
ARMENIANS, GEORGIANS AND AZERBAIJANIS AT THE CIVILIZATIONAL CROSSROADS: SEARCHING FOR "CAUCASIAN IDENTITY"

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The Problem: It is well known that Armenians and Georgians, two of the three main nations of the South Caucasus, belong to the Christian civilizational area, and the third nation - the Azerbaijani, belongs to the Turkish-Islamic civilizational area. This subject has certain peculiarities which are worth considering here. Particularly:

- a. Which orientation is stronger: the orientation of Azerbaijanis towards Turkey, or the orientation of Armenians and Georgians towards Russia?
- b. Are there civilizational factors defining the attitudes of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis towards other nations?
- c. Does a "Caucasian Identity" factor exist in the mutual perceptions of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis?
- d. Do the attitudes of Armenians, Georgians, and Azerbaijanis towards other nations change over time?

Methods: To get the answers to the defined questions, the social distance perceptions of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis towards 9 nations (Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Turks, Iranians, Greeks, Jews and Americans) have been calculated. For Georgians, two additional distances have been calculated - towards Abkhazians and Ossetians. Then, a factor analysis of the social distance for Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis perceptions has been carried out.

Data: To calculate the scores of social distance perceptions, we have used the database created by the Caucasian Research Resource Centers (CRRC) "Data Initiative 2007"¹. The data were collected in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan by the same methodology and are representative nationwide. The sample size in Armenia includes 2,457 respondents, in Georgia – 3,306, and in Azerbaijan – 2,148. The survey questionnaire contains 3 of the 7 questions necessary to construct the Bogardus social distance scale permissibility of: a) marriage, b) friendship c) business with the representatives of a given nation. The Bogardus scale is constructed with scores in range [0; 3], where 0 corresponds to the minimum social distance.

Hypothesis: The existence of a civilizational factor is identified by two criteria. If the representatives of the given nation perceive a group of nations to belong to the same civilizational area, then their social distances for the given nation:

¹ The database is available at <http://www.crrc.am>. CRRC is a network of resource, research and training centers established in the capital cities of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with the goal of strengthening social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus. CRRC is a partnership between the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF).

1. Should be near, and simultaneous,
2. Should be positively correlated.

Results: Figure 1 presents the social distance scores of 9 nations (11 for Georgians) as perceived by Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis.

Evidently, Armenians and Georgians feel more isolated than Azerbaijanis. After themselves, both Armenians and Georgians perceive Russians as the closest nation. On the other hand, in the perception of Armenians and Georgians, Russians are closer to Americans and Greeks. But the Turks, who are the closest to Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijanis' perception, are at a farther distance from other nations than from Azerbaijanis.

At the farthest distance from Armenians are the Azerbaijanis, Turks and Iranians (Islamic nations). However, Armenians and Jews in Georgians' perception belong to the Islamic group. Armenians are at the possible maximum distance in the perception of the Azerbaijanis. The distance of Abkhazians and Ossetians from Georgians is 0.8, which is the same for Americans.

The factor spaces of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis are on Figures 2 - 4, respectively. The first two factors are the same for each of the nations: *F1: Islamic Factor* and *F2: Western Factor*. The third Factor *F3: Russian Factor* exists only for the Armenians and Georgians. The *F4: Caucasian Nations Factor* exists only for Georgians.

The Factor models have their peculiarities.

Georgians are vaguely associated with each of the three factor axes in the Factor Model of Armenians. On the other hand, on *Figure 1* the Georgians' distance in Armenians' perception is greater than that of Russians, Americans and Greeks and is in the third place by remoteness from Armenians.

In Georgians' perception, Armenians are in the *F1: Islamic Factor*. This is the reason that for the Georgians this Factor is named the *F2: Asian Factor*. Simultaneously, on *Figure 1*, in the perceptions of Georgians, the Armenians are in the farthest group of Islamic nations. In perceptions of Georgians, the Abkhazians and Ossetians are "similar" nations, but they are at a farther distance than the Russians and Greeks.

F1: "Islamic Factor" for the Azerbaijanis is more of "*Turkish-Islamic*" than purely "*Islamic*". On the other hand, the factor loadings of the non-Islamic nations on the axes *F1: "Islamic Factor"*, are increasing concurrently with decrease of their factor loadings on the axes *F2: "Western Factor"* and the sequence of nations on the axes *F1* is practically similar to the same sequence on *Figure 1*. Armenians are absent in the Azerbaijanis' factor model, because the variance of Armenians' social distance perception by Azerbaijanis is practically 0. Social distances of Russians and Georgians in perceptions of Azerbaijanis and their position in the Azerbaijanis factor space are practically similar. There is no "obvious" prevalence of one upon the other.

The temporal trends of various nations' social distance perceptions by Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis are represented by the level of permissibility of marriage, because these trends have essential nonlinearities, which are graded in the result of factor analysis. *Figure 5* shows the levels of marriage permissibility by Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis to various nations in 10-year range age-groups.

The data demonstrate that the general trend among Armenians is the increase of tolerance. The most intensive rise of tolerance is in the youngest age group, including tolerance of Turks and Azerbaijanis.

In the two youngest age groups of Georgians a rise of tolerance towards Russians and Americans and decrease of tolerance towards Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Turks (nations of Eastern Factor) are observed.

Starting from 56-65 age group, the rise of tolerance towards Turks and Iranians is observed among Azerbaijanis, but in the two youngest age groups the rise of tolerance towards Iranians stops. At the same time, there is a trend of decrease of tolerance towards Georgians.

However, it must be mentioned that the observed trends do not cause structural changes in the nations' perception patterns (the graphs of the trends do not intersect).

An interesting feature is observed among the 56-65 age groups, who are the young people of the "Khrushchev thaw" of early 1960, when a general rise of nationalism was observed in many nations of the USSR. Among Armenians, this period of rise of nationalism is paralleled by the increase of tolerance towards other nations, but among Georgians and, especially Azerbaijanis, it is the opposite, and there is a sharp decrease of tolerance.

Conclusions:

1. From the point of civilizational membership, the modern Southern Caucasus is a "**torn area**".

2. The three main nations of the Southern Caucasus have different civilizational paradigms. Armenians and Georgians are disposed to perceive themselves rather as **isolated ethnic-cultural commonalities** that have no intimate sense of commonality with any civilizational area. Azerbaijanis reveal a sense of belonging to Turkish **sub-civilization**, as well as a definite sense of belonging to Islamic civilization.

3. In the exercise we presented above, "**Caucasian Identity**" is **not detected** in the mutual ethnic perceptions of the three main South Caucasian nations, and there are no trends for its formation.

4. Meanwhile, Armenians and Georgians reveal a slight sense of belonging to previous Soviet and modern Russian civilizational area.

5. In Azerbaijanis' perception, all the examined non-Islamic nations are grouped in a single group, but there is a slight prevalence of Russians and Georgians.

6. Among the Armenian youth ethnic tolerance is rising. Among the Georgian youth tolerance toward the "East", including Armenians and Azerbaijanis, is decreasing. The mainstream trend in the Azerbaijanis' perception is towards the Turkish sub-civilizational area.

7. Apparently, in the context of the represented findings about Armenians, taking into consideration the cultural studies which show the **continuous development** of the Armenian culture for thousands of years as an **open cultural system**², as well as the new factors conditioned by the existence of Armenian modern independent nation-state, Toynbee's concept of "fossilized relics" with regard to Armenians³ may be recalled and revised.

² **Gevorgyan G. A.** National Culture from the Standpoint of Philosophy of History. NAS of Armenia, Institute of Philosophy and Law, Yerevan, 1992.

³ **Toynbee A. J.** A Study of History. Vol. 1, Oxford Univ. Press, L. – N.Y. – Toronto, 1955.

Figure 1
 Social distances perceptions of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis towards various nations

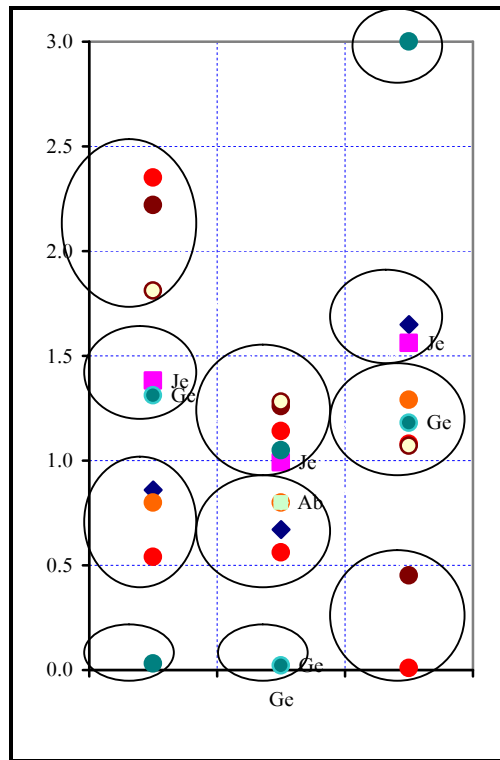
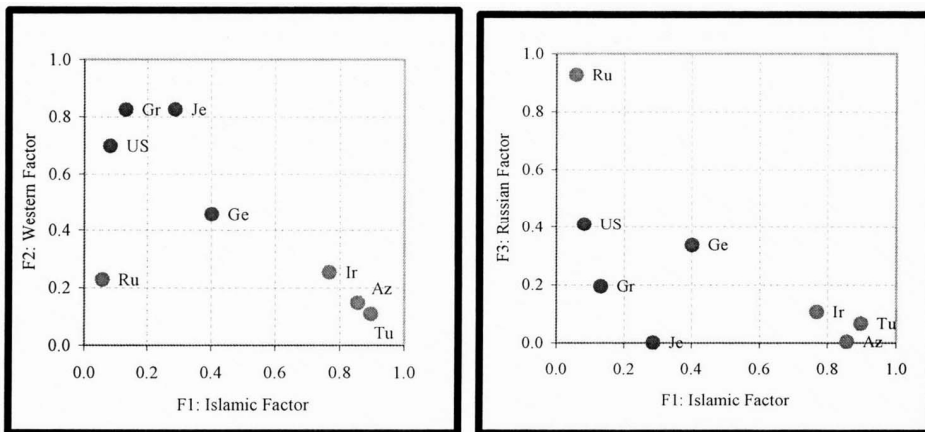


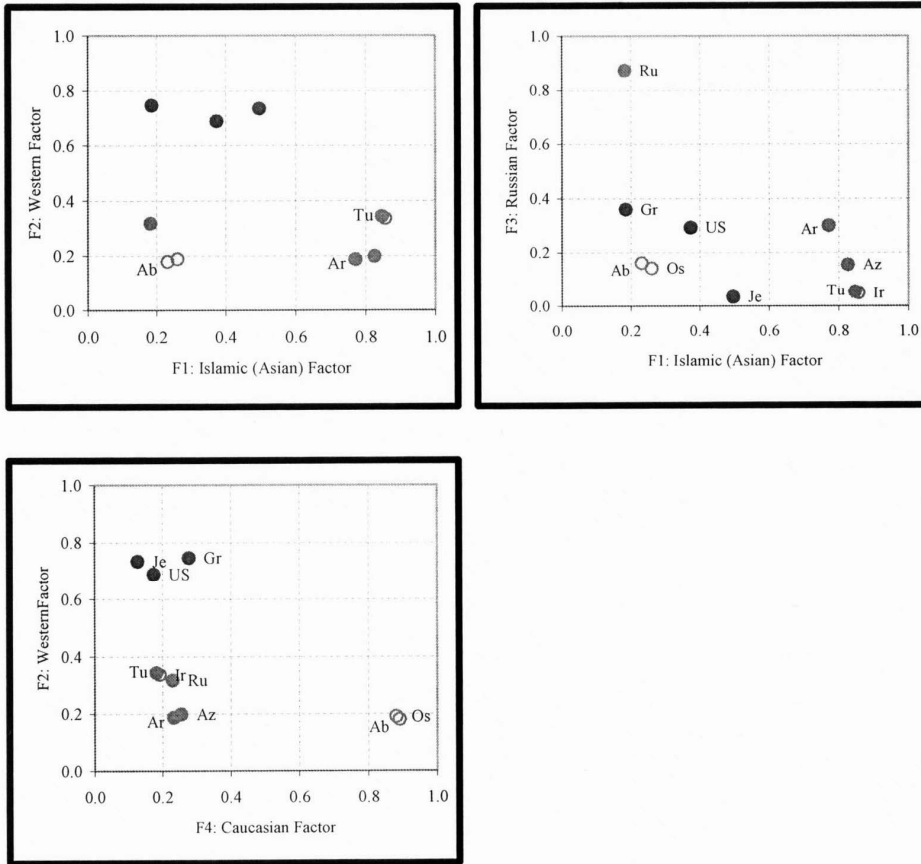
Figure 2
 Factor spaces of Armenians' perceptions of social distances



3 Factors explain the 72.5% of total variance.

Figure 3

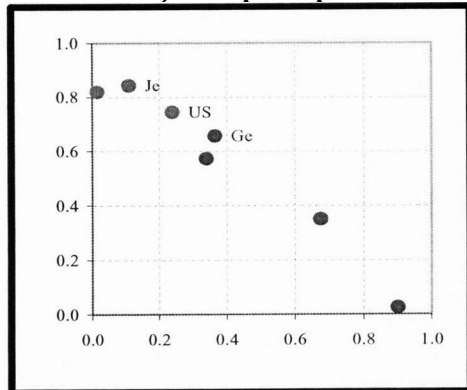
Factor spaces of Georgian perceptions of social distances



4 Factors explain the 82.4% of total variance.

Figure 4

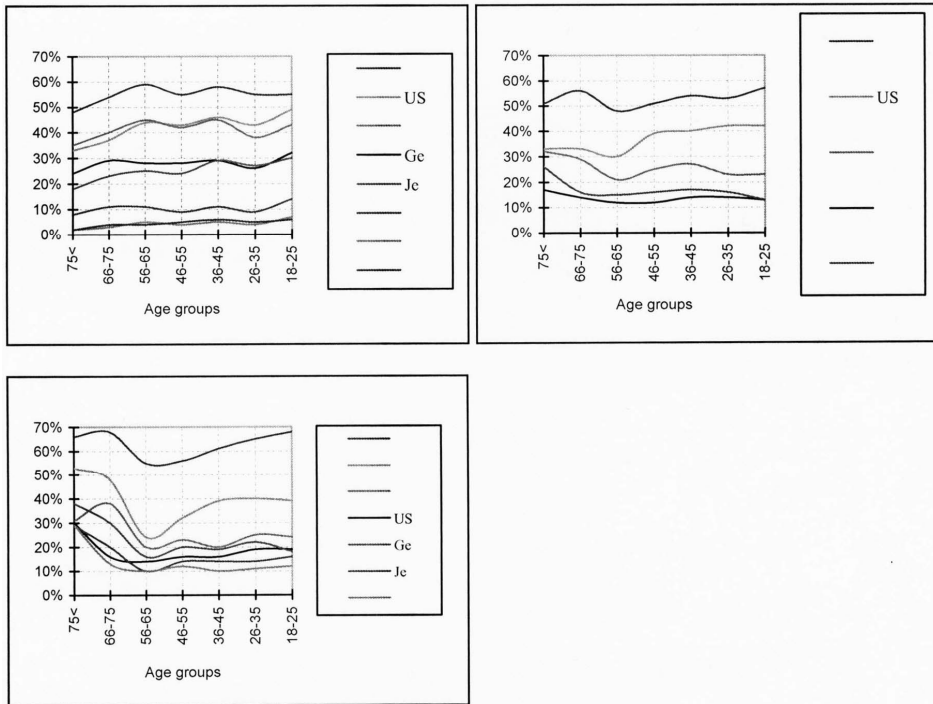
Factor spaces of Azerbaijanis' perceptions of social distances



2 factors explain the 62.9% of total variance

Figure 5

The levels of marriage permissibility to various nations for age groups of Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanis



ԷԴԻԿ ԿՅՈՒՐԵԴՅԱՆ, ՍԱՄՎԵԼ ՍԱՆՈՒԿՅԱՆ - Հայերը, վրացիները և ադրբեյջանցիները քաղաքակրթությունների խաչմերուկում. «կովկասյան ինքնության» որոնումներում - Հոդվածում ներկայացված են հայերի, վրացիների և ադրբեյջանցիների կողմից 9 այլ ազգերի նկատմամբ Բոգարդուսի սանդղակով չափված սոցիալական տարածությունների ընկալումները: Սոցիալական տարածությունների գործոնային վերլուծությամբ ուսումնասիրված է այն հարցը, թե արդյոք հայերի, վրացիների և ադրբեյջանցիների կողմից այլ ազգերի նկատմամբ սոցիալական տարածությունների ընկալումները պայմանավորված են դրանց քաղաքակրթական պատկանելությամբ:

ЭДИК КЮРЕГЯН, САМВЕЛ МАНУКЯН – Армяне, грузины и азербайджанцы на цивилизационном перекрестке: в поисках “кавказской идентичности”. – В статье анализируется, как армяне, грузины и азербайджанцы воспринимают социальные дистанции по отношению к девяти нациям, измеренным по шкале Богардуса. Посредством факторного анализа исследован вопрос, обусловлены ли их восприятия социальных дистанций цивилизационной принадлежностью различных наций.