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

It was a summer evening. It was the last day of the summer. Arriving from Esfahan, my uncle picked us up at the bus terminal in Tehran. The sky was reddish. It was the last day of my serene childhood. It was war, the “War” from now on. Saddam had attacked Iran. It changed my childhood from a time of childhood—yes, just normal “childhood”—to a time of suffering, which accompanied me into my youth. Now, I know that I was not the only child who has been denied just normal “childhood”. I had always thought that war was something which belonged to the movies or legends. The reality soon taught me that I was wrong.

Shortly after my arrival in the Netherlands the War stopped. But it took more than one more year for the Western World to begin admitting that Saddam was “bad”. I was angry and I remain angry: why did they not admit that Saddam was “bad”—and not just bad, but cruel, bloodthirsty, and evil—when he killed so many Iranians and Iraqi Kurds by “conventional” and chemical weapons.

The War had ended, but the horrors of that war were still fresh in my memory. I still remember the day when the torn bodies of our schoolmates arrived at our school yard and made our tough Nazem—the school manager of punishments—hit his head and shed tears.

But the War had hardly stopped when new wars emerged—and still emerge all round the world, unfortunately. The ethnic conflicts in the Soviet Union broke out one after another. It was a time of euphoria in the West. The former communist regimes fell one after another. Despite the salience of an aggressive ethno-nationalism in the former communist countries, many believed that it was the beginning of better times. The nationalism? Oh, yes, the Nationalism; that was just an expression of new freedom, because the ethnic and national feelings were suppressed for “so many years”. Really?

Many years later it became visible that the better times were still not there. It was a time of extreme poverty and bloodshed. Thanks to my background, I have always been interested in the Caucasus. Why were they fighting? Despite many pseudo-intellectuals, I know very well that it was not natural for people in the Caucasus to kill each other. It was a time when I began seriously to study the Caucasus and Central Asia and the post-communist world in general.

The Caucasus and Central Asia were also the regions about which I wrote two Masters’ theses and one PhD thesis. This current book is a result of my PhD research. That research was made possible only by the grant I received from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific
Research (NWO). It was a competitive grant and was not easy to get. But fortunately I was successful and this motivated me all the more.

Therefore, I want to thank my supervisors, Professor Dr. Hans Knippenberg and Dr. Dijkink. Without their comments, corrections, suggestions—at times demanding but always benign—and guidance, I could not have managed to write this book. Writing this book has been a pleasurable task, which has consumed so many hours of my life in different parts of the world, such as the Netherlands, USA (Minnesota), Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Iran—even in the most unusual places, such as in airports, trains, and taxis.

I am grateful to Ruadhan Hayes for correcting and editing my English text; his efforts have enormously improved the readability of this book.

I also want to thank other colleagues from my institute—formerly called AMIDSt and now AISSR—at the University of Amsterdam. Many colleagues, both seniors and juniors, both scientific and non-scientific, were kind to me and have supported me in many ways. To name only a few, I would like to thank Virginie Mamadouh, Jan Mansvelt-Beck, Jan Markusse, James Sidaway, Herman Van der Wusten, Hebe Verrest, Benson Mulemi, Guida Morais e Castro Ermida, Puikang Chan, Gert Van der Meer, Joos Droogleever Fortuyn, Sjoerd de Vos and many others.

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Babak Rezvani
2012