

**Postmortem on a Stillborn Census:**  
**Bosnia-Herzegovina, 2013-16**

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**Abstract:**

The 2013 census in Bosnia and Herzegovina produced two competing official results, each exclusively valid in half the country, which is constitutionally an ethno-political consociation. An International Monitoring Operation inadvertently contributed to a breakdown of agreements among the three government statistical agencies conducting the census. Neither result shows with reasonable certainty how many of the enumerated were actually residents, but comparing them shows where non-random overcounts occurred in geo-politically strategic locations. This article is a postmortem of an internationally monitored census that failed as enumeration but still provides useful data on ethno-religious and political divisions in Bosnian society.

**Keywords:** ethnic overcounting; geographically strategic overcounting; ethno-political census competition; international census monitoring; census failure; census as empirical research

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## **Introduction**

The 2013 census in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) may be unique in having two different official results, each exclusively valid in about half of the country and thus invalid in the other half, and with no total population figure accepted throughout the state. This odd result was certainly not planned; to the contrary, an International Monitoring Operation (IMO) largely paid for by the European Commission was supposed to ensure that the census results would be widely accepted in the country. However, the involvement of the IMO itself contributed to a breakdown in agreements among the three government statistical agencies charged with conducting the census. Despite their best intentions, the IMO ultimately was perceived by the leaders of one community in Bosnia's ethno-religious politics as siding with another community and, correctly or not, as having distorted international statistical standards in doing so. An unfortunate consequence is that not only does Bosnia lack a census with general internal acceptance, but the Bosnian census agencies did not plan an enumeration in the 2021 round of European censuses, due to lack of agreement on basic issues. In 2019 a working group was formed to write a new statute to govern a census in 2023, but this necessary first step towards a new census had not been completed as of August 2020. Further, the prospect of international monitoring is greeted with suspicion by some parties whose agreement will be required if a new census is to be held.

This article analyzes in detail how it happened that the 2013 Census collapsed at its 2016 conclusion, even though it was well organized and collected data that can tell researchers a great

deal about the people on whom data was gathered. While neither of the census results can be said to show with reasonable certainty how many of the enumerated were actually residing in the country, comparing the two results – the one endorsed by the IMO and the one that was not – in the part of the country where both are available does show where overcounts were most frequent, and how they were non-random in terms of location and ethno-religious identity of those overcounted. Thus this article is meant to provide an interpretive aid to understanding the Bosnian census as a failed enumeration of population numbers, but as still providing potentially useful data for empirical research.

It is also, however, a postmortem of a project that failed in its main task, despite the involvement of the IMO. As it happens, a year before the Bosnian census staleimated into collapse, the leader of the IMOs in B&H, Kosovo and Montenegro had raised rhetorical questions on the costs and benefits and potential impact of these censuses, saying that these would become apparent only after a period of years (Everaers, 2015, p. 194). Nearly seven years after the B&H census was conducted and four years since its competing results were published, it is possible to make some suggestions as to the answers to these questions. But in doing so, it is necessary to examine in some detail the involvement of the IMO in the collapse of the consensus within B&H that had enabled conducting the first post-war census, 18 years after the end of the war there. This is not to imply that the IMO or its personnel acted improperly; to the contrary, we presume that they acted in accordance with high standards of professional and personal integrity and competence. It is for this very reason, however, that it is important to examine their role in the failure of the census to gain full acceptance in the country. It is not sufficient to ask rhetorically whether the Bosnians were “mature enough to accept the results” (Everaers, 2015, p. 194), without examining whether instead the IMO may have misjudged their own role and

capacity to impose acceptance of results on the parties. Thus this article is meant both as a postmortem on a stillborn census, and as a step towards determining lessons that can be learned about a well-intentioned and professionally executed project that largely failed in achieving its objectives.

## A Stillborn Census

Almost three years after the data were collected, and only hours before the statutory deadline for publication of results would expire, the 2013 Population and Housing Census of Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H) was released by the Bosnia & Herzegovina Agency for Statistics (BHAS). This was the first census in the country in 22 years, the last one having been conducted in 1991, before the war began there. Through a Technical Consulting Group and then an International Monitoring Operation (IMO), EUROSTAT personnel were closely involved in the design of the census and monitoring its progress (Everaers, 2015). In October 2016 the Steering Committee of the IMO, in its final assessment, stated that the census “as a whole was conducted in compliance with international standards” and that “the results are in general considered valid and useful for economic and social policy planning.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet these results were immediately rejected as invalid by the Republika Srpska Institute for Statistics (RSIS), one of the three government statistical agencies that had been charged by law with organizing and conducting the census. The RSIS objection was that the methodology used by the BHAS permitted substantial overcounts of non-residents as resident, non-random in terms of location and ethno-nationality of those overcounted. This overcount would have been reduced by using a methodology that included data for questions collected in part for that

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<sup>1</sup> IMO - Final Assessment Report (October 2016), available at <https://popis.gov.ba/?lang=eng&page=download>; accessed 29 June 2020. All IMO reports cited can be accessed at this site.

purpose, recommended by RSIS but rejected, with IMO approval, by the Director of BHAS, who was arguably not empowered to take such a step on his own responsibility. The parliament of the Republika Srpska, one of the two “entities” that along with a small district comprise B&H, then passed a law mandating that the RSIS process the data collected in that entity, and publish the results.<sup>2</sup> Thus there are two official results for the 2013 census for RS, one by BHAS and one by RSIS; only the latter is valid in the RS, though only the BHAS result is recognized in the other half of the country.

These dual results have meant that within B&H, the 2013 census results released by BHAS with IMO approval were dead upon publication. They cannot be used to generate statistics for the entire country, since by RS law, only the RSIS results are valid for that jurisdiction, nearly half of the country. Accordingly, since releasing the 2013 census over the vehement objections of RSIS, BHAS has not been able to publish a demographic report on the whole country; what had since 2005 been an annual report on demographics stops with the 2016 report.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the Federal Institute of Statistics (FIS), the third of the statistical institutions mandated to jointly conduct the 2013 census and under the jurisdiction of the other entity in B&H, released in July 2019 an estimate of the Population of the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina (FBH, which does not include RS) 2013-19, using the BHAS 2013 census as a base and adjusting for births, deaths and migrations as recorded by the FIS (Velić & Idrizović, 2019). The RSIS released its own population estimates for the RS for 2013-19, with its results of the 2013 census as base, similarly adjusted (Komić, 2020). Since they are based on different results

<sup>2</sup> Закон о Обради И Објављивању Резултата Пописа Становништва, Домаћинства И Станова 2013. Године у Републици Српској [Law on the processing and results of the Census of populations, households and dwellings of 2013 in Republika Srpska], Службени Гласник Републике Српске 02/1-021-858/16, 13 јула 2016

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.bhas.ba/index.php?option=com\\_publikacija&view=publikacija\\_pregled&ids=1&id=5&n=Population](http://www.bhas.ba/index.php?option=com_publikacija&view=publikacija_pregled&ids=1&id=5&n=Population), accessed 4 July 2020.

of the 2013 census, these numbers cannot be combined to form valid statistics on the level of BiH. In 2018, documents submitted by the government of BiH to the European Commission used the RSIS results of the 2013 census for RS along with the BHAS ones for the FBH and Brčko District.<sup>4</sup>

The lack of national statistics is apparent in other realms. BHAS publishes an annual Labor Force Survey (LFS), which in the absence of a census after 1991 used a Sample Frame that was updated in 2009. The 2013 census was supposed to be used to calibrate the survey, but this was not done through 2018, and in 2019 the RSIS and BHAS each published its own LFS. Both are calibrated on the Sample Frame as updated in 2009, not on the 2013 census; the difference is that the RSIS report provides calculations of the total population of RS in accordance with the Sample Frame and not the 2013 census, while the BHAS avoids using non-2013 census figures by using only percentages of the population. However, in 2019 the EU paid for a new Sample Frame to be based on a survey of 60,000 households and conducted by all three statistical agencies. Having spent €13 million on the failed 2013 census, the EU is thus spending more for the Sample Frame update that was supposed to have been obviated by it. These problems would indicate that BiH, more than most other states, would need to hold a census in the 2021 round of European census, but as of August 2020, preparations for another census even in 2023 were minimal.<sup>5</sup> Media reports indicate that, following their experience in the 2013 census, staff of the three statistical institutions doubt that agreement can be reached on definitional and methodological issues. That the IMO tried to obviate the need for consensus

<sup>4</sup> <https://zurnal.info/novost/20924/u-brisel-odlaze-dva-rezultata-istog>, and <https://www.index.ba/ekskluzivno-index-objavljuje-dokument-u-brisel-idu-dva-odgovora-na-pitanje-o-popisu-stanovnistva-zvizdic-priznao-rezultate-iz-rs/>, both accessed July 4 2020

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/drustvo/BiH-jedina-nece-imati-popis-2021-godine/577526>, see also <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/popis-stanovnistva-u-bih-i-stranacke-svade> and <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/popis-stanovnistva-bih/30766064.html>.

reduces the likelihood that any party will risk again being made irrelevant in making key decisions by the actions of foreign monitors.

The failure of the IMO's mission is apparent when one looks at its formal charge, in its Memorandum of Understanding with the European Commission and the BiH government. The MOU states that the EC "consider[s] of utmost importance the respect of international standards in the conduct of the census exercise, leading to an accurate socio-economic and demographic picture of BiH's population and results that will be widely accepted." Further, the IMO's task was to "contribute to the building of confidence in the Census ... and advocating respect of international recommendations." The IMO mission failed on all of these counts: the results are rejected in half the country, and there is so little confidence in international recommendations that a new census may not be held in 2023. While the EC may publicize the IMO involvement as a success story<sup>6</sup>, they are not legally valid in half the country, and no valid figures for all of Bosnia-Herzegovina can be generated from them. One demography website uses RSIS figures for the resident population of places in the RS, and BHAS ones for "ethnic groups," including "also citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina living and working abroad for many years," which means that some towns manage to have many more individual members of ethnic groups than they do population.<sup>7</sup>

Yet until the deadlock on the methodology for processing data on residency, the census was conducted reasonably well, and researchers can learn a great deal about the people enumerated in the census. The problem is that, ironically for a census, we cannot know with reasonable certainty from the IMO-approved results how many of them actually resided in BiH.

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/bosnia-herzegovina\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/funding-by-country/bosnia-herzegovina_en), suggested projects reform of public administration: helping improve statistics, accessed July 5 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/bosnia/republikasrpska/prijedor/218189\\_kozarac/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/bosnia/republikasrpska/prijedor/218189_kozarac/). The overcount is not due to people listing themselves as having more than one such identity.

On the other hand, the oddity of having two different official results for the RS does let us see where the spurious recordings of non-residents as residents were most concentrated. In fact, when the two official results are compared, one can get a much more accurate demographic picture of Bosnia than would be available from either result alone, a point to which I return below.

### **A Delayed Census in a Consociational State**

That the 2011 round of European censuses was not held in Bosnia until 2013, and that the results were not released until literally the last day possible for them to be valid, indicates that the situation in that country was unusual. Of course, no other European state had Bosnia's post-socialist experience of civil war, mass killings, ethnic cleansing and restructuring as a state with little effective central government, divided on ethno-national grounds into two constituent, self-governing "entities" plus one "district," with one of the entities also divided on ethno-national grounds into self-governing "cantons" (Basta, 2016; Bennett, 2016; Hayden, 1999, 2005, 2011).

The Entities and cantons are *de facto* the territorial delineations of sovereignty of the three "constituent peoples" of B&H, "sovereignty" as defined by Abraham Lincoln, "in the political sense of the term," as "a political community without a political superior" (Lincoln, 1861/1989, p. 256). The "political communities" in question are the three "constituent peoples" (*konstitutivni narodi*): Bosniaks (*Bošnjaci* after 1993, née *Muslimani*), Croats (*Hrvati*) and Serbs (*Srbi*). As explained by Laurence Cooley (2020), Bosnia has a form of corporate consociation in which it is these peoples, as groups, that are seen as sharing power. The formal, constitutional linkage of territory to ethno-national group was explicit in the politics that led to the collapse of Yugoslavia (Hayden, 1992). In Yugoslav political discourse, from the socialist period onwards,

the major South Slavic peoples/ nations (*narodi*) were considered to be constitutive (*konsitutivni*), meaning that they had the right to form sovereign states, a right not held by members of other communities who lived in the territories claimed for each nation (Hayden, 1992, 1999). These constitutive nations were conceived as joining their separate sovereignties in the Yugoslav federation and in the Socialist Republic of B&H within it during the period of socialism; the seceding republics in 1991 claimed to be exercising the right to reject such sharing and to assume complete sovereignty, as per Lincoln: each as a political community without a political superior.

In the first free elections in B&H after communism, in 1990, the population partitioned itself into Croat, Muslim (after 1993, known as Bosniak) and Serb constituencies. In each case one party identified with each community received the vast majority of votes from that group, and civil society oriented parties did very poorly (Bougarel, 1996; Burg & Shoup, 1999; Hayden, 1993). This pattern has held in every election since, so that by 2014, parties that gathered votes overwhelmingly from one of the three constituent peoples received 98% of the vote (Žila & Čermák, 2020).<sup>8</sup> The stated goals of the Serb and Croat parties were and have been to establish their separate national sovereignties over parts of B&H, outside of the governance of a Bosnian state; the stated goal of the Muslim/Bosniak party was and has remained the establishment of a centralized state that would govern all of B&H (Hayden, 2011; Kasapović, 2018). The main military forces in the 1992-95 war were three separate, ethno-national armies fighting for three different countries, as seen in the memorials to fallen soldiers seen throughout B&H. The Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina soldiers are memorialized as *šehidi*, Muslim “martyrs” who fought for B&H, and are embellished with Koranic inscriptions. The Serb military dead are memorialized

<sup>8</sup> The 98% figure includes votes for some parties that claim to be civic-oriented rather than ethno-national, yet attract primarily Bosniak votes; see Žila & Čermák (2020) at note 72; also see Touquet (2011) Hulsey (2010).

as “warriors” (*borci*) who fought in the Fatherland War (*Otadžbinski Rat*) for the Republika Srpska and their monuments have Orthodox Christian imagery, while the Croat soldiers are commemorated as “defenders” (*branitelji*) who fell in the Homeland War (*Domovinski Rat*), for the Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna, and are commemorated with Roman Catholic imagery.

The Fatherland of the Serbs includes parts but not all of B&H; the Homeland of the Croats includes part but not all of B&H (and the Serb Fatherland and Croat Homeland overlapped in places), while the Bosniak vision of B&H includes all of the formerly Yugoslav Republic of B&H, including parts with few if any Bosniaks.<sup>9</sup>

The Constitution of B&H that was part of the 1995 Dayton peace agreement *de facto* recognized the territorial re-structuring of Bosnia into territories generally defined by ethno-national majority, under a central B&H government that had almost no authority to do anything within the country, though it did acquire some by fiat of the international community in 1997 (Bose, 2002; Chandler, 2000). Still, almost all governmental authority in one half of B&H resides in the RS, which has a unitary government. In the other half, the FBH, governmental authority resides almost exclusively at the level of ten cantons, while the small Brčko District has had an administration under international supervision. In 1995, five of these cantons were Bosniak majority, three of them Croat majority, and two “mixed” (Bose, 2002; Hayden, 1999, 2005). The delineation of the territories of the RS and FBH were done largely in consideration of control on the ground at the end of the war (Raos, 2010). Whether these divisions were meant to mark the permanent division of Bosnia or not, the separation of the peoples into their separate territories has continued (Pejanović, 2017), even in places in which Bosniaks and Croats nominally share the same town (see, e.g., Katić & Bugarin, 2016; Makaš, 2011, 2012).

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<sup>9</sup> This description of the memorial and cemetery structures is derived from author’s extensive fieldwork travel throughout B&H in 2018 and 2019; see also Sokol (2014).

Key to understanding this system is that it is a consociation in which consensus is required for almost all decision-making, and what looks like a central government actually has very little constitutional authority over the two “entities” that comprise the state (Bose, 2002). Consensus of representatives of the constituent peoples of B&H -- Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – is required for decisions to be made, at the levels of B&H, the FBH, the cantons, and the RS. A requirement of consensus is, of course, primarily a mechanism for blocking decision-making, and that is what has largely happened since Dayton. It is in this sense that the constituent peoples are sovereign in Lincoln’s sense within the territories allocated to them: decisions may not be imposed upon them without the consent of their representatives.

Consociationalism also holds in the realm of statistics: the government act creating the BHAS states that it “may not have any authority of any kind over the institutes for statistics of the entities” and that it will “in a completely cooperative way cooperate” with the entity statistical institutes.<sup>10</sup> The same act mandates that BHAS is led by an Executive Committee composed of a chair and two deputies, each representing one of the three “constituent peoples” of B&H (i.e., Bosniak, Croat and Serb) and that it makes decisions by consensus.<sup>11</sup> These provisions meant that a decision taken by BHAS against the expressed wishes of an entity statistical institute would likely be regarded as illegitimate by the government of that entity. Such an effort to impose a decision without consent could also be ignored, since each entity statistical institute, not BHAS, was responsible for conducting the census in that entity. These considerations proved to be the critical elements in the failure of the census.

<sup>10</sup> Odluka o osnivanju Agencije za Statistiku Bosne I Hercegovine, *Službeni Glasnik BiH* br. 6 / st. 516, Ponedeljak, 7. septembra 1998, art. III. The original wording is that BHAS *ne može imati bilo kavku nadležnost nad zavodima za statistiku entiteta* and *će na potpuno kooperativan način saradivati sa zavodima za statistiku entiteta*.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* art. IV.

The consociational structures of B&H as devised in 1995 had one inconsistency, in that they were premised on the return of refugees and IDPs to the places where they had lived before, as mandated in Annex 7 of the Dayton Agreement (Toal & Dahlman, 2011). Annex 3 of the Dayton Agreement, on elections, provided that citizens whose names appeared on the 1991 census would in principle be eligible to vote in the places where they had been enumerated then. Art. IV (1) of that Annex stated that “[b]y Election Day, the return of refugees should already be underway,” an assertion that proved overly optimistic. Had such returns happened in large numbers they would have upset the logic of the Dayton agreement, the consociational structures of which would not have made much sense (see Žila, 2020).

Using the 1991 census as a baseline for allocation of political functions was not limited to the first election, however. The Dayton consociational system mandated specific balances of functions among the three constituent peoples, and also quotas in representation in government services (see Cooley, 2020), both based on the 1991 census. This system is in some ways similar to the “national key” that had been basic to politics in B&H under socialism (Pearson, 2015). The (con)federal nature of B&H was also an important consideration, because of the assignment of *de facto* local territorial sovereignty to the RS and FBH, and within the FBH to the cantons. Croats especially worried that if their proportion of the overall population fell below 10%, the justification for counting them as a “constituent nation” might be brought into question, as also their inclusion in the quota system in some of the FBH cantons and in RS.<sup>12</sup> In 2017-2018 proposals to revise the electoral law of B&H to reflect the 2013 census were resisted by Croat political parties, who feared losing influence over decision making to Bosniak majoritarianism in the FBH (Pepić, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-11-13/bosnia-census-results-threaten-power-sharing-system>, accessed August 23, 2020.

Censuses are sometimes delayed in countries in which governance is linked to the percentage of people of specific religions/ ethnicities in specific territories for precisely such reasons, concerns that the new census results may show that the established division of governance is no longer in accordance with the distributions of peoples on the ground (see, e.g., Maktabi, 1999). Yet by 2010, basing representation on the populations as found in 1991, and using the 1990 election rolls, was untenable. The governing political parties, which had been elected by what are effectively three separate constituencies, had correspondingly differing interests and thus demands regarding the census (Manning, 2004; Perry, 2013). The political parties of Bosniaks, who had lost the most people in the war (about 66,000 of the total 102,000 killed) and also had the largest numbers of displaced persons, took the normative position that the census would legitimate ethnic cleansing; and wanted to maintain political power based on the 1991 census in places where few Bosniaks have lived since 1992-93. Serb parties, for their part, wanted the census to confirm that the distributions of peoples on the ground were now very different from what they had been in 1991, and to provide the basis for adjustments to the political and governmental systems. The Croat parties were in a difficult position: it was generally thought that Croats had the greatest decrease as a percentage of total population, which gave them similar incentives to the Bosniaks to resist a census. Yet like the Bosnian Serbs, the Croats of Herzegovina wanted to demonstrate the near-total separation of most Croat populations from those of Bosniaks and Serbs. Thus the Croat parties wanted to boost their numbers in some places, while not boosting those of Bosniaks in other places in the FBH, especially in Herzegovina.

What ultimately prompted the 2013 census was a requirement from the European Union that a census law must be adopted in order to qualify Bosnia for a Stabilization and Association

Agreement (Hoh, 2017; Perry, 2013). This law was adopted by the Bosnian parliament on 3 Feb 2012, calling for the census to be conducted in 2013, and mandating that the results must be released by December 31 2015,<sup>13</sup> extended by a February 2013 statute to July 1, 2016.<sup>14</sup>

Since the census was likely to be controversial, several mechanisms were put into place to ensure its accuracy. The Census Law provided for a complex interweaving of responsibilities between the BHAS and the statistical agencies of the two “entities,” the RSIS and the FIS, which were required to “cooperate” with each other, coordinated by the BHAS. The entity agencies had the responsibility and authority to carry out the census data collection only on their respective territories while the BHAS had that responsibility and authority only for the Brčko District. The law mandated, however, a common data base for all collected and processed data which would be the property of all three agencies, and to which all three would have access. All three agencies were charged with publishing the results of the census. In addition, the law provided that there would be “international assistance” and an international monitoring coordinated with the EU (Art. 20.1.p), the IMO, to be coordinated by BHAS. The IMO began its work more than a year before the census was undertaken, monitoring the development of the census materials and all phases of preparation, data collection, processing and analysis.

While the point may seem elementary, the goal of the census, as presented to the Bosnian population, was “to provide a list of *correct, complete and high quality statistical data* on population and its territorial distribution.” The enumeration of the population was in accordance with categories including age, gender, educational level and disabilities. Art. 8 also specified collection of data on ethnic/national affiliation, as well as on mother tongue and religion, but Art.

<sup>13</sup> Art. 37 (b), Zakon o Popisu Stanovništva, Domaćinstava i Stanova u Bosni i Hercegovini 2013. Godine [Law on the census of population, households and dwellings in B&H 2013], *Službeni Glasnik BiH* broj 10/12.

<sup>14</sup> Art. 6, Zakon o Izmjenama Zakona o Popisu Stanovništva, Domaćinstava i Stanova U Bosni i Hercegovini 2013. Godine, *Službeni Glasnik BiH* broj 18/13.

12 specified that persons covered by the census would not be required to provide information on ethnic/national or religious affiliation. Responses to the other questions were mandatory, including that on mother tongue.

The most contested issue turned out to be that of who should be counted as “resident” in the country, since the census was by law limited to counting “citizens of [B&H] with place of usual residence in [B&H]”, using a definition that was meant, in accordance with EUROSTAT practice, to exclude the diasporas. This residency criterion was important because of the territorial redistributions of populations that had taken place during and just after the 1992-95 war. The disagreements over the methodology for processing the data from the 2013 census were based on the presumption that the relative percentages of the national communities in specific towns in Bosnia could have important political consequences for controlling not only those towns, but also for the larger territorial division between the RS and the FBH. Since maintaining the RS was the most important goal of the Bosnian Serb political parties, and establishing instead a unitary Bosnian state ruled from Sarajevo was the primary goal of the Bosniak parties, the 2013 Census provided opportunity for the Bosnian Serb parties to confirm their achievement of their primary goal, and for the Bosniak ones to start to reverse this outcome of the war. It was widely believed that Croats had disproportionately emigrated during and after the war, and if the census revealed such to be true, there might be demands for the reduction of Croat representation in the organs of government. High stakes indeed, and thus the 2013 census was never likely to be simply a technical operation of counting people in locations where they live.

**The Most Contested Issue: Who is Actually Living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Where?**

As a population census, the primary goal was to determine how many people were actually residing in B&H. Art. 2 of the law followed international practice in defining “place of usual residence” as “the place where a person lives and normally spends the daily period of rest, regardless of temporary absences for purposes of recreation, holidays, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment and religious pilgrimage.” Art. 4 of the Census Law specified that it shall include “Citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina with place of usual residence in [B&H], regardless of whether, at the time of the census, they are present or absent” from the country.

EUROSTAT personnel had anticipated that in B&H and other Balkans states there were likely to be organized attempts to register non-resident diaspora citizens of B&H as resident, and this problem was to be met “by guaranteeing rather rigidly the principle of *place of usual residence* for counting the population (thereby not including diaspora)” (Everaers, 2015, p. 193). This was to be accomplished by including questions that would control for false or erroneous reports of residency by people not meeting the statutory definition of having a “place of usual residence” in B&H. Additional questions asked whether a person enumerated was present; if not, why not, and for how long present/ absent. Further, Questions 12, 31 and 40 required answering where the person worked or attended school. Art. 11 of the law provided that data on persons absent when the census taker conducted the visit could be given by an adult member of the household, which in practice meant that any adult could provide information on almost all other adult members of the family, none of whom needed to be present.

Leaders of the Bosniak, Croat and Serb communities undertook efforts to increase the reported numbers of their own religious-national communities. For example, the Archbishop of

Vrhbosna (Sarajevo) said that it was the moral duty of Catholics to declare themselves as Croats, and so did Croatian political leaders in Bosnia, while Serbian leader Milorad Dodik also encouraged everyone in the RS to declare their nationality, religion and language (Armakolas & Maksimović, 2014; Perry, 2013). Ensuring high congruence between declaring Bošnjak as nationality, Bosnian as language and Islam as religion was a primary goal of Bosniak efforts (Perry, 2013: 13-14). Since answering the questions on religion and nationality was not mandatory, it was not illegal to urge Bosnian citizens to answer these questions in particular ways.

What was legally problematic, though, was facilitating people in providing false answers. Such falsification was easy to do, since information on members of a household could be given by any adult member of it. Bosniak organizations were especially active in advising their diaspora about how they should fill out the forms in order to achieve maximum political effect from the census (Armakolas & Maksimović, 2014), establishing a foundation called *Popis 2013* [Census 2013] with a website and Facebook page. The website stated that “We [Bosniaks] mature as a nation through the census,” and that “The Census is a political issue,”<sup>15</sup> and distinguished Bosnia from countries where a census is used “primarily for research and planning development” by saying that in Bosnia the Census is “primarily a political question.” It also provided an “example and explanation of how to fill in the forms if you work temporarily abroad or are in the diaspora and are unable to be in the homeland for the census.” Further, while Art. 40 of the statute stated that the Census would count citizens of Bosnia who live abroad and have a residence established in Bosnia but have been absent for more than 12 months, Popis.net recommended that members of the diaspora not register under that article because if they do,

<sup>15</sup> <http://popis2013.net/>, accessed 25 June 2017; see also <https://www.islamska-zajednica.hr/kategorija/popis-stanovnistva-u-bih>, accessed July 6 2020.

“they will not have any role in internal Bosnia-Herzegovinian relations and their property could be the subject of various speculations on local and entity levels;” the second statement especially was false. The Foundation also printed up thousands of flyers with similar information.

### **The Silent Reversal of the First IMO Position Regarding False Residency Enumerations**

The census was monitored by a web of interlinked western-supported NGOs called *Popis Monitor*, which engaged in extensive research on the census and also in activities publicizing it as a civic exercise rather than a nationalist one.<sup>16</sup> Their report is perhaps the best study of irregularities in the 2013 census.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the issue of counting non-residents was not discussed in this report, since in March 2014, both the RS and FBH statistical institutes had said that they would “strictly follow the procedures and definitions in the Law on Census, when analyzing the data” and then would “be able to give more specific information on irregularities of this type.” This reassurance turned out to be overly optimistic.

The Popis Monitor report provided evidence of falsification of enumerations of residence by examining unexplained variations in the rates of growth and decline of population in parts of Bosnia, compared to official demographic data estimates for the years just before the census. The most striking example is Brčko District, strategically perhaps the single most critical territory in Bosnia (see Dulić, 2018). Other locations identified as problematical by the Popis Monitor study included municipalities in the RS adjacent to Brčko District, and Canton 10 in the FBH. These were also among the most contested territories during the war and remain highly

<sup>16</sup> <https://zastone.ba/programi/koristenje-novih-tehnologija/popis-monitor/>, accessed 6 July 2020; and <http://techpresident.com/news/wegov/24538/civic-monitoring-group-raises-concerns-bosnian-census>, accessed 6 July 2020.

<sup>17</sup> “Report on the Civic Monitoring of the Census in BiH 2013,” accessible from zastone.ba via search for the title; accessed 6 July. 2020.

strategic territories for the political goals of the leaderships of the main ethno-national parties who control Bosnia.

The IMO 13<sup>th</sup> report (Oct. 2013), reporting observations made when the census was conducted, noted that “The main problem concerned people living abroad, either enumerated by a present member of a household, or coming to the country during the census period to be enumerated. The *phase of data processing should help distinguish between the resident and non-resident population using the answers to questions 1 to 7, but also questions on the place of study or work*, as some people were encouraged by some unofficial campaigns to answer to Q1 - 7 in a way to be considered as residents” (emphasis added). In the 20<sup>th</sup> IMO report, however (Nov. 2014), this recommendation was dropped, stating instead that for determining residence status, the “simplest” model should be used, including only questions 1-7 and not including Questions 12, 31 and 40, on place of work or study. While some detail about the new recommendation was provided, no mention was made of the recommendation in the 13th report that questions in addition to those from 1-7 should be used to control for this distortion.

Further indications of false residency reports were found in the Post Enumeration Survey (PES), which, following international practice was conducted about a month after the census enumeration, in order to “evaluate the coverage and quality” of the enumeration. The 19<sup>th</sup> IMO report (pp. 7-8) noted that while there were very few people enumerated in the PES but not found in the census data, the opposite was not true: that “the number of persons enumerated in census but not found in the PES is quite high,” and that “analysis showed that those persons are mostly members of large households (15 or 20 members) who were absent (presumably living abroad),” which is the pattern one would expect to see resulting from large numbers of false reports of non-residents as resident. On p. 14, this difference is said to be “significant.” While

reconciliation visits had been planned for the PES, these were not undertaken, in part for budgetary reasons but also in part for political ones: “revisiting some households to check the status of the individuals and/or households might be sensitive. *Taking into account forthcoming elections in October, such revisiting might be even more sensitive [,] raising doubts why some persons are checked*” (emphasis added).

The 20<sup>th</sup> Report acknowledged that between 207,005 (5.67%) and 271,837 (7.44%) of the people enumerated “cannot clearly be determined as resident or non-resident” (para. 66), the difference being whether the simplest set of rules are applied (Q 1-7 only, lower figure) or the more complex ones (Q 1-7, 12, 31, 40, higher figure). The report then said that 18.8%, or 38,875 of these undetermined could be resolved because their data were not actually inconsistent. This still left, however, between 168,130 and 232,962 cases undetermined. The recommendation was that “the principle of parsimony (*lex parsimoniae*) recommends to [sic] only the simplest set of rules that consider only Q1-Q7” and that “it is important to underline that the set of rules should be easy to explain and defend and that any additional unnecessary complication should be avoided,” though why addressing the issues of false residency reports would be an “unnecessary complication” was not explained. In any event, the philosophical principle of preferring parsimony seems ill applied here, since there was substantial evidence that there were falsified answers to Q1-Q7, and many of them could be discovered by the more complicated set of rules.

### **The Inherent Ethnopolitics of Counting in Strategic Territories**

In discussing various approaches to the problem of determining residence the IMO reports refer to percentages of possible erroneous enumerations or indeterminate status on the level of BiH. But territorial distribution of the Bosniak, Croat and Serb populations in strategic

locations was the most politically sensitive issue in the census, and could not be presumed to be random on either count. The Popis Monitor analysis in March 2014 of the results of the preliminary census figures showed that increases in enumerations were found mainly in specific towns; they were not random errors at the level of BiH.

It would be reasonable to suppose that organized false registrations would be concentrated in territories that had been seen as strategic during the war. This would mean above all else Brčko District, on the Sava River in the north, the crucial link between the two halves of the RS, and existing as a district because agreement on dividing it could not be reached in the negotiations at Dayton that ended the war (see Parrish, 2010). An academic analysis of spatial patterning of violence during the war is more specific, identifying the municipalities of Derventa, Bosanski Brod, Odžak, Bosanski Šamac and Orašje as crucially strategic to the Croats, Doboј, Modriča, Gradačac and Brčko to the Bosniaks (Dulić, 2018, p. 154), and Prijedor and Zvornik to the Serbs. While this analysis was not available to the IMO, the general point about the strategic nature of overcounts could be seen in the Popis Monitor analysis, especially in regard to Brčko and municipalities (*općine, opštine*) surrounding it. Similar indications of strategic over-enumerations by both Croats and Bosniaks were also seen by Popis Monitor in parts of the FBH.<sup>18</sup>

The issue was thus one that would seem to require use of all data that had been collected for that purpose, as had been stated in the IMO 13<sup>th</sup> report. Excluding such data as avoiding “unnecessary complications” or observing “parsimony” was a position that required much greater explanation. Since in practice the IMO’s position appeared to acquiesce, at least in part,

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<sup>18</sup> The IMO in its October 2016 final report (p. 33, para. 180) referred dismissively to Popis Monitor as not having had a clear methodology and as holding a press conference “without presenting any evidence or explanation;” however, PopisMonitor’s written report, in English, was already available in March 2014.

to a well-publicized effort to distort the census returns, non-randomly in terms of ethno-national population counts, in specific strategic locations, it was never likely to gain acceptance by all parties, but would be seen as favoring the side that had organized a strategic overcount, most prominently the Bosniaks, the community that had the most prominent campaign encouraging false reports of residency by non-residents. Endorsing the position thus favored by one community when that as opposed by the another, in this case explicitly by Serbs, would not easily be seen as simply a technical matter of counting, because the locations of the potential overcounts were as crucial as the numbers themselves. Unfortunately, despite the intentions of the IMO to avoid getting drawn into the ethno-politics of B&H, they were coopted into being perceived as doing just that in order to assure that the census results were released on time.

### **From Timeliness to Deadline: The Reluctant Cooptation of the IMO into Desperately Seeking Plausible Affirmability**

As it became clear that the Bosnian parties were in disagreement on the appropriate data processing scheme, IMO officials expressed increasing concern about meeting the deadline imposed by the Law on the Census for releasing the results, and their reports read rather like an epistolary novel. They initially noted good progress on processing the data, though the 19<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report (15-17 September 2014) urged the statistical institutions “to finalize as soon as possible... the system of rules for identifying the resident population, in order not to delay more the dissemination of the census results.” The 20<sup>th</sup> report (18-21 November 2014) urged the statistical institutions to reach agreement on this issue and recommended that dissemination of the first final reports should take place “in any case before summer 2015.” The 21<sup>st</sup> report (24-27 February 2015) noted that “critical decisions remain to be taken, regarding the determination

of the residence status” and that “the data processing phase is at high risk of serious delays.”

The next (22d) report was not issued until a year later, however (1-4 February 2016) and reflected deep concern: that “the processing of the census data is still on hold … one year has been lost, affecting the timely dissemination of the 2013 Census.” Since the IMO’s assessment was that it would take four months to processes the data once agreement would be reached on the methodology, such agreement would have had to be achieved within the next two weeks.

No agreement on methodology for determining resident status was reached by the end of February, but the 23<sup>rd</sup> report (25-27 May 2016) “welcome[d] the decision” on May 18 of the Director of the BHAS to unilaterally decree a uniform methodology, an action vigorously disputed by the RSUS and by RS politicians. The IMO still considered it “highly improbable to finish the editing of the census database within one month” and therefore recommended delaying the statutory deadline for publication for a maximum of three months. When a new law providing for such an extension was not forthcoming from the Bosnian Parliament, the Chairman of the Monitoring Group of the IMO stated that “given the need to perform validation of the data and ensure the necessary quality of the census results, we recommend caution in the first phase of dissemination.”<sup>19</sup>

The 24th report (26-30 September 2016), however, found that what in May the IMO had thought was “highly improbable” had none the less been realized – that the data processing had been finalized to enable dissemination of results by the statutory deadline of July 1. This statement seems at odds with a letter from the IMO dated two days before release of the results,

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Dr. Pieter Everaers, Chairman of the Monitoring Group of the IMO to Mr. Velimir Jukic, Director of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Statistics, dated 29-06-2016; ESTAT-AO/PE/A3/CJ/MA/bmD(2016)3748796.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Dr. Pieter Everaers, Chairman of the Monitoring Group of the IMO to H.E. Mr. Denis Zvizdić, Chairman, Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 16-06-2016, ESTAT-AO/PE/A3/CJ/MA/bmD(2015) 2841026.

which referred to the need to perform validation and ensure necessary quality. Further, on 24 June 2016, the Director General of the RSIS had explained in some detail that the program for data verification adopted by the BHAS Director on May 18 could not be completed by July 1, so that any publication on that date “would be a publishing of unverified information” (Čičković, 2016).

Further, a contract with international experts to resolve inconsistencies between the census and PES was signed only on 27 June 2016 – thus 3 days before the results were released – and called for that work to be done on July 11-15 2016, thus two weeks *after* the results had to be published. The discrepancies were described by the experts as “not usual,” and needed to be resolved “in order to detect whether some kinds of erroneous collected records are still included in the final data set” (Cibella & Tuoto, 2016). The conclusion of the 24th IMO Report stated in bold letters that “**limited time was available for validation.**”

Confidence in the positions taken by the IMO is also not aided by various comments made by its chair near the end of the process. In a June 16, 2015 letter to the Bosnian government, he said in regard to using Question 40 (place of work/ education) in determining resident status that, “as this is a non-core question in census taking, and there is no description in the [Bosnian] Census Law that this question should be part of the variables used to determine the resident status, the IMO considers that it should not be used to determine or correct the resident status.” He then suggested that “*if BiH wishes to do so, this variable could be used to describe characteristics of the population,*” and “could disseminate tables” on this point along with first results [emphasis added].<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Dr. Pieter Everaers, Chairman of the Monitoring Group of the IMO to H.E. Mr. Denis Zvizdić, Chairman, Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, dated 16-06-2016, ESTAT-A0/PE/A3/CJ/MA/bmD(2015) 2841026.

This assertion seems disingenuous. First, EUROSTAT actually does see “Place of Work” as a “core topic” and as being linked to “place of usual residence,” though “place of study” is not core (UN Economic Commission for Europe, 2006: 51). Thus Q40, combining both, may not technically be a core *question* but it is certainly a question on a core *issue*. Yet even if Q40 were not a “core question,” that fact is irrelevant to its use to determine whether the answers to other core questions were truthful. The Conference of European Statisticians recommendations for the 2010 censuses defined “place of usual residence” as a core topic but noted that there are special circumstances in which additional data need to be considered to determine this, including specifically work and study away from the reported home address, and the Bosnian law provided for gathering such additional information via Q40.

The assertion that the census law does not say that Q40 should be used to determine resident status is factually true but irrelevant. The Census Law does not specify any methodology, including the one that the chair of the IMO was recommending, so were the point to be valid, there could not be a census at all as no methodology was specified in the statute. In any event, this reading would make Q40 irrelevant, which is also indicated by his statement that BiH “could use” this variable for purely descriptive purposes. An argument that the data from a mandatory question can be ignored is odd – most rules of statutory interpretation call for reading a statute in a way that does not exclude any part of it.

In another apparently misleading statement, the leader of the IMO referred to the Director of the BHAS as the “chief statistician” in Bosnia who enjoyed “professional independence.”<sup>21</sup> However, the profile by the Center for Investigative Journalism in Sarajevo of BHAS Director Velimir Jukić indicates that he is a professional politician with neither training nor previous work

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<sup>21</sup> International Monitoring Operation: BiH to finalise and publish Census results urgently,” 25 May 2016, <http://europa.ba/?p=42759>.

experience in statistics: a 1984 graduate in geology with a 2010 MA in economics, Mr. Jukić worked in a bauxite mining company until 1991, when he went into politics in the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).<sup>22</sup> He rose in that party until losing an election in 2010, at which point he became an advisor in the B&H Ministry of Defence, then in 2013 Deputy Director of the B&H Agency for the Development of Higher Education, before becoming Director of BHAS in 2015. This is the resume of a political administrator, not of a professional statistician, much less the “chief statistician” in the country. As for professional independence, Mr. Jukić stated in an interview soon after unilaterally imposing the methodology producing greater overcounting, that “what is in the program is complete implementation of the IMO team, and I think we need to respect their knowledge and good intentions towards everybody in BiH.”<sup>23</sup> It thus appears that the chair of the IMO praised the professional statistical judgment of a non-statistician politician whose independent judgment was to adopt uncritically the program favored by the IMO. Also in regard to independence, Mr. Jukić was interrogated by the Bosnian state prosecutors office under threat of prosecution if the census were not published on time,<sup>24</sup> though he denied that he was intimidated by this.

This is not to say that the IMO acted unprofessionally. EUROSTAT’s recommendations for the 2011 round of censuses in Europe note that in census planning, “trade-offs necessary to ensure an appropriate balance between quality and concerns of cost, response burden and other

<sup>22</sup> <http://imovinapoliticara.cin.ba/biography.php?id=65> (accessed July 9 2020). The Center’s annual report for 2016 indicates that it was supported by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, among other western sources; see [https://www.cin.ba/dokumenti/CIN\\_GI-2016\\_bos\\_02.pdf](https://www.cin.ba/dokumenti/CIN_GI-2016_bos_02.pdf) (accessed 5 July 2018).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bh-index.com/jukic-nisam-preksio-zakon-a-ako-neko-sumnja-u-nezakonitosti-neka-se-otvori-istraga/>.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/29552/direktori\\_na\\_saslusaju\\_tuzilastvo\\_bih\\_ce\\_saslusati\\_velimira\\_jukica\\_radmilu\\_chichkovic\\_i\\_emira\\_kremica.html](https://www.slobodna-bosna.ba/vijest/29552/direktori_na_saslusaju_tuzilastvo_bih_ce_saslusati_velimira_jukica_radmilu_chichkovic_i_emira_kremica.html)

factors will be made,” refers to “overall trade-offs between accuracy, cost, timeliness and respondent burden,” and states that timeliness is “often based on trade-offs with accuracy and relevance” (Europe, 2006: 184, 186). Decisions on these trade-offs should be informed by considerations of statistical methods, operations and systems but obviously require consideration of non-statistical information and goals as well. The managers making such decisions are thus not acting only as statisticians, but rather as administrators within statistical institutions, charged with allocating resources and interfacing with other parties. In the case of B&H, as timeliness turned into a strict deadline, accuracy and validity were impaired.

The sense of urgency of the IMO as the deadline for publishing results approached is not surprising for, as its chair put it at a press conference in Sarajevo, “the European Union attaches crucial importance to the census as essential to economic and social planning … and [as] important in the context of European integration, including the implementation of the reform agenda.” By late May 2016, with the deadline for publication less than five weeks away and four months of data processing time being still required, the IMO seems to have been looking for plausible affirmability, rather than for standards having actually been met. It thus seems that despite their best intentions, or perhaps because of them, the IMO was coopted into supporting one side’s position in Bosnia’s ethno-national political machinations.

### **What if The Census Had Been an Empirical Research Study?**

Were the 2013 Bosnian Census to be considered as an empirical research project, the methodological problems would probably have precluded publication of the results on resident population, as presented separately by either the BHAS or the RSIS. It was acknowledged by the IMO that there were organized attempts to falsify data, and patterns in the preliminary data

reports showed that there were major discrepancies throughout the country. It was also apparent that whatever falsifications would occur would likely be targeted to particular strategic locations, not randomly in the territory. However, data that had been collected and that were relevant to determining the locations and extent of falsification were excluded from the analysis, on the grounds of “parsimony.” Finally, while all of the statistical agencies in Bosnia and the IMO agreed that there was substantial overcounting in the census, this is nowhere mentioned in the officially published final reports. It is difficult to believe that the editors of a major scientific journal would accept such a flawed study, and especially to the absence of reference to the known ranges of inaccuracy in the published results.

Considering the project as empirical research rather than a census might, however, have offered an alternative to the IMO other than acquiescing in being gamed by some of the Bosnian actors. Paragraph II.4 of the MOU establishing the IMO provided that the operation could be terminated or suspended “should the political or social conditions in [B&H] not be suitable for the continuation” of it. When the statistical institutions were deadlocked, and the issue clearly made acceptance of either position politically unacceptable to one or the other of the major ethno-national parties, the IMO might have suspended the operation and then made a suggestion in accordance with a comment made by the IMO chair at a press conference in Sarajevo in June 2015: “Statistics is not a registration where you count exactly each individual. Statistics is like making a picture; you can have some areas which are vague or not that clear.”<sup>25</sup> A representational picture, of course, can seem more or less detailed: consider Vermeer contrasted with Monet. With this image in mind, the IMO might have reported, with perfect honesty, that unfortunately the data gathered for the census had been distorted by organized efforts to induce

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/political-disputes-delay-publication-of-bosnia-s-census-results>, accessed July 12, 2020.

false reporting of residency status, and that for that reason, it was possible only to publish a range of the reasonably reliable minimum number of actual residents and an upper range of potential residents for which residency was not clear. In addition, instead of searching for a uniform methodology when none was likely to be agreed upon, it could have recommended publishing both sets of figures. Such alternative publications, in turn, would have had the advantage of facilitating determination of populations in the parts of the country that are most likely to be contested between Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs.

The “picture” just outlined would have been closer to the goal set for the IMO, of ensuring that the census presented “an accurate socio-economic and demographic picture of BiH’s population and results that will be widely accepted,” than the results finally issued by BHAS without the consent of RSIS, and rejected as invalid in the RS. At the same time, the characteristics of the minimum number of verified residents could have been used for planning and other purposes, which, after all was what the IMO was charged with achieving. It might be objected that rejecting a single figure would make B&H statistics not comparable to those in other states, but if the neighboring countries did indeed “guarantee rather rigidly the principle of *place of usual residence* for counting the population (thereby not including diaspora),” as EUROSTAT officials had said they would do (Everaers, 2015, p. 193), valid comparisons with the BHAS figures are in any event dubious. It would be intellectually honest to state that fact and indicate that the Bosnian census was flawed.

Had the IMO invoked the paragraph of the MOU establishing it, which provided that the operation could be terminated or suspended “should the political or social conditions in [B&H] not be suitable for the continuation” of it, the result would have perhaps been what looked like a census but with an asterisk, as not validated. Ranges of possible figures, rather than single final

numbers, have been used in criticisms of census aimed at improving them (see, e.g., Warren & Passel, 1987). Further, accounts of victims of war and genocide have used ranges because the data are incomplete, contradictory or inconclusive (Dulić, 2005, pp. 319-324). The BiH census, of seen as empirical research, would fit that description.

In any event, since both the RSIS and the FIS were institutionally capable of doing their own analyses, and legally empowered (and in the RSIS case, required) to do so, either could always reject an IMO position and generate legally authorized results within the jurisdiction of the relevant entity. Had the IMO accepted that reality, the overall position would have been what we now see: separate census results from the RSIS and FIS, but without potentially discrediting the IMO (and by extension, EUROSTAT) as neutral monitors in a future census.

### **The Continued Utility of the 2013 Census Data**

Even without reliable figures on the resident population, the 2013 census data can still be used to analyze some social and demographic trends. The concentration of overcounts in strategic locations can be seen through the quirk of Brčko District being comprised of what had been a single municipality in pre-war B&H, with about 2% of the population of the entire country, according to BHAS results. As mentioned earlier, Brčko was the most strategically important location in the entire country during the war and in the peace negotiations, so it would be reasonable to anticipate the highest incidence of false reports of non-residents as resident. And that is what is seen: according to the Final Report of the IMO, the net over-coverage error rate in the District was 16.51%, compared with 4.61% at the national level.

The RSIS was not empowered to produce its own result for Brčko District, but the availability of both RSIS and BHAS results for RS can be used to show patterns in that entity of

overcounts, if not necessarily completely reliable numbers. Overall, the BHAS results show 3% higher numbers for Serbs, 14% higher for Bosniaks and 11% higher for Croats than do the RSIS results (Žila & Čermák, 2020). However, these higher counts are not distributed randomly in the RS. As one might anticipate, the highest differences are in areas that were highly strategic during the war. In Prijedor municipality, the BHAS results included 23% more Bosniaks than did RSIS; 36% more Croats in Pelagaćivo (bordering Brčko); and in the line of municipalities on the southern border of RS around Brčko, about 16% more Croats in Derventa, Modriča and Doboj, and 10% more Croats and 20% more Bosniaks in Doboj. In the Drina Valley, BHAS results showed about 16% more Bosniaks than BHAS ones in strategically critical towns of Zvornik, Bratunac and Srebrenica.

Unfortunately, since BHAS did not calculate results for the FBH using the RSIS formula as well as the one sanctioned by the IMO, we cannot make such evaluations of that territory. However, comparing numbers of votes cast for ethno-national parties in the elections held in 2014, one year after the census was conducted and two years before its results were announced, it is possible to see substantially fewer votes for Croat and Bosniak parties in places in the RS than would be expected based on their enumerated numbers even by the RS results, and many of those cast absentee by people actually living outside of BiH (Žila & Čermák, 2020). Similar patterns can be seen in the FBH compared to the BHAS results; they would almost certainly be even more pronounced were the data in FBH also processed by the methodology used by the RSIS.

As for what this means: a sociologist at the University of Sarajevo analyzed the BHAS 2013 census data and concluded that in BiH, “the forming of ethnic territorialization areas is completed” (Pejanović, 2017). By this analysis, Serbs have Republika Srpska, while in the

Federation of BiH, Bosniaks have 5 cantons, and Croats 3 cantons. Since the the BHAS figures overstate the resident population mainly by overcounting Bosniaks and Croats in strategic areas, the analysis is probably better supported empirically than the BHAS data themselves show.

Finally, even without reliable figures on the resident population, the census as reported by BHAS does provide useful information on the people enumerated. A key question in the literature on Bosnia before the census results were released was the legitimacy of utilizing questions on ethno/national identity, religion and native language (Armakolas & Maksimović, 2014; Bieber, 2015; Bochsler & Schläpfer, 2015, 2016; Cooley & Mujanović, 2016; Everaers, 2015; Hoh, 2016, 2017; Keil, 2015; Keil & Perry, 2015; Perry, 2013, 2015; Visoka & Gjevari, 2013). The grounds varied, including concern that such identities are inherently fluid or flexible, but are inevitably defined artificially by census designers so that people are thereby denied free choice to define themselves. Another issue raised was that such identifications were the result of actions by “ethnic entrepreneurs” who mount campaigns for people to adopt specific identities and vote for the parties that claim to support people of that identity. In part to meet these objections, answering questions on ethnic identity and religion were made optional, and those questions plus the one on native language were described as “sensitive,” since they had such high political salience.

The BHAS census results, however, indicate that the academic concerns about the supposed fluidity or flexibility of identity were misplaced: only about 1% of people enumerated refused to answer the optional, sensitive questions. More than 96% declared themselves Bosniak, Croat or Serb, and about 99% of those who did so also indicated the expected corresponding language and religion. “Did not declare” was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest category of answer to the question on ethnic identity, but this was still only 0.7% of respondents, right after the ethno-religiously

neutral “Bosnian” (*Bosanac/ Bosanka*) at 1%. In regard to religion, 1,751,980 of the 1,769,592 people (99%) who declared themselves as Bosniaks also declared themselves as of either Islamic (1,737,838) or Muslim faith (14,142). Similarly, 1,076,807 of the 1,086,733 (also 99%) who declared themselves Serbs also said that they were of Orthodox (1,073,272) or Serbian (3,535) faith. Among declared Croats, 527,651 said that they were Catholics, while another 6,386 said that their religion was “Roman Catholic” (*Rimokatolička*), thus totaling 534,037, or 98% of the 544,780 total.<sup>26</sup>

Regarding languages, 99.6% of Bosniaks said they spoke Bosnian, 98.1% of Serbs said they spoke Serbian and another 9,422, Serbo-Croatian, bringing their total to 99%. Among Croats 93% spoke Croatian. There were outliers, of course: 1,448 Bosniaks said they spoke Serbian (0.08%), 1,136 (78%) of them in the RS, and of those, 64% females; while 587 Bosniaks said they spoke Croatian, 533 of them in the FBH and 60% of those females. 1,448 Bosniaks said they spoke Serbian (0.08%), 1,136 (78%) of them in the RS, and of those, 64% females. 7,269 Serbs said they spoke Bosnian (0.6%), 6,690 (92%) of them in the FBH, and of those 63% females. Of the 1,227 Serbs who spoke Croatian, 87% were in the FBH and 70% of them were females. Of the 17,088 Croats (0.03%) who spoke Bosnian, 94% were from the FBH; and of the 5,349 Croats speaking Serbian, 5,027 (94%) were in the RS and of those, 68% were females.<sup>27</sup>

The non-random distributions of these outliers by location and gender lend credibility to the results; a plausible explanation might be that women married into places where their own ethnic identity is a minority may say they speak the language that their neighbors claim also to speak. Even the “did not declare” category was distributed geographically in non-random ways:

<sup>26</sup> Calculated from figures in Table K2\_T3\_B of Book 2 of the 2013 Census of Bosnia & Herzegovina, as published by BHAS 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Calculated from figures in Table K2\_T4\_s of Book 2 of the 2013 Census of Bosnia & Herzegovina, as published by BHAS 2019.

30.2% in the RS and nearly as many in Sarajevo (26.8%). The remainder in the FBH were mainly located in Tuzla (12.7%) and in the cantons containing Zenica (9%) and Mostar (6.5%). Thus this form of non-declaring declaration was mainly an urban phenomenon.

What is not plausible would be asserting that these strikingly uniform patterns of responses were the results of actions of “ethnic entrepreneurs.” Entrepreneurs, after all, generally succeed when they are marketing a product that people want to buy, and both the census and election returns in Bosnia over the past century indicate that what many people have wanted to buy is ethno-religious nationalism. In so heavily identifying themselves as Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs with the expected corresponding religion and language identifiers, the responses of the Bosnian population in 2013 followed the patterns seen in both censuses and elections in Bosnia since the end of the Ottoman period. While the terms used for specific communities have changed over the decades (Mrdjen, 2002), the key indicator of the major communities in the language area formerly known as Serbo-Croatian is religious heritage, without necessarily reference to religiosity (Baćević, 1991; Flere, 1990; Hammel, 1993). The links between language, religion and national identity (*narod*) have been stable enough that in 1941 Austrian geographers could produce highly detailed 1:200,000 scale ethnographic maps of Yugoslavia based on religion and native language data from the 1921 and 1931 censuses (Mrdjen, 2002; Orlandini, 2013). For that matter, representation from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Ottoman parliament in 1876 had mandated specified numbers of a Muslim majority, and a minority of Christians and one Jew (Gelez, 2010).

A plausible explanation of the pattern of census responses in Bosnia has been suggested by Florian Bieber, one of the scholars who had otherwise argued that “efforts by ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize citizens to choose particular identities” are especially prominent “in

deeply divided postconflict societies such as the states of former Yugoslavia” and postulated before the census was reported that many identity boundaries in the Balkans, and specifically in Bosnia were “fluid” (Bieber, 2015, pp. 3, 17). He also suggested that “[i]f group boundaries are well defined, and fairly stable, the census campaign will seek less to convince others to join the group, but rather to mobilize the predefined community” (Bieber, 2015, p. 17), and this is what the BHAS and RSIS data from the census both indicate: that the group boundaries in BiH are indeed well defined and fairly stable, and hardly flexible or fluid, for overwhelming majorities of the people enumerated in the census.

If the census results do not necessarily show the success of supposed ethnic entrepreneurs, the high degrees of ethno-national identification they show do indicate the failure of efforts by anti-ethnic entrepreneurs, despite well-publicized campaigns by some NGOs to have people declare themselves in non-ethnic or national terms (see Cooley, 2019). “Bosnian” or “Bosnian & Herzegovinian” accounted for only 1.3% of BHAS’s enumeration for the entire country, and only 3% of those were in the RS, compared to 38.8% in Sarajevo Kanton alone in FBH. The remaining non-ethnic “Bosnian” and “Bosnian & Herzegovinian” enumerations were also concentrated in the same FBH cities as those enumerated as “did not declare.”

The attempt at anti-ethnic entrepreneurship may have failed not only because of the consociational structure of Bosnia (Cooley, 2019), but because its organizers were urbanites, mostly well-educated and with access to international support, and for those reasons not representative of most citizens of B&H. This is not a new phenomenon in the Balkans – Jane Cowan has referred to “organic intellectuals” in late Ottoman Macedonia who inhabited “a subject position of considerable means, education, the opportunity to travel, a certain cosmopolitan experience … and thus seem to have reveled in the contrasts, contradictions and

ambiguities of their times" (Cowan, 2008, p. 342). Such intellectuals supported a cosmopolitan ideal for an independent, secular and not-ethnically divided Macedonia, as opposed to the separate, separatist and opposed Bulgarian, Greek, Serbian and ethnic Macedonian identities that were being promoted by various nationalist; but as in B&H nearly a century later, it was the latter that triumphed, which led to partition (see Gingeras, 2009; Yosmaoğlu, 2014). It is not that the cosmopolitan position was wrong, but rather that it was not held by many other than members of the cosmopolitan elite.

In its final assessment, the IMO noted that answers to these "sensitive questions" were "most of the time provided spontaneously and directly," and then concludes that this spontaneity is "a clear outcome of the influence of the campaign carried out by interests groups on these variable." Yet the near-universality of these responses is probably a much better indicator that the group boundaries are not only well defined and fairly stable, but also seen as important by most people enumerated. This being so, the final recommendation of the IMO, that "Given their optional character and their impact on the census processes, Bosnia and Herzegovina should consider not including sensitive questions bearing high political impact such as ethnicity, religion and mother tongue, in future censuses." Recommending the "choice of ignorance" (Simon, 2008) in a country in which the population is so profoundly self-partitioned is hard to justify. Such a census could not possibly deliver an "accurate socio-economic and demographic picture of BiH's population," as the MOU establishing the IMO put it. Nor will discrimination against non-Serbs in RS, or non-Bosniaks in most of the FBH and non-Croats in the rest of it, vanish if census takers pretend that some of the social categories most primary to the population are irrelevant.

### **Local Politics and the IMO: All's Well that Ends Badly?**

While the analysis in this article has been critical of the IMO's actions once the Bosnian statistical agencies deadlocked on the issue of whether to use data gathered to control for incorrect residency reports in order to achieve that goal, the threat that that disagreement posed to the completion of the census by the statutory deadline was not created by the IMO. The foreigners were thus caught up in a Bosnian dispute not of their own making. This is not, of course, the first time that Bosnian political actors have appropriated the services of well-intentioned foreign intervenors to pursue their own goals in their battles with each other; or for such foreigners to be frustrated by the unwillingness of locals to "take ownership" of well-intended interventions (Ejdus, 2017; Kostić, 2017). There is a genre of Bosnian black humor that deals with this, such as the film *Gori Vatra [Fuse]* (Žalica, 2003). Indeed, the tendency of foreigner intervenors to misunderstand Bosnians while thinking themselves superior to the locals is a time-honored theme in Bosnian literature (see Milutinović, 2008). There is some irony in the case of the Bosnian census of 2013, however, in that the IMO seem to have relaxed their own standards to whatever might be said to offer plausible affirmability for the results of a census that was distorted in ways that EUROSTAT personnel had anticipated, but the IMO had not been able to prevent.

Yet no one should have expected anything different. Consociations are most needed when the component communities have not agreed on the form a joint state should take, and most members of at least one community are actually not much willing to be included in a joint state with the other(s). B&H is an extreme example because the joint state was imposed on both the Croats and the Serbs by international interveners, and was never subjected to ratification in a

plebiscite since no one believed that it would be approved by members of those two communities (Hayden, 2005; Kasapović, 2018). The Dayton constitution was consociational because the Serbs and Croats both rejected being governed from Sarajevo (Hayden, 1999; Kasapović, 2018), and thus accepted being in B&H only if they would not actually be subjected to governance by the central government demanded by the Bosniaks. Serb and Croat politicians in Bosnia have repeatedly been elected by voters who still reject the possibility of being subjugated to the centralized rule from Sarajevo that is the platform of the Bosniak parties. In opposing Bosniak efforts to increase enumerations of non-residents as resident and thus increase their official numbers, RS politicians were thus responding to the wishes of their primary constituency; just as in supporting such efforts to boost Bosniak enumerations by counting non-residents, Bosniak politicians were responding to the wishes of their own constituency.

In fact, perhaps the census, stillborn as it was, may be considered a success by all parties, in delivering something to their several constituencies. The IMO reported a successful B&H census to the EC, even though it failed as a census in half of B&H. Bosniak parties got an EC-accepted census that counted many non-residents as resident and thus showed Bosniaks to be a majority in Bosnia, as desired by their constituents. Croat parties similarly got a census that showed many more Croats in B&H than were really there. And the RS got a separate census of its territory and has since been able to block the use of the BHAS census for demographic reports on the level of B&H. These several victories are mutually exclusive: a more accurate enumeration would not have suited the Bosniak or Croat parties, acknowledging failure would not have suited the IMO, and accepting the inflated BHAS enumeration of non-residents as resident would not have suited the RS. So in this case, perhaps all's well that ends badly.

Of course, this raises the question of whether an accurate census is even necessary. This is certainly a political question. Arranging for undercounts is probably more common than organizing overcounts, and as I write in late August 2020, the Trump administration in the USA is attempting to arrange undercounts in the 2020 census of members of ethnic and racial minorities and of undocumented immigrants, not a new situation in US census practice (see, e.g., Choldin, 1986). Yet not only does planning of schools, roads and other infrastructure depend on reasonably accurate demographics, but so do crucial policy-relevant fields in public health, to name one area that is obvious in the time of Covid.

As noted earlier, the statistical agencies in B&H are moving forward with replacements for the failed 2013 census by doing new household survey to establish base lines for some work, and separate new sample frames for the labor survey. However, considering the importance of the demographic data for the quotas involved in the political system, the incompatible enumerations in the RS, as well as the large overcount in Brčko District, are likely to cause political problems at the time of the next elections.

## Conclusions

We may conclude that the Bosnian census as approved by the IMO cannot safely be used as an enumeration of the population, but the data can be used for empirical research. We may hope that consideration of why the census was stillborn may help alert future international monitoring missions to the need to pay close attention to the social and political realities of the country into which they have been called, and avoid taking actions that will be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as siding with one community in a state that has robust ethno-religious divisions within its society and built into its constitutional structure.

Finally, perhaps future IMOs may consider that once a census is underway, the evaluation should not be seen in binary terms, as being “worthwhile or would it have been more useful to resist the international pressure for holding the census?” (Everaers, 2015, p. 194). If the census is viewed as an exercise in empirical research, some data may well turn out to be useful even if the enumeration, as such, can be presented only as a range. Had the IMO acted on its leader’s statement that “Statistics is like making a picture; you can have some areas which are vague or not that clear,” cited above, it could have endorsed the data as providing useful information on the people for whom responses were gathered, and the enumeration of residents as a range rather than a number. Had that course of action been taken, the results would have been largely what we now see: separate results for the RS on the one hand, FBH and Brčko District on the other, recognizing what the IMO’s observers had themselves reported as organized efforts to distort the enumeration by registering non-residents as resident. The main difference is that the IMO would not have been perceived as taking one side in the ethno-religious politics of B&H, thus maintaining the credibility of international monitoring and perhaps making it more likely that a new census will be held.

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