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The Double Delegitimatisation of Julia Gillard: Gender, the media, and Australian political culture

Abstract

This article *explores Australian media coverage of Julia Gillard's leadership*. It employs a comparative discourse analysis of the gendered nature of media reporting on her sexism and misogyny speech and eventual demise. The article places these gendered framings within two contexts: that of the more general gendered expectations of the double bind facing all women leaders; and the more specific challenge *to Australia's women leaders*, posed by exclusivist national identity narratives. These narratives – of mateship, the ANZAC myth, and various apparently ideal-type masculinities – serve to further disassociate Australian women from positions of national leadership. Together, we argue that the twin constraints of gender expectations and exclusivist national identity narratives amounted to a double delegitimisation *of Julia Gillard's leadership, on the basis of her being a woman leader, generally, and an Australian woman leader, specifically.*

Keywords: Julia Gillard, gender, politics, history, newspapers, media, discourse, narrative.

Introduction

In the summer of 2013, as Julia Gillard was deposed as Australia's first female prime minister, Jackman (2013) noted that, notwithstanding the usual public acrimony of Australian politics, there is a "special vengeance suffered by women" leaders. This was certainly seen to be the case in gendered media framings of Gillard's infamous 'sexism and misogyny' speech, in October 2012 (Donaghue 2015; Wright and Holland 2014, 466). And, as this article shows, a number of these framings were continued through to the end of her tenure. However, at the time of Gillard's ousting, in June 2013, there were indications that a process of introspection had begun within the Australian media. This article explores these two important moments in Australian politics and history, arguing, first, that media framings must be understood within the long history of Australian political culture's exclusivist national identity narratives. And, second, the (more nuanced) tone in 2013, was enabled in significant part by her return to traditional female typed roles when she was removed from power: victim, rather than victor; and a return to the domestic, rather than public, sphere. Both moments, we suggest, remained within the dominant patriarchal narratives of Australian political life, largely reinforcing rather than challenging foundational discourses.

This, then, is the article's key argument and provocation: gendered coverage in 2012 followed logically from, and apparent introspection in 2013 remained well within, the confines of exclusivist national identity narratives. We argue that Gillard's gendered treatment at the hands of the media must be understood against two specific contexts, interwoven in Australian political culture. First, the article shows how a general (western) double bind afflicts media coverage of women leaders. Second, and more provocatively, the article suggests that the Australian context is exclusivist in unique ways, due to its prevalent national identity narratives, which facilitate a specific bias against Australia's women leaders. Together, we argue that the twin constraints of the double bind and exclusivist national identity narratives amounted to a double delegitimisation of Julia Gillard's leadership, on the basis of her being a woman leader, generally, and an Australian woman leader, specifically. This occurred through the perceived mutual exclusivity of, first, women and leadership, and, second, women and the Australian national identity. Clearly, this is a large and important

claim, which warrants further reflection. For Julia Gillard, it means that her prime ministership appears to mark a significant moment rather than a critical juncture in the evolution of the Australian political landscape, as media coverage continued to perpetuate troubling exclusivist narratives.

The article therefore makes three linked contributions. First, it presents new empirical material, analysing media coverage of Gillard's final month in office (with additional new empirical data from October 2012). Second, this data enables an original critical comparative analysis, which underpins an important argument on (change and) continuity within gendered Australian media discourse surrounding Gillard's 'sexism and misogyny' speech and her departure from office. Third, the article situates these empirical and theoretical arguments within critical gender and constructivist historically focused Australian politics literatures, providing further support for the argument that Gillard was delegitimised as a leader by virtue of being a woman leader (Trimble 2016: 313; Wright and Holland, 2014). We add to this an understanding of the cultural specificities underpinning Australia as a nation which contribute to Gillard's double delegitimation.

The article is structured in five parts. First, we develop a theoretical framework, premised on the notion of a double bind, conceptualising the role played by the Australian media as a gender mediator. Second, we situate Gillard's prime ministership, and media representations of her leadership, within the history of Australian political culture's exclusivist narratives. In turn, we consider narratives of mateship, the ANZAC myth, and various apparently ideal-type images of masculinity. Third, we develop a linked discourse analytic methodology. Fourth, we employ this comparative gender-sensitive discourse analysis in order to reveal the most prominent tropes and themes in media coverage of Gillard leadership in October 2012, following her impromptu speech in parliament on sexism and misogyny, and June 2013, as her reign neared its end. Fifth, we consider the impact of both moments, located within the historical development of Australian political culture.

Gender, leadership and the media

As Hall and Donoghue (2012: 1) note, when she came to power in June 2010, Julia Gillard did not appear to conform with the usual expectations for an Australian Prime Minister: not only was she a woman; she was also unmarried, childless and a redhead. These factors were drawn upon in opposition accusations of her ‘deliberate barrenness’ (e.g. see Appleby 2015: 156) and in subsequent media coverage which drew attention to her childless status. An image of an empty fruit bowl in her Canberra apartment was held up as further evidence of the ‘non-traditional’ role she had adopted. Repeated media coverage of any apparent style faux pas and her difficulties negotiating high-heeled shoes reinforced the notion that this was a prime minister struggling to reconcile the expectation upon her to ‘act like a women’ and the commonplace masculine typed qualities, more synonymous with (political) leadership. This constructed binary constitutes a useful heuristic. The task of embodying the category of ‘woman leader’ has been described as akin to walking a ‘tightrope of gender expectations’ (Johnson, 2010: 1), with apparently contradictory gender expectations pulling female leaders in different directions and structuring media portrayals along a spectrum of gender-premised expectations, which stretch from ‘woman’ to ‘leader’.

The term double bind highlights that women leaders get caught between the (constructed) mutually incompatible expectations of womanhood and leadership (e.g. Hall and Donoghue 2012; Stevenson 2013). They are required to achieve an impossible balance between subservience and strength, timidity and ambition, emotion and rationality, amongst many other traditionally constructed gender binaries (Campus 2013; see also: Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Larimer, Hannagan, and Smith 2007; Mavin, Bryans, and Cunningham 2010, 563; Heliman et al 2004). Failing to get that balance right incurs electoral and political costs. As a gender mediator, the Australian media plays an important role in perpetuating the double bind, holding women politicians to account for both their role as a leader and their gender. Failing to ‘do gender’ appropriately, for women politicians, has implications on a magnitude comparable to failing to lead effectively (e.g. Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham 2010; Hall and Donoghue 2012). Appearing too assertive can readily be framed, along gender lines, as being too bitter, quarrelsome and selfish (Schnurr 2008: 556). Women

leaders therefore face the unenviable task of projecting just enough power, strength and ambition without going so far as to fail to ‘do gender’ well, whilst also demonstrating emotion and feeling, without being seen as too weak for leadership. Negotiating this double bind is therefore a challenging task for women leaders, and the media acts as a gender mediator in assessing the success or failure of women leaders in achieving this careful positioning.

In its role as a gender mediator – evaluating and arbitrating on the performance of woman leaders – the media serves to reproduce the categories which introduce gendered framings into reporting in the first place. As Gillard herself has since noted, in her role as Prime Minister, her mere presence – the very fact of her existence – challenged these gendered preconceptions, including the traditional view of women as embodying a role within the home and outside of the public view.

“Some in the media would not refer to me as prime minister ... They were deeply uncomfortable at dealing with a woman in a leadership position” (Gillard 2014b).

This was the context in which Gillard worked as prime minister. Looking back on her tenure, Gillard has spoken of the difficulties faced by a woman leader, whose very existence challenged the traditional binary separation of women and leadership, as she was required to balance the ‘performance’ – in her word, posture – of meeting expectations for being a woman and being prime minister:

“The stereotypes that are still in our culture ... men do and women appear, and men act and women feel. So as a woman in a position of leadership who is called upon to act and do things it is hard to get the combination and the posture right of feeling as well. If you look like you’re feeling too much it will look like you aren’t competent to do the acting ... to get the things done they want a leader to do. If you look like you are not feeling enough there is a ‘coldness’ to that because they expect a woman to feel emotions” (Gillard 2014b).

This culmination of gendered expectations led Gillard to argue that her position as prime minister left her trapped, looking out from the bars of a “gender prison” (Gillard, 2014a: loc 1550).

Australia's exclusivist national identity narratives

In Australia, the inherent basis of gender-premised inequality is cultural, pervasive, and enduring. Moreover, it is central to commonplace understandings of the national Self. Gendered narratives of Australian identity have been endemic to the nation since foundation. In fact, gendered narratives have helped to underpin the very possibility and conceptualisation of an Australian nation, answering questions about what it means to be 'an Australian'. These gendered narratives have shaped the contours of the Australian social, economic and political landscape for the best part of two centuries, such that Australia possesses an explicitly gendered political and social terrain.

To map this terrain, gendered narratives of the Australian identity are explored in three interrelated parts. First, we trace the exclusivist conception of 'mateship' that continues to lie at the heart of 'Aussie culture', and which is frequently (re-)evoked in political (and media) discourse. Second, we revisit the central premise of the birth of the Australian national identity through the perceived 'coming of age' of the fledgling Australian nation on the beaches of Gallipoli in 1915. Third, we trace this foundational national myth, through associated narratives of mateship, via its linking with and manifestation in three related and exclusivist images of Australian-ness and Australian masculinity: the Larrikin, the Ocker, and the Bushman.

'Mateship' is the most prominent of the narratives, images and myths, which undergirds notions of Australian-ness. Emerging in the nineteenth century, the politico-cultural construct of 'mateship' was an important discursive tool in the creation of a positive image of unionised, working class labour (Dyrenfurth 2007). Looking forward and back, 'mateship' evoked a perceived pre-modern bond of trust between friends, which would be matched in an egalitarian (socialist) future (Dyrenfurth and Quartly 2007). From the outset, this was a myth premised on exclusions, of both race and gender. Mateship was 'manly, true and white' (Spence 1909, cited in Dyrenfurth 2007: 212); it was centred on the 'sex segregated involvement of men' and implied the 'physical and intellectual exclusion of women' (Bell 1973: 1, cited in Dyrenfurth 2007: 213). Denoting the camaraderie of comradeship between working men, the success of the Australian Labor movement

helped to cement the myth's prominence in images of the national identity. But, 'mateship is a sentiment that while inclusive also excludes' (Piterman 2014). The egalitarian nature of this populist myth was useful in veiling anxieties about and tensions between races, classes, and genders, achieved through the constructed invisibility of elites, ethnic minorities and women. The prominence of the myth was, in fact, reliant upon these very exclusions and the oppositional identities it (re-) produced.

The maleness (and associated connotations with unionism) of 'mateship' helped to facilitate its partial supplanting by 'the ANZAC legend of wartime sacrifice' (Dyrenfurth 2007: 213). Dyrenfurth argues that the popularity of the ANZAC myth was such that it "largely supplanted unionist mateship in the national psyche" (Dyrenfurth 2007: 220). For us, this is too strong; we see the ANZAC legend as complementary component of a national mythology of mateship, which united working class Australians in opposition to, first, elites (and traitor 'scabs'), and, second, foreign enemies (and weak leaders), in two distinct contexts: uniting on behalf of unionised Labour in nineteenth century Australia and dying for the cause of the British Empire on the battlefields of World War One. For former Prime Minister John Howard, for example, "Australian mateship and national identity" saw their "fiery birth in the ANZAC legend (fighting for, not against, the British Empire), rather than in the class conflict of the 1890s" (ibid.) As Anthony Burke (2008: 236) has put it, this was about "shivering in muddy khaki on a far-off battlefield, desperate not to fail our mates".

The ANZAC legend portrays "the birth of the Australian nation through sacrifice in war, suggesting 'that the Australian national identity was forged through the remarkable courage shown by Australian soldiers in the face of overwhelming odds in a military campaign at Gallipoli in 1915'" (McDonald and Jackson 2008, 16, cited in Holland 2010: 654). Here, again, we see an exclusively and exclusionary male narrative of the national identity. And it is a narrative that is particularly powerful, as it is perpetually revisited in popular and political culture as the foundational moment of Australian national consciousness. The ANZAC myth suggests the notion of Australian statehood achieved widespread resonance as those back home heard of the tragic heroism displayed in mutual acts of wartime sacrifice.

The appeal of this national myth has not waned with time. Gillard's predecessor, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, argued forcefully that Gallipoli remains a "part of our national consciousness... part of our national psyche... part of our national identity" (Sydney Morning Herald 2008, cited in McDonald 2010: 287).

Within a conception of the national identity as forged in the fires of mutual wartime sacrifice – of fighting and dying alongside mates as comrades in arms – it is the figure of the 'Aussie Digger' that looms largest as the literal and figurative embodiment of Australian values. The term 'digger', as with all narrativised mythologies, has contentious roots and etymology, but is generally understood to have originally referred to working class Australian miners and subsequently their khaki-clad comrades on the beaches of Gallipoli and beyond. It therefore reinforces the connections of unionised mateship and ANZAC sacrifice. And, like those other mythologised figures of Australian culture – the Larrikin, the Ocker, and the Bushman – it is, once again, a constructed category that appeals to a particular and contingent set of imagined masculine qualities that are seen to be the exclusive preserve of men.

Like the mateship of 'Aussie Diggers', Larrikinism and Ockerism (re)produce, celebrate and glorify working-class masculine qualities. The laid-back, authority-opposed culture of Larrikinism and down-to-earth qualities of Ockerism have been important in recent appeals to a 'relaxed and comfortable' national identity and 'frank and honest' calls to debate immigration by John Howard (see McDonald 2011; and Summers 2011), as Australians have been encouraged to 'speak their minds', protected by claims of 'common sense' and criticism of 'political correctness'. While the former is associated mainly with (jovial) young Australian men and the latter encompasses a broader group of 'everyday Australians', enjoying simple pursuits outside of sophisticated urban centres, both include a sense of "conviviality: comradeship with a touch of good-hearted sexism" (Chipperfield 2001). In all of these mythical, ideal type figures, we see an exclusively male image of Australia, Australians, and Australian-ness (see Bellanta 2012 on the exclusions of the Larrikin tradition). As Piterman (2014) notes, 'the Larrikin lives on at the expense of Australian female leadership'. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the popular image of the Australian Bushman – never Bushwoman – as a fiercely capable, self-

reliant, but affable man. Such modernist fantasies of man's triumph over and taming of the wild have been endlessly reproduced in political discourse and popular culture. They have helped to shape and structure Australian social and economic relations, as well as Australian political culture.

While appeals to national identity may well have helped to create a sense of imagined community in the young country of Australia, they have reached something of a crescendo in Australia in the past two decades. John Howard and Tony Abbott, in particular, made frequent appeals to the ANZAC myth and narratives of mateship, at times attempting to embody the qualities of the Larrikin, the Ocker, and even the Bushman, albeit in a modern form. In this period, selective masculine traits have once again been relocated at the heart of the 'new mainstream' of Australian political culture. It was against the backdrop of this immediate context that Kevin Rudd and then Julia Gillard would become prime minister. It was a context characterised by a 'populist hegemony', achieved through the 'mainstreaming' (Mondon 2012) of conservative and exclusionary (gendered) images of Australia(ns) (see also Clyne 2005; and Goot and Watson 2007 on populism). Gillard therefore faced both general and specific gendered challenges to her role as Prime Minister. In Australia, we suggest that constructed narratives of gender identity and national identity come together to perform a double delegitimisation of women leaders. The difficulty of being a woman leader, we suggest, is particularly acute in Australia, due to the interweaving of gender expectations with foundational and exclusionary national identity narratives. It is this idea of a doubly oxymoronic role – of 'woman leader' and 'woman leader of Australia' – that our article develops in assessing Australian media coverage of Julia Gillard. We argue that this double delegitimisation informed the context in which Gillard's work as prime minister was reported in the media; while at times being invoked specifically – usually in the form of mateship and blokeyness – this narrative context helped to make possible (other) explicitly gendered media frames in making sense of Gillard's speech, tenure and demise.

Methodology

The article analyses media coverage in five of Australia's largest newspapers – The Australian, The Courier Mail, The Herald Sun, the Sydney Morning Herald, and The West Australian – which have circulations from 135,000 to over half a million. They are 'five of Australia's most important and influential media outlets', which play an important role in 'setting the national media agenda and tone, reaching and influencing a particularly large swathe of the Australian population' (Wright & Holland, 2014). Although differences in style are evident, pervasive framings were consistent across all of these outlets, indicating the significance of the underpinning cultural ideas identified in the article's opening two sections.

Two periods of Gillard's tenure are considered. First, coverage during October 2012, in the four weeks following Gillard's speech on sexism and misogyny, is analysed. Second, coverage during the final four weeks of her government, in June 2013, is analysed, compared and contrasted. Articles were selected for dataset inclusion, using LexisNexis software, based on the use of three keywords: Gillard, sexism, and misogyny. Coding was conducted manually, using NVivo software. A total of two hundred and sixty-six articles were included in the dataset and analysed. All articles were coded (despite saturation being reached before completion), producing over 70,000 words of coded output.

Articles were analysed using gender-sensitive discourse analysis, whereby language is seen to be culturally embedded and co-constitutive of broader power relations (*ibid.*; and see, in particular, Fairclough 1995; 2000; 2003). This requires an analysis that 'looks beyond' the text itself, connecting it to broader operations of power in society as co-constitutive of them. A gender sensitive discourse analysis is alive to patriarchal discourses and the power relations they sustain (e.g. Lombardo and Meier 2008; Ferree 2008). Our approach is influenced by a wide and interdisciplinary range of similar studies (e.g. Donaghue 2015; Lawrence and Rose 2010; Mugge 2013; Krogstad and Storvik 2010; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover 2009). We inductively and deductively code frequent and major discursive nodal points, such as 'anger', locating them hierarchically within broader organising categories, such as 'emotion' (Holland 2013: 41), and 'horizontally', in terms of their

relationships with other nodal points. Anger and strategy, for example, might present contrasting and competing framings, rather than complementary accounts, whereas as anger and sadness might both belong to an overarching and structuring theme of emotionality. Ultimately, informed by a critical approach to discourse analysis, we consider the location and implications of these frames within broader political, social and cultural life. In particular, in keeping with our understanding of the narrative context underpinning Gillard's reporting in the media, our gender sensitive discourse analysis is focused on two types of broader interrelated discourse: (i) patriarchal narratives, including the tensions of the double bind and its tendency to disassociate women from leadership; and (ii) narratives of the Australian national identity, including the (at times, implicit) tendency to exclude women from popular tropes of Australian-ness, through generalisation and the mobilisation of key identity markers.

Sexism and misogyny

In October 2012, Gillard delivered what would become known as the 'sexism and misogyny' speech to Parliament (Gillard 2012). In response to a question from the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott, Gillard called out his sexism and misogyny as well as that of his Liberal Party. The speech went viral and was acclaimed internationally for highlighting the patriarchy inherent in Australian politics (Wright & Holland, 2014). In contrast, the Australian media framed the speech as ill-conceived and accused Gillard of 'playing the gender card' (Donaghue, 2015; Worth, Augoustinos, and Hastie, 2015). Gillard herself sought to resist being defined by her gender throughout her time as prime minister, viewing it as inconsequential to her leadership (Sorrentino & Augoustinos, 2016); her 'sexism and misogyny' speech therefore represented a notable deviation from her previous approach to the issue. Despite these efforts, Gillard's time in office was significantly influenced by the gendered nature of Australian politics (Johnson, 2015) to the extent that her time in office is remembered, in considerable part, not for her leadership or reforms, but rather for being that of Australia's first female prime minister (Kennedy 2015: 191). It is also remembered for the manner in which Australia's first female prime minister was treated by the Australian media because of her gender (ibid).

Media coverage of Gillard's sexism and misogyny speech framed her parliamentary performance with reference to the everyday – and decidedly apolitical – categories of wife and mother. In contrast Tony Abbott was constructed as an everyday man: a husband and father, but also a rational, Australian man, confronted with 'female unreasonableness'. Marital and maternal metaphors – of scolding the long-suffering husband or the naughty child – were commonplace within this framing (e.g. Probyn 2012). Campbell (2012), in *The Herald Sun*, noted that 'The look on Abbott's face was a study in male helplessness. Each time the camera cut away to him he appeared to be experiencing one of the many different emotions that pass through every man's head when confronted with female unreasonableness' (Campbell 2012). Commentators reported their own anger with Gillard and consequent silencing by their own wives at home; Abbott was going through the same thing that they were; and they could associate with Abbott's 'ham-fisted attempts to display his understanding of modern women' (Syvret 2013).

“Every man would recognise the flicker of panic in Abbott's eyes, when he switches from blokey guffaw to ‘hang on, she might have a point’. This is the son being told off by the mother, the partner being given the ultimatum”. (Wilson 2012).

In this reading, ordinary Australian 'blokes' – the mythologised backbone of the nation – were being forced 'to view politics through the lens of a first-year gender studies curriculum' (Maley 2013), with an agenda portrayed as not only un- but potentially anti-Australian. Abbott, for many of the journalist reporting the speech, quite simply, 'resembles millions of Australian men' (ibid). Such framings pre-dated the media reporting of this speech and would endure through to his own prime ministership: 'he is this Ocker' (Marr 2010) and 'his brutal insensitivity just might... consolidate the Ocker vote' (Greer 2010). As Switzer and Day had already noted, 'there is something quintessentially Australian about Abbott's Larrikin streak'; in this reading, his sexism simply rendered him an ordinary and likeable Aussie bloke.

In conjunction with the implicit portrayal of allegations of sexism as anti-Australian, media coverage also explicitly noted that Gillard's performance was channelling something decidedly un-Australian: the influence of a foreign kind of politics that did not belong Down Under. Frequently, the easiest route to making this claim was to note the nationality of Gillard's recently-employed political advisor. As

Pearson (2012) noted, the 'sexism diversion is a classic tactic already employed in Britain by Gillard's Scottish spinmeister, John McTernan'. Such diversions were argued to be fundamentally un-Australian. For example:

'The logical absurdity of the gender wedge was shown by Christopher Pyne when he argued that it should be unparliamentary to refer to a fellow member as "a good bloke", since a reference to a woman's gender in similar terms would apparently be a transgression' (ibid.).

Together, Gillard's 'foreign' tactics and Abbott's embodiment of traditional Australian gender characteristics came together in his wife's defence of the Leader of the Opposition: 'I just want to add a bit of balance to this and to present the fact that he is a pretty ordinary bloke, no airs and graces, who enjoys time with his family and is surrounded by strong, capable women'. This was in stark contrast to Gillard, deemed to be mobilising un-Australian tactics, in a manner that demonstrated she failed to lead by relapsing into female stereotypes - she had lost control of her emotions, was full of rage and had resorted to screaming.

Gillard's demise

The tone of Australian media coverage of Prime Minister Gillard during her final month in office demonstrated both change from and continuity with coverage of her sexism and misogyny speech in October 2012. On the one hand, building on the notion that her political tactics were un-Australian, the media continued to report on Gillard as a prime minister who was prepared to use her gender instrumentally in order to gain political, electoral and policy advantages (which served to dismiss the veracity of the issues raised). This line of reporting framed Gillard and her "feminist hit squad" had "foisted" a "gender war" "on Australia", as they swung "their handbags" in an attempt to land a political blow (Murray 2013; Onselen 2013; The Australian 2013; Shanahan 2013a). Within this framing, Gillard's Scottish political advisor was seen to be instrumentally using the issue as "a crutch designed to save Gillard personally" (Onselen 2013) through the portrayal of Abbott as "sexist, old-fashioned, pugilistic, combative and conservative" (e.g. Kelly 2013a, b; Shanahan 2013b). Australian media coverage claimed to see through this, insisting such tactics were alien to Australia, pure political theatre, and doomed to fail:

“[By playing the gender card] Gillard wasn't so much preaching to the converted but preaching to the shrill lunatic fringe; feminazis devoid of logic ... No doubt Gillard was trying to recapture the magic of the much YouTubed misogyny speech that resonated deeply with the Twitter faithful but left some of us wondering why the most powerful woman in the country was playing the victim ... If there is one thing the electorate hates more than unhinged feminists, it's hypocrisy” (Panahi 2012).

On the other hand, sections of the media did, at the same, begin to adopt a more contemplative and introspective tone, acknowledging the reality of the issues Gillard had initially raised in October 2012. Paul Syvret (2013), for example, focused on the need “to stop the vile vitriol” directed at the prime minister. He lamented the “storm of bile” that followed “menugate”, “witch” and “bitch” placards, and various other “grossly inappropriate and disrespectful intrusions” (ibid). “Sexist sledging” (Blake 2013), Syvret noted, was wildly out of line (compared with the treatment of former prime ministers) and attracting negative coverage overseas. International newspapers had begun to question if Australia, as “the land that political correctness forgot”, was witnessing a “naked, visceral hatred” that demonstrated the “extent to which sexism is tolerated” (Syvret 2013). Reports noted that debate had “degenerated into the trivial, the personal and the downright derogatory” (Courier Mail 2013); they were, nothing less than, “disgraceful sexist attacks on the Prime Minister” (Maiden 2013a). Gillard, the paper noted, had been “subjected to more naked hatred and personal abuse than any leader who has gone before her”, such that “the demeaning and very personal abuse levelled at the leader of what is a middle-ranked power and the 13th largest economy in the world is quite disturbing” (Courier Mail 2013). The newspaper, however, stopped short of reflecting on its own derogatory contributions to such debates.

In The Herald Sun, Samantha Maiden (2013b) noted that June 2013 was a “disgraceful” period in Australian politics, which “made a mockery of claims sexism no longer exists in Australian politics”. For Susie O’Brien (2013), despite cross-party condemnation, June’s events revealed that “Gender discrimination is still rife in Australian society” and Australian politics remains run by “sexist male dinosaurs”. David Crowe (2013), *The Australian’s* National Affairs Editor, noted the “dangerous

underbelly” of corrosive sexism that plagued Australia. The gender focused events of June 2013 were, Hudson and Johnston (2013) amongst others noted, widely condemned across the political spectrum. But, for O’Brien (2013), the conclusion was obvious: “Ultimately, it does matter that there are not enough women in Parliament. One in four is simply not enough ... Let’s change the structures that are holding women back”. Anne Summers (2013), author of *The Misogyny Factor*, stood out for her piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, that did acknowledge the important contribution of “the usual misogynist mainstream media crowd”, which had quickly reverted to tried and tested gender tropes of, for instance, “playing the gender card”. Summers’ piece also stood out for its strident defence and justification of the prime minister’s actions, language and policy, explaining why Gillard was being persecuted because of her gender.

It is this increasing space afforded for the articulation of ‘alternative’ framings of Gillard’s leadership, which are sympathetic to the message of her speech on sexism and misogyny, that distinguishes reporting in June 2013 from that of October 2012. While dominant framings remained they were now accompanied by a crucial corollary, pulling readers in an alternative direction. Sadly, we suggest that this was for two related reasons: (i) Gillard no longer failed to comply with the impossible demands of the double bind, generally, having, first, returned from public life to an explicitly family-oriented private sphere and, second, taken up a new role, in-line with gendered expectations, advocating for girls’ rights, as chair of the Board of Directors for the Global Partnership for Education; and (ii) with her tenure as prime minister ended, she was no longer a challenge to dominant narratives of the Australian national identity, specifically.

The gendered (double de-)legitimization of Australian political leadership

As Dyrenfurth (2007: 211) astutely reminds us, “Prime Minister John Howard’s rhetorical appropriation of egalitarian ideals, such as ‘mateship’, ‘battler’ and the ‘fair go’, are pertinent examples of the intersection of cultural and electoral politics. Howard ... successfully recast shibboleths of the Australian Left” that are premised on gendered narrations of what it is to be Australian. This rhetorical hegemony

helped to inspire “decade-long electoral success”, and limit “the collective desire to address inequality”, as “many on the Left have been content to leave masculinist icons such as mateship and the broad notion of ‘Australian Values’ to Howard” (ibid.). Whereas Dyrenfurth (2007: 215) can note how “Howard’s employment of the Australian vernacular, in particular, ‘mateship’”, helped him to embody national character, by virtue of her gender, and the exclusivist categories through which it and her nation are understood, Gillard was immediately and irrevocably precluded from association with such fundamental markers of national identity. Not only does this challenge her claims to ‘strong leadership’ – derived from qualities reserved for male Australians – moreover it challenges her essential Australian-ness. She is less readily a symbol for ‘good old’, ‘ordinary’ Australia than male counterparts who have repeatedly evoked and attempted to embody national mythologies such as mateship and its derivative associated images of the Digger, Larrikin, Ocker, Bushman, and Battler.

It is the relationship of Gillard and Abbott, then, structured through the narratives constituting the Australian national identity, that enable delegitimizing framings of Gillard’s October 2012 speech. Within these narratives, Abbott is all Australian men; he is Australia. Gillard, on the other hand, is occupying a series of related and equally impossible positions; she is Australia’s leader and Australia’s representative, despite being disavowed of both positions by virtue of being a woman. It is this double delegitimation that enables commentators such as Campbell (2012), to note that Abbott is representative of all “male helplessness”; his emotions are those of “every [Australian] man”. Abbott is, quite simply, “a man who resembles millions of Australian men” (ibid.). By virtue of his gender aligning with his job and ambition to lead Australia, Abbott’s position is legitimized in contrast to the prime minister. Gillard’s “female unreasonableness”, in this context, is seen to derive from more than simply her argument and daring to speak out on gender inequality; it derives from being: (i) a woman leader; and (ii) the woman leader of Australia. This last point was demonstrated through the divergence of national and international coverage; the

negative reading of the Australian press went far beyond concerns regarding political hypocrisy.¹

As Maley (2013) noted, the “model for leadership was created by white guys in the 1950s” and it “hasn't changed much since then” (Maley 2013). In contrast to Kevin Rudd, Maley (2013) argued that “Gillard's gender was difference enough for the Australian electorate. But on top of her atheism, her unmarried status and her childlessness, she was simply not "relatable" enough”. In short, the dominant narratives that make sense of leadership and the Australian nation meant that the deck was already stacked against Gillard, before her infamous speech to parliament. This was not lost on all commentators or on Tony Abbott. According to Sara Charlesworth, Tony Abbott’s explicit use of sexist and misogynist language was designed to tap into Australian patriarchy (Rourke 2012).

At the close of her leadership, Gillard’s embattled position and fall from power meant that she no longer represented a challenge to entrenched gender stereotypes. She had become victim, rather than victor, and her return to both the domestic sphere and a job that enabled her to perform her gender ‘appropriately’ resonated with traditional narratives of Australian society and the Australian nation. Together, these changes made Gillard a more accessible subject for reporting; one who did not challenge dominant discourses in the manner of a reigning woman leader. Returning to the domestic realm and falling victim to (legitimate) male ambition in the form of Kevin Rudd, Gillard no longer challenged dominant patriarchal expectations, as she had done when in power. The double bind unravelled as she apparently performed her gender more effectively at the expense of her leadership and her claims to represent the Australian nation. Indeed, on leaving office, Gillard promised Australia that she would become a particularly devoted aunt; partially addressing one of the most persistent gender-premised attacks she suffered as prime minister. This helped to create space for the media to adopt a tone of contrition and introspection, beginning to question, without overhauling, the dominant narratives at

¹ Gillard’s speech followed a scandal involving Speaker of the House Peter Slipper, who had been accused of sexist behaviour, having sent crude messages to female colleagues. Calls for his resignation placed Gillard in a difficult political position, given her narrow parliamentary majority.

the heart of what it means to lead Australia. As one article noted, the “push to redefine Labor on gender grounds hardly fits a party still essentially run by and for mates, usually defined on male terms”. (Cox 2013, emphasis added).

Conclusion

The gendered nature of much of the media coverage of Gillard during her time as prime minister can be understood to result from: (i) the role of the media as a gender mediator regulating the qualities acceptable for each gender, more generally (Gidengil and Everitt 2003; Wright and Holland 2014); and (ii) the role of specific and exclusionary narratives of the Australian national identity. Both operated together to structure the context within which Gillard’s performance would be evaluated and reported to the nation. Our contention is not that all of the Australian population is sexist; such a claim would be ludicrous. Rather, our argument is that Australia is sexist. The concept of Australia as a nation has been built upon a series of exclusions, the maintenance of which are necessary prerequisites for the preservation of national identity in lieu of a national conversation on the role of women within the state. Gillard then certainly faced a double bind, as do nearly all woman leaders in the western world, she also however, faced the double delegitimisation of being an Australian woman leader, whereby the category of woman is actively defined in opposition to perceived qualities of leadership and Australianness.

Various commentators noted that Gillard’s treatment by the media revealed the “brutal edge of sexism” (Needham and Power 2013) and “the dark seam of misogyny and sexism that appears to run through our culture” (Caro 2013). According to Campbell (2012), in October 2012, Gillard’s “female fans should savor their girl’s take-down of Abbott because I suspect she will come to regret drawing such a nasty caricature of a man who resembles millions of Australian men”. Together these arguments bring an important question to the fore: are Australian political, social, cultural and media landscapes uniquely patriarchal? Her Scottish political advisor noted as much, reflecting that Gillard faced “deep-rooted misogynist forces in society”, on the basis that although Australians believe “that everyone should be given a `fair go” there exists at the same time “a powerful sense of mateship, of male

values and a male-inscribed culture” (Lion 2012). This is obviously a vital question for Australia(ns) to wrestle with and attempt to resolve. We argue that our analysis shows this process has begun in only a very limited sense, despite Gillard’s prime ministership and her explicit highlighting of the problem.

In view of the limited and seemingly unlikely opportunity for dramatic change in Australian political culture, which perpetuates gender inequalities, perhaps it is better to look to the prospects of creeping, ‘gradual change over a long period brought about by sustained resistance to the dominant discourse’ (Jackson 2011). As Jackson (2011) argues, oppositional and alternative voices ‘can destabilise and deconstruct accepted knowledge, eventually leading to a’ crisis of credibility for politicians and/or the discourses which sustain them and their (patriarchal) policies. On being ousted from the prime ministership in June 2013, Gillard herself noted that gender did not explain everything or nothing of her time in charge. Of all the issues she experienced as prime minister gender was “the hardest to explain, to catch, to quantify” (Gillard, 2014a: loc 1550). She hoped, however, that it would be easier for the next woman leader in Australia. Our analysis indicates that, if this is to be proven correct, it will only be so in a very limited sense, in lieu of more wholesale national conversation and reflection. To be the woman leader is to walk a tightrope of gender expectations. To be a woman leader of Australia is to face a process of double delegitimisation, along the lines of enduring patriarchy and exclusionary patriotism. As Gillard noted, Tony Abbott would have benefited from a mirror in order to witness sexism. We suggest, as a start, it is imperative that the media also reflect in, as well as on, the mirror Gillard has effectively helped to hold up to all Australians.

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