

Book Review: The Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions and the Internet: Australia in Transnational Perspective

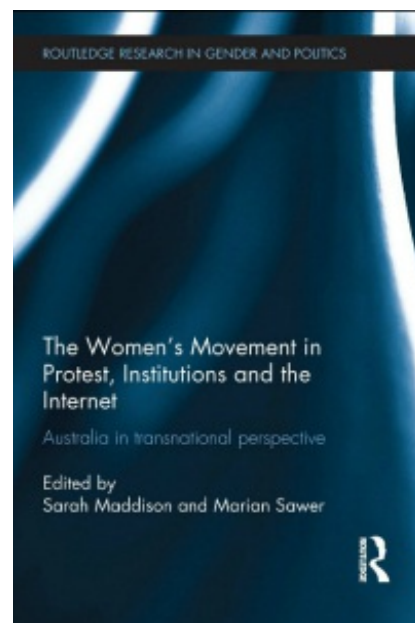
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*The death of feminism is regularly proclaimed in the West. Yet at the same time feminism has never had such an extensive presence, whether in international norms and institutions, or online in blogs and social networking campaigns. This book argues that the women's movement is not over; but rather social movement theory has led us to look in the wrong places. **Elizabeth Evans** finds that this is essential reading for those interested in finding out more about the dynamic and varied nature of the Australian women's movement.*

The Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions and the Internet: Australia in Transnational Perspective. Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer (eds.). Routledge. July 2013.

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Julia Gillard's 2012 parliamentary [denunciation of sexism and misogyny](#) shone a light on the highly gendered culture of Australian politics. The anger and eloquence with which the former Prime Minister spoke attracted worldwide attention, underscoring the fact that the presence of a female Prime Minister does not eradicate sexism or gender inequality. As such, [Sarah Maddison](#) and [Marian Sawer](#)'s collection of essays exploring the 'state' of the women's movement in Australia is both timely and important. The central argument is that despite continued gendered inequalities, the women's movement is alive and well, operating in multiple traditional and emerging spaces. The collection includes a wide range of interesting and well-written essays, spanning a host of issues and modes of activism. It is, for instance, refreshing to see research exploring roller derby as a feminist sport (Ch.7), the discursive problems surrounding Slutwalk (Ch.9) and increasing uses of the Internet to mobilise and engage feminist activists (Ch. 8); alongside analysis of women's policy agencies (Ch.5 & 6) and the broader project of mapping out how, where and when the women's movement engages with the state (Ch.4).



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Much has been written about the resurgence of feminism, feminist activism and the women's movement in western democracies over the past decade; yet all too frequently studies fail to acknowledge the transnational nature of the women's movement, and the various and interconnected ways in which it operates. Indeed, the international and transnational nature of the women's movement becomes progressively important with the increased availability of the internet and new social media allowing for greater engagement and dialogue across state boundaries and time zones. Maddison and Sawer's book situates the Australian women's movement within its transnational context, albeit within the Anglophone world, seeking to demonstrate links and continuities, explored in depth in chapter 10. This is a real strength of the book and one that rightly recognises the international character of the women's movement.

The



Julia Gillard at the Labor Party Conference 2011. Credit: [Liam Mendes](#) CC BY-SA 2.0

decision to focus on the women's rather than feminist movement is interesting and the editors spell out the importance of distinguishing between the two, noting that they don't include the word 'feminist' in their definition of the women's movement (p.3). However, this is a difficult distinction to make at times and it's telling that at certain points in the collection authors use the terms interchangeably (p.55). I highlight this not as a criticism of the authors but rather as being indicative of the empirical difficulties facing those who seek to distinguish between two such closely related and overlapping movements.

It is heartening that all contributors agree that the women's movement is alive and well, and operating in a variety of spaces; there is, however, less consensus regarding whether or not this amounts to a 'third wave'. For instance whilst Dahlerup notes in her analysis of continuity between the first and second wave of feminism that 'there maybe a third wave' (p.21), Maddison, in her analysis of Slutwalk, observes that 'there is little evidence to suggest that we were then, or are now, in another wave of feminist activism' (p.135). The uncertainty regarding whether the current iteration of the women's movement constitutes a third wave is in and of itself interesting and, to my mind at least, reinforces the need to account for political, cultural, geographical and temporal context when discussing the applicability of the wave narrative.

The book draws upon a wide range of empirical evidence to support the analysis of the women's movement in Australia; perhaps the most important of these is the large quantitative dataset that maps the various activities and organisations that were operating in 2005. Whilst not always a site for much critical engagement, the appendix provides a very useful overview of the methods employed. In particular the methods used to analyse blogging should be of interest as scholars develop their understanding of how to study these now established forms of political engagement.

There is an impressive line-up of writers included in this collection, combining internationally renowned scholars with early career academics; as the editors note, this was a deliberate decision and enhances the feminist sentiment behind the project, namely to adopt a wide ranging and inclusive approach to the study of how, where and in what ways the women's movement is currently operating in Australia. I would recommend this book to students and scholars of feminism and social movements; the book does not require (or assume) a knowledge of Australian politics and as such it is essential reading for those interested in finding out more about the dynamic and varied nature of the Australian women's movement.

Dr Elizabeth Evans is Lecturer in Politics at the University of Bristol. Her book, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats: Representing Women?*, was published by Manchester University Press in 2011, and she has published articles in *Parliamentary Affairs*, *British Politics*, *Representation*, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* and *The Political Quarterly*. She is currently working on a comparative analysis of UK and US third wave feminism due to be published with Palgrave. [Read more reviews by Elizabeth](#).

