Russian policy of neocontainment of neighboring states. Untenable as this idea is, we must turn to the word's multivalence as an explanation for its use by such disparate entities. Language is a pesky business: if *Eurasian* can mean "neocolonialist," it does not follow that the word must mean *only* this. How would Onyshkevych adjudicate its meaning, even were she (unwisely) to take up such authority to do so?

Comparatist ambitions are not neocolonial ambitions; conflation of the two discourages the research these agencies and journals support. Implicating *Eurasian* summarily in neoexpansionism, we run the risk of restricting ourselves intellectually to the nation-state and its symptoms, leaving us unable to address critical issues more inclusive of those cultures for which the nation-state serves as an inhospitable model. Suspending, if only momentarily, the matrix of neoimperialism, we will see that among the research lacunae of the nation-state model (and of sedentary cultures more broadly) is its difficulty in accounting for culture that exists as exilic, itinerant, or borderland practices across a broad, overland expanse. It is not surprising that a former contiguous empire—in contrast to the thalassocratic empires of a more familiar postcolonialism—could have been more deeply marked by these traces and that their study is not reducible to the endorsement of neoexpansionism.

I am sympathetic to the need for Poland and Kyrgyzstan (to choose two distant examples) to enter into political relations as sovereign states rather than as distant points of an immense, overland space—as proper nouns, so to speak, rather than as metonyms of the imperial contiguity. At the same time, important comparatist research continues to trace the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic pathways of border culture—by which I mean not the periphery of but the crossover points between cultures—not adequately captured by the model of the nation-state.

Mark von Hagen and others have made a compelling argument for the cogency of an "emerging *reconquista*" of the term *Eurasia* (von Hagen, "Empires, Borderlands, and Diasporas: Eurasia as Anti-paradigm for the Post-Soviet Era" [*American Historical Review* 109 (2004)]: 448). The jury is still out. If such a *reconquista* fails, it may be less a rejection of the term's neocolonialist associations than the result of its research subjects' having little in common. Similarly, its success will have less to do with axiological debates than with its usefulness in comparatist research. Yes, the term can be misleading in precisely the ways Onyshkevych productively identifies, but so far we apparently have no better term or else the research community would, I suspect, gladly embrace it.

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Reply:

Larissa Onyshkevych expresses timely concern about the dangers inherent in post-Soviet Russia's hegemonic designs in the region. She rightly points out that "neo-Eurasianist" currents in contemporary Russian thought have frequently functioned as an intellectual rationale for Russian hegemony. *Eurasia* is a toponym with a muddled and unstable history: while in the Russian context it is perhaps vitiated for many by its great-power connotations, its recent currency in the English-speaking world has more to do with the bureaucratic exigencies of area studies and funding agencies, where it has functioned as a stopgap term for the former Soviet bloc. Some scholars in the West, such as Columbia University's Mark von Hagen, have even sought to ascribe an anti-imperialist or at least anticentralist orientation to "Eurasian studies." My work has focused on those writers, philologists, and thinkers, Russian (Velimir Khlebnikov), Kazakh (Olzhas Suleimenov), and Georgian (Grigol Robakidze and others), who might be read as critical Eurasianists—for whom, in other words, the legacy of empire arises as a linguistic and historical problem to be contemplated creatively rather than as a political solution imposed by the center. This much should be evident from my intervention; nor do I believe that any of the other contributors to the *PMLA* Forum sought to reconstitute the Russian empire. *Eurasia* remains an ambiguous term: a useful marker of geographic contiguity and shared historical experience but easily equipped with alarming geopolitical fantasies.

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