

This article was downloaded by: [McGill University Library]

On: 06 September 2012, At: 07:27

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,
UK



Ethnic and Racial Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rers20>

Accounting for ethnic and racial diversity: the challenge of enumeration

Patrick Simon & Victor Piché

Version of record first published: 19 Dec 2011

To cite this article: Patrick Simon & Victor Piché (2012): Accounting for ethnic and racial diversity: the challenge of enumeration, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35:8, 1357-1365

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.634508>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Accounting for ethnic and racial diversity: the challenge of enumeration

Patrick Simon and Victor Piché

‘The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line’, claimed W. E. B. Du Bois in his famous statement in his 1903 masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*. This prediction has been reproduced and updated for the twenty-first century in countless books and articles which open their introductions with this quote. We obviously cannot derogate from this now well established tradition. Colour, racial and/or ethnic diversities have reached an unprecedented level in the contemporary world. Migrations throughout the last centuries, from or to Europe, and then from the former colonial empires and peripheries to the former mainlands or centres, have reactivated classifications that were used before the disqualification of scientific racism. However, if the colour-line is the problem of the twenty-first century, what are *colour*, race, and ethnicity? This broad and fundamental question has received so many answers and disclaimers that we won’t do any justice to it in this introduction. Our purpose in this special issue is to focus on one narrow, still crucial, issue of the conundrum of ‘doing race’ (Markus and Moya 2010): the production of ethnic and racial statistics. Group boundaries, as measured in population censuses and social statistics, vary from country to country and very few definitions are truly universal or uniform: local social conventions, political traditions, legal prohibitions and political mobilization impose different group norms and definitions. These categories are not just scientific categories, invented for the sole purpose of measuring demographic changes or taking stock of ‘true and authentic’ identities. They are socially constructed, influenced by existing (and shifting) power relationships, national images and stereotypes, legal procedures and historical paths. The *statistical representation* of diversity is a complex process which reveals the foundations of societies and their political choices. Thus there is a gap between the *apparent* ethnic and racial diversity in most countries in the world and the way these societies perceive themselves and are portrayed in official and social statistics. We are *categorically* diverse,

sometimes *visibly* diverse, and in some circumstances *classified* in categories which account for this diversity.

This special issue of the journal aims to address major epistemological questions through basic methodological questions. The articles are partly a selection of papers given at the 2007 Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity conference: 'Should we count, how should we count and why?'¹ and invited contributions. They cover three different though nested issues related to the broad topic of ethnic and racial statistics: Should we count? How to count? Why count?

Should we count?

Collecting ethnic and racial data is a contentious issue in a large number of countries around the world. The answer to the question 'Should we count?' involves two dimensions: an ethical issue and a pragmatic policy-making one. For decades, ethnic and racial classifications have been conceived and used to segregate, build hierarchies and nurture racial and ethnic stratifications and inequalities. The rationale behind collecting ethnic and racial data has dramatically changed; the purpose and meanings of data have shifted, even when the data look the same (Hacking 2005). Societies where such data have been collected for decades no longer have to justify their processes; those who do not have this tradition are facing the challenge of explaining to the general public the rationale behind such statistics. Does distinguishing and characterizing populations according to their ethnic origins constitute a risk of stigmatization or is it, on the contrary, an asset for measuring and explaining discrimination and for demanding more inclusive policies?

The use of ethnic categories is not without problems, and a growing literature discusses the issue of the social and political significance of such categories (Aspinall 2007). Socially constructed, culturally shaped, biologically determined, and genetically designed: the definitions of race and ethnicity as concepts and categories are far from being stable and shared among scientists, policy makers, public opinion and statisticians (Wimmer 2008; Brady and Kaplan 2009; Morning 2011). The linkages between political framings and the statistical categories that support them can be observed in every society (Nobles 2000). Population statistics not only aim at producing knowledge of demographic dynamics, they provide a benchmark for policies and contribute to the (re)production of national identity (Alonso and Starr 1987; Anderson 1991; Desrosières 1993). Official (and scientific) statistical categorizations both *reflect* and *affect* the structural divisions of societies, as well as mainstream social representations. As *conventions*, they offer arbitrary definitions of the social objects they are intended to describe, but these definitions ensue from

historical, social and political processes of negotiation between public authorities and social forces. In this respect, censuses are a strategic place in which views on race and ethnicity are confronted by official statistics (Omi 1997). In this sense, censuses do more than reflect social realities; they also participate in the construction of these realities (Kertzer and Arel 2002).

The dissemination of ethnic and racial categories in public debate, policies, scientific research and statistics has sometimes been understood as one of the consequences of American imperialism. As Bourdieu and Wacquant suggest in their criticism of the hegemony of the conceptual toolkit of 'race', forged, they say, in the US: 'the recent as well as unexpected discovery of the "globalization of race" results, not from a sudden convergence of forms of ethnoracial domination in the various countries, but from the quasi-universalization of the US folk-concept of "race" as a result of the worldwide export of US scholarly categories' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999, p. 48). This argument had already been developed by Wacquant in his paper entitled 'For an analytic of racial discrimination', published in 1997. The key issue, as pointed to by some of the very critical responses to Bourdieu and Wacquant's essay published later on,² is whether the expansion of ethnic and racial studies in the social science arena in most countries of the world is a pure artefact determined by the domination of the US academic field and institutions over the rest of the world, or whether it reflects the rise of similar social realities in multicultural countries.³

How to count?

Methodological choices to capture ethnicity or race in censuses, surveys and polls are just as important as the initial decision to count. To a certain extent, it is impossible to disentangle the ethic of data collection and the methodology of census or survey taking (Burton, Nandi and Platt 2010). In fact, there are so many ways to define ethnicity or race that finding the best and most common practices in this area, taking into account the historical, socio-economic and political specificities of each society, is a challenge (Brady and Kaplan 2009). Recent examples of such difficulty in aligning the intention to capture ethnicity and the result obtained are to be found in the Americas, specifically in Brazil and the United States, and in the UK, where the increasing mix of population across ethnic and racial groups tends to blur the boundaries (Telles 2002; Perez and Hirschman 2009; Roth 2010; Loveman et al., this issue; Thompson, this issue). There is a growing criticism of the way official statistics do portray ethnicity and race. Beyond the issue of the legitimacy of collecting such data, the 'realism' and accuracy of these

data to map race and ethnicity as constructed categories is under scrutiny.

Why count?

Although components of the discussion on social statistics and ethnic diversity sometimes overlap, it is possible to explore the many questions as to why it is positive to count. What are the characteristics of legal, social and economic integration? Can ethnic statistics play a role in supporting social change, in developing countries as well as in older democracies? How do we identify the existence and magnitude of discrimination, implement equality policies and assess their impacts? These questions all require innovative data sources (e.g. administrative data and longitudinal surveys), whose future orientation needs careful consideration (Wrench 2011).

Ethnic or racial data are (almost) no longer collected to preserve racist social systems, or to maintain unacceptable hierarchies among social groups, but to describe objective and subjective group realities in order to facilitate the enforcement of generally progressive social programmes (Simon 2005). Measuring the extent and nature of the diverse forms of discrimination is essential to the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of anti-discrimination policies, be they national, regional or global. Compensation for past and current discrimination, claims for group rights, recognition of minority status, and praise of cultural diversity have often led to the development of new policies, either multicultural policies or positive action measures (Grigolo, Hermanin and Moschel 2011). Indeed, among the new challenges to be faced by national governments, international organizations, and civil society, is a rising political and social demand for evidence-based policies. These measures, in order to be effective, require precise definitions of group boundaries, hence the proliferation of ethnic and racial categories in numerous population censuses, or the use of data on national origin, language spoken at home and religious affiliation.

The contributions included here are all part of the recent revisiting of mainstream assumptions about statistical categories being objective and straightforward. As mentioned above, the use of ethnic categories is not without problems, and several works discuss the issue of the social and political significance of such categories (see for instance Anderson and Fienberg 1999; Zuberi 2001; Rallu, Piché and Simon 2006). This special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* dwells on one main idea, that there is a clear connection between social change, politics and the production of statistical categories. In this respect, social changes will have important impacts on the evolution of official categories. However, this connection is not unilateral; on the contrary,

there are often competing paradigms, and policy outcomes are the result of contestation and compromise.

Census categories and competing frames of reference

While diversity is an objective fact in a large number of countries, the question remains as to how to account for it. Patrick Simon's article argues that in the European context, the political responses to diversity have been far from homogeneous. Over and above the historical context of widespread opposition to collecting ethnic data on an official basis (almost half of the European countries reviewed do not produce ethnic data), given recent EU anti-discrimination legislation, there is as yet no consensus on the best ways to collect such data. One reason for this is related to competing models of diversity. The 'assimilationist' perspective claims that ethnic data should be collected and analysed to show complete assimilation, while the 'multiculturalist' perspective focuses on ethnic retention and self-declared ethnicity. On the other hand, the 'anti-discrimination' paradigm reflects a shift in the use of ethnic and racial data geared towards the monitoring and evaluation of public policies. Simon's review of collecting ethnic statistics in Europe concludes that the current regime does not meet the standards required for effective positive action.

The Brazilian case, analysed here by Mara Loveman, Stanley Bailey and Jeronimo Muniz, is particularly interesting because it casts competing racial classifications in a historical context and shows the empirical impact of opting for one classification over another. Historically, racial categories in Brazil used a three-fold classification system: white, black and mixed (or brown). This three-fold classification is increasingly criticized as an ideological myth of fluid racial order, as not reflecting the actual composition of the Brazilian population and as impeding the consolidation of a unified black identity. As a result, there is a momentum towards a binary approach by activists and scientists. An empirical examination of three scenarios (A = self-classification in three official census categories, B = combination of self-classified black and brown from A into a single nonwhite category, and C = self-classification in a forced binary format) shows that each classification yields very different results with respect to racial composition and inequality. For example, with scenario A, Brazil has a bare majority white population, a large mixed population and a small black population; with scenario B, Brazil becomes 50/50 white and nonwhite; and with scenario C, Brazil is a largely white country with a minority black population.

One of the most unexpected outcomes of recent competing agendas in the field of census categories is the active involvement of ethnic majorities in identity claims. Tahu Kukutai and Robert Didham

discuss the significance of the new category 'New Zealander' which appeared in the 2006 census. What is significant about the category is that it refers to the nation rather than a particular group. The New Zealander campaign 'Declare your pride', and the equivalent 'Count-me Canadian' campaign, point to the fact that dominant groups perceive that their interests are not reflected by official practices of ethnic counting. Hence, in line with the competing claims approach, this group response in the census might serve as a denial of the importance of ethnicity and to counter the perceived threat posed by ethnic pluralism and minority group rights. It is interesting to note that this colour-blind construction, usually reserved for the exemplary French 'republicanism', is gaining weight in traditional immigration countries. According to Debra Thompson's analysis (see next paragraph), this is in line with Republican Party elites favouring the ideal of having one box on all Federal forms that simply reads 'American'.

Census politics in the United States, Great Britain and Canada with respect to the state's role in the decision to count mixed-race categories, as presented by Debra Thompson, again clearly illustrate the connection between social changes and categorization. While the multiracial movement played a significant role, it is the three countries' shift towards a paradigm of multiracial multiculturalism that made the difference in acknowledging mixed-race categories as a positive attribute of the multicultural nation. In brief, this is a clear example of the causal sequence between the emergence of ethnic and racial diversity, political commitments to the recognition of a multicultural society and ensuing legislative changes. The census becomes an instrument of diversity governance. But again, the connection is neither automatic nor unilateral, due to competing claims. As the article shows, there were long gaps between the adoption of the Race Relations Act in Great Britain (fifteen years) or the Employment Equity Act in Canada (ten years) and the decision to count by race. Hence, legislation is necessary but insufficient to bring about changes in data collection and production.

Hungary is another interesting case-study highlighting the effects of competing frames, as the article by Andrea Krizsan shows. Indeed, the demand for ethnic data is high in this country, but it fails to produce reliable and consistent ethnic data. According to Krizsan, three ideological frames compete for the definition of the right type of data to be collected: (i) the group self-determination perspective claims the need for 'objective' data to identify 'historical' minorities, thus excluding recent immigrant groups; (ii) the individual rights frame is more geared towards data protection; and (iii) the social inclusion model argues for ethnic data as monitoring tools. The first approach has clearly gained a dominant position in

Hungary. Competing claims thus produce inconsistencies and result in the failure to adapt ethnic data to the new realities of diversity.

The South African context, presented by Tom Moultrie and Rob Darrington, remains a puzzling case. Colonial and apartheid-driven racial classifications were the result of a top-down approach, the state imposing its own racialized ideas on the enumeration process. Furthermore, census categories were fraught with great imprecision because there was a presumption that the terms employed in legislation were 'common-sensical and self-evident'. (Aliya Saperstein below argues the same point for the United States, referring to common-sense belief that everyone knew what race was.) While it could have been expected that post-apartheid governments would have radically changed the nature of racial data, no such thing happened. The nature of information on race and ethnicity remained the same. One change, however, was the significant shift in the use of racial data from evil to good, from colonialist to modern monitoring of progress in redressing iniquities of apartheid social and economic policies.

As the Brazilian case discussed above has demonstrated, different classification systems yield quite different pictures of both racial composition and inequality. Increased demands, over and above opposing and competing claims in the nature of the data to be collected, also pose important methodological challenges. The most important challenge is linked to the very complex definition of what is ethnicity. As Patrick Simon argues in his article, most social scientists and policy makers adopt a constructivist approach, which considers ethnic categories as fluid and ethnic boundaries as movable. This conceptualization contrasts with the very crude and simplistic world of statistics. Thus, there exists no standard, agreed-upon, definition of ethnicity. One alternative in face of complexity is to adopt multiple measures of race and ethnicity. Aliya Saperstein argues for such an approach in order to capture the complexity of racial boundaries in the United States. Her article shows the differential impact on income and health of two different measures of race in the USA (self-identification and classification by interviewer). One interesting finding is worth noting: women who are seen as white but identify as black seem to fall on the 'black' side of the divide in family income. Thus, the assumption that self-identification and classification by others will be equivalent is not borne out.

In conclusion, if there were any doubts that the formulation of classificatory systems in censuses and social statistics is objective and straightforward, the articles presented here clearly show that categories are socially constructed and most often the result of competing claims. Census questions on 'race' or 'Hispanic origin' in the US, 'visible minorities' in Canada, 'ethnic group' in Great Britain, 'national minorities' in Hungary, or 'colour' in Brazil are embedded

in a long history and reflect the complex ties between identity, ascription, subordination, prejudice, affiliation, recognition, identification, experience of social inequalities, and social and cultural capital. This accounts for the diversified and often inconsistent ways of collecting ethnic and racial data in most countries, even though there is increased recognition of diversity and the need to capture it.

Notes

1. Organized jointly by the Quebec Inter-University Centre for Social Statistics and the Institut National d'Études Démographiques, and held in Montreal, Canada, 6 to 8 December 2007.
2. See *inter alia* Webner 2000.
3. See for example Bonnett's reply to Bourdieu and Wacquant's argument: 'The move towards a politics of racial identity and away from civic universalism is not a product of direct US manipulation but of the adoption, by transnational institutions and NGOs, of a vision of the relationship between social emancipation and economic progress that is both based and implicitly refers back to the USA as the paradigmatic modern or "developed" state' (Bonnett 2006, pp. 1096–7).

References

- ALONSO, W. and STARR, P. (eds) 1987 *The Politics of Numbers*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation
- ANDERSON, B. 1991 *Imagined Communities*, New York: Verso
- ANDERSON, M. and FIENBERG, S. 1999 *Who Counts? The Politics of Census-Taking in Contemporary America*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation
- ASPINALL, P. 2007 'Approaches to developing an improved cross-national understanding of concepts and terms relating to ethnicity and race', *International Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 41–70
- BONNETT, A. 2006 'The Americanisation of anti-racism? Global power and hegemony in ethnic equity', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 32, no. 7, pp. 1083–103
- BOURDIEU, P. and WACQUANT, L. 1999 'On the cunning of imperialist reason', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 41–58
- BRADY, H. E. and KAPLAN, C. 2009 'Conceptualizing and measuring ethnic identity', in R. Abdelal, Y. Herrera, A. Johnston and R. McDermott (eds), *Measuring Identity: A Guide for Social Scientists*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 33–71
- BURTON, J., NANDI, A. and PLATT, L. 2010 'Measuring ethnicity: challenges and opportunities for survey research', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 33, no. 8, pp. 1332–49
- DESROSIERES, A. 1993 *La Politique des grands nombres. Histoire de la raison statistique*, Paris: La Découverte
- GRIGOLO, M., HERMANIN, C. and MOSCHEL, M. 2011 'How does race "count" in fighting racial and ethnic discrimination', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, iFirst (September 2011)
- HACKING, I. 2005 'Why race still matters', *Daedalus*, vol. 134, no. 1, pp. 102–16
- KERTZER, D. I. and AREL, D. 2002 'Censuses, identity formation, and the struggle for political power', in David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (eds), *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–42
- MARKUS, H. R. and MOYA, P. M. L. (eds) 2010 *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company

- MORNING, A. 2011 *The Nature of Race: How Scientists Think and Teach about Human Differences*, Berkeley: University of California Press
- NOBLES, M. 2000 *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press
- OMI, M. 1997 'Racial identity and the state: the dilemmas of classification', *Law and Inequality*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 7–23
- PEREZ, A. D. and HIRSCHMAN, C. 2009 'The changing racial and ethnic composition of the US population: emerging American identities', *Population and Development Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 1–51
- RALLU, J.-L., PICHE, V. and SIMON, P. 2006 'Demography and ethnicity: an ambiguous relationship', in Graziella Caselli, Jacques Vallin and Guillaume Wunsch (eds), *Demography: Analysis and Synthesis. A Treatise in Population Studies* Vol. 3, London: Academic Press, pp. 531–49
- ROTH, W. 2010 'Racial mismatch: the divergence between form and function in data for monitoring racial discrimination for Hispanics', *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 5, pp. 1288–311
- SIMON, P. 2005 'The measurement of racial discrimination: the policy use of statistics', *International Journal of Social Science*, no. 183, pp. 9–25
- TELLES, E. 2002 'Racial ambiguity among the Brazilian population', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 415–41
- WACQUANT, L. 1997 'For an analytic of racial discrimination', *Political Power and Social Theory*, vol. 11, pp. 221–34
- WEBNER, P. 2000 'Who sets the term of the debates? Heterotopic intellectuals and the clash of discourses', *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 147–56
- WIMMER, A. 2008 'The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: a multilevel process theory', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 113, no. 4, pp. 970–1022
- WRENCH, J. 2011 'Data on discrimination in EU countries: statistics, research and the drive for comparability', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, iFirst (February 2011)
- ZUBERI, T. 2001 *Thicker than Blood: How Racial Statistics Lie*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

PATRICK SIMON is Director of Research at the National Demographic Institute in Paris (INED).

ADDRESS: 133 Boulevard Davout, F-75020 Paris, France.

Email: simon@ined.fr

VICTOR PICHE is Associate Researcher, Hans & Tana Oppenheimer Chair in International Public Law at McGill University in Montréal, Québec.

ADDRESS: International Public Law, McGill University, 3644 Peel, Montréal (Quebec) H3A1W9, Canada.