Census and Identity

The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses

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The past decade has seen a great outpouring of interest in the nature of collective identities of various kinds. Within the United States, both popular and academic interest in identities that divide the population have not only spawned heated debates but have also had substantial social consequences and public policy implications. Fueled in part by the legacy of racism and the still daunting problems of racial division, and nurtured as well by recent and ongoing waves of immigration, the issue is frequently framed in terms of "multiculturalism." In this version, the American population is presumably divided into a fixed number of different "cultures," each deserving of equal respect and some, perhaps, deserving of special aid.

Beyond the American shores, interest in issues of collective identities, their nature, and their consequences, is scarcely less acute. Nineteenth-century theorists of nationalism – riding the Europe-wide wave of state-creation according to principles of national identity – gave way in the twentieth century to theorists who predicted that such national identity would soon be supplanted by supranational allegiances. The European Union was, for some, viewed as the very embodiment of these processes. Yet events of the recent past have sent these evolutionary internationalists into retreat and ushered in a new concern for the continuing – some would say growing – strength of national and ethnic loyalties. Moreover, from the Balkans to central Africa, ethnic conflict and violence have been interpreted as evidence that people's collective identities do not necessarily match national borders. Accordingly, states that are ethnically heterogeneous – the great majority of states in the contemporary world – are under pressure to take measures to prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions and the development of internal lines of social division.

These tensions are all the more on people's minds as a result of the huge movements of peoples that characterize the world today, movements that are likely to continue to reshuffle the human population in the decades to come. Huge differentials in wealth are drawing people from the poorer to the richer countries, just as low fertility means that, in many cases, the

wealthier countries cannot maintain their population without such immigration. The many other well-known sources of instability in much of the world – wars, famines, political fragility, environmental degradation – mean that even within what used to be known as the Third World people are continually in motion, producing a new mix of peoples lacking any common sense of identity.

All of this may be granted, yet what does it have to do with national censuses? Censuses are, after all, generally viewed as matters of bureaucratic routine, somewhat unpleasant necessities of the modern age, a kind of national accounting. Yet it is our argument that the census does much more than simply reflect social reality; rather, it plays a key role in the construction of that reality. In no sector is this more importantly the case than in the ways in which the census is used to divide national populations into separate identity categories: racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious. It is our hope that the chapters in this book will establish this point and show how collective identities are molded through censuses.

State modernity and the impetus to categorize

The significance of official state certification of collective identities through a variety of official registration procedures can be gleaned by contrasting these government efforts with the situation that existed before such bureaucratic categorization began. Collective identities are, of course, far from a recent innovation in human history. However, before the emergence of modern states, such identities had great fluidity and implied no necessary exclusivity. The very notion that the cultural identities of populations mattered in public life was utterly alien to the pre-modern state (Gellner 1983). That state periodically required some assessment of its population for purposes of taxation and conscription, yet remained largely indifferent to recording the myriad cultural identities of its subjects. As a result, there was little social pressure on people to rank-order their localized and overlapping identities. People often had the sense of simply being "from here."

The development of the modern state, however, increasingly instilled a resolve among its elites to categorize populations, setting boundaries, so to speak, across pre-existing shifting identities. James Scott refers to this process as the "state's attempt to make a society legible," which he regards as a "central problem of statecraft." In order to grasp the complex social reality of the society over which they rule, leaders must devise a means of radically simplifying that reality through what Scott refers to as a "series of typifications." Once these are made, it is in the interest of state authorities that people be understandable through the categories in which they fall.

"The builders of the modern nation-state," Scott writes, "do not merely describe, observe, and map; they strive to shape a people and landscape that will fit these techniques of observation" (1998:2–3, 76–77, 81).

The emergence of nationalism as a new narrative of political legitimacy required the identification of the sovereign "nation" along either legal or cultural criteria, or a combination of both. The rise of colonialism, based on the denial that the colonized had political rights, required a clear demarcation between the settlers and the indigenes. The "Others" had to be collectively identified. In the United States, the refusal to enfranchise Blacks and native Americans led to the development of racial categories. The categorization of identities became part and parcel of the legitimating narratives of the national, colonial, and "New World" state.

States thus became interested in representing their population, at the aggregate level, along identity criteria. The census, in this respect, emerged as the most visible, and arguably the most politically important, means by which states statistically depict collective identities. It is by no means the sole categorizing tool at the state's disposal, however. Birth certificates are often used by states to compile statistics on the basis of identity categories. These include ethnic nationality (a widespread practice in Eastern Europe); mother tongue, as in Finland and Quebec (Courbage 1998: 49); and race, in the United States (Snipp 1989: 33). Migration documents have also, in some cases, recorded cultural identities. The Soviet Union, for instance, generated statistics on migration across Soviet republics according to ethnicity. The US Immigration Service, from 1899 to 1920, classified newly arrived immigrants at Ellis Island according to a list of forty-eight "races or peoples," generally determined by language rather than physical traits (Brown 1996).

Parallel to the need for statistical representation was the need for control. In order to establish a "monopoly of the legitimate means of movement" (Torpey 2000: 1), states imposed the use of personal identity documents to distinguish the citizen from the foreigner (Noiriel 1996) and, in some cases, attempted to control the internal migration of their population through residency permits and internal passports (Matthews 1993). In a number of cases, such identification documents contained an identity category beyond the civic or legal status of the individual: for example, the Soviet Union, where citizens had their "nationality" (in the ethnic sense) indicated on their internal passports (Zaslavsky and Luryi 1979); Rwanda, with Hutu or Tutsi ethnicity (actually called "race") appearing in identity cards (Uvin, this volume); Greece, Turkey, and Israel, with religion recorded in identity cards (Courbage 1997: 114; Goldscheider, this volume)[1]; and apartheid South Africa, with racial categories inscribed on identification papers (Petersen 1997: 97).

The categorization of identities, along culturally constructed criteria, on *individual* documents can serve nefarious or well-meaning purposes. In the United States, a racial category in birth certificates was long used to discriminate against Blacks and Indians. Following the rigid principle of the "one-drop rule," according to which a single Black ancestor, however remote, made one Black, birth certificates were often used in Southern states to bar individuals of racially-mixed ancestry from marrying Whites (Davis 1991: 157). The rise of affirmative action, based on the notion that achieving true equality required special consideration to be given to historically disadvantaged minorities in access to jobs and education, implied the bureaucratic categorization of "minorities." As a consequence, particularly in the case of Blacks and Indians, it has meant continuing commitment to the determination of race according to "objective" ancestry, as opposed to simple self-definition. Thus, the Indian Health Service of the Bureau of Indian Affairs continues to hold that eligible patients must have a minimum of one-fourth "blood quantum," which in practice entails that they must prove that at least one of their grandparents appeared on tribal enrollments (tribal rolls) of recognized tribes (Snipp 1989: 34).

A similar policy was employed by Nazi Germany to identify both Jews and Germans. In spite of the shrill propaganda on the physical alienness of Jews, the criterion actually chosen to separate the Jews eventually targeted for destruction was a mixture of religion and descent, and not anthropometric measurement. Those with at least three Jewish grandparents were categorized as Jews. Ancestry, in turn, was determined by birth certificates issued by religious institutions (Hilberg 1985). At the outset of World War II, when the Nazi government sought to transfer German-speaking populations from the East (Baltics, Ukraine, Romania) to newly annexed territories from Poland, the question of defining German identity arose. In this case, religion was not deemed determinative and ethnicity did not appear on birth certificates. In Estonia, where a liberal minority law in 1925 had established officially recognized ethnic associations, claimants had to show a certificate, delivered either by their German association or by the Estonian Ministry of the Interior, attesting to their German ancestry (Institut national de la statistique 1946: 80).[2] Interestingly, since post-war Germany has adopted a kind of Law of Return, granting automatic citizenship to ethnic Germans from abroad, the issue of legally documenting one's ethnic German affiliation remains germane today. After apparently relying on the self-declaration of applicants during the Cold War, the German state devised a complex questionnaire in the early 1990s to determine who can be deemed "German" (Brubaker 1996).

The practice of inscribing cultural categories on personal identification documents can clearly affect an individual's own sense of identity. In the Soviet Union, the ethnic nationality in one's internal passport was also determined by descent (i.e., one's parents' nationality), as with the cases of the Jews, Germans, Blacks, and Indians cited above. In such a context, it seems likely that people whose passport certified them to be of "Ukrainian" ethnic nationality, yet spoke Russian as their first language, would nevertheless associate "Ukrainian" with their ethnic identity, at least by force of habit. However, a literature is lacking on the relationship between state-enshrined identities on personal documents and collective identity formation or, for that matter, between categories used on the census and in private documents. Clearly, comparative research on the politics and bureaucratic implementation of identity categorization practices in state documents is needed. Yet, while cognizant that the census belongs to a larger family of state categorizing practices, the current volume focuses its gaze on the census and its relationship to identity formation. Our goal in doing so is both to reconcile various strands of emerging literatures, which to date have often been regionally segmented (New World, colonial experience, France, East-Central Europe), and to help provide a theoretical framework for further comparative research. The universality and political salience of the census dictated our selection of the census as a fruitful point of departure.

The rise of population statistics and the construction of identities

Much of the most influential literature on the role of statistics gathering in extending state control has focused on the colonial state. Anderson, in his influential book *Imagined Communities*, pointed to the census as one of the primary devices employed by the colonial state to impose a "totalizing, classificatory grid" on its territory, and hence make all inside it its own. For Anderson, the key was the ability to make distinctions, to draw borders, to allow governments to distinguish among "peoples, regions, religions, languages." The very boundedness of the state meant that its component objects were countable, and hence able to be incorporated into the state organization (Anderson 1991: 184). The state's goal here, as Scott (1998:65) put it, is to "create a legible people."

In short, the use of identity categories in censuses – as in other mechanisms of state administration – creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and hence are conceptualized as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity. This, in turn, encourages people to view the world as composed of distinct

groups of people and may focus attention on whatever criteria are utilized to distinguish among these categories (Urla 1993). Rather than view social links as complex and social groupings situational, the view promoted by the census is one in which populations are divided into neat categories. Appadurai's (1993: 334) comment is apropos here: "statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose."

In Europe, national statistics-gathering was developing in the nineteenth century as a major means of modernizing the state. International congresses were held where the latest statistical and census developments were hawked to government representatives from across the continent. Knowledge was power, and the knowledge of the population produced by the census gave those in power insight into social conditions, allowing them to know the population and devise appropriate plans for dealing with them. As Urla (1993: 819) put it, "With the professionalization and regularization of statistics-gathering in the nineteenth century, social statistics, once primarily an instrument of the state, became a uniquely privileged way of 'knowing' the social body and a central technology in diagnosing its ills and managing its welfare."

Such language, not coincidentally, brings to mind Foucault, and his view of the emergence of a modern state that progressively manages its population by extending greater surveillance over it. In examining state action in the construction of collective identities, we enter into the complex debates over what is meant by "the state." The state itself is, of course, an abstraction, not something one can touch. Such a perspective impels us to examine the multiplicity of actors who together represent state power, and discourages us from the view that "the state" necessarily acts with a single motive or a single design. An inquiry into censuses and identity formation, then, requires examination of just which individuals and groups representing state power are involved, and how they interrelate with one another as well as with the general population. Pioneering research of this sort has been done on the impact of various advocacy groups. Especially valuable work has been done on the Census Advisory Committee on Spanish Origin Population in formulating the "Hispanic" category in the 1980 US census (Choldin 1986). Similarly important work has been done on the role of ethnographers, geographers, and party activists in devising an official list of ethnic "nationalities" for the first Soviet census of 1926 (Hirsch 1997). Sorely needed are more ethnographic efforts at examining the workings of state agencies of various kinds – from legislatures to census-takers – in their interactions with each other and with the people under their surveillance.[3]

That the kind of counting and categorizing that goes on in censuses is an imposition of central state authorities, and thereby a means of extending

central control, has long been recognized. Indeed, ever since the first census-takers ventured into the field, struggles between local people and state authorities over attempts to collect such information were common. Such was the case in mid-eighteenth-century France, when various attempts to collect population data by the central government had to be abandoned. Opposition came not only from a suspicious populace but also from local governments. Each feared that the information was being gathered to facilitate new state taxes (Starr 1987: 12–13). These first population enumerations were typically identified with attempts to tax (often newly acquired) populations, as well as to conscript them for labor or military service.

Given such purposes, those undertaking these early censuses sought not to achieve a complete enumeration of the population, but only to register the part of most direct interest to state authorities. That segment generally was a taxable unit, such as the household, and not the individual *per se*. Moreover, since several social groups were exempted from taxation – in the case of the first enumerations of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries these included religious orders, the military, and judges (Behar 1998: 137) – pre-modern censuses were neither comprehensive nor standardized. Regional implementation tended to vary enormously, both in time and form.

Churches, too, have long been involved in this process, indeed in parts of Europe long predating the state in attempting comprehensive population enumerations. For example, the Lutheran Church in Sweden began a full registration of its population in the 1600s (Willigan and Lynch 1982: 123). Similarly, one product of the Roman Catholic Church's counter-Reformation efforts to solidify its control over its far-flung population was to order parish priests to take an annual census of their parishioners. This practice, begun in the sixteenth century, continues in many areas to this day.

Full, regular, periodic state-sponsored enumerations of individuals apparently date to 1790, when the United States began its decennial censuses. Within a century, they would become a defining feature of the modern state, with most European/New World states and colonial possessions having experienced their first modern census by the latter part of the nineteenth century. The decision to enumerate individuals, however, brought up the question of *which* individuals to include. Should the enumeration be limited to citizens, or should it encompass all individuals residing within the boundaries of a given state at the time of the census, irrespective of civic status? The United States, for example, did not count Indians remaining in reservations, who were not considered citizens and therefore subject to taxation, until the 1820 census

(Nobles, this volume). The question of whom to count was debated several times by the International Statistical Congress, a body that met every three years or so in Europe between the 1850s and the 1880s, and its recommendation to count the *resident* population became standard practice.

States thus sought to count everyone on their soil, and among the first categorizations introduced on the modern census was the division between citizens and non-citizens or the related – but distinct – division between those born within the state and those born abroad. The French case, in this respect, is of particular interest. The French republican state had an organic conception of "la nation," a civic body regarded as indivisible. French discourse became philosophically opposed to any subcategorization of the nation in the census or other state-sponsored practices. This conception, however, called for a strict separation between those who were part of the *nation* and the others. As a result, "the citizen and the foreigner became the two principal categories of analysis" (Blum, this volume). "Foreigners" were categorized according to their country of origin, a criterion eventually extended, from 1962 on, to the "naturalized French."

British, American, and Australian census-designers have also long been interested in ascertaining the country of origin of their residents. A census question on birthplace has appeared on the censuses of these countries from the beginning in the United States, since the middle of the nineteenth century in Britain, and since 1911 in Australia. In Britain, a question on nationality (citizenship) was likewise included from 1851 to 1961 (Booth 1985: 256). The German census had questions on both place of birth and citizenship, while Austria and Hungary – which administered separate censuses – were only interested in ascertaining citizenship (Tebarth 1991). The information on the foreign-born was sometimes used to calibrate immigration policy. When legislation was passed after World War I to restrict immigration to the United States, an annual quota (2 percent) was established for each country of origin according to the census figures of foreign-born for 1880 (Simon 1997b: 16).[4] This remained in force until the 1965 immigration law abolished country-specific quotas.

The development of cultural categories

While the practice of distinguishing the enumerated by civic status or place of birth became generalized, no such consensus emerged over the merits of using *cultural* categories in the census. With the rise of the "nationality question" in Europe – i.e., the legitimization of political

demands based on the cultural markers of territorially concentrated groups – two representations of the "nation" came into conflict. On the one hand there was the French model of a political nation that was coterminous with the boundaries of the citizenry (the "nation-state"). On the other there was the German model of a cultural nation (in practice defined by language) not necessarily corresponding to state boundaries. States of Western Europe (France, Britain, Spain) professed the ideology of the "nation-state," while to the east (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire) leaders embraced a model of the multinational state (with religion serving as a marker of identity in the Ottoman lands).

At the sessions of the International Statistical Congress, statisticians from the Western "nation-states" argued that the concept of cultural nationality, as developed in Eastern Europe, did not apply to them. Their Eastern counterparts argued that the concept was not geographically restricted, and they held extensive discussions on which particular categories would best represent people's cultural "nationality." A consensus emerged among Eastern census-makers that the question of cultural nationality should not be asked directly, but rather be derived from a question on language. With a few minor exceptions to the rule, this became the practice in the first wave of periodic censuses in Eastern Europe before World War I. The main objection to directly asking individuals about their cultural nationality was that, at a time of low national consciousness, many would have been confused about what to answer (Kleeberg 1915: 42; Roth 1991). In other words, while certain nationalist elites were arguing that national groups existed and needed to be statistically represented, many of the putative members of these groupings were unaware that they had such an affiliation.

Meanwhile, as new colonial territories were conquered, or modern administrative practices brought to old ones, censuses were introduced to the colonies as well. One of the major elements of this attempt by colonial state authorities to make populations knowable, to link them to the state and thereby make them governable, was the Herculean effort to divide the people into mutually exclusive and exhaustive identity categories. This represented a decisive break from precolonial enumerative practices. Appadurai contrasts the European practice with that of the earlier conquerors of South Asia, the Mughals, who did much to map and measure the land they controlled, as part of their efforts to tax it, yet showed no interest in enumerating the whole population. "Enumeration of various things," he writes, "was certainly part of the Mughal state *imaginaire* as was the acknowledgment of group identities, *but not the enumeration of group identities*" (1993: 329).

The European colonial powers (France, Britain, Belgium), who re-jected cultural categorizations in their metropolitan censuses as incom-patible with their imagined "nation-states," had no such qualms when faced with the daunting task of counting their colonial subjects (Kateb 1998: 105; Appadurai 1993: 317–18). There is little doubt that racial ideologies, popular in Europe in late nineteenth century, influenced the thinking of colonial census-makers regarding the enumeration of Asian and African communities (Hirschman 1987). Yet another important fac-tor was the absence of any idea of common citizenship uniting the colonial settlers with the locals. Since the "nation-state" construct was restricted to the relatively tiny number of colonial settlers, other categories had to be devised for the vast majority of the population (Anderson 1997: 58).

Censuses and the construction of race

As a product of the ideology of colonial and modern states, the project of dividing populations into separable categories of collective identity in-evitably intersected with the division of populations into racial categories. The two efforts share a common logic, a kind of categorical imperative, in which people must be assigned to a category and to one category alone. The history of racial thinking is a history of cultural categorization, of seizing on certain physical characteristics and inventing a biological cat-egory for those people who manifest them.

In devising "racial" categories, imperial census-makers used names from the existing repertoire of cultural and geographical markers, but the categories themselves reflected the perception of the European rulers rather than that of the natives. Anderson (1991: 165–6) writes that few recognized themselves under the early "racial" labels of "Malay," "Javanese," "Sakai," "Banjarese," etc. in the 1911 Indonesian census. In the same vein, Hirschman (1987: 567) argues that the "Malay," "Chinese," and "Indian" categories in the Malaysian census were much broader than socially understood. That these categories reflected subjec-tive values is hardly distinctive. Identities being by definition subjectively determined, their conceptual representation in *any* census can only re-flect subjective processes. What distinguished colonial from non-colonial censuses, however, was that the formulation of categories in the colonies was unilaterally done by the ruling officials, while European categories of cultural nationality and language were already being negotiated, to some extent, with social groups.

Even more significant was the belief, fundamental to a racist concep-tion of the world, that racial categories were rank ordered according to aptitude. Imperial races, unlike colonial ones, were fit to rule, while

certain colonial races were better equipped to assist the colonial project than others. Such a conception of group categories was initially foreign to the natives in most areas. In Rwanda and Burundi, for instance, the Belgian colonial state ruled through the minority Tutsi, in keeping with the widespread colonial practice of indirect rule. The Belgians legitimized Tutsi dominance by creating a racial distinction making the Tutsi superior Africans, due to an alleged "Hamitic" origin, while the Hutus were relegated to the bottom of the racial scale. What was new was not the naming itself, since the colonial categories of Tutsi and Hutus overlapped with pre-existing ones, "but rather the colonial policy of indirect rule and the racist ideology associated with it. It was those factors that crystallized the categories and erected them against each other." (Uvin, this volume.)

It is the United States, however, that has the longest continuous history of placing its entire population into mutually exclusive racial categories based on pseudo-scientific theories of race. As Nobles shows in her chapter in this volume, the categories and criteria have evolved over time, with categories once thought natural – such as that of "mulatto" – eventually being regarded as not only unscientific but morally reprehensible. In societies such as the United States, where the ideology of racial categorization has had tremendous social and political consequences, the census is a cauldron of racial construction. By pigeon-holing people into official governmental categories, the census gives a legitimacy to the categories and to this mode of thinking about people. Moreover, in so far as the census is presented as an instrument of scientific inquiry, racial categorization in censuses provides an aura of scientific legitimacy for the racial project as well.

The confusion between race and ethnicity

The compulsion to divide people into racial categories has never been far from the drive to divide them into ethnic categories. In fact, the two concepts are often blurred, a confusion having largely to do with a belief that identity can be *objectively* determined through ancestry. We have already discussed how racial categorization in the United States continues to be linked, in courts and government agencies, to "blood quantum." Yet the primordialist discourse of nationalism, with its emphasis on the timeless "essence" of the nation, also implies a genetic transmission of identity across the ages. "National consciousness," rather than phenotypical traits, constitutes the inherited trait for primordialists. Nationalist literature is replete with assumptions about presumed members of the ethnic nation who do not know who they *truly* are, that is, whose authentic and transmitted national identity is, as it were, buried within

themselves. To give an example among many, Lithuanian nationalists consider the Polish minority of Lithuania to be "polonized Lithuanians." As Snyder (1998: 10–11) points out, "On this line of thinking, national identity is treated as a question of race rather than of history or personal choice."

This explains why, prior to World War II, European ethnic nationalities were routinely referred to as "races" in public and scholarly discourse. For instance, when the renowned British historian R. W. Seton-Watson published *Racial Problems in Hungary* in 1908, a book chiefly on the Slovaks, he was mostly employing categories that would now be called "ethnic." The Slovaks formed a different nation, in his view, because of such cultural traits as their distinct language and their belief in sharing a common descent. Moreover, it was widely believed at the time that nations had unique "characters." The "national character" of the British was deemed to be different from that of the French or Germans. Even the nations espousing a so-called civic conception of themselves, such as the British, were commonly referrred to as "races" as well. The common thread to this semantic jumble of nations, nationalities, and races – the term ethnicity was rarely used before World War II – was a notion that what these "races" passed along through heredity was largely expressed through *cultural* traits. These included not only language and religion but also "character," denoted by work ethic, collective personality, and so forth.[5]

This is not to say that the colonial emphasis on inherited physical traits was absent from the European landscape. Yet, until the rise of fascism in the 1920s, the biological idea of race remained marginal in nationalist discourse and, even more importantly for the purposes of this volume, was entirely discarded from pre-World War I censuses in Europe. However pervasive in popular discourse, "race" was found, by census-makers of the era, to be totally inadequate to capture cultural nationality (ethnicity). Crucially, these census-makers shared a belief that nationality was *subjectively* determined, and thus contingent on one's sense of identity, a notion that contradicted the belief in objectively descended "races." When Nazi Germany introduced racial categorizations based on documented lineage – in the 1939 census, respondents had to indicate whether one of their grandparents was Jewish – it constituted a break not only from the German census tradition of categorizing identity by self-professed language, but also from the entire European census practice of rejecting race as a category (Labbé 1998).

After the Nazi cataclysm, the conflation of biology and culture was discredited and the old practice of calling national, religious, and linguistic groups "races" vanished in Western Europe and the New World. References to "race," which had been routine in the League of Nations, were

replaced by references to "ethnicity" in documents of the United Nations. In the colonies, on the other hand, while imperial rule became gradually delegitimized in favor of native "self-determination," racially-based categories often survived decolonization, and not only in the apartheid regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa. We have already mentioned how Hutu rulers in Rwanda continued to highlight the Hutu and Tutsi "races" in censuses, identity cards, and local population registers (Uvin, this volume). That case does not appear to be singular. As Rabushka and Shepsle (1972: 8) pointed out, giving Malaysia as an example, "very often the inhabitants of plural societies subjectively perceive broad cultural divisions as a surrogate for objective phenotypical characteristics." The pre-World War II European confusion between race and ethnicity is still found in various parts of the non-Western world.

That confusion, however, has re-entered Western discourse in recent decades and, for the first time outside of the United States, has become enshrined in official categorizations in a few notable cases. Three developments brought race back to the forefront. First was the unprecedented flow of migrants from Asia and Africa to European countries that previously had relatively little immigration from these areas. Second was the rise of official concerns about combatting discrimination, often leading to policies of "positive discrimination". Third was the mobilization of immigrant groups on the basis of their cultural heritage. Countries that had previously been loath to categorize their populations along a cultural marker were suddenly confronted with a dilemma: how to effectively prevent discrimination without statistically distinguishing the people most likely to be discriminated against? In Britain and the historic countries of immigration (United States, Canada, and Australia), the answer, highly politicized and contested, was to devise "minority" categories – in the case of the United States, to enhance existing "racial" ones, while infusing them with an entirely new purpose. In most instances, the new categories muddled race and ethnicity, despite the consensus among anthropologists and ethnologists on the spuriousness of conflating biology and culture. The case of Britain is illuminative of the recurring failure to distinguish race from ethnicity.

In 1976 Britain passed an anti-discrimination bill, the Race Relations Act, which defined discrimination as the unfavorable treatment of an individual on "racial grounds," that is, on the basis of "colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origin" (Simon 1997a: 25). In one fell swoop, the legislation thus mixed together race, ethnicity/cultural nationality, and citizenship. Census officials were instructed to categorize the "minorities" targeted by the Act in order to enable the government to obtain statistical information on them on a variety of social

indicators, such as family structure, housing, employment, education, and so forth (White 1979: 333). Various tests were conducted to determine how minority data could best be collected. While people from some minority populations – such as those from India and China – had no objection to checking themselves off as belonging to such a category (e.g., "Indian" or "Chinese") despite the fact that they were born in Britain, others felt differently. Most notably, many of those whose forbears came from the West Indies objected to being officially categorized as "West Indian," arguing instead that they should simply be considered British. To overcome this opposition, census officials proposed using the term "Black British," thus indicating that those so dubbed were indeed British, while distinguishing them by their race, as was done in the United States. Government officials, however, rejected this proposal on the grounds that it placed (politically) unacceptable emphasis on "race" rather than ethnicity (White and Pearce 1993: 274–75).

Political discomfort in Britain with using "race" led to attempts to replace racial terms with ethnic terms. One problem was to find a way out of the use of "White," and so the proposal was made to substitute "White" with two composite categories, separating groups "indigenous" to Britain – "English, Welsh, Scottish or Irish," – from "Other European." Yet whatever terms were used, minority groups objected, and in the end no minority question was asked on the 1981 British census (Booth 1985: 259–60). The matter did not end there, however. After these abortive attempts, the census authorities managed to institute a minority question in the 1991 census by reintroducing the racial categories "White" and "Black," with "British West Indians" becoming a subcategory of "Blacks." The official categories became: White; Black (divided into Caribbean, African, Other); Indian; Pakistani; Bangladeshi; Chinese; Any Other Ethnic Group (Bhrolcháin 1990: 559–60).[6] This amalgam of racial and ethnic categories reflected political pressures. "European" British officials, in line with colonial thinking, viewed the key marker of differentiation between "Europeans" and minorities as racial ("White" versus the Others). Yet those in these minority populations had a different perspective. As Ballard (1997: 185) explained:

So precisely because the visible minorities quite rightly repudiate (in sharp contrast with 'white' majority!) any suggestion that they can be positively identified in biological terms, plain logic suggests that the only kind of question to which they might be expected to offer a positive response would be one about their self-defined ethnic affiliation. And so it proved.

Similar difficulties with collecting data on minority categories were experienced in Canada. Unlike Britain, Canada had an ethnic origin

question appearing on its censuses from the start, i.e. since 1871, a century before the rise of the anti-discrimination movement. The reason was that Canada defined itself as a pact between "two founding peoples," largely territorially concentrated – the descendants of French and English settlers. The purpose of the ethnic origin question was to register the changing proportions of these groups in relation to themselves and other groups. The Canadian desire to enumerate groups based on cultural origin was therefore closer to the Eastern European conception of cultural nationalities than to the nation-state premise epitomized by Britain. Between 1901 and 1941, the census question on origins was actually called "race," yet it reflected the sentiment, widely held at the time, that, when applied to European-based groups, "races" were mostly defined through cultural markers.[7]

As in Britain, legislation on the prevention of discrimination forced census-makers to introduce new categories. In 1986, the Canadian government passed the *Employment Equity Act*, requiring employers to report annually on the representation of "designated groups" among their employees. The Act identified four such groups: women, persons with disabilities, aboriginal peoples, and "persons who are, because of their race or colour, in a visible minority in Canada." In a development similar to the British experience, the first efforts to develop a question using racial categories for the 1991 Canadian census floundered, since pre-tests revealed that many respondents found the question offensive (Boyd 1993: 535–36). Amidst continuing controversy, the racial question finally made it to the 1996 census, where respondents were given ten choices: White, Black, Chinese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Filipino, Arab, Japanese, Korean, Latin American, and Other. Aboriginal peoples, the Canadian equivalent of "Native Americans," were counted in a separate question, offering the categories North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo). In response to criticisms about instituting racial enumeration, the Chief Statistician of Canada, Ivan P. Fellegi, argued that the question was not about "race," but about "visible minorities," to enable the government to implement its employment-equity legislation (Fellegi 1996).

While adding the new questions on visible minorities and aboriginals, the Canadian census kept its old ethnic-origin question, but the rationale and the categories underwent drastic changes. To counter the rise of nationalism in Quebec, Canada passed the Official Languages Act in 1969, making English and French the official languages of the federal government. The elevation of French as an official language proved unpopular among the increasing number of Canadians of neither British nor French stock who objected that a minority (the French Canadians having been

a demographic minority since the inception of Canada) be given more recognition than other immigrant minorities. To assuage the growing opposition to the vision of two "founding peoples," the Canadian government passed the Act on Multiculturalism in 1971 (revised in 1988), which defined the country as a mosaic of cultural groups and provided state funds for the promotion of ethnic heritage. There are important differences between the Multicultural Act and the Employment Equity Act. The former calls for state subsidies of cultural and educational activities of groups including those of European ancestry. Indeed, it was the "Europeans," such as the Ukrainians, who were most involved in mobilizing for such a law in the 1960s). The latter mandates "equitable" representation of certain groups ("visible minorities"), excluding those of European background.

The Official Languages Act, and the subsequent Quebec law making French the sole official language of Quebec, had the effect of shifting the battle between the English and French groups from the ethnic origin to the language question. The ethnic origin question became instead the means of assessing the demographic strength of the groups susceptible to benefit from the Multicultural Act. The question, however, became vulnerable to other emerging political currents. The campaign for gender equality in the 1970s forced the traditional emphasis on paternal ancestor to be dropped from the 1981 census (White, Badets, and Renaud 1993: 229). A decade later, a growing backlash against the "Balkanization" of Canada led to a grass-roots campaign, spearheaded by the *Toronto Star*, urging Canadians of all backgrounds to identify their origins as "Canadian" ("Call Me Canadian!"), a category which had never been allowed by census-makers. In the 1991 census, 3.3 percent entered "Canadian" in the category "Other – specify" of the question on origins, making it the fifth largest "ethnic" group. Since the ethnic categories on the census form must, by law, appear in order of demographic weight according to the previous census, "Canadian" was for the first time listed as an official category in the origin question of the 1996 census, appearing in fifth place. The effect was staggering. A whopping 24.1 percent of the population put down "Canadian," an increase that could be partly be attributed to a semantic confusion among Québécois respondents, since the French term "Canadien" has historically referred to ethnic French Catholics (Goldscheider, this volume; Desjardins 2000).[8]

In the United States, as mentioned earlier, a question on race has appeared in all censuses since 1790. A growing number of categories supplemented this original distinction between White and Black over the years. Indians (in the sense of Native American) and Chinese appeared in 1870, Japanese in 1890, Filipino, Hindu and Korean in 1920

(the last two categories disappearing in 1950), Mexican in 1930 (and only in that year), and Hawaiian, Aleut and Eskimo in 1960. In the 1970s, buffeted by changing political winds, having to respond to civil rights legislation, and facing increasingly vocal "ethnic" or "racial" lobbying groups, census officials found they had less and less control over the categorization system that they administered. In 1977, Directive No. 15 of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) enunciated a policy for distinguishing races and ethnic groups in all federal statistics including, of course, the census (Nobles, this volume). As a result, several "racial" categories were added to the 1980 census: Korean, Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Guamanian, and Samoan. A separate question on Hispanic ancestry was also added to the census, as mandated by the OMB directive, thanks to intense lobbying from Hispanic groups (Choldin 1986). Twenty years later the categories were largely unchanged. As in Britain and Canada, these categories became linked to specific anti-discrimination legislation: in this case, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, requiring that the decennial redrawing of congressional districts produce a fair representation of selected minorities (Jenkins 2000).

American census-makers have also, in recent years, been tackling the question of ethnic origin. Previous to 1980, the only question about origin had to do with the country of birth of the respondent and their parents, never venturing beyond the second generation. That question is useful to gauge the current wave of immigrants but is a poor indicator of ethnic identity, since most countries of origin are multiethnic. Thus, a study conducted at the turn of the century showed that only 2 percent of the "Russian" immigrants to the United States, i.e., immigrants from (Imperial) Russia, could be classified as ethnic Russians, the great majority being either Jewish or Polish (Petersen 1987: 219), or claimed as such by leaders of Jewish and Polish ethnic organizations in the U.S.[9] The 1980 census marked the first time an attempt was made to attach an ethnic label to every member of the population, regardless of how long a person's ancestors had been in the country. Before that, data on ethnicity were only gathered indirectly, by combining information on place of birth and language (McKenney and Cresce 1993: 176). The census language data, however, were unreliable because the questions were poorly formulated and frequently altered (Crawford 1992: 126).

Beginning in the 1970s, the rise of "multiculturalism" created pressure on enumerative bodies to pay attention to the "ethnic" make-up of the population. The US Census Bureau began to experiment with a question on "ancestry." As happened in Canada, whether an ethnic group was listed or not as an example in the ancestry question made a huge difference in the number of respondents identifying with that particular group.

Thus, the number of Americans of Slovak, Croat, and French Canadian ancestry more than doubled between the 1980 and 1990 censuses, while the number of Cajuns increased sixty-fold – all four categories which were not listed in 1980, but were in 1990 (Passel 1994). On the other hand, no significant popular resistance to ethnic enumeration, in the genre of the "Count Me Canadian!" campaign, arose in the United States (Goldscheider, this volume).

In Australia, another of the historic countries of immigration, similar developments were observed. In preparing for the 1991 census, a government committee found that more than the indirect indicators of place of birth, religion, or language used at home – the questions previously used in Australian censuses – were needed to properly distinguish an ethnic group. Committee members concluded that such was the complexity of ethnicity (involving a sense of history, of cultural tradition, of being "racially conspicuous," etc.) that a specific ethnic question should be asked. Among their arguments was that third and subsequent generation immigrants to Australia could not be distinguished by these indirect indicators, while people born in British colonies who themselves came from British stock were being erroneously assigned to the ethnic category of the colonized (Cornish 1993: 308–11).

Even though the concepts of race and ethnicity tend to be used in a confusing manner in contemporary censuses of the Western countries of the former British Empire, census categories of "race" and "ethnicity" are kept separate (except in Britain) because they serve different political purposes. While the enumeration of "races," or "visible minorities," is directly linked to the politics of entitlement, the enumeration of "ethnic groups" is linked to a renewed pride in one's ancestry, generally without *individual* benefits. (In Britain, as we saw above, the largely racial classification is actually called "ethnic".) Non-White recognized minorities, such as "Japanese," can benefit from policies of implicit or explicit positive discrimination, while Whites of a minority ethnic background, such as Ukrainians, cannot. A key question is whether such political distinctions are sustainable in the long run.

The validity of defining cultural identity in the census

As the discussion has so far amply demonstrated, the formulation of census questions and categories is inextricably embroiled in politics. This raises the question of whether the collection of census data on cultural categories can have any scientific validity. Does the politicization of the census represent the undermining of an exercise that should be left in the hands of scientific experts? Social science does not speak with one voice

on the matter, due in part to conflicting disciplinary assumptions and a certain compartmentalization of research.

The assertion that statistical science can stand above politics assumes that the object to be enumerated "exists previous to and outside of statistics" (Labbé 2000). From this perspective, the task of the statistician, and thus of the census expert, is to establish methodological rules protecting data collection from imprecision and sundry distortions, thereby attempting to describe with the greatest accuracy the object under study. The problem with this approach is that, by focusing mainly on the technical aspects of measurement, it takes for granted the existence of the category itself. This is unproblematic when categories refer to objective markers such as "age." But to assume that categories denoting cultural affiliation can be enumerated as objectively as age is to assume that identities can be reduced to an essential core within each individual, a core that exists outside of politics.

The notion that cultural categories can be reduced to an objective core, called "statistical realism" by Labbé, is dangerously close to the primordialist notion of timeless identities, much discredited in recent social science, particularly among anthropologists. Nonetheless, statistical realism appears to have many adherents among demographers. Labbé relates the case of an ambitious project undertaken by the French Institute of Demography, aiming at assessing the reliability of all available demographic data in the Balkans. One of the issues concerns the underregistration of Romas (Gypsies) in the last Hungarian census. The project apparently does not question the criteria used to define the category "Roma" in the first place and whether someone of Roma descent could not legitimately declare him or herself as "Hungarian" (Labbé 2000).

The same mindset characterized the European experts sent to Macedonia in 1994 to devise and conduct a special census aimed at verifying whether ethnic Albanians had been undercounted in the 1991 Macedonian census, as Albanian activists claimed they had been. The experts "thought they were going to be overseeing the technical aspects of a statistical exercise," but were instead shocked by the level of political passion their very exercise reignited, and baffled by the sheer ethnographic complexity of the area (Friedman 1996, 94). How is a Macedonian-speaking Muslim to be counted? As the experts discovered, two diametrically opposed views existed on the matter, and statistical realism was of little help to adjudicate the issue.

Anthropologists emphasize the fact that identities are social constructions, that is, intrinsically dependent on social incentives and political projects, as opposed to deriving from some unalterable kernel that could be discovered in an ideal "state of nature." Some conclude from this

that identities are "not real" and therefore inappropriate for enumeration, or for political recognition, for that matter. Others, however, point out that while identities have no reality independent of people's perceptions, the belief by social actors that their identities are real is itself a social fact. In other words, identities are socially "real," inasmuch as socially significant acts are based on ideas of identities (Labbé 2000). For instance, while there is no objective "Macedonian" identity, there is little doubt that social movements and political parties exist whose action is based on the belief in such an identity. The social import of these movements and parties is certainly "real" and, at the same time, likely to affect how individuals define themselves. In this vein, enumerating identities is akin to sorting out how people subjectively define themselves *vis-à-vis* others. As Bulmer claimed, during a debate on the merits of introducing a race/ethnicity question on the British census:

The use of "race" (and the term itself is unsatisfactory and even misleading) in the context of social research refers to the way in which members of a society perceive differences between groups in that society and define the boundaries of such groups, taking into account physical characteristics and skin colour . . . What the ethnic question is trying to do is to find out in as objective a manner as possible how members of British society identify themselves. (Bulmer 1980: 5)

In other words, the census sets its goal as that of *objectively* assessing the state of *subjective* identities. As has already become clear from our discussion of contemporary Western cases, however, the categorization of subjective categories by census-makers is more often than not a matter of political *negotiation*, rather than objective assessment.

While among scholars constructivist approaches have demystified the "scientific" nature of census identity categories, outside the scholarly community many people remain wedded to contrary views. Anthropologists have recently shown consirable interest in the ways that the powerful have attempted to use statistics and quantification to lend themselves the legitimacy of science, to appear to speak truth to the benighted. Urla (1993: 819) refers to this as the equation of knowledge with measurement, and writes of statistics as "technologies of truth production." She herself examines these issues in the heart of Europe, analyzing the fraught political relations of the Basques to the modern Spanish state. In that study, she points out that censuses and social statistics are not simply means of state domination, but also seized on by insurgent political forces to create their own construction of social reality (1993: 837). Far from being a scientific enterprise removed from the political fray, the census is more like a political battleground where competing notions of "real" identities, and