

Thank you for this incredible honour. I can't tell you what it meant to have been asked to deliver the Dymphna Clark lecture at the invitation of Manning-Clark House. To follow in the footsteps of luminaries like Professor Megan Davis and Professor Jenny Hocking is frankly, overwhelming. I can not promise to live up to them and their compassionate intellect, but I hope, like Dymphna, I have something to say.

I would like to begin by acknowledging we are on the stolen land of the the Ngambri and Ngunnawal people. Sovereignty was never ceded. And as a nation we need to do better in not only acknowledging our history, but working to making it right. I pay tribute to First Nation elders, past and present and of course any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the room or listening. May this nation finally have grown up enough to have a serious conversation about addressing past wrongs, and we progress Truth, Treaty and the Voice in a safe and compassionate environment.

That's not very nice!

I can't remember when I first had that line thrown at me - but it came early enough to become a foundational stone in my inner voice.

I heard it when I stood up for myself as a child, finally pushing back against the bullies who had pulled my hair, hid my bag and stole rare treats. I heard it from teachers who deployed it when boundaries were set or questions were asked. I heard it from the boys who called me a frigid bitch when I fought them touching my pre-pubescent body, or fought touching theirs. I heard it from my parents. Friends. Bosses. I still hear it today. Difficult, challenging, bolshy, aggressive, touchy, angry, emotional. All of it different versions of 'that's not very nice'.

So it's time to say it. Fuck nice. I am not 'nice.' I despise nice. 'Nice' in our social construct is just another weapon to keep us silent. To keep us in our place. Because if we drill down in it, nice is just another form of oppression.

To be nice is to be passive, and in many cases, to be dishonest. Being nice is a way of forcing someone into doing nothing, saying nothing, and standing for nothing which may cause someone else discomfort.

And so, it is used as part of the armoury of civility wielded by those who hold power and are actively engaged in *not* feeling discomforted, in holding on to the way things always have been. Because those ways have always been very, very comfortable *for them*. Discomfort is for the *not-nice* among us.

When it comes to the politics of civility, nice is just one more tool to keep people in their place - **so they don't trouble** the status quo.

I am not sure when I began to rebel against the concept of nice, when I began to see the way civility is used to police who is allowed a voice. Probably the same time the seeds of rage, planted inside of me while I was just cells inside my grandmother's womb began to take root.

I had been a quiet child, as children in stressful environments often are. My father, whom I love dearly, probably should never have had children, scarred as he was from a childhood in displaced peoples' camps and religious schools which didn't spare the rod when it came to rambunctious children acting out their trauma. My mother, barely an adult when she had me, had been made to grow up too fast in a household where children had limited choices in when they would become adults.

Both discovered, in different ways, that playing nice was a survival mechanism. They passed it down to us, unthinkingly, as those who hold limited power often do.

Both wanted better for their children than they had had. And so, we were taught to question the world. But to do so 'nicely'.

For my refugee father, being accepted in Australia meant playing by the rules, an attitude borne out of both immense gratitude **that** this country had offered his parents and himself safety when for so long he had known only fear, and the constant fear it could all be taken away again.

My mother, my mother was different. My mother learnt how to play nicely as most women do - out of fear for their personal safety.

For so many, growing up female means growing up learning your body never truly and wholly belongs to you. Getting through it as intact as possible means learning to 'be nice'. And even that isn't enough to protect you.

Women are taught to be nice at the same time as they are grasping their fine motorskills, absorbing the lessons as they would milk. After all, sugar and spice and all things nice are what little girls are made of.

While all children are taught manners, and how to be polite, the lessons of 'ask nicely' or 'speak nicely' are particularly honed for young girls, who are told 'that's not very nice' at the same time young boys, playing roughly, are just boys being boys. A young girl being bullied by a classmate will be told by at least one well-meaning adult that it's 'just because he likes you' and the correct response is not to fight, but to be nice to him.

A young child pushing against being asked to hug or kiss an adult is told to 'be nice' and submit, even as they're told their bodies are their own.

A child upset with another might be asked 'were they not very nice to you' for behaviour ranging from not sharing to physical abuse. A neuro-divergent child may have their actions described as 'not nice' over tics or self-soothing methods.

But little girls are told to be nice over and over and over again, until it becomes not just second nature, but something you have to fight against as an adult. Even when you are uncomfortable. Even when it's against your own interests. Even when it is absolutely *not* what you want.

Like that kiss you were made to give or accept from the uncle who smelt like cigarettes and alcohol, who always held on a little too long and a little too tight, or the family friend who looked at you in a way you didn't understand, but your cells did, as he told you you were

‘ripening up nicely’. Or the men who told your father they’d have to lock you up when you got older because you’d cause trouble for the boys. You are taught, if not explicitly, that the correct response is to smile and play nice.

Until one day you wake up and realise you’ve been made to play nice your entire life.

And so many who hold power know it. And they use it against us every single day.

Don’t believe me? Let’s take the word difficult. On its own, it’s a challenge, something you might need to put some effort into. A difficult exam, or a difficult climb - used there, it’s a descriptor for something you need to prepare for, a feat you’ll need to think about.

A difficult woman though? ahhhh, that’s different.

A difficult woman is something to be conquered and if that isn’t possible, avoided. She’s hard, but in a different way. A ball buster. A bitch. A difficult woman is someone who tends to speak up. Who doesn’t play nice. Who refuses to minimise herself, or stroke egos. Someone who doesn’t spend her time making you feel *comfortable*.

Not that anyone comes out and says it though. Of course not. That’s where the politics of civility comes in.

It’s coded. Describe a woman as difficult and you’ve said everything you need to say. Everyone knows what you mean. And calling it out is like catching smoke - no one has said anything ‘unprofessional’. They’ve not had to. Our social rules of engagement make pushing back against a label like ‘difficult’ impossible. You become even more difficult. Even more of a problem. It opens the door for more and more toxic civility. Afterall, they’re the issue.

You can say anything you like if you have painted someone as an obstacle. And nine times out of 10, it’s deployed against someone who has *less social power*.

Women. People of colour. Someone outside the gender binary. A person practicing a religion outside of Christianity.

We see it time and time again, but how often do you see it called out, there and then, in the moment?

Is it because you know that doing so would see those same weapons of civility turned against you? Is it because even if we haven’t thought about it, we know how the politics of civility work?

And laughing along with the ‘jokes’ or just accepting someone’s characterisation of someone you can see is pushing against the status quo is easier than lending your own power to them? Because we know how quickly it can be turned against us?

We see it play out in the halls of power everywhere. The media. Parliament. Board rooms. Living rooms and pubs. Classrooms and playgrounds and parks. Social media. Parties. The pervasiveness of *who is allowed to hold power* - and therefore **who** can set the rules of what is considered ‘civil’ or not - is everywhere. It’s insidious. Sometimes it is ‘just asking the

questions', which question the right to someone's very existence. Playing 'devil's advocate', to deliberately muddy waters that should be clear.

Why am I talking about this? Why am I talking about the politics of civility?

Because we see it everywhere, but so very rarely call it out. We have seen it at home, during the reckoning Australian politics and society at large faced **recently** with how Australia's Me Too moment was handled. Men having things **such as rape** put into perspective for them, by being reminded of their daughters, while actively pushing against any real change.

Men deciding how people who had enough were allowed to protest - what was civil and what was not.

Men deciding how people should react in the face of a woman's discomfort - who should smile, because it was the nice thing to do, and would make others feel comfortable.

The time for debate on how we might make things better, how we might bring about much needed societal change always seems to be *later*, according to those who hold the power.

And if you want a place at that debate, you have better be civil.

No outbursts here, while the Very Important Adults have these conversations. No emotion. No anger. That would be uncivil. For goodness sake, don't be so hysterical! Calm down. When you're ready to have an adult conversation, when you've calmed down, then they can talk. Until then, the Very Important Adults will let you know what is allowable or not.

And it is not just men. It's anyone who holds power and wants to *hold on to it*.

We have all seen people act against their own interest, stay silent, or criticise those who do not **stay silent**, because they hope that by being complicit, some of that power will be shared with them. Morals and ethics are often sacrificed in the hope of receiving even just the crumbs of power. These crumb maidens, a term I and others have used to describe **people** who actively uphold toxic power structures in the misguided belief that **some scraps of power** will be shared **with them**, are happy to ignore what is in plain sight - until suddenly, **the system** turns against them **too**. And then, all of those things they didn't see, didn't hear, **that** never happened to them, **that** wasn't their experience - are *everywhere*.

Because the system will always, always hold itself up first.

And then every **so often**, we see these people try to tokenise calls for accountability in order to further its own means.

In one of the most cynical displays of politics in recent memory, **last month** a group of Coalition women came together to 'call out' what they said was the belittling and bullying of a woman in parliament by prime minister **Anthony Albanese**.

It was over a case, and I am being generous here, of mistaken belief. One of the **female** MPs thought she had been the subject of ridicule, when her male leader **was the one being ridiculed. The matter had** been cleared up **afterwards**. It was clear on the tape. But then suddenly, there **was** a group of Coalition women standing in front of the television cameras after **Question Time had finished**, saying they weren't going to stand for the bullying and belittling of women anymore. That they were going to 'call it out'. Even, it seemed, when **there was nothing to actually call out**. These women had seemingly not seen anything when some of their female colleagues had complained of bullying within their own party and in some cases, had gone out of their way to say they had not seen any issues. But now, now they were 'calling it out'.

And by making their stand on shifting sands, they **make it harder** for **the rest of** us to call out actual issues. It de-legitimises our attempts to call out **real problems**. It trivialises and cheapens **genuine** calls for accountability. [At best it is cynical, and at worst calculating]. And yet, when it suits, **the people who enforce** the politics of civility will **co-opt** the language of the *actually aggrieved* and deploy it **for their own use, and they'll say anyone who pushes back** against such cynicism is **merely being** political.

In such a regime, only one side of the political divide is allowed to call out bad **or uncivil** behaviour. Anyone else doing it has an agenda. Is 'woke'. Is full of hatred.

The politics of civility allow a young woman of colour to be chased out of this country by conservative voices in the media and politics for a **seven-word** social media post that asked people to remember the damage Australia's heavily criticised and condemned asylum seeker policy had created, as well as the the violence in Syria and Palestine.

Yassmin Abdel-Magied's quick social media post was enough to whip up media and political commentators into a frenzy, where she was vilified and hounded, until she left the country for her own safety and health.

All because she used the phrase 'lest we forget' next to the words Manus, Nauru **and Syria and Palestine** on a day we are not allowed to be critical of Australia or the narratives we have created.

There is no room for critical thought among those who uphold the politics of civility. Questioning the orthodoxy, even with evidence on your side, is a crime against civility, and punishable by no-holds barred abuse. Death threats, rape threats, all is allowed. Understandable even. Because the person you are deploying them against dared, dared, to question the unquestionable.

Prue MacSween said she would like to run Yassmin down with her car. MacSween was 'joking' though. She is still invited to commentate and give her opinion on whatever she'd like. Even after suggesting she'd like to see a repeat of the 'Stolen Generation' on national television. Where were the kilometres of column inches on those comments? Where was the unrelenting outcry?

Or is it different when certain voices raise issues for 'debate'? When one side is 'just asking questions?'

Not so long ago, ‘freedom fighters’ reportedly urinated on the Shrine of Remembrance in **Melbourne**. We did not see the coverage we saw in Yassmin’s case. In fact, certain sectors of **our community**, they were held up as the real heroes, because they were fighting against health mandates. Meanwhile, police formed protective barriers around statues of colonists as people marched for Indigenous rights and Black Lives Matter. Those protests were apparently a civil abomination because they *might* have held up ambulances, even though organisers had sought legal permits and had given notice of the routes they would take.

Those who control the politics of civility love to set up binaries. Those not with them, are against them, and therefore open to abuse.

Extinction rebellion protesters are uncivil, uncouth, and dangerous.

Anti-lockdown protesters and the causes they have morphed into, have been pushed into their actions for not being heard. Can you blame them, the commentators ask? Given all they have had to put up with, from the ‘intolerant woke left?’

Meanwhile, centrists scoff and **do their usual weighing of both sides**, saying calls for **greater accountability of the powerful are** just as bad as attempts to dismantle or undermine our democracy.

Yes, Scott Morrison may have assumed secret powers for no other reason other than to hold that power. But you won’t let it go. Obviously, you are just as bad. You’re hounding the poor man. How are you supposed to win anyone over when you’re being so uncivil?

In recent years, politics has taken a very nasty turn. We have seen it with the rise of fascism and the far right across Europe and the United States and here, in Australia.

Populist politics has given legitimacy to things that were once thought but not said. And with it, has come a new *tone* policing - push back **too angrily** against fascism, or far right ideas, and **you risk being called** ‘intolerant’.

Apparently, only one side of the **debate is allowed to express their frustrations with uncivil language, or abuse, or threats of violence**. Anyone on the other side has to be absolutely perfect if they wish to even *question* the status quo!

Oh, you’re asking about poverty? But you’re wearing nice shoes? How hypocritical of you. Yes, they’re wearing a swastika, but it’s a free country. They were just trying to have a conversation with you, and you immediately went on the attack. And you call *them* uncivil?

Fascists have always known how to hack the discourse. They literally wrote the book on it. If they can manage to label you ‘uncivil’ for pushing back against them, it doesn’t matter what you’re saying, or what they’re doing. The thing that seems to matter is *your* tone.

But it’s not just extremists like fascists. The policing of tone is deployed against anyone who pushes back against authority or an outdated status quo.

It’s used to defend the patriarchy and misogyny. It’s used to protect intolerance for LGBTIQ+ members of our society. It’s used to buttress racism and bigotry.

The real *meaning* and *intent* of words doesn't matter if you present them in a way that sounds calm and sensible on the surface.

If you're just expressing 'common sense' or calling for 'common decency' then it doesn't matter what you're actually calling for, or defending. You're being civil. You're perfectly 'nice.' And we are programmed from birth to respect that, to defer to it.

Donald Trump often tells his acolytes that someone he doesn't like 'isn't very nice'. "She is not a very nice woman. He's not very nice. I'm being nice, they aren't nice." On the flip side, someone he supports is "a very nice man," "she's very nice". It's a code everyone in the room understands. As the arbiter of what is and isn't 'nice', Trump sets himself up to be able to say anything he wants.

It isn't always as extreme as Trump. But the rules of engagement are clear. If you are deemed 'not nice' or acting against 'civil society' as decided by certain power structures, then you are not seen as deserving the protection of a civil society.

And that is what it all seems to come down to.

Niceness gets you *protection*. And if you aren't nice, it's open season. It's a lesson as old as Eve. No one's ever taught it. But we all understand the rules of engagement.

It's why Grace Tame not smiling for **Scott Morrison when he was** prime minister prompted such a visceral response **from some quarters**.

We saw certain commentators, those Very Important Adults, very 'sensibly' chastising a young woman for her 'rudeness'. For daring to take up space without ceding to power. For making people, *gasp*, *uncomfortable* by not masking her true feelings. Tame was polite. She was quiet. She didn't scream at Morrison, or push past him, or throw a glass of wine in his face. She just didn't smile because she didn't *want* to. And that one act of self-expression launched a national debate, even as the nation had just spent a year examining gender politics.

"When anyone comes to our home, we greet them with a smile," said Morrison who used the politics of civility to reach the highest office in Australian politics.

His position was duly put forward by those Very Important Adults in the room, who said those who could not be polite shouldn't be in the room in the first place, and how smiling was a very small thing and would have made everyone a lot more comfortable, and after all, isn't that what it's about? Not what people have to say, but how comfortable they make everyone else?

That was to be expected.

But the number of people who I know who identify as feminists, who consider themselves quite progressive, who thought the exact same thing, shows just how pervasive the politics of civility is.

The number of people who believed Grace Tame just should have smiled to be polite, without examining where that thought came from, or what it would cost Tame or every other person

who is told to ignore their true feelings and be inherently dishonest because it's the polite thing to do, because it is what we consider a social norm, without thinking about who those norms are *truly* benefiting, proves my point.

Did you feel uncomfortable when you saw that image of Tame **standing next to the prime minister, not smiling?** Did you think 'she just could have smiled?' And did you wonder why you felt that way? It is because we are supposed to respect the office of the prime minister? Why must we automatically grant respect to *any* office, if the person holding it doesn't deserve it?

I'd like you to think on this - why *should* she have smiled?

Why should *any* of us smile when we feel uncomfortable? Why does any one feel they have the right to tell someone else to smile?

Because it is not just something that happens when you're standing next to official power. It happens when you're walking down the street. On the bus. At work. 'Aww, smile love'. 'You'd be much prettier if you smiled' "Smile, it can't be that bad.' It's rude not to smile when the civil police deem it a smiling situation, but apparently it's not rude to claim ownership over someone's behaviour if they're making you uncomfortable.

So, when does that ownership stop? Because it happens every day, in almost every space you can imagine.

It's women being told to smile as they are catcalled by men on the street, or being told 'it's just a joke' when a racist or xenophobic joke is told.

It's being told to 'relax' when an unwelcome touch is made. It's being told to submit when consent has been withdrawn, or never offered in the first place. It's being told 'it's ok,' when you know it's not. It's being told he hits you because he just loves you so much, and he goes a little crazy sometimes. It's being told that someone else knows what's best for you, your finances, your body, your autonomy. It's being told the state has a right to take away your children because of their colour.

Because where does it end? Where does 'tolerance' and 'civility' become oppression and **unquestioned** authority?

And the thing about the politics of civility is that it's never seen as a problem. It's scoffed at. **But it's used to keep you quiet and to ridicule calls for change.**

Men and women aren't treated differently in the workplace?! There's no such thing as the gender pay gap. People of colour aren't being abused. Racism just doesn't exist any more. No one really thinks that about LGBTIQ+ people now. I have a friend who is gay and he's never said anything like that has happened to him. Black people aren't targeted by police. My friend is Indigenous and she's a police officer! People aren't treated differently by health care. It was probably because they were yelling. People just don't like activists, you know? I have nothing against migrants, I love Vietnamese food! I just think they need to assimilate to our culture, you know?

In March this year, women journalists who were writing about gendered violence in parliament house were described, by a male journalist, as delivering “angry coverage” that strayed into “unapologetic activism.” That same male journalist who had an issue with women writing about issues related to women also recently felt the need to tell readers that some other women journalists had a talent agent, or made tiktoks of their breakfast or trips to the gym (which was factually wrong, but that is not the point). In that same piece, he wrote about a man and a woman who both held political power. One was described as pugnacious. The other, aggressive. Guess which **adjective** was applied to the woman.

Powerful men are tough negotiators. They are bulldozers. cunning. Women with those same qualities are difficult. Bitches. Upstarts. Aggressive.

And one believes it until it's them in the crosshairs. Just think of the number of politicians who have stood against marriage equality until they've learned their child was gay. Men who always denigrated women, until they had daughters. Suddenly, what had been completely acceptable and civil, isn't anymore.

Don't believe me? A recent research paper with the brilliant title 'Yellin, at Yellen' quantified sexism among US politicians by measuring how many congressman yelled at Janet Yellen, the **former** head of the US Federal Reserve, when she appeared in congressional hearings. The researchers compared how the male **congressmen** had treated Yellen during **those** hearings, and how they'd treated her male predecessors or male successor.

You'll be shocked to learn that the congressmen interrupted Yellen more than the men who held **her** same position, used more aggressive tones **when speaking to her**, and were ruder. Oh, and if the congressmen had daughters? They were less likely to interrupt or use aggressive tones **than** their counterparts **who didn't have** daughters. Apparently, it's harder to belittle a woman if you love a little version of one

I can't tell you about the Australian experience, as we have never had a woman governor of the RBA. Or a woman in charge of Treasury. It seems economics is just a little too heavy for delicate female brains in this country.

But we did have a woman in charge of Australia Post, and we know how that ended. I'm not sure if we have ever seen a male CEO **practically** given their marching orders **from** the floor of parliament *ahead* of a review into their actions, but I'm happy to be corrected.

And **the treatment of** Julia Gillard was just about politics, and not at all about her gender, **of course**, because plenty of male politicians have had their bodies used as a menu item at a political fundraiser, and have had their opponents gleefully stand under placards declaring 'ditch the witch' and 'Bob Brown's bitch'. I don't think I have every heard a male politician described by a former Treasury secretary as 'a Welsh witch' riding upon an 'iron broomstick' as Gillard was described by John Stone in 2009. Not in private, in a speech to the HR Nicholls society. Just jokes, you see. And male leaders are always being asked how they will balance their family life with their public life, or in the case of Jacinta Ardern, asked 'what if you have a baby' after winning an election.

All very sensible questions, you understand. Just common sense, you see. What's the problem?

This is not an experience exclusive to women. I speak of women because that is where my experience lies. I am very aware that I hold more power than so many others in the room. I present how I feel on the inside without issue, I am white, I am educated, I am now middle class. I don't have any other visible markers so often associated with 'othering'. And so, if I am not allowed a seat at the table unless I play by the rules of civility, how is anyone else with less social power than I have supposed to get there? If the politics of civility can be so quickly turned against white women in the same social sphere, how hard do you think it is for anyone who doesn't look like me? When Julia Gillard called out sexist and misogynistic abuse, she was accused of 'playing the gender card'. Which we all know, is not very nice.

Because apparently, we are supposed to be nice in the face of abuse and hate.

The politics of civility tells us we must treat all opinions nicely, that we should be open to all ideas **regardless of their history**. To do anything else would be 'intolerant', a **term** regularly wielded against the left.

As an aside, I don't think anyone has ever referred to the "intolerant right", despite its intolerance of anyone calling for understanding and compassion for those who exist outside of conservative comfort.

But by and large, power structures **like to pretend** that a tolerant society is tolerant without limit - tolerance of course, being defined by those who hold power.

And that every opinion, no matter how harmful, should be tolerated because that is what a tolerant society does. And a tolerant society is a civil society, one that weighs all opinions as equal, except those deemed 'uncivil', or presented in a way that's not, well nice.

It makes me think of the *Paradox of Tolerance*, as described by the philosopher Karl Popper. Popper believed that a proudly open and tolerant society should still assert the right to suppress intolerant ideas sometimes.

In 1945, in his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, he argued that if a society had unlimited tolerance it would lead to the disappearance of tolerance itself, because the norms of tolerance would be hacked by people who didn't actually believe in tolerance. As he put it:

"We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant."

Now, I am not a student of philosophy, but it seems to me that Popper was right. It may seem like a paradox, but to protect *real* tolerance you have to be prepared not to tolerate some things.

And so, I believe we should therefore claim, in the name of *real* civility, the right not to tolerate *toxic* civility.

That by calling out wrongs, and by pushing back against power structures that are designed to keep people they deem 'too much' away from the seats of power, we are actually doing what Popper argued - creating a more tolerant **and civil** society.

Because that is what we should be aiming for. A more tolerant society, that protects those with less power, that considers new ideas in good faith and with open minds, and knows, **instinctively**, where the boundaries are.

Right now, we seem to have lost sight of those boundaries. We take someone espousing far right ideas and someone pointing out the very real world dangers of those ideas and we shrug our shoulders and say, "oh they're both as bad as each other."

We police women, particularly young women, with 'niceness' and very quickly abandon them if they are just not nice enough. Or, we use that niceness against them when it all goes wrong. Consider the young woman who says yes to a drink, even when she doesn't want to, because she's trying to be nice. If that ends in sexual assault, you can bet one of the first things people will wonder is why she went for a drink with him.

We train children to ignore their instincts, in order to be nice. We tell migrants they need to let go of culture, so they fit in nicely with our society. We tell young men that if a woman is being nice to you she likes you, and we tell young women that if a man is treating you badly, it's because he likes you, and just to be nice. We tell people having issues in the workplace to try and be nicer, to just grin and bear it. We tell people in uncomfortable social situations to smile and nod.

And when we watch people wield niceness as a weapon, we say nothing, because we've been taught that being civil means saying nothing and not causing a scene. We don't think of the person being belittled as 'a scene'. But defending them, standing up for them, calling for some accountability - that, that we consider a scene.

Instead, we just laugh nervously when we're uncomfortable because it's nicer than saying - I think that's wrong.

And so, the only way to defeat the politics of civility is to ignore it. We have to do what's right, even if it's not socially 'nice.'

There are times when playing nice is the only thing that keeps you safe. When smiling and staying quiet, is what keeps you whole. For some, getting angry, pushing back, making a stand could mean the end of a career. It could mean physical danger. And there, in those moments, in those situations, I *understand* playing nice. What keeps you safe, what keeps a situation manageable, what keeps you secure, is right. But that's when the rest of us, who hold more power, need to step in.

Ask the casually racist or the casual misogynist in your office or social group or family to explain what's so funny about that joke.

Tell that guy to knock it off. Step in and let your mate know he's gone too far. Point out when she's actively turning a blind eye to toxic behaviour. Stop. Being. So. Nice. And instead, let's work on being *decent*.

I need to work on this. I have turned a **blind eye**, stayed quiet, not stepped in. In the moment, I've always been able to justify it. But I am finding that increasingly, there is no justification.

As I said at the beginning, I am not nice. But I am polite. I try to be kind and compassionate. I like to think I am empathic and reasonable. I have an open mind and I believe in equality. But niceness? Pretending a civil society is **one that tolerates** abuse, or hatred, or punching down on those already fighting for survival? I am done with that.

And I hopeful for the sake of decency, for upholding the type of society we should all be fighting for - a tolerant society intolerant of the intolerable, one which lays claim for *genuine* civility and not the toxic civility **that suppresses** what we know is right - you are too.

And so, with all due respect, fuck niceness.

Not being nice may be the only way we can create **nicer** spaces for everyone. A more equal society. A more tolerant one.

And honestly, wouldn't that be nice?

Thank you.