

**‘Can Ladies Work Here Too Nanna?’
Gender and Australasian Politics Textbooks**

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Introduction

In 1992, Janice Dudley attended the APSA Conference in Canberra. As she had not been to Canberra since she was 7 years old, she spent some time being a tourist. One of the 'sights' she did was of course the new Parliament House, and she spent several hours with her cassette guide slung over her shoulder making her way around that astonishing building. During her tour she was standing in King's Hall looking at the portrait of Joan Child when she overheard the comment of a small boy who had noticed, perceptively, that this former Speaker of the House of Representatives was a woman! He turned to his grandmother and asked her in amazement "Can Ladies work here too Nanna?" It was not an unreasonable question. Indeed it was a most perceptive comment. What he had seen in that building had not provided him with the evidence that ladies - women - *could* work there. He was perhaps 7 or 8 years old, so he will now be mid way through secondary school. It is to be hoped that when he attends university in another couple of years' time, the introductory politics texts he is assigned will acknowledge (at the very least) that women

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are significant and mainstream participants in the politics of both Australia and New Zealand, *and* will provide him with the evidence of this fact.

In 1981, the Australasian Political Science Association (APSA) took an important step forward by adopting, at its Annual General Meeting, the policy "That the study of women be incorporated into all politics courses". In 1984, Gillian O'Loughlin, as APSA Secretary, undertook the first review of the implementation of this policy. Departmental heads were asked to report back on curriculum changes (APSA Newsletter, May 1984). Subsequent reviews have been conducted by means of the review of widely used first-year textbooks. Merle Thornton conducted the first such review in 1986. It was published in the APSA Newsletter of September 1986, under the title of 'Written out of Politics: Neglect of Gender in Introductory Texts in Australian Politics'. Thornton found that

despite the endeavours of feminist scholars, including the recent appearance of many articles and at least a dozen books on the place of women in Australian political life, past and present students beginning the study of politics via the study of the Australian political system will find little or nothing in their text books about the pivotal role of women and of familial relationships in the politics of Australia.

It seemed fairly discouraging news. Five years later, a second review was conducted by Felicity Grace, Barbara Sullivan and Gillian Whitehouse and reported in the May 1991 edition of the APSA Newsletter. Their aim was to review texts which had been published since Merle Thornton's 1986 review and elaborate their own concept of an 'integrated political science' - a politics, that is, where the 'specific situation of women and the importance of gender issues more generally in the construction of political life' were heeded. They concluded:

... introductory textbooks in Australian government published during the last five years have contributed little towards making women more visible in the analysis of Australian politics, and almost nothing towards the inclusion of feminist scholarship in Australian political science. We can only hope that a follow up review of this nature five years from now will reveal a significant advancement.

At the 1995 meeting of the Women's Caucus of APSA, it was resolved to review, once again, introductory politics texts. Elizabeth Harman and Janice Dudley were commissioned to undertake the project. Members of the Women's Caucus from both Australia and New Zealand provided reviews of the twelve texts identified as those most commonly used in the teaching of introductory Australasian politics and government. These reviews have been used as the basis for this paper.

The paper is concerned with the manner and extent to which women are being incorporated into mainstream political science teaching in Australasian universities. The first section examines what the authors of these texts have included in their overviews of Australasian politics with respect to women, gender and feminist political science scholarship. Secondly, the paper considers the ways in which these topics are covered throughout the texts, discussing the appropriateness of the language or imagery being used, the accuracy of the facts presented vis-a-vis women, and the literature being used to inform the texts, concluding that, in essence, these readers deal with women in a descriptive rather than an analytical fashion. Lastly, the paper considers the implications of women's non-inclusion for the critical teaching of Australasian politics..

In our view, and in the view of our reviewers, most of the introductory texts for Australian and New Zealand politics either ignore women, or 'ghetto-ise' women's issues or women's participation in politics into a separate chapter with the 'real' politics remaining unscathed. Feminist political thought and feminist scholarship more broadly, with some honourable exceptions, are

ignored. If the analogy of cooking can be used, women are often an ingredient to be added, but rarely stirred.

Sadly, in 1999, little has changed regarding the significance ascribed to women in Australasian first year Politics textbooks. Whilst there have been new editions of some texts, and some of these are better in detail than the earlier editions (particularly Lovell et al.), our criticisms of the 'add women and stir' approach, of the failure to include women as mainstream players in Australasian politics, of the failure to take feminist theorising seriously, remain. Thus, unfortunately, if the present rate of progress is maintained, it is more than likely that when the young boy whom Janice Dudley overheard at Parliament House enrolls for Politics I at university, he will still be learning that politics is principally a man's world.

Research Design

During 1996 Elizabeth Harman and Janice Dudley surveyed all Australian and New Zealand universities requesting data concerning the texts they used for teaching introductory Australian and New Zealand politics. Twenty-one Australian institutions² provided this information and the most commonly used texts in Australia were identified. Two institutions³ indicated that they did not use a published text, basing their study of

² University of Adelaide, Australian National University, University of Canberra, Charles Sturt University, Curtin University of Technology, Flinders University of South Australia, Griffith University, La Trobe University, University of Melbourne, Monash University - Clayton Campus, Monash University - Caulfield Campus, Monash University - Gippsland Campus, Murdoch University, Northern Territory University, Australian Defence Force Academy - University of New South Wales, University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of Tasmania, University of Western Australia.

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Politics upon an in-house reader. Based on the three institutions⁴ which responded to their requests for information, two texts were the most commonly used in New Zealand. Table One details the popularity of each text. Included also is Dean Jaensch's *Parliament, Parties & People: Australian Politics Today* (1994)⁵, not only because it is used by several institutions, but principally because it is a widely used text in the upper secondary school study of Politics⁶. As a result, many students studying introductory Politics at university level continue to use it as their primary source of information.

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⁵ This text will henceforth be referred to as Jaensch (1994b).

⁶ 1331 copies of *Parliament, Parties & People: Australian Politics Today* were sold in Australia in 1996 - principally in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. Of particular interest are the 60 copies sold through the Parliament House Bookshop in Canberra!

Table One: Texts most commonly used in Australian and New Zealand politics courses

TEXTS	Number of institutions
A. Parkin, J. Summers and D. Woodward <i>Australian Government, Politics, Power and Policy</i> , 5th edition, Longman Cheshire 1994	10
D. Lovell, I. McAllister, W. Maley and C. Kukathas <i>The Australian Political System</i> Longman Cheshire 1995	8
H. Emy, and O. Hughes <i>Australian Politics: Realities in Conflict</i> 2nd edition Macmillan 1991	7
G. Davies, J. Wanna, J. Warhurst and P. Weller <i>Public Policy in Australia</i> 2nd edition, Allen and Unwin, 1992	6
D. Jaensch, <i>Power Politics: Australia's Party System</i> 3rd edition, Allen and Unwin, 1994	4
R. Stewart and I. Ward <i>Politics One</i> 2nd edition, Macmillan 1996	4
R. Smith (ed.) <i>Politics in Australia</i> , 3rd edition, Allen and Unwin, 1997	4
G. Maddox <i>Australian Democracy in Theory and Practice</i> Longman Cheshire, 3rd edition 1995	3
D. Jaensch, <i>The Politics of Australia</i> , Macmillan, 1992	3
H. Gold (ed.) <i>New Zealand Politics in Perspective</i> , 3rd edition, 1992	3
R. Mulgan <i>Politics in New Zealand</i> , 1994	3

Note: The total of institutions is greater than the 24 institutions which responded to the survey, because several institutions assign or recommend more than one text

Whither the concept of gender?

With respect to the question of what is included, a preliminary glance at these texts reveals four main findings. Firstly, gender is often referred to in terms of a 'gender gap' in electoral behaviour. Secondly, women are mentioned across an interesting range of discussion points, but only sparingly. Thirdly, whilst good material may be included, more often feminist theory is conspicuous by its absence; and lastly, there is an almost systematic aversion in these textbooks to the role and position of women in the political institutions of Australia and New Zealand.

The ill-defined concept of **gender** is most commonly treated in first year university politics text books as a quantitative variable with which to analyse electoral behaviour. Parkin et al. (1994) use gender to demonstrate a difference between men and women's levels of political trust and efficacy, and political participation. According to these authors, "men are more likely to have engaged in these [loosely defined, political] activities than women" (p. 204). Whilst Lovell et al. (1995) use similar methodology, they maintain, conversely, that in terms of voting patterns, women have become more like men. This is in a one-page effort to include gender in a section on political behaviour. The one-page gender phenomenon extends to Stewart and Ward's (1996) text where again, there is only a very short reference to gender as a voting variable. Jaensch (1994b) also mentions the gender gap in party support.

Some authors have not, however, followed the statistical gender gap trend. Davies et al. (1993) declare "gender balance has never been regarded as crucial by the party caucuses and machines". This is used to explain the

paucity of women elected to the Australian parliament and the Ministry, as of 1992. More effectively, Smith (1997) dedicates an entire chapter to gender and patriarchy where Vanessa Farrer discusses both the realities of Australian women's social and political experience, and feminist theories, including post-modern perspectives. Thirdly, Mulgan's (1994) chapter on the composition of New Zealand society includes gender as a distinctive and significant cleavage. Additionally, this section on gender incorporates competing feminist perspectives and references to women's issues and their political interests. Where gender is not mentioned, it is either ignored altogether (Jaensch 1992, 1994a, Gold 1992), or alluded to briefly in terms of the existence of 'gender inequality'.

Women, per se, are in fact incorporated across a whole range of different reference points in the textbooks reviewed. Sadly, this 'incorporation' is most notable by its brevity. Women are discussed, to a varying extent, in relation to the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) (Davies et al. 1992, Lovell et al. 1995, Stewart and Ward 1996, Maddox 1995, Jaensch 1992, 1994b), the women's movement (Stewart and Ward 1996, Jaensch 1994b), interest or pressure group politics (Davies et al. 1992, Maddox 1995, Gold 1992), their being voters (Emy and Hughes 1991, Gold 1992), political parties (Parkin et al. 1994, Stewart and Ward 1996, Maddox 1995, Gold 1992), the number of women in Parliament (Parkin et al. 1994, Stewart and Ward 1996, Jaensch 1992, Gold 1992, Smith 1997), the femocracy (Davies et al. 1992, Maddox 1995, Smith 1997), their patterns of work (Mulgan 1994, Jaensch 1992), women's issues and interests (Mulgan 1994), and their exclusion from politics and power (Smith 1997). It is noteworthy that none of the authors cover all of these points - only ever a combination of them.

Significantly, the extent to which these points are covered varies considerably. At one extreme, Jaensch (1994a) appears to make not even a token attempt to address many of these issues. In Lovell et al.'s (1995) compilation, women make only fleeting appearances -- and moreover, in articles written by *other* authors and added to the text. At the centre point of the spectrum, women have been subjected to the 'highlighted box' syndrome. Stewart and Ward (1996) dedicate one and three quarter pages to such boxes to address the topic of women and the ALP, the Liberals, and the Australian Democrats respectively. Jaensch (1992) presents statistics on the numbers of women in employment, politics and the public service in boxes, whilst Gold (1992) simply demonstrates the increased presence of women in party hierarchies by statistics. Of the more extensive (although by no means comprehensive) coverage of women made in this selection of text books, Davies et al.'s second edition provides a good example of the 'add women' formula in their discussion of the public sector and policy. Whilst tantalisingly short, there is, for instance, some consideration of the manner in which policy carries the imprint of contradictory influences by and for women (pp. 107-108).

Feminist theory is notable more for its absence rather than its inclusion, let alone application. Where it is discussed, it is in reference to conceptions of citizenship (Emy and Hughes 1991), political power (Parkin et al. 1994, Maddox 1995), patriarchy (Smith 1997) and theories of structural dominance (Mulgan 1994).

The most remarkable finding concerning the general 'location' of women in these text books, however, is that women are most often completely omitted from discussions of the political institutions of Australia and New Zealand. That is, women's engagement with, or non-inclusion in, processes and institutions such as the nature of responsible government, federalism, the constitution, the Cabinet and/or Ministry, the senior echelons of the Public Service, and the High Court is not considered to be a subject for serious consideration in first year University political science text books. Furthermore, women are notably absent from discussions of economic structures and problems. Women and the 'real world' of politics it seems, do not make for a well-blended recipe.

Well incorporated or simply added?

Where authors have included women in their accounts of Australasian politics, the question of *how* women appear in these texts deserves some attention. In answering this question, it appears that women do epitomise the extra ingredient of political science scholarship. In so far as women do rate a mention in these texts, the accounts are often marginalised in a separate chapter. Alternatively, the literature used to inform the texts of women's political activity and presence is outdated or simply not appropriate. This, among other things, leads to the more worrying trend prevalent in some of these books of inadequately representing the women's cause.

The marginalisation tendency

We are using the term marginalisation to indicate that one chapter covers much of the ground that could be included elsewhere, and more

pertinently, that there is no attempt to 'mainstream' the analysis of gender. The most consistent finding regarding these texts is the tendency of authors to write descriptively about women in one specific section or chapter of their text, leaving the rest of the text free from any gender analysis. It is only a minority of texts which engage at all seriously with feminist theory. However, these texts tend also to 'isolate' the feminist perspective, almost without exception, in a single chapter.

In this vein, Emy and Hughes (1991) incorporate an explicitly feminist analysis in Chapter 14 of their text, based on selections of feminist literature. Yet this chapter constitutes just 7 of the 577 pages of the text, or a little over 1 percent of the text. The isolation of this feminist analysis effectively means that the detailed theoretical examination of liberal democracy, and the author's critical analysis of economic restructuring, economic rationalism, and the New Right which appear prior to this chapter, appears to have been neither influenced nor engaged by feminist critique. They have a tendency to view 'the political' relatively narrowly, solely in terms of Left and Right. However, any discussion of 'the political' which does not include women is necessarily only partial – the political does and must include women.

Similarly, Rodney Smith's (1997) text attempts, in the first two chapters, to highlight the traditional exclusion of women from politics and power, and the power exercised over women in patriarchal societies. In so doing, the public/private divide and rape are used as case studies to illustrate these themes. Essentially, these accounts aim to expose the gendered character of politics, particularly as it stands in relation to theories of politics.

However, not all the chapters focus equally upon the gendered character of politics and power in Australia. In the section dealing with 'institutions', women's exclusion from full and equal participation in the more formal processes and institutions of politics such as the Cabinet, the higher echelons of the Public Service and Parliament itself are acknowledged but not analysed. There is no questioning of the status quo, nor is there any explanation offered for it.

Whilst the inclusion of feminism at these points is certainly welcome, they are overall too brief and too discrete. Their significance is diminished by their treatment as an optional extra rather than as one of the analytical tools to be used throughout the texts. In effect, they give rise to the misgiving that women's relationship to the political process, and feminist theory are still only 'added on' rather than integrated into the overall analyses. There is rarely an attempt to develop what the implications are for mainstream policy making, social and economic policy, government and society. Inserts appears as just that - one-paragraph touches of the 'add women' formula. We would suspect that the inclusion of a/the 'feminism chapter' (particularly in later editions of an existing text) may be a response to earlier criticisms of the inadequacy of their inclusion of gender analysis. Whilst the authors of such texts are to be commended, for their attempts to act upon such criticism, the 'add women' formula continues to trivialise feminist thought. Whatever the basis of the incremental or additive approach, it is essentially superficial and fails to grasp the necessity for the inclusion of feminist analysis as a mainstream analytical tool.

The linguistic tools used

Two types of language problems are noticeable in these texts, different from each other, but similarly inappropriate. Jaensch's (1992) text gives cause for concern with its quite sexist language. Although there appears to have been some attempt to use non-sexist language (that is, "his or her") the language of the book is highly gendered. For example, a number of politically flavoured aphorisms are scattered through the chapters (the source a thesaurus of quotations cited by Jaensch on p. 1), and of these over a quarter present politics as the domain of men (13 out of 49). Additionally, in Jaensch's discussion of "the ideal voter" (p. 402) the exclusive use of the masculine pronoun would suggest the "the ideal voter" is a male!

On the other side of the scale is the use, by Smith (1997), of inappropriate gender-neutral language. Used incorrectly, gender-neutral language can effectively disguise or cloak the gendered character of particular issues. Thus for example, in Chapter 10 when the origins and labourist culture of the ALP is under discussion, reference is made to "workers" whereas the labourism of the ALP, Australian unionism and the labour movement was concerned with the interests of the working **man**. This use of ostensibly gender-neutral language is quite bipartisan. When discussing the Liberal Party of Australia (pp. 160-162) Smith states "Almost every Liberal Federal president has been a business**person**" (emphasis added). Has there ever been a Federal President of the Liberal Party who was a businesswoman? Has there ever been a Federal President of the Liberal Party who was a woman? As the answer to both questions is no, then the sentence would read more honestly: "Almost every Liberal Federal president has been a business**man**" (emphasis added). Similarly in Chapter 19 "The news media"

Smith describes the media takeovers of the late 1980s "... a number of business**people** became caught up in an over-optimistic business climate and made extremely high takeover bids for media companies" (p. 334, emphasis added). They were not businesspeople, rather Alan Bond and Kerry Packer were, or are, business**men**. Such concerns are not trivial. Whether this inaccurate use of gender neutral language is an artefact either of the publisher's house style or of tokenism, is irrelevant - it disguises the gendered character of politics and business in Australia, and glosses women's lack of participation in these domains. It does women a disservice.

The incorporation of inaccurate information

What is perhaps more disturbing about certain authors' incorporation of women into their first year political science texts is that on occasion the authors do not present the realities of women's political involvement accurately. In particular, they do not discuss the contextual factors which explain certain facts about women's ability to participate equally in politics. When this happens, students necessarily misunderstand what they read. Indeed, in some cases, students are simply reading what is not true.

Parkin et al. (1994), for example, state that the adoption of gender issues by the ALP is attributable to the growth of new politics, with little further comment. No mention is made of the feminist pressure within the party which resulted in both the development of comprehensive women's policies, and the increase in women's preselection in winnable seats during the 1980s. Another instance of these authors' lack of regard for context is in detailing the fact that there is a greater proportion of women in the

Australian Senate, no mention is made of the system of proportional representation which has generally favoured women's representation.

Particularly troublesome, however, are statements such as the following made by Stewart and Ward (1996):

In Australia the challenge to patriarchal politics mounted by the women's movement has been marginalised and labelled as radical feminism ... Radical feminists favour autonomous, non-hierarchical collectivities. Their views may have had broad social impact but they have made little impact on mainstream politics. (p. 185)

If the 'challenge to patriarchal politics' were indeed only mounted by radical feminists, how do Stewart and Ward account for the ever increasing numbers of women in Parliament and indeed, the rise of the femocrats? Feminists of diverse backgrounds have individually (and in some cases collectively) had great impact on mainstream politics, and it is a great shame that these authors have not recognised this.

Perhaps more disturbing however, is the depiction of Ros Kelly standing behind the then Prime Minister (Keating) with an aggressive look on her face, obviously addressing the Opposition under the bold caption of 'SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOUR IN PARLIAMENT'. The decision to include a picture of a female member to show 'shameful behaviour' in Parliament, when they only represent 22.3 percent of the House of Representatives (and even fewer at the time Ms Kelly was in Parliament) and are generally accepted to behave less shamefully than their male colleagues is, at best, disappointing.

Feminism taken seriously?

The fundamental problem is that too many authors do not fully engage with the 'provocation' that feminism often represents. For example, in his New Zealand text book, Mulgan (1994) depicts feminism through a simplistic view

of society in which there is a rigid, narrow focus on the struggle between men and women. For Mulgan feminism is too radical and utopian, and possibly dangerous. The book concludes: "Those who think that radical transformation provides the only hope of improvement, not those who work for modest and incremental reforms, are in effect the strongest ideological allies of the rich and powerful. By concentrating on the impossible they help to impede the possible" (p. 308). This rather outdated perception of feminism obscures the changing dynamics of feminist theory and practice and confirms popular (media) misconceptions of feminism. Alternatively, several authors (including Lovell et al.) espouse Inglehart's 'post materialist values' thesis, resulting in the women's movement and feminism being presented dismissively as 'lifestyle issues' and 'lifestyle choices' resulting from the rise in post materialist values.

There are some writers – sadly the minority – who do take feminist thought seriously. Under the heading of political theory, Maddox (1996) discusses feminist political theory, with specific reference to the notion that 'the personal is political' and he considers the challenge this presents to liberalism. It is of course very difficult to reconcile the two positions, and as Maddox himself points out, "... the liberal democrat would want to preserve a conceptual separation between the public and private spheres, since the intrusion of the state into all aspects of our private lives would be unthinkable." Whilst Maddox rejects the feminist definition of politics. he does acknowledge that feminist theory provides a distinct approach for the study of politics.

Conclusion

These texts are those which most introductory Politics students are exposed to and hence those which might arguably be considered the most influential. They fall into three groups which could be described broadly as 'good in parts', 'needing to be supplemented by appropriate readings' and 'to be avoided'. The first group, which includes Emy and Hughes (1991), Maddox (1996), Mulgan (1994), Parkin et al. (1994), and Smith (1997) are texts which engage with feminist theory even if it tends to be ghetto-ised into separate chapters. The second group, which consists of Davies et al. (1993) and Stewart and Ward (1996), use conventional institutional analysis to consider women's participation in politics and hence tend to construct the political activity of women principally in terms of interest group activity. The third group, Lovell et al. (1995) and the three texts by Jaensch, either ignore or actively exclude women as mainstream players in Australian political life.

What is most disturbing is that almost without exceptions these texts demonstrate a stubborn resistance to considering gender to be a substantive issue in Australian politics and as equally constitutive of politics as the so-called 'mainstream' issues. In addition, feminist analysis cannot be considered an 'optional extra'. A 'feminism chapter', whilst better than nothing, does not absolve the authors of what purport to be **comprehensive** introductory politics texts, of their responsibilities to engage with the substantial body of feminist thought. Without the inclusion of the critical analytical insights of feminism, any analysis of Australian political life can only be partial, limited and hence flawed.

We are not arguing for a model of teaching introductory politics that is reductive to 'women's issues'. Rather, we challenge the assumption that existing texts are neutral with respect to gender. These introductory texts are gendered in that they are *masculinist*, the *male* is the norm. Thus these texts are reductionist with respect to gender. Australian politics is gendered - it is *masculinist*, the *male* is norm. Most of these texts do little to question this state of affairs.

The Way Forward?⁷

Is the best we can say of these textbooks that some of them have 'added women' more comprehensively than others? That improvement in the treatment of gender can be measured merely by the inclusion of more index references in subsequent editions of offending texts? We think not. Our disillusionment with the current crop of Australian first year textbooks reflects a deeper dissatisfaction with the conventional approaches to teaching Australian politics as exemplified by most of these books: their approaches to gender and women are merely indicative of greater problems in the structure and content of the typical first year curriculum.

We need therefore to consider what we believe the roles of both first year Politics and introductory Politics texts to be. We would suggest that they are to introduce students to the substantive content of Australasian politics, in order to provide them with opportunities to evaluate institutions, practices and theories critically. In addition, we should be supporting students in analysing current political issues using the tools of theory. If therefore, a University education is about assisting students to develop their skills of critical analysis, then it is reasonable to expect that texts should engage critically with **existing** institutions and practices.

Thus we believe that Australasian political textbooks need to do more than merely parallel the gendered character of Australasian politics⁸. We believe

⁷ This section is loosely based upon material by Ann Capling as part of the collective effort embodied in this review.

⁸ The issues and language to be included in proposals for a new Preamble to the Australian Constitution clearly illustrate this gendering. Whereas the Women's Constitutional Convention of January 1998 recommended that the principles which should be adhered to in relation to constitutional change should include "gender equity in all *processes of change*" and that any new preamble to the Australian constitution should include "commitment to equality including equality

that Australasian political texts which employ the insights of theory -- including feminism -- are needed if Australasian political practices and institutions are to be subjected to critical analysis.

There is a number of ways of incorporating gender into first year teaching which moves beyond treating gender as a tutorial topic or textbook chapter. One way is to adopt the approach used by feminist historians who challenge the conventional male-centred, public sphere-oriented periodisation of history. A similar strategy in Australasian politics might reproblematised Australasian institutions in a way that makes power relations - and therefore issues of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality - central to their description and analysis. An approach along these lines might deal with the institutions of the Australian Federation settlement, citizenship, post-war reconstruction, republicanism, and the welfare state. There is no shortage of material to support the approach of examining the changing nature and meaning of Australian political values and shifting power relationships -- examples would include work such as that by Peter Beilharz, Helen Irving (for example, 1997, 1999) Sheila Shaver and van Acker (for example, 1999).

The particular policy domain of welfare is illustrative - it is impossible (or at least absurd) to talk about the rise and decline of Australasian welfare

between women and men and racial equality” (<http://www.womensconv.dynamite.com.au>), and the Canberra Constitutional Convention of February 1998 (the Con Con) recommended that the inclusion of gender equality in a new preamble was worthy of ‘consideration’, the Prime Minister’s draft Preamble of March 1999, specifically excludes any mention of the ‘politically correct’ gender equality. This lack of commitment to gender equality is depressing given that 1999 is the centenary of non-indigenous women’s suffrage in WA and the centenary of women’s suffrage at the Commonwealth level is only 3 years away. Similarly depressing is the refusal in the PM’s preamble to acknowledge, let alone embrace the High Court’s native title decisions and the potential for reconciliation that these provide to all Australians as we approach the centenary of White Australia.

states in a non-gendered way. One need only consider how the welfare state replaced or at least gave public support to the private sphere of women in their domestic roles of rearing and teaching children, caring for the sick and invalid and aged, and providing basic the means to existence through gardening and animal husbandry (sic) -- always useful when the male earner was thrown out of work. Not to mention the impact the expansion of the welfare state had in terms of white collar employment opportunities for women. Nor the centrality of welfare support for the clients of the welfare state, especially single mothers and impoverished widows. And finally, the gendered implications of the dismantling of the welfare state in Australasia (see for example, Shaver, 1998, O'Connor et al., 1999).

This is not to say of course, that we should be not be introducing students to the Constitution, the High Court, responsible government, federalism, parliament, the bureaucracy and political parties. These are the basic building blocks of the Australian political system. But unless we as teachers or as writers of textbooks begin to ask ourselves -- and more importantly, our students -- some fundamental questions about the underlying power relations that created, shaped and reshape these institutions, we are unlikely to make much progress on dealing with issues of inclusion and exclusion in Australian politics. Or is it just too 'political' to ask how our political institutions came to be, whom they benefit, and how they change?

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