

Searching for Nationality: Statistics and National Categories at the End of the Russian Empire (1897–1917)

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In 1897 the tsarist administration decided to carry out the first general census of all the people in the Russian Empire. They planned a second census on the same scale for 1915, but cancelled it due to the war. In both instances, administrators came up with a question to determine the language of the citizens of Russia, in order to provide a snapshot of the national (ethnographic) make-up of the country.

At the end of the nineteenth century, unlike the categories of estate (*soslovie*) and religion, which identification documents (parish registers, the passport) recorded, nationality was at best a marginal administrative or legal category in the Russian Empire.¹ The 1897 imperial census makes clear that the concept of nationality remained weakly defined. Statisticians, in fact, decided not to ask individuals a direct question on nationality, arguing that the population would not know how to respond to such a question, or would answer so poorly that the results would not be a true reflection of “reality.”² After the Revolution of 1905, however, the “national question” became an essential component of the new political life. The late Imperial regime was highly uncertain about how to take into account the multiethnic character of the country. Even though there was no empire-wide record of national membership, diverse administrative practices increasingly came to depend on it. In the 1910s the discussions surrounding the organization of a new

¹Charles Steinwedel, “Making Social Groups, One Person at a Time: The Identification of Individuals by Estate, Religious Confession, and Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russia,” in *Documenting Individual Identity: The Development of State Practices since the French Revolution*, ed. Jane Caplan and John Torpey (Princeton, 2000), 67–82; Charles Steinwedel, “To Make a Difference: The Category of Ethnicity in Late Imperial Russian Politics, 1861–1917,” in *Russian Modernity*, ed. David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (New York, 2000), 67–86; Daniel Beauvois, *La bataille de la terre en Ukraine, 1863–1914, Les Polonais et les conflits socio-ethniques* (Lille, 1993); L. E. Gorizontov, *Paradoksy imperskoi politiki: Poliaki v Rossii i russkie v pol'she (XIX–nachalo XX v)* (Moscow, 1999).

²S. Patkanov, “Razrabotka dannyykh o iazyke v tsentral'nom statisticheskom komitete,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 72 (June 1898): 999.

census reveal to what extent scholars, administrators, and some members of the society had engaged in much reflection about how to register national identity, what nationality meant for individuals and the society, and its political and social values. Mostly liberals who were in favor of reforming the autocratic empire, the statisticians nonetheless acted primarily as agents of the state, and their census practices reproduced state concerns about the so-called national question.

Statistical studies were becoming a tool for disciplining and transforming the population, part of the state's increasing reliance on policies focused on the "population."³ Like ethnographers, statisticians played a major role in the process of transforming nationality into a crucial indicator of individual identity.⁴ The statistics they produced, premised in what they termed "objective" (scientifically asserted) categories of national belonging, were not equivalent to what today we call identity, defined by self-identification. In the process of defining objective categories of national belonging, statisticians effaced the conflict over identification inherent in the national question, but the statisticians also made these categories more political, by making them into objects of policy, a new tool of government. After the 1917 Revolution the Soviet regime drew upon the knowledge base Imperial scholars had created, using their national categories as a grounds for governing, by institutionalizing them in territorial units and through administrative policies of promotion of national minorities.⁵

MOVING BEYOND THE : AND NATIONALITY

Descriptions of the Russian Empire had long included information about its different peoples and the various languages they spoke. Authors relied on scattered information to provide approximate lists of the peoples inhabiting a given region.⁶ It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, however, that the statistical study of nationalities, which relied on language use to assign each individual a national identity, gradually emerged in Eastern Europe and Russia.⁷ The work of members of the Imperial Russian

³Michel Foucault, "La gouvernementalité," in *Dits et écrits*, vol. 2, 1979–1988 (Paris, 2001), 635–57. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London, 1991), 87–104.

⁴Caplan and Torpey, *Documenting Individual Identity*.

⁵On the structural continuity of a multiethnic empire in imperial and Soviet regimes see Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*, trans. Alfred Clayton (Harlow, England, 2001); and Juliette Cadiot, "La constitution des catégories nationales dans l'empire de Russie et en URSS, 1897–1939" (Ph.D. diss., EHESS, Paris, 2001). On Soviet national policy see Francine Hirsch, "Empire of Nations, Colonial Technologies and the Making of the Soviet Union, 1917–1939" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1998); and Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire* (Ithaca, 2001).

⁶Works describing the peoples of the empire date to the eighteenth century, notably those by Peter Simon Pallas and Iogann Gottlin Georgi. On the descriptive tradition of the eighteenth century see Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists Versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity," *Representations* 47 (Summer 1994): 170–95.

⁷Morgane Labbé, "Le projet d'une statistique des nationalités discuté dans les sessions du Congrès international de statistique (1853–1876)," in *Démographie et Politique*, ed. Hervé Le Bras et al. (Dijon, 1997), 127–42; Cadiot, "La constitution des catégories nationales."

Geographic Society (IRGO) first advanced such a conception,⁸ while efforts to collect military statistics gave it form.⁹ It reached maturity with the 1897 census, which included a question on native language (*rodnoi iazyk*) whose explicit purpose was to elicit information on “the peoples and tribes” of the empire.

Organized by the Ministry of the Interior (MVD), the 1897 census had a dozen questions that dealt as much with scientific concerns as administrative. Over 150,000 census takers went out into a population that they eventually numbered at 129 million. Besides questions about civic status and economics, questions about educational achievement, physical and mental handicaps, language, religion, and *soslovie* were supposed to allow a sociocultural profile of the country to be drawn.¹⁰

It was through a comparison of data on language, *soslovie*, and religion that statisticians and ethnographers established the ethnic make-up of the empire. As they worked on the raw data, they also evaluated the importance of each of these categories in the Imperial regime.

The linguistic data collected brought to the fore questions about whether language and the “ethnographic composition” of the country corresponded. Statisticians maintained that, while language was the most useful criterion for obtaining data on nationality, language, and nationality did not always coincide.¹¹ Language was transformed by statisticians into nationality during the coding process. During the 1897 census, one of the methods they employed to determine an individual’s “true” nationality was to compare the responses on language to that on *soslovie*.¹²

It was not just census-takers, but respondents as well who viewed ethnic denomination as indicative of a particular status within the imperial social hierarchy. The census sheets are replete with ethnic qualifiers to answers that were intended to determine estate.¹³

⁸In the nineteenth century the IRGO published cartographic work or maps dealing solely with the European part of the empire. In particular, see the various statistical surveys using questionnaires for clergymen or the revisions, which sought to obtain precise information on national composition, based as much as possible on individual data, by Petr I. Keppen, *Ob etnograficheskoi karte evropeiskoi Rossii, izdannoi imperatorskim russkim geograficheskim obshchestvom* (St. Petersburg, 1853); and “O narodnykh perepisiakh v Rossii,” *Zapiski IRGO po otdelenie statistiki* 6 (1889): 1–94. See also the first map to differentiate the Little Russians, Belorussians, and Russian, by A. F. Rittih, *Etnograficheskaiia karta evropeiskoi Rossii, sostavlena po porucheniiu Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva* (St. Petersburg, 1875).

⁹A. F. Rittih, *Plemennoi sostav kontingentov russkoi armii i muzhskogo naseleniia evropeiskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1875); Peter Holquist, “To Count, to Extract, to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Soviet Union*, ed. Terry Martin and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York, 2001); David Rich, *The Tsar’s Colonels* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); David Rich, “Imperialism, Reform and Strategy: Russian Military Statistics 1840–1880,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 74 (October 1996): 621–39.

¹⁰Henning Bauer et al., eds., *Die Nationalitäten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszahlung von 1897*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1991); David W. Darrow, “Census as a Technology of Empire,” *Ab Imperio* 4 (2002): 145–77; Juliette Cadiot, “Le recensement de 1897: Les limites du contrôle impérial et la représentation des nationales,” *Cahiers du Monde russe* (forthcoming 2005).

¹¹Moreover, in response to a request by the local authorities in the Caucasus, the census in this region included a question on nationality in addition to the question on language.

¹²Gregory L. Freeze, “The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm and Russian Social History,” *American Historical Review* 91 (February 1986): 11–36.

¹³N. A. Troinitskii, ed., *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi Imperii 1897 g.: Obshchii svod po Imperii rezultatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia* (St. Petersburg, 1905), 2:1.

Respondents themselves drew a connection between estate and ethnicity. For example, during the 1897 census members of the Siberian community of Ust' Olensk responded "peasant" to the language question, thus distinguishing themselves (more so than by the Yakut language they spoke) from the surrounding Yakut population.¹⁴ Russian colonists relied on legal status, more than language, to affirm their "Russianness." Thus, in areas colonized by Russians in the distant past, where a long history of cohabitation blurred the boundaries between Russians and non-Russians, conquerors and locals, the *soslovie* system was viewed as having preserved the Russianness of the ancient colonists.¹⁵

Seraphim Patkanov of the IRGO was an expert on Siberia who was appointed to process the data on language-nationality. In numerous official census publications and his own articles he analyzed the ways that the estate system worked to discriminate and to segregate. In Western countries, he wrote,

almost all the nationalities are regularly leveled socially, legally and in other ways, and it is impossible to divide the population of a province into its various ethnic groups, except in the most approximate fashion. This is not the case with most Russian provinces. There are entire regions within the empire, where the indigenous population leads a different existence than that of the Russians, with regard to rights, taxes, etc.¹⁶

Referring more specifically to the legal category of natives (*inorodtsy*) and comparing Russia to the United States, Patkanov embraced an explicitly racial perspective to focus on the collection of demographic data. He observed that, in America,

it is not possible to obtain reliable data on the demographic growth of the Indian population, or to differentiate those of mixed race and mulattos (they might have forgotten or hidden their origins) from the "pure blood" (*chistokrovnye*); in the empire, however, the Russian population is differentiated according to estates.

But at the end of the nineteenth century, estate status was no longer sufficed to understand the evolution of imperial society and ethnicity was viewed as an autonomous category. When statisticians processed the census, the Ministry of Finance criticized the results—singling out as an example of inconsistency the identification of Lopars and Samoeds of Archangel alternatively as either peasants or *inorodtsy*.¹⁷ The ministry insisted that groups classified along estate lines were homogeneous, drawing a direct connection between ethnic community and estate. However, the Central Statistical Committee (CSC) of the MVD noted that the existing system allowed for individual mobility, citing recent laws that specified how sedentary natives could decide on their own to become peasants

¹⁴Yuri Slezkine, *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (Ithaca, 1994), 98.

¹⁵Instances where the ways of Russians and the indigenous population in these regions melded, obliterating distinctions between the two groups, were viewed as anomalous at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Willard Sunderland, "Russians into Yakuts? 'Going Native' and Problems of Russian National Identity in the Siberian North, 1870s–1914," *Slavic Review* 55 (Winter 1996): 806–25.

¹⁶International Institute of Statistics, session 1899, Christiana, *Dépouillement des données sur la nationalité et la classification des peuples de l'Empire russe d'après leurs langues* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 7.

¹⁷*Posobiia pri razrabotke pervoi vseobshchei perepisi*, no. 13.

or bourgeois by enrolling in a guild.¹⁸ The statistical committee therefore recognized that the nationality issue needed to be distinguished from the official hierarchy of estates. The committee indicated that if one wanted to obtain a count of the Lopars, Samoeds, and other natives of Archangel, one had only to consult the table on language. Even more than the possibility of mobility within the estate system, the CSC's implicit claim that ethnic identity was immutable called into question the equivalence between estate and nationality. In keeping with assimilationist theories, particularly the writings of Speranskii, founder of the *inorodets* status, it would have been possible to argue that an individual's move from *inorodets* to peasant equated assimilation into the Russian population.¹⁹ The refusal to consider change in status as a reflection of assimilation demonstrates that the traditional structures of Imperial integration were no longer viewed as resolving the issue of the presence of non-Russian communities and the question of ethnicity was now strictly differentiated.

CONFESSION AND NATIONALITY

Confessional differences structured the Imperial edifice and the lives of individuals and communities as much as distinctions based on estate at the end of the empire. Even if confession and nationality were now considered as mutually constitutive identities, confessional registration acted as an ethnic marker in numerous provinces of the empire, both for the population and the administration. Therefore, during the 1897 census respondents in Central Asia answered "Muslim" to the question on language, while respondents in Siberia answered "Lutheran" to the same question.²⁰ Administrative correspondence in the western provinces shows that each religious affiliation was understood as revealing a nationality. Thus, in 1903 the governor of Vilna asked the CSC for the census instructions pertaining to the distribution of nationalities in his territory. This data was still being processed and thus could not be released. However, he was told, the instructions concerning confession were available and these could be used to reconstitute national composition. The equivalents were as follows: Orthodox were Russians, Catholics were Poles or Lithuanians, Protestants were Germans, and *Iudeii* were Jews. This exchange between Vilna and the MVD shows the extent to which registration based on confession substituted for registration based on nationality.

The Fundamental Law of the empire recognized "freedom of religion" (*svoboda very*)—that is, religious differences—but only at the community level, not for individuals. It stipulated that "all peoples (*narodny*) inhabiting Russia pray to All Mighty God in different

¹⁸Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f. 1290, op. 10, d. 13, 26 April 1900. The committee cited the 1876 "Polozhenie ob inorodtsakh," which can be found in *Obshchii svod zakonov* 16, no. 2 (1802): 777–826, and *ibid.* 9:504–7, 552–640, 835–989.

¹⁹Marc Raeff, *Siberia and the Reforms of 1822* (Seattle, 1956); Virginia Martin, *Law and Custom in the Steppe* (Richmond, England, 2001), 34; Paul W. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy* (Ithaca, 2002); 127–39; John W. Slocum, "Who, and When, Were the *Inorodtsy*? The Evolution of the Category of "Aliens" in Imperial Russia," *Russian Review* 57 (April 1998): 173–90.

²⁰*Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia*, 6; S. Patkanov, "Statisticheskiia dannia pokazyvaiushchiia plemnoi sostav naseleniia Sibiri: Iazyk i rody inorodtsev," *Zapiski IRGO po otdeleniiu statistiki* 11 (1912): 34, 139.

languages in connection with the faith and confession of their ancestors.”²¹ As Robert Crews notes, from the end of the eighteenth century the Imperial state began to regulate with ever greater precision the religions of the non-Orthodox populations through the institutionalization of their hierarchy and of their clerical organization.²² A segment of private law, family life, and civil status were defined by confessional affiliation. In the absence of a standardized, secular civil law, group-specific codes governed the daily lives of many individuals, particularly in the borderlands.²³ The local religious hierarchy played the role of state bureaucracy in communities where the state religion, the Orthodox Church, was not present. Official registration of religion assumed that it functioned along a largely hereditary and endogamous character. Changing confessions was rare, although on the rise at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was strictly regulated. A series of regulations defined very precisely the parameters of marriage between adherents of different faiths.²⁴

Legal protections for the preponderant position of Orthodoxy, the state religion, had acted as a powerful force of Imperial integration, uniting converts and their offspring to Orthodoxy—normally for eternity, since apostasy was forbidden. Since being Russian was equated with being Orthodox in the state ideology, Imperial jurists clearly articulated that the obligation assumed to raise one’s children in the Orthodox faith was a means of national assimilation (*sliianie*).²⁵

According to the statisticians, “moving from one religion or faith to another is most often followed by the loss of nationality.”²⁶ Draft laws when these rigid principles were put into question at the beginning of the twentieth century noted that “mixed marriages [between individuals of differing religions] contributed to the rapprochement (*sblizhenie*) and, in part, the fusion (*sliianie*) of different nationalities.”²⁷ Paul Werth shows that it was as much long term spiritual movements as the 1905 revolutionary upheavals that compelled the tsar to grant freedom of conscience (*svoboda sovesti*) in the October 1905 Manifesto.²⁸ This decision fostered an apparently seamless Imperial regime shift away from distinctions based on religious confession to those based on nationality. Advances in the notion of freedom of conscience for individuals loosened the rigid character of religious categorizations. When the government and political parties discussed the recognition of freedom of conscience and civil rights that followed the publication of the

²¹Paul W. Werth, “The Limits of Religious Ascription: Baptized Tatars and the Revision of ‘Apostasy,’ 1840s–1905,” *Russian Review* 59 (October 2000): 496.

²²Robert Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *American Historical Review* 108 (February 2003): 50–83.

²³William G. Wagner, *Marriage, Property and Law in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1994), 57.

²⁴Thus, Christians were not permitted to marry non-Christians, except for Lutherans, who could marry Jews and Muslims, but not animists. See “O vzyvaemykh provozglashennoi Vysochaishchi, Manifestom 17 Oktobria 1905, svobodoi sovesti izmeneniakh v oblasti semeistvennykh prav,” 28 February 1907, *Zakonoproekt o svobode sovesti, 1907–1908: Materialy* (St. Petersburg, 190-), MVD, DDDII, no. 1478, available in Harvard Pre-Soviet Law Preservation Microfilm Project, 03227.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶*Dépouillement des données*, 5.

²⁷“O vzyvaemykh provozglashennoi Vysochaishchi,” 42.

²⁸Werth, “The Limits of Religious,” 510; Peter Waldron, “Religious Reform after 1905: Old Believers and the Orthodox Church,” *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, new series, 20 (1987): 110–39.

1905 Manifesto, a series of discriminatory regulations, which especially targeted Jews, Catholics, and Muslims were called into question as illegal. But the government's jurists found a way to maintain them. They insisted that such regulations did not work to protect the state from the members of a particular religion, but from people with "national particularities." Discriminatory regulations, "if premised in political reasons specific to different national groups," continued to be necessary. With no official registration of nationality, "other criteria, including confession, must be used to define these groups." Confessional registration remained an administrative marker capable of identifying "national enemies" of the state, although religion itself no longer posed a threat.²⁹

More and more, the local administration refused to equate confession and nationality. In 1903 the governor of Vilnius specified that "the confusion between religion and nationality has led to serious errors in local administrative practice, resulting from the totally unjustified identification of a given confession with one of the *narodnosti*, which are subject to the restrictive laws of the northwest krai."³⁰ Noting that the discriminatory decrees had been issued in 1865 not against Catholics, but individuals of Polish origin, the administration of this region, at the turn of the twentieth century, remarked that the question of nationality was definitely not reducible to religion.

THE NATIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL ISSUES

The 1905 Revolution saw the unprecedented spread of calls for national rights in the empire, notably in the western regions and the Caucasus. The politicization which followed the creation of the Duma, the first representative assembly in the history of the Russian Empire, the easing of censorship, and the growing spread of literacy led many to question of the status of the country's non-Russians. Within the Duma, political factions defined themselves according to their nationality or confession. Nationalist parties, media, and networks mushroomed and the "national question" became a central question of political discussion. Mobilization in the name of national rights took place not only in St. Petersburg but also locally, during elections to both the Duma and the *zemstvos*. In the Volga regions, as in the western provinces, the Russian administration was faced with the painful fact that non-Russian voters demonstrated greater political mobilization, and took measures to reduce their participation.³¹ Parallel to this, the government increasingly sought to

²⁹It was thus specified that "adherence to this or that faith, including Judaism, should not in and of itself serve as a basis for any limitation whatsoever in the sphere of personal and property right." See "Ob otmene soderzhashisia v deistvuishe, zakonodate'l'stve ogranitsenii, politicheskikh i grazhdanskikh, nakhodiashisia v zavisimosti ot prinadlezhnosti k inoslavnym i inovernym ispovedaniia ...," *Zakonoproekt o svobode sovesti, 1907–1908*, 3–4.

³⁰RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 87, l. 59; Theodore R. Weeks made the same observation in "Russification and the Lithuanians, 1863–1905," *Slavic Review* 60 (Spring 2001): 96–114.

³¹Warren B. Walsh, "Political Parties in the Russian Dumas," *Journal of Modern History* 22 (June 1950): 144–50; Geoffrey A. Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914* (London, 1973); Edward Chmielewski, *The Polish Question in the Russian State Duma* (Knoxville, 1970); Terry Martin, "The Mennonites and the Russian State Duma, 1905–1914," *The Donald W. Treadgold Papers*, no. 4 (January 1996); Dilzhara Usmanova, *Musul'manskaia fraktsiia i problemy "svobody sovesti" v Gosudarstvennoi Dume Rossii (1906–1917)* (Kazan, 1999); Charles Robert Steinwedel, "Invisible Threads of Empire: State, Religion, and Ethnicity in Tsarist Bashkiria, 1773–1917" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1999).

present itself as the representative of an often xenophobic Russian nationalism. And on 3 June 1907, Nicholas II attributed the failure of the second Duma to the excessive number of non-Russians, whose level of “civic mindedness” (*grazhdanvennost'*) was too weak. A new electoral law was passed to curb their influence. Among other things, it prevented non-Russians from voting on “purely Russian” (*russkie*) questions. The number of deputies from provinces that had a non Russian majority was drastically reduced.³² The new electoral law specified that, in the primary electoral assemblies, nationality would serve to differentiate electors, and a particular number of seats would be assigned to each nationality.³³ It was in a highly political context formed by electoral politics that the broad registration of nationality was first considered.

It was during debates about a subsequent electoral reform project that the primacy of nationality over *soslovie* and religion in the attribution of political rights became apparent. In 1909, Prime Minister Stolypin drafted a law extending local self-government provided by the *zemstvos* and urban councils to certain western provinces. However, in order to safeguard Russian interests, he envisaged electoral assemblies based not on estate, as was the case elsewhere, but on nationality (Polish, or others). This willingness to abandon the *soslovie* system so as to introduce representation along national lines (and the opposition to this shift expressed by a segment of the government elite) attests to the extent to which political issues were becoming nationalized.³⁴

The desire for statistical representation of the ethnic diversity of the empire is ambivalent, given that official recognition of the need to discriminate against certain nationalities was strengthened by the fear that, in a climate of heightening international tension, national movements would acquire territorial and demographic visibility in the borderlands. In particular, the question of the statistical representation of Ukrainians (still called *malorusskie*) and Belarusians, both of which official ideology assimilated into Russian culture, provoked considerable anxiety among officials. The nationalist mobilization occasioned by the censuses carried out in the neighboring Austro-Hungarian Empire fueled fears of public disturbances in the frontier regions.³⁵ While the government prepared the second census, projected first for 1913, then 1915, it was confronted by increasing calls for the fair registration not only of language but also of nationality.

TOWARD A SECOND CENSUS

Planning for a second census began in 1897. After 1905 these discussions focused on how to reform the statistical institutions. Planners criticized the 1897 census for being under the control of administrators, and not of specialists. In preparation for the second census, professional statisticians in the provinces as well as in St. Petersburg played a much greater role and were not required to submit to the demands of ministers and

³²*Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii (PSZ)*, vol. 27, 1907 (St. Petersburg, 1910), 321; Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*, vol. 2, *Authority Restored* (Stanford, 1991), 352.

³³*PSZ*.27:324.

³⁴Abraham Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford, 2001), 332–42.

³⁵E. Brix, *Die Umgangssprachen in Altoesterreich zwischen Agitation and Assimilation: Die Sprachenstatistik in den isleithanischen Volkszaehlungen, 1880–1920* (Vienna, 1982).

governors. Statisticians' claims for autonomy revealed their desire to view society through their own lenses. Led in particular by A. A. Kaufman, at that time an important member of the liberal Kadet party, they participated in discussions about how to reform the state. At once opposed to autocracy and, for some, members of the Imperial administration (since the CSC was part of the Ministry of the Interior), statisticians found themselves in an ambiguous position vis-à-vis a state which they served as part of the new technocracy.³⁶

The preparation of the second Imperial census spawned an uninterrupted correspondence between the CSC and a host of experts, provincial statisticians, and ethnographers, or central and local officials between 1908 and 1915. The CSC affirmed that it wanted to formulate a questionnaire that differed from those used in Western Europe, and to reduce the number of questions that applied to only one part of the population. A shift to a more egalitarian vision was proclaimed; questions on *sostoianie*, place of registration, and military service, would give way to questions pertaining to education, occupation, and tribal composition.³⁷ The proposed census form was comprised of more than twenty questions. Besides information on name, physical defects, sex, family situation, age, place of birth, and normal residence, it also included a question on *soslovie*, confession, native language, and spoken language, accompanied by another on knowledge of Russian (except for Ukrainians and Belarusians, who were automatically assumed to know Russian). A series of five questions enquired into reading and writing ability, in Russian or another language, and education. Finally, occupations, professions, trades, services, and other livelihoods were classified as either principal or supplementary sources of income.³⁸ However, with Russia's entry into World War I, the empire's second census was shelved.³⁹

THE NUMBERS BATTLE AND CONTROL OF STATISTICAL REPRESENTATION

Official interest in statistical data, notably data on nationality, became increasingly apparent as the national question became more politicized and international tensions mounted. One of the ways this growing interest manifested itself was in battles over numbers that revealed conflicting definitions of the nationality. For example, the governor of Astrakhan demanded that census offices in neighboring jurisdictions be required to send the authority of the Kalmyk people copies of the questionnaires filled out by all Kalmyks during the census.⁴⁰ This demand testifies not only to the persistence of a special status for the Kalmyks, who were dependent on their Kalmyk authority no matter where they were, but also to the birth of the certainty, derived from statistics, that numbers revealed a national entity.

³⁶Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et révolution: Un compromis impossible (1880–1930)* (Rennes, 2001).

³⁷RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 118, l. 52. *Sostoianie* was a category of the estate system that was used more frequently than the term *soslovie* in legal language. In the first census, there was a question that dealt simultaneously with *zvanie*, *sostoianie*, and *soslovie*. On the estate system see Freeze, "The *Soslovie* (Estate) Paradigm," 11–36.

³⁸RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 157, ll. 33–40ob.

³⁹Ibid., d. 125, l. 64.

⁴⁰Ibid., d. 118, ll. 32–32ob.

Following the publication of the results of the first census of 1897, definitively completed in 1905, the data was analyzed, appropriated, and corrected not only by central administrators and scholars but also by society at large. In particular, nationalist movements, ethnographers and statisticians used their “expertise” to analyze whether the nationality they represented had been appropriately taken into account. Statistics offered a holistic image of the nation—of its territory, by mapping where people lived and its economic strength, but also of its future, through analyses of rates of birth and death. The organic metaphor so crucial to ideologies of the nation coincided with the new science of demography.

Criticisms of the way that the 1897 census was organized led to its results being corrected in order to improve the image of non-Russian nations. In the monthly *Kievskaiia starina*, which had acted as the voice of Ukrainian nationalists since the end of the nineteenth century, statistician L. Lichkov concluded that, in 1897, in the northwest krai, “often, the respondent answered “Russian” and the ignorant census-taker automatically counted this person as Great Russian, while the Little Russian respondent in fact meant the Little Russian language.”⁴¹ In the same journal, A. Iarosevich also discussed the use of the question on native language. Concluding that Ukrainians and Belarusians lacked a national consciousness because of the repressive language policies of the empire, he maintained that the census undercounted their populations.⁴² Basing himself on the Belarusian slavist Evfemii F. Karskii, A. Novina estimated that 8 million Belarusians was a more accurate figure than the 5.8 million recorded in the census.⁴³ And M. Slavinskii thought that the number of Great Russians was overestimated in the 1897 census, at the expense of Jews, Ukrainians, Poles, and Armenians, who were undercounted.⁴⁴ Statistician and Jewish political activist Boris Brustkus discussed the fact that thousands of Orthodox converts had nevertheless reported Jewish (*evreiskii*) as their language, testifying to an identity claim among the population which went beyond merely religious and juridical definitions.⁴⁵ In poems penned by Tatar nationalists, the empire’s Muslim population, officially numbered 16 million by statisticians, mushroomed to 40 million.⁴⁶

Officials in peripheral regions also professed great interest in the possible results of a future nationalities count. Their concerns echoed nationalist certainties that discovering the “right number” would reinforce the contours of certain (non-Russian) “national organisms.” Since 1909 the Holy Synod had criticized the Georgians for their efforts to

⁴¹L. Lichkov, “Iugo-zapadni krai po dannym perepisi 1897 goda,” *Kievskaiia starina* 90 (1905): 317–66. On *Kievskaiia starina* see Michael Voskobiynik, “The Nationalities Question in Russia in 1905–1907” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1972), 210–20.

⁴²A. Iarosevich, *Malorossy po perepisi 1897* (Kiev, 1905), republished from a piece in *Kievskaiia starina*.

⁴³Anton Novina, “Belorusskie,” in *Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniia v sovremennykh gosudarstvakh Avstro-Vengriia, Rossiia, Germaniia*, ed. A. I. Kastelianskii (St. Petersburg, 1910), 30.

⁴⁴M. Slavinskii, “Velikorusskie,” in *Formy natsional'nogo dvizheniia*, 280.

⁴⁵Boris D. Brustkus, *Professional'naia sostav evreiskago naselenie* (St. Petersburg, 1908), 3. During the preparation of the new census, statistician Brunneman argued that, at the time of the 1897 census, “very often, a segment of Jews who had adopted Christianity declared *evreiskii* as *rodnoi iazyk*” (RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 121, l. 17).

⁴⁶S. Rybakov, “Statistika musul'man v Rossii,” *Mir Islama* 2, vyp. 11 (1913): 759. Rybakov concluded that Tatar publicists increased the number of Muslims in order to demonstrate the importance of the Muslim population and of its socioeconomic tendencies.

depict their territory as ethnically homogeneous, denouncing the 1897 experience and attempts to include among the population of Georgia “groups not part of Georgia in the strict sense, but made up of Kartvel tribal groups, Mingrelian nationalities, Svans, and others.” The Synod commented on the importance of employing reliable census-takers for counting nationalities in peripheral areas, where tribal groups claimed dominance and “artificially included in their make-up units that do not belong to them,” citing, for example, the Baltic regions, Belarus, the Kholm region, and the Caucasus.⁴⁷

FEAR OF THE ASSIMILATED, DREAD OF THE INVISIBLE

During preparations for the 1915 census, the question of registering religion remained a strategic consideration, but it was less important than nationality. A Ministry of the Interior representative for Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Confessions expressed the same fears troubling the Holy Synod in regards to apostasy movements which made it very difficult to control religion as a marker of identity. Thus, he requested that, in “the western krai, the Uniat areas of the Kingdom of Poland, the Volga regions ... where the process of definitive confessional consciousness or self-definition is incomplete,” the actual religion of respondents be registered along with the religion to which they officially belonged before the Edict of Toleration was issued.⁴⁸ But the statisticians, who made a clear distinction between membership in an established religious community and the inner or personal faith of individuals, refused to comply.⁴⁹ A draft questionnaire of the census therefore included a question (no. 8) on faith (*vera*), as freely understood by each person, not in the sense of a formal confessional affiliation.⁵⁰

The fear that religious defectors would remain invisible was real and partly explains the growing call, during preparations for the second census, for direct data on nationality or on “national origin.” A letter from the governor of Akmolinsk to the CSC explains that “because of confessional freedom, religious defectors have become common, especially among Jews. Consequently, proclaimed religion can not be used as a nationality marker for the Jews.”⁵¹ The governor of Vilna insisted that, since 1908, the registration of Jews needed to be conducted carefully, going as far as to suggest that a specially trained group of census-takers deal with them, armed with instructions particularly formulated concerning Jews.⁵² This concern about religious defectors fed hopes that the registration of nationality

⁴⁷RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 117, l. 65. A number battle was waged in the province of Kholm, which in 1912 was separated from the Vistula territories (the ancient Polish Kingdom), to which it had traditionally belonged. The move was justified by the existence in the province of a Little Russian (Ukrainian) population, viewed as Russian by the administration. See Theodore R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914* (DeKalb, IL, 1996), 183–89.

⁴⁸See the journal of the meeting to discuss preparatory work for the next population census, 17 April 1914, RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 130, ll. 11–13.

⁴⁹Proposal made by the academician Ivan Iaiul’ in a letter to the director of the CSU, dated 19 March 1909, *ibid.*, d. 117, l. 2.

⁵⁰“Kto kakoi very kak kazhdyi sam sebja shchitaet,” *ibid.*, d. 130, l. 119.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, d. 121, l. 76.

⁵²*Ibid.*, d. 118, ll. 3–4ob.

would make it possible to evaluate the “influence of the *inorodcheskii* element on the life of the Russian government,” in particular in regards to Jews, Poles, and Armenians.⁵³

The nationality issue, tainted by anti-Semitism and xenophobia, was distinct not only from confession but even from language.⁵⁴ Thus, a letter of 30 November 1908 addressed to the department of statistics sought to show, with the aid of figures, that “it is apparent that counting people who claim Russian as their *rodnoi iazyk* does not guarantee their Russian origins, in the same way that being Orthodox cannot serve as a nationality marker.”⁵⁵ The anxiety of the central authorities, conveyed by supporters of the regime, was felt everywhere. In some forums, it was ridiculed. For example, in the February 1914 issue of *Birzheviia vedomosti* one observer remarked that the census will reveal “the extent to which the “heterodox dominance” (*inovercheskoe zasil'e*) weighs on us, prompting our famous “true Russians” to cry out from every rooftop.”⁵⁶ The anxious mood was also apparent in the influence that the Russian nationalist party exerted on the government since 1907 and on Great Russian rhetoric in the years leading up to the war. The dilemma between denying visibility and knowing, between assimilating and segregating, cut through the discussions surrounding the preparation of the census.

In 1914, as the census approached, a member of the council of the MVD who had just returned from Vilna expressed concern that statistics provided visibility to national differences in the western regions. He reported that “government institutions and even the rank and file employ the term ‘*natsional'nost'*’ instead of ‘*narodnost'*,’ and speak of the Little Russian and Belorussian *natsional'nosti* within the Russian people itself, thereby giving many nationalities an official status.” He criticized the department of spiritual affairs for producing the forms which distinguished Roman Catholic parishioners by nationality, that is, “Belorussians, Little Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians.” He concluded that “it would be very desirable that these *natsional'nosti* not be counted in the next general census,” even though he himself, by his choice of words, recognized that they were *natsional'nosti*.⁵⁷

The statistical registration of nationalities in fact was introduced progressively and spontaneously in a host of local administrations in connection with elections to the Duma, and the gathering of data on schools, migrations, as well as religious issues accelerated the process.⁵⁸ According to the councilor of the juridical branch of the city of Ploiskii, the city commission itself decided to register *rodnoi iazyk* and spoken language under the rubric of the parents’ language, defined as the language spoken in the family. He made a distinction between *rodnoi iazyk*, spoken language, and the language of the Church.⁵⁹ The municipal zemstvo of Olonets wondered whether it should record childhood language

⁵³Ibid., d. 121, l. 716.

⁵⁴Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1986), 25–39; Eli Weinerman, “Racism, Racial Prejudice and Jews in Late Imperial Russia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17 (July 1994): 442–95.

⁵⁵RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 117, l. 85.

⁵⁶Ibid., d. 125, l. 38.

⁵⁷Ibid., d. 128, l. 38.

⁵⁸Steinwedel, “Making Social Groups.”

⁵⁹RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 121, l. 496.

(of the father, of the mother), or the current language. These questions point to the extremely rapid changes taking place in Imperial society, as an increasingly broad network of zemstvos, religious, and Ministry of Public Instruction schools taught children in the local language. The registration of the parents' language, intended to define that of the children, became systematic as part of an effort to organize classes and schools. However, Duma discussions ultimately dropped the question of organizing instruction in Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Yiddish.⁶⁰ The tendency to distinguish *rodnoi iazyk* from spoken language is reflected in the questionnaire prepared for the new census, which includes these two questions, in addition to one on knowledge of Russian.

The statisticians wondered about the fact that they had received many comments from local authorities on question 9 (on language) and that certain localities had expressed the desire to see a direct question on nationality.⁶¹ At the very start of the preparatory efforts meant to construct a census in consultation with a vast segment of Imperial society, demands were made to adopt a more precise question on language and to resolve the challenge posed by the offspring of mixed marriages. The governors of Vitebsk, Kurland, and Akmolinsk, the police chief of the nomadic peoples of Stavropol, the superintendent of the schools of Lublin, the underwriter of Tver's rural insurance, and the chief of the city of Elisavetpol', as well as professors and statisticians, were among those who asked for a direct question on nationality.⁶² In 1909, S. Evreinov, a member of the statistical council, criticized the expression *rodnoi iazyk*, which "does not at all signify belonging to a people," and proposed that the question be replaced by one on *natsional'nost'*.⁶³ Professor Koshkin was even more radical. He hoped that the question on nationality, formulated in terms of *narodnost'* or *plemia*, would be included among the principal questions, appearing immediately after those on name, sex, and age. The president of the rural municipality of Saratov and of the Iaranskii uezd (in Viatka) also wanted a question on *narodnost'*.

Everywhere, a distinction was being made between *narodnost'* and *natsional'nost'* because of the ethnic and political connotations of the terms. Nathaniel Knight notes for the mid-nineteenth century that *narodnost'*, as a term denoting strictly ethnicity, also implied an "absence of the idea of popular sovereignty."⁶⁴ At the beginning of the twentieth, the term *plemia* was employed essentially by Russian nationalists to convey the unity of the Russian tribe, composed of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. *Natsional'nost'*, from the root "nation," was clearly linked to the political demands of national movements, and remarkably, was the term most used in these debates.

OBJECTIFYING THE NATIONAL

The census organizers did not conceal their embarrassment in the face of this growing call for a direct question on nationality. Senator Sudeikin believed that "the very word

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., d. 141, l. 123ob.

⁶²Ibid., d. 159, l. 40ob.

⁶³Ibid., d. 117, l. 76.

⁶⁴Nathaniel Knight, "Ethnicity, Nationality and the Masses: *Narodnost'* and Modernity in Imperial Russia," in *Russian Modernity*.

‘natsional’nost’ is plagued by many variations, and misunderstandings must be avoided.”⁶⁵ Patkanov considered the topic of a direct question on nationality “improper.”⁶⁶ This ambivalence does not suggest a lack of interest in asking a question about nationality. On the contrary, the statisticians debated the issue more intensely than in 1897 and increased the number of questions that could provide an ethnolinguistic profile of the country, but centered on a view of the spread of Russification. A question on native language and a question on the knowledge of Russian were put in the census form. The question, “Do you speak Russian?” had to be automatically answered “Yes” for *malorusskie* and *belorusskie* peoples.

When the instructions to the census were debated for the last time on 24 July 1914, the president of the CSC criticized the formulation of question 9, which enquired into “the language that each person considers *rodnoi*, that is defining his/her nationality (*natsional’nost’, narodnost’, plemia*).”⁶⁷ In his view, the question would elicit “material from which we will not be able to draw any conclusion,” considering the case of those who, although not Russians, speak Russian and would call themselves Russians. He believed that the wording of the instruction contained an internal contradiction, since the first part of sentence (“the language that each person considers”) called for a subjective representation of nationality, which the second part (“which defines his/her nationality”) rested on an objective definition. He thus asked that the expression “that each person considers” be replaced by “which is for each person *rodnoi*, that is defining his/her nationality.”

This subtle distinction was the fruit of an evolution in statisticians’ thinking that can be seen, for example, in the changes in A. A. Kaufman’s conception of the statistical registration of nationality. In a 1910 article he supported a double question on *rodnoi iazyk*, which would define nationality, in addition to language spoken. Sympathetic to “those who, while they normally speak Russian, nevertheless wish to underline their belonging to an indigenous tribal group (*inorodtsy*),” he proposed that the St. Petersburg census include as an optional or supplemental addition a question on *rodnoi iazyk*, defined as the ethnographic language and a means to express identity.⁶⁸ However, in discussions concerning the general census, Kaufman ultimately came to support a single question on usual (*obychnyi*) language. He noted that “it is impossible to study nationality if one is trying to conform to the way interested parties think, since *natsional’nost’* is an objective marker that can not be established on the basis of opinion.”⁶⁹ Returning to this idea of objective nationality in his articles, he stated that “no opinion” can produce a Russian, in the ethnographic sense of the term, out of a Russified Jew or Latvian,” and argued that registering knowledge of Russian merely helped to determine the cultural influence of the dominant nationality.⁷⁰

⁶⁵RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 121, l. 19ob.

⁶⁶Patkanov, “Statisticheskii dannia,” 3.

⁶⁷Meeting of July 1914, RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 141, l. 76. See also *ibid.*, l. 110.

⁶⁸A. Kaufman and I. Makarov, *Po povodu perepisi goroda Sankt Petersburga 15 dekabria 1910* (St. Petersburg, 1911), 29.

⁶⁹RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 121, l. 19.

⁷⁰A. A. Kaufman, “Voprosy vtoroi vseobshchei perepisi,” *Statisticheskii vestnik*, bks. 1 and 2 (1914): 3.

It was political pressure that forced this evolution in statisticians' thinking and desire to avoid a direct question on nationality. The MVD's statisticians were terribly anxious about political mobilization on the national question. Kaufman, for one, refused to believe that nationality could be recorded through statistics. Expressing his doubts more precisely in 1914, on the eve of the war and amid growing agitation in the Finnish borderlands, he pointed to the example of the Russified Karelians, who "will be forced to claim the language which is not really their language," by registering Karelian, a language closer to Finnish than Russian.⁷¹ Statistical adviser Le Dantiu refused to debate the issue in terms of whether nationality was objective or subjective, concluding that the real question was: Who could more competently determine nationality, the census-taker or the respondent?⁷² Henceforth, the issue would revolve around the need for total control of the data-construction process by government agents. What the statisticians of the MVD wanted to avoid was allowing individuals to decide their nationality. This concept, they believed, was not open to personal choice, but was simply a reflection of objective reality.

The main result of these various discussions was to anchor the idea that specialized knowledge or expertise could determine nationality. Because of the political context and because of the war, statisticians were afraid to recognize or articulate nationality as a form of personal identity; instead, they defined it as an objective category. While they admitted that nationality could be subjective, a matter of personal feeling, they rejected the idea that this was the one they were interested in. Nationality was an objective criterion and not the object of a political or personal claim; this was particularly true in the context of extreme geopolitical tensions, with border disputes now linked to the national make-up of the people inhabiting the frontier regions. The empire's entry into the war and its deportations of "enemy nations" from the borderlands dramatized this debate about the objectivity of identity markers and the control of personal identities by agents of the state.⁷³ Anticipating the peace negotiations, statisticians and ethnographers formed a Commission for the Study of the Tribal Population of Russia and the Borderlands, attached to the Academy of Sciences, in order to construct an ethnographic map of the territory.⁷⁴

In late Imperial Russia, in particular after the 1905 Revolution, political and scholarly efforts to understand Imperial society relied less and less on estate status. At the same time, confession was becoming privatized and secularized. In this context, definitions of national identities emerged as crucial signposts to make sense of political events. Political and social movements as well as the Imperial administration itself all encouraged and relied on nationalist sentiments, and as a result the desire for statistical, ethnographic, and demographic studies of the peoples of Russia grew. Meanwhile, ethnographers and statisticians joined other scholars in elaborating a definition of nationality. They

⁷¹Meeting of 21 April 1914, RGIA, f. 1290, op. 10, d. 121, l. 17.

⁷²*Ibid.*, d. 141, l. 76.

⁷³Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

⁷⁴Cadiot, "La constitution des catégories nationales"; Hirsch, "Empire of Nations"; *idem*, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56 (Summer 1997): 251–78.

distinguished subjective feelings about national identity from objective criteria, which could only be determined through scholarly research based in studies of language, folklore, patterns of settlement, or physical anthropology. State administrators participated to transform sentiments of national belonging into objective categories that could be mapped geographically and used to define particular individuals.

The February 1917 Revolution reversed the Imperial regime's efforts to suppress the identity claims of non-Russian national groups. Statistical studies now focused wholly on determining new criteria for national identity and measuring the role such identities played in shaping group identities. Thus the agrarian census, organized by the Provisional Government, was the first to include a direct question on nationality.⁷⁵ When the Bolshevik regime recognized the principle of self-determination, it further transformed the question of defining nationality. The instructions for the first Soviet census of 1920 defined nationality as "a group within the population united by a common national consciousness," and it was up to the respondent to determine to which group he or she belonged.⁷⁶ Their language now appeared as a separate question.⁷⁷ Over time, the Bolsheviks relied on the scientific data amassed by ethnographers and censuses to institute an official list of nationalities and to insist that each Soviet citizen had a specific national identity. Once the Soviet state had recognized the new political norms, it used a series of administrative measures to anchor and institutionalized them. The new regime relied on the process of objective determination of national identity, which they had inherited from the former period, to pursue new ways of governing national minorities. By collapsing distinctions between personal affirmations of national identity and the "scientific," objective determination of nationality, the state could draw administrative boundaries that coincided with the country's ethnic make-up, create national republics, and establish "affirmative action" policies. After the wars ended, the goal became revealing to Soviet citizens which nation they belonged to and encouraging national consciousness. A lack of national consciousness explained the difficulty many people experienced in defining their nationality. This could be remedied if their true nationality was revealed to them, or "unveiled" (*vyiavlennie*), by state promotion of ethnicity.⁷⁸

⁷⁵According to instructions issued on 9 May 1917 the census was to be held throughout the empire, except in Finland, during the summer. The surname, given name, and patronymic of the property-holder were to be followed by estate, then nationality. The instructions specify that it was necessary "to record the *natsional'nost'* (*narodnost'*) of the property-holder and to define it as precisely as possible (Great Russian, Little Russian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, Pole, Latvian, Estonian, Finn, Karelian, Jew, German, Tatar, Armenian, Kirgiz, etc.)." See Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, f. 1797, op. 1, d. 315; and *ibid.*, d. 352, ll. 13–14.

⁷⁶Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki, f. 1562, op. 2, d. 306, l. 185.

⁷⁷"Predvoritel'nye itogi perepisi naseleniia 28 avgusta, naselenie 25 gubernii," *Trudy Tsentral'nogo Statisticheskogo Upravleniia* 1:1 (1920): 3.

⁷⁸Yuri Slezkine, "The Soviet Union as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 415–52; Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire*.