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Whitewashing the Gap: The Discursive Practices of Whiteness

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Abstract

In this article I utilise critical discourse analysis to investigate the discursive practices evident in the Gillard Government's 2011 'Closing the Gap' speech. The speech is interpreted as a performative activity which normalises the racialised privilege/disadvantage divide in contemporary Australia by framing this divide as meritocratic. Inherently contradictory discourses are used to position both the government and Indigenes in antithetical ways. The government is constructed as a benevolent authority, yet is excused from responsibility for 'closing the gap'. Indigenous peoples are framed as culturally deficient while simultaneously held responsible to 'close the gap'. The contentiousness of these discourses is minimised by their portrayal as hegemonic commonsense.

Introduction

'Closing the Gap' is the Council of Australian Governments' overarching nationwide policy approach to Indigenous disadvantage. In comparison to non-Indigenous Australians, Indigenous peoples are disadvantaged on all major socio-economic indicators, such as life expectancy, health, education and employment (Australian Human Rights Commission 2008). As its name suggests, 'Closing the Gap' (CTG) policy aims to reduce these discrepancies.

The contemporary socio-economic positioning of Indigenes is a consequence of the ongoing legacies of past and present government policy (Moreton-Robinson 2003, 23). Following British colonisation in 1788, Indigenous peoples were decimated by frontier conflict, introduced diseases and dispossession from traditional lands (Flood 2006). As conflict subsided, the 'civilising mission' gained precedence, in which Indigenes were segregated onto missions and reserves in order to be 'civilised' into modernity and Christianity (Maddison 2011, 51–2). From the 1930s, policy shifted from segregation to assimilation. This resulted in an escalation of the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families with the explicit aim of assimilating them with white culture (Lecouteur and Augoustinos 2001, 51). Following the civil rights era of the 1960s, the assimilation policy became untenable, resulting in the formal adoption of liberal and egalitarian policy. Reflecting this shift, after 22 years in opposition, a federal Labor government was elected in 1972 on a platform including human rights and self-determination for Indigenes (Flood 2006, 240). This was followed by over three decades of arguably well-intentioned Indigenous policy-making by both major parties (Pearson 2006). However, in spite of diverse approaches, the socio-economic position of Indigenes relative to non-Indigenes continued to fall.

The election of the Howard Liberal Government in 1996 saw a return to paternalistic policy reminiscent of the pre-civil rights era and culminated in the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007. The Howard Government held power for eleven years until the Rudd Labor Government was elected in 2007. Following his election, Kevin Rudd (2008) instigated the CTG policy and apologised to Indigenous Australians on behalf of the nation, emphasising the ongoing legacy of child removal. The current leader of the Australian Labor Party is Prime Minister Gillard, who delivered the speech which is the subject of this article (Gillard 2011).

The Prime Ministerial CTG speech is a key text, given in the first sitting of parliament each year, which summarises CTG policy and all progress to date. Rudd (2008) initiated annual reporting on CTG in order to create 'real measures of policy success or policy failure'. In contrast, I argue that rather than being an impartial progress report, the Gillard Government's 2011 CTG speech is a

discursive performance that normalises the 'gap', absolving the government from responsibility by framing disadvantage as the result of Indigenous cultural deficiency. As Herschell (2011, 126) notes, pre-scripted speeches are 'deliberated over, discussed and carefully worded' in order to 'achieve the maximum required effect on the audience'. Moreover, political speeches are powerfully positioned to construct and promulgate particular versions of social reality (Lecouteur and Augoustinos 2001, 52).

I employ critical whiteness studies and critical discourse analysis to examine the discursive formation and normalisation of racialised 'truths' within the CTG speech. The critical approach challenges relations of power that remain concealed due to their status as commonsense or institutionalised norms (Ahmed 2004). As such, critical work aims to create societal change—in this case, to disrupt the ideological networks that construct and maintain the racialised privilege/disadvantage divide in Australia. My aim notwithstanding, I acknowledge that I am not outside the networks being critiqued. Rather, as a white woman, I am positioned favourably within Australia's racialised hierarchy as the beneficiary of ongoing Indigenous dispossession and marginalisation. As a white critic of whiteness, however, I reject the connection between embodiment and perspective (Nicoll 2004) by contesting the hegemonic discourses present in the CTG speech. I argue that far from being a meritocracy, with outcomes resulting from individual effort in a race-neutral society, racial inequality in Australia is produced and maintained by the continual circulation of racialised discourses such as the CTG speech in which whiteness is unmarked and unexamined while, at the same time, Indigeneity is problematised.

I utilise a Foucauldian understanding of language as an ideologically-loaded performative activity which creates 'truth' (Jacobs 2010, 353). As Foucault (1972, 49) explains, discourses produce the reality they appear merely to describe. Discourses are not fully determining, however, but are limited by the frameworks of the social world. Historically established rules and norms determine what can meaningfully be said, leading to a tendency for specific domains to produce repetitive and predictable statements (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 13). The discursive reproduction of social, cultural and historical processes normalises and reinforces the existing order. In this way, the power of discourse remains hidden, maintaining social structures via routine, everyday talk or commonsense (van Dijk 2001, 302).

In this article, Foucault's (1980, 105) concept of discipline is extended to include 'race' which, as a discursive discipline, is formative of racialised bodies, subjectivities and worldviews (Ehlers 2008, 335; Green and Sonn 2005, 479). These racialised discourses remain 'hearable' as long as they reinforce, rather than challenge, commonsense understandings (Tuffin 2008, 597). The CTG speech reinscribes the racialised status quo through the reassertion of hegemonies such as neoliberalism and Indigenous cultural deficiency. Moreover, the acceptability of these discourses is augmented through the employment of an 'arsenal of rhetorical tools to avoid the appearance of racism' (Bonilla-Silva 2002, 63).

'Heads-I-win, tails-you-lose'

Analysis of the Gillard Government's (2011) CTG speech is based on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis. This model not only involves examination of discourse as text (such as words chosen) and discursive practice (rhetorical strategies employed) but also links these discursive elements to social practice (reproduction of hegemony).

I identify three pairs of inherently contradictory discourses in the CTG speech: difference/equivalence; authority/solidarity; and benevolence/self-reliance (see Table 1). The 'difference' discourse enables the government to deny its complicity with Indigenous disadvantage, by framing Indigenous cultural deficiency as the cause. In contrast, the 'equivalence' discourse evokes shared responsibility for outcomes by positioning all Australians equally, thereby negating the racial stratification of Australian society. The 'authority' discourse legitimates the government's powerful position to construct CTG 'truths' while the 'solidarity' discourse denies this dominant location by framing Indigenous-government relations as a partnership. The 'benevolence' discourse positions the government as virtuous in its attempts to 'close the gap', while the 'self-reliance' discourse contradicts this by holding Indigenes as solely responsible.

Table 1: The six identified discourses organised into contentious–conciliatory pairs

Contentious	Conciliatory
Difference	**Equivalence**
Indigenes fundamentally different to settler Australians	Indigenes not different to settler Australians
Difference problematic	Equal opportunity, equal responsibility for progress
Authority	**Solidarity**
Government discourse dominant and legitimate, evidence-based	Government and Indigenes positioned symmetrically, shared vision
Government as 'knowing subject'	Personal opinions expressed
Benevolence	**Self-Reliance**
Indigenes dependent on benign authority of government	Indigenes fully agentic
Government respectful, well-intentioned	Personal responsibility key to progress

The initial discourse in each pair is contentious and susceptible to accusations of racism, while the latter discourse in each pair contradicts the initial discourse and works to deflect these anticipated accusations of racism. The narrative oscillates between the different discourses at the narrator's discretion. This ambivalent element of discourse practice reflects a lack of 'coherence' (Fairclough 1992, 233) and creates a 'heads-I-win, tails-you-lose' situation which privileges the purveyor of the narrative and disadvantages the subject. Although the speech is framed as a report, it is 'promotional' as it seeks to manage perceptions by representing the 'gap' in a way that positions the narrator optimally while disadvantaging the subject (Fairclough 2001, 251–2). These discursive practices normalise the 'gap' while shoring up the Gillard Government's anti-racist credentials.

Difference/equivalence

The 'difference' discourse establishes the inherent difference, or 'otherness', of Indigenes and Indigenous cultures. In this sense, difference is not used to mean 'distinct', but to infer 'inferiority' or 'deviance'. 'Difference' is constructed in binary opposition to the invisible white norm, which stands for all that is 'good' and 'moral', and is the standard from which the white subject judges 'other' cultures (Dyer 1997, 9).

The 'difference' discourse provides the overarching framework for the CTG speech, which is a report on the 'other', that is, Indigenous Australians. Although Indigenes are constructed as the 'other', they are nevertheless positioned as 'entirely knowable and visible' (Bhabha 1983, 33) as evidenced in the following extract:

I've come to see even more power in Closing the Gap as a way of defining, driving and measuring improvements in the lives of Indigenous Australians (2).

This phrase confounds the goals of CTG policy with its outcomes, thereby enhancing the policy's legitimacy. Given the gross disparity between Indigenes and settler Australians on CTG indicators, the goal of improving Indigenous lives is morally unassailable (Pearson 2006). By framing CTG policy as the exclusive means to achieve this goal, the policy also attains this status and successful outcomes are implicitly guaranteed. There is no suggestion that CTG policy is contested.

'Otherness' is constituted by CTG's analytical focus of comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous data. CTG policy establishes two distinct groups—Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Although the concept of two homogeneous groups is an analytical construction, it has significant discursive power, creating axiological, epistemological and ontological distinctions between 'us' and 'them' (Attwood 1992). For example, in the following phrase, Indigenes are excluded from national belonging by differentiating 'them' from 'Australians':

I do believe that Australians want our Indigenous people to have a better life (1).

By contrasting Australians with Indigenous people, the default Australian is constructed as 'non-raced'. To be 'non-raced' is a core privilege of whiteness which reflects the invisibility of racial identity to those who occupy positions of cultural dominance. The first person plural 'our' in this phrase signifies that the Australian nation is white, with Indigenes constituted as objects rather than subjects of the nation (Riggs 2004, 4).

Despite the fact that the speech is manifestly about Indigenous welfare, Indigeneity is repeatedly and superfluously declared, foregrounding 'race' as the touchstone of difference. The adjective 'non-Indigenous' is used three times in the speech. In contrast, 'Indigenous' is used 53 times. Repeated references to Indigeneity work to constitute the border between the dominant white subject position and the 'other' (Attwood 1992). Although the word 'race' is avoided, discourse consumers are constantly reminded of racialised difference. Indeed, without the endless repetition of racial discourses such as 'difference', 'race' would no longer exist as a socially meaningful category (Ehlers 2008, 334).

The 'difference' discourse is contradicted by the 'equivalence' discourse. Whereas the 'difference' discourse is prevalent throughout the speech, the 'equivalence' discourse is utilised sporadically in strategic support of particular arguments. The 'equivalence' discourse constructs the nation as egalitarian and meritocratic, thereby disavowing the racial stratification of Australian society. By framing Indigenous peoples as non-different to settler Australians, this discourse works to deny Indigenous-specific rights, as well as any ongoing repercussions experienced by Indigenous peoples from social, cultural, political and economic marginalisation.

The opening remarks of the speech evoke a harmonious, multicultural Australian nation. After deeming her acknowledgement of country respectful, Gillard quotes Indigenous elder Matilda House:

I express the hope of a united, reconciled nation, the oldest living culture joined with the many diverse cultures of a modern successful Australia (1).

The themes of unity, reconciliation and multiculturalism establish the tone of the speech (and the nation) as tolerant and race-neutral. Multiculturalism is portrayed as an egalitarian alliance of various diverse cultures. By inferring that no specific ethnic, religious or cultural values are privileged, multicultural rhetoric constructs the nation as egalitarian and tolerant, thereby precluding other possibilities, such as white cultural dominance. This view is contested by Haggis and Schech (1999, 47) who state that settler Australians manage multicultural diversity 'in a way which [does] not undermine or challenge the apparent coherence of dominant whitenesses'. The purpose of multicultural policy, then, is not to create an egalitarian society but to portray the nation favourably by creating a discursive break with previous policy approaches such as the White Australia policy (Hage 1998, 105).

While lip service is paid to the antiquity of Indigenous culture, it is positioned as merely one culture among the many that contribute to the cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society. This decontextualised deployment of egalitarianism negates Indigenous Australians' unique status and rights as First Peoples. In order to forestall any accusations of impropriety for this arguably disrespectful stance, an Indigenous voice is used to express this concept.

As well as positioning all cultures equally, the 'equivalence' discourse also works at the level of the individual to frame Australian society as providing equal opportunities for all and to demand that Indigenes assimilate with white norms:

Because I believe a fair nation creates opportunities for all, I see Closing the Gap as a genuinely important national goal … all Australians will have the same opportunities … demography will not be destiny … success will be defined by hard work, not postcode. …

Indigenous people should expect from the Government the same things every Australian expects … opportunity in life ... and … Indigenous people should expect of themselves the same things all

Australians expect as well … with opportunity comes responsibility, and individuals only achieve progress through work and effort (2).

Notions of equal opportunity and fairness are evoked in these phrases. However, the lack of equal opportunity for Indigenes is not admitted explicitly, nor is it used to explain the context of current disadvantage. Rather, the provision of opportunity by the government is predicated on Indigenes conforming to neoliberal behavioural expectations regarding market employment, as demonstrated in the second extract where obligation modalities are used to assert the normative order (Fairclough 1992, 260). The contentiousness of the government's assertion is minimised by using 'cohesion' (Fairclough 1992, 77) whereby the two components of the extract are linked via a shared grammatical structure. Expectations from government which position Indigenes equally with settlers are followed by expectations from Indigenes. The 'reasonableness' of providing equally for all citizens is used to assert the 'reasonableness' of expecting similar behaviour from all citizens, thereby overshadowing the assimilatory undertone.

To argue that Indigenous peoples need to demonstrate the same behaviours as the non-Indigenous to achieve equality advocates a model of humanity which is unquestioningly white. As Dyer (1997, 1) remarks, white people 'function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people'. Within this white frame of reference, national belonging is dependent on performing neoliberal subjectivity. The primacy of economics within the neoliberal paradigm reduces citizenship to market participation, with success framed as the outcome of behavioural choices in a race-neutral, meritocratic market (Moreton-Robinson 2009, 5). The focus on individual effort and agency enables institutionalised processes that reproduce racial inequality, which remains unexamined and unchallenged. In this way, neoliberal policy 'alchemizes the structural into the individual' (Goldberg 2009, 244), thereby rendering structural change irrelevant.

The 'equivalence' discourse is also used to argue that the change required to overcome Indigenous disadvantage is a shared responsibility:

When this campaign began, the truth is this: the most remote community and the most respected leader, the smallest shop and the biggest corporation, and the Australian Government itself, we all needed to change (2).

If Indigenous kids in this nation aren't getting a fair go, we share the responsibility for change. I don't mean as Indigenous people; I don't mean as non-Indigenous people; I mean as adults ... us. All of us and each of us, we share the task ahead (3).

Truth modalities (Fairclough 1992, 260) are used to assert that all parties are positioned equally and are therefore equally responsible for change. Framing change as a nationwide requirement creates the impression that this request is fair and reasonable—Indigenes are not being targeted unfairly. When these changes are elaborated, however, they apply only to Indigenous behavioural change.

The government supports the 'reasonableness' of its demand for Indigenous behavioural change by citing Indigenous people who also advocate change:

If I speak strongly, it is because I have listened to Indigenous people who do these things already, people who speak even more strongly: people like Chris Sarra … people like Noel Pearson (2).

Anticipated objections to demands for Indigenous behavioural change are countered by framing these demands as mild in comparison to those of Indigenous people. Condemnation of the government's stance would also censure these Indigenous people. Referencing successful Indigenes such as Pearson and Sarra also affirms that success is available to Indigenes as well as settler Australians. Pearson and Sarra's renown repudiates suggestions of racialised barriers to success and confirms the opportunities available to both Indigenous and settler Australians.

Authority/solidarity

The CTG speech draws on the authority of the nation state to position its discourse of Indigenous disadvantage as dominant and legitimate. The government is framed as a 'knowing subject' (Riggs and Augoustinos 2005, 466) with the politically vested authority to manage Indigenes for their own good. The 'authority' discourse is contradicted by the 'solidarity' discourse in which the government denies its authority by framing its demands of Indigenes as a shared vision. The appearance of overbearing authority is also minimised by oscillating between the discourses of 'authority' and 'solidarity'.

The 'authority' discourse reflects the increasing tendency for government communication to be 'one-way' or 'non-dialogical' (Fairclough 2001, 254). Even texts with single authors may be 'dialogical' by presenting alternative viewpoints, using interrogative statements and structuring texts as arguments. These strategies engage with consumers and open the text to counter-argument (Fairclough 2001, 256-260). In contrast, the CTG speech lacks alternative voices which results in the discourse itself being segregated (van Dijk 2001, 304). Declarative assertions are used to create the façade that the issues presented are not contested. These devices enhance the authoritative position of the government by creating a 'non-dialogical divide between those who are making all these assertions and those they are addressed at' (Fairclough 2001, 260).

The government uses its authoritative position to frame the discourse from their perspective, thereby serving their interests. For example, the CTG report follows the cultural norm of subjecting Indigenes to a white gaze:

> … the Government's plans for the enormously difficult and complex social problems of Indigenous disadvantage (2).

> This year's census will tell us more about Indigenous Australians (6).

Rather than suggesting consultation with Indigenes, the phrase 'Government's plans' reveals the government's authoritative position. Speaking from the 'invisible white standpoint', the narrative focuses exclusively on the 'other', leaving whiteness unexamined and unacknowledged (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 343). As well as restricting the focus to Indigenous disadvantage, the government unambiguously positions itself as a 'knowing subject' with a clear understanding of Indigenous disadvantage as well as techniques to resolve it:

> The Closing the Gap goals mean we know what we are trying to achieve ... The Closing the Gap strategy means we know how we are going to achieve it (1).

In contrast to other segments of the speech, where hesitation about 'closing the gap' is indicated due to the apparent intractability of Indigenous disadvantage, these categorical assertions signal certainty. The government locates itself as a powerful actor, wholly aware of how to achieve its goals, thereby asserting its legitimacy. The façade of 'knowledgeable authority' is augmented through claims of evidence-based approaches which portray CTG policy as objective, rational and value-neutral:

> Closing the Gap has allowed Australia to move beyond anecdote and intuition to act on the best evidence we can get (1).

> It is evidence-based, accountable and transparent. It tells us what needs to be done first and fastest and builds a methodical approach. It allows us to build consensus in support of specific progress, instead of debating abstract ideas (2).

> The report tells us that we must keep improving investment, keep changing behaviours, keep working together with respect, if we are to meet the targets to Close the Gap (5).

An order of discourse is a 'particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning [in which] some ways of making meaning are dominant' (Fairclough 2001, 235). These extracts reveal a hegemonic order of discourse in which the 'truth' of evidence-based approaches is constructed as commonsense. The first two extracts use truth modalities to create a discursive break with previous Indigenous policy platforms. It is intimated that previous policies failed because they were ideologically driven. In contrast, CTG is framed as value-neutral because it is evidence-based, suggesting policy which is pragmatic, realistic and bound to succeed. By framing CTG policy as the impartial and judicious implementation of the CTG report, its racialised nature is obscured. This is a discursive strategy which obscures the ideology underpinning CTG policy, thereby asserting its legitimacy.

The authoritative position of the government is augmented by various rhetorical strategies which circumvent potential challenges to this authority. For example, truth modalities are used more frequently than obligation modalities. Whereas obligation modalities allow for the possibility of disagreement, truth modalities position the government as authoritative through categorical assertions which are difficult to dispute. Examples include: 'This work will go on' (1) and 'we must reject the "soft bigotry of low expectations"'(2).

The dominance of governmental discourse is also reinforced by silencing alternative discourse:

> In the past three years, we have genuinely come together with respect and worked together with shared responsibility and genuinely broken the cycle of blame (3).

In this extract, 'working together with respect' is contrasted with 'blame'. Throughout the speech, 'working together with respect' is repeatedly declared to be one of only three essential criteria for 'closing the gap'. By implication, to hold the government accountable for the current situation would impede progress on 'closing the gap'. This combination of rhetorical devices works to silence contemporary and historical causes for the current position of Indigenes beyond those that the government chooses to acknowledge, enabling the government to reinforce the dominance of its discourse.

The authoritative position of the government is bolstered by its power to deny its own discursive location. The 'solidarity' discourse uses vernacular, informal speech to position the government and Indigenes symmetrically. The government's exclusive power to frame the discourse is denied by constructing the discourse as a shared vision. Demands are framed as Gillard's personal beliefs, opinions and feelings which enables the government to avoid the paternalistic tone of much previous Indigenous policy, thereby deflecting accusations of racism.

The 'solidarity' discourse disavows authority by adopting a conversational style which frames the speech as a 'friendly chat', thereby denying the 'non-dialogical divide' (Fairclough 2001, 260) created by the 'authority' discourse. Everyday conversation is imitated by the extensive use of the first person pronoun 'I' instead of 'the government' or the passive voice. Some examples include: 'I understand' (1); 'I feel' (1); 'I want' (2); 'I mean' (3); 'I really think' (3); 'I look forward' (3); and 'I know' (6).

The pronoun 'I' communicates sincerity and dignity (Herschell 2001, 130). This assists in the acceptance of the government's narrative. According to Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000, 453), 'political discourse … has "colonized" everyday speech genres in order to achieve hegemony and increased legitimation for the voice of authority'. This can be seen in the conversational style of the CTG speech:

> I also believe that with opportunity comes responsibility and individuals only achieve progress through work and effort so I see Closing the Gap as a call for changes in behaviour (2).

Although this statement is a demand for behavioural change, an authoritative tone is avoided by preceding the demand with the subjective modalisation 'so I see', thereby framing it as a personal opinion (Fairclough 1992, 236). The statement 'individuals only achieve progress through work and effort' is also constructed as personal opinion rather than axiomatic fact by preceding it with the subjective modalisation 'I also believe'. Moreover, the 'cohesion' created by linking these clauses transforms what could be an authoritative statement into a commonsense rationale (Fairclough 1992, 235). A similar effect is created in the following statement:

> I am certain that Australia will never Close the Gap without all of us committing to the change (2).

Rather than demanding that 'all of us' need to change, change is framed as the commonsense means to 'close the gap'. Transforming its authority into self-evident truth in this way enables the government to position its discourse as fair and reasonable.

Having created the mood of a 'friendly chat', discourse consumers and objects are then interpellated into the government's agenda through the use of 'we', such as 'a hope we all do genuinely share' (1); 'we all now see it that way' (3); and 'we share the task ahead' (3).

By using the pronoun 'we', a shared vision is articulated. This 'shared vision', however, is constructed and promulgated exclusively by the narrator of the speech. Positioning both parties equally justifies the concept of shared responsibility. The government's powerful discursive location is used to speak for Indigenes while simultaneously disavowing this privileged location.

Benevolence/self-reliance

The 'benevolence' discourse echoes the rhetoric of the 'civilising mission' to construct the government as a benevolent master with the politically vested authority to manage Indigenes for their own good. The government uses its discursive power to position itself as virtuous, while delimiting its responsibility for action.

The white nation is cast as well-intentioned in its attempt to resolve Indigenous disadvantage, while the government is constructed as altruistically aiming to benefit an 'other'. For example:

> I also remember so vividly what Kevin Rudd said, speaking for all of us, when the 42nd Parliament began. He said sorry … and then Kevin turned his intelligence and determination to Closing the

Gap for Indigenous Australians. Setting six specific, ambitious targets for our nation to achieve …
(1).

The government's commitment is revealed by highlighting the arduousness of the task and its valiant endeavour to tackle the intractable problem of Indigenous disadvantage. Citing Rudd's (2008) apology aligns the current government with this 'noble' act and thereby bolsters the credibility of the government's benevolent stance. Drawing on other texts in this way is known as 'manifest intertextuality' (Fairclough 1992, 233). In this case, this device attempts to distinguish the current Labor government from the previous Liberal government leader, John Howard, who consistently refused to apologise to the Stolen Generations. Overall however, the speech's interpretation of Indigenous disadvantage as the product of dysfunctionality, rather than over 200 years of oppression, echoes Howard government ideology (Nicoll 2008, 62).

Intertextuality is also evidenced by the themes from Rudd's apology, echoed in Gillard's speech, such as mutual respect and responsibility. In the apology, the past is acknowledged with the specific intent of 'bring[ing] the first two centuries of our settled history to a close, as we begin a new chapter' (Rudd 2008). The theme of 'a new chapter' is also manifest in the CTG speech:

Saying sorry ... gave us the chance to break the cycle of blame (2).

Since 2007, our nation has been working together to Close the Gap ... and to build new understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (3).

These phrases frame the current Labor government's apology as heralding an unprecedented era of respectful and co-operative Indigenous–government relations. By implication, these qualities were absent prior to the apology. These are 'claims of virtue' which frame the current government as exemplary while repudiating previous governments. The apology reflects the 'new public morality' of a 'growing political willingness, and at times eagerness, to admit one's historical guilt' (Ahmed 2004, 113). The virtue manifested from the public expression of guilt functions as 'useable property' (Moreton-Robinson 2011, 644) to establish the morality of the nation by creating a discursive break between the past and the present. This historical disjuncture enhances the legitimacy of the current government by negating the current manifestations of past Indigenous policy. While responsibility for past policies is acknowledged in the apology, the ongoing repercussions of those policies are dismissed. The act of apologising establishes the morality of the nation while simultaneously freeing it from the burden of responsibility.

The government also averts its responsibility for ongoing racial inequality by limiting its responsibility to financial investment while unequivocally declaring that it is meeting this responsibility:

Closing the Gap demands that the Australian Government meets our responsibility: to overcome decades of under-investment in services and infrastructure. We are doing this (4).

This privileging of economics evidences the 'marketization of discourse'—the economic colonisation of the discursive practices of public institutions (Fairclough 1993). In this new era of Indigenous–government relations, any additional issues are repudiated. The apology has rendered historical injustice and inherited disadvantage irrelevant. These discursive strategies suppress any potential challenges to the government's narrative. Constructing the 'gap' as the result of 'decades of under-investment' repudiates any additional causes. White privilege is obscured, whereas the white nation is constructed as 'benevolent' as it bears the burden of caring for Indigenous peoples who, by implication, cannot care for themselves.

The 'self-reliance' discourse contradicts the 'benevolence' discourse and enables the government to deny its contentious aspects. While the 'benevolence' discourse positions Indigenes as dependent 'others' who are beneficiaries of the 'good' white nation, the 'self-reliance' discourse constructs Indigenes as agentic neoliberal subjects who are responsible and capable of 'closing the gap'. Australian society is constructed as egalitarian and meritocratic, with success dependent on personal responsibility and hard work. Neoliberal ideologies are legitimated as commonsense. This perspective negates structural impediments based on 'race'.

The 'self-reliance' discourse advocates 'responsibility', 'opportunity', 'hard work' and 'effort' (2) as the solutions to Indigenous disadvantage. Advocating these individualised values constructs racial inequality as a moral issue which can be solved through ostensibly race-neutral values such as 'the work ethic, self-reliance, individual achievement, and self-discipline' (Augoustinos, Tuffin and Sale 1999, 90). This perspective assumes opportunity is equal for all, thereby denying the existence of racialised structural

privilege or disadvantage. Within this nominally non-raced framework, structural intervention by governments to redress social and economic disadvantage is unwarranted.

The 'self-reliance' discourse presents meritocracy as self-evident truth. The phrase 'a fair nation creates opportunities for all' (2) is used to suggest that Australian society is equitable, and everyone is positioned equally, regardless of 'race'. The speech also emphasises that government investment is targeted to provide the 'building blocks' (2) of opportunity. By implication, Indigenes simply have to take advantage of the opportunities which have been provided. Indeed, in a curious twist to neoliberal discourse, even opportunity is deemed Indigenes' responsibility: 'social and personal responsibility as a driver of Indigenous opportunity' (2). Personal responsibility is supposed to create opportunity and overcome entrenched disadvantage and structural barriers to progress. In contrast, Sanders (2009, 10) suggests that this agentic emphasis is 'overly optimistic ... and overlook[s] the profound structural and psychological constraints which ... still massively restrict the socioeconomic status of Indigenous people'.

In the 'self-reliance' discourse, language shifts from collective to singular forms. For example, the terms 'individuals' and 'personal responsibility' are used rather than 'Indigenous people' or 'Australians'. Emphasising the individual erases collective racial identity and reinforces the notion of an egalitarian, race-blind society (Moreton-Robinson 1999, 30). Indeed, under neoliberal regimes, racial language is 'purged' from the public lexicon, thereby rendering critiques of structural disadvantage based on 'race' incomprehensible (Goldberg 2009, 341). In such a society, where white values are portrayed as universal, Indigenes are expected to assimilate with the dominant society. Indeed, assimilation is essential to 'close the gap': 'Australia will never Close the Gap without all of us committing to the change' (2).

This truth modality admonishes Indigenes and claims that 'closing the gap' is dependent on behavioural change. In other words, there is no option but to assimilate with white norms. This phrase also intimates that potential failure to reach CTG targets will be the fault of Indigenes. The possibility of failure is signalled by references to the intractable nature of Indigenous disadvantage. The 'evidence-based' report itemises the action needed to end disadvantage: improve investment, change behaviour and work together with respect. The government clearly states that it is meeting its responsibility as well as demonstrating this through providing evidence. Thus, if the problems are remediated, the government can take the credit. On the other hand, repeated admonishments calling for Indigenous behavioural change presuppose that poor performance on CTG indicators is due to 'bad behaviour'. If CTG policy fails, responsibility will lie with the failure of Indigenes to change their behaviour. The government's powerful location to frame the discourse in their interest creates a 'heads-I-win, tails-you-lose' situation. Whether constructed as different or equivalent to non-Indigenes, dependent or self-reliant, Indigenes are framed as responsible for racial inequality.

Conclusion

The discursive practices employed in the Gillard Government's 2011 CTG speech overlay racial inequality with a veneer of reasonableness. The discursive performances in the speech normalise the hegemony of whiteness, rendering it 'mainstream' and race-neutral. The speech, however, is neither a neutral description nor a 'report' on 'closing the gap'. It is a promotional performance which seeks to manage perceptions by representing the 'gap' in a way that positions the narrator optimally. Moreover, the continual circulation of discursive 'truths' articulated in the speech produces and maintains the racialised privilege/disadvantage divide in contemporary Australia. White privilege is reinforced yet retains its unmarked and unexamined status. Structural disadvantage is also concealed by constructing the white nation as egalitarian and meritocratic. These liberal values are decontextualised by disavowing the legacy of colonialism and the racialised hierarchy of Australian society. This enables Indigenous cultures to be constituted as inherently dysfunctional, which is then framed as the cause of racial inequality. In spite of rhetoric suggesting a new era of Indigenous–settler relations, the historical precedent of white benevolence and Indigenous dysfuctionality continues uninterrupted. These practices of whiteness help to explain the apparent intractability of Australia's racialised privilege/disadvantage divide in spite of ostensibly sincere intentions to 'close the gap'.

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