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Author hails migrant input

ELENA MORABITO

Author Dr Criena Fitzgerald will have a Kalgoorlie-Boulder launch this month for her book on the Yugoslav migrants who called the Goldfields home between 1890 and 1970.

She spent seven years researching the project, and said while writing her post-doctoral thesis on tuberculosis in the Goldfields she discovered the Yugoslavs were the second-biggest migrant group in the Goldfields, with Italians being the first.

"I think that the contribution of migrants to the Goldfields is under-written and under-reported and remember, where the open cut (Super Pit) is now was where the riots happened, which is where 400 Yugoslavs were made homeless," Dr Fitzgerald said.

Dr Fitzgerald told the Kalgoorlie Miner she had only 120 copies of the book left after ordering 500 and the local community had "really loved it".

She explained she would give a talk on the Yugoslavs in the riots at the launch, and would play recorded interviews with people who had knowledge of the riots.

"I think a lot of people have spoken about it in relation to Italian hotels, but much less so in relation to Yugoslavs, because all of the homes that were rebuilt. So there were only 50 rebuilt by the government two years afterwards for Yugoslavs," Dr Fitzgerald said.

She noted the book covered a range of aspects, including background into mining legislation, as many restrictions were put on the migrants at the time and naturalisation was extremely difficult to achieve.

As the houses of the Yugoslavs which were burnt down during the riots used to stand where the Super Pit now stands, Dr Fitzgerald said she believed there should be a memorial to commemorate the pain these people had to go through when they lost their possessions in the fires.

"I think there should be (a memorial) because it isn't just Yugoslavs because the Greeks got burnt out in 1914, the Italians in 1919, and then the Italians, Yugoslavs and Greeks and anyone who looked foreign in 1934. And so I think there could be a really great memorial for it actually," she said.

Dr Fitzgerald said she was writing another book about Faiz



Dr Criena Fitzgerald

Mahomet, a "mega wealthy cameleer", whose great-grandson and herself were friends.

"He was worth 50,000 pounds in 1896, which is a lot of money and so he initially started out in Geraldton and Cue and then his brother Tagh opened the business in Coolgardie and he was shot dead in the mosque by another Afghan in the Coolgardie mosque," she explained.

"There were actually about nine mosques in WA, mostly in the Goldfields areas where there

were lots of Muslims." She explained that in 1896, when his brother was shot, Faiz was in Geraldton at the time and hired a train, which only took him to Southern Cross before he had to hire a coach to try to reach his brother's funeral.

"That was sort of a year of disasters for Afghans because the railway was opened and most of their business went, there was nothing for them because the railway brought in goods and carted things away," Dr Fitzgerald said. "So they moved to Menzies and Leonora before

the train came in, and a lot of them ended up destitute."

"There was government legislation to stop (Afghans from) importing camels, because the Mines Department had its own camel breeding program out of Coolgardie, and it stopped Afghans being involved. So it was all really racist in a way.

"I think people are unaware of that, I think they thought that apart from Faiz Mahomet most Afghans were just poor people schlepping camels about the State, but . . . some of the major players were quite wealthy."

Dr Fitzgerald has written four books relating to the region, and believes it is "hugely important" to write about the rich local history.

"There's wonderful archives here that are absolutely underused," she said.

Dr Fitzgerald invited Goldfields residents to attend the launch of her book *For a better life: Yugoslavs on the Goldfields of Western Australia 1890-1970* at the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society from 6.30pm-7.30pm on November 24, with a glass of champagne offered on arrival.