

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

EPW-26
On Coming to One's Census

P.O. Box 628,
Port Moresby,
Papua,
Territory of Papua
and New Guinea

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Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Executive Director,
Institute of Current World Affairs,
535 Fifth Avenue,
New York, New York 10017,
United States of America

Dear Mr. Nolte,

I have been using the results contained in the Papua and New Guinea Population Census 1966 for a variety of purposes since they first began to be published. Even now, however, a great deal of important data has still not been decoded, or at least it has not been made public, and a second census is already scheduled for the middle of next year. Nonetheless, a great deal of useful-to-amusing information is available, and I think it might be of some interest to my readers if I share some of the census results with them. All too few people read rather than refer to the hard-won findings of the census-takers.

The Australian administrative style in Papua and New Guinea has long had something of a quantitative bias. Almost since the beginnings of Australian rule in the Territory, patrol officers have toured the countryside to record names (and sometimes quite offensive comments on the illiterate villagers) in the village-books that were kept on their behalf by New Guinea's luluais and Papua's village constables. It has, in fact, been illegal since the late 1940s at least not to appear to be counted or to conceal another person from a census-taker, on pain of a fine or a gaol sentence (of up to four months in Papua in 1948). As the same village-books were used as the primary source of names for the collection of head-taxes (on the model of the original Roman census), and for estimates of the number of people a village could spare for recruitment as plantation labourers, it is perhaps understandable that many Papuans and New Guineans were quite careful not to come to their census.

In this respect, then, Australian rule has been crudely interventionist and quite openly paternalistic in its approach towards village life. The successive Australian administrations of Papua and New Guinea have always insisted on knowing how many Papuans and New Guineans there were living at the time of each patrol, even when they lacked the financial resources to provide the indigenes with even minimally useful longterm medical attention. In the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, by way of contrast, district officers do not line up each village to be enumerated on their rounds. There is, however, a "decennial" census in the Solomons which is designed to provide the central government with essential data for efficient forward planning.

The 1931 census was allegedly a complete tally of the Protectorate's population in April of that year. It was, in fact, no more than a rough assessment based on several months of enumeration. The 1949 census had, unfortunately, to be abandoned because of widespread opposition to it on the part of the leaders of the proto-nationalistic Marching Rule movement. It is clearly important to have the co-operation of the people involved if a proper population count is to be conducted: its organisers must, in short, be skilled in the art of creating a political consensus. However, the roughly 2,000 adherents of Marching Rule who were imprisoned for their anti-government activities had their names and other particulars taken down on the prison rolls in even more detail than is usual in a census. The next Solomon Islands census, that of November 1959, was "deliberately incomplete". It provided information on only a sample of the Protectorate's total population, primarily because there would not have been a sufficient number of English language literates available for a complete count to be undertaken. The 1970 census, which covered the entire population of the Solomons, turned up fully 9,500 people whose existence had not previously been officially suspected.

The Indonesian administration of West Irian, as in so many other things, is far more practical about estimating the population of the seventeenth province than are its Melanesian neighbours. As in Papua and New Guinea in days gone by, vast areas of West Irian are inhabited by "estimated populations", which, together with those which have been accurately counted, total 815,904 — an estimate, the magnificent precision of which renders any cavil at the overall incompleteness of the census quite uncharitable. Some 508,600 of those who had been counted by the middle of 1969 "could not be classified according to the number of males and females". Demographic shortcomings must, of course, be forgiven in a province in which the terrain, according to the official Guide Book, "constitutes West Berlin type of jungle gordoned enclaves".

Not to be outdone by the Indonesians, the Australian government was able to report to the United Nations Trusteeship Council some time ago that, as at 30 June 1966, the population of New Guinea (exclusive of Papua) totalled 1,600,814, including both the estimated and enumerated totals. In the Kainantu Sub-District, there were an "estimated" 901 uncounted people.

As must appear obvious from the foregoing, Melanesia is one of the last great areas of the world for the speculative demographer. The student of the decline of populations, through starvation, warfare, or the collective loss of the will to live, and — more rarely, if more accurately — of sudden and dramatic rises in population, can still practise his art here relatively unhampered by the presence of "hard data". As Sir Hubert Murray lamented in 1925, when psychologically-based explanations of a suspected decline in the population of Melanesia had some currency, "this question of the decrease in population has been made a happy hunting-ground for all the faddists of the Pacific":

"One is continually being told that the natives dance too much and that dancing should be forbidden; that they do not dance enough and that dancing should be encouraged; that feasts should be approved as a means of assisting and improving native agriculture; and that they should be disapproved as encouraging waste, gluttony and sickness; that the natives eat too much and work too little; and that they eat too little and work too much. The advice is sometimes rendered more impressive and obscure by being clothed in the language of psycho-analysis, or some other philosophical system with which few of us are familiar...."

Some years earlier, he had himself inclined to the view that "so far as one can form an opinion in the complete absence of statistics ... the population was probably stationary; that is, I think that in some places it increased while in others it diminished, and that very probably the increase and decrease about balanced one another". Today, the problem is, of course, no longer one of depopulation, but of an unduly rapid, if not dangerous, tendency towards population growth in some areas, analysed in terms of only the crudest statistical data.

But enough of frivolity and speculation, the truly sensitive social scientist can learn much of benefit from a good census book.

The Conduct of the 1966 Census

The 1966 census was the first nation-wide census to be held in Papua and New Guinea, except for the crude cumulative totals which could be calculated in the course of the numerous, episodic patrol officers' tax-collecting and other routine tours, which, together, probably covered most of the Territory's village population perhaps once in every two years. Until 1966, the Territory's expatriate population was habitually counted as part of the Australian census (in which, incidentally, it was constitutionally impossible to count Australia's Aborigines until the constitution was amended in 1967).

In the words of the Director of Public Health, the 1966 census was "a milestone in statistical development". It was designed to provide the kinds of demographic, economic and social information suggested as appropriate for developing countries by the United Nations Statistical Office, and penalties were provided for under the Census Ordinance should co-operation in its conduct not be forthcoming. To add to the popular impact of the census, special school holidays were declared for its duration, so that schoolteachers could be made available for its administration, and to ensure that as many people as possible would be at home on census day, June 30. To that extent, the very conduct of the census distorted the normal distribution of population in the Territory, and some adjustments in the definition of a person's "normal place of residence" had, therefore, to be made.

Given the dispersed character of the Territory's settlement patterns, and the lack of adequate communications facilities and of personnel who could be trained as enumerators and supervisors, the census was neither complete nor simultaneous. The non-indigenous population and the indigenous inhabitants of Papua and New Guinea's urban areas, plantations and other commercial establishments, missions, and government posts, were completely enumerated on census day, while only a ten percent sample of the village population was taken. The sample was stratified on the basis of 102 strata, including geographical location, tribal groups, staple foods and religion, with the total population estimates based on the old patrol censuses. The anticipated standard error for the entire Territory population was about one half of one percent of the estimated population, and about three percent for any given District. The District reports contain the additional warning that for "components of these populations the anticipated error will be greater, depending on the size of the estimate":

"FOR VERY SMALL NUMBERS, THE ERROR WILL BE VERY GREAT.

Such figures should be used only with extreme caution and a thorough understanding of their limitations....

Further minor errors arise from incorrect replies, incorrect coding of replies and other processing errors. These are virtually all detected and rectified. However, because of the complexity and magnitude of the Census, a very small number remain uncorrected, but these do not affect the general validity of the results.

However, these uncorrected errors in the sample grid would be expanded by the sample raising factor. Thus, for example, if one accountant were incorrectly recorded in a sample area in which there were in fact no accountants, this would be expanded and appear in publications as perhaps 10 or as high as 14 accountants. This emphasises the need to be cautious in using the sample data for small cells." Because of the need to conduct much of the census on patrol — there are still relatively few "patrol officers" in Papua and New Guinea — the data which was collected in some areas had also to be "corrected" to the common census date, June 30. Finally, as most of the people to be censused were thought to be illiterate, most inquiries were conducted through a verbal inquisition rather than a written one.

Some Findings from the Census(1) Distribution of the Population — Geographical and "Racial"

The total population of Papua and New Guinea on the day of the census was estimated to be 2,184,986, and the overall population density was 11.91 persons per square mile — ranging from 1.55 in the swamplands of Papua's Western District to 59.73 in the mountainous, land-short Chimbu District of the New Guinea Highlands. Almost 1.6% of the Territory's total population was not indigenous.

In all, 87.05% of the population lived in rural villages, 7.09% on a plantation, mission or government station in a rural area, and 5.86% in one of the Territory's thirty-four designated "towns" (that is, centres with a population of at least 500, excluding separately located schools, hospitals, missions, plantations, rural settlements, and villages, of whatever size). Some 251 expatriates purportedly lived in a "rural village" — presumably, mainly anthropologists, missionaries, and other members of that small band of expatriates who have eschewed the "benefits" and "pleasures" of urban, colonial society for real contact with the people of the country. This group constituted rather less than one percent of the overall non-indigenous population, while just on two-thirds of all expatriates lived in "town". The outstations no longer account for as great a proportion of the expatriate population as they did in the pioneering days of Australia's administration of Papua and New Guinea. Incidentally, almost forty percent of the non-indigenous village-dwellers worked mainly within the subsistence sector of the economy — 66 as gardeners, four females as fishermen, and fifteen more as sago processors, plus a handful whose specialisms were not specified.

The "towns" varied in size from Kerowagi, with a total population of 506, to Port Moresby, with one of 41,848. The population of every town was predominantly indigenous. However, while there were only 90,000 more indigenous males than females in the Territory as a whole, in almost every town there were at least twice as many males as females. The non-indigenous male-female ratio was 7:5 in the towns, almost the same as the national average. There is surely food for thought in these figures for students of the putative relationship between urbanisation, crime and other social disorders. It seems clear, for example, that most urban employers provide, at best, only all-male barracks for the accommodation of their indigenous employees rather than married quarters, although insofar as urban employment and youth overlap it may be the case that many of the indigenous employed are not married.

For the student of "race", the census provides some fascinating data on the mixtures to be found in the Territory, calculated in many cases down to the last grotesque quarter. There were, in sum, 2,150,419 varyingly "indigenous" inhabitants of Papua and New Guinea, defined with magnificent disregard for detail in this case as comprising

"the aboriginal people of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and other islands of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia", and anyone else who was "descended from these aboriginal peoples to the extent of more than one half". There were also 29,350 ("more than 50%") Europeans, and 2,749 others, including 2,455 Chinese, a solitary Afghan, and three people who were "more than 50%" of "Other and Indefinite Race". The Territory's total population of mixed racial origins was 3,569, more than one-third of whom were part-European, and two of whom were partly of European and partly of "Sinhalese Burgher" extraction.

Just under one quarter of the non-indigenous population of Papua and New Guinea was born in the Territory, and slightly more than half (17,847 persons in all) was Australian-born. The next largest group was English-born (2,151), and then followed a long list of birthplaces down to Syria whence came a single migrant, and two people who were evidently born "at sea".

More than 85% of the non-indigenous population held British citizenship, which category still includes Australian nationals — a galling piece of information for the wouldbe Australian nationalist when he fills in his immigration papers. However, non-indigenous British citizens have one great "advantage" over their 589,259 indigenous (Papuan) fellow-citizens in that, being white, they are allowed to settle permanently in Australia. Papua's indigenous British citizens and New Guinea's 1,560,301 "Australian Protected Persons" are generally discouraged from seeking longterm entry into Australia.

However, the "White Australia Policy" (now known officially as a "restrictive immigration policy") has more than domestic application, for, apart from New Guinea's Chinese (the relatives and descendants of the coolies brought there by the Germans), and 618 other Pacific Islanders (probably mission employees in the main), there were almost no other non-European non-indigenes in Papua and New Guinea. This last figure has probably been mildly modified since the census was taken in that a handful of carefully selected, highly skilled Asians have recently been admitted into the Territory to work for the University of Papua and New Guinea and for various large Japanese firms. They are, however, subject to more stringent selection procedures and immigration controls than are the thousands of Australians who seem to drift north beyond Queensland for a while "to make their pile".

(ii) Age, Marital Status, and Length of Stay

The estimation of a person's age can be a source of considerable amusement and education in Papua and New Guinea. In the absence of documentary information, the census-takers were instructed to estimate ages by reference to locally significant historical events:

"From a list of notable events the informant was asked to identify an event which he remembered during his childhood. He was then asked to point out a child the same size as he

remembered himself to be at the time of this event. The child's age was then subtracted from the date of this event to give an estimate of the date of birth of the informant." If that procedure could not be made to yield a satisfactory result, a person's age was calculated in terms of the age of someone else who could remember an identifiable event which could be dated with some accuracy.

The lists of dates were themselves usually gems of administration-centred ethno-history, as if nothing (at least nothing to which a specific date could be attached) had ever occurred outside the administration. An example of a rather more detailed list than usual, from the 1970 British Solomon Islands census, is reproduced on page eight. In some cases, such a list had to be produced separately for each small island in a District, and for many small areas which had a "contact" history all of their own.

The results of the age-estimates were probably no more accurate than those of the harassed patrol officer (in 1967) who suddenly began to hope quite feverishly that a certain candidate would ~~lose~~ an election because he had now re-estimated him to be less than twenty-one years of age, or than those which led a prominent member of the House of Assembly to be listed officially as forty-four in 1964, and 57 in 1968. One can grow old very quickly in the tropics it would seem.

For students of the revolution to be wrought by the young, they (that is, the under-twenty-ones) represented 53.28% of the total indigenous population in 1966. Only one percent of Papuans and New Guineans were 65 years of age or over — an indication of the relatively low life-expectancy of most Melanesians. The expatriate population, in turn, consisted predominantly of the young-but-not-youthful on the make: 64.87% was between twenty-one and 65, and more than forty percent was between twenty and thirty-nine years of age. As old-age pensions are not provided in Papua and New Guinea, but are universally available to those who need them in Australia at age 65, only 1.88% of the expatriate population had reached retiring age.

Insofar as the age-distribution of the indigenous population reflected a rising birth-rate, it served to highlight a growing clash of values in the Territory. Under the Native Regulations and the Native Administration Regulations the administrations of both Papua and New Guinea have consistently striven to outlaw abortion and to discourage other forms of population control, such as warfare, sorcery, and the use of traditional medicines. In this case, official policy accorded with at least one important aspect of traditional custom in that a large family was a source of prestige, wealth, and security in old age throughout most of Melanesia. However, now that the indigenous population has begun to increase — rather too dramatically in some areas — the administration has begun to try to extend its public health programmes into the field of population control — a policy which offends many Papuans and New Guineans on religious grounds, and even more on the same traditional grounds which underpinned the comparative success of the earlier laws. For some sophisticates, the very mention of population control can stimulate a lecture on the evils of those colonialist plotters who seek to keep their subjects' numbers down.

British Solomon Islands Protectorate

CENSUS 1970

Historical Calendar

Central District

List of Important Events which may be remembered by people in your area

<u>Date</u>	<u>Age in 1970</u>	<u>Occurrence</u>
1969	1	High Commissioner Sir Michael Gass arrives Duke of Kent visits September 4th South Pacific Games
1968	2	High Commissioner Sir Robert Foster leaves Solomons and goes to Fiji Council Elections
1967	3	Marau airstrip opened Legislative Council Elections
1966	4	Avu Avu airstrip completed Big winds on the weather coast Decimal (Australian) money comes to the Solomons Savo road begun
1965	5	Strike in Honiara Honiara Census 1st Rennell and Bellona council Big Rains
1964	6	First Council Elections
1963	7	Mr Tedder becomes D.C. Heavy rains flood Avu Avu mission
1962	8	Mr Francis Bugotu becomes Education Officer New market opened in Honiara Mr Tedder becomes D.O. Guadalcanal
1961	9	Earthquake destroys buildings at Makina Mission, Marau
1960	10	Guadalcanal road to Visale opened
1959	11	Visit of H.R.H. Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh
1955-1958	12-15	Guadalcanal council started in 1953 Big Wind in 1952 Emily Sprott leaves Ysabel in 1950
1945-1949	21-24	S.S.E.M. European returned to Talise 1947 Edmund Kiva ordained priest in 1946 Litogahira school started in 1945
Before 1900	Over 70	Maravovo school started in 1897 Austrian expedition attacked at Tatuve 1896 Protectorate proclaimed by H.M.S. Curacao in 1893

The fuel of proof is only added to the fire of suspicion by the seemingly prolific breeding habits of the Territory's expatriate population. The latter group would, of course, argue that they seem, proportionately, to have so many children only because they tend themselves to be, on average, quite young, and, anyway, what else is there to do amid the boredom of the tropics?

The questions pertaining to the marital status of the population yielded a perhaps unique word of advice for the census-taker:

"Where it [is] established that a man [has] been married to more than one wife and [has] lost them all, the way he lost his last surviving wife [determines] his marital status..." — that is, whether he has been widowed or divorced.

In all, almost ten percent of Papua and New Guinea's married males had more than one wife, and nearly two percent had more than two, the traditional symbol of wealth and status in many parts of the Territory. There were no publicly recorded practitioners of polyandry.

Again, the marriage figures revealed something important about the structure of colonial society. There were nearly 1,500 more married expatriate males than married females in the Territory. Even after a generous allowance has been made for interracial liaisons, it would still seem quite likely that Papua and New Guinea serves as something of a refuge for Australia's unhappily married males, or is it true that white women cannot survive life in the tropics?

Certainly, very few expatriates seem to commit more than a few years of their lives to the Territory. At the time of the census, fully one quarter of the non-indigenous population of Papua and New Guinea had been in the Territory for less than one year, and only a little more than one third for five years or more. About fifty percent in all had been resident there for less than three years — yet another measure of their generally transitory connection with the Territory, and, perhaps too, of the rise in the recruitment of overseas personnel as development has proceeded.

(iii) Religion

Probably the most questionable results produced by the census were those concerning the religious affiliations of the population. Few missionaries would claim that more than half of the people in their areas were even nominally Christians, much less complete converts. Even among the "Christians", there have been many who were not rational believers but seekers after a materialistic millennium, or who have not been finally baptised because they could not demonstrate the requisite knowledge of the rituals, beliefs and books of the church, or were polygamists, etc. However, fully 92.27% of the indigenous population thought it desirable to tell the census-takers that they were Christians. One is tempted, then, to ponder to what degree the census itself seemed

to hold out the threat of divine retribution to those who would deny the church, and to what degree the original specification of the sample to be questioned was inaccurate. Certainly, the indigenes' religiosity outshone that of their expatriate mentors, only 86% of whom professed to be of either the Christian or what the census called the "Hebrew" faith. However, thirteen expatriates claimed to have moved in the opposite direction to the indigenes, and were adherents of an "Indigenous Religion".

Probably the most remarkable finding of the religious survey was the revelation that there were thirty-seven Papuans and New Guineans of "Hebrew" religious affiliation — fourteen of them, all females, resident in the Southern Highlands of Papua. Now, it has often been pointed out by those explorers and travel-writers who have penetrated the mud of Papua's Western District and the mountain fastnesses of the remote and newly pacified Southern Highlands that many of the people there have a very distinctively Semitic appearance. Perhaps these fourteen female Southern Highlanders are the last remaining members of those "lost tribes" of Israel whom so many explorers have sought after in New Guinea?

The only two denominations that accounted for at least ten percent of the indigenous population were the Catholics (31.23%) and the Lutherans (27.63%).

(iv) Language, Education, Occupation

Fluency in one or more of the three principal lingue franche, some schooling, and a history of paid employment are the hallmarks of the modern man in Papua and New Guinea. Indeed, the first attribute is virtually a prerequisite for the achievement of the other two. However, the attainment of even a modicum of "modernity" by even a very small elite among the indigenous population is still an aspiration rather than a reality.

To take language first: only 13.26% of the indigenous population aged ten years or over at the time of the census could say, and 11.41% could read, a simple sentence in English. There were proportionately more English speakers in Papua than in New Guinea, and twice as many males as females. For Pidgin, the comparable figures were 36.46% and 12.23% (both mainly New Guineans) respectively, and for Motu 8.13% and 3.38%, mainly Papuans. All but three percent of the Territory's expatriates spoke English, two-thirds claimed to speak Pidgin (although only half claimed to be literate in this phonetically written language), and only three-quarters of the Territory's eight percent who spoke Police Motu could also read and write in that language (again phonetically).

In sum, the linguistic possibilities for interracial communication were not very favourable, quite apart from the social barriers that inhered in the very structure of colonial society.

Altogether, possibly one quarter of the indigenous population had undergone some formal education, although only two individuals were university graduates, some 14,546 had undergone at least part of a secondary education, and 5,018 had some kind of post-primary qualification. There were, for comparison, 1,555 expatriate graduates in the Territory, some 8,500 with other post-primary qualifications, while the rest of them were either still at school, or — probably a majority of the remainder — had no specific skills to lend to Papua and New Guinea's development.

Of a total indigenous workforce of just over 1,250,000, only twenty percent worked wholly or mainly within the money-making sector of the economy, and more than one third mainly in the subsistence sector (supplemented by a small income to pay for their clothes, medical and school fees, and taxes). The rest of the indigenous workforce was wholly engaged in subsistence production.

The census analysts were particularly dubious about the value of their findings in the occupational sphere, because so many people seem to work for varying periods at quite different jobs, which are called by a multitude of similar names, and within an economy in which the number and kinds of jobs available are rapidly increasing. However, about 85% of the Territory's indigenous money-earners were farmers, fishermen, hunters or timber-getters at the time of the census, and some six percent were craftsmen, production-process workers and labourers. The remaining nine percent included skilled, semi-skilled and many only marginally trained workers.

One quarter of the expatriate workforce consisted of professional and technical workers, and nearly twenty percent were engaged in clerical duties. While there was a sufficient number of Papuans and New Guineans in domestic employ for one in every four non-indigenes (man, woman, and child) to have a personal servant, it seems worthy of note that even in Papua and New Guinea, with its tremendous reservoir of seekers after quite lowly-paid employment, thirty-eight non-indigenes were in domestic employment in private households.

While only about fifteen percent of the indigenous workforce was in government employ, 39.55% of the Territory's non-indigenous population worked for the Australian or Territory governments — a figure which reflects Papua and New Guinea's contemporary social status midway between that of a "settler" and a purely administrative colony.

Conclusion

Many serious sociological inferences can be drawn from the above, and a few of them have been outlined. Indeed, they were, at least partly, the original stimulus to this "Newsletter". However, perhaps the final comment on the nature of the census-taking process in Papua and New Guinea belongs to the Tari people of the Southern Highlands: at the time of the great influenza epidemic which swept through the Highlands in October and November of 1969, and when Australian troops were hurriedly airlifted to the Territory to take part in a massive treatment and inoculation campaign, more than one hundred percent of the total known population of the Tari Sub-District received an injection of anti-'flu vaccine. In the process, they seemed to many observers to provide quite clear and unmistakable evidence as to the importance of care and consideration for others in the business of efficient colonial administration and development: "if you want to be able to count on us," they seemed to be saying, "then we must be able to count on you."

Yours sincerely,

Edward Wolfers.

Received in New York on October 26, 1970.