Homeland Truths: The Unspoken Epidemic of Violence in Indigenous Communities

Helen Hughes Talk for Emerging Thinkers

Jacinta Yangapi Nampijinpa Price

THE CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT STUDIES

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Foreword

Sara Hudson, Research Fellow and Manager of the Indigenous Research Program at The Centre for Independent Studies

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price's very moving address *Homeland Truths: The Unspoken Epidemic of Violence in Indigenous Communities,* at CIS's inaugural Helen Hughes lecture, examined a topic many people have shied away from discussing: how traditional Aboriginal culture normalises violence.

I cannot think of a better person to give the first Helen Hughes Talk for Emerging Thinkers. Jacinta's bravery in speaking the truth about such a deeply personal and controversial subject, embodies all Helen stood for. Throughout her life, Helen dared to be different and question conventional thinking on Indigenous issues.

Helen's book, *Lands of Shame,* published in 2007, was a much needed wake-up call to Australia. Prior to then, Indigenous researchers tended to romanticise remote Aboriginal life and downplay the violence and despair of many remote Aboriginal communities.[1]

Then, very few people knew how dire things were, because remote Aboriginal communities were out of sight and out of mind of most Australians.

Unfortunately, nearly 10 years later, people still continue to wear rose-coloured glasses when it comes to Aboriginal culture, and refuse to admit that not all aspects of Aboriginal culture are positive.

Jacinta, like her mother Bess, has received criticism for speaking out about the violence her family and people have been subjected to under traditional customary lore, such as the practice of 'promised husbands' and child brides.[2]

There is a deep silence that envelops domestic violence in Aboriginal communities: "many assaults are never reported for the simple reason that there seems to be little justice for young women and girls if they do go ahead."[3]

Recently Marcia Langton's claims on ABC television show Q&A — that Aboriginal women are between 37 and 80 times more likely to experience domestic and family violence than non-Indigenous women — was subjected to a rigorous fact check by The Conversation and found to be true.[4]

When people do acknowledge that domestic violence is an issue in Aboriginal communities, colonisation and alcohol abuse are usually blamed as the cause, not traditional Aboriginal culture. The conventional belief is that prior to the 'invasion' of British settlers, Aboriginal people lived a harmonious existence with very little violence.

Jacinta exposes this myth when she explains that under customary lore she and other Aboriginal women could be raped and killed for accidentaly disturbing men's sacred ceremonial parties.

According to Jacinta, Aboriginal culture "is a culture that accepts violence and in many ways desensitises those living the culture to violence." As Jacinta eloquently argues in her speech, if Aboriginal people are to successfully address the high rates of intrapersonal violence in Aboriginal communities, they need to acknowledge the real causes of this violence. This means not excusing perpetrators' behaviour by blaming the victims and or colonisation, but taking a long hard look at the aspects of Aboriginal culture that need to change.

No culture is static and unchanging, and the belief that Aboriginal culture needs to be frozen and preserved in time is preventing many Aboriginal people from moving forward and embracing modernity.

European culture has evolved, and it is fallacy to believe that Aboriginal culture should not have to do the same. As Jacinta points out, in the not so distant past (prior to the 1980s) there was no such thing as marital rape in Australia.[5]

We need to abandon romanticised notions of Aboriginal culture and really listen to what brave people like Jacinta Price are saying:

"Help my people understand the necessity and value in constructive criticism and self-reflection. Please don't encourage us to remain stagnant, instead encourage us to ask questions and challenge long held beliefs so that we may determine the way forward, with that, which enriches our lives."

Providing a platform for Aboriginal leaders like Jacinta — whose voices have until now been drowned out by the established orthodoxy — is a cause that CIS holds dear. Although Jacinta was our inaugural Helen Hughes lecturer, the CIS has been recognised for its history of inviting Aboriginal leaders to share their experiences of living in two worlds and how best to integrate Aboriginal culture into modern life — including Bess Price (Jacinta's mother), Marcia Langton, Alison Anderson and Noel Pearson. And we will continue to do so to honour Helen's legacy.[6]

Endnotes

1 Hughes, H (2007) *Lands of Shame: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Homelands' in Transition*, The Centre for Independent Studies: Sydney.

2 See Jacinta's Price's speech for examples , also Hudson, S (2013) "Let's Get Serious About Tackling Indigenous Violence" The Punch, available at https://www.cis.org.au/commentary/articles/lets-get-serious-about-tackling-indigenous-violence

3 McGlade, Hannah: Justice as Healing: Developing Aboriginal Justice Models to Address Child Sexual Assault [2007] 7(1) Indigenous Law Bulletin 10 http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/IndigLawB/2007/59.html

4 The Conversation (2016) "FactCheck Q&A: are Indigenous women 34-80 times more likely than average to experience violence? Available at https://theconversation.com/factcheck-qanda-are-indigenous-women-34-80-times-more-likely-than-average-to-experience-violence-61809

5 Australian Government, (2010) Final Report Family Violence available at https://www.alrc.gov.au/publications/24.%20Sexual%20Assault%20and%20Family%20Violence/history-activism-and-legal-change

6 Coleman, P (2013) "Australian Notes" The Spectator, available at http://www.spectator.co.uk/2013/03/australian-notes-160/

Homeland Truths: The Unspoken Epidemic of Violence in Indigenous Communities

Helen Hughes Talk for Emerging Thinkers

My name is Jacinta Yangapi Nampijinpa Price. I was born in the tropical town of Darwin in 1981 to my Warlpiri mother Bess Nungurrayi Price and Australian born Anglo-Celtic father Dave Price. My dreamings are Yirrikipai (Crocodile) from my conception site on Melville Island in salt-water country and my inherited dreamings from my other Warlpiri fathers are Ngapa (Rain) and Warlu (Fire) from desert country. I am a mother of four sons, three who are my own and the youngest my stepson. My partner is a proud Scotsman and between our four boys, their heritages are made up of Mauritian, Warlpiri, Malay Indian, Chinese, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Scandinavian, African and German. But above all they are modern Australia.

As I sit down to write this speech, news comes to me that one of my skin mother's nieces has been stabbed in the head in a town camp in Alice Springs. The details are not yet fully known but I'm sure I will learn more over the days to come.

I have essentially grown up in Alice Springs but spent a great deal of my childhood in remote communities in the Northern Territory and Yuendumu in particular. I feel privileged to have been taught my cultures; both Warlpiri and a modern day Australian culture steeped in Celtic roots. I guess my parents were perfect for one another because the nomadic lifestyle of a Warlpiri woman most certainly suited that of a young New South Welshman from the working class city of Newcastle. I had my first airplane flight at one week old from Darwin to Millikapiti on Melville Island. By the time I was six I'd been through every state and territory in Australia. And by the time

I was 13, I had travelled around the globe visiting thirteen countries on a family holiday with my nomadic parents. I was privileged that my parents were teachers and educators, as I believe this instilled in me the desire to seek knowledge, to understand the world, to question everything — and in particular that which does not seem right.

My childhood in the bush was always about being surrounded by family. The best memories were always those spent walking barefoot across red earth with a stick in hand… poking at the ground between tufts of spinifex grass looking for goanna holes and playing tricks on my cousins, while our aunties and mothers did the serious hunting and gathering. Looking back, it was a peaceful existence in the bush and a stark contrast to town, where family resided in town camps and alcohol fuelled violence took a strangle hold on their lives. I watched as my uncles, whom I loved dearly — men who loved their families with a tender depth — slowly became powerless to the bottle because they no longer knew where they stood in society. I witnessed alcohol-fuelled rage from men and women toward each other and even inflicted upon themselves. We took in babies and little ones here and there when things got out of hand, until everyone sobered up and realized their wrongdoings. From the 11 siblings in my mother's generation, only two remain: my mother and her youngest brother. Some siblings died before mum was born in infancy, but the majority we lost to alcohol-related illness.

I certainly grew up with my feet in two different worlds and to this day I continue to straddle these worlds. What has become apparent to me over the years is that when two worlds come together at two different stages of evolution, the world that is still steeped in its old existing traditions and the culture that has not known another way of existence or way of life is the culture that will suffer the most.

As a child I grew up in a carefree household and lifestyle, despite the sufferings endured by our immediate little family, as well as our wider family. It was always understood that life was hard, but you had to remain resilient. My main concern as a child whenever tragedy struck was my parents' wellbeing. I had lost my brother to childhood leukemia when I was three; he was ten. My brother and I were very close, and even being so young, I felt a great loss. I don't remember my

mother's sadness but more my father's. I think being a Warlpiri woman she had learned to maintain a brave face through such heartache. After all, heartache was no stranger to my mother. Death was — as I learned from early on — a very significant part of life. My mother almost died three years later when I was six years old after her kidneys collapsed. We still don't know why, she was a non-drinker and a keen sports woman who ate well. She recovered quickly after a successful kidney transplant. My uncle, my mother's youngest brother, the only one still with us donated one of his to her.

I could easily say that there has not been a year in my life when I have not attended at least one funeral. A great deal of the funerals I have attended have been for family members whose deaths have been connected to alcohol in some way. I have also grown up to understand that in life there are times when violence is a necessity. Alice Springs was a town where I grew up defending my whitefella friends with my fists. On those unfortunate occasions, other Indigenous girls our age had targeted friends of mine and often had racially vilified my friends. You learned to fight and defend yourself from a young age, which often meant Aboriginal girls were fiercer and more likely to get into fights. When I was 15 I took up kickboxing as my father had encouraged me to do, so that I was able to defend myself not just against girls but against the very real possibility of being attacked by a man. In traditional Aboriginal culture everyone, boys and girls, learned to fight. This is the way it is in all small-scale societies on earth as a matter of survival.

Growing up in and knowing my culture, I know that it is a culture that accepts violence and in many ways desensitizes those living the culture to violence. As I have previously mentioned this becomes very apparent when an evolved culture comes up against a long unchanged culture. Those who argue it must be maintained unchanged as it is the world's oldest living culture, come from two different perspectives. They are either far removed from it, don't live it and have no idea what they are talking about or they are the old ones who can't bear to see their old ways disappear. This leads me on to Customary Law.

Customary law up until recently was used in court to argue in defence of Aboriginal men who had violently and sexually assaulted

Aboriginal teenage girls who were their traditional promised wives. It was only in 2002 that a 50 year-old Aboriginal man by the name of Jackie Pascoe faced court over the abduction and rape of his 15-year-old promised wife in 2001[1] — although his lawyers appointed by Aboriginal Legal Aid and the court did not describe the circumstances as such at the time.

Pascoe had already killed his first wife, but this previous case had only delivered a manslaughter charge back in 1996.[2] In this case, her family had promised the young victim to this man. She was held against her will at Pascoe's outstation, where she was repeatedly raped. When she attempted to leave with a carload of friends, Pascoe produced and fired his shotgun to scare her into staying. The defense argued that Pascoe was acting within the parameters of his cultural law and fulfilling obligations to the victim's family;[3] which is true. He was acting according to his law. This argument delivered a previous police charge of rape reduced to one of 24 hours imprisonment for unlawful intercourse with a minor, and 14 days imprisonment for the firearm offences. When the details were published in a national paper there was outrage at the findings, which urged the crown to appeal the decision in 2003.

I will read an insert from the court report 2003:

According to Pascoe, this pressure was brought about by concern regarding the victim's behavior (sic). He related that the victim's school attendance was poor, that she had been "prowling" at night and had been using "gunga". He stated, "It wasn't my idea. I was just forced to take her, I been told so many times".[4]

At a later interview, Pascoe disclosed that he had been aware that the victim was sexually active and had experienced a miscarriage. He suggested that this was sufficient evidence for him to determine she was mature enough to have a sexual relationship with him.[5]

Despite no formal meeting between the family groups having taken place, the offender asserted that he had consulted the correct people and satisfied all of the cultural requirements prior to cohabiting with the victim."[6]

There was other material in the report, which tends to support the respondent's view of the circumstances leading up to the committing

of the offence. For example, Mr Curwen-Walker — who prepared a sentencing report for the trial judge — said that the victim's maternal grandmother and her maternal uncle were identified as the correct persons to determine the appropriateness of the relationship, in accordance with the custom. They confirmed the existence of the "promised" relationship and they had been consulted and consented to the cohabitation between the victim and the respondent. The grandmother said that in accordance with traditional culture she had assessed the sexual maturity of the victim and determined the appropriate timing for the partners to cohabit. A maternal uncle told Mr Curwen-Walker that he had satisfied himself that the victim had consented to the arrangement and that he had negotiated with the respondent to take proper care of her. Both those persons dismiss suggestions that the victim had been sexually active or that her behaviour had been problematical in any way.

It is hard to comprehend that family would be in support of such treatment of the young woman within their own family and it can be likened to the treatment of women in some Islamic and other conservative communities trying to stay loyal to their traditional cultures and religions.

Australians are quick to condemn cultural practices that support honour killings, female genital mutilation and forced child marriage when they happen overseas yet similar practices in Australia are ignored by those very same people, the human rights lawyers, the feminists and others. The cries for help from our own Aboriginal girls and women usually fall upon deaf ears here in our own country.

Hannah McGlade quotes NT parliamentarian Lorraine Braham in her article 'Aboriginal women, girls and sexual assault — the long road to equality within the justice system' in her commentary on the case, "At this moment, many assaults are never reported for the simple reason that there seems to be little justice for young women and girls if they do go ahead." [7]

She therefore proposed legislative amendments that would remove customary law as a relevant or mitigating factor in sentencing for cases of sexual offences against minors, however this proposal was rejected by the Territory Government who felt that it might possibly breach

the Race Discrimination Act 1975. ATSIC representatives did not agree that such a proposal was discriminatory, arguing instead that "Aboriginal girls should have the same protection under the law as other Australian girls under 16."[8]

From a young age we Aboriginal girls are told which men within the community are potential promised husbands. As a young girl this was always pointed out to me. If I misbehaved or did not obey the orders of the women in my family it was threatened that I would be married off right there and then to one of these men known as my promised husbands.

I recall a time at Yuendumu when my female family members were playing a game of cards in my aunt's backyard and during this occasion a Japangardi, one of my potential husbands was walking past. At this point all of the women began to pretend as though he was coming to take me away. They all teased me and huddled around me pretending to protect me from the clutches of this man. He played along pretending to grab for me. I was terrified and suddenly everyone burst into laughter at my terror, including the potential promised husband. He then signaled it was all a joke and nothing meant by it and noticing my terror handed me a twenty-dollar note.

The men that I was always teased for were never going to be my promised husbands in fact. I would never be promised, my parents were determined that that would never happen, but as a child you would obey for fear of the threat of being married off. Fear is used as a means of control. My case however is not the same as for many other Aboriginal girls and women. I know of many cases like the 15 year-old victim of Pascoe. I know of many stories of rape and murder, stories that belong to women in my family and many other Aboriginal families. Stories that never reach the ears of the wider public.

In my own family there are a number of cases that I am aware of, stories I have been told about women who are my blood who have experienced abhorrent acts of sexual violence, domestic violence or have been murdered. One of the women in my family that I am very close to had her womanhood violently stolen from her at the age of 14. Her promised husband, a much older Aboriginal man held her captive at his outstation. The story was that he bound her with rope

"like one would a kangaroo" as it was described to me and repeatedly raped her.

Her childhood was taken from her, no one reported the incident and everyone went about their lives as if nothing had happened while my aunt — one of the most loving, caring and, as I've come to learn, resilient women I know — continued on in silence. She had lost the ability to bear children. She was left to deal with her scarred womb and tormented psyche while her perpetrator continued masquerading as the highly regarded and revered law man the community believed him to be. He died at an old age, known as an elder, by the Aboriginal community as well as the white community. Another story I have been made aware of is the case of the disappearance of an aunt, which occurred when I was just a baby. She had been married off to a man who again had been convicted of murdering his first wife. It was understood that during their marriage my aunt often experienced acts of violence at the hands of her husband and when she decided she had had enough she planned to leave him. Knowing that she had planned to do this he took her out bush where there were no witnesses. It is believed that he murdered her, as reports back to family members described that there existed a fresh mound of earth where it is believed her body was buried. Other stories surfaced that she had run away to Queensland but no one has seen her in over 30 years.

No one ever reported her missing, not even her father who had allowed this arranged marriage to take place knowing his daughter was being forced to live with a convicted murderer who later was privileged enough to die from cancer. Her father is a prominent member of the Central Australian community, a highly regarded and revered elder whose voice is often a tool used by the left activists for their own political ends. I can't prove any of this. These are stories I have been told and believe. Everybody believes them in my part of the world.

In my mother's case, her promised husband was a man of strong virtue. My mother under customary law was supposed to become an apprentice wife, if you like, at the age of 13, when she would be trained by her older sister — who was the first wife — to become the second wife when considered mature enough. My mother, however, was a modern teenager who rebelled against tradition. She would threaten

to jump off buildings or trees when her sister would attempt to coerce her into living in their camp. Eventually my mother's promised husband relented and decided, along with my grandfather, that she would have her wish and would not be required to marry him but be allowed to finish her schooling. This decision would see my mother enter into a relationship with the man who would become her first husband. This man, although not my mother's promised husband, became the father of my brother. He was not a man of virtue, he was a violent and abusive man who attempted to control every aspect of my mother's life. My brother witnessed much of this abuse in his young years. He vowed that when he grew up he would beat his father for the abuse he gave our mother. This would never be. Many in my family either turned a blind eye or felt powerless to help my mother. My mother's brothers would take any opportunity to beat her husband as punishment for how he treated my mother but never was it thought that one should involve police and report such behaviour. This was a time when spousal abuse was common in many cultures and not met with any urgency to intervene. If my parents had not found each other, my mother would probably be dead.

There is not a woman in my family who has not experienced some kind of physical or sexual abuse sometime in their life. As my mother described, when she was younger the kinds of things she had experienced from her first husband were deemed the norm. Girls were not aware of any other way of life, but a life where violence and abuse was simply tolerated. There isn't a word that is the equivalent to English 'rape' in Warlpiri and I do not know if there is in any other Indigenous language. In customary law, a man is entitled to have sex with his promised wife; simply knowing she is the wife is consent enough.

The late Lindsay Bookie, while he held the title of chairman of the CLC, stated publicly that if an Aboriginal woman was found on men's sacred ceremonial grounds she was in danger of being executed. When a man in a remote community had assaulted his wife, the police had got involved. So the perpetrator, in an attempt to evade police, ran onto a ceremonial ground. One of the police officers who went after him was a woman.

Mr Bookie's statement was broadcast on the evening ABC news but the fact that the man had perpetrated violence against his wife was not mentioned. All that was mentioned was that white police had interrupted an important Aboriginal men's ceremony and Mr Bookie was interviewed stating "it's against our law for people like that, breaking the law (referring to the police), they shouldn't be there. Aboriginal ladies, they're not allowed to go anywhere near that. If they had been caught — a woman, Aboriginal lady, got caught — she would be killed. Simple as that!"

The public reaction was deathly silence. Mr Bookie was a courageous and honest man to say what we all knew to be true. But there was no reaction from the hypocrites in our southern cities. No complaint from anybody: no human rights lawyer, no feminist, no activist, no one made it into the media with a word of concern that women could be executed in the Northern Territory for even accidentally walking on to a ceremonial ground. Why not?

As an Aboriginal woman I have grown up knowing to never travel on certain roads during ceremonial time for fear of accidentally coming across a ceremonial party — because, like all Aboriginal women, there is the fear of being killed as punishment for doing so. As my mum put it, this was and still is the norm for Aboriginal women whose cultures are intact, whose cultures have been maintained; whose cultures — that are steeped in tradition — continue to control them and maintain the rights for men to control them.

Recently I participated in a round table conference held in Alice Springs to address the issue of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. The conference was facilitated by Josephine Cashman, Member of the PM's Indigenous Advisory Council and Chair of the Safe Communities Subcommittee. It was attended by representatives of community service providers, police, community members and members of the Tangentyere Council's Women's Safety Group. The point I chose to raise at this event was the need for us as Aboriginal women to acknowledge the very real beliefs which exist within our own culture that support the use of violence, and the fact that we as women have to take a stand and condemn acts of violence perpetrated by our own family as well as others.

We are all very aware that we are related to both the victims and the perpetrators in almost all incidents that occur within our own communities. You don't have to be an Aboriginal woman from a remote community to understand this. So it is up to us to do something about it.

Everyone appeared to nod in support of my points. But as discussions continued, there were three instances that caused me to be alarmed when we attempted to address the tough issues. I almost choked when they were raised but the vast majority of Left-leaning service providers didn't bat an eyelid.

The first instance was with regard to a question put by Josephine about the effects of porn within remote communities, particularly for young people. The first reaction to this was from an Aboriginal woman from Tennant Creek who sprang into defensive mode stating, that she did not like to address the issue of porn because it brought about unwanted reminders of the beginning of the intervention. She did not consider porn to be of any concern or relevance to Aboriginal people in communities. While this point was made, an attendee, who is and has been for many years, an activist and mouth-piece for the far Left applauded the speaker for her attack on the intervention.

My instant reaction to this was to counteract the point, stating that while acts of sexual violence and rates of STIs for Aboriginal children in remote communities are amongst the highest in the country — if not the world — the effects of pornography must be taken very seriously if we are to fight these atrocities. I also highlighted that pornography in this day and age is a very serious issue for all communities, as our young people have very easy access to an ever-growing industry that depicts sexual violence towards women. We must not act defensively when attempting to address these hard issues. But you will find many Aboriginal people will act in defence by saying not all Aboriginal men are perpetrators — which, of course, is true — and there are no problems in 'our town camp' or 'our community' but instead the problems exist in 'others' … which is usually not true. This attitude is common, but does not allow for the hard questions to be asked, given we have to face the hurtful but truthful answers. This takes ownership and responsibility.

The second instance was when Josephine had asked an activist in the room whether the women in her town camp were aware of the sexual assault services that were available to them. In response, she said she wasn't aware of any cases where the women might be in need of such services. She explained that she may have been aware of once or twice when a girl may have been raped, but that the girl was from somewhere else and happened to stumble into her town camp from the river in need of help … and that the activist herself had been the one to call the police in order to assist the victim. She then continued to explain that she had done her best to warn young girls in her family not to wear skimpy clothing in case men decided to stare at them and give them ideas that may lead to sexual assault. Again I had to intervene with commonsense as I insisted that we should be teaching our boys not to rape women — not our girls to be mindful of inviting predatory men to assault them.

The third instance occurred when another member of the Tangentyere Council's Women's Safety Group who is an aunt to me was asked a question in relation to the high numbers of children running the streets late at night. This is an ongoing problem for the community of Alice Springs. My aunt pointed out that she had found it difficult trying to care for her 12-year-old granddaughter who was continually running the streets with other kids late at night. She explained that the mother of her granddaughter was always drinking and uninterested in caring for her daughter and that she had put her son in jail, which removed him from parental duties. I could only imagine that being put in jail by his wife meant he had assaulted her, which led to his arrest. Once again no one batted an eyelid when blame was put onto the woman victim of violence for the loss of a man's freedom and his parental responsibilities.

Too often we women are part of the huge problem. In my culture men are hardly seen as being capable of doing anything wrong and women are the ones to blame if they should. As long as this logic exists within the hearts and minds of the women who are related to the perpetrators, we will not gain headway in the fight against physical and sexual violence against women. It is heartbreaking but true. And the whole idea of intra-generational trauma only came to light in my

mind and way of thinking recently during a conversation I had with Marcia Langton. I strongly believed that 'intra-generational trauma' was just a farce, an ideology created to stand as another excuse for Aboriginal people to play victim to white government perpetrators. But then Marcia made a comment that made sense to me. If we are to believe that intra-generational trauma exists, then Aboriginal people have been experiencing it within our culture for over 40,000 years. Because even before the British came to our shores life was extremely hard and violence was a fundamental part of life. What Marcia helped me understand was that intra-generational trauma came in the form of thought pattern: a way of looking at life through the eyes of a victim. The victim mentality is what grew out of intra-generational trauma.

It has been the older generation and members of the stolen generation who have instilled — within each generation passing — that as Aboriginal people, we have been victims of colonialism, white government and oppression. The current generation of the city-based victim brigade also reinforces the victim message. This argument has sat at the forefront of political debate, driving the activists for whom it once served a very real purpose and brought about much-needed change. But at this point in time, in our country's current circumstances, it is drowning out the voices of the victims who are being victimised by our own cultural forms of oppression.

Activism has become so infatuated with looking outward that it is unable to look within. Guilt politics is the easy option; to point and blame deflects responsibility and puts it onto another. That 'other' is our government, which cannot fix our problems.

In recent times I have experienced threats of violence made against me for being vocal about the tough issues surrounding violence against women. Through social media a man by the name of Daniel Whyman who is an administrator for the Blackfulla Revolution Facebook page has openly said that I "need a bullet." Whyman also referred to myself and other female family members of mine — including an Aboriginal woman police officer — as c**t's and sluts for simply holding an opinion that differs from his own. At the same he was time claiming

to be advocating for Aboriginal people's rights as an activist, all the while insisting that we march onto Parliament House on Australia Day and protest for our rights. He also warned that I "should look out as the Prices' name was on his hit list and he did not work alone." Surprisingly, when this was reported to police, nothing could be done about it. Considering a white man was recently charged for making threatening and racist remarks toward Nova Peris on social media[9] this seems odd to me. Perhaps this case involving my family needs to be revisited — or is it that because the perpetrator was Aboriginal it is not considered an urgent or even significant matter?

It is not the first time I myself or my mother have experienced backlash from the east coast Aboriginal activist community for speaking out against violence and the need for cultural change. The late Tiga Bales on air during one of his radio broadcasts referred to my mother as a head-nodding Jacky Jacky who would do and say anything the government asked of her. As a full blood Aboriginal female Government Minister of the Northern Territory, whose first language is Warlpiri, my mother found herself being told by the acting head of the Indigenous unit of Griffith University in Brisbane that they wished to cancel her planned visit as this particular person was concerned for the safety and wellbeing of the Indigenous students and staff should they be subjected to a difference of opinion to that held within the confines of an institution of higher education — in a country where freedom of speech is supposedly celebrated.

The universities have become a place of censorship in recent years, and a particular demographic appears to control the educational content based on the opinions of activists rather than the knowledge of educators and reality lived by the less-educated. It seems truth is not what Aboriginal units in universities are interested in, but rather ideology and popular opinion expressed through social media. This does not help in the cause that we fight for.

This isn't the only frontline, however, where we face battle. A few weeks ago when my mother attended a CLC meeting in her role as a Minister and MLA, she was pulled aside before leaving by a prominent member of one of Central Australia's remote communities. This man is also a convicted murderer whose past has been forgotten by many. He had at this point brought together other members of my family

who held prominent positions within communities and began to insist that I had been saying things in the media that were wrong and that I must stop.

My mother was taken by surprise and perplexed by the vagueness of the claims of wrongdoing carried out by me, her daughter. It appeared that the other family members did not completely understand what it was I had actually done but felt obliged to support the 'big man'. My mother asked for specific details but could not really be given any, as it was more about the warning — not the substance of the charge. One of the men who was my uncle could see that this concerned mum, and when she questioned his knowledge he said he wasn't sure but was certain I would be doing the right thing and he would support my mother and me should things escalate. He basically said he was on our side.

My mother went away from this feeling uneasy. It was just before I was about to take part as an audience member on the SBS television show *Insight* with regard to the removal of Aboriginal children and placement into foster care. While activists may rant about threats from racism and government policy it is a very different issue when threats come from those closer to home, especially if they are coming from convicted murderers. However this will not deter us from continuing to fight our cause. In fact, it only fuels the flames of our determination.

I believe that one of the great problems behind the high levels of physical and sexual assault — besides the fact that it is widely accepted within the culture — is the fact that many outside the culture are also willing to accept this or perhaps are in denial of it because:

1: it is crime committed against those of a culture not their own;
2: because the perpetrator is not of their own culture;
3: because of their own guilt having come from a culture that committed atrocities against ours;
4: because they have no understanding of how our culture operates; and
5: they are not willing to question our culture for all of the above reasons.

Quite often I hear outsiders make excuses for the very real issues of child sexual abuse and domestic violence, even downplaying it by saying 'well it exists in white society too but you just don't hear about it because in white culture it occurs behind closed doors.' To this I say: it is not good enough when the facts state that Aboriginal women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised from violence perpetrated by those who are related to them.[10]

It is easy to stand on the outside and make excuses rather than condemn acts of violence. It is becoming worse in the current climate where the thought police and the politically correct brigade are more interested in denying facts and truths in a selfish and self-righteous attempt to elevate their own moral standing. Well they are not elevating their moral standing they are suffocating the victims further. By likening everything that happens to us as the same as what happens to everyone else is belittling the women who have been murdered, their children that have grown up without mothers and their loved ones who have lived in darkness and fear of retaliation or meeting the same ending.

I will give you examples of such behaviour. My niece, whose brother lives here in Sydney, was murdered nine years ago because she had decided that she wanted to give her two small sons a better life by moving to Newcastle to live with my white cousin, who is her stepfather. When the father of her children learned of this, he confronted her at a town camp in Alice Springs where an argument broke out and he stabbed her. She drowned in her own blood waiting for an ambulance that took over an hour to reach her — because the ambulance couldn't go in to the camp without a police escort. Ambulance officers were routinely attacked when they came in to try to save lives. This man was released this year. My cousin had fought for her sons to live in Newcastle, where the youngest still resides. My niece's mother has maintained contact with her daughter's killer because he is the father of her grandchildren. His family has attacked my niece's mother in the past for speaking poorly of him and calling him a murderer. She has never been given the opportunity to grieve for her daughter and still supports and stands by her killer — even more so now that he has been released.

This kind of acceptance sends a strong message to perpetrators: this kind of unrelenting support from perpetrators' families is what enables these sorts of atrocities to continue. Because if perpetrators and victims are of the same community, you can guarantee there exists far more support for the perpetrators than the victims. The cycle continues and the victims are silenced one way or another.

It all comes back to the levels of acceptance of violence. In traditional law, spearing in the leg, or even death, would be used as a means to punish perpetrators — and once this is carried out, forgiveness is reached and everyone is expected to carry on. This logic does not work anymore. This logic does not work in a culture where there are no tools to deal with alcohol, drugs and addiction. This logic is only negated by these influences.

Although such a different kind of logic exists within these remote communities, there are those in them who want it to change. There are those who chip away in small ways to introduce the idea of change. Yes, not all Aboriginal men are perpetrators, but every Aboriginal man that isn't would most certainly be related to a number who are. What we cannot continue to do is make excuses for violent behaviour. We have heard the excuses and many of us are well aware of the impact colonialism has had in the past. Like anyone who has deep-seated issues stemming from violence and, or, addiction, only that individual can take ownership and make change. Thankfully many have. No one can enforce this upon them, and the same can be said about any people whose culture is engulfed by the same problems.

Instead of looking for constitutional recognition or treaties or governments to solve the problems, ownership, responsibility and constructive criticism must take place. Yes, we've worked out the role governments have played in our country's history, but we also must acknowledge our own part in the demise of our people. We must acknowledge what within our own culture is detrimental to us finding solutions to our own problems, and work out what changes we must make to move forward.

Why is it that we should remain stifled and live by 40,000 year old laws when the rest of the world has had the privilege of evolution within their cultures, so that they may survive in a modern world. Why in these times should there be an 'us and them' mentality.

We can't rid this country of Europeans and the British — or those from the rest of the world for that matter — who now call Australia home. Especially when the blood that runs through the veins of most modern Aboriginal people has come from the rest of the world as well as Australia. Who is supposed to sign a treaty on behalf of Aboriginal people? Who will sign for my family? Nobody has asked me that question. One Aboriginal person or group of Aboriginal people cannot represent us all, just as one white Australian does not represent all of white Australia. It simply does not make sense and it certainly isn't going to put an end to the continued violence and sexual abuse that is being experienced throughout remote Australia. That is our problem and we are the ones who need to fix it.

I am often asked by well meaning Australians from outside my culture 'what can we do to help?' Well, you can help by acknowledging that we are human and every human on the face of this earth has a culture. This is a step toward this idea of equality. Everyone's culture has its negative aspects and its positive aspects. My culture worked incredibly well for over 40,000 years in the deserts of this country, but it knows not the tools to survive in this modern world. Your culture does, and therefore you can use your knowledge and understanding of the modern world to share with my people so that they may better understanding the ever-changing ever-evolving world around them, and not get left behind. Help my people understand the necessity and value in constructive criticism and self-reflection. Please don't encourage us to remain stagnant. Instead encourage us to ask questions and challenge long-held beliefs so that we may determine the way forward with that, which enriches our lives. Abandon the 'us and them' mentality.

There was a four-decade long campaign to win citizenship rights for Aboriginal Australians in this country, but now the absolute fundamental rights of Aboriginal women, girls and children are being denied and ignored by white feminists and human rights lawyers who believe they know better — who believe that the real perpetrators are English-speaking white men. We have the same rights as anybody else in this country and it is about time those rights were respected by everybody.

The way forward has to be a unified effort; not an 'us and them' approach but an open and honest journey together. I want the young women and children of my family and the wider Aboriginal community to have the same opportunities, the same feeling of safety and security, the same self-belief and determination in themselves as the people and women of the western world; whose confidence gives them the ability to speak out against that which denies them these fundamental freedoms.

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Jacinta Nampijinpa Price is a Walpiri/Celtic woman who grew up in Alice Springs. In 2015, Jacinta was elected into Alice Springs' Town Council and is deeply involved within her community as well as remote communities of the Northern Territory.

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