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## **Displacing Indigeneity and Whiteness: A Case Study of Northwestern Adelaide**

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**Abstract:** This paper re-examines complexities of Indigeneity in relation to whiteness, focusing on how residents of northwestern Adelaide manipulated the Indigenous–white boundary. Existing racial categories were displaced on both sides, while retaining the boundary. The concept, ‘Indigeneity’, was expanded or narrowed in accordance with the context while the range of whiteness fluctuated, thereby becoming entangled with the fluidity of Indigeneity. Displacement or reorganisation of the boundary was enabled by intergenerational face-to-face relationships among residents who experienced social exclusion. Thus, Indigeneity could be derived from a cohesion not premised on an essentialised identity and could overcome the conventional dualism: Indigeneity–whiteness.

(Indigeneity; whiteness; Australia; ethnic boundary; everyday practice; displacement)

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## **Introduction**

With the emergence of people in many countries who claim the status of 'Indigenous', and in response to the increasing attention paid to Indigenous rights by international institutions, the discipline of anthropology has been re-examining the concept of Indigenous people and Indigeneity in the global and local contexts (Merlan 2009: 304–305; Kuper 2003: 389–402).

However, exactly what constitutes Indigeneity has been a constant theme of discussion because of the lack of a consistent definition of Indigenous people. Traditionally, in anthropology, the definitions of Indigeneity could be characterised as either 'criterial' or 'relational'. The former type of definition proposes some set of criteria, such as being a descendant of Indigenous people, or conditions corresponding to those used by official organisations like the United Nations and International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Merlan 2009: 304–305). In the latter definition, emphasis is placed on how the Indigenous people relate to those around them. Drawing on this categorisation, studies of how Indigeneity is perceived in local contexts have argued although relational definitions come closer to grasping how Indigenous people understand the world and themselves, as the discourse on Indigeneity spreads worldwide across international institutions and nations, people are required to explain their experiences and worldviews based on criterial definitions (Kuper 2003; Yamanouchi 2014: 95–103).

For example, Kuper indicated the discrepancies between the reality of Indigenous people and Indigeneity as constructed in initiatives spearheaded by the UN and the World Bank and by international development agencies and NGOs. He argued the understanding of Indigeneity used to claim Indigenous rights, such as land rights, relies on an essentialist image of Indigenous people as primitive and backward, and that it was created by anthropologists despite the fact that Indigenous lifestyles actually have much in common with those of non-Indigenous people (Kuper

2003). In a comment on Kuper's paper, Omura (2003: 394–395) argued an alternative to the theoretical foundation of essentialist ideology is needed. Omura stressed further the importance of focusing on the daily practice of Indigenous peoples to erode the foundation of essentialist ideology.

Although these earlier studies have provided significant insights on how Indigeneity is mobilised and utilised in political contexts, to overcome this problem of essentialism we must examine Indigeneity not only within Indigenous societies but also in relation to non-Indigenous people in the daily life of mainstream society. The presence of Indigenous people in urban settings in settler societies such as Australia—where many Indigenous people belong to multiple social and political communities, including non-Indigenous communities—offers the opportunity to examine Indigeneity in relation to whiteness within the wider society. In these complex contexts, Indigenous people selectively interact with urban societies to create new forms of Indigenous identity (Peters and Andersen 2013: 8–9).

The present paper highlights the manipulation of ethnic boundaries by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in everyday life, based on my fieldwork conducted primarily in Adelaide, Australia from 2008 to 2014. After gaining permission for the research from Adelaide Aboriginal Community, I interviewed approximately 50 Indigenous people who agreed to participate in the research and lived with an Indigenous family during this fieldwork. During the fieldwork, I mainly complied with the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies' created by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). For privacy protection, the individuals in the paper are anonymous.

This article draws on Matsuda's study on an art based on everyday knowledge that creates individual discourse and practice based on the 'convenience' of life in everyday practice.

According to Matsuda, who referred to theories of the art of practice by Michel de Certeau (1984), in a convenient art based on everyday knowledge, subjects employ formulaic categories to simplify their understanding of society, such as classifying people into ‘those who promote development’ and ‘those who support nature preservation’ in discussions of environmental issues. People also distinguish subjects using a consistent ideological system, arrange those subjects into multiple categories, and use those categories depending on convenience. Since the ‘convenience’ of life requires relating with incommensurable others who cannot be reduced to a static category or identity, but whose identity is continuously built through sharing the same living space, individuals can use the categories that they have devised in dynamic ways without perpetuating such categories. Matsuda (2009) argues this perspective allows us to view complex life practice and the way people build solidarity with others more meaningfully.

Based on this concept of a convenient art as proposed by Matsuda, I examine the manipulation of the boundary between ‘Indigenous’ and ‘white’ by residents on both sides of this division, focusing on race relations in a north-western suburb of Adelaide where physical and social boundaries between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents are ambiguous because of their shared experience of poverty and accompanying shame. By highlighting the way in which racial categories are reviewed and modified in a convenient art based on everyday knowledge, I show that the ambiguity of Indigeneity can become entangled with the fluctuation of whiteness, through the mediation of the common experience of being socio-economically disadvantaged. Eventually, in this way, the concept of Indigeneity may assume a different nature, which may not be equivalent to conventional Indigeneity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is based on data obtained through my fieldwork in north-western Adelaide for 18 months in 2008 and 2009 along with annual follow-up research.

The term 'Indigenous people' in Australia refers to Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal descendants of those who lived on the Australian continent and the surrounding islands prior to colonisation. This term has political connotations that distinguish these 'natives' from 'others', and it has been used to claim privileged or exclusive rights to resources at national and international levels. In the present article, I primarily use the term 'Aboriginal people' because most Indigenous people in Adelaide are descendants of the Aboriginal people. Aboriginal residents of Adelaide use the word 'Nunga' as a collective term of self-ascription that encompasses several regional groups. It is influenced by notions of pan-Aboriginality and is regarded as an identity of resistance to the hegemony of white mainstream society (Amery 2000). The term 'Non-Aboriginal people', when used in this paper, refers to Anglo-Australians rather than to other ethnic groups.

### **Earlier Studies on Aboriginality and Whiteness**

The classic studies on Indigeneity in Australia focused mainly on homogenous, pan-Aboriginal ethnicity or Aboriginality, a concept constructed in the 1970s and 1980s as Australian policy on Indigenous peoples promoted self-determination. These studies examined the process by which urban Aboriginal leaders constructed identities and utilised them strategically in political contexts and in everyday practice (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1972: 214–246; Keeffe 1988: 67–81; Schwab 1988: 77–95). According to these studies, along with advocating for the persistence of 'authentic' Aboriginal culture, Aboriginality assumed a posture of resistance to white hegemony. This socio-political movement incorporated a more dynamic understanding of culture and identity, enabling the unity of Aboriginal people regardless of differences in their cultural and social background.

However, as postcolonial studies began to criticise the essential nature of a collective identity and argued for recognising the diversity of Indigeneity at an individual level (Paradies 2006: 355–367), the focus of research shifted to more fluid and dynamic aspects of Aboriginal identity. This newer group of studies contended Indigeneity is not necessarily established either on kinship relations or as a political tool. For example, a study of an Aboriginal community in southwestern Sydney indicated the possibility that people of the ‘Stolen Generations’ (i.e. people removed from Indigenous families due to prior government policies), who did not have a kinship relationship with the local Indigenous community, could nevertheless be accepted as a member of the community through participation in the activities of Aboriginal organisations (Yamanouchi 2010: 216–228).

Furthermore, recent studies have suggested Indigeneity can also become entangled with the experience of multiracial interaction in a particular geographic area and social space where Indigenous communities are embedded. For example, Greenop and Memmott (2013: 274–275) indicated young Aboriginal people in an outer suburb of Brisbane developed a type of oppositional identity that embraced non-Aboriginal residents based on their shared experiences of poverty and shame. This case, they argued, shows contemporary Aboriginal identities do not rely exclusively on kinship or the shared experience of Indigenous people, but can be more intercultural in nature. Their study reinforces the claim Indigeneity is not necessarily based on a binary dualism of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous people.

Such diversity in the interpretations of Indigeneity can also become entangled with the ambiguity of whiteness. Conventional studies on whiteness, mainly in the United States and emerging in response to critiques of racism, have drawn academic attention as offering an analytical perspective on how social systems create racial inequality. These studies, in revealing



the privileges associated with whiteness, regarded whiteness as an unmarked and unnamed category, serving as a norm against which differences of other cultures were measured (Frankenberg 1993: 1). In addition, whiteness is viewed as a criterion by which to include or exclude others and thereby to protect the privileges of a certain group (Frankenberg 1997: 13).

Meanwhile, other studies revealed the unstable status of whiteness, indicating that is not self-evident but is always in the process of being made and unmade, interwoven with the constructions of other lines of division between human beings such as class, nationhood, femininity and masculinity (Frankenberg 1997: 11–16). Therefore, whiteness can become masked in particular times and spaces. Hartigan (1997: 185) illustrated such a slipperiness of whiteness, focusing on ‘poor whites’ in inner-city Detroit where the majority of residents are black. There, unlike the norm in most of the United States, whiteness is a marker of being out of place.

According to Hartigan, racial meanings are heterogeneous and are always contested and negotiated depending on the particular site and context. For example, although some white residents in Detroit seemed to develop a sense of racial animosity toward black residents, they rarely reduced their black neighbours to a racial category; they resisted the urge to attribute the conflicts that occurred between neighbours as being of racial origin and instead specified the precise context in which hatred occurred. Hartigan (1997: 187–93) argued this attitude developed because lower-income whites were degraded by their own white families due to their class status, which encouraged closer relationships with black families.

Whiteness in Australia has been discussed in terms of its power relations with Indigenous people. For example, Moreton-Robinson (2003: 30–31), an Indigenous scholar, views whiteness as a possession, arguing that in ‘postcolonizing’ Australian society, where power relations are based on an ongoing denial of original possession, the question of who belongs and the extent of

that belonging are inextricably tied to the possession of whiteness. She emphasises the incommensurable difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples because of Indigenous people's ontological relationship to land derived from the Dreaming and the lived experiences based on that worldview.

This dualism of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was supported partly by an anthropological study on race relations between the two groups. Cowlshaw (2004: 113–120), who studied a town in New South Wales where racial division is prominent, found Aboriginal people displayed their opposition to white hegemony through what white residents perceived as unconstrained, physical and boisterous behaviour, such as fighting, drunkenness and breaking bottles in public spaces. White residents responded to such acts by asserting the value of order and normalcy, positioning themselves as detached from and not responsible for the prior destructive relationships between Aboriginal and white people that have provoked frustration and fury among Aboriginal people. Although some white residents who have Aboriginal partners or friends joined the Aboriginal community, crossing the racial boundary, they were also pressured to show their racial loyalty to the white community by hiding their relationships with or making insulting jokes about Aboriginal people.

In these studies in Australia, the dichotomised structure of whites as oppressors and non-whites as the oppressed was taken for granted. Thus, little attention has been given to diversity within either the 'white' or the 'Indigenous' category, and the status of members of the white working class who do not enjoy the privileges of middle-class whites has been largely ignored. Nevertheless, while arguing the racial boundary was constantly maintained in this rural town, Cowlshaw (2004: 101–106) described also cases in which the experience of poverty, which constitutes an aspect of Aboriginality, was shared with lower-class white residents. This fact can

be seen as offering potential solidarity between the two groups, which could transcend the essentialised categories of white and Indigenous in certain aspects of everyday practice.

### **Port Adelaide and its Indigenous Community**

The migration of Aboriginal people from nearby reserves to Adelaide, South Australia began in the mid-1940s, and since that time the Aboriginal population in Adelaide has increased significantly. The 2011 census reported an Aboriginal population in Adelaide of approximately 15,000 people, or 1.3 percent of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

Although the Aboriginal population is dispersed across the city, it is concentrated mainly in the north-western and northern suburbs where public housing is available. About 17 percent of this population lives in Port Adelaide, a long time industrial area located approximately 15 kilometres northwest of Adelaide's central business district.

After South Australia was colonised, the Port Adelaide area became a major base for trading with other Australian colonies and with the world. Known historically for its maritime industry, Port Adelaide was the second-largest city in South Australia in the early 20th century, with more than half of the total Adelaide population. However, with the decline in industry after World War II, its population dropped. Today, Port Adelaide has about 112,000 residents, or 10 percent of Adelaide's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). It has a significantly lower average household income, a higher proportion of persons working in manufacturing, and a higher unemployment rate than other suburbs in metropolitan Adelaide. However, in recent years, as part of an area redevelopment plan, new apartments and a marina have been constructed. Consequently, Port Adelaide's established image as an old industrial area is changing gradually.

The Aboriginal people in Adelaide come mainly from two former southern reserves: the Narungga of Point Pearce reserve and the Ngarrindjeri people from Raukkan (Point McLeay)<sup>3</sup> reserve. In addition, there are some Kurna people from the Adelaide plains. After colonisation, the Kurna people intermarried with the Narungga and Ngarrindjeri groups. Although there is no large Aboriginal family group in Adelaide, there are small families from each regional group, such as the Wilson, Spender, Adams and Goldsmith families among the Kurna and the Rankine, Rigney and Sumner families from the Ngarrindjeri.

When urbanisation began in the 1940s, most Aboriginal people in Port Adelaide had come from the Point Pearce and Raukkan reserves and had strong kinship ties. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the social networks expanded beyond the kin level to an organisational level, with the formation of all-Aboriginal voluntary associations to address the common problems associated with life in the wider Australian society such as unemployment and discrimination. These social relationships and kinship ties provided the primary basis for their identity (Pierson 1977: 320–321).

Today, these voluntary associations or self-help organisations have been replaced by government or non-government Aboriginal organisations, some of which preferentially employ Aboriginal people from particular families—a practice that has prevented Aboriginal people of other families from obtaining employment. In other words, Aboriginal families compete with each other over resources, including government employment. Generally, at ceremonial occasions, social relationships between Aboriginal people are at the family level.

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<sup>3</sup> When Ngarrindjeri people regained control of the area in 1972, the name was changed from Point McLeay to Raukkan, which can be translated as ‘ancient way’.

With the arrival of many people from outside Adelaide, including some who have newly identified as Aboriginal, an increasing ambiguity regarding Aboriginal identity in Adelaide has emerged. For example, identifying Aboriginal identity has become problematic in determinations of eligibility for government services such as public housing or education scholarships. The federal government requires that people claiming Aboriginal status when applying for these benefits must meet three Aboriginality criteria: descent, self-identification as Aboriginal, and community recognition. However, meeting these criteria does not guarantee acceptance as a member by the local Aboriginal community.<sup>4</sup> For example, an Aboriginal community college admissions officer in Port Adelaide said that she judged applicants' Aboriginality by their family name, as she knew all the Aboriginal family names in South Australia.

In the Adelaide Aboriginal community, the most typical way to confirm a person's Aboriginality was to find a common relative and to ask which reserve their family came from, or to ask questions about kinship networks such as 'Do you know Auntie Mary who is married to Uncle Bill?' Even when a kinship network is established, some members of the community insist on confirming that the person claiming Aboriginality has maintained social relationships within the Adelaide Aboriginal community. If kinship relationships cannot be identified, the claimant may be accused of pretending to be Aboriginal. In these cases, attributes such as skin colour<sup>5</sup> or the

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'community' refers here to a social network of Aboriginal people who are connected to one another through kinship and participation in the activities of Aboriginal organisations. However, in the Adelaide Aboriginal community, some community organisations assess one's Aboriginality and provide confirmation of Aboriginality.

<sup>5</sup> Among urban Aboriginal people, there are cases in which people with darker skin are viewed as 'real' Aboriginal as opposed to those with lighter skin.<sup>6</sup> This term refers to Eyre Peninsula, which is located approximately 280 kilometers west of Adelaide. Colleen's husband was classified as white by the

distinct cultural values shared by the Adelaide Aboriginal community, such as caring and sharing, can be used to confirm or deny Aboriginality.

In one illustrative case, a fair-skinned Aboriginal man from Victoria entered an Aboriginal community college in South Australia with proof of Aboriginality; however, he was not fully accepted by the local students because of his skin colour and lack of social relationships with the Adelaide Aboriginal community. On the other hand, as Inglis (1961: 200–218) and Schwab (1988) indicated, there have also been many cases where Aboriginal people from outside Adelaide were accepted after establishing relationships with local Adelaide people and acquiring the local cultural styles.

Because the Aboriginal people in Port Adelaide associate regularly with non-Aboriginal residents from similar socio-economic backgrounds, they also have a Port Adelaide resident identity separate from their Aboriginal identity. As these non-Aboriginal neighbours, because of their low socio-economic status, suffer from social exclusion experiences similar to those of the local Aboriginal community, some residents in Port Adelaide feel that they share a local identity characterised by poverty and shame, across racial lines. A non-Aboriginal resident in his thirties who has lived in Adelaide for 27 years and has worked as a chef explained his feelings about being a resident of Port Adelaide:

In Port Adelaide everyone is a bloke no matter what kind your skin is. We all do pretty tough, so no one becomes richer than anyone else, so we usually all get along better. Living in Port Adelaide and working in eastern or northern suburbs, people always look down on

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authorities under the Aboriginal Act because of his light skin. Nevertheless, he began to identify as Aboriginal after Indigenous people were granted the right to determine their own identity in the 1970s.

me a little bit because I live in Port Adelaide. ‘Are you living in Port Adelaide? It is full of Aborigines. Why would you live there?’ There is a perception that Port Adelaide is full of Aborigines, so it’s dangerous. But I have more bad experiences with Anglos than I have with Aborigines. (Interview, 16 March 2014)

Friendships develop between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents who share neighbourhoods and schools. For example, an Aboriginal woman in her forties continues to maintain contact with her non-Aboriginal school friends. These friendships often spawn intergenerational relationships as most residents remain in the same geographic area throughout their lives due to their low socio-economic conditions, and as intermarriage is relatively common. However, such friendly relationships with non-Aboriginal residents are not always observed among Aboriginal elders and activists, as some of them tend to emphasise their experiences of deprivation and place great importance on their Aboriginality.

Furthermore, some prejudice against the Aboriginal people persists, although at a group level there have been no conflicts between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. For example, an Aboriginal woman in her fifties who grew up in Port Adelaide said when she was at school, she was called derogatory names by non-Aboriginal girls at school, and she recalled that the ‘Blackfellas stuck together’ to fight the non-Aboriginal children. These long-standing and often decades-old negative experiences of the behaviour of non-Aboriginal residents continue to affect the attitudes of some in the Aboriginal community, who claim their distinct culture separates them from the non-Aboriginal residents.

### **Case Studies of Interracial Relations**

The following case studies illustrate the life experiences of Indigenous families that include non-Indigenous members, focusing on the fluctuation of Indigeneity and whiteness. As Hartigan (1997:184) indicated, the family, located between individuals and the society, is the most significant setting where racial identity is formed and reproduced. Whether a particular family incorporates an individual from another racial category plays a major role in determining how racial categories gain or lose significance in that family. Boundary Displacement from the Indigenous Side

Colleen, born at Point McLeay reserve in 1941, was a woman of Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri descent and part of the first generation who migrated from this Aboriginal reserve to Adelaide after World War II. She moved to Adelaide at age fourteen to receive secondary education. After graduating from secondary school, she remained in Adelaide, marrying an Aboriginal man from the West Coast<sup>6</sup> and having four children. Colleen became involved in various activities within the local Aboriginal community.<sup>7</sup> For example, around 1970 she became an Aboriginal Education Worker<sup>8</sup> at a local primary school and initiated Aboriginal cultural classes, where she taught

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<sup>6</sup> This term refers to Eyre Peninsula, which is located approximately 280 kilometers west of Adelaide.

Colleen's husband was classified as white by the authorities under the Aboriginal Act because of his light skin. Nevertheless, he began to identify as Aboriginal after Indigenous people were granted the right to determine their own identity in the 1970s.

<sup>7</sup> 'Nunga' refers to Indigenous people in Adelaide. Collective identity as Nunga was constructed in Aboriginal cultural revival by Aboriginal leaders and elders in the 1970s and 1980s.

<sup>8</sup> An Aboriginal Education Worker assumes a role as a liaison between the school and Aboriginal families. For example, when an Aboriginal student is absent for a long period of time without any notice or when he or she causes troubles with other students, an Aboriginal Education Worker contacts or visits the student's family to discuss the problems and mediates the interaction between teachers and parents.



Aboriginal art and crafts to both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students.

Despite this community engagement, Colleen's everyday life was mired in poverty, especially after she separated from her husband, who had supported the family financially by working as a truck driver. She raised her children with the help of her relatives. Colleen's oldest daughter explained the 'Aboriginal way' that she learned while growing up:

It's about lifestyle—the way of life in the home. You could see it in our cooking, in a sense. When we had nothing, you've got nothing. Mum would get a soup dish, and all of a sudden, in a minute we would have something cooking on a stove like a soup, you know. It was like a poor man's meal at the time. But it was an Aboriginal way in a sense, because we weren't any different growing up than the Aboriginal people down the street; you know, they had nothing. It was like if you were rich at that time, you didn't fit in. You had to be like a lower-class citizen of the whole society. That's how I saw the Aboriginal people.  
(Interview, 5 September 2008)

However, this daughter recalled that some white residents in her neighbourhood were as poor as her family or even poorer. Colleen shared food not only with Aboriginal residents but also with those white children, many of whose parents had problems with alcoholism.

Although Colleen mostly identified herself as Nunga until the 1980s, she later began to emphasise her affiliation with regional groups, first as Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri and later as Indigenous in the mid-1990s when she initiated the land rights movement in Port Adelaide. Colleen attempted to register 4.4 hectares of land, where her ancestors on her matrilineal side had once lived, as a Kaurna heritage site under the State Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1988 (South

Australia).<sup>9</sup> She had also a vision of establishing an Aboriginal elders' village and an interpretive centre on the site so that local residents could learn about Kaurna culture. However, Colleen's request was rejected by the state government, both because of the uncertainty of the exact location where her ancestors had actually resided and because a redevelopment plan was already in progress in the area.

Dissatisfied with this response by the government, Colleen and some of her relatives formed an association in the mid-1990s, seeking to prove their ancestors' connection to the land. Since she gained little support apart from her close relatives and some Ngarrindjeri elders, because of divisions within the Indigenous community in Adelaide and suspicion of her claim to Kaurna descent among some Indigenous members,<sup>10</sup> she turned to local non-Indigenous residents for assistance. Later, Colleen formed an action group composed of her family members, her non-Indigenous friends, and local working-class citizens. The non-Indigenous participants included people who knew her from her work at the local school and some whom she had helped while they were children. Colleen, as part of her effort to promote support for Indigenous rights among local white residents, attempted to link the significance of the land rights movement to

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<sup>9</sup> This legislation was passed by South Australia's Parliament in 1988 to protect Aboriginal heritage. Under the legislation, all Aboriginal sites, objects and remains in South Australia that are of significance to Aboriginal tradition, archaeology, anthropology and/or history are protected by making it a criminal offence for any person to damage Aboriginal sites or objects without authority.

<sup>10</sup> Although her descent as Kaurna was proved by anthropologists, she was more likely to be seen as Ngarrindjerri rather than Kaurna in the local Indigenous community because she was also involved in the Indigenous movement in Lower Marry River as an Ngarrindjerri elder around the same time as when she initiated the land rights movement in Port Adelaide. Thus, some members were not comfortable with her claiming the right to the Kaurna heritage on behalf of the whole Kaurna people.

universal Western values such as peace, equity and democracy. In a leaflet that she distributed to local residents, for example, she described the movement as follows:

This is a journey for peace where we as the Indigenous nation and as family strengthen our bonds of love and trust. This is also a journey of creation, of spirituality, culture, and languages; we pledge to protect our heritage, and this is the legacy that we leave for our children and the children of generations to come. (Mardawi Kiawi Thangwilin yunti: Sisters and Brothers Standing Together)

Colleen believed white citizens would accept and endorse these values. By emphasising the movement was not only for Indigenous people but also for all Australian citizens fighting for justice, she used Western cultural values to assert her Indigeneity and defend her claim to special rights as Indigenous.

Colleen articulated concerns relevant to both Indigenous and white residents also. As indicated by the slogans that the action group produced in its protest against the redevelopment plan—including ‘No ghettos for the rich’ and ‘Tokenism will not strengthen our community’—she emphasised the shared experiences of poverty, social exclusion, and consequent suffering caused by a social situation unique to Port Adelaide. Therefore, when her group members opposed redevelopment, they fought as residents of Port Adelaide, setting aside the racial boundaries between non-Indigenous and Indigenous status.

Notably, some non-Indigenous participants in the movement initially had negative views of Indigenous people. For example, a man in his thirties who became involved at a relative’s invitation previously held unfavourable opinions regarding the sociality of local Indigenous

residents. He described a night club where local residents usually gathered, saying the ‘Aboriginal people stuck together by themselves and never interacted with other cultural groups.’ This experience made it difficult for him to approach Aboriginal people in general. However, his attitude toward Aboriginal people changed after he met a woman who warmly welcomed him and made him feel that ‘she was like my grandmother.’<sup>11</sup>

Initially, Colleen presented her Aboriginality through active participation in the activities of Aboriginal organisations and by teaching Aboriginal culture in a school setting. Meanwhile, the experience of poverty in her daily life overlapped with the experience of her white neighbours, giving her the chance to establish relations with them by sharing food. Although the land rights movement that she initiated in the 1990s had the original goal of asserting her Indigeneity and claiming special rights as Indigenous, she expanded its purpose into an anti-redevelopment advocacy group and eventually a movement for justice by all local residents who shared the experience of poverty and exclusion. In this process, Colleen displaced the meaning of Indigeneity to incorporate local white individuals with whom she had built relationships over many years, to strengthen her position in negotiations with the state government.

### ***Boundary Displacement from the White Side***

Although some members of Colleen’s family had non-Indigenous partners, their social position within the extended family structure varied, as some were more fully accepted as family members than others. Andrew, the partner of Colleen’s granddaughter, was an example of acceptance. Born

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<sup>11</sup> The efforts by Colleen and the local residents did not lead to any revisions of the government’s plan and redevelopment was implemented. Two years after Colleen passed away, a small park commemorating the land’s Kaurana heritage was established in the middle of the apartments as a result of a government proposal.

in 1982, Andrew came from a rural town in South Australia where racial division between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was prominent. His family ran a dairy farm and was one of the wealthiest families in the town. Andrew explained that his parents worked most of the day and that he rarely spent time with them at home. Although he went to a public school where the majority of the students were white, he associated more with Aboriginal boys from another town than with white children. His somewhat rebellious behaviour caused him to associate with Aboriginal children who were also viewed as misbehaving in the town. Having spent most of his lifetime with Indigenous people, he has experienced racism himself. For example, when he stayed in his parents' caravan at a caravan park in the town and invited his Indigenous friends to visit him, white people staying in the park complained about his actions and he was eventually kicked out of the park.

Andrew was forced to leave school at year nine<sup>12</sup> because of his behavioural problems and began working at a metal fabrication shop. When his parents purchased a restaurant in the Adelaide central business district, Andrew moved there too with his Indigenous partner, Colleen's granddaughter, who had grown up in a rural town with her aunts and had met Andrew at the public school. After moving to Adelaide, Andrew rarely visited his parents, instead spending more time with his partner's relatives in Port Adelaide. He participated actively not only in family events such as birthday parties and funerals, but also in the mutual aid<sup>13</sup> practised by family members on

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<sup>12</sup> In Australia, year 9 is usually the tenth year of compulsory education. Despite slight variations between the states, most children in year 9 are 14 or 15 years old.

<sup>13</sup> 'Mutual aid' or 'demand sharing' practised among Indigenous people was regarded as a significant element of the 'Blackfella (Aboriginal) Way' by Indigenous people in Adelaide, which differentiates them from non-Indigenous people (Schwab 1991).

a daily basis, such as sharing daily goods or the borrowing and lending of small amounts of money. Andrew occasionally offered to lend or give money when someone in the family needed a large amount of money urgently or when money was short, although such offers were sometimes declined with the comment, 'We will look after ourselves.'

When asked why he associated more with the Indigenous family than his own family, Andrew explained that he felt 'excluded' from his own family because he had 'chosen a different life', which included his relationships with Aboriginal people. Comparing his family with his partner's family, he said, 'A Nunga family accepts anyone. My white family wouldn't accept you if you are an Aboriginal.' His partner's sister commented, 'There are some people who are Aboriginal but don't want to acknowledge that they are Aboriginal. They want to be white. But Andrew is more black than such Aborigines' (Interview, 23 November 2009).

Nevertheless, no matter how much time he spent with the Indigenous family, Andrew never identified himself as Indigenous and continued to view himself as white. He could not avoid realising his whiteness when Indigenous family members spoke of their people's history, mentioning land deprivation by white settlers, regarding which he commented, 'I cannot do anything about that.' Furthermore, though he participated in the practice of mutual aid within the family, he occasionally faulted the practice, stating that 'Aboriginal people will never be rich because all the relatives ask the richest member of the family for money.'

Although Andrew has now separated from his partner, he still visits the family to see his children; his partner's mother refers to him as 'our son' and has maintained a relationship with him. However, the family did not adopt the same attitude toward other non-Indigenous members of the family. White partners who rarely visited and spent time with the family were not seen as a part of the family.

Having grown up in a rural area where the boundary between white and Indigenous is prominent, Andrew associated with local Indigenous residents as one of his compensatory strategies to make up for his lack of a sense of belonging in white society, including his own family. He succeeded in securing a temporal place in a Port Adelaide community through his association with his partner's family. Nevertheless, Andrew remained aware of the incommensurability between the categories of white and Indigenous, which occasionally caused him to differentiate himself from Indigenous residents. Even so, his partner's family viewed his life experience as demonstrating his racial loyalty to the Indigenous side, which made it easier for him to be accepted in the family. This sense of community, characterised by racial loyalties and strong kin connections, differentiates poverty among Aboriginal people from severe urban poverty (Cowlshaw 2004: 101–106). The family interpreted Andrew's life in a way that suited the ethic of their Aboriginality, indicating, 'although he is from a wealthy family, he grew up without knowing family affection.'

### ***Boundary Displacement from Both Sides***

As with Aboriginal people in rural New South Wales (Cowlshaw 2004: 101), poverty constituted Aboriginality in Colleen's family. However, since Colleen's generation, the experience of Aboriginal poverty has also been shared with white residents of the T district, the most impoverished area of Port Adelaide. Karen, another granddaughter of Colleen, was born to Aboriginal parents in this district in 1990. Since her father was in prison and her mother had an alcohol problem, she was raised by her aunts and grandparents, who lived in the same suburb. She caused problems at a local secondary school and was forced to leave at year ten.<sup>14</sup> Karen then

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<sup>14</sup> In Australia, Year 10 is the eleventh year of compulsory education. Despite slight variations between the states, most children in Year 10 are age 14 to 16.

studied at an Aboriginal community college on a scholarship intended to help Indigenous students to acquire vocational skills. She reflected on her childhood in the T district as follows: ‘There is not much difference between Aboriginal and white families, because many people in this area have alcohol and drug problems. Whether we are Aboriginal or white, our parents have the same problem’ (Interview, 23 November 2009).

Karen had several non-Indigenous friends in addition to her Indigenous friends from the same district. Her closest white friend was Tina, who lives in the same neighbourhood. Tina was born to Irish and Spanish parents. Her father, who was a labourer at a railway station, passed away when she was a child. After that, Tina resided with her mother, who suffered from mental illness, and her two brothers. Comparing herself to other white Australians in the metropolitan area, she felt ashamed of her circumstances. For example, she explained, ‘I had to go shopping by myself far away from my house on hot summer days. Normal children wouldn’t do that.’ After finishing secondary school, Tina began working at a local hospital’s call centre while also caring for her mother.

Karen and Tina’s relatives had known each other before the two were born, and when Tina’s father passed away, Karen’s relatives attended his funeral. Tina had had some Aboriginal friends before she met Karen, and one of her brothers had an Aboriginal girlfriend. Karen and Tina also had similar living situations, in that both resided in public rental housing (for Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents, respectively), and their mothers received a single parent pension. Despite Karen’s remark that Indigenous and white families in Port Adelaide had essentially the same lifestyles, there was one difference: whereas Karen’s relatives resided in the same suburb, enabling the family to turn to them for help if food or money was short, Tina’s family had to be self-reliant because their relatives lived all over South Australia and rarely visited one another.



Karen and Tina visited each other's home on a daily basis and helped each other by sharing not only food and daily goods but also their experiences of growing up in a complex family environment and in a lower-income area. For example, when Karen's family became embroiled in intense internal conflicts, Tina and her family became her primary source of emotional support. Karen occasionally referred to Tina's mother as 'mom' when she was at Tina's house. They were also acquainted with each other's family members. Karen's relatives showed sympathy for Tina's circumstances and offered help when she had difficulties. For example, when Tina could not afford to go to driving school, Karen's sister offered to teach her how to drive. Karen called Tina's family 'my white family' and Tina reciprocated by referring to 'my black family', both thereby regarding each other's families as an extension of their own. This emotional link was particularly apparent when Tina's mother passed away in her fifties; Karen mourned her death as if her own mother had died.

Growing up in an Indigenous family and community in Port Adelaide, Karen viewed her Indigeneity as self-evident. However, in her everyday life she shared with non-Indigenous residents a common experience of social exclusion through poverty and discrimination. There were many similarities between Karen and Tina's life experiences: both grew up in fatherless households, the two families shared intergenerational associations, and the racial constitution of each family was heterogeneous, making interaction between them more likely. Since Tina's family could not obtain everyday support from relatives, Karen and her family expanded their mutual aid network to encompass Tina. Meanwhile, Karen also fled to Tina's family emotionally, seeking a place there as a friend and neighbour. In this way, both women displaced the traditional racial boundary to include each other, so as to enhance the convenience of their lives. When such

displacement occurred, racial meanings became too heterogeneous to be reduced to one abstract racial order.

## **Discussion**

In the absence of any clear consensus on the criteria for Indigeneity in the Adelaide Indigenous community, the racial boundary between Indigenous and white has always fluctuated. Especially in Port Adelaide, where most whites are socio-economically poor and gain no structural advantage from their whiteness, the boundary could easily become blurred. Therefore, Indigeneity was not regarded as a static category with a rigid range, but as a fluid and flexible category in which people from the white category could be included for daily convenience.

For example, unlike some other Indigenous leaders and activists, Colleen did not choose to claim her homogeneous, consistent Indigeneity when she became involved in the Indigenous land rights movement, in which people's distinct identity as Indigenous is mobilised in negotiation with the state. Instead, she involved white residents and their acquaintances with whom she had already built relationships in everyday practice, incorporating them into the Indigenous category to help her achieve her goal. Thanks to the activities of a resident who shared the same living space and experience with whites and who had gained whites' trust through face-to-face interaction over many years in everyday practice, a temporal displacement of the racial boundary between white and Indigenous took place. Here one can see her strategy, derived from the art with everyday knowledge, of selecting from a stock of plural categories such as Kurna, Indigenous or residents of Port Adelaide depending on the situation or purpose.

Meanwhile, although Andrew was originally from a white family who strongly affirmed their whiteness, his own whiteness was displaced eventually because he chose 'a different way' from his relatives. Alienation from his white family and ambiguity about his whiteness led him to

find his place in the Indigenous family with whom he became connected in Port Adelaide. Through this association, he participated actively in family events and in the daily practice of mutual aid. This attitude was perceived by an Indigenous family member as displaying racial loyalty toward Indigenous people at the expense of his own, as reflected in the remark that 'he is more black than other Aboriginal people.' However, for him the racial categories of white and Indigenous remained, even though he temporarily displaced the boundary between them and incorporated himself within the Indigenous category to avoid alienation from the local community. We can deduce that in Andrew's case, an ongoing relationship with the Indigenous family to whom he was connected enabled this reorganisation of the racial boundary.

By sharing the experience of poverty and the various hardships that accompany it, and by engaging in everyday practices of mutual aid, Karen and Tina sought to overcome difficulties and survive in their poor community, applying the sense of caring and sharing widely practised within Indigenous families. Although Tina and her family did not enjoy the privileges of whiteness like most white residents in the metropolitan area, and although she shared a living space with Indigenous residents, the boundary between white and black did not disappear completely, as seen in the description of each other's family as 'my white family' and 'my black family'. However, this boundary was occasionally displaced through the extension of the circle of mutual aid by Karen's family toward Tina or vice versa. They modified the boundary by creating categories such as 'friend' and 'resident of the T district'.

The common factors that led to ethnic boundary displacement in these cases are the experiences of deprivation and resulting suffering. Because of their underprivileged social status, the subjects were compelled to help one another to overcome the difficulties they faced in their daily lives. The practice of mutual aid emerged in various forms, ranging from 'caring and sharing'

to solidarity in resisting power and authority in a political context. In the process of mutual aid, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjects reorganised the formulaic racial categories by expanding their kin network to the other group, as seen in quasi-kinship terms such as ‘our son’, ‘my black family’ and ‘my white family’, or by creating new categories, including ‘residents of Port Adelaide’, ‘friend’ and ‘neighbour’, since it was more convenient for them to rely on these categories than to adhere to the existing racial categories. Such reorganisation of racial categories was enabled by the accumulation of relationships among residents of Port Adelaide over many years. Through frequent face-to-face interaction, new, complex relations can be formed that prevent subjects from simply categorising others according to their racial group.

Furthermore, the perspective of ‘convenience of life’ and ‘everyday practice’ allows us to recognise ethnic boundary displacement occurs not only on the Indigenous side but also on the white side. Although whiteness is viewed as having the power to exclude certain groups to protect the privilege of other groups, in this case study whiteness did not function in an exclusionary manner since the non-Indigenous people were already deprived of the privileges usually associated with being white. Instead, whiteness was set aside as whites incorporated themselves into the Indigenous category as a life strategy to survive in a poor area. Although the distinction between Indigeneity and whiteness remained to some extent, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members lived along a spectrum between Indigeneity and whiteness, which can be constantly displaced to either side depending on the situation and the actors’ purposes.

## **Conclusion**

We can conclude from this case study that the displacement of the boundary between Indigenous and white occurred among both groups in their everyday practice. Intergenerational relationships built over many years caused members of both groups to make sense of others as residents of a

particular area and as friends. Moreover, Colleen's family has reproduced heterogeneous racial categories over generations, in a setting where racial categories occasionally lost their significance. Inheriting Colleen's art with everyday knowledge, Indigeneity as expressed in her family could flexibly expand or narrow its range in everyday interactions with other people, and thus its meaning and range changed in accordance with the context. At the same time, the range of whiteness was not fixed but always fluctuated, becoming entangled with the ambiguity of Indigeneity. Therefore, whiteness does not always have the power to include and exclude others; rather, both Indigeneity and whiteness can gain such power through the establishment of continual relationships in everyday practice.

A convenient art based on everyday knowledge, as proposed by Matsuda, can be considered a practice used to survive in a particular community based on social bonds and proximity. The stock of plural categories such as 'Indigenous', 'my white family' and 'residents of Port Adelaide' mobilised by the family members was not based on an essentialised and homogeneous identity such as Indigeneity or whiteness. Instead, it is derived from what Oda (2008: 299–300) called an 'authentic society', or a society based on the face-to-face relations between residents. According to Oda, a cohesion formed in an authentic society is not fixed with an explicit boundary, but has proximity on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, the members are always considered as specific individuals who cannot be reduced to attributes such as class and gender. Reorganisation of the racial boundary and the creation of a new category can overcome the conventional dualism of Indigeneity and whiteness. This study shows the significance of paying attention to the subtle ways in which such displacement occurs in everyday practice to grasp the diverse and dynamic aspects of Indigeneity and whiteness.

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