

Indigenous People in the Alice Springs Town Camps: The 2001 Census Data

W. Sanders

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June 2004

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**INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE ALICE SPRINGS
TOWN CAMPS: THE 2001 CENSUS DATA**

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations and acronyms	iv
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Introduction	1
Numbers, ages, languages, education.....	2
Labour market status and income	5
Households and dwellings.....	9
Counting methods, visitors and abnormal undercounts	13
Conclusion.....	14
Notes	16
Appendix A. Alice Springs Community Living Areas.....	17
References	18

TABLES

Table 1. Numbers and age distributions of people in Alice Springs and Apatula, 2001 Census.....	3
Table 2. Languages spoken at home by people in Alice Springs and Apatula, 2001 Census.....	4
Table 3. Highest level of schooling completed by people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census.....	4
Table 4. School attendance, people aged 5–14 years, 2001 Census	4
Table 5. Labour market status of people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census	6
Table 6. Weekly individual income of people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census.....	8
Table 7. Weekly household income, 2001 Census	8
Table 8. Average household size by household type, 2001 Census	9
Table 9. People enumerated by household type, 2001 Census	10
Table 10. People enumerated by dwelling type, 2001 Census.....	11
Table 11. Households by tenure type, 2001 Census.....	12
Table 12. Rent levels of Indigenous households by tenure type, 2001 Census.....	12
Table 13. Visitors included in the Alice Springs count, by location of usual residence, 2001 Census	14

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses 2001 Census data relating to Indigenous people living in the Alice Springs town camps as compared to three other population groups: Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs and Indigenous people living in the outlying communities of the region around Alice Springs. The paper builds on earlier work which observed and reported on the collection of the 2001 Census in the Alice Springs town camps.

The paper finds expected similarities between Indigenous town camp residents and Indigenous people in outlying communities. It also finds expected socio-economic differences between town camp residents and Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs, and even greater differences in comparison with the non-Indigenous residents of Alice Springs.

The paper identifies a number of shortcomings and inadequacies in the 2001 Census data used, but argues that these do not nullify the usefulness of the larger exercise. Rather they point the way to improvements in census collection procedures which may hopefully be implemented in 2006.

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INTRODUCTION

Town camps are living environments for Indigenous people within northern and central Australian urban areas which are somewhat different from, though often interspersed with, suburban residential developments. Town camps tend to be more basic in their provision of housing and related services than the surrounding suburban residential areas, but they can be defended in public policy debates as an appropriate and affordable means of meeting the needs of some Indigenous people (Sanders 1984). The Alice Springs town camps are among the most well established in Australia, having had a dedicated organisation, the Tangentyere Council, specifically fighting for their right to exist and develop over the last 30 years (Heppell & Wigley 1981, Drakakis-Smith 1980, 1981). This development has been significant, with 19 town camps or 'community living areas' now being scattered through Alice Springs both on its outskirts and nearer the centre of town (see Map in Appendix A).

It has in the past been difficult, if not impossible, to use census data to give a socio-economic profile of the Alice Springs town camps. The reason for this was that in the Alice Springs census geography of previous years the town camps were not clearly distinguished from the surrounding suburban residential areas. This omission or oversight was made good by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in the 2001 Census by grouping the 19 town camps into 11 census collection districts, which could then be analysed separately from and in contrast to the rest of Alice Springs. This significant procedural innovation has now made possible the use of census data to provide a socio-economic profile of the Alice Springs town camps, as this paper endeavours to do.

The paper compares the socio-economic status of Indigenous people living in the Alice Springs town camps with that of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs and with Indigenous people living in the surrounding non-urban region, referred to as Apatula.¹ It is based on publicly available data drawn from the Indigenous Community Profile Series of statistics for the 2001 Census produced by the ABS. The comparison with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs was driven by an expectation of difference and disadvantage: it was anticipated that the socio-economic status of the Alice Springs town campers would be somewhat lower than that of Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs and would differ even more significantly from the socio-economic status of non-Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs. The expectation in relation to the comparison with Indigenous people living in the outlying non-urban Apatula region was, by contrast, more one of anticipating similarity. Strong links between the town camps and outlying Indigenous communities have been suggested in the past, in the context of high levels of mobility (Young & Doohan 1989). Also, particular town camps are known to have strong links to particular outlying communities and in a sense represent the 'in-town' presence of those communities. Hence there is a reasonable expectation that the socio-economic profile of the town camps might be somewhat like that of outlying communities, while being somewhat different from that of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs. These expectations are indeed borne out in the paper, although some refinement of them emerges along the way.

Before proceeding to the data analysis, it should perhaps be noted that this is in many ways a companion paper to one in which I reported on observing the conduct of the 2001 Census in the Alice Springs town camps (Sanders 2002). As in most other discrete Indigenous communities, the ABS employed an interviewer-based enumeration methodology in the town camps, rather than the general census methodology of household self-enumeration. While I was supportive of this methodological adaptation in general, there were a couple of aspects of its implementation, as I observed it in the town camps, of which I was also quite critical. First and foremost, I was critical of the very onerous and demanding form structure used in discrete Indigenous communities, involving separate household and personal forms. Second I was critical of an attempt, in central Australian and possibly also in some other Northern Territory discrete Indigenous communities, to switch to a count of usual residents. The standard census methodology is to count people present and also absent usual residents who might not be counted elsewhere (Sanders 2002).² As a result of this critical assessment based on field observation, I am somewhat doubtful of the quality of some of the 2001 Census data in relation to the Alice Springs town camps, both in terms of numbers of people counted and their socio-economic characteristics. However, this paper shows that, even given these doubts and shortcomings, the 2001 Census data are good enough to be able to characterise the Alice Springs town camps and show some of their basic expected socio-economic differences from and similarities to surrounding population groups. A secondary aspect of this paper is that it is possible, from time to time, to identify possible likely data effects of the different methodologies employed in the discrete Indigenous communities and elsewhere.

The data analysis looks first at population numbers, age profiles, languages spoken at home and education. It then moves on to labour market status and income and to an analysis of households and dwellings. There is then a brief section of the paper on counting methods, visitors and abnormal undercounts before some concluding cautionary comments.

NUMBERS, AGES, LANGUAGES, EDUCATION

The 2001 Census counted 990 people in the Alice Springs town camps, 973 of whom identified as Indigenous. Elsewhere in Alice Springs it enumerated 3,279 Indigenous people and over 20,800 non-Indigenous people (see Table 1). Indigenous town campers, therefore, constituted just 4 per cent of the Alice Springs population and Indigenous people living in the rest of town comprised 13 per cent. The number of Indigenous people enumerated in the surrounding Apatula region was 8,094, almost twice the number enumerated in Alice Springs in both the town camps and the rest of the town combined. Hence town campers were only about 8 per cent of the total Indigenous population of Alice Springs and the surrounding Apatula region. Town campers are, thus, a relatively small group numerically in comparison to all three of the other groups with which they are being compared in this paper.³

Censuses generally show that the Indigenous population is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous Australian population, and this is clearly evident when the non-Indigenous people of Alice Springs are

Table 1. Numbers and age distributions of people in Alice Springs and Apatula, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people	973	3,279	8,094	20,820
% of Alice Springs pop.	4	13		83
% of Alice Springs and Apatula region Indig. pop.	8	27	66	
Age distribution (%)				
0-4	9	11	10	7
5-14	17	23	23	15
15-24	17	18	22	12
25-44	36	32	29	36
45-64	17	13	12	25
65+	4	3	4	6
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: 1,708 people counted in Alice Springs did not state whether they were Indigenous or not, but none of these were in the town camps. The 17 people counted in the town camps who identified as non-Indigenous are included in column 4.

compared with Indigenous people living in suburban housing in Alice Springs and Indigenous people living in the outlying communities of the Apatula region. Whereas 22 per cent of non-Indigenous residents living in Alice Springs suburban housing were under 15 years of age, 34 per cent of Indigenous residents of suburban housing were under 15. In the outlying Apatula region communities the proportion was 33 per cent (see Table 1).

Interestingly, in the town camps, the proportion of Indigenous people under 15 years of age, at 26 per cent, was significantly smaller than in the other Indigenous population groups. This significant statistical difference between the town camps and the outlying Indigenous communities probably reflects the fact that town camps are highly connected to these communities and that children often stay in those communities while parents and associated adults, for a variety of reasons, move quite frequently and in circular fashion between the communities and Alice Springs (see Young & Doohan 1989). Hence, while in this instance, the statistics for the town camps are quite different from those for both the outlying Indigenous communities and Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, the difference from the outlying communities is readily explained.

Similarity between the town camps and the outlying communities is clearly observable in Table 2, which shows that 85 and 90 per cent respectively of Indigenous people in these two types of communities speak an Indigenous language at home. By contrast, only 14 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice

Table 2. Languages spoken at home by people in Alice Springs and Apatula, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people	973	3,279	8,094	20,820
Language spoken (%)				
Australian Indigenous language	85	14	90	0.1
English only	13	66	4	93

Table 3. Highest level of schooling completed by people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people	973	3,279	8,094	20,820
Level of schooling completed (%)				
Never attended School	9	4	16	0.3
Year 8 or below	51	16	50	6
Year 10 or below	34	26	19	30
Year 11 or 12	4	28	3	58
Still at school	1	5	4	3
Not stated	0.4	20	8	3
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Table 4. School attendance, people aged 5–14 years, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
Total (no.)	166	761	1,871	3045
Attending school (no.)	126	674	1,398	2,909
Attending school (%)	76	89	75	96

Springs reported that they spoke an Indigenous language at home and 66 per cent reported that they spoke only English. Here, clearly demonstrated, is the expected similarity between the town camps and outlying communities and their expected difference from Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs. Non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs, in even greater contrast, speak virtually no Indigenous languages at home. This cultural difference between non-Indigenous people living in Alice Springs and the Indigenous people of the town camps and outlying communities is nothing short of vast.

Levels of schooling completed by town campers are also more similar to those completed by Indigenous people in the outlying communities than to those of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, or to those of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs. In the population aged over 15 years, 60 per cent of town campers and 76 per cent of Indigenous people in outlying communities have either never attended school or have only attended to year 8 or below. The comparable figure for Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs is 20 per cent and for non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs is 6.3 per cent. Hence while town campers have had a little bit more schooling than people in outlying communities, they are still much closer in their levels of schooling to the people of the outlying communities than to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs. Conversely, only 5 per cent of town campers and only 7 per cent of Indigenous people in outlying communities aged 15 or more had either completed year 11 or 12 or were still at school in 2001, compared to 33 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs and 61 per cent of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs as a whole (see Table 3).

Another aspect of Table 3 which is worth noting is the 20 per cent 'not stated' figure for level of schooling completed among Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs. This rather high figure suggests that household self-enumeration among Indigenous people in suburban housing in Alice Springs comes up against some problems and limits as a collection methodology, leading to instances of poor data quality. By contrast the interview-based collection methodology used in discrete Indigenous communities has kept down the level of 'not stated' responses in the town camps to 0.4 per cent. However, in the outlying communities, which also used the interview-based methodology, 'not stated' responses to the level of schooling question rose to 8 per cent.

Table 4 provides another view of educational status, relating to those aged 5 to 14 years. In the town camps and outlying communities very similar proportions of this age group, at 76 and 75 per cent, were reported as attending school, while among Indigenous people aged 5 to 14 in the rest of Alice Springs the figure was 89 per cent and among non-Indigenous people 96 per cent. Again the town camps look more similar to the outlying communities than to the rest of town.

LABOUR MARKET STATUS AND INCOME

Census data generally suggest that Indigenous Australians are far less likely to be employed than non-Indigenous Australians and far more likely to be unemployed or not in the labour force. For Alice Springs and the surrounding region in 2001, this is certainly the case, with the added dimension that Indigenous

people in the town camps and outlying communities are even less likely to be employed and more likely to be unemployed or not in the labor force than Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs. An additional complication, or clarification, which arises out of the form of questions used in the interview-based collection strategy in discrete Indigenous communities is a distinction between employment in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme, an Indigenous-specific work-for-the-dole type program, and general employment. This distinction is not generally made in the Census outside discrete Indigenous communities, although some small amount of CDEP employment was identified through the household self-enumeration process undertaken among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs (see Table 5).

Table 5. Labour market status of people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people	716	2,150	5,367	16,333
Labour market status (%)				
Not in the labour force	76	40	72	22
Unemployed	11	5	3	2
Employed CDEP	10	3	14	0.2
Employed other	2	37	7	75
Not stated	0.5	15	4	0.8
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Table 5 shows that only 12 per cent of Indigenous town camp residents aged over 15 were employed and only 21 per cent of those in outlying communities, and that this employment was in both instances predominantly within CDEP. By contrast, 40 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs were in employment, of whom only 3 per cent were in CDEP. The contrast with non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs, of whom 75 per cent were employed, was even greater. Conversely 87 per cent of town camp residents and 75 per cent of outlying community residents over the age of 15 were either not in the labour force or unemployed, compared to 45 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs and 24 per cent of non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs. If we add the CDEP employed to those either not in the labour force or unemployed, the figure for town campers not employed in the *general* labour market rises to 97 per cent. This is higher even than the comparable figure for outlying communities, which sits at 89 per cent. So town camp residents are very clearly *not* involved in the general Alice Springs labour market. Indigenous people living elsewhere in Alice Springs, by contrast, are tied into the general Alice Springs labour market to a significant degree, though not as extensively as non-Indigenous people.

On this last comparison, it is also important to note the high level of 'not stated' answers to labour market status among Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs. At 15 per cent, this figure again suggests that the household self-enumeration census collection strategy comes up against problems and limitations among Indigenous people in dispersed suburban housing in Alice Springs. Again it is notable that by comparison the 'not stated' figure is kept low in the town camps, and to a slightly lesser extent the outlying communities, probably because the interview-based collection procedure is used for these discrete Indigenous communities.

Income status of individuals aged 15 or more is very much tied to labour force status. Among Indigenous people in the town camps of Alice Springs at the 2001 Census there was a very steep peak in the income distribution, with 77 per cent of people having an income in the range of \$120–\$199 per week (see Table 6). This range corresponds to the levels of both social security payments and CDEP wages, and reinforces the idea that the economy of the town camps is primarily based on Commonwealth government income support payments, rather than on income derived from general labour market employment. The income distribution of Indigenous people living in outlying communities of the Apatula region is very similar, with 64 per cent having an income in the \$120–\$199 per week range, and 16 per cent, perhaps because of larger numbers of dependent children, creeping up into the \$200–\$399 range. By contrast, the income distribution of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs is much flatter, with only 19 per cent being in the \$120–\$199 per week range, another 19 per cent in the \$200–\$399 range and 24 per cent spread over the \$400–\$799 per week range that is more typical of income derived from substantial employment. Among the non-Indigenous people of Alice Springs only 6 per cent have weekly incomes in the \$120–\$199 range that is typical of heavy reliance on Commonwealth income support payments. In the higher income brackets typical of substantial employment, non-Indigenous people also have a much higher income distribution than Indigenous people, with 25 per cent earning over \$800 per week compared to only 8 per cent of Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, 1 per cent of Indigenous people in the outlying communities and none in the town camps. There is, in short, a very stark contrast in income levels between Indigenous people in the Alice Springs town camps and outlying communities on the one hand, and non-Indigenous towns-people on the other, with Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs occupying something of a middle ground.

It should also be noted from Table 6 that, as with education and labour market data, the income 'not stated' response rate among the self-enumerated Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs is high, at 21 per cent, and that among the interviewed town campers and outlying communities it is relatively low at 1 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. This again highlights the data quality limits which self-enumeration encounters among Indigenous people in suburban Alice Springs and the efficacy of the interview-based methodology used in discrete Indigenous communities in ameliorating the problem.

Income differentials between Indigenous people in the town camps and outlying communities and the other two population groups are somewhat lessened and changed if we examine household, as opposed to individual income data (see Table 7). The steep peak of low individual incomes among town campers and those in outlying communities becomes somewhat dissipated, with just 26 per cent of town camp

Table 6. Weekly individual income of people aged 15 years or more, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people	716	2,150	5,367	17,615
Level of income (% of population)				
Negative/nil income	4	5	5	5
\$1-\$119	9	5	6	5
\$120-\$199	77	19	64	6
\$200-\$399	8	19	16	14
\$400-\$599	0.4	14	2	19
\$600-\$799	0.4	10	0.8	16
\$800-\$999	0	4	0.3	10
>\$1,000	0	4	0.7	15
Not stated	1	21	6	10
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Table 7. Weekly household income, 2001 Census

Household:	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of households	171	918	1,229	6,685
Level of income (% of households)				
<\$199	5	18	5	3
\$200-\$399	21	11	18	7
\$400-\$599	19	11	18	10
\$600-\$799	18	11	14	10
\$800-\$999	12	8	12	10
\$1,000-\$1,199	8	7	7	10
\$1,200-\$1,499	6	8	6	10
\$1,500-\$1,999	4	7	6	17
>\$2,000	2	4	2	11
Income not fully stated	1	21	6	10
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

households and 23 per cent of outlying community households having weekly incomes under \$400, and significant proportions ranging up to weekly incomes of \$1000. By contrast 29 per cent of Indigenous households in the rest of Alice Springs have weekly incomes of less than \$400, so this group no longer seems to occupy a middle income ground between Indigenous residents of town camps and outlying communities and non-Indigenous townspeople. Rather it is the population group with the largest proportion of low income households. As we will see in the next section, this rather different income statistic can be related to household size. The Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs live in smaller households than those in the town camps and outlying communities.

HOUSEHOLDS AND DWELLINGS

Alice Springs town campers were enumerated in the 2001 Census in 171 households with an average household size of 5.7 persons (see Table 8). Of these households, 22 per cent were categorised by the ABS as multi-family households, with an average size of 9.4 persons, and only 5 per cent were lone person households. Indigenous households enumerated in outlying communities had a slightly larger average household size, at 6.5 persons, a slightly greater proportion of multi-family households, at 32 per cent, and the same proportion of single person households. By contrast only 3 per cent of the 918 Indigenous households enumerated in the rest of Alice Springs were multi-family households and 29 per cent were lone person households. This made the Indigenous households elsewhere in Alice Springs far more like those of

Table 8. Average household size by household type, 2001 Census

Household:	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of households	171	918	1,229	6,685
Household type (% of households)				
One-family	74	68	63	73
Multi-family	22	3	32	1
Lone-person	5	29	5	26
Total (%)	100	100	100	100
Average household size (persons)				
One-family	4.8	3.7	5.4	3.1
Multi-family	9.4	5.3	9.4	5.3
Lone-person	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.1
All household types	5.7	3.0	6.5	2.6

the non-Indigenous townspeople, in terms of both size and composition (see Table 8). The average size of Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in Alice Springs outside the town camps was quite close, at 3.0 and 2.6 persons respectively, which is roughly half the size of the households in the camps and outlying communities. However, the trade-off for these Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs for small household size seems to have been low household income. As noted in the commentary on Table 7, a greater proportion of Indigenous households in the rest of Alice Springs have household incomes under \$400 than do town camp households and Indigenous households in outlying communities.

Table 9 reinforces the image of similarity in household composition and type between the town camps and outlying communities, on the one hand, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs on the other. Whereas 36 per cent of town campers and 47 per cent of Indigenous residents of outlying communities live in multi-family households, only 4 per cent of Indigenous people and 1 per cent of non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs do so. By contrast only 1 per cent of town campers and Indigenous people in outlying communities live in lone person households, whereas among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs the figure is 11 per cent.

Table 9. People enumerated by household type, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people enumerated	968	2,744	8,011	17,555
% by household type				
One-family	63	85	52	88
Multi-family	36	4	47	1
Lone-person	1	11	1	11
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

If we switch our focus from household composition and type to dwelling and tenure type, we again find that the circumstances of Indigenous people in the town camps are very similar to those of Indigenous people in the outlying communities and very different from those of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs. Town campers and Indigenous people in outlying communities live almost exclusively in separate dwellings which are rented from a community organisation or occupied rent free (see Tables 10 & 11). By contrast, Indigenous and non-Indigenous households in the rest of Alice Springs are spread across four housing tenure types—owning, purchasing, government rental and private rental—and also across private and non-private dwelling types other than separate houses, such as flats and hostels.

This patterning of housing tenure type among the four population groups is unsurprising. Discrete Indigenous communities, both in urban and remote areas, are in many ways defined, or identifiable, by their distinctive systems of housing tenure and infrastructure provision. Tangentyere Council exists largely to provide community rental housing and related services to Indigenous people in Alice Springs. The camps do, in fact, have a range of dwelling types, from houses with their own ablution facilities to tin sheds which share communal ablution blocks, and this latter style of dwelling is probably reflected in the 10 per cent figure for 'other private dwellings' in the town camps. But Tangentyere generally leaves to other organisations the provision of hostel and other non-private dwelling accommodation to Indigenous people in Alice Springs. So, in Table 10 Indigenous people in 'non-private dwellings' in Alice Springs appear in the 'rest of Alice Springs' census geography (comprising 17% of that population). Perhaps more surprising is the higher number of Indigenous people sleeping out or in improvised dwellings in the rest of Alice Springs compared to the town camps: 4 per cent compared to 0.3 per cent. However, having observed the conduct of the 2001 Census, I can report that this was largely due to a homeless persons enumeration exercise which identified 115 Indigenous people sleeping rough around Alice Springs on census night (Sanders 2002: 85). These people were added to the 'rest of Alice Springs' census geography, rather than to the town camps.

Table 10. People enumerated by dwelling type, 2001 Census

	Indigenous:		Non-Indigenous:	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of people enumerated	974	3,279	8,094	20,820
% by dwelling type				
Separate house	89	59	89	67
Improvised dwelling/sleeping out	0.3	4	4	0.5
Other private dwelling	10	19	7	26
Non-private dwelling	0	17	1	7
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Table 10 is, for all the above reasons, somewhat less easy to interpret than Table 11. The latter clearly shows the predominance of community rental in the town camps and outlying communities and the strong contrast with housing tenure patterns elsewhere. This is an important finding, which I will expand on briefly below, but before doing so it is worth noting in passing the 17 per cent 'not stated' figure for housing tenure among Indigenous households in the rest of Alice Springs, compared to the zero 'not stated' figure for town camp households and the 7 per cent figure for Indigenous households in outlying communities. This again reinforces the idea that employing the self-enumeration procedure among Indigenous people in the suburban housing of Alice Springs leads to data quality issues, and that the interview-based methodology

Table 11. Households by tenure type, 2001 Census

Household:	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous	
	in town camps	in rest of Alice Springs	in Apatula region	in Alice Springs
No. of households	170	916	1,231	6,681
Tenure type (%)				
Owned	0	5	0.3	19
Being purchased	0	21	0.2	38
Community rental	91	0.3	78	0.2
Government rental	0	29	0	7
Private rental	0	22	0	22
Employer rental	0	2	1	3
Other rental	2	1	0	1
Other tenure (e.g. rent free)	6	2	12	7
Tenure not stated	0	17	7	2
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

Table 12. Rent levels of Indigenous households by tenure type, 2001 Census

	Alice Springs		Apatula region	
	community rental	government rental	private rental	community rental
No. of households	158	268	206	958
% of households paying weekly rent of:				
\$1-\$49	37	18	0	70
\$50-99	15	36	3	14
\$100-\$149	8	14	21	6
\$150-\$199	2	10	34	1
\$200-\$249	0	10	24	0.4
\$250-\$299	0	3	11	0
>\$300	0	0	4	0
Not stated	38	10	1	9
Total (%)	100	100	100	100

employed in the town camps and outlying communities does help to keep data quality somewhat higher.

Table 12 compares rents for Indigenous households in community rental in Alice Springs and Apatula with those of Indigenous households in government and private rental in Alice Springs. Community rental households in Alice Springs are concentrated overwhelmingly in the town camps. Table 12 demonstrates that the community rental housing system in the town camps and outlying communities is very different from the other two types of rental accommodation in Alice Springs. Community rental is a much cheaper tenure even than government rental, with 37 per cent of Indigenous households in Alice Springs and 70 per cent of Indigenous community rental households in outlying communities paying under \$50 per week, compared to 18 per cent of Indigenous households in government rental. Indigenous households in private rental, by contrast, had only 3 per cent of rents under \$100 per week in 2001, at which level community rental has already reached the high-end tail of its rent distribution.

This contrast between community rental and the other two rental tenures would probably be even greater were it not for a 38 per cent rent 'not stated' response among Indigenous community rental households in Alice Springs. In terms of data quality, this rent question is one instance where the interview-based census enumeration methodology used in the discrete Indigenous communities comes up against its own limits and problems. As noted in my earlier paper (Sanders 2002: 81), the rent system in Alice Springs town camps is in fact a 'per person contribution scheme' rather than a clear housing rent, so it is perhaps unsurprising that census interrogation of it encountered some data quality problems. Nevertheless, it is clear from the 2001 Census data that community rental in the town camps, and in the outlying communities of the Apatula region, is a far less expensive housing tenure for Indigenous households in central Australia than is private rental, or even government rental in Alice Springs.

COUNTING METHODS, VISITORS AND ABNORMAL UNDERCOUNTS

As explained in my earlier paper (Sanders 2002) and noted again in passing above, the Northern Territory administration of the ABS attempted to adopt non-standard counting practices in the discrete Indigenous communities of central Australia in 2001. Rather than counting people present, and also asking them about absent usual residents who might not be counted elsewhere, the ABS Northern Territory administration attempted just to count usual residents in discrete Indigenous communities. This meant that some people who were physically encountered in the Alice Springs town camps were not counted there. As 'visitors' from elsewhere, they were not required to complete a census form, on the assumption that they would be counted elsewhere as usual residents. I expressed doubt, in my earlier paper, about whether this would indeed occur, and wondered whether there might have been a larger than normal undercount among central Australian Indigenous people in the town camps and the outlying communities (Sanders 2002). The consequence for this paper is problems of comparability between the data for the town camps and outlying communities and the data for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, in relation to visitors from elsewhere in Australia.⁴

Data used in the above analysis for town camps and outlying communities does not, in all probability, include visitors from elsewhere in Australia. However data for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs does include such people. Table 13 shows that 3,483 (17%) of those enumerated in Alice Springs were visitors from elsewhere in Australia; 4 per cent were visitors from the same statistical local area, 27 per cent were from elsewhere in the Northern Territory, and the rest were from other States and Territories. Hence, in comparison to these other populations, town campers were being systematically undercounted to the extent of their visitor population. This is unfortunate, not just on comparative grounds, but because in many ways it is the population actually present in the town camps which is of importance for Tangentyere and others in the planning of services.

Table 13. Visitors included in the Alice Springs count, by location of usual residence, 2001 Census

Visitors (total no.)	3,483
Usual residence of visitors (% of total)	
Alice Springs SLA	4
Other Northern Territory SLA	27
Victoria	21
New South Wales	15
South Australia	15
Queensland	9
Western Australia	5
Tasmania	2
Australian Capital Territory	1
Total (%)	100

This shortcoming in the ABS figures relating to town camps in 2001, should however be rectified in 2006. The ABS central office has, as I understand, now taken a firmer line against the ABS Northern Territory administration adopting a usual residents only counting procedure. In 2006 people present at census time in the Alice Springs town camps and other Northern Territory discrete Indigenous communities should all be counted. There is nothing, however, that can be done in retrospect to overcome this shortcoming in the 2001 figures.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to make use and sense of census data relating to the Alice Springs town camps which, because of changes to census geography in 2001, were for the first time distinguishable from the rest of Alice Springs. The distinguishing of town camps in the census geography, not only in Alice Springs but also

in other northern Australian urban centres, is an important innovation. Building on earlier observational work, the paper is supportive of the switch to an interviewer-based census collection methodology in discrete Indigenous communities, but also somewhat critical of related switches to a household-plus-personal form structure and, in the town camps at least, to a usual residents basis of counting. Although these last two factors have contributed to some shortcomings and inadequacies in the 2001 Census data for the Alice Springs camps, these have not been so great as to nullify the larger exercise. Indeed a major finding of this paper is that the 2001 Census data does seem to show expected similarities and differences between the Alice Springs town campers and surrounding Indigenous and non-Indigenous population groups.

Alice Springs town campers are shown in this paper to have quite different socio-economic characteristics from Indigenous people in the rest of Alice Springs, and even more so from non-Indigenous residents of Alice Springs. On the other hand town camp residents have quite similar socio-economic characteristics to Indigenous people in outlying communities in the region surrounding Alice Springs. This, it is argued, is to be expected, given the links between the town camps and the outlying communities and the obvious differences between town camp and suburban residential life in Alice Springs. Indigenous people in town camps and outlying communities are far more likely than the other two population groups to speak an Indigenous language at home, have lower levels of schooling, not be employed, have lower individual incomes and live in a community rental dwelling and a multi-family household. These differences are, at times, quite striking, which bears out the usefulness of the geographic distinction between the town camps and the rest of Alice Springs. It should be possible to undertake a similar statistical exercise for other north Australian urban areas.

This contrast between town campers and Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs should not however be taken too far, and particularly it should not be taken to imply some separation or absolute social distance between these two population groups. The census is a blunt instrument which, by its very nature, highlights cross-sectional differences and similarities at a single point in time. Other instruments, such as more detailed, historical survey work, can give a somewhat different picture. For example, in historical survey work carried out among Indigenous people in Katherine in the late 1980s, Taylor (1990) found considerable intra-urban mobility between the town camps and suburban residential housing. A similar pattern of mobility would not be incompatible with the 2001 Census findings in Alice Springs, as Indigenous people may well move between these two very different types of housing as they gain and lose employment and as their incomes move between levels which can support the two housing types. Some social indicators, such as age left school and whether people speak an Indigenous language at home, are not of course amenable to change as people move between different housing types. But this may simply explain the significant minorities of Indigenous people in Alice Springs suburban residential housing who have similar socio-economic characteristics to town campers. For example, 20 per cent of Indigenous people living in the rest of Alice Springs are very like town campers in that they have schooling levels of year 8 or below, and 14 per cent, as noted above, speak an Aboriginal language at home. These people may be quite closely connected

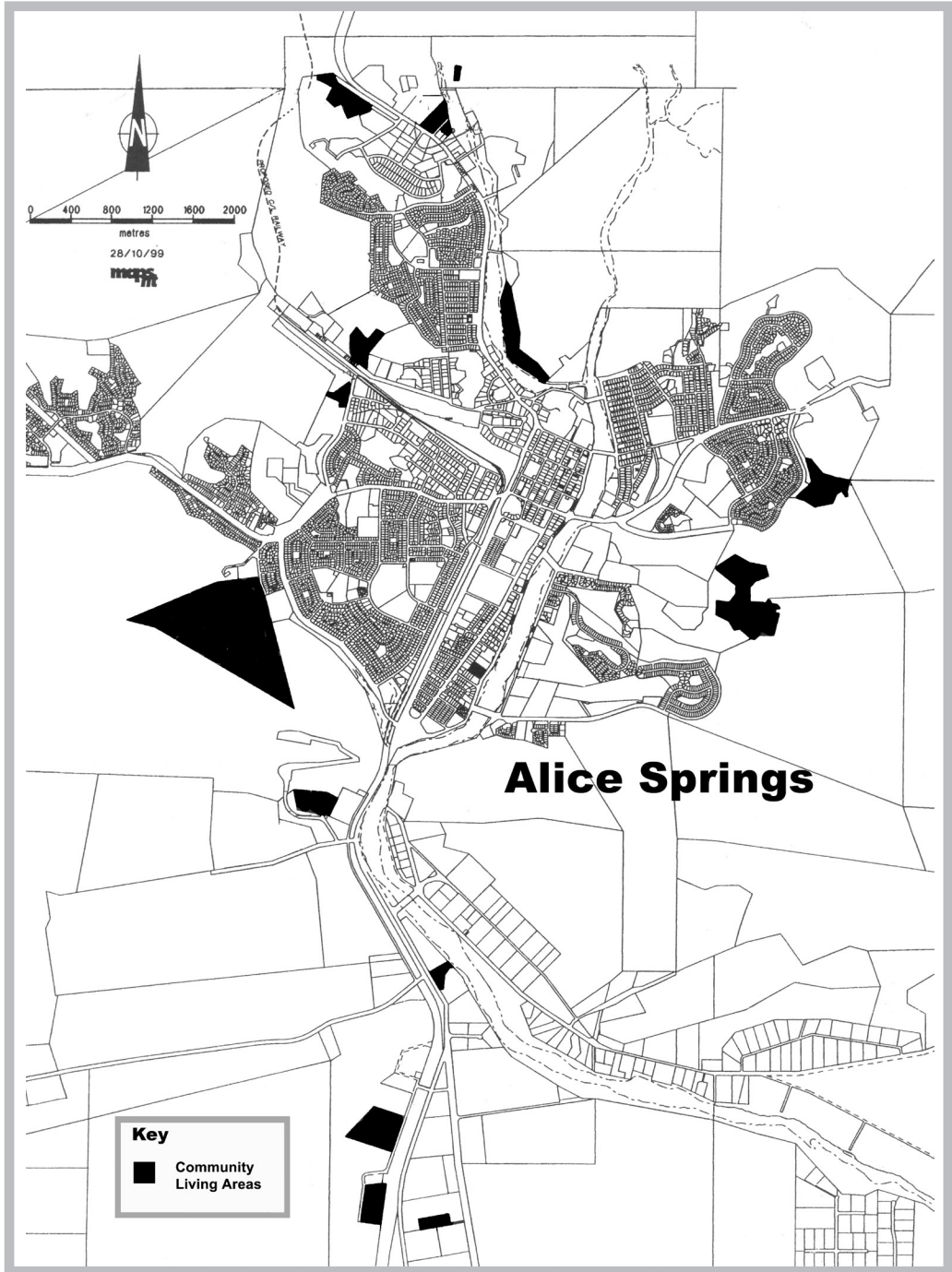
to town campers, with whom they share these social characteristics. But to find out would require research which goes beyond analysis of the census, and hence beyond the scope of this paper.

The point of this paper has been to make use and sense of the 2001 Census data which for the first time allowed the identification of the Indigenous people in the Alice Springs camps as a distinct population group. It has been possible to compare and contrast this group with others, yielding insights and confirming expectations about similarities and differences in cross-sectional socio-economic characteristics. This, I would argue, has been a worthwhile exercise in itself, demonstrating the usefulness of the new census geography in north Australian urban areas which tries to differentiate town camps from more conventional suburban residential areas. The census is not yet as good as it could be in relation to the Alice Springs town camps. But it is now of considerable use, in marked contrast to earlier years. The 2006 Census should, hopefully, lead to further improvements, relating in particular to the counting of town camp visitors and not just usual residents.

NOTES

1. This is the name used at one time for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission region to which these figures refer.
2. On one interpretation it was the whole of the Northern Territory administration of the ABS which attempted this methodological switch in relation to discrete Indigenous communities. However another census observation case study undertaken by Frances Morphy in the Top End of the Northern Territory essentially reports the use of the standard census methodology (Morphy 2002).
3. There is a slight issue, to which I will return at the end of the paper, concerning the abnormal extent to which town campers may have been undercounted in the 2001 Census. But that does not change this basic finding.
4. Visitors from overseas are excluded from place of enumeration counts, so it is only visitors from elsewhere in Australia who are at issue here.

APPENDIX A. ALICE SPRINGS COMMUNITY LIVING AREAS



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