This book deals with the story of Australian postgraduates who pursued higher degrees in the United States from 1949 to 1964. In so doing, these ‘pioneers’ broke new ground, both educational and cultural, given the Australian academy’s historical attachment to the United Kingdom as the gold standard in matters of academic excellence.

The author’s interest, she tells us, was stimulated by her father’s experiences as one such student and by the detailed letters kept by her mother (during a year of separation, before joining him) in that most traditional of Australian archives, the shoebox.

In addition to the letters, Ninham was able to secure the cooperation of a hundred plus ex-students in completing a questionnaire. Thirty-three respondents were also interviewed, along with scholarship administrators and wives of scholars. Initially, the author sketches a largely familiar narrative: the ultra-elite nature of Australian university education till at least the post-WWII period, minimal masters enrolments, the lack of doctoral study options until the 1940s or 1950s (depending on discipline) and the suffocating deference to Britain in matters of academic structures, practices and appointments. A doctoral qualification from other than the mother country was simply doomed not to be taken seriously.

Between the wars, there had been some research contacts between Australia and the US, most in science and some in education. But, the end of WWII and the onset of the Cold War saw an explosion in the opportunities for foreign students to undertake postgraduate study in the US, as epitomised by the Fulbright and Smith-Mundt initiatives. While the former scheme had more educational motives, the latter was blatantly political, with one proponent observing that if it was America’s destiny to help serve the world with its educational system, ‘then destiny needs a little shove’. Ninham sees this difference as non-problematical, since the long-term outcomes were intertwined: Smith-Mundt opened opportunities to a wider range of nationalities than had Fulbright.

While for some of the Australians in this study, the US postgraduate application followed rejection for a preferred UK scholarship, this was not universally so. Some students made shrewd and informed choices about locations of disciplinary strength and potential for research collaborations while others proudly identified an element of rebellion in choosing the new world over the old. For the small number of female applicants, it was also relevant that American institutions were less discriminatory.

Several of the (overwhelmingly male) students were accompanied by wives, with some marriages brought forward to facilitate travel and cohabitation (this was the 1940s and 1950s). The challenges for such young women were understandably substantial and some coped better than others. For the email generation, the sheer time lag with communication in the period under review (international phone calls were expensive and hence rare) must be virtually incomprehensible.

If the main aim of the US scholarship schemes was (at least for some American policy-makers) to indoctrinate foreigners and enlist them as cold warriors back home, then it was less than successful with Ninham’s cohort. The features of America that appealed to them most were the country’s pluralism, its diversity of voices, public debate, the emergence of the civil rights movement and for several in the later years, the anti-war movement. McCarthyism (when mentioned by respondents) was seen as repugnant. Those who identified their own political awakening as occurring at this time were invariably on the progressive side of the spectrum, regardless of academic discipline. Some were motivated to pursue political activism back in Australia.

As the staid Eisenhower years gave way to Kennedy’s New Frontier, the sense of excitement and engagement...
was, for many of these visiting students, palpable. It is
doubtful whether the traditionalists, on the other side of
the Atlantic, felt similarly engaged by Harold Macmillan!
Upon return to Australia, many in this study found
academic work in the newly emerging universities: the
laws of doctoral supply and demand were on their side,
although that did not ensure a smooth transition. Several
experienced hostility to their US credentials and opposi-
tion to their efforts to effect change in curriculum and
teaching methods. (The empire was not going without a
fight). Later, many would revisit the US under the gener-
ous sabbatical leave provisions of the time.
Outside the academy, others used their qualifications
and experience to pursue very successful careers in a
range of fields, with this cohort including two High Court
judges. While most reported some challenges in readjust-
ment to Australia and in employer acceptance of an exotic
US qualification, the postgraduates identified their time
overseas as a positive life and career-changing experience,
which saw them retain an enduring fondness for the US.
Perhaps by today’s standards, this volume has fewer
editing/proofing problems than most. Zelman Cowen’s
surname is mis-spelt (as Cowan) in some sections of the
book, but not in others; Perth is identified as lacking a
bridge over the Swan River (till the Narrows was built by
eone of Ninham’s ‘cohort’ in 1959), but this is (accurately)
contradicted in the following paragraph; the plural of
‘moratorium’ is given as both ‘moratoria’ and ‘moratori-
umms’. Ninham has JFK assassinated in December (instead
of November) 1963 – an error which should not have sur-
vived the most cursory editing.
A strength of this book is Ninham’s location of the
study in the broader context of Australia’s loosening
cultural, social, economic and political ties with Britain
in the post-war period, in which cause she assembles an
extensive and impressive bibliography. In summary, this
account is a readable and engaging one, dealing with an
important post-war higher education phenomenon, the
effect of which is evident in our institutions today.
Paul Rodan is Adjunct Professor at Swinburne University of
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Gender, power, management... and higher education

*Gender, Power and Management – A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Higher Education*, by Barbara Bagilhole & Kate White (eds).

Review by Michelle Wallace

This eight-chapter book presents collaborative research
on gender, power and higher education management in
eight countries. The book makes a major contribution to
the women in higher education management literature as
it offers a nuanced, comparative analysis across a range of
countries in relation to the factors that have shaped their
gender dynamics and higher education systems and gives
voice to perspectives from contemporary higher educa-
tion managers.

The book is invaluable for those teaching and research-
ing gender, leadership and management. It well deserves
close and multiple readings to appreciate the range of
theoretical perspectives used to analyse reasons for the
lower number of women in higher education manage-
ment and senior managers’ perspectives on their roles and
the management cultures of their institutions.

In their Introduction, Barbara Bagilhole and Kate White
explain the genesis of the Women in Higher Education Man-
agement (WHEM) Network and provide practical exam-
ple of how the research collaboration operated. This is an
inspiring example of feminist informed research practice.

The aims of the research were to collate statistical and
other secondary data to map the representation of women
in higher education management, undertake empirical
research with senior higher education managers across
the eight countries and identify interventions to support