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

Citation for published version (APA):
Rezvani, B. (2013). Ethno-territorial conflict and coexistence in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Fereydan
Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter Six
Ethno-Territorial Conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Eight out of the 129 ethno-territorial encounters are, or were until recently, afflicted by ethno-territorial conflict. All these encounters are located in the (post-)Soviet space: the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in Georgia; the North Ossetian-Ingush conflict over Prigorodny and the Chechen conflicts in Russia; the Armenian-Azeri conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan; the Osh conflict between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan; and finally the Tajikistani Civil War, with the participation of Uzbeks and Pamiris in alliance with and against Tajiks. There were no ethno-territorial conflicts in Fereydan.

The aim of this chapter is to provide an analytical description of these cases of conflict. As the recent political, and more so territorial, histories of these regions prior to the conflicts are important, these histories are also discussed. Although attention is paid to the histories of these ethno-territorial conflicts, chronological discussions of these conflicts are not within the scope of this chapter.129 There will be a focus on the explaining conditions that were introduced in the previous chapters. However, the analytic descriptions are not restricted to these. The case study character allows for more in-depth analysis and provides opportunities to explore and discuss nuances and additional explanations.

---

129 One can consult many sources in order to read more in depth about the histories of these conflicts and the regions in which they have occurred. History, for obvious reasons, has taken an important place in the understanding and explanation of the ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus in many authors’ works (e.g. Cornell 2001; Cornell 2011; Cheterian 2008; Hille 2010; King 2008a; De Waal 2010; Zürcher 2007). In addition, those who discuss the conflicts and political situations by focusing on the course of the current conflicts, whether in a chronological order focusing on the present or reporting from the field, do not fail to refer (occasionally) to past events and history (see e.g. Goltz 1999; Goltz 2003; Goltz 2009a; O’Ballance 1997; De Waal 2003). Even though Central Asia is not as much afflicted by ethno-territorial conflicts as the Caucasus is, many studies do discuss history and historical factors in the explanation and understanding of (post-)Soviet-era politics, which also include conflicts there (see e.g. Atabaki & O’Kane [eds] 1998; Bergne 2007; Jonson 2006; Khalid 2007).
Political-Territorial History of the South Caucasus

The South Caucasus has been an arena of power struggle between the great powers for a long time. The Iranian, Ottoman, and later Russian empires have competed for dominance in this region, and periods of direct imperial rule, suzerainty, and local rule have followed each other in a disorderly manner.

Russia conquered the South Caucasus in the first half of the 19th century, and its conquest and sovereignty in the South Caucasus was confirmed by two treaties with the Qajar Iran, which had lost a rather large part of its territory to Tsarist Russia (Bournoutian 1998: 59-67; Cornell 2001: 37; Hunter 1997: 437-438; Hunter 2006: 112). These two treaties, the Golestan (Gulistan) (1813) and Torkamanchay (Turkmanchay) (1828), were a beginning point for the new political realities in the region, and as they were very humiliating are referred to in Iran as Nangin or Shum, two Persian words with very negative connotations (see e.g. Hunter 1997: 437-438; Takmil Homayun 2001: 29-39). These two treaties were manifestation of a new geopolitical and ethno-political order. They marked the beginning of colonization of the South Caucasus by Russia and changed the demography and ethno-political power relations in the region. While Shi’ite Muslims were the favorites in the Iranian times, Orthodox Christians became the favorites of the Russians. Although after the Russian conquest the number of Armenians in the South Caucasus increased, the ethnic map of the region until the early 20th century was still very different from what it was at the end of the 20th century—and from what is now. In the 19th century, Armenians lived mainly in the urban centers all around the Caucasus, in Georgia, and in the territories of the modern-day republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The predominantly rural Azerbaijanis, who at that time were called Tatars, Muslims, Shi’ite Turks, or even Persians by different people(s) and sources (see. e.g. Bronevskiy: 2004 [19th century]; Tsutstiev 2006), lived scattered throughout the southern part of Transcaucasia.132


131 Treaty of Torkamanchay. (Russian) (other spellings are also possible). Available online at the Moscow State University M.V. Lomonosov, Faculty of History website: http://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/FOREIGN/turkman.htm (Accessed 12 May 2011).

132 The Turkic-speaking, predominantly Shi’ite Muslim people in Transcaucasia, who are now called Azeri or Azerbaijani, were before called Tatar, Turk, Muslim (Musalman), or Persian by different
The territory of modern-day Armenia was inhabited predominantly by Muslims, but changed rather rapidly in favor of Christian Armenians. From the mid-20th century until the end of 1989, however, there evolved a nearly ethnically homogeneous Armenia, in which Armenians constituted more than 93% of the population, in addition to Azerbaijan and Georgia, in which the titular groups constituted, respectively, more than 82% and 70% of their total populations, according to the last Soviet census (1989).

The Russian conquest of the Caucasus was an important event and needs more discussion, because it clearly shows the allegiances based on religions, but also qualifies this simple black-and-white picture. First, although Orthodox Christians were subordinated to Shi’ite Muslims, they were still tolerated and could get along rather well with their Shi’ite (and Sunni) neighbors, who shared similar culture. Russia was a foreign power and sought its own interests, which in some cases coincided with those of Christians and in other cases did not. As will be seen below, a significant part of the Christian Georgian population, both the nobility and peasants, were not quite happy with the Russian supremacy in their native lands.

At the end of the 18th century, Iran was weak, while a strong vital Orthodox Christian Russia was approaching Transcaucasia. The Georgian king, Erekle (Irakli) II of Kartli-Kakheti (Eastern Georgia), whose authority was also recognized by the west Georgian dynasts (Gachechiladze 1995: 26), signed a treaty by virtue of which his kingdom was to become a protectorate of Russia. His exact motive can be speculated about. In the context of a chaotic political succession in Iran and the devastating consequences of political rivalries in Iran, protection from an emerging Orthodox Christian and powerful Russia was a sensible choice. That does not necessarily mean, however, that Erekle II was anti-Iranian or anti-Muslim. Despite religious differences, the Georgian culture had a strong Iranian flavor (see Soudavar Farmanfarmaian 2009). He himself had served as an Iranian general in Nader Shah’s conquest of India. Georgian rulers had many Muslim subjects and were generally tolerant and kind to them (Muliani 2000: 193 and 240).

Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar,133 the Iranian king of the time, who was establishing his sovereignty over all the Iranian territories, had waged wars in many regions with success. In his Caucasian campaign, he

---

133 Many Iranian military commanders and administrators were (Islamized) Georgians, and many members of Iranian royal families, notably of the Safavid dynasty and nobility, had Georgian blood. It is reputed that Agha Mohammad Khan from the Qajar tribe, who were related to the Safavids, had partially Georgian roots (see Muliani 2000: 193 and 206-294).
sacked Tbilisi (1795), reputedly at the instigation of Javad Khan Ziadoghlu Qajar, a prominent Turkic-speaking Shi’ite political figure and the powerful khan of the Ganja Khanate, who wanted to avenge earlier Georgian actions. Agha Muhammad Khan saw Georgia and, in general, the South Caucasus as part of his Iranian dominions. Whether his sack of Tbilisi was at Javad Khan’s instigation or because of religiously based rivalry is debatable. Agha Mohammad Khan, a eunuch who did not enjoy much popular respect, is known to have been a cruel ruler. His infamous massacre of Kerman, a Shi’ite Persian-speaking city in Iran, was similar to or worse than that of Tbilisi. Tbilisi had a mixed cultural composition. Next to Christian churches there was always a Shi’ite mosque alongside a Sunni one (which was destroyed by Agha Mohammad Khan) (see e.g. Sanikidze 2008: 164-168). Although Agha Mohammad Khan did not particularly do his best to spare Tbilisi’s Shi’ite Muslims either, Christians suffered enormously during his attack.

Javad Khan, the main Shi’ite Muslim political figure at the frontline of the Russian-Iranian front was a member of the Qajar tribe, as were the Iranian ruling dynasty. He sided with Iran and resisted the Russian rapprochement. After Agha Mohammad Khan’s death in Karabakh (1797), Javad Khan in his letter (1803) to Pavel Tsitsianov, the Imperial Russian commander and head of the Russian troops in Georgia, wrote that he still regarded himself as loyal to Iran (Figure 6.1). Although he admitted in his letter that in a context of Iranian weakness, he was obliged to be subordinate to Russia, as his letter indicates, he believed in an Iranian victory and hoped to safeguard his and his constituency’s position and declared war on Russia. He probably realized that with the erosion of Iranian sovereignty and the ascendancy of Russia, the position of Christians would be enhanced at the cost of that of Shi’ite Muslims. After the Russian conquest of the South Caucasus, the social position of Shi’ite Muslims and Christians, notably Armenians, reversed. Javad Khan’s hopes for an Iranian victory proved futile as he was killed one year later (1804) when Russians attacked and conquered the Ganja Khanate. Generally speaking, unlike Armenians, the Turkic-speaking Shi’ite Muslims of the Caucasus, who were later officially named Azeris supposedly for geopolitical reasons (see Chapter 7), entered the Russian Empire reluctantly and with bad grace.

The attitude of Georgian nobility was diverse and evolved generally to anti-Russian. After Erekle II died, his relatively pro-Russian son, Giorgi XII, ruled briefly (1798–1800) and was to be followed by his son David (known as David the Regent) (1800–1801), when Russia, allegedly requested by Giorgi XII, officially annexed Georgia instead of installing his son as the new king, disrespecting the earlier agreements, and abolished the Georgian Orthodox Church’s autocephaly. Alexander
Batonishvili, a prince of the house of Bagrationi, was a throne pretender and was supported by Iran and some members of the Georgian nobility, whose efforts towards crowing him as the king of Georgia were to no avail (Bournoutian 1984; Bournoutian 1998: 75 note 38; Soudavar Farmanfarmaian 2009: 38; Suny 1994: 70-72). He was a companion of the Qajar prince Abbas Mirza, who was tasked with fighting against Russia and the re-conquest of the lost Iranian dominions in The Caucasus. The last plot to reinstall the Georgian monarchy, by the kingship of Prince Alexander, was nipped in the bud. In accordance with the Iranian tradition that the vali (that is, a governor with a high degree of autonomous capabilities) was also recognized by Iran as the king of Georgia, Alexander was regarded as the Georgian vali in absentia in his exile in Iran (Soudavar Farmanfarmaian 2009: 38). Nevertheless, Georgia was never again ruled by a Georgian king after Alexander died in exile in Iran.

Not only eastern Georgia, but also other Georgian lands and other areas in the Caucasus as far south as the Talysh and Nakhichevan areas were subordinated to Russia, whose sovereignty was confirmed by the two aforementioned treaties. “The Russian advance against Islam”, as Bernard Lewis (2002: 38) calls it, was already begun and was proceeding further.

The Russian domination altered the religious map of Transcaucasia. The Abkhazians, similar to their Circassian kinfolk, also went through a sad ordeal. In the 19th century Imperial Russia accused them of collaboration or sympathy with the Ottoman Empire, and compelled them to leave their lands and emigrate to the Ottoman empire. Accordingly, most Muslims left, but Christians stayed on (Gachechiladze 1995: 81). In the more southern parts of Transcaucasia, the Russian conquest also altered the religious demography. While Armenians of neighboring Iran and the Ottoman empire were encouraged to settle down in the newly conquered Russian territories, Muslims left. Today, family names such as Iravani, Nakhjavan, Qarabagi, Shirvani, Lankarani, etc. are in abundance in Iran. These family names can be translated, respectively, as from Yerevan, Nakhichevan, Karabakh, Shirvan, and Lenkoran, all cities and areas located in the modern-day republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Armenians, in general, regarded Russia “as their liberator from the Muslim overlordship” (Swietochowski 1985: 39). Armenian support contributed to the Russian military successes:

Armenians of Ganja, Karabakh and Zangezur [in the southern part of modern-day Armenia and the western part of the modern-day Republic of Azerbaijan] openly sided with the Russians during the first Russo-Persian war. They were instrumental in the speedy Russian successes. In the conquest of those khanates in 1805…. During the second Russo-Persian
war [which ended in a Russian victory], the Muslim population of Karabagh and the Caspian region welcomed the surprise Iranian attack, which had caught the Russian command off guard and would have annihilated the Russian administration and garrisons had not the Armenians and their armed volunteers protected the latter until the arrival of the Russian army. (Bournoutian 1998: 66)

Russia returned the Armenian favor generously. Although the Russian supremacy in Transcaucasia enhanced the position of Christians vis-à-vis Muslims, it was notably more beneficial for Armenians than any other (Christian) ethnic groups there. Russia put an end to the maltreatment of Armenian merchants and craftsmen by the Georgian nobility (Suny 1993: 37). After the Russian conquest, initially the Georgian nobility’s position vis-à-vis peasantry was enhanced, but later reform and the abolishment of serfdom gave more freedom to the peasants. While the Georgian nobility suffered under the Russian rule, even the peasants were not happy, because of the monetary obligations imposed upon them (Suny 1994: 112). Meanwhile, the Armenian merchants in eastern Georgia prospered. Georgians saw commerce as shameful and disdained Armenians who dominated the Transcaucasian urban economy (Suny 1993: 37-39). Although the Imperial Russian attitude toward the Armenian merchants and church was ambivalent and fluctuated, it was generally in favor of preferential treatment for Christians and notably Armenians (see Suny 1993: 34-41).

Armenians, a people with significant international connections, were influenced by European ideas about nationalism at the end of the 19th century. The idea of a national homeland, in the Transcaucasian lands where their ancestors lived, was certainly attractive to them.

Already in the 19th century the Armenians had better socio-economic positions than the local Muslims, despite the latter’s demographic predominance in the eastern part of the South Caucasus. A clear ethno-religious division of labor was visible in the oil industry in Baku. While Armenians profited from the oil industry, Muslims formed the bulk of the unskilled labor force (Ahanchi 2011: 7-9; Atabaki 2003: 417; O’Balance 1995: 29; Siwetochowski 1985: 39). As Atabaki (2003: 416-417) puts it:

We have useful data on the ethnic composition of the workforce in the Baku oilfield.... In the case of the Baku oilfield, Iranian workers constituted the majority of unskilled foreign workers in the region.... The labour market in the Baku oilfield was initially segmented by race, with oil companies hiring mainly Russians and Armenians for jobs requiring skill and literacy, and Muslim workers, Iranians, local Tatars [i.e. Azerbaijanis] and Dagestanis for lower-paid unskilled jobs.
As a result of these social and economic discrepancies, Armenians were detested by their neighbors in the South Caucasus. Inter-ethnic clashes between Armenians and Muslims in the South Caucasus, even before the First World War, Armenian Genocide, and the mass migration of Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire. (The people who were later called Azerbaijanis were called Transcaucasian Tatars or simply Muslims by Russians and various peoples and sources.) These clashes first erupted after the Russian revolution of 1905, when various parts of the Russian Empire were struck by widespread unrest. The so-called Armenian-Tatar violence may have had a socio-economic rationale, but it soon transformed into purely ethnic and ethno-religious clashes, in which material gain also played a prominent role. As events showed in Nakhichevan, the Armenians there were not as wealthy as the Muslim elite, but Muslim-organized gangs still took advantage of the chaos, and possibly also of the Armenian stereotype elsewhere in the Caucasus, to kill and rob Armenians. As Luigi Villari wrote in 1906:

In 1829 Russia, after her last war with Persia, received Nakhitchevan, together with Erivan, by the treaty of Turkoman Chai. The Armenians played the same role in this conquest as they had done in that of other parts of the Caucasus, and it was largely through their action that the local princes were dispossessed. But if the khans no longer actually rule they are still very wealthy…it was only in trade that they [i.e. Armenians] had the advantage over the Tartars…. After the Baku outbreak in February the agitation among the Tartars spread to Nakhitchevan, and grew more and more acute…. [The Local Muslims] were all more or less armed, but their weapons were not always of the latest patterns. They set about to make good the deficiency, and through the early spring consignment after consignment of arms were smuggled in, chiefly from Persia…. The Armenians were completely taken by surprise; few of them had firearms, and there was no time to concentrate or organize resistance against this ferocious onslaught…. Out of 195 Armenian shops in the bazar, 180 were completely plundered, twenty safes were broken open and their contents stolen…. It was clear that although the original cause of the outbreak was racial hatred, the desire for plunder played no small part in bringing it about…. Out of a total of fifty-two villages with an Armenian or mixed Armeno-Tartar population, the official reports mention forty-seven in which Armenians were killed and wounded or their houses plundered and burnt. (Villari 1906: 266-272)

The violence spread all around Transcaucasia. In total, between 3,100 and 10,000 persons, mostly Muslims, died in the South Caucasus as the results of the Armeno-Tatar violence. “Indeed, all the available data suggests that the Muslims, who were usually on the attack suffered greater losses than the Armenians, though not overwhelmingly so” (Swietochowski 1985: 41). The fact that Muslims suffered higher losses than Armenians did is
evidence of the better organization and military superiority of the Armenians (Swietochowski 1995: 39-40).

The inter-ethnic violence erupted again a decade later, during the aftermath of the First World War and the Russian civil war (1917–1923). It is not surprising that the inter-ethnic violence in the South Caucasus has always emerged when the central authorities in the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union were weak or absent. Such violence occurred in the period following the Russian revolution of 1905, in the period of the First World War and the Russian civil war, and in the era of glasnost, perestroika, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

On 22 April 1918 an independent Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was proclaimed with Tbilisi as its capital, which lasted until 26 May 1918. The short-lived state was proclaimed by the Transcaucasian legislature, called Seim, because the Georgian Mensheviks (a socialist-democratic party rival to Lenin’s Bolsheviks) and the Armenian Dashnaktsutiun (an Armenian nationalist and self-declared socialist party) did not regard Lenin’s Bolshevik regime as legitimate. Pressures from the Turkish military formed another reason to separate from Russia and declare independence. The Azerbaijani Musavat party (a political party with pan-Islamic and pro-Turkish flavor) “enthusiastically supported the decree of separation, but the Mensheviks and Dashnaks [i.e. the members of the Armenian Revolutionary Party, better known as Dashnakstutiun] took this step reluctantly” (Suny 1994: 191). Paradoxically, it was also because of Turkish military advances that the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic dissolved. Azerbaijanis, “who had long felt victims of the Christian overlords and bourgeoisie in Caucasia” (Suny 1994: 191), welcomed the Turkish military advances. When the Turkish military attacked the Armenian parts of the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic, Georgians knew that this republic was not viable. Seeking protection from Germany, they declared independence on 26 May 1918. Later, Azerbaijan and Armenia, the latter being in the middle of the battles of Sardar Abad (Armavir) and Qara Kilisa (Vanadzor), declared independence. The choice of the name Azerbaijan by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic raised suspicions in Iran that this new republic would serve as a device for Turkey to separate the northwestern region of Azerbaijan from Iran. Therefore, the authorities of the newly born state used the term “Caucasian Azerbaijan” in their documents circulating abroad (Swietochowski 1985: 129-130). Later, the name Azerbaijan was consciously retained by the Soviet leaders (and other policy makers) for obvious geopolitical and expansionist

134 Dashnaktsutiun, or better, the Armenian Revolutionary Federataion (ARF), claims to be a socialist party. It is indeed a member of the “Socialist International”, of which its bitter enemy, the Turkish Republican People’s Party, a nationalist and Kemalist Turkish party, is also a member.
reasons, notably hoping to gain, or in any case have more influence in, Iranian Azerbaijan (see Appendix 3).

The capitals of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the Democratic Republic of Armenia, and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic were, respectively, Tbilisi, Yerevan, and Ganja (Baku was in the hands of Bolsheviks and their supporters). Already before the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic was dissolved, Baku was conquered by the Bolsheviks headed by Stepan Shaumian (also spelt Shahumian), an Armenian. This episode, known as the “March Days”, re-discovered and popularized in Azerbaijani public opinion, forms an important element of the Azerbaijani anti-Armenian rhetoric of recent decades. In a well-calculated move, Dashnaks joined the Bolsheviks. The state of affairs turned tragic when the Armenian Dashnak allies of the Bolsheviks in Baku “took to looting, burning, and killing in the Muslim sections of the city” (Swietochowski 1985: 116). According to Shaumian, the casualties numbered 3,000 (Swietochowski 1985: 117). With the prospect of the Turkish military advances towards Baku, and the Bolsheviks being outvoted from the Soviet of Baku, the Armenian Dashnaks, along with the Social Revolutionary Party and the Mensheviks (the latter two being the Bolsheviks’ rivals), turned to the British forces in neighboring Iran and asked for their help. The British occupied Baku and supported a coalition of the aforementioned parties, called the Central Caspian Dictatorship. However, Baku soon fell, and the Turkish army, accompanied by Azerbaijani fighters, took their revenge on Armenians.

The three Transcaucasian republics went through their short years of independence in total chaos and rivalry. In addition to a war with the Ottoman Turks, Armenia engaged in wars with Azerbaijan over Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Karabakh, and with Georgia over the Akhalkalaki and Lori regions in the southern Georgia and northern Armenia.\(^{135}\) The battle over Karabakh was bloody, and both Muslims and Armenians committed atrocities. In the context of a defeated Ottoman Empire, Armenians took control over Karabakh. The British military, however, replacing that of the defeated Turks, chose a Muslim as the governor of Karabakh. The situation in Georgia was not very calm either. Initially, Abkhazia was given a degree of autonomy, but South Ossetia was not. The Georgian Menshevik party, which initially was tolerant towards Georgia’s minorities, grew too nationalistic in the eyes of many minorities:

\(^{135}\) Detailed political maps of this period can be found in *Atlas Etnopoliticheskoi Istorii Kavkaza (1774–2004)* by Artur Tsutsiev (2006), and on the website *Ethnic Conflicts, Border Disputes, Ideological Clashes, Terrorism* (http://www.conflicts.rem33.com), a project founded by Andrew (Andreas) Andersen in 2002 and developing until now (2011).
In this situation, the Armenians, Ossetians, Abkhazians and other minorities, who had organized their own national soviets in 1917-18 began to fear they would be locked into a position of permanent inferiority. Social and economic resentments among non-Georgians combined with a newly discovered national consciousness that local Bolsheviks exploited, led to a series of armed conflicts with the Georgian National Guard. The revolts in non-Georgian areas, which entered Soviet mythology as resistance to Menshevik oppression, have become part of today’s competing ethnic histories. (Jones 1997: 508)

Soon the three short-lived independent republics were conquered by the Bolsheviks. The first one was Azerbaijan (April 1920), followed by Armenia (November 1920) and Georgia (April 1921). In 1921 the Bolsheviks united the three republics as constituent parts of the Transcaucasian Federative Soviet Socialist Republics, which lasted until 1936 when the three republics separated and each became a national Soviet Socialist Republic. Nakhichevan ASSR and the Nagorno-Karabakh AO were assigned to the Azerbaijan SSR. Already in 1921 a treaty had been signed between the Bolsheviks and Turkey (Treaty of Kars) by virtue of which Adjara was transferred to the Soviet Union, and in exchange, Ardahan, Kars, and Ararat areas (which were claimed by Armenia) were transferred to Turkey. Adjara, Ardahan, and Kars belonged for a time to the Tsarist Russian Empire and its successors, the Democratic Republics of Georgia and Armenia, but were regained by Turkey in the aftermath of the First World War. The newly regained Adjara was assigned as an autonomous republic (Adjara ASSR) to the Georgian SSR. A new South Ossetian AO was created out of the Georgia proper’s territory. Abkhazia was also assigned to Georgia. From 1921 until 1936 it was officially an SSR associated with Georgia and was therefore, together with Georgia, part of the Transcaucasian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1936, however, Abkhazia became a regular ASSR inside the Georgian SSR.

The cases of Nagorno-Karabakh AO and the Nakhichevan ASSR in the Azerbaijan SSR and of South Ossetian AO and the Abkhazian ASSR in the Georgian SSR were the only cases in which double autonomies were created for the ethnic groups who were awarded autonomy elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The case of Nagorno-Karabakh is a remarkable one. While the majority of its inhabitants (almost three quarters) were Armenians, it was not awarded to Armenia, where the Armenians enjoyed titular status, but was awarded to Azerbaijan, and awarded a relatively lower degree of autonomy (AO). Nakhichevan, which was predominantly inhabited by Azeris, was given a higher autonomous status (ASSR).

The (Soviet or already de-Sovietized) republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia proclaimed independence in 1991 before the
The ethnic homogenization of the republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia continued during Soviet times and afterwards. Previously more heterogeneous, Azerbaijan in Soviet times became more Azerbaijani, and Armenia became almost ethnically homogeneously Armenian (see Figure 6.2). For example, Baku had become a predominantly Azeri city in the late 1980s, while that city had contained a diverse population of local Azeris, Armenians, Russians, diverse European groups, and in addition Iranians (mostly Iranian Azeris who had migrated there to work in the oil industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries) (see Atabaki 2003). Although Georgia did not become homogeneously Georgian, even Georgia became more Georgianized during Soviet times. For example, Tbilisi (Tiflis), a city in which Armenians, Azeris, and Russians constituted a large part of the population, became a predominantly Georgian city after Georgians from various regions of Georgia settled there and large numbers of non-Georgians left the city, notably for their titular republics.

In a context in which the titulars identified themselves with their corresponding territory and in the context of a salience of ethno-nationalism after glasnost and perestroika, Georgia and Azerbaijan became involved in ethnic conflicts, which continued after their independence. In these republics the ethnic minorities that were titular in lower-ranked autonomous areas rebelled against the hosting states and demanded independence. After a relatively short period of fighting, they reached a ceasefire agreement with their host state. These are the cases of Armenian-Azerbaijani ethno-territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the Georgian-Ossetian ethno-territorial conflict over South Ossetia, and the Georgian–Abkhazian ethno-territorial conflict over Abkhazia. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has remained a frozen conflict since the corresponding ceasefire (1994), but the other two ethno-territorial conflicts re-erupted in an overt internationalized form more than a decade after their corresponding ceasefires (respectively 1992 and 1995). Allegedly after a period of planning and preparation (Cornell 2009; Cornell, Popjanevski & Nilsson 2008; Cornell & Starr 2009 [eds]). Russia invaded Georgia after hostilities re-emerged between the Georgian army and South Ossetian troops on 8 August 2008. All these three formerly autonomous territories have gained de facto independence. Nagorno-Karabakh is not recognized by any state. Even the position of Armenia towards it is ambiguous. South Ossetian independence is recognized by
Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, and Tuvalu, and Abkhazia’s independence is recognized by the aforementioned states plus Vanuatu.

Figure 6.1. Javad Khan’s Letter
**The Karabakh Conflict**

The ethno-territorial conflict between the Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the Republic of Azerbaijan concerns the status of the formerly autonomous province (AO) of Nagorno-Karabakh. The war, however, has affected a wider region far beyond the former Nagorno-Karabakh AO, a region that can be justly called Karabakh. Nagorno-Karabakh, in fact, means mountainous Karabakh, while the war spread outside the borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh AO and affected the areas around it and lower Karabakh. In fact, it affected, more or less, the historical Karabakh. In this book the terms Nagorno-Karabakh and Karabakh are used interchangeably. Nagorno stems from the Russian *nagorny*, which means “mountainous”. Karabakh is the Russianized version of the native word Qarabagh or Gharabagh, an Azeri/Persian word meaning black garden. The Armenians, however, also call the region by its ancient name, Artsakh.

![Figure 6.2. Armenian ethnic concentration in the Ottoman and Russian empires at the end of the 19th century. The darker an area, the larger is the proportion of Armenians in its population. Source: Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen (1896).](image-url)
The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began with clashes in the late 1980s between Armenians and Azeris but later developed into a full-scale war until a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994.

In the late 1980s, Armenian nationalists in Karabakh, with popular support, demanded the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia. The Supreme Soviet Council of Nagorno-Karabakh, ignoring its ethnic Azerbaijani members’ concerns, voted in favor of such a territorial transfer. After a period of time, Armenia agreed, but Azerbaijan SSR and the Soviet Union did not agree with the transfer. In the beginning days of the conflict, the Soviet authorities tried to calm the Armenian demands by punitive actions, known as “Operation Ring”, in the Shahumian area to the north of Nagorno-Karabakh, where a large number of Armenians lived and which is viewed as part of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians. Many also believe that pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait, a town to the north of Baku, and elsewhere in Azerbaijan have been orchestrated by the Soviet authorities, either local or even central ones. An oft-heard argument is that the Soviet troops were not sent in a timely manner to the area when their presence was urgently required, and the Soviet Azerbaijani police acted inefficiently or even reluctantly. These were times when a large number of ethnic Azerbaijani (and Shi’ite Muslim Kurds) left or, in fact, had to leave Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and many Armenians did the same from Azerbaijan. Many rumors circulate that the pogroms against Armenians in Sumgait was committed by Azerbaijanis who were evicted from Armenia. Others believe that they were instigated when people roused the Azeri mobs with rumors that Azeris were killed or raped in the Zangezur area of Armenia. Whatever the reasons may have been, the conflict shifted to Nagorno-Karabakh itself, where Armenians were successful in the military sphere. Aside from the notable exception of Khojali, where a whole town was massacred allegedly by Armenian irregulars, the Armenian militias gained easy victories without much resistance. Of course, the political geography counts. The areas between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were vulnerable and not easily defendable and hence were occupied by Armenian forces and subsequently ethnically cleansed.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh’s status is uncertain. The Republic of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh), de facto independent, is still legally part of Azerbaijan even though it has not been part of it since its independence. Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence before the official end of the Soviet Union. In August 1991 it declared its independence, and in December of that year the Azerbaijanis voted in favor of independence in a referendum. Earlier that month, however, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh had held their own referendum and voted in favor of independence. In September 1991 the Azerbaijani parliament had voted to
abolish the autonomous status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Although one-sidedly, and illegally in the Azerbaijan viewpoint, Nagorno-Karabakh had already separated itself from Azerbaijan before the effective Azerbaijan independence from the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, not all occupied territories were already under the Karabakh Armenian control at that date. The war continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in major Armenian victories and ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis and Shi’ite Kurds from occupied territories. Meanwhile, the pan-Turkist-minded regime of President Elchibey was toppled, and Heydar Aliyev, a Soviet-era experienced politician, was elected as the president of Azerbaijan in October 1993. In May 1994 a ceasefire agreement was signed between Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, with Russian blessings. The ceasefire has been respected since that time, even though there have been many incidents of skirmishes. Many efforts to resolve the final status of Karabakh, mainly by the OSCE, have proven to be in vain. A cold war continues between Azerbaijan and Armenia that supports the Armenian separatist government in Karabakh, and the conflict is a frozen conflict since 1994.

The Karabakh conflict is the bloodiest ethno-territorial conflict in the former Soviet Union and its successor states, after the conflicts in Tajikistan and Chechnya. Most estimates put the number of casualties at 20,000 to 25,000. The Azerbaijan scholar Arif Yunusov (2007a: 11-12; 2007b: 11), however, puts the number at 17,500 (11,000 Azerbaijanis and 6,500 Armenians). The numbers of disappeared or killed prisoners of war are not included in these numbers. According to Thomas Goltz, who was a first-hand witness of the war between 1991 and 1994, the “operative number” of those killed on both sides was approximately 35,000, with the vast majority being on the Azerbaijan side. “Some want that number higher, some lower--but 35,000 is what I and various colleagues from diverse NGOs managed to cobble together from visits to local cemeteries, official numbers, etc.” (personal communication by email, with Thomas Goltz, October 2009). In the preface of his book, Goltz (1999: X) estimates the number of the casualties of the Karabakh War (prior to 1998) at over 30,000. All in all, and regarding the available estimates, a number of 25,000 souls is a fair estimate of the number of casualties of the Karabakh War.

According to De Waal’s (2003: 286) calculations, 13.6% of the Republic of Azerbaijan’s territory is now controlled by the separatist Armenian forces (see Figure 6.3). In addition to a very large part of the former Nagorno-Karabakh AO, the Armenian separatists have also occupied many other areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan proper, causing a huge number of internally displaced persons (IDP). Yunusov (2007a: 12; 2007b: 12) estimates this number at about 740,000 persons. The
Karabakh conflict is the bloodiest, the most protracted, the most frozen, and at the same time the most emotionally heated ethno-territorial conflict in the South Caucasus. As Hunter (2006: 114) states:

One of the thorniest of ethno-territorial disputes in the South Caucasus is that between Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding Nagorno-Karabagh…. The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict derives from the region’s checkered historical legacy, from the misguided nationalities and territorial policies of the Soviet era, from the mismanagement of the ethnic problems during the Gorbachev years, and from the impact of post-Soviet regional and international rivalries.

The adjective “misguided”, however, does not adequately describe the Soviet nationalities policies. The Soviet practice of territorial division was only partially consistent with the Soviet understanding of national self-determination and the accompanying official Soviet policy that ethnic groups, called “nationalities”, deserved to have their own homeland, the territorial delimitation of which should be on the basis of the largest concentration of these ethnic groups. There have been many evident inconsistencies between the Soviet theory of national self-determination and the practice of ethnic territorialization. These inconsistencies, among which the Nagorno-Karabakh is a notable one, can be explained in general by the geopolitical motives and geopolitical calculations of Soviet decision-makers. The Nagorno-Karabakh decision was influenced by the positive Soviet attitude towards the emerging Turkish Republic, regarded initially as a potentially progressive and anti-imperialist ally (see Pasdermajian 1998: 502-506; Suny 1998: 118-19). In addition to the generous concessions made to Turkey by respecting her request not to assign Nakhichevan and Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, placing an autonomous province inhabited by a historically Christian loyal people within the borders of Muslim Azerbaijan, as well as dividing the Azerbaijan SSR in two by Armenia, was an attractive strategy to the Soviet Center.

In the first Soviet designs, Nagorno-Karabakh bordered Armenia, but later there were territorial adjustments by which Nagorno-Karabakh was totally encircled by Azerbaijan proper and lost its border with Armenia. This border is seen on a map in the Great Soviet encyclopedia of 1926, but the maps from 1930 onwards show Nagorno-Karabakh without any borders with Armenia (Cornell 2001: 74). Nevertheless, Nagorno-Karabakh could be regarded as contiguous to Armenia. Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh were separated from each other by the Lachin Corridor, which, is about ten kilometers long. This area was occupied.

---

136 The distance between the Armenian border and Nagorno-Karabakh varies depending on which two points one takes.
by Armenian separatists during the Karabakh conflict and officially incorporated into the self-proclaimed Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh (see Figure 6.3). The Karabakh Armenian authorities, backed by Yerevan, have announced that they will not return this area even if they ever manage to reach an agreement with the Azerbaijani authorities (Cornell 2001: 121-127; Potier 2001: 88).

The Soviet authorities chose the name Azerbaijan for the Soviet republic in the southeastern part of Transcaucasia. Arran or Aran was the true name of this region, but the Soviets retained the toponym Azerbaijan in order to be able to dominate the neighboring region of Azerbaijan, located in the northwestern part of Iran. Therefore, it seems logical that they did not award Nakhichevan to Armenia, despite the fact that it was separated by the Armenian SSR from the Azerbaijan SSR proper, and all of the routes of transportation and communication naturally related the Nakhichevan region rather to Armenia than to Azerbaijan proper. This design meant that the Azerbaijan SSR was dependent on the Armenian SSR for the transport between its two constituent parts. The Nakhichevan ASSR as a constituent part of the Azerbaijan SSR meant a long borderline between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Iranian region of Azerbaijan. This could contribute to the geopolitical imagination that the Iranian Azerbaijan and the Soviet Azerbaijan were both parts of one contiguous region, which was divided only for some political reasons. This choice was also in agreement with the Cold War discourse, in the sense that it could be associated with the communist North Korea and North Vietnam versus the capitalist South Korea and South Vietnam (Hunter 1997: 437). Iran was an ally of the West in those days. Therefore, the analogy of North versus South was very useful in the way that it was associated with the battle between communism and capitalism, between the East and the West, and between North Vietnam and North Korea versus South Vietnam and South Korea. According to this logic, ideally, capitalism had to be defeated, the Eastern Bloc had to be victorious over the Western Bloc, and the southern parts should reunite with their northern counterparts, which in fact meant that they were to be brought under communist rule and Soviet supremacy.

In line with the Soviet and post-Soviet ethno-nationalistic historiographies, both the Azerbaijani and Armenian historiographies attribute Karabakh or Artashk to Azerbaijani or Armenian historical legacy. According to the Azerbaijani historiography, the area was inhabited by Caucasian Albanians, whom they regard as one genealogical component of the Transcaucasian Azerbaijani people. The Armenian

137 The Azerbaijan region of Iran was not inhabited by the Caucasian Albanians and was called Azerbaijan or ancient varieties of it (i.e. Atropatena, Aturpatak, etc.) since ancient times. Caucasian Albanians were linguistically related to the Dagestani Lezgic group and, like Armenians, were...
historiography states that the Caucasian Albanians were Armenians because they, similar to Armenians, adhered to a Gregorian Church, which they most often call the Armenian Church. They also claim that Caucasian Albania was dependent on Armenia. In reality both the historical Armenia, certainly the Transcaucasian parts of it, and the Caucasian Albania, like most other Transcaucasian territories, were most of the time dependencies or integral parts of the successive Iranian empires. In their absence or in face of their weaknesses, Armenia has enjoyed (de facto) independence to a certain degree or has been conquered by other empires, such as the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian claim that the Caucasian Albanians were assimilated into Armenians makes sense: owing to their religious similarity they are likely to have been Armenicized. The only remnant of the ancient Christian Caucasian Albanians are the Udin people. The Islamicized Caucasian Albanians, however, are most likely a genealogical component of the Transcaucasian Azerbaijani. Therefore, both Armenian and Azerbaijani claims can be true, but as their politicians know, these claims do not bestow on them any legal rights over the disputed territory. The facts are that the territory was legally part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, enjoyed an autonomous status (AO), and was three-quarters inhabited by Armenians.

Although the Armenian ethnic identity shows a great degree of continuity since the Armenian conversion to Christianity, it is incorrect to say, as many Armenian nationalists claim, that the Azerbaijani identity was an artificial one. Cornell (2001: 32) states that the Azerbaijans, unlike their Armenian and Georgian neighbors, were missing a sense of national identity in the 19th century. Overall, he is not fair in his statement because he himself points to an Iranian connection. An Iranian identity, however, is itself a national identity. Explaining his assertion, he points to the varying levels of controls of their khans by the Iranian Shahs as the only sense of national identity. This is untrue; Armenian and Georgina rulers also stood under varying levels of control by Iranian Shahs. He is correct, however, about the Iranian connection. The Muslims of Transcaucasia were predominantly Shi’ite Muslims and had an Iranian culture. Like the Turkic-speakers of Iran, they spoke an Oghuz Turkic language with an extensive Persian vocabulary, identical (or at least very similar) to the language spoken in the Iranian region of Azerbaijan, and had used Persian as a literary language. In fact, they were mainstream Iranians, unlike the Transcaucasian Georgians and Armenians, who,
despite the absence of independence for centuries, had developed a sense of national identity, mainly due to their “national” Christian churches. It is also true that the Iranian identity in the South Caucasus has been eroded because of the Russian and Soviet efforts and to the salience of pan-Turkism in the 20th century (see e.g. Yunusov 2004: 113-132). Nevertheless, the Iranian element in the culture of the predominantly Shi’ite Muslim and Turkic-speaking people of southern Transcaucasia, and their accompanying material culture (e.g. dress, cuisine, architecture, etc.) was so strong that it still holds today and is not likely to be erased soon. In addition, the dispute about the name of their republic does not mean that the predominantly Shi’ite Muslim Turkic-speakers of Transcaucasia should have no historical claims over the disputed territory. Since many nationalists regard historical antiquity as a sound basis for territorial claims, they try to deny the “Other” by advancing such (historical) arguments. Similar senseless claims were advanced with regard to the right of Bosnian Muslims to Bosnia. Identity, solid or confused, does not matter; a people has the right to “live” on the land it inhabits.

Nevertheless, attributing the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict to religious motives and ancient hatred is very superficial. “We can assert that the conflict was not caused by ancient hatred: Armenians and Azeris have much in common in the cultural sphere; until the end of the 19th century they lived peacefully side by side” (Garagozov 2006: 150). Moreover, if the Shi’ite Muslim Azeri culture and the Christian Orthodox Armenian culture, or identity, or character, etc. have been inherently conflicting, the Armenians could not live in neighboring Iran with their Shi’ite Azerbaijani (and other ethnic) neighbors there. If a religious ancient hatred was a prominent factor explaining ethno-territorial conflict in the South Caucasus, then a Shi’ite-Sunni rivalry would be more likely than an Armenian-Shi’ite one. While Sunnis and Shi’ites were bitter enemies, Christian Armenians and Shi’ite Muslims often cooperated against (their common enemy) the Sunni Turks, Lezgins, and other Dagestani tribes. Notable are the events of the massacre of Shi’ites in the city of Shamakhi by Sunnis, and the pact (1724) between the Armenians of Karabakh and the Shi’ite Muslims of Ganja to assist each other in the face of attacks by Turks and Lezgins (Yunusov 2004: 78-80). In modern times, Christian Armenians and Shi’ite Muslim Azeris and other ethnic groups coexist peacefully in Iran. The Iranian Azeris (as well as other Iranians) regularly visit Armenia and many even live there. Yerevan’s Shi’ite Blue Mosque has been reopened with the assistance of Iran. In Georgia also, Armenians and Azerbaijanis live peacefully and even share businesses (interview and personal communications with Tom
Such an area of coexistence and peaceful interaction between Azerbaijanis and Armenians is the town of Sadakhlo in Georgia. I noticed that the Armenian passengers en route to Armenia call the local Azerbaijani women there “sister” (Sadakhlo, summer 2008). As one Azerbaijani inhabitant, working there as a railroad worker, stated: “This family is Armenian. We have lived together in peace for many years. Armenians are faithful comrades”. The fact that Azerbaijanis living in Georgia express their resentments more about Georgians than about Armenians or any other ethnic minorities reflects the logic and nature of (post-)Soviet ethno-politics and interethnic relations between the titulars and non-titulars, rather than the prevailing stereotypes. Already in 2007 in Mtskheta, an ancient town near Tbilisi, I was told by two Georgian policemen, originally Azerbaijani refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, that Azerbaijanis and Armenians live peacefully together in Georgia. This peaceful interaction could not be seen, however, in northeastern Armenia, an area I visited by car (summer 2008). Ijevan, a town close to the Azerbaijani and Armenian border, had a lively vending market. That market, which in Soviet times was visited by a large number of Armenian and Azerbaijani villagers, was now totally Armenian. No Azeri was visible there, at least not manifestly.

According to De Waal (2001: 272-273), the conflict is not born of ancient hatred, but nevertheless history and “hate narratives” serve as tools in order to mobilize masses for the conflict:

> [A]s has been shown, this [i.e. the Karabakh conflict] is not a conflict born of ancient hatreds. Before the end of the nineteenth century, Armenians and Azerbaijanis fought no more often than any other two nationalities in this region. Even after the intercommunal violence of the early twentieth century, the two nationalities have generally gotten along well…. [Nevertheless]…the Nagorny Karabakh conflict makes sense only if we acknowledge that hundreds of thousands of Armenians and Azerbaijanis were driven to act by passionately held ideas about history, identity, and rights…. The ideas expanded inside the ideological vacuum created by the end of the Soviet Union and were given fresh oxygen by warfare. The darkest of these convictions, the “hate narratives”, have taken such deep root that unless they are addressed, nothing can change in Armenia and Azerbaijan…. Hateful impulses coexist with conciliatory feelings in the same person. Armenians and Azerbaijanis can be simultaneously enemies and friends. They are torn between aggression and conciliation, personal friendships, and the power of national myths.

Although not an ancient one, such an event used by the Azerbaijani authorities and nationalists is the event known as the March Days. The

---

138 Tom Trier (from Denmark) was at that time the director of the Caucasus office of the European Centre for Minorities Issues (ECMI).
Azerbaijani estimate the number of Muslim Azerbaijani deaths substantially higher and use it as a tool to mobilize Azerbaijani public opinion against the Armenian enemy.139

Even though the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a political conflict and does not stem from the inability of Armenians and Azeris (or for that matter Shi’ite Muslims) to cooperate and live together, the power of “hate narratives” and “collective memories” and “symbols and myths” should not be dismissed totally. They are unlikely to be the roots causes of ethno-territorial conflicts; nevertheless, they do function as catalysts in combination with more pressing and real factors that are more immediately at stake, e.g. (alleged) discrimination and demands for independence. In fact, the conflict may have other root causes, but the memory and memorization of these events adds to the “security dilemma”, especially when the patterns of recent violence are viewed as similar or related to those of the olden days. There is no need for the recent violence to have similar causes to those in the olden days; the fact that they get associated with them evokes fears among ethnic groups that something more and worse may happen and that their ethnic opponents are their “natural” enemies and have been such for a long time. Naturally, the catalyzing power of such events is greater when they are more traumatic, more recent, felt by more people, and are still memorized and remembered by more people. Such a powerful catalyst is the Armenian Genocide, a very traumatic event in the Armenian collective memory:

> It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of the mets eghern (great slaughter) for contemporary Armenian thinking, both in Armenia and in the diaspora. The genocide virtually eliminated Armenians from ninetenths of their historical territories in Turkey, leaving them only the small fragment in the Russian Transcaucasia to call their own. Throughout the Middle East, Europe, and North America, it created new or vastly enlarged diaspora communities, where the memory of the genocide served as a virtual “charter of identity”, even for those who had not directly experienced it. (Dudwick 1997: 475)

Although the Armenian Genocide occurred in the Ottoman Empire and not in the Caucasus, it was nevertheless relevant to the events in the South Caucasus. As noted above, while Armenians fought the invading Turkish army, the Musavat party and Azerbaijani fighters allied, or in at least sympathized, with them. In addition, a large number of inhabitants in the

139 Many Azerbaijani ethno-nationalist and political activists call the clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians the infamous “March Days”, the Azerbaijani Genocide. Genocide is a fashionable word in the Caucasus, but it is not surprising that they apply this word only selectively to the misdeeds of Armenians, their enemy by now, while they do not in this way label the numerous and more widespread killings of Azeris, truly a genocide, by the Ottoman Turks during the Iranian–Ottoman wars.
modern-day Republic of Armenia are the descendants of the genocide survivors. They account for possibly more than a quarter of the population. The first Armenian republic was born in a difficult situation: it was involved in war with three of its four neighbors, thousands of refugees poured into the republic, famine and malnutrition were widespread, and “20 percent of the population died during the first year of its independence” (Dudwick 1997: 471). In such a context, the Bolsheviks ceded large parts of the territories claimed by (and fought for by) the Democratic Republic of Armenia to Turkey (Treaty of Kars 1921). Apparently, Turkey at that time was seen as a progressive and potentially anti-imperialist Soviet ally. These were areas that Armenia had inherited from the Russian Empire and were heavily populated by Armenians (see Figure 6.2).

These territories not only covered those conquered previously by Imperial Russia against the Ottoman Empire but also included the Surmalu area around Mount Ararat, which was conquered earlier, in a war against Iran (Treaty of Torkamanchay 1828). Mount Ararat (also called Masis) has a symbolic meaning for the Armenians. They believe that it is the place where the ark of Noah landed. It was even depicted in the Armenian SSR’s coat of arms (see Figure 6.4). Mount Ararat can be seen by the naked eye from Yerevan and a large part of Armenia. It is not too difficult to imagine how sad it is for Armenians to realize that this mountain is now located in Turkey, a country that, as the heir to the Ottoman Empire, refuses to recognize the Armenian Genocide.

The relationship of Armenians towards the Soviet Union was one of love and hatred. Unlike the case in Imperial Russia, Armenians were certainly not the favorites of the Soviet Union. This fact was obvious during the course of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, when the Soviet authorities openly sided with Azerbaijan. On the one hand, Armenians were still content with the fact that they enjoyed a certain type of quasi-statehood and the protection of their culture to a high degree within the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it was difficult to forget what the Bolsheviks had done to them.

The Nagorno-Karabakh issue remained a major source of Armenian dissatisfaction during the Soviet period. In fact, it was the main issue around which the Armenian dissatisfaction manifested itself. Even before glasnost and perestroika, Armenians had many times requested in vain that Nagorno-Karabakh be incorporated into Armenia. Glasnost and perestroika, however, provided an opportunity to pose ethnic and ethno-territorial demands, an opportunity that had not been seen before in Soviet history. As a result, street rallies were organized in Stepanakert, Nagorno-

---

140 This was what I was told in Armenia during my stay there in the summer of 2008.
Kaufman (2001: 49-74) states that the conflict was not initiated by the authorities. Boris Kevorkov, the Armenian head of the Nagorno-Karabakh AO, was in fact nothing of a nationalist and, in the words of Kaufman (2001: 59), he was “a man slavishly loyal to his superiors in Baku”. Nevertheless, as Kaufman describes in his book (2001: 54-76), the later leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh sympathized or did in any case make concessions to the nationalists and their demands. Very early on, on 20 February 1988 “the Supreme Soviet (legislature) of the Mountainous Karabagh autonomous Region, endorsed the request [to be incorporated into Armenia], ignoring the concerns of its Azerbaijani members, who were boycotting, and of Azerbaijan’s Communist Party boss Kamran Baghirov, who had come to Stepanakert to lobby” (Kaufman 2001: 60). Mobilization never occurs without its leaders, be it the official authorities or informal popular leaders. In this case the nationalist popular leaders were followed first by the latter, and then the official authorities themselves took over the nationalist discourse or were nationalists themselves.

Melander (2001) argues that the war over Karabakh was not inevitable and would not have gone so far if the Soviet Union had not collapsed. Nevertheless, the general pattern in the Soviet Union, perestroika and glasnost as opportunity structures, and the weakness of the Soviet state at the end of its life were enough to unleash serious ethnic strife and clashes. Rather early on, Dostál & Knippenberg (1988: 607) observed references to glasnost and perestroika on the placards of the Armenian demonstrators.

Neither the Soviet nor the Azerbaijani authorities ever agreed with the separation of the Nagorno-Karabakh AO and its incorporation into Armenia. Needless to say, most states are not very eager to lose territory. On the other hand, the Armenian separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh was uncompromising and intransigent. Two episodes need to be mentioned here: the proclamation of independence by Nagorno-Karabakh (1991) after Azerbaijan declared its independence, and the Volskiy administration’s period. Nagorno-Karabakh’s proclamation of independence predates the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Immediately after Azerbaijan proclaimed its independence from the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh proclaimed itself independent. At that time, the Soviet Union was not still officially dissolved. This is an argument in favor of the Armenian separatists, who assert that Nagorno-Karabakh never formed
part of an independent Azerbaijan. On the other hand, after a period of direct rule by Moscow (from 20 January 1989 until 28 November 1989), led by Arkady Volskiy, Nagorno-Karabakh was returned to the Azerbaijan SSR. The Soviet Union’s position was clear that this province should belong to the Azerbaijan ASSR, but it was intended to offer the province a package of cultural and economic investments, or even a higher degree of autonomy as an ASSR. All these concessions were not enough for the Armenian separatists, who only wanted one thing: freedom for Nagorno-Karabakh, which meant for them separation from Azerbaijan.

In a paper written relatively early in the course of the ethno-territorial conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Yamskov (1991) emphasizes mainly the economic factors in his explanation of this conflict. Nevertheless, even he points to two interesting points: (economic) life is better in Armenia (Yamskov 1991: 640); and Baku had placed restrictions on cultural contacts between the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and those of Armenia, and generally the Armenian cultural life in Nagorno-Karabakh was less thriving in comparison with that in Armenia (Yamskov 1991: 643). It is debatable whether the economic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was better or worse than elsewhere in Azerbaijan SSR. It was certainly worse than in Baku, but it is unfair to say that it was worse than most other rural areas or small-sized urban areas in that republic. All evidence indicates that economic motives were far less important than the issues of identity and the ownership of territory.

The Karabakh conflict is an ethno-territorial conflict and territorial conflicts are very difficult to resolve. Reaching an agreement is easier if the conflict is about economic benefits. States, however, are not particularly eager to concede territory. This conflict has brought about other events which have contributed to their own logics and are used as material for the hate narratives. Such events are the anti-Armenian pogroms (notably in Sumgait) and the massacres of Azeris in Khojaly, the (forced) migration of Azeris and Kurds from Armenia and that of Armenians from Azerbaijan, and the loss of a significant part of Azerbaijan’s territory under the presidency of the pan-Turkist-minded Elchibey. Both societies have developed fervent ethno-nationalisms, correctly labeled “mirroring nationalisms” by Cornell (2001: 92). Genuine and legitimate grievances also exist in both societies. Notably, genuine grievances exist among the refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh, grievances which are difficult to disregard and which should not be confused with hate-mongering of ethno-nationalists. For example, in 2008 a very gentle Azerbaijani young man, a refugee from Aghdam, who has lived in a refugee camp since his childhood, told me honestly that he has no problems living together with Armenians but not with the Dashnaks (by
which he meant all ethno-nationalist militants), who have killed his family.

Owing to the consequences of the conflict and the incompatibility of the demands and desires of the parties to the conflict, it is very difficult to reach a solution. Even relatively more moderate politicians have not been able to do so. When Heydar Aliyev, an experienced politician and ex-communist, replaced the aforementioned Elchibey, he was able to reach a ceasefire agreement in 1994 with Armenians. Since then, the subsequent leaders of Armenia (e.g. Ter-Petrossian, Kocharian, and Sargsian), Azerbaijan (Heydar Aliyev Sr. and Ilham Aliyev Jr.), and Nagorno-Karabakh (Kocharian, Ghukasian, and Sahakian) have been unable to reach an agreement.

The willingness of the Republic of Azerbaijan to offer Nagorno-Karabakh a high degree of autonomy does not satisfy Armenians. One argument often brought forth is that Armenians already had autonomy within Azerbaijan, but went through a *white genocide*, by which is meant the preceding de-Armenization of Nagorno-Karabakh caused by the emigration of Armenians and immigration of non-Armenians (Zürcher 2007: 155-157; Kaufman 2001: 55). The Karabakh Armenians, having won a war, are not satisfied with any solutions which put them under the Azerbaijan Republic’s overlordship. Probably they and the Azerbaijani authorities will not agree even to the so-called horizontal design of a “common state”, in which both Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan proper have equal status within a horizontal confederal relationship, as what exactly this would mean in detail and in the legal sense is still very vague (see Cornell 2001: 118-119; Cornell 2011: 142-143). The arguments of the Republic of Azerbaijan are based on its right to territorial integrity, while the Karabakh Armenians and Armenia itself, holding an ethnic view of national self-determination, argue that the Karabakh Armenians have the right to their independence or to join Armenia, based on the right of national self-determination. Armenia maintains an ambiguous position: it does not recognize the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, but it does support the rights of Armenians there. It does not regard Nagorno-Karabakh as legally part of Armenia, but has *de facto* incorporated it. It is noteworthy that the contemporary and the former presidents of Armenia, Sargsian and Kocharian, were both Karabakh Armenians. Perhaps the relationship between Armenia and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is the best example of a “common state”. If so, then it does not seem very likely that the Karabakh Armenian authorities will agree with such a mode of relationship between them and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

---

141 As an example of “white genocide”, Armenians refer to the Nakhichevan, which became almost homogeneously Azerbaijani during the Soviet era, despite the fact that historically it has had a rather large Armenian population.
As Turkey has had its own issues with Armenia, the recent rapprochements between Turkey and Armenia—and hence the deterioration of Turkish-Azerbaijani relations—even though not as significant as it was thought before, may weaken the position of the Republic of Azerbaijan. But it remains to be seen whether this can lead to a resolution in favor of Armenia or not. Russia, as the most powerful regional player, has its own interests in preserving the balance of power there.

Hypothetically, solutions can be found if ethno-nationalism subsides. As a legacy of the Soviet Union, ethno-nationalism in the Soviet successor states has a territorial dimension. The only solution to the conflicts in the post-Soviet space is a replacement of the rigid type of “Blut und Boden” nationalism with civic nationalism and an awareness that ethnic nations and states do not necessarily have to be congruent.

Figure 6.3. Territorial consequences of the Karabakh conflict

---

142 Armenian–Turkish relations suffer traditionally from the Armenian demands for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by Turkey. The recent rapprochements between Armenia and Turkey have brought about angry reactions in the Republic of Azerbaijan. In addition to the pulling down of Turkish flags in the Republic of Azerbaijan, eyewitnesses report that Turkish flags were thrown into garbage cans there. The Republic of Azerbaijan, which has enhanced its cooperation concerning energy transfer with and to Russia, also threatened to stop delivery of cheap oil and gas to Turkey. Although it seems that Turkey has been susceptible to these threats, there is no guarantee that Turkey will continue to be manipulated by Baku, as Ankara has many other sources of energy, notably from its new ally, Iran.
Figure 6.5. The depiction of Mount Ararat on the coat of arms of the Armenian SSR
Ethno-Territorial Conflicts in Georgia: South Ossetia and Abkhazia

In the last two decades, Georgia has been the scene of two ethnic conflicts—in South Ossetia and Abkhazia—a civil war and a revolution, and a war with Russia in 2008. The latter war was not a civil war or an ethnic conflict (Cheterian 2009) in the narrow sense of the word. It stemmed from the complications of once “frozen” ethnic conflicts, indeed separatist wars, over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The August 2008 war made prominently visible the formerly “hidden Russian hand” (see Goltz 1993).143 Although these conflicts have not led to as many casualties as those in Chechnya and Tajikistan, they have still produced tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of refugees, amongst whom the largest number are Georgian refugees from Abkhazia. The Abkhazians, South Ossetians, and Georgians on each front have suffered significant numbers of casualties—that is, hundreds if not thousands.144

In Georgia, two types of explanation are often heard as the explanations for the conflicts in Georgia and the Caucasus in general. On the one hand, many believe that these conflicts are about “our land”, “our language”, and “our religion”. On the other hand, many more believe that the root of all conflicts in the Caucasus is Russia (by which many also mean the Soviet Union).

The first, and more popular, explanation has its roots in Ilia Chavchavadze’s thinking. Ilia Chavchavadze was a Georgian nobleman, whose struggle was against the Russification of his native Georgia and aimed at the revival of Georgian identity. He maintained that the three pillars of Georgian identity were land, language, and religion. It is clear that by language and religion, Chavchavadze meant ethnicity, as these are the main denominator of ethnic identity. By land, however, he meant a people’s right to govern their land, free of tutelage by another (superior) people and their state. Similar popular explanations and ideas existed elsewhere, notably in the North Caucasus, and the nationalism of Gamsakhurdia in Georgia and of Dudayev in Chechnya probably stemmed from such an ideology.

Although there exists a certain amount of truth in each explanation, they are rather naïve explanations for these conflicts. This section will also discuss to what extent these popular explanations can explain the ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia. First, the history of these

143 On Russia’s role, see also Goltz 2009a: 250-292; Goltz 2009b; Gordadze 2009; King 2008b; Makedonov 2008a; Markedonov 2008b; Mitchell 2009: 171.
144 Owing to the nature of these conflicts and their high propaganda value, it is impossible to give any reliable or generally accepted estimations.
conflicts will be reviewed, and then the search for explanations will assess these popular explanations.

Recent Georgian history has been the most turbulent of the three countries in the South Caucasus. During the last years of the Soviet Union, Georgia was the scene of nationalism. The Baltic republics are often regarded as the most independence-loving and anti-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union, but Georgia was not far behind them in this respect. Even in the Caucasus, a region famous for its nationalisms, Georgians were one of the most nationalistic peoples. Georgian nationalism always evoked fear among minorities in Georgia, and these fears became even stronger after Georgians pushed for independence. On 9 April 1989 a pro-independence demonstration in Tbilisi was broken up by the authorities, as a result of which many Georgians were killed or wounded. Many regard this event as a major milestone in Georgian history, after which its relationship with the Soviet Union was irreparable.

Most Georgians associated the Soviet Union with Russia and Russians, with whom they had uneasy relations since the incorporation of Georgia into the Russian Empire. Too often the minorities’ calls for more cultural rights and more autonomy were perceived by Georgians as minorities being gullible and being agents of Russia (see Figure 6.6).

In 1989 thousands of ethnic Abkhazians signed a petition demanding that Abkhazia be granted the status of a full union republic, after which clashes occurred between Abkhazians and Georgians in Abkhazia, resulting in many casualties. On 25 August 1989 the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet proclaimed itself independent from Georgia, although it left a door open to restructuring its relationship with Georgia on an equal (con-)federative basis, by which Abkhazia would only be associated with Georgia. South Ossetia followed suit and proclaimed itself a sovereign republic on 20 September 1989. The Georgian Supreme Soviet annulled both proclamations. South Ossetia reacted in turn by declaring itself sovereign and withdrawing from Georgia on 10 December. Georgia responded by abolishing the South Ossetian autonomous status.

The referendum in March 1991 on preserving the Soviet Union formed an important milestone in the Georgian relationship with its autonomous ethnic territories. While Georgia, asserting its view that it was neither part of the Soviet Union nor wanted to be part of a restructured Union, boycotted the referendum, Abkhazia and South Ossetia both participated and both voted in the majority for the preservation of the Soviet Union. On 9 April 1991 Georgia proclaimed itself independent. After many smaller clashes between Georgians and Ossetians in South Ossetia, hostilities began to escalate between them.
Meanwhile, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, a nationalist, was elected as the Georgian president. Son of a famous novelist, he was a rather popular figure among Georgians at that time. Although it is true that in those days there were more extreme nationalist figures in Georgia, nevertheless, Gamsakhurdia’s nationalism made ethnic minorities anxious about their future in an independent Georgia. In addition, Gamsakhurdia showed “erratic behavior” (Cornell 2001: 168), which contributed to his loss of power when he alienated himself from his once allies. According to Stephen Jones (1997: 522), Gamsakhurdia was paranoid and accused his political opposition of conspiracy with Russia. He also compared himself to the French General, Charles De Gaulle. To be fair, it was not Gamsakhurdia but his Chechen ally Dudayev who could be compared to De Gaulle. Both men, however, resembled each other in their perception of Russia as an imperialist power and in their support for Caucasian unity (although under their own specific terms). Their semi-authoritarian traits and the way they treated their opposition also resembled each other. They accused their opposition, sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly, of being Russian agents. Gamsakhurdia, however, was less successful than Dudayev and was deposed from his short tenure of power.

A ceasefire agreement was reached in South Ossetia (1992) when the warlords Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani rebelled and replaced the (moderate) nationalist Gamsakhurdia with the ex-communist Shevardnadze. The agreement split the territory between Georgia proper and the Ossetian separatists. Georgia retained a significant part of South Ossetia (see Figure 6.5).

The situation in Abkhazia, however, worsened because the fight between the Georgian warlords and Gamsakhurdia’s loyalists (called Zviadists) in western Georgia spilled over into Abkhazia. Accusations of collaboration between the Abkhazian authorities and the Zviadists were made by Georgia, and in turn Abkhazia accused Georgian troops of looting in Abkhazia. It became clear again that Abkhazian authorities did not want to be under the overlordship of Tbilisi. They reacted by military action and expelled the Georgian militias. The military hostilities cost many human lives, both Georgian and Abkhazian, and produced a significant number of internally displaced persons as many Georgians fled and took refuge elsewhere. Having lost the larger part of Abkhazia, Shevardnadze signed a ceasefire agreement with the separatist Abkhazian government in 1995. The ceasefire was violated many times, notably in 1998 when the Abkhazian armed forces set fire to the houses of returning Georgian refugees in the Gali district and forced them to flee again. In 1999 Abkhazia held a referendum, by which a large majority of its population—Georgian and other refugees excepted—voted for independence.
After the Rose Revolution (2003) and the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as the president of Georgia (2004), the relationship between Georgia and Russia as well as the separatist regions deteriorated. Before the Georgian-Russian War of 2008, the situation between Georgia and the separatist regions had been tense. This situation was especially conspicuous with regard to South Ossetia, where the relations between Georgians and Ossetians had initially been relaxed in the late 1990s. In 2004, however, a military stand-off developed between Georgian and South Ossetian (para-)military troops, and the Ergneti Market, a major source of income and provision of basic goods for South Ossetians, was closed by the Georgian authorities. This event deteriorated Georgian-South Ossetian relations. In addition, the appointment of Sanakoyev, an ethnic Ossetian who had collaborated with separatists before, as the head of the parallel loyal-to-Georgia South Ossetian administration by Georgia, was seen as a provocation by South Ossetian.145

Russia invaded Georgia on 8 August 2008, allegedly after a period of planning and preparation (Cornell 2009; Cornell, Popjanevski & Nilsson 2008) and after hostilities re-emerged between the Georgian army and the South Ossetian troops the same day. According to Russian sources, Georgia began the hostilities by shelling the territory held by South Ossetia. A closer look at the chronology of events shows, nevertheless, that the hostilities had already begun earlier when the South Ossetian separatists allegedly attempted to assassinate Sanakoyev, Saakashvili’s ally and the head of the loyalist pro-Georgian South Ossetian administration. Russia soon forced the Georgian troops out of South Ossetia, and Georgia lost the territory it controlled there and in Abkhazia (Kodori Gorge). After the Georgian–Russian War of 2008, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were recognized as independent republics by Russia, followed by Venezuela, Nicaragua, Nauru, and Tuvalu (while Vanuatu has recognized only Abkhazia so far).

In his interview with Russian Analytical Digest (Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008), Chirikba accused the West,146 particularly the USA and Israel, of being responsible for the August 2008 wars, as the Georgian government was advised by American and Israeli advisers and as the Georgian army had acquired weapons from them both (see e.g. Cheterian 2009: 158; Russian Analytical Digest/ Chirikba 2008:

---
145 I was invited by the Georgian government to attend the festivities around the day of Georgian independence in 2007. I remember Sanakoyev—he was pointed out to me—sitting next to President Saakashvili during the latter’s speech at the Marriott Courtyard Hotel in Tbilisi.
146 The accusation of Western involvement in instigation of the conflict is prevalent among Abkhazians and South Ossetians. According to Paula Garb (2009: 140), “Abkhazians and South Ossetians not only blame Western countries for stimulating the conflict, but also accuse them of not caring about their fate”.

199
9). Chirikba referred to a meeting in Abkhazia on 25 July 2008, in which he, as the Abkhazian presidential adviser on foreign policy, and Stanislav Lakoba, the secretary of Abkhazia’s security council, met with the American Assistant Deputy Secretary of State, Matthew Bryza, and the American ambassador to Georgia, John Teft. During that meeting, “Bryza said that the situation was very tense and that they were afraid that the ‘hot-headed boys’ in Tbilisi would do things, and that if there were no immediate talks, August would be hot” (Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008: 8).

The Georgian desire to become a NATO member is often referred to as the (or a) main reason behind the eruption of the August 2008 war (Chirikba 2004: 343-348; Chirikba 2008: 15; Closson 2008: 2; Gegeshidze 2008: 12-14; George 2009: 141; Jones 2009: 94; Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008: 8-9; Russian Analytical Digest/Gegeshidze 2008: 12-14; Suny 2009: 91). Indeed, Georgia had taken a pro-Western and increasingly anti-Russian course ever since the Rose Revolution and had made clear its desire to become a member of NATO. A simple and facile explanation of the August 2008 war is that it was a Russian punitive reaction to the Georgian desire.

There is, however, another reason why a Georgian NATO membership may be relevant: Georgian leaders were aware of the fact that NATO did not want to import unresolved conflicts into its realm. Indeed, at the NATO Bucharest Summit (3 April 2008), Germany clearly stated that Georgia should not be admitted to NATO as it has unresolved territorial issues (Cornell, Popjanevski & Nilsson 2008: 8; Russian Analytical Digest/Gegeshidze 2008: 12). Possibly this determined a Georgian desire to show NATO (and the rest of the world) that Georgia is capable of restoring its territory.

South Ossetia was an easier target in that regard: it was surrounded on three sides by Georgia proper, and many villages there still stood under Georgian control. In addition, Georgia obviously feels more uneasy about its lack of control of South Ossetia than of Abkhazia. Unlike the peripherally located Abkhazia, South Ossetia is located in central Georgia, close to the Georgian capital city and core areas.

The military operation was a fiasco. It remains rather bizarre that the Georgian army’s efforts were focused on taking the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, and not very much on South Ossetia’s northern part in order to close the Roki tunnel (see e.g. Cheterian 2009: 162), especially when they suspected the Russian army’s presence, or invasion from, there. Shelling villages and towns does not serve the military purposes of

---

147 The Georgian Minister of Defense during the August 2008 War, Davit Kezerashvili, holds Israeli citizenship.
territorial restoration. “Kezerashvili [the Georgian Minister of Defense at the time] admitted that Georgian forces used the GRAD BM-21 multiple rocket system to target administrative buildings in Tskhinvali. When used in an urban environment, GRAD rockets inevitably cause collateral damage; which translates to simply killing peaceful residents of the town” (Haindrava 2008: 7).

Kezerashvili was sacked, but this could not undo the fact that Georgia lost control over the villages and towns it had controlled in South Ossetia (Figure 6.5) and Upper Abkhazia. Soon after the Georgian defeat, the South Ossetian militants, allegedly under Russian eyes or assisted by them, plundered Georgian villages and set them on fire. The August 2008 war resulted in many deaths and thousands of Georgian refugees (IDPs) from South Ossetia. Russia’s swift and disproportional military action cost many civilian lives. “Russian military used internationally-banned cluster munitions and SS-26 missiles against civilian populations multiple times” (Russian Analytical Digest/Gegeshidze 2008: 12).

The pro-Georgian role of the West should not be exaggerated. It is true that the French president, Nicholas Sarkozy, made a deal with Russia according to which Russia could operate far beyond South Ossetia and Abkhazia but had to retreat from Georgia after a period. However, it was never clear from the Russian actions that it ever wanted to remove Saakashvili from power. It is now obvious that the West did not care much about Georgia, as they have still not admitted Georgia into NATO three years after the 2008 war, while they did admit such countries as Croatia and Albania. Moreover, the West is not interested in confrontations with Russia for the sake of Georgia.

The recognition of Kosovo by the West is also believed to be a reason for the (rather hasty) Georgian operation. It is speculated that the Russian recognition of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence was a reaction to the recognition of Kosovo’s independence by the West. Russia was against the violation of the territorial integrity of Serbia, its Christian Orthodox, Slavic ally in the Balkans. Traditionally, Russia has been against any recognition of separatist entities, as it may endanger its own territorial integrity. The most worrisome case, Chechnya, was under firm Russian control at that time, however. Such speculations may, or may not, be explanations for Russian’s recognition of these break-away territories after the August war, but they cannot explain the eruption of the August 2008 war.

There are, however, more reasons to believe that Kosovo’s independence was a trigger to the eruption of the August 2008 war. It

---

148 Ivlian Haindrava, at the time of his publication (2008), was the Director of the South Caucasus Studies Program at the Center for Development and Cooperation—Center for Pluralism (Tbilisi, Georgia) and the foreign policy spokesman of the Republican Party of Georgia.
created fear among the Georgian leadership that Kosovo’s recognition by most Western countries might create a precedent and that Abkhazia and South Ossetia might be the next to be recognized. And, simultaneously, it gave separatists a boost, who proceeded to announce their desires ever louder than before (Chirikba 2008; Chirikba 2009; Closson 2008: 2; Garb 2009: 242; King 2008b: 7; Markedonov 2008a: 6).

Russian Analytical Digest published a special issue on the “frozen” conflicts in Georgia, which were identified as “boiling” (Closson 2008) or “unfreezing” (Gegeshidze 2008), already shortly before the August 2008 war. In that issue (May 2008) and another issue, published shortly after the war (September 2008), many analytical articles and interviews were published from scholars, amongst whom were those representing either a Russian, Abkhazian, or Georgian perspective. They tried to explain the emergence of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in Georgia by referring to their root causes. As these scholars (or officials) held top positions, their perspectives were very close to the hegemonic perspectives in their polities.

The Georgian perspective is very well verbalized by Archil Gegeshidze, a senior fellow at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies in Tbilisi. Gegeshidze’s (2008: 12) explanation of the conflicts points to three mechanisms. First, these conflicts emerged at a time when the political environment of Georgia (and the Soviet Union in general) was affected by salient ethno-nationalism. Second, the cultural divisions within Georgia were manipulated by outside forces in order to maintain control over Georgia. And third, the leaders of those minorities possessing territorial autonomy, aware of their opportunity, sought independence from Georgia. This explanation is consistent with the nature and mechanism of the Soviet nationalities policy. That policy had created an ethno-political system in which the Center (Moscow) was regarded as a balancer between the different territorial autonomies and as a protector of the lower-ranked ethnic groups (with lower-level autonomies) vis-à-vis the union republics (SSRs). This system enhanced ethno-nationalism, which was manifested increasingly in the late 1980s and the early 1990s in the aftermath of glasnost and perestroika and ultimately the Soviet collapse.

The Soviet nationalities policy’s territorial manifestation was a hierarchical ethno-territorial system. Although the union republics (SSRs) were regarded as internal states, the Center (Moscow) placed lower-

---

149 Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly publication and a forum for interesting analytical articles about Russia and post-Soviet space. It is produced jointly by the Research Center for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich (ETH Zurich).
ranked ethnic territorial units (AOs and ASSRs) inside them as highly explosive hot-spots which could explode at a moment when the time was ripe. Interestingly, the Georgian scholar and diplomat, Revaz Gachechiladze (1995: 33), calls these lower-ranked autonomous ethnic territories “delayed-action mines”.

This Georgian perspective is in essence consistent with the Russian perspective announced by Sergey Markedonov, the head of the Department of Inter-ethnic Relations at the Institute of Political and Military Analysis in Moscow. According to Markedonov (2008a: 4) these conflicts were caused by attempts at the redefinition of former Soviet borders. Many (formerly) lower-ranked autonomous ethnic territories desired independence. Such moves were not welcomed by their hosting Union Republics (or host states), and hence violent conflicts erupted.

Next to these (more or less) institutional explanations, there are those by the Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists and activists, whose discourse touches a great deal upon discrimination and repression, as well as the right of national self-determination. Although the Abkhazian and South Ossetian perspectives are very similar in nature, there are a few minor differences between them. The most important difference is that Abkhazia has always been univocal about its desire for independence, while in South Ossetia a unification with North Ossetia and hence incorporation into the Russian Federation has been also a serious option (Cheterian 2009: 165; Garb 2009: 236; Skakov 2011: 1-5). In one thing, however, they are very similar: the desire for independence from Georgia.

The separatist perspective is clearly announced by Viacheslav Chirikba (2008), who regards the Abkhazians and South Ossetians as entitled to independence, especially after the recognition of Kosovo by many Western countries. In an interview by the Russian Analytical Digest shortly after the August 2008 war, Chirikba, then the Abkhazian president’s advisor on foreign policy and now the Abkhazian Minister of Foreign Affairs,150 verbalizes the Abkhazian perspective very well:

> History plays a crucial role in the Caucasus, and Abkhazians regard their right to independence as historically justified. Abkhazia is an ancient country, as ancient as Georgia itself. It has its own history, specific language, which is unrelated to Georgian, and its own distinct culture, identity and political aspirations. The majority of Abkhazians are (Orthodox) Christians, though there are also Sunni Muslim Abkhazians…. In the past, Abkhazia was a kingdom and a principality. In 1810 it came under the Russian protectorate, quite independently from the neighboring Georgian provinces of the time. With the Sovietization drive after the

---

150 I know Viacheslav Chirikba personally as an able linguist and Caucasologist, from whom I have had language lessons when he was working at Leiden University in the Netherlands.
collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, Abkhazia entered the USSR, again, independently from Georgia. Until 1931 Abkhazia enjoyed the status of a Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), on an equal footing with the Georgian SSR. The troubles started in 1931, when Abkhazia was included into Georgia as an autonomous republic by Joseph Stalin against the will of its people. The ensuing years saw the repression of Abkhazian culture by Georgian rulers. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, Abkhazia proposed to establish federative relations with Georgia. But instead of negotiations on its political status, on 14 August 1992 Georgia under Eduard Shevardnadze unexpectedly attacked Abkhazia militarily. During the war of 1992–1993 Georgians killed four percent of the entire Abkhazian population. Miraculously, David won over Goliath. In September 1993 Abkhazia won the brutal and devastating war with Georgia. Since that time it exists as an independent polity. The independent Georgian republic is thus 16 years old, and the independent Abkhazian republic is 15 years old. (Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008: 10-12)

It is obvious that Chirikba regards the autonomous territorial units, and hence also South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as forms of statehood. As he puts it, “within the Soviet constitutional framework, the Abkhazian ASSR was regarded as a State: it had state symbols, a government, elected parliament and ministries” (Chirikba 2009: 2). Already before its limited recognition as an independent state, Chirikba (2004: 341) asserted that Abkhazia was a state as it possessed all “attributes of a state (territory, distinct borders, a permanent population, authorities exercising control over the territory of the state, the ability to enter into international relations, the absence of foreign control, etc.), minus recognition, which, from the point of view of the Declarative Theory, is relevant for its qualification as a state”. He regarded Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states because they held a territory and ruled over it, and had a state apparatus. He opposes the term “self-proclaimed state”, as any state is self-proclaimed, and in his view recognition by others is irrelevant (Chirikba 2004: 341). Therefore, in his view, the Russian recognition of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence was welcome but irrelevant.

Although there is truth in many of Chirikba’s statements, the objective reality is more complex and, therefore, a few qualifications and remarks are necessary. His statement about Abkhazia possessing statehood already in the Soviet period is in many respects in accordance with the nature of the Soviet nationalities policies, which attached ethnic nationality to a territory and gave a sense of statehood. One problem, however, is that the Soviet nationalities policy had a hierarchical territorial nature and placed the lower-ranked autonomous units under the tutelage of union republics. Abkhazia, as an autonomous republic, was placed within the territory of Georgia. The 15 union republics were considered as the highest form of “internal statehood” within the Soviet
realm. After the disappearance of that realm, they were recognized as the Soviet successor states and admitted to the United Nations. The argument that Abkhazia possessed the status of a union republic (SSR) prior to its downgrading to an autonomous republic in 1931 does not make it any different. The territorial division of the Soviet Union underwent changes many times prior to its dissolution. For example, Karelia (under the name Karelo-Finnish SSR) had enjoyed the status of a union republic from 1940 until 1956, after which it was reincorporated into Russia. Karelia was not recognized as an independent state after the Soviet Union’s dissolution. Only the legally accepted territorial situation and borders of the Soviet Union before its collapse were recognized as the starting point for its dissolution, and so only the union republics existing at that point of time were recognized as independent states.

It is true that the ethnic Abkhazians suffered deportation and hence had become a minority in Abkhazia. Their painful ordeal, however, was caused by Russia and not by Georgia or Georgians. It is also true that Abkhazia’s status as a union republic was lost during Stalin’s era. It is incorrect, however, to see this as an example of Georgian dislike of ethnic Abkhazians. First of all, Stalin is not representative of the Georgian people; and secondly, Stalin also implemented policies elsewhere which were not favorable to ethnic groups. For example, in his time the Chechens and Ingush were deported and their autonomous republic was dissolved, and the Pamiris became the subject of assimilation into Tajiks.

Although most Georgians have a different outlook on (ethno-)historical issues, it is not totally justifiable to accuse them of discriminating against the Abkhazians and trying to assimilate them. The assimilation of ethnic Abkhazians, as shown by the use of language in Abkhazia, has been more a case of Russianization than Georgianization. Abkhazia was one of the richest territories in the former Soviet Union, and the people there had quite a high standard of living. The ethnic Abkhazians were one of the better-off ethnic groups there.151

Most Georgians do not agree with Chirikba when he says that for the Georgian policy makers, “Abkhazia had to become Georgia, and Abkhazians had to become Georgians” (Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008: 10). In fact, Georgians have always regarded Abkhazia as part of Georgia and many regarded ethnic Abkhazians as Georgians. Abkhazians and notably South Ossetians were most often regarded as Georgians, much more so than were other ethnic minorities in Georgia, and more or less in the same fashion as were the Georgian local groups (for example, the Mingrelians, the Khevsurs, etc.). For Georgians,

151 This is true even if one does not consider the informal economy and only bases such an argument on the consecutive Soviet statistics.
Abkhazia and South Ossetia were parts of Georgia and should remain as such: ethnic Abkhazians could be Georgian citizens with full cultural rights and even with full autonomy, but nothing more than that. For ethnic Abkhazians, however, Abkhazia was always Abkhazia, even when it was incorporated into Georgia; hence, they regard Abkhazia as entitled to its independence. Although the Soviet nationalities policies was divisive, many Georgians still regarded the indigenous ethnic groups in Georgia simply as Georgians. On the other hand, the existence of Georgian theories that the early Abkhazians were in fact a Georgian tribe and that only later emigration (of Circassians) from the North Caucasus produced the modern-day ethnic Abkhazians—who speak a non-Georgian language related to Circassian—gives many Abkhazians the feeling that Georgians do not have any respect for a separate Abkhazian ethnic identity.

Chirikba is correct in that interview (Russian Analytical Digest/Chirikba 2008: 10) that a large number of Georgians were moved to Abkhazia and hence Abkhazians became a tiny minority in Abkhazia. Remarkably, he fails to speak of the main cause of the Abkhazian demographic problem: the Abkhazian exodus to the Ottoman Empire, forced by Tsarist Russia. Although the number and proportion of Abkhazians in Abkhazia would have been much larger if so many had not been deported, it is certainly not true that all Georgians in Abkhazia were colonists; members of the Georgian Svan tribe have lived in the Kodori Gorge since long ago, and the southern district of Gali has long been populated by Mingrelian Georgians, who also inhabit the bordering Mingrelia (Samegrelo) in Georgia proper.

Ethnic Abkhazians constituted only about 17% of the population in Abkhazia, while about 45% of the population was composed of Georgians (mainly Mingrelians). In addition, there were also immigrants from other ethnic groups, such as Armenians, Greeks, and Russians. Ethnic Abkhazians were a minority in their homeland and feared assimilation and extinction as an ethnic group. The memories of their extinct kinfolk, the Ubykh, may have contributed to this fear. As noted earlier, the Abkhazians, similar to their Circassian kin, went through a tragic ordeal. In the 19th century, Imperial Russia compelled the Abkhazians to leave their lands and emigrate to the Ottoman Empire. As a result most Muslim Abkhazians left, but Christians stayed on. According to Gachechiladze (1995: 81), the number of Abkhazian emigrants in the 1860s is unknown, but referring to 19th century statistics, he states that 32,000 left and 13,000 stayed. In addition, Gachechiladze (1995: 81) quotes from Zurab Anchabadze’s book (1976: 86), in which he holds the Imperial Russian authorities responsible for the distribution of the vacant land to peasants from other ethnic groups. All in all, the migration or, more accurately, the deportation in the 19th century is an issue to which
Abkhazian ethno-nationalists refer very eagerly in order to give their entitlement to their homeland a legitimate character. They often frame this “loss of homeland” in a very emotional way. Thomas Goltz (2009a: 26), in his conversation with Ardzinba, the former Abkhazian president, was informed that the ethnic Abkhazian diaspora in the Middle East does not eat fish anymore, because they associate the sea with the corpses of their loved ones thrown into it during their flight from their homeland.\textsuperscript{152} Regarding the fact that the Abkhazian flight to the Ottoman Empire occurred in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, however, it is unlikely that even the elderly experienced it or knew anyone who had experienced it. The demographic problem of ethnic Abkhazians now exists to such an extent that even after the separation from Georgia, the eviction of many Georgians, and the exodus of many members of other ethnic groups, ethnic Abkhazians still do not constitute the majority of the population in Abkhazia.

The Abkhazian and Ossetian fears and accusation of Georgia’s genocidal intentions (Garb 2009: 238; \textit{Russian Analytical Digest}/Chirikba 2009: 9-10) do not rest on solid grounds. The conflicts have indeed resulted in human casualties, but there is generally no Georgian hatred towards ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians. It is noteworthy that not only Abkhazians and Ossetians but also Georgians have suffered a lot. The Georgian population of the breakaway territories have been targeted many times and expelled. As there are many types of Georgians—sensible and tolerant individuals but also “racist” and narrow-minded ones—harassment and discriminatory behavior towards Georgia’s minorities cannot be totally excluded. Nevertheless, many years after the emergence of the separatist wars, there still live significant numbers of Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia proper—about 3,500 Abkhazians and 38,000 Ossetians (not much fewer Ossetians than those in South Ossetia). These are not small numbers knowing that these ethnic groups are small ethnic groups.

The conflicts in Georgia are the best examples of the fact that neither religion nor ancient hatred can be regarded as necessary or sufficient factors in explaining ethno-territorial conflicts. Since Abkhazians and Ossetians, similar to Georgians, are predominantly Orthodox Christians (with a Muslim minority), theses such as the “Clash of Civilizations” cannot explain the conflict between them. They have interacted for centuries and their nobilities have often intermarried, and among ordinary people intermarriages were also not uncommon. For example, it is believed that Stalin, a Georgian from Gori, also has certain

\textsuperscript{152} I was informed about the issue by the members of Circassian community of Jordan, who have experienced a similar ordeal. Accordingly, they eat fish, but they do not eat fish from the Black Sea.
Ossetian roots. Christian Ossetians were present in Georgia at least since the 17th century and are mentioned in the Persian chronicle *Tarikh-e Alam-ara-ye Abbasi*, (Eskandar Beyg Monshi 1998 [17th century]: 1445), which describes the events in the Safavid empire. Ossetians, notably the southern Ossetians, have been influenced in many ways by Georgians. Christianity among Ossetians is rather old and has a Georgian origin. For example, *Devari* as an Ossetian designation for a certain type of Christian sanctuary, is very similar to the Georgian word for cross, *Jvari* (see Kaloev & Tsalagova 2005: 39-43). It is also notable that Ossetians call Tbilisi “Kalak”. *Kalaki*, or *Kalak* (after omitting the final “i”, which is a nominative case-ending in Georgian), is a Georgian word meaning “city”. In fact, for Ossetians in Georgia, who lived much more dispersed before the establishment of the Ossetian AO, Tbilisi was “The City”, the main urban center. Apparently, *Tskhinvali*, called *Tskhinval* or *Ch’reba* by Ossetians these days, is a Georgian word derived from *Krtskhinvali*, meaning an area full of hornbeams. The folkloric dance called *Osuri*, literally meaning Ossetian, belongs to the standard repertoire of Georgian dances. Similar things can be said about Abkhazians and Georgians. In the medieval period, the name of western Georgia was Abkhazia. For example, the poet Khaqani Shirvani, from what is now the Republic of Azerbaijan, wrote in his Persian poem that he fell in love with a beautiful woman, settled down in Abkhazia, and began to speak Georgian. Remarkably, the land is called Abkhazia although its language is called Georgian. Many Abkhazians claim that the Georgian royal dynasty of Bagrationi were ethnic Abkhazians. Although such claims conflict with other claims about the Bagrationi origin, such as their descent from the Parthian dynasty, there is still a good possibility of intermarriages between the Georgian and Abkhazian nobility and aristocratic families. The fact remains that the relationship between the Georgian, Abkhazian, and especially Ossetian peoples has generally been warm and cordial until the 20th century.

Cultural factors cannot explain the conflicts in Georgia. These conflicts have a purely political-territorial character rather than anything else. Indeed, “land” is a very emotional subject all over the Caucasus and particularly in Georgia. Very often in discussions with Georgians about the conflicts, they mention that although many Abkhazians and Ossetians live there, it is “our” land, by which they mean it belongs to Georgia.

Land is a scarce commodity in the Caucasus, which is predominantly mountainous. The multitude of ethnic groups and their relatively high concentration in a relatively small area creates emotional attachments to the locality. In comparison with the North Caucasian people, Georgians are a large ethnic group and live over a larger area. Nevertheless, northern Georgians resemble the North Caucasians in their
material and non-material culture, and especially their relationship with land and the way they use it. Even though the numbers and areas of dwelling of Georgians (and Armenians, for that matter) are larger than those of North Caucasians, they are still much smaller than those of their southern neighbors. Georgia (in cultural terms) has traditionally been a transitional area between the South, the Iranian sphere (see e.g. Sanikidze 2008; Soudavar Farmanfarmaian 2009), and the mountainous culture of the North. In addition, the ancient roots of Orthodox Christianity make Georgia a very unique place. Although it was often a suzerainty of the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian empires, it was a metropolis of its own kind in the Caucasus. Its influence is manifested in the fact that the Christianity of Abkhazians and particularly Ossetians, and even the earlier Christianity among the Avars and Chechens, originated from Georgia. Its distinct Christianity in the Muslim empires has given Georgians a distinct ethno-national identity and pride.

Even though the sense of national pride, and perhaps superiority, among Georgians has deep roots, Georgia has traditionally been home to many non-Georgian ethnic groups, who spoke different languages and confessed different religions. Georgia has traditionally been famous for its multicultural character and its ethno-religious tolerance. Nevertheless, the Soviet nationalities policies complicated the situation. It cherished the concept of ethno-nationality and attached it to territory in a hierarchical way. It was divisive and disintegrative in areas were groups of different ethnic origins were already integrated into a single cohesive society. Ethno-nationalism and ethnic competition, and latent ethnic conflict, were inherently part and parcel of the Soviet nationalities policy (see, for example, Bremmer 1997; Brubaker 1994; Martin 2001a; Martin 2001b; Slezkine 1994). The bomb of ethno-nationalism, however, did not explode loudly until after glasnost and perestroika, which deteriorated the inter-ethnic relations in a collapsing empire. In such an environment, minorities in union republics felt insecure. The Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia were no exception.

This does not mean, however, that Abkhazians, Ossetians, and Georgians are “in essence” unable to coexist peacefully. Although Abkhazians and particularly Ossetians live(d) in other parts of Georgia, the violent conflicts were concentrated only in the former autonomous territories.\footnote{In the 1990s there were a few clashes outside the autonomous territories, but there have been no reliable reports of such clashes in 2008, either prior to, or in the aftermath of, the August 2008 war.} South Ossetians from the seceded territory had fruitful business relations with Georgians until 2004, and ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians residing in Georgia proper coexisted peacefully. Chirikba, a fervent proponent of Abkhazian independence, has stated that “in an
independent Abkhazia all citizens regardless of their ethnic background will enjoy equal rights of citizenship” (Rezvani 2005: 61). When already appointed as the Abkhazian Minister of Foreign Affairs, he wrote to me: “I hope Abkhazia will restore its friendly relations with the Georgian people after Georgia recognizes Abkhazia” (personal communication by email, November 2011). A similar statement was also made by him earlier: “When/if Georgia comes to its senses and recognizes both Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent nations, these three can, no doubt, build up their relations on a new basis, that of equality and cooperation, which will be beneficial for all sides”. All these statements indicate that the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in Georgia are territorial conflicts about the political status of these territories and not about (ancient or modern) ethnic hatreds and cultural incompatibilities.

The popular explanation of “our land, our religion, and our language” is, thus, partially correct as an explanation of conflicts in Georgia. Land, or more accurately, territory, is the main issue around which these conflicts have emerged. Cultural factors are much less important—if at all—than the political-territorial factors in explaining these conflicts.

Out of the many ethnic groups in Georgia, only the Abkhazians and Ossetians engaged in separatist wars. Why was this so? The answer lies in the key phrase: ethno-territorial autonomy.

As already discussed, part of the Abkhazian grievances stem from the fact that they were expelled from their homeland by Tsarist Russia and their land was settled by many newcomers belonging to many different ethnic groups. Remarkably, they accuse Georgians, and not other ethnic groups, of wrongdoings against them. Why are Georgians different from the many other ethnic groups who also lived in Abkhazia? Why is the Abkhazian aversion one-sidedly directed towards Georgians? The answer lies in the fact that by taking the Georgians as the “Other” and as their main adversary, the Abkhazians protest their subordination to Georgia. Georgians are the titular nation in the whole of Georgia. The Abkhazians view them as their main rival in preserving their status and position in Abkhazia. As Giorgi (Yuri) Anchabadze—a member of a famous Georgian-Abkhazian aristocratic family, a scholar and a peace activist—maintained:

In the Soviet Union the titular nations on the republican level (in addition to Russians) occupied the better political and economic positions. On the level of lower-ranked autonomous territorial units, however, the lower-ranked titulars competed over these with the titulars of the union republic. All other ethnic groups were not much involved in these politics. In
Abkhazia specifically the competition was between the Abkhaz and Georgians. (interview and personal communication, Tbilisi 2008)\(^{154}\)

In addition, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia were atypical cases in the former Soviet ethno-territorial delimitations. Ossetians enjoyed a double autonomy: a North Ossetian ASSR within the Russian Federative SSR and a South Ossetian AO within Georgia, contiguous to each other. Although ethnic Abkhazians were a minority in it, Abkhazia was given a higher autonomous status (ASSR) than the South Ossetian AO, in which the Ossetians did constitute a majority of the territory’s population. Abkhazia was contiguous to the Karachay-Cherkess AO and very proximate to Kabardino-Balkarian ASSR and the Adygheyan AO, where their Circassian kinfolk lived. The Ossetian and Abkhazian connection with their North Caucasian kinfolk, therefore, may have played a role in their feelings of dissociation from Georgia and their desire for political separation (even to go to the extent of joining the Russian Federation).

It is no secret that many Ossetians and Abkhazians collaborated with the Bolsheviks against the nationalist Menshevik government of the Georgian Democratic Republic. Their connections to their North Caucasian kinfolks, who supported the Bolsheviks, probably contributed to this political behavior, and the Bolshevik offering or at least tolerance of their self-declared autonomy most probably stems from this. Nevertheless, these facts cannot be seen as explanations for the ethno-territorial conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s. Armenia(ns) fought a war against Georgia in 1918. In addition, among the “rooted” minorities, Armenians (and not the Abkhazians or Ossetians) have suffered the most negative stereotype in Georgia (see Figure 6.5). If a past conflict can determine a new conflict, then why did Armenians and Georgians not go through a new war? The answer lies probably in the fact that Armenians, unlike the Abkhazians and Ossetians, did not possess territorial autonomy in Georgia.\(^{155}\)

In the 1990s the organization Javakhk (the Armenian name of Javakheti) and its military wing Parvana tried in vain to mobilize local Armenians for independence or even autonomy in Javakheti (Hin 2003:

\(^{154}\) Although it happened without prior appointment, my communication with Giorgi Anchabadze had the character of a formal interview. Not being successful in finding a number of famous Georgian peace activists, I was lucky enough, thanks to Professor Giorgi Kipiani, to find Giorgi (Yuri) Anchabadze in June 2008 in Tbilisi. Anchabadze was kind enough to answer each of my questions in turn.

\(^{155}\) According to Armenian informants, the Georgian police fired on the Armenian protestors in the Javakheti district in southern Georgia. In my meeting with Giorgi Kheviashvili, the Georgian Minister of Refugees and Accommodation (May 2007), I raised this issue. A top official informed me that the police only fired in the air to deter the mob. The Armenians, apparently, did not agree with the Georgian government’s decision that Georgian language should be an obligatory subject in the school curricula all around Georgia.
According to local experts,\textsuperscript{156} the Georgian state did not have much control in Javakheti in the early 1990s; nevertheless, the situation did not develop into a violent conflict. The reason lies in the fact that Javakheti did not possess autonomy. During the chaotic times, Javakhk could be informally in charge in Javakheti, but they did not have any institutional or legal structure to be so. Georgia had all the opportunity to restore its control over the area once the chaos was over.

The territorial autonomous units were generally designed according to the Soviet interpretation of right of national self-determination and were seen as national homelands. In addition to the ability of local autonomous authorities to mobilize local people, these territorially (nearly) clearly defined units may evoke psychological and moral appeals of “separateness” and “distinctness”, and hence also independence. The fact that Javakheti did not possess territorial autonomy is probably the main reason for the lack of Georgian violent reaction. The lack of such structure in Javakheti probably made the Georgian authorities realize that separatism in Javakheti had few real chances as well as less psychological and moral appeal (inside and mainly) outside Javakheti.

Remarkably, no separatist war emerged in Adjara, another autonomous republic (a former ASSR) in Georgia. The Adjaran president, Aslan Abashidze, governed Adjara as his personal fiefdom and enjoyed a good relationship with Russia. He was toppled after the Rose Revolution. In that sense, his removal was not much different from that of other pre-revolutionary politicians and administrators.

Part of the explanation for the absence of a separatist war in Adjara is that Adjara was not an ethnic autonomy. Adjarans are ethnic Georgians. As this territory belonged to the Ottoman Empire for a long time, it had a large Muslim Georgian population when it was transferred to Soviet Georgia in 1921. Although Adjara belonged for a time to the Tsarist Russian Empire and the Democratic Republic of Georgia, it was briefly regained by Turkey in the First World War before being placed under British control. Adjara transferred to the Soviet Union as a result of the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of Kars (1921). The Turks demanded autonomy for Adjara as it had a large Muslim population at that time. The religious composition of Adjara has changed since then, and Orthodox Christians are now the majority in Adjara and were probably already so in the last decade(s) of the Soviet era. In addition, Muslim Georgians also have a Georgian identity and were regarded as titulars in Georgia, a label which was accompanied by many formal and informal privileges. Moreover, religion has not been a factor in conflicts in Georgia.

\textsuperscript{156} I leave them anonymous for obvious reasons.
The situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were very different. These autonomous territorial units were designed as ethnic homelands for the Ossetians and the Abkhazians. They were distinct ethnic nations (natsional'nosti) according to the Soviet categorization, while they were subordinated to Georgians. The possession of territorial autonomies served as an opportunity structure for them in order to get mobilized for separation and independence from Georgia.

It is a fact that many Georgians regard Russia and Russians as the main adversary and the instigator of separatism. This is only correct if they associate Russia and Russians with the Soviet Union and its nationalities policy. Otherwise, such a statement is not a solid one. The recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia does not serve any vital Russian geopolitical interest. It would be more attractive for a manipulative Russia to have its say in the break-away territories as parts of Georgia, and by that also to have a say in the Georgian internal affairs. Recognition of these territories’ independence means that Russia is bereft of its opportunity to “manipulatively” meddle in Georgia’s internal affair. Russia had already punished Georgia in the form of embargoes, and it would have done more so even if the August 2008 war had not erupted. Nevertheless, it is not very likely that it would recognize these territories as independent if the conflict had not re-erupted. After the war the prospects of reintegration of these territories into a unified Georgia no longer seemed realistic, at least not in the near future. Therefore, Russia’s best move was to recognize their independence as yet another punishment for an anti-Russian Georgia. Nevertheless, it was not very likely that Georgia, whether under Saakashvili or even under a Russian-friendly leadership, would ever agree to cede territory.\(^{157}\) States are usually not very eager to cede territory.

Georgia on one side and Russia and the Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists on the other side accuse each other of provocations prior to the August 2008 war. Russia had lifted the economic blockade on Abkhazia and was engaged in relationships with both break-away territories, a fact which was regarded by Georgia as a provocation. In fact, Russia could not do otherwise as the northern kinfolk of South Ossetians as well as the Circassian and Abazian kinfolks of Abkhazians actively lobbied and expected Russia to do so. Russia did not want to jeopardize its own security and stability in the North Caucasus (Chirikba 2004: 344 and 347; Markedonov 2008a: 8; Markedonov 2008b: 4; Mitchell 178-179; Skakov 2011: 1). Russia had offered a large proportion of the population of these republics’ Russian citizenship (as they had no globally recognized

\(^{157}\) Usually states are not very eager to cede territory. Hypothetically, they may; nevertheless, it is not very likely in the short run in the current post-Soviet Caucasus, with its strong ethno-nationalist tradition.
passports). Distribution of passports can be called *ethno-geopolitical engineering* as it makes humans a politicized item and extends a state’s political influence and also responsibilities beyond its borders. Russia and its proponents claim that Russia was obliged to interfere actively in the conflicts between Georgia and the Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists in order to protect its own citizens (see e.g. Cheterian 2009: 156; Chirikba 2004: 343-344; Closson 2008; Garb 2009: 236; George 2009: 135; Markedonov 2008a: 7; Rezvani 2005: 61; Russian Analytical Digest/Gegeshidze 2008: 12). Although Russia, particularly after August 2008, emerged as a protector of South Ossetia, the relationship between them is more complex than one might want to believe. For example, certain circles in South Ossetia and Russia profiting from the current situation regard a formal Russian supervision as a nuisance to their corrupt business. In addition, the increasingly emerging idea of a united Ossetian independent statehood is certainly a dissonant jarring sound in the mighty Russian bear’s ears (see e.g. King 2008b: 6; Skakov 2011).158

On the other hand, Russia and the Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatists regard the installment of parallel loyal-to-Georgia administrations for South Ossetia and Abkhazia as a Georgian provocation. These are, indeed, signals to the separatists that Georgia is intent on re-conquering its lost territories. They may provoke vigilance in these territories but they cannot be regarded as unacceptable: Georgia had never given up its claim on the whole Georgian territory as it was in Soviet times.

In reality, however, *all* sides have violated agreements by engaging in brief military stand-offs or by disrespecting demilitarized zones. In particular, Russia’s bombing of Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge, where the Kisti, ethnic Chechens of Georgia, live, was a blatant violation of international law. This latter action stemmed from Russia’s troubles in the North Caucasus, and Chechnya in particular. Generally, all these acts which are labeled as provocations are nothing other than securing of interests in ethno-territorial conflicts by different parties with seemingly incompatible interests. Georgia does not want to formally lose its territory; the separatists do not accept anything less than independence from Georgia; and the ethnic situation in the Russian North Caucasus compels Russia to take a position more inclined towards the Abkhazian and South Ossetian demands.

158 Once a North Ossetian “colleague” (in the broad sense of the word) told me shortly before the August 2008 war that Russia uses Abkhazia and South Ossetia as bargain chips with Saakashvili. He said the fact that the Adjaran president Aslan Abashidze, an adversary to Saakashvili, left Adjara for Russia was due to an order from Russia which was meant as a signal to Saakashvili. According to him, Russia wanted to tell Saakashvili: “Here you have Adjara. Take this as a gift and a sign of goodwill. You will also get back South Ossetia and Abkhazia, if you behave as we want you to”. It is difficult to evaluate this statement, but it clearly shows that Russia did not enjoy full Ossetian trust.
A narrow emphasis on Western–Russian rivalry when explaining the August 2008 war obscures the roots of the conflicts, which are ethno-territorial in nature and decades old. The Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts are related to the collapse of the Soviet empire and Georgian independence, but in turn these conflicts have their roots in the almost century-long Soviet nationalities policy. In the perception of the autonomous territories’ leaders and the bulk of their population, if a union republic had the right to independence, then the autonomous territories, fearing a worsening of their position in the newly independent state without any supervision from the former empire, also had the right to secede themselves from that republic and become independent. Geopolitical and geostrategic motives are only secondary and did not play a very essential role until recently. The aversion towards Russia goes hand in hand with these conflicts. Georgia’s pro-Western orientation has also had a good deal to do with its frustration with Russia. Accession to NATO and the recognition of Kosovo by many countries only made Georgian leaders act hastily. These global geopolitical events may have triggered the August 2008 war, but they were not its root causes. Even if the August 2008 war can be regarded as (an) ethno-territorial conflict(s), it cannot be understood and explained without referring to the earlier ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia: the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in the early 1990s. In this sense, global geopolitical factors can only explain their re-eruption but not their emergence in the first place. The wars and conflicts in Georgia are about “land” and not about the “big powers’ geopolitical games”.

Figure 6.5. Georgian-controlled areas in South Ossetia before the August 2008 war. Source: International Crisis group (2007).
Figure 6.6. A Bolshevik monster from the Soviet Union has put its hand on South Ossetia and is biting Abkhazia, injuring Georgia. It seems that the monster is standing on a tree, which appears to be Armenia. (Courtesy of Munchehr Shiva; description is mine.)
**Political-Territorial History of the North Caucasus**

Although there exist more ethnic tensions in the North Caucasus with a territorial dimension, the only two cases that have resulted in full-scale wars are the Chechen war of separation from the Russian Federation and the Ingush-Ossetian conflict over the Prigorodny district (*Prigorodnyi Rayon*). Chechnya is the only case in the Russian Federation where a full-scale separatist war has been going on for years. Although ethno-political strife has not been rare in other territorial units of the Russian Federation—for example, in the Tatarstan and Tyva republics (see, e.g. Dunlop 1997; Fondahl 1997; Frank & Wixman 1997; Graney 2010; Shaw 1999; Toft 2003)—only the war in Chechnya meets the criteria for a separatist ethno-territorial conflict. The other case of ethno-territorial conflict in the North Caucasus, the Prigorodny conflict, is also an odd case, in the sense that it is the only case in which two ethnic groups that possessed lower-ranked autonomous units came into ethno-territorial conflict with each other.

The roots of these conflicts lie partly in the nature of ethno-politics and hence ethno-territorial policies in the Soviet era (especially in the 1940s) and to some extent the late Tsarist era. Especially the punishments of many North Caucasian peoples by Stalin, in the form of systematic and organized deportation in which large numbers of members of these ethnic groups perished, form historical traumas in the collective memories of these peoples and can be held at least partially responsible for the outbreak of these ethno-territorial conflicts in the North Caucasus. As Bruce Ware (1998: 338) correctly comments about the ethnic situation in the North Caucasus: “[The] present tensions in the Caucasus, which threaten Russia’s further fragmentation, may be viewed, in part, as deriving from the history of Russo-Soviet policies of separatism, federalism, and ethnic nationalism”. Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss briefly the turbulent political history of the North Caucasus before the ethno-territorial conflicts there are discussed.159

The treaties of Golestan (Gulistan) (1813) and Torkamanachay (Turkmanchay) (1828) between Qajar Iran and Tsarist Russia confirmed the latter’s supremacy and sovereignty in (parts of) the South Caucasus at the expense of Iran. The full possession and pacification of the North Caucasus, however, was to be a more difficult task for Russia. Although they were by-passed in order to reach Transcaucasia, the pacification of the North Caucasian Muslims took a long time. The so-called Caucasian

---

159 The text of this section, “Political Territorial History of the North Caucasus”, and that of “The Ossetian-Ingush Conflict over Prigorodny” section overlap largely with my published paper titled “The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict” (Rezvani 2010).
military highway, a mountain pass which crossed through modern-day North Ossetia into Georgia provided Russians a path of entry into Transcaucasia. Ossetians are an Orthodox Christian people and, therefore, are suspected of having been sympathetic to the Russian advances. While it is not totally illogical that a people might ultimately facilitate its subjugation to a religiously similar powerful outsider, it is more logical to assume that it was the Russians who regarded their co-religionist Ossetians as reliable and favored them over the Muslim North Caucasian ethnic groups, and not vice versa. The fact also that Ossetians have resisted subjugation by Russia from time to time is evidence for this.

An important Russian achievement in the conquest of the North Caucasus and the subjugation of its inhabitants was the war against the Circassians in the 1860s, as a result of which large numbers of Circassians were killed and many fled to the Ottoman Empire. The Circassians, in contrast to most other North Caucasians, lived in the lower foothills and plains to the north of the Great Caucasus ridge and were therefore an easy target. In addition, their assumed affiliation with the Ottoman Empire along with their fertile lands were more reasons for Russia to subjugate them. Their early subjugation and pacification, however, meant that Circassians (and Ossetians) were largely spared the hardships experienced by their mountain-dwelling ethnic neighbors, and in contrast to the Ingush, Chechens, and Karachay-Balkars they were not subjected to deportation and punishment in the 1940s, under allegations of having collaborated or sympathized with Nazi Germany.

The political history of the mountainous Caucasus, however, was more turbulent. It was one of continuous and incessant resistance. The resistance and rebellion in the mountainous Caucasus, particularly in its eastern parts, re-erupted after a while many times after being suppressed by Tsarist Russia or the Soviet Union. Already in the 18th century, North Caucasian mountain dwellers were able to wage resistance against Russia. A Chechen leader, Sheikh Mansour, was able to unite a number of Muslim mountain peoples around himself in a struggle against Russia, until he was captured in 1791. Subsequently, the Avar leader, Imam Shamil (Figure 6.7), was able to lead the struggle (called Ghazawat) against Russia, until he was captured in 1859. Even after his capture the rebellions and opposition to Russia did not subside. In addition, the fate of the Circassians did not deter the mountain peoples. After 1878, the Russian authorities took a harder line vis-à-vis the mountain dwellers. Russian actions were harsh and brutal. Members of Sufi brotherhoods, who were not killed in the violent suppression of rebellions, were either executed or deported to Siberia. Russia was unable to pacify the mountainous Caucasus, however, even using these harsh measures. As Cornell (2001: 29) puts it:
Thus Russia expected to have drastically reduced the potential for further uprisings on the southern flank. However, they were mistaken. Sufi brotherhoods...became underground organizations, which ... managed to include over the half and in some areas almost the entire male population of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan.... Thus it seems fair to say that Russia occupied the northeast Caucasus without succeeding in truly incorporating it into its empire.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the Muslim mountain dwellers of the Northern Caucasus tended to support the Bolsheviks against General Denikin’s White Army during the Russian civil war during and in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917–1920). This time also the Christian Ossetians fought together with their Muslim neighbors against Denikin’s White Army. The Whites were associated with the Tsarist empire and its brutal policies against the mountain peoples and particularly its Muslim population. On the other hand, Lenin intended to offer the mountain peoples autonomy and supported their right to national self-determination.

Nevertheless, rebellions soon broke out against the Bolsheviks, and Bolshevik policies were not much different from the Tsarist ones with regard to the mountainous North Caucasus. The Caucasian rebellion was suppressed by a disproportionate use of military force in 1921. In that year the Bolsheviks abolished the Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus, the leaders of which had cooperated with the Bolsheviks earlier, and established the Mountainous Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Russian Federative SSR.

The Mountainous Republic of the Northern Caucasus possessed the territories which are located today in the territories of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachayevo-Chekessia. Dagestan, however, was not included in the territories of the Mountainous Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which itself was divided into ethno-national districts. This republic was subjected to disintegration, as new territorial designs were made by which it lost its territories to the newly designed territorial units. Chechens, the kinfolk of the Ingush, were separated from them, and a Chechen autonomous oblast’ was created, while Ingush and North Ossetian districts remained part of the Mountainous Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, until its abolition in 1924 and the establishment of separate Ingush and North Ossetian autonomous oblasts.

The final territorial design of the North Caucasus remained intact with the exception of a short, late-Stalinist period. This final territorial design included four ASSRs—Dagestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Kabardino-Balkaria—and two AOs—Adygheya and
Karachayvo-Cherkessia. In 1992, Ingushetia separated from Chechnya as an autonomous republic. Also Karachayev-Cherkessia’s and Adygheya’s statuses were elevated from AO (autonomous province) to autonomous republics in the independent Russian Federation. North Ossetia has adopted the epithet Alania after North Ossetia, in order to emphasize the Alan ancestry of Ossetians.

In the 1940s the names of Karacahys and Balkars were removed from their corresponding autonomous territories after they, along with the Chechens and Ingush, were deported. The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was then totally abolished. After Stalin’s (Figure 6.8) death these territories were rehabilitated by Khrushchev and remained intact until 1992. These fatal deportations, during which a large number of people perished, were important events and are still vividly present in the collective memories of these “punished” peoples. As their victims are still alive today and these deportations targeted whole ethnic groups—even those who were fighting for the Soviet Union during the Second World War—the Stalinist-era deportations had a profound impact on the punished peoples’ political behavior. According to Tishkov (1997: 166):

The deportation of peoples, including Chechens and Ingush, had a dual influence on the fate of ethnic communities. Of course, there was the enormous trauma (in terms of physical scope, and socio-cultural and moral dimensions) for hundreds of thousands of people on both the collective and personal levels. Cruel and aggressive actions aroused the desire for vengeance among the victims; first as a curse, then as a means of political survival, and finally, at present stage as a form of therapy (catharsis) from the unspeakable trauma—a means to reinstate and mend collective and individual dignity. Deportation never managed to annihilate the collective identity; indeed it further strengthened ethnic sentiment by drawing rigid borders around ethnic groups, in many cases borders which had not existed in the past. Deportations provoked feelings of ethnicity….

The legacy of the turbulent and arbitrary territorial delimitation process of the North Caucasus, in addition to the punishment and deportation of many mountainous North Caucasian ethnic groups in the 1940s, and the problems arising after their rehabilitation, have contributed in certain ways to the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts in the North Caucasus.

The recent re-eruption of conflicts in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan raises the question of whether conflicts in the Russian Federation may re-erupt again. The Chechen conflict is already transformed into an Islamist resistance and Wahhabi/Salafi terrorism by militant Sunni extremists in large part of the North Caucasus, which, although directed against Russian dominance, is not directly linked to the ethno-national aspirations of the Muslim North Caucasian peoples. Although the volatile situation in the
North Caucasus suggests that the re-eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts are possible, Russia’s firm control over the political establishments in its North Caucasian republics makes it rather unlikely (Rezvani 2010: 427).

Figure 6.7. Imam Shamil, the legendary North Caucasian resistance leader (1834–1859)
Figure 6.8. Stalin (Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili), the Soviet Leader (1924–1953)
The Ossetian–Ingush Conflict over Prigorodny

The Ossetian–Ingush conflict in the North Caucasus is the only case in the post-Soviet space in which two ethnic groups possessing territorial autonomy came to overt warfare with each other.\(^{160}\) According to Tishkov (1999: 578, table 2), it cost about 1,000 human lives. In addition to Armenians, Ossetians were another people in the Caucasus that possessed a double autonomy: the North Ossetian ASSR in the Russian Federation bordered the territorially contiguous South Ossetian AO in Georgia.

It is often said that the Ingush and Ossetians are culturally incompatible. Indeed, there does exist a difference in the languages they speak and in the religions most of them confess. While the Ingush speak a Nakh language close to Chechen, Ossetians speak an Iranian language (the Northeastern branch) and are believed to be the descendants of Scythian (Sarmatian and Alan) tribes. Language, however, is unlikely to serve as a potential conflict-instigating factor, as both people were able to communicate in other languages, notably in Russian. A more important cultural factor is thought to be religion. Indeed, religion and religious difference are factors that seem to affect ethnic groups’ alliances and political actions. As will be seen below, religious difference has also played its part in the Ossetian-Ingush conflict. Nevertheless, it is rather naïve to assume religious difference as a sole determinant of ethno-territorial conflict between the Ingush and Ossetians. Ossetians are also engaged in a protracted ethno-territorial conflict with Georgians over the former South Ossetian AO in Georgia, even though both peoples are Orthodox Christians.

The dispute over the Prigorodnyi Rayon (Prigorodny District) is the reason behind the ethno-territorial conflict which occurred between the Ingush and Ossetians in the early 1990s. This conflict manifested itself in a short period of overt warfare but was less bloody in comparison with the other conflict in the North Caucasus (Chechnya). Nevertheless, the ethno-territorial nature of this conflict is evident, and it should be noted that the dispute has had a longer history.

The Prigorodny district is a district in the southeastern part of modern-day North Ossetia. It belonged to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, which had emerged after the merger of the Chechen AO with the Ingush AO in 1934 and its elevation into an ASSR in 1936. In 1944 Stalin gave orders to deport the Ingush and Chechens, and their ASSR was abolished. The Prigorodny district was transferred to the North Ossetian ASSR. Although the Ingush and Chechens were rehabilitated and the Chechen-

\(^{160}\) The description of the Ossetian-Ingush conflict in this chapter overlaps largely with my published paper, “The Ossetian-Ingush Confrontation: Explaining a Horizontal Conflict” (Rezvani 2010).
Ingush ASSR was restored by Khrushchev in 1957, the Prigorodny district remained part of the North Ossetian ASSR. The deportation has burned itself into the Ingush collective memory and has influenced their political actions.

After the Ingush returned en masse from their exile, they sought justice from the authorities. Already in the 1970s the Ingush had petitioned the Soviet government, asking for the return to them of the Prigorodny district (Ormrod 1997: 107). After perestroika and during the process of dissolution of the Soviet Union which proceeded afterwards, Chechnya, under the leadership of Johar Dudaev, announced its independence, but Ingushetia preferred to remain part of the Russian Federation, hoping that this would benefit its negotiating position vis-à-vis North Ossetia.

Aside from the Ingush’s desire to remain within the Russian Federation, their particular relations with the North Ossetians, their distinct language, and their compactly-settled territory have contributed to their willingness to split the former Republic of Checheno-Ingushetia. In 1988–1989, before Chechnya had undertaken to separate from the Russian federal structure, 60,000 Ingush citizens signed a petition calling for the formation of an autonomous Ingush Republic. On 8 January 1992 the Chechen parliament announced the restoration of the 1934 border between Chechnya and Ingushetia. (Ormrod 1997: 107) [Italics are mine]

Boris Yeltsin, campaigning for his presidential election (1991), expressed his support for the Ingush claim at a rally in Nazran in Ingushetia. As early as 1990, a Russian commission (the Belyakov Commission) that was set up to investigate the Ingush claim on the Prigorodny district concluded that it was well-founded. Ingushetia was one of the most pro-Yeltsin territorial entities in Russia, while the North Ossetian leadership sympathized with the hardliner communists (who organized the August 1991 coup against Gorbachev) (Cornell 1998b: 412; Cornell 2001: 254).

Yeltsin’s pro-Ingush attitude was also evident in the Russian federal decree “On the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples” (April 1991)—which aimed at social and territorial rehabilitation of deported peoples—and in the official Russian declaration of a separate Ingush Republic within the Russian Federation (4 June 1992). Nevertheless,

---

161 The political history of the Ingush (and Ingushetia) created a situation which requires special attention. In the dataset (Appendix 5), the identification and filling in of the data of most cases was relatively easy. The only ambiguous cases were those of encounters in which one pair of the dyad (i.e. encounter) were the Ingush. The complex political development of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and its territorial effects are discussed in this book. The more numerous Chechens controlled the autonomous institutions in the ASSR. The Ingush, relatively early after their separation from the Chechens, came into conflict with the Ossetians, and hence the Russian authorities mediated. In addition, the Ingush could not develop well-functioning autonomous institutions early enough to pose a separatist challenge to the Russian Federation, even if they had wanted to. Therefore, only their encounter with
Despite Yeltsin’s sympathy to the Ingush claims, substantial Russian support was absent when it was critically needed.

In the aftermath of Ingush activism and the resulting Ingush-Ossetian tensions, the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet took a decision that suspended the right of the Ingush to live in North Ossetia. The Ingush resisted this decision and set up self-defense militias, resulting in an escalation of tensions. It was clear that the possession of territorial autonomy did matter. Even though the Ingush could arm themselves, “the Ossetians were in a more favorable position, as they could make use of their republican administration to legitimize the existence of rogue paramilitary units as different kinds of militia” (Cornell 2001: 256).

After a time of tensions and skirmishes between the armed Ingush and Ossetians, large-scale violence broke out on 30 October 1992. Although Russian troops were already present on 31 October, the violence continued. The largest number of people (over 450 persons) were killed in a short period between 30 October and 4 November 1992. According to official sources, 644 people had been killed by June 1994 (Cornell 1998b: 415; Cornell 2001: 258).

Despite the fact that the large-scale violence subsided, there have been armed clashes and tensions between the Ingush and Ossetians ever since. In this light, the hostage-taking in the Beslan school requires special attention. The motives of the hostage takers were not ethno-national in nature, being related rather to the Wahhabi/Salafi insurgents in the North Caucasus. Moreover, the Islamist Chechen leader Shamil Basayev took responsibility. In addition, the hostage-takers consisted of many ethnic backgrounds from within and outside the post-Soviet space (notably of Arab origin). Nevertheless, a number of Ingush took part in the hostage-taking drama, and the fact remains that the logical route to Beslan from the Chechen mountains passes through Ingushetia. Also, the bomb blast (9 September 2010) in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz was a blow to the troubled Ossetian-Ingush relationship. There is no claim that the Ingush leadership or a large part of the Ingush population supported these terrorist actions; nevertheless, these actions have contributed to anti-Ingush feelings among the Ossetians (and vice versa, as a reaction).

Despite Yeltsin’s initial pro-Ingush positioning, Russian support for the Ingush has never materialized. On the contrary, the Ingush complain about the Russian support for their fellow Orthodox Christian Ossetians (Cornell 1998b: 416-417; Cornell 2001: 258-259). The reason for the

the Ossetians is codified on the basis of the situation after they had separated from Chechens. Their encounters with Chechens and Russians are codified on the basis of the situation before they had separated from their Chechen kinfolk. The different situations (before and after their separation) affect the variable “Demographic dominance in the autonomous territorial unit” (D). In the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, the Ingush had no demographic majority (d= 0), but in the mono-titular Ingushetia the Ingush comprised the majority of the population (D=1).
Russian “inconsistency” may lie in the fact that the actions of Russian armed forces do not always reflect the policy of the Center. In the view of the Russian military, Ossetians are loyal Orthodox Christians, while the Ingush are a disloyal people like their ethnic kinfolk, the Chechens. It is also argued that the Russian military pro-Ossetian attitude may be a strategic maneuver to get the Chechens involved in the conflict on behalf of their Ingush kinfolk. The Chechen war itself began in 1994, and it seems plausible that there were elements in the Russian military (or leadership generally) who sought a reason to invade Chechnya even before that date. According to Cornell (2001: 259):

The main evidence supporting this hypothesis is that the Russian forces, who entered the Prigorodny from the West and North, actually crossed the border to Ingushetia, pushing eastward towards the still undemarcated Chechen Ingush border, where they were countered by the Chechen forces.... An operation against Chechnya was halted by the threat of mobilization of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus, which could have at that point led to a full-scale regional confrontation.

As evident from the above quote, ethnic kinship was a factor which the Russian leadership and military were aware of in their policy-making. The Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus is an organization which assertively defended the North Caucasian peoples against outsiders. It has supported the Chechens against the Russian Federation and the Abkhazians against Georgia. Although this organization still exists, it is largely inactive now. The importance of ethnic kinship is also reflected in another fact. The Georgian-South Ossetian conflict in the neighboring South Ossetia had already broken out before the open warfare between the Ingush and North Ossetians began. Russia was latently pro-Ossetian until 2008, when it openly supported the South Ossetian separatist claims. Even if Russia was an honest and neutral peacekeeper and mediator, its passive involvement in the South Ossetian-Georgian conflict gave it a strategic foothold in the South Caucasus and hence brought Russia and Ossetians together. North Ossetia, which needs space to accommodate refugees from South Ossetia, does not want to give away the Prigorodny district, and Russia’s interests are in preserving its internal borders between the autonomous subjects, thus preventing chaos in the country.

In 1994, Yeltsin brokered a deal between the North Ossetian and Ingush presidents of the time, respectively Galazov and Aushev. The Russian mediation resulted in an official renouncement of the Ingush claims on the Prigorodny district, while North Ossetia agreed to allow the Ingush refugees to return to their homes. Nevertheless, neither side has been committed wholeheartedly to the agreement. The North Ossetian authorities attempted to hinder resettlement of the Ingush in North
Ossetia, and it is unlikely that the Ingush have given up their claims on the disputed district. Even though there were threats of secessions during the Yeltsin era (Ormrod 1997: 107-116), it is unlikely that either North Ossetia or Ingushetia will undertake to separate from the Russian Federation in the post-Yeltsin period. Putin’s and Medvedev’s Russia, unlike Yeltsin’s, is a stable and economically strong country. North Ossetians, who benefit from Russia’s policy in support of their ethnic kinfolk in South Ossetia and are de facto the victors of the Prigorodny conflict, do not have much reason to separate. As for the Ingush, they are likely to regard the Russian Federation’s mediating role as welcome, especially when neighboring Chechnya is plagued by Wahhabi/Salafi militant groups. In fact, although there exists sympathy for their Chechen kinfolk, Chechnya’s destiny is an example for other North Caucasians to avoid.

**Wars in Chechnya**

The Chechen conflict has been, and arguably still is, the most protracted and the most deadly ethno-territorial conflict in the post-Soviet space and one of the most deadly in the whole Eurasian continent. This conflict had already begun before the collapse of the Soviet Union but led to large-scale violent warfare in 1994 and, after a truce, again in 1999. After the installation of a Chechen local government loyal to the Russian Federation in 2000 and presidential elections and the adoption of a Chechen constitution in 2003—which regards Chechnya as an integral part of Russia—the Chechen conflict seems to be resolved. Even though the political status of Chechnya was settled in favor of Russia, there still remains a hardcore Chechen rebel movement, which is accompanied by other Caucasians and relatively small numbers of (partially) Caucasian “diaspora” from Turkey and Arab countries, as well as Arabs, Pakistanis, and Turks, all of whose ideology derives not from ethno-nationalism but from the radical Sunni Wahhabism/Salafism. Their aim is not merely the national liberation of Chechens from the Russian yoke, but the establishment of an Islamic (read Wahhabist/Salafist) emirate in the Caucasus and the defeat of the infidel Russia in a holy war (jihad).

According to Russia and the Chechen government, the counterterrorism operation in Chechnya was terminated in 2009 (BBC 16 April 2009). Nevertheless, it is obvious that Russia has not yet been able to put an end to the mainly Wahhabist/Salafist-originated terrorism and insurgency in the North Caucasus.

The course of the Chechen conflict can be divided into several phases. The first phase was the aftermath of the “Chechen Revolution” and the declaration of Chechen independence up until the Russian military
invasion of 1994. The second phase was the so-called First Chechen War of 1994–1996. The third phase was the phase of truce and the *de facto* recognition of the Chechen rebel government. The fourth phase was the so-called Second Chechen War of 1999–2000 (or arguably until 2003). The fifth phase was the installation of a new Chechen government and a constitution which defines Chechnya as an integral part of the Russian Federation.

The Chechen conflict began as a vertical ethno-territorial conflict. It was first a war of independence by Chechen separatists against Russia, supported by a large share of the Chechen population. It was initially a war with an ethno-national character. Later on, the nature of the war became diffused when radical Islamists—or more precisely, Wahhabists/Salafists—hijacked the war. They merged with and were supported by a few Chechen militant groups and warlords, but were opposed by many others. Later, particularly with the intervention of these radical Islamists, the conflict spread to neighboring areas in the North Caucasus.

Many analysts and journalists often speak of the “First” and the “Second” Chechen wars, referring to the corresponding first (1994–1996) and second (1999–2000) Russian military interventions. Such thinking and classifications, however, do not account for the number of deaths and the human suffering which have been inflicted upon the Chechen population in the years when active warfare was absent. Even before the first Russian intervention, and again in the period of truce between the first and the second war, the situation in Chechnya was not calm and peaceful. And even after the second war and the installation of Ahmed Kadyrov as the head of an interim Chechen government, and his election as president of Chechnya (as an integral part of the Russian Federation), the violence did not subside. As Thomas Goltz (2003: 5) puts it:

> Actually, most Chechens do not make any distinction between “first” and “second” wars. They tend to regard the entire period from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 down to today as being a long continuum of cold, cool, warm, and hot conflict with Russia, often expressed as merely the most recent attempt by Russians, repeating approximately every 50 years, to eradicate the Chechens from the face of the earth.... And given their communal experience over the past ten years, with over 100,000 civilians and combatants killed and virtually all survivors forced into refugee status or reduced to a troglodyte life in the shattered ruins of their cities and towns and villages, it is difficult to blame them for believing so.

The Chechen conflict, which has cost more than 100,000 human lives (Cornell 2005c: 255; Goltz 2003: 5), has been going on for more than 20 years, of which at least four were years of large-scale conventional warfare. It has even surpassed the war in Tajikistan in both duration and
casualties. The estimations of the casualties of the Chechen war by the Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship are shocking. This was a human rights NGO monitoring human rights violations in Chechnya, which was closed down by the Russian Supreme court in 2007 (Ria Novosti 23 January 2007). According to the Society for Russian-Chechen Friendship, basing its estimations on many reports:

 Estimates indicate that during the first and second war in Chechnya, on a Chechen population of 1 million, 150,000–200,000 civilians died or disappeared. This amounts to 15% – 20% of the entire population. About 30,000–40,000 children died and 20,000–40,000 Russian soldiers lost their lives during the same time. Casualties between the Chechen forces might be comparable…. Bombardments and artillery shelling throughout Chechnya, in apparent disregard for the physical security of the civilian population…, caused an unnecessary loss of tens of thousands…. Chechnya is one of the world’s deadliest areas for mines. More than 5,600 people were killed by mines in Chechnya in 2002 alone.162

The murdered critical journalist and human rights activist Anna Politkovskaya (2003) wrote a book which discusses the extremely brutal and harsh nature of the Chechen conflict, of which the English title is A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya. It should be noted that not all human deaths were the results of the Russian army’s aggression. A number of deaths can be attributed to the inter-Chechen fighting between the different Chechen factions and between them and the Wahhabist/Salafist forces, among whom are many foreign, mainly Arab, fighters. Although the Russian army has been the biggest violator of human rights in the Chechen conflict, it should be noted that it itself has suffered heavy losses, especially as a result of the First Chechen War, not necessarily in the material sense but even more so in the sense of reputation and self-confidence. The Russian army was indeed humiliated in Chechnya, particularly during the first Chechen war.

Surprisingly (or perhaps not) the Russian army’s invasion of Chechnya took place relatively late (1994), already three years after the Chechen Revolution and declaration of Chechen independence (1991). The so-called Chechen Revolution is associated with one prominent name: General Johar Dudayev. In fact, it was not a revolution in the classical meaning of this word but an accession to power by Chechen ethno-nationalists and the sidelining of the officially recognized Chechen regional government headed by Doku Zavgayev.

General Dudayev was one of the very few Chechens who reached a high position in the former Soviet Union. He had lost a number of his

family members during the genocidal deportation of Chechens (Cornell 2001: 198) and was deported as an infant to Kazakhstan, where he spent his youth. After the rehabilitation of Chechens, he returned to Chechnya in 1957. He furthered his education in Vladikavkaz (North Ossetia) and then entered the military high school in Tambov and Yuri Gagarin Air Force Academy. There is a rumor that Dudayev introduced himself as an Ossetian when he applied there in order to be admitted more easily (Cornell 2002a: 37). Dudayev served in the Soviet military in Afghanistan, and after being promoted as a general he was appointed as the head of an important bomber division in Tartu, Estonia (Cornell 2001: 206). Support for Dudayev from the Baltic countries stems not only from their anti-Russian ideological affinity but also from Dudayev’s attitude towards, and services to, Baltic nationalism. In fact, Dudayev was not much of an anti-Russian; he had married a Russian woman and was well-integrated into the Russian-dominated Soviet Air Force. He wanted to maintain a good relationship with Russia, but he also wanted independence for Chechnya. Already in 1988 he had allowed the Estonian flag to flutter over the Tartu air base and held an open day for the public in 1990. In 1991 he denied the incoming Soviet planes landing permission at the base. The planes were carrying soldiers in order to crush the Baltic separatist movements. Dudayev refused “to allow the use of force against a democratically elected government” (Cornell 2001: 207).

He resigned himself, before getting fired, from his function, and returned to Chechnya, where he was elected in 1990 as the leader of the Chechen National Congress, an umbrella organization which united several emerging nationalist (and democratic) groupings, similar to the popular fronts which emerged nearly at the same time in the Baltic and Transcaucasian states (Cornell 2001: 205-206). In addition, it was agreed that the Ingush, who were co-titulars in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR, but were left out of the developments in the republic, establish their own republic.

The Chechen Revolution occurred when the Congress stripped off the formal bodies of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and its head Doku Zavgayev, who was accused of having sided with the conservative “putschists” of the August 1991 coup d'état, or in any case of cowardice and treachery. Despite the fact that Zavgayev was known as a reformist, he did not condemn the coup d'état and remained silent at the time, suggesting that he had sided with the conservatives. This became the ground for Dudayev to depose him from power. Possibly Dudayev expected support from Moscow and Yeltsin. Paradoxically, as in the case in Tajikistan, Moscow and Yeltsin ultimately chose the side with their alleged former enemies and against the pro-reformist forces. The reason was probably that certain circles were not really happy with the rapid and
obstinate manner of Dudayev’s political actions and his not having consulted first with Moscow. It was the independent character of Dudayev’s actions that were detested by Moscow. Contrary to what later was said about him, he was neither a criminal nor an Islamist. He can be characterized as a moderate nationalist, similar to Gamskhurdia, his Georgian colleague, with whom he maintained a fraternal relationship (Goltz 2009a: 196).

Disobeying the Russian order to postpone the presidential election in Chechnya, the Chechen National Congress went ahead and organized the election. Dudayev was elected as the Chechen president and later, on 2 November, Chechnya’s independence was proclaimed.163 “Yeltsin reacted to the declaration of independence by refusing to recognize Chechnya, something Dudayev returned in kind, by refusing to recognize Russia” (Cornell 2001: 210).

Contrary to the general belief that Russia reacted relatively late (1994), the Russian response was prompt, but ineffective. No later than 9 November 1991 Yeltsin issued a decree and instituted a state of emergency in Chechnya. On that day he sent troops to Chechnya and ordered the arrest of Dudayev. Yeltsin’s move, however, was fruitless and caused his humiliation. Chechen gunmen occupied Grozny Airport and forced the incoming Interior Ministry troops to leave. In addition, the Russian parliament ordered the troops’ withdrawal, as it considered the emergency law in Chechnya illegal because Yeltsin had not consulted the parliament first. This was a boost to Dudayev and the Chechen independence movement.

Dudayev was a brilliant strategist but was not an economist or a statesman, and the conditions of economic and social life in Chechnya were poor. Dudayev could blame this situation on the Russian embargo. Although Georgian public sentiments remained generally very pro-Chechen and anti-Russian, Georgia also closed its borders to Chechnya because Dudayev had given asylum to the deposed president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia (Cornell 2001: 212; Cornell 2002a: 166; Goltz 2009a: 18 and 196; O’Ballance 1997: 111). Meanwhile, the Russian leadership tried to depose Dudayev by supporting the opposition. This effort was without much effect, however, because many opposition factions also supported Chechen independence, and because each coup attempt increased Dudayev’s popularity, which indeed needed a boost at that time. In addition, in 1992 there was a Russian army attempt to “tease”

163 Different sources refer to different dates of Chechnya’s independence. Indeed, separatist conflicts’ timelines may be confusing, as different persons and entities, at different times, may make declarations and statements in different versions, official, semi-official, and unofficial. In this case, however, Cornell (2001: 210) as well as a number of other sources give 2 November as the date of Chechnya’s declaration of independence.
the Chechens into war, when it pushed against Chechnya’s undefined western borders when they were to intervene in the Ingush-Ossetian conflict. During this time of *de facto* independence (1991–1994), more and more ethnic Russian civilians left Chechnya, as they felt threatened (Cornell 2001: 212; O’Ballance 1997: 170; Ormrod 1997: 105; Soldatova 1995: 87). Attacks on ethnic Russians in Chechnya became more common and tolerated, as there were many assaults on Chechens and other Caucasians in Chechnya and other areas in southern Russia by local Russians (particularly Cossacks), often instigated by Moscow (Cornell 1997: 204; Cornell 1998b: 421-422; Cornell 2001: 264). In such a situation the ethnic groups became polarized, and relations between Chechens and Russians were tense. Inter-Chechen relations were also very tense. Although there was a genuine desire for independence among Chechens, Dudayev did face opposition, and the situation in Chechnya was chaotic.

The chaotic and lawless situation in Chechnya had its own impact on Russian public opinion in favor of a military intervention in Chechnya. Especially when the Russian media began to turn anti-Chechen and anti-Caucasian, blaming the Caucasians for criminality in Russia in a more or less racist and disrespectful fashion, or labeling them as terrorists and Muslim fundamentalists (Cornell 2001: 213; Ormrod 1997: 105). Accusations of Chechens being Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists will be discussed later. It suffices now, however, to mention that although Chechen criminals contributed their share, it is unfair to point the finger at them as the main culprits for crime in Russia. As the Russian scholar Victor M. Sergeyev (2001) discusses, criminal behavior and corruption were prevalent in Russia in the 1990s, and Chechens and North

---

164 Descriptions of the ethno-demographic situation in the North Caucasus over time can be found in *Etnicheskaya Karta Svernogo Kavkaza* [The Ethnic Map of the North Caucasus]. In that book Vitaliy Belozerov (2005) provides facts and evidence that the proportion of ethnic Russians in the population of the autonomous regions in the North Caucasus had been decreasing since the last decades of the 20th century, long before the outbreak of the Chechen conflict. The only notable exceptions are the proportions of Russians in the autonomous republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia, which (compared with 1989) increased very slightly in 1994. This trend is summarized and illustrated in Table 5.9 of the aforementioned book (Belozerov 2005: 247). As Walker (2001: 345-346) notes, between 1959 and 1989 the proportion of Russian population in Dagestan fell by more than half and declined further in the 1990s, while a large number of Chechen refugees came to settle, at least temporarily, in Dagestan. It should be added, however, that the outmigration of indigenous population from the autonomous republics of the North Caucasus should also be considered. Nevertheless, no phenomenon has changed the ethno-demographic map of the region so dramatically as the Russian military intervention in Chechnya, as it made hundreds of thousands of people into refugees. More general information on the developments and changes in 1990s in the Northern Caucasus can be found in Bugay & Gonov (2004).

165 It is notable that in *Terrorizm, Ekstremizm, Separatizm* [Terrorism, Extremism, Separatism], written by General-Polkovnik Valeriy Zhuravel’ (2005), Chechens and in general North Caucasians are too often—duly but also often unduly—associated (implicitly and explicitly) with terrorism and extremism. Also, the title is interesting. It disregards the association of separatism with ethno-national liberation, while stressing its connection to “extremism” and “terrorism”.

232
Caucasians were by no means alone in this. In any case, whether the accusations against Chechens were false or valid, there were sufficient reasons for Russia to intervene.

Russia, just like any other state, is likely to take military action against organized separatism. The question is, however, why did the Russian intervention occur relatively late, only in 1994?

Although states tend to act rather promptly and vigorously to attempts at separatism, it is not always so. For example, the Armenians in the Armenian-populated Javakheti area in southern Georgia, and the Talysh and Lezgins, respectively in the southeastern and northern parts of the Republic of Azerbaijan, undertook separatist (or at least illegal and extraordinary autonomy-seeking) attempts against Georgia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. The Azerbaijani and Georgian governments did not react resolutely with military action, and hence large-scale bloodshed was avoided. This in fact was the reason that these conflicts did not escalate into full-scale warfare. It can be said that these republics were not able to intervene because of their internal problems; but the main reason these cases were neglected and remained largely unnoticed, I argue, is because the aforementioned areas had no autonomous status and no autonomous regional governmental bodies. Hence, neither could the separatists easily create an image of legitimacy which could be recognized internationally or regionally, nor could they mobilize the population there effectively. In the end, as the situation in the republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia stabilized, these areas were again placed under the effective sovereignty of their respective states. As described above, Chechnya was a totally different case. Chechen separatist ethno-nationalists had seized the power and occupied the political organs of the self-declared independent Chechnya.

The question remains, therefore, why the Russian military invasion came so late. The answer should be sought in the intra-Russian political realities of power. It is a fact that Yeltsin had bad relationships with the Russian parliament, which he disbanded in 1993. After that event the more conservative elements gained more prominence and power. Whether or not it was mainly due to Ruslan Khasbulatov, the Russian parliament speaker at the time, that Russia did not attack Chechnya earlier than 1994 is doubtful. As noted earlier, it was the Russian parliament that rendered Yeltsin’s first abortive intervention attempt in Chechnya illegal. Khasbulatov was himself an ethnic Chechen and normally did not want bloodshed and destruction in his homeland. Yeltsin and Khasbulatov were, indeed, not well-attuned to each other, as Yeltsin’s stand-off and shelling of the Russian parliament (1993) made clear. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Khasbulatov favored Dudayev, as he showed his opposition to Dudayev in many instances. Moreover, he had already been
removed from his position, more than one year before the military invasion of Chechnya, in October 1993 after Yeltsin’s victory over the parliament. It makes more sense to regard Sergey Shakhray (a Terek Cossack), the Russian Minister of Nationalities and Regional Affairs and deputy prime minister at that time, as the mastermind behind the large-scale Russian military invasion of Chechnya in 1994.

It is often thought that the Russian military intervention in 1994 had much to do with oil politics. However, the oil factor cannot be regarded as a major factor around which the Chechen conflict was formed. Oil production and refinement could not make Chechnya a viable state, nor was oil production in Chechnya worth an expensive and bloody war on the Russian side. The major reason to suppress Chechen separatism was indeed to establish Russian sovereignty and to prevent Chechnya from becoming a precedent and a model for other territorial subjects to follow.

Nevertheless, there are speculations that oil politics (co-)determined the timing of this intervention. In the fall of 1994, the Baku oil consortium was signed. Accordingly, the Azerbaijani state signed an agreement with many Western oil companies on extracting oil from the Caspian Sea. As the issue of exploitation and export of the Caspian Sea oil became more serious, oil companies began to think about the possible routes through which the Caspian Sea oil could be exported into international markets. The most logical way was through Iran to the Persian Gulf or the Gulf of Oman. Iran has an extensive existing oil infrastructure which could be adjusted to this purpose, and, in addition, oil swapping was a possible option. Oil swap would cut the costs in transport and security. Iran could use the Caspian oil for its internal market and sell its “southern oil” in the Persian Gulf on behalf of the other Caspian littoral states. Although this option was attractive to many oil companies, including the American ones, it did not have much chance of realization, owing to the political situation and the American politics of isolation and boycotting of Iran. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline was another serious option. It could transport the Caspian sea oil through the potential or existing conflict spots such as Turkey’s Kurdistan and southern Georgia where there was serious danger of Armenian ethnic strife at that time, or through areas which were proximate to the three Caucasian ethno-territorial conflict areas, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. Russia’s desired option was another one. Russia wanted the Caspian sea oil to be transported through an existing Russian oil pipeline. This oil pipeline carries Caspian Sea oil to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. There was, however, one major problem: it passed through Chechnya. Hence Cornell’s (1997: 205; 2001: 222-223) assertion that the
The signing of the Baku oil consortium was the direct prelude of, and determined, the Russian military intervention in Chechnya.

Although the abovementioned reasoning makes sense, it also has its flaws. The existing oil pipeline, which passed through, and in proximity to, Chechnya, was not designed for the transportation of large amounts of oil. In addition, gas and oil pipelines and their accompanying technical support need permanent maintenance. It is not difficult to realize that, because of the war in Chechnya and the overall poor state of infrastructure in the former Soviet Union, this pipeline also needed serious maintenance and renovation. It was not difficult, therefore, to imagine that investment in laying new pipelines, which would circumvent Chechnya, was a cheaper option for Russia than war. It is true that a troubled and chaotic, let alone totally seceded, Chechnya would make trouble for the entire North Caucasus, especially for Dagestan, the main railroads to which passed through Chechnya. But again, the counterargument is that laying new railroads which circumvented Chechnya would have been cheaper for Russia than war.

In addition, it is not too far-fetched to ask the question whether Russia was even interested in keeping the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation’s realm in the first place.

According to Cornell (2001: 222), another reason that Russia wanted Chechnya back under its own sovereignty was the strategic importance of the Caucasus in general and Chechnya in particular. This statement also should be qualified. The Caucasus has been of strategic importance for Russia, but for a Russia which wanted to reach the open seas of the south (the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean) and extend its sphere of influence in the Islamic world. The Russia of the early 1990s was oriented towards the West. As one could observe, Yeltsin was not upset about the collapse of the Soviet Union and was in fact very eager to disengage from the Soviet southern periphery, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The North Caucasus was hardly something a Western-oriented Russia desired. It was, in fact, only nominally Russia. In fact, it was a continuation of the South Caucasus into the North. Unlike other regions of the Russian Federation, Russians did not constitute the majority of population there, and it was amongst the poorest, least developed, and least urbanized regions in the Russian Federation (see e.g. Shaw 1999: 152-235). The fact that the North Caucasus is predominantly Islamic makes this region less attractive for a Russia which wanted to be associated with a liberal West, one which has been traditionally (latently) Islamophobic.

Uwe Halbach (2005: 11) maintains that the Caucasus is Russia’s Schicksal Region, that is, its region of destiny, and can decide the fate of Russian unity. It is true that the Caucasus is often thought to be of
strategic importance for Russia. Although this statement is a little bit exaggerated, it is nevertheless true—but only for a Eurasianist Russia and not for a Western-oriented Russia. Already in the first half of the 1990s (1993 or 1994), the Russian *Weltanschauung*, or geopolitical orientation, had shifted from a Western orientation towards Eurasianism (Kerr 1995; Smith 1999; Tsygankov 2007; Morozova 2009). Eurasianism is considered to be Russian imperial nationalism or imperialism (Khazanov 2002; Laruelle 2004). It can be so; nevertheless, I argue that regarding Russia’s geographical position in the world, its ethnic and religious diversity and its political and political territorial history, a Eurasianist geopolitical orientation is the most natural one for Russia. According to Trenin (2002: 14): “[T]he Russian Federation cannot exit from the ‘old [Eurasian] empire’ without risking its territorial integrity, and not just in the borderlands”. I argue that the reverse of this statement is also true: a Eurasian Russia does not want to and cannot permit itself to lose its territories in the North Caucasus. The question is, however, whether there is any country which is eager to lose territory. In fact, as stated before, no state is eager to lose territory. An unstable and geopolitically confused Russia was a temporary exception to the general rule. The revival of Eurasianism may indeed have urged Russia to take back Chechnya, but it was the early Yeltsin-era adventure of Russian “Westernism” that caused apathy among the Russian agenda-setters about taking prompt action and bringing Chechnya back into the Russian realm.

The Russian military intervention, or more accurately, invasion, began on 31 December 1994. It was bloody and cruel. Grozny was devastated by bombardments; a once vivid city became a ruined (ghost)

---

166 Khazanov (2002: 1) states: “The only thing that prevents me from stating that Russian nationalism is nowadays turning away from the West is that its mainstream was always anti-Western. There is nothing new in this respect”.

167 For more background information and different views on Eurasianism, see also Shlapentokh (1997; 2007a), Trenin (2002), and Tsygankov (2003; 2005). I do not agree with Tsygankov (2007; 2005) that the new Russia is deviating from the “traditional” Eurasianism and is becoming a normal super-power (Tsygankov 2005), or that it is shifting towards a liberal Eurasianism called “Euro-East”. In addition, Trenin’s thesis of “End of Eurasia” seems too sensationalist and void of reality. Not only the two wars in Chechnya but also the Russian attack on Georgia in 2008 support my argument. I argue that Putin’s and post-Putin Russian Eurasianism is the solidification of Eurasianism. It is not a deviation of Eurasianism, but simply a logical development of Eurasianism in a stabilized and powerful Russia.

168 The granting of independence to colonies by the Western imperial powers does not apply here, because the North Caucasus is contiguous with Russia proper and is part of the Russian integral territorial body. Also not applicable is Monica Duffy Toft’s (2003: 26-27) argument that bi-national states may be willing to lose territory non-violently. Czechoslovakia, an oft-mentioned example, does not fit this picture, because in addition to Czech and Slovak ethnic groups, it was also host to relatively large Hungarian and (less large) German-speaking ethnic groups. Moreover, she cannot explain then why Sri Lanka did not consent to the secession of Tamil-inhabited areas. The reality, as also mentioned in the text of Chapter 5, is that no state is eager to lose territory. An unstable and geopolitically confused Russia, as well as any other such state, was only an exception to the general rule.
city. Although the estimates vary, thousands of civilians lost their lives in the bombing of Grozny. As O’Ballance (1997: 190) asserts:

[O]n 31 December, the [Russian] Defence Ministry had quoted its own losses in Chechnya as 50 dead and 132 wounded, a considerable underestimate. Later, on the [January] 8th, Khamzat Yarbiyev, the Chechen deputy speaker, cited the Chechen civilian casualties as 18,000 killed of whom 12,1210 had died in Grozny, which was thought to be an overinflated figure. The Red Cross’s estimate of refugees was about 350,000, of whom at least 15,000 had fled Grozny.

According to Cornell (2001: 226), citing Ingmar Oldberg (1995: 17), over 20,000 civilians were killed in the battle of Grozny. “Russia’s Human Rights’ Commissioner, Sergei Kovalyov, has said that 24,000 civilians were killed just in Groznyy (Yevsyukova 1995)”. The invasion of Chechnya was thus not to become a painless blitzkrieg. The Chechen population, and also the Russians, suffered severely under this war. It also damaged the Russian army’s reputation enormously. As Svante. E. Cornell (2001: 229) writes:

To recapitulate, the war in Chechnya led to the total destruction of Grozny and many other Chechen towns and villages. According to estimates, the death toll in Chechnya ranges between 45,000 and 60,000 people. Compared with the Afghan war, the Chechen war was far more lethal for the Russian army. 1984 was the worst year for Russia in Afghanistan, with almost 2,500 soldiers being killed. In Chechnya, the Russian losses surpassed this number within four months of the intervention, a figure which shows all too clearly just how deadly the war was for Russia. At its most intense, the shelling of Grozny, counted by the number of explosions per day, surpassed the shelling of Sarajevo by a factor of at least fifty. Any visitor to Sarajevo will see that the city is largely already rebuilt and that most buildings are only lightly damaged. By contrast, Grozny has literally been razed to ground.169

Indeed, the Chechen conflict, especially the so-called First Chechen War, dealt a strong blow to the myth of Russian invincibility. The Russian army was unable to defeat the Chechen rebels, and the Russian government under Yeltsin had to recognize unwillingly the rebel government in Chechnya, although in an ambiguous way to save its face as much as it was still possible (see the discussion further on). The brutality of the Russian army in Chechnya exceeded that of the Serbian militia’s in Bosnia and may be comparable to Baathist Iraqi brutality against Shi’ite and Kurdish Iraqis and Iranians, that of the Soviet army in Afghanistan, or

---

169 Only recently, after the end of the Second Chechen War, and with the economic improvement in Russia, has Grozny been undergoing restoration and renovation and the urban life been getting back (nearly) to normal.
the American brutality in the Vietnam War. Yet the humiliation inflicted upon the Russian army was far worse than that inflicted upon the Soviet army in Afghanistan.

The First Chechen War lasted until 1996 but did not bring the desired outcome for Russia. Despite the devastations it brought about, the Russian army was not able to topple the rebel government in Chechnya. In fact, the mighty Russian army was halted by Dudayev’s rebel army, which was perhaps only 15,000 men strong at its height (Cornell 2001: 230). It is this humiliation of the Russian army’s brutality that has inspired Anatol Lieven’s (1998) book, Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power. Johar Dudayev was killed in a Russian helicopter attack. His deputy, the acting president at that time, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, lost the presidential election in 1997 to Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen prime minister of that time. Unable to subdue the Chechen liberation movement, Russia reached a peace agreement with the Chechen rebel government on 31 August 1996 in Khasavyurt (Dagestan). It was signed by Aslan Maskhadov, chief of staff of the Chechen armed forces at that time, and General Alexander Lebed, respectively for the Chechen rebel government and the Russian Federation.

Later in Moscow, on 12 May 1997, a formal peace treaty was signed between Boris Yeltsin and Aslan Maskhadov, the Chechen president at that time. The term Dogovor o Mire [literally “the Treaty on Peace”] was used (see Bugay 2006: 212). Dogovor [treaty] is a term which is used for international treaties. The terms for domestic agreements are either soglashenie or kompakt. Another exception to this rule was Tatarstan, a republic which insisted on being a sovereign state, but nevertheless wanted to remain within the realm of the Russian Federation. Hence, the dogovor in this case meant its voluntary association with the Russian Federation (see e.g. Toft 2003: 45-64; Walker 1996). Unlike Tatarstan, however, Chechnya had no desire to remain part of Russia, nor was it de facto part of Russia. The final status of Chechnya’s (in)dependence was to be decided by 2001. The peace treaty was signed by the presidents of the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Cornell (2001: 243) regards the addition of “Ichkeria” to the Chechen Republic’s name as a “face-saving variant of the Chechen independence” among “certain high circles” in Russia. I have to disagree with this. Although the Russian name of the republic was

170 Cornell (2001: 230) writes: “According to Western military observers, Dudayev commanded a regular army of perhaps 15,000 fighters at its height, especially during large operations such as the reconquest of Grozny”. He refers to Oldberg (1995: 17). Regarding the fact that the Chechens were a relatively small ethnic group of less than one million, this number of fighters is a respectable number.

171 Both documents, the agreement on ceasefire and the peace treaty, are provided in Bugays’ (2006) well-documented book, Chechenskaya Respublika: Konfrontatsia, Stabil’nost’, Mir. [The Chechen Republic: Confrontation, Stability, Peace], on pages 186 and 212 respectively.
Chechenskaya Respublika Ichkeria, its Chechen name was Nokhchiyn Respublika Nokhchiycho (see Bugay 2006: 436), which in fact means the “Chechen Republic of Chechnya”. Ichkeria was used, therefore, as an equivalent for Chechnya and could not serve as a face-saving strategy for Russia; or else, these “high circles” in Russia were suffering from self-deception. This peace treaty was a victory for the Chechens and a humiliation for Russia. The peace treaty was welcomed in Chechnya as a victory, as it really was. The mighty Russia could not subdue the small Chechen nation. This was indeed a case of “giant-killing”.

In the so-called interbellum period (1997–1999), or the “recognized” de facto independence of Chechnya, the internal situation worsened and Chechnya destabilized more and more. As Maskhadov said, Chechens won the war but lost the peace. A main reason for this situation was the intrusion of Sunni militant Wahhabis/Salafis into Chechnya. Wahhabism/Salafism was exogenous to the Caucasus. Islam in Chechnya has been traditionally associated with the Qadiri and Naqshbandi Sufi tariqats. The Wahhabists/Salafists took advantage of the situation and hijacked the Chechen conflict. The Wahhabis/Salafis often engaged in terrorist activities. The Chechen war of liberation always had an Islamic character. This is not surprising because it was associated with the earlier resistance of North Caucasian Muslims against imperial Russia and the Bolsheviks, and above all, Islam is a source of identity for the Chechens. This Islam, however, is traditional Sufi Islam (see e.g. Jaimoukha 2005: 106-122; Khasiev 2004: 110-112; Swirszcz 2009: 63-65; Ten Dam 2010: 344-347; Ten Dam 2011: 241-246; Vatchagaev 2005b). On the other hand, Wahhabism/Salafism does not enjoy much support among Chechens, and opposition to it is very strong, because “many Chechens see it as imposing an alien way of life not corresponding to Chechen tradition” (Cornell 2001: 247). One should not be misled by the sensationalist and often ignorant accounts of Western and Russian journalists and publicists, who get nervous at the very mention of jihad and sharia, and who do not distinguish between Wahhabism/Salafism and

172 Bugay (2006: 436) has provided a document from the Chechen “Ministry of Foreign Affairs” from 1997. On the document is written in Arabic, “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful”, and in the text the Chechen name of the republic is written in a Turkish-like, Latin alphabet. It is also remarkable that the title in English is “Chechen Republic Ichkeria”, rather than “the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria”. If it is not a grammatical mistake and was done intentionally, it is another piece of evidence that Ichkeria is not meant as a territorial entity other than Chechnya, but simply as a name for Chechnya.

173 This was also said to me by all Chechens whom I interviewed. There were, however, those who said that there is a small minority of native Chechens with these Wahhabi/Salafi backgrounds; nevertheless, the people I interviewed were very unhappy about the foreign Wahhabi/Salafi fighters who were using their homeland and the whole Caucasus as a battleground, worsening in this way the security situation in the Caucasus and often triggering another violent Russian action in retaliation.
other forms of Islamism. *Jihad* is a general term and can mean any violent or non-violent attempt for a cause which is perceived to be good. In the context of the North Caucasus, it refers to the wars of liberation from Russian imperialism. *Sharia* simply means Islamic law. Nevertheless, different Islamic schools think differently about the concrete laws of *sharia*. In addition, the Sufi tradition has inherent inconsistencies with *sharia*. In the Chechen tradition there exist both *adat* (customary law) and *sharia* (Islamic law). They are not necessarily always opposed to each other but could be so in many cases and respects.

There were many terrorist acts and insurgencies in the interbellum period. Even though Maskhadov appeared to condemn Wahhabism/Salafism, he could not halt it. Terrorist activities expanded beyond the borders of Chechnya. For example, in 1999 a Wahhabist/Salafist group associated with two infamous Wahhabi/Salafi field commanders, Basayev and Khattab, had invaded Avar (in fact its Andi subgroup’s) villages in neighboring Dagestan in order to establish an Islamic state through the union of Chechnya and Dagestan. They faced opposition from the local villagers with whom they clashed. As a result, Dagestani public opinion became even further distanced from the Wahhabi/Salafi field commanders (Cornell 2001: 245). Many terrorist acts, such as the incursions into Dagestan, as well as the apartment bombings in Moscow, formed a prelude to the new Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1999. Although most terrorist and militant acts in Chechnya and elsewhere in southern Russia were claimed by the terrorists, the bombings of residential apartments in Moscow (1999) were not. The accusation that Chechen terrorists were the culprits seems doubtful, because it served no military purpose and moreover affected public opinion about them negatively. Although there was no sound evidence against Chechens, Vladimir Putin, then acting as the Russian prime minister, used this as another reason to invade Chechnya in 1999.

The Second Chechen War could save Russian face because it restored the Russian Federation’s sovereignty over Chechen territory, but it nevertheless could not whitewash the brutal face of the Russian army. However, as there were more “bad guys” active in the Second Chechen war, the Russian army and their proxies were not the only ones to blame for the violations of human rights and crimes against civilians. The Wahhabi/Salafi rebels could also be, and should be, blamed for such crimes.

The Second Chechen War changed the political status of Chechnya. A stable and powerful Russia could this time bring Chechnya back under its sovereignty. Nevertheless, it could not bring an end to the Chechen resistance. The so-called Chechenization policy of Russia diffused and confused the political alliances in the Chechen resistance. A
Sufi Islamic leader, Ahmad Kadyrov, was first appointed and then elected as the Chechen president. Many former liberation fighters joined him. Ahmad Kadyrov, as well as his son, Ramzan, opposed Maskhadov’s Ichkeria republic, which they had once supported and defended in the 1994–1996 war, because they, as proponents of traditional Chechen Sufi Islam, were shocked by the Wahhabi/Salafi hijacking of the Chechen conflict. Putin, who tried to “Chechenize” the conflict by co-opting Chechen leaders, orchestrated Ahmad Kadyrov’s election as the Chechen president on 5 October 2003. Ahmad Kadyrov was later assassinated by the opposition in 2004. After the brief intermezzo of Alu Alkhanov’s presidency (2004–2007), his son Ramzan Kadyrov followed him into the presidency and is still the Russian-backed president of Chechnya. Maskhadov, the main non-Wahhabi/Salafi leader of the Chechen resistance against Russia, was killed in 2005. After his death the Wahhabi/Salafi movement became the main opposition to the Russian-backed Chechen government. Kadyrov governs Chechnya as an Islamic state and fights against the Wahhabis/Salafis. The fact that the predominantly foreign Wahhabi/Salafi opposition do not enjoy much support from the Chechen population does not mean that Ramzan Kadyrov enjoys full support from the Chechen population either.

After their take-over of the once ethno-nationalist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the Wahhabis/Salafis abolished that republic and incorporated it into a larger self-proclaimed Emirate of the Caucasus in 2007, with Doku (Dokka) Umarov, the main Chechen opposition leader and the president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria at that time, as its first Emir. Umarov’s aim is to unite the North Caucasus in a Wahhabi/Salafi state called the Emirate of the Caucasus. This is certainly a deviation from the main aim of the Chechen liberation movement, which sought independence for Chechnya.

Umarov had become the president of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria after Abdul-Halim Sadulayev was killed (2006). Sadulayev had become briefly the president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (2005–2006) after Maskhadov was killed. He tried to unite the Chechen separatists with different Islamist groups in the Caucasus. This is evidence of the proceeding Wahhabization/Salafization of the once ethno-nationalist Chechen movement to the extent that it ceased to exist. The abolition of a self-proclaimed independent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and establishment of a self-proclaimed Emirate of the North Caucasus by Wahhabis/Salafis is the ultimate evidence for the hijacking of the Chechen conflict by the Wahhabis/Salafis.

Owing to the fact that they do not enjoy much support from the local population and are supported externally (mainly by “certain circles” from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan), and owing mainly to the fact that their
main motive does not relate to ethnicity or territoriality but rather to their religious ideology, the Wahhabi/Salafi insurgency cannot be regarded as an ethno-territorial conflict.

There was certainly a tendency, even before 9/11 and the so-called war on terror, among many Western journalists and political analysts to downplay the Wahhabi/Salafi force as an extra-systemic nuisance in the conflict. The general Western attitude was that Chechens are Muslims. Westerners rarely distinguished between the extremist Sunni Islamist Wahhabi/Salafi movements and the Chechen desire for national liberation, a desire in which Islam had its own place merely as a component of the Chechen identity. The Arab, and to some extent also the Turkish, media behaved in a very apologetic fashion, as if the Chechen people themselves asked for these foreign Wahhabi/Salafi (and other extremist Islamist) elements to use their homeland as a battleground. Conversation with Chechen people teaches otherwise. Chechen people do not support Wahhabis/Salafis and are not happy to have these elements in their homeland. The truth is that not only Wahhabism/Salafism as an ideology, but also many of their ideologues, warlords, and fighters are in fact “imported” into Chechnya. Among the Wahhabis/Salafis are many foreign fighters, such as Pakistanis, Turks, and particularly Arabs. It is worth mentioning that the Wahhabi/Salafi clandestine parliament is dominated by Arabs: “The meeting of Arab-dominated Majlis-ul-shura held in July 2005 was an important milestone in the history of the terrorist movement: Shamil Basaev was the only Chechen of its 12 members; the others were Arabs” (Dobaev 2009).

In addition to Arabs, there are also many Chechens from Middle Eastern countries, such as Jordan and Turkey, who support the Chechen resistance. It is not certain that the latter’s motivation is to spread Wahhabism/Salafism in Chechnya. There are certainly many members of this group who have played a key role in the Wahhabi/Salafi movement. For example, Sheikh Fathi (Al-Shishani) from Jordan is (at least partially) of Chechen descent, or at least represented himself as such (Swirsycz 2009: 76; Vatchagaev 2005a). Khattab is rumored to be of (partial) Chechen or Circassian descent from Jordan. But these rumors appear to be false; according to an interview with his brother (2002), Khattab was a Saudi (Islamawareness.net 2002). All in all, the proportion of the

---

174 According to Cornell (2001: 235-236), the Turkish far-right organization Grey Wolves supported the Chechen resistance and shipped arms to Chechnya. Similarly, the Grey Wolves organization was involved in the war and political action in the Republic of Azerbaijan. On the main Wahhabi/Salafi website about the North Caucasus, there are sections in Arabic and Turkish. In addition to Jordan, Turkey is also host to large Circassian and to a lesser extent Chechen ethnic groups. There is, however, no indication that the Wahhabis/Salafis from Turkey are North Caucasians only, nor is there strong evidence that the Wahhabi/Salafi ideology is popular among the North Caucasian communities in Turkey.
members of the Caucasian community from the Middle East in the Wahhabi/Salafi militant movement appeared to be small in comparison with that of the Arabs.\textsuperscript{175} The fact is that the Wahhabis/Salafis who have hijacked the Chechen conflict do not have a North Caucasian ethno-national basis and do not pursue an ethno-nationalist goal, and they present an ideology alien to the Caucasus.

According to Shlapentokh (2007b; 2011), the Islamic resistance in Chechnya was “Jihadized”. He is correct if he means by “Jihadization” the process of Wahhabization/Salafization. However, in this kind of “Jihadization”, (Chechen) ethnicity is not a decisive factor. If it was so, then the northwestern part of the Caucasus, inhabited by Circassians, should be more afflicted by Wahhabization/Salafization than Chechnya is, because the number of Circassians in the Middle East is far larger than the number of Chechens there. As Circassians constitute a significant part of the Jordanian population and are exposed to this ideology from Saudi Arabia, it would have been more logical to target Circassian republics as the hubs of Wahhabization/Salafization in the North Caucasus. The fact is that the proportion of Wahhabis/Salafis in the Circassian (and Chechen) population in the Middle East is relatively small, and the North Caucasian population are not very hospitable to the Wahhabis/Salafis. The Wahhabis/Salafis, nevertheless, could take their opportunities when Chechnya was in chaos.

Chechens have often been portrayed as criminals and terrorists by the Russian media. The many terrorist actions by Bassayev and Khattab and other radicals have only strengthened these images, and the Chechens and North Caucasians in general suffered from these images even in the recent years. The rhetoric related to 9/11 and the “War on Terror” provided yet another justification for anti-Chechen and anti-Caucasian sentiments in the Russian media and society.\textsuperscript{176} After 9/11 and the “War on Terror”, a rather dominant Islamophobic discourse emerged in the West, in which different Islamist movements were lumped together, practically undistinguished from each other (see e.g. Roy 2007: 61-88, especially 62-65). Needless to say, such a discourse proved to be useful.

\textsuperscript{175} In 2007 my student and I undertook research and investigation on the role of the ethnic Chechens in Jordan in the Wahhabization/Salafization of the conflict in Chechnya. We came to similar conclusions. It should be said, however, that at time, we assumed that Khattab was a Chechen from Jordan, but after investigating more, it seems doubtful.

\textsuperscript{176} According to Sinelina’s (2006: 20, Table 2) data, the share of the Russian Federation’s population (actively) identifying itself was constant (7%) each year from 1993 until 2002. The notable exceptions were 1999 (6%) and 2000 (9%). Although speculative, one explanation for these exceptions might be out of self-protection in a context of Islamophobia after the 1999 bombings, and an assertive reactions of Muslims one year later against the horrifyingly brutal Russian actions against their co-religionists in Chechnya. A similar pattern was also visible in Western Europe: one could see that the proportion of girls wearing Islamic headdress increased after Islamophobic discourse became salient in the 2000s.
for Russia’s justification of its harsh actions in Chechnya and the rest of
the Caucasus.

There are indications that the Wahhabi/Salafi militants in the
North Caucasus and elsewhere in the post-Soviet space are involved in
drug trafficking and other clandestine criminal activities (Björnehed 2004:
313; Cornell 2005a; Cornell 2005b; Cornell & Swanström 2006: 20; Dobaev 2009: 53; Halbach 2007: 27). As many Islamist militants and
particularly the Wahhabi/Salafis in the post-Soviet space have
connections with Afghanistan, it is not difficult to imagine that such
accusations do exist. Drug-trafficking and criminal activity, next to
financing from abroad, may be their sources of income. True or not, the
mere fact that post-Soviet politicians and a significant share of the
population believe in these accusations is enough reason for policy makers
to take action against the (alleged) Wahhabis/Salafis. Moreover, the
careers of many of the main Wahhabi/Salafi figures show that
accusations such as having connections with Islamist terrorist groups in
Afghanistan do not rest upon pure fantasy. For example, Khattab and
Sheikh Fathi have been to Afghanistan. It is also very likely that other
foreign terrorists in the North Caucasus have a similar curriculum vitae.
Drug-trafficking and other criminal activities, as well as alleged financial
support most probably from Saudi Arabia, provide material resources for
the Wahhabists/Salafist in order to finance and continue their activities in
the North Caucasus.

As a militant Sunni sect, the Wahhabi/Salafi groups often fight
against traditional Islamic institutions and civilians. The Chechen
population themselves (and other North Caucasians) are more often
victims of Wahhabi/Salafi terrorism than its perpetrators. It is not
surprising that the Wahhabists/Salafists seek to establish an Islamic
Emirate instead of an independent Chechen republic, because Dudayev’s
goal has almost been fulfilled by Kadyrov; although not independent, there
is an Islamic Chechen autonomous polity with a high degree of
policy-making capabilities in internal affairs, which can absorb ethno-
nationalists. “Moreover, the lavish Moscow subsidy provided to Kadyrov
looks almost like a tribute that Russia pays the victorious Chechnya”
(Shlapentokh 2010: 118). Therefore, in this context in which many of the
ethno-nationalists’ goals are realized and in which Russia is more stable
and stronger than ever after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, another
ethno-nationalist war does not seem realistic.

The question that remains is why it was only Chechens, as the
sole ethnic group in the entire Russian Federation, who undertook a
(rather successful) war of liberation against Russia—a so-called vertical
ethno-territorial conflict, in the terminology of this study.

244
One argument is that the presence of natural oil (petroleum) resources in Chechnya and its strategic location made it a “viable state” (Cornell 2001: 205). The booming oil business in Chechnya is mentioned by many authors (e.g. Cornell 2001: 205; O’Ballance 1997: 162). Nevertheless, as mentioned before, this is an exaggeration. Chechnya does not possess much oil of its own. It was indeed a main hub for refinement of oil and production of oil products; however, this did not make it a viable state. Chechnya is surrounded on all sides, except to the south, by Russia. To the south it borders Georgia in a mountainous area. It is unlikely that an independent Chechnya, a land-locked country, could export its products to Russia or use Russian territory for its transport. The oil would have to be transported from the Caspian Sea, through the territory of a hostile Russia. The border with Georgia is mountainous, and laying pipelines in such a high altitude mountainous terrain is not easy. Moreover, before the war, Dudayev wasted this hypothetical opportunity by giving asylum to Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the former dissident president of Georgia.

As was mentioned above, although skeptically, the transportation of oil from the Caspian Sea through Chechnya might have been a motive to invade Chechnya, but this certainly does not mean that Chechnya was a viable state. Chechnya was not an economically viable state; it was viable neither during the wars nor before them, nor would it be after them. Oil products cannot be produced without crude oil. It is unlikely that Russia would transport its own oil into a separated Chechnya. Other states’ oil might be transported via Azerbaijan and Georgia into Chechnya; nevertheless, this option is not very likely because no state would jeopardize its relationship with mighty Russia for the sake of small Chechnya. And the important question is this: why would these states transport their oil for refinement to Chechnya at all if they have their own refineries? In addition, exporting oil products from Chechnya would have been very difficult because of its land-locked position.

Other arguments which have been advanced relate to the Chechen culture and their military prowess. Chechen values may indeed have played a role in their resistance against the Russian imperialists. Nevertheless, North Caucasian values are similar all over the North Caucasus. Other ethnic groups in the Caucasus, notably the Avars and the Circassians, have also had a history of resistance against, and bloodshed with, the Russians. Nevertheless, it was only Chechnya who undertook a war of liberation against Russia.

This not to say that history has not left deep scars in the Chechen collective memory and national awareness. It obviously has. As Thomas Goltz said, in an interview with the University of California TV (2005) about his understanding of the Chechen conflict: “History is deep! Is
deep!". The Chechen deportation of 1994—a genocidal deportation, in fact—made a deep impact on Chechens. Chechens were accused of supporting the invading Nazi Germans and were deported eastwards, mainly to Kazakhstan but also to a lesser extent to elsewhere in Central Asia and Siberia. It is noteworthy to mention that many Chechen key figures, such as Maskhadov, Yandarbiyev, and Ahmad Kadyrov were born in exile in Kazakhstan. Dudayev was deported as an infant to Kazakhstan. The Chechen-Ingush ASSR was abolished and was re-established only in 1957, after Khrushchev denounced the Stalin-era deportations and after Chechens returned en masse to their homeland, using their meager personal and familial means. The deportation and exile were designed and engineered in such a harsh way that many Chechens perished:

People were fooled into gathering at certain locations, and loaded up on the 12,000 train carriages that were waiting…. Needless to say, the deportation was accompanied by cruelties of an unimaginable character. The train carriages on which the deportees were loaded had no sanitary arrangements; people were often fed only once during the week that the transport took; the result was epidemics of typhoid, and people dying of starvation or cold. The most outrageous examples of atrocities was the high mountain areas from where the NKVD found it impossible or too difficult to deport the people, because the Studebaker trucks that were used could not reach the isolated locations or for other reasons. In such areas, for example the Khaibakh area near the Georgian-Chechen border, the people that were too old, sick, or otherwise unable to walk were considered “untransportable” and subsequently burnt alive in a stable. Among the people burnt in this locality were some inhabitants from the small settlement of Yalkhoroi; an interesting detail that surfaced only later is that the grandmother, aunt and two cousins of Chechnya’s first president Johar Dudayev were killed in Khaibakh…. Among those that were loaded on the cattle-wagons, up to 60 per cent of certain individual groups are believed to have perished from cold or malnutrition and generally a third of the Karachai-Balkars, and over a quarter of the deported Chechens and Ingush are estimated to have died within five years of the deportations, as it was upon arrival in the harsh climate of Kazakhstan that the worst suffering took place. First of all the deportees were not adequately allocated the food rations and other supplies necessary for life, and as a result many, in particular children, died as a result of undernourishment and disease. Moreover the local people in the areas of destination had been psychologically “prepared” that traitors, rebels, and even supposedly wild tribespeople, incidentally cannibals, were to be relocated there. (Cornell 2001: 198-199)

Chechen, as well as other, deportees, were ill-treated; it is generally estimated that over 100,000 Chechens lost their lives. This is a very large number for an ethnic group that numbered approximately 400,000 souls in those years. When the loss of growth is taken into account, the demographic damage of the deportation was even more severe. Although he admits that it is speculative and the number of losses calculated in this way may have been even greater, Cornell (2001: 199) maintains that “the direct and indirect (from absence of growth) losses of Chechens actually amount to over 200,000”.

Already in 1942, before the deportations, the Soviet Air Force had bombed the Checheno-Ingush Republic. The accusation of Chechens having collaborated with the Nazi Germans seems baseless. There was indeed a Chechen resistance against the Soviet authorities, but this had already begun before the Nazi German advances into the Soviet Union, at a time when the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany were still allies. Only a small number of Chechens, perhaps 100 souls, collaborated with the Germans. “By contrast 17,413 of Chechens had sought enlistment in the Red Army in three separate voluntary mobilizations in 1942–1943. Hence it seems safe to say that the claim of collaboration with Germany was by any standard a fabricated reason” (Cornell 2001: 200). It should be mentioned that 17,413 young men out of a nation of about 400,000 souls is a large proportion. The Chechen deportation, hence, was a clear example of a case in which the whole ethnic group was targeted indiscriminately. Membership of the Chechen ethnic group was a sufficient criterion for a Chechen to be deported.

All in all, it is understandable that the genocidal deportation made a deep impact on the Chechen collective memory and national awareness, and they associated the Soviet Union with Russian imperialism and also with Russia and Russians. Nevertheless, they were not the only ethnic group to undergo such an ordeal in the Soviet Union. Yet, no other ethnic group waged a war of liberation against Russia, as the Chechens so successfully did. The deportation, therefore, is not a sufficient factor in explaining the eruption of ethno-territorial conflict in Chechnya.

Another argument which is advanced is that Chechens, with about 900,000 souls, were the largest North Caucasian ethnic group and constituted a critical mass. There were also other large ethnic groups in the North Caucasus: the number of Avars was about 600,000, and Ossetians and Circassians each numbered around 500,000. All these ethnic group, Chechens included, were relatively small peoples which were not a serious match for mighty Russia, and not even for Russians whose number was tens of times more than each. In addition, larger Muslim ethnic groups—for examples Tatars and Bakshkirs—existed in Russia who did not engage in armed struggle.
Demography, however, did matter, although in another way. Chechens had a dominant demographic position in the Chechen-Ingush ASSR (about 58% of the population) and an even greater proportion (probably more than 90%) in the Chechen Republic separated from Ingushetia and void of its Russian population. According to Monica Duffy Toft (2003: 64-84), this was the main factor that explains the peculiarity of the Chechen case. She maintains that the Chechens were a concentrated majority (in Chechnya); not only they were the absolute majority in Chechen-Ingush ASSR and Chechnya, but they were also concentrated there. The number and proportion of Chechens elsewhere was relatively small (less than 20% of the total number of Chechens before the outbreak of the war). According to the latest Soviet census (1989), 84.2% of the Chechens in the Soviet Union resided in its “national” territory (Belozero 2005: 100, Table 2.13). Accordingly, this demographic position legitimized the Chechen claim, and I would add to that that it also made the Chechen mobilization easier. As Toft (2003: 86) puts it:

In the Chechen interaction, both Moscow and Chechnya viewed the issue [of Chechen independence] as indivisible [i.e. non-negotiable]. Moscow’s views have been explained [i.e. prevention of a precedent for other potential separatist movements in Russia], and Chechnya’s can be explained as by the widespread notion that Chechnya must be ruled by Chechens and the fact that Chechens believed they had an obligation to defend their territory. The 1994 violence was interpreted as a continuation of a three-hundred-year-old struggle. Moscow and ethnic Russians would forever be viewed as outsiders, imperialists who had no right to conquer and control the Chechen people or their homeland. [Italics are in the original]

Toft’s (2003) explanation, however, disregards the issue of territorial autonomy. As most conflicts in the (post-)Soviet space erupted in the regions which enjoyed territorial autonomy, Cornell’s (1999; 2001: 41-56; 2002a; 2002b) notion that autonomy played a crucial role in the emergence of these conflicts certainly makes sense. The possession of territorial autonomy can serve as an opportunity structure and can make the mobilization of the population easier. Moreover, it more easily helps the imagination of an independent state, as its bases and frameworks are already existent in the form of a territorial autonomy. The possession of an autonomous territory facilitates ethnic mobilization especially when the titular ethnic groups possesses the demographic majority of its autonomous homeland. In all cases of ethno-territorial conflict in the (post-)Soviet space—except Abkhazia—in which the ethnic groups involved possessed an autonomous homeland, they constituted also the demographic majority of the population in their territories. In addition to Chechens, also the Ingush and Ossetians constituted the majority of
population in their autonomous homelands in the Russian Federation. Although the Ingush and Ossetians were not engaged in a separatist war against Russia, they were engaged in an ethno-territorial conflict with each other over Prigorodny. Therefore, neither possession of territorial autonomy nor demographic dominance therein is a sufficient factor in explaining ethno-territorial conflict. They cannot explain satisfactorily ethno-territorial conflict because there are many cases of ethno-territorial groups in the (post-)Soviet space that enjoy territorial autonomy and a dominant demographic position therein, but nevertheless have not waged a war of independence. Apparently, in addition to their demographic dominance in their autonomous homeland, the burden of trauma caused by their genocidal deportation as well as a certain peculiarity of the Caucasus—probably its mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration—are crucial factors, which in combination can explain the Chechen conflict.

**Political Territorial History of Central Asia**

Central Asia has always been a crossroads between many cultures and civilizations. Both sedentary and nomadic peoples have lived (and still live, to a lesser extent) in Central Asia. Nomadic–sedentary relations in the past have been complex. There have been periods of violence between nomads and the sedentary population. In most of such cases nomadic tribes harassed and pillaged the sedentary population. The most notable case is the Mongol invasion of Central Asia. On the other hand, the relations between the nomads and the sedentary population were not always violent. Needless to say, the nomadic pastoralists and the sedentary agriculturalists saw more benefits in peaceful coexistence and mutual trade of their products than in fighting each other.

Central Asia was also visited and influenced by many merchants as it was the heart of the Silk Road. Many peoples have migrated and settled there peacefully. Central Asia was conquered and suffered under many conquerors. All these events and interactions have contributed to the political history of Central Asia in one way or another. Parts of Central Asia have been parts of many ancient and medieval empires, kingdoms, emirates, and khanates. To name but a few, parts have belonged to the Achamenid, Kushanid, Samanid, Mongol, Timurid, and Afšarid empires. The cultural orientation and political affiliation of Central Asia, like the Caucasus, were more towards the south than the north. This situation changed drastically, however, in the last few centuries, and particularly from the mid-19th century onwards.

The northern parts of Central Asia, which consisted of vast steppes inhabited by nomadic tribes, were gradually conquered and settled.
by Russians during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. In the mid-19th century, Russia was inclined to conquer the southern part of Central Asia, which has a long tradition of urban settlement and (native) statehood. Russian completed their conquest by subjugating the Turkmen tribes and conquering the Pamirs. Russia was involved in an expansionist type of geopolitical rivalry with the British Empire, known as the Great Game (Hopkirk 1994). The most famous early usage of the designation “Great Game” for this Russian-British geopolitical rivalry is most probably that of Rudyard Kipling, a British writer born in British India, who in his book (1901) *Kim* wrote: “Now I shall go far and far into the North, playing the Great Game…” The Russian desire to reach the open seas of the South and the British desire not to lose its Indian dominions resulted in the Russian conquest of Central Asia, while Afghanistan became a buffer-zone between the two empires. As Rafis Abazov (2007: 35) puts it:

The situation changed, however, in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Russians became increasingly interested in reaching the Central Asian market for their goods, securing the land trade routes with Persia and India, and halting the British advance from their bases in northern India toward Afghanistan and Central Asia. This race for influence in Central Asia and the associated bitter British-Russian rivalry became known as the Great Game. British strategists argued that the Russians might advance to Afghanistan and Persia, thereby threatening the maritime trade routes in the Middle East, and that they might stir up mutinies in the Indian colonies in order to weaken the British Empire. Russian strategists, in turn, saw great economic and military benefits in advancing into Central Asia and further to the south and considered that from this base they could project their military power into the British colonies and dependencies in case Russian-British relations turned sour.

Directly prior to the Russian conquest of southern Central Asia in the mid- and late-19th century, there existed three political units that controlled much of the sedentary centers of Central Asia. Nomadic tribes were to varying degrees subjugated to them. Many nomadic tribes were only nominally subjugated to them and many more, especially in the northern part of Central Asia, were totally independent of them. These three political units were the Emirate of Bukhara, the Khanate of Khiva, and the Khanate of Kokand. Next to the establishment of a Russian Turkistan governorate in Central Asia, the first two retained a degree of semi-independence and became Russian protectorates. The Khanate of Kokand, on the other hand, was abolished in 1876 after a short period of vassalage since 1869 and was incorporated into Russian Turkistan.
Kokand was a khanate in which the Sarts\textsuperscript{178}—ancestors of modern-day Uzbeks and Tajiks—dominated and held firm control over the sedentary southern part of Kyrgyzstan, in which the Osh region is located. Many Kyrgyz tribes were incorporated into the Tsarist Russian Empire already before the abolishment of the Khanate of Kokand. October 1963 was officially proclaimed by Soviet historiography as the voluntary incorporation of Kyrgyz into Russia (Bohr & Crisp 1996: 404, note 4). While Soviet historiography may have exaggerated the voluntary character of the Kyrgyz incorporation into the Russian Empire, post-Soviet historiography should be careful not to exaggerate the opposition towards it (Huskey 1997: 655). The fact was, however, that the arrival of the technologically advanced Russians could mean a liberation from, or at least could balance the power of, the Kokand rulers, who governed the Kyrgyz with increasing brutality. The predominantly Sart-inhabited areas in the Fergana Valley were incorporated into the Russian Empire only after the defeat and hence abolishment of the Khanate of Kokand.

The political arena (particularly the southern part) of Central Asia was marked by the Jadidi movement in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The Jadidis were (followers of) Muslim thinkers who proposed a modern Islam suitable for the political realities of the day, opposed Russian colonial rule, and had a nationalist slant (see e.g. Khalid 1998). As they opposed the Tsarist regime, the Bolsheviks initially found allies among them. Nevertheless, similar to the North Caucasus, the alliance between Bolsheviks and the local elites did not solve the problems. Central Asia was then struck by the Basmachis’ revolts. Basmachi, a Turkic word which means “bandit”, is referred as an umbrella term to different pockets of resistance against Bolshevik domination of the region, who apparently had little connection to the Jadidis:

The Jadids had little connection with the Basmachi revolt in Ferghana, which began in 1918 and continued for several years, by which time it had

\textsuperscript{178} Sarts was the name for the sedentary population of Central Asia, and they were composed of Iranian and Turkic elements. They were one component of the modern Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups. According to Akiner (1996: 335), Sart is derived from Sanskrit and means a trader. A Sanskrit etymology for this part of the world sounds, nevertheless, very improbable. My hypothesis is that this ethnonym is derived and is a corrupted form of Sughd or Soghd (Sogdian), the ancient East Iranian natives of this part of Central Asia. Another explanation is that it is derived from Sary It, which means “the yellow dog” in the Turkic languages. Another explanation is that it is derived from Shahryyk, which is then corrupted as Saaryyk and ultimately Sart in the Kypchak Turkic. According to this logic, this word means “city-dweller” and derived from the Iranian shahr, which means “city”. Although such an explanation makes sense, still, this explanation is somewhat problematic. Not only the word is phonetically far from its origin, but also the local Iranian word in Central Asia for “city” was kand, or kent, rather than shahr (which became prevalent in the western part of Iran relatively late). Shahr in Middle Persian Pahlevi, which was spoken prior to the Islamic era, meant “country” rather than “city”.

251
also spread to eastern Bukhara. Conventional wisdom connects the Basmachi to the destruction of the Kokand Autonomy. Soviet historiography saw in them the force of counterrevolution, acting in unison with every reactionary force in the region to nip Soviet power in the bud. Non-Soviet scholarship has generally accepted the romanticized émigré view of the Basmachi as a guerrilla movement of national liberation. Both views place a greater burden on the Basmachi than historical evidence can sustain. Instead, the revolt was a response to the economic and social crisis produced by the famine,...requisitions and confiscations on the part of “Soviet authorities”. The Basmachi represented one strategy of the rural population to cope with this dislocation.... [T]he movement was embedded in local solidarities, which remained alien to the more abstract visions of national struggle espoused by those who sought to coopt it to their goals. (Khalid 1998: 285-286)

Bolsheviks initially had a hard time quelling the Basmachi revolt. Nevertheless, once the Bolshevik power established itself, Central Asia remained relatively peaceful and obedient to communist rule until glasnost and perestroika (Schoeberlein-Engel 1994b). The Soviet policy makers tried to secure their positions in Central Asia (similar to the case in the Caucasus) by isolating them and severing their populations’ interactions with those of the neighboring countries, Iran, Afghanistan, and China (see e.g. Shaw 2011).

Figure 6.9. Central Asia in 1922. Source: Allworth (1967). A similar map is also available in Shaw (1999: 36).
In the early Bolshevik period, three republics were established in the southern part of Central Asia (see Figure 6.9). The Bukharan People’s Soviet Republic and the Khorezm People’s Soviet Republic were the successors of, respectively, the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanate of Khiva. The rest of southern Central Asia became the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, with Tashkent as its administrative center. The territorial demarcation of the territorial units in Central Asia were subject to change in the ensuing years.

In 1924 the issue of “optimal design” was raised (Gleason 1997: 573). In that year the Politburo issued a resolution, “On the National Redistricting of the Central Asian Republics”. When national territories were designed, present-day Kyrgyzstan was incorporated into the Russian Federative Soviet Socialist Republic (1924) as Kara-Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast’—Kazakhstan was initially named Kirgizistan, as Russians at that time called Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, respectively, Kirgiz and Kara-Kirgiz. One year later the Kara-Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast’ was renamed as the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast’. In 1926 its status was elevated to an ASSR within the Russian Federative Socialist Republic and to an SSR in 1936, the direct predecessor of the modern-day independent Kyrgyzstan. The predominantly Uzbek-inhabited areas such as the cities Osh Jalal Abad and their vicinities in Fergana Valley, became part of the Kirgiz SSR instead of the neighboring Uzbek SSR (which was established in 1924).

The creation of Uzbekistan was a remarkable case and dissimilar from most other cases in the former Soviet Union. In certain ways the modern Uzbek nation and Uzbekistan is a product of Bolshevik concession to a Jadidi leader, Abdulrauf Fitrat, apparently a Persian-speaker with pan-Turkist inclinations. The Uzbek nation was a blend of different Iranian- and Turkic-speaking groups (see Chapter 6). In fact, a territorial Uzbek nation was first made and then a language based on Jaghatay (Chaghatay) Turkic was imposed on them.

Tajikistan was first included in Uzbekistan as an ASSR in 1929. The Tajik ASSR did not include the Leninabad (Khujand) region. It gained that region only when it became a separate SSR in 1929. There were also demands that Samarkand and the region of Surkhon Darya (Surkhandarya) be transferred to the new Tajik SSR, but these demands were refused on the basis that Uzbekistan would lose its border with the non-Soviet outside world—that is, its border with Afghanistan (Masov 1996). The basis of these demands was that these areas are Persian-speaking and hence they should be recognized as Tajik. The fact remains that, to date, a large population of Persian speakers has gone into the Uzbek nation-building project. This, in addition to the similarities in material and non-material culture, is yet another fact which makes the
ethnic boundary between Uzbeks and Tajiks blurred and the distinction between them debatable and artificial at times.

Finally, Uzbekistan was enlarged by the incorporation of the Karakalpakstan ASSR in 1936. In that year Kazakhstan (called Kyrgyzstan until 1925) was promoted from an ASSR within the Russian Federation to a separate SSR. It lost Karakalpakstan to Uzbekistan, however.

The “national” delimitation of Central Asia was complete in 1936. However, its ethnic composition changed further afterwards. During the course of the Second World War, many Caucasian ethnic groups such the Ingush, Chechens, and Meskhetians were deported to Central Asia, where there were earlier communities of deportees or forced migrants such as Kurds and Koreans. Many other people moved seeking jobs, or were moved, to Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan. After the independence of these republics, the proportion of non-Central Asian migrants decreased. This was most visible in Tajikistan, which was struck by a bloody civil war.

The Tajikistani Civil War and the Role Played by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Pamiris

The Tajikistani civil war is the name of the war, or more precisely, the series of conflicts that occurred after the presidential elections in Tajikistan in 1992 and lasted until 1997, when a peace was reached between the different factions. In fact, it began earlier in the pre-independence era and lasted until a little later, as a warlord, Mahmud Khudoiberdiyev, rebelled until 1998. This war was one of the bloodiest and longest wars in the successor states of the former Soviet Union. It cost more than 50,000 human lives and resulted in approximately 1.2 million refugees or IDPs (UN 2004). Barnes and Abdullaev (2001: 8) summarized the nature of the Tajikistani civil war succinctly:

In comparison with many of the “internal” wars of the late twentieth century, the inter-Tajik conflict is notable both for its rapid escalation to war in 1992 and for its relatively quick conclusion through a negotiated settlement reached in June 1997.... [T]he civil war ... originated primarily in the dynamics of a power struggle between a new class of “political entrepreneurs” rather than in deep social divisions. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Tajikistan unveiled a vibrant array of political movements. They were formed at a time of great social and economic insecurity and were able to attract many activists. In addition, as Roy [2001] points out, inter-regional competition during the Soviet period generated tensions that fuelled the conflict; fighting was most intense where it intersected with localized antagonisms.
Although ethnicity played a role in this civil war, its main causes were not related to ethnicity or ethno-territorial disputes. It was primarily a war about political power in Tajikistan. It is often said that groups’ origin from and loyalty towards their localities played a role in the conflict. One’s group’s locality, however, overlapped in a few cases with its ethnicity. The different political clans, with their strongholds in different localities of Tajikistan, competed with each other in order to maintain or change the realities of power which had been established in the Soviet era. Clan in this sense is not a genealogical concept, but by it is meant a political formation of elites with strongholds in a certain part of the country. In the course of the Tajikistani Civil War, certain political movements were associated with certain areas of the country. In other words, different political movements had different clan backgrounds. People in these regions were not necessarily all sympathetic to the local movement’s ideology, but the very fact that the leaders of these movements had strongholds in these areas enabled them to mobilize combatants for their cause.

During Soviet times the top political positions were in the hands of the political clan from Leninabad (Leninobod). This is the northernmost province of the country, now called Sughd after the ancient Sogdians. Its capital was Leninabad (now renamed Khujand after its ancient name). It was the area that was still part of Uzbekistan proper when Tajikistan was still part of the Uzbek SSR as an ASSR. Tajikistan acquired this province when its status was elevated to an SSR in 1929. A major part of the population of this province are Uzbeks, and owing to its geographical location the province was, in Soviet times, more orientated towards Uzbekistan (see Figure 6.10). This province was (and still is) well connected to Uzbekistan, and the mountainous routes to southern Tajikistan are often closed in the winter time.

Next in the hierarchy stood the Kulobi political clan from. Their stronghold was the former province of Kulob—also spelled Kulyab in a Russianized way—now part of the newly formed Khatlon province. The former Qurghonteppa province (oblast’)—also spelled as Kurgan-Tyube in a Russianized way—is now the western part of the Khatlon province (viiloyat). It is interesting to note that Qurghonteppa was a stronghold of opposition in the Tajikistani civil war, and its merger with the loyal Kulob province probably serves as a strategy of control of the area.

Similarly, the former Karotegin province, another stronghold of the opposition in the Tajikistani civil war, was in an area which is now called the “Region of Republican Subordination”. That area consists of many districts which are governed directly from the Tajikistani capital of Dushanbe. This area is the homeland of the Gharmi people. Gharmi
people are a sub-group of Tajiks. In Soviet times large numbers of Gharmis were relocated to Qurghontepa. Gharmis were largely excluded from any important positions during Soviet times and supported the opposition groups in the Tajikistani Civil War. They are especially associated with the Islamist groups. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, not to be confused with the nationalist Tajik Renaissance Party (Rastokhez), was their main political party.

Another disadvantaged group were the Pamiris or Badakhshanis. They are the local inhabitants of the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous province. The bulk of the area was not a part of the Emirate of Bukhara. After the Tajik ASSR was formed inside the borders of the Uzbek SSR, the area was transferred from the former Turkestan ASSR to the newly emerged Tajikistan. They were quite distinguishable from Tajiks by the fact that they spoke their own East Iranian languages and dialects and were traditionally Ismaili Shi’ites. Even though the official Soviet policy was apathetic towards the religion, they were traditionally seen as heterodox and even as infidels by many Sunni Muslims, even in the Soviet times. Owing to its mountainous character, the largest area of this province was not really suitable for agriculture and was not industrially developed either. The local Pamiri people had to endure more privations during Soviet times. “In the 1960s the government imposed taxes on the orchards and as a result the apricot trees, mulberry trees, walnut trees, etc. were cut” (Red Book: The Peoples of the Pamirs).

Owing to the fact that there were more disadvantaged rural regions in the Tajik SSR, it is difficult to prove that there existed an official policy of discrimination against Pamiris. Nevertheless, in light of the policy record of the authorities, such a conclusion is certainly possible. Even if not the case in the economic sphere, Pamiris were certainly discriminated against in the cultural sphere. After the 1939 census they were not registered separately and the Soviet policy towards them was generally assimilationist:

So...
small. Large numbers of Pamiris were resettled in southwestern Tajikistan in the Qurghonteppa province, especially in the Vakhsh Valley, in order to work on the cotton farms (Red Book: The Peoples of the Pamirs). During the Tajikistani civil war a relatively large number of Pamiris were killed. Pamiri migrants outside Gorno-Badakhshan were also targets of assaults and murders.

The main party of Pamiris during the Tajikistani Civil War was the Pamiri nationalist party called *Lali Badakhshan* [The Ruby of Badakhshan]. Gorno-Badakhshan proclaimed independence in 1992 during the Tajikistani Civil War, but renounced it later (Minority Rights Group 2008a). Together with Gharmis, the Pamiris were part of the Tajik united opposition, a more or less loose coalition of different nationalist, liberal democratic, and Islamist parties.

According to Minority Rights Group (2008a), violence against Pamiris has been largely suspended, but they still complain about discrimination. Nevertheless, projects founded by the Agha Khan Foundation have revived the economy of Gorno-Badakhshan somewhat. The Agha Khan Foundation is named after Agha Khan, the spiritual leader of Shi’ite Ismaili Muslims, and is now very active in Central Asia—and also in Sunni areas. They have established universities in Gorno-Badakhshan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan (University of Central Asia). The Agha Khan’s project may affect the public image of Pamiris positively, but nevertheless, as late as 2012, Pamiris complained about lack of understanding and many still feel discriminated. A frequently heard complaint is that while in the newest census of Tajikistan the different Turkic Uzbek subgroups are recognized, Pamiris are still unrecognized and still registered as Tajiks.180

Aside from the local Tajiks, notably the Kulobis, these displaced Gharmis and Pamiris had another neighbor in western Tajikistan: the Uzbeks. In addition to the northern Uzbeks in the aforementioned province of Leninabad (or Sughd), Uzbeks were concentrated in western Tajikistan, notably in the Hisor Valley. Like Kulobis and Khujandi (Leninabadi) Tajiks and Uzbeks, these Uzbeks are also known to have been supporters of the Tajikistani (communist) government during the Tajikistani civil war, but they complained about discrimination in the latter years of the war. This was most probably because the regional political balance of power had been shifted in Tajikistani politics since 1994. As the role of Uzbeks and their position in Tajikistan is intimately related with the course of the civil war, this will be discussed after a brief overview of the war.

---

180 Interviews and communications with Pamiris during the first regional CESS (Central Eurasian Studies Society) conference in Bishkek and Chok Tal (Issyk Kul), Kyrgyzstan, August 2008.
A few remarks should be made in order to understand the Tajikistani Civil War better. It is often stated in a Euro-centrist way that Central Asians had no national identity and that nationalism and demands for reforms were not common there, unlike the European parts of the Soviet Union. Such a view is certainly wrong with regard to Tajikistan. In fact, nationalism and demands for reforms are at least partially, if not fully, responsible for the outbreak of the Tajikistani Civil War. Glasnost and perestroika affected Tajikistan more or less in the same way as they affected other republics. The Tajikistani political movements were in contact with those from other republics (Atkin 1997: 603). The nomadic people of Central Asia identified more or less with their tribal affiliations rather than with a territory or a territorial state in the past. This is not surprising as they were nomads. The case is very different in the case of Tajiks and Uzbeks, who were traditionally urban-dwellers or agriculturalists.

Tajik and Uzbek nationalism claimed legacy from many kingdoms in the past and a civilization that had produced many scientists, poets, and philosophers. The association of the contemporary Uzbek nation with either the Turkic and Turco-Mongolian conquerors, or with the Iranian, and Turco-Iranian states of the past is somewhat difficult, as the Uzbeks were initially a nomadic Turkic tribe and the ancestors of contemporary Uzbeks were not called Uzbeks in the past. The case of Tajiks is very different. The Tajiks have preserved the Persian language of the medieval Central Asian kingdoms, and they can claim their legacy with more justification. Indeed, there is some continuity between the modern Tajik national identity and the past kingdoms, especially the Samanid one, as the language of that kingdom is still intelligible to Tajiks and the works of medieval poets are still taught in the educational curricula in Tajikistan.

Tajiks had experienced statehood until the early 20th century. The Emirate of Bukhara, although it had become a Russian protectorate, was a state and was self-governing to a large degree. Although its population was a mixture of Turkic-speaking and Persian-speaking people, Persian was the dominant language there. The controversy arose over the fact that during the course of national delimitation in Central Asia and its aftermath, the large Persian-speaking—read Tajik—cities of Samarkand and Bukhara were allocated within Uzbekistan (proper). This has undeniably affected the national feelings of Tajiks.

The fact that the Tajikistani political arena was characterized by localism does not mean that the Tajikistani sense of national identity was absent and that nationalism had no place in the Tajikistani political arena.

---

181 The political territorial history of Tajikistan is discussed in detail by Masov (1996).
and society. In fact, the expression of Tajik nationalism was a prelude to the emerging warfare in Tajikistan. In contrast to the Soviet rhetoric, Tajik nationalists did not see their nation as a “formerly backward people” (Atkin 1997: 606). In this light it is more painful for the Tajik nationalists to realize that their republic was one of the most underdeveloped republics of the former Soviet Union and the smallest Central Asian republic, deprived of medieval Tajik cultural centers such as Samarkand and Bukhara.

The first notable events arising from nationalism after glasnost and perestroika were the so-called Dushanbe riots in February 1990. The main cause of these riots was the rumor that Armenian refugees from the Republic of Azerbaijan had arrived in Tajikistan and that they would get affirmative treatment in housing. This angered the Tajiks, who already complained about housing and about the general living conditions in Tajikistan. The rumor was only a trigger. These feelings of dissatisfaction and anger already existed and were not directed specifically against Armenians or any other ethnic groups but against the Soviet system and, in particular, the Tajikistani authorities. The riots became even more widespread after the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs opened fire on the protesters. The Dushanbe riots triggered an outflow of non-indigenous population from the republic.

Despite the fact that Tajik nationalists and reform-minded intellectuals were influenced by events in other parts of the Soviet Union, glasnost and perestroika did not have much effect on the Tajikistani leadership, who continued to rule the republic in an authoritarian way. The Tajikistani leadership in fact supported the hardline communist 1991 coup in Moscow. When the coup failed, Qahhor Mahkamov, the Communist Party’s first secretary and president of Tajikistan, was ousted and the Communist Party of Tajikistan was briefly suspended. After independence, however, the communists ousted Qadriddin Aslonov, who had assumed the office of presidency of Tajikistan shortly before, and installed the old-style communist Rahmon Nabiyev, who had been ousted as the first secretary of the Communist Party back in 1985 after an alleged corruption scandal.

Nabiyev stepped down briefly from the presidency owing to the pressures on him during the campaign for the presidential elections. He won the elections in 1992. This gave rise to large-scale protests by the opposition and was in effect the beginning of the Tajikistani Civil War.

The Tajikistani Civil War was a bloody protracted war, in which the Tajikistani conservative ruling elite was assisted by Uzbekistan, which had a similar-minded political ruling elite, and paradoxically also by the Russia of the Yeltsin era. The ruling elite saw rural people as susceptible to Islamic fundamentalism and were suspicious of most civil initiatives. In
fact, this was not an idle fear, since Tajikistan shares a rather long border
with Afghanistan and many citizens of Tajikistan had served in the army
during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

Nabiyev is often accused of having provoked the conflict by his
harsh and reckless performance. On the other hand, it is not certain what
would have happened if the opposition had seized the political power. It
was inconceivable that different local clans and different ideologies,
nationalists, liberal democrats, etc. could cooperate with the Islamist
elements. In any case, although he wanted it very much, Nabiyev was
unable to reaffirm the power of the old Soviet-time elite in an
authoritarian country. He failed, while President Karimov in Uzbekistan
was successful.

Later that year Nabiyev was detained at Dushanbe airport and
forced to resign. He retreated to his hometown of Leninabad and died in
April 1993, reportedly of a heart attack. Rumors are prevalent that he shot
himself or was assassinated. Emomali Rahmonov of the Kulobi clan held
de facto political power at the time and in 1994 was elected as president.

The war continued until 1997, when a peace agreement was
signed between the government and the United Tajik Opposition, by
which some government posts were assigned to the latter. Nevertheless, as
late as 1998, an Uzbek warlord rebelled and the position of Uzbeks
deteriorated in western Tajikistan. The role of Uzbekistan, and Tajikistani
Uzbeks and their position in Tajikistan will be discussed below.

It is often argued that Uzbekistan as an external player in the
conflict was not interested in the position of Uzbeks in the country. It is
true that Uzbekistan was primarily interested in its own domestic security,
and its involvement in the Tajikistani Civil War was primarily in order to
prevent a spill-over into Uzbekistan and to hinder the precedent of an
Islamist government in Central Asia, which would then trigger an Islamist
takeover of power in Uzbekistan (see e.g. Fumagalli 2007; Horsman
1999). Nevertheless, it is untrue to say that Uzbekistan was not at all
interested in Uzbeks in Tajikistan.

Uzbeks are the largest ethnic group in Central Asia and comprised
about a quarter of Tajikistan’s population before the Tajikistani Civil
War—now they comprise approximately 16% of Tajikistan’s population.
They were a demographic source to be reckoned with in Tajikistani
politics. In the early days of the civil war, “[t]he government of
Uzbekistan encouraged anti-Tajik sentiments among the Uzbek
inhabitants of southern Tajikistan” (Atkin 1997: 609). This is not
surprising because these were Uzbeks, who were the neighbors of the
oppositional political clans in Qurghonteppa. During the civil war these
Uzbeks clashed frequently with the opposition.
Uzbekistan assisted the conservative government directly and indirectly. It is rumored that the late Nabiyev was in fact an Uzbek. Given his Asiatic facial features and phenotype, it is more likely that he was indeed an Uzbek rather than a Tajik. However, this is not necessarily so, as many Tajiks also have the same facial features. Uzbek and Tajik identities are blurred, especially in Uzbekistan (see Schoeberlein-Engel [1994a; 1997] for an in-depth description of Uzbek and Tajik identities).

Nabiyev was from Leninabad. The fact is that Leninabad province was heavily populated by Uzbeks and was orientated towards Uzbekistan. As it was the home base of the conservative ruling elite, who were assisted by Uzbekistan, Leninabad during the Tajikistani Civil War became even more orientated towards Uzbekistan, to which it was better connected by means of transportation and communication than to the rest of Tajikistan.

From 1994 onwards, however, there was a shift of policy visible in the attitude of Uzbekistan towards the Tajikistani Civil War. From that time Uzbekistan supported negotiations between the opposition and the conservative government. According to Horsman (1999: 43-44), this was because the Uzbekistani government thought of its position as already consolidated, having used the Tajikistani Civil War as a legitimate reason to crack down on the opposition in Uzbekistan. The Andijon events in 2005 showed that there are still some challenges to Uzbekistan’s ruling elite, especially from the Islamist opposition. Nevertheless, the Uzbekistani ruling elite is consolidated enough in order to resist these challenges. I argue that the shift in the Uzbekistani attitude towards Tajikistan was also due to another fact. In 1994 the balance of power in the government forces shifted in favor of the Kulobi political clan at the expense of the Leninabadi one which was more orientated toward Uzbekistan. This shift of power coincided with the complaints of discrimination by Uzbeks. According to the Minorities at Risk Project (MAR 2010a) in 1994:

Many Uzbeks in Panj complained before representatives of Human Rights Watch that they had been illegally detained for more than twenty-four hours in the headquarters of the special forces. Some were detained for a few days, other were detained for longer periods and permitted only sporadic family visits. Many of the detainees were beaten while in detention. When asked by Human Rights Watch why Uzbeks in Panj were suddenly being targeted by their former allies, the pro-government Tajiki forces, Uzbeks unanimously responded that the Tajiks who had previously been enemies (i.e. Kulabis and Gharmis) were now uniting in an effort to push Uzbeks out of Tajikistan.

What the above quotation indicates is that the shift of power had brought about new realities of power. In 1994 the Kulobi clan, which was
previously the second-ranked after the Leninabadi clan, became the dominant force in the country. In order to maintain its position it is conceivable that the Kulobi clan will accommodate its former enemies in order to remain at the top. This way the former opposition will get a relatively inferior position while they will be on top at the expense of the former Leninabadi overlords and their Uzbek allies. I argue that the peace deal and the willingness of the new government to negotiate with the opposition follows the same logic.

Uzbeks in Tajikistan complain that the government has not rewarded them for their support during the civil war. Uzbeks have come into clashes with the Tajik returnees who have claimed back their homes, lands, and properties. Regarding the fact that these Tajiks were associated with the supporters of the opposition in Qurghonteppa, the feuds of the civil-war era still play a role. The Tajikistani government has instead disarmed the Uzbeks. In fact, the government made a plan to disarm everybody in this area, but Uzbeks believed that this policy was especially targeted at them.

In 1998 the Tajikistani Uzbek warlord Mahmud Khudoberdiev, once an ally of the government, rebelled against the new government in the northern province of Sughd (former Leninabad). He demanded better government positions for the northerners (i.e. the Leninabadi political clan and the Uzbeks there). This probably caused the new Tajikistani government to be even more suspicious of Uzbeks.

According to Minorities at Risk Project (MAR 2006d) and Minorities Right Group (2008b), Uzbeks face discrimination in Tajikistan. While the former source states that the risk of rebellion by Uzbeks is low in Tajikistan, the latter source maintains that the tensions between Uzbeks and Tajiks have increased since 2006. The question of discrimination and rivalry between Tajiks and Uzbeks remains unclear, as the ethnic boundaries between the two people are blurred. In fact, it is often stated that Tajiks and Uzbeks are one people who speak two languages.

Although at peace and making progress, post-conflict Tajikistan still faces many challenges (Heathershaw 2011). It is conceivable that the issues of economic well-being and political representation in Tajikistan remain sensitive issues in Tajikistani politics and could be a source of tension between different local and ethnic groups in the (near) future, despite the fact that Tajikistan has not had major upheavals and unrest in recent years. Even though the recent events in Kyrgyzstan (2010) show that Central Asia is still not free of ethnic tension, and despite the fact that relations between Uzbeks and Tajiks are reportedly soured more than before, in post-conflict Tajikistan the challenges from Islamic fundamentalism remain a more pressing issue than ethnic rivalry in Central Asian politics. Even though expressions of political Islam are
generally not tolerated in Central Asia (Mateeva 2006: 28), and even though a widespread apolitical mood prevails in post-conflict Tajikistan (Heathershaw 2011: 78-79),\textsuperscript{182} still the danger of violent conflict initiated by Wahhabi/Salafi militants is real. The many recent incidents of this nature are, indeed, evidence for such a possibility. As Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, which is an unstable state plagued by militant Sunni Islamist insurgency with links to Wahhabi/Salafi (or as many would say, Deobandi) groups in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, it remains vulnerable to such an Islamist-inspired violent conflict; in any case, much more than purely inter-ethnic conflicts. As recent events show in Taliban-era Afghanistan (1994–2001, and even thereafter), Bahrain (2011, Saudi invasion), Iraq (2003–2011 post-Saddam instability), and the many attacks on Shi’ites in Pakistan, a strong Wahhabi/Salafi presence is often accompanied by the massacre of Shi’ites and liberal Sunni Muslims. Such a scenario may lead to reactions among the Pamiri Ismaili Shi’ites, which in turn may cause a new war in Tajikistan. This scenario, however, remains hypothetical only.

\textsuperscript{182} According to John Heathershaw (2011), in the post-conflict Tajikistan the popular discourse of peace at the local level is framed around the discourse of \textit{tinji} (a word meaning "peacefulness" and "wellness" in the Tajik language). Heathershaw identifies an element of anti-politics in the latter discourse, which I would rather call apolitical (see Rezvani 2011: 471).
Southern Kyrgyzstan was in June 2010 again the scene of ethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Aside from the civil war in Tajikistan, Central Asia had been free of large-scale violence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The recent (summer 2010) violence in Kyrgyzstan between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz has shocked many, particularly those who thought that the hostility between these two ethnic groups was already lost in the darkness of history. The former Uzbek–Kyrgyz conflict in Kyrgyzstan was often blamed on the post-*perestroika* deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the former Soviet Union. Most analysts, certainly those in the West, thought that even though ethnic stereotypes existed between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks similar to those between other ethnic groups worldwide, violence and hostilities had already subsided in 1990 after order was re-established.

Arguably, the 2010 conflict was a re-eruption of the former conflict in 1990, which had remained dormant after violent hostilities subsided. Although the 2010 conflict was fought only over a short period of time, it is rooted in a longer history. Like many other ethno-territorial conflicts elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, its roots go back to the establishment of the Soviet Union and its nationalities policy and national territorial (re)divisions. As a result of these divisions, a large Uzbek population now lives in the territory of Kyrgyzstan contiguous to the Uzbekistani border.

Asanbekov (1996) calls this conflict a Turkic self-genocide. Without approving his wording, this labeling is insightful because lingual and religious affiliations are often wrongly thought to be determinants of ethnic conflicts. Although belonging to different branches, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz both speak a Turkic language and both are Sunni Muslims.

Traditionally, Uzbeks were largely sedentary while the Kyrgyz were traditionally nomadic. Although there have been periods in which nomads attacked and pillaged the sedentary population, the relations between the nomadic Kyrgyz and the sedentary Sarts—i.e. the ancestors of modern-day Uzbeks and Tajiks—were not always violent as they saw benefits in peaceful coexistence and trade and exchange of their products. Nevertheless, Soviet—and to some extent earlier imperial Russian—policies vis-à-vis these peoples ultimately contributed to a situation in which the interests of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz seemed to be incompatible and hence came into open violent conflict with each other.

During the Soviet era, and in conformity with the situation elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz as the titular ethnic group held most, and the most important, positions in Kyrgyzstan. Hence, the highest officials and the militia in the Osh region and the rest of Uzbek-inhabited
southern Kyrgyzstan were ethnically Kyrgyz. The Uzbek majority predominated in the agriculture and service sectors.

Although Uzbeks were a minority in Kyrgyzstan, with approximately half a million souls, and only compromised 13% of the total population, they formed a majority of the population in many southern areas adjacent or close to the Kyrgyzstani–Uzbekistani border. In addition, the Uzbek demographic weight in Central Asia was large. Uzbeks were the largest ethnic group in Central Asia, regardless of whether we take the official numbers of the Soviet census or the unofficial numbers which count the number of Uzbeks much lower. Large numbers of Uzbeks lived in all other Central Asian republics. Uzbeks in Uzbekistan outnumbered the Kyrgyz (in Kyrgyzstan or elsewhere) by a factor of more than three.

In the late 1980s and after Gorbachev’s policies of glasnost and perestroika were initiated, there was more room for opposition and dissent. Kyrgyzstan was one of the poorest republics, and unemployment and underemployment were rampant, with the ethnic Kyrgyz moving steadily to the cities and in serious need of housing (Huskey 1997: 660-661).

The issue of housing for the ethnic Kyrgyz, in addition to the issues of revival and assertion of Kyrgyz language and culture, became one of the main aims of the Kyrgyz nationalist movements and organizations that began to emerge. In the Osh region the ethnic Kyrgyz organization Osh Aimagy was established, which demanded land for the housing of Kyrgyz in this predominantly Uzbek area. The Kyrgyz-dominated regional authorities allotted 32 hectares of fertile agricultural land belonging to a predominantly Uzbek collective farm for the housing of ethnic Kyrgyz.

On the other side, the ethno-nationalist Uzbeks had organized themselves in the Adolat [justice] Organization, which aimed at more Uzbek cultural rights, autonomy, and even separatism and incorporation of parts of southern Kyrgyzstan into Uzbekistan (Asanbekov 1996; Huskey 1997: 662). These demands were not only advanced by the separatist groups such as Adolat, but also by the “well-to-do” Uzbeks and Uzbek oqsoqols (elders with social prestige). Declarations of autonomy of and support for separatism of the Uzbek-inhabited areas in southern Kyrgyzstan also appeared in Uzbekistan, even among scholars (Asanbekov 1996).

The Kyrgyzstani authorities failed to appease the local Uzbeks, and violent ethnic conflict erupted (4–10 June 1990) in the Osh region, notably in Osh and in Uzgen cities. The Uzbeks were supported by their co-ethnics “from Uzbekistan, who crossed the republican border in the
early stages of the fighting” (Huskey 1997: 662). Asanbekov (1996) states that according to a KGB report:

The opposing sides, especially Uzbeks, had long been preparing for this conflict. The Uzbeks had probably begun preparations in February 1990 [four months before the conflict]. Some of the Uzbek population in Osh began to drive out Kyrgyz tenants from their lodgings, prompted by the threats of Uzbek extremists to set fire to their houses if they did not expel their Kyrgyz tenants. The result was the appearance of some 1.5 thousand young Kyrgyz men in Osh who joined Osh Aimagi.

The estimates of human casualties of this ethno-territorial conflict remain modest, varying between slightly less than 200 (Tishkov 1995: 134-135; Tishkov 1997: 137) and slightly more than 300 (Asanbekov 1996). Nevertheless, given the fact that the actual fighting took place over only a few days (4–10 June 1990), this ethno-territorial conflict can be regarded as one of the most violent ones in the former Soviet Union. Approximately 5,000 criminal acts occurred during this conflict, many of which had an extremely brutal character (Tishkov 1995: 135; Tishkov 1997: 135-154).

This ethno-territorial conflict was one of the few cases in the former Soviet Union in which the rebelling minority did not possess an autonomous status in the host republic. In this respect, this conflict resembles the Transnistrian conflict in Moldova. Kaufman’s (2001) classification of the conflicts in and over South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh as mass-led mobilization is not totally justified because in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan nationalists ultimately seized the political power. However, the conflict in Osh (not discussed by Kaufman) can certainly be seen as such a case. In this case, nevertheless, ethno-nationalists were not successful in their separatist aims. In contrast to the unresolved conflicts in the Caucasus, violence subsided after the authorities announced a military curfew and a treaty of friendship was signed between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in March 1991. Nevertheless, tension still remains between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in this part of Kyrgyzstan (Eurasianet.org 24 January 2006; MAR 2010b).

The first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, did much in order to appease the Uzbeks, but the situation worsened after he was removed from office after the so-called Tulip Revolution (2005). Already before the Tulip Revolution there were signs of deterioration in the inter-ethnic situation. According to Nick Megoran (2005: 568-574), in the late 1990s and early 2000s, generally a xenophobic discourse existed among the opposition, viewing foreign forces, as well as the ruling elite, as a threat to Kyrgyzstan’s security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. “After domestic chongdor [i.e. the Kyrgyz elite], the terrorist threat from
the [Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan] IMU was named as a major
danger. Much reference was made to foreign capitalists—Turkish and
Chinese traders and ‘Western’ capitalists. These were sometimes
described as being in cahoots with the Kyrgyz chongdor, and were
together draining the wealth of Kyrgyzstan” (Megoran 2005: 573). Even
Akayev’s government, which was renowned for its orientation towards a
civic model of the Kyrgyzstani nation and had initially resisted and
opposed the opposition’s Kyrgyz ethno-nationalistic discourse, fell
ultimately into a (ethno)-nationalist discourse on border disputes when the
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan penetrated the Batken area in southern
Kyrgyzstan in 1999 (Megoran 2004: 752-758).

The “Tulip Revolution”, however, was the major turning point. It
shifted the balance of power in Kyrgyzstan in favor of the “southern”
Kyrgyz. After the Tulip Revolution Kurmanbek Bakiyev, with his
stronghold in southern Kyrgyzstan, seized political power. As in
Tajikistan so also in Kyrgyzstan: clans and locality play a role in political
affairs. After the Tulip Revolution, the ethnic competition between the
southern Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan gained salience.

After Akayev and his government were removed from office,
Uzbeks complained increasingly about discrimination and blamed the
new, i.e. Bakiyev’s, government for being insensitive to inter-ethnic
relations (Eurasianet.org 24 January 2006; Fergana News 19 March
2007; MAR 2010b). During Askar Akayev’s presidency Uzbeks were
represented in the local authorities in southern Kyrgyzstan in areas where
they constituted a majority of the population. Following the famous Soviet
phrase, “Soviet Union is our common home”, Akayev’s government was
chanting “Kyrgyzstan is our common home”. This fact suggests Akayev’s
orientation towards a civic model of nationalism, even if half-hearted
since he simultaneously also spoke about Kyrgyz statehood (Suleymanov
2008: 21). In any case, his policies of appeasing and accommodating
Uzbek demands had positive effects on the inter-ethnic situation in
southern Kyrgyzstan.

After the Tulip Revolution, too many Uzbek officials were
reportedly replaced by southern Kyrgyz, who were genealogically and
ideologically close to President Bakiyev. Already on 24 January 2006,
not very long after the Tulip Revolution, Eurasianet.org reported:

The increasing view among Uzbeks is that the March 2005 revolution that
ousted former president Askar Akayev and installed Bakiyev was not a
beneficial development for their community. Akayev, during the last years

---

183 I remember this issue was mentioned to foreign scholars by my Kyrgyz colleagues during my
fieldwork and a conference in Kyrgyzstan in August 2010. At that time not many believed in a re-
existence of ethnic conflict in the Kyrgyzstan, despite the warnings of deterioration in inter-
ethnic relations in southern Kyrgyzstan.
of his administration, courted Uzbek support by espousing a policy called “Kyrgyzstan is our common house”. Uzbeks also used the People’s Assembly, a formal association of ethnic minorities established by Akayev, to represent their interests. Uzbek leaders say that Bakiyev has shown little interest in continuing the Akayev line on inter-ethnic relations, noting that the People’s Assembly has lost much of its former influence. Uzbeks have been alarmed by the nationalist rhetoric employed by Bakiyev administration officials. (Eurasianet.org 24 January 2006)

Although it is unfair to claim that all Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan were his supporters, it is true that Bakiyev had his stronghold among the Kyrgyz there. Therefore, it is fair to blame the deterioration of the inter-ethnic situation in southern Kyrgyzstan on the policies implemented during Kurmanbek Bakiyev’s presidency. It was conceivable that a privileged position of southern Kyrgyz, accompanied by a deterioration in Uzbeks’ position, would lead to much grievance among the latter.

As Bakiyev’s government was brought down by another revolution, the shift of political power also aggrieved the southern Kyrgyz, who feared they would lose their privileged position. Due to the legacy of Soviet nationalities policy and its practice of the allocation of resources by central government, the southern Kyrgyz possibly began to realize that the aggrieved Uzbeks’ animosity towards Kurmanbek Bakiyev might receive a welcoming ear from the northern Kyrgyz. Whether this was the reality or their own (mis)perception, the southern Kyrgyz’s fear was understandable.

Although usually not leading to inter-ethnic clashes, negative stereotypes of Uzbeks are widespread among the Kyrgyz and also among other ethnic groups elsewhere. The demographic dominance of Uzbeks in the region makes them a despised ethnic group in Central Asia, especially among the nomadic groups such as the Kyrgyz, who traditionally were almost absent in the cities in (what is now) their country. Certainly Uzbeks were seen as capable of posing serious separatist and irredentist demands, such as the first Osh conflict (1990), and meddling in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, as they did during the Tajikistani Civil War (see e.g. Horsman 1999). According to Tishkov (interviewed by De Waal 2003: 133), Uzbekistan was another ethnic assimilator, in addition to Georgia and Azerbaijan. Stereotypes of Uzbeks being chauvinists who suppress the minorities in Uzbekistan are common in Kyrgyzstan as well as in other Central Asian countries, particularly in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, ethnic competition in the materialistic sense is a pressing issue only in southern Kyrgyzstan, near the Uzbekistani border (Fergana Valley) where the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks encounter each other. Other areas in Kyrgyzstan are almost void of Uzbeks.
The disorder and chaos resulting from the “new” revolution and removal of Bakiyev is a factor which has increased the opportunity for unleashing hostilities. Similar to the 1990s, when the whole Soviet Union was in disarray, the situation in Kyrgyzstan became chaotic after Bakiyev was removed from office, and Otunbayeva, together with many members of the opposition, came to power. In this chaos and power vacuum Bakiyev relied on his supporters in southern Kyrgyzstan. Criminal gangs could also carry on and prepare themselves for a potential conflict, be it against the new government or against Uzbeks, whom they mistrusted and viewed as supporters of the new government.

Although the conflict in 2010 between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan is, in certain respects, the re-eruption of the 1990 conflict between them, still it is unfair to say that this was a “frozen” conflict which “melted” again. The Kyrgyz–Uzbek conflict in Kyrgyzstan is not similar to “frozen” conflicts in the Caucasus—that is, Ossetian–Georgian, Abkhazian–Georgian, or Azerbaijani–Armenian conflicts. The first Kyrgyz–Uzbek conflict in the 1990s was terminated when the violence stopped. Kyrgyzstan was one of the few (post-)Soviet republics that moved (half-heartedly) towards a civic model of nationhood. Unlike most other Soviet successor states, which implemented firm nationalist policies, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, for example, have retained Russian as an official language in the republic. The demographic position of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs in, respectively, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was simply not large enough to make negligence of ethnic minorities a viable option. This situation, however, had largely changed since the Tulip Revolution, to the detriment of Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan.

On the other hand, the new eruption of conflict was in way a continuation of the 1990 ethnic conflict: it was a revenge on Uzbeks. It requires more detailed investigation and is difficult to state with certainty, but it is quite possible that the Kyrgyz mob which attacked Uzbeks in June 2010 were relatives of the victims of the 1990 conflict, the memory of which was still vivid in the minds of citizens in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbeks were the underdog during the second conflict in 2010. This was especially so during the first days of the conflict, but the situation seems to have changed later on. This is obvious from a few facts. The course of the conflict, and its related news, could be followed on the official website of the Kyrgyzstani news agency, “Aki Press” (Akipress.com and Akipress.org). In the first few days of clashes, the situation was chaotic. As a result, tens of people died and many people fled the towns. However, it seems that the situation returned to relative

---
184 During my visit to Kyrgyzstan (August 2008) I noticed that the negative ethnic stereotypes of the “Other” still exist among the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.
calm after many were arrested. The night of 13 to 14 June, a few days after the atrocities began, was reported as being calm in Osh (Akipress 14 June 2010a). The number of casualties increased dramatically from 77 (Akipress 12 June 2010) to 192 (Akipress 18 June 2010), after 203 persons crossed the border from Uzbekistan into Kyrgyzstan (Akipress 14 June 2010b). Therefore, the increase in the number of casualties may relate to an Uzbek revenge. This is supported by the Kyrgyz minister’s claim that refugees were not only Uzbeks but also Kyrgyz; the latter sought refuge in the mountains. It is true that the Uzbekistani president Karimov had taken an isolationist stance in regional politics after 2006. The Uzbek-Kyrgyz border is officially difficult to cross. However, the borders are not totally closed. Uzbek networks operate on both sides of the Uzbekistani–Kyrgyzstani border. The Uzbekistani government uses these informal networks, particularly in order to contain and counter (alleged) radical Islamists (Wahhabi/Salafi) activists (Fumagalli 2007: 115). Certainly, 203 militants, who may have crossed the border into Kyrgyzstan, are more than enough to account for the sharp rise in the number of casualties.

This conflict has officially cost between 400 and 500 human lives and has resulted in 400,000 refugees (Akipress 3 May 2011; Akipress 3 June 2011; Reuters 17 June 2010). According to Roza Otunbayeva, the (interim) Kyrgyzstani president (at the time of conflict), the number of casualties could be estimated at 2,000 (BBC 18 June 2010; BBC 3 July 2010; The Guardian 18 June 2010; The Independent 19 June 2010; Ria Novosti 18 June 2010; Ria Novosti 3 July 2010; VOA 16 August 2010; The Washington Times 18 June 2010). Although the official accounts provide a smaller number than 2,000, Otunbayeva’s estimates do not seem far-fetched if one realizes the brutal nature of this conflict. The initial number of deaths was much lower but rose as the seriously injured unfortunately died from their injuries. In addition, there was and still is much uncertainty about the exact number of casualties at that chaotic time. One thing, however, is certain; this conflict (2010) was a bloody one, especially for Uzbeks. Compared with the conflicts in the Caucasus and Tajikistan, the number of casualties in such a short time is evidence of the brutal and fatal character of this conflict. Despite the fact that it was not a conventional war between armies, a number of machine guns and other weapons were used in this conflict.185 According to the Kyrgyzstani National Security Service, about 300 automatic weapons and 1,500 Molotov cocktails had been used in the clashes in Osh. (Akipress 15 June 2010).

185 This can be clearly read in the news provided by Akipress.com.
It is not totally justified to regard this conflict as terminated, because its root causes still remain. On the other hand, it is conceivable that this conflict’s potential will cease to exist as time goes on, and the (current type of) ethno-nationalism—a product of the Soviet nationalities policy—may erode. Conscious state policies will certainly help create a civic model of the Kyrgyzstani nation and hence may reduce the chances of similar conflicts in future.

**Conclusion: Patterns of Ethno-Territorial Conflict**

After having described them earlier in this chapter, below the ethno-territorial conflicts will be compared with each other. By doing that, an attempt will be made to find patterns and draw conclusions. The findings of this chapter confirm many theoretical assumptions discussed in Chapter 2. These findings and conclusions are discussed below.

All conflicts have originated at a time when the respective host country was in political chaos. All ethno-territorial conflicts in the Soviet Union and its successor states have emerged after glasnost and perestroika, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, or shortly thereafter. In every case, the first signs of conflict were visible already before the Soviet Union’s dissolution.

The times of eruption of all conflicts confirm the fact that the political instability of the host country is a background condition that enables the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts. This is true about all ethno-territorial conflicts discussed, including the Kyrgyz–Uzbek conflict in summer 2010, but with the exception of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in August 2008 that could better be seen as international wars.

The conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in summer 2010, similar to the first conflict there in 1990, occurred in a time of political chaos. The political situation in Kyrgyzstan was indeed chaotic in June 2010. Ex-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev was deposed in May 2010, while Roza Otunbaeva’s presidency was not yet legitimized. There were many riots and much discord, especially in the south of country, at that time.

The first conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan occurred in the aftermath of perestroika, at a time when the Soviet Union was disintegrating and when ethnic nationalism was salient all over the former Soviet empire. Roughly during the same period many other ethno-territorial conflicts—the South Ossetian, Prigorodny, and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts—occurred in the (post-)Soviet Caucasus and
Central Asia. Although the dispute about Nagorno-Karabakh had begun earlier, it evolved into a violent conflict roughly at the same period of time as the aforementioned conflicts. This was also a time when Chechens voiced their desire for independence from Russia for the first time. The only conflict which can be typified as an ethno-territorial conflict in the (post-)Soviet space outside the Caucasus and Central Asia began also at the same period of time: The Transnistrian conflict began in Moldova in 1990, and the Gagauz minority there demanded autonomy. One year earlier (1989), the pogrom against Meskhetians occurred in Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan, not very far from Osh.

Comparing the cases of conflicts teaches us that religious difference does not seem to be a necessary factor for the emergence of these ethno-territorial conflicts. Half of the ethno-territorial conflicts in these regions were fought by ethnic groups who adhered to different religions. On the one hand, the predominantly Orthodox Christian Ossetians and Abkhazians fought against the predominantly Orthodox Christian Georgians; and the Sunni Muslim Uzbeks were involved in conflicts with fellow Sunni Muslim Kyrgyz and Tajiks. On the other hand, the Sunni Muslim Chechens and Ingush fought against, respectively, the predominantly Orthodox Christian Russians and Ossetians; the predominantly Orthodox Christian Armenians fought against the predominantly Shi’ite Muslim Azeris; and the Sunni Muslim Tajiks fought against the Ismaili Shi’ite Muslim Pamiris. However, there were many more ethno-territorial encounters between ethnic groups adhering to different religions that were not afflicted by conflicts.

No ethno-territorial conflict was fought by ethnic groups who spoke closely related languages. This is also true in the case of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Although both Turkic languages, Uzbek and Kyrgyz belong to different branches of the Turkic languages. Nevertheless, as will be discussed further on, ethnic kinship may have had an impact on the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts in these regions, and, therefore, linguistic difference or similarity may also have had such an impact on them.

Remarkably, all the ethno-territorial conflicts reviewed have occurred in areas which can be typified as the mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration. The whole Caucasus, as well as the southeastern part of Central Asia, can be typified as such. One might argue that the Caucasian political culture, and that of southeastern Central Asia for that matter, is more ethno-nationalistic than other regions and, therefore, the eruption of ethno-territorial conflicts are more likely in these regions. However, the prominence of ethno-nationalist sentiments may itself be the result of the “mosaicness” of the ethno-geographic configuration there. The prominence of ethno-nationalism may have many
causes; nevertheless, a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration probably contributes to it, especially in the context of politicized ethnicity in such ethno-political systems as that of the Soviet Union.

The ethno-territorial conflicts in the (post-) Soviet space, with the exception of the North Ossetian–Ingush (Prigorodny) and the partial exception of the Tajikistani Civil War, are in essence separatist wars fought by ethnic separatists and fit Gurr’s (1993; 1994; [ed.] 2000) description and phrases of “Peoples versus States”, “Peoples against States” and “Minorities at Risk”. In the terminology of this current study, these were vertical ethno-territorial conflicts in which one ethno-politically subordinated ethnic group fought against the host state which was dominated by a certain titular ethnic group. As the host states or republics in the (post-)Soviet space were dominated by one titular ethnic nation, these wars were, in reality, between minorities and the titulars in a republic. On the other hand, there were many more cases in which subordinated ethnic groups did not fight separatist wars against their respective host states.

The titular status of an ethnic group determines to a great extent its ability and success in ethnic politics, be it of separatist or more moderate nature such as cultural preservation or representation in official governmental bodies. Especially after glasnost and perestroika the position of titular groups in different republics improved (Tishkov 1991: 610). According to Tishkov (1995: 133), the violence in the (post-)Soviet space was instigated by titular groups, who attacked minorities in their republics. His argument that the titular groups had well-established cultural institutions makes sense. These groups also had the best representations in the governmental and administrative bodies (see Bremmer 1997; Tishkov 1991). His examples—Uzbeks against Meskhetians in Uzbekistan, and the Kyrgyz against Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan—also make sense. Nevertheless, the initiation of violence should not be confused with the initiation of ethnic strife. In many cases, the better-equipped and often numerically superior titular groups may attack first, but this is often a reaction to the minorities’ actions. The minorities are often the ones who initiate a conflict by making autonomist or separatist claims. The minorities may even actively initiate an armed conflict. Secondly, minorities may also be well-equipped and have governmental institutions at their disposal. Many minorities in (post-)Soviet republics are a titular nationality in a neighboring republic or elsewhere. In addition, many minorities possess autonomous territorial units within (post-)Soviet republics. These autonomous structures increase the likelihood of successful separatism because they function well in the mobilization of population, as well as in making (pseudo-)legal declarations. Like the (post-)Soviet union republics, the autonomous units
are often named after an ethnic group and are regarded internally and externally as its ethnic homeland.

The possession of territorial autonomy seems to be important. Most ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus and Central Asia are fought between ethnic groups who possessed territorial autonomies. Many studies have pointed to territorial autonomy as a factor that enables or facilitates ethnic mobilization, separatism, and hence conflict. Cornell (1999; 2001: 41-56; 2002a; 2002b), for example, maintains that autonomy in the context of the Soviet legacy contributes to ethno-political separatism. Indeed, the Armenians in Azerbaijan, the Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia, the Pamiris in Tajikistan, and the Chechens in Russia all possessed territorial autonomy. The Ingush and Ossetians, who were involved in a horizontal conflict in the North Caucasus, also possessed territorial autonomies. Remarkably, the Ossetians, who possessed a better-functioning territorial autonomy than the Ingush, were better able to mobilize armed groups, and their military actions were more organized than those of the Ingush, whose recently obtained territorial autonomy, understandably, did not function well enough at that time.

There are also indications that the host states react more vigilantly and resolutely against separatist claims from the autonomous units than against similar claims elsewhere in their territory. For example, the republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia reacted resolutely against separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. On the other hand, Georgia did not react militarily against the Armenian separatism in Javakheti (called Javakhk by Armenians), while Azerbaijan did not do much either about the Lezgin (Lezgistan) and Talysh (Talysh Mughan Republic) separatism. Armenians were numerous and formed an absolute majority of the population in Georgia’s Javakheti region, and the Talysh and Lezgins were concentrated and formed a majority of the population in, respectively, the southeastern and northeastern part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia and the Armenians in Azerbaijan, the Armenians in Georgia and the Lezgin and Talysh in Azerbaijan did not possess any autonomous territories in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Although ethnic competition and the prevailing ethno-territorial hierarchy in the Soviet ethno-political system make separatist wars by those ethnic groups possessing territorial autonomy an understandable option, not all such peoples have taken such attempts. In addition, one has to agree with Toft’s (2003) conclusion that a demographic dominance of the titular group inside the territorial autonomy enhances the likelihood of separatism. In all territorial autonomous units subject to ethno-territorial conflict, with the notable exception of Abkhazia, the corresponding lower-ranked titulars constituted a demographic majority of the population in
their respective territorial units. This is also true for the only horizontal ethno-territorial conflict reviewed: although in the Prigorodny conflict there was no separation from Russia at stake, both ethnic groups had the demographic majority of the population in their autonomous homelands, Ingushetia and North Ossetia, similar to the Chechens in Chechnya.

Although ethnic competition does exist in the North Caucasus as a legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy (Bremmer 1997), and clashes and tensions do exist between different ethnic groups, they have not resulted in large-scale conflicts and wars, as autonomous territories in the North Caucasus, with the exception of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and North Ossetia-Alania, are not territories in which a clear majority of a certain ethnic group exists. The inter-ethnic rivalries between the ethnic groups inside those autonomous territories take the upper hand, giving the central government the role of mediator and balancer, and hence mitigating the likelihood of separatism. Remarkably, the Ingush came into conflict over Prigorodny with North Ossetia-Alania only after their separation from the Chechens. The Ingush were first hampered by the more demographically dominant Chechens in Chechnya, who had occupied the most important political positions in the republic and who had different political projects. Many truly believe that the separation of the Ingush from their kinfolk Chechens was, in fact, due to their desire to undertake more decisive action with regard to the status of the Prigorodny district.

Although the cases studied by Toft (2003) concerned ethnic minorities who possessed territorial autonomy, still many elements in her theory could apply to Uzbeks who despite not possessing territorial autonomy in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were concentrated, and constituted a large majority of population, in certain areas there. Despite not being titular there, Uzbeks in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan mobilized themselves for, and in, ethno-territorial conflicts. Uzbeks, however, were in both cases titular in a neighboring republic, Uzbekistan, where their population was three or more times as large as the Tajiks in Tajikistan or the Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek demographic dominance in Uzbekistan and in the region as well as the contiguity of the Uzbek minorities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to their co-ethnics in Uzbekistan had probably an effect on the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts there. Their territorial contiguity along with their transborder dominance may have compensated for their lack of territorial autonomy inside their host republics.

Transborder dominance brings about external support from the kinfolk, which may or may not deter the titular ethnic group in the host state from initiating an ethno-territorial conflict with such a subordinated ethno-territorial group. Even if the external support is fictional, its hypothetical possibility creates fear among ethnic opponents and may
even trigger them to come into conflict preemptively. This fictional fear apparently still existed, even though the Uzbekistani–Kyrgyzstani border was less permeable in 2010 than it was in 1990.

Uzbeks are the largest ethnic group in the whole of Central Asia and outnumber most other ethnic groups by many times. The demographic dominance of such ethnic groups does not make them popular and causes them to be mistrusted in the host states/republics and perceived as potential separatists. The situation in Uzbekistan does not help either: Uzbekistan has pursued a very nationalistic and, in many ways, chauvinistic ethnic policy. Already in its early years as a Soviet republic, many Persian-speaking groups and unrelated Turkic groups who either spoke an Oghuz Turkic or Kypchak Turkic variety were registered as Uzbeks, despite the latter being a mainly Qarluq Turkic-speaking ethnic group. In fact, in contrast to the Soviet nationalities policy, which identified ethnic nations mainly on the basis of language, Uzbeks were defined as a territorial nation. The task of Uzbek nation-builders (or “chauvinists” as they might be called) was then to make Uzbeks out of diverse ethno-lingual groups, with various degrees of success. This has contributed to the image of Uzbeks as the oppressors of ethnic minorities and has added to the negative stereotypes about them.186 It is not very surprising in the (post-)Soviet space, where ethnic nationalism is (still) highly salient, that these “primordial” feelings of “Stay away from my ethnic kin, otherwise...!” exist. Apparently, the fact that Uzbeks and Kyrgyz are both Turkic-speaking Sunni Muslims does not exclude such feelings and stereotypes.

Not only transborder dominance but simply contiguity to ethnic kinfolk may also matter. Contiguity to ethnic kinfolk mattered most prominently in the South Ossetian and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, in which Ossetians and Armenians were supported by their ethnic kinfolks respectively from North Ossetia and Armenia. The expression of a desire to unite with their ethnic kinfolk in a neighboring union republic/state was heard in all these cases. Nagorno-Karabakh is de facto associated with Armenia. Although it proclaims its independence, it is attached to Armenia and forms part of it in most aspects. Moreover, although the Abkhazian authorities, and presumably most of their subjects, no longer wish to be officially incorporated into Russia—where their Circassian and

186 It was notable that in northern Kyrgyzstan in August 2008, nearly two years before the re-eruption of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek conflict, driving from the Manas airport to Bishkek, my taxi-driver, an “average” Kyrgyz, directly after the sentence “Uzbeks and Kyrgyz cannot be friends”, added, “Did you know that many Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan are forced to be registered as and become Uzbeks?” Also following the news on TV channels such as K+, it is striking to see that a dispute over water resources and a hydro-electrical power plant has led to “nationalist-oriented” demonstrations in Tajikistan, where Uzbeks do not have a popular image either. It was remarkable that Tajik flags were waved during these demonstrations.
Abaza kinfolks live—these sentiments were voiced in the past. In addition, similar to the case of South Ossetia and Ossetians there, Abkhazians possess Russian passports, and Abkhazia and Abkhazians are patronized by the Russian Federation, where their ethnic kinfolks live.

Materialistic explanations of the (post-)Soviet conflicts should be regarded with skepticism. Toft (2003) and Kaufman (1999) have discussed and rather convincingly proven that materialistic (or economic) explanations of ethno-territorial conflict in the (post-)Soviet space are weak and unconvincing. There is, in general, no correlation between welfare and incidence of ethno-territorial conflict in the former Soviet Union. For example, Georgia was a republic with a relatively high standard of living, while Tajikistan scored the lowest on most indicators of welfare and development in the whole Soviet Union. Both republics, however, were afflicted by ethno-territorial conflicts. Similarly Abkhazia and the ethnic Abkhazians were among the economically better-off, and Gorno-Badakhshan and Pamiris were among the most underprivileged and poorest regions and ethnic groups, respectively in Georgia and Tajikistan and perhaps in the whole Soviet Union. Both ethnic groups were involved in ethno-territorial conflicts. Nevertheless, apparently in Central Asian conflicts the materialistic factors did matter in a certain way. The first conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan began when the Kyrgyz authorities assigned fertile lands of an Uzbek farmland to a housing project which would benefit the ethnic Kyrgyz. As in Tajikistan, where the aggrieved and deprived Garmis and Pamiris came into conflict with the better-off Khujandi and Kulobi factions (Atkin 1997), the southern Kyrgyz who felt vulnerable in their “own republic” in comparison with the Uzbeks came in conflict with the latter, who dominated in business in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstan (see Asanbekov 1996).

Like the other Central Asian conflict—the Tajikistani Civil War—and unlike the conflicts in the Caucasus, the sub-ethnic factions played an important role in the Uzbek–Kyrgyz conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan. Regionally based factions, often called political clans, fought each other in Tajikistan. Similarly, regional background, rather than ethnicity as such, mattered more in the Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict. It was primarily the southern Kyrgyz who fought against Uzbeks, not the Kyrgyz as a whole as an ethnic group. In Tajikistan the Khujandis controlled the political life and in alliance with Kulobis and Uzbeks fought the aggrieved Garmis and Pamiris (Atkin 1997). The situation was very different in the Caucasus: there ethnic groups and not sub-ethnic factions were the main parties of conflict. Even in Georgia, afflicted by a civil war after the removal of president Gamsakhurdia, the sub-ethnic factions did not matter much. Gamsakhurdia was from Mingrelia, a region in western Georgia that speaks its own Georgian-related language. He had many supporters in
Mingrelia. Nevertheless, he was a fervent Georgian nationalist and not a Mingrelian (sub-)ethnic activist. His adherents were from all over Georgia. Since Soviet-style economic planning included the allocation of resources to different regions and localities, it is reasonable to believe that in the relatively poor and deprived Central Asia, locality or sub-ethnicity was a relevant category, in addition to ethnicity, which determined to a large degree one’s access to resources, and, therefore, sub-ethnic groups were more likely to be a party to potential conflicts.

The Tajikistani Civil War differed in many aspects from other conflicts in this study, but it shows certain similarities with them—particularly with the conflicts in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia. The dynamics and character of conflict in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan differed. While Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, certainly in the first conflict there, had separatist (or autonomist) motives, their motives were obviously less so in Tajikistan. One might argue that Uzbeks in Tajikistan were just trapped into a civil war initiated by Tajiks. Nevertheless, one should also ask oneself why Uzbeks did not remain unpartisan and neutral during this war, as most other minorities did. Apparently they participated actively in the war because they wanted to protect or enhance their “place”, interests, and position in Tajikistan. Although in terms of welfare and economic development Georgia was among the better-off and Tajikistan among the worse-off Soviet republics, conflicts in both republics show certain similarities: both republics were afflicted by civil wars and conflict among different factions over the control of central authority, as well as by multiple ethno-territorial conflicts. However, the ethnic dimension was more pronounced in Georgia than in Tajikistan, whereas the intra-ethnic local dimension was more pronounced in Tajikistan. The cases of ethno-territorial conflicts in Georgia were obvious. Those in Tajikistan, however, were blurred and overlapped with the general pattern of the civil war there. Nevertheless, it is fair to speak of Uzbek–Tajik and notably Pamiri–Tajik ethno-territorial conflicts, in addition to many other intra-Tajik conflicts, in Tajikistan.

Traumatic peak experiences also seem to have played a role in the emergence of many ethno-territorial conflicts. Such traumas are usually still vivid in people’s collective memories. They are also reminded by the narrations of history by ethno-nationalist-minded politicians, journalists, propagandists, and even scholars. Stuart J. Kaufman (2001) maintains in his book *Modern Hatreds: the Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, in which he also discusses the conflicts in the South Caucasus, that although the recent conflicts’ roots go back to earlier events in the 20th century, the conflicting ethno-national historical myths and symbols contribute to the mobilization of, or the spontaneous mass-led, animosity between the conflicting ethnic groups (see also Grigorian & Kaufman 2007; Kaufman
Indeed, collective memory and the trauma of past events, in addition to the way people memorize and narrate these, are often stated to be contributing factors to the conflicts and tensions (e.g. Cheterian 2008; Garagozov 2002; Garagozov 2005a; Garagozov 2005b; Garagozov 2006; Garagozov 2008a; Garagozov 2008b; Garagozov 2008c; Garagozov 2008d; Garagozov 2008e; Garagozov 2008f; Garagozov 2008g; Garagozov 2009; Garagozov 2010; Garagozov & Kadyrova 2011; Hovannisian 1994; Hovannisian 1999; Ismailov & Garagozov 2007; Miller 1999; Zargarian 1999). The imprints of traumatic peak experiences are still visible on collective memories of many peoples in the Caucasus, such as the Ingush, Chechens, and Armenians, and hence could bring about justice-seeking political behavior. The Armenian Genocide may have been a factor which contributed to Armenian separatism in Nagorno-Karabakh. As with the Soviet territorial concession to Turkey in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide, Armenians were not pleased with the Soviet awarding of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, with whose titular population they had clashed before, accusing them of having had sympathies with Turks. The impact of Stalin-era genocidal deportations on the emergence of the Prigorodny conflict is obvious as the disputed area was transferred to Ossetians after the deportation of the Ingush. It is also remarkable that the Chechens, the only ethnic group who waged a war of separation from Russia, were subjected to these genocidal deportations. Therefore, it seems plausible that these traumatic events have indeed contributed to the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus.

A review of and comparison of ethno-territorial conflicts with each other confirm many theoretical assumptions relating to the factors discussed before. Next to the political instability which was common throughout the Soviet Union, these factors are ethno-political subordination, religious and linguistic differences, the possession of territorial autonomy as well as demographic dominance therein, transborder dominance and contiguity to a titular ethnic kinfolk, a mosaic type of ethno-geographic configuration, and traumatic peak experiences. However, the impacts of religious difference and also linguistic difference, albeit to a lesser extent, on the emergence of ethno-territorial conflict seem doubtful. In order to assess their impact on the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts more

187 Garagozov is spelt as Karakezov in this Russian publication (2005a).
188 Garagozov (2002; 2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d; 2008e; 2008f; 2008g; 2009; 2010) speaks of the role of collective memories and national historiography in the conflicts in the post-Soviet space (see also Garagozov & Kadyrova 2012; Ismailov & Garagozov 2007). This way of thinking is similar to that of Jenny Edkins (2003), who in her book Trauma and the Memory of Politics speaks about the impact of trauma and memory on politics, without a specific focus on the Caucasus.
systematically, all these factors should be taken into systematic analyses, which also include all other cases—that is, cases of co-existence in the regions covered in this study. Only then one can speak of their impact on the emergence of ethno-territorial conflicts with more certainty.