

Unsightly contortions of tweet-deep ‘feminists’

By Janet Albrechtsen, The Australian, 8 March 2017

International Women’s Day has become a day of organised nonsense. In the name of gender equality, the ABC is marking #IWDABC by patronising women and punishing men.

It will be a girls-only day, with Aunty removing all men who host television and radio gigs. A droll stunt given women already rule the roost there, holding most of the senior hosting roles.

Elsewhere, International Women’s Day will be celebrated at a morning yoga session for women in Sydney and at breakfasts across the nation where women will network over croissants. There will be chats about the gender gap, what technology means for women, how women cope in the corporate world, a bit on women’s healthcare in Afghanistan, a round of women’s basketball and so on.

Imagine a session on what it means to be a feminist in Australia in 2017. Or a chat about who are the real feminists. Or even: where are the real feminists? None of these questions will be asked as women gather to pat themselves on the back for nothing much except networking the day away.

Three years ago, as International Women’s Day approached, Liberal senator Michaelia Cash found herself in strife for not wearing the feminist label on her sleeve. “I have never been someone who wears labels,” she said. Dumbfounded, Labor senator Penny Wong was sure that Cash had got her “nomenclature” wrong. “I think (feminist) is more than a label; it’s an expression of your ideals,” Wong said, adding it was disappointing Cash “doesn’t wish to assert those ideals”. Wong was clearly not listening. Cash did assert feminist ideals such as gender equality. She simply eschewed the feminist label. Women’s website Mamamia expressed its own whiny disappointment while Greens senator Larissa Waters tweeted her “horror” at Cash’s rejection of the label.

Three years on, the hypocrisy of women who wear feminism as flippantly as a fashion label has stripped them of moral authority. Today’s feminists are so ensconced in the world of identity politics, they fail to speak out when they should. When Muslim woman [Yassmin Abdel-Magied announced on Q&A that Islam is the most feminist religion](#), the label-wearing feminists were not interested in critical analysis. Instead the filter of identity politics kicked in, leading to anti-intellectual drivel that would truly horrify their feminist forebears.

Critiquing Abdel-Magied’s claim was sexist, said Julie McKay, the gender adviser to the Australian Defence Force. “Last week, young women all around Australia learned that it is better to stay quiet, to keep your opinions to yourself, to not aspire to be a visible leader — because if you do, you risk being torn down in the most public of ways,” McKay said. In fact, young women learned that the ADF’s gender adviser has no interest in the substance of core feminist debates and prefers the cheap, unthinking thrills of throwing around identity political barbs.

That same week, young Australian women also learned that Greens leader Richard de Natale, the man who proudly wears his feminist credentials, said it was racist to question whether Islam is a feminist religion.

Feminism has become so engulfed by identity politics that *The Sunday Age* thought it entirely sensible to ask in headlines that week, “Why is no one protesting about Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s visit to Australia?” What should people be protesting against? Against her bravery or her honesty?

The Somalian-born woman who will visit Australia next month suffered genital mutilation as a child and speaks openly and honestly about Islam. She has received death threats to the point where she has been surrounded by 24-hour security for more than a decade.

Sadly, asking serious questions about feminism is verboten in Australian feminist orthodoxy. Writing in *The Saturday Paper*, Muslim woman Susan Carland, the wife of *The Project*’s Waleed Aly, denounced analysis of Abdel-Magied’s claim that Islam is a feminist religion as nothing more than a “frenzied, paranoid witch-hunt”. The aim was to “annihilate Yassmin”, it was “a full-scale assault on her existence”, wrote Carland. “Keep your head down, or we will destroy you,” Carland said about the media daring to question whether Islam is a feminist religion. That’s a comic conclusion, given that Abdel-Magied is now apparently shopping around for a PR firm.

Defaulting to identity politics, Carland, who is the Muslim darling of the Left, denounced critics of Abdel-Magied as being interested in viewing Islam only through a pair of “misogyny-goggles”. Carland revealed herself as another feminist apologist for weaponised identity politics, the kind that rejects legitimate questions about female empowerment if it means critiquing her religion. Her claim that, for many Australians, the only acceptable Muslim is ex-Muslim Hirsi Ali is both tawdry and hypocritical, given that it is Carland who rejects the observations of Hirsi Ali because she is an ex-Muslim.

When [Muslim leader Keysar Trad](#) explained that the Koran sanctions violence against women once a man has first tried to settle a disagreement with soft talk, chocolates and flowers, it took two Liberal MPs to condemn that view. Cash, the woman who refuses to wear the feminist label, called out Trad for espousing completely unacceptable views. Peter Dutton did the same, asking: “Where are the feminists?”

It was an astute prediction since Trad’s defence of violence against women was greeted with deafening silence from Australia’s left-wing media. Not a word of reporting, let alone critiquing, from Fairfax or *The Guardian* or the ABC, until *Media Watch* last week broke the silence by pointing out how the left-wing media was looking the other way.

Last June, on what would have been the 14th birthday of Luke Batty, the young boy tragically killed by his father, Greens senator Waters stood on a podium together with Luke’s mother, Rosie, and Cash, campaigning to end family violence. After Trad’s comments about Islam condoning domestic violence, Cash spoke up while Waters stayed quiet.

The hypocrisy of the Greens senator exposes her feminism as tweet-deep, lacking moral credibility.

Last year, a friend asked me to recommend a good book about feminist issues in Australia that he could send to his daughter who lives overseas. We struggled to think of a single example. Instead, young women are subjected to label-proud feminists like Lena Dunham who lamented last year that she wished she had experienced an abortion so she could speak with more authority on abortion rights, and then, after the US presidential election, announced that it was her duty, much ‘like being a parent to a teenager’ to enlighten foolish white women who voted for Donald Trump. Dunham is the very model of a modern faux feminist who cannot see that

there's only one thing worse than men patronising women: that's when women patronise women.

Slut-shaming Melania Trump for posing nude years ago as a model, attacking the migrant to America for not speaking polished English, mocking her with "Melania, blink twice if you need help" riffs: none of this is genuinely feminist. Celebrating a post-election women's march organised by Linda Sarsour, an apologist for Saudi Arabia and donning hijabs in the name of solidarity shows that feminism has become what Christopher Hitchens called the silly being led by the sinister.

And International Women's Day is a festival of the silly. That said, the yoga session this morning is a neat reminder that the fusion of feminism with identity politics forces feminists into unsightly yoga-style political contortions where accusations of sexism, racism, take-you-pick-isms, are routinely used to avoid discussing real feminist issues.

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