munity minded volunteers and committees over the century since the Avenue planting commenced.

This was a keenly anticipated work and Roberts certainly takes the reader into the Lucas involvement as it relates, not only to the Arch and Avenue, but to the story of a family, a local company, the political situation in Victoria, to civics and the Ballarat story through an interesting and informative narrative. He has done this by drawing together the links that stretched throughout the families of those who volunteered to serve and the interrelationships of the community in war and peace and across the generations.

All that said, Avenue of Memories is a must read for anyone interested in Ballarat local history and of the Avenue and Arch memorials that hold pride of place to most in Ballarat and many beyond.

Reviewer: Dr Michael Taffe, CRCAH, Federation University Australia.

Miss Ex-Yugoslavia


Miss Ex-Yugoslavia is a memoir and coming of age story of a migrant’s feelings as a double outsider in Australia and in what remained of Yugoslavia. The title refers to the author’s participation in a ‘beauty’ quest run by the Yugoslav community in Melbourne. As a subjective memoir, Stefanovic’s book is also a personal insight into how the loss of the Yugoslav ideal of ‘Brotherhood and Unity’ affected the lives of an expatriate community.

During Stefanovic’s childhood in Belgrade, Yugoslavia had begun to disintegrate through the efforts of Serbian, Croatian and Kosovo nationalists to separate their respective states forever. With the intensification of chaotic and confusing warfare, militarization and the ethnic cleansing associated with Slobodan Milošević, the Stefanovic family migrated to Melbourne and began the process of adapting to a new society. Even though her parents were well educated and quickly found employment, Sofja experiences the difficulties of living two lives: adapting to Australian schooling, language and social expectations while also participating in the community life of the Ex-Yugoslav diaspora.

Stefanovic writes with an engagement that signifies the empathy of a participant. Nevertheless, she maintains sufficient, authoritative detachment for the stories of migrant family life, puberty, and becoming a woman in a new land, to convince the reader that, indeed, the book is a significant work of social history. The writing is sometimes light-hearted, sometimes deadly serious, yet always readable and devoid of jargon. Although Stefanovic warns that she has used creative licence to adapt her personal story, the whole work is chronologically referenced to the account of the Balkan dismemberment. The reality of the conflict is carried by the insertion of textbook style interludes or explanations of the events of inter-ethnic warfare at the relevant stages of Stefanovic’s story. These insertions underline the bifurcation of the migrant’s social existence in two cultures at once.

Lest readers think that the title ‘Miss Ex-Yugoslavia’ betrays an outdated approach to gender issues, Stefanovic writes of her misgivings about entering such a contest in her university student days. Had she omitted this episode we would have a lesser picture of the perceptions that migrant communities had about older Australian cultural expectations. The quest was organised and run by migrants of Stefanovic’s parents’ age, those who had come to Australia before the inter-ethnic conflict that destroyed the land of their memories. (Right up until 1970, Monash University, for example, ran an annual ‘Miss Monash’ quest.) In this way, Stefanovic’s participation is an act of defiance of ethnic cleansing and of solidarity with the expatriate community.

Miss Ex-Yugoslavia is interesting as a story in itself but its strength is that it adds a deeper understanding of the Balkan diaspora and its politics. It is an admirable contribution to the social history of migrant experiences in Australia.

Reviewer: Dr Nicholas Butler, CRCAH, Federation University Australia.

The Menzies Era: The years that shaped modern Australia


In this work of history a former prime minister, John Howard, shows he is ever the politician even when sporting the historian’s elbow patches. The Menzies Era is a fascinating insight into the mind of a successful politician. Though it is a work of non-fiction focused on another former prime minister, Robert Menzies, temptation leads Howard to digression. The reader often finds himself witnessing unrelated commentary, either unsolicited defence or gratuitous attack, and sometimes cannot help but sense the repressed passive aggression of an unsettled score. For example, in his discussions on Doc Evatt and Arthur Calwell, his attacks on the pusillanimous inability of the latter to strike down the former causes one’s mind to drift in the direction of Peter Costello. Howard also runs a commentary about his subject’s tactical deficiencies which strongly suggests he sees himself as the greater tactician. This review is based on a reading of chapters four to eight, as well as the introducing and concluding sections, which address the decade after the Second World War.

Howard quite ironically casts himself as the revisionary historian, choosing to portray Menzies as the great reformer who foreshadowed free university education and befriended women and non-whites alike. The Australia of his formative years is greatly romanticised and, in fact, he acknowledges (on page 150):

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The Australia that I grew up in was stable and full of hope. It had blemishes and shortcomings, but probably fewer than other comparable societies.

For a white male born into the middle-class, in a bustling city, raised during the long boom of the post-bellum, this view is understandable and, perhaps, expected. But in his nostalgia the shouts and cries of others, including Indigenous, women, workers, radicals, foreigners and the newly arrived, are at best muffled or at worst muted. Howard’s view of history is quite benign. He discusses General Thomas Blamey without mention of his fascism, Governor-General William Slim without mention of child molestation (committed in Australia), Winston Churchill – his namesake – without reference to his entrenched anti-Australian views.

Howard’s ideology has evidently advanced little beyond the kitchen table dicta of his fond recollections. His father and mentor, Lyall, was a war veteran known for his sharp business practises. But as others have observed, his childhood romanticism is imbued by misinformation:

Unsurprisingly, the Howard family mythology of hard work and private enterprise came to centre on small business rather than the sorting of government largesse.

Of particular note is the revelation that Lyall had probably been a member of the fascist New Guard. His lessons on politics, history and economics vested his son, John, with the certainty of the warrior.

His discussion on the attempted bank nationalisation in the 1940s is underpinned by assumption. He accepts unquestioningly Menzies’ fallacious and self-serving dichotomy of ‘socialist tyranny’ versus ‘capitalist choice’. Howard also accepts the similarly fallacious – and related – conflation of capitalism and democracy. After accepting the historically commonplace frustration of Parliament by the High Court, he seamlessly transitions into Menzies’ defence of parliamentary democracy. No regard is had for the legitimacy of the written constitution that permits this frustration; an antiquated document approved largely without women and Indigenous voters. Despite his stated desire to ‘tell the full tale’ we find a decidedly incomplete discussion on bank nationalisation. No mention is made of the private banks and their paid army of thousands which campaigning on the streets against nationalisation, disseminating misinformation en masse. Nor is mention made of corporate interests, including advertising agencies, news media, manufacturers, financiers, that campaigned against the government, again with the use of propaganda.

The warrior born of Lyall is surprisingly malleable for the purpose of savaging his imagined opponents. We find him reach for principle only to volte-face and attack another’s lack of pragmatism and back again. He describes the National Health Service in the United Kingdom as a ‘massive encroachment’ by the state, without considering its (immense) practical merits. He describes Ben Chifley’s belief that ‘the general good of the community’ was not always served by the profit motive as ‘naïve, even unworldly’. Yet, he criticises Evatt for his decision to defend a union against the 1950 communist ban as ‘a provocative and politically inept decision’, ‘a foolish act’, ‘superficial’, as well as self-serving, improper, ‘self-indulgent’, and resulting from ‘chronically poor judgement’. These are not the criticisms of a moralist. His attack on Evatt’s political nous continues with the events of 1954-55. Evatt was ‘foolish’, ‘humiliated’, suffering from ‘naiveté and political ineptitude’ and a ‘warped… judgement’; he ‘fearfully embarrassed’ and ‘severely aggraved’ through his ‘grotesqueness’, ‘exceeded his cumulative follies’. Howard even implied Evatt was insane for believing ASIO and Menzies were engaged in conspiracy when, in fact, he acknowledges the reality of the Petrov defection was of great political benefit to the Coalition…The PM who for years had talked about the threat of world communism… and had rallied against the weakness of the ALP in opposing the Reds could now announce the Russians had been spying in our midst…

If ASIO and Menzies had not been so engaged, they certainly did little to avoid netting political benefit. As a former solicitor, Howard knows beneficium invito non datur (no benefit can be conferred upon one who will not accept). It is also surprising that Howard – having astutely observed, unlike many, that Labor did not win the popular vote in 1954 – fails to see that the election called within days of the Petrov affair could have had happened months later. But Howard’s preoccupation with practical politics reveals something deeper. For ‘in politics, wherever there is a conflict, common sense should trump all other considerations’. This might explain why Howard openly boasts that the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, presented ‘the same dynamic’ to his government as the Petrov affair did to Menzies. Indeed, the election of October similarly could have been held later.

On the issue of anti-communism we can again see Howard on manoeuvres. Menzies had been acutely aware of the political advantages to be netted. Indeed, he would not have been worthy of his nom de guerre, Ming the Merciless, if he had not. Howard makes no mention that that the United States also saw the same advantages in an overstrung Cold War based not on geopolitical reality but a confected ideological contest. And Menzies chose to seek the outlawing of communists at a time when the support and power of the Communist Party of Australia and communism was ebbing, which Howard acknowledges. Once the matter was defeated at referendum Menzies vowed to pursue communists with ‘undeniminished vigour’. But Howard overlooks Menzies’ disregard for the rules of Australian constitutional democracy. What can one say? For a solicitor he has a barrister’s eye for detail.

3. Ibid., 9.
4. CJ Coventry, Origins of the Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security (MA thesis accepted by UNSW, 2018), 55.

Reviewer: CJ Coventry, PhD candidate, CRCAH, Federation University Australia.