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Towards a culturally-appropriate model of collecting
demographic data from ethnic minority communities:
A case study of the Burundian community census in Queensland

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Abstract

Black African refugee communities are a relatively recent addition to Australia's multicultural landscape. This immigrant group has been described as one of the most disadvantaged in Australia, requiring high levels of settlement support. Until recently, however, very little was known about the settlement geography of African refugee communities when compared to that of other ethnic minority communities in Australia. The lack of reliable data on population size, spatial distribution and secondary migration has serious implications for policy-makers and service providers, who require contemporary, reliable and accurate data to budget, plan and deliver specialised settlement support to these communities. A study of the settlement geography of the eight largest African refugee communities in Southeast Queensland addressed this knowledge gap in that particular geographic location. This article reports on a community-based census, undertaken by Queensland's Burundian community. The results of the community census are compared with data from two of the secondary data sources most commonly used by decision-makers and support services for planning purposes: the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) census and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) Settlement Database. The results suggest an under-enumeration of the Burundian community in both secondary data sources, as well as differences in patterns of spatial distribution. This article proposes a community census model, based on the Burundian experience, which is a more

¹ Acknowledgements: My sincere thanks go to the leaders and members of the African communities who participated in this research, in particular to the Burundian community and the Burundian community leader for their valuable time, effort and contribution. Thank you to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for compiling the 2007 and 2012 Settlement Database datasets used in this article. My heartfelt thanks to Dr Iraphne Childs and Dr Peter Hastings for their contributions to the larger research project, and for the feedback on the initial draft of this paper from Dr Childs. Thank you also to the two reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions of ways to improve this paper.

culturally appropriate and inexpensive method of collecting these important data from new and emerging communities. Data gathered through the model could be used to supplement existing data collection mechanisms. The model could also be replicated by organisations working with new and emerging communities or implemented by the communities themselves.

Introduction

Black African communities of refugee background are a relatively recent addition to the Australian landscape, with most resettling in Australia since 2000 through the federal government's structured refugee program (the Humanitarian Program). African refugees have been described as a particularly disadvantaged immigrant group which requires high levels of settlement support due to pre-settlement experiences, settlement needs and high levels of un- and underemployment.² Settlement service providers are integral to providing the support these communities need to achieve full participation in Australian society.³ In order to plan, budget and deliver this support, however, policy-makers and service providers need access to fundamental data on population size and spatial distribution,⁴ in addition to specific information about their clients' particular circumstances and needs.

² Paul Atem and Lou Wilson, "Housing Pathways for African Refugees in Australia: Towards an Understanding of African Housing Issues," *Australian Sociological Association conference*, University of Melbourne, 2-5 December 2009; Val Colic-Peisker and Farida Tilbury, "Employment Niches for Recent Refugees: Segmented Labour Market in Twenty-first Century Australia," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19:2 (2006): 203-229; Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in Community Relations Commission of New South Wales, *Investigation into African Humanitarian Settlement in NSW*, (Sydney: Community Relations Commission, June 2006).

³ Rebecca-Lea Perrin and Kevin M. Dunn, "Tracking the Settlement of North African Immigrants: speculations on the social and cultural impacts of a newly arrived immigrant group," *Australian Geographer* 38:2 (2007): 253-273; Laurie Ferguson, "Parliamentary Secretary Announcement of the Strategic Settlement Framework," Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, speech, Parliament House, Canberra, 25 September 2009.

⁴ Andrew Beer and Paul Foley, "Housing Need and Provision for Recently Arrived Refugees in Australia," *AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin* 58 (August 2005); Madeleine Wong, "Emerging Patterns of African refugee resettlement in the United States," (M.A. thesis, Florida Atlantic University, Florida, 1995).

African refugees are under-enumerated in two key secondary databases (the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] census data and Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC] Settlement Database) and this has implications for the decision-makers and support systems whose policy it is to use these data sources in their planning, budgeting and delivery of services to these communities.⁵ There has also been a notable lack of research on the settlement geography of African-Australian communities when compared to earlier immigrant communities (for example, Burnley [Vietnamese, Greek and Italian]; Dunn [Vietnamese]; and Glavac and Childs [Vietnamese]).⁶ My doctoral research⁷ addressed this gap in Southeast Queensland by investigating the settlement geography—in particular the population size, spatial distribution and secondary migration patterns—of the eight largest African refugee communities in that particular geographic region, namely, the Burundian, Congolese (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Ethiopian, Liberian, Rwandan, Sierra Leonean, Somali and Sudanese communities. This particular article reports on a community census undertaken by the Burundian community in Queensland during the course of that doctoral research. The census produced rich data on population size and spatial distribution for the Burundian community, and forms the basis of a proposed community-based demographic data collection model discussed here.

This article first provides a brief background to African refugees in Australia. It discusses the data sources that were used to establish the settlement geography of the eight case study communities in my earlier study, including the two key secondary data sources—the ABS census

⁵ Elizabeth Wendy Harte, “Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities in Southeast Queensland” (Unpublished PhD thesis, Queensland University of Technology, 2010).

⁶ I.H. Burnley, “Settlement Dimensions of the Vietnamese-born population in Metropolitan Sydney,” *Australian Geographical Studies* 27:2 (1989): 129-154; I.H. Burnley, “Generations, Mobility and Community: Geographies of Three Generations of Greek and Italian Ancestry in Sydney,” *Geographical Research* 43:4 (2005): 379-392; Kevin M. Dunn, “The Vietnamese Concentration in Cabramatta: Site of Avoidance and Deprivation, or Island of Adjustment and Participation?” *Australian Geographical Studies* 31:2 (1993): 228-245; Sonya Glavac and Iraphne Childs, “Vietnamese settlement patterns in Brisbane: the role of chain migration,” *Queensland Geographic Journal* 8 (1993): 23-36.

⁷ Harte, “Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities in Southeast Queensland.”

data and the DIAC Settlement Database—and primary data collected directly from the communities. It presents the results of the community census undertaken by Queensland’s Burundian community, and provides updates from the Burundian community leader, the ABS 2011 census and the DIAC Settlement Database (2012), highlighting considerable discrepancies between these data sources. This article then proposes a community-based demographic data collection model, based on the Burundian experience. This model has the potential to be 1) used to supplement existing data collection mechanisms; 2) replicated by service providers and organisations working with new and emerging communities; and 3) implemented by communities themselves.

African refugees in Australia

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines a refugee as a person who has fled his or her country of nationality because of a fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality or affiliation.⁸ People who have been identified as refugees by the UNHCR can apply for refugee status in Australia through the federal government’s Humanitarian Program, a component of Australia’s Immigration Program.⁹ The first intake of African refugees to Australia occurred in the 1980s, with numbers steadily increasing during the 1990s and peaking between 2001 and 2007. Until recently, Australia accepted between 13,000 and 14,000 humanitarian entrants each year¹⁰ with an increase in the number of humanitarian visas to 20,000 in the 2012-2013 intake year.¹¹ During the period of peak intake, up to 70 per cent of the Humanitarian Program’s visas were issued to refugees from Africa¹² and over 5,000 African refugees resettled in Queensland.¹³ Despite a shift in geographical focus from Africa to the Middle East and Asia since 2007, Africa remains a key area of focus of

⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, (Geneva: UNHCR, 1996)

⁹ The Australian Immigration Program has two components: 1) the Migration Program (for skilled and family migrants) and 2) the Humanitarian Program.

¹⁰ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Fact Sheet 60 – Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program* (Canberra: Australian Government, November 2011)

¹¹ Julia Gillard and Chris Bowen, “Refugee Program increase to 20 000 places,” media release, 23 August 2012, (Canberra: Australian Government, 2012).

¹² Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia’s Response*, (Canberra: Australian Government, June 2011)

¹³ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Queensland Settlement Trends and Needs of New Arrivals 2007*, (Canberra: Australian Government, 2007)

the Humanitarian Program with a continuing 25 to 30 per cent of visas allocated to assisting people from that continent.¹⁴

Establishing the settlement geography

The difficulty of accessing contemporary, accurate and reliable secondary demographic data on refugee populations is well recognised (see, for example, Forbes and Wong)¹⁵ and is a problem which is neither new nor particular to African refugee populations. In order to examine the spatial distributions of the eight African communities for my doctoral research, however, it was essential to gather and use the most contemporary, accurate and reliable population size and location data available. Following is a description of the available data sources, including discussion of their limitations.

Secondary data

Census data

In Australia, the national population census is conducted every five years by the ABS. Most studies of ethnic minority group distribution and secondary migration in Australia have used census data as their main secondary data source (for example, Burnley; Dunn; Glavac and Childs; Perrin and Dunn).¹⁶ However, Harte, Childs and Hastings¹⁷ have highlighted significant concerns regarding the reliability and accuracy of representations of African refugees in census data. Firstly, it is difficult to differentiate African refugees from economic migrants because the census does not collect data on visa type.¹⁸ Secondly, 'birthplace' data

¹⁴ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia's Response*.

¹⁵ Susan Forbes, *Residency Patterns and Secondary Migration of Refugees: A State of the Information Paper*, Washington, DC: Refugee Policy Group, 1984; Wong, "Emerging Patterns of African Refugee Resettlement."

¹⁶ Burnley, "Generations, Mobility and Community"; Dunn, "The Vietnamese Concentration in Cabramatta"; Glavac and Childs, "Vietnamese Settlement Patterns in Brisbane"; Perrin and Dunn, "Tracking the Settlement of North African Immigrants."

¹⁷ Wendy Harte, Iraphne Childs and Peter Hastings, "Settlement patterns of African refugees in Southeast Queensland," *Australian Geographer* 40:1 (2009): 51-67.

¹⁸ Alice Bloch, "Carrying out a Survey of Refugees; Some Methodological Considerations and Guidelines," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12:4 (1999): 367-383; James Jupp, *Exile or Refugee? The Settlement of Refugees, Humanitarian and Displaced Immigrants*, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1994); James Jupp, "African Ethnic Communities: A new Dimension," *African*

in census reports are an unreliable indication of discrete African populations because, until recently, the ABS aggregated African birthplace data into regional categories making it impossible to identify settlers from individual countries. For example, Burundians were classified as ‘Southern and East African’ along with immigrants from other countries in that region. Furthermore, the recent addition of the ‘birthplace’ question in the census is itself problematic in terms of identifying specific African populations. Birthplace may not necessarily reflect the ethnicity of many African refugees, because refugees born to displaced parents are more likely to associate their ethnicity with that of their parents’ birthplace than the country in which they were born (for example, a child born to Burundian parents in a refugee camp in Kenya is more likely to associate with their parents’ ethnicity—Burundian—than the country of their birth, in this case, Kenya).¹⁹ Thirdly, people who live in temporary accommodation and those who are not literate in English, both of which are common features among Queensland’s African communities, are more likely to be undercounted in the national census.²⁰ Finally, there was also a strong suggestion made by a settlement service provider²¹ working closely with Queensland’s African communities that members of these communities are reluctant to complete census forms for fear of what the government might do with this information. This assertion was also confirmed by the African community leaders who participated in the study.²²

The ABS recognises the issues relating to the under-enumeration of newly emerging communities and has implemented a number of proactive efforts to address these, including techniques to match data

Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific conference, Australian National University, Canberra, 31 January 2008; Andrew Middleton, “Statistics on Africans in Australia,” *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific conference*, Australian National University, Canberra, 31 January 2008; Perrin and Dunn, “Tracking the Settlement of North African Immigrants.”

¹⁹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), “Settlement Database data,” Database received by email from Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 27 February 2007; Middleton, “Statistics on Africans in Australia.”

²⁰ Dale and Marsh in Alice Bloch, “Carrying out a Survey of Refugees.”

²¹ Jo-Ann Cochran, Multicultural Development Association Representative, personal communique, 24 July 2006.

²² Harte, “Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities in Southeast Queensland.”

from the national census with the DIAC Settlement Database.²³ A decision was made, however, to only use the ABS census data to compare with data from other sources, a technique supported by previous research in other refugee communities (for example, Bloch).²⁴

Settlement Database data

The research used data requested specifically for the study (obtained in February 2007) from the DIAC Settlement Database.²⁵ The Settlement Database contains entry records of settler arrivals since January 1991, including data on country of birth, age, gender, migration stream, main language spoken, English proficiency and location of residence in Australia.²⁶ Data from the Settlement Database are used to generate the publicly available *Settlement Reports*. The Settlement Database is updated regularly from a number of sources, including data on individual immigrants and refugees collected by Medicare. The Settlement Database was considered the most comprehensive secondary data source on African refugee populations in Australia, particularly in light of the limitations of census data outlined above.

The data obtained from the Settlement Database specifically for this research included:

- country of birth *by*
- postcode in Queensland *by*
- year of arrival (January 1996-February 2007) *by*
- visa class 200, 201, 202, 203 and 204 (i.e., offshore Humanitarian Program visas).

From these data it was possible to ascertain a population size for each community in individual postcode boundaries. The data were mapped using Geographical Information Systems software to produce visual representations of the spatial distribution for each of the eight communities (for example, see Figure 1).

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Census data enhancement* (ABS, 27 April 2012).

²⁴ Bloch, "Carrying out a Survey of Refugees."

²⁵ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Settlement Database data," 2007.

²⁶ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Queensland Settlement Trends and Needs of New Arrivals 2007."

Due to the initial concerns regarding the reliability and accuracy of secondary data sources, the research design incorporated a check on the accuracy of the secondary data via comparison with communities' own knowledge of population size and spatial distribution.

Primary data

Focus groups and interviews

Community members and leaders provided an alternative dataset of population size and distribution for their own communities. These data were obtained during interviews and focus groups with community leaders and community members. The research participants were provided with the mapped data from the Settlement Database (for example, see Figure 1), which led to in-depth discussions of the accuracy of the data. Participants were also asked about their knowledge of the population size and geographical location of their community. The data gathered from the communities were mapped to produce a second set of maps ('community maps'). The two sets of maps allowed for comparison of the data regarding the population size and spatial distribution of each community.

Price cautions that immigrant communities have a tendency to overestimate population size for perceived gains.²⁷ The subjectivity of this method of data collection and the possibility of community members overestimating population size is thus recognised as a limitation of the study.²⁸ To help address this limitation, the data were triangulated with community leaders cross-checking all focus group and interview data and checking and validating the final community maps.

Burundian community census

In addition to the focus groups and interviews conducted with all case study communities, the executive committee and leader of the Burundian community association in Queensland, in consultation with the author, conducted a community census to answer questions about the population size and distribution of the Burundian community in the

²⁷ Charles A. Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963); Charles A. Price, "Ethnic intermixture of migrants and indigenous people in Australia," *People and Place* 4:4 (1996): 12-16.

²⁸ Wendy Harte, Iraphne Childs and Peter Hastings, "African Refugee Communities in Southeast Queensland: Forces of Concentration and Dispersion," *Australian Geographer* 42:3 (September 2011): 325-342.

state. The census involved members of the executive committee nominating representatives from the Burundian community to collect basic demographic data from individual Burundian households in their suburb. Representatives were nominated on the basis of a) being a member of the community association, b) their geographical location (i.e., the suburb in which they lived), and c) their availability. The possibility that Burundians not affiliated with the community associations were missed in this process was a limitation of this recruitment process and data collection method. However, given their reluctance to engage with official data collection techniques, these were the most effective means to reach the greatest number of Burundians in Queensland.

The type of data collected by the representatives included the number of Burundians in each Burundian household in their suburb and the household's address. The data collectors reported their findings to the community leader who collated the information, using the household addresses to cross-check for duplications. The census was conducted over a five month period between May and October 2008. The data collected during the census was validated, checked and verified by the Burundian community leader, a respected representative elected to the position by the community. Leaders from all case study communities also had an opportunity to discuss and comment on the method, data and the maps that were produced from the data at a final data validation meeting held in late 2009. The discussion is reported below in the section on the community census model.

The Burundian community in Southeast Queensland

Results from the data sources described above are compared in the following section.

Population size of the Burundian community in Queensland

Results from my doctoral research into the eight largest African refugee communities in Queensland showed that there was a tendency for community estimates (through focus groups and interviews) of population size to be considerably higher than both the ABS census data and data from the Settlement Database (Table 1).

Table 1 - Comparison of population data from ABS 2006 census, DIAC Settlement Database and community estimates²⁹

Case study community	ABS 2006 census (Ancestry ¹ / country-of-birth)	DIAC Settlement Database data -- 2007	Community estimates 2008-2009
Burundian	- / 185	192	753 ² (900-1000) ³
Congolese	- / 173	60	243
Ethiopian	468 / 429	174	252
Liberian	183 / 218	268	800
Rwandan	- / 60	64	104
Sierra Leonean	120 / 206	226	314
Somali	337 / 255	242	324 <i>family units</i> + 91 <i>single households</i> ⁴
Sudanese	2424 / 2399	2790	n/a ⁵

¹Ancestry data are not available for the Burundian, Congolese and Rwandan communities.

²The count of 753 was derived from a community census undertaken between 24 May and 25 October 2008.

³Focus group participants (at focus group in May 2008) reported approximately 900 Burundians living in Southeast Queensland; the community leader (during an interview in October 2008) estimated the number to have increased to over 1,000.

⁴Somali focus group participants provided the number of families and the number of single Somali households.

⁵Sudanese participants were unable to provide an estimate of population size in Southeast Queensland due to the considerable size and diversity of the community.

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Cat. No.2068.0 - 2006 Census Tables 2006 Census of Population and Housing Queensland (State). Country of birth of person (full classification list). Count of persons (excludes overseas visitors). Based on place of usual residence," ABS 2007 (Last updated on 8 February 2008) <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au> (accessed 9 July 2012); Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Cat. No.2068.0 - 2006 Census Tables, 2006 Census of Population and Housing Queensland (State). Ancestry (full classification list) by sex. Count of responses based on place of usual residence," ABS 2007 (Last updated on 8 February 2008) <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au> (accessed 9 July 2012); Department of Immigration and Citizenship, "Settlement Database data," 2007.

The difference between the two secondary datasets and the community data was the greatest for the Burundian community. The ABS recorded 185 Burundians in Queensland in the 2006 census;³⁰ the DIAC Settlement Database recorded 192 Burundians in Queensland in 2007;³¹ and results from the Burundian focus groups and interviews provided a fairly consistent population estimate of approximately 900 Burundians in Queensland in mid-2007. This latter population estimate was largely derived from a count at a Burundian community function held in Brisbane in May 2007. It is possible that Burundians may have travelled interstate to attend this function, thus temporarily inflating Queensland's Burundian population. However, the community census undertaken in 2008 recorded 753 Burundians in Queensland, which is closer to the community's population estimate of 900 than to the ABS and DIAC counts.

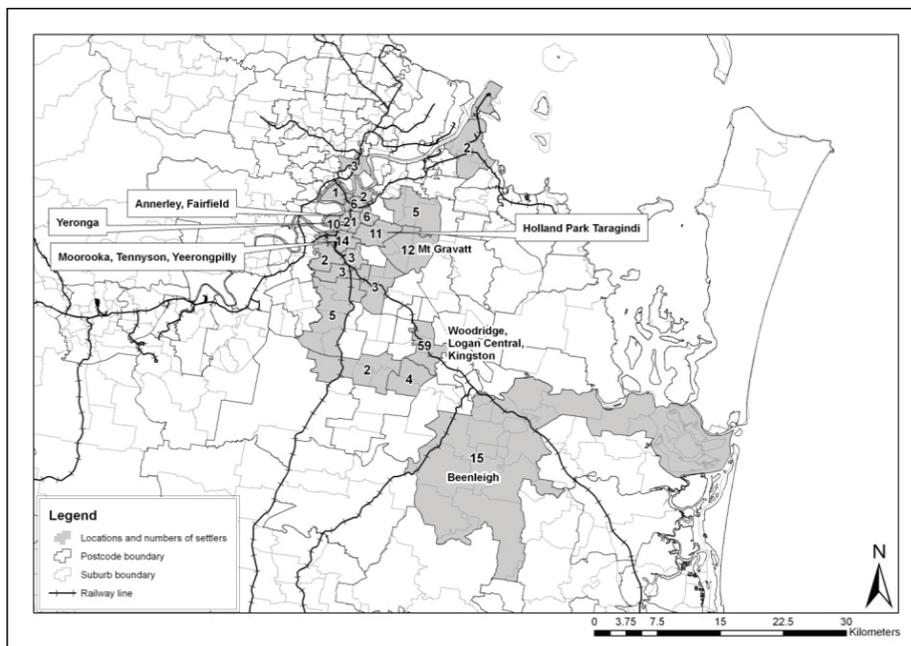
The data collection and validation process followed by the executive committee and leader of the Burundian community association in the community census is believed to be a reasonable way to eliminate data duplications. Given the leader's role in the community and his work with newly-arrived Burundians, and the consistency of community census results with the estimates provided during the focus group and interviews, the community census results were assumed to have a high degree of reliability.

In an interview in October 2008 (after the completion of the community census), the community leader estimated that the population had risen to above 1,000 with the arrival of new community members from Africa. Even given the possibility, as Price suggests, for community members to inflate population numbers, it is presumably in the interest of the community leader, a respected representative of the community, to know the actual size and distribution of his community.

³⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Cat. No.2068.0 - 2006 Census Tables 2006 Census of Population and Housing Queensland (State). Country of birth of person (full classification list). Count of persons (excludes overseas visitors). Based on place of usual residence," <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au> (accessed 9 July 2012); Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Cat. No.2068.0 - 2006 Census Tables, 2006 Census of Population and Housing Queensland (State). Ancestry (full classification list) by sex. Count of responses based on place of usual residence," <http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au> (accessed 9 July 2012).

³¹ Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), "Settlement Database data," 2007.

Figure 1 - Burundian community distribution in Southeast Queensland based on data from the Settlement Database (numbers refer to number of individuals)³²

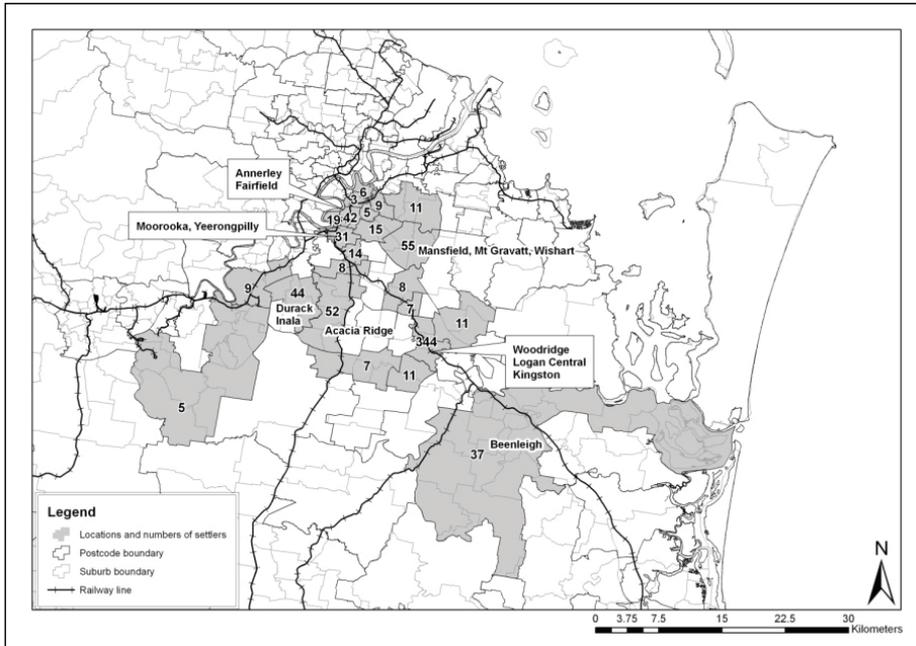


Spatial distribution of the Burundian community in Queensland

Figure 1 shows the spatial distribution of the Burundian community according to the Settlement Database, while Figure 2 shows the spatial distribution of the Burundian community from the community census data. The difference in terms of distribution and residential concentration represented on the maps is evident. On the Settlement Database map, the largest cluster of Burundians is located around the inner-Brisbane suburbs of Annerley, Fairfield, Moorooka, Tennyson, Yeerongpilly, Yeronga, Holland Park and Tarragindi with a smaller concentration in the outer-southern suburbs of Woodridge, Logan and Kingston. In contrast, the mapped Burundian community census data shows the largest concentration of Burundians in Woodridge, Logan and Kingston (344 individuals), and a secondary concentration in the nearby suburbs of Durack, Inala and Acacia Ridge (96 individuals).

³² Harte, "Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities."

Figure 2. Burundian community distribution in Southeast Queensland based on data from the Burundian community census results³³



The differences in locations of residential concentrations on the two maps are most likely explained by secondary migration. All communities in my doctoral research reported high rates of secondary migration driven largely by housing affordability and house size, and the pull of social and ethnic networks. Housing, in particular, was the most important driver of secondary migration in the Burundian community. A Burundian community member explained:

We know that 70 per cent of Burundian families live in [the] Logan [area] but they weren't necessarily settled there first. Many people have moved to Logan mainly because housing is cheaper and food is cheaper ...

³³ Harte, "Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities."

In the past, communities were able to regroup in secondary migration, but this has become more difficult due to increasing rental prices and the decreasing availability of appropriately-sized housing stock.

Proposed community census model

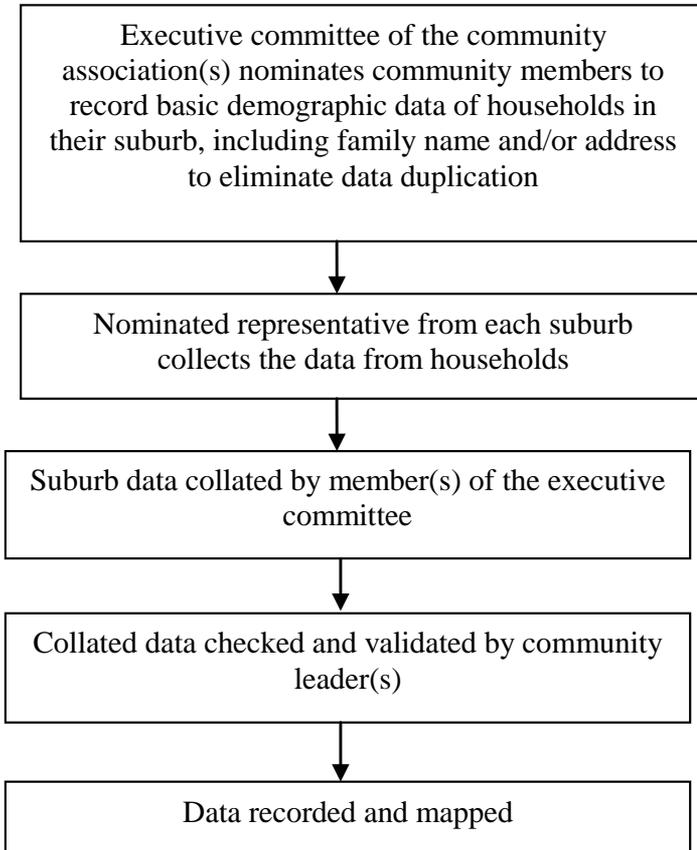
At the final data validation meeting with the African community leaders in 2009, discussions turned to the approaches government departments use to collect demographic data. All of the African community leaders present at that meeting agreed that such ‘top-down’ approaches were unlikely to yield accurate demographic data from their communities, and that neither the ABS census data nor the Settlement Database gave an accurate representation of their communities’ population numbers or spatial distributions in Queensland. The leaders confirmed that community members were reluctant to provide their details on census forms for fear of what the government might do with their information, a relic of the fear carried with them from their African countries.

The leaders unanimously agreed that a community census model would be a more culturally appropriate, and preferable, means of collecting demographic data in their communities, and that this method of data collection would most likely provide a more accurate representation of the population size and spatial distribution of their communities. Figure 3 outlines the steps of a proposed community census model. The model is simple and inexpensive to implement in a small community with an active community association. It could be used to supplement existing data collection techniques, such as the ABS census or the DIAC Settlement Database. It could also be replicated by service providers and organisations working with new and emerging communities, or implemented by the communities themselves.

Update from the Burundian community—2012

The Burundian community leader, in an interview with the author in July 2012, reported that the data collected during the 2008 community census have been beneficial in terms of the community development work and service delivery undertaken by the executive committee of the Burundian association. For example, the maps helped the executive to ensure that members of the Burundian community from all geographic regions in Queensland were represented on the community’s state

Figure 3. Proposed community census model of demographic data collection³⁴



³⁴ Adapted from Harte, "Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities."

committee. In the same interview, the leader estimated that the total Burundian population in Queensland had risen to approximately 1,800 people (Table 2).

Table 2 - Updated data of the Burundian population in Queensland—community leader’s estimate, DIAC Settlement Database and ABS 2011 census³⁵

Community leader’s estimate (July 2012)	1,800
DIAC Settlement Database data (as of 4 June 2012)	508
ABS 2011 census data based on country-of-birth	490
ABS 2011 census data based on ancestry	774

Using the community map (Figure 1) as a visual reminder of where residential concentrations were located in 2008, the leader said new residential concentrations had since emerged in Ipswich and Brisbane’s outer western suburbs of Goodna, Redbank and Riverview, while the existing residential concentration around Woodridge (including the suburbs of Marsden and Runcorn) had also increased. He confirmed that access to more affordable rental housing and the availability of public housing were the main reasons for secondary migration to these areas. This is unsurprising as, as reported earlier, housing affordability was one of the key reasons for high rates of secondary migration in all eight case study communities in the larger study.³⁶ The community leader reported that a further development since the 2008 community census had been the resettlement of Burundian households in Queensland’s regional centres of Toowoomba, Townsville, Cairns and the Sunshine Coast.

Updated data from the Settlement Database

An updated dataset of the Burundian community in Queensland was requested from DIAC in June 2012.³⁷ The 2012 Settlement Database

³⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Table Builder (Burundian country-of-birth/ Queensland; Burundian ancestry/ Queensland) (accessed 21 August 2012); Department of Immigration and Citizenship, “Settlement Database data,” 2012.

³⁶ Harte, “Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities in Southeast Queensland.”

³⁷ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, “Settlement Database data,” Database received by email from Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 4 June 2012.

data put the Burundian population in Queensland at 508, still considerably lower than the 2008 community census result (753) and the 2012 estimate made by the community leader (1,800). The updated data, however, does reflect a change in residential concentration, supporting the community’s knowledge of a significant residential concentration in the outer southern suburbs of Woodridge, Logan Central and Kingston (Table 3 and Figure 2).

Table 3 - Comparison of largest residential concentrations of Burundians in Queensland according to various data sources³⁸

	Settlement Database 2007	Burundian community census 2008	Settlement Database 2012
Largest concentration identified in the data	Annerley, Fairfield, Moorooka, Tennyson, Yeerongpilly, Yeronga, Holland Park, Tarragindi	Woodridge, Logan Central, Kingston	Woodridge, Logan Central, Kingston

Updated data from the ABS 2011 census

According to the ABS 2011 census there were 490 people born in Burundi living in Queensland in August 2011. This figure is lower than the number of people who reported Burundian ancestry (774 people) in the 2011 census. The data discrepancy again highlights the difficulties of using birthplace and ancestry data from the ABS census to determine the size and spatial distribution of a new and emerging community of refugee origin. The difference between the community leader’s July 2012 population estimate of 1,800 and the ABS census counts of 490 and 774 also tends to support the finding that Queensland’s Burundian community is under-enumerated in the ABS census data (Table 2).

³⁸ Department of Immigration and Citizenship, “Settlement Database data,” 2007; Department of Immigration and Citizenship, “Settlement Database data,” 2012; Harte, “Settlement Geography of African Refugee Communities.”

Conclusion

My doctoral research of the eight African refugee communities in Southeast Queensland revealed consistent results in terms of 1) under-enumeration of the communities in the official secondary databases and 2) differences in the residential distributions of the communities when the community data were compared to that recorded in the official databases. The Burundian community data collected during the 2008 community census presented an interesting case study as it was the only community in the larger study to use this process of data collection. Five years on, a second community census would enable a comparison of the more recent (2012) dataset from the Settlement Database and the most recent ABS census (2011). This follow-up community census would also allow an analysis of trends in population growth, spatial distributions and secondary migration since the 2008 community census.

While limitations are recognised, the community census model appears to have good potential to be accurate, is culturally appropriate and was preferred by representatives of all of the researched communities. This 'grassroots' approach is thus likely to yield more reliable, contemporary demographic data from these communities than is currently available. These data could be used to supplement existing efforts to address the under-enumeration of new and emerging communities in official secondary datasets, alongside longer-term programs educating community members of the importance and confidentiality of these data collection techniques. The model could also be replicated by organisations working with new and emerging communities or implemented by the communities themselves, empowering the communities in the resettlement process.

While the Queensland Burundian community is relatively cohesive, and the leader is an elected, respected representative of the community, more work is needed to establish the effectiveness of the model in larger communities that have less cohesiveness, more factions, and multiple community associations and leaders.

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