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# TO KNOW OURSELVES – NOT<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract.* The quest for self-knowledge has been a guiding principle throughout history. Plato acknowledged the duality of self-knowledge as both individual (the Delphic maxim “Know thyself”) and societal. “[I]f a Canadian is to seek self-knowledge that is essential for both health and wisdom, he [*sic*] must have access to a wider self-knowledge of his historical community and its contemporary circumstances” (Symons 1975:14). Thus began the Canadianization project which saw Canadian artists in all fields recognized; Canadian subject matter and data taught in universities, colleges, and public schools; Canadians hired as faculty at our universities; and Canadian Studies programs flourish. Census data and census making are key means by which we know ourselves as Canadians, both at present and from whence we came in families and collectively. The Census is a unique way of knowing ourselves since it enables collection of data on everyone from the most disadvantaged and hidden members of society to the best known individuals. The Census is the preeminent text for us all, particularly those who are silent or weak, to make claims for recognition. The Census is also an increasingly utilized resource for tracing ancestry, to know ourselves as descendents. In this paper, we rely on Plato’s duality of self-knowledge to explore some examples of the making of claims for recognition by groups past and present that may be lost with the cancellation of the mandatory long-form Census for 2011.

**Keywords:** Canada, census of population, self-knowledge

*Résumé.* La quête de la connaissance de soi est un principe directeur reconnu tout au long de l’histoire. Plato[n] reconnaît la dualité de la connaissance de soi à la fois comme un fait individuel (la maxime delphique : « Connais-toi toi-même ») et de société. « [S]i un canadien cherche la connaissance de soi, lequel est crucial tant pour la santé et la sagesse, il [*sic*] doit avoir accès à une plus large connaissance de soi tant dans son contexte historique et ses circonstances actuelles » (Symons 1975:14). Ainsi commence le processus de canadianisation, lequel a vu apparaître des professionnels canadiens dans nombre de domaines reconnus : enseignement des disciplines canadiennes dans les universités, les collèges et les écoles publiques ; recrutement des professeurs canadiens dans les universités, et développement des Programmes d’ Études canadiennes. Les

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recensements de la population réalisées et les données issues de ces opérations demeurent des moyens essentiels par lesquels nous nous connaissons en tant que canadiens, tant au moment actuel et d'où sommes-nous venus en tant que famille et collectivité. Le recensement reste une unique façon de nous connaître, car elle permet de collecter des données sur chacun de nous, les membres de la société les plus défavorisés, cachés et individus les plus connus. Le recensement est l'outil par excellence pour nous tous, en particulier les sans voix et défense, pour formuler des revendications de reconnaissance. Le recensement est également une ressource de plus en plus utilisée pour tracer l'ascendance et nous connaître en tant que descendants. Dans cet article, nous nous appuyons sur le dualisme platonicien de la connaissance de soi pour explorer quelques exemples de la réalisation des revendications de reconnaissance des groupes dans le passé et aujourd'hui qui pourraient disparaître avec l'abolition du caractère obligatoire du formulaire long du recensement de 2011.

Mot clés : Canada, recensement de la population, connaissance de soi

## INTRODUCTION

“Count Yourself In” has been the slogan of recent Censuses of Canada. Most Canadians are, and have been, very willingly “counting themselves in” on censuses for 130 years, even before the motto was used. The Census offers the fundamental mirror in which we see ourselves reflected. We also see in that mirror a means to stage and enact our Canadian identities in ever-changing social and economic contexts.

The quest for self-knowledge inclusive of knowledge about one's country is nearly universal. Early population censuses were done for a variety of reasons: so that governments could govern or govern better, to know whether populations were growing and specifically which sub-groups were growing, to assess where people live, to administer taxes, to assign political representation, the list goes on. Population headcounts or censuses have long been deemed matters of national importance in all countries, even those that are least developed. Censuses, done periodically in most jurisdictions in the world, enable benchmarking, or what Curtis (2001:306) terms a “codification of social relations,” the quantitative assessment of what is happening in society. “Work in the social laboratory [of policy and governance] depends on incorporating objects of investigation in administrative structures of greater or lesser complexity and solidity. Censuses are made, not taken” (Curtis 2001:307). And censuses are unmade, with deep social and sociological meaning, as this paper explores.

## THE 2011 CENSUS DRAMA

On June 26, 2010, the Harper government unmade the Census of Canada. It slipped a statement into the *Canada Gazette*, a publication not widely read, with no fanfare or hint that it was coming, that there would be no long-form census in 2011. In accordance with the 1971 *Statistics Act*, the questions for both the Census of Population and the Census of Agriculture are prescribed by the Governor in Council through an Order in Council. Typically, this is a formality only. Questions on the census are not debated in Parliament or in Cabinet in Canada, as they are in some countries such as the US. The statement in the *Canada Gazette* on June 26, 2010 read as follows:

Her Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Minister of Industry, pursuant to subsections 19(1) and 21(1) of the Statistics Act, hereby fixes May 2011 as the month in which a census of population shall be taken by Statistics Canada and prescribes the questions to be asked in the 2011 Census of Population, as set out in the annexed schedule.

And in the annexed schedule appeared *only* the short-form census with eight questions, thus abolishing the long-form census for 2011.

The account of the subsequent “drama” is told by the Chief Statistician at that time, Munir Sheikh (2011:18–19). The word “drama” is the Chief Statistician’s own choice of descriptors. He notes that this decision precipitated widespread criticism. “Close to 370 groups objected to the decision” (Sheikh 2011:18). And they were highly diverse: from provincial and municipal governments to academic researchers to religious organizations and think tanks on virtually every part of the political spectrum. The National Statistics Council, select experts from across Canada from public and private sectors which provides advice to Statistics Canada, heard about the decision only when the public did, and was highly critical. Canada’s national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, offered at least a dozen editorials on the matter, all critical of the government’s decision, unprecedented in number on a single issue. The minister responsible for Statistics Canada, the Honourable Tony Clement, responded that he was seeking what he called “balance” in obtaining the needed data and citizens’ interest in privacy. Statistics Canada has a world-wide reputation for meticulously protecting the privacy of all data provided by citizens as well as for carefully vetting all questions well in advance of each Census of Canada, with citizens’ groups and with the Privacy Commissioner.

Balance was argued by the Minister to be met by a voluntary survey instead of a mandatory census. The Chief Statistician had this to say in a subsequent paper, months after his resignation: "Undoubtedly, the quality of a mandatory census is higher than that of a voluntary survey, just as the power of a 53 foot transporter is greater than that of an SUV which itself is stronger than a passenger car" (Sheikh 2011:19). He goes on to suggest that a number of serious questions arise from the government's position to seek "balance," among them: whether the government analyzed carefully the consequences of a loss in data quality, why they had not consulted with data users prior to the decision, what relative gains in privacy resulted and how they compare with loss in data quality, and vitally, what exactly was the problem, if any, with Statistics Canada's long-standing and well respected approach to achieving data quality and privacy simultaneously. The answers to these and other questions arising have yet to be made public.

Another issue has emerged in the wake of the long-form Census drama. Statistics Canada has long believed and acted accordingly, that the 1971 Statistics Act provides enough independence to Statistics Canada from government so that it can be seen as "arm's length." The well known line from Statistics Canada for decades is that it provides no policy advice, just illumination of issues through the data it collects and analyzes. This, it is deeply understood in Statistics Canada, gives the agency trustworthiness in citizens' eyes. The census drama revealed that this tradition of an independent, arm's length organization was not as fully enshrined in law as Statistics Canada believed. Minister Clement seemed to be saying that census-making, inclusive of the technical and methodological, was his/the government's to do, not a responsibility of the technical experts at Statistics Canada. This distinction makes census-making inherently political, something very new in Canada. It also undermines the integrity and credibility of Statistics Canada and its data.

What led to the resignation of the Chief Statistician of Canada were media reports following comments made by the Minister on at least three occasions to the effect that the quality of the voluntary survey, the Household Panel Survey, would be as good as that of the mandatory census, and secondly, that Statistics Canada, and in particular the Chief Statistician, were firmly behind the decision. Advice given to the Minister from the Chief Statistician is protected under law, so cannot be released. However, Munir Sheikh's resignation statement of July 21, 2010, posted on Statistics Canada's website says:

I want to take this opportunity to comment on a technical statistical issue which has become the subject of media discussion. This relates to the

question of whether a voluntary survey can become a substitute for a mandatory census. It can not. (Sheikh 2010)

### SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND RECONFIGURING POWER POST 2011

Knowing in both sociology and history is highly contested territory. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter the intricate terrain of multiple ways to know ourselves. Instead, we endeavour to explore the long-form census in Canada as one of the foundational means by which Canadians come to know ourselves in both present and past. In our exploration, we work to provide specific examples of self-knowledge in its dual sense, both individual (the Delphic maxim “Know thyself”) and societal self-knowledge. And we, as a historian and a sociologist, layer two additional senses of self-knowledge — where we have come from and where we are now and in future.

Ways of knowing through official statistics are particular ways to seek self-knowledge. The process of census making involves multiple actors, various pressures, and needs for data. The processes involve priority setting, consultation with various publics, protections of privacy and individual data, and crucially, abstracting. This means that individuals in completing censuses engage with categories defined largely by others. Censuses thus are, in part, appropriating and expansive, even as they paint a fascinating canvas in which we can each see ourselves in relation to others and to our communities and other communities comparatively. Census making, which involves the entire process of construction, form filling, and interpretation/public sharing of results, is an inherently socially interactive process on multiple levels.

What the 2010 long-form census drama revealed was the sociopolitical wizardry behind the curtains. Our first objective in this paper is to consider, sociologically, what the process of the 2011 Census unmaking has revealed. Census making is known to be a disciplinary activity in Foucault’s sense. It demands of us that we complete questions, the meaning of which may not be transparent or resonant, particularly because we as individuals may resist tabulation into grids and categories. In the 2010 census drama, the issue of discipline was ostensibly the justification for abolishing the long form. Citizens, it was argued by the Harper government, do not wish to be disciplined in the fundamental first-order sense, into completing a census that is mandatory. That very few citizens complained about the imposition of the long-form census discipline is clear. Munir Sheikh (2011:19 i), the Chief Statistician who resigned over this matter, notes “[t]o my knowledge, there were two complaints against

the census on privacy grounds in the 2006 census, and one in the 2001 census.” But what emerges as compelling is that the technicians at Statistics Canada felt the strong arm of Foucault’s concepts of power and discipline. The technical was tamed, brought to heel by the political. The Minister repeatedly said that those at Statistics Canada think they are independent but they report to him. This is evocative of Jeremy Bentham’s (1931:399–400) “perfect machine of power.” Spectacle matters in obedience to those with power. The drama and the spectacle of the resignation of the Chief Statistician of Canada, however honourably he may have acted, reveals the Foucauldian prospect of how things are to be so that they may be ruled. The technical becomes eclipsed by the arm of the ruler.

Language and public opinion appear to bear out this shift toward that ever more perfect machine of power. Many, even those vehemently against the decision to cancel the 2011 long-form census, seem to have come under that machine of power in referring to the National Household Panel Survey as “the voluntary census,” a term that although inaccurate, has been parlayed frequently by the powerful. Social relations have been reorganized by the rulers on their terms, with the census as the instrument even in its unmaking. That the matter of the demise of the long-form census barely hit the radar in the spring election of 2011, with the minority Harper government sweeping to a majority, further attests acknowledgement of the discipline of power by the electorate/citizenry. Yet interestingly, the term “long-form Census” was the number one search phrase on Google by Canadians in 2011, so the discipline of power was not complete, it would seem.

### TO KNOW OURSELVES WITHOUT THE LONG-FORM CENSUS IN 2011?

Until 1971, there was no separation of the census into a long and short form, although there was sampling on supplementary questions beginning in 1941. From 1852–1966, all households in Canada were part of the same “long” population form. A separate agricultural census, which contained 251 questions in 1961, was sent to those engaged in agriculture. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics cited “response burden” as the reason to send the long form, which included the short form’s basic population questions and nine housing questions, as well as an additional twenty housing and thirty socioeconomic questions to 20% of the population (Worton 1998:288–291).

Canadians’ quest for self-knowledge formed part of the growing interest in the information the Census of Canada provided about us.

The 1975 four volume *Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies*, known widely as the Symons Report (Symons 1975), is credited as a turning point in Canadian self-knowledge. “[I]f a Canadian is to seek self-knowledge that is essential for both health and wisdom, he [*sic*] must have access to a wider self-knowledge of his historical community and its contemporary circumstances” (Symons 1975:14). The Report makes multiple recommendations, including access in education, particularly but not exclusively in universities and colleges, to data about Canada and Canadians, suggesting clearly and without equivocation that this access is crucial for individual self-knowledge and to develop knowledge about ourselves as Canadians. Prior to this report, many social sciences courses in Canadian universities relied on data and trends from elsewhere, primarily the US. In part, this was the result of the presence of many US faculty who had joined the ranks of Canadian universities. They tended to rely on data, textbooks, and trends that they had been taught. As a result, Canadian students were not afforded the opportunity to know themselves. To extend Symons’ argument, Canadian scholars went into their careers teaching young Canadian students with little self-knowledge of Canadian society, thus compromising the health and wisdom of future generations.

Based on the teaching of US trends and data, many Canadians lacked a Canadian self-identity and consciousness. Our distinctiveness and diversity — geographically, climatically, linguistically, culturally, economically, and politically — were not understood or appreciated by Canadians. Our differences from the Americans, our closest neighbours, were not fully known. The US, for example, sought to integrate immigrants into a vast melting pot while in Canada, a country founded officially by two linguistic and cultural groups, the French and the English, sought to nurture those heritages. Now, of course, we more fully acknowledge First Nations as a third founding peoples with their own multiculturalism. Our political institutions are different, as are our cities and various of our policies. Climatically, geographically, and geopolitically, Canada is distinct from other countries. Without self-knowledge, the Symons Report points out:

An otherwise intellectually alert person ... will be constantly at odds with himself. He will be constantly tripping, as it were, over his own feet. Lacking self-knowledge, he will inevitably entertain a false conception of himself and must try to act, more or less adequately, in accord with that false conception. (Symons 1975:13)

The Report continues, based on these insights, to make a strong case for self-knowledge by and for Canadians. Among the most vital of self-



knowledge, is that of where we came from, the study of Canadian history, and where we are now and going, the study of sociology. Both require good, universal data about Canadians across Canada, with the Census as one of the most reliable sources. The Census is particularly vital, as we shall highlight, where other data sources are scarce as they often were in the past, or are today with funding being curtailed and paperless forms of communication increasing. The Census has traditionally offered a comprehensive portrait of Canadians and has asked a core set of demographic, social, and economic questions since 1852, allowing analysis of change over time. The census is reliably repeated every ten — and since 1971, every five — years, and it has always encompassed the total population.

### KNOWING OURSELVES (OR NOT) OVER TIME

The majority of historical sources that have survived to the present privilege a particular gender, class, region, or lifecycle stage. Newspapers of the 19th century, for example, tell us a lot about 19th century people and events, but there is no doubt that these newspapers represent the interests of their audience: literate, urban adults with sufficient spare change to purchase the paper. Another common historical source, diaries, also represent the middle and upper classes disproportionately. At the risk of stating the obvious, an individual must be literate to produce a diary — and we know that approximately 12% of Canadians were not literate in 1901, according to that year's census (Canadian Families Project, Census of 1901 Database). After being produced, in order for the diary to survive, the diarist must have had sufficiently stable accommodations to preserve the diaries and sufficient self-assurance to consider donating it to an archive, or directing their heirs to make the donation. An archivist, even then, might refuse the diary if the person was not considered "important" or relevant to the particular mandate of the archive. The number of diaries available in archives today is miniscule compared to the number of people whose past lives are captured on the pages of the census.

A mandatory long-form census, while not perfect, is a crucial balance to less representative sources such as diaries and newspapers, which, while useful, provide a more narrow perspective. These considerations drawn from the late 19th and early 20th centuries are instructive for understanding the potential impact of the decision to transform the 2011 long-form census into a voluntary survey. As explained by the National Statistics Council and Munir Sheikh himself, the National Household Survey is bound to suffer from differential nonresponse (Sheikh 2010).

Differential nonresponse is uneven response rates from different population groups and different size geographic areas. Those who are less likely to respond to a voluntary survey are persons who speak neither English nor French, immigrants, persons who move frequently, the poor, and those who are well off. “Increasing the sample size cannot offset this problem,” suggests the former Chief Statistician (Sheikh, 2010: np). Losing the mandatory long-form census means we lose the rare record of people on the margins, those who are unlikely to fill in a voluntary survey precisely because they are “on the margins.” We are at greater risk, decades from now, of having the history of the 21st century reflect only those Canadians who felt it their civic duty to fill in the National Household Panel Survey, persons who tend to be more highly educated, more financially stable, and less peripatetic. This dilemma is compounded by the decision of Statistics Canada to ask Canadians to indicate their agreement on the census form that their personal information be released for research purposes 92 years after the date of the census. Those who checked yes to this question are, once again, a select subgroup of the population who appreciate that researchers require census data and trust that their privacy will be protected.

When Minister Clement defended his government’s decision to cancel the mandatory long-form census, he most often cited the “bedrooms” question as the epitome of the Census’ unwarranted invasion of privacy. *National Post* reporter Scott Stinson wrote, “[t]hat the bedroom question has sucked up so much of the oxygen surrounding the still-burbling debate about the census changes says a lot about the willingness of both the government and its critics to make this controversy one that is ideological in nature” (Stinson 2010). In fact, the “number of rooms in this dwelling” and “bedroom” questions are far more practical than ideological; their elimination, as part of the broader elimination of the mandatory long form, will adversely affect knowledge of both society and the individual over the short and long term. The census is organized by household, and thus highlights the space in which most of the population spends most of its time. Census officials have recognized that asking how many rooms are in a house and how many of them are bedrooms, answers a myriad of questions about how people live and thus began asking, “How many rooms are in this dwelling” in 1891. Terry Copp and Peter Baskerville are just two examples of historians who have studied aspects of the relationship between household size and class, gender, health, community, and marital status. Their findings have made significant contributions toward our knowledge of society and highlight the potential expansion of our knowledge as past manuscript censuses continue to be released after their 92 year embargoes.

Slums were a concern in cities such as Toronto and Montreal even at the time of Confederation and a major feature of slums was a high ratio of individuals to rooms in the dwelling. Copp identified infant mortality and tuberculosis as Montreal's most serious public health problems in the late 19th century (Copp 1974:93, 100), and that both were exacerbated by overcrowding. In fact, at the turn of the 20th century, infant mortality in Montreal was reported as second only to that of Calcutta, India. Regardless of whether the statistic was accurate, impoverished Montrealers lived in fear of it. Between 1897–1911, approximately one in three babies born in Montreal died before the age of 12 months, the most common causes being diarrhea and enteritis. As Copp explains, infant mortality followed a peculiar pattern: “whereas in most cities the highest percentage of deaths occurred in the first month after birth, the crucial period for Montreal's children extended to six months,” indicating that postnatal environment was a greater factor than in utero development (Copp 1974:93). Infant death correlated sharply with the lowest incomes, which had a 20% infant mortality rate in 1921, while wealthier wards and suburbs had rates of less than 6%. A related pattern showed that almost three quarters of illegitimate children were victims of infant mortality in 1924, their deaths spread over their first six months, which, in Copp's words, suggests “what conditions were like in crèches and infant ‘boarding homes’ which looked after the majority of these children” (Copp 1974:95). Because Copp conducted his research in the early 1970s before the 1891 manuscript census was released, he did not have the benefit of “the number of rooms” census question. His data comes from public health reports which did not provide thorough data by household or street as the census could and does from 1871–2006.

Three decades after Copp's important study of poverty in Montreal, Peter Baskerville mined the number of rooms in this dwelling question from a sample of the 1901 census. Using the ratio of more than one person per room as a definition of overcrowding, Baskerville found that almost half of Canadians lived in crowded homes averaging 1.7 individuals per room (Baskerville 2001:273). Moreover, rural dwellers and the working class were more likely than urbanites to live in crowded homes (Baskerville 2001:274, 281). What is most striking in Baskerville's research is that while ethnicity had little connection to home ownership, it could have a very strong tie to house spaciousness. Most starkly, French Catholics lived in homes with, on average, the fewest rooms (Baskerville 2001:284). Baskerville concludes by affirming that Jason Gilliland and Marc Choko's argument that housing conditions in turn-of-the-century Montreal were profoundly inequitable, actually applies to the country as

a whole, a finding that is impossible without data from the 1901 manuscript census (Baskerville 2001:284).

When one reflects on the connections between poverty, ethnicity, overcrowding, and disease — connections well recognized in the 19th and 20th centuries — it is not surprising that census officials asked the “number of rooms” question beginning in 1891, but it is alarming that Conservative MP Maxime Bernier misunderstood its significance. Bernier’s application of Trudeau’s admonition that “the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation” is irrelevant and ahistorical. Trudeau was promoting the legalization of birth control, since the law against it lagged far behind actual practice in Canada. There is no comparison between Trudeau’s statement and the counting of bedrooms in a dwelling. On the contrary, the number of bedrooms question is indeed relevant to longstanding public health issues. Most simply, the higher the ratio of people to rooms, the greater the poverty and risk of spreading disease.

There is no question that all censuses incorporate biases that reflect the historical context within which they were produced. Bruce Curtis, for example, has argued that “the census is made, not taken” (2001:33). Benedict Anderson writes “the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it and that everyone has one — and only one — extremely clear place” (1991:166). The census is a decidedly human project. Questions are infused with the political and social goals of the day; enumeration practices can be inconsistent; and permitted answers can be insufficient or overlapping. And yet, for many areas of historical study, the census is an incredibly rich source that provides important information unavailable from any other source. Not only is the census inclusive, repeated over multiple decades, and geographically and chronologically precise, but the questions are as significant as the answers.

Census questions, including the rooms question, evolve over time, reflecting the interests and concerns of the state and citizens in a particular time and place (Dillon 2010). Scholars analyze the evolution of census questions to measure what governments and citizens believed most important. The questions therefore are just as revealing as the answers. For example, the 1931 census was the only census to ask: “Has this family a radio?” to which 34% of households replied “yes” (*Census of Canada, 1931*, vol 5:979–980). So few households had a radio in 1921 that it was not considered worthwhile to ask. In 1941, the question was not worth asking because radios were so prevalent. What makes the 1931 radio question so valuable as part of the national census, rather than as part of a survey of individuals, is that the census asked it by household, where members other than the household head would have access; a radio technically owned by one person could be shared by a household of ten. The

aggregate census breaks down the results of the question by province; urban and rural areas; and localities of less than 1000, 1000–30,000, and over 30,000. Thus we know that while 34% of all households in Canada had a radio in 1931, 53% of households in urban Ontario had radios, while in rural Quebec, only 8% of households had radios. Furthermore, census data allows the historian to analyze households by street or by neighbourhood. In 2023, when the 92 year privacy hold is lifted, genealogists and historians will be able to learn if their ancestors' households had a radio. Of course it was not just Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's government which found such information useful, so did 1930s groups from marketers, to churches, to the National Hockey League, not to mention historians today and in the future.

Probably the most consistent theme in the census is the measurement of employment, which has always been a goal of the census, and which became increasingly precise by the turn of the 20th century. While Canadian censuses since 1852 included a single blank for "profession, occupation, or trade," there were three employment questions in 1891 that distinguished between employee and employer. There were fourteen employment questions in 1901, grouped into categories related to occupation, employment status, duration of employment, and earnings (Baskerville and Sager 1995:526–527). Canada's census investigation into employment exceeded that of the United States, whose census asked only two employment-related questions in 1900, and Britain, whose census asked five such questions in 1901 (Baskerville and Sager 1995:525). According to Eric Sager, the extensive nature of Canada's employment questions reflected not only the government's goals of classifying and understanding workers and industrial establishments, but also unions' concerns about working conditions and unemployment, and employers' various agendas. The census was far more than a simple counting; it expressed multiple agendas.

We know a great deal about the workforce in Canada in 1901 thanks to the highly successful, collaborative, and interdisciplinary "Canadian Families Project," which University of Victoria historians Eric Sager and Peter Baskerville directed between 1995–2001. The project is founded on a 5% sample of census households from 1901, which gives information on 50,943 dwellings and 265,286 persons. The database is available online (<http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/data/index.html>) and has resulted in dozens of publications on the 1901 workforce and other aspects of the 1901 census, not to mention its use by high school and university students. Sager explains that "The [1901] census ... has one great advantage absent in most other sources on wages, earnings, and incomes: it allows the historian to observe individual earners and the people with

whom they lived, either as a family or household,” which is much more revealing than studying individuals alone (Sager 2007:342). Among the findings revealed by the Canadian Families Project’s correlation of age, gender, locality, and employment data is that

Earnings varied with age in the 1901 census, and among both men and women earnings resemble an inverted U: earnings rise to a peak when workers reach their forties, and then decline. The rise for men was somewhat steeper than for women ... and men held their earnings better than women as they aged. (Sager 2007:362)

Feminist and labour historians have long complained about the exaggerated emphasis on the wages of the male breadwinner, and the disregard for women’s paid and unpaid labour in the census and in other statistics. Using 19th century census data, Bettina Bradbury was able to argue in 1993 that, “families with more than one breadwinner are not a new phenomenon today, whatever newspaper and journal articles, government reports, or sociological literature dealing with the growing importance of women’s labour force participation might suggest” (Bradbury 1993:13). Three or more wage earners per household were not unusual in the late 19th century, according to Bradbury. Moreover, at least since the 1970s, North American and European historians have argued that labour within the household, even when performed for one’s own family and without pay, should be considered work. This is a shift from early Canadian censuses which focussed on paid work. For example, in 1901, census enumerators were instructed: “if [married women] are only carrying on domestic affairs in a household without wages, they are not to be classed as having any occupation” (*Census of Canada, 1901*, vol. 1:xix). Labour historians and others have more recently refuted the notion that a wage defines what one considers work. In Jeanne Boydston’s words, “a thing can also, formally speaking, have a value without having a price; or to put it another way, a labour form can also have a value without having a wage” (1990:xviii). It is fascinating that in late 20th century Canada, feminist advocacy for valuing women’s unpaid work in the household and in care giving centred on the demand that the census include questions on unpaid work.

An important thrust of second wave feminism was that unwaged labour, and especially the routine housework performed by women, must be recognized and valued; this issue simmered from the 1960s onward, gaining momentum in 1985 when Canada became a signatory to the United Nations resolution, “Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,” which was part of the Third United Nations World Conference on Women held in Nairobi that year. As Meg Luxton

and Leah Vosko explain, several paragraphs of the resolution refer to measuring and valuing women's remunerated and unremunerated work and including it in gross domestic product (1998:5–54). Statistics Canada ran several initiatives on women's work, but argued that the census was not the best place to measure unpaid work, and did not include any questions on this in the 1991 census. In 1994, several women's groups from diverse political and ideological backgrounds campaigned vigorously to insist that the 1996 census include questions on unpaid work. When Statistics Canada reiterated that the census was not the best place to include unpaid work questions, the women's groups would not take "no" for an answer and lobbied the federal cabinet, which overruled Statistics Canada's decision. Luxton and Vosko argue that "One of the campaign's key claims was that governments will not design or retain social programs to support work that, according to the GDP, does not exist" (1998:60). These women activists were adamant that the census give recognition to their work. Without an unpaid work question, they could not see themselves reflected in the census. They fought for inclusion of these questions partly to bring the census in line with their own identities, in other words, asserting the Delphic maxim, "know thyself." Their own identity as individuals and collectively as unpaid workers was strengthened once the census reflected their realities. This diverse group of women can hardly be imagined to come together for any other cause; their well-documented lobbying efforts demonstrate how the census has, until recently, been a dialogue between government and citizens, a measure of what is believed to be important to a society in a particular time and place. It is self-knowledge for Canadians and a palette on which individuals and groups can "count themselves in." Unpaid work is part of who these people are, and how they wanted to see themselves included in the census alongside other categories of worker. It is a poignant reminder of how Canadians expect and need to find themselves reflected in the census.

The mid 1990s demand for recognition of unwaged labour through the census is proof of the intersection of the census and self-knowledge. The unpaid work question also illustrates how census questions reflected society in a particular time and place, because, like the "own a radio" question, the unpaid work question was not permanent. The consultation process for the design of the 2011 census (which began in 2007, long before the mandatory census was cancelled) led to discontinuing the unpaid work question. The Statistics Canada website explains that while continuity in questions is valued for allowing comparisons between censuses, "changes to the census are necessary to keep it relevant"; furthermore, "to avoid respondent burden, when questions are added,

others must be dropped” (Census Consultation Introduction and Executive Summary 2007). Thus when a question on commuting to work was added to the proposed 2011 census, the question on unpaid work was dropped, suggesting that at that time, Canadians hated traffic jams more than we valued measuring unpaid work. Alternatively, advocates of the unpaid work question may have believed they made their point in having the question included in three censuses and may have chosen not to continue their fight to maintain the question. With the cancellation of the long-form census, we lose not only the answers to census questions, but the societal knowledge that can be gleaned from census design as questions are added and dropped, rigorously demanded or quietly forgotten according to the needs of particular generations.

Of course, governments also exercise their interests in the census by asking particular questions and excluding others. Governments also should wish to “know ourselves” for a number of excellent reasons outlined succinctly by the former Chief Statistician, Munir Sheikh (2011:1–3): describing events, gaining insight, allowing analysis by putting different data together, providing a context for decision-making, monitoring progress, building policy and data systems, forecasting and predicting trends, evaluating outcomes. In sum, Sheikh suggests, “data provide the foundation for knowing things the way they are and taking steps to making things the way they should be” (Sheikh 2011:1). The cancellation of the mandatory census long form in July 2010 is a stark indicator of what the government considers important; the Harper government had indicated it did not consider any of the questions on the 2006 mandatory long form to be important. However, when a court challenge was pending on the language question by Francophones who appropriately saw language knowledge as part of their constitutional right, the Harper government quickly acceded and directed Statistics Canada to add the language questions to the short-form census, without compromising on their decision to cancel the 2011 long form.

### **TO KNOW OURSELVES NOT IN 2011**

The first decade of the 21st century has seen rampant social change. What will we not know about ourselves as Canadians in 2011 in the absence of the long-form census? From what we have said above, it is apparent that knowledge of the poor and disadvantaged, often hard-pressed to find time to respond to a voluntary survey, or unclear on the process and its importance, will be lacking. Other groups that are typically underrepresented in voluntary surveys are the rich, those who do not



speak English or French, immigrants, youth (particularly young men), and the homeless. Policies, as a result, will not be fully reflective of their numbers, needs, or realities. It also should be noted that the very well-off will be less represented in voluntary surveys. Even though we shall have a wealth survey, very much needed in Canada, we will lack a representative database that includes the rich as well as the poor.

The 2006 long-form census provided a wealth of detail on changing families and households, details that will be forever missing for 2011. Linguistic composition, fundamentally important in Canada, is changing dramatically over time as more and more Canadians speak a second or third language. Although, under the duress of a possible lawsuit, the government consented to add the legally important questions on French language, other linguistic information such as what languages are spoken at home, how many Canadians speak more than one language, or what their mother tongues are, will not be there. Why is this information important? In a global world, knowledge about how many Canadians speak multiple languages and what those languages are, can have economic value.

Less geographic and ethnic specificity will dampen the possibilities for analyzing the changing Canadian social landscape. This is important not only for self-knowledge, so that we do not, as Symons warns and we quote above, entertain false conceptions of ourselves, but also impedes planning by municipalities, provinces, and universities/colleges for future needs.

## CONCLUSION

The Census of Canada has always been a political project, as Curtis (2001) has shown. Over time, however, it incorporated increasingly the best social science protocols available, beginning in 1871 and always seeking to do better and better. The reputation of Statistics Canada, as the best statistical agency in the world, from which other countries, including the US and China, sought and received advice, was unassailable. Even if the long-form is reinstated in future census years, 2011 will always be a black hole of absent self-knowledge (Dillon 2010).

The major question arising, to which there is no conclusive answer, only hints, is why the Harper government chose to cancel the long-form 2011 Census. It seems to have little to do with citizen concerns since response rates for the Census were high, and few complaints were received (Sheikh 2011). Canadians seem eager for the self-knowledge the census provides. That the long-form census data is needed for a number of purposes by diverse groups is evident in the number and diversity of the

criticisms of the decision. This brings us back to Foucault and Bentham and the “perfect machine of power.”

Some speculations about why the Harper government cancelled the long-form census have been proffered. Paul Saurette (2010) suggests that the motivation may be the government’s ideological suspicion of statistical or research-based knowledge, or what Saurette calls “epistemological populism.” In this standpoint, the most reliable knowledge is direct individual experience, not any knowledge that is numerical or general. Another speculation, from closer to the inside of the bureaucracy, is not inconsistent with Saurette’s hypothesis: that the cancellation of the long-form census had little to do with the census itself and much to do with bringing Statistics Canada to “heel” to government power. The objective of our paper, as we state at the outset, is not to discern the motivation for the cancellation of the census long form in 2011, but to examine the ways in which Canadians know ourselves less well as a result and that power, as theorized by Foucault and Bentham, is strongly at play.

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