

## *The Great Australian Dreaming*

Dr Janine Mohamed, National Foundation of Australian Women event,  
National Press Club, Canberra, 9 November 2021



Good evening, everyone.

- I would like to begin by paying my respects to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, to Elders, past, present and future emerging generations for whom tonight is so important.
  - I would also like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present this evening.
  - I am a proud Narrunga Kurna woman, and mum of 5 kids.
  - I am also the CEO of the Lowitja Institute – Australia’s National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Research.
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- After more than a year of hardship and stress for so many in Australia, I really wanted to focus tonight on hope and relationships.

- So the title of my address is: “The Great Australian Dreaming”.



But before we can hope to dream — and I’d love us to dream big — I’d like to talk to you about how I got to this topic for tonight.

- A big part of that of course is the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Tonight is my first face-to-face public event for many months. And after more than 260 days of lockdown in Naarm, it feels strange to be seeing everyone in 3D instead of on a laptop screen and to not be wearing a mask whilst talking to you!

- I had a lot of time to think in lockdown and my thinking — funnily enough — was about the experience of containment. What my people experienced, living on a mission, controlled at all times, in the name of ‘Protection’ — for years, in fact for decades.



- My nana grew up at Point Pearce mission in South Australia- under legislation that determined when she left school, what job she could apply for, when and if she could leave the mission, even who she could get married to.

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- I also thought about young women this year — separated from my own daughters, who were here in Canberra. They were unable to come to Melbourne and of course we were unable to visit them.



At the same time, I was looking at the *'March 4 Justice'* rally in Canberra, which was replicated across the country. Hearing women's voices rise up.

- It's hard to believe that their calls went largely unheard by those in power.





But even as we rallied together, the pandemic has cut us off from each other – both individually and in our everyday lives.

- The pandemic has also exacerbated social divisions between us.
- It's polarised us.
  - We are vaxxers or anti-vaxxers now.
  - We are either for or against lockdowns, and so it goes on....
- There is a growing sense that 'if your views are different to mine, you are not part of – and cannot be a part of – my world', you are against me.

## **Chimamanda Adichie:**

*“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can break the dignity of a people but stories can also repair that dignity.”*

- I feel that in the face of this division we need to re-assert our ability to share what unites us.
- As Nigerian writer Dr Adichie says, our stories in this are so important.
- We need to insist on the human ability, and need, to tell and hear each other's stories.
- For me these stories are what bridge these divides. The ability to have courageous conversations and through them to build relationships.



- But that of course gets me thinking about the voices we don't hear, and those who are silenced – for decades.
- We all know this so well as women, to be unheard, to be silenced!
- But we know that even more so as Indigenous women.
- In the places where I live and work, the names of women voices that are not heard resonate profoundly and tragically for us.....



- Naomi Williams should be alive today raising her son— but at 27 this young Wiradjuri woman, who was pregnant, died of septicaemia (a very preventable death) at Tumut Hospital in New South Wales in January 2016.
- The coronial inquiry into her death found she went to hospital 15 times in the months before she passed away without receiving a referral to an expert.

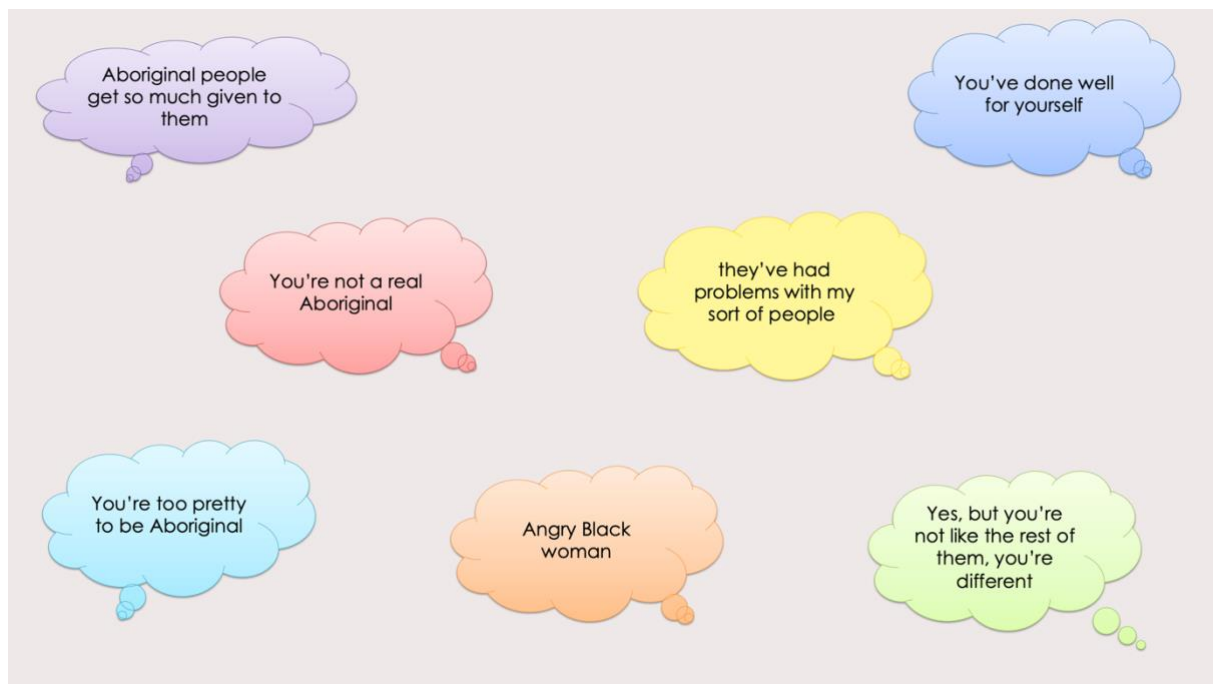




- Ms Dhu was a 22 year old Yamatji woman, who died in custody in Western Australia in 2014 because of “deficient” medical care. The Coroner found that both police and hospital staff were influenced by their racial bias.



- I know it can be difficult for many people in Australia to talk about racism.
- It's a huge topic that I can't unpack fully here tonight...
- But for me in a nutshell.... racism refers to the attitudes and ideas we carry about Indigenous peoples: attitudes and ideas that do not value us.

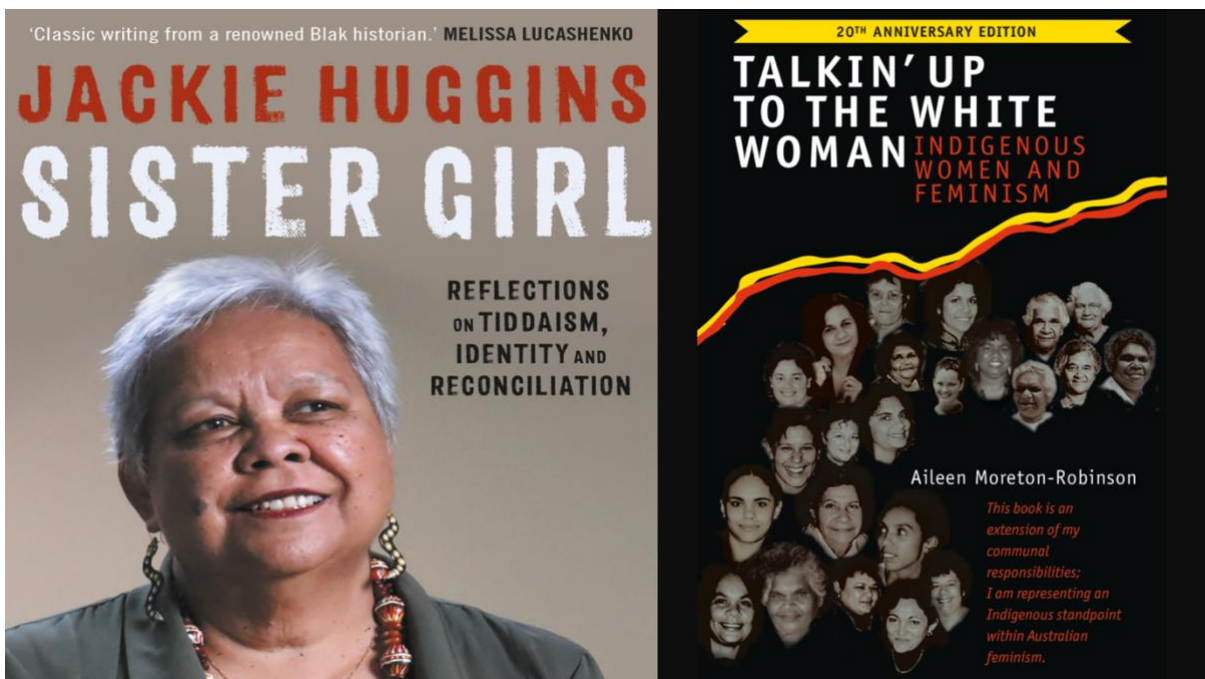


- Some of these ideas and beliefs are obvious. Others we don't even realise we have. They are taught to us, seeped into our psyches and embedded into our structures.

- They lead to comments such as these.



- Racism exists across genders – just as sexism exists across cultures.
- Racism — like a virus or cancer — doesn't discriminate, it is present among non-Indigenous women and yes, even amongst feminists!





- Intersectionality in this conversation tonight is so important to recognise.
- And I would encourage you to read the work of Indigenous women such as Dr Jackie Huggins and Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson on power and privilege within feminist theory and practice.

**Dr. Irahapeti Ramsden**



- This brings me to what has been my lifelong work – cultural safety, particularly in nursing and midwifery — fields dominated by women and by feminist approaches, but often devoid of Indigenous women’s voices.
- So it was wonderful to learn that cultural safety originated in the work of a Maori nurse Dr Irihapeti Ramsden.
- I believe cultural safety has to be at the heart of any change we can imagine and pursue, at the heart of important work like the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Close the Gap initiative.



- In Australia we tend to use the terms “cultural safety” and “cultural awareness” almost interchangeably.
- But they are profoundly different.

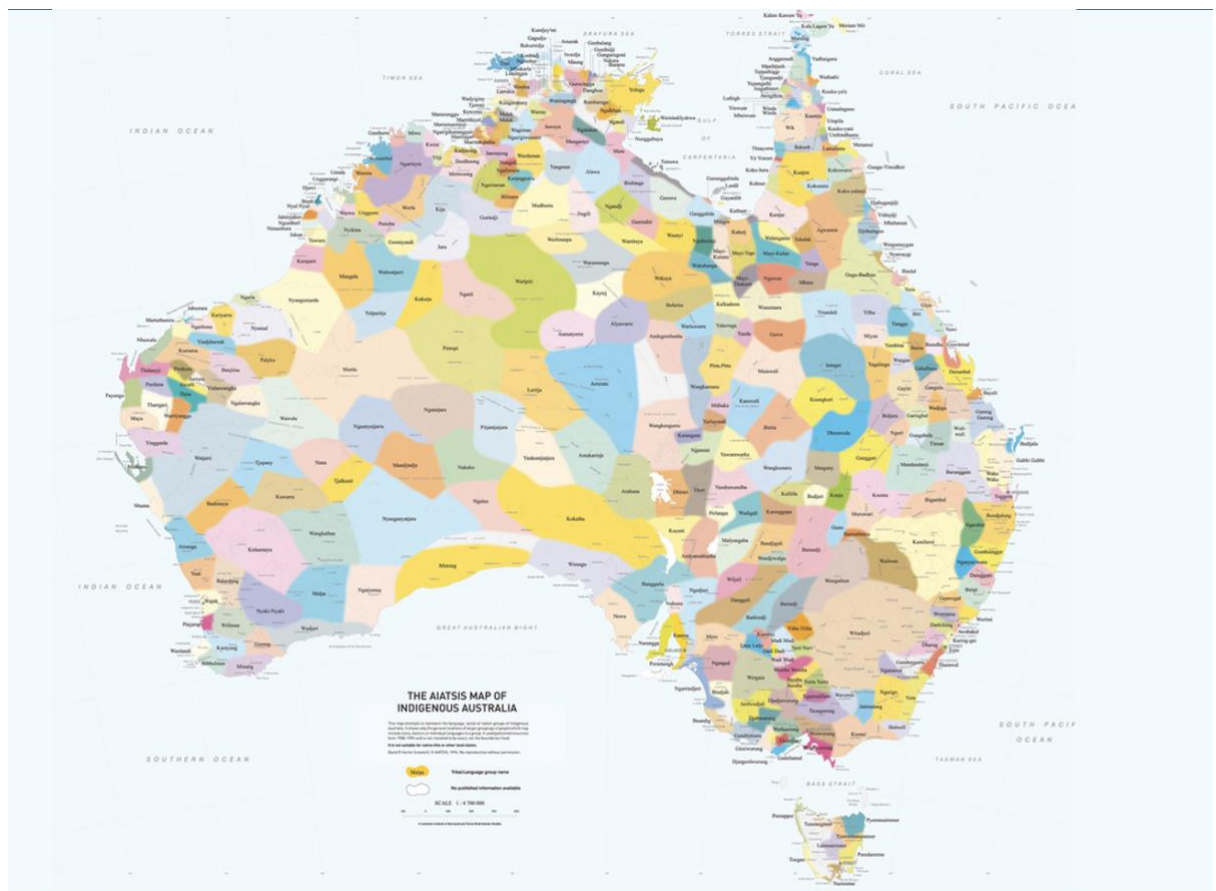
## **Cultural Awareness**

- Acknowledges differences
- Doesn't seek broader context or understanding
- The gaze is outwards
- Comfortable
- Cultural Voyeurism

- Cultural awareness is focused on improving the knowledge of non-Indigenous Australians.



- It “others” us as Indigenous peoples by examining our cultures, the way we live our lives.
- It is a process of ‘looking’ at us — so the gaze is outwards.
- Non-Indigenous people don’t have to examine themselves.
- Therefore it can be a comfortable experience for non-Indigenous people.



- Cultural Awareness also reinforces the simplistic notion that all Aboriginal people are the same.
- But we’re not — as you can see from Tindale’s map — we are uniquely and beautifully different.
- And you can never know all there is to know about us.

Cultural Safety is 'knowing thy self', the gaze is inward, not outward. It aims help participants to identify and challenge their biases and myths and to understand where these beliefs come from.



- With cultural safety, the gaze is inwards.
- It's about critical self-reflection.
- Tuning into your racial orator.
- It is about examining racism.
- When learning about cultural safety — non-Indigenous people are asked to critically examine themselves — their own worldviews, assumptions and beliefs.
- They come to recognise how these ideas, attitudes and beliefs are formed intergenerationally and embedded into organisations and systems.
- Cultural Safety asks non-Indigenous people to acknowledge how these views, assumptions, and beliefs may be harmful for Indigenous colleagues — and then are asked to challenge and unlearn them.

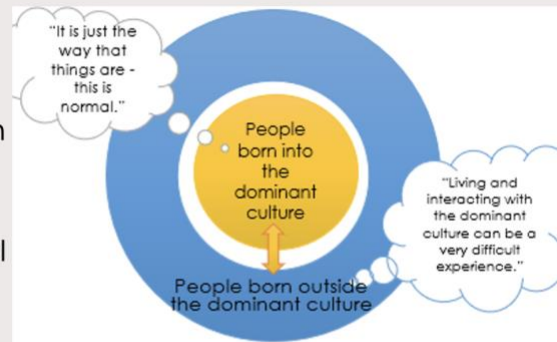
## What do we mean by 'dominant culture'?

The set of values, beliefs, standards and systems that govern and organise our lives.

This were brought to this country by the British when they claimed and colonised Australia.

This included laws, structures, decision-making processes, ideas about the individual and families, science, health and education systems - they were established as 'normal'.

They are the basis of how we do things now and used as the required norm for everyone who lives here.



- Cultural safety unpacks the concept of dominant culture.
- When you are a member of the dominant culture your identity is constantly affirmed and reinforced, in ways that you possibly don't even realise.
- But for those of us living outside of this dominant culture, it can be challenging, it can be othering.
- Our identities, our ways of knowing, being, doing are rarely acknowledged or affirmed by the dominant culture.
- Cultural safety asks us to understand and challenge power dynamics, particularly in systems.
- It asks us to think about what we don't see.
- As the slide says: It is important to acknowledge that when non-Indigenous people arrived here, they redefined what was 'normal'.

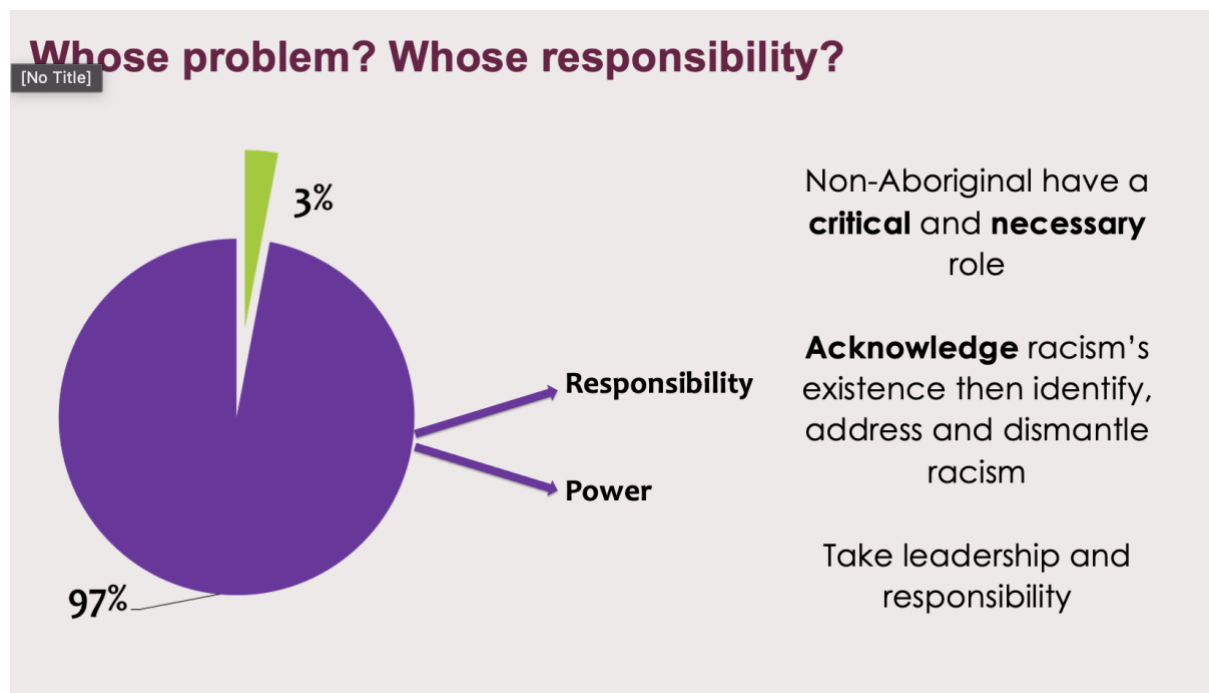


- If we return to sexism.... there should be an echo here for all of us.
- Isn't this what women expect men to acknowledge, understand and respond to in clear and honest ways about the systems they created, the systems they have benefited from and the systems that they have locked women out of?

**'men wouldn't be asked if sexism was eradicated,  
nor should women be asked to fix a sexism.  
Similarly white people wouldn't be asked if racism  
has been eradicated and Indigenous people  
shouldn't be asked to fix it'  
– Dr Greg Phillips**

- And whose job is it to dismantle these barriers and burdens?

- In the fight against sexism, as women we demand that men take on this responsibility.
- We say, "it is not a woman's job to fix it".
- Instead, we demand that men firstly recognise the privileged position in which their **gender** places them and the structural nature of the advantages they hold.
- In the same way, as an Aboriginal person, I say "it is not our job to fix racism against my people".



- It is too big a job — we are just 3 per cent of the Australian population, so surely the 97 per cent can step up?
- I believe that if you understand sexism, you can understand racism.
- And then surely non-Indigenous women are our natural allies?



- To be willing and able to look at themselves and the structural advantages they have?



- I have been lucky enough to come from a long line of incredibly strong and disruptive Aboriginal women, born into mission life and servitude – this was their lot.
- And now I have the honour to walk in the footsteps of women like Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue....
- Lowitja was born in the far north-west corner of South Australia in 1932.
- However at the age of two, like so many of her generation, she was taken from her family.
- Despite growing up in institutions while being prepared for domestic service, her dreams went way beyond the servitude that was supposed to have been her lot.

- She ended up having a distinguished career in nursing, advocacy and public service and was instrumental in founding the Institute that was named in her honour.



Pat Anderson, my chair at Lowitja Institute, who is with us tonight, has been such a fearless advocate for justice and equity for decades.

- She went from growing up on a camp outside Darwin in the 1950s to leading campaigns and organisations in health and education.
- Four years ago Pat played the leading role in facilitating the Uluru Statement from the Heart ... and more on those beautiful words shortly.
- I think so often of their strength and their resilience....
- However I also know that Aboriginal women's strength and resilience comes at a cost, which at times can be hard to bear.
- Lowitja, Pat and many others have offered me hope for my daughters and their daughters.

- But what if they didn't have to fight to be heard. What if they were able to dream, to dream big?



- As many of you understand, women have spent their whole lives fighting for equity, it is tiring and often thankless.
- Unfortunately for our women, we may never see the fruition of our work in our lifetime.
- We look to our daughters and their daughters to carry this forward for us.
- This is not the legacy — the burden — I want to leave my children.





- So let me share with you my *Great Australian Dreaming*.
- I'm looking forward to Australia in 20 years time .... where cultural safety doesn't begin in the health system, it begins in our homes and schools and it's everywhere.



- Politicians of all persuasions, in fact people across Australia are having brave conversations about racism and understand that racism is an attack on people’s health and well-being and our capacity to live productive, self-determining lives.
- In 2041 the cultures, knowledges and practices of Indigenous peoples are central to the national narrative.



- They are not only valued and respected but our ways of knowing, being and doing are at the heart of our approaches to climate action — they were galvanised into action at the COP-26
- We finally realised what Caring for Country and custodianship really means!
- Our first Aboriginal Governor General is June Oscar.





- Her powerful *Wiyi Yanu U Thangani* report was translated into meaningful action, bringing true gender justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls – having listened to their voices in that extraordinary report.
- It's a nation where we deeply understand intersectionality.
- Sexism is non-existent. Gender equity policies are the norm.



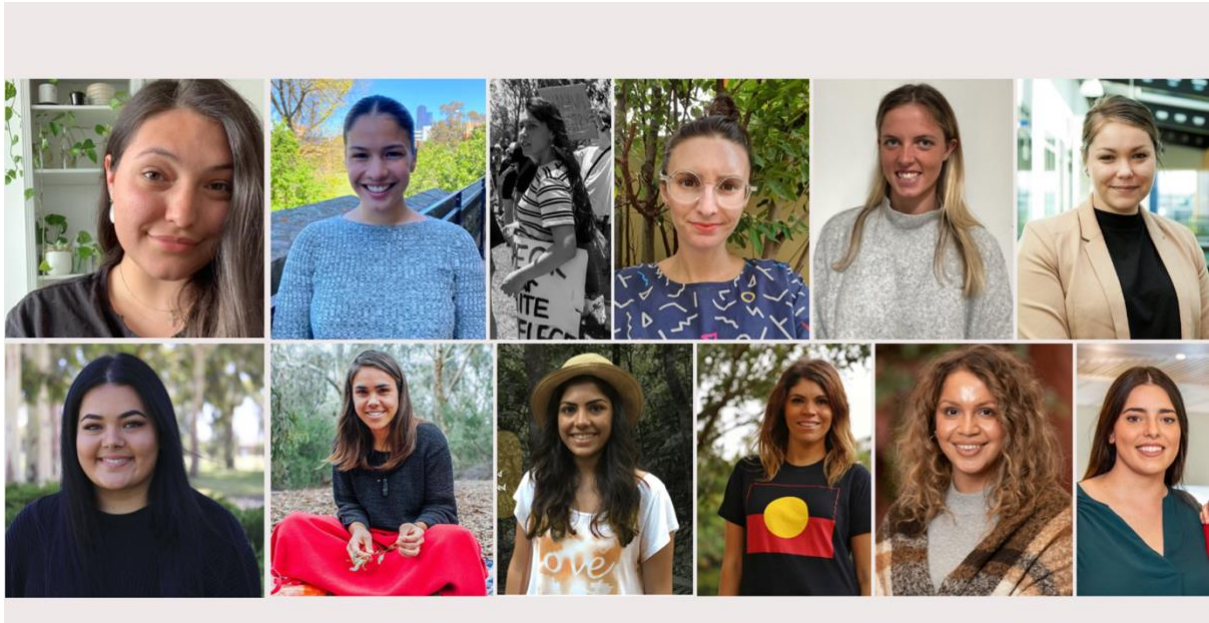
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- One of the reasons I'm so happy is that I am now watching my grandchildren thrive.
- My grandchildren are reading histories and textbooks that have been written by Indigenous peoples.



- My grannies are learning from their teachers, the true history of Australia.
- They are proud and strong in their identities because of how and what they are learning.
- It is a far cry from when I was at school — and university — when our stories were told by non-Indigenous people — who too often saw us through an overlapping lens of deficit, unconscious bias and racism.
- Instead, in 20 years, my grandchildren are learning about the tremendous achievements of our first Indigenous Prime Minister.





- Take your pick from these amazing candidates!
- They're hearing her read out loud the 2041 Close the Gap report, telling us that we have finally closed those gaps that burden so many of my people today — and that women like Ms Dhu and Ms Williams — and my daughters — are safe in health care.



- From my grandchildren's classrooms, they can scan in to hear the latest discussions from the Voice to Parliament.....
- an amazing body that was established when Australians woke up to the beautiful promise of the Uluru Statement From The Heart and embraced its gifts of Treaty and Truth.
- But it is not only my grandchildren who are learning about the strengths and proud histories of Indigenous peoples – so are their non-Indigenous classmates.

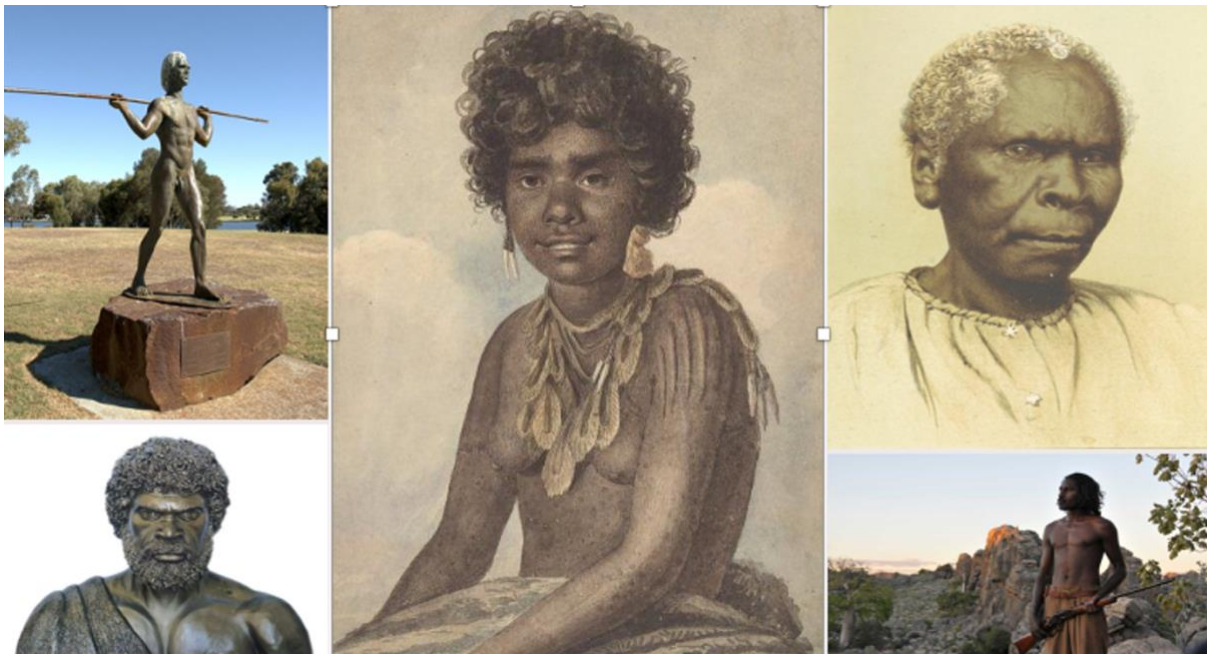


- They grow up knowing about whose country they were born on – because this is written on their birth certificates and is part of their identities from the day they are born.





- They grow up knowing to always be conscious of whose country they are on – the signs, GPS messages and names on our maps and roads remind them of this.



- When they go on school excursions, they visit memorials that honour First Nations peoples, including our brave Warriors and protectors of country such as Pemulway, Barangaroo, Truganini and Jandamarra.



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- When they go shopping for beauty or fashion products, they will be able to choose from all skin colours — we have begun to see what we couldn't see before.



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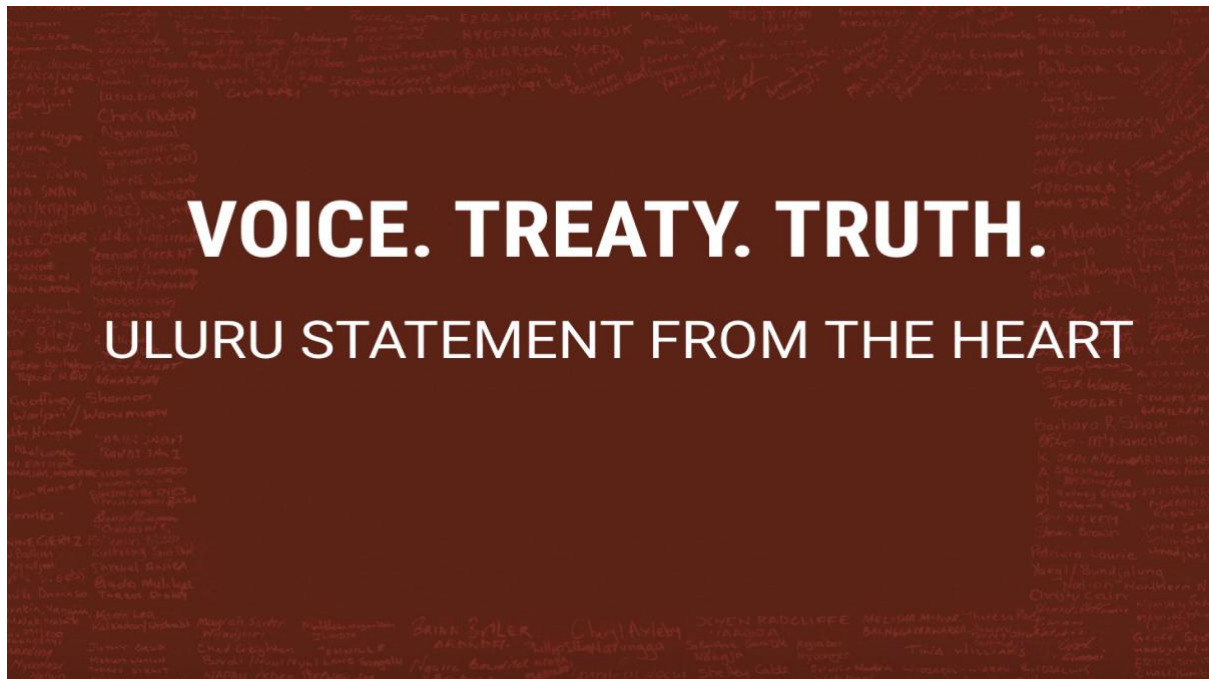


- My grandchildren are growing up with intergenerational hope, rather than intergenerational trauma.
- They are relative strangers to the experiences of racism that were part of the daily experience of their ancestors over so many generations — including for me, my parents and my children.
- We have fixed the “racism problem”.
- This is a crucial part of my Great Australia Dreaming, and I am optimistic about it...



- I invite you to journey with me and mine into this future.
- I ask each and every one of you to think deeply about how you might contribute to creating this future, starting with self-reflection and moving our learning and action into broader social spheres.
- As you walk away, please consider:
- How can you become a part of this *Great Australian Dream*?

- How can you help to make history?



- In closing tonight, I invite you to embrace one of the greatest gifts our nation has been offered...The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and its demands for:
  - Voice
  - Treaty
  - Truth
- We ask that you accept this gift and demand that our politicians take all the needed steps to make it a living part of this nation and the Foundation for a new Dreaming.
- I now have the honour of inviting Pat to the stage to share with you the Uluru Statement from the Heart .....



