

# “Maintain Your Hope and Know That You Are Loved.” Mr. Anthony Albanese’s Discursive Construction of Collective Emotional Resilience

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**Abstract:** This paper employs Stephanie Paterson’s empathic policy analysis framework to explore the discursive construction of emotional resilience. The research conducted for the paper focuses on Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s notion of emotional resilience during a press conference he delivered on October 15, 2023, in the context of the Voice referendum. Mr. Albanese discursively frames the concept of emotional resilience as emotional stability that builds the community’s resistance to crisis situations, enables progress, and avoids division. The study identifies two emotional discourses influencing this portrayal of emotional resilience: (1) a discourse of emotional stability among opponents of the Voice referendum and (2) a discourse of emotional stability among supporters of the referendum. The article analyzes the assumptions underlying this representation and the silences—that which has been left unspoken or implied—associated with it.

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Over the past few decades, political sociologists have increasingly examined the role of emotions, and this has given rise to the political sociology of emotions (Berezin 2002; Heaney 2019; Demertzis 2020). The conceptualization of emotions in politics aligns with the broader “emotional turn” in the social sciences, contributing to an enhanced understanding of how emotions shape and are shaped by policy debates, processes, and outcomes. Emotions are defined as the translation and expression of affect, encompassing unconscious bodily experiences in response to stimuli (Paterson and Larios 2021:288). Emotional discourse is described as a set of ideas and metaphors that encompass both written content and enacted behaviors. It encapsulates problem representations that reflect emotions. Emotional discourse shapes, and is shaped by, how we experience the world around us. This discourse influences what can be said, thought, and felt, and produces various subjectifications and material effects (Paterson 2019:253-254). The analysis of emotions has significantly advanced our understanding of the emergence, duration, action, decline, and effectiveness of social and political movements (e.g., Flam and King 2005; Goodwin and Jasper 2006; Benski and Langman 2013; Van Troost, Van Stekelenburg, and Klandermans 2013). Scholars also explore the intricate relationship between emotions and rationality using psychoanalytic approaches to specific emotions (Clarke, Hoggett, and Thompson 2006; Thompson and Hoggett 2012). Some have undertaken to explain the connection between power and emotions (e.g., Ahmed 2004; Heaney and Flam 2015), while political sociologists have also focused on concepts including “political fear” and/or the “politics of fear” (e.g., Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011; Barbalet and Demertzis 2013; Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou 2017). The role of emotions in

media communications and the public sphere has also taken on greater importance (Benski and Fisher 2014; Yates 2015; Papacharissi 2015; Demertzis and Tsekeris 2018; Slaby and von Scheve 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen 2019). There has been a notable emphasis on understanding the elicitation, generation, and suppression of emotions, ultimately contributing to the shaping of a specific emotional culture within parliamentary debates (Konecki 2016). However, despite the growing interest in the role of emotions in politics, relatively little is known about how politicians engage with society’s emotional resilience.

This paper aims to enrich the current discourse on emotions in politics by scrutinizing Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s discursive construction of collective emotional resilience. It focuses particularly on the efforts to achieve emotional stability in a democratic society facing polarization, using Australia as an illustrative example. Employing the concept of emotional resilience, it sheds light on the intricate and challenging aspects of emotional discourses in politics. The paper begins by presenting the theoretical background of the research. It then examines the study context, the research methods, and the findings of the original empirical study. The article ends with the conclusion and discussion section.

## Collective Emotional Resilience and Its Discursive Construction

Initial research on resilience focused on individual resilience, defined as an individual’s ability to adapt to adverse conditions. The first studies on resilience, conducted by psychologist Norman Garmezy in 1973 and later extended by psychologist Emma Werner, explored the resilience of individuals and small groups. These studies examined children’s

resilience to challenging living and social conditions, including having parents with schizophrenia, which did not negatively impact their development. Psychologists argue that resilience can be learned and developed throughout life (Smith et al. 2008).

With time, researchers took up other aspects of resilience, including community/collective resilience, which encompasses the adaptive capacities of communities and societies to manage change and adversities over time. Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens (2015) investigated the resilience of social systems and explored potential scenarios for society to transform in the face of various crises. Karim Fathi (2022) introduced the concept of “multiresilience,” demonstrating that crises in the 21st century are interconnected, multi-dimensional, and occur on multiple system levels. While the concept of resilience is intricate and not easily defined, there is consensus that it applies to both individual and community levels, signifying successful recovery from or adaptation to the adversity of stress (Sousa et al. 2013:238). This involves utilizing individual or community characteristics, resources, strategies, and processes (Sousa et al. 2013:238).

In the study of resilience, structural or systemic adjustments that enable adaptation in crisis situations are often considered. However, many aspects of resilience are still not fully understood. While the recovery of well-being requires agency from individuals and social groups, the social and political context in which they operate is also crucial. James Brassett (2018:17) argues that, in the case of events of global significance, political discourses on trauma (“a story of universal human vulnerability in the context of vital existence”) and resilience (“a story about adaptability and strength”) affect the emotional perception of the global market. As for emotional

and collective resilience, only a handful of studies have addressed the topic of positive emotions (e.g., Meneghel, Salanova, and Martínez 2014).

This article looks at Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s use of positive emotions to emotionally stabilize Australia’s national collective. It assumes that emotional well-being is crucial for collective resilience (e.g., Liu et al. 2022). According to Claire Yorke (2020:45), “[t]o withstand future threats and challenges, as well as to help society build back better, emotional resilience is required at the collective level.” Ensuring that it is provided involves fostering public trust, offering hope, and cultivating cohesion and compassion to enable society to adapt and rebuild. If emotions are incorporated into preparedness planning, they can prepare people to accept the certainty of risks while equipping them to respond proportionately and collectively. It is also assumed that a political leader, through discourse, can either dampen or reinforce strong emotions that arise when a society faces a crisis. Political leaders can influence the well-being of individuals and groups, enabling them to be resilient. As Yorke (2020:45) emphasizes, “[h]ow people feel about their country and its choices inform not only public perceptions and support but also contribute to the ability of people to respond to, and recover from, threats.”

The examination of collective emotional resilience can be framed within Durkheim’s theory of collective effervescence, which posits that intense, often negative, collective emotions following a disaster (such as a terrorist attack) increase solidarity within the affected community (Garcia and Rimé 2019). However, this theoretical approach is somewhat limited in capturing the actions of political leaders aimed at mitigating negative emotions in a divid-

ed, polarized society where the negative emotions associated with a significant event do not necessarily strengthen solidarity. Isabella Meneghel and colleagues (2014) draw upon Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory, which explains how positive emotions expand an individual’s thought-action repertoire, subsequently enhancing their personal resources over time. The theoretical framework employed in this study is valuable for investigating the importance of cultivating collective positive emotions to help teams foster resilience and improve performance, as well as for identifying practical strategies for developing collective positive emotions. However, it does not focus on the analysis of the discursive construction of emotional resilience by political leaders.

Some scholars propose alternative conceptualizations, such as grounded theory (Liu et al. 2022), which is useful in examining the evolution of public opinion and emotional expressions related to mass focal events (e.g., a Covid-19 pandemic), revealing the characteristics of collective resilience development processes and changes in emotional behaviors during an emergent public crisis. This approach is invaluable in capturing political discourse production (Borowiec 2017:41- 42). However, it is not as systematic and focused on examining the relationship between emotions and politics as the empathic policy analysis framework. The same observation emerges in the context of applying international political economy to the study of collective emotional resilience (Brassett 2018). The empathic policy analysis framework I use in my research is situated within a constructivist ontology.

In this paper, I assume that access to the material world occurs through discourse, in which language and our intellectual constructions about the world

(socially constructed knowledge) play a crucial role. Like Sarah Bierre and Philippa Howden-Chapman (2022:6), I “focus on the assumptions informing behaviours” and examine political discourse and rhetoric. Emotional resilience discursively constructed by a political leader can be treated as a “problematization” that encompasses “implied problems” (Bacchi 2018). In this paper, I posit that emotional resilience discourse has the potential to frame public policies. It can indicate what is considered real and exists within the policymaking arena. However, in my study, I am dealing with a declarative statement that others can follow in putting forward solutions to actual problems. At the same time, I do not track the political actions that followed these declarative statements, and therefore, I cannot demonstrate how the discourse I analyze translates into the practice of public policy.

The presentation of emotional resilience follows specific patterns and includes socially constructed meanings. With respect to this, the paper focuses on the conceptual foundations upon which the emotional resilience discursively constructed by a political leader is built. It critically questions the “taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie...policies and policy proposals by scrutinising (problematizing) the ‘problem’ representations it reveals within them” (Bacchi 2009:xv). Thus, it aligns with a “problem-questioning” paradigm (Bacchi 2009:xvii). It adopts the empathic policy analysis framework developed by Stephanie Paterson (2019), which is based on the “What’s the problem represented to be” (WPR) approach by Carol Bacchi.

Devised by Carol Bacchi (1999), WPR serves as a discursive framework for policy analysis in academic research. Its objectives include: (1) discerning the depiction of the issue under consideration within

a proposed policy, (2) scrutinizing the underlying presuppositions and unexamined assumptions inherent in these depictions, (3) assessing how these depictions influence the framing of an issue, thereby constraining potential avenues for change, and (4) identifying the omissions and lacunae in policy discourse by probing what aspects remain unaddressed in specific depictions.

Bacchi delineated the method into seven interrogative prompts: (1) What's the "problem" represented to be in a specific policy? (2) What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem?" (3) How has this representation of the "problem" come about? (4) What remains that is unproblematic in this problem's representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be thought about differently? (5) What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem?" (There are discursive effects, subjectification effects, and lived effects). According to Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin (2016:23), "a study of discursive effects shows how the terms of reference established by a particular problem representation set limits on what can be thought and said. Subjectification effects draw attention to how 'subjects' are implicated in problem representations, how they are produced as specific kinds of subjects...Lived effects, as an analytic category, ensures that the ways in which discursive and subjectification effects translate into people's lives"). (6) How/where has this representation of the "problem" been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted, and replaced? (7) Self-problematization: Apply this list of questions to your problem representations.

Inspired by Bacchi's approach, Stephanie Paterson and Lindsay Larios (2021:274) introduced the empathic policy analysis (EPA) framework to help

analysts emotionally situate themselves and foster connections with subjects that prioritize emotional engagement, receptivity, and concern. The framework's objective is to prompt analysts to empathize, project, and comprehend, striving toward the development of more socially equitable policies (Paterson and Larios 2021:278). An emotional comprehension of phenomena, crucial for effecting social change, can be nurtured through an emotional examination of policy (Paterson and Larios 2021:273). EPA is designed to assist officials and policymakers in becoming more empathetic, ultimately making the public policies they implement more empathic.

Paterson and Larios provided policymakers with an opportunity to reconsider the construction of policy issues and subjects within policy discourse, aiming to enhance their critical thinking and empathetic reflection when addressing social problems. The analytical tool proposed by the researchers consists of two parts. The first assists in examining how emotions function in policy, shaping the representation of policy problems and constituting subjects (Paterson and Larios 2021:278). This section comprises four sequential questions: (1) What is the problem portrayed to be, and what emotional landscapes contribute to its emergence? (2) Where and by whom is this representation endorsed or challenged? What silences exist, and how is this influenced by emotional discourses? (3) What are the underlying assumptions supporting the representation, and how are they influenced by emotional discourses? (4) What are the effects, both discursive and lived, and how are subjects emotionally formed in this representation? The emotional positioning of various subject positions is mapped out, linking these positions to power dynamics such as authority, legitimacy, trustworthiness, rationality, et cetera (Paterson and Larios 2021:278).

The second part of the research framework instructs the analyst to position themselves within the analysis, scrutinizing their emotional responses to the issue and subjectivities involved. It further prompts them to explore why they feel a certain way and how these emotions might impact their responses to the issue and/or subjects (Paterson and Larios 2021:278). This section comprises five consecutive questions: (5) How do I feel about the way the problem is represented and the emotional positioning of various subjects? (6) In what ways do I identify with specific subject positions, and with which subjects am I more aligned? How does this alignment affect my feelings toward the subjects presented in this case? (7) For those with whom I least identify, can I recall instances where I was similarly emotionally positioned (e.g., powerful/powerless, helpless, voiceless, marginalized, invisible, etc.)? How does that experience relate to the current investigation, and how does it shape my thoughts and feelings about the case and the subject positions produced therein? (8) What did, or what would have helped in that situation? Can any of those responses be adapted for the present case? (9) Can we envision alternative and more socially just representations of the problem? (Paterson and Larios 2021:278). This framework is considered one of the most comprehensive in addressing the issue of empathy (and emotions more broadly) in discourse analysis. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first such analysis of emotional resilience.

## Study Context

According to Edelman’s 2023 Trust Barometer (Australia on a Path to Polarisation: Edelman Trust Barometer 2023), Australia finds itself teetering between the categories of “moderately polarised” and “at risk of severe polarisation.” A recent report indi-

cates that nearly half of Australians (45%) perceive the country as more fragmented now than previously. The primary factors contributing to this division are identified as the wealthy and influential (72%), followed by adversarial foreign governments (69%), journalists (51%), and government officials (49%) (Australia on a Path to Polarisation: Edelman Trust Barometer 2023). Australian politics is also fraught from polarization, with distinct differences between political parties. Divisions among politicians from different parties or their respective electorates revolve around issues such as social policy, Indigenous people, and immigration. However, in Australia, political leaders ultimately govern, and win elections, from the center. Thanks to the country’s compulsory voting policy, politicians are not compelled to campaign on contentious issues that mobilize voters, thus helping to reduce polarization. Factors exacerbating social and political polarisation include Australia’s income inequality and political disinformation on social media (Kousser 2020).

Australian society is diverse and marked by social inequalities. Indigenous people are situated at the most challenging end of the social spectrum. Indigenous Australians (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, First Nations of Australia, First Peoples of Australia, First Australians) include individuals who trace their ancestral lineage to, or are affiliated with, the ethnic communities that inhabited regions of the Australian continent prior to British colonization, or possess both connections. This demographic comprises two discernible categories: the Aboriginal communities residing on the Australian mainland and Tasmania, and the Torres Strait Islander communities located amidst the waters spanning Queensland and Papua New Guinea. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (n.d.) reported in 2021 that there were 812,728 Aboriginal and Tor-

res Strait Islander individuals, constituting 3.2% of the total Australian population. In 2018, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males had a life expectancy of 71.6 years (compared to 81.2 years for non-Indigenous males), while for females it was 75.6 years (compared to 85.3 years for non-Indigenous females). By 2021, 46% of Indigenous people had at least one chronic condition, reflecting an increase from 40% in 2012-2013. Indigenous students had lower school attendance rates (82%) compared to non-Indigenous students (92%) in 2019. In 2016, unemployment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were higher across all age groups, with the greatest disparity among young individuals aged 15 to 24 years (27% versus 14% for non-Indigenous people). Homelessness affected 24,930 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals in 2021, constituting 20.4% of the overall homelessness in Australia. Despite making up only about 3% of the total population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals represented 27% of the incarcerated persons in 2016. According to the Australian Council of Social Service (n.d.), over 30% of Indigenous Australians lived in households with incomes below the poverty line in 2016, in contrast to over 13% of the general population.

Australians are divided on strategies to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people. In 2023, the socio-political polarization of Australian society on this issue even deepened. In a referendum held on Saturday, 14 October, 2023, Australians exercised their democratic right to determine whether amendments should be made to the country's constitution to officially acknowledge the First Peoples of Australia through the establishment of a body known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. The primary purpose of this institution would be to provide counsel on legislative matters concern-

ing the Indigenous peoples of Australia. The incorporation of the Voice into the political system was a key proposition outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Crafted and endorsed by leaders of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in 2017, the statement served as a petition to the Australian public. The referendum question was as follows: A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognize the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve of this proposed alteration?

The referendum was positioned as a pivotal initiative toward acknowledging and empowering the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Its objective was to extend their involvement in decision-making processes that impact their lives and communities. Despite these intentions, all six states<sup>1</sup> voted against the proposal to amend the constitution for the recognition of First Nations people and the establishment of an advisory body. Nationally, only 39.6% of the population supported the amendment, while 60.4% opposed it. As a result, the referendum did not obtain either of the two required majorities: a majority of voters across the nation and a majority of voters in a majority of states.

The referendum campaign and its results polarized Australian society, stirring strong emotions within various social groups. In response, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (Labour Party) addressed the public in a press conference on October 15, 2023, seeking to rebuild emotional resilience in Australian society. In this context, the Australian

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<sup>1</sup> The Commonwealth of Australia comprises six states (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia) and ten self-governing territories (excluding the Jervis Bay Territory).

case is particularly useful for analyzing the discursive construction of collective emotional resilience. Moreover, in shaping the discursive narrative, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese appealed to positive emotions such as empathy rather than fostering social unity by highlighting internal or external threats. This discursive strategy is rare and worthy of investigation.

## Data and Methods of Analysis

In my research, I explore the narrative of emotional resilience as articulated by Mr. Albanese. To accomplish this, I utilize “part 1: the problem” of the empathic policy analysis framework (Paterson and Larios 2021). While Paterson advocates for a comprehensive application of her framework, the scope of my small-scale study necessitated a more focused analysis to establish a well-defined research approach. The research questions, based on “part 1: the problem” of Stephanie Paterson’s EPA framework (2019), are formulated as follows: How does Mr. Albanese discursively construct his take on emotional resilience? Where and by whom is this representation endorsed? Where and by whom is it challenged? Where are the silences? How do emotional discourses shape it? What are the underlying assumptions that support Mr. Albanese’s discursive construction of emotional resilience? How does emotional discourse undergird them? Are the effects discursive, subjectification, lived?

The research has been limited to the transcripts of the press conference (Press Conference 2023), which took place at the Parliament House in Canberra on October 15, 2023. In the process of data analysis and interpretation, a textual analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify and describe the representation of emotional resilience. This involved

examining the problematizations that were reconstructed from the text. The text was read twice, each time using open coding. Previous codes were revisited and compared with later ones to achieve a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the text’s content. Secondly, how the representation of emotional resilience was constructed within dominant discourses was described. The broader context of this representation that was silenced is then outlined, and the underlying assumptions that support the representation of emotional resilience are then reconstructed. Next, an effort was made to understand the range of consequences that the emotional resilience representation has on different groups in society. There are three interrelated categories of effects—spanning both symbolic and material dimensions—that require careful attention from analysts: discursive, subjectification, and lived effects. Finally, I have related the findings of my analysis to the literature on emotional resilience. The Polish Sociologists’ Code of Ethics was followed throughout the research process, and the rules outlined in the code were reflected upon during the research. However, my research entails challenges, which I elaborate upon in the conclusion and discussion section.

## How Does Mr. Albanese Discursively Construct His Take on Emotional Resilience?

During his press conference, Mr. Albanese addressed the results of the Voice referendum, seeking to strengthen emotional resilience, discursively constructed as emotional stability, within Australian society. This stability was seen to build the community’s resilience to crisis situations, enable progress, avoid divisions, and move forward. The Prime Minister based his representation of emotional resilience on positive emotions. As Siyao Liu and colleagues



(2022:14958) observed, “[p]ositive emotions are one of the key components of the psychological dimension of collective resilience. When there is a crisis, a positive attitude can be a functional manifestation of psychological resilience.” The emotional landscape influencing Mr. Albanese’s representation of emotional resilience was influenced by both a discourse on emotional stability among opponents of the referendum and a discourse on emotional stability among its supporters. The latter discourse was considerably more developed than the former.

Mr. Albanese endeavored to find a common point of reference for both opponents and supporters of the referendum. In so doing, he fostered a sense of belonging to the “great Australian nation” for opponents of the referendum and his political adversaries alike. He sought to enhance the emotional well-being of referendum opponents by providing them with a sense of understanding, respect, and a listening ear. He emphasized: “We just had a referendum. We had a referendum and it wasn’t successful. I respect the outcome of that referendum.” Mr. Albanese acknowledged and accepted the result of the referendum, expressing respect for the decision made by the majority of Australians, even if it was not the option he advocated. He underscored gratitude for the peaceful, democratic political process, respecting the equality of all citizens. Within the discourse of emotional stability among opponents of the referendum, Mr. Albanese discursively constructed a national community (cf. the emotionality of the nation-state [Demertzis 2020]) by utilizing references to history. Rationalizing this decision, he noted that, historically, a majority of referenda have been rejected (eight out of 44 have succeeded). Consequently, he discursively forged a national bond that was undermined by societal polarisation accompanying the referendum campaign. Albanese’s approach aimed at transcending

political divisions and emotional strains within society by emphasizing shared national identity and fostering a sense of unity among Australians. He declared his willingness to collaborate with individuals holding diverse political views on the future of reconciliation: “In that spirit, just as I offered many times to co-operate with people from across the political spectrum on the next steps in the event of a Yes victory, I renew that offer of cooperation tonight.” He emphasized that Australians, as a community, must collectively confront this challenge: “And it is as Australians, together, that we must take our country beyond this debate.”

At the same time, hope, optimism, grace, and humility were apparent in the discourse of emotional stability among proponents of the referendum. This emotional and discursive strategy cast the Australian Prime Minister as a politician intent on conveying hope in his political communication (cf. Benski and Langman 2013). He appeared to employ a strategy based on a “discourse of hope,” emphasizing positive aspects and perspectives in his policies. He also seemed to act as a “guarantor of hope,” implying a commitment to delivering positive changes and outcomes. At the same time, he refrained from stigmatizing political opponents, presenting instead a politics based on “emotional reconciliation,” indicating a desire to unify society through an understanding of the emotions and perspectives of various groups. It is worth noting that, in contrast to other politicians (cf. Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou 2017), Mr. Albanese avoided creating a dichotomy between hope and fear. He did not call for others to fear his political adversaries nor attempt to construct a narrative focusing on the opposition of hope and fear. This may suggest a more positive and unifying approach to politics, one based on building common understanding and trust. He called on

citizens to accept and humbly embrace the results of the referendum while continuing to work towards reconciliation: “tonight, we must meet this result with the same grace and humility. And tomorrow, we must seek a new way forward with the same optimism.” He stressed that improving Indigenous Australians’ rights and living conditions has been a crucial but challenging issue, making it difficult to resolve.

According to Mr. Albanese, the supporters of the referendum should acknowledge defeat but treat it as one possible outcome when dealing with challenging issues: “And of course, when you do the hard things, when you aim high, sometimes you fall short. And tonight, we acknowledge, understand, and respect that we have.” It was not a cause for shame or frustration. As the Prime Minister emphasized, he did not shirk responsibility for his decisions and their consequences, such as the rejection of the referendum question: “I will always accept responsibility for the decisions I have taken. And I do so tonight.” However, being ambitious and optimistic in working toward Australia’s development remained paramount: “But I do want Australians to know that I will always be ambitious for our country, ambitious for us to be the very best version of ourselves. I will always be optimistic for what we can achieve together.” While the referendum proposal was ultimately rejected, it was an opportunity to strengthen social empathy in Australian society: “All of us have been asked to imagine what it would be like to walk in someone else’s shoes.” Mr. Albanese asserted that reconciliation was crucial, and by maintaining optimism, a collective effort should be made to find alternative solutions:

And I want to make it clear. I believed it was the right thing to do. And I will always stand up for my beliefs.

It’s now up to all of us to come together and find a different way to the same reconciled destination. I am optimistic that we can. And indeed, that we must... It is in the interest of all Australians to build a better future for our nation.

Mr. Albanese observed that First Australians’ disadvantaged living conditions would not disappear or resolve themselves. There was a need to maintain hope and kindness, to collaboratively seek new ways to improve this challenging situation:

The issues we sought to address have not gone away, and neither have the people of goodwill and good heart who want to address them. And address them we will, with hope in our heart, with faith in each other, with kindness towards each other. Walking together in a spirit of unity and healing. Walking together for a better future for the first Australians.

The Prime Minister alluded to the “walkabout,” a rite of passage in the culture of the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia. The purpose of this traditional journey is spiritual transformation. According to tradition, young males, typically ranging from 10 to 16 years of age, historically underwent an immersive experience in the wilderness, lasting up to six months, to facilitate their spiritual and traditional transition into adulthood. Through this reference, Mr. Albanese implied that reconciliation had served a similar role of spiritual transition in the context of Australian politics. He referred to a “new beginning,” emphasizing that the matter was not lost and that joint effort would help improve the fate of the first Australians: “From tomorrow, we will continue to write the next chapter in that great Australian Story. And we will write it together. And reconciliation must be a part of that chapter.” Quoting Churchill—“Success is not final. Failure is not fatal. It is

the courage to continue that counts”—Mr. Albanese emphasized that it is not only hope and optimism that matter but also courage. He turned to an iconic figure in Anglo-Saxon culture (a symbol of victory) to provide supporters of the referendum with hope for a successful outcome of their political project—reconciliation. His objective was to inspire these individuals and capture their public imagination. He assured the nation that the government would continue its efforts toward reconciliation: “We intend, as a government, to continue to do what we can to close the gap. To do what we can to advance reconciliation. To do what we can to listen to the First Australians.”

### **Where and By Whom Is This Representation Endorsed? Where and By Whom Is It Challenged? Where Are the Silences? How Do Emotional Discourses Shape It?**

In Mr. Albanese’s representation of emotional resilience and the emotional landscape within which this representation was generated, a number of aspects were omitted. Due to space limitations, I will briefly mention only a few of them. Firstly, through discourse on emotional resilience, Mr. Albanese attempted to ameliorate divisions in Australian society, which he himself had somewhat exacerbated by organizing a referendum. Opponents of the referendum, including Peter Dutton, leader of the Liberal Party, pointed out that the measure could create divisions among Australians based on race without effectively addressing the disadvantages faced by Indigenous communities: “When we need to unite the country, this would permanently divide us by race” (Dutton 2023). Furthermore, adversaries cautioned that the Voice could potentially serve as an initial stage for Indigenous demands related to repatriation

and compensation. Some noted that the proposed solution was not radical enough and did not sufficiently strengthen the rights of the First Australians. However, many of the critical arguments have been assessed as manipulation, in response to which the government failed to reach citizens. It was observed that the Voice referendum campaign was beset by false and distracting information and was conducive to an information space so confusing that many people switched off or were diverted away from reliable sources (Johnson 2023). Moreover, Mr. Albanese organized the referendum aware of the lack of support for his project from the opposition and the impossibility of achieving success in the referendum given the lack of support. Consequently, he exposed society to unnecessary polarisation.

Secondly, the impact of the referendum campaign on the emotional resilience of the First Australians is assessed negatively. The rejection of the referendum proposal brought disappointment and sadness: “This is a bitter irony,” Indigenous leaders said in a statement. “That people who have only been on this continent for 235 years would refuse to recognise those whose home this land has been for 60,000 and more years is beyond reason” (Menon 2023). Elements of racism were said to have emerged in the public debate leading up to the referendum: “This heart-breaking result comes after rampant online disinformation in Australia about the consequences of the referendum, and the reverberation of the racist myth of ‘Terra Nullius,’ the false premise of ‘nobody’s land’ upon which Australia was colonised 235 years ago” (Amnesty International 2023). There was concern that a “No” result might significantly delay reconciliation efforts for an extended period: “It’s very clear that reconciliation is dead,” Marcia Langton, an architect of the Voice, said on NITV. “I think it will be at least two generations before

Australians are capable of putting their colonial hatreds behind them and acknowledging that we exist” (Menon 2023). Government action geared to rebuilding the emotional resilience of this population group was deemed insufficient. As a result, Australian Indigenous leaders called for a week of silence and reflection after the referendum proposal was decisively rejected (Menon 2023). It is worth noting, however, that reconciliation is pursued not only at the federal level but also at the state level, where the situation looks much better, especially in the state of Victoria, which has engaged in an advanced treaty negotiation process with the First Australians (Linder and Hobbs 2023).

In the narrative of the Australian government leader, one can identify silences in the understanding of what needs to change and what should not. In the first instance, Mr. Albanese states: “The fullness of our history has begun to be told.” He then adds, “But we have had, including in outlets represented in this room, discussions about a whole range of things that had nothing to do with what was on the ballot paper tonight. You all know that that has occurred.” Mr. Albanese points out the need to improve First Australians’ quality of life and to improve structural factors related to Australia’s socio-political system (such as access to education and the healthcare system). However, as a representative of power, he overlooks other significant phenomena related to the emergence and perpetuation of the aforementioned structural factors. One such phenomenon may be racism, which underpinned discriminatory policies toward Indigenous People in the past and has now emerged in the discussion surrounding the referendum.

In the second instance, Mr. Albanese repeatedly speaks about accepting the results of the refer-

endum. At the same time, he assures listeners, “I made it very clear that this was the only referendum that I was proposing in this term. I made no commitments about any further referendums.” The silence here is that the referendum results turned out to be not a moment of success but a crisis of social legitimization for the ruling authorities. At such a moment of crisis, there is a risk of a conflict of discourses between the ruling government and the opposition, resulting in a discursive shift towards an alternative discourse. Therefore, Mr. Albanese is assuring voters that the status quo they may desire will be maintained, which, in turn, will allow his government to maintain social legitimacy in power.

The above silences align with an atmosphere of positivity, optimism, and mutual goodwill of the two emotional discourses dealing with the Prime Minister’s representation of collective emotional resilience. This creates the risk that the collective emotional resilience constructed by Mr. Albanese will be superficial and instrumentalized—and become a new tool for governing the population.

### **What Are the Underlying Assumptions That Support the Discursive Construction of Mr. Albanese’s Emotional Resilience? How Does Emotional Discourse Undergird Them?**

Mr. Albanese’s discursive construction of emotional resilience was underpinned by several assumptions. First, he referred to external solidarity as a crucial element of collective resilience (Brassett 2018:16; Liu et al. 2022). Jardar Sørvoll and Bo Bengtsson (2020:67) perceive solidarity as “the willingness to share and redistribute material and immaterial resources drawing on feelings of shared fate and group loyalty.” Solidarity is defined as “the feeling

of belonging to a certain group (collective) and voluntary behaviour consisting in cooperation with other members of this group, in providing them with help and support” (Szarfenberg 2001:193). External solidarity is seen as a contractual relationship of exchange (Perl 2021). Thus, emotional collective resilience, of which external solidarity is a part, is based on social cohesion (enabling exchange). Building resilient, flexible communities requires the development of skills for collectively coping with difficulties, effectively supporting and mobilizing one another in the face of shared challenges. Thus, social inequalities must be addressed.

In the case of Australia, a country with a colonial history, this will particularly involve improving the rights of Aboriginal Australians. Hence, Mr. Albanese acknowledged that the issue of improving the living conditions of the First Australians was an important matter that should be addressed. He explained his position as follows: “I supported recognition through a Voice because this was the vehicle that Indigenous Australians believed could change this. This was the change they asked for at the First Nations Constitutional Convention at Uluru in 2017, after a process that involved hundreds of meetings and thousands of people.” The problem of the disadvantaged living conditions of Aboriginal Australians is multifaceted: “the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, in educational opportunity, in rates of suicide and disease. The gap which separates Indigenous Australians from the right to make a good life for themselves.” The gap represents a void in Australian society’s emotional stability. Indigenous Australians are often marginalized in social life: “Because too often in the life of our nation and in the political conversation, the disadvantage confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been relegated to

the margins.” The Australian authorities have long promised reconciliation with the First Australians. However, it was the government of Anthony Albanese that sought to make good on this promise:

Prime Minister John Howard promised to have a referendum on recognition, that Scott Morrison prior to 2019 promised to have a referendum on recognition. I was there in 2019 at the Garma Festival with Ken Wyatt, who I have total respect for, who stood there and gave, just as I did after the 2022 election, after 2019 there was a speech at Garma saying we would advance this. We promised to accept the graceful invitation of First Australians to put this to the Australian people. We did that.

The second assumption is that, in seeking to address the above issue and achieve emotional resilience in Australian society, divisions must be counteracted. Mr. Albanese referred to two divisions—the first an artificially created one between supporters and opponents of the referendum, and the second a genuine one involving the persistent disparities between the living conditions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples: “The real division is one of disadvantage.” To alleviate this inequality, Australians would need to act together, in agreement and with goodwill: “let us now co-operate to address the real division.” As Mr. Albanese observed, the need for agreement and cooperation has been embedded in the Australian political system: “the truth is that no referendum has succeeded in this country without bipartisan support. None.” A significant factor in the negative outcome of the Voice referendum was the opposition parties’ resistance to the proposed changes.

The above assumptions, regarding solidarity and cohesion, as well as the avoidance/alleviation of di-

visions and the need for cooperation, are not neutral. Mr. Albanese linked his vision of collective emotional resilience in Australian society with the ideology of social democracy (Jackson 2013). To promote his narrative, he evoked compassion, empathy, respect, and promise-keeping, the latter of which fosters effective interpersonal connections rooted in trust. Meanwhile, trust is frequently cited as the adhesive in the construction of social capital (Grubiak 2019). Mr. Albanese suggested that these issues are important for emotional stability among opponents of the Voice referendum and emotional stability among supporters of the referendum.

### **What Are the Effects: Discursive, Subjectification, Lived?**

I discussed many of the discursive effects earlier in this paper. They included, first, framing the concept of emotional resilience as the emotional stability that builds community resilience to crisis situations, thus making it possible to overcome impasses, move forward, and avoid divisions; and, second, the tangible consequences, including accepting the results of the referendum as well as the commitment to cooperation and the search for new solutions and a new path toward reconciliation. I will, therefore, now direct my focus toward the subjectification effects. Mr. Albanese used a significant portion of his speech to discuss the support of individuals who voted “Yes” in the referendum. These are people with hope and goodwill. Many of them are volunteers charged with energy and enthusiasm. However, Mr. Albanese gave a bit more attention to another group—the First Australians. He observed the hopes and aspirations they have expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which is a generous, optimistic, humble, and gracious invitation to reconciliation. As Mr. Albanese perceives it:

Tonight, I want to recognise that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this campaign has been a heavy weight to carry, and this result will be very hard to bear. So many remarkable Indigenous Australians have put their heart and soul into this cause, not just over the past few weeks and months but through decades, indeed lifetimes, of advocacy.

The Prime Minister emphasized their courage and grace, as well as their great love for Australia. He appreciated their deep faith in the people. These individuals inspire him and make him proud to be an Australian: “I have never been as proud to be Australian as when I sat in the red dirt at Uluru with those wonderful women. I have made lifetime friends. And for that, I am grateful.” It was them specifically that he addressed in saying: “Maintain your hope and know that you are loved.” The Prime Minister announced further measures to be taken for this population: “I will tell you that the first thing we will do is that we will continue to listen and we will engage with those Indigenous Australians, treating them with respect.”

However, mindful of emotional balance, he did not forget about the rest—indeed, the majority—of Australians. Mr. Albanese portrayed opponents of the referendum as being essentially close to those who supported it. He played down the differences between the two groups: “Indeed, those arguing against a change to the Constitution were not arguing for the status quo because no one could say that more of the same is good enough for Australia.” He also pointed out that the experience of the referendum campaign had strengthened empathy for the difficult situation of the First Australians among everyone. While Mr. Albanese observed that his compatriots were fair and compassionate people, he also noted that, during the referendum campaign,

inappropriate topics had been introduced into public discourse that had little to do with the content of the referendum.

Mr. Albanese sought to build an emotionally stable community composed of equal Australians, not winners and losers: “Because this moment of disagreement does not define us. And it will not divide us. We are not Yes voters or No voters. We are all Australians.” There is no discursive distancing between “us” and “them.” In fact, as Mr. Albanese puts it, we are dealing with different positions within the same “great nation.”

## Conclusion and Discussion

Drawing on theoretical implications for research in the political sociology of emotions by further exploring the issue of collective emotional resilience, this study adds to the ongoing debate on emotions in the public sphere within the political sociology of emotions. The paper illustrates the use of positive emotions in constructing collective emotional resilience. In his press conference on October 15, 2023, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese discussed the Voice referendum and sought to enhance emotional stability in Australian society. He constructed two emotional discourses influencing this portrayal of emotional resilience: (1) a discourse of emotional stability among opponents of the Voice referendum and (2) a discourse of emotional stability among supporters of the referendum. He worked to unite Australians by fostering understanding and a sense of belonging among opponents (using the emotionality of the nation-state) while at the same time expressing hope and humility for supporters in the face of rejection (using a discourse of hope). In contrast to Albanese’s strategy, political leaders often attempt to discursively

build collective emotional resilience by invoking negative emotions.

For instance, in his speech delivered to the people of France on October 12, 2023 (“Address to the French People”), Emmanuel Macron embeds his vision of an empathetic French nation in a broader context of the reality of warfare (Zubrzycka-Czarnecka forthcoming). Mr. Macron seeks to strengthen the emotional collective stability of French society, weakened by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by creating a division between empathetic people of peace and cruel, cynical, and law-breaking people of war. Mr. Macron constructs discursive distancing between “us” and “them.” He attempts to define French society as a cohesive group of people of peace, glossing over internal divisions and simplifying the complex social issues (including integration and discrimination against immigrants) that France grapples with. The consequence of such an approach to building collective emotional resilience may be to provoke aversion and lack of trust from society toward this concept, behind which lies not only the desire to strengthen the emotional stability of the community but also the desire to maintain and strengthen power in specific areas (such as among Muslim voter demographics).

In the highly polarised US, Republican Speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, in his press conference on April 24, 2024, at Columbia University, attempted to discursively craft collective emotional resilience in the context of pro-Palestinian protests at the Ivy League school (Speaker Johnson to Antisemitic Protesters: “Go Back to Class” 2024). Unlike Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Mike Johnson based his entire speech on criticizing the protesters. He juxtaposed two contrasting visions of Columbia University: the first, a historical one, was that of a university as a bastion of truth, democracy, reli-

gious freedom, morality, and freedom of speech; and the second, a contemporary one, cast the institution as divided by protesting campus students, whom he described as antisemitic, unlawful, dangerous, radical, extremist, and linked to Hamas terrorists or Iranian Ayatollahs. Mike Johnson tried to build communal emotional stability through threats of withholding funding for the university, punishing protesters, having President Shafik dismissed, and deploying the National Guard. These actions may only deepen polarisation in American society.

In the Australian case, however, collective emotional resilience is a type of political narration created by a political leader within the emotional discourses. As such, it pertains to socio-political power. The Prime Minister’s discourse regarding collective emotional resilience serves an underlying purpose—maintaining power and its direction in a particular manner. This action is undertaken at a specific time—during a crisis of power and discursive crisis. The rejection of the Voice institution in the referendum undermines the social legitimization of the ruling authorities and the vision of the power relations they promote. There is a risk of a discursive shift toward an alternative discourse—that of opposition. Here, Mr. Albanese’s conceptualization of collective emotional resilience takes on the characteristics of a discursive strategy in the struggle to maintain a certain truth regime. The presentation of collective emotional resilience follows specific patterns and includes socially constructed meanings. Below, I explain how.

First, the Australian politician embeds his discursive representation of collective emotional resilience within a set of underlying assumptions related to the rationality of social democracy (close to his political party). Mr. Albanese’s conceptualization of

emotional resilience relies on external solidarity in society, viewing it as the willingness to share resources based on mutual fate and group loyalty. It hinges on social cohesion and calls for the development of skills for collective coping and addressing social inequalities, particularly concerning the rights of Aboriginal Australians in the context of Australia’s colonial history. Mr. Albanese acknowledges the multifaceted challenges Aboriginal Australians face, whilst emphasizing gaps in various aspects of life and well-being. The government, led by Mr. Albanese, commits to fulfilling promises of reconciliation with First Australians, aligning themselves with the historical pledges of other administrations. Mr. Albanese redefines the term “divisions.” He points to the artificial division between supporters and opponents of the Voice project and the genuine division rooted in persistent disparities in living conditions. To address these inequalities, cooperation and goodwill are deemed crucial. Mr. Albanese attempts to shift the term “divisions” from the political sphere (political views of opponents and proponents of the Voice institution) to the social sphere (division as social inequalities, associated with the responsibility for the country’s past and the moral obligation to improve First Australians quality of life). This promoted understanding of the term “divisions” is tied to empathy, a sense of responsibility, and respect.

Second, the Australian government leader constructs “subjects” by discursively creating the concept of the “great Australian nation.” In so doing, he makes common ground for both opponents and proponents of the Voice institution. Balancing emotional considerations, he portrays opponents as essentially close to supporters, emphasizing unity over division. Mr. Albanese aims to build an emotionally stable and united community, rejecting the notion of winners



and losers and emphasizing the shared identity of all Australians within the same “great nation.” He attempts to restore social peace, a shared identity, and mutual trust; he encourages everyone to collaborate. He defines the “great Australian nation” as composed of ambitious individuals striving to be their best selves. These are courageous people. The “great Australian nation” respects democracy, traditions, and rights, including those of First Australians. Mr. Albanese invokes hope, optimism, respect, kindness, peace, and empathy in this context.

Finally, the Australian Prime Minister remains silent on what is inconvenient for him. For instance, he ignores critical arguments from the opposition, pointing out the negative impact of the Voice referendum on social cohesion in Australia. According to political opponents, it deepened socio-political divisions. Critics, including Peter Dutton, raise concerns about potential racial divisions and the inadequacy of the referendum in addressing Indigenous disadvantages. The rejection of the referendum proposal negatively impacts the emotional resilience of First Australians, leading to disappointment and fomenting racism in public discourse. Moreover, the critics reveal the government’s inability to deal with misinformation on social media, which negatively affects the political process and exacerbates political polarisation. Additionally, Mr. Albanese fails to address the issue of racism as it influences the situation of First Australians and the referendum campaign, ultimately posing a threat to social cohesion and the quality of democracy in Australia.

### **Methodological Implications for Research in the Political Sociology of Emotions**

This paper has examined the use of a discursive approach to collective emotional resilience. It incorpo-

rates Stephanie Paterson’s empathic policy analysis framework, which is rarely employed in the political sociology of emotions-related studies. Nonetheless, it holds promise for analyzing the role of emotional discourses in politics. At the same time, my research has shown the limitations of EPA.

As I employ EPA, only relatively small segments of text can be scrutinized. Consequently, the analysis is potentially susceptible to allegations of partiality or bias. Hence, I elucidate the criteria for selecting cases and research materials. EPA may be criticized for purportedly reducing all aspects of social existence to language. Nevertheless, in my study, I do not posit that there is no differentiation between material and discursive realms. Rather, I assert that access to the material world is mediated through the lens of language and discourse. Another critique might suggest that EPA favors individual actors and subjectivity while downplaying structural influences. Given this limitation of the applied method, I contextualize individual agency by delineating the broader social and political context. In practice, texts are not examined in isolation but are interconnected with historical and other sources, thus linking text and wider social processes. Furthermore, EPA could be depicted by some critics as obscure and lacking in scientific rigor. Ever aware of this criticism, I strive to be transparent about the research process and the methodologies I employ in my text selection and analysis. I also prioritize coherence and acceptance of arguments within the text. Furthermore, I endeavored to ensure that my analysis was grounded in the data I collected; however, I recognize that a set of intellectual interests and normative commitments guided my involvement in the research process. Consequently, my interpretations are never entirely free of theoretical and other assumptions.

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