

From the Editors

Eurasian Studies?

The story of *Kritika*'s new subtitle is an instructive one, for it was no easy task to settle on "Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History." To consider the merits of the newly prominent term *Eurasian* is to engage all the dilemmas of renaming, and hence, to a significant degree, redefining the post-Soviet, more-than-just-Russian field. There are many issues — geographical, historical, methodological, and political — at stake. In a nutshell, however, the problem is easily stated. In the past, *Russian* or *Soviet* served effectively to encompass the space and scope of the former Russian empire and Soviet Union. To be sure, when applied to historical journals, those terms may well seem inadequate both in relation to the non-Russian components and the pre-imperial and medieval pasts of those two historical states. But in the wake of 1991, and based on the field's new configuration in light of the flourishing of studies of empire, borderlands, and non-Russians on that space, *Russian* has become manifestly exclusionary. Maintaining it alone would thus involve a methodological retreat. That is one horn of the dilemma. The other horn is also easily identified: the drawbacks of using a new term, *Eurasian*, as an encompassing new alternative.

Eurasian is an ostensibly geographical term, but, unsurprisingly, it carries political and ideological baggage. It is no secret that many groups and tendencies, not to mention entire countries, want to be linked to the first Eurosyllable and not the "backward" Asian half of the compound in question. Those committed to drawing closer to Europe do not wish to be part of Eurasia; and those who ideologically embrace the East, in Russia and elsewhere, often maintain stances that are politically unsavory and (what can never be forgiven) ahistorical. One can note, as part of a related phenomenon, the increasingly prevalent replacement of Eastern Europe (and the more technical East-Central Europe) with plain old Central Europe. This tendency has a lengthy history in its own right, but in its immediate post-1989 manifestations has its roots in East European (that is, Central European) dissident intellectual circles. The term *Eurasian*, in contrast, has no such prominent backers and is being furthered in North American academic circles. For us antiquarians, moreover, if not for our less erudite financial patrons, *Eurasian* smacks of the Eurasianism of the 1920s émigré intellectuals — with their *iskhod k vostoku* movement toward repentant reconciliation with a reconstituted, continental, strong Soviet state, and flirtation with revolutionary struggle against the "Romano-German" cultural type.

Let us note, however, that necessary compromises have hardly been unknown to the readers of journals in our field. Those that use the ethnolinguistic term *Slavic* are guilty of many sins of omission, even as they purport, for example, to include the study of Hungarians, Gypsies, Kazakhs, or Jews. *Russian* and *Soviet*, respectively, are linked to historically specific state and imperial boundaries that hardly encompass the content of many historical journals that have employed those labels. When it comes to history, names based on states have arguably reinforced dubious scholarly choices connected to borders and present-day geopolitical realities. For examples, one might point to the semi-exclusion of Finland and Poland from the consideration of Russianists, not to mention the effective de-internationalization of many aspects of Russian history. Leaning on the crutch of *post-Soviet*, finally, maintains a disciplinary contiguity established for a polity that has now passed away. This precisely avoids reconceptualizing what

it is we study today; it retains Soviet hegemony in academia at a time when it has vanished on the ground.

The fate of any terminology depends, of course, on the meanings infused into it in practice. Even the proponents of *evraziistvo* imagined Eurasia in radically various ways: it was associated by some with a spiritual culture, by others with a history of the steppe, by others with an ethnic-cultural type, and by still others with a geopolitical civilization. What we see now, in contrast, is a much different phenomenon. In North America, at least, foundations, academic programs, and even job searches have begun to use the term *Eurasian*, thus effectively reinventing it in a scholarly and, one hopes, neutral incarnation. A similar sanitation occurred after 1989 in the case of the popular new *Central Europe*, which effectively jettisoned earlier connotations of the German *Mitteleuropa*. In our opinion, one should be wary of blocking the emergence of this new usage of *Eurasia* merely to appease new nationalisms of the part of the world we study, especially if in transit they are linked to the terminological piety of contemporary political correctness. *Eurasian*, after all, has some big advantages going for it. It is inclusive but open-ended; it foregrounds a geographical component that, as it is appropriated into Western academe, lends the term quite readily to politically and ideologically agnostic use. Above all, it is not identical with any existing or historical state formations.

In the context of *Kritika*, moreover, there were certain other, practical considerations that helped determine our choice. Our British colleagues at the former *Soviet Studies* decided on the double-barreled *Europe-Asia Studies*, more neutral than *Eurasian*, but in doing so ran the risk that no one would really know what field they are in. We were restrained from settling on the more conventional *Russian and East European* because we do not intend to focus on certain well-developed fields that would have immediately been evoked, notably Southeastern Europe and Habsburg studies. We considered the heretical *Russian and European* for a time, but received well-founded objections from those who discerned an implied exclusion of all the territories, peoples, and non-European aspects of Russian and (for lack of a better term) Eurasian history. One might in despair settle on ungainly, kasha-like terminological compounds along the lines of the new "CEERES" program at the University of Maryland (Central, East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies). But even then one is not out of the woods: students of non-Russian parts of the former Soviet Union, such as Central Asian specialists, might perceive in this very inclusiveness evidence of disciplinary imperialism, a post-hoc scholarly preservation within the Russian/Soviet orbit of imperial territories lost politically.

Is the use of *Eurasian* revanchist or politically obtuse, or both? Paradoxically, the fact that the term is geographical yet, like Europe itself, without precise boundaries does open it up to potential politicization, while at the same time making it available to neutral academic deployment. The fact that it is not identical to existing or historical states, moreover, fits it well with some of *Kritika*'s agendas, which include bolstering international, comparative, transnational, cross-cultural, local, and regional histories alongside those written within national and state-centered frameworks. Peoples and cultures cross borders, as do many other historical phenomena.

The linguist Max Weinreich once defined the difference between a dialect and a language: languages are dialects that have an army and a navy. Eurasia, not to mention the humble scholar

who employs the term, has no army or navy. Those working within its expansive scholarly purview are free to pursue links with differently defined historical-geographical associations, to develop other scholarly identities, or, as most all of us do in practice, to maintain ties with several variously defined fields and disciplinary configurations at once. Surely, however, the Russian field would be the poorer if we did not reach beyond that single qualifier for an inclusive yet flexible complement that, despite its imperfections, appears to be like Winston Churchill's democracy — flawed, but better than the alternatives.