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Interpreting “Nationality” and “Language” in the 2001 Ukrainian Census¹

Dominique Arel²

Abstract: Ukraine conducted its first post-Soviet census in December 2001. The author examines the use of the categories “nationality” and “native language” in the census and relates them to fundamental precepts of Soviet nationality and census policies. The enumeration of national and linguistic identities is related to the expression of political preferences. Orientations toward language policies (particularly in Galicia and Crimea), regional autonomy (in Transcarpathia), and territorial belonging (among the younger generation) are analyzed in order to reveal the politics of the 2001 Ukrainian census.

In 1959, in the tumult of a recurrent political crisis over how to count language in the Belgian census, a commission of statisticians, sociologists, and linguists suggested that census respondents confidentially write their language on a bulletin separate from the regular census form, to be handed to the census-taker in a sealed envelope. Flemish activists claimed that many people of Flemish origins in the contested bilingual zone of Brussels felt constrained to publicly declare French their language. A secret declaration was expected to neutralize the external pressure to conform (Lévy, 1960, p. 65).³

Fast-forward four decades. In 1998, at an international seminar on interethnic relations in the Ukrainian province of Transcarpathia (*Zakarpat-*

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³In the end, the question on language was removed from the 1960 census and has not returned since.

tia), a Western expert suggested that minority organizations and international observers be allowed to monitor the conduct of the Ukrainian census (Trier, 1999). Activists agitating for the recognition of the "Rusyns" as a nationality in Ukraine claim that census-takers will not fairly record how the putative members of their group identify themselves. External monitoring, in this view, could ensure fairness in the process.

These vignettes illustrate a point generally overlooked by scholars assessing census data. As instruments enumerating *persons*, censuses are large-scale administrative operations, the province of technicians. Censuses that are able to achieve the goal of counting everyone within a margin of error of five percent are internationally recognized as valid. However, as instruments recording the *identities* of persons—that is, their ethnicity (cultural nationality), language, race, or religion—censuses belong to the same species as popular consultations: elections, plebiscites, or referenda. The literature is replete with the assumption, if not the outright assertion, that censuses can elicit the "true" identity of respondents, as long as the correct methodology is in place. This is illusory. Like an election, what a census can achieve is a fair representation of people's identity *preferences* within the specific political and social context that obtained on the day the census was conducted. Renan (1996 [1887]) famously defined the nation as a daily plebiscite. One could say that, more practically, the nation is being redefined through a decennial plebiscite—the census.

The notion that a census records the preferences of respondents, as far as the identity question is concerned, runs counter to the basic ethos of census officials and, more generally, of statisticians, demographers, and many social scientists, who are steeped in the belief that the *raison d'être* of censuses is to ascertain objective demographic facts about a population. When the Council of Europe dispatched a "Group of Experts" to supervise an extraordinary census in Macedonia in 1994, the experts, baffled by the political ruckus that ensued, confided that they merely expected to oversee "the technical aspects of a statistical exercise" (Friedman, 1996, p. 94). In a situation in which Albanians feared they would be undercounted and Macedonian Slavs feared that Albanians would be overcounted, questions such as whom to count as an Albanian (due to the fluidity of identity boundaries) and which of these Albanians to include in the count (due to the fluidity of migration)—questions that had led to the European Union-funded census in the first place—left the experts utterly unprepared.

CENSUS AND SOVEREIGNTY

Censuses used to be conducted largely for purposes of taxation and conscription. In the modern era of popular sovereignty, they have become essential tools of political legitimacy. Electoral legitimacy—the claim that governments are "from the people"—rests on regular and precise counts of "the people," to ensure fair representation. Social legitimacy—the claim that governments are "for the people"—is dependent upon reliable census-derived socioeconomic data, to devise effective welfare policies, such as

school planning, health campaigns, and regional development. Economic legitimacy—another variation of the claim to serve the people—can be derived from census data advertising growth. What is not always recognized, however, particularly in the often shallow literature on the “civic” state, is that modern states also aim to legitimize themselves *culturally*.

Census strategies have differed in this regard. Colonial states developed categories of “race” to legally discriminate against the colonized “other.” Multinational empires gathered statistics on language spoken to gauge the assimilation of linguistic minorities. Nationalizing states have used census data on nationality to bolster their claim of sovereignty on a given territory. States of immigration, redefining themselves as multicultural states, have reformulated categories of racial origins for purposes of affirmative action (Kertzer and Arel, 2002). In each case, the intent was political, since the pursuit of legitimacy, by its very nature, is a political act. Demographers may bewail the political hijacking of census questions, but the political use of the census is the norm. Asked about the list of nationalities and languages officially recognized by the 2001 Ukrainian census, the director of the Ukrainian Committee on State Statistics (*Derzhkomstat*) Oleksandr Osaulenko revealingly answered that the list corresponds to the “national interests” of the Ukrainian state (*S”ioma sesia*, 2001). The census statistically projects how states choose to represent themselves culturally. This political choice often arises from clashing interests within state structures and, at times, from the mobilizing pressure of non-state actors.

State officials are prone to dismissing censuses conducted under a different regime as politically tainted, but—Osaulenko’s statement notwithstanding—rarely admit to their own central political role. They are also loath to openly view the census recording of identities as an expression of preferences. An enduring discourse is that, under the proper political conditions, a census can ascertain the *real* identities of the people. This belief, that somehow an unchanging identity core can be uncovered by statistics, is pure primordialism. Of course, primordialism is the stock of day-to-day nationalist discourse, and therefore of much state discourse. In the former Soviet Union, it also remains the dominant paradigm of a scholarly community that continues to view ethnic groups as “organic” entities (as critically discussed in Tishkov, 1997). Although primordialism is discredited in theoretical statements in the West, it creeps back in when scholars too readily accept claims about census respondents “rediscovering” their lost identity, or about the frequent “falsification” of census results. This is not to argue that there are no irregularities during censuses. Census results can be doctored, the same way that ballot boxes can be stuffed. But few would question an election on the basis of the notion that the electors did not know where their true interests lay when they voted (a Marxist-Leninist argument that has long withered away). By contrast, much of the alleged falsification of past censuses pertains to results said not to represent what respondents ought to have conceived of themselves.

The first round of post-Soviet censuses offers a unique opportunity to reflect on the political nature of identity categories in the census. Soviet

ethnographers and census-takers intensely debated how to categorize identities in the census in the early decades (1920s–30s) of Soviet power (Hirsch, 1997; Cadiot, 2001), before an abrupt end was put to any overt public reconsideration of official nationalities policy.⁴ With nationalities issues openly discussed, and nationalist appeals routinely made in public forums since the onset of perestroika, it was reasonable to expect that the debate would be revived in post-Soviet states. Is the category “nationality” (*natsional’nost’*) still necessary? What constitutes a nationality? Is “native language” (*rodnay yazyk*) the most efficient way to obtain census data on language? Should a question on second language be maintained?

As it turned out, there was little or no public discussion of these matters prior to post-Soviet censuses, not because they are deemed unimportant, but perhaps because the Soviet conception of nationalities has been deeply internalized. At the same time, the actual formulation of identity questions was altered everywhere. Not a single post-Soviet census reproduced verbatim the old Soviet census questions. As a case study of census politics, this article will examine the key post-Soviet state of Ukraine.⁵ Unlike a more standard essay based on census data, the emphasis will not be on results or their implications (the article, in any case, was written shortly after the December 2001 Ukrainian census, well before detailed preliminary results were available), but on the politics lurking behind the census categories, questions, instructions, and census campaign, and its role in the state-building project.

Ukrainian officials and scholars tend to present the census categories of nationality and language as based on “science.” While inherited wholesale from Soviet nationality precepts, this belief is not particularly “Soviet,” or Eastern European, in character. Urla (1993, p. 819), investigating the Basques of Western Europe, argued that social actors perceive the census as a provider of “truth” (in her anthropological parlance, as a “technology in truth production”). Since truth is equated with science, groups seek to be recognized in the census as a “proof” of their existence. The census itself, more than other state instruments, brings a unique aura of scientific legitimacy. This often leads to the notion that identities counted in the census can be *objectively* assessed. In fact, they are as objective as the General Will. Democratic theorists concur that, contrary to Rousseau’s utopian vision, political preferences cannot be expressed in a pristine and absolute form,

⁴The post-Stalin era saw the emergence of a cautious scholarly debate on some aspects of nationalities policies. For instance, scholars suggested adding a census question on “conversational language” (Silver, 1986, p. 88). Public discussion on sensitive census matters, such as who should be recognized as a nationality, was off limits.

⁵Post-Soviet censuses have been held in Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Azerbaijan (1999), Estonia, Latvia, and Kyrgyzstan (2000), Lithuania, Armenia and Ukraine (2001), and Georgia and Russia (2002). When this article was completed, the Russian census was still four months away, being scheduled for October 2002. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan also held censuses, but of questionable validity. The Azeri and Georgian censuses did not cover the secessionist areas of Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia.

and vary according to the concrete electoral system in place (Riker, 1982). In other words, there cannot be a perfect, “scientific” method to measure political preferences, since preferences are influenced by the system of measurement itself. The point applies to identity preferences. Identities cannot be revealed in the absolute by a census. They vary according to evolving social and economic incentives, often politically driven, and the particular identity options (categories) available on the census form.

In the case of Ukraine, the overarching political context is one of nation-building, or of a hesitant “nationalizing state,” as I have called it elsewhere (Arel, 1995), and of porous language boundaries. As revealed during the adoption of the Constitution in 1996, the official public discourse is ambiguous as to whether it is the “cultural” nation or the “political” nation that serves as the foundation of the nation-building project. Yet the very decision to keep a “nationality” category in the census, and the ways in which the category was altered on the census questionnaire, suggests a tilt toward the cultural nation. The language situation is similarly ambiguous. Most Ukrainians living in the cities of eastern Ukraine speak Russian as their language of preference at home, but most of them claim Ukrainian as their “native” (*rodnoy*) language, even if, in many cases, perhaps most, they were raised mainly in Russian. Most of these Ukrainians are using the census question on language to express their preference for a nationality. In the last analysis, Ukraine legitimates its independence from Russia by the claim of the historic right of ethnic Ukrainians—defined as collectively distinct from Russians in language and history, even if the claim to language may be more symbolic than behavioral—to self-determination. The census seeks to make the claim statistically credible. This article will show how the political use of census categories in Ukraine is in remarkable continuity with Soviet and even pre-Soviet practices, and how the behavior of state and non-state actors who profess faith in the “scientific” nature of the census betrays their understanding that questions on nationality and language are fundamentally about political preferences.

NATIONALITY AND LANGUAGE: THE EUROPEAN AND SOVIET LEGACIES

While European states, including Austria, Hungary, and Prussia/Germany, conducted several decennial censuses before World War I, Imperial Russia held a single statewide census, in 1897.⁶ The Soviet Union organized seven censuses—in 1926, 1937, 1939, 1959, 1970, 1979, and 1989—as well as two partial enumerations, in 1920 and 1923. The 1937 census was dead on arrival, since its organizers accurately reported the huge population losses largely resulting from political campaigns—in particular, the famine in Ukraine. The census became a “blank spot” in history, leading census officials were shot, and only a tiny volume of aggregate results could

⁶Plans to conduct a second one in 1915 were quashed, owing to the war (Cadiot, 2001).

be published in the 1990s from archival discoveries (Volkov, 1990; Polyakov, 1991). The 1939 census confirmed the accuracy of the 1937 census, but had the good fortune of reporting an authentic demographic increase of approximately six million souls in the intervening two years. Soviet officials padded an additional three million to make the official figure (170.6 million) in harmony with Stalin's earlier prediction (Zhiromskaya, 1992; Shelestov, 1999).⁷ Nonetheless, the 1939 census results were barely published until the 1990s.

The Russian Imperial and Soviet censuses all contained questions on nationality. It is widely known that the Russian/Soviet understanding of "nationality"—an ethnonational sense of belonging, rather than the fact of citizenship—originated in Germany and remains prevalent in east central Europe. Lesser known is the degree to which Russian/Soviet census officials and ethnographers were influenced by European debates and practices related to the use of nationality in censuses. In fact, statisticians from leading European states, including Russia, periodically met in the second half of the nineteenth century in a quest to standardize census questionnaires and methods. Unsurprisingly, they were divided as to how to define nationality, with the French and German conceptions of the nation at loggerheads, and could not agree on a continental standard.

Delegates from Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Russia, however, took the existence of cultural nations as self-evident and, therefore, in need of statistical representation.⁸ They long debated how best to categorize cultural nationality in the census and finally settled on language (Labbé, 1997). Interestingly, the Russians took the lead on that question at an International Congress of Statistics held in St. Petersburg in 1872, strongly influenced by the work of the Prussian statistician Böckh. Some East European ethnographers tended to view nationality as a composite of cultural markers and customs and doubted that it could be adequately measured statistically. Congress delegates determined that language was the fundamental indicator of nationality (very much in sync with the philosophical musings of German Romantics) and that language was a measurable indicator. The St. Petersburg recommendation to European census officials was to record the spoken language (*langue parlée* in French, the proceedings' official language) of respondents. Nationality was thus to be ascertained indirectly, by collecting census data on language, and then

⁷In a speech to the XVIIth Party Congress, Stalin had famously announced that the population of the Soviet Union had grown to 168 million. The 1937 census counted only 162 million souls. The padding of the 1939 census was easily identified in the archives in the 1990s and does not affect the accuracy of the raw figures. In the Russian Republic (RSFSR), a different kind of padding occurred, with 1.5 million people statistically reallocated to other areas of the Soviet Union to hide concentrations of Gulag prisoners and Red Army formations (Zhiromskaya, 1992; Shelestov, 1999).

⁸After 1867, while deferring to Vienna on foreign policy, Hungary had complete autonomy on domestic matters, including the elaboration and administration of the census.

making assumptions about how a given language constituted the core marker of a nationality (Arel, 2002).

Langue parlée, however, is an ambiguous concept. A most useful conceptual clarification of the different meanings of spoken language was offered by the Ukrainian demographer Arsen Khomenko (1931, p. 16), who distinguished between the language of one's surroundings (*mova otochenia*) and the language in which one feels most comfortable (*mova vnutrishn'oho, intymnoho zhyttia*, literally "the language of internal, intimate life"). In this view, an individual who speaks mostly Russian at work, but Ukrainian in the intimacy of his home, has two *langues parlées*. Even if this individual happens to speak both Russian and Ukrainian at home, or even mostly Russian, his language of "comfort," or language of "preference," as we will call it in this article, might still be Ukrainian, as long as he recognizes Ukrainian as his language of choice, whenever the individual feels that the choice can be exercised, and as the language in which he thinks. The language of preference thus comes closest to an identity statement—"this is *my language*"—while the language of one's surroundings theoretically has more to do with the social dominance of a language, rather than an individual's preference.

The St. Petersburg Congress, which assumed that the census should record a *single* language, did not specify which of these two situations would best define the *langue parlée* of an individual. As a result, the major multinational states of prewar east central Europe differed in their interpretation of the census language question. Austria resorted to "language of use" (*umgangssprache*), a concept that corresponds to Khomenko's "language of one's surroundings," while Germany and Hungary used "mother tongue" (*Muttersprache, anyanyelv*), defined as the language in which "one is most fluent and in which one thinks" (Germany), or "that language which you recognize as your own and which you enjoy most speaking" (Hungary), in both cases clearly suggesting a sense of comfort and preference with a language. Imperial Russia settled for native language (*rodnoy yazyk*), without defining it other than tautologically ("The native language is the language that the individual considers native").

While these distinctions are important to ascertain the validity of statistical categories, they were of little political consequence. Austria, Hungary, Germany, and Russia were all accused by nationalists from among their minorities (for instance, Czechs in Austria, Romanians in Hungary, Poles in Germany, and Ukrainians in Russia) of undercounting their group by using an illegitimate language question on the census. It did not matter politically whether the question was about "use," "fluency," or "preference (comfort)" since all these concepts capture the outcome of linguistic assimilation. An individual's language of use or language of fluency may not correspond with the language he first learned as a child, or with the language of his parents. Nationalists in east European multinational states did not consider legitimate the assimilation of speakers of their group to dominant languages (German, Hungarian, Russian) and demanded that the language of a census respondent be equated with that

of his group of *origin*. The issue was whether the census should reflect changes in language practices, or whether it should attempt to capture an alleged linguistic state of affairs prior to the onset of assimilatory trends portrayed as unjust and artificial. The historian Zeman, in his study of the Austrian censuses, called the latter approach “backward-looking,” as opposed to the “forward-looking” policy of registering language changes within or across generations (Zeman, 1990; Arel, 2002).

In assessing the legacy of Soviet censuses on post-Soviet censuses, it is critical to understand the extent to which early Soviet nationality policy adopted the “backward-looking” approach. Co-opting European nationalist rhetoric, Soviet officials in the 1920s condemned as illegitimate the linguistic “Russification” of late Imperial Russia. This meant that, contrary to the recommendation of the 1872 St. Petersburg Congress, the census could not rely solely on a language question to ascertain the ethnic nationality of an individual. Nationality, consistent with the nationalist narrative, came to be linked to the objective fact of someone’s *origins*, rather than to an individual’s subjective determination. Consequently, the language that an individual may actually recognize as his language of preference was not necessarily seen as indicative of his ethnic nationality, even though an ethnonational *group*, in both the German Romantic and Soviet conceptions, is ultimately defined by language. In this view, for example, while the Ukrainian nationality, as a collective entity, is ultimately reducible to the Ukrainian language as the core marker of the group, a Russian-speaker of Ukrainian-speaking lineage should still be considered Ukrainian, on the grounds that his Russian linguistic identity results from an illegitimate process of Russification.

The logical outcome of this normative shift in counting identities was to ask a direct question on ethnic nationality in the census, since the “objective” use of a language, even in the intimacy of one’s life, could no longer be seen as a “just” definer of nationality. While this new policy could be interpreted as a recognition that nationality was a matter of self-determination, and thus an eminently subjective phenomenon, the reigning assumption was in fact that nationality, like every other category in the census, could be objectively ascertained, as far as the “true” origins of an individual could be unveiled. On the one hand, census instructions, in conformity with the standards elaborated by the prewar International Congresses of Statistics, stressed that nationality was to be freely determined by the respondent, strictly based on an oral declaration. On the other hand, as we will see below, only certain ethnonyms were recognized (in Ukraine, “rus’kyi,” “Little Russian (*maloros*),” “Cossack,” and, after the annexation of Transcarpathia, “Rusyn,” were definitely out), while tremendous resources were deployed throughout the 1920s to incite people to identify with their “correct” nationality and de-legitimize assimilation. In Cadiot’s apt observation, “the knowledge acquired from the census is to a large extent tautological, individuals being asked to define themselves according to categories elaborated by the center” (Cadiot, 2001, ch. 4, p. 315).

The decision to introduce separate categories of nationality and language in the 1926 Soviet census broke with the prewar legacy, but followed postwar census practices in Habsburg successor states, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland. The political intent was to incite linguistically assimilated non-Russians (or Czechs and Poles) to declare the nationality of their origins (parents), thereby restoring the “true” count of the nation. The organizers of the 1926 Soviet census were unambiguous in this regard. The category actually used on the census form was *narodnost'*, an obscure term that census organizers could not specifically define, but which does have, for a Russian speaker, a clearer connotation of origin than *natsional'nost'* (nationality).⁹ Mikhailovskiy, who had the greatest influence in the formulation of census categories and instructions, explained that *narodnost'* was chosen “precisely to underscore that what is expected is an answer on tribal origin (*o plemennom proiskhozhdenii*)—that is, on an affiliation to [an ethnic group][*etnicheskaya gruppa*]” (Cadiot, 2001, ch. 4, p. 279). In his monumental study of Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s–30s, Martin (2001) shows how entrenched was the conviction among Soviet officials that people were not supposed to assimilate. The census question on *narodnost'*, and the propaganda that accompanied the census campaign, was intended to statistically obliterate traces of assimilation. It proved highly successful in Ukraine. While the number of Russians throughout the Soviet Union increased by 42.5 percent, in comparison with the 1897 census, the number of Russians in Ukraine went up by only 11.2 percent. Khomenko (1931) demonstrates that this significant difference could not be explained primarily by demographic factors, i.e., birth, death, and migration rates. A lot had to do with identity redefinition.

The Soviet census added a question on ethnic affiliation, but it kept a question on language. Mikhailovskiy and his colleague Osinskiy, another leading figure in the team that prepared the census questionnaire in 1926, made clear in their writings that, since the census language question no longer served as an indicator of nationality, its aim was to document, as accurately as possible, the extent of linguistic assimilation. Armed with that information—namely, the proportion of respondents claiming a language other than the language of their ethnic group (generally Russian, but not always)—state agencies could then devise policies to correct these “anomalies.” “Statistics,” wrote Osinskiy, “can and must only study facts. If it turns out that a rather significant part of representatives of one or another

⁹While both *narodnost'* and *natsional'nost'* are built on root words connoting origin, *rod* (kin, family) is Russian and *nasci* (from birth) is foreign (Latin). Even though *narodnost'* is sometimes confusingly translated in English as nationality, the official French-language publications of the 1926 Soviet census used the expression *groupe ethnique* (ethnic group). In Ukraine, *natsional'nost'* was actually used in brackets in the 1926 census, as in “*narodnost'* (*natsional'nost'*)”. In Imperial Russia, the Ukrainians had been officially categorized as one of the three branches of the Russian nationality, along with “Great Russians” and “Belorussians,” and Ukrainian officials feared that classifying Ukrainians as a *narodnost'* in 1926 might be interpreted by many as a recognition that the Ukrainians are still part of the Russian nationality (Hirsch, 1997).

ethnic group [*narodnost'*] prefer not to use their language [*ne svoim yazykom*] (which is highly doubtful), we could thus ... conclude, not that the situation is fine and must remain as is, but, on the contrary, that we have to change it so that conversational language corresponds to ethnic affiliation."¹⁰

Contrary to the question on nationality, census organizers were not interested in ascertaining the language of *origin*—that is, the language first learned but not necessarily spoken anymore, or the language of one's forebears. Their aim instead was to record an individual's language of preference. The instructions issued to census-takers, however, were careless, conflating language of fluency and the vague notion of language of use (language of one's surroundings, in Khomenko's dichotomy). The decision to maintain the pre-revolutionary census concept of *rodnoy yazyk* (native language) was even more puzzling. *Rodnoy* shares the same root word as *narodnost'*—*rod*, meaning kin or family (see footnote 9). As we saw above, census organizers had selected *narodnost'* over *natsional'nost'* to convey the message that they were seeking to capture one's ethnic origins. The use of *rodnoy yazyk* contradicted the assertion that, in the case of language, the goal was to record actual language practices, rather than one's linguistic origins. Moreover, people were constantly reminded in the media that each one has a nationality, and that each nationality has its own language. Under these conditions, identifying "native" language with one's "native" group (nationality) could appear perfectly natural. There is indeed extensive evidence that in the 1926 census, and in all subsequent censuses, the question on *rodnoy yazyk* was widely interpreted as a restatement of one's nationality, irrespective of actual fluency (Silver, 1986, p. 89).

In the decade following the 1926 census, two developments cemented how national identities were categorized by the state. First, state recognition of a nationality came to be firmly linked to a recognized "homeland," and Soviet officials pragmatically put a cap on the number of groups endowed with their own nationally-defined territories ("national-territorial formations"). All those with a recognized homeland—either "titulars" with a homeland within the boundaries of the Soviet Union, or "diasporas" with a homeland abroad—were a nationality (*natsional'nost'*). All those who did not make the list (e.g., Cossacks, Mingrelians, and hundreds more ethnonyms) were classified as "sub-ethnic groups" (*subetnicheskiye gruppy*) in the process of consolidating into a nationality. Second, internal passports, introduced in the early 1930s, first in key cities and special "regime" zones, and then gradually throughout the Soviet Union, contained an entry for *natsional'nost'*. In a highly regimented society, where identification documents had to be shown virtually on a daily basis, individuals learned

¹⁰As quoted in Khomenko (1931, p. 15). Osinskiy's article, "O perepisnykh uklonakh i perepisnoy 'otsebyatine'" [On census deviations and a census 'concoction'], was published in *Pravda* on December 16, 1926, on the eve of the census. Note his assumption that the language of a respondent's nationality is "his" [*svoim*] language, even if he does not speak it.

that nationality was an integral part of their social identity. Consistent with these two changes, the 1937 census dropped *narodnost'* in favor of *natsional'nost'*. Census identity policy had been finalized. Until the end of the Soviet Union, all censuses asked laconic questions on *natsional'nost'* and *rodnay yazyk*, with virtually identical instructions.¹¹

THE UKRAINIAN CENSUS AND STATE LEGITIMACY

Ukraine conducted its first post-Soviet census in December 2001. The census was controversial mainly on two issues: the confidentiality of personal data and the gathering of information on nationality and language. Regarding confidentiality, the media reported widespread anxiety about the illegal use of personal census information by tax authorities, the police, or criminal organizations (Rudnitskiy, 2001). Census officials explained that the law on the census, modeled on international practices, provided safeguards against this kind of abuse (Ostapchuk, 2001). Yet in a society where government officials flout the law with impunity, these legal guarantees tend to be seen as hardly reassuring.¹² As a result, the answers given to the questions on sources of income and sites of employment are not likely to be credible. Many apparently refused altogether to answer these questions (*Perepis' naseleniya*, 2001).¹³

Equally contentious were the questions on nationality and language. Revealingly, no one seems to have questioned the very presence of a question on ethnic nationality in the Ukrainian census. For that matter, no one seems to have questioned it anywhere on the territory of the former Soviet Union, save a few scholars more conversant with Western social science literature. All post-Soviet states, without exception, opted to retain a question on nationality in their first independent census. It could very well be that seventy years of Soviet practice, in census and internal pass-

¹¹Census forms simply contained entries for "nationality" and "native language," without any questions. The forms were filled out by census-takers during oral interviews with respondents. Census takers, no doubt, often added their own words, or reformulations, in the course of the census interview.

¹²In a visible case of legal impunity, the OSCE and Council of Europe reported that the conduct of the 1999 presidential election conformed neither to international standards nor to Ukrainian law (Arel, 2001). These reports had no legal impact in Ukraine. Critics have also claimed that the census was purposely conducted just before the parliamentary elections of March 2002, potentially providing early unpublished results to political insiders. That charge is far less convincing, since Soviet censuses have always taken place in December or January, a period when people are most likely to be at home, and therefore available to be counted by census-takers.

¹³A thorough examination of the confidentiality of census data is outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that the issue is extremely controversial in certain Western European states, such as the Netherlands, Germany, and, more recently, France. Interestingly, Cadot (2001) reports that the Imperial Russian census of 1897—which covered much of the territory of present-day Ukraine, with the exception of the provinces of Galicia, Bukovina, and Transcarpathia—also stoked popular fears that census data would be used by tax authorities.

ports, have made nationality so “natural,” so hegemonic in public discourse, that no one is capable of thinking outside the box.

Social inertia, however, did not prevent Ukraine—as well as Russia and Belarus—from removing the nationality entry in internal passports. The passports, introduced in 1932, contained a famous “fifth entry” (*piatyy punkt*) on ethnic nationality, which could not be equivalent to citizenship (Soviet), was exclusive (no hybrid category, such as “Russian-Ukrainian,” was allowed), and, by 1938, was determined by the nationality of one’s parents, unless they were of different nationalities. Even though available archival sources on the matter remain sketchy, it appears that the original decision to inscribe nationality in internal passports did not intend to discriminate on the basis of ethnic background, but was rather consistent with the spirit of *korenizatsiya* (indigenization)—i.e., the policy of promoting the career opportunities of non-Russian nationalities (Zaslavsky, 1982, p. 93). Once in place, however, and with a wave of purges devastating Soviet society, one’s official ethnic nationality could become a liability. There is circumstantial evidence that data from internal passports were used to deport ethnic groups, such as Poles in Right Bank Ukraine in 1938,¹⁴ and it is well known that, in the postwar era, unofficial quotas limited the educational and career mobility of individuals with tainted passport nationalities—Jews and Germans, in particular.

In the glasnost era, Jewish activists in Ukraine made passport nationality a civil rights issue and quietly campaigned for its abolition. Oleksandr Burakovs’kyi, president of a Jewish language society and head of the short-lived Council of Nationalities of the Ukrainian national movement *Rukh*, successfully worked behind the scenes to make the public expression of nationality a matter of personal choice (Burakovs’kyi, 1995). The law on national minorities, adopted by parliament in June 1992, stated clearly that “Citizens of Ukraine have the right to freely choose or revive their nationality” (*Europeis’kyi orientyr*, 1999, pp. 46–49). Not coincidentally, a law on new Ukrainian passports was passed the day after. Ukrainian policy makers were no doubt aware of the European Union practice of strongly discouraging the use of cultural markers (race, religion, ethnicity) on identity cards to prevent their potential misuse for discriminatory purposes. Remarkably enough, however, the issue was hardly debated publicly. When the draft law on the new passports was presented to parliament in June 1992, the government representative sponsoring the bill could not

¹⁴At the height of the purges, when victims were increasingly sought out according to ethnic criteria, an infamous circular from the secret police (NKVD) ordered that the passport nationality of an individual had to correspond to that of his parents, and that the “true” nationality of individuals with passport nationalities that did not correspond to foreign-sounding names be investigated. The circular gave the specific example of passport Russians with Polish, Greek, or German family names, at a time when these three groups were slated for deportations. This strongly suggests that the passport was a key instrument in identifying potential ethnically-defined victims of Stalinist repressions. On the circular, see “Raz’yasnyayushcheye ukazaniye” (1994).

explain why nationality was no longer to be included in the passport (*P'iat sesiia*, 1992). Deputies from Ukrainian nationalist parties objected, arguing that the passport nationality entry acted as a barrier against assimilation—a point that was also raised by representatives of other non-victimized minorities—but their resistance was lukewarm, as they appeared ambivalent on the question.¹⁵

The decisions to remove nationality from the passport but to keep it on the census are not necessarily inconsistent. The purpose of census information is to compile statistics, to provide states with *aggregate* data on a variety of indicators. Once information from individual census sheets is entered in a database, the sheets themselves are of no further use, and individual profiles, in theory, remain confidential.¹⁶ By contrast, identification documents, such as the internal passport, must by their very nature be shown periodically to officials. The European Union acknowledges the distinction by dissuading the use of ethnic markers on identity documents as a violation of human rights, while making the use of ethnic categories in censuses optional. Ukraine's two-track policy is thus perfectly in line with European standards.

Why then maintain nationality on the census? One could argue that post-Soviet states, Ukraine included, are receiving contradictory signals from European institutions. On the one hand, the joint UN/EU Eurostat Recommendations on eastern European censuses state that “some countries *may* [our italics—DA] wish to collect information on the ethnic and/or national composition of their population” and that “some countries *may* wish to collect data on languages” (*United Nations Statistical Commission*, 1998, pp. 21–22). On the other hand, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, diplomatically enforced by the Council of Europe and the OSCE, specifically ties minority rights “to areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial number” (*Framework Convention*, 2001, Art. 10, Par. 2), a formulation which strongly implies that state censuses must devise ways to count these “persons” as member of ethnic nationalities. How else can the “substantial number” of “national minorities” be ascertained?

In the last analysis, we would submit that, irrespective of indirect European pressure to count minorities, Ukraine has a *raison d'état* to produce statistics on the ethnic composition of its population. In eastern Europe, states that have emerged from the collapse of multinational empires since World War I have legitimated their independence by appealing to the right of an ethnonation to exercise political self-determination on a territory defined as its “historic homeland.”¹⁷ Even if the right of self-determination is expressed in terms of prior settlement of an ethnically

¹⁵Nationalist activists were far more incensed by the fact that the new internal passports were in Russian and Ukrainian, and not Ukrainian only.

¹⁶As discussed previously, whether confidentiality can be ensured by census and state authorities is a very important practical point of contention.

distinct group, and not numerical majorities, state officials have long understood the psychological power of official numbers. A census showing that the “titular” nationality—i.e., the nationality with historical claims to the land—constitutes a solid majority of the population, particularly in disputed areas, is a strong instrument of legitimization.

In Ukraine, the agent of self-determination—i.e., the actual group in whose name independence was proclaimed and is legitimated—has remained legally ambiguous. Initially, when Leonid Kravchuk was in power, first as parliamentary speaker (1990–91) and then as president (1991–94), the language of choice was “people of Ukraine” (*narod Ukrayiny*), an expression with a distinctly inclusive connotation. This was the formulation used in the Declaration of State Sovereignty in 1990, a semantic choice that was extolled in the West as a wise decision by the Ukrainian leadership to appeal to the *political* nation, encompassing all citizens of Ukraine, rather than the more restrictive “Ukrainian people” (*Ukraïns’kyi narod*), whose connotation is more ethnic (Furtado, 1994). In the final debates leading to the adoption of the Constitution in 1996, however, the government embraced the concept of the “Ukrainian people,” while arguing simultaneously that “Ukrainian” was not to be interpreted in ethnic terms. The semantic compromise was tortuous. The very first sentence of the Constitution defines the “Ukrainian people” as equal to the “citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities (*hromadian Ukrayiny vsikh natsional’nostei*)” (*Konstytutsiia Ukrayiny*, 1996).¹⁸ In an effort to highlight the civic nature of the adjective “Ukrainian,” deputies voted to capitalize the first letter (thus, *Ukraïns’kyi narod*).

In the section of the preamble invoking the right of self-determination, on the other hand, the simple proposition that the right had been exercised by the political nation (*Ukraïns’kyi narod*, with capital U) could not muster a constitutional majority (*P’iata sesiia*, 1996). This proposition would have run counter to the whole nationalist premise that it is the Ukrainian nation ethnically defined (*ukraïns’kyi narod*, with small U)—with a distinct language, customs, and historical consciousness—that is exercising its historic right to an independent state. The solution was to let the two opposite conceptions of the nation stand side by side: the Ukrainian Constitution indicates that the right of self-determination was realized both “by the Ukrainian nation” (with small U) and “all the Ukrainian people” (with capital U).

¹⁷Bear in mind that the point is about post-collapse legitimacy, and not why these empires collapsed in the first place or even whether secessionist movements played a major role in the collapse.

¹⁸To the objection that the previous formulation, “people of Ukraine,” was less ambiguous in this regard, the chairman of the Constitutional Commission, Mykhailo Syrota, retorted that since Russia does not appeal to the “people of Russia,” why should Ukraine do so? (*P’iata sesiia*, 1996). The reply was disingenuous, insofar as the Russian language disposes of different adjectives to distinguish the ethnic (*russkiy*) and civic (*rossiyskiy*) Russian body, while the Ukrainian language has no equivalent to *rossiyskiy*.

The conceptual muddle in Ukraine's Constitution as to who exactly is the agent of self-determination should not obscure the fact that, in everyday discourse, people associate *Ukrains'kyi narod* with ethnic Ukrainians. State officials tend to do the same. This is reminiscent of the imbroglio over *rodnoy yazyk*: no matter how concepts are redefined formally by state agents, what counts ultimately is how they are popularly perceived. Ukrainian nation-builders knew that they could not get a definitional consensus in the Constitution, but they scored an important symbolic victory.

In census politics, the state-building legitimacy of the *Ukrains'kyi narod* (popularly understood) translates into the imperative to produce a large majority of the state-forming Ukrainian nationality (*Ukrains'ka natsional'nist'*). This calls for the maintenance of a question on nationality separate from questions on language, since a politically significant proportion of people claiming Ukrainian as a nationality claim Russian as their native language (*rodnoy yazyk*).¹⁹ The Bolshevik delegitimization of linguistic assimilation has remained the dominant paradigm in post-Soviet Ukraine. Western states with strong nationalist movements—Canada, Spain, Belgium—use language on their censuses to indirectly assess the size of minority groups (up to 1960, in the case of Belgium). This practice would diminish the size of the titular Ukrainians in Ukraine and is therefore not an option. Nationality, counted separately from language, is here to stay.

The 2001 Ukrainian census, however, modified the formulation of the nationality entry on the census form. Instead of the single word *natsional'nost'*, which had been used in all Soviet censuses since 1937, the entry referred to ethnic origin (*etnichne pokhodzhennia*), equated in parentheses with “nationality (*natsional'nist'*), sub-nationality (*narodnist'*), or ethnic group (*etnichna hrupa*).”²⁰ The question is admittedly confusing to the average person, since the adjective ethnic—contrary to American prac-

¹⁹ According to 1989 census data, 72.7 percent of the population of Ukraine claimed a Ukrainian nationality, but only 66.3 percent claimed Ukrainian as a mother tongue. The latter figure may appear to be rather high, but one should note that the contentious question of majorities also operates at the regional level. While only one province (Crimea) produced a majority of Russians using the nationality criteria, two more (Donets'k, Luhans'k) returned large majorities of people claiming Russian as a mother tongue (67.7 and 63.9 percent, respectively), while three more (Odessa, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia) hovered just below the 50 percent mark. Russian majorities would be clear-cut in half of Ukraine's provinces, in the industrial east, if “language of preference” was the criterion used to define nationality, which, as we saw, was never the case in past censuses. (Calculations made on the basis of official census data made available by the Russian scholar Mikhail Guboglo.)

²⁰ *Natsional'nist'* and *narodnist'* are the Ukrainian-language equivalents of the Russian *natsional'nost'* and *narodnost'*. The Russian ending *ost'* generally translates as *ist'* in Ukrainian. The Russian and Ukrainian versions are used in this article according to context. The Ukrainian version prevails in discussion of the 2001 Ukrainian census, since official census documents, including the census form itself, were printed in Ukrainian only. As we saw earlier, *narodnost'* refers to a group inferior in status to a nationality. The 1920s translation of “ethnic group” could not be used here because of the appearance of its exact semantical equivalent (*etnichna hrupa*) in the same sentence.

tice—was not dominant in Soviet nationality discourse, while *narodnost'* fell out of usage in the 1930s outside of a narrow circle of specialists.²¹ Moreover, instructions to census-takers failed to define any of these terms (*Instruktsiia*, 2001). Press reports and personal observations suggest that census-takers tended simply to ask about “nationality,” as in the Soviet days.

What then impelled census decision-makers to adopt a cumbersome formulation? The official explanation, albeit little publicized, was that this would allow groups not recognized as nationalities to be counted and appear in official statistics. In the past, respondents who claimed an identity not recognized as an official nationality had their answers recoded into the “corresponding” nationality. A *Dictionary of Nationalities* listed all recognized nationalities (128 in 1989), as well as all potential ethnonyms for each one (823 in 1989, up from 530 in 1926) (Tishkov, 1997, p. 15). Eight ethnonyms were listed as belonging to the Ukrainian nationality: Lytvyns, Pinchucks, Polishchuks, Cossacks, Boikos, Lemkos, Hutsuls, and Rusyns (*Rus'ki*). The first three were recognized as sub-ethnic categories of both the Ukrainian and Belarusian nationalities, with the professed native language (*rodnoy yazyk*) of the respondent determining his nationality. Similarly, a self-professed Cossack (*kazak*) was recoded as Ukrainian or Russian, depending on his *rodnoy yazyk*. The last four ethnonyms, on the other hand, were classified as regional identities belonging exclusively to the Ukrainian nationality.

Soviet censuses never published statistics on these non-recognized ethnonyms. In a report to the governmental Census Commission in June 2000, Ukraine’s State Committee of Statistics (*Derzhkomstat*) claimed that this “well-known deficiency” of Soviet censuses would be rectified by asking people about their “ethnic origin,” and no longer recoding “sub-ethnic groups” (*subetnichny hrupy*) into nationalities. The purpose, it was specified, was “not to divide” the Ukrainian nation (*natsii*) into its ethnic (*etnichni*) components, but to have an opportunity for the first time to obtain “unique data on the ethnic (*etnichnyi*) composition of the [Ukrainian] state” (*Pro pidhotovku*, 2000). Lest these fine distinctions be lost on the reader, let us clarify that the standard Soviet position of classifying these eight ethnonyms as “Ukrainian” (or, in some cases, as Russian or Belarusian) remained unchanged. As in the Soviet era, the vernaculars spoken by these groups are recognized by the state not as languages, but rather as dialects of Ukrainian (or Russian and Belarusian). The one change in policy was the intention to publish official numbers on these sub-nationalities. Why? *Derzhkomstat* seemed to be presenting the case in purely academic terms. But the motive was most certainly political, especially since *Derzh-*

²¹Anatoliy Orlov, of the Institute of Arts, Folklore and Ethnology, who was instrumental in preparing the official list of nationalities and languages, advised against a change in the formulation of the census question on nationality on the grounds that people would not understand these technical concepts (Orlov, 2000).

komstat actually changed its mind on the eve of the census and announced that there would be no published results on sub-nationalities after all, only on nationalities.²²

Ukrainian census-makers are aware of the standard established by Ukraine's law on national minorities, consistent with the precepts of the Council of Europe, according to which the affirmation of national identity is an individual right and that "compulsion in any form to deny one's nationality is not permitted" (*Zakon Ukrayny*, 1992). While the law does not prevent state officials from determining that a self-professed identity is not in fact a nationality, the use of a more generic category of "ethnic origin" in the census has the appearance of being more democratic, since it does not refer to an approved list. These considerations may have played a role in the preparation of the census form. We know, at the very least, that more immediate political pressures had an impact, perhaps decisive. The Rusyns of Transcarpathia have been campaigning publicly to be recognized as a nationality, and *Derzhkomstat*'s flip-flop over the publication of census results of "sub-ethnic groups" is most likely linked to the sensitive Rusyn question.²³

WHO ARE THE RUSYNS?

The Rusyns live in the province of Transcarpathia (*Zakarpattia*), bordering Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. *Zakarpattia* belonged to Hungary for centuries and to Czechoslovakia in the interwar period, when it went by the name of "Subcarpathian Rus'" (*Podkarpats'ka Rus'*). East Slavic populations in the Austrian and Hungarian states used to be called Ruthenian (*Ruthenisch*) by outsiders and tended to call themselves *rus'kyi* (literally, "from Rus," referring to the medieval state Rus' centered around Kyiv). With the rise of the nationality question in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, Ruthenian elites in Austrian Galicia agreed that Ruthenians belonged to a nationality living predominantly in the Russian Empire, but disagreed as to whether that nationality was Russian or Ukrainian.²⁴ By the 1880s, the Ukrainian position prevailed at the elite level (Himka, 1999), although the 1931 census in Galicia and Volhynia (then provinces of the Polish state) showed that, when given the choice between Ruthenian (*russki*, in Polish) and Ukrainian (*ukrainski*) as their language, forty percent of Ruthenians/Ukrainians actually selected *russki*

²²Statement by *Derzhkomstat* head Osaulenko during a parliamentary hearing in July 2001 (*S"ioma sesiia*, 2001), reiterated during a press conference in Kyiv on November 27, 2001 (*Pershyi Vseukraïns'kyi*, 2001), a week before the census began.

²³In Russia, Cossacks have demanded recognition of their group as a separate nationality in the 2002 Russian census (Stepanov, 2001). There has been no such movement among Cossacks in Ukraine, since Cossacks from the Dnipro (Dnepr) region are considered the cradle of the Ukrainian nation in the Ukrainian national narrative.

²⁴Among educated Galicians, the spelling of *rus'kyi* varied depending on political orientations. Russophiles used *russkiy*, while Ukrainophiles preferred *rus'kyi* (Himka, 1999).

(Sokolov, 2001), suggesting that a Ukrainian national consciousness was far from hegemonic.

In the Carpathian region, a public debate on the national identity of the local East Slavs awaited the interwar period. Three options collided: Ukrainian, Russian, and Rusyn (the Hungarian option having exited the repertoire of possible identities). Contrary to what occurred in Galicia, a political movement arose claiming that a local identity (*rusyn* or *karpatoros*) was a nationality separate from Ukrainian or Russian. The Czechoslovak censuses of 1921 and 1930 did not shed light on nationality preferences among the Eastern Slavs of *Podkarpats'ka Rus'*, since the only East Slavic nationality category appearing on census forms was *ruskà*, identified in parentheses with all three options—i.e., “Great Russian, Ukrainian, Carpatho-Rusyn” (Magosci, 1999, p. 46).

Magosci, the leading scholar on the Rusyn question, claims that the Ukrainian option, at the onset of World War II, was the most “dynamic,” but that the Russian and Rusyn orientations were “still very much alive” (Magosci, 1999, p. 223). The Soviet Union, which annexed the Carpathian province in 1945, terminated the debate by fiat, ruling that the East Slavs of what it then called *Zakarpattia* were Ukrainian, reiterating a position taken by the Moscow-dominated Communist International (*Komintern*) in 1924 (Magosci, 1999, p. 100). The Soviet position was not hard to fathom: claiming that the great majority of inhabitants of the Carpathians were Ukrainian enabled the Soviet state to make territorial claims on the basis of the right of all ethnic Ukrainians to be reunited within their “own” state (namely, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). In Soviet *Zakarpattia*, a Rusyn identity was officially seen as a component of the Ukrainian nationality, and was therefore absent from postwar Soviet censuses (and internal passports).

Since perestroika, groups in *Zakarpattia* have demanded that the Rusyns be recognized as a nationality.²⁵ The official Ukrainian position, in perfect continuity with the *Komintern/Soviet* line, is that the Rusyns are not a nationality (*Europeis'kyi orientyr*, 1999), a fact, it is said, irrefutably demonstrated by historical science. In a Ukrainian parliamentary commission hearing in March 2001, called to explore the possibility of accepting “Rusyn” as a nationality on the census, a battery of high-ranking officials from the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences prevented any substantive discussion, in the name of historical “truth” (Myhovych, 2001).²⁶ This position is ludicrous, of course, and is yet another illustration of the entrenchment of hard primordialism in the post-Soviet academy. Nationalities, or culturally defined nations, are based on a sense of presumed descent and on their

²⁵Rusyn activists include Lemkos, Boikos, and Hutsuls as putative members of their nation (Trier, 1999)—in other words, as “subethnic groups” of the Rusyn nationality.

²⁶Myhovych, a deputy from Zakarpattia to the Ukrainian parliament (*Rada*), is a sociologist by training and defines himself as a “Rusyn-Ukrainian.”

contemporary social and political appeal. The question is not whether the Rusyns, or any other would-be nationality, have a historical right to exist, but whether elites agitating in the name of a nationality have the social and political power to rally the alleged members of their nationality to their vision. Ukrainian primordialists intuitively understand that, as their denunciations of the “artificiality” of the Rusyn cause are combined with an anxiety about how successful it might become.

Under domestic and international pressure, Ukrainian politicians had made early promises that the Rusyns would be listed in census results (Pozun, 2000). The about-face, referred to above, may be linked to a realization that publishing numbers on a new category (Rusyn), even if presented as those of a “sub-nationality,” is an act of recognition in itself and could incite more people in the future to identify as Rusyns. As a Western observer put it, reacting to the initial governmental promise, “The central government must be prepared to recognize the Rusyns as a national minority, since the census will show that the minority does in fact exist” (Pozun, 2000). Mistrustful of the loyalty of Rusyn political activists, the Ukrainian government is not prepared to do so.²⁷ And it appears determined not to divulge the number of respondents who answered “Rusyn” to the census question on ethnic origin. Western observers doubt that this number is likely to be high, after nearly 60 years in which Ukrainian was the only permissible nationality, and where perhaps most people claim to be both Ukrainian and Rusyn (Dickinson, 2002). The unknown is the extent to which Rusyn organizations were able to effectively “campaign” for their option. Interestingly, these organizations ran their own parallel census to count “their” people prior to the December 2001 Ukrainian census. The Ukrainian state is highly unlikely to recognize the validity of this counting operation.²⁸

²⁷A 1990 declaration of the “Society for Subcarpathian Rusyns,” demanding that Czechoslovakia reacquire Zakarpattia and restore its interwar autonomous status, is remembered in political circles in Kyiv (Maiboroda, 1999).

²⁸Also of contention during the census was the Moldovan question in the Ukrainian province of Chernivtsi. As became clear in the 1990s, Romanian nationalists of all hues claim that the Moldovan nationality does not exist, Moldovan being a regional (sub-ethnic) category of the Romanian nationality. The Moldovan state disagrees, but its population is divided on the matter (King, 2000). In Soviet censuses, the Romance-speaking population of Chernivtsi was divided almost evenly among Romanians and Moldovans. During the 2001 Ukrainian census, there were reports that Romanophile activists were campaigning to encourage people to declare themselves Romanian (Zausylo, 2001). In a visit to Kyiv on the first day of the 2001 census, the Romanian foreign minister demanded that Ukraine dispense with “the artificial distinction made between Moldovans and Romanians” (Shafir, 2001). Some have noted the double standard in the Ukrainian census position in recognizing the national identity of self-professed Moldovans, but not that of self-professed Rusyns. The inconsistency in applying a criterion of identification masks a consistency in promoting Ukraine’s security interests. Ukraine fears the potential secessionism of Rusyns, and it does not want to antagonize a neighbor, Moldova, judging that it can live with the protestations of Romania.

THE FEAR OF UNDERCOUNTING

The claim to have been undercounted is pervasive in census politics. In the Ukrainian census, both Russian and Ukrainian nationalist organizations declared that the census was purposely designed to undercount their group (although, in the case of Ukrainian nationalists, as we will see below, their key preoccupation focused on the language questions). The “Russian Bloc” was particularly active in Crimea. An alarmist pamphlet argued that the census was used by the Kyiv government “to show the world that there are almost no Russians left in Ukraine, and that no one speaks Russian.” Another one, no less pessimistic, stated, “In 1991, we lost most of the state. In 2001, we may lose most of the nation (*narod*). Don’t let our numbers dry up! (*ne day usokhnut!*)” (Kipiani, 2001). The message was clear: “Say that you are Russian on the census!” (*Skazhi na perepisi, chto ty russkiy chelovek!*) (Rudnitskiy, 2001).

Russians in Crimea are concerned that census results may weaken what they believe to be their right to autonomy in ethnically “Russian” Crimea. According to the 1989 Soviet census, 67 percent of the Crimean population declared a Russian nationality, the only province (*oblast*) in Ukraine to record a majority of Russians. This percentage is certain to diminish, since the proportion of Crimean Tatars, below 2 percent in 1989, has increased at least sixfold, by all estimates, as a result of migration from Central Asia.²⁹ It could further diminish because of outmigration to Russia, or if a greater proportion of children of ethnically mixed marriages identify as Ukrainians. Crimean Russian nationalists fear that it could eventually dip below 50 percent, which would be a psychological blow to their implicit claim of “ethnic” ownership of the land. The 50 percent threshold is of critical importance in nationalist politics, as exhibited by the Kazakh leadership’s determination to produce an ethnic majority of Kazakhs at all costs in the 1999 Kazakhstan census (Kolsto, 1998; Dave and Sinnott, 2002). There are also indications that it could become the legal threshold for the recognition of minority rights in Ukraine.

As a member of the Council of Europe, Ukraine is a party to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2001), which codifies minority rights, and is expected to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (2001), which set forth the language rights of minorities. As we saw above, a key section of the Convention (Art. 10, par. 2) limits the legal obligation to implement minor-

²⁹The official estimate before the census was 260,000 Crimean Tatars. Census officials in Crimea were reportedly under great pressure to match that figure (Uehling, 2002). Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev confidently expected the proportion of Crimean Tatars in Crimea to stand at 13 percent in census results, not counting the city of Sevastopol, which is not administratively linked to the Crimean Republic. Crimean Tatars were divided as to whether they should be counted as *Krymski Tatary* (Crimean Tatar) or *Kirimli* (Crimean, in the Crimean Tatar language), but decided not to raise the issue publicly; interview with Dzhemilev, December 2001.

ity rights to “areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or [my italics—DA] in substantial numbers,” which suggests that census figures could be decisive in determining the territories qualifying for minority rights policies. Note that the Convention does not specify what exactly constitutes “substantial numbers,” leaving it to the discretion of states. When the Ukrainian parliament ratified the Charter in December 1999, the threshold was fixed at 20 percent (Shul’ga, 2001, p. 188).³⁰ The figure was reportedly linked to a bilateral agreement with Romania regarding the treatment of each other’s minorities (Popescu, 2001).³¹ The Romanian minority in Ukraine is concentrated in Chernivtsi oblast, and the 1989 Soviet census established the percentage of that minority at 22 percent. Obtaining a threshold inferior to that figure is thereby critical for Romanians.³²

Ukraine’s Constitutional Court, however, overturned the ratification of the Charter in July 2000 on procedural grounds (Shul’ga, 2001, pp. 207–212). Ratification documents had been signed by parliamentary speaker Tkachenko, but the Court ruled that the Constitution mandates the president to be the last to sign ratified international treaties. Minority rights activists smelled a rat, since all treaties ratified by parliament had followed the same procedure after the adoption of the Constitution in 1996, but only the ratification of the Charter was rendered invalid. Moreover, when a new draft law on the ratification of the Charter was registered in parliament—it had yet to be debated in a plenary session as of early 2002—the threshold had been raised from 20 to 50 percent (Popescu, 2001).³³ This had little to do with particular concern over the Romanian minority, and everything to do with the all-too-large Russian question. A 20 percent threshold would give language rights to Russians just about anywhere in Eastern Ukraine—half of the country. A 50 percent threshold would limit it to Crimea, and

³⁰The law stipulated a second threshold of 10 percent, with a less comprehensive commitment to the use of minority languages. For instance, while Ukraine committed itself to “make available primary [secondary, vocational, university] education [in the relevant minority language],” whenever that minority group reached at least 20 percent on a given territory, the commitment, for a threshold of 10 percent, was to make education in a minority language available in “a substantial part.”

³¹Popescu, an ethnic Romanian from Chernivtsi oblast (and also a sociologist by training), is arguably the most active deputy in the Ukrainian *Rada* on minority issues, which may explain why the ratification of the Convention was so closely linked to the Romanian question.

³²As explained in footnote 28, half of the “Romanian” population of Chernivtsi actually declared itself Moldovan. While Romanian activists would prefer that “Moldovans” declare themselves “Romanian” in the census, they still retrospectively lump all Moldovans as Romanians for the purpose of minority rights. In initially agreeing to the 20 percent threshold, Ukrainian lawmakers appeared to have accepted the compromise. It should also be noted that the threshold of 20 percent has long been the standard in territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.

³³The 54 deputies who successfully appealed to the Constitutional Court to have the ratification of the Convention overturned belong to factions in parliament associated with a Ukrainian nationalist position. That is to say, the present and future implementation of Ukraine’s language law is of preeminent importance to them.

even there, as we saw, Russian activists are nervous about the future of their ethnic majority.³⁴

The fear of undercounting is also pervasive among nationally-oriented Ukrainians. An enduring belief in these circles is that ethnic Ukrainians have always been undercounted by the states that ruled over them before independence: Imperial Russia, Austria/Poland, and the Soviet Union. As discussed earlier, the Russian, Austrian, and Polish censuses inquired about language—"Malorusskiy" (*Little Russian*) in Russia, "Ruthenisch" (*Ruthenian*) in Austria, and "Ukrainskiy" (*Ukrainian*) in Poland—thereby removing from the count "Ukrainians-by-lineage" who declared another language. A standard exercise in the Ukrainian-language, and much of the English-language, historical literature on Ukraine is to "correct" these allegedly "false" counts. The core assumption of these census rectifiers is that the "true" identity of scores of Ukrainians was not properly revealed by these census enumerations. The very thought that the preference expressed for the Russian or Polish language by people deemed of Ukrainian lineage could, in certain cases, indicate a preference for a Russian or Polish nationality, is ruled out. Identification with a socially dominant nationality is *ipso facto* equal to a declaration made under duress and, therefore, to falsification.³⁵ In this view, a "Ukrainian-by-lineage" who declared Russian as his language in the 1897 Imperial census could only *truly* be a Ukrainian. A Galician of Roman-Catholic religion who declared Polish as his language in the 1931 Polish census could only truly be a Ukrainian, since in the Ukrainian nationalist narrative of West Ukraine, religion and nationality were supposed to exactly coincide (Zastavnyi, 1994).

Soviet censuses, as we saw, were the first to directly record a Ukrainian nationality, irrespective of declared language. Still, the nationalist presumption is that they undercounted Ukrainians as well. Viacheslav Chornovil, the Rukh leader until his death in 1999, once declared that ethnic Russians were "significantly less numerous" than the 11 millions recorded by the 1989 Soviet census.³⁶ He was convinced that, if a new census were

³⁴The short-lived law on the ratification of the Charter (*Zakon Ukrayiny Pro ratyfikatsiu Europeis'koi khartii rehional'nykh mov abo mov menshyn*, 1992 r.) used nationality, not native language, as the census indicator for the threshold. In addition, the law left unclear whether the actual "administrative-territorial unit" (*administrativno-teritorial'na odymytsia*) referred only to provinces (*oblasti*), or to smaller units as well, such as cities or electoral/census districts (*okruhi*).

³⁵This is not to deny that social pressure can influence the way people choose to publicly declare their identity (in this case, nationality). Identities are indeed shaped by their social environment. In certain cases, people may refrain from expressing their identity preference out of fear. This is akin to the act of "voting" in repressive regimes, when one's publicly expressed preference could have serious personal consequences. In other cases, however, people may prefer to express an identity that may differ from that of their parents, in the interest of career advancement, social status, or a sense of personal comfort. In the nationalist mindset, the latter expression is also a falsification of one's true identity, since the very social environment that leads someone to choose assimilation is deemed illegitimate, being the result of policies of "Russification," "Polonization," and so forth.

³⁶As reported by *Nezavisimost'* (July 6, 1994).

to be conducted, “many of those who before, due to well-known factors, described themselves as Russians, would now openly declare themselves as Ukrainians” (Chornovil, 1994). There is no evidence, in fact, that people massively refused to disclose a Ukrainian nationality preference in the census in Ukraine itself, and chose Russian instead. On the contrary, with the Soviet policy of keeping republican party membership and party/governmental positions proportional to the nationality composition of the republic, people actually had an incentive to declare themselves Ukrainian.³⁷ This is reflected in data on the nationality preference of children of interethnic marriages in internal passports. Contrary to entrenched beliefs (Pirie, 1996, p. 1088), Russian was not the overwhelming choice among these children, and nearly half of them selected a Ukrainian nationality.³⁸ While there was every incentive to speak Russian in Soviet Ukraine, to the point that speaking Ukrainian in public was at times a social or political act of courage, there does not appear to have been a social awareness that a Ukrainian nationality constituted an impediment to one’s life chances.

Outside of the Ukrainian republic, on the other hand, a systematic policy of “genocide by census redefinition,” as Weiner once coined it (cited in Geertz, 1963, p. 126), did take place at the height of the purges in 1937 among people who had previously declared themselves Ukrainians. The 1926 Soviet census had counted 7.9 million ethnic Ukrainians in the Russian Republic (RSFSR).³⁹ The 1937 census counted only 3.1 million, an enormous drop of 60.8 percent. In the North Caucasus and Kuban/Krasnodar regions, the decrease was catastrophic, reaching, respectively, 93.6 percent and 94.7 percent (Martin, 2001, p. 405). Crucially, while there was severe population attrition, at least four million, in the Soviet Ukrainian republic

³⁷ Ukrainians were discriminated against in party and state organs if they happened to originate from the Western territories annexed after World War II. Because the proportion of ethnic Russians was small in these areas, the number of children from mixed Ukrainian-Russian marriages who could have been inclined to choose a Russian nationality for career purposes was relatively small.

³⁸ A study based on a representative sample of the 1979 Soviet census showed that 55.3 percent of children of Ukrainian-Russian marriages in Ukraine selected a Russian nationality (Volkov, 1989, p. 17). Earlier research conducted in the Soviet era showed that ethnically mixed children in Kyiv were almost evenly divided in their choice of the Russian or Ukrainian nationality (Krawchenko, 1985, p. 108; Kaiser, 1994, p. 319). It is significant, of course, that these children always had to choose a *single* nationality, and that the option of claiming both was not allowed.

³⁹ Leading Ukrainian demographers are of the opinion that the 1926 census undercounted Ukrainians living in Russia, particularly in Crimea (then part of the Russian Federation) (Khomenko, 1931, p. 18; Kubijovyc, 1963, pp. 208–209). Khomenko notes that the ethnic Ukrainian population in Crimea grew by only 19.6 percent between 1897 and 1926, compared to 66.6 percent for ethnic Russians, despite the fact that a significant number of migrants came from Ukrainian territories. Kubijovyc writes that “the official nationality statistics for the Crimea for 1926 … are incorrect, but there is no criterion on the basis of which more exact figures can be given.” Both assumed that a “correct” count of nationality had to be “backward-looking” and dismissive of assimilation, an assumption also shared by leading Soviet census officials at the time. This point is ammunition to contemporary Ukrainian nationalists who project Crimea as a historically ethnic Ukrainian land.

as a result of the politically induced famine, there was no overall population decline in the ethnic Ukrainian border provinces of the Russian Federation. Most Ukrainians of Russia, as counted in the 1926 census, disappeared statistically, but not physically.

Historians scouring the archives in the past decade have not found a specific document, a “smoking gun,” describing what actually happened in these areas during the 1937 census. The circumstantial evidence, however, is damning. The Ukrainian leadership had irritated Moscow in the 1920s by making territorial claims to border areas of Russia containing ethnic Ukrainian majorities (as recorded by the partial census of 1923 and the comprehensive census of 1926), such as Kuban, Kursk, Voronezh and the North Caucasus. The promotion of the Ukrainian language (*Ukrainizatsiya*) in those areas had also caused friction. After Stalin determined that “sabotage” in the frenetic policy of collectivization and grain requisition in Ukraine in 1932 was caused by “Ukrainian nationalism” (Martin, 2001, pp. 302–303), a decision appeared to have been made to solve the RSFSR/Ukrainian border contention by making Ukrainians (of Russia) into Russians. Or rather, since Soviet nationality discourse maintained its primordialist stance, by performing a “true” count of Russians, millions of whom were now deemed to have “incorrectly” been assigned to the Ukrainian nationality in 1926.⁴⁰

Can one thus assert that millions of Russians on the Russian side of the Ukrainian-Russian borderland are “truly” Ukrainian? This would assume that identities reflect an unalterable core. What seems to have happened is that most people in this borderland had a non-national (*rus’kyi*) sense of themselves in 1926, but were strongly encouraged, by Soviet propaganda and census-takers, to identify as Ukrainians. In 1937, however, they came under terrifying pressure to claim a Russian nationality (and were probably issued internal passports with that nationality without being given a choice).⁴¹ They could have become Ukrainians as a result of Soviet policy (*korenizatsiya*); they became Russians instead as a result of a superseding Soviet policy (the Stalinist method to solve border squabbles).

⁴⁰A 1940 article in *Bol’shevik* claimed that a pamphlet of the Central Statistical Administration in 1926 specially emphasized that Russians of Kuban “insofar as their ancestors had come from Ukraine, should be counted not as Russians which they declared themselves to be, but as Ukrainians (according to the criteria of ethnic origin)” (I. Sautin, “Naseleniye strany sotsializma (The population of the socialist state),” *Bol’shevik*, 10, May 1940, p. 17, as quoted by Bilinsky, 1964, p. 414). Residents of these rural areas had still a very weak sense of national consciousness and many would have probably declared themselves “rus’kii,” had the option been available.

⁴¹One often hears that residents of Kuban, who had previously identified as Ukrainians in the 1926 census, had a Russian nationality inscribed in their internal passport in the 1930s. However, passports were distributed only to people living in cities and border areas, or working in so-called state farms (*sovkhozy*), and most residents of Kuban probably did not fit those criteria in the 1930s.

The situation was drastically different in Soviet Ukraine. Millions of Ukrainians perished or suffered deportation, but there is no evidence that large numbers reidentified as Russians, either in the 1930s or in the post-war era. In a landmark study, Anderson and Silver (1983) estimated that a very low proportion of ethnic Ukrainians (3 percent) reidentified as Russians between the 1959 and 1970 censuses. Since their pool included the entire Ukrainian population of the Soviet Union, including the six million living in the Russian Federation, the proportion was without question lower among Ukrainians living in Ukraine. This is all the more significant, considering the high rates of linguistic assimilation to Russian among Ukrainians, which the census greatly underestimated, as we will see below. Far from inciting Ukrainians to "become" Russians, Soviet nationality practice, through its policy of determining nationality in internal passports according to lineage, had the opposite effect of "congealing" nationalities.

In postwar censuses, the percentage of ethnic Ukrainians in Ukraine gradually declined, from 76.8 percent in 1959 to 72.7 percent in 1989. This trend is virtually certain to be reversed in 2001.⁴² National activists are expected to interpret the new percentages as a confirmation that many "true" Ukrainians had been forcibly Russified in the past, but the changes are likely to be related more to outmigration, which probably affected a greater proportion of ethnic Russians than ethnic Ukrainians, and new incentives to identify as Ukrainian among the younger generation.

On the latter point, Rapawy (1997), using data from birth certificates between 1989 and 1994, observed that the proportion of mothers giving birth who were of Ukrainian nationality steadily increased, from 73.5 percent to 77.4 percent, while that of the Russian nationality decreased from 20.8 percent to 17.0 percent. This led him to argue that a process of ethnic reidentification from Russian to Ukrainian among these young mothers was the most likely explanation. The Soviet practice, however, was to record the nationality of parents on the birth certificate on the basis of information provided in internal passports, not following an oral declaration. It is most unlikely that mothers went through the tedious process of having their passport nationality changed, especially since there was no legal foundation to do so before 1992.⁴³

First-time identification with a nationality among children of mixed ethnic background, rather than reidentification among adults, might be a more promising hypothesis to explain the relative change in nationality

⁴²The aggregate number of ethnic Ukrainians, however, is likely to decrease, since preliminary results a week after the completion of the census put the overall population of Ukraine at 47.825 million, a decrease of 3.63 million since the 1989 Soviet census (*Obrobka danykh*, 2001). The relative decrease (7.0 percent) is far larger than the decrease of 2.1 percent registered between the 1926 and 1937 censuses.

⁴³The nationality entry in internal passports was abolished by law in 1992, but new passports only began to be issued in 1996, reaching a critical mass by 1998. A legal procedure to change one's passport nationality, absent from Soviet legislation, had been instituted in Ukraine by presidential decree on December 31, 1991.

composition that cannot be reduced to birth/death differentials or migration flows. Data from sociolinguistic tests conducted in Ukrainian-language and Russian-language schools from four regions of Ukraine in 1998 by the Dutch geographer Germ Janmaat indicate that the vast majority of children from ethnically mixed marriages chose to identify as Ukrainian, a huge change from Soviet-era trends.⁴⁴ Janmaat asked schoolchildren to complete the sentence "I am (Ukrainian, Russian, Other)." One could argue that some of these children might have expressed a sense of civic, not necessarily ethnic, affiliation to Ukraine. But this is precisely the point. For a generation not socialized into equating nationality with an ethnic identity inscribed in personal documents, the meaning of "nationality" may be associated more with territory ("I live in Ukraine, thus I am Ukrainian"). While this process can be called "assimilation" (Tul'skiy, 2001), it is important to note that it concerns a younger generation in the process of acquiring a national identity (and massively acquiring a Ukrainian nationality), as opposed to adults previously identifying as Russians and now "assimilating" into Ukrainian.⁴⁵ The great appeal of a Ukrainian identity among children of mixed heritage underscores the high status of a Ukrainian nationality in post-Soviet Ukraine, despite the continuing prevalence of the Russian language.

LANGUAGE: WHO YOU ARE, NOT WHAT YOU SPEAK

Any visitor to Kyiv or heavily urbanized Eastern Ukraine can attest to the fact that the Ukrainian language is seldom used in the streets. Reliable survey opinion polls conducted throughout the past decade have indicated that approximately one out of three ethnic Ukrainians in the whole of Ukraine prefers to use Russian at home. In Eastern Ukraine, the proportion is nearly one out of two. On the face of it, linguistic assimilation to Russian appears to be far advanced in Ukraine, with approximately half of the entire population in Ukraine selecting Russian as the language of preference at home, more than twice the proportion of ethnic Russians (22 percent) recorded in the 1989 Soviet census in Ukraine (Arel and Khmel'ko, 1996).⁴⁶

Census data on language, based, as we saw earlier, on the standard category of native language (*rodnoy yazyk* in Russian, *ridna mova* in Ukrainian) used in all Russian and Soviet censuses, are quite different. In the

⁴⁴Unpublished data presented in conferences on Ukraine at the University of Toronto and Yale University in 1999–2000.

⁴⁵Tul'skiy claimed that the main cause of the decline in the number of ethnic Russians in the 1999 Belarusian census was "assimilation," i.e., "the fact that children of mixed marriages who used to register themselves as 'Russians' now registered themselves as 'Belarusians'." Tul'skiy's formulation is misleading, as the registration process of nationalities in documents has also been terminated in Belarus. Writing five months before the 2001 Ukrainian census, he expected that the decline in the Russian population of Ukraine would be largely associated with assimilation via mixed marriages.

1989 Soviet census, one ethnic Ukrainian *out of eight* (12.2 percent) claimed Russian as a native language—approximately one-third as much as the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians expressing a preference for Russian at home in sociological surveys. Census data paints a picture of Ukraine in which nearly two residents out of three speak Ukrainian as a native language—a constitutional majority.⁴⁷ Surveys ascertaining the language of preference at home portray residents of Ukraine as equally divided in their language of preference at home—a tie.⁴⁸

Shouldn't a census question on language attempt to capture the language that people prefer to speak in their private lives? When asked this question, the chief census official observed that a census is not a sociological survey (Stel'makh, 2000).⁴⁹ The point is well taken. Sociological surveys are made to advance scientific research, while the purpose of including categories on language or nationality in censuses is political. In neighboring Belarus, the Russophile administration of President Lukashenka, which *de facto* promotes Russian as the language of state, has an interest in projecting a statistical image of Belarus as largely Russian-speaking. With this objective in mind, a question on “conversational language” (*razgovornyy yazyk*) was included in the Belarusian census, and the great majority of ethnic Belarusians declared Russian as their conversational language (Goujon, 2001).

Ukraine, on the other hand, has consistently used the Ukrainian language as a legitimating symbol of its independence from Russia. Its pre-eminent state-building interest is to produce majorities both for the Ukrainian nationality and for Ukrainian-speakers. The Russian state, which declares itself preoccupied with the fate of Russian linguistic populations in the so-called near abroad, claims that Russian-speakers are in the majority in Ukraine. A statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs even asserted that Russian is “the native language of the overwhelming majority of the population of Ukraine” (Solchanyk, 2000). This statement

⁴⁶Critics have charged that opinion poll data on language spoken at home overlooks the extent of bilingualism in home conversations (Martyniuk, 1999). The point is a serious one that cannot be given proper treatment within the scope of this article. Personal observation, reinforced by the 1998 Janmaat study (footnote 44), suggest that, often, the declared use of bilingualism (e.g., at home, among friends) does not coincide with an individual's *actual* preference in such encounters.

⁴⁷In the 1989 census, 64.7 percent of the population of Ukraine declared Ukrainian as a native language, including 87.8 percent of those claiming a Ukrainian nationality, 1.6 percent claiming a Russian nationality, and 10.0 percent claiming another nationality. Calculations are based on census data provided by Guboglo (see footnote 19).

⁴⁸In conducting surveys, the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) asks a respondent to select the language of the interview (Ukrainian or Russian). The “language of preference” thus reflects an empirical act, rather than a claim. In a previous publication (Arel and Khmel'ko, 1996), my co-author and I called this act “the language of convenience.” “Convenience,” however, may have the connotation of deferring to another party, more than choosing a language on the basis of one's preference.

⁴⁹Liubov' Stel'makh was head of the Administration on Population Statistics, State Committee of Statistics (*Derzhkomstat*) of Ukraine.

is inaccurate. When specifically asked about *native* language, as we just discussed, two-thirds of Ukrainian residents chose Ukrainian in 1989. A question on *razgovornyy yazyk* (*rozmovna mova*) would, admittedly, produce results more favorable to Russian, but Ukrainian nation-builders have obviously no interest in promoting this kind of statistical representation. The nation-building imperative for Ukraine is to equate language and nationality as closely as possible, thereby presenting Russian as a minority language and emphasizing the language of people's *origins*.

The Ukrainian census thus kept "native language" as its main language indicator. As argued previously, *rodnoy yazyk* does have the connotation of origins. (*Ridna mova* has exactly the same connotation in Ukrainian). This point was driven home to me a number of times as I was observing the census campaign in Kyiv in December 2001. Particularly illuminating was a conversation I had with a college student named Pasha (Kazymirov, 2001). The student, like most Kyivans, was perfectly fluent in Ukrainian, but preferred to use Russian at home and with his friends. Moreover, his parents raised him in Russian. No matter how "mother tongue" is defined—as "the first language(s) spoken in early childhood" (UN/Eurostat Recommendation), or "the language which the person commands best" (in the German tradition)—Pasha clearly has Russian as a mother tongue. Yet the census inquires about *native* language, not mother tongue, and he interpreted this to mean the language of his nationality. "Why didn't you say that Russian was your *ridna mova*?" I inquired. "Because I am not Russian!" The same heartfelt affirmation of identity could be heard from taxi drivers, hotel administrators, and other random Kyivans I chatted with who, otherwise, merrily functioned in Russian. Suddenly, what Soviet and Western scholars had theorized about—that Soviet respondents tended to interpret the census question on *rodnoy yazyk* as a restatement of their nationality—was coming alive in the streets of Kyiv.

Yet this is not at all how language activists saw it. On the very first day of the census, the Prosvita Ukrainian Language Society accused census officials of devising questions aimed at maximizing Russian to the detriment of Ukrainian (Liss, 2001). The question on native language, they complained, should have clearly referred to the language a person first spoke with his mother (i.e., the UN/Eurostat definition) (Kipiani, 2001). Amazingly, census instructions reproduced word-for-word the same ambiguous formulation, tilted toward the language of use, that had plagued the Soviet question on *rodnoy yazyk* since the 1920s.⁵⁰ Prosvita activists were concerned that the question on native language might be understood as the language people speak *now*, as opposed to the one they used then (as a child), an understanding that could only favor Russian. They also expressed misgivings about the objectivity of census-takers in reporting people's preferences on language. In a radio roundtable with Prosvita representatives, the deputy head of *Derzhkomstat*, Nataliia Vlasenko, conceded with rare candor that the "subjective convictions" of census-takers would influence census results on native language. Vlasenko

witnessed a scene between census instructors at a district census station and a woman who said she had originally declared Russian as her *ridna mova*, but after talking it over with her family, wanted to change it to Ukrainian. The instructors told her that, since she was speaking Russian (the whole scene took place in Russian), then her *ridna mova* should be Russian. Vlasenko interjected that determining the native language was up to the respondent (which is, after all, what the first line of the instructions clearly states). She was berated as a nationalist (*Pershi rezul'taty*, 2001).

Incidents like these have prompted analysts to predict an increase in the number of respondents claiming Russian as a native language (*Ukraine Census 2001*). This is most implausible. Since the great majority of ethnic Ukrainians actually using Russian at home claimed Ukrainian as their native language in the Soviet era, at a time when the status of Ukrainian was very low, why would more Ukrainians identify with Russian now that Ukraine is independent and the status of the Ukrainian language is on the rise?⁵¹ The example of neighboring Belarus is instructive in this regard. For the first time in postwar Belarusian censuses, the proportion of respondents claiming Belarusian as their nationality and Russian as their native language has decreased, in spite of the overt pro-Russian language policy of President Lukashenka (Goujon, 2001). This suggests that the identification of native language with one's titular nationality, which I observed in Kyiv, is getting stronger under post-independence conditions.⁵² Besides, there is evidence from surveys that the proportion of respondents claiming a Ukrainian nationality but using Russian at home has slightly, but perceptibly, diminished since the mid-1990s.⁵³

⁵⁰The instruction first tautologically asserts that native language is the language that the respondent considers native. It then adds that, if the respondent has difficulty naming a native language, the census-taker writes down the language that the respondent commands best, or that he uses in life, or at home. Confusion about the meaning of native language appears to be shared by census officials. Census head Stel'makh's declaration that the Ukrainian census "uses the same definition of 'native language' adopted by the UN" (Liss, 2001), is incorrect, insofar as the UN provides no definition for "native language," defines "mother tongue" as the first language(s) spoken in early childhood, and defines "main language" as the language which the person commands best. "Main language" (*osnovna mova*) is absent from Ukrainian census terminology (*United Nations Statistical Commission*, 1998).

⁵¹Public use of Ukrainian used to be relegated essentially to the Writers' Union and food markets in the capital. It now dominates formal state meetings, parliamentary proceedings, TV and radio public broadcasts, research institutes, and university teaching. Outside of Crimea, it also acts as the sole language of official documentation.

⁵²A fascinating question, which has yet to be investigated, is how to explain the variation in census answers among ethnic Ukrainians using Russian as their language of preference. Most claimed Ukrainian as their *native* language, but a significant minority (approximately one out of three) did not. What prompts the latter to choose Russian as their native language? One hypothesis could be the Vlasenko factor—undue pressure from census takers. Another one, perhaps more fruitful, is the mixed-marriage factor. Many respondents claiming a Ukrainian nationality have a Russian parent. For them, asserting a different nationality (Ukrainian) and native language (Russian) could be an indirect, and unconscious, way of asserting a dual identity (private communication from Ukrainian sociologist Iryna Lyzohub, December 2001).

Harder to fathom are the results of the census question on fluency in another language—i.e., other than a respondent's native language.⁵⁴ The question inquired about the "other language" that a respondent "freely command[s]" (*vil'no volodiete*). One could carp over the imprecise definition of "freely command."⁵⁵ The real issue, however, is the purpose of the question and how it is likely to have been interpreted by respondents. A virtually identical question was first introduced in the 1970 census. The purpose then, fairly transparent to Western observers, was to document the spread of Russian as the language of "inter-ethnic communication" (*mezhnatsional'noye otnosheniye*) in the Soviet Union. The purpose now is far less obvious. Since the knowledge of a second language other than Russian or Ukrainian remains extremely low in Ukraine, the "other" language that the vast majority of Ukrainian native speakers freely command happens to be Russian. Even the most committed Ukrainian nationalists agree with this sociolinguistic fact. The question is why the Ukrainian census should represent this fact in official results. The answer may have to do with the division among Ukrainians over the public use of Ukrainian. Many Ukrainians who express a preference for Ukrainian as a native language also happen to express a preference for Russian in their daily interactions. Census data indicating an overwhelming command of Russian among Ukrainians (as a second language), alongside a symbolic majority of Ukrainian speakers (as a native language) would reflect the popular ambivalence regarding language.

Ukrainian nationalist organizations, mistrustful of the state resolve to promote Ukrainian in public spheres, warned of a political conspiracy designed to make Russian a second state language and diminish incentives for people to learn and speak Ukrainian. The argument runs like this: census results indicating that the great majority of people speak Russian either as a first (native) or second (other) language will present Ukraine as a bilingual state; this will lead to a policy of official bilingualism (two state languages); official bilingualism will in turn reinstate Russian as the *de facto*

⁵³According to KIIS, the proportion of so-called "Russophone Ukrainians" (respondents claiming Ukrainian nationality, but Russian as their language of preference) was approximately 33–34 percent in 1994–95. In 2001, the proportion had decreased to approximately 28–30 percent. At the same time, the proportion claiming a Russian nationality had decreased from 22 to 20 percent (private communications from Valeriy Khmel'ko, March 2001 and January 2002).

⁵⁴In another departure from Soviet practice, the Ukrainian census asked three questions on language, under the rubric "Your language characteristics" (*Vashi movni oznaky*): native language, whether the respondent freely commands Ukrainian (for those not indicating Ukrainian as a native language), and another language the respondent freely commands.

⁵⁵The instructions first define "freely command" as the ability to read, write, and freely converse (*vil'no rozmovlyati*), and then contradict themselves by stating that the ability to freely converse is sufficient in itself. Moreover, the question on knowledge of Ukrainian ("If your native language is not Ukrainian, then indicate if you freely command Ukrainian") assumes that respondents claiming Ukrainian as native necessarily freely command the language.

hegemonic language of official communication, since Russian-speakers will have no incentive to use Ukrainian, knowing that they can legally get by in Russian.

Fearful of the political manipulation of results on second-language knowledge, these organizations called on Ukrainian native speakers *not* to declare their fluency in Russian: "Indicate whichever language you want [as second language], as long as it is not Russian" (*Kerivnytstvo*, 2001). The effectiveness of this appeal could very well reflect the electoral weight of nationalist parties, which tend to be very strong in the western region, moderately strong in the center (including Kyiv) and very weak in the east and south. The census, we argued at the outset, is best approached as a referendum on identity preferences. As an important constituency in Ukraine prefers that Russian be given no official status, it may very well have heeded the call of nationalist organizations and understood the question on second language as a referendum on language politics.

Ironically, Russian nationalist parties in Crimea sounded similarly ominous warnings about the manipulative potential of the question on knowledge of Ukrainian, but for diametrically opposed reasons. Crimea is a hegemonically Russian-speaking zone, where very little Ukrainian or Crimean Tatar can be heard anywhere. Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tatar all are official languages. In practice, Russian is used as the language of documentation (contrary to the rest of Ukraine) and of oral communication. Russian nationalists fear that census data showing that most Crimean Russians freely command Ukrainian could serve as the political pretext to forcefully introduce Ukrainian as the sole official language. In a mirror image of Ukrainian nationalist appeals to feign ignorance of Russian, the Crimean Russian press advised its readers not to declare knowledge of Ukrainian (Orlov, 2001). There is even evidence that census takers were predisposed, or perhaps trained, to test whether respondents volunteering Ukrainian as their "other" language where really fluent in Ukrainian (Uehling, 2002).⁵⁶ Hence, the two regions of Ukraine were a single language is most entrenched (Crimea—Russian, Galicia—Ukrainian) interpreted the census question on second language as an assault on their political fortress and, in effect, called on their constituents to boycott the question. Consequently, census results will tell us less about the number of people knowing Russian or Ukrainian as a second language than about how many read in the question yet another restatement of their nationality.

CONCLUSION

Counting nationalities in censuses tends to be presented as a scientific measurement of objectively defined groups. In reality, what the process

⁵⁶Uehling, an American anthropologist, accompanied census-takers in Crimea during the 2001 Ukrainian census. Uehling, Dickinson, and the author were part of a collaborative research team on the Ukrainian census.

captures is more an expression of preferences along a set of official categories. In censuses conducted on territories of present-day Ukraine in over a century, the categories (language, nationality) were devised by state agents to pursue state-building interests. In the 2001 Ukrainian census, these interests, in striking continuity with Soviet practices, called for the maintenance of separate categories of nationality and language, the use of a language category (*ridna mova*) connoting origins rather than current use, and the recoding of unrecognized ethnonyms in the name of science. Within these pre-determined categories, the population of Ukraine, to a certain extent, used the census questions on nationality and language to express political preferences, filtered through the third-party intervention of census takers.

A crucial preference expressed in the Ukrainian census concerns language. Constituencies among Ukrainian-speakers and Russian-speakers have interpreted the question on knowledge of a *second* language as a referendum on language politics, i.e., on how the state will regulate the public use of language where they live. Furthermore, the question on first language—native language—stands out as a case study in census identity politics. Analysts had noted how linguistically assimilated non-Russians during Soviet censuses tended to identify with the language of their nationality. The trend was unmistakable in Ukraine. In all likelihood, the “vote” for a Ukrainian “native” language by people raised in Russian was as strong as ever in the 2001 Ukrainian census. The census behavior of “Russophone” Ukrainians—i.e., of people claiming a Ukrainian nationality but preferring to speak Russian at home—is intriguing. It is as if Russo-phone Ukrainians, who can speak Ukrainian but would rather not speak it if they don’t have to, are asserting that the Ukrainian language is, nonetheless, at the root of their identity. Russian-language activists in Ukraine tend to be dismissive of census results on *rodnoy yazyk* by focusing on the language actually spoken by half of the population (Russian). Yet census results on language, while selective (a question on conversational language was carefully avoided), are a fair representation of popular preferences. Russophone Ukrainians are not pressured to identify with the Ukrainian language (Ukrainian nationalists, as we saw, actually believe that the pressure favors Russian). These Ukrainians appear to be saying, through the census, that the Ukrainian language collectively defines their *distinctiveness*, even if they would rather use Russian in their daily lives.

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