
This International Women's Day, where are the Indigenous voices?

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International Women's Day is just another day in the colony for Indigenous women.

In the week leading up to International Women's Day, I was invited to participate on two ABC panel shows. One was on feminism and another on racism in sport, but as the allegations of sexual assaults in Canberra unfolded, I found myself no longer needed on either of them.



University of Queensland academic, Associate Professor Chelsea Watego.

I tell this story not because I am upset about not being on a television show. As someone who has a platform to speak, I am not looking for more airtime. I tell this story for the way in which it reveals settler women's imaginings of the intellectual capabilities of Indigenous women, even when it comes to matters that affect women.

Both cancellations came via texts, with similar wording that the proposed shows would go ahead at a later date. Interestingly, the proposed panellists I was to appear alongside still retained their spots, which led me to think about the possibilities, or rather parameters, for which the intellectual contributions of Aboriginal women can exist in this place, especially in the week that was.

The first show to cancel was Q&A who had approached me to be on a panel about feminism and general news in association with the All About Women Festival at the Sydney Opera House. As former co-host of the weekly Wild Black Women radio show and former lecturer in a university course called 'Gendered Business', I felt equipped to participate in the conversation.

But over a week out from the show, I was told I would not be needed because they were "taking a slightly different turn" to instead be a "focused discussion on the problems in the Liberal Party". Given the significance of the events in the news, I could appreciate the shift in focus, but I had naively presumed they would have still sought Indigenous representation on the topic, particularly when the program episode retained its name of "All about women".

It was earlier in the week that I received a phone call from ABC's *The Drum* inviting me to participate in a discussion about racism in sport. While I am not a sports fan, I had authored a few pieces on racism in sport, and suggested that perhaps on that basis I would be an appropriate fit. I was advised that an African American basketballer with experiences of racism, and a female economist and Collingwood supporter would also be joining.

But the day before the show, I received a text advising me that they "weren't having a decent chat about racism in sport any more" and that it would be rescheduled. Having tweeted about my disappointment with the experience, I received a phone call at 7am from the producer who appeared slighted by it.

In both invitations, from festival vibes to sports fan, there was a real sidelining of me as a scholar. But this is no coincidence. The academic editorials I get invited to write are often under the umbrella of 'arts and culture' rather than the disciplinary area in which I was trained. It is also not a coincidence that my scholarly work in building an Indigenist health humanities is housed in an Aboriginal studies unit rather than the health or humanities faculties within my institution.

Indigenous woman is only ever a subset of the category of woman when convenient. And it is no coincidence that settler women have had a hand in the decision-making for where my intellectual work would be situated.

Birri Gubba and Gangulu woman, Teila Watson, said it best when she tweeted: "Colonisers want my song without my story, my art without my politics and my culture without my sovereignty."

And by colonisers, we mean women, all of them.

This International Women's Day, in all of the talk of sexual violence experienced by white women, you wouldn't have heard much about the ongoing violence of settler colonialism upon the lives of Indigenous women, of which sexual violence has been central.

The Indigenous woman, we are reminded, must know her place, even if she is busy getting her kids to school. She must wait her turn and she must only speak of matters

that affect her, on their terms, to testify, rather than theorise. The Indigenous woman is only ever a subset of the category of woman when convenient, yet barely human let alone knowing; for we are primarily seen as an example of the oppression that settler women lay exclusive claims to knowing about, when it serves their interest.

Yet the Indigenous woman isn't passively accepting such orders, for our testimony is theory, action and resistance every damn day in this place.

As Teila Watson concludes: "... the difference is I don't want nothing from the colony, abolish it".

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