

# Counting a Divided Nation

## On the Sudanese Census

JOSHUA CRAZE  
UC BERKELEY

The streets in Khartoum were quiet. April 22, 2008 was a national holiday, and as the day drew to a close, the police told everyone to go home. Around midnight, President Omar al-Bashir was the first to be counted in Sudan's census. It was the only quiet moment in the entire process.

A census in a divided country is always a fraught endeavour. Seen from the perspective of Sudan's looming 2011 referendum on the South's secession, the Sudanese census exacerbated existing divisions within the country and was used to draw even stronger contours between the North and the South. The 2008 census was mandated as part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which finally brought an end to the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005). It was on the basis of the census data that the national elections held April 11–15, 2010, took place.

Under the terms of the CPA, the provisional power-sharing government was to be determined by temporary quotas. The Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the main group in the semi-autonomous Government of South Sudan (GoSS), was to receive 28% of the seats, and the National Congress Party (NCP), the governing party in Sudan, 52%. These quotas, however, were to be replaced by numbers that (presumably) reflected the facts on the ground. The census would determine the percentage of the Sudanese population in each state, and under the CPA, 60% of the seats in the national assembly were to be allocated according to the population of the states. However, when the results of the census were finally released in May 2009, the SPLM immediately rejected them.

South divide, would mean that the SPLM would lose their ability to block legislation in the parliament. The facts on the ground did not correlate with the political facts of a divided nation.

### The North-South Divide

Historically, the census was devised as a mechanism to assess populations that, as Foucault argues, were seen as technical-political objects of management and government, which the state could classify and organize. In Sudan those same processes of classification and organization functioned to exacerbate the political divisions within the state. Far from showing each individual as quantitatively exchangeable within a single state, the Sudanese census categorically measured two kinds of individuals, qualitatively distinct—those from the North and those from the South.

The tensions underlying this split were evident in the run-up to the census.

Before the census began, GoSS attempted to transport large numbers of southern Sudanese from the North of the country, where they had fled during the war, back to the South. The fear was two-fold: that the southerners would not be properly counted in the North, and that this count would affect the proportion of the population counted as being part of the South—for, although southerners in the North would still be asked if they were from the South or the North, this would not be reflected, at the very least, in the number of seats given to the southern states.

A week before the census was scheduled to begin, GoSS demanded that it be delayed until the end of the year, citing concerns that many southerners had not been able to travel back to the South. Clashes between the armed wing of the SPLM (the Southern

closed roads in Northern Bahr al-Ghazal, and were perceived as part of an attempt by the NCP to actively prevent internally displaced persons (IDPs) from returning to the South.

The parties finally agreed on a delay of one week. GoSS, however, seemed justified in its fears. Oxford Analytica reported that the former director of the census commission, Awad Haj Ali, claimed the census has undercounted southern Sudanese living in the North, and that the number might be closer to 1.5 million, one million more than the 520,000 reported in the census.

gion are crucial issues. They address the identity of Sudan," the deputy chairman of the SPLM, Riek Machar, told Reuters. "Our wars are based on [the question:] What is Sudan?" The southern motivation here was in part to use the census, and the categories in which it took form, to undermine the claims of the NCP to represent the majority of the population, and to counter NCP depictions of Sudan as an Islamic country.

In the end, neither category was included in the census. It listed only the categories of North and South, just as the last full census

---

Under the 2005 CPA, what was initially a pre-eminently political settlement (in terms of a quota of seats) between two actors was to be replaced by objective facts on the ground; it is precisely these facts that became an instrument for the politics they were supposed to displace.

### Uncounted Divisions

Rather than transparently revealing the distribution of people in the country, the process of census-taking reflected political divisions already at work within Sudan.

The partitioning of the country was not just a question of where people were counted, but of what (or who) they were counted as. A fierce debate raged around whether questions on religion and ethnicity should be included in the census. Ethnic categories had been instrumentalized during the two civil wars—from simplistic depictions of conflict between Arabs and Africans in the international community, to the sharpening lines of "Arabism" as a racial ideology in Darfur. Moreover, these developments took place against a centuries old background of *ta'rib*, or Arabization. Religion is also a fraught issue in Sudan, especially since the resumption of war in 1983, when southerners increasingly turned to Christianity partly as a means of resisting an Islamist regime in the North.

The SPLM pushed for the inclusion of both religion and ethnicity in the census. "Ethnicity and reli-

of Sudan did when conducted in 1956 by the British administration prior to independence. All the complex inter-relations among Sudan's many groups were reduced to one central question.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the foremost political issue in the country is foregrounded to the exclusion of all others. Problems arise, however, when politics is masked in the neutral language of demographics, and the task of the census is seen to be, as the UN Population Fund has it, to find out about "the distribution of the population which will [be] the primary source of information for all development planning processes."

### A Political Solution?

Under the 2005 CPA, what was initially a pre-eminently political settlement (in terms of a quota of seats) between two actors was to be replaced by objective facts on the ground; it is precisely these facts that became an instrument for the politics they were supposed to displace.

In order to understand these instrumentalizations one does

## COMMENTARY

According to the results of the census, the South represented only 21% of the population, which, if people voted according to a North-

People's Liberation Army) and Messiriya (nomadic Baggara Arabs who had backed the Government of Sudan during the war) had

not, unfortunately, even need to consider the 260,000 registered Sudanese refugees living in exile, nor the Sudanese diaspora. Displaced following long decades of war, both groups have been excluded from the census that will be used to determine the political future of Sudan. Apart from even these important concerns, one only needs to look at basic census findings, and the responses of local political leaders and the public to those findings, to recognize the degree to which counting has functioned as a political instrument in much of the country.

Luka Biong Deng, the GoSS Minister for Presidential Affairs, argued in an interview with *Al-Sahafah* that it was not logical that the population of South Darfur would have increased by 90% since the partial census of 1993, as the 2008 census claimed. The 322% increase in the population of Arab nomadic groups, he noted, was especially surprising. His fears about the validity of the census results were widely reflected in the SPLM. Some voiced concern that

many residents of IDP camps in Darfur were not counted, as the Central Bureau of Statistics chose to estimate rather than count the number of people in camps and other “unsafe” areas.

It was against this background of politicized demography that the SPLM rejected the results of the census. It took months of negotiations before, in late February 2010, the parties agreed to increase the number of seats given to southern Sudan in the national parliament; like the other seats, they will be appointed on the basis of the election results.

In a divided country, a quantitative survey required a qualitative, political solution.

*Joshua Craze is a PhD student at UC Berkeley. His doctorate focuses on border disputes in Sudan. With Mark Huband, he is the editor of The Kingdom: Saudi Arabia and the Challenge of the Twenty-First Century (2009). His book on borders in the Middle East, Line Language, is forthcoming in 2011.* 

## Recount

*continued from page 13*

they were posing for an evidentiary photograph. While Pachacutanos realize that no single survey will guarantee land rights—recurrent political contestation makes this a seeming impossibility—they understand that every “official” count helps them to construct a paper trail that they can use to legitimate their land claims.

### The Beginning of the Story

Three years later, data from the 2007 census have finally been fully elaborated and the statistics are ready to take on lives of their own as they appear in political speeches, NGO mission statements, corporate investment strategies and the popular imagination. Yet community leaders in Pachacútec argue these data are already obsolete. Many of the houses built on census day lay abandoned. Others were quickly “sold,” leaving new occupants eager to be recognized as

owners. In still other cases, the recognition of one house prompted the construction of 50



more houses alongside it, creating a new generation of need that waits to be counted. Community leaders, local governments and NGOs therefore continue to take their own opportunistic censuses, constantly updating data in ways that drive, rather than simply reflect, local social dynamics. Far from a “snapshot of reality,” the Peruvian case demonstrates that taking the census photo is itself integral to Peruvians’ livelihood strategies. As ethnographers we would do well to move beyond critiquing categories to consider what role censuses play in the various places they land and the social dynamics engendered by the very act of (re)counting.

*Kristin Skrabut is a PhD candidate at Brown University. She is currently investigating the social significance of statistics as they pertain to Peruvian anti-poverty campaigns.* 

## Anthropology News Calls for Proposals

### November 2010 Issue: Tourism



In reflecting on the anthropological gaze, many have compared fieldwork with the participant-observation of the tourist and travel writer. However, as anthropologists become increasingly involved in both global tourism industries and tourism studies, additional opportunities develop to examine the practices, ethics, flows and relationships involved in the commoditization, consumption and marketing of cultures, histories and people. What do tourism practices and encounters say about concepts such as authenticity and ownership in relation to the cultivation, management, display and erasure of difference and otherness? What consequences do tourism programs

and industries have for local sites, populations and economies? How can we understand tourism’s simultaneous dependence on global flows (of money, images, people, information) and the maintenance of boundaries and local specificity?

For this thematic issue, we welcome work engaging a variety of types of tourism and related topics, including, but not limited to: ecotourism and sustainability; thanatourism or “dark tourism”; world heritage tourism; disaster and volunteer tourism; food and agriculture tourism; museums, fairs, theme parks, memorials and historic landmarks; performance and representation; tourism and community development; pilgrimage; collective memory and contested heritage. Additionally, we welcome proposals that reflect on anthropology’s particular entanglements with tourism zones, such as the promotion of tourism as a tenet of postcolonial “development” plans in communities that have traditionally hosted anthropological research.

**Proposal submission deadline: May 25, 2010.**  
**Early submissions are encouraged.**

### December 2010 Issue: Music and Sound

The AAA Music and Sound Interest Group gathered for the first time in 2009 to recognize the increasing production and impact of aural anthropology projects. Anthropologists of music and ethnomusicologists are today developing innovative work on musical experience and performance, sound recording and broadcast technologies, public soundscapes and more. As recording technologies become more accessible, the topics available for study and methods for approaching them continue to expand. For example, scholars are currently researching the music and verbal art of gospel choirs living with HIV in South Africa, playback singing in Bollywood film, and the use of sound in military practices during the Iraq war. Their research contributes to broader anthropological literatures in areas ranging from linguistics to aesthetics to economics.

Still, significant room for growth remains. As interest group convener David Novak noted in February 2010 *AN*, “aurality is underrepresented in comparison with visually as an area of anthropological research.” The December 2010 *AN* issue offers contributors an opportunity to (1) consider both the challenges facing the anthropology of music and sound as a growing discipline, and the unique and compelling insights it can provide; (2) share current scholarship in this topical area; and (3) examine the interrelationships among various disciplinary approaches to the study of music and sound. In addition to textual and visual submissions, we also welcome sound recordings, to be posted online in conjunction with print publication of the issue.

### Guidelines

To participate, email a 300-word abstract and 50-100-word biosketch to *Anthropology News* Managing Editor Dinah Winnick (dwinnick@aaanet.org). Proposals for photo essays should also include five high resolution photographs (tiff or jpg), each with a caption and credit. Proposals for audio submissions should also include selected sound clips, to illustrate audio quality, style and content. Selected authors will be notified of their status in late June, and full articles—commentaries of 1000-1400 words or shorter pieces for other article types, plus any multimedia submissions—will be due September 1 for the tourism issue and October 1 for the music and sound issue.