

What Good *'the Voice'* in a Culture of Violence?



Nationals Senator and “No” advocate Jacinta Nampijinpa Price created an inflexion point in *'the Voice'* debate when she said that Aborigines have benefited from colonial settlement. She was answering the *Guardian's* Paul Sakka during her address to the *National Press Club* in Canberra last month. She cited plentiful food and tap water, but could equally have cited ending of inter-tribal massacres and infanticide.[\[1\]](#)

The press gallery pack had a meltdown — as if she'd claimed the Sun orbits the Earth. Aboriginal big-wigs and wise academics lined up to blame any outback dysfunction and violence on [inter-generational trauma](#). Jacinta speaks from family experience. Her mother Bess Nungarrayi Price has written,

My own body is scarred by domestic violence...We Aboriginal people have to acknowledge the truth. We can't blame all of our problems on the white man... The Racial Discrimination Act was there to protect us from white racism and we needed that protection. But it has not protected our people from ourselves...the problem now is blackfellas killing blackfellas and killing themselves.[\[2\]](#)

[The Guardian](#), along with Russell Skelton's troubled ABC-RMIT unit, rushed out their “*Fact Check*” misinformation to nail Jacinta's heresy.[\[3\]](#) Why such uproar? It's because the Aboriginal Industry requires that remote Aborigines be victims of white oppression. Otherwise, all Aborigine-identifiers would become colour-blind Aussies enjoying normal needs-based welfare and services. Goodbye to peak, staffed-up Aboriginal bureaucracies thriving on the taxpayer dime. Goodbye to bespoke opera tickets [discounted to \\$25](#), even for Aborigine-identifying professors on \$200,000.

Alleged Aboriginal trauma, we are told, explains outback health gaps, truancy, crime, and extreme domestic violence. The traumatised are said to lack agency and accountability. They *must* be given special care, in perpetuity, by agencies led by *the Voice*. In a nutshell that's the argument for voting YES.

Northern Territory police stats throw light on the current dysfunction. [Try Tennant Creek](#), where half the population of 3,000 is Aboriginal: In the year to July, property-damage cases are up 69 per cent, housebreaking up 62 per cent and commercial break-ins up 21per cent. Common assaults and domestic assaults are each up by 31 per cent, and grog-fuelled assaults are up 41 per cent. Things are not just bad, they're getting badder.

Where the stats get near-unbelievable is the offence totals per 100 population there, to create an offence rate. We get crimes against the person, 12.4 relative to 100 population, and crimes against property, 37. Keep in mind that one offender might generate ten or 20 break-ins or grog rampages. Other appalling figures: *Assaults*, 11.5; *Domestic Violence* 8.7; *House Break-Ins*, 7; and *Property Damage*, 16.6.

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The figures are understated. They ignore women victims' under-reporting to police, whether from shame, loyalty or fear of retribution.[4] The global *Equality Institute* estimates that more than 90 per cent, of domestic assaults go unreported. Likewise, the *Robertson* report in 1999 estimated nearly 90 per cent, of rapes in the Indigenous communities went unreported.[5]

Only half the Tennant Creek population is Aboriginal. And from NT prison and juvenile justice data, we know that locked-up offenders are overwhelmingly Aboriginal. If the police stats for Tennant Creek were divided into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, would the Aboriginal offence rates be illuminating?

The *Equality Institute's* study this year on NT domestic violence said it was among the worst in the world. In Central Australia, *NPY Women's Council* has estimated that Aboriginal women are around 60 times more likely to be victims of domestic homicide than non-Aboriginal women. Domestic violence is said to cost the NT budget \$600 million a year. It's not surprising the territory has a *Minister for Domestic Family and Sexual Violence*, currently Kate Worden, who describes the violence as "horrific". Why has the plethora of well-funded Aboriginal councils not tackled the violence issue? They can't solve the problem, they *are* the problem. Here's two case studies:

The Voice's predecessor, the *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)* was created by Bob Hawke in 1990 with bipartisan political support. It was supposed to be "a radical shift towards self-determination", to fund housing, infrastructure, jobs and legal aid, along with grants and loans to a myriad claimants. At its peak ATSIC was disbursing \$1.1b a year. The bosses focused on land rights, treaties, self-determination and constitutional "reform", as though Aboriginal women's sufferings were irrelevant.

Indigenous legal expert Hannah McGlade took a job with ATSIC in 2001 on treaty work. She found the gamut of women's affairs was handled by one junior staffer, part-time. A *Women's Office* was first to be axed when Prime Minister Howard reduced funding. Domestic violence, child abuse and women's rights were off-limits.[6]

In mid-2001 *The Age* ran an exposé by Andrew Rule about the ATSIC chairman, headed "*Geoff Clark: power and rape*", alleging him to be a serial perpetrator of sexual violence. Four women provided sworn allegations of assaults by Clark in the 1970s and 1980s. One woman was his child cousin at the time. Police said the evidence was not enough to secure conviction. Clark strongly denied the allegations, saying, "*My only crime is that I am an Aboriginal and I have had the audacity to question the legitimacy of this country, to question the treatment of Aboriginal people ... and I have called for a treaty.*" In 2007 he was found in a civil court proceeding to have raped one woman.

McGlade was outraged that, when the allegations arose, ATSIC women, "rights" supporters, Aboriginal big-shots and the *Green Left Weekly* closed ranks to denigrate the complaints as "bullshit" from the "capitalist media". Other women stayed silent for fear of retribution. The ATSIC board, backing Clark, did not even require him to step down pending criminal investigation.

Journalist Margo Kingston, to her credit, ran a series on ATSIC failures and alleged other ATSIC leaders were suspect for sexual misconduct (Hannah McGlade agreed). The Howard government abolished ATSIC with *Labor* support in 2005.

A second example of black-on-black oppression involved the *Swan Valley Nyungah Community (SVNC)* in outer-east Perth.[7] The community was led for 40 years by an elder, Robert Bropho. A charismatic power broker, he led Aboriginal rights campaigns and became the 1990 NAIDOC "Person of the Year".

Welfare authorities skirted around the enclave and police dumped wayward youths there. Glue-sniffing was rife among children who were sexually abused both by men and teens.[8]

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In 1999 Bropho's 15-year-old grandniece, after years of addiction and degradation, hanged herself in a derelict toilet block, the third SVNC suicide in five years. A year later a man in his 20s called [Timothy Lenin Bropho](#) (what a middle name!) and his 15-year-old cousin violently raped and injured their two-year-old niece. A child who witnessed the rape told police in 2001 that he and ten other children were also being abused. The welfare authorities gave the complaint irresolute treatment for two years. *"At this particular point in Noongar history, the prosecution of Noongar male perpetrators of sexual assault was virtually unknown,"* McGlade wrote. Timothy Bropho in 2002 got 12 years and the cousin four years.

Premier Gallop's *Labor* government shut the settlement in 2003, whereupon a UN committee condemned the closure as racist. Robert Bropho in 2008 got three years – increased on appeal to six – on five counts of unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under 13. Judge Nisbett described Bropho as *"a bully and a repeat liar who had sexually abused the complainant from the ages of 11 to 22."* Bropho in turn likened himself to Martin Luther King and Gandhi. He died in prison. In 2014 the government flattened the derelict settlement.

For interest I've constructed an admittedly weird timeline about Aboriginal violence:

Prehistoric: Paleopathologist Stephen Webb in 1995 publishes his analysis of 4,500 individuals' bones from mainland Australia going back 50,000 years. Priceless bone collections at the time are being officially handed over to Aboriginal communities for re-burial, which stops any follow-up studies. Webb finds highly disproportionate rates of injuries and fractures to women's skulls, with the injuries suggesting deliberate attack and often attacks from behind. His findings, according to anthropologist Peter Sutton, confirm that the clubbings of women have been common over thousands of years.

1788: First Fleeter Watkin Tench notices a young woman's head *"covered by contusions, and mangled by scars"*. She also has a spear wound above the left knee caused by a man who dragged her from her home to rape her. Tench writes,

They are in all respects treated with savage barbarity; condemned not only to carry the children, but all other burthens, they meet in return for submission only with blows, kicks and every other mark of brutality. When an Indian [sic] is provoked by a woman, he either spears her, or knocks her down on the spot; on this occasion he always strikes on the head, using indiscriminately a hatchet, a club, or any other weapon, which may chance to be in his hand.

Marine Lt. William Collins writes, *"We have seen some of these unfortunate beings with more scars upon their shorn heads, cut in every direction, than could be well distinguished or counted."*

1790: Governor Phillip's indigenous confidant, Bennelong, takes a woman to Port Jackson to kill her for payback. He inflicts two severe wounds on the head and one on the shoulder. Phillip is appalled that an *Eora* woman within a few days of delivery has fresh club wounds on her head.

1802: An explorer in the Blue Mountains writes how, for a trivial reason, an Aboriginal called Gogy took his club and struck his wife's head such a blow that she fell to the ground unconscious. *After dinner ... he got infuriated and again struck his wife on the head with his club, and left her on the ground nearly dying.*

1830s: George Robinson in Tasmania says that men court their women by stabbing them with sharp sticks and cutting them with knives prior to rape. They barter their women to brutal sealers for dogs and food; one woman voluntarily goes back to the sealers rather than face further tribal violence.

1841: Port Phillip's assistant protector of Aborigines reports that a young Bolagher woman is speared twice in the face and eaten by Targurt people at Lake Terang. (Trigger warning: The account doesn't square with schools' *Polyanna* versions of pre-contact culture). He reports:

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The bowels and entire viscera having been disengaged from the body, were at first portioned out; but from the impatience of some of the women to get at the liver, a general scramble took place for it, and it was snatched in pieces, and, without the slightest process of cooking, was devoured with an eagerness and avidity, a keen, fiendish expression of impatience for more, from which scene, a memory too tenacious upon this subject will not allow me to escape; the kidneys and heart were in like manner immediately consumed, and as a climax to these revolting orgies, when the whole viscera were removed, a quantity of blood and serum which had collected in the cavity of the chest was eagerly collected in handfuls [sic], and drunk by the old man who had dissected the body.

The flesh was entirely cut off the ribs and back, the arms and legs were wrenched and twisted from the shoulder and hip joints, and their teeth employed to dis sever the reeking tendons, when they would not immediately yield to their impatience. The limbs were now doubled up and put aside in their baskets; and on putting a portion of the flesh upon a fire which had previously been lit, they seemed to remember that I was of the party; something was said to one of the women, who cut off a foot from the leg she had in her possession, and offered it to me...

...During the day they brought another part, and some half-picked bones, and offered them to us. The head was struck off with a tomahawk and placed between hot stones in the hollow of a tree, where it has undergone a process of baking, and it is still left there otherwise untouched. [9]

1845: Explorer Edward John Eyre, who is very sympathetic towards Aborigines, [nevertheless records](#):

Few women will be found, upon examination, to be free from frightful scars upon the head, or the marks of spear wounds about the body. I have seen a young woman, who, from the number of these marks, appeared to have been almost riddled with spear wounds.

1875: Anthropologist T.G.H. Strehlow describes a black-on-black massacre that year in the Finke River area of Central Australia:

The warriors turned their murderous attention to the women and older children and either clubbed or speared them to death. Finally, according to the grim custom of warriors and avengers they broke the limbs of the infants, leaving them to die 'natural deaths'. The final number of the dead could well have reached the high figure of 80 to 100 men, women and children." All up, the two tribes lost 20% of their members. [10]

1900 approx: Walter Roth (1861-1933) a doctor, anthropologist, and *Chief Protector* in Queensland narrates that when a Pitta-Pitta girl first shows signs of puberty, "several men would drag her into the bush and forcibly enlarge the vaginal orifice by tearing it downwards with the first three fingers wound round and round with opossum string. Other men come forward from all directions, and the struggling victim has to submit in rotation to promiscuous coition with all the 'bucks' present."

And around Glenormiston:

A group of men, with cooperation from old women, ambush a young woman, and pin her so an old man can slit up the shrieking girl's perineum with a stone knife, followed by sweeping three fingers round the inside of the virginal orifice. She is next compelled to undergo copulation with all the bucks present; again the same night, and a third time, on the following morning.

1905: The local telegraph operator at Fitzroy River reports a five-year-old half-caste girl, Polly, "was out with the old woman, Mary Ann, when a bush black took her away for two nights during which time the blacks here said he made use of her. Such actions as that of Polly and the men are very common among the natives."

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1934: Anglican lay missionary Mary Bennett testifies,

The practice to which I refer is that of intercision of the girls at the age of puberty. The vagina is cut with glass by the old men, and that involves a great deal of suffering ... I remember my old Aboriginal nurse speak with horror of the suffering which she had been made to undergo. [11]

If a Kimberley woman was thought to be ['running around'](#), a group of men will take her into the bush, and so cut her genitals that she will be incapable of ever again having sexual intercourse.

1960s: In Warrabri, “old men looked upon their young wives ‘as their pension ticket’; it was also a matter of prestige to have a young wife.” In the 1970s bride prices were from \$500 to \$1,000.

1970s: John Coldrey, later a Victorian judge, deals in Alice Springs with a traditional man who has inflicted 201 separate injuries on his crouching wife. She bleeds to death. Coldrey finds that the wounds are on traditional punishment areas of the body, and convicts him of manslaughter, not murder.

1978: A man at Ernabella still feels guilty because, when he was small 35 years earlier, he crept out to watch a corroboree. The next morning the group killed his mother over it and he was deposited by the group into the care of Ernabella Mission. [12]

1980: Ivan Imityja Panka is angry with his wife because she refuses to cook meat for him. Both are drunk. After thrashing her near-fatally, Panka forces a piece of rippled reinforcing steel up her vagina, killing her. [New Delhi’s “*Braveheart*” in 2012 died in a bus when thugs similarly used a jack handle]. Panka’s defence relies on a husband’s traditional rights of chastisement if provoked. In Numbulwar, NT, a drunk severs a sister’s limb, going at her with an axe as well as a spear.

1997: A man, his wife and her brother are drinking around their campfire. The husband says something out of place to his wife, and the brother, instead of punishing the husband, clubs his sister, massively fracturing her skull. An elder of the *Ngukurr* gives evidence this is a hangover from customary law: “*That’s her punishment – you know. She got to take that...*”

2002: At Maningrida, Jackie Pascoe Jamilmira, a 50-year-old wife killer, forces sex on a 15-year-old promised bride. Justice John Gallop of the NT Supreme Court sentences him to 24 hours jail for unlawful sex, saying the man was exercising his traditional rights. The girl ‘*knew what was expected of her. It’s surprising to me [that the defendant] was charged at all*’.

2003: Gerhardt Max Inkamala, 21, at Hermannsburg digitally penetrates a seven-month-old girl’s vagina, causing serious injury. His sentence is increased after appeal from five years to nine.

2004: Morgan Jabanardi Riley, 27, sexually assaults a two-year-old at Tennant Creek, digitally penetrating her vagina and anus as she screams in pain. He gets 4.5 years non-parole, later increased to 6.5 years.

2005: Louis Nowra writes his book, *Bad Dreaming*, after a spell in Alice Springs hospital, where he saw many girls and women severely injured from domestic violence.

Some of the women’s faces ended up looking as though an incompetent butcher had conducted plastic surgery with a hammer and saw. The fear in the women’s eyes reminded me of dogs whipped into cringing submission.

2006: The *Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce* visits 29 NSW Aboriginal communities. It describes child sexual assault as a ‘*huge issue*’ in every one of those communities. Aboriginal witnesses tell the inquiry that the assaults on girls and boys are by grandfathers, fathers, stepfathers, uncles, cousins and brothers, often important men, including some non-Aboriginals.

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2008: A husband stabs his wife multiple times with a steak knife, which is within traditional bounds — Yolngu wife punishments are deemed valid if they leave scars but do not kill. The husband gets a short sentence and this minor punishment is quashed by *Southwood J.*

2008: Nearly 400 men from the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress make this apology:

We acknowledge and say sorry for the hurt, pain and suffering caused by Aboriginal males to our wives, to our children, to our mothers, to our grandmothers, to our granddaughters, to our aunts, to our nieces and to our sisters.

2009: Dave Price, non-Aboriginal husband of Bess Price, is shocked by elders' open comments in 2009 that their women can and should be executed for sacrileges. The comments come after a policewoman unwittingly drove onto men's ceremonial grounds. Lyndsay Bookie, chairman of the *Central Land Council*, tells ABC TV news:

It's against our law for people like that breaking the law, 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. [\[13\]](#)

Dave Price complains that neither feminists nor human rights activists care about this variety of capital punishment.

2013: Veronica Hudson 42, is jailed for six years for manslaughter for stabbing her partner, Woody Heron, in the chest at Bendigo on December 26, 2011. Heron had earlier been gaoled for five years for assaulting her by kicking, biting and stomping on her head, breaking her jaw. He had also pulled her teeth out with pliers. Three days before she killed him, he slit her throat from ear to ear, though not deeply, and cut her arm and hand. She was released from a psychiatric hospital into Heron's custody two days later. On sentencing, Ms Hudson sobs to Justice Betty King: *"I just want to say I'm sorry. I didn't mean it."*

2017: Police dub Roebourne in the Pilbara *"town of the damned"* because of the child sexual abuse, seen as *"staggering"*, *"a cancer"* and *"an almost unrecoverable crisis"*. Children there are more prone to being raped than almost anywhere else on earth. Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan likens the district to a war zone for little kids, with about 130 men either suspects or accused. The town is also afflicted with drugs, violence, gambling, house break-ins and per capita alcohol consumption three times the WA average. Men use welfare payments not only buy grog but to bribe children for sex.

Present day: See my three essays of last June, [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#), particularly covering astonishing rates of removals by welfare officials of babies and children from Aboriginal mothers in households plagued by domestic violence.

Meanwhile I can't see how a constitutionally-endorsed but unelected *Voice* in Canberra would fix anything,

Tony Thomas's new book from Connor Court is Anthem of the Unwoke – Yep! The other lot's gone bonkers. \$34.95 from Connor Court [here](#)

[\[1\]](#) Report of Father Nicholas, Parish Priest in Broome, in *Royal Commission on the Condition of the Natives*, 1905, Perth, WA.

"I regret to state that I know of 44 non-Christian infants who have been killed by their mothers at birth, and one child even of four years of age who was killed and eaten by its mother: now the latter is a Christian. I always let the blacks know when I visit their camps that I am fond of their children, and offer them so much rice and flour for any infant they do not want."

[\[2\]](#) Jarret, Stephanie, *Liberating Aboriginal People from Violence*. Connor Court, p v, p291

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[3] A UWA team quoted by Skelton adds a new twist to the “*Stolen Generation*” hype of Sir Roland Wilson by citing “*the forced removal of children and elders from families and communities*”. What elders? Did the state place their “*stolen*” elders in orphanages or farm them out to childless couples?

[4] Alice Springs Crown Prosecutor Nanette Rogers, who dealt with many rapes of infants, has said that witnesses were regularly intimidated and reports were not followed up for fear of further violence.

[5] Nowra, Louis: *Bad Dreaming*. Pluto Press, North Melbourne, 2007, p48

[6] *Our Greatest Challenge Aboriginal: children and human rights*. Hannah McGlade, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012 P78-82

[7] Ibid, p83-88

[8] *Traditional Australian Aboriginal Culture: From Pioneering Sources*. Monograph, Alistair Crooks. P171 2019.

[10] When Pauline Hanson, then member for Oxley, quoted this account in 1996, an Aboriginal woman elder replies, “*Mrs Hanson should receive a traditional Urganapul punishment: having her hands and feet crippled.*”[27]

[11] Windschuttle, Keith, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: The Stolen Generations*. Macleay Press, Sydney 2009, p464

[12] Today he would be deemed a member of the “*Stolen Generation*”.

[13] Even children could be killed for real or imagined sacrileges.

Q

- *Solo*

I'd only welcome an *Acknowledgement of Country*, if it actually acknowledged what was going on in said country. Devastating to read, but sadly unsurprising. How anyone can respect, let alone promote, Aboriginal culture is beyond me.

- *March*

Thanks Tony. I'm just at the pre-poll handing out for NO. So tempting to read the passages above to the ignorant YES spruikers near me and ask them how a Canberra-based voice will help those poor women.

- *Daffy*

I see in the later horrors the direct result of post-modernist '*multi-culturalism*'. Women and girls lose every time.

- *lbloveday*

“*The figures are understated. They ignore women victims' under-reporting to police, whether from shame, loyalty or fear of retribution*”: *The Australian's* Ellie Dudley recently reported. Hundreds of Aboriginal women who are victims of domestic clashes are being punished, and sometimes thrown in jail, for retracting claims against their abusers.

The Australian has been alerted to many recent instances of women being charged with making a false accusation after taking back allegations of assault, sometimes presenting with physical injuries when they do so. Meanwhile their partners, some of whom held lengthy rap sheets with historical charges of assault, were let off. In some cases, police did not conduct a formal investigation into

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whether the women had been abused, but based the charge on fact the complaint had been retracted, sources said.

- *John Daniels*

When I finished high school in Melbourne I hitch hiked to Kalgoorlie to make some money before I went to university. It would of been in 1968. Up until then I had never interacted with an Aborigines. Parked outside of the a municipal building about 10 am on a Sunday morning with another young man I had met who was teaching me how to drive. It was a peaceful morning and sitting on a bench about 15 meters away was an old Aboriginal couple quietly sharing a drink from a bottle in a brown paper bag. Suddenly for no apparent reason the old man stood up and gave the woman a mighty crack over the head with the bottle that fortunately did not break.

Instinctively I yelled out "*Hey don't do that!*" The woman stood up and shouted angrily "*Shut your fucking mouth, we know what colour we is!*" I was absolutely gobsmacked; I said nothing.

I was amazed at what I had seen and especially the response of the woman and the venom with which she shouted at me. He did not hit her again and I probably would have stopped him if he had continued. They were both obviously drunk and they slowly walked away together.

I puzzled over that encounter for years after. However when I was a child in the working class mainstream it was almost culturally acceptable for a man to give his wife a "*good hiding*". There were a lot of returned soldiers from the war then dealing with unresolved trauma. I am very glad the mainstream now treats family violence as a very serious crime.

- *garryevans41*

Which former prime minister described living in remote communities a life-style choice ?

- *john mac*
- I would posit that if the "*Voice*" is enshrined , the violence could actually increase , so emboldened and vindictive they will be. [11th October 2023](#)
- [Comments \(7\)](#)



Tony Thomas