

## THE POLITICS OF THE CENSUS: OF GYPSIES, ROMS, AND EGYPTIANS

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The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place.

Benedict Anderson,  
*Imagined Communities*

If population size is important in determining the political and economic status of an ethnic group, then the determination of that size is crucial. Indeed, if ethnic population size is politically important, then the process of statistical collection, compilation, analysis and interpretation becomes politicized.

Milica Bookman,  
“Demographic Engineering and  
the Struggle for Power”

Save us, Lord, from the Bulgarian  
who becomes a Greek and from the Gypsy  
who becomes a Turk.

Bulgarian proverb<sup>1</sup>

In *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Donald L. Horowitz (1985: 86) observes that political competition in ethnically divided societies tends to turn into a census as the members of such societies vote their ethnic affiliations. The purpose of this article, however, is to consider the flip side of this coin by pointing to ways in which the census can reflect ethnopolitical considerations in the choice of census categories, the application of these categories, and the claims put forth by interested parties. To this end, I examine the production of census figures on “Gypsies” under Communism<sup>2</sup> and on “Roms” and “Egyptians” in post-Communist Eastern Europe.<sup>3</sup>

I first survey the effects on census results of the range of categories available to those who are its objects as well as of the ways in which the census is administered. I then outline methods used by most East European Communist regimes for counting Gypsies and the reflections of these methods in post-Communist census results. Moving to a greater degree of specificity, I turn next to a case study of the emergence of the census category “Egyptians” in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup> Taking into account the considerable discrepancies between the official and unofficial sizes of Romani

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Poulton (1995: 38).

<sup>2</sup> My characterization of the (admittedly non-identical) regimes that came to power in Eastern Europe shortly after World War II as Communist reflects the name usually taken by the ruling political party rather than a thesis about the stage of historical development of the societies living under those regimes.

<sup>3</sup> Whereas the term ‘Rom’ is neutral, ‘Gypsy’ often has a pejorative connotation. I use the latter term in presenting policies and statements the declared targets of which are “Gypsies.” In using the plural ‘Roms’ rather than ‘Roma’, I accept Victor Friedman’s (1999: 319-320) assertion that “‘Roma’ exoticizes and marginalizes rather than emphasizing the fact that the group in question is an ethnic group” equal to all others, the names for which end in ‘s’ in the English plural.

<sup>4</sup> While self-identifying Egyptian populations live throughout the Balkans (see, for example, Marushiakova et al. 2001: 31), the case study in this paper is limited to the former Yugoslavia.

populations throughout post-Communist Eastern Europe, in my conclusion I briefly sketch measures toward producing more accurate figures on the size of Romani populations.

### **Making the census**

Within the range of methods available to actors seeking to change the numerical relations among ethnic groups living within the boundaries of a given territory, altering the ways in which populations are defined and measured is perhaps the least intrusive (cf. Bookman 2002: 28). Possible effects of state category choices include “amalgamation” (e.g., Czechs and Slovaks vs. Czechoslovaks; the inclusion of all ethnic minorities in a single census category in post-Communist Albania), “absorption” (e.g., Communist Bulgaria’s classification of Pomaks,<sup>5</sup> Turks, and Roms as Bulgarians), “fragmentation” (e.g., distinctions between Germans, Saxons, and Swabians in the 1992 Romanian census), “invention” (e.g., the introduction of categories “Yugoslav” and “Muslim” in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), and “omission” (e.g., ruling “Jews” a confessional category and “Gypsies” a social category, such that neither constitutes an appropriate object of Communist statistics on ethnic composition<sup>6</sup>) (Liebich 1992: 33-35). These techniques can also be combined: The Soviet census category “Moldovans” constitutes an example of fragmentation combined with invention (i.e., ruling persons previously considered Romanians to be members of a nationality created for those same persons) (Liebich 1992: 34).

Even after the categories to be used in a given census have been determined, the results of the census are affected by the ways in which it is administered. First, the language (or languages) in which census documents are printed (and in which the census is publicized more generally) delimits the language that a country’s inhabitants use to answer the questions contained in the documents. This, in turn, presumably has a restrictive effect on

the ethnicities likely to be declared by those being counted, particularly affecting the declarations of persons with weak or multiple ethnic identifications.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, direct appeals by state and non-state figures influence census declarations: during the 1991 census in Macedonia, for example, the leading political party of the ethnic Albanian population called for a boycott on the grounds that census forms were not printed in Albanian, while at the same time appealing to Roms and Macedonian Muslims to declare themselves Albanian (cf. Liebich 1992: 37; Popov 1992: 38-39). Finally, characteristics of those actually administering the census may have an effect on the results – even if we assume that census-takers do their best to let those counted make their own choices (not always a fair assumption), the ethnicity and native language of the census-taker (to the extent that these are known) may affect the answers generated and thus the apparent ethnic composition of the country in question.

### **Counting Gypsies, polling Roms**

Most East European Communist regimes officially denied the existence of Romani ethnicity while counting Gypsies as members of a backward social group according to criteria specified by high-ranking bureaucrats.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, official figures on the Gypsy population were usually produced on the basis of ascription by state officials, rather than from the declarations of those being counted.<sup>9</sup> In light of the stigma associated with classification as a Gypsy since well before the Communist period, the collapse of Communism has in some cases led to a steep drop in the number of persons declaring Romani nationality relative to the number of persons classified as Gypsies under the previous regime, with the decrease in the official statistics due to the change from ascription by state officials to self-declaration.<sup>10</sup> Thus, many

<sup>5</sup> Pomaks are Bulgarian-speaking Muslims whose ancestors converted to Islam under the Ottomans.

<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to Srb (1985: 144-145), in the Czechoslovak census of 1980 78.7% of Roms declared Slovak ethnicity and 20% Magyar. As a result, Roms accounted for 3.64% of declared Slovaks and 7.16% of declared Magyars (also see Bakker 1997: 42).

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Phil Roeder for pointing this out.

<sup>8</sup> The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was a notable exception to this generalization in making “Gypsy” (before 1971) and “Rom” (after 1971) voluntary (self-)designations.

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed discussion of methods used by Communist regimes for counting Gypsies, see Kalibová (2001: 126) and Srb (1985: 39).

<sup>10</sup> In the Czech and Slovak Republics, for example, the 1991 census figures (32,903 and 75,801) amount to well below half the corresponding

self-conscious Roms conceal their ethnic identity in the present day, such that their declarations of ethnicity to census takers are not necessarily useful indicators of their ethnic identity (Druker 1997: 2; Kalibova 2000: 171; Liebich 1992: 37; Mann 1998: 49; Marushiakova et al. 2001: 22; Podolák 1998: 30; also see Baèová 1991: 140-141): “Official recognition of nationality status,” Zuza Kumanová notes, “does not mean an immediate willingness and a real possibility to declare national consciousness” (Kumanová 1998: 49).

Whereas the stigma of Gypsiness leads many self-conscious Roms to declare an ethnicity different from the one with which they identify in daily life, others confound ethnicity with identities civic, confessional, and linguistic. In the first type of confounding, Roms declare themselves members of the titular nationality out of an identification with the state bearing its name rather than with the titular nationality itself.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Slovak Roms explained to me repeatedly in the course of my fieldwork in Romani settlements that “Roms are Slovaks.”<sup>12</sup> The second variant of

confounded identities, on the other hand, seems to occur most frequently in former Ottoman possessions, with Roms in Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia sometimes declaring themselves Turks on the grounds of their shared religion (i.e., Islam). Examples of confounded linguistic and ethnic identities, on the other hand, include declarations of Magyar ethnicity by Hungarian-speaking Roms in southern Slovakia and declarations of Albanian ethnicity by Albanophone Roms in Western Macedonia.

Although distinct analytically, these confoundings of ethnic, civic, confessional, and linguistic identities need not be distinct in practice. In Macedonia, for example, Turkish-speaking Roms (like the Romani population of Macedonia as a whole) are predominantly Muslim, such that a declaration of Turkish ethnicity to a census taker may stem as much from religious as from linguistic considerations. Moreover, some people identified as Roms (or Gypsies) from without do not think of themselves as Roms. Instructive in this regard are the results of a 1990 survey of Roms in Slovakia by the Slovak Statistical Office (cited in Jurová 1997a: 155), according to which 37% self-identify as Roms, 28% as Gypsies, 18% as Slovaks, and 17% as Magyars.

In light of the stigma associated with being a Gypsy and the possibilities for confounding ethnic identity with other identities, it is often unclear whether declarations of non-Romani ethnicity by persons identified from without as Roms stem from instrumental calculations or confusion on the part of self-conscious Roms, or whether the same declarations

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statistics from the previous census (88,587 and 199,853), conducted in 1980.

<sup>11</sup> The confounding of civic and ethnic identities is distinct from conscious declarations of civic identity by persons who (also) self-identify as Roms, as in the claim by a Romani politician from Macedonia in an interview that I conducted in November 2000 that “There is no greater Macedonian than I,” or in the condolences sent by mobile phone text message to Macedonian Television by “Roms-Macedonians from Belgium” on the occasion of the funeral of the late president Boris Trajkovski in February 2004.

<sup>12</sup> That the confusion of civic and ethnic identities is not the exclusive domain of Roms in Eastern Europe is demonstrated by references in US print and broadcast media to ethnic Macedonians as ‘Macedonian Slavs’ and Albanians from Kosovo as ‘Kosovars’. In the former case, the chosen category implicitly assumes the existence of a category “Macedonian Albanians,” which, from the standpoint of both ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia, is a category containing far fewer members than there are ethnic Albanians with Macedonian citizenship; “Macedonians, Albanians, and others do not regard themselves as individual citizens with a defined and equal relationship to each other and to the state, but rather as members of collectivities that have to be defended from each other as well as from the state” (Bassuener 2001: 3; also see

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Hristova 2000: 10). An additional problem with this category is that it is excessively broad, as the existence of Bosniak, Bulgarian, and Serb populations within the Republic of Macedonia is sufficient to establish that not all Slavs in Macedonia are ethnic Macedonians. Finally, as Victor Friedman has brought to my attention, claims that the use of the term ‘Macedonian Slav’ is necessary because the Republic of Macedonia is a multi-ethnic state often serve to deny the legitimacy of a Macedonian ethnic identity; while the Russian Federation is also a multi-ethnic state, for example, the appellation ‘Russian Slav’ is not in common use. The problem with the use of the term ‘Kosovar’ to refer to Albanians from Kosovo, on the other hand, is that its exclusive use effectively excludes Kosovo’s non-Albanian inhabitants, despite the fact that they, too, identify with the region.

come from people who do not identify themselves as Roms in any circumstances. Regardless of its underlying considerations, ethnic mimicry among people identified from without as Gypsies or Roms is neither a recent phenomenon nor a thing of the past (Druker 1997: 22; Popov 1992: 40, 42; Vukanoviæ 1963: 11): already observable in Ottoman registers, this tendency is equally apparent in the U.S. Department of State's estimate that 150,000 Hungarian-speaking Roms in Slovakia declared themselves Magyars at the 1991 census (Tomova 1995: 19; U.S. Department of State 1997). Notwithstanding ethnic mimicry's ties to upward social mobility, however, non-Roms faced with declarations of non-Romani ethnicity by persons whom they identify as Roms tend to maintain their views of the prospective assimilants (Duijzings 1997: 208-209; Popov 1992: 42). In this sense, Romani social (as opposed to personal) identity constitutes a paradigmatic example of what Ernest Gellner has called an "entropy-resistant" classification (Gellner 1983, Chapter 6).

The village of Jarovnice in eastern Slovakia provides a neat illustration of the persistence of a clear ethnic boundary despite changes in declarations to census takers.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the results of the 1991 census indicate that 36.8% of Jarovnice's inhabitants are Roms, the corresponding figure from the 2001 census is 16.3%.<sup>14</sup> Although such a change in the census figures raises questions about assimilation and migration processes over the decade that elapsed between the two censuses, statistics kept by the town hall and the village's primary school indicate that the local Romani population has grown consistently in both absolute and relative terms. Further, the location of the local police station at the point where the only road out of the Romani settlement connects to the village streets suggests that although most of Jarovnice's inhabitants now declare themselves Slovak at the census, the drop in the official number of Roms is not an indication of assimilation.

### **The Balkan Egyptians**

#### *"Egyptian" as a census category*

The political nature of the census as it applies to persons generally viewed by others as

Roms<sup>15</sup> is perhaps best illustrated by the emergence of the census category "Egyptians" in the former Yugoslavia. First recognized as a distinct group in 1990 by the (then-)Yugoslav state in methodological materials to be used in the 1991 census, Egyptians appear in the results of the 1991 Macedonian census in the number of 3,307 persons, with the census conducted in 1994 yielding a figure of 3,169 (Risteski 1991: 10; also see Duijzings 1997: 201).<sup>16</sup> Also in 1990, Egyptians founded civic associations in Ohrid and Prishtina (Duijzings 2000: 139). Whereas the primary stated goal of the associations was to prevent Egyptians in Western Macedonia and Kosovo from assimilating into the ethnic Albanian population (Duijzings 2000: 139), recognition in the census was apparently the Egyptians' sole political demand, with the president of the Ohrid-based association stating, "We have all the rights we need. We don't need our own schools or anything" (Sudetic 1990). Additionally, while Egyptians in Macedonia formed political parties in 1991 and 2000, neither has been particularly active.

The inclusion of a census category for Egyptians in countries well outside the Middle East begs the question as to how Egyptians got to the Balkans. The remainder of this section consists in an examination of two disparate approaches to this question. Whereas the first type of approach endeavors to trace the Egyptians to Egypt, the second type emphasizes the stakes associated with census results. Following a brief look at some attempts to establish the Egyptians' origin in Egypt, I present evidence that Egyptian identity became attractive to those who declared it as a

<sup>15</sup> The international Romani leader Rajko Djurić, for example, has called Egyptians "gentrified Gypsies" (Sudetic 1990). My own Macedonian and Romani informants tended to take a similar view (cf. Abduramanoski 1994). Many ethnic Albanians, on the other hand, think of Egyptians as "Albanian Gypsies" (Risteski 1991: 17; cf. Willems 1997: 2).

<sup>16</sup> While an additional census was conducted in Macedonia in 2002, the published results of this census do not include a separate figure for Egyptians. By way of contrast, the results of the 2002 Serbian census (which does not cover Kosovo, for which no such figure is available) indicate that a total of 814 Egyptians live in Central Serbia and Vojvodina (Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore 2004: 13).

<sup>13</sup> For a similar example from another East Slovak village, see Molčan (2000: 167).

<sup>14</sup> Data provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

result of a change in the incentive structure of official ethnic affiliations, a change integrally tied to a desire on the part of Yugoslav authorities to reduce the nominal Albanian population in the Autonomous Territory of Kosovo and the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.<sup>17</sup>

### *Egyptians as a diaspora of Egypt*

Among the various<sup>18</sup> accounts of the Egyptians' arrival on the Balkan Peninsula, perhaps the most familiar has the ancestors of present-day Egyptians coming with the armies of Alexander the Great to the territory of Macedonia, where they intermarried with local inhabitants (Risteski 1991: 11; cf. Hadži-Ristikj 1994c). A second scenario has the Egyptians coming to the Balkans as traders on the Via Ignacia under the Byzantine Empire (Risteski 1991: 11). According to a third account, Egyptians arrived on the Balkan Peninsula during the Arab siege of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik) in the ninth century (Risteski 1991: 12).<sup>19</sup> Another version relies on an Ottoman-era history of the Central Macedonian city of Bitola (Monastir) which mentions another, much older, handwritten history of the city that describes the arrival of Ramses II on the Balkan peninsula around 2300 BC (Hadži-Ristikj 1994c). While none of these narratives is absurd on its face, evidence for any of them is lacking.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In so contesting claims that the Egyptians of the Balkans in fact originated in Egypt, it is not my intention to contest their right to declare themselves Egyptians at the census and in everyday life. My aim is rather to demonstrate the highly politicized nature of Egyptian identity in the former Yugoslav republics by pointing out problems with the evidence on the basis of which scholars have thus far attempted to establish the veracity of the Egyptians' genesis myth.

<sup>18</sup> Hadži-Ristikj (1996: 110-120), for one, has outlined ten possible contexts for the arrival of the ancestors of the present-day Egyptians in the Balkans.

<sup>19</sup> While Egyptians are mentioned in the town register of Ragusa, the entry dates from 1362 (Marushiakova and Popov 2001: 19).

<sup>20</sup> In the last of his series of articles on Egyptians in the Macedonian daily *Nova Makedonija*, Hadži-Ristikj calls for a biochemical test to establish a genetic distinction between Egyptians and Roms (Hadži-Ristikj 1994e). To the best of my knowledge, no such test has been attempted at this writing. Poulton (1995: 142), on the other hand,

If there seems to be little in the way of physical evidence to substantiate a migration from Egypt to the Balkans, the linguistic evidence presented to establish an objective distinction between Egyptians and Roms is even more tenuous. As evidence of such a distinction, Miodrag Hadži-Ristikj claims that Egyptians have never spoken Romani and observes that no subgroup of the Romani population has ever lost or given up the Romani language (Hadži-Ristikj 1994a; 1994d). Whereas the first claim is difficult, if not impossible, to substantiate, the latter assertion is refuted by the existence of sizeable (and declared) Romani populations in Western Macedonia, the members of which speak Macedonian or Albanian as their first language and do not generally know Romani (even as a second language).<sup>21</sup> Hadži-Ristikj also points to various terminological distinctions (e.g., 'Egyptians,' 'Gypsies,' 'Copts,' and 'Blacksmiths') in Macedonian, Serbian, and Turkish as evidence that Egyptians and Roms have different origins (Hadži-Ristikj 1994b; also see Zemon 1996).<sup>22</sup> In light of the fact that misnomers for Roms (including the English term 'Gypsies') have been coined in various languages<sup>23</sup> on the

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reports the recent discovery of documents in the Vatican Library which purport to show that some 300,000 Egyptians came to Macedonia in the 4th century, while Duijzings (2000: 141-142 fn 11) cites a statement from the official Yugoslav news agency concerning such documents. See Kuzman (1996) for a discussion of archaeological evidence of an Egyptian presence in Macedonia.

<sup>21</sup> Thus, in Gostivar, whereas 1,904 persons declared Romani ethnicity in the 2002 census, 301 claimed Romani as their mother tongue (State Statistical Office 2004a; 2004b). Similarly, in Kičevo 1,630 persons declared themselves Roms while 114 reported that their mother tongue was Romani. The best example of self-identifying Roms speaking a language other than Romani as their first language, however, is Debar: 1,079 Roms but only 49 native speakers of Romani.

<sup>22</sup> Here it is worth noting the existence of a relatively small, largely Albanophone ethnic group in Montenegro the members of which call themselves '*Kovači*' (Blacksmiths) but are generally considered Roms both by (self-identifying) Roms and by non-Roms.

<sup>23</sup> In 17th-century Ottoman Turkey, for example, non-Roms referred to Roms interchangeably as "Copts" and "people of the pharaohs" (Friedman and Dankoff 1991: 3, 5).

basis of a mistaken belief that the Roms originated in Egypt,<sup>24</sup> however, this line of argument is on ground no more solid than are the other hypotheses presented above.

*“Egyptians” as an artifact of interethnic competition*

More plausible than accounts that attempt to link the Egyptian populations of the former Yugoslavia to Egypt is the thesis that official recognition of an Egyptian identity in Kosovo and Macedonia is the product of ethnopolitical considerations. As Ger Duijzings (1997: 210) puts it, the Yugoslav census in an important sense substituted for democratic elections by providing a basis for proportional representation. Insofar as census results were used to set ethnic quotas for jobs, housing, political appointments, and scholarships, the Yugoslav census effectively reinforced the importance of ethnic affiliation (Duijzings 1997: 210, 216). Particularly in Kosovo, but also in parts of the Socialist Republic of Macedonia, underdevelopment and relative overpopulation made for a particularly high degree of interethnic competition. In this environment, declarations of Albanian ethnicity by person who might otherwise be considered Albanian-speaking Roms offered the promise of improved access to valued resources.

That views of Albanian population growth as problematic were accepted by Yugoslav authorities is demonstrated by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts’ 1985 publication of an edited volume entitled *Problems of*

<sup>24</sup> Whereas most scholarly theories of the origins of the Roms trace the Roms’ ancestors to the Indian subcontinent, more common among laypersons have been theories that Roms originated in Egypt or in Little Egypt. Like much else about the early history of the Roms, how they came to be associated with (Little) Egypt has not been explained to the satisfaction of all who study them. The dominant account, however, is that Roms realized shortly after their arrival in Europe the advantages of presenting themselves as princes chased out of (Little) Egypt by invading Muslims (Courthiade 2001: 5; Horváthová 1964: 14). If finding Egypt on a map is easy enough, the location of Little Egypt has been the subject of some debate, with the consensus apparently that the term referred to the Peloponnesian peninsula (Marushiakova and Popov 2001: 16; Petrovski 2000: 65).

*Demographic Development in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia* (Bogoev 1985b). Whereas contributors to *Problems of Demographic Development* (e.g., Bogoev 1985a; Bubevski 1985) tend to focus on the birthrate of the ethnic Albanian population, other observers have made note of assimilatory pressures exerted by ethnic Albanians on members of smaller Muslim populations (see, for example, Duijzings 1997: 211; Friedman 1999: 23; Irwin 1989: 392; Limanov 1980; Poulton 1995: 141; 1998: 15, 19; Ramet 1992: 196-197). Concerned with alleged Albanian irredentism, authorities in the republics took a variety of measures to bolster the distinctiveness of the smaller groups as a means of discouraging assimilation into the ethnic Albanian population (Bubevski 1985: 540-541; Crowe 1996: 228; Friedman 1999: 318 fn 2, 329; Kenrick 2001; Popović 1989: 280; Poulton 1989: 29; 1998: 15; Reemstma 1995: 13). Among the smaller Muslim populations affected by these measures were Roms, Macedonian Muslims (*Torbeši*), and Egyptians.<sup>25</sup>

As ethnic Albanians lost power in Kosovo and Macedonia during the crackdowns of the 1980s, Albanian ethnicity ceased to be an advantage, such that representatives of the ethnic Albanian population found it increasingly difficult to “incorporate statistically” members of smaller Muslim populations (Duijzings 1997: 211). This shift in the ethnic balance of power initially left some who had previously declared themselves

<sup>25</sup> Robertina Ašuri and Rubin Zemon (1996: 11-14) tell a slightly different story. By their account, Egyptians in Struga and Ohrid responded to pressure from both Albanians and Roms by declaring themselves as “*Toskari*” in the 1971 census. Because the term *Toskar* refers to the Albanian dialect spoken by Egyptians in southwestern Macedonia, however, authorities counted them as Albanians in that census, allowing them to declare Egyptian ethnicity for the first time in 1981 (but included Egyptians only in the residual category for groups not among the 24 most numerous nationalities in Yugoslavia). In any case, the fact that Victor Friedman met with self-identifying Egyptians in Ohrid in 1972 makes clear that Egyptian identity is not simply a product of official recognition. Perhaps even more revealing in this regard is that a letter to the editor of the newspaper *Makedonia* dated June 3, 1867 was signed “An Egyptian from Prilep” (Marushiakova and Popov 2001: 76; Marushiakova et al. 2001: 31).

Albanian caught between two undesirable ethnic identities: an Albanian identity which had become a political liability and a Romani identity stigmatized by its association with Gypsiness (Ašuri and Zemon 1996: 13; Duijzings 1997: 213-214; Marushiakova et al. 2001: 43; Willems 1997: 2). Faced with these two unattractive options at a time when authorities were anxious to reduce the nominal Albanian population, members of this group agitated successfully for official recognition as Egyptians, with authorities in Albanian-inhabited parts of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia allowing and even encouraging Egyptian identity in pursuit of their own ethnopolitical goals (Duijzings 2000: 153-154). Thus, in a 1990 interview with *Der Spiegel*, Slobodan Milošević claimed that the majority of Kosovo's nominally Albanian population in reality consisted of Egyptians and spoke of the importance of registering Egyptians as such in the upcoming census of 1991.<sup>26</sup> Eight years later, Milošević included an Egyptian in Serbia's delegation to the February 1999 negotiations at Rambouillet, insisting that any national group represented in the parliament of an autonomous Kosovo be allowed to block any decision contrary to the group's (undefined) "vital interest" (Abrahams 1999; also see Poulton 1998: 16).

### Toward accurate census figures?

Taken together, the various pitfalls associated with census-taking in general and counting Roms in particular combine to yield considerable discrepancies between the official and unofficial sizes of Romani populations throughout post-Communist Eastern Europe. More specifically, the official figures tend to be considerably lower than the number of persons who identify themselves as Roms in daily life, often resulting in turn in overestimation on socially delicate indicators such as birthrate, unemployment, and criminality (Project on Ethnic Relations 2000: 27). On the other hand, some

<sup>26</sup> The (ethnic Albanian) head of the federal commission for the 1991 census, Hisein Ramadani, responded to Milošević's claim with the assertion that the "Egyptians" are in fact Albanianized Gypsies who suddenly want no longer to be Albanians (*Der Spiegel* 1990: 197). Risteski (1991: 18), on the other hand, claims that Albanian nationalists and separatists have exerted pressure on the Egyptian population during the entire postwar period.

Romani activists give inflated estimates of the numbers of those whom they claim to represent, sometimes without knowing much about Romani communities beyond their own locality (Druker 1997: 22).<sup>27</sup> The divergent origins of the excessively low and excessively high estimates notwithstanding, the question raised by both is what can be done to produce more accurate figures on the size of Romani populations.

On the one hand, there is widespread agreement among experts active in the field of anti-discrimination that data on ethnicity are necessary for the design and implementation of effective policies to combat discrimination (see, for example, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2005: 3; Goldston 2001: 39; Ivanov 2005: 6; Milcher and Ivanov 2004: 13; Petrova 2004: 5; Project on Ethnic Relations 2000: 16). On the other hand, there is increasing awareness among these same experts (almost invariably non-Roms) that the resistance of many otherwise self-identifying Roms to declaring themselves Roms at the census is rooted in lived experiences of abuse of personal data through policies designed to eliminate Gypsies by methods ranging from cultural assimilation to physical extermination. In an attempt to take both sets of considerations into account, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has recommended that ethnic data be collected in ways that ensure confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary self-identification (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2005: 4). Further, ECRI (2005: 4) has

<sup>27</sup> Druker (1997: 23), for example, cites estimates of 458,000 to 520,000 Roms in Slovakia and 110,000 to 260,000 in Macedonia. Moderate maximal estimates of the Romani population of the Slovak Republic (379,200) and the Republic of Macedonia (160,000) come from demographer Boris Vaňo (2001: 13) and from Romani non-government organizations, respectively. As André Liebich (1992: 39) states, "No figures on the numerical strength of minorities should be accepted uncritically," with Victor Friedman (1996: 89) pointing out that the rival claims of Macedonia's Serbs, Turks, Roms, Greeks, Egyptians, Bulgarians, and Vlachs surpass the total population of Macedonia and leave ethnic Macedonians uncounted; wide discrepancies among Bulgarian, Serbian, Greek, and Turkish census figures for Macedonia between 1889 and 1905 demonstrate that such rivalries are not a new phenomenon (Friedman 1996: 85).

stipulated that “personal data should be adequately protected and not be published in a manner that would divulge an individual’s identity.”

As reasonable as ECRI’s recommendations might be, the extent to which voluntary self-identification contributes to useful statistics on Roms depends in large part on *demonstrating* (rather than simply promising) to the target population that the personal data to be gathered will not be abused. Necessary to make such demonstration possible is a method that renders impossible the abuse of the data. As Iván Székely (2001: 279) puts it, such a method would “count the members of a community without numbering them, i.e., without recording them individually in files, registries or computer databases.” While the process of demonstrating to Romani populations the security of counting without numbering will require considerable effort on the part of state and non-state actors, it seems also to offer the best prospects for eliciting self-identification corresponding to Roms’ real experiences of ethnic identity.

### Conclusion

Moving from a general survey of census design and its effects on census results to a case study on the emergence of the census category “Egyptians” in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, this study has examined the production of census figures on Gypsies, Roms, and Egyptians in Eastern Europe. The overall aim of this examination has been to show that just as political competition in ethnically divided societies can take on elements of a census, so can the census reflect ethnopolitical considerations in its design and implementation. A subsidiary aim has been to demonstrate that although the census methods employed in post-Communist Eastern Europe differ significantly from those used under Communism, the fact that the populations living under the post-Communist regimes consist primarily of persons who also lived under those regimes’ Communist predecessors means that experiences under the Communist regimes can be expected to condition relations between these persons and the regimes under which they now live. Particularly where the Romani populations of the region are concerned, this fact requires in turn that special attention be paid not only to securing personal data, but also to demonstrating the function of the security measures. To the extent that these demonstrations are successful in promoting self-identification corresponding to real experiences of ethnic

identity, however, future censuses may yield not only higher numbers of Roms, but also more Egyptians, as well as others whose genesis myths we may find cause to question.

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