

**The Discourse of Civilization in the Works of Russia's New
Eurasianists: Lev Gumilev and Alexander Panarin**

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Introduction

Russia's cultural and political discourse has long been dominated by the question of its place in the world: does Russia belong to, or should it aspire to, the values, norms and traditions of Western civilization, or does it have its own culture, "Asiatic" or otherwise, that sets it apart from the West and requires an approach to governance that is radically different than the solutions offered by its Western neighbours? At the time of the collapse of the USSR, the Westernizing trend seemed to have the upper hand, but more than a decade later, another stance setting Russia apart from the West has become far more current. This general point of view has lately come to be known as "Eurasian", or as I will call it for the sake of clarity, "Eurasianist"; but I wish to prevent any misconception now by defining the "Eurasianists" to whom I refer. "The Eurasianists" were a group of Russian intellectuals who formed a school of thought in European exile during the 1920's, after the Russian Revolution. While the problem of Russia vis-à-vis the West goes far back into Russian history, perhaps most famously expressed in the nineteenth century polemic between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers, the Eurasianist movement was radically different, partly because of its geopolitical turn (borrowed, evidently, from Western thinkers like Karl Haushofer and Halford Mackinder), and its cultural positioning of the Russian space squarely outside the European experience. Until the early twentieth century, Russian intellectuals saw the Russian nation in an essentially European context, despite disagreements with the West: they were a European, Slavic, Orthodox Christian nation that had extended its reach into Asia on a *mission civilatrice*. The exiles (Prince Nikolai Trubetskoi, Piotr Savitskii, Piotr Suvchinskii and Georgii Florovskii), who founded the Eurasianist movement, by contrast, were saying something quite different: "Russian [*russkie*] people and people of the nations of the 'Russian [*rossiiskii*] world' are neither Europeans, nor Asians... we are not ashamed to admit that we are *Eurasians*" (Trubetskoi et. al., 1920: VII)*.

This is significant, because it represents a break with the past in terms of the intellectual basis of the nation-forming process. It represented something completely new to the Russian intelligentsia (Riasanovsky, 1967: 52). While they could trace some roots to the Slavophile and Pan-Slav schools of the nineteenth century, these exiles, in a radical move, expressed the idea of Russia as a cultural and anthropological space that was not exclusively Slavonic, but also Finno-Ugrian and indeed Turkic (the term for these two ethno-linguistic influences taken together is 'Turanian') in origin (Trubetskoi, 1920: 100).

The Eurasianist movement sprang from a world that had been turned upside-down. They formed their ideas in the broader background of the aftermath of the First World War, the devastation of the Russian Revolution that forced them into exile, and, as Riasanovsky points out, the movement coincided with the beginning of the end of the colonial era of the European powers (1967: 53). The Neoeurasianists have come back to relevance during a time of seismic political events, perhaps less cataclysmic than the events of the early twentieth century, but considering their

global scale, no less significant. Now however, the time may be more appropriate for the advancement of Eurasianist thought. The geopolitical side of Eurasianist thought does seem to fit well with the times, where geopolitics and the talk of conflict between civilizations is very much in vogue, most famously in the version of Samuel Huntington (1996). The cultural side may be more problematic, because Eurasianists are split on this themselves. Many would simply call themselves conservatives, some are nationalists, but I would suggest that the post-Soviet Eurasianists who hold some sort of claim to the original Eurasianist doctrine would adhere to a cultural and normative policy that differs from ethnic nationalism or Orthodox Christian conservatism in the strictest sense, a sort of spectrum of values that challenge modernity as one prominent Neoeurasianist, Alexander Panarin, advocates.

Intellectuals, such as the members of what may turn out to be a new Eurasianist intellectual establishment, are responsible for the “imaginative ideological labour that brings together disparate cultural elements, selected historical memories, and interpretations of experiences” (Kennedy and Suny, 1999: 2). The views of intellectuals, in Moscow and St. Petersburg (and elsewhere) on the role Russia should play, have made, over the centuries, lasting changes affecting its neighbours in Europe, Asia, and more recently in Africa and the Americas. Russia, even now, continues to be a major actor on the world stage. Russia has played a forceful role in Europe for hundreds of years. It experienced a fantastic expansion across northern Asia beginning in the sixteenth century. As an Empire, it reached deep into the south of Asia in the nineteenth century. The Russian Empire’s successor, the USSR, was one of the two superpowers that completely dominated the politics of the entire planet for the second half of the twentieth century. Through all these changes intellectuals have built ideological structures to support the state, and sometimes to bring it down. It is inevitable, therefore, that Russian intellectuals such as the new Eurasianists will play a major role in the 21st Century, even if what the future may bring to the country is unclear: consolidation of the status quo, renewal and re-expansion, or continued contraction and/or disintegration. Any one of these outcomes will have a great, far reaching effect on people in neighbouring countries and across the world.

This paper does not intend to be an exercise in prognosis. Nor will I try to analyse Russia in an international relations context. Nevertheless, I want to point out that if the Russian thinkers who have theorized Russia’s place in the world have been labelled “messianic” time and time again in the Occidental literature, it may be possible to forgive them. Keeping the country’s geographical and historical circumstances in mind, I will undertake to study what might be considered one of the most recent branches of Russian intellectual discourse, drawing on the ideas of the Eurasianists, by intellectuals known in the literature as the “New” Eurasianists or “Neoeurasianists.” The aim of this paper is to identify what writing is representative of Neoeurasianist thought, to distinguish Neoeurasianism both from its historical antecedents (particularly the writers whom I will term the “classical” Eurasianists, or simply “Eurasianists”)

and some other modern, nationalist and conservative trends in Russian thought that many Western writers have frequently confused it with over the last ten years, and, most importantly, to analyse some of the texts of the Neoeurasianists to attempt to get a fix on what this school of thought represents, if it can indeed be termed a “school”.

I view the discourse of the Neoeurasianists as part of a broader conversation going on throughout the world at present, one that challenges universalist attempts to define “culture” and civilization. I will therefore pay particular attention to places in the New Eurasianists work where this dialogue of civilizations is played out clearly. For reasons I will explain below, I have chosen two authors to examine in detail for this work: Lev Gumilev and Aleksandr Panarin. A third author, Aleksandr Dugin, also considered foundational, will not be looked at in so much detail, since he is the subject of the main body of literature that already exists on the New Eurasianists.

In this paper, I will briefly review some recent literature on the Eurasianist movement, in order to define the movement, provide a historical context and trace the link between the Eurasianists of the 1920’s and 30’s and the post-Soviet Neoeurasianist intellectuals. I will then look at the texts of the two authors, Gumilev and Panarin, whom I consider foundational thinkers in the Neoeurasianist world-view. Using the texts of these authors, I will illustrate the two main thrusts of Neoeurasianist thought: the important geopolitical side and the cultural factors that the Neoeurasianists highlight that make the movement an ideology. The goal of this paper is to provide a broad review of the writings of the foundational Neoeurasianists as the groundwork for a more detailed study.

The State of Occidental Research on the Eurasianists

Before 1992, there was not much literature on Eurasianism outside of Russia. Shlapentokh’s (1997) history of the classical Eurasianist movement includes a partial literature review of both the work of the classical Eurasianists and the academic literature covering them. He makes no mention, however, of work published on Eurasianism by Nicholas V. Riasanovsky (1967 and 1972), which are probably the most detailed reviews in the English language of the rise of the classical Eurasianist movement. Interest in the subject was very limited and little was written about it until a fascination with the movement re-emerged in Russia in the era of *glasnost*. Shlapentokh (1997) attributes this to the fact that the largest collection of Eurasianist materials was located in the Prague Archive, unavailable to Western historians. Désert and Paillard (1994) point out that Eurasianist ideas were obscure in Russia until 1990-1991, when they began to be debated in the media and more literature became available to the Russian audience. While Eurasianism caught on in Russia, the study of the Eurasianists and post-Soviet Russian advocates of Eurasianism became more common in the Western literature, in Slavic studies, international relations studies, and geography. Thus it seems that both the opening up of archives and the diffusion of ideas in the media created an area of interest. What is interesting is that in spite of the

large amount of material available, including the writings and archived materials of the “classical” Eurasianists and the many volumes written by Russian Neoeurasianists, there is still not a large amount of Western literature, while much of what exists is of a haphazard nature, characterized by an inability to define who the Eurasianists are and what they actually represent. This has led to a conflation of “Eurasianist” with “nationalist”, “red-brown”, “pro-Asian”, “anti-Western” or “anti-American”, and to the labelling of Gennady Ziuganov (leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation), Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (of the famous Liberal Democratic Party) and ex-Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov (Clover, 1999) as Eurasianists, which probably dilutes the definition of Eurasianist too much. Some self-professed Eurasianists may be Anti-Western or nationalist, but by far not all nationalists are Eurasianists. The confusion is the result of the various meanings of the word Eurasia, and I will devote some time to defining which ‘Eurasia’ the Eurasianists are referring to a bit later.

Some observers of the phenomenon have also confused Eurasianism with the Slavophile movement from the nineteenth century. An example of this can be seen in (Hahn, 2002). Smith (1999:482) also makes a direct link with the Slavophiles. While there is a case that Eurasianism can regard the Slavophile and Pan-Slav movements as predecessors (Paradowski, 1999: 20), there are significant differences that make Eurasianism a qualitatively new school of thought. A convincing explanation of this can be found in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky’s (1967) essay, “The Emergence of Eurasianism”.

Marlène Laruelle (2000; 2003) is at the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of the breadth of her erudite determination of whose work can be rightly called “Eurasian”. In (2003) she goes further than other authors by saying that Lev Gumilev cannot be considered a Eurasianist in the strictest sense, due to some major epistemological differences that can be seen in comparing his work with the classical Eurasianists, and also as evidenced in his correspondence with classical Eurasianist Piotr Savitskii. In contrast, she observes in (2001) that Alexandr Panarin follows the Eurasianist tradition much more closely. Later we will observe that Panarin owes a debt to Gumilev, but Laruelle’s distinctions make the line of Eurasianist thought easier to trace.

To sum up the state of non-Russian research on the Neoeurasianists, while many scholars treat the Eurasianists in passing, usually in the broader context of nationalism or of Russia’s “new Right”, there are a few authors who have clearly studied the movement in detail. The picture that emerges is one of a Eurasianist movement that burst on the scene in exile in the 1920’s with a lot of energy, and then faded in the late 1930’s with geographer Piotr Savitskii remaining the only real advocate (Shlapentokh, 1997: 148). There was a correspondence, beginning in 1956, between Savitskii and ethnologist Lev Gumilev, a specialist on the history of the Turkic- and Mongol-speaking steppe nomads (Laruelle, 2003: 56). Gumilev, in turn, in his work, presented a vision of Russia that owed a great debt to these same nomads in the formation of the modern Russian state:

instead of presenting the usual picture of a mediaeval Russia suffering under the “Tatar-Mongol Yoke”, Russia becomes a product of the interaction of peoples living in the steppe and forest zones, and the real barbarians in Russian history were the knights of the Teutonic Order, defeated by Aleksandr Nevskii. Gumilev remained an unknown figure until the *glasnost*’ years of Gorbachev, when his writings became available to a broad public, and the author became a celebrity just before his death in 1992. Eurasianism took on a new life at this point, no longer in exile but in Russia itself. There are many different political views among those who, through the 1990’s, could be classed as Eurasianists, but as Laruelle points out, the literature shows three broad streams in the Russia-based part of the movement. Since the authors studied in the present paper represent these streams fairly closely, I too will follow a three-stream approach, while making a minor adjustment to Laruelle’s taxonomy. This way of classifying the Neoeurasianists is different from the way presented by Tsygankov, which, while acknowledging a wide diversity of viewpoints, splits the movement into two broad categories: “hard-line” (imperialist, Anti-Western) and “liberal” (1998: n. 5). This, I feel, is a misleading distinction. Eurasianism, by definition, challenges the Enlightenment project and the post-industrial phase that it has moved into.

Of the three streams I propose, Gumilev, in a significant way, represents what I will call in this paper the “ethnological stream”. This is a departure from what Laruelle termed “*culturaliste et folkloriste*” (2001: 72). For the purposes of this paper, I reserve the idea of a “cultural stream” for the work of Aleksandr Panarin. There are other authors, many representing diverse ethnic groups in the Commonwealth of Independent States and in the Russian Federation itself, who fit more squarely into this category. Gumilev is a source of inspiration for authors in the other two broad streams of Eurasianism, such as Panarin and Dugin, but for the ethno-nationalist researchers representing the intellectual class of many different ethnic groups in the post-Soviet space, Gumilev is particularly inspirational in what might be termed his historical vindication of the peoples of the Steppe. It comes as no surprise, in this context, that a university in Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan, was named after Gumilev.

The stream most commonly represented in the non-Russian literature is what I will call the “geopolitical stream” represented by Alexandr Dugin, who eventually became the founder of a Eurasian political movement. He is by far the most controversial of the prominent Neoeurasianists. Dugin’s activist stance and involvement in the Russian policy community, aside from his extremist past, have made him a figure of interest for people studying international relations, for example in Kerr (1995), Shlapentokh (2001) and Tsygankov (1998). Dugin, a paradoxical figure, has solid ultra-right wing credentials, and a long association with Eduard Limonov’s Bolshevik Nationalist Party (BNP), an ultra-right fringe party. He later came to identify himself more firmly with Eurasianism, and even went as far as founding the Eurasia Party. Throughout the 1990’s Dugin was widely read in Russia, and gained considerable attention

among students of Russia in the West (Shlapentokh, 2001: 29). The geopolitical emphasis in Dugin's writing has attracted attention to him as a personality, and he has received attention in the US media (for example, Clover, 1999). Among the more scholarly research on the Eurasianists, Dugin gets attention from political geographers such as the late Graham Smith (1999), where Aleksandr Panarin is ignored. Dugin's attraction to observers of the movement is not surprising, considering his activity in Russia's policy community. His intellectual heritage, however, consists mainly as a compiler of various streams of Eurasianist thought, and as a popular commentator.

Panarin represents another broad trend in modern Eurasianism, the "cultural stream" as I will call it, notwithstanding Laruelle's classification of Panarin, which singles out his defense of the notion of empire and his advocacy of "*étaticité*" (2001:73). As Laruelle goes on to point out, Panarin was involved in an attempt to define an ideology that can be termed "postmodern" (ibid.: 73), as it is meant to withstand what might be called the end game of Modernity. Panarin, as we shall see, was a political scientist, and advocate of a conservative ideology, but also advocated Eurasianism on a cultural plane in a way different from the "ethnic Eurasianists," for example those who have received support from Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev. A teacher of Political Philosophy at Moscow State University who passed away in late 2003, Panarin had solid academic credentials, published prolifically, but did not attract much attention outside of Russia. I will therefore devote particular attention to his work in this paper.

It will also be important for the purposes of this paper to define the idea of "Eurasia", as it is understood among the Eurasianists. To begin, I am breaking with the dominant trend in the literature to translate the noun *evraziitsy*, as "the Eurasians" when referring to the adherents of the school of thought, and the adjective *evraziiskij* as "Eurasian", instead favouring "the Eurasianists" and "Eurasianist", respectively. The reason for this choice is to make a clear distinction between the normal English meanings of Eurasia and Eurasian, and the school of thought that is concerned with the Eurasian continent.

As Tsymburskii (2003) points out, the idea of Eurasia stems from the nineteenth century. It originally referred to the plain extending to the East and West of the Ural mountains. As late as 1915 the Russian geographer V. Semenov-Tian-Shanskii used the term "Russian Eurasia" (*Russkaia Evraziia*) to designate the expanse from the Volga to the Enisei Rivers, north to the Siberian Arctic and south to Turkestan (Tsymburskii, 2003: 26). Soon, however, the idea of Eurasia was extended to cover the whole continent as we now know it. From the nineteenth century, the term Eurasian was also used to refer to the offspring of European and Asian parents, in India for example (ibid). It is for this reason that I propose not to use this word to describe the adherents of the intellectual movement that began among Russian exiles in the early twentieth century. Also, if we take the term "Eurasianism" as the name for the movement, as most authors

do, then the root appears to be the adjectival noun “Eurasian”. In English, to underscore the fact that a person adheres to a school of thought or an ideology, we normally remove the suffix “-ism” from the root and replace it with “-ist”, as in “socialism/socialist” or “formalism/formalist”.

For the Eurasianists, interestingly, the territorial concept of Eurasia appears to be closely related to the “Heartland” concept of Mackinder; despite the fact that the classical Eurasianists never cite him, the territory they refer to matches the heartland concept closely (ibid.: 27). Savitskii, specifically, suggests that the division “Europe–Asia” is awkward. In an essay written in 1925, he maintains that geographically, the Eastern European plain is much closer to the plains of Western Siberia and Turkistan than to Western Europe. These three, taken together with Eastern Siberia, Central Asia, Persia, the Caucasus and Asia Minor, form a special world that is different “both from the countries lying to the West, as well as from the countries, lying to the South-East and South. If one names the former ‘Europe’ and the latter ‘Asia’, then the world named just now, as both a middle and intervening world, would be appropriately named ‘Eurasia’” (Savitskii, 1997: 82).

This is the concept that is to be used throughout this study. Unless otherwise noted, Eurasia will not represent the landmass stretching from Portugal to Singapore, but rather this “middle” space, representing unity separate from, but at the same time bridging, Europe and Asia.

The Classical Eurasianists

Eurasianism arose during a catastrophic time in Russian history, and takes much of its force from an attempt to make sense of catastrophe. It is marked, as has been pointed out, by a euphoria arising from ruin (Désert and Paillard, 1994: 80). For them, the Russian Revolution represented two outwardly irreconcilable events: a turn away from God, the collapse of a world-view, but also the possibility of rebirth (Riasanovsky, 1967: 53). For them, the Revolution was not simply a rebellion comparable to that of Pugachev, for example, but rather it represented a process, “the self-destruction of Imperial Russia, the death of old Russia... in the birth-pangs of a new Russia, a new individualization of Eurasia” (Savitskii, 1997: 52). As Savitskii went on to say, it was the result of a fundamental rejection of European culture by the Russian people, on whom it had been forced since the time of Peter the Great. In that sense, they welcomed the Revolution, as an opportunity for Russia-Eurasia (*Rossiia-Evraziia*) to break away from Europe.

The Eurasianists’ evaluation of the Bolshevik approach to spirituality and culture was much more critical. “We have no words, other than words of horror and loathing, to characterize the inhumanity and vileness of Bolshevism” (Trubetskoi, et. al., 1920: p. VI). These intellectuals found the idea of culture and spirituality as superstructure offensive. Indeed, for them, the Bolsheviks represented the worst of Western ideology, the importation of a soulless Western idea onto Russian soil.

The Eurasianists shared a rejection of Europe with some nineteenth century Russian thinkers, such as the Slavophiles and Danilievskii. As Riasanovsky (1967) points out, attempts to find the roots of Eurasianism in these streams of thought have limits. The Slavophiles saw the State as a necessary evil, while the Eurasianists believed in a strong State. Danilevskii may have been closer to Eurasianist thinking, but the Eurasianists put more emphasis on culture. The Eurasianists differed from both of these earlier movements in the very idea of Eurasia, and the ethnic mix of peoples, not only Slavic peoples, that went into the creation of Russia. Trubetskoi sees Pan-Slavism as a “false nationalism”, a mere aping of nineteenth century Pan-Germanism (Trubetskoi, 1920: 84). Russian culture was the result of a process of the interaction of the cultures of the Byzantine “South”, the Tatar-Mongol “East” and the European “West”, each taking a leading role during various points in Russia’s history (Savitskii, 1997: 83).

The Eurasianist idea of culture is significant for this study. According to Trubetskoi, the statements which best capture highest calling of a human being are “know thyself” and “to thine own self be true”. Peoples know themselves through their folk-culture, which ultimately is a reflection of their spiritual being. This is the true source of culture, because happiness comes not from material culture, but from harmony in all aspects of spirituality (Trubetskoi, 1920: 78). National culture takes on a central role in the expression of the individual, and an individual who “is true to his own self” will be a shining example of a national culture. Peoples whose national characteristics are similar will have similar cultures. A universal human culture is impossible, however, because, taking into account “the motley plurality of national characters and psychological types, such a ‘universal culture’ would lead either to the satisfaction of purely material demands while totally ignoring spiritual needs, or would impose a way of life, deriving solely from the national character of one ethnic group, on all peoples.” (ibid.) For Trubetskoi, on a political level this means a rejection of European-style nationalism for smaller ethnic groups, because this sort of nationalism does not represent a deepened self-knowledge, but the parroting of the European modernity. For the same reason, Trubetskoi felt that the original ideas of the early Slavophiles, which were at the outset closer to what he termed the “true” nationalism of “know thyself”, were corrupted later into the forms of “false” nationalism that he described, resembling too much the nationalisms of Western Europe.

Starting from this idea of culture, the Eurasianists made a definitive break with Russian intellectual history, where, since the time of Peter the Great, Russia was always identified with the Western, Christian world. As Riasanovsky points out, “even those Russians who went against the current and rose in opposition to the West, for example, the Slavophiles, the upholders of Official Nationality... or... arch-conservatives, formulated their conflict with the West as essentially a fraternal conflict” (1967: 63). Eurasianists, by contrast, believed in a Russia that, while having obviously been influenced by the West, was, since its birth in the ninth century, and

particularly after the Tatar-Mongol period in the Middle Ages, a world apart, sharing a cultural space with the Finno-Ugrian and Turkic peoples.

The Eurasianist idea of culture, combined with the Eurasianist political geography, was translated over the course of many works into a programmatic political philosophy. One noteworthy example is the Eurasianist's idea of the economy, which was neither communist nor capitalist. Their vision of a Eurasian economic system was one of private enterprise, based on the idea of the *khozain*, rather than the model of the western capitalist. The word *khozain* can be translated to English as "owner", "master", "administrator", "boss", "host", or "landlord", depending on context. The Eurasianists made a distinction between the *khozain* and the entrepreneur; specifically, the *khozain* had a moral, almost spiritual relationship with his domain, while the capitalist entrepreneur did not (Voeikov, 2003: 104). The Eurasians essentially advocated a different concept of property. The ultimate "owner" of all property had always been, in the Russian-Eurasian tradition, the state; the *khozain* could not be considered the owner. In the ideal Eurasian state, the *khozain*'s authority could be seen as similar to the owner, but conditionally: there was a moral obligation on the part of the *khozain* to be a *dobriy*, or "good" *khozain* (Savitskii, 1974: 74). The role of the state was to intervene in the case of an abdication of the *khozain*'s moral responsibility. The Eurasianists' ideal concerning property was one of stewardship rather than ownership, one that was fundamentally different than the inalienable right to property that had grown out of the Western philosophical notion of individuality.

On the geopolitical side of Eurasianist thought, there were also arguments to support increased state activism in industry. The Eurasianists felt that the competitive system of capitalism had arisen partly as a result of the West's relationship to the Ocean, and oceanic trading. Land-locked Eurasia, by contrast, deeply rooted in the Continent, created barriers to competition, and thus favoured monopolies (Voeikov, 2003: 107).

A picture emerges of what the Russian-Eurasian state advocated by the Eurasianists of the 1920's might have looked like. Similar in territory to the USSR of the time, it would have been governed by a central authority, but would have also allowed a certain amount of cultural autonomy to its member peoples. It would have displayed a mixed economic system, similar perhaps the system that began to form under Lenin's NEP. Religion would be encouraged, along with traditional culture. Russian Orthodoxy, itself being influenced by Finno-Ugrian and Slavonic pagan tradition, would have a special place as an indigenous "Eurasian" religion, but it would not be exclusive. Vague shades of this idea were seen in Stalin's quasi-rehabilitation of nationalism and the Orthodox religion during the Second World War. This vision, suppressed during the Soviet years, was resurrected as the Soviet system began to collapse.

Lev Gumilev: Ethnogenesis and Passionarity

Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev (1912-1992) was the son of two of Russia's most famous poets,

Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova. After a long life scarred by tragedy and an academic career held back by arrests and forced labour in the “GULAG Archipelago”, Gumilev’s ideas found a wide audience beginning in the 1980’s and widespread fame at the very end of his life. Since his passing in 1992, his influence has continued to grow, mainly in Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union, particularly in Central Asia. Recently, in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan, a new university has been named after him. In the popular press, his books, originally printed on a small scale, have become, in a sense, objects of Russian mass-culture, and have been reprinted several times with great success. Harder-to-find works are now freely available in Russian on the “Gumilevica” web site (<http://gumilevica.kulichki.net>) in full-text. A search of the most complete Gumilev bibliography available (Karamullina, 1990, containing over 250 entries) and an internet search of, among other sources, the Library of Congress, revealed the following: despite his immense recent popularity and influence in Russia and the CIS, and the critical response by the Slavic studies community outside of the former Soviet Union, very few of his works have appeared in languages other than Russian. In 1965, his paper “Les fluctuations du niveau de la Mer Caspienne” appeared in *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Sovietique* (Vol. 6, No. 3). Later in the 1960’s, a few English translations of articles appeared in the American digest *Soviet Geography*. Only two of his major works have been translated to English: *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere* (Moscow: Progress, 1990) and *Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom: The Legend of the Kingdom of Prester John*, translated by R.E.F. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Gumilev’s relative obscurity outside the Russian-speaking world is a problem because terms introduced by Gumilev have had a profound effect on the academic, social and political discourse in the Russian language. This increases the level of complexity in engaging in a dialogue with Russia’s social science community. Also, as we will see below, Gumilevian terms are of particular importance to the Neoeurasianists. We will therefore spend some effort in explaining the major vectors of Gumilev’s work.

A detailed biography of Lev Gumilev was written by Sergei Lavrov (2001), providing a good deal of insight into personalities and events that contributed to his academic legacy. Gumilev was born in Tsarskoe Selo, near St. Petersburg, but spent most of his childhood at Bezhetsk, which is located in Tver’ Region, between Moscow and St. Petersburg. His father, the poet Nikolai Gumilev, a monarchist, was arrested and murdered when Lev was only 8 years old. Lev was brought up mainly by his grandmother, Anna Gumileva. He joined his mother, the poetess Anna Akhmatova, and her third husband, Nikolai Punin, in what by then was Leningrad in 1929 to continue his education, first as an assistant on geological expeditions, then as a student at the Faculty of History at Leningrad State University. During the 1930’s as a student, he participated in some archeological expeditions, most notably to the Khazar archeological site at Sarkel (on the Don river). He found a chilly reception in the Punin household, but that turned out to be only the

beginning of his troubles. The NKVD arrested him briefly in 1933 and again in 1935, along with his stepfather Punin. Akhmatova went to Moscow to petition Stalin to release her husband and son, which happened shortly afterward. After his release, he moved out of his stepfather's household, and spent the next few years sleeping on a bearskin rug in one room with a friend named Axel. In 1938, before completing his degree, Gumilev was arrested again with two other students, and was, fantastically, implicated in a plot to commit a terrorist attack on Leningrad Communist Party leader Andrei Zhdanov. At this point he was beyond help. He was shipped off to work on the White Sea Canal in 1938, where conditions were brutal and he nearly died. He was apparently saved by a bureaucratic procedure: early in 1939 he was sent back to a prison in Leningrad while his case was re-examined. The result was a five-year sentence to another GULAG camp, this time in the far north of Siberia, at Norilsk.

His term at Norilsk came to an end at the climax of the Second World War. He was released from the GULAG to go to the front, and thus participated in the capture of Berlin. On returning to Leningrad, he was able to finish his undergraduate exams and move on to graduate studies in Oriental Studies, but this time of relative calm ended quickly, as his mother fell out of favour in 1946 during the Leningrad Affair. He had enough time to participate in more archaeological expeditions, and defend his graduate thesis in 1949. Soon after he was arrested again, and sent back to the camps, where he remained until 1956, during the period of de-Stalinization in the USSR. He was able, this time, to begin work on his histories of the people of Central Asia towards the end of his term in Siberia. Shortly after his release he began a correspondence with Piotr Savitsky, by recommendation of a colleague who had been imprisoned together with the founder of the Eurasianist movement. Within a few years Gumilev began to publish prolifically, first with a few articles at the end of the 1950's, then in 1960 with the first book of his "Steppe Trilogy", *Khunnu*, referring to The Hunnu Empire, or empire of the Huns, who ruled over a vast area of Central and East Asia from the third century B.C. to the first Century A.D. He continued to publish his history of the Steppe with *Otkrytie Khazarii* (The Discovery of Khazaria) in 1966; *Drevnye Tiurki* (The Ancient Turkic Peoples) in 1967; *Poiski Vymyshlennogo Tsarstva* (Searches for an Imaginary Kingdom), a book dealing with the Mongol Empire, in 1970; and followed this work with *Khunny v Kitae* (The Huns in China, 1974). During the 60's and 70's his ideas about the *ethnos*, *ethnogenesis*, and *passionarity* (a Gumilev neologism) took their final form, and were synthesized in a book explaining his theory, while drawing on his encyclopaedic knowledge of world history: *Etnogenez I Biosfera Zemli* (Ethnogenesis and the Earth's Biosphere, 1979; translated into English as *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*, 1990). His view on the origins of the Russian state, a view based on the theory outlined in *Ethnogenesis*, was published in *Drevniaia Rus' I Velikaia Step'* (Ancient Rus' and the Great Steppe, 1989) and in a more popular form, published after his death, in *Ot Rusi do Rossii* (From Rus' to Russia [*Rossii*], 1992). By the time Gumilev passed away, he was a celebrity in the Russian-speaking world.

To begin the discussion of Gumilev's ideas, it is important to start with a sense of his methodological approach. His epistemology is one that deliberately breaches the barrier between the natural sciences and the humanities. Gumilev's approach to the study of the history of human civilization fits into the hierarchy of the sciences that Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer both described in the nineteenth century (White, 1969: 56), beginning with the physical sciences and encompassing the biological and social sciences, including cultural anthropology. Gumilev's objects of study were the collective groups of human beings that have clung together throughout human history, bound by common cultural traits and by those traits identifying themselves as being different from others. His major historical works cover the "life spans" of the empires formed by the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian Steppe and states related to them: the Huns, the Kaghhanate of the ancient Turkic tribes, the Mongol Empire, Kievan Rus', the Khazar Kaghhanate, Muscovy, and the Russian Empire. These accounts of the rise and fall of empires take into account interactions with other cultures from the fringes of the European and Asian continents.

The theory of history that Gumilev formulates is driven by two major ideas. The first is that of the *ethnos* as a fundamental structure in human history, essentially biological in nature, although unique to the human species. The other is the driving force of *passionarity*, the innate drive in human culture to expand, create, and replicate itself, which is, in Gumilev's view, the effect of a surplus of biochemical energy in individual human beings that allows for self-sacrifice for the sake of an ideal. Passionarity works against the basic instinct for self-preservation. These two words, along with their derivatives, whose roots are familiar, are Gumilevian terms with specific meanings, which I will explain as I examine each idea in more detail.

Gumilev shares, in a broad sense, a mission with Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Karl Jaspers: a search for a logic or a law governing the development of world history, albeit taking his cues in this project from the somewhat neglected point of view of the Steppe nomads. Gumilev cites the works of these three authors in his *œuvre*, but does not consider them sources so much as historians who have made similar observations, but incorrect conclusions about the reasons for the development of history. Gumilev differs from these historians in his starting point: the articulation of a basic unit of human cultural association, using the Greek word *ethnos*; and a process, deriving from interaction with the natural environment and carried through a medium of individual human beings organized in such an association, *ethnogenesis*. This is a more naturalistic approach than the ones used by most previous students of history. Spengler saw, as the key to understanding world history, "a number of mighty Cultures", each with "its own idea, its own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death" (1934: 21). Jaspers chose as a focus the few "Great Civilizations" that formed about 5000 BC, underwent, separately but synchronously, a transformation during an "Axial Period" several hundred years BC, resulting eventually in a single human civilization (1965: 24). Toynbee identified 21 societies in world history, of which five, the Western, Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Hindu and Far Eastern societies,

exist to this day (1939: 51). By contrast, Gumilev's entities, while on the surface, at times, resembling Toynbee's societies, or Spengler's "mighty Cultures", take on a more concrete, natural appearance. Gumilev, however, sees the difficulty faced by these historians as one of method.

Gumilev's major works read like detective novels, and for good reason. The general method of reasoning used by historians, he writes, and in general the chasm between the natural sciences and the human sciences, originated with the Scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages, and their inductive method of citation (primarily the Bible and the works of Aristotle), favoured over the observation of natural phenomena (Gumilev, 2001: 15). A major problem is the reliability of sources, which tend, in Gumilev's view, to add to confusion, and represent a limiting factor on the usefulness of inductive reasoning. By contrast, the sciences dealing with natural history seem to have overcome this problem by adopting a deductive method, one that can and should be used to study history. Using this deductive reasoning as his guide, Gumilev establishes the need for a new science: Ethnology. Not to be confused with the sociological research method of ethnography, the term as it has come to be accepted in Russia is also slightly different than the ethnology, or cultural anthropology, as it is normally defined throughout the world. As Gumilev defines it, and as it was adopted by the Geographic Society of the Soviet Union, ethnology is the science dealing with three interrelated problems: ethnogenesis, ethno-geographic classification and the association of ethnos and *Landschaft* (Gumilev, 2003: 373). The idea of this science is to look at the evidence of all available sources, including ancient textual material, but only after it has been rigorously screened against other sources of information. Where necessary, gaps will be filled in based on existing available knowledge. "As the paleontologist recreates the look of a dinosaur with two or three bones; as the meteorologist, having data from two or three weather stations, makes a forecast... so the historian, using the ethnological method, can describe the process of the rise and fall of a great or small empire, principality or free city-state" (ibid.: 375).

The world of human beings, according to Gumilev, comprises many *ethnoi*. The starting point of a definition of an ethnos is when a people (which could be a nation, or a union of clans or tribes), after living together for a long period of time, are of the idea that "their way of life, manners, customs, tastes, outlook and social relationships, i.e. all that which today is called 'the behavioural stereotype'" (idem 2001: 21), is the only possible and correct one. Gumilev recognizes, however, that this definition has to be made more precise, and in *Ethnogenesis* he eliminates a series of false definitions. Even though, for Gumilev, the idea of "nation" lies outside of his discourse, the nation being only one of many possible manifestations of the ethnos, he makes an attempt to pre-empt the objections that we normally see in literature about nations and nationalism. The problem is essentially the same. As Eric Hobsbawm asserts, "there is no way of telling the observer how to distinguish a nation from other entities *a priori*, as we can tell him or her how to recognize a mouse or a lizard" (1990: 5). By placing the idea of ethnos in naturalistic

framework, Gumilev removes it from the hierarchy of “clan-tribe-people-nation” (Gumilev 2001: 78). Language, race, customs, material culture and ideology cannot be seen as absolute determining factors in the identification of an ethnos. The “behavioural stereotypes” mentioned earlier are changeable (ibid.: 93). He concludes that an ethnos can be regarded as a dynamic system of people, the products of their activities, traditions, the geographical environment, surrounding ethnoi and “also certain dominant tendencies in the system’s development” (ibid.: 100). This is not quite the same thing as the concept of *ethnie* used by Anthony Smith, which is essentially a pre-national political structure “with no sense of membership with citizenship rights for the majority of the population, and little organic solidarity in the economic sphere” (Smith, 1971: 190). For Gumilev’s ethnos, economic and citizenship rights are not a factor – members of an ethnos may enfranchised titular citizens of a nation-state, peasants living on a manor, or steppe nomads. It makes no difference: they still are part of an ethnos, which is to say, part of a natural system. It is not for a ruling class to recognize someone as part of an ethnos; rather, each individual carries the sense of belonging to an ethnos, every time they are confronted with an ‘other’. Thus the concepts ‘ethnos’ and ‘*ethnie*’ should not be confused.

It is important to note that Gumilev sees the ethnos as a system, in other words, not a sum of human units, but a complex of interrelationships between humans. The ethnos is not a genetic trait, even though the need to form ethnoi is, for Gumilev, a biological constant. The ethnos is an arbitrary unit, somewhat like a meter or a litre. The largest human system is humanity as a whole, or the *anthroposphere*, one of the layers enveloping the Earth, like the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, or the biosphere. The next largest unit is the *superethnos*, or a group of ethnoi, which appear at the same time in the same region and are similar to each other. The superethnoi look very much like Toynbee’s societies, but Gumilev would claim that they are different, since they are based on an internal process of ethnogenesis. They are the result of a period of expansion. Ethnoi themselves are divided into *subethnoi*, which cannot exist outside the context of an ethnos.

For Gumilev, these identities – sub-ethnic, ethnic, super-ethnic – are relative, not in any way absolute, but at the same time, they are real, and every human being is born into one. An ethnos is not a “socio-historical category”, since societies can change from feudal to capitalist, for example, but ethnoi remain (ibid.: 47). Language, territory, heredity, ideology and culture are not determining factors either. In modern Western Europe, ethnoi generally fit into the boundaries of nation-states, which are a historically new phenomenon, and not at all eternal, as Hobsbawm (1990), Anderson (1981) and many others have theorized. Gumilev recognizes this, and points out that the concept of the State itself is variable in different parts of the world and throughout history, so that the Chinese idea of *go* does not “correspond to the English *state* or the French *état*, or even the Latin *imperium* or *respublicæ*. Equally distant in content are the Iranian *shakhr* or the... term *horde*” (Gumilev, 2001: 62).

This would all seem to indicate that the idea of ethnos has no bearing on reality, but Gumilev has already affirmed that an ethnos is a biological concept. He points out that the problem in defining the ethnos arises when it is defined as a ‘state’ of human life, as opposed to a ‘process’. Matter has different states: solid, liquid, gaseous, plasma. A change of state in nature is a change from one stable energy level to another. A living organism, then, might be thought of as having two states, alive and dead, but since a dead organism by definition is no longer really an organism, it makes little sense to talk of a change of state. Rather, a living organism is a constant process, from birth through maturity and aging to death. Gumilev’s argument continues that to understand processes, especially evolutionary ones, a hierarchical taxonomy is needed, similar to the ones invented Linnæus and Darwin. This model is necessitated by the evolutionary nature of living processes. When an organism dies, it reverts to a ‘state’; the same is true for an ethnos, the remains of which can be studied at an archaeological dig, for example. The idea of ‘state’ is useful when speaking of technology, the means of production; one can also talk about social states, such as class. One can change one’s social ‘state’ through the expenditure of energy. It is not possible to change one’s ethnos in the same way. Therefore, ethnos must be regarded as a process (ibid.: 70).

Thus, for Gumilev, an ethnos is relatively stable, but certainly not static. The ethnos is a process, and as such is in a state of constant development. Ethnoi are, in a sense, born; they grow, mature, decay and fade away. The question still remains, however, of what exactly is growing? When Spengler asks “what form will the down-curve assume?” (1934: 424), Gumilev wonders what exactly is the “down-curve” supposed to follow?

To explain Gumilev’s thinking on this point, it is important to return to his idea that ethnoi arise naturally among humans, but do not imply some kind of racial differentiation: “it is not in people’s bodies, but in their deeds and relationships” (Gumilev, 2001: 146). Here he would be in agreement with Hobsbawm, who, when speaking of ethnicity, stated that what was important in the unity of an ethnic group is “not blood but belief” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 65). Where Hobsbawm and Gumilev would disagree is on the conclusion coming from this point. For Hobsbawm, ethnic identity, like the nation, is a social construction. For Gumilev, on the contrary, ethnogenesis is not simply social in nature. There is a relationship between the ethnos and the *Landschaft* – meaning the physical geography of a place – where ethnogenesis takes place. In fact, according to Gumilev, ethnogenesis takes place only where there is a conjunction of two or more kinds of *Landschaft* (Gumilev, 2001: 254). Moreover, another basic requirement of ethnogenesis is the presence of two or more ethnoi in contact (ibid.: 147). In short, according to Gumilev, an ethnos is a process that arises from a combination of other ethnoi meeting at a juncture of two or more geographic settings.

In the Occidental literature on Gumilev and the Eurasianists, there are very few attempts to try to understand this aspect of Gumilev's theory. The notable exception is Laruelle, and I am forced to disagree with some of the conclusions she arrives at. For Laruelle, Gumilev's thinking involves a rigid physical determinism, of which geography is the first factor, setting him far apart from the original Eurasianists, particularly Savitskii. She claims Gumilev's preference for the term *Landschaft*, and eschewal of Savitskii's term "*mestorazvitie*" (meaning literally "place of development" and being coined by Savitskii to resonate with the geological term *mestorozhdenie*, which refers to a mineralogical deposit), to support this view: "si le premier terme illustre un déterminisme absolu et la dépendance de l'homme envers la nature, le second met principalement en lumière l'interaction entre milieu naturel et développement historique, les tendances communes existant entre un territoire et le peuple ou l'État qui s'y développe" (2000: 173 fn.).

In fact, judging by Gumilev's endnotes in *Ethnogenesis*, the term *Landschaft* seems to have undergone some changes in the Soviet literature, since he quotes S.V. Kalesnik in defining it as a portion of the Earth's surface, "qualitatively different from other portions, bordered by natural boundaries and representing an integrated and mutually determined regular aggregate of objects and phenomena, typically expressed over a significant space and indissolubly connected in all ways with the *Landschaft* layer" (2001: 189). Gumilev immediately proposes using "Savitskii's apt term – *mestorazvitie*" – to express this long definition (ibid.). This serves as a clue that the rhetoric of the natural sciences that Gumilev employs does not necessarily equal a hard determinism.

Laruelle sees Gumilev's determinism as a rigid, physical one, where human history is an effect of natural, physical laws set in motion. This implies an almost mechanistic view of the universe, which is not the best characterization of Gumilev's naturalist approach to human history. For example, Gumilev takes inspiration from the work of Vladimir Vernadskii on the biosphere, which is not "just a film of 'living matter' on the surface of the Earth", but a "constantly changing aggregate of organisms, connected to each other by, and subject to, the evolutionary process in the course of geological time" (Gumilev, 2001: 326). The difference between living and non-living matter is explained partly by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that the entropy of any isolated system increases with time, which is to say that matter moves from an ordered state to a disordered state. This loss of orderliness is uneven, however, and systems that are not isolated, in other words, that interact with their surrounding environment, can reverse entropy in themselves while speeding up the process of entropy around them. According to some modern interpretations, living things represent just such a process (Dennett, 1996: 69). Ordinary matter on the closed system of planet Earth is subject to the growth of entropy, while living matter 'exchanges', as it were, entropy with the surrounding environment, in the form of energy, the "biochemical energy of the living matter of the biosphere" (Gumilev, 2001: 327). When Gumilev speaks of ethnogenesis being governed by natural laws, it is this "reverse entropy" that

he is speaking of, the same principle that applies to biological processes.

If an ethnos is a process, however, then ethnogenesis is a change of state, and that means, following Gumilev's thinking, that it requires an injection of energy, perhaps not immediately noticeable, similar to the hidden thermal energy in a material change of state from solid to liquid to gas. Drawing from Vernadskii's principle of biochemical energy, Gumilev concludes that it is this energy that stimulates all ethnogeneses (ibid.: 277). An ethnos, left on its own, will find a state of equilibrium with its natural surroundings and other ethnoi, resisting change; in a word, homeostasis. An impulse is needed to move an ethnos to change its environment, whether by migration or by the effort required to change a landscape to make it arable. This impulse, for Gumilev, is the single invariable factor in the creation of ethnoi. It is indicated by an impulse that runs counter to the instinct of self-preservation, or the preservation of one's offspring. Individuals who demonstrate this quality "carry out... deeds that upset the inertia of tradition and initiate new ethnoi" (ibid.: 265).

Because this indicator manifests itself on the individual level, but on a scale that seems, according to his observations, to happen simultaneously in different parts of the world in a way that affects whole populations, Gumilev attributes it to genetic mutations. He introduces a new term to the Russian language, *passionarnost'*, from the Latin word *passio*, which means "suffering", and is the root of the English word "passion", which has taken on new meanings (except, generally, in the context of the Passion of Christ). The term was translated inaptly in the (journal) U.S. journal *Soviet Geography* as "drive", and that is the word used in the single English-language version of *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*. It would have made more sense, however, to create a new English word, to keep in line with Gumilev's thinking. Laruelle wisely translates the abstract noun as *passionarité* (2000: 174), and I will use the appropriate anglicized form: "passionarity", from which, the adjective and adjectival noun "passionary" (*passionarnii*).

Passionarity is a very controversial and, it is safe to say at this point, a scientifically unfounded concept. It is necessary to pay close attention to it, however, since it is a term central to Gumilevian thinking, and has become fairly widespread in Russian social discourse. Essentially, it represents an overabundance of biochemical energy, and it manifests itself in individuals who are willing to "do deeds", heedless of the instinct of self-preservation. Passionarity is thus the force that moves history; moreover, it is a force of nature. Gumilev allows that the actual form of the acts carried out by the passionary individual are dictated by the social and political situation, which he leaves outside of the natural science of ethnology. The presence of passionarity in the individual is, however, a physiological difference involving heightened activity. Since, as Gumilev deduces, passionarity comes in bursts, or "*passionary impulses*", that affect whole populations, passionarity must be the effect of genetic mutation. This mutation, it must be noted, is not necessarily a good thing from the passionary individual's point of view, since it leads to

behaviour that can often lead to early death (2001: 329). Even during a phase where passionarity is high, the number of true passionaries in a given population is still very small. Passionarity is, however, contagious, according to Gumilev. Since it is a form of biochemical energy, there can be said to be “passionary fields” where higher numbers of passionaries live in a given population. This allows “subpassionary” individuals, as Gumilev calls them, to take risks similar to passionaries, and to participate in their exploits (ibid.: 282).

The level of passionarity does not remain constant in an ethnos once it has burst out in a passionary impulse. Gumilev’s concept involves a series of phases, which correspond to the life cycle of the ethnos. The initial passionary impulse forms the ethnos by, in a sense, “welding” disparate subethnoi together in a given place and time, in a given geographic setting. The typical life span of an ethnos is approximately 1500 years, unless cut short by, for example, conquest by another ethnos. (idem, 2002c: 14). This life span is characterized by a sharp rise in passionarity in its first three hundred years or so, at which point a climax is reached. By this point, the ethnos will often have expanded, absorbing other ethnoi and forming a superethnos. At this point the passionarity in the system begins to burn itself out, beginning a slow breakdown that typically lasts about the same amount of time as the rise in passionarity. This is a time of monument building in the art and culture of a superethnos, the diffusion of passionarity being spent in a cultural crystallization. Represented in linear graphic form (for example, idem, 2001: 349), with the *x*-axis representing time (from zero to 1500 years) and the *y*-axis representing passionarity, the cycle Gumilev describes peaks sharply just after 300 years, and then tapers off unevenly over the remaining 900 years or so. The last few hundred years of this slow falling-off of passionarity are characterized by decadence, but also by technological development (ibid.: 451) which is needed to replace the dynamic energy of ethnic expansion.

This describes, in effect, what one might call (using a metaphor from the more well-established natural sciences) Gumilev’s ‘climatology’ of the ethnosphere. He reached this point after a great deal of observation of the ethnic history of the Eurasian steppe. In his later works, Gumilev uses these concepts to explain the processes that led to the formation of Russia, particularly in *Drevniaia Rus’ i Velikaia Step’* and *Ot Rusi do Rossii*. In these works, to continue the metaphor, Gumilev studies ethnic ‘meteorology’ in more detail. Not surprisingly, his conclusions are different from those of other historians. Here, the Eurasian steppe was the stage on which the meeting of several different ethnic systems in the seventh to tenth centuries A.D. led to the creation of Kievan Rus’.

Some important concepts, theorized in *Ethnogenesis and the Biosphere*, are examined in more detail in these later works. According to Gumilev, they have to do with contacts between superethnoi, so in a sense, they have a bearing on the Samuel Huntington’s (1996) work on the ‘clash of civilizations’. It is worth noting that in some superficial ways, Gumilev’s cultural map

of the world is the most similar of all the Eurasianists to Huntington's. Huntington draws on recent research on civilizations, as well as the cultures identified by Toynbee, Spengler and Fernand Braudel (1996: 43, 325 fn). Gumilev draws on a similar tradition in framing his view of the present state of world civilization, and there are some interesting parallels between his conclusions and Huntington's, but Gumilev's ethnology is very different from the method used by the American political scientist. If Huntington sees a world where civilizations 'clash', conflicting on the plane of cultural values, Gumilev sees ethnoi and superethnoi interacting in a way similar to storm systems or other natural phenomena. Ethnoi can live together in a state of *symbiosis*, where two or more ethnoi exist side by side in a region, or *xenia*^{*}, a symbiotic state where an ethnos leads a peaceful but separate existence inside the territory of another ethnos. When members of two different superethnoi combine in one society, however, what forms is a brittle, but dangerous, system called a *chimera*[†].

Gumilev is able to cite many instances of chimeræ in world history, but his classic example is also the most controversial one, dealing with the history of the Khazar Kaganate in the second half of the First Millennium A.D. Gumilev was a student of the Soviet archaeologist Mikhail I. Artamonov, who is recognized as perhaps the foremost author on the history of the Khazars (Christian, 2002: 7), and whom Gumilev himself accompanied early in his career to the archaeological excavation at Sarkel, one of the Khazars' main settlements (Lavrov, 2001). The Khazars were a steppe people living to the north and west of the Caspian Sea, who formed out of several Turkic tribes, the western remnants of the Turkic empire that had stretched across the Eurasian steppe; but later, evidently in the ninth century, converted to Judaism.

Jews had originally appeared in the lands north of the Caucasus, the territory of the Khazars, in the sixth century, after the Sassanid Persian rulers had expelled them for supporting Mazdakitism (Christian, 2002: 11). The Mazdakites, or the followers of the cult established by Mazdak in primarily Zoroastrian Persia at the end of the fifth century, were an example of what Gumilev calls an *antisystem*. Gumilev, as we have mentioned earlier, considers ethnoi to be systems. A system has a 'positive' relationship with the world when people consider themselves a part of nature, and a system where the world and worldliness is seen a source of suffering, where "the world is rejected as the source of evil", is negative, or an antisystem (Gumilev, 2002a: 268). In the case of Mazdak and his followers in fifth century Persia, this apparently meant a redistribution of all property during a reign of terror. The Jewish community in Persia, according to Gumilev, was split by this turn of events: Jews who were "Orthodox and talmudic found the Mazdakites abhorrent, while those who were free-thinking and cabbalist found them sympathetic" (ibid.: 120). Thus the former fled to take refuge in Byzantium while the Mazdakites were in control, while the latter remained in Persia until forced to flee by the final defeat of Mazdak in 529. It was this group that ended up in the Khazar lands of the North Caucasus in the sixth century, living a pastoral life side by side with the Khazars. Later, during the Arab invasion of the eighth century,

the two ethnoi were able to form a state of symbiosis, and resist the expansion of the Omayyad Caliphate (ibid.: 66). In the ensuing period, the contact between these two ethnoi – representatives, in fact, of what Gumilev terms two superethnoi, Western Eurasian and Judaic – became closer, but the two remained distinct.

Gumilev insists that there was no “conversion” of the Turkic Khazars to Judaism. Rather, Jewish women married into the Khazar nobility. Eventually, a class of influential Khazars developed whose social status was inferred by paternal lineage, and who were Jewish by their maternal lineage. They did not, however, cling to their Jewish heritage, according to Gumilev, until the beginning of the ninth century, when a Khazar kaghan invited rabbinical scholars to entrench Judaic customs among the ruling class that was descended from both Jewish and Khazar parentage (ibid.: 144). Thus a system formed from the two superethnoi, which Gumilev qualified as a chimera, inherently unstable and self-destructive. By way of contrast, the co-existence of the East Slavs and the Varangians who together formed Kievan Rus’ in the ninth and tenth centuries, eventually crushing the Khazar Kaghanate, did not lead to a chimera. This was not due, in Gumilev’s words, to any “noble qualities” of these peoples, but simply the fact that the Varangians did not constitute an ethnos; instead, they were “free atoms” comprised not only of Scandinavian warriors, but also Balts, some Slavs and Finns. These people would later become incorporated into the Slavic ethnos of the Rus’ (ibid.: 228). It should be pointed out that the Jewish-Khazar chimera is not the only example that Gumilev recognizes. Among others, he refers to the Livonian state of the Teutonic Order in the thirteenth century (idem, 2001: 322).

The idea that non-Slavic peoples were instrumental in the formation of Kievan Rus’ was controversial in Soviet times, and the work of Artamonov was suppressed (Christian, 2000: 7). Therefore Gumilev’s interpretation of the origin of the Russian state was bound to be controversial from the point of view of Soviet historiography. The fact that he assigns the label of “terrible chimera” to history’s only Jewish state outside the Holy Land is also, certainly, the source of controversy. His rhetoric, at times, certainly seems anti-Semitic, which has affected the diffusion of his ideas (ibid.: 22).

In what way, then, is Gumilev’s work so important for Eurasianism? Gumilev’s affiliation to the ‘classical’ Eurasianists is open to debate. Notwithstanding some of my objections to Laruelle’s conclusions regarding the Gumilevian discourse, she does make a persuasive case that Gumilev’s approach is fundamentally different from the original Eurasianists. Certainly the key Gumilevian concepts that I have taken pains in outlining here – ethnogenesis, passionarity, the “science” of ethnology – were unknown to the classical Eurasianists, because they were invented by Gumilev late in the twentieth century (Laruelle, 2003: 56). Laruelle, however, does not seem to notice that the way he defines one of his central concepts, the ethnos, is essentially cultural, referring as it does to “behavioural stereotypes”. This, and his grouping of ethnoi into superethnoi, recalls

Trubetskoi's idea of culture quoted earlier in this paper. Nonetheless, considering his favouring of the natural sciences over the humanities, and his stated distrust of philological approaches to unravelling the history of ethnoi, Gumilev's epistemology can be considered radically different from that of most of the members of the classical Eurasianist school, and from the other serious Neoeurasianist, Aleksandr Panarin.

Gumilev's relationship to Eurasianism can be expressed in two ways: first, the impact of the vocabulary of his discourse on the modern wave of Eurasianists. Writers like Dugin, among many others, have used Gumilevian language in the course of their analyses. Panarin uses the term "passionarity", although "contrary to Gumilev, we do not relegate human passionarity to a natural-determinist factor. Man is, foremost, a spiritual creature, receiving energy from culture" (Panarin, et al. 1996: 360). Despite this, Panarin goes on to speak of Russian "cosmism", drawing on the same concept, expressed by V Vernadskii, of civilization's relationship to the natural universe as Gumilev did, and describing relationships to nature similar to Gumilev's 'systems' and 'antisystems' (idem: 388).

Secondly, Gumilev speaks to Eurasianists in his detailed ethnology of the peoples and cultures of the Eurasian steppe: the Huns, the Turkic peoples, Khazars, the spread of Nestorianism in Central Asia. The research that Gumilev did in the earlier part of his career, without having read many of the works of the classical Eurasianists, nevertheless supported the ideas of Trubetskoi and Savitskii concerning the mixed Slavonic-Turanian origins of Russia. Indeed, by classing Russia as "the Eurasian superethnos", he was placing it as the fourth incarnation of the great pan-Eurasian imperative that built the Hun, Turkic and Mongol Empires before it. In the sense that Gumilev saw Russia as belonging to a superethnos (read civilization) that was neither Western-Christian, nor uniquely Asian in origin, made him a central figure among the new Eurasianists. Like the classical Eurasianists, he suggested that it was important that the individual ethnoi in Eurasia to remain true to their own cultures, and traditions, as history demonstrated: "when each people (*narod*) retained the right to be itself, united Eurasia successfully withstood the onslaught of Western Europe, and China, and the Moslems. Unfortunately, in the twentieth century we abandoned this sensible and traditional (for our country) policy in favour of European principles" (Gumilev, 2002c: 292). For Gumilev, the need for a different approach to development in Eurasia is expressed by his idea that the Eurasian superethnos is 500 years younger than the West-European superethnos, at a different stage of ethnogenesis, and with a different level of passionarity. This holds out comfort for Eurasianists, particularly for the stream that Laruelle identified as "euro-asiatism" (Laruelle, 2003: 62) or the ethnological movement in Eurasianism mentioned earlier, which is involved in creating a scholarly basis for the national identities of the primarily Turkic-speaking peoples of Russia and Central Asia.

I agree with Laruelle that, in retrospect, Gumilev should not be considered the last of the

‘classical’ Eurasianists, in spite of the article where Gumilev appears to claim this himself (Gumilev, 1990). It should be noted, however, that in 1990, there was no Neoeurasianist movement to speak of, or at least it was in its infancy and not widely known, so in a sense, at the time, his claim was not so outlandish despite his basic differences with Savitskii, Trubetskoi and the other classical Eurasianists. “‘I met and had conversations with Savitskii, and corresponded with G. Vernadskii. I am basically in agreement with the fundamental historic and methodological conclusions of the Eurasianists’” (quoted in Lavrov, 2002: 295). As for his specific view of Russian history, Gumilev’s concept of a superethnos formed by a meeting of Slavonic and Mongol-Turkic elements echoes a strong theme among the classical Eurasianists, even if the methodology used to arrive at that conclusion was different.

As Gumilev mentioned himself, the thrust of his work as it pertains to history is best formulated as an attempt to systematize the study of the ethnosphere the way meteorology does for the atmosphere or plate tectonics does for the study of the lithosphere. Since it reaches into the realm of the humanities, the criticism levelled against his work often targets his epistemology (for example, Laruelle, 2000), or the ‘dilettantism’ that his approach requires, reaching out to disciplines that he clearly does not have a firm grasp on, for example in the biochemistry and cosmic links in his theory of passionarity (Koreniako, 2000). It is not very difficult to find inconsistencies in Gumilev’s work; after all, he was forced to spend much of his early career working his own, and yet he showed considerable audacity in trying to create a new science, in fact, practically a new world-view. Clearly it would be impossible for one man to be able to forge such a different approach to history in a way that is completely factually and logically “waterproof”: there are simply too many facts, and too many unfamiliar disciplines to be able to cleanly unite into one whole. Does this invalidate his entire *œuvre*? I would suggest, rather, that studying Gumilev might provide some interesting approaches to theorizing nationalism or the “clash of civilizations” in general. In relation to the topic of this paper, Gumilevian terminology has become central to the discourse of Neoeurasianism, even if some Neoeurasianists are not in complete agreement with him.

Aleksandr Panarin: Eurasia After Modernity

Aleksandr Sergeevich Panarin (1940-2003) was a teacher of philosophy at Moscow State University until his death. His career was linked closely with the Department of Philosophy at MSU, where he obtained his undergraduate and graduate degrees in the late 60’s and early 70’s. He was unable to fully realize his potential until 1992, when he became a full professor of philosophy at his *alma mater*. As an author, he was particularly prolific in the last 10 years, publishing many articles and a number of books, none of which have been translated into English, but several of which have won major prizes in Russia, including the A. Solzhenitsyn Award for *Revansh Istorii* [The *Revanche* of History] and *Iskushenie Globalizmom* [The Temptation of Globalism]. During this period he was a regular contributor to influential periodicals such as

Znamia [Banner], *Nash Sovremennik* [Our Contemporary] and *Literaturnaia Gazeta* [Literary Gazette], and scientific journals such as *Voprosy Filosofii* [Problems of Philosophy]. At the time of his death, it could be said that he was only just reaching his peak of popularity.

Little effort has been made so far to understand Panarin's *œuvre* in the Occidental literature on the Neoeurasianists, with the exception of an analysis by Marlène Laruelle (2001). Tsygankov (1998) mentions Panarin briefly in a footnote as an example of a "liberal" Eurasianist, because of his "respect for democracy and human rights", as opposed to the "hard-line", "anti-Western" Eurasianists, among whom Aleksandr Dugin is the most visible example. In fact, Panarin's message, similar to many in the anti-globalization movement of recent years, is very clear: the West, in its current form, is not the source of "respect for democracy and human rights" for the rest of the world, but rather the source of oppression, the dismemberment of the former Soviet space of Eurasia into sovereign states organized on nationalist lines, each with a dependant, western-oriented elite and a population thrown back from the industrialized second world to a third-world source of natural resources and cheap labour. Russia and Eurasia's best chance, therefore, is to become a centre of global resistance. The means to this end is through a cultural rebirth. In the case of Russia, this means a return to Orthodox values.

Panarin's thought is laid out in a large number of books, where many ideas are carried over from one volume to the next. For the purposes of grasping the direction of Panarin's thinking, I will concentrate on a selection of several books: *Rossiiia v Tsvilizationnom Protsesse* [Russia in the Civilizational Process], published in 1995; *Reformy i Kontrreformy v Rossii* [Reforms and Counter-Reforms in Russia], a work co-authored with V. V. Il'in and A. S. Akhiezer in 1997; *Rossiiia v Tsiklakh Mirovoi Istorii* [Russia in the Cycles of World History] published in 1999; from the same year, *Global'noe Politicheskoe Prognozirovanie v Usloviakh Strategicheskoi Nestabil'nosti* [Global Political Forecasting in Conditions of Strategic Instability]; in his larger work, *Politologia* ['Politology', i.e. political science] (2002), much of *Global'noe Politicheskoe Prognozirovanie* is reprinted as Part II, but Part I deals with questions of method. Finally, I will refer to his last major work, *Pravoslavnaia Tsvilizatsiia v Global'nom Mire* [Orthodox Civilization in a Global World], published in 2002.

Panarin's work has several dimensions. In its broadest sense, it is an attempt to create a home-grown method of political science, different from Western, particularly American, models that are now standard in Post-Soviet Russia. He qualifies the goal of political science as "the study of the nature of state power, as well as the patterns and procedures of its various applications in various social and socio-cultural (civilizational) systems" (Panarin 2002a: 12). Another important dimension is his geopolitical view, comprising an eternal, epic struggle between Land and Sea for supremacy. Finally, there is his cultural analysis, which on the one hand is profoundly Orthodox Christian, while on the other hand is pan-Eurasian, particularly in the context of the westernizing

power of globalization.

Panarin takes what could be termed a “dualist” view of world history. One outward form of this dualism is history’s apparent “bi-hemisphericity”, the age-old division of “East” vs. “West”. This is an idea that he draws from Karl Jaspers: “Ever since Herotodus, men have been aware of the antithesis of East and West as an eternal antithesis that is forever reappearing in fresh shapes” (Jaspers: 1965: 67). In addition, Panarin regards himself as a historicist. For him, the analytical method in political science that grew out of American sociology “fits neatly with the current liberal paradigm of ‘the End of History’, the eternal consolidation of the Modern paradigm that was achieved in the West” (Panarin. 2002a: 14). For him, “socio-cultural inversion”, a continuation of history in the Hegelian sense, is a matter of when, not if. Thus Panarin presents himself as an opponent of two kinds of bias: the Western universalizing bias of space, predicting the advent of a global civilization, and, more particularly, the universalizing bias of time, in the notion of the “end of history”.

For Panarin, these dualisms are the sign of a fundamental philosophical phenomenon, the quarrel between nominalism and idealism. He suggests that there is a cosmological foundation for this dichotomy, which could just as easily be illustrated by the symbols of Ying and Yang, which leads to the suggestion that there is a cyclical pattern of ascendance of these two fundamental principles, which likely has an anti-entropic significance in the socio-cultural dynamic of human history. The current cycle of Modernity, the ascendancy of the West, is marked also by the ascendancy of nominalism: “neither the market economy nor political democracy are possible with the weakening of the nominalist principle” (Panarin, 1999a: 21). By “democracy”, Panarin means Western-style, representative democracy. This model of society is an outgrowth of nominalism, specifically the Lockean idea of the “natural state” of Man, but it is confronted with many paradoxes, which have come into particularly sharp relief during the post-Soviet period of Russian history, where people have been “liberated”, in the sense that now they have a representative democracy. Panarin highlights the difference between this form of democracy and participatory democracy: “the retreat of the state in Russia in fact lead to a certain (quite limited) minimal amount of democracy in the political sphere at the price of a further retreat of democracy in the social sphere” (2002a, 75).

Another paradox faced by the nominalist path is that its presumption that growth and progress can continue forward indefinitely has been confronted with the reality of the limited amount of resources on this planet. The progressive impulse leads to two problems. First, it tends to universalize and rationalize human culture, leading to a loss of diversity. Second, there are the “limits to growth” that the Club of Rome warned about. This means that Western civilization, “the golden billion”, in order to keep its progressive lifestyle going, must place ever-increasing limits on the rest of the world’s people (1999b: 64).

Continuing from his dualist perspective, Panarin's theory of history takes a turn from Arnold Toynbee. The cyclical nature of the development of civilization can be expressed in terms of *challenge* and *response*. For Panarin, the challenge posed by Western civilization, specifically the United States, reaches far beyond Russia, and is in fact a challenge to the rest of the world. Panarin sees the US in an attempt to "end history", that is, crystallize the balance of world power by creating a unipolar world, or more correctly the production of a world that has never yet existed. The programmatic, technical means to this end is the dismantling of the world's large, multi-ethnic states, such as Russia, India and China, under the guise of ethnic sovereignty. At this point, "the whole experience of world political history is witness to the fact that a *response* would, sooner or later, always be found, and thus history never became a monologue of an eternal victor" (1999b, 19).

Panarin's dualism can be seen in the geopolitical side of his thought. Russia, for Panarin, represents what he calls a "civilization". His conception of this is influenced by Toynbee, but more by Trubetskoi and the classical Eurasianists. Toynbee rates religion too highly as a factor leading to the formation of civilizations, according to Panarin. This interpretation has led to an idea where, "with the light hand of S. Huntington and his adepts, confessional fanaticism and ethnocentrism are held up as the mobilization of the civilizational consciousness" (Panarin, *et. al.*, 1996: 224). Furthermore, "in the myth of the 'clash of civilizations', the geopolitical interests of the West are, doubtlessly, at play. In feeding the myth of a clash of civilizations, specifically Christian and Muslim, certain circles are counting on the break-up of Russia along the watershed of its Slavic and Turkic constituent parts" (*ibid.*: 225).

In fact, Panarin's geopolitical view of Eurasia stems from an idea similar to that of the classical Eurasianists. According to this, the Slavic and Turanian (Turkic, Finnic, etc.) elements of the Eurasian steppe formed a symbiotic relationship at the beginning of the modern Russian state, where the settled Slavonic side in a sense "tamed" the wild, barbaric instincts of the steppe nomads. The process of "westernization" in Russia is one where the Slavic element withdraws from the Turanian side, which would conceivably lead to a rift, in all likelihood catastrophic. This is in contrast to the much more typical view that Russia's experience with the steppe nomads of the Tatar-Mongol Empire lead to a tradition of "Oriental despotism" that remains to this day:

The West, separated from Russia after 1917, brings its identity into line in such a way in order to attribute the totalitarian syndrome to the East. Our "Westernizers" believed that, initiating a campaign of masochistic auto-flagellation on a national scale. Meanwhile, modern analysis indicates that the Soviet totalitarian model arose completely from the Enlightenment (1999a: 37).

Essentially, Panarin is describing an Orientalism that has been applied now to Russia. It could

have easily been Panarin writing that

...the Orientalist now tries to see the Orient as an imitation West which, according to Bernard Lewis, “is prepared to come to terms with the West.” If in the meantime the Arabs, the Muslims, or the Third or Fourth Worlds go unexpected ways after all, we will not be surprised to have an Orientalist tell us that this testifies to the incorrigibility of Orientals and therefore proves that they are not to be trusted (Said, 1979: 321).

The difference here is that Panarin is really addressing the “Orientalists” *within* Russian society, in other words, the Westernizing elite.

If splitting Eurasia along religious lines is dangerous, Panarin is unequivocal about the splitting up of Eurasia on ethno-nationalist lines. He sees a double-standard: while the West encourages ethnic separatism not just in Eurasia but throughout the rest of the world, it discourages ethno-nationalist separatism within its own ranks. He notes that “the post-totalitarian ethno-sovereignties are not at all democratic. Their ideology is aggressive, low-brow nationalism, leading far back compared to the ‘Soviet empire’, away from the ideals of the Enlightenment.” (1999b: 237).

Laruelle interprets the use of the term “civilization” in Panarin’s discourse to suggest that Panarin “shares with Huntington the idea that the notion of civilization has an absolute explicative value” for the post-bipolar world, and that this definition supposes a polycentric view of the world (Laruelle, 2001: 71). A careful re-reading of Panarin would seem to refute those two points. Certainly, the idea of civilization does come into play in his thought, drawing some energy from the writing of Toynbee, for example. His idea of Russian civilization, as we have seen, reminds us of the Eurasianist concept of the interaction between the Slavic and Turanian worlds. In fact, it is also very reminiscent of Gumilev’s “Eurasian superethnos”. This idea is outwardly similar to the civilizations of Toynbee and Huntington, yet it does not give religion central role in the formation of civilizations. On the other hand, for Panarin, Orthodoxy plays a central role in the “Eurasian civilization”. In fact, he sees Orthodoxy providing a moral energy to a broader engagement against Western universalism in a struggle that is not multi-polar, but bipolar. He does indeed speak of a “pluralism of civilizations” but it is in the context of a resistance of various cultures against the space-compressing force of post-modern Western civilization (Panarin, *et. al.*, 1996: 369). Laruelle brings this point up to demonstrate that the Neoeurasianists take a disingenuous comfort in the notion that in a multi-civilizational world, Russia will be assured a warm seat. Perhaps they do, but I would say, rather, that in Panarin’s Neoeurasianism, the ideal is the preservation of Russian culture as such, along with other world cultures.

Another major factor in Panarin’s geopolitics is the dichotomy of Land and Sea, Continent and

Ocean, which transcends the geopolitical notion of civilizations. This idea comes from Mackinder, and is very important among the classical Eurasianists. It is also important to Carl Schmitt, where Panarin picks up on two key metaphors: the Ship, symbolizing movement, as the basis of the maritime way of life, opposed to which the House, as the symbol of the land-based way of life, represents tranquility. The Sea way of life is also represented by piracy, the expropriation of wealth, while the Land is characterized by sedentary pastoralism. This fundamental dualism fits well with Panarin's conception of the world history, and also is a good fit with his historicist outlook. Translated into the present, we are faced with the symbolic Maritime way of life taken to an extreme, in the guise of global capitalism:

Today we are dealing with the global piracy of a maritime civilization, exacting, on the one hand, a growing tribute from the entire surrounding global space by means of such new mechanisms as the institutional banking economy, from which there is no defence by means of the usual procedures of state protectionism and self-defence; and splitting up, on the other hand, the bedrock of the former continental monoliths, enabling it to set apart the Rimland, its familiar oceanic edge. (1999a: 128)

Using another dualistic geopolitical metaphor, Panarin goes on to describe this as the triumph of the geographic horizontal over the vertical. He does not mince words in describing the current state of affairs. The forces of the Sea, or the West, led by the US, are leading a direct attack on the former Soviet Eurasian space or "Second World", in a process designed to divide it and add it to the Third World. "The whole former Second World is in the grip of a process of de-industrialization that is clearly imposed and encouraged from outside. De-industrialization is a forcible separation from progress" (2002b: 331). Panarin paints a bleak picture of the implications of this: Russia has to stop pretending that it is not under attack, and realize that the Fourth World War has already begun, soon after the end of what he calls the Third World War, in other words, the Cold War. The situation is masked, because Russia has fallen back so far without any kind of resistance, but since her very existence is at stake, along with other large Eurasian states, who need to be neutralized in order for the West to gain control over Eurasia, "we have the right to speak of the beginning of a *new World War*" (idem, 1999b: 227). For Panarin, because of Russia-Eurasia's strategic place on the Continent, the resistance of what he terms the "Maritime horizontal", using a geopolitical bloc of the "Continental vertical" has implications reaching far beyond Eurasia. His sense of historicism, on the other hand, gives him faith that a response will be found.

In her analysis of Panarin's version of Neoeurasianism, Laruelle makes note of a valorization, a rehabilitation of barbarism. The Eurasianists, she states, had paradoxically revived the image of the barbarian, the nomad without culture, as the only way to revive decadent societies. She goes on to cite Panarin, stating that his

néoeurasisme poursuit ce culte du barbare en appelant au renversement des habituels critères de valeur. “La barbarie totale n’est pas le produit d’un héritage archaïque, mais le résultat des expériences ‘post-civilisationnelles’ de dépasser à tout prix les contradictions et tensions immanentes à tout état civilisationnel.” (Laruelle, 2001: 79)

The quote comes from *Rossia v Tsvilizationnom Protsesse* (Panarin, 1995: 19), and it is mistranslated into French. Panarin is speaking of “*totalitarnoe varvarstvo*” – totalitarian barbarity – in the context of French philosopher Jacques Ellul’s discourse on the way Western civilization, in its rush towards a technological utopia, has betrayed its fundamental values, such as ‘freedom’ and ‘individualism’. Panarin, here, is reasoning that many of Russia’s terrible experiences of the twentieth century were the result of a Western utopian, technological ideology being taken to its logical conclusion. He is trying to discredit the Orientalist idea of “oriental despotism” as a major factor in Russia’s totalitarian heritage.

Rather than rehabilitating a “cult of the barbarian”, Panarin curiously begins the book we have just quoted in a spirited defence of the original victories of the Enlightenment, in the form of an examination of Ellul’s work, *Le Trahison de l’Occident* (2003, originally published in 1975). Reading Laruelle’s review of Panarin’s thought, this would seem rather paradoxical; after all, Ellul is a fierce critic of the perceived “barbarism” of the modern age, and in the book Panarin quotes, he exhorts the unique role the West has played in human history. This brings us to another important aspect of Panarin’s Eurasianism. Modernity is not, in itself, a bad thing; but a sustained attack on the value system of one’s own civilization can lead the way to horrors down the road. That is why he takes up Ellul’s defence of the Occident. In *Le Trahison de l’Occident*, Ellul examines what he considers a fundamental paradox in the unfolding of Western thought during the twentieth century, the flowering of a cultural relativism, that can be based only on the notion that reason is a “natural quality” of human beings. Ellul says that on the contrary, reason, and the beneficial aspects of Western culture are not a “natural state” at all, but the product of many centuries of cultural refinement. Reason is fragile, and must be treated with care, for fear of losing those qualities while heading down a utopian path toward a totalitarian future, which is what any earthly utopia represents, particularly in its technocratic incarnation.

Regarding this position of “over-confidence” in relation to one’s own civilization, Panarin writes that Russia had an experience with the same phenomenon. To her critics, “Tsarist Russia seemed in its time both ‘the prison of nations’ and an unshakeable monstrosity... later, after her death, her critics had to admit that [the GULAG] was a real ‘prison of nations’” (Panarin, 1995: 15).

Panarin shares with Ellul a fundamentally Christian philosophy, and like Ellul, he brings his beliefs to bear in a critique of what Ellul had called (in its English translation) “the technological

society”. Panarin is less deterministic than Ellul, in the sense that where Ellul believes that where the technological world is concerned “it is vanity to pretend it can be checked or guided” (Ellul, 1964: 428), Panarin counters that a challenge of a universalist society will invariably be met by a response. Where Ellul gives up, Panarin sees a way out. Fredric Jameson spoke of the challenge that Panarin refers to as “the cultural logic of late capitalism”, which falls in line with Marxist theory. Panarin would likely agree with Jameson on the diagnosis, but not on the response. For Panarin, the response is to be found in the Orthodox Christian world view. He notes that the “phenomenology of the Orthodox Christian spirit” has a certain quality that can be compared to Marx’s “surplus value”, which the worker adds to bourgeois society. Were it not for the added value, the system would fall apart. The difference between the Orthodox spirit and surplus value is that the sacrifice of the worker is mandatory, while the sacrifice of “the Orthodox spirit is always voluntary, spontaneous, and only in this way can it truly be creative” (Panarin, 2002b: 409).

In *Pravoslavnaia Tsvilizatsiia v Global'nom Mire*, Panarin examines the alternatives to a global monoculture. In the world of modern civilizations, China, the Muslim world, and Orthodoxy can all offer different responses. He suggests that Orthodox spirituality can be the foundation of a post-industrial Eurasian alternative, where creativity is valued over consumerism. He proposes to support the cultural, creative people, “not of this world”, who are most susceptible to the social Darwinism of the “new, aggressive Paganism” of global capitalism. These people would be the strength of a post-industrial economy founded in Orthodox spirituality. An ascetic, culture-based, as opposed to a consumer-based, world economy would be more able to withstand the physical challenges of the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, I would note here that Panarin’s view is global, in the sense that it demands a set of relationships to space and time that are fundamentally different from the trajectory of post-modern capitalism and the currently-forming global economy. In reading Panarin, we see a quest to find a viable alternative to the world structure that is now in the process of forming. Panarin is in search of a sustainable way of existing for all of humanity, firmly – sometimes shrilly – rejecting the Western civilizational path, with its technological society and usurious economic model, thus attributing a messianic function, for all humanity, to his Eurasianism. At the same time, he is rooted in a cultural conservatism, reminiscent of Ellul, which valorizes conservative Western values just as it holds up Orthodox, Islamic and Buddhist values. This brings to mind a point that Hardt and Negri make about fundamentalisms as postmodernist theory (2000: 149). What Panarin is seeking is an alternative postmodernity, taking geopolitical factors as a starting point, just as the classical Eurasianists were interested in an alternative modernity.

Conclusion: Neoeurasianism, History and Politics

The question that is left after reading these fundamental Neoeurasianist authors is how do their

ideas reflect on the discourse of Russia's developmental path in the current climate? Certainly, they have not gone unnoticed, and they are being regarded more and more seriously by many in Russia right now. They are popular among those who are called, and call themselves, "conservatives" in Russia, and this is significant, because much can be understood about Russia's cultural status quo by examining who the "conservatives" are.

Eurasianism, as an intellectual movement, belonged to a specific time and place: the 1920's and 30's, in émigré circles outside the USSR. Eurasianism as a geopolitical stance has come to acquire a much broader definition. Now, it seems, just about any Russian politician who holds the West in suspicion, or protests against NATO expansion, must be a Eurasianist. The reason for this is that Russian nationalism is often hard to pin down, due to Russia's imperial heritage and motley, multi-ethnic makeup. Eurasianism, in the sense of an ideology that draws strength from Russia and Central Asia's multi-confessional, multi-ethnic nature, in a way that offers an alternative to the industrial (or more recently post-industrial) West, is a rarity in Russian politics. I am less inclined than others, for example, to describe Zhirinovskiy as a Eurasianist, as Graham Smith essentially does (1999: 485). A desire to dominate Eurasia does not a Eurasianist make, as I hope the preceding pages have made clear. Since the mid-1990's Gennady Zyuganov's Communist Party of the Russian Federation has often played the role of a Eurasianist force, partly due to its broad, multi-ethnic appeal, partly due to its rehabilitation of religion.

A problem with Eurasianism is that its principal authors leave a bit of room for interpretation, and this tends to encourage more the more xenophobic of Russia's political forces in the search for a right-wing ideology that will work in Russia's specific circumstances. Thus Paradowski points out that a Gumilev-inspired Eurasianism can either lead to some interesting political solutions, or, quite the opposite, be used to promote a traditional anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic doctrine (1999: 27).

Aleksandr Dugin, as the main face of Neoeurasianism and the founder of the Eurasia Party, has made an interesting journey. A prolific writer, he was able to draw attention to the Eurasianist idea through the 1990's to the present. His greatest service to those interested in the Eurasianist world-view, and in geopolitical thought in general, is to distribute, freely, Eurasianist anthologies that he has compiled, along with his own writings, over the Internet. He is a paradoxical figure, whose political journey began in his youth, flirting with neo-fascist and anti-Semitic organizations, later moving to the National Bolshevik Party of Eduard Limonov, and then to the eventual creation of his own party, adhering more closely to Eurasianist principles (for a detailed biography, see Yasmann, 2003). When the Eurasia Party was formed, one of its central principles was a policy of support for President Putin. In fact, Eurasianist influences can be seen in different parties in the Russian Duma, in the military, and other parts of Russia's political society. It is in fact Eurasianism, in a general sense, that seems to sum up the broad mood of Russian

conservatism, better than ethnic nationalism. It appears as if Dugin, during the course of his political career, came to the realization that as a nationalist, in the narrow ethnic Russian or Slavic sense, he would always remain an outsider. It appears that his move toward Eurasianism was based on his assessment of the popular conservative mood.

I believe that Dugin, and Neoeurasianism in general, may represent the beginning of a normalized conservative stand in Russia and perhaps beyond, into Central Asia. In recent Russian politics, we have seen a very popular president who satisfies many voters who would lean towards a Eurasianist-style conservatism, and also those who favour continued economic reforms while maintaining a strong state. The pro-presidential, United Russia party dominates the State Duma. The Kremlin seems to have effectively neutralized the Communist opposition, which was perennially strong throughout the 90's, perhaps by sloughing off the "Eurasia"-minded voters over to the *Rodina* (Motherland) Party, which served its purpose by taking a large number of votes away from the Communists (see, for example, Khamraiev and Bulavinov, 2004). Right now, the Eurasianist mindset in Russian politics under the current President seems to be expressed by what one might call "Putin's Loyal Opposition". By that, I mean really loyal: the Eurasianists seem to support most of the President's moves, but will criticize Westernizing policies in the government, the same government that was formed by the President.

Slowly, perhaps with the help of the classical Eurasianist philosophy along with the works of Gumilev and Panarin, a new "conservatism" will awake in Russia, more clearly defined along Eurasianist lines. My feeling is that in a more developed state, the Russian political spectrum will not display the traditional Western European "left/right", where social conservatism often coincides with economic liberalism. Rather, we may see a formalization of a political view which is not ethnically exclusive, where social conservatism and an economic concept similar to the one expressed by the Eurasianists combine into an institutional conservatism.

It is clear that the works of these authors need to be studied in more detail, along with those of the original Eurasianists. A very worthwhile project would be the translation of some of the key works of Gumilev and Panarin, in order to enable the possibility of wider discussion and debate, since their works could be of scholarly interest to those outside Russian area studies. This would have the advantage of making the discourse that has become current in political, sociological and ethnographic debate in Russia more accessible to English-speaking observers.

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