



An Aboriginal Australian Republic

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Presentation by

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I'd like to thank the Wurundjeri, Bunurong and the other clans of the Kulin nation for their custodianship.

I'd like to thank the traditional owners properly, and particularly people like Aunty Joy, who I understand was here yesterday, Aunty Di Kerr, Uncle Jim Berg. He's not Kulin, but all of the koori elders here in Melbourne and Victoria who have welcomed me, a Murri from the Curry, as we say; Murri from Cloncurry, Mt Isa, and looked after me and taught me about what I need to know about the country here.

I'd also like to thank an elder called Aunty Lilla Watson. Some of you may have heard of her. Her and Aunty Mary Graham were the first Aboriginal academics at Queensland University where I studied and they taught a course called Aboriginal Perspectives and Aboriginal Philosophy and approaches to knowledge, and it was in those courses that I kind of discovered myself as an Aboriginal person properly.

I mean, I grew up in a proud Aboriginal family, but in the north of Queensland under John Bjelke-Petersen regime, there was still an incredible amount of shame about saying too much in public about our culture or our language or about who we were. This is where I'm from. It's the Gregory River.

I like to tell people I'm named after that river, but I'm actually named after my boofhead cousin. But anyway. But that's a very special place for us and our family.

So I suppose what I wanted to talk about today was that we can be an Aboriginal Australian Republic, and I'll explain that as I talk.

Today really, and what Aunty Lilla and Aunty Mary and other elders taught me, is that for the land to survive it needs its people, and for people to survive we need the land, and that you can't do one without the other.

And often in Western culture we try and do sustainability or we try and do land stuff, environmental care or land rights - well we don't do land rights in Australia - but we try and do land things without worrying about the people who live on it, and we don't have a more intimate understanding of the connections between land and people and why they're so important.

So I want to talk about those things today.

I want to say that we use this term in Australia a lot about past mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples, and it's good that that's acknowledged, but it's happening today actually as well.

The Northern Territory Intervention is an example of genocide continuing and there are many other examples I could use. So let's be clear about we have an opportunity to heal the past but we have work to do here and now and that is joint work and we can all share in that together.

Colonisation does affect us all. I'm going to share this story from Aunty Lilla, where she talks about the Aboriginal terms of reference, or the Aboriginal world view, the Aboriginal ways of seeing the world, and she says it far more clearly than me.

Forgive me, the slide's a bit full but I'll read it out.

She says: "Aboriginal people believe that the Spirit Child comes from the Earth. I haven't seen this belief about the Spirit Child in any other cultures, even indigenous ones.

“We come from this Earth and we are born from the Earth. We believe that the whole of life is a spiritual experience and that we as Aboriginal people are actually more spirit than matter.

“I really believe that emotions can create chemical reactions in the body. If we don’t face those emotions, it can create sicknesses. So for Aboriginal people the whole of life is a spiritual experience and so the whole of sickness is a spiritual process.

“The spirit cannot be in balance if it’s out of balance with the body. If you’re spiritually unwell, you can’t help but affect the whole of your being. See the impact of colonialism has been huge.

“We Aboriginal people are spiritual people and we’re still recovering because of colonialism. There’s not a lot of understanding about that on the part of white Australia, because they have this misguided belief that colonialism doesn’t affect them. Of course it does.

“It’s made them into the people they are today, which means they cannot hear what Aboriginal people are telling them. Many are trying to run away from their own history. As they get older and more mature, hopefully they’ll have a better understanding.

“You see that mouth of the snake, our people have retreated into the belly of the snake.

“It’s our consolidation of our Aboriginality, a renewing of our identity. Only recently have we begun emerging from the mouth of the snake with renewal and consolidation of who we are.

“You see, it’s the white terms of reference. It’s their misinterpretations that have given definition to Aboriginal illnesses.”

So Aunty is talking that colonisation does affect us all. In a more simple term, or in other terms, in domestic violence cases of course it's not just the victim who's affected, it's all of their families, but it's also the perpetrator.

And I think actually colonisation and whiteness is very similar to the dynamics that you find, the power dynamics that you find in domestic violence. I'll talk about that in a bit. But she also tell us that rather than just seeing things in how western communities think of history and of culture and of people, let's go back to the Aboriginal terms of reference, and she's giving us an example.

She's saying that for the Aboriginal world view the way that we understand colonisation is that we've spiritually retreated. We had to retreat back into our shells to survive, and now we are trying to come back out and be ourselves. And it's not exactly still safe to be an Aboriginal person.

Now, I just want to put a disclaimer that nothing I say today is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being the most oppressed or the most downtrodden. I don't like those kind of comparisons, but I think what I want to do is change the conversation from deficit to what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people actually have.

Now, I'm going to give you an example of some of this stuff, how it plays out in action and how colonisation and whiteness are very subtle and they are still operating today.

When I say colonisation is happening today, most detractors will say: "Oh you know, there's no massacres today. That's all in the past. Stop whinging about the past."

Well, of course Anzac was in the past, but we still celebrate that and honour and remember as we should.

And really colonisation is just much more subtle now. It's just different tools.

When I use the term whiteness, that doesn't refer to ethnically white people or white skin colour, it refers to the set of values that go with that; the set of values that come from Western culture about neo-liberalism and about greed and about subjugating the land.

They're the values I'm talking about when I talk about whiteness.

And Aboriginal people can have whiteness as well, or anybody can. So I'll give you an example of how that plays out.

I started work with the Medical Deans in Australia and New Zealand in 2003. That's what brought me to Melbourne.

I was here for a one-year contract but it kind of kept going, and we developed a curriculum for Aboriginal health –what would be the basics that we want every medical graduate in Australia to know about Aboriginal people?

The first thing we said is we actually want them to know what their own culture is. It's no use learning about the other if you don't know who you are. And then we stepped out some of the basics of culture and history and language and how history affects communities today and how doctors need to take that into account in their clinical work.

Then we got this curriculum accredited and then we set up a leadership network. So LIME is the Leaders and Indigenous Medical Education Network for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in medical schools and Aboriginal medical services and community organisations, medical colleges, that want to develop a professional development community.

We got the AMC, the accrediting body for medicine, to include this curriculum framework and change their standards.

After roughly 10 years of the medical schools being supposed to be implementing this as core medical school curricular, the Dean's own review found that there was more Aboriginal health curriculum being taught, but no more resources going into it.

So the same amount of Aboriginal people and their allies were just teaching more on project funding, and there was no guarantee of the quality of that curricular.

So there was an improvement, and the Dean should be congratulated for that. We had improved in that there was more curriculum being taught in the medical schools ... we just couldn't guarantee the quality of it.

And similarly, they had enrolled more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students – so now in Australia we're actually on population parity in terms of enrolments of Aboriginal people and medical school.

We're at 2.5, 2.6%. So it's almost population parity. But the graduation of those students is not at parity. So my PhD then said, well why, what else is going on?

And it's all centred around this idea of the hidden curriculum, and if any of you saw Four Corners last night about bullying and harassment in the medical education and medical training system, you'll understand what I'm talking about.

So for Aboriginal health, the hidden curriculum is about who makes the decisions, who's teaching you and what are the power relationships involved, who gets the funding and who decides where the funding is going, does the medical school think that Aboriginal people are all just simply a disadvantaged group of people that they have to deliver health care to, or do they see Aboriginal health as actually a paradigm that they might actually learn from?

There's something radical.

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And you know, presumably it was a former.

I'll just talk briefly about this idea about cultural safety, which is what we're trying to say to them.

Cultural awareness is about learning about the other. Cultural safety is about learning about yourself and how that applies and what your values are and your biases I guess. In New Zealand they talk about three tiers of change, cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, so having more than awareness and being clear about have some idea of what to do and not to do, and cultural safety is about institutional change. It's not just about the individual's skills or competencies, it's about the whole hospital for example.

That's from a New Zealand perspective. What happened in New Zealand, which is an interesting parallel, cultural safety was first used by Maori nurses who were trying to reform the curriculum for nurses to make sure that they understood about Maori culture, and after about 10 years – and because they have the Treaty of Waitangi and language is stronger and culture is stronger; it's a bicultural nation – they were successful in getting cultural safety written into the national public health legislation, making sure that every hospital and health service had to show how they were culturally responsive as part of their funding for Maori people.

What happened over time though is that the health services started to say, "Well we've got lots of different cultures. Why are Maoris so special? We do cultural safety for everyone." You ever heard that before? "Our door's open to everybody. Everybody's the same. We treat everyone the same."

And the Maori then had to say, "Well hold on a minute. Actually, cultural safety and Maori health are actually two different things. They're related. Cultural safety is about being culturally safe and responsive to all different cultures, but

you can't pretend that Maori health statistics are not what they are. You can't just do one without the other."

And let me explain that and then I'll turn the discussion into Australia in general, because what's happening in medical schools is instructive of Australian society.

So I'm going to talk in crude and broad terms here, but on the left, if we were to say that's Aboriginal people's business, it's leading Aboriginal health – actually, before I get to that, let's say on the left is Aboriginal people and on the right is non-Aboriginal people.

What happens in Australia is pretty much Aboriginal people spend all our time telling white fellas what to do: how to do better policy, how to understand us better. We spend all our time educating white fellas. And on the other hand, white fellas spend all their time telling us what to do: get educated like us, go to school like us, think like us, get a neoliberal job and you know, get on the rat treadmill like everybody else and then you'll be normal.

So that's a waste of energy, right, because what I need Aboriginal people to be able to do is focus on delivering Aboriginal health. We don't need do-gooders in the middle, we don't need people telling us how we should be doing Aboriginal health.

Our non-Aboriginal manager's well intentioned saying, "Don't go to that community meeting, that's not your job. You're supposed to be doing Aboriginal health", but not understanding that Aboriginal health is delivered in a comprehensive way, in a holistic way.

So, I'll give you a parallel example. The AFL, when they realised they had a bit of a problem with sexism and how they treated women - duh - they employed one woman whose job was to not only deliver women's participation and try and get young girls into the sport and women on board, and all of that, but her job was

also to reform the whole of the AFL and teach all of the blokes about their sexism.

Of course, that wasn't in her job description, but for her to do women's participation properly, she couldn't not do that. Do you see? So women's health was only her responsibility.

What we need is the blokes to take care of the sexism and take responsibility for and to educate themselves to allow them a safe enabling environment for women to be able to do participation on more equal terms.

So it's the same thing with Aboriginal health. What we need is hospital managers and clinic managers and doctors and nurses and you know, justice system same thing. We need the system to take responsibility for racism and discrimination and uncovering its own biases and privileges that it thinks are normal through the values of whiteness.

"Of course neoliberalism's normal. Of course everybody should just get a job and speak English."

So we need the system to take responsibility for that, because I'm sick of educating others.

I need to put my energy into educating my family and community about Aboriginal identity and culture and how to be proud of yourself, right. But to do Aboriginal health in the mainstream system, actually our whole time is spent trying to educate this big behemoth.

What all of these things are dependant on is Aboriginal knowledge, and it's what Aunty Lilla was talking about, the Aboriginal terms of reference. So that's the thing that binds those two concepts together. You can't be culturally safe for, let's say the Sudanese in Dandenong or Vietnamese in Richmond or any other community, you can't be culturally safe for those communities if you're not

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acknowledging whose land you're on. It depends on where you are. Those communities need to be connected into the local traditional owners as much as the rest of us, not because we want to privilege Aboriginal people as the most special people in the community, but because they've got knowledge about the land and place and history that can help the rest of us survive easier, right.

It's not about charity. I don't want people to do Aboriginal health or education or whatever for charity reasons, or because we're all disadvantaged. Sometimes the way statistics are reported reinforces the deficit thinking, reinforces that Aboriginal people are passive victims, that we're all mad, bad and sad and we need help. We need white experts to help us, because we're all so useless and dumb, right. Inadvertently it gets reinforced.

So what we need, is we need the system to take responsibility for that stuff based on Aboriginal knowledge.

You can't be culturally safe with someone else if you're not using Aboriginal knowledge. And on the other hand, I can't do Aboriginal health in someone else's country, here in Wurundjeri country, if I don't acknowledge that this is Wurundjeri country.

It's not my country. I have to talk to the local mob.

So it's about place in the land. You can't deliver good health care or good community services or good justice services if you don't know what the context is that you're working in, and the context is more than just a piece of dirt. It's what's happened on the piece of dirt before, because what's happened on the piece of dirt is still in it. The land remembers what has happened, and it has not been healed yet.

So that doesn't mean it has to be negative all the time, but it means that if you work with the local mob, they'll help you unlock how to do things better, working with elders.

You know, in our western training we get taught, you know, start with objectives and aims and strategies and, you know, the measures and you do a strategic plan and blah, blah, blah, blah. In the Aboriginal world view that's just laughable. That's hilarious.

In the Aboriginal world view the first thing you do is you go and talk to your aunties or your elders, because you need spiritual guidance. And when they're talking to you, they're not sussing you out for what strategy or objectives or funding you're going to do, they're sussing you out for what's your motivation, what are your values.

Are you doing it because you want to make money or look good, or are you doing it because you care about the land, or are you doing it because you care about the next generations? That's what they're sussing you out for.

So in the Aboriginal world view, you go straight to the elders and you start from there, then you start working with talking to lots of other people and you'll start to find lots of other people who do good things and who can help.

Land rights is about the rights for Aboriginal people to have our say over our land – but the benefits of that are for everybody.

Aboriginal people don't want to take over. We don't think of land that way. We don't want to own the land so that we can get all the money from it. It's impossible in the Aboriginal world view to think like that.

We want to have responsibility for land so that other people can survive, that we can look after each other on the land properly. See the land and social

cohesion are not disconnected. So I've talked about those things. We haven't talked about the values in Australia of what we want this country to be.

Like those medical Deans, what happens often in organisations who want to do Aboriginal health or education, since the apology we've noticed or these mainstream NGOs who are all running around going, "Quick, quick, let's save the gap. Quick find an Aborigine. Quick, how do we do this?" and it's really good that everyone want to do it, right, that's the public awareness and that's fantastic, but what often happens, because of the narrative of mad, bad and sad and disadvantaged, what we do is we jump straight into the operations.

"Quick, how can we save?" When I started at Monash, one of the senior professors said to me, "Quick, let's go up to the Northern Territory and start taking blood samples", because there's no Aborigines in Victoria, apparently, and because the people in Northern Territory had never had their blood taken away before for medical research and because they'd really just be okay with that, you know. So it's not about jumping straight into operations.

If you want to do good things with your community partners, and many of you will understand this working in the community field, is you need to sit down with your partners and talk about what are your values first, why are you doing it, who really cares, what's motivating, what do you want to get out of it, what are your values.

Start there.

Then you can start talking about how you might work together, the terms of power, the terms of the partnership, who might make the decisions, what happens if things go wrong, how might you work together and what kind of a partnership do you want, then you can start talking about what you want to do, your strategy, what your strategy might be and what kind of objectives you might want to achieve together.

Then you can start talking about how that might look like in operations, then you can start implementing, then you can start evaluating properly or you should evaluate all the way through.

That's an ideal way and that's the Aboriginal way of working actually is to start with the elders and the values. It's very confusing to me why western society doesn't understand this.

And they do understand it in other areas. I mean, if a medical school wanted to do something, a new emerging field around surgery or gene technology or something, as an organisation they sit down and go, okay, we need to get the key change agents, we need to talk about what we're really doing here and why we would do this, why are we making an investment, who needs to be at the table, what kind of strategies can we really make a difference in, and then you start doing operations.

So it's not actually rocket science. It's just that for Aboriginal people, because the narrative and the values of whiteness are that white is normal and nothing wrong with it and science is objective and normal and not value laden, apparently, then of course because all Aborigines are mad, bad and sad we should just jump in and start doing it.

Oh, and then what we do to make sure that we feel like we're including them is put the Aboriginal flags out the front and we have a sausage sizzle at NAIDOC week and we employ one Aboriginal person. Done. Tick box. Reconciliation action plan. Yay. Woohoo.

Let me start on reconciliation. In Australia, race relations and building, healing the wounds of the past absolutely is our task as a nation, but the way that reconciliation has been constructed in Australia is white polite.

It is based on the values of whiteness, based on the values that those Deans were doing, which is we will include you in our medical school if you just follow all our rules like everybody else, you poor little Aborigine.

You need charity, we'll help you, come through our normal system. Right.

That's what we do in Australia.

We want reconciliation, but we don't want truth and reconciliation.

We want the warm good fuzzies, we want corporates doing reconciliation action plans and ticking all the boxes, but not really being clear on the implementation or evaluation.

What we need is a paradigm shift people, not just for Aboriginal people but for all of us, because the values of whiteness, neoliberalism, greed, fear of the land, those things are the things that are oppressing all of us, not just Aboriginal people.

They impact us perhaps more in some areas.

This treadmill that we're all on: get a job, go to work, get home, feed the kids, you know, that treadmill that we've come to just accept as normal, is not normal actually. That's about corporate control. That's about the corporates keeping the governments in line who keep us in line, while we get to feel and pretend that we're free. That's what happens for Aboriginal people.

We're supposed to be thankful that this constitutional recognition stuff's come up. The language of it, it's very instructed the language, we will include you Aboriginal people in our white normal constitution, because we own the country. What never gets addressed is the power imbalance, right.

So Aborigines get included on white terms.

Contracts that you all have to deal with as well, you know, government contracts. The fastest way for government to control anybody is to fund them.

So in the sixties and seventies, Aboriginal organisations and the movement was powerful and strong and didn't stand back and said what needed to be said.

Since then, very slowly over those years, and this parallels what's happened in the broader community sector and, you know, across the world, is slowly governments have become more controlling of descent from anyone, so that now the community sector, we are pretty weak compared to what we used to be in terms of advocating for issues, or we have to advocate within the bounds that the government sets.

So George Brandis will allow a Human Rights Commission, but only if they say nice things. Yeah? That's the kind of oppression that we're all under.

That's the whiteness. That's neoliberalism. That's the stuff that impacts Aboriginal people most.

So those medical Deans wanted to include Aboriginal people, but if we dare question that Aboriginal health shouldn't be just an add-on and like two lectures at the end of public health in disadvantaged community subject, that we wanted to – and there's a subject at one of the psychology schools called Problems of Psychology, and it's where all of us "freaks" go, you know: Aboriginal, gay and lesbian and women and you know, who actually collectively are the majority, but yeah.

So that's the thing, we're oppressed and our Constitution actually was a great example when they set it up of people coming together and trying to do the right thing, but it's just that those people were white men only and rich, right. They weren't poor white men either.

So our Constitution of course is set up on those values. And Australia, we have this fear of change. Oh you can't change everything. We've got a stable democracy, we've never had civil war in Australia. Bullshit.

What about the Frontier Wars? Of course we've had civil war in Australia. Of course we've had genocide here. But we're very scared of that word genocide. We want to talk about reconciliation because it's nice and we can just move on.

Well guess what, Aboriginal people want to move on too. We don't want to talk about this stuff forever and a day. The only reason we're saying it is because we know that if we don't deal with this as a country, if we don't have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission instead of just the reconciliation white polite stuff, then the country can't move on.

And I'll give you two practical examples. We lock people up in Nauru and PNG because we're scared of the other. It's our racism. And we're scared that they're going to come and take our little bit of the land, our little bit of money, our Centrelink. Who really wants to fight over Centrelink? I mean, right.

So it's because we have this fear that there's not enough, we are locked into the corporate thinking of growth is the only way out of it all, and they're the things that are oppressing all of us people. The two biggest issues facing Australia are sustainability; so economic, environmental, social. Sustainability broadly. And national identity. We don't know who we are. That's why we're so scared of everybody else.

And we are an island home surrounded by sea and I think that actually makes us more fearful actually, more close-minded sometimes.

We don't have vision in politics or leadership. Our vision is very small. We're still hoping we're the last white bastion in the corner of the Earth. We don't really want to deal with those bloody Asians, but they've got a lot of money so

we'll have a go. As long as it's on our terms and just don't come in here. We'll only let the rich ones in and then we'll complain if they're buying our houses.

Do you see how confused we are as a nation? Our values are confused. We have the myth of the fair go, the myth of a stable democracy, the myth of a fair go for all.

Now, it's not to say everything in Australia is bad because I do actually think it's an amazing country and I love being from here. Our medical scientists do amazing things, but we don't give them any support so they all go overseas and then we complain.

Our social visionaries, Germaine Greer, she's gone a bit wonky lately, but Germaine Greer and Uncle Joe McGinness and Aunty Lilly Watson and some of you in the audience.

Our Australian intellect is actually pretty amazing and that capacity for innovation and to solve problems, but it's because of our values of whiteness and fear that we dumb them down. That's how these things impact us all.

So we're scared of the land still, we still think the land is something to be subdued and made money from, and we're scared of each other. So those things are deeply psychological: fear of the land, trying to control it, fear of the other.

I want to go back just briefly to what happened when Captain Cook first arrived. He and the Aboriginal people actually got on pretty well. This is a broad brushstroke of what happened. But they got on pretty well at first.

And then those convicts – they were people who were oppressed by their own. Treated as outcasts because they were poor, and jailed and criminalised. And if I imagine, if I were a convict I would be pretty pissed off about that. And I get to

this strange land and this land I have no idea what it is, and these strange dark people and how confusing that must have been.

But at first, human nature took over and they got on. Then Aboriginal people started to see what was happening, and they were actually trying to control and take over the land. So then the Frontier Wars started right in Sydney and in Brisbane and all around the country if you care to read about it.

And then those people who had served their terms, those convicts who had served their five or ten year terms for stealing a loaf of bread, they were offered a chance to make something of themselves with the land plot.

So they were given land plots and it was just unfortunate that those Aborigines had to be massacred to get them out of the way. Do you see? Aboriginal people became collateral damage where the values of land as money took over, and those convicts who were oppressed themselves, saw their chance to make something of themselves.

And therein I think lies the big story about Australia. We think real estate will save us. We think location, location, location. We fetishise house renovations and the rest of the rubbish, because we are so scared about being left alone when we're old that we, without meaning to, have gotten on the treadmill of greed.

Negative gearing is greed. One family needs one house. That's enough. It's not sustainable.

So therein is the Australian obsession about land as money. That's what oppresses us all. That's where we think we can just simply keep growing, keep digging up more things.

And Aboriginal people are here not to say these things because we want to pretend we're the best and our culture doesn't have any problems. It's because

we know that there are certain things that must be done and observed for the land to survive and for us to survive in turn.

If you don't have social cohesion the land will suffer. If you don't have a healthy caring for country and listening to the elders when they tell you to burn off the land instead of waiting for catastrophic bushfires, if you don't listen to that Aboriginal knowledge – Aboriginal knowledge is not fanciful myth. It is 60,000 years of human survival.

Now we're looking, the Murray-Darling Basin, the Yorta Yorta and other elders have been telling the Murray-Darling Basin Commission and State and Federal Governments for decades how to manage water flow, but they refuse to believe that that is real science, because they're not experts. They can't be. It's the values of whiteness. They're just little Aboriginal people talking about culture or something, you know.

And these white environmental experts know everything. Now I'm not saying discount science. What I'm saying is, science is limited, but with Aboriginal knowledge it could be very powerful.

Now in terms of our place in Australia, we only want to include Aboriginal people if we can exploit, own or consume.

So Aboriginal art is welcome, but not us.

Aboriginal culture is welcome because we can make a tourism industry of it, but not the history of genocide and how that impacts us today.

So this is what I mean, the terms of inclusion are very, very important. I don't want to be included in a Constitution that's for white men and Gina, right.

A few white men and Gina. We have to share power and resources. It's the only way through. It's the only way through. Now the republic, I'll spend five more minutes.

So what are we going to do? We need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we need to heal the wounds like we are healing the wounds or starting to with this sexual abuse business. And Aboriginal people are leaders, can I say.

The Stolen Generations, that was leadership and that helped the lost generations come forward and that's helping sexual abuse survivors come forward. So Aboriginal people are not all mad, bad and sad.

Actually, they've kind of got an idea about how society could run. Anyway, we need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Germany and Japan memorialised genocide. They admit it. It's in the school curriculum. Christopher Pyne still doesn't want basic Aboriginal studies in the curriculum, not even the nice stuff, not even the cutesy arty stuff.

The reason of doing Aboriginal studies for all non-Aboriginal people is not because we think we're only special but because those circles, it's a part of the whole country understanding where we've come from as a people, and then move on. Then we can move on.

We need a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We need national discussions about our values and what we want them to be. Then we need to sit down and start talking about the terms of the new Constitution, what it would look like.

I want Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people to share power and resources so that it's a system of dual-sovereignty, so that we have a national Parliament, we have a Prime Minister as normal, we have a President.

You know, why can't that President be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person in a ceremonial role? It is Australia saying we're proud of who we are.

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You know why we look to the Queen so much? The Republican movement are very basic in their understanding of the Australian Polity I think and I've told them so. The Republic is carrying on about this stuff about, oh we want an Australian Head of State. Well yeah, duh, but that doesn't explain why.

Why people love the Queen is because they see stability and they see ceremony. They're human needs. We all need that. But I would want to say to you that 60,000 years of governance is pretty stable. Aboriginal people governed and managed the land sustainably for 60,000 years.

So if we turn our attention from England to Aboriginal culture and heritage, we have the oldest human heritage in the world here, but we trash it. We let mining companies dig it up every day. We acknowledge it very basically. Human heritage, not just Aboriginal people.

The oldest human culture in the world is right here, and do we acknowledge that? Is that in our Polity? Is it in our ceremony, our public things? It's a little bit. We're starting, we're getting there. But it's all very white polite at the moment.

So I want to see sharing power. I want to see an Aboriginal President or a Torres Strait Islander President, and maybe every second term it's an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person only. Only candidates are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island, and then the next one is open to everybody again. Something like that.

But we're not even having those discussions. We're not even looking at our options. I don't want to be like American representative democracy, which is a bastardised version of Native Americans mind you. Native American Iroquois

Confederacy, six tribes formed representative council and Thomas Jefferson took that idea and formed the American Congress, but he ruined it.

Anyway, right here where we are, the six clans of the Kulin Nation, had a similar thing. To see Aboriginal ways of understanding how to manage the land and people and resources is right here under our feet and we don't even have that conversation properly.

If we learn those lessons, respectfully, don't steal the knowledge and then just ignore Aboriginal people, but actually have true partnerships with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, then we'll move forward as a country.

I don't want reconciliation. I don't want constitutional recognition. I don't want to be included in someone else's sovereignty. I want shared sovereignty thank you very much.

I don't want a treaty. I think that's probably a bit stronger. But treaties still need to be legislated by the Crown and by the Parliament, which means that the Minister of the day can simply ignore it when they choose, which is what happens in New Zealand and Canada where there are treaties.

It would be a step forward from what we've got now, but still not true shared power and resources.

So the reason for doing all this is not because Aboriginal people want charity or because we think we're any more special than the others. It's because we know how to manage this land so we all get to survive and our grandkids get to survive.

We don't have all the answers, but we've got a lot more answers than the so-called experts, because all the so-called experts really knew – and the Westminster System, Uncle Joe McGinness says the Westminster System is a bit primitive, it's a bit old. Six hundred years, it's fallen down. Western

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governments around the world are locked 50/50. Congress you can't get anything through in America.

Our system needs change people. It needs change for all of us. We need to fix this, and the republic is our opportunity to fix it. It's our opportunity to dream big about the kind of nation we want to be, not what America does or England does, but who we want to be: proud of our Aboriginal heritage, proud of our non-Aboriginal community, proud of new Australians, proud of our place in the Asia Pacific, with an outward view of the world.

A big vision of equality. A big vision of managing the land and resources properly. But the corporations are not going to like that. Those handful of people and Gina, who control the governments, Labor and Liberal are just as bad, those handful of people are going to fight us tooth and nail.

So we can all stay on our little treadmill and do our little community projects and they are critical that we do that, but until we get some big systemic change and the people have to call for this and the republic is our opportunity, until we do that, we will forever be on that treadmill in one way or another.

The corporations are very, very smart about how to trick people into believe they've got freedom. And it's not that everybody in a corporation is evil. It's not that the market or economy in and of itself is a bad thing, it's that the motivations and values have become skewed.

They have gone away from the Earth. And the whole point of this stuff, the whole point of making money is so your families can survive. It's not so that one or two people can amass more than they need.

So rather than reconciliation, we need to talk about peace making, genocide and war happened here. I'm sorry, we are not a country free of civil war. We had

war right here. Lots of them. And we haven't acknowledged that properly yet, so we need a peace building process.

The IRA and the Crown had to have a peace building process and both had to compromise. The IRA didn't get everything they wanted and the Crown didn't get everything they wanted, but they sat down and talked.

That's what we need to do in Australia. We need to talk about our values. We need to open ourselves from the small mindedness. I want to finish with what Aunty Lilla says, and she always says it far better than I ever could, and the elders do, but we need a balance.

These terms of reference, the Aboriginal terms of reference, are actually for all people because they're the oldest surviving people in the world. The Aboriginal terms of reference is what Australia needs, and in that power and money gets balance between the people and the government and the corporations. Not one of those.

We have a balance of traditional and scientific knowledges. We have a balance between black and white and new, if I could use that term. We have a balance between male and female. It is inconceivable in Aboriginal culture for women not to have equal decision-making. Inconceivable. And Aunty Lilla talks about this.

Aboriginal children are taught from a young age to share food. This is critical because it teaches them what Aunty Mary Graham refers to as the reflective motive. It teaches them to be aware of and consider the needs of others. Researchers have found that empathy is best taught in the very early years and that if this is taught properly, it encodes empathy in the person from a young age.

This is why Aboriginal people are teaching their children to share food very early and even have lullabies for sharing food. This reflective motive is why it's more important to consider how you teach, rather than what you teach.

Aboriginal people teach by doing and showing context, place, acknowledging country. White people's education is often based on facts only. The focus is on the what. But unless you teach the how, you won't have built empathic human beings. You will have only built competitive ones.

Teaching equality, such as in feminism, only encourages competition between the sexes, but teaching congeniality in a community and group way helps build empathy. So she's not anti-feminist. What she's saying is that the power imbalance that the feminist women are trying to – well true feminists, as you will know, are trying to tear down the joint and start again and have a proper power balance, but this idea that women's equality will come if they just are included in the male system and just, you know, get jobs like the men, that's inconceivable to Aboriginal culture.

What we need is this empathic business where everybody, it's just normal that everybody has a say.

I want to end on this quote:

“If you have come to help me then you're wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together.”

That's from Aunty Lilla Watson. Thank you very much for your time.