

## **Ethnic conflict in the Transcaucasus**

### *The case of Nagorno-Karabakh*

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In this article I shed light on the causes underlying the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and disclose analogous factors operating in other regions of ethnic tension in the Transcaucasus. In seeking the causes for conflict, one implicitly accepts the view that a historical approach can shed light on contemporary reality; however, in view of space limitations, only a brief historical exposition is possible here. For the same reason this work cannot claim to provide a complete exploration of either the rapidly changing situation in the region or a fully explicated analysis of the goals and programs of the national movements that are active there. These are subjects for a different kind of study, one that should more appropriately be termed a "politology," and that would be based on other sources of information.

The Transcaucasus, like Central Asia, has in recent years been among the most explosive regions in the U.S.S.R.. Ethnic clashes have resulted in pogroms, the deaths of dozens of citizens, and the appearance of hundreds of thousands of refugees. The Transcaucasus therefore provides an ideal case study for testing the approach to ethnic conflict outlined below. The author has been engaged in annual ethnographic field research throughout the Transcaucasus since 1983. This research has been conducted in the Nakhichevan autonomous republic, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Abkhazian autonomous republic, Armenia, and the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous oblast. This study represents a summary of that research<sup>1</sup> and contains the theoretical conclusions derived from this experience.

### **A methodology for the study of ethnic conflict in the Transcaucasus**

The stream of apologetic texts that once proclaimed the successes of Soviet ethnic policy has virtually disappeared and it has been replaced by a large number of critical works on ethnic relations and interethnic conflict in the Soviet Union. Most current works in the field of Soviet ethnography fall into one of two groups: either they represent specific studies of the current situation in a particular area of the country where ethnic relations are particularly tense, or they constitute general works that attempt to evaluate the general situation and present the author's views concerning the ideal in ethnic relations and how to achieve it.

Unfortunately, there are as yet no summary analytic reviews of this body of literature, although there is an obvious need for them. Soviet ethnographers still lack a stable and generally accepted system of concepts and terms for the study of ethnic conflict. Nor is there a detailed classification or typology of ethnic conflicts, although the first steps toward the production of a typology of ethnic conflicts have been taken. This dearth of methodological tools hinders the development of comparative studies and makes it difficult to evaluate work in the field. At the same time, it underscores the need for increased efforts to improve the conceptual apparatus and the theoretical foundations of the approaches we utilize in studying ethnic conflicts.

Certain social psychological theories suggest that the basis of conscious ethnic membership is the "we/they" dichotomy, which underlies ethnic self-identification and group stereotypes. However, this dichotomy misses the fact that ethnic relations and the mutual perceptions on which they are based may vary in accordance with changing conditions. Mutual perceptions and ethnic relations are more likely to be favorable when ethnic groups share a similar ideology or religion, or when both groups oppose the same enemy or ideology. However, mutual relations will be neutral or negative in the absence of these factors. The differences between these types of ethnic stereotypes and the relations that they produce are rather arbitrary, and one type can be displaced by another over time as historical situations change. These differences are most clearly reflected in the group stereotypes that mould mutual perception. These stereotypes can be discovered through large-scale ethnopsychological investigations, but field ethnographic studies can also provide significant data on such topics.

For a variety of reasons, the relationships among the major ethnic

groups of the Transcaucasus (the Armenians, Azeris, and Georgians) have been negative since at least the onset of the Russian annexation of the region in the early nineteenth century. In recent decades, the relations between the Georgians and the Abkhazians and Ossetians, two autonomous ethnic groups within the territorial confines of the Georgian Republic, have also taken a visible turn for the worse. Recent events have also produced or greatly aggravated negative attitudes on the part of the major ethnic groups in the Transcaucasus toward ethnic Russians, who are generally associated in the popular mind with the all-union (federal) government organs and the policies of the center.

Negative stereotypes do not in and of themselves render the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups impossible even in areas where populations have shifted and intermingled. This has been illustrated, for example, by the experience of the Armenians and Azeris, who lived together successfully throughout the Soviet period, up until the beginning of the Karabakh crisis. Although conflictual ethnic relationships are always accompanied by negative perceptions of the opposing group, much more is required for conflict, i.e., negative perceptions are necessary, but not sufficient for ethnic conflict. It should be noted that the term "ethnic conflict" should be reserved for those instances where the goal of relatively influential national movements is to change the status quo, particularly when that state of affairs has been accepted or tolerated in the past.

Each conflict situation also has its "initiator," although the use of this term in relation to a national movement should not be interpreted as imputing moral opprobrium. Striving for change can be both reasonable and justifiable. However, if a conflict becomes protracted, leading to bloody clashes or great economic costs, mass attitudes will frequently turn against the side that initiated the conflict, and the reasons underlying the demands for change can lose their force or come to be openly denigrated. As one example, there is currently less understanding and sympathy for the Armenians among Russians living in the Caucasus than there was in 1988, a fact that may reflect a more general principle of mass consciousness.

National movements that attempt to change the existing situation initially encounter resistance from the authorities who created and by their inertia preserve the status quo. They may also provoke in response the formation of national movements among peoples whose interests, real or imaginary, the initiators are seen to threaten. The Arme-

nian-Azeri conflict, which emerged at the end of 1987 with the protests and mass meetings of the already rather well-organized Armenian movement in Nagorno-Karabakh, illustrates these points well.

The authorities in the autonomous oblast itself, in the republic of Azerbaijan, and in the all-union government initially attempted to silence and suppress the movement on the one hand by granting small concessions and on the other by discrediting the leaders of the movement, but without noticeable results. The national movement among the Azeris was formed almost a year and a half year later in response to continued Armenian mobilization, and by the autumn of 1989 it had attained an equal size and level of organization. At present it is these two competing national movements that wield real authority in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

It is possible in principle for ethnic conflicts to run their course and to be resolved by means of a legal-political struggle between competing national movements. Therefore, we should not confuse the conflicts themselves with the frequently tragic events that accompany their rise, such as ethnic clashes, the use of force, and human casualties. These are different, though closely related, phenomena. In a situation of ethnic conflict, an ethnic clash may be the result of a random event, or events may flow from the internal logic of an ongoing conflict. In any case, such events serve only as the triggers of tragedy. The factors that produce conflict, including those that lead to ethnic clashes, must be sought at a deeper level. Sometimes these factors are not even reflected in the slogans and formal demands of the national movements, as these are often "adjusted" to fit a political reality that imposes its own set of priorities.

It is useful to divide the many complex factors that have engendered or strongly influenced ethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasus into three main groups, based on their historical origins and the possibility of dealing with them effectively. In the next section, we shall apply this system to an analysis of the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh, but for the present we shall limit ourselves to a brief exposition of the typology itself.

First are those factors that continually influence ethnic relations in the region and that cannot be eliminated in the foreseeable future. These factors include the *historic past*, i.e., the record of interrelationships between the effected ethnic groups (e.g. wars and invasions, relations of

political domination and subordination); *religious differences*; and *cultural differences* in the broadest sense (these may range from differences in domestic patterns of behavior to variations in political culture).

Second are those key conditions under which ethnic relations have developed in the region. These are also virtually impossible to regulate, because they have evolved over long periods of time and can be changed only as a result of a radical transformation in the region's social life and government structure. Relevant conditions are: *territorial* – the locus of the settlements of the different ethnic groups prior to 1917, particularly the divergences between ethnic boundaries and the boundaries of union and autonomous republics and oblasts; *legal* – the unequal political status of ethnic groups or parts thereof as a result of the hierarchy of national-state (or national-administrative) formations (union republics, autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts); *ideological* – the discrediting of the official ideology with its emphasis on internationalism and the parallel growth of nationalism as the basis of popular world views; *social* – the general decline of living standards and the resultant increase in social tension due to the economic crisis; and *political* – the antagonism or variance between the goals of the national movements and those of official government organs, accompanied by the loss of authority of official governmental institutions and their consequent inability to halt the violent actions of extremists.

Third are the *direct causes* of the aggravation of ethnic relations; these represent the immediate sources of conflict situations. These causes can be sub-divided into: *national-cultural and linguistic*, *socioeconomic* (resulting from inequalities in living standards or group representation in prestigious professions, high status groups, or government bodies); and *ethnodemographic* causes. The last includes significant changes in the relative size and distribution of ethnic populations in a given territory. These changes may result from in-migration of people of a given nationality from outside the territory or, in areas where the ethnic composition of the population has been historically mixed, the departure of people of one nationality, or even differences in the natural population growth of ethnic groups living side by side. The most frequent ethnodemographic cause of conflict is the threatened loss of a numerical advantage that has undergirded the position of one ethnic group in a given territory. It should be noted that these immediate causes can be eliminated or significantly neutralized within the existing politico-eco-

conomic situation or in conditions of less than fundamental systemic transformation.

This list of possible causes is not exhaustive, but it nonetheless emphasizes two key points – that the roots of ethnic conflict go well beyond linguistic and cultural policies and historical injustices, and that some causes are not tied directly to ethnicity. Many of the causes of ethnic conflict are essentially socioeconomic and political problems that have either acquired a national coloration in the multinational mix of Soviet society or that have come to be evaluated from the standpoint of nationalism.

The goals of the national movements that initiate ethnic conflicts largely define the potential severity of the situation, the probable actions of the opponents, the numbers of people that will be involved, and the possible domestic and foreign policy consequences. On the basis of this approach, we can distinguish the following *types of ethnic conflict*:

1. Socioeconomic conflicts that result from demands for the equalization of a genuine or perceived inequality in living standards, the centralized distribution of goods, or the comparative socio-professional differentials among ethnic groups. Such movements can be directed against ethnic minorities or they can base themselves on national-state (or national-administrative) organizations. In the latter case, they tend to focus their demands on higher-level state formations and the majority ethnic groups that are associated with them.
2. Cultural-linguistic conflicts that are most often characterized by demands to protect or restore the functions of an indigenous language or culture and to protect opportunities for genuine cultural autonomy. These national movements are generally directed against superior governmental organs (most often at the republic level) and the ethnic groups associated with them.
3. Territorial-status conflicts that have flowed from the national-state structure of the U.S.S.R. These conflicts generally incorporate demands for changes in boundaries, augmented status in the hierarchy of state formations, the implementation of formal rights, or the creation of entirely new state formations at the national-state (republic) or national-administrative (autonomous oblast) level. These national movements are most often directed against superior

levels of the government or against neighboring national-state formations and the ethnic groups associated with them.

4. Political conflicts that include demands for full independence and secession from the U.S.S.R.. These national movements frequently are directed not only against the central (all-union) government but also against the Russian people, with whom this government is identified.

Conflict situations corresponding to all these categories exist in the Transcaucasus. In the spring of 1990, the national movements in Georgia and Azerbaijan appeared to be moving toward type-four conflict situations, but they have been prevented from taking the final step by a lack of formal authority (which they will probably obtain after the upcoming elections) and by acute unresolved internal type-three ethnic conflicts: the Armenian-Azeri, Abkhazian-Georgian, and Ossetian-Georgian cases. The national movement of Armenia, which is involved in a type-three conflict with Azerbaijan, cannot consistently demand secession from the U.S.S.R. because of the complex geopolitical situation in the Transcaucasus and neighboring regions. The situations in southern Georgia (Armenian-Georgian) and southeastern Georgia (Azeri-Georgian) can be categorized as type-two conflicts, although both are now starting to exhibit the features of the more dangerous type-three conflicts. Type-two conflict situations are developing in central Georgia (Greek-Georgian), in the south (Talysh-Azeri), and the north of Azerbaijan (Tat-Azeri, Lezghian-Azeri), although the religious and cultural similarity of the ethnic groups involved and their relatively small size may prevent the serious aggravation or escalation of these conflicts.

Type-one conflict situations in the Transcaucasus have received little attention because of the abundance and acute nature of the more serious conflicts. However, this type of conflict has largely characterized the relations between Azeris and Armenians both in the cities and rural areas of Azerbaijan outside Nagorno-Karabakh. This type of conflict is also common in the Russian villages of the Transcaucasus. As long as the Russians represented a majority in these settlements, they opposed permitting members of the indigenous nationalities to fill certain administrative posts, or prestigious or well-paid vacancies among agricultural specialists, trade workers, and public health or education professionals. Once it became clear that it was no longer possible for them to influence the personnel policy of local governments, a situa-

tion that commenced in the 1960s, the local Russian population began to depart for Russia with increasing frequency. In most cases they now represent a minority in what were formerly Russian expatriate villages.

Recent events in the Transcaucasus demonstrate that where large populations are involved, conflict situations usually begin by exhibiting the characteristics of either type one or type two, but they have a tendency to become more serious and to acquire the features of type-three and even type-four conflicts over time. One example of this is the Karabakh crisis: it was initially localized in Nagorno-Karabakh and displayed features of type one and type two conflict situations. Once it spread and included the entire population of Armenia and Azerbaijan, however, it took on the features of a type-three conflict. After the direct involvement of the central government and the movement of troops into Baku, it came close to becoming a type-four conflict situation.

We should also note that all ethnic conflicts appear to have a certain inherent logic in their internal development. As time passes they come to be defined not only in relation to their objective causes but also in terms of their subjective reflection in the social consciousness of the ethnic groups involved. As a result, in the later stages, not even the effective neutralization of the direct causes of the conflict may be able to halt the escalation of the conflict.

An analysis of the events in and around Nagorno-Karabakh demonstrates that they have passed through several distinct stages:

1. The economic, linguistic and national-cultural conflict between the local Armenian population and the government of the autonomous oblast and that of the republic of Azerbaijan as a result of infringements on the rights of the local Armenian population. During this period the conflict was restricted to the Karabakh region (winter 1987–88).
2. The conflict over the territorial status of Nagorno-Karabakh, which gradually encompassed the populations of Armenia and Azerbaijan. This conflict was based on mutually exclusive conceptions of the ethnic territory of the respective groups. The dispute has called into question the legitimacy of republican boundaries and the state-administrative affiliation of Karabakh (spring-summer 1988).
3. Open confrontation and ethnic clashes have resulted in the deaths



of dozens of people and in massive migrations of refugees between various republics (beginning in the fall of 1988). Only the tragic earthquake in Armenia on December 7, 1988 put a temporary stop to these clashes, but in the spring of 1989 the situation began to deteriorate rapidly again. In the fall and winter of 1989-1990 there were numerous armed Armenian-Azeri clashes that were both bloodier and more organized. In the fall of 1987, all Azeris were expelled from Armenia and the overwhelming majority of Armenians were expelled from Azerbaijan; in early 1990 the last Armenians were evacuated from the large cities of Azerbaijan. The clashes that took place in early 1990, including those on the border between the two republics, were interrupted only by the decisive military action of the armed forces of the central government, an intervention that resulted in numerous casualties in Baku.

However, the Karabakh question has not been resolved in the usual fashion. Despite the now customary use of the army to prevent bloodshed, it proved impossible to prevent or put a quick end to the pogroms against Armenians that took place in Sumgait in the spring of 1988 and in Baku in January of 1990. It seems clear that the final, fourth stage will develop in the near future as a full-blown inter-republican crisis. This may occur soon after the elections, when the national movements assume formal power. This will significantly alter the situation in the region, as up until the spring of 1990 the national movements, and their extremist militarized wings in particular, have directed their attacks against the official raion and republic governments (especially early in the crisis) either because of their supposed neutrality or impotence. The direct opposition of the Azeri national movement to the all-union government and the evident preparations for the secession of Azerbaijan from the U.S.S.R. and for the arrival of Russian refugees from Azerbaijan represent fundamentally new elements in the region.

### **Causes of the crisis in Nagorno-Karabakh and similarities with other transcaucasian regions**

The direct factors underlying the local Armenian population's extreme dissatisfaction with the status quo during the mid-1980s appear to have played a major role in the Karabakh crisis.

*The socioeconomic causes of the conflict* played an important role in the first stage, although even then they received disproportionate coverage

in the media and in the slogans of the Armenian national movement. Initially, primary emphasis was put on economic demands, as the ones most easily understood by a traditionally politically passive population. As the ethnic conflict became more severe, however, the prevalence of these arguments declined.

The most fundamental economic cause underlying the conflict is the significant lag in the standard of living or quality of life in Azerbaijan relative to that in Armenia (statistical data are presented in Table 1). These average figures mask the tremendous differences between life in the industrial centers or in the rich plains regions where the income of the population is comparatively high, and in the backward mountainous raions of the republic, where a shortage of arable land and unemployment are compounded by a rapidly growing rural population.

*Table 1.* Characteristics of socioeconomic living conditions in Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1985–1986.\*

	Armenia	Azerbaijan
Life expectancy (years)	73.3	69.9
Infant mortality	23.6%	30.5%
Consumer goods produced per person (rubles)	1190	635
Domestic services per person (rubles)	137	100
Gross state and cooperative commercial turnover in rural areas (rubles per person)	405	278
Housing area, per person	13.7 m <sup>2</sup>	10.5 m <sup>2</sup>
Mean wage of workers and employees (rubles)	149.6	141.1
Mean savings (rubles per person)	1868	1195
Number per 10,000 residents of:		
University students	163	168
Technical school students	143	114

\* Some of the figures per unit of population were calculated by the author.<sup>2</sup>

Although the population of Nagorno-Karabakh lives in a predominately mountainous area, it enjoys a level of social and economic development that is somewhat higher than that of the general population of Azerbaijan.<sup>3</sup> However, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh are well aware that life is even better in neighboring Armenia, and are dissatisfied, believing that their lower standard of living is the result of the deliberate policies of the Azerbaijani republican government, which controls the development and the economy of their oblast. The government of Azerbaijan, comparing the living conditions in Nagorno-Karabakh with those in the neighboring backward mountainous raions of

the republic, concluded that the situation in the autonomous oblast was significantly better than elsewhere, and that funds received from businesses in Karabakh should be directed toward the development of other, poorer territories. This was the soil in which the conflict concerning the actual level of economic development of Nagorno-Karabakh took shape; obviously, the position of each side had its own merits.

The Armenian population in the mountainous raions of southern Georgia (that border Turkey and Armenia), and the Talysh in the mountains of southern Azerbaijan as well as the Tat in the mountainous settlements of northern Azerbaijan share many of the same reasons for dissatisfaction with their economic situation. To some extent, the noticeably lower standard of living of the mountain people has resulted from environmental factors: the shortage of arable land, the cold climate, the low economic return from agriculture, the high cost of building roads and power transmission lines, and the difficulty of building television relay stations. However, there is another aspect of this problem that is even more significant.

Inasmuch as the economy of the U.S.S.R. is predicated on the centralized collection and distribution of goods and financial payments (at the all-union and republic levels), the standard of living in the various regions, oblasts, and republics bears little relation to the relative efficiency of the local socialist economy or to the contribution that their residents make to the nation's economy. In those cases where the persons responsible for the distribution of funds and for the administration of the economy at the all-union and republican levels of government are of a different ethnicity from that of the majority population, any mistakes or delays can be perceived as the product of national antagonism, or, at least, as neglect. This is precisely what occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh.

One possible solution to this type of situation may be the introduction of territorial cost accounting (*khozraschet*) and self-financing. Under these systems enterprises would send only a small fixed percentage of their taxes to higher administrative organs, while a larger share of these funds would be retained by the local Soviet and allocated to projects that would benefit local residents. The elimination of egalitarian redistributive policies, which is now underway, will undoubtedly result in an increase in the already considerable differences in the living standards in various raions. Although the economic causes that engender the

development of national movements will remain, however paradoxical it may seem, they should be significantly weakened. Whereas up until the recent past people tended to demand that they receive "their due," i.e., the fruits of their labor, which they believed had been unfairly extracted from them, in the new situation they will only be able to request assistance or greater benefits from the republic and all-union governments.

The social causes underlying the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh are less significant. Nagorno-Karabakh is an autonomous oblast with some degree of self government and it therefore has a certain amount of control over its own personnel policies, but these issues remain important in numerous areas in the Transcaucasus that are populated by ethnic minorities that do not have autonomous territorial status. Highly paid administrators and specialists are generally selected "from above" by superior levels of government (the raion or the republic). The individuals selected are chosen on the basis of their previous work record or training, but members of the ethnic majority in the given raion usually occupy the bulk of local positions and members of the ethnic majority of the republic usually hold most of the corresponding positions at the raion level. In areas inhabited by ethnic minorities this has resulted in a stratum of administrators that consists primarily of people from a different nationality. Any incompetence or corruption among these administrators is then seen by the local population through the prism of ethnic relationships, a fact that negatively affects interethnic relations.

The steps that have already been taken to increase the independence of production teams and the new forms of territorial self-government may reduce the impact of this factor in many ways. In the spring of 1990, ethnic minorities residing in compact territories received the legal right to declare their villages or raions to be "national areas," and this may improve the situation with reference to such policies in the future.

*National-cultural and linguistic causes of conflict* played a significant role in Nagorno-Karabakh, despite the oblast's autonomous status. The reason for this is that, throughout the Soviet period, territorial autonomy has been recognized only in terms of the hierarchal subordination of certain national populations to others, and has rarely gone beyond form to content. The example of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan clearly demonstrates this situation. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and other raions in Azerbaijan have been guaranteed the right to develop and use their own language and culture, and the right

to an education in their native language or to the study of their native tongue within the framework of the regular school curriculum. However, Armenian teachers were only trained in the center of Nagorno-Karabakh, at Stepanakert, or in Baku, and were not allowed to study in the capital of neighboring Armenia, Yerevan. In these schools they studied a course entitled "The History of Azerbaijan" in Armenian, whereas schools in Armenia itself teach "The History of the Armenian people," a course that is not permitted in the Armenian schools of Azerbaijan. In these courses the same historical events receive diametrically opposite interpretations. The only Armenian language television that was permitted was that produced in Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite numerous requests, scarce equipment that would allow the reception of television transmissions from neighboring Armenia was not provided until well after the strikes and clashes had started. The residents of Karabakh are still not satisfied with what they regard as brief periods of local Armenian broadcasting, but this is unlikely to be rectified as long as the proportion of Armenian to Azeri broadcasts is determined in Baku.

The Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh were initially aroused by the virtually complete severance of their educational and cultural ties with neighboring Armenia, and secondly by what they considered insufficient attention to the development of the Armenian language and culture in the autonomous oblast itself. Their protests indicated that they believed that these policies were dictated by the Azerbaijani republican government in Baku.

The situation is more or less similar in those areas of Georgia that are populated by Armenians, Azeris, and Ossetians. However, a different situation has arisen in areas inhabited by other ethnic minorities that do not have autonomous status (viz., the Greeks, Talysh, Tats, Lezgins, and Kurds). These groups are currently mobilizing in order to revive or expand the use of their native languages, demanding their study and sometimes even their use as the language of instruction in the schools. Formerly, these peoples were compelled to choose between educating their children in Russian or in the majority language of the republic.

The "Law on the Free National Development of Citizens of the U.S.S.R. that Occupy Areas Outside their National-State Formations or that have no such Formations," which was adopted in the spring of 1990, has in fact alleviated most, if not all, of these problems. It will be more difficult to rectify another situation, however. Traditionally, the

party and state leadership have shown, at best, a complete indifference to the fate of many national treasures and artifacts. Official policy has frequently produced attempts to destroy relics that related to the history of national churches, political movements, and states. This official indifference or outright hostility has aroused intense national feeling in the current period, especially in situations where the people who were responsible for the destruction were of another nationality. This pattern was repeated in Nagorno-Karabakh in connection with the destruction of churches, monasteries, and *khachkars* (stone crosses). For this reason, the all-union government must pay particular attention to problems associated with the restoration of Armenian historical and cultural monuments in this autonomous oblast.

*Ethno-demographic causes* – In Nagorno-Karabakh these appear to have played a major role in the conflict, although they have rarely been reflected in contemporary slogans or appeals. In the 1970s and 1980s a trend toward a radical change in the prevailing ethnic composition of the population became evident in Nagorno-Karabakh, as it had in most of the mixed Armenian-Azeri rural raions of the eastern Transcaucasus.

When the Soviet government drew the boundaries of the Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan and created the autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh the oblast had a population of 131,500 people, 94.4 percent Armenians and 5.6 percent Azeris (a total of 7,400 people).<sup>4</sup> The Nakhichevan autonomous republic, created at the same time in Azerbaijan, contained only 104,900 people in 1926, 15 percent of whom were Armenians (a total of 15,600).<sup>5</sup> By 1979 the population of Nagorno-Karabakh had only increased to 162,000, but the Azeris accounted for 22.8 percent (37,000); whereas in the Nakhichevan ASSR, out of a total of 240,000 persons, only 1.4 percent were Armenians (3400).<sup>6</sup> By January 1, 1987, the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was 180,000 (52 percent of whom lived in rural areas), in comparison with 278,000 in the Nakhichevan ASSR, (73 percent rural).<sup>7</sup>

The primarily agrarian Azeri population of the Nakhichevan ASSR has maintained persistently high rates of population growth, while the Armenian population, both as a percentage and in absolute numbers, has been steadily declining. Whereas the overall population of Nagorno-Karabakh has grown much more slowly, the percentage and absolute number of Azeris in that oblast have increased even more rapidly than in the Nakhichevan ASSR. For example, between 1926

and 1979 the number of Azeris in the Nakhichevan ASSR increased by more than two and one-half times, (from 85,400 to 230,000), while the number of Armenians decreased almost five times (from 15,600 to 3,400). In Nagorno-Karabakh between 1921 and 1979, the number of Armenians actually declined from 124,100 to 123,000, while the number of Azeris increased by a factor of 5, from 7,400 to 37,000.

This trend was particularly pronounced in rural areas, not only in Nagorno-Karabakh itself, but also in the neighboring raions of the Azerbaijan SSR and in the raions of Armenia boarding Azerbaijan. (See Table 2, which presents data on the neighboring mountainous raions of both the Azerbaijani and Armenian SSRs, where the natural and economic conditions are approximately identical). As this table indicates, the rural Azeri population increased almost everywhere between 1959 and 1979, in some cases so rapidly that the growth can only be explained by an influx of migrants. The ethnically Armenian rural population decreased almost everywhere during the same period. It is important to emphasize that this process occurred throughout the region, independently of the republic to which these raions belonged.

In the 1970s the absolute number of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh remained virtually stable (120,800 in 1970, and 123,000 in 1979), while the number of Azeris continued to increase rapidly (27,200 in 1970 and 37,000 in 1979). This resulted in a significant ethno-demographic shift as the percentage of Armenians constantly dropped and the percentage of Azeris increased dramatically.

According to the estimates of T. Sarkisian, A. Vartanov, and G. Starovoitova,<sup>9</sup> by early 1987 there were 133,200 Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh (74 percent of the population) and 43,900 Azeris (24.4 percent of the population). The Azeris represented the following percentages of the population in the raions of Nagorno-Karabakh: Mardakertskii – 14.8% (6,800), Askeranskii – 16.7% (3,000), Shushinskii – 90.1% (19,000), Martuninskii – 22.7% (6,200), Gadрутskii – 14.6% (2,100); Stepanakert City – 12.8% (6,800). The 8.3 percent increase in the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, which these figures indicate for 1979–87, was accompanied by an even higher 18.9 percent increase in the population of Azeris.

These demographic changes in the ethnic composition of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh were clearly evident and they were well known in Baku and Yerevan. If these trends were to have continued for

Table 2. Rural Armenian and Azeri Population dynamics in particular areas of Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.\*

Territory	1959	1979
<i>Azerbaijan SSR</i>		
Nakhichevan ASSR (Primarily Azeris)	103,100	179,300
Lachinskii Raion (Azeris)	22,400	41,200
Dashkesanskii Raion	22,300	20,700
Azeris	14,100 (63.2%)	15,200 (73.4%)
Armenians	8,200 (36.8%)	5,500 (26.6%)
Shaumianovskii Raion	16,500	12,200
Azeris	4,200 (25%)	4,600 (38%)
Armenians	12,100 (73.3%)	7,400 (60.7%)
<i>Nagorno-Karabakh</i>		
Mardakertskii Raion	37,300	33,900
Azeris	2,200 (5.9%)	5,100 (15.1%)
Askeranskii Raion	20,100	19,200
Azeris	1,400 (6.9%)	3,500 (18%)
Shushinskii Raion	4,500	5,200
Azeris	2,300 (50.9%)	3,500 (67.7%)
Martuninskii Raion	24,200	21,100
Azeris	1,700 (7.2%)	2,200 (10.3%)
Gadrutskii Raion	16,800	12,600
Azeris	(No data)	900 (7%)
<i>Armenian SSR</i>		
Krasnosel'skii Raion	24,000	20,400
Azeris	9,300 (38.8%)	14,000 (68.6%)
Vardenisskii Raion	35,600	45,700
Azeris	17,100 (48%)	30,000 (65.6%)
Sisianskii Raion	22,700	21,100
Azeris	5,400 (23.8%)	4,900 (23.2%)
Gorisskii Raion	19,000	18,800
Azeris	800 (4.2%)	800 (4.3%)
Kafanskii Raion	16,700	13,600
Azeris	6,900 (42%)	7,600 (56%)

\* Computed by the author.<sup>8</sup>

another 15–20 years the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh would have lost their majority status, and the stance of the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR may have been affected by this calculation. It was precisely for this reason that, as the Armenian share of Nagorno-Karabakh's population started to decline from three-quarters to close to two-thirds in the 1980s, the Armenian intelligentsia raised the issue of uniting Nagorno-Karabakh with the Armenian Republic. Up until the 1980s,



the changes in the ethnic balance within the autonomous oblast had not been so obvious and hope had remained that the trend would stop. However, by the 1980s it was conceivable that the once overwhelming Armenian predominance in Nagorno-Karabakh could disappear in the foreseeable future. Were this to happen, grounds for uniting with the Armenian SSR would vanish as well.

One reason for the steady "Azerbaijanization" of Nagorno-Karabakh and the rural areas of many of the adjacent raions of the Azerbaijan and Armenian SSRs is the Azeris' higher rate of population growth. Even more important, however, is the slower rate of migration of rural Azeris to the cities. This can be explained both by the Azeris' greater loyalty to their traditional rural lifestyle, and their greater reluctance to master the language of the cities, Russian. In contrast, the Armenians are more oriented to modern urban culture and city lifestyles. Their generally higher levels of educational attainment and mastery of the Russian language have allowed them to take up permanent residence not only in Yerevan and the commercial centers of Armenia, but also to move from Nagorno-Karabakh and the raions of the Azerbaijan SSR to the cities of Russia and other republics. However, over the last ten or twenty years the scale of Armenian (and also Russian) emigration from raions and villages with significant or predominantly Azeri populations has been determined not so much by the attraction of urban life as by friction and conflict with local Azeris.

One result of the rapid growth of the rural Azeri population<sup>10</sup> in the raions of the Azerbaijan SSR, particularly the mountainous raions where the tillable area is small and cannot be increased, has been the development of substantial unemployment. This unemployment was initially concealed as some residents worked only in the summer or part-time, but it has been followed by the open idleness of many young men. Widespread unemployment produced the active migration of Azeris in recent years into the rural areas of Nagorno-Karabakh and the neighboring raions of Armenia, despite the hostile attitude of the fundamentally Armenian populations. Work was available in these areas due to the departure of many Armenians for the city. These territories were neither strange nor unfamiliar for most of these migrants. Some had relatives among the local Azeri population; others had been told repeatedly by their elders of previous summer rambles in these raions; while others, predominantly shepherds, had passed through these regions repeatedly with their herds.

Azeri immigrants were able to find employment as shepherds in other regions particularly quickly, as in recent decades few Armenian young people (or Georgians or Russians) were willing to choose an occupation that requires them to live and work far from home throughout the year, spending the summer in the high mountain meadows, and winter in the plains' pastures. This same process has been repeated in recent decades in southeastern Georgia, where both the number and percentage of the rural population represented by Azeris have constantly increased. Azeri shepherds have also moved into the villages and raions of Georgia, where the Georgians no longer perform this work.

The active migration of Georgians into Abkhazia, which took place largely in the late 1940s and 1950s, also resulted in a significant change in the numerical relationship between the ethnic populations of this autonomous republic. Although the area that now comprises southern Abkhazia was inhabited by some Georgians in the eighteenth century, Georgians began migrating there in large numbers only in the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

By 1979 approximately 83,000 Abkhazians in the Abkhazian autonomous republic represented only 17 percent of the population, while 44 percent of the population was ethnically Georgian.<sup>12</sup> Despite these demographic changes Abkhazians were able to retain a dominant position in the leadership at the republic and raion levels until quite recently. With the democratization of the perestroika period, the Georgian majority began to express its dissatisfaction with what it considered to be discriminatory policies and has issued demands for more equitable ethnic representation in government organizations, a significant increase in the number of students taught in the Georgian language, and a general expansion in the functions of the Georgian language. Some members of the Georgian national movement have even called for the elimination of Abkhazian autonomy altogether. The Abkhazian national movement in turn has issued demands for the republic to become a full-fledged union republic, a status it held in the early 1920s. In the late 1970s, when the ethnic conflict in the republic became particularly severe, some Abkhazians even demanded that Abkhazia become part of the Russian federation.

It is essential to emphasize that the ethno-demographic causes of ethnic conflict are frequently perceived by the parties to the conflict in acute and painful ways. The social consciousness of almost every people includes the concept of their "native land." In the U.S.S.R., where

official policy has encouraged ethno-territorial autonomy and endowed it with certain elements of national statehood, the image of a “native land” has become intimately interwoven with the structures of government. A Soviet ethnic group that has had its own national state or national-administrative structure will have particular difficulties coping with significant demographic change because it may mean that the group will lose its special status as it approaches the status of an ethnic minority. This loss of status is particularly disturbing as it will be perceived both as a displacement from the motherland and as the loss of statehood to “foreigners.”

This source of ethnic conflict can be partially relieved only by giving Soviets at all levels real control over economic development, particularly the authority to create new jobs and eliminate vacancies. Such authority is possible within the framework of territorial cost-accounting, and could provide for the indirect regulation of in-migration by other ethnic groups. However, in many raions in the Transcaucasus with historically mixed ethnic compositions, such factors as differentials in population growth rates and participation in urbanization will remain as sources of this type of ethnic conflict.

Certain of the conditions under which the Karabakh conflict has taken shape and developed have contributed to its severity and depth. Territorial factors have been of primary importance, as have changes in the relative size of the Armenian and Azeri populations. Changes in the latter have produced a situation where ethnic boundaries no longer coincide with the boundaries of union republics or autonomous oblasts.

*Territorial conditions* – As early as the second stage of the Karabakh crisis the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and of Armenia had ceased to speak about injuries or problems and had begun to insist on uniting the motherland – the area historically and currently populated by Armenians – into a single governmental entity. The briefest glance at history, however, demonstrates that powerful and far-reaching consequences can be unleashed by the attempt to unite different territories into a single homeland. To choose only the most obvious examples, this idea was a major motive force in Italy, Poland, and in Germany in the nineteenth century, and it continues to fuel the crisis in Ulster/Northern Ireland today.

The Azeris perceive the situation differently. Demands for the transfer

of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR are seen as attempts to dismember their homeland, to impinge on the national interests of the Azeri people and to cut them off from part of their native land. The Azeri conception of Karabakh as an inseparable part of Azerbaijan is based on other considerations than the oblast's ethnic composition. The Armenians have resided in Karabakh for a long time, and they represented an absolute majority of its population at the time that the autonomous oblast was formed. However, for centuries the entire high-mountain zone of this region belonged to the nomadic Turkic herdsmen, from whom the Khans of Karabakh were descended. Traditionally, these direct ancestors of the Azeris of the Agdamskii raion (and of the other raions between the mountains of Karabakh and the Kura and Araks Rivers) lived in Karabakh for the four or five warm months of the year, and spent the winter in the Mil'sko-Karabakh plains. The descendants of this nomadic herding population therefore claim a historic right to Karabakh and consider it as much their native land as that of the settled agricultural population that lived there year-round.

The following statistics permit us to make a rough estimate of the number of nomadic Azeris who summered in the mountains of what is now Nagorno-Karabakh and the neighboring raions of Azerbaijan (Kel'badzharskiy, Lachinskiy) and Armenia (Kafanskiy, Gorisskiy, Sisianskiy, Azizbekovski). In 1845 in historic Karabakh the population included 30,000 Armenians and 62,000 Moslems (Azeris), of whom approximately 50,000 were nomads.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1890s, only about 1/30 of the plains population remained in the lowlands in the summer, whereas the overwhelming majority spent the period in the mountain pastures of the Karabakh ridge (the western boundary of Nagorno-Karabakh), the Murovdagskii ridge (a part of the northern boundary of Nagorno-Karabakh), and in the Zangezurskii ridge and the Karabakh uplands (outside the autonomous oblast).<sup>13</sup> In 1897 the rural population of the Shushinskii and Dzhevanshirskii districts, which comprised almost the entire territory of historic Karabakh, was 43.3 percent Armenian (93,600) and 54.8 percent Azeri (115,800).<sup>14</sup> In the Agdamskii and neighboring raions of the Karabakh steppe, most of the Azeri population were semi-nomads, but some resided in settled Azerbaijani villages. In Nagorno-Karabakh most of the population was Armenian, but there were a few Azeri villages, whereas in the Kel'badzharskii raion there were only a few Azeri and Kurdish villages.

Nomadic migrations continued after the formation of the autonomous oblast in the second half of the 1920s. At that time a special study was

made of the residents of the Agdamskii district, which included the plains of the former Shushinskii and Dzhevanshirskii districts that had been inhabited exclusively by Azeris. It was found that as before, “the population leads a nomadic way of life, spending the winter in the lowlands and summer in the mountains...” and that “entire families move to the mountain pastures including the heads of families who are not herdsmen. Settled residents also move to the mountain pastures...”<sup>15</sup>

The seasonal migration of Azeris from the Mil'sko-Karabakh steppe to the mountains of Nagorno-Karabakh ceased with the transition of the semi-nomads to a more settled way of life in the early 1930s. However, there are still people alive today that clearly remember these summer migrations and they, and their relatives, consider the Karabakh summer pasture lands to be Azeri. Unfortunately the census was always conducted when the nomads and semi-nomads were in winter pastures. As a result they were never officially counted as part of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh (e.g., the Azeri population was calculated as only 6 percent in the early 1920s). This information is important not only because it makes it possible to present certain data on land use and the ethnic composition of the summer population of Nagorno-Karabakh in the period prior to the 1920s, but because it helps us to understand the Azeri rejection (in Agdamskii and neighboring raions) of Armenian demands to join this region with the Armenian SSR.

The idea that Karabakh is a component part of Azerbaijan has also been significantly reinforced by the recent publication both in periodicals and in the popular scientific press of the republic of a large number of studies by Azerbaijani historians. Thanks to these articles, most of the residents of the Azerbaijan SSR are now aware that the Karabakh Khanate, centered in Shushe, was one of the major Azerbaijani states prior to the Russian annexation of the Transcaucasus in the early nineteenth century. These studies have also pointed out the massive immigrations of Armenians from Turkey and Persia into the Russian Empire that took place in the middle and late nineteenth century. These immigrants, it should be noted, settled largely on territories that form part of eastern Armenia and northern Azerbaijan, and that partially include Nagorno-Karabakh.

A brief examination of the ethnic situation in the area that became the Armenian oblast of the Tsarist empire is also in order here. This oblast basically corresponds with the territory of the present Armenian SSR, (except in the extreme northern and southeastern regions) and the

Nakhichevan ASSR. Immediately prior to its annexation by Russia the population of the Yerevan and Nakhichevan Khanates included about 25,500 Armenians. Between 1828 and 1832, approximately 57,000 Christians (overwhelming Armenians) migrated into the Armenian oblast from Persia and Turkey. However, in 1832, four years after its official annexation by Russia, the Moslem population (primarily Azeris) represented 82,000, or fully half of the area's 164,500 residents.<sup>16</sup>

This information on the migration of Turkish and Persian Armenians into the eastern Transcaucasus does not negate the fact that many of the local Khanates had contained a significant native population of Armenians prior to their annexation by Russia. It is particularly important to note that these "original" Armenian residents were largely concentrated in the Karabakh Khanate (the territory of the present-day autonomous oblast occupies only part of this original territory), as well as in the mountains of Zangezur (coextensive with the present Kafanskii, Gorisskii, Sisianskii, and Azizbekovskii raions of Armenia and the northeastern Nakhichevan ASSR), the Gandzha Khanate (the Shaumianovskii, Dashkesanskii, and Khanlarskii raions of the Azerbaijan SSR occupy part of this territory), on the southern slopes of the Great Caucasus (in the Sheki-shemakha zone of the Azerbaijan SSR), and in a number of areas of modern Soviet Armenia.<sup>17</sup>

Large-scale migrations and the seasonal nomadic movement of Turkish herdsmen have occurred throughout the Transcaucasus for many centuries. In most raions, and particularly in Karabakh, the population has been ethnically mixed for the past several centuries. It should also be noted that the present boundaries of the union republics and autonomous formations do not reflect ancient boundaries between distinct nation-states that existed prior to the region's annexation by the Russian Empire, but rather the historical-political and economic-geographic realities of the nineteenth century. Most of the boundary lines of the Soviet period were carried over from earlier district-provincial subdivisions and traced the watersheds of the mountain ridges, borders that were generally inherited from the previous Khanates.

The borders that were established by the Soviet authorities in the Transcaucasus after the Revolution included significant ethnic minorities in every republic, particularly in the zones along the boundaries. The establishment of the autonomous oblast of Nagorno-Karabakh created precisely this problem – a large enclave of Armenians, not only

surrounded by Azeris, but also separated from kindred groups in the west by the Kurds of Azerbaijan.

A no less complex situation of ethnic boundaries and republic and autonomous area borders has developed in the western Transcaucasus. Prior to the annexation of Georgia by the Russian empire, there were substantial numbers of Azeris living in the what is now southeast Georgia, Ossetians in northern Georgia, and Armenians in the cities and villages of eastern Georgia. After the annexation, this area was divided into various provinces and districts, and the distribution of peoples became even more complex. Armenians migrating from Turkey and Persia settled in the almost uninhabited regions of southern Georgia; the Armenian population of the cities and villages of eastern Georgia increased significantly; Armenians began settling in what is now Abkhazia; and Greeks from Turkey moved into central Georgia and Abkhazia. So many Russian migrant peasants began to settle in eastern and southern Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, that by the beginning of the twentieth century they represented 10 percent or more of the population of many districts of the Transcaucasus.

*Legal conditions* – The Armenian-Azerbaijani and the other ethnic conflicts that have developed in the Transcaucasus have been influenced by the hierarchical federal structure of national-state and national-administrative entities in the Soviet Union. Ethnic groups that already have such entities have attempted to elevate their status and thus expand their rights of self-government. Under present conditions, ethnic minorities that do not have their own nation-state structures perceive themselves to be discriminated against as a result of their comparatively limited legal status and are putting forward demands for their creation. However, given conditions where the populations are of mixed ethnic composition, these demands inevitably evoke negative reactions from other peoples. Furthermore, the majority population of the republic within which these minorities currently reside tend to perceive such demands as a threat to the territorial integrity and permanence of their own state borders.

Given the overall democratization of public life and the continued aggravation of ethnic conflict, these contradictions will probably lead in the end to the acknowledgment that every ethnic group is equally entitled to self-determination and full political representation. This in turn may require far-reaching territorial changes if that is the decision of the majority. The only alternative is to preserve some variation of the

present situation with its numerous constantly smoldering centers of ethnic conflict, massive migrations, and resettlements.

*Ideological conditions* – Ethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasus and other regions of the U.S.S.R. have been influenced by the crisis in the official ideology and particularly in one of its key components – internationalism. Paradoxically, this may have resulted from the fact that the Soviet Union has become increasingly integrated with the global community and is increasingly exhibiting features of such global trends as the worldwide “ethnic revival.” As the result of this greater integration of material and, in part, spiritual cultures, which is itself partially the product of the extension of urban standards and behavioral stereotypes, ethnic identification has largely lost its foundation in the external, visible world. Perhaps as some type of compensation it appears to have been transposed into the ideological sphere, and many groups now perceive the strengthening and deepening of national self-consciousness as the principal safeguard of their group identities.

Throughout the period of Soviet rule, ethnic self-consciousness was played down or openly attacked by the official ideology and appeared to have lost its hold on a significant portion of the population. The officially propagandized image encouraged people to see themselves as representatives of particular groups only secondarily, and as members of a single Soviet people first. This propaganda has probably been least effective in the Transcaucasus. However, the long-term promotion of social-class self-identification has borne important fruit, though not perhaps in the manner originally intended. A preference for group identification over individual identification, a value that has long been cultivated in the public consciousness, appears to increase the susceptibility of individuals to nationalistic appeals. In the contemporary Soviet Union, nationalism, often in combination with religion, seems to be filling the vacuum left by the discredited official ideology.

*Social conditions* – The social conditions under which ethnic conflicts have developed in the Transcaucasus are basically the same as those in other regions. The key elements are: a diminished standard of living, a lack of confidence in tomorrow, fears of the loss of savings as a result of inflation, rumors of monetary reform, the possibility of unemployment, and difficulty locating even the most basic consumer goods. These factors in and of themselves cause sharp increases in social tension, but they are particularly unsettling in a society such as the Soviet Union, where people have been accustomed to stability for decades. In the



Russian federation this crisis in the social sphere has led to strikes, mass meetings, and clashes with government representatives, in a situation of acute political and economic conflict, as well as to a significant increase in the crime rate. In areas of ethnic conflict the same conditions provoke or significantly increase the probability of extremist actions, clashes, and the use of force.

*The political conditions* within which ethnic conflict has developed have significantly changed since the initiation of perestroika, and this has resulted in a significant aggravation of such conflicts. First of all, democratization and glasnost have done far more than simply enable the open discussion of conflict situations and broaden the search for mutually acceptable solutions. They have also permitted the dissemination of nationalist and even openly chauvinist propaganda, as well as the publication of tendentiously selected historical facts in the local media. This activity on the part of certain elements within the local ethnic intelligentsia has strongly affected the thinking of ethnic groups throughout the region, stimulating the development of nationalism or, at the least, endowing it with an aura of respectability. Democratization has enabled the now legalized national movements to increase their activity and the number of their active members, and to strengthen their organizations. This has allowed them to make the transition from small-scale agitation and the filing of complaints in Moscow to the organization of strikes, mass meetings, and campaigns of civil disobedience.

The early attempts by the republican and all-union officials that control the central and local mass media to silence the national movements, or to distort their goals, and to discredit their leaders and participants only aroused the indignation of the majority of the region's population. This initial response strengthened the position of the most extreme forces among the national movements, thus making the situation worse.

In the more recent period the republican and all-union authorities have evidenced passivity in the face of ethnic conflicts, and a seeming inability to prevent pogroms and bloody clashes. They have been unsuccessful in preventing not only open discrimination based on national origin, but also the direct and forcible expulsion of almost the entire Armenian population from Azerbaijan and of the Azeris from Armenia. As a result, real power in this region is actually wielded by the national movements, so much so that even those residents of the

Transcaucasus who were initially inclined not to participate in these movements now feel it necessary to support them.

Other factors have also played a serious role in the Transcaucasus. First of all the *historical record of past ethnic interrelationships* must be taken into account. The Karabakh crisis, for instance, arose against the background of the tragic and conflict-ridden history of centuries of Armenian-Azeri relations. Suffice it to recall that virtually every Armenian and many Azeri families retain living memories of close relatives who died during the massacres of 1905 and 1918–19. In Karabakh alone approximately 20 percent of the population died in internecine clashes in 1918–19.<sup>18</sup> The Turkish forces that were invited into Azerbaijan in the summer of 1918 by the local “Mustavat” party of nationalists (which has recently been reconstituted), together with the nationalists, implemented a policy of genocide in captured Armenian villages. More recent tragedies have revived this historical memory and have reminded people that the horrors of pogroms and massacres could be repeated today.

The history of almost all the ethnic groups of the Transcaucasus is one of internecine warfare. It is particularly important in this regard to mention the ethnogenesis of the Azeris. These people are the descendants of Turkic nomads whose repeated and destructive assaults on the settled ethnic groups of the region have been emotionally described in the works of past and contemporary Armenian and Georgian popular historians and writers. Today, in a situation of rapidly increasing national self-consciousness and an increased attention to the history of their people, age-old victories and defeats are becoming widely known and are being actively discussed by the broad masses of the population.

In contrast, the *religious factor* has not played a particularly important role in aggravating recent ethnic conflict in the Transcaucasus. Although the Armenians are Christians, (the overwhelming majority of whom belong to the Armenian Gregorian Church), and the Azeris are Moslems, (primarily Shiites), slogans of religious intolerance or struggles for the faith have rarely been heard in the course of the recent conflict. Kurdish Moslems continue to live undisturbed in Armenia after the expulsion of the Azeris, while the Udins (a small ethnic and linguistic group with Armenian names that hold to the Armenian Gregorian faith), remain in Azerbaijan. Nonetheless, the fact that the Armenians and Azeris adhere to different religions undoubtedly complicates their interactions and hinders mutual understanding. The

bloody clashes between the Georgians, who are Orthodox Christians, and the Ossetians and Abkhazians, the majority of whom are also Orthodox Christians, similarly demonstrates the minor role played by religion in the ethnic conflicts of the Transcaucasus.

Finally, *cultural differences* among the major ethnic groups of the Transcaucasus have had a negative impact on the development of ethnic conflict. First of all, there is a clear difference in the degree to which various groups accept modern urban culture, lifestyles, and living standards. The Georgians and Armenians are the most "Europeanized" in the region, while the Azeris are the least. In terms of values and behavioral stereotypes, many modern Armenians and Azeris are more different from each other than their ancestors were a century ago, when both groups maintained traditional peasant societies and similar world views despite their religious differences.

The historical cultural divide between the Azeris and the settled ethnic groups of the Transcaucasus is reflected in the fact that a significant number of Azeris maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle well into the 1920s. The descendants of these semi-nomads generally seek work herding animals, and it is they who most frequently migrate to Armenian, Georgian, and Russian villages to work as shepherds. Whereas the families remain in the villages, the male shepherds generally return home only for brief vacations. Partially out of necessity (due to their work) and partially out of tradition (the nomad's scorn for a settled lifestyle), these people pay little attention to the maintenance of their home and the land around it, to agriculture or to gardening. The families of shepherds frequently do not use and therefore do not maintain the sections of rural irrigation systems that pass through their lands, thus rendering them liable to breakdowns and thereby threatening their neighbors' incomes. All of these and many other domestic frictions and conflicts of interests have combined to embitter ethnic relations at the local level.

Finally, and even more importantly for a study of ethnic conflict, many ethnic groups in the Transcaucasus differ both in their political cultures, in the broadest sense of the term, and in their attitudes toward the use of force in political conflict. However, this theme demands a separate, serious investigation.

The normalization of ethnic relationships in this region, particularly in Nagorno-Karabakh, can only be achieved within the framework of the

rule of law and on the basis of the acceptance by all the ethnic groups of the Transcaucasus of the right of every territorially based population group to self-government and self-determination, including the right to choose their national and state affiliation. Such a development, relying as it would on the democratic resolution of ethnic conflicts, would be possible only on the basis of a strengthened and more unified federal state and presupposes the disappearance of separatist tendencies in the individual republics.

However, the opposite tendency, one of increasing the sovereignty and power of republican authorities, prevails in the Transcaucasus at the present time. In view of the numerous disagreements that already exist concerning ethnic and republican borders, this tendency ensures the exacerbation of ethnic conflict in the future. Furthermore, the stronger the idea of republican sovereignty and the related concept of the inviolability of republican borders becomes in the national consciousness of the ethnic groups of the Transcaucasus, and the more strongly these ideas become reflected in republican law, the more probable is the growth of ethnic conflict into inter-republic conflict. The recent economic blockade of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and the outbreak of armed border clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis indicate that decisive steps have already been taken in this direction.

## Notes

1. For example, the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh was the subject of the author's report, "O krizisnoi situatsii v Nagornom Karabakh i vozmozhnykh putiakh ee resheniia" [The Crisis Situation in Nagorno Karabakh and Possible Means of its Resolution], Moscow, Institute of Ethnography, U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, August 1988, and the article "Nagorni Karabakh: analiz prichin i predlaga'shikh-shia putei resheniia mezhnatsional'nogo konflikta" [Nagorno-Karabakh: An Analysis of the Causes and Possible Means of Resolving Ethnic Conflict] in the collection *Natsional'nye protsessy v SSR* [National Processes in the U.S.S.R.], Moscow: Nauka Press, 1991.
2. Some of the figures per unit of population were calculated by the author; primary information was taken from the statistical collection *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR v 1985 g.* [The U.S.S.R. Economy in 1985], Moscow, 1986: 17, 171, 511; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSSR za 70 let* [The Economy of U.S.S.R. Over 70 years], Moscow, 1987: 187, 407, 409, 434, 435, 458, 460, 498, 522.
3. According to *Bakinskii Rabochii*, March 11, 1988, capital investment in the social sphere and construction of housing, pre-school institutions and public health projects in Nagorno-Karabakh over the past decades has been above the average for Azerbaijan. The autonomous oblast occupies one of the first positions in the republic in terms of the production of food products per unit of population. Available

domestic services per unit of population in rural areas in 1987 in Nagorno-Karabakh represented 41.2 rubles, as opposed to 16.7 rubles for the republic as whole. Both in the cities and in the rural areas of the autonomous oblast the figure is 14.6m<sup>2</sup> of housing per person. In the republic as a whole the figure for cities is 12.2m<sup>2</sup>, and in rural areas – 9.2m<sup>2</sup> per person. In Nagorno-Karabakh there are 26.3 motor vehicles registered per 1,000 persons, while the average for Azerbaijan is 17.5. One very important fact that has resulted in a rapid influx of Azeris into Nagorno-Karabakh is the rate of employment of the population, the highest in Azerbaijan; i.e., it is easier to find work in the autonomous oblast than anywhere else in the republic.

4. *Azerbaidzhanskaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaya perepis', 1921 Goda. Itogi* [Azerbaijan Rural Census of 1921: Results], Baku, 1924, vol. 3, no.17: iv.
5. Calculated from *Bol'shaia sovskaia entsiklopediia* [Great Soviet Encyclopedia], Moscow, 1939, Vol. 41: 334; *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, Moscow, 1974, Vol. 17: 351.
6. S. I. Brooke, *Naselenie mira* [World Population], Moscow: Nauka Press, 1981: 215–216.
7. *Narodnoe khoziaistvo SSR za 70 let* [The Economy of USSR over 70 Years], Moscow, 1987: 394.
8. Computed by the author from the 1959 and 1979 Soviet census, stored at the Institute of Ethnography, U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences.
9. Data taken from: G. V. Starovoitova, A. N. Yamskov, & I. I. Krupnik, "Dokladnaia zapiska o situatsii v Nagornom Karabakhe" [Report on the Situation in Nagorno-Karabakh], Moscow: Institute of Ethnography, U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, September, 1988.
10. In the U.S.S.R. the rapid growth of the rural population continued in 1980–1987 only in the Central Asian republics (ranging from 26 percent in Tadzhikistan to 14 percent in Kirgizia) and in Azerbaijan (a 10 percent increase). In Kazakhstan the rural population remained stable, while it decreased in the other eight republics. However, in Armenia in this same period the rural population increased by 4 percent. In view of the fact that the Azeri population of Armenia had increased by 8.5 percent in the period from 1970–1979 and that it remained concentrated predominantly in rural areas (up until its expulsion in 1988), where the total increase in population in 1971–1981 was only 3 percent, we can attribute this 4 percent increase in the rural population of the republic in 1980–1987 largely to the increase in the Azeri population in Armenia. Calculated by the author from *Naselenie SSR 1987. Statisticheskii sbornik* [USSR Population. Statistical Collection], Moscow, 1988: 8–15, 27, 106.
11. S. I. Brooke, *Naselenie mira* [World Population], Moscow: Nauka Press, 1981: 215.
12. *Kolonial'naya politika rossiiskogo tsarizma v Azerbaidzhane v 20–60 ykh godakh XIX veka* [The Colonial Policy of Russian Tsarism in Azerbaijan in the 1820s–1860s], Part II, Moscow-Leningrad, 1937: 20, 22.
13. M. A. Skibitskiy, "Karabakhskie kazennye letnie pastishcha" [Karabakh Public Summer Pastures], in: *Materialy dlia ustroistva kazennykh letnikh, i zimnikh pastbishch i dlia izucheniia skotovodstva na Kavkaze* [Materials for the Laying-out of Public Summer and Winter Pastures and for the Study of Herding in the Caucasus], Tiflis 1898, Vol. IV: 39.
14. Calculated from *Pervaia Vseobshchaia perepis' naseleniia Rossiiskoi imperii 1897* [First General Census of the Russian Empire, 1897], St. Petersburg, 1904, No. 63.
15. M. N. Avdeev, *Mil'sko-Karabakhskaia step'. Kochevoe i osedloe khoziaistvo* [The

- Mil'sko-Karabakh Steppe. Nomadic and Settled Economy], Baku, 1929: 85, 165.
16. D. I. Ismail-Zade, *Russkoe krest'ianstvo v Zakavkaz'e* [The Russian Peasantry in the Transcaucasus], Moscow: Nauka Press, 1982: 33.
  17. For more detail see Iu. A. Gagemeister, *Novye ocherki Zakavkaz'ya* [New Essays on the Transcaucasus], St. Petersburg, 1848: 58, and later essays; S. P. Zelinskii, "Plemennoi sostav, religiia i proiskhozhedenie gosudarstvennykh krest'ian" [Tribal Composition, Religion and the Origin of State Peasants], in: *Svod materialov po izucheniiu ekonomicheskogo byta gosudarstvennykh krest'yan zakavkazskogo kraia* [A Summary of Materials for the Study of the Economic Life of State Peasants in the Transcaucasus], Tiflis, 1887, Vol. II: 12–13.
  18. Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia [Great Soviet Encyclopedia], Moscow, 1939, Vol. 41: 19.