

Demology

Migration and New Diasporas: Comparative Methodological Approach (on the Example of Armenia and Georgia)

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Abstract. This article presents the methodological framework for a comparative study of the ethno-social consequences of migration processes in Armenia and Georgia from the late 20th to early 21st centuries. Given the continued Eurocentrism in migration and diaspora studies, it broadens the field by focusing on non-Western, post-Soviet contexts and by applying concepts beyond the Western-centric paradigm. The study conceptualizes the “new diaspora” as a dynamic, adaptive structure shaped by global migration. An interdisciplinary approach – combining sociology, ethnography, demography, political science, and cultural studies – enables an analysis that spans from macro-level migration flows to micro-level community self-organization. It prioritizes identifying indicators for measuring integration, identity preservation, and social cohesion, including self-identification, language practices, participation in cultural and civic life, transnational communication, and institutional engagement in host societies. The analysis considers socio-demographic and ethnocultural transformations in both sending and receiving societies, examining how migration reshapes community structures, identities, and the transmission of culture. Situating Armenia and Georgia within global migration processes provides insights into how post-Soviet transitions intersect with broader trends in mobility, adaptation, and transnational connectivity. © 2025 Bull. Natl. Acad. Sci. Georg.

Keywords: migration, ethnosocial approach, new diaspora, Georgia, Armenia

Introduction

The paper was developed as part of the joint Armenian-Georgian project *Migration and New Diasporas: A Comparative Methodological Approach (on the Example of Armenia and Georgia)*, which marks the first collaborative effort to undertake a comparative analysis of Georgian and Armenian

diasporas focusing on the impact of migration processes during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This project pays particular attention to post-Soviet outmigration and its consequences, including transformation of the socio-demographic structure and ethno-cultural composition of populations in sending (Armenia and Georgia) and receiving countries. Drawing on sociological and ethno-

graphic methodologies, it investigates mechanisms of new diaspora formation, the role of social networks, patterns of adaptation and integration, and the dynamics of intra-community and interethnic relations.

Although Georgia and Armenia share a common post-Soviet legacy – characterized by mass emigration during the 1990s and continued demographic decline and brain drain – the development of migration and diaspora studies in each country takes divergent paths. In Armenia, research was shaped by institutionalized frameworks, systematic data collection, and policy engagement, fostering sustained academic and political attention to diaspora issues. Georgia's scholarship and institutional support in this field remain relatively limited.

In recent decades, population migration has become one of the most influential drivers of social transformation within ethnic communities. In receiving countries, migration processes are accompanied by interethnic interaction, while in countries of origin, they result in the deformation of the socio-demographic structure and the ethnocultural composition of the population. The analysis of these processes – opposite in direction and content, yet unified by an ethnocultural dimension – remains complex and methodologically challenging. Their multifaceted nature and the diversity of conditions, under which they unfold, necessitate empirical research grounded in a rigorous methodological framework.

A productive starting point is the examination of such processes within a specific, well-defined case. Particularly promising is the study of migration through the lens of a relatively homogeneous ethnic group, which enables the collection of comparable data across key variables with minimal interference from ethnocultural heterogeneity. In this context, comparing processes across multiple ethnic groups further enhances the potential for generalization. Comparative analysis is especially effective when applied to ethnic groups with similar cultural and historical backgrounds, as it

allows for deeper insight into both specific and common patterns of transformation.

In this context, the development of a methodology for the comparative study of similar migration processes in Armenia and Georgia acquires particular significance. As in many other countries, the outmigration from Georgia and Armenia led, on the one hand, to the disruption of their socio-demographic structures and the emergence of new ethno-social stratification. On the other hand, it contributed to the formation of new Armenian and Georgian diasporas beyond their ethnic homelands. These transformations are unfolding in countries with similar living conditions, and the nature of post-Soviet transitions in both contexts is likely to share similar features.

Consequently, along with the possible uniformity of the processes occurring in two closely related nations, the variability of their manifestations due to ethnocultural differences is likely to be observed. The latter, in turn, form new specifics of community configuration, influencing ethnic identity, self-organization, and homeland-diaspora relations. Based on the above, it appears that studying these processes through the example of two nations, closely related in historical, ethnocultural, and ethnosocial characteristics, is particularly relevant and methodologically sound.

Theoretical basis and methodological approach.

It is worth noting that the methodological approaches employed in the study fall within the fields of comparative, ethnosocial, demographic, and economic research. The authors proceed from the scholarly conviction that a systematic understanding of the relationship between migration and diaspora formation requires the integration of comparative, ethnosocial, and interdisciplinary approaches. These approaches emphasize not only the quantitative analysis of migratory dynamics, but also the examination of social and cultural transformations occurring in both the places of origin and the settlement of migrants.

In this context, existing theoretical perspectives on the nature of migration processes and their interrelation with social, demographic, ethnic, and cultural dynamics are of particular relevance. It is therefore essential to formulate guiding principles that unify diverse scholarly approaches within a coherent conceptual and analytical framework. Grounded in contemporary migration studies, ethno-sociology, and cultural studies, such a framework provides the analytical tools necessary to identify key variables and derive interpretations from empirical data.

In academic literature, migration is frequently examined primarily through economic and demographic lenses. However, analyzing shifts in social networks, cultural identity, and the everyday life of migrant communities necessitates a revised terminological framework. Such a framework allows for the integration of diverse methodological approaches aimed at establishing causal relationships between the consequences of migration, processes of group self-organization, and the modes of integration of diaspora formations.

In this regard, it is particularly important to highlight the contributions of Anthony Giddens, Monica Boyd, William Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, Robert Putnam, Steven Vertovec, and other theorists and scholars of migration and diaspora studies. In developing their theoretical models, these scholars conceptualize migration as a multilayered social process. Their collective perspective emphasizes that migration entails not merely the physical relocation of populations, but also profound transformations in territorial organization, social networks, cultural patterns, institutional structures, and the formation and redefinition of both individual and collective identities.

In the works of Anthony Giddens, migration is conceptualized as an integral component of modern societies, wherein spatial mobility is closely linked to shifts in temporal perception. Giddens emphasizes the interplay between individual agency and structural forces in the formation of society. His

theory of structuration offers a valuable framework for understanding how individuals both constitute and are constituted by social structures – an especially pertinent insight when analyzing how migrants navigate and reshape new environments. This dual perspective enables the consideration of both macro-level systemic factors and micro-level decision-making processes in migration. Giddens views migration not merely as a response to globalization, but as its constituent element. Globalization, as a dynamic and multifaceted process, generates both opportunities and constraints for migrants. His structuration theory highlights the role of social agents – migrants included – not only as subjects of structural adaptation, but also as active participants in transforming those very structures. This theoretical lens is particularly useful in analyzing processes of migrant self-organization in new sociocultural settings. Migrants are seen as forming their own institutional and communal structures, leveraging technology and transnational networks as resources, and contributing to the reconfiguration of host societies by influencing cultural norms, labor markets, and patterns of political participation (Giddens, 1984).

While Giddens' structuration theory provides a framework for understanding the reciprocal relationship between individuals and social structures in the context of migration, Monica Boyd's social network theory offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing the central role of interpersonal ties among migrants. M. Boyd, developed a theory of social networks in the context of migration dynamics, emphasizing that the relational networks of migrants not only ensure the reproduction of migration, but also facilitate the formation and evolution of new social ties. According to her, migration is not merely an individual decision or movement driven by economic factors, but a social process that is controlled, regulated, and shaped by social networks. In this theory, the network is seen not only as an intermediary tool, but also as the basic unit for analyzing migration processes. New

migrants often rely on the existing diaspora or kinship ties, which in turn help address their problems and provide a minimum threshold for integration (Boyd, 1989).

Like Boyd, Vertovec emphasizes the centrality of social ties in shaping migratory experiences; while Boyd focuses on migrant networks as facilitators of mobility and settlement, Vertovec extends this perspective by conceptualizing diaspora as a transnational social form sustained through enduring interpersonal, cultural, and political connections across borders. Vertovec explores how diasporas sustain themselves through memory, cultural reproduction, and transnational practices. He shows how diaspora communities create hybrid identities and influence homeland politics (Vertovec, 1997).

Thomas and Znaniecki, in their classic work, examine how migration reshapes individual biographies and social structures. They emphasize that migrants navigate between two cultural systems – the old and the new, highlighting the challenges of bicultural belonging and cultural discontinuity faced in new societies. They analyze migration as a biographical and cultural rupture marked by the emergence of a dual identity. On the one hand, the migrant retains elements of their culture of origin; on the other, they are compelled to adopt the norms, language, and cultural practices of the host society. This often results in a contradictory or negotiated identity //contractual identity. The notion of dual cultural belonging implies that a migrant's identity takes shape at the intersection of cultures. The migrant simultaneously belongs to two or more cultural systems, is never entirely "at home" in any one of them, and exists in a state of ongoing cultural transition. It is in this context that the concept of adaptation conflict emerges, referring to the migrant's simultaneous efforts to adjust to a foreign environment while also resisting the erosion of their original cultural identity (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918-1920).

Against the background of this duality of experience and culture, Putnam's theory of social capital offers practical criteria for assessing the level of integration of migrants, paying attention to their participation in social and institutional networks, as well as the formation of mutual trust and cooperation in the new environment. His theory emphasizes the centrality of social capital to the effective functioning of society. In the context of migration, the formation – or lack – of new forms of social capital plays a critical role in shaping the processes of migrant integration, cohesion, and long-term stability. According to Robert Putnam's theory of social capital, trust, norms of reciprocity, and civic participation in social networks constitute the foundational elements of societal stability. In the context of migration, this theoretical framework enables the analysis of migrant integration across multiple levels of social engagement, including participation in state and local institutions, involvement in voluntary and non-governmental organizations, and the development of horizontal ties (between migrants and host society members) as well as vertical ties (between migrants and governmental structures (Putnam, 2000; Portes, 1998).

A methodological innovation introduced by Mazzucato – the Simultaneous Matched Sample (SMS) Methodology, is designed to empirically capture transnationalism by studying both ends of the migration corridor at the same time – i.e., migrants in the host country and their families or contacts in the country of origin. It implies data collection simultaneously in both origin and destination countries to avoid time-lag biases (e.g., differing economic or political contexts that affect responses) (Marrucato, 2010).

It is important to note that the authors conceptualize migration not solely as a socio-economic or demographic phenomenon, but as a dynamic process of ethno-social and cultural transformation. From this perspective, diaspora formation is understood not as a discrete stage following migration, but as an ongoing social process through which

individuals and groups continuously renegotiate their social roles, ethnic identities, cultural practices, and social ties with both their new and original environments.

In comparative studies of migration processes, this approach is particularly important, as it allows for the identification of both general patterns of identity transformation and the specificities shaped by ethnocultural, religious, or historical factors. For example, it enables a comparison of the symbolic forms of identity reproduction among Armenian and Georgian diasporas within the same host society, such as in France (Bakhsoliani, 2023; Karapetyan et al. Ed., 2023).

Despite similar living conditions, these communities exhibit varying institutional capacities and distinct strategies for preserving their identities. The Armenian diaspora, for example, often maintains stable institutions such as Armenian Apostolic churches, cultural centres, and weekend schools, which function as "symbolic anchors" of identity. These institutions provide not only platforms for the public expression of culture, but also structured environments for the intergenerational transmission of values and norms. In contrast, the Georgian diaspora tends to develop a more institutionally fragile framework, relying predominantly on informal networks, temporary associations, and spontaneous cultural initiatives. For instance, gatherings or events organized by Georgian compatriots often occur sporadically and lack a stable institutional foundation. In such contexts, the transmission of identity relies predominantly on familial and intergenerational ties rather than on formal mechanisms. Modern technological advancements and communication tools, now accessible to all age groups, enable migrants to maintain close ties with their home societies, often allowing them to participate virtually in traditional family and community rituals. In contexts where formal diaspora institutions are scarce or underdeveloped, such transnational social networks often serve as the primary mecha-

nism for sustaining cultural continuity and collective identity.

Additionally, differences emerge in the degree of socio-political engagement within host societies: Armenian diaspora organizations are more frequently involved in structured interactions with state institutions – participating, for example, in diaspora councils or political initiatives – whereas Georgian communities more often function within the scope of localized, grassroots efforts. However, gradual activation is observed in several Georgian diasporas (e.g. Greece, Germany) in this respect. These disparities are shaped not only by the cultural characteristics of each group, but also by the historical depth of diaspora formation, availability of resources, and prior experience with institutional self-organization. A comparative analysis of these dynamics enables a clearer understanding of which identity reproduction strategies prove more sustainable and effective in the migratory context, and underscores the influence of both cultural and institutional environments on processes of integration and ethnic self-preservation.

Therefore, the foregoing review allows us to dovetail the approaches of these scholars, which do not contradict but rather complement our ideas, thereby enriching our understanding of the key directions for the development of the issues under consideration.

Prospects for a comparative study. Thus, the diaspora is not conceptualized as a stable or static entity, but rather as a mobile and adaptive structure shaped primarily by global migration processes. This theoretical framework provides the methodological foundations for conducting comparative analyses, particularly in the context of examining migration dynamics across different national settings, as in the cases of Armenia and Georgia. Of particular theoretical relevance is the question of the extent to which an interdisciplinary synthesis of diaspora and migration studies is feasible, especially through the integration of approaches from

sociology, ethnography, political science, and cultural studies.

The comparative study of the migration practices and consequences of the two neighboring, historically interconnected states (Armenia and Georgia) is motivated by several factors. Both countries share a post-Soviet legacy and underwent similar transitional processes. Both face significant challenges related to out-migration and possess multilayered diasporas formed across various historical periods. Within this context, it becomes possible to identify and analyze both differences and common patterns at local, regional, and global levels. Crucially, this comparison treats migration not merely as a demographic or economic phenomenon, but as an ethno-social process encompassing issues of identity, community reorganization, and intra-societal dynamics. The following research challenges are central:

- How does the movement and settlement of migrants transform diasporas and their different structures?
- What relationships are formed between "old" and "new" diaspora groups, especially under the influence of different waves of migration?
- How do ethnic networks form and function as important tools of information, mutual aid, and adaptation for migrants?

This approach enables us to move beyond the limitations of simple demographic indicators and macroeconomic estimates, allowing migration to be studied as a complex process of cultural and social transformation. The study employs methodologies from ethnography, sociology, demography, and cultural studies, whose integration will serve as its foundational framework. It encompasses the analysis of both macro-level indicators, such as migration flow directions, and micro-level data, including forms of community self-organization.

At the initial theoretical stage of the study, priority was given to defining the research subject, selecting analytical units, and developing the methodological framework. Several fundamental

issues were identified that necessitate in-depth examination and methodological clarification. These issues are significant not only within the context of this study, but also from a broader perspective on advancing research in this field.

First and foremost, this concerns the definition of the concept of the 'new diaspora,' which differs markedly from traditional diasporic communities. The term 'new diaspora' necessitates a clear distinction from historically established diasporas. While traditional diasporas are characterized by generational continuity, cultural heritage, and relationships with the homeland state, new diasporas are often economically or labor-motivated, temporary or cyclical in nature, arise from political upheavals, and exhibit networked self-organization without established social institutions. Moreover, they tend to maintain comparatively weaker cultural ties to their countries of origin.

Secondly, it is essential to identify suitable indicators for measuring integration, identity preservation, and the strength of social ties, given challenges related to subjective measurability and methodological diversity. Potential indicators include self-identification and the degree of cultural affiliation; language practices, such as the frequency of mother tongue use; participation in community activities encompassing cultural, religious, and educational domains; the intensity of social ties with the homeland and other diasporic communities, which can be assessed through technological communication data; as well as institutional involvement within the host society, including employment, education, and civic engagement.

The combination of these indicators should enable the creation of a synthesized picture of both the degree of integration and the logic of maintaining ethnic identity.

Thirdly, it is necessary to employ both quantitative and qualitative methods concurrently, avoiding methodological constraints on either approach. This recognizes that migration and diaspora

studies inherently require methodological pluralism, combining statistical analysis with historical and ethnographic inquiry. Quantitative methods are instrumental in identifying socio-demographic trends such as emigration flows, gender and age composition, and professional dynamics. Conversely, qualitative methods provide insight into value systems, functions of collective memory, and mechanisms of identity construction.

Fourth, the significance of the historical legacy of post-Soviet social ties in shaping new diaspora structures. The new migration diasporas of Georgia and Armenia emerged within a historical and political context shaped by “memory ties” of the past, including the Soviet institutional legacy, the shared language environment (with Russian serving as a *lingua franca*), and a relatively recent common administrative history. This legacy manifests primarily through the continued reproduction of shared educational, military, and cultural experiences from the Soviet era within the contemporary migration milieu, as well as through the “inertia” of social networks. Consequently, Armenians and Georgians in diaspora communities engage not only along ethnic lines, but also through a post-Soviet affiliation. This dynamic should be understood not merely as a memorial connection to the past, but also as a valuable resource that expands opportunities for community integration and interethnic cooperation. In this regard, discerning the commonalities and particularities influencing the migration and diaspora processes among these two ethnic groups is of critical importance.

These questions necessitate not only theoretical justification, but also inform the formulation of practical measures, including the design of research

instruments and the organization of fieldwork. Moreover, they create opportunities to model the collected data beyond mere description, enabling analytical interpretation and the development of prognostic insights.

Conclusion

Analyzing the challenges of migration and the formation of new diasporas requires an interdisciplinary approach that draws on demographic, sociological, and ethnographic methods. The examination of comparable experiences in Armenia and Georgia can provide a foundation for developing standardized regional policies and foster collaborative research initiatives at the European level. The theoretical and methodological groundwork presented in the article aims to establish a scientifically rigorous interdisciplinary framework for the comparative analysis of migration processes in Armenia and Georgia, with a focus on the ethno-social dynamics of emerging diaspora formations. This article constitutes the pre-field stage of the research, with the primary objectives of defining key concepts – such as “new diaspora,” “ethno-social network,” and “consequences of migration” – and formulating comparable and adaptable methodological guidelines applicable across diverse regional contexts.

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სტატიაში წარმოდგენილია სომხეთსა და საქართველოში მე-20 საუკუნის ბოლოსა და 21-ე საუკუნის დასაწყისში მიმდინარე მიგრაციის ეთნო-სოციალური შედეგების შედარებითი კვლევის მეთოდოლოგიური ჩარჩო. მიგრაციისა და დიასპორის კვლევებში ევროცენტრიზმის უპირატესობის პირობებში, ნაშრომი არადსავლურ, პოსტსაბჭოთა კონტექსტებზე ამახვილებს ყურადღებას, რითაც აფართოებს მიგრაციული კვლევების გეოგრაფიულ და კონცეპტუალურ არეალს. სტატიაში განხილულია „ახალი დიასპორის“ ცნება, როგორც გლობალური მიგრაციის შედეგად ჩამოყალიბებული დინამიური, ადაპტაციური სტრუქტურა. მიგრაციული ნაკადების მაკრო და მიკრო დონეებზე გაანალიზების საშუალებას იძლევა ინტერდისციპლინური მიდგომა, რომელიც გულისხმობს სოციოლოგიის, ეთნოგრაფიის, დემოგრაფიის, პოლიტიკური მეცნიერებისა და კულტურული კვლევების ერთობლიობას; კვლევაში უპირატესობა ენიჭება ინტეგრაციის, იდენტობის შენარჩუნებისა და სოციალური ერთიანობის შეფასების ინდიკატორების, მათ შორის, თვითიდენტიფიკაციის, ენობრივი პრაქტიკის, კულტურულ და სამოქალაქო ცხოვრებაში მონაწილეობის, ტრანსნაციონალური კომუნიკაციისა და მასპინძელ საზოგადოებებში ინსტიტუციური ჩართულობის დადგენას. ნაშრომში ხაზგასმით არის აღნიშნული სოციალურ-დემოგრაფიული და ეთნოკულტურული ტრანსფორმაციების როლი, როგორც გამგზავნ, ასევე მიმღებ საზოგადოებებში და მიგრაციის გავლენები საზოგადოების სტრუქტურაზე, იდენტობასა და კულტურულ ტრანსფორმაციაზე. გლობალურ მიგრაციულ კონტექსტში განხილულია სომხეთსა და საქართველოში მიმდინარე მიგრაციული პროცესები, სადაც იკვეთება პოსტსაბჭოთა ცვლილებები მობილობის, ადაპტაციისა და ტრანსნაციონალური კავშირების უფრო ფართო ტენდენციებთან.

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