VISIBLE MINORITY, RACE AND RACIALIZATION IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES: CHALLENGING CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENTS

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The government of Canada's 1995 Employment Equity Act (henceforth the Act) defines visible minority as referring to persons, other than aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. The term "non-white" is used in the wording of the Act and in employment equity questionnaires for government applicants and employees. As required by the Act, since 1996 the census of Canada has included a question on visible minority. The results are used primarily by governments, business, community groups, health care providers, researchers and others promoting employment equity. The census responses to visible minority questions include the following groups: "Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, South-east Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, Visible minority, n.i.e. ('n.i.e.' means 'not included elsewhere'), and Multiple visible minority."[1] However, a few exceptions are applied to some groups.

Efforts to have the term *race* dropped from the United States census have not been successful. On the basis of guidelines provided by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the United States Census Bureau collects racial data to help promote civil rights and specifically to support

1 www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/006/98-500-x2016006-eng.cfm

equal employment opportunities as well as to assess racial disparities in health and environmental risks.

Based on self-identification, census officials contend that "...racial categories...generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically."

By contrast with classification in Statistics Canada's visible minority census question, the U.S. census lists five minimum categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

The use of terms *race* and *visible minority* have come under fire from many academics, civil society representatives and policy-makers in North America and Europe who insist that such terminology reinforces stereotypes and obscures meaningful distinctions between different minority groups.

That which follows will review recent developments in Canada and the United States as regards the terminology that seeks to categorize 'skin color' and to determine how best to measure the economic and social outcomes associated with its classification. Particular attention is directed at how analysts deal with the question of mixed identification.

Since the introduction of this uniquely Canadian term, the identification and/or classification of visible minority status has faced mounting criticism and remains an object of ongoing controversy. The idea of inquiring about visible minority status is increasingly part of a global debate about the respective use of the terms *race* and *racialization*. The term *visible minority* has become a lightning rod, with perhaps the main criticisms involving the composition of "visible minorities", where the selected groups often have little in common with each other, as some groups encounter greater vulnerability than others and yet get rolled up into a singular category for policy purposes. Others note that *visible minorities* may form a majority of the population as is already the case in Vancouver and Toronto. "When we use the aggregated visible-minority groups," StatCan analyst Laetitia Martin said, "we tend to homogenize the experiences of the different minority groups and we divert the attention from where the needs are really the greatest."

In the academy, civil society and amongst a number of policy makers in North America and Europe, the term *racialization* or *racialized minorities* is increasingly used instead of visible minority or racial formation (the former terms aim to replace the term race).

Analysts insist that simply asking such questions reinforces the view that there is such a thing as race. Hochman (2019) contends "... if race is best defined as a biological concept which does not refer to anything in the world – then we should probably cease using 'race' as a descriptive term." Segall (2002) remarks that "belief in the existence of 'race', coupled with widely held beliefs in behavioral differences, is a powerful sociological phenomenon that impacts on intergroup relations." He argues that simply treating the social construct of "race" *as if it were* a biological reality is itself "racist" and should be resisted vigorously.

Hochman states that the term *racialized* offers a way for groups that have been understood and treated

as inferior "races" to assert and defend themselves collectively, while rejecting the biologization and inferiorization associated with "race." Others argue that the use of the term race encourages racism by acknowledging the existence of race.

But Hochman acknowledges that there has been a backlash against the use of the term *racialized*. Some suggest that it is an awkward substitute for 'racial formation' and creates confusion when speaking about racism. It might be argued that there has not been much of a backlash against the term since — outside of the academy and civil society — there is little evidence of considerable public uptake of the word *racialized*.

The 2020 U.S. census form will state that: "race and ethnicity categories are socio-political constructs; should not be interpreted as scientific or anthropological in nature". United States census officials have considered alternatives to the term *race*, and in 2015 experimented with new ways to ask people about their background. Test questions asked respondents which "category" best describes them, and then list a series of races and origins including white, Hispanic and black, among others. The census differentiates *between* race and origin. That Hispanic is not regarded as a race has been cause for some confusion.

The U.S. census bureau ultimately determined that the 2020 census would keep the same racial and ethnic categories used in the previous census. However, under the check box for "Black or African American," a new space will be added on the questionnaire to enable participants to write in their non-Hispanic origins with such examples offered as "African American," "Jamaican" and "Nigerian".

FROM 'RACES' TO VISIBLE MINORITIES TO 'ETHNICITIES'?

There appears to be a growing interest in moving away from the collection of information on visible minorities in favor of using data on ethnic origins so as to identify economic and social inequality. In 2012, the United Nations warned Canada that the term visible minorities risked homogenizing experiences of different ethnic groups. They declared that "its lack of precision may pose a barrier to effectively addressing the socioeconomic gaps of different ethnic groups." Visible minority categories (including the 'not a visible minority' category) can indeed mask a diversity of ethnic origins.

Preliminary findings of a Statistics Canada analysis revealed that income and employment outcomes by ethnic origins gave rise to differing outcomes in the labour market. Statistics Canada has been assessing the feasibility of disaggregating data sets on ethnic origins with a view to exploring whether the visible-minority concept "is still relevant in measuring inequalities in today's labour market." But any such changes would require amending Canada's Employment Equity Act, which would by no means be straightforward.

THE MIX UP?

In Canada and in the United States, complications arise in the process of classification of those cases where census respondents identify as both a visible minority and a non-visible minority. In Statistics Canada's population group, variable data are included for multiple responses such as 'White and South Asian' and 'White and Black'. But the same multiple responses are counted differently in

the visible minority variable because of the need that it be derived in accordance with the government's employment equity requirements. In the visible minority variable, persons who reported 'South Asian,' 'Chinese,' 'Black,' 'Filipino,' 'Southeast Asian,' 'Korean,' or 'Japanese,' in combination with 'White' on a write-in response, are included in the visible minority count for the specific visible minority group reported. For example, respondents who checked 'Black' and 'White' are included in the 'Black' count. But persons reporting 'Latin American' and 'White,' 'Arab' and 'White,' or 'West Asian' and 'White' are classified as 'Not a visible minority'. An important challenge to the use of the *term visible minority* is that not all those identifying as such may be "visually" identifiable. For example, many persons that consider themselves of various Latin American or Arabic ethnic origins choose not to self-identify as a visible minority in the corresponding categories in the census question.

In the United States, the multiple responses to questions about racial identification are often referred to as "mixed race". In the United States, "mixed race" brings to mind a biracial experience of having one black parent and another white one, or perhaps one white and the other Asian. But for many U.S. Latinos, mixed-race identity takes on a different meaning — one that is tied to Latin America's colonial history and which commonly includes having a white and indigenous, or "mestizo" background somewhere in their ancestry. A 2014 report by Pew Research reveals that one-third of U.S. Hispanic adults identify as "mestizo," "mulatto" or some other mixed-race combination. The term "mixed race" has yet to find a satisfactory substitute in Canada. Rarely does the term *multiple visible minority* get employed in public discourse when referring to persons who identify with more than one group. University of Toronto geographer Minelle Mahtani has recently written an important monograph in Canada entitled *Mixed Race Amnesia: Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality*.

According to a Pew Research survey of U.S. Hispanics, those who identify as mixed race, mestizo or mulatto are more likely than Latino adults who do not identify as mixed race to be non-Mexican (45 vs. 36%) and to have a higher educational attainment (45% have some college or more, versus 27%). The U.S. Census Bureau encounters important challenges when measuring Hispanic 'racial identity'. Indeed, a considerable number of Hispanics do not choose a standard census race category such as white, black or Asian. Instead, about four in ten select the 'some other race' and some two-thirds of U.S. Hispanic adults regard being Hispanic as part of their racial background, not just an ethnicity (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015).

The census of Canada makes it possible to look at the relationship between ethnic identification(s) and visible minority status. In the case of a number of ethnic groups that identify as Latin American (as well as Arabic) there are varying responses to the census question on visible minority status. As observed in the Table below, those who ethnically identify as Argentinean and Brazilian do not identify with a visible minority, a modest majority of Mexicans do and an important majority of Colombians do.

When looking at income data on the basis of the intersections between the four aforementioned Latin American ethnic origins and visible minority status, one observes important differences between those groups identifying as visible min-

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DECLARING VISIBLE MINORITY STATUS BY SELECTED ETHNIC GROUP, CANADA, 2016

	Male	Female
Argentinian	41%	42%
Brazilian	45.8%	48.2%
Colombian	86%	86.2%
Mexican	57.2%	59.5%

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, SPECIAL TABULATIONS, CENSUS OF CANADA, 2016

ority Latin American and not identifying as a visible minority. In the table below, we can see a 15-per-cent income difference amongst ethnic Argentinians that respectively identify as Latin American and Not Visible Minority, and the difference rises to 38% for ethnic Brazilians on the basis of whether they define as Latin American or not a visible minority.

CONCLUSION

Identities and identification are in flux — as is the terminology we use to define ourselves. In pluralist democracies, citizens define themselves in multiple ways and census takers face considerable challenges in measuring identities in highly charged contexts. Segall (2002) insists that it is imperative to spread the word that "race" is a cultural construct that varies over space and time and differs across countries. He maintains that groups that are anywhere perceived as "races" are better described as ethnic groups, simultaneously shaped by and reshaping their own particular cultures, and influencing other groups with whom they come in contact. But the continued effort to spread the word and get North Americans to use such terms as 'racialized' as a substitute for race, racial formation or visible minorities does not seem to have made substantial progress outside of the academy, and the time may be right for a reset.

TABLE 2: INCOME STATISTICS FOR SELECTED LATIN AMERICAN ORIGINS, CANADA, MALE, 25-54 YEARS OF AGE, AVERAGE WAGES, SALARIES AND COMMISSIONS IN 2015 ($) AMONG RECIPIENTS UNIVERSITY CERTIFICATE, DIPLOMA OR DEGREE AT BACHELOR LEVEL OR ABOVE

2016	Argentinian	Brazilian	Colombian	Mexican
Total - Visible minority	100,325	67,489	63,870	69,239
Latin American	91,840	56,405	60,453	66,610
Not a visible minority	104,037	77,734	82,725	79,225
Approximate Difference between Latin American and NVM	15%	38%	35%	20%

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, SPECIAL TABULATIONS, CENSUS OF CANADA, 2016

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