Simply put, *Eurasian* equates with neocolonial, thus negating the *postcolonial* in the above title.

Larissa Onyshkevych
Shevchenko Scientific Society

Reply:

From her letter, I have a feeling that Larissa Onyshkevych thinks that *Eurasia* means the forced integration of Ukraine into a Russian-led empire. My use of the expression was simply to acknowledge that the post-Soviet areas are not simply "Europe." I hope this will satisfy her. As a longstanding worker in the field of postcoloniality, I have no interest in endorsing new imperialisms.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
Columbia University

Reply:

I appreciate Larissa Onyshkevych's contribution to the conference debate "Are We Postcolonial? Post-Soviet Space," in which she suggests that *postcolonial* and *Eurasia* are mutually canceling concepts. "*Eurasian*," she suggests unequivocally, "equates with neocolonial." In one sense, we are in agreement: my passing use of the term (830) invoked Eurasia and the Soviet space as more or less coterminous.

Here is where we differ: it makes urgent sense to distinguish among three spheres of meaning for *Eurasia*. As Onyshkevych knows, the early or classical Eurasia belongs to the Russian émigré community in Europe from the 1920s to the interwar period, whose leaders included the structural linguist Nikolai Trubetskoi (1890–1938), Petr Savitskii (1895–1968), and others. Their central concerns were less the continuity and preservation of the empire (the dynastic empire, after all, had fallen, and they were hardly supporters of the Soviet version) than its differentiation from (and resistance to) a doomed and waning Europe in favor of the contributions of Russia's "Asian" expanses, not only Turkic-Mongol influences but also Finno-Ugric. The appeal and influence of classical Eurasianism can be discerned to this day in both elite and popularized forms, such as the state-sponsored Russian television serial *Death of the Empire*, which enjoys a similar Spenglerian and Nietzschean incandescence.

A second cluster of meaning around *Eurasia*—through such transitional, warring figures as the "ethnogeneticist" Lev Gumilev (1912–92) and the ethnographer Iuliian Bromlei—pertains more directly to Onyshkevych's concerns. Arguing in favor of a cultural affinity between Russia and Central Asia, the political activist Aleksandr Dugin, founder in 2002 of the Eurasia Party, has advocated an "imperial conglomeration of the oriental nations, united round Russia" as its "heartland" (http://utenti.lycos.it/EurasianWebSite/dugin_mnb_eng.html). Attention paid to this concept by such political figures as Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akaev, and the current Kazakhstan president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, suggests that there is indeed much in this conservative—and, in some respects, racist—movement worthy of caution. Of course, it would be as much a mistake to ignore the differences between the classical and contemporary Eurasianists as it would be to conflate Dugin's national-Bolshevik politics with Vladimir Putin's rather consistent neoimperial tactics, yet a certain historical overlay and continuity of interests exists. It is to this potential vested interest in neocontainment that Onyshkevych presumably refers.

A third cluster, which I describe without advocacy, is the search within the academic community for ways to preserve shared research interests, data, and funding. In this context, the comparatist spirit signaled by *Eurasia* no more endorses neocontainment than the profession's earlier study of communism endorsed Marxism-Leninism or the study of empire today endorses neoimperialism. Were we philosophers, I suppose we might describe this as the fact-value distinction.

If indeed (as the letter suggests) "*Eurasian* equates with neocolonial," then by this logic neocolonialism has odd bedfellows. The Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (State Department), the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies (Harvard), the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, and the Eurasia Program (Social Science Research Council), as well as the profession's major journals, such as *Slavic Review* ("American quarterly of Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies") and *Kritika* ("Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History"), would be advocates of neocolonialism—that is to say, a

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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.

Nancy Condee
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh

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.

Harsha Ram
University of California, Berkeley

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