the predicament that many racialised populations face, as they are refused access to the benefits of citizenship, but are saddled with the controlling aspects of government bureaucracy. In this way, these refugee children are experiencing similar types and effects of descriptions and controls that have been used to determine the lives of Aboriginal children and other racialised groups over Australia's history. What distinguishes them is their different position in society: it is the movement across borders, and their position within the Australian community after arrival, that is being placed under surveillance and managed. Those who migrate, and those who are Indigenous, are treated by governments in ways that coincide, but are not the same.

Refugee children are being produced as a group through both the collection of this information by social workers and the like, and then by its retention and public availability through archival practices. Bureaucratic processes of description, collection and retention help to produce a population that can be known, for these instances of refugee children's lives being intimately – and now publicly – documented repeat and repeat. Another child at the Enterprise Hostel was described in the following language: 'His relationship with his aunt ... is not good. Amongst the complaints that he lists are that no friends are allowed to visit him in his room,

43 See, for example, David Tait, Terry Carney and Kirsten Deane, *A Ticket to Services, or, a Transfer of Rights? Young People and Guardianship* (Hobart: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, 1995).

he receives no pocket money', and the next few sentences are expunged.⁴⁴ While certain intimate details are determined to be of interest to note, and allowed to be read by the public, a line is drawn somewhere. The precise place is – for those of us who access these documents – inscrutable. But we know that we can read other children described as 'likeable',⁴⁵ as 'more mature than her age would indicate, readily displaying responsibility and sensibility',⁴⁶ as having a 'well mannered, pleasant personality',⁴⁷ and as 'attractive and very shy'.⁴⁸ One school was asked to provide a report on two siblings, and of the brother they report that he 'wears very corrective glasses' while the sister 'has no physical problems, in fact she has a most affectionate smile'.⁴⁹ Another child's report states that:

At the beginning he wanted to go back but with the time, he gained friends and his happy go lucky attitude is infectious. He has changed his mind and is definitely FOR AUSTRALIA.⁵⁰

In this notation, as in the one with which I began this chapter, the position of the child refugee in relation to the nation is invoked: there is a move towards incorporating these model child refugees into the nation. Surveillance and description remain part of the process of producing a desired national population.

All of these stories were collected as the result of the existence of the idea of the category of the child refugee, and in the service of the production of that category of person. As noted in the description of the child and her family with which I began this chapter, certain refugees were imagined as 'models' for others by the social workers and settlement service workers who created the reports; certain ideas of what it meant to be a refugee were created through these reports in order to be held up and followed by others. These descriptions of the children existed as both a product of surveillance and a way of creating a category of personage, as well as in order for bureaucrats and public servants to lobby different branches of government to provide funding and support. Thus, a July 1976 report

44 F Wositzky, Welfare Officer, Enterprise Hostel, no date, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 K Richardson, Migrant Coordinator, and K Gough, Principal, Springvale Primary School, 15 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

50 Deputy Director General, Victorian Resettlement Co-ordinating Committee, Confidential Note: 'Unattached refugee children still in Victoria', 30 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

from the Victorian state government utilised case file reports written about unattached children in order to support their claims for greater assistance and regulation in policy and practice. The cases outlined included descriptions of children's housing and financial arrangements, as well as of their state of mind, and served to be 'illustrative of the difficulties being encountered in effectively planning for these refugee children'.⁵¹

These documents thus provide us with a glimpse into the genealogy of these categories of person and the ways in which their histories can be written. While these case file notes in some ways propose to outline the stories of the children, to provide seemingly vital information about them, they instead provide a set of discourses about how these refugee children were thought of and written about, how they were surveyed, described and categorised. Certain aspects of their lives were deemed important to document, other aspects discarded. These traces sit within the government archive, providing us with the means to understand the work that government discourse does when relating to, describing and producing certain categories of person.

Conclusion: The work of categorisation

In their use of surveys to gain information about the children, and their management of their housing and thus relationships with others, the Australian welfare departments and their social worker employees sought to tell a set of stories about who these refugee children were, how they would live and what their relational lives in Australia would look like. These stories were collected as the result of the imagining of the category of the child refugee, and in the service of the production of that category of person. This was to be a category of person defined as 'child-like': as requiring care and protection provided by the workers of the state. These descriptions buttressed the existence of this category of person within the population. The dividing up of the population served as a means of exerting control, both of this divided group and of the population at large. In this way, refugee children as a group were circumscribed and defined through their relationship to place, to surveillance and to other peoples. They were kept within a particular political order.

51 Confidential Report by the A/Director Regional Services, Ivan Beringer, addressed to the Deputy Director-General, 30 July 1976, NAA: B925, V1978/60922 PART 1.

But alongside this we can read the work of Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, who have written, following Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, that 'the refugee is precisely the one who stands outside the political order, and is thus by definition a figure that disrupts the established order of things'.⁵² This is because, they say, the refugee crosses boundaries, moving around the world and thus inhabiting the world in a manner that disrupts the bounded world of the citizen. If we follow this thinking, which I think can be helpful, we can understand the ways that the bureaucracy tries to contain and annul this disruption: to manage any possible alteration to the political order.

Peter Mares, writing in relation to a recent case of a temporary resident parent being denied permanent residency even though their children and former partner were Australian citizens, explains that there is caution among policymakers that women may fall pregnant in order to remain in Australia: one 'senior government adviser' told him that 'You have to be very careful what visa products you put on the market ... People will try to exploit those loopholes'.⁵³ Could a new way of thinking – one that avoids these racialised capitalist logics – about the place and role of regulation of borders and human movement open up a new way of describing how, and why, people move around the world, and how they should be related to when they do? What other possible languages, or 'grammars' could be used?⁵⁴

We can come to understand that in these documents those who worked within settlement services, or at schools, or in the multitude of other spaces (both bureaucratic and physical) with which the children interacted, produced a set of languages, discourses and grammars about the children. The knowledge that was produced about these children was refracted through the government and social workers' words. As in governmental documents more generally, there was an attempt at silencing. Governments tend to make policy for, rather than with, those who are subjected to that policy. In this case, these refugee and asylum seeker children were doubly infantilised, imagined as unable to speak,

52 Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, 'Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba: Disruptive Empathy and Binationalism in Israel/Palestine', *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 1 (2014): 90, doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.878114.

53 Peter Mares, *Not Quite Australian: How Temporary Migration is Changing the Nation* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2016), 93.

54 Liisa H Malkki, 'Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 516, doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.24.100195.002431.

both as refugees and as children. This then, perhaps, is part of the work being done in these documents: the production of a group of people who are imagined to rely on being controlled, and having their lives shaped, by the settlement services offered by various layers of government. Even if at times officials might have consulted with children as to where they wanted to live, decision-making power rested with officials, not with the children. These archives that I have examined – and that now share *too much* with the public – are sources of discipline, both discursive and material, and they sit within those practices of the art and vocabulary of government that work to create ideas of what it meant to be a Vietnamese or Timorese unaccompanied child refugee in Australia in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁵

55 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), esp. 87–134.

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