Making Sense of the Census: Observations of the 2001 Enumeration in Remote Aboriginal Australia

D.F. Martin, F. Morphy, W.G. Sanders and J. Taylor
Foreword

This monograph had its genesis in discussions held over many years between CAEPR researchers and the ABS regarding the capacity of census data to adequately and accurately represent the distinctiveness of Indigenous social, cultural and economic life in its many varied forms. Initial discussions surrounded the correct interpretation of census characteristics in situations where these fail to capture the on-the-ground reality of Indigenous circumstances. Other discussions concerned the adequacy of census counts in remote areas following the publication of a CAEPR Discussion Paper by David Martin and John Taylor illustrating discrepancies in enumeration at Aurukun community on remote Cape York Peninsula. More recently, and following on from that paper, the idea of using CAEPR researchers (who were to be in the field at the time of the 2001 enumeration) as official observers of the census in select communities was raised with the ABS. As the case studies in this monograph testify, this plan was supported and subsequently brought to fruition.

This is not the first time that CAEPR and the ABS have collaborated to produce research of importance to national Indigenous policy development. In 1992, current CAEPR Associate and former CAEPR colleague, Anne Daly, was the recipient of an ABS fellowship which resulted in a landmark study of the labour market status of Indigenous people. In 1996, Boyd Hunter and John Taylor collaborated with the National Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statistics to produce a joint ABS/CAEPR publication on employment outcomes for Indigenous people using data from the 1994 NATSIS. Boyd Hunter is also the recent recipient of an ABS fellowship under the Australian Census Analytic Program. In addition, several CAEPR staff assisted in the development of the NATSIS as members of Technical Reference Groups, and John Taylor is currently a member of the committee overseeing development of the Indigenous Social Survey. Over the years, ABS staff have participated in CAEPR workshops on employment equity, housing need, and the development (1992) and then analysis (1996) of NATSIS data.

In all of these activities, the ABS has displayed an interest in, and a commitment to, productive collaborations with CAEPR researchers. From CAEPR’s perspective, the ABS provides statistical expertise, ready access to published and unpublished data, and, most importantly, insight into the methodological and bureaucratic processes that lead to official data collection. From the ABS perspective, CAEPR provides an interpretive and analytical capacity which is informed by ethnographic understanding, social sciences theory and methods, and familiarity with the social and economic realities of daily life in Indigenous communities. Together, these provide a powerful (and essential) means towards improving the quality of statistical information that is of fundamental importance to the development of effective and appropriate Indigenous social policy.

Professor Jon Altman
CAEPR
August 2002
Contents

Foreword iii
Lists of figures and tables vii
Abbreviations and acronyms ix
Abbreviations for kin terms (chapter 3) x
Acknowledgments xi

1. The context for observation 1

John Taylor

Out of sight, out of mind: remote census counts before 1971 3
The referendum of 1967 and beyond 4
The development of special enumeration procedures 5
Current practice 7
Data quality 9
Departures from standard procedures 10

2. Counting the Wik: the 2001 Census in Aurukun, western Cape York Peninsula 13

David Martin

Introduction 13
Pre-census preparation 14
Proposed collection methodology 16
Conduct of the census 17
Responses to the census questions 20
Completion of the count 27
Conclusion 28

3. When systems collide: the 2001 Census at a Northern Territory outstation 29

Frances Morphy

Introduction 29
Putting the census team in place 32
From training to doing 34
The enumeration proceeds 37
The interviews 40
List of figures and tables

Figures

Fig. 1.1 Procedural structure of the Indigenous Enumeration Strategy, 1991 Census 8
Fig. 2.1 Example of a ‘cluster’ of households, Aurukun 22
Fig. 3.1 Kin relationships between people designated as ‘person 1’ for each occupied dwelling, community A, 2001 Census 31
Fig. 3.2 The kin connections of the community A enumerators, 2001 Census 32
Fig. 3.3 Siblings and cousins in the Anglo-Celtic and local Indigenous systems 56
Fig. 3.4 Children in the Anglo-Celtic and local Indigenous systems 57
Fig. 3.5 The Anglo-Celtic term mother and the local Indigenous term M compared 58
Fig. 3.6 Dwelling J: actual relationships of usual residents 61
Fig. 3.7 Dwelling K: actual relationships of usual residents and visitor 62
Fig. 3.8 Anglo-Celtic kinship terminology and the nuclear family 64
Fig. 3.9 Local Indigenous kinship terminology and the intersection of lineages 64
Fig. 4.1 Alice Springs Community Living Areas, with hand annotations of town camp CD numbers 79

Tables

Table 2.1 ‘Family types’ at Aurukun, 2001 Census 22
Table 2.2 Language spoken at home and English proficiency, Aurukun, 2001 Census 24
Table 2.3 Religious affiliation, Aurukun, 2001 Census 25
Table 3.1 Details of dwelling J in community A as recorded on the SIHE, 2001 Census 61
# Abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>The Australian National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAEPR</td>
<td>Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>Community Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Collection District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development Employment Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFO</td>
<td>Census Field Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGC</td>
<td>Commonwealth Grants Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHINS</td>
<td>Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYPLUS</td>
<td>Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAA</td>
<td>Department of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>enumerator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA</td>
<td>homelands association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IA</td>
<td>Indigenous Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IES</td>
<td>Indigenous Enumeration Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Consultative Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARU</td>
<td>North Australia Research Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q.</td>
<td>SIPF question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNO</td>
<td>Census Record Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s.</td>
<td>section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIHF</td>
<td>Special Indigenous Household Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPF</td>
<td>Special Indigenous Personal Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Statistical Local Area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations for kin terms (chapter 3)

B  brother
C  child
D  daughter
F  father
M  mother
Z  sister

Compound terms should be interpreted as follows: MB ‘mother’s brother’, MMB ‘mother’s mother’s brother’, etc. When a compound term appears with one of its terms in brackets, this indicates that the compound term has different referents for different categories of people. For example (Z)C is the term used by a woman for her own and her sisters’ children, and by a man for his sisters’ children, while (B)C is the term used by a man for his own and his brothers’ children and by a woman for her brothers’ children. Anglo-Celtic terms appear in two forms: in italic (e.g. sister) or between quotation marks (e.g. ‘sister’). The former are to be understood as terms in the Anglo-Celtic system, whereas the latter are approximate ‘translations’ of local Indigenous terms.
Acknowledgments

Paul Williams of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has shown a continuing interest over many years in engaging researchers in open debate and in the exchange of ideas and information about the interpretation of Indigenous census data. It was he and John Struik, in his capacity as head of the Population Statistics Group of the ABS, who bravely entertained the notion of independent observation of the 2001 Census, and who made it possible. Logistically, numerous individuals also assisted in this process. Those deserving of special mention include Martin Brady of the ABS in Canberra, and Roger Jones of CAEPR who was invaluable as a constant source of ideas and critical comment.

David Martin wishes to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Roylene Wolski, and the census collectors at Aurukun, particularly Albert Peinkinna. Frances Morphy would like to thank the enumerators, residents and visitors at community A, who accepted her presence as an observer with equanimity and good humour. She owes a special debt to the CFO, who spent more time than he could probably afford in providing information that could not have been easily obtained otherwise, particularly about the training procedures and the regional context of the enumeration. Lorraine Oakshotte and Sue Ward of the Darwin ABS Office also provided valuable assistance. Frances also thanks Roger Jones, David Martin, Will Sanders, Di Smith, and John Taylor, all of CAEPR, and Rosa Gibbs and Paul Williams of the ABS for their comments and feedback on various drafts of her chapter. Will Sanders would like to acknowledge the Tangentyere Council and Peter White, ABS Central Australian Census manager, for their assistance in carrying out his study.

Those who deserve special mention for their help with the production of the book include Paul Williams and Emma Perkins of the ABS for the speed and efficiency with which they provided the extra materials we asked for. Hilary Bek and Sally Ward of CAEPR are thanked for their copy-editing and proofreading.