Ethno-territorial conflict and coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan

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Many accounts suggest that the numbers of some ethnic populations in the (Soviet) Republic of Azerbaijan were (and are) underestimated in the official censuses, even in the last Soviet Census of 1989, which is seen as the most accurate Soviet census after the Second World War. In addition, the usage of the toponym Azerbaijan for that territory and the ethnonym Azerbaijani or Azeri for its titular people is problematic. Below, an attempt is made to provide reasonable estimates of populations in 1989 of the under-represented ethnic groups and to bring clarity to these issues by using different (historical, statistical, etc.) sources.

The adjective Azeri or Azerbaijani has been traditionally used for anything related to the region of Azerbaijan (Azarbaijan) in the northwestern part of contemporary Iran. Such an adjective has not been used traditionally in relation to the region to the north of Araxes, despite the fact that the Shi’ite Muslim Turkic-speaking population there were culturally very similar to the Azerbaijani population to the south of Araxes. They both speak almost the same language. In Iran the Azeri language still resembles the more archaic and literary Azeri, uses the Perso-Arabic alphabet and has an extensive Persian vocabulary. This language, called classicist Azeri (Swietochowski 1995: 28) or classical Azerbaijani (Swietochowski 1985: 26) by Tadeusz Swietochowski (1995: 28), came under pressure from the Russian conquest onwards:

The hold of Persian as the chief literary language in [the current Republic of] Azerbaijan would be broken, followed by the rejection of classicist Azeri, a heavily Persianized idiom that had long been in use along with Persian, though in a secondary position. De-Iranization found a measure of support from Russian officials anxious to neutralize the Azeris’ identification with Iran. (Swietochowski 1995: 28)

This policy’s consequence is very tangible to this date and makes the Azeri spoken in the Caucasus somewhat different from that spoken by a larger number of Azeris in Iran. The de-Iranization process proceeded after the collapse of the Russian Empire and the advent of Soviet rule. Unlike their Christian Armenian and Georgian neighbors, the Turkic-speaking, largely Shi’ite Muslim population of Transcaucasia were
subjected to a harsh de-culturalization policy in order to break and diffuse their ties with Iran. 

Paradoxically, however, the choice of the name Azerbaijan relates this republic to Iran even more. The choice of the name for the republic and its titular ethnic groups, however, had political reasons.

The region to the north of the river Araxes was not called Azerbaijan prior to 1918, unlike the region in northwestern Iran that has been called so since long ago. According to Bartold (in Reza 1993: 162-163), the region should have been called Arran, and only for political reasons was renamed to Azerbaijan, in order to attach the region to the Iranian region of Azerbaijan and legitimate its future incorporation into the Soviet Union. Reza (1993; 2011) quotes and cites many sources in which only the contemporary Iranian region of Azerbaijan is called Azerbaijan, while (a vast part of) the territory of the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan is called by names such as Arran, Aran, Alban, Aghvan, Aghvank, Rani, and Albania. Reza (1993; 2011) also provides many Soviet sources which confirm the fact that the region was renamed to Azerbaijan under the influence of the pan-Turkists, who had an expansionist agenda and desired annexation of the Iranian region of Azerbaijan into their dominion. After the Bolsheviks re-conquered the former imperial Russian territory, they preserved the same name of Azerbaijan for the same expansionist reasons. This region was called Azerbaijan during the reign of the Musavat party in the region under the influence of the occupying Ottoman forces, followed by the British forces. The name was again preserved after the Bolsheviks took over political power in Transcaucasia. The occupying Ottoman and British powers and the Soviets and the local pan-Turkists all hoped that they could have political influence in the region of Azerbaijan in the northwestern part of the neighboring Iran via the newly renamed Transcaucasian Azerbaijan.

Remarkably, in a recent atlas published in Baku, entitled Azerbaycan Tarixi Atlası (2007) [Historical Atlas of Azerbaijan], the name Iran is even not mentioned for the political entities which had covered the territories of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran, and it uses instead the name of dynasties. Although the name Iran is used in the text of that atlas, it is absent in the maps, except those which depict the Islamic Republic of Iran (Azerbaycan Tarixi Atlas 2007: 50-55). Strangely, it labels the Pahlavi-era Iran as “Pars” (p. 49), a Persian/Azerbaijani equivalent for Persia, but this is the period during which the Iranian authorities officially requested foreign governments to use Iran instead of Persia for the name of the country.

In accordance with the Russian/Soviet policy elsewhere in the conquered Islamic lands, the policy in Azerbaijan aimed at the most tangible ties to their past. Not only was the Perso-Arabic alphabet changed to first the Latin and then the Cyrillic alphabet, but also the family names were changed to a Russianized version, ending in -ov and -ev instead of the Persian zadeh [son of], while in contrast the traditional family names of predominantly Christian Georgians and Armenians were retained.

Reza’s (1993) famous book, Azarbaijan va Arran (Albania-ye Qafqaz), was recently translated into Russian (Reza 2011) and published in Russia. The Russian version also contains contributions by V. A. Zakharov.

Udi language, belonging to the Lezgic branch, is thought to be a descendant of the extinct Caucasian Albanian language.
This choice was also in agreement with the Cold War discourse, because by calling this republic Azerbaijan, in fact a “North” Azerbaijan was created and hence the region called Azerbaijan in Iran could be called “South” Azerbaijan. In this way “North” Azerbaijan could be associated with communist North Korea and North Vietnam, and “South” Azerbaijan could be associated with capitalist South Korea and South Vietnam (Hunter 1997: 437). Knowing that Iran in those days was a Western ally, the analogy of North versus South represented the battle between communism and capitalism, and between the good East and the bad West. The Soviets hoped that capitalism and the West would be defeated and the southern parts would reunite with their communist northern counterparts.

This wishful thinking was about to be realized during the course of the Second World War’s Soviet occupation of northern Iran, but was unsuccessful when their marionette local government headed by Paishevari was toppled in 1946. Azerbaijan was not the only Soviet naming trick. For example they created “another” Moldavia inside Ukraine during the interbellum (Cowther 1997: 317). The reason was probably similar: to incorporate Moldavia, which was part of Romania at that time. The experiments and manipulations in the official name and autonomous status of the region of (Finnish-) Karelian (A)SSR in northwestern Russia also seem to have been based upon similar political motives.

Old maps show the names of the two regions, to the north and to the south of the river Araxes, as different. The area to the south is called Azerbaijan, while the area to the north is called Arran, Shirvan, and other local names (e.g. Talysh, Nakhichevan, etc.). These maps are representations of the past situation and are based on many old(er) maps, descriptions, and documents (which are also abundant in Reza’s [1993; 2011] work). Many new maps representing the historical situations also make this distinction; for example, the map in Gronke’s (2006, the first map) Geschichte Irans: von der Islamisierung bis zur Gegenwart [History of Iran: From Islamization until Now] names the region to the south of Araxes as Azerbaijan and those to its north as Arran and Shirvan (Schirwan). 210

The (ethno-)nationalists in the Republic of Azerbaijan usually take offence at these discussions and regard them as an affront to their identity. They usually blame Iranians for having imperialistic intentions. These claims are groundless because, first, it is not only Iranians who

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210 Remarkably, a map representing the Ottoman conquests in Iran and elsewhere, to be found at the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, in Ankara, does almost the same thing. Although the map was remade and Latinized in the modern Turkish Republic, it names the region to the south of Araxes as Azerbaijan and to its north as Karabagh. I saw the map and took a picture of it when I visited the museum in August 2010.
discuss this situation. Second, Iranians and non-Iranians rely mainly on non-Iranian, even Soviet, or medieval Islamic sources. For example, *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* published in 1911 also held this view. Third, even Turkey, which is regarded as an ally of the Republic of Azerbaijan since its independence, allegedly “without imperialistic intentions” [sic!], has produced similar maps. In addition, referring to a people to the north of Iran as Azeris, who share linguistic, religious and cultural similarities with the Azeris and the rest of Iranians and whose living areas have been constituent parts of Iran, is not after all very detrimental to the interests of an allegedly imperialistic Iran. On the contrary, calling the Republic of Azerbaijan as Azerbaijan and its titular ethnic group as Azeris or Azerbaijani, could be very well in favor of such an Iran. Dr. Nosratollah Jahanshahlou Afshar, an ex-member of the pro-Soviet Pishevari government in the Iranian Azerbaijan (1946), writes in his memoirs (Jahanshahlou Afshar 2007)\(^{211}\) about Mr. Qasemzadeh, his teacher of the French language and the foreign minister of the Musavat party in the first independent Republic of Azerbaijan (1918–1920). According to Qasemzadeh, they chose the name Azerbaijan instead of Arran in order to get support from Iran, hoping to reunite with Iran, but to no avail.

The modern-day Iranian government calls this region simply the Republic of Azerbaijan. The discussions contesting its name are mainly a scholarly affair. The reason for these discussions is simply for the reason of clarity and nothing more. It is, nevertheless, understandable that ethnic discussions are politicized in the post-Soviet space and may invoke strong reactions and uneasy feelings.

According to Tsutsiev (2006: 67), in his *Atlas ethnopoliticheskoy Istorii Kavkaza* [Atlas of ethno-political history of the Caucasus], the ethnic category Azerbaijani is a relatively modern designation. In the early 20\(^{th}\) century, the “Transcaucasian Tatars” were renamed as Azerbaijani Turks and finally as Azerbaijanis. In a Russian source (Bronevskiy: 2004 [19\(^{th}\) century]) originally written in the 19\(^{th}\) century by Semen Mikhailovich Bronevskiy, one of the groups living in the South Caucasus and Dagestan are designated as Persians. In those descriptions often two other population groups exist: the Tatars and the Shirvianians. The distinction between them is not always quite clear. It is, nevertheless, very probable that the ethnonym Persian in that source refers to a (a large part of the) the Shi’ite Turkic-speaking population. Indeed, Persian in many sources, even contemporary ones, does not always necessarily refer to ethnic Persian-speakers similar to those in Iran (the ethnic Fars people). It is true that the ethnic Tats of the Caucasus are linguistically close to the

Persian-speakers of Iran, and one of their subdivisions was called Pars (Tsutsiev 2006: 15, Map 3), who lived in the Absheron peninsula near Baku. The designation Pars in modern-day Iran means Persian. Nevertheless, from Bronevskiy’s description in that Russian source (Bronevskiy: 2004 [19th century]) it is obvious that by Persian it refers to the Turkic-speaking population which are today called Azeris or Azerbaijani. First, the more the source describes the northern areas of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan, the less Persians as a population group are prominent. In fact, they do not appear in many northern areas. Indeed, the northern part of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan’s territory is mainly inhabited by Sunni people, who usually do not speak a Turkic language. Second, it explicitly states that all people in Dagestan are Sunni Muslims, except Persians, who are Shi’ites (Bronevskiy 2004 [19th century]: 223). As the modern-day Azeris are the main Shi’ite population in Dagestan, it is obvious that the source has referred to them—or to be more precise, their ancestors—by the designation Persian. After all, when Bronevskiy (2004 [19th century]: 37) mentions languages in the Caucasus, Tatar appears, while neither Persian nor Azeri, Azerbaijani, Azerbaijani Turkic, etc. appear. Tatar is the designation that Russians gave to most Turkic-speaking Muslims—for example, to those in the South Caucasus (Tsutsiev 2006: 67)—and does not necessarily refer to the peoples who are still registered as Tatars, such as the Crimean and Volga Tatars. There is every reason, therefore, to believe that by the Tatar language is meant the modern-day Azeri or Azerbaijani language, and by Persian is meant the (urban) Turkic-speaking Shi’ite population. Nowhere in that source (Bronevskiy 2004 [19th century]: 37) is there any reference to a people or a tribe in the Southern Caucasus who were called Azeris.

For reasons of consistency (with the contemporary sources of information), however, the Republic of Azerbaijan’s titular population and anything related to them or the Republic of Azerbaijan are called Azerbaijani (or Azeri) in this book. Below are discussed a few other ethnic groups in this republic, whose numbers are believed to be underestimated in the official censuses. An attempt is made to reach more solid and reliable estimates of their numbers.

On the number of Talysh
The Talysh were reintroduced in 1989 as a census category after having been totally removed from the census since 1970. According to the last Soviet census (1989), their number was no more than 21,602 souls. Their number was no less than 77,000 in the first Soviet census (1926). Such a decreasing trend, despite their high fertility rate, can only be explained by attempts at assimilation and by underestimation of their numbers in the official accounts. Although higher than 1989, the numbers of Talysh in

The under-representation of the number of Talysh people may be because of deliberate governmental manipulation, as well as self-denial in order to escape the stigma of being disloyal to Azerbaijan. Because of the prevalence of pan-Turkist discourse in the Azerbaijan republic, the non-Turkic groups are distrusted, or they feel uneasy in any case. There exist today latent separatist tendencies among the Talysh and Lezgins, which makes them a target of observance and ethnic politics by the Republic of Azerbaijan’s authorities (see e.g. Cornell 2001: 268-272 and 356; Cornell 2011: 75 and 260-261). Because of the fact that the Republic of Azerbaijan has historically been an Iranian territory and because of the contemporary Iranian influence there, the Talysh who inhabit the region bordering Iran and speak an Iranian language are reportedly mistrusted and suppressed.

According to Yunusov (2006: 489), at least 200,000–250,000 Talysh live in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Although he does not explicitly mention the year or period to which these numbers are attributed, it is implicitly clear that he bases his estimates on the ethnographic research which was done by (his) Institute for Peace and Democracy during the period 1994–1998 (Yunusov 2006: 486). It is unlikely that the number of this population has increased dramatically since 1989; therefore, it seems that the number of Talysh clearly was under-represented in the last Soviet census (1989). Even though significantly higher by the official accounts, the estimates by Yunusov (and his institute) are still very low compared with other estimates.

According to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO: 2006), some 800,000 Talysh live in the Republic of Azerbaijan, of whom 500,000 live in the Talysh areas in southeastern districts of the Republic of Azerbaijan such as Astara, Massali (Masally), Lenkoran (Lankaran), Lerik, and Yardimli (Yardymly). Ethnologue (2009, 16th edition) estimates the number of Talysh in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1996 at 800,000. According to Hunter (1997: 438), “[i]n Azerbaijan today…it has been estimated there are up to one million Talysh”. In her discussion paper published by the OSCE, Hema Kotecha (2006: 33) states:

According to the Talysh Cultural Centre in Lenkoran, 60% of Masalli is Talysh, only two villages in Lenkoran are Turkic, Astara is entirely Talysh and in Lerik only two villages are “Turkic”. There are also several Talysh-speaking settlements in Baku and on the Absheron peninsula as in the 19th

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century they migrated for employment in the oil industry and fisheries (according to the Lenkoran Talysh Cultural Centre one third of Sumgait is also Talysh).

Despite his lower estimates of the total Talysh population, Yunusov (2006: 489) seems to be more generous than the Talysh nationalists who state that only 60% of Massali region is Talysh (Kotecha 2006: 33). According to Yunusov, 48% of all Talysh live in that district. Based on his estimates and considering the fact that the population of Massali district in 1990 was 146,400, these numbers are respectively 87,840 (according to the Lenkoran Talysh Cultural Center) and 110,000–120,000 (according to Yunusov). In order to calculate the number of Talysh, I maintain the 60% estimates for the Massali district, which appear to be lower than Yunusov’s (2006: 489) estimates; but I count only 90% of them as Talysh in the districts Astara, Lerik, and Lenkoran, where—according to the Talysh Cultural Center in Lenkoran—(almost) the entire population is Talysh. It is likely that in the towns of Astara and Lenkoran, the centers of the homonymous districts, groups other than Talysh also live. I also count 90% of the population in the southeastern district of Yardimli as Talysh. As that area is situated to the southwest of Massali District and to the east of Lerik District, it is very likely that it has a rather large Talysh population. Despite the fact that the percentage of Talysh in this district is disputed, counting such a large proportion (90%) as Talysh will not have a major impact on the estimate of total number of Talysh, as this district has a relatively small population. The number of Talysh outside these districts are excluded from this calculation. The number of Talysh population (1989) is calculated by using the information about the total population of these districts available from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s website (Azsat.org): 213

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(69,700 \times 0.9) + (53,800 \times 0.9) + (163,600 \times 0.9) + (40.0 \times 0.9) + (143,300 \times 0.6) = 62,730 + 48,420 + 36,000 + 147,240 + 85,980 = 380,370.
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These estimates may still be lower than the real numbers, because a (rather large) number of Talysh live outside the traditional Talysh area—for example, in Sumgait and Baku. A fair estimate seems to be 500,000 persons when the number of Talysh elsewhere in the Republic of Azerbaijan is added to this number. These numbers of Talysh in 1989, calculated in such a way, are still larger than the numbers of Talysh in the 1999 and 2009 official censuses.

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On the numbers of Lezgins
According to the 1989 Soviet census, 175,1395 Lezgins lived in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Lezgin ethno-nationalist movements of Sadval (in the Republic of Azerbaijan) and Samur (in Russia) estimate the number of Lezgins in the Republic of Azerbaijan to be between 600,000 and 800,000, but the realistic numbers, even though larger than the official accounts, are most probably lower than the Lezgin ethno-nationalist accounts (Yunusov 2006: 486). According to Cornell (2001: 269):

Whereas officially the number of Lezgins registered as such in Azerbaijan is around 180,000, the Lezgins claim that the number of Lezgins...[in] Azerbaijan is much higher than this figure, some accounts showing over 700,000 Lezgins in Azerbaijan. These figures are denied by the Azerbaijani government, but in private many Azeris acknowledge the fact that the Lezgin—and for that matter the Talysh or the Kurdish—population of Azerbaijan is far higher than the official figures.

Relying on the ethnographic research which was done by Institute for Peace and Democracy during 1994–1998, Yunusov (2006: 486) counts the number of Lezgins between 250,000 and 260,000.

According to a report for the UNHCR, about 75% of the total population in Qusar and Khachmaz districts and 15% of the total population in Greater Baku are made up of Lezgins (Mateeva 2003, referred to in Kotecha 2006: 38). It is very likely that these percentages were the same in 1989. Using the statistics provided by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s website (Azsat.org),214 these percentages can be calculated to absolute numbers: 75% of Qusar (total population 68,400) and Khachmaz (total population 117,900) make up 139,725 persons; and 15% of Greater Baku (total population 1,807,800) makes up 271,170 persons. Consequently, there should be as many as 410,895 Lezgins in the Republic of Azerbaijan. According to this report, there must be more Lezgins in Greater Baku than in the Lezgin homeland in the northern part of the republic, which seems a little unlikely. On the other hand, the report does not make any statements about the numbers of Lezgins in other districts (rayons), which in many descriptions and maps are designated as (partially) inhabited by Lezgins. Amongst others, these districts are Shaki, Oghuz (formerly called Vartashen), Qabala (Gabala), and Quba (Guba). An additional problem may be that this report or the Lezgin nationalists’ accounts may count the Lezgins’ kinfolks such as Taskahurs and Rutuls, as Lezgins, while these ethnic groups were counted separately in the census.

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The numbers provided by ethno-nationalists (600,000–800,000) are too high, while the numbers provided by Yunusov (250,000–260,000) may be low. However, Yunusov’s (2006: 486) numbers are still larger than the Lezgins’ numbers in the independent Republic of Azerbaijan’s censuses: 178,000 in 1999 and 180,300 in 2009. Nevertheless, in the absence of other reliable numbers, it is appropriate to take Yunusov’s numbers (2006: 486) as good estimates.

Yunusov (2006) speaks about (a) people(s) called Shahdagh. Shahdagh people is an umbrella name which refers to the related small groups (Budukh, Kryz, and Khinalygh) that live at the foot of Mount Shahdagh in the Republic of Azerbaijan and are related to the Lezgins. They were neglected in censuses before the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan and counted either as Azeris or as Lezgins. The Republic of Azerbaijan’s census reports that there were 4,400 Kryz and 2,200 Khinalyghs living there in 2009. While Budukh and Kryz languages are closer to the standard Lezgin, the Kinalygh (or Khinanlugh) language is more distant from it. According to Yunusov (2006: 488), their number is around 10,000. It is a fact that these groups are assimilating rapidly, but it is unclear how large their number was in 1989. Their numbers are probably already included in the estimates of Lezgin people that count their numbers higher than the official figures. In fact, the Shahdagh people can be regarded as subgroups of the Lezgin people in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Because of the fact that in this current study the Soviet ethnic categories are maintained in cases in which groups are smaller in number than 20,000, these Shahdagh groups are not counted separately from the Lezgins.

On the number of Tats
Muslim Tats were yet another underestimated ethnic group in the last Soviet census (1989). Muslim Tats should not be confused with the Tat-speaking Jewish population of the Republic of Azerbaijan who were included in the last Soviet Census (1989) as Mountain Jews. According to Arif Yunusov (2006: 488), Muslim Tats live in 33 out of 40 villages on the Absheron (Apsheron) peninsula—the peninsula on which Baku is also located. According to him (Yunusov 2006: 488), the Tats constitute the majority of the rural population in Apsheron peninsula around Baku and also live in three villages in the Ismail (Ismaili) district, as well as in Khyzy, Davachi (which is called now Shabran), Guba, and other districts. Although he does not name these other districts, these could be Siyazan, Khachmaz, and Shemakha, districts which either have a Tat name or are mentioned or depicted as Tat-inhabited areas by maps and descriptions in the Atlas Etnopoliticheskoi Istorii Kavkaza (Tsutsiev 2006: 15, Map 3; 38,
Map 12; 69, Map 23; 102, Map 37), Ethnologue (2009, 16th edition), and The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire (Red Book 1991: The Tats), and in any case are proximate to the districts (rayons) which Yunusov (2006: 488) mentions.

One reason for under-representation of the number of Tat population in the Republic of Azerbaijan may be due to the undirected process of assimilation, and another may be deliberate underestimation and policies of assimilation by the authorities. As their language is very close to Standard Persian and as the Republic of Azerbaijan as a former territory of Iran may feel uneasy about a very close association with Iran, reducing the Iranian-speaking element may be perceived as a good strategy, especially since the pan-Turkist discourse has been much enhanced in recent decades in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Although Yunusov (2006) does not estimate the number of Muslim Tats, it is still possible to provide a conservative and somewhat underestimated estimate of their numbers, which is reasoned further below.

As Yunusov (2006: 488) states that the Tats are undergoing a process of assimilation, the total number of Tats in urban areas—even the urban centers of traditional Tat areas—are excluded from the calculation, because the inter-ethnic interactions and hence assimilation are greater in urban centers than in the relatively isolated and remote villages of the less densely populated northeastern parts of the Republic of Azerbaijan. To calculate the Muslim Tat numbers, I use the following strategy: I assume that the size of population of individual villages does not vary much in these districts. According to the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s website (Azstat.org), there were 108 rural settlements in Ismailli district in 2009. The number of these settlements may not have been much different in 1989 or 1990. Considering the fact that three villages in Ismailli district were Tat villages, it means that they constitute about 3% of the rural population in that district. A total of 33 out of 40 villages in Absheron Peninsula means that about 82.5% of the rural population in that districts were Tats—assuming that villages have approximately the same size of population. For other districts, I take a more conservative approach and count only 50% of the rural population as Tats, despite the fact that these are also mentioned as Tat areas on the

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maps in Tsutsiev’s (2006: 15, Map 3; 67, Map 23) Atlas Etnopoliticheskoi Istorii Kavkaza [Atlas of the Ethno-political History of the Caucasus] and Ethnologue (2009, 16th edition). Of the other districts not explicitly mentioned, only Siyazan is considered because unlike Ismailli district it is encircled by, and is located in, the same economic administrative region as the other districts mentioned explicitly by Yunusov (2006: 488). The other districts, such as Khachmaz, which are not mentioned by Arif Yunusov are excluded from this calculation. I use the statistics available from the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s website (Azsat.org), which distinguish between the rural and urban population. Although these numbers are attributed to 1990, they cannot be much different from those of 1989. The calculation proceeds as follows:

\[(49,000 \times 0.03) + (20,900 \times 0.83) + (4,300 \times 0.5) + (20,300 \times 0.5) + (92,600 \times 0.5) + (9,500 \times 0.5) = 1,470 + 17,347 + 2,150 + 10,150 + 46,300 + 4,750 = 82,167.\]

This number is still a clear underestimation because it does not count the number of Tats in the urban areas in and outside traditional Tat areas, and it even uses a very low estimate of rural population in the traditional Tat areas. There are reasons to justify a conservative approach with respect to the estimation of the number of Tats. In general, an increase in the number of rural population is more likely, but in this case the rural areas are located close to urban centers such as Baku and Sumgait, and, therefore, a decline is more probable. Considering also the decreasing number of Tats in the Republic of Azerbaijan, it is plausible to assume that their numbers in 1989 were slightly higher than these numbers calculated on the basis of statistics from 1990. The decreasing numbers thanks to assimilation may be an undeniable fact; nevertheless, there is also a reverse trend possible, however weak that might be. According to the censuses of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the number of Tats was 10,900 in 1999 and 25,200 in 2009, which means that the number of Tats more than doubled in ten years. This fact may indicate that ethnic awareness is awakened among many formerly assimilated Tats; but even this number (25,200) remains very low.

According to the Soviet census of 1926, nearly 70,000 Tats (including the Tat-speaking Mountain Jews) lived in Azerbaijan (Red Book 1991: The Tats; Red Book 1991: The Mountain Jews). Yunusov (2004: 350) presents data from 1886, according to which the number of Muslim Tats was 119,663 persons, while the number of Azeris in a wider

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region than the contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan was 849,116. According to other data (from 1913) presented by Yunusov (2004: 351), the total number of population of the territory of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan was 2,532,317. Departing from these numbers, it can be concluded that in 1989 the number of Azeris in the Republic of Azerbaijan had increased approximately six times, and the number of total population approximately three times. Even assimilation into other groups does not seem to be a reliable explanation for the rapid decline in the relative and absolute numbers of the Tats and a few other minorities in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The rate of increase of the population among the predominantly rural Tats should have been most likely higher than that of the more urbanized Turkic Azeris. This is true especially in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, when the Tat settlements were less under pressure from urbanization and attraction from most urban centers. Although Tats were predominantly rural and a large share of Azerbaijani were urban, still, assuming that the predominantly rural Tat population increased at the same pace as that of the Azeris, or assuming that the increase in the number of Tats was proportional to the increase in the total population, the number of Muslim Tats in the Republic of Azerbaijan should have been between 350,000 and 700,000 in 1989.

These calculations all show that the number of Tats in the Republic of Azerbaijan is underestimated, whatever assumptions are made or whichever methods of calculations are used.

On the number of Kurds

The 1989 census counted the number of Kurds in the Republic of Azerbaijan at 12,226. According to Yunusov (2006: 489), however, several expert estimates count their numbers between 50,000 and 60,000. To count the number of Kurds in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1989, the number of Kurds who arrived from Armenia after the Nagorno-Karabakh war should be deducted from the number of Kurds there in recent years. Approximately 18,000 arrived from Armenia after the Nagorno-Karabakh War (Yunusov 2006: 488-489). Therefore, the number of Kurds in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1989 should have been between 32,000 and 42,000. Another source also gives a similar number and estimates the number of Kurds during the Soviet period at 41,000 (or more, depending on the exact date) (Orujev 2005). Although the Kurdish nationalists give a substantially higher figure, as many as 200,000 (De Waal 2003: 133), the numbers provided by Yunusov may be more reliable. According to Yunusov, a large number of Kurds were already assimilated into Azeris by the late 20th century (Yunusov 2006: 488-489). Regarding the fact that the Kurds in the Republic of Azerbaijan were predominantly Shi’ite
Muslims (Ethnohistorical 1994: 409; Red Book 1991: Kurds, their assimilation into Shi’ite Azeris is very probable. As The Red Book of the Peoples of The Russian Empire (Red Book 1991: Kurds) puts it: “Kurdish identity is most endangered in Azerbaijan. In recent decades the Azerbaijani authorities have been attempting to assimilate all ethnic minorities. In the absence of religious differences they have succeeded. The Kurdish language is not officially used and during censuses the Kurds have been recorded as Azerbaijani”. A fair and rather reliable estimate of the number of Kurdish population in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1989 would be 40,000–45,000.

The censuses from 1999 and 2009 report the number of Kurds in the Republic of Azerbaijan as 13,100 and 6,100 respectively. As can be seen, the number of Kurds has been decreasing in the Republic of Azerbaijan, especially when one counts the influx of Kurds from Armenia into Azerbaijan. As most Kurds living in the independent Republic of Azerbaijan come from Armenia and the Armenian-occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, they may associate with Azerbaijani nationalism and, therefore, may identify themselves as Azeris. However, as the decline in the Kurdish number is sharper in the last census than in the aftermath of the Karabakh conflict, such a reasoning seems weak. The number of Kurds may still be deliberately under-represented, but the Kurds may also have migrated to other countries.

On the number of Georgians
According to the last Soviet census (1989), there were 14,197 Georgians in Azerbaijan. However, according to Yunusov (2006: 487), most probably this number does not include the Ingilo (or Ingiloy) Muslim Georgians. Apparently, in Azerbaijan most Muslim Ingilo Georgians were registered as Azeris, while Christian Georgians were registered as Georgians. There are estimates which put their number in 1989 as high as 10,000 persons (Yunusov 2006: 487). According to Antoine Constant (2002: 35), in addition to the Orthodox Christian Georgians, there were 15,000 Shi’ite Ingiloys in the northwestern part of the Republic of Azerbaijan (the Qakh area) in (or prior to) 2002. Yunusov (2006: 487) himself counts the number of rural Ingilo Georgians as 12,500 persons in 1999. This number could have been slightly lower in 1989. It is appropriate to take a more conservative attitude and take the 10,000 figure for 1989 and add that to the 14,197 who were officially registered as Georgians. Hence, the number of Georgians in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1989 can be estimated at slightly above 24,000.

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According to the more recent censuses, the numbers of Georgians in the Republic of Azerbaijan were 14,900 in 1999 and 9,900 in 2009. Assuming that Yunusov’s statement is right that the number of Georgians (14,197) in the last Soviet Census referred only to the Christian Georgians, and assuming that such a strategy is maintained in the censuses after the Republic of Azerbaijan’s independence, their slightly higher number in 1999 seems to be reliable. Also the decline in the number of Georgians in the 2009 census may be explained by their probable migration to Georgia—a country which has economically improved after the Rose Revolution. These explanations are plausible only if the Muslim Georgians are not considered in these numbers. It is very probable that Muslim Georgians still get registered as Azeris in the censuses, or because they may actively identify themselves as such hoping to get a better social and economic position by identifying with the titulars.