
Section 18C: a bad law that finds racism where there is none

- Jacinta Nampijinpa Price
- *The Australian*
- 2 February 2017

My traditional Warlpiri culture is governed by stringent rules regarding the sharing of knowledge and what women can and cannot say in public, but I believe my people need cultural reform to allow more open and honest discussion so that women and children victims of violence are no longer silenced.

The domestic violence epidemic that has been played out in Aboriginal communities for decades is worsening, and the political correctness that suppresses freedom of speech is contributing to it.

Activism once sought to champion freedom of speech but has now turned on those wishing to practice that right who do not follow the left-green ideology, or simply if they are Caucasians addressing an issue relating to individuals who are not. The popular ideology of these people is that all Aboriginal people need to be protected from white people.

Political correctness is a set of rules that governs the way in which we use language about, or towards, minority groups so as not to offend them. Oddly, people of Caucasian backgrounds are exempt from this protection. They are fair game.

This means if we wish to expose horrible truths in order to address them to try to bring about real change, it can be misconstrued or branded “insulting” or “humiliating” to someone, somewhere who self-identifies as indigenous.

This is exactly what happened with Bill Leak’s cartoon. According to the unwritten rules of political correctness you must not speak of the reality of the circumstances Aboriginal people face unless you are Aboriginal, or can claim to be.

If a non-Aboriginal person attempts to address any of these issues and an Aboriginal person is offended, they can simply call out “racist” and the debate is shut down.

This is exactly the tactic that abusers of power, supporters of Aboriginal perpetrators of domestic violence and deluded individuals with an unhealthy victim mentality will use to shut down any honest debate about the plight of their fellow human beings.

This is the case even though a clear majority of those identifying as indigenous produce children with their fellow Australians who don’t. What, then, are the non-Aboriginal people to do in order to address any issues their Aboriginal or ethnic loved ones are facing? How are they supposed to deal with the issues causing incredible suffering to their fellow Australians who happen not to be white?

I believe 18C invalidates the idea that we are all human and hold differing opinions. It denies basic human nature that allows us critical thinking and the means to learn and grow. It is absurd that 18C ever became legislation.

It is my human right to argue that Aboriginal people have never been given the privilege that those of the West have had, the right to culturally evolve. We have been told we must remain in an unchanged culture. We have been exempt from constructive criticism, as has Islam in the West.

There are other points of comparison. If you criticise Islam, you risk a threat to your life. If you criticise Aboriginal people in any way, shape or form, you are labelled a racist or bigot if you are white. You may also risk a threat to your life if you are Aboriginal like me.

My life has been threatened because I wrote a piece telling the world that as an Aboriginal Australian I celebrate Australia Day.

The Racial Discrimination Act has made many who identify as indigenous believe they are exempt from its provisions. That they can't be racist and therefore they feel free to insult, offend and humiliate whomever they please. They do it to white people and they do it to other Aboriginal people who refuse to follow the "party line".

In Alice Springs a member of the public is far more likely to be randomly assaulted, physically or verbally, if they are perceived as "white" rather than "black". Grossly offensive racist insults are used liberally in the streets of Alice Springs against white people. I have walked the streets of this town with my white friends to protect them from this sort of thing. But there have been no complaints under 18C, which is not seen as a protection of the rights of Australians generally. White Australians feel intimidated, not protected, by this act.

Both my mother (a senior Warlpiri woman and former minister of the crown) and I have been vilified in obscene sexist and racist terms by somebody who described themselves as an indigenous activist, because we refuse to be told what to think and say. I've lost count of how many times I've been called a coconut and much worse.

We have not once been insulted in racist terms by white people, not as far as we know. And if that happens we know how to defend ourselves. We aren't victims, we aren't afraid to stand up for our people and ourselves.

Our people are suffering and their problems are daunting and complex. We will not find the answers if we are denied the right to take part in an open and honest debate.

We can't do that without offending those who are ideologically committed to the party line that has been laid down by the activists of the eastern cities and their white allies.

They are educated, speak English and know how to use the system against anybody with whom they disagree. We speak for the most marginalised, those whom the education system has failed, who are often illiterate and don't speak standard English.

It is not just the white people who are closed down, it's also the most marginalised and least powerful of the Aboriginal population who are denied a voice by the self-

appointed spokespeople who know nothing of the circumstances in which they live. The agenda is controlled by an English-speaking Aboriginal middle class ignorant of the values and issues of those who live remotely.

The Racial Discrimination Act's 18C treats us Aboriginal Australians as infants who can't speak or stand up for ourselves. It treats non-Aboriginal people as if they have no right to hold an opinion about anything that relates to us, especially the problems of our own making that are killing us.

White people are not game to speak out. That should never be allowed to happen in a democracy.

The way to beat racism is through debate, not the closing down of debate.

The way forward for our people is cultural evolution.

We have an absolute right to find our own solutions, to find our own way forward out of this misery without being vilified by those who claim to be on our side and claim to speak for us.

Jacinta Nampijinpa Price is an Alice Springs councillor. This is an edited version of her submission to the parliamentary inquiry into freedom of speech.