

Eurasianism and Post-Soviet Political Geography

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Future Risk

Abstract: Books review: Bassin M. *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia*. Cornell University Press, 2016. 400 p.; Bassin M., Pozo G. (eds). *The Politics of Eurasianism: Identity, Popular Culture and Russia's Foreign Policy*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. 384 p.; Clover Ch. *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*. Yale University Press, 2017. 360 p.

The review considers three works on Eurasianism, the theoretical geography of Lev Gumilev and contemporary Russian ethnonationalism. It places the reviewed works in the context of the historical ideological evolution of Eurasianism. The principal argument in all three reviewed texts is that there are three forms of Eurasian ideology: classical Eurasianism, Gumilevian Eurasianism and neo-Eurasianism. This essay argues that instead of a rank appropriation of Eurasian ideology into contemporary Russian ethnonationalist discourses, there remains a great intellectual and theoretical power in Gumilevian Eurasianism that could yet be applied to contemporary Eurasian and Russosphere geographies in a more positive and empowering manner than the current misappropriated form of Russian ethnonationalist Eurasianism. While neo-Eurasianism is a misappropriation of Gumilevian Eurasianism, a revival of a new fork of neo-Gumilevian Eurasianism could diffuse the contemporary Russian misappropriation and return to a more objective and inclusive Eurasian ideology.

Keywords: Eurasianism, Gumilev, Political Geography, Ethnonationalism, Soviet Union, Russia, Central Asia

Andrew Foxall recently wrote of Central Asian geopolitics that Central Asia has been uncritically written into global space as an object of multiple and intersecting geopolitical discourses since the region's five states gained their independence (Foxall 2018). But how did Soviet historians, geographers and ethnographers imagine the space of these Soviet geographies and the wider conceptions of Eurasia? And how are the ideas of Russian-language political geography, geopolitics and ethnogeography continuing to shape contemporary discourse in Russia and the Central Asian republics on a Eurasian political space?

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Lev Gumilev's Eurasianism is alternate to any orthodox Western geopolitical discourse. The three books reviewed help us to understand Gumilev's own work, the misappropriation of Gumilev's ethnogenesis theory by the contemporary Russian Right, and some of the more positive ways that Gumilevian Eurasianism is being practiced by various polities both within Russia and more importantly by the contemporary states which have formed around Central Asian geographies.

Failing to understand the theoretical basis of Eurasianism, Western political geography is likely to be blind to future political geographic formations emerging from the extant political constructions of Russia and Eurasia. Failure to critically engage with Eurasianism as an ideology of space on a distinct tangent from Western political geography theory turns out to be a danger, particularly as China emerges into the Eurasian geographies and Russia is politically redefining its own engagement with Eurasia and Eurasianism.

Most authors in the works surveyed (Bassin 2016; Bassin, Pozo 2017; Clover 2017) treat the subject chronologically, from classical Eurasianism, to Gumilevian Eurasianism to neo-Eurasianism. It is neo-Eurasianism and the appropriation of Gumilevian ideas into nationalist discourses that should most worry contemporary Russia and Central Asia scholars and policy-makers.

The review is based on three assumptions. Firstly, Lev Gumilev's conception emerged as a Soviet form of historical and theoretical geography, and his works have been just recently correctly understood in the Western academic circles. Secondly, Gumilev's ideas of Eurasianism is the basis for Russia's Eurasian geopolitics, and this is a powerful theoretical underpinning of legitimacy which ensures that the Russian ideology behind its continental political geography is organically more advanced than any geopolitical interests of Europe, the United States, or China in the Eurasian region. Thirdly, Aleksandr Dugin and the new Russian Right are using Eurasianism as a race policy and a crutch for right wing nationalism. In other words, there exists a post-Soviet critical geography theory, and it might be used in the state strategies and multilateral processes of a constructed Eurasianism.

Classical Eurasianism and linguistic structuralism

Eurasianism is generally typologised into three historical branches: early classical Eurasianism of the end of the tsarist silver age, Gumilevian radical Eurasianism of the Soviet Union, and the contemporary neo-Eurasianism of the ethnonationalist movement in the Russian Federation.

Classical Eurasianism first developed in Russian white émigré circles in the 1920's and 1930's, who sought to reinterpret "Russia" as a polity symbiotically interrelated with "Eurasia", and to reinterpret the formation of the institutions of the Russian State with the history of the nomadic peoples that Russian medieval history was betwixt and between. The rewriting of Russian history to include the Mongol influence is the founding contribution of Eurasianism. Jakobsen's "Prehistory of Slavic Languages";

Danilevsky's Romano-German ideology expressed in "Europe and Mankind"; and Petr Savitsky's writings in "Ruskaya Mysl" were early works which ultimately culminated in the founding work of Eurasianism, Florovsky's "Exodus to the East". These works sought to reorient Russian historical geography towards its East, its Steppe, its nomadic and Mongol history, as a reaction against the default European axial perspective which at the time was seeking to define Russia as solely integrated with, or separated from, Western Europe.

This early classical Eurasianism was really rooted in linguistics and was characterized by the ethno-linguistic determinism of geography. The underlying ideology is of linguistics structuralism which rejects Russia being a Slavic country in the European sense. In an attempt to explain the nomadic Turanian element in the civilisational formation of Russia, the classical Eurasianists engaged in a kind of political anthropology to explain the unconscious substrates of language which linked huge disparate human geographies into a proto-state. This linguistic structuralism gave rise to the concept of ethnolinguistic zones and basins of ethnic biopolities where geography forced peoples into closer contact and consequently a cultural-linguistic convergence. The political and historical geography of the peoples of Eurasia was thus influenced by linguistic geographical determinism, giving a form of legitimacy to a traditional civilisation which existed before the State. Physical boundaries created convergence zones wherein it was easier for language and culture to flow inwards and mingle than it was for memetic language and culture to cross natural boundaries. It is essentially a way of explaining the formation and development of Uralic, Siberian, Central Asian, Altaic, Volga and European Russian civilizational areas by circumventing the dominant orthodoxy of European Enlightenment Statehood. Essentially, geography forms linguistic structures which in turn form social structures and further – nations, and these nations of Eurasia do not easily fit into the Westphalian Statist model.

Neo-Eurasianists argue that since Russia is setup as a patchwork of nationality-based administrative units, there is no actual "homeland" for Russians the same way as for Buryats or Kazakhs, and conversely, many ethnic Russians are now stranded outside the Russian Federation as a result of the dissipation of the Soviet Union. There is a gap in Western political geography here, the ethnography of the post-soviet space does not fit the mould.

Classical, Gumilevian and neo-Eurasianism are all really struggling with a redefinition of the political state, not as the Westphalian legal construct, but as a biopolity, to find something in traditionalism and natural geography to explain the development of human geographic institutions of the proto-state. To achieve this State exceptionalism they look to political geography, linguistic geography and natural geography and seek to create a political theory founded in historical geography. Eurasianism argues that the European states themselves were biopolities that had been politicised, that the nation state is not the founding historical institution, but that ethnogenesis runs deeper than the political state into earlier forms of political geography. Initially for the classical Eurasianists and later for Gumilev, biopolities are not an excuse for ethnonational-

ism, rather the concept is a circumvention of an institutional construct which is alien to most peoples of the world: European statehood.

Gumilev's theory is championed in places of strong biopolities but weak states like Tartary and Kazakhstan, while in states with both strong biopolities and strong politics can misappropriate his ideas. Biopolitics offers alternative paradigms of belonging and yet everywhere it seems bound by concepts which transform it into a crude nationalism. Think of the subjugation of political geography to the nation state in England-Scotland-Wales; the four medieval regions of France; or the Bismarckian German nationalist project to bring together Prussia, Bavaria, Baden, Ruhr etc. These multi-ethnic and multilingual geographic structures were flattened and homogenised by the formation of the industrial state. The truce of ethnicity and ethnonationalism resulted from these socio-religious-ethnic amalgams that stabilised through the 18th and 19th centuries in the industrial states of Europe, are now seen as the prototypical ethno-state formation: explicitly relying on concepts of political state, yet implicitly relying on concepts of a "biological state".

Gumilevian Eurasianism as Soviet political geography

"Environmental Complementarity", is the crux of Gumilev's biopolitics. That if industrial complementarity results in institutionalisation of economic geography, that human-nature interrelationality also should be naturally represented by an institutionalisation of environmental-linguistic-social complementarity. Gumilevian Eurasianism expanded on the classical, linguistic structuralism by bringing in organic, biological geographic factors into the determination of human institutions. Bassin's monograph thoroughly explains the key concepts that define Gumilevian Eurasianism (Bassin 2016).

We should though consider Gumilev's work as isolated from the Western political geography at a time which was moving through a period of positivism and leaving geographic theory behind. Reading Bassin's "Gumilev Mystique" (Bassin 2016) next to Edward Soja's "Postmodern Geographies" (Soja 2011) really highlights this juncture. Gumilev's political geography in the Soviet Union was a real break from the Western theoretical geography. Therefore the contemporary post-Gumilev geography is on a different tangent to the post-modernist geographies of the West. Soja's "Postmodern Geographies" explains this intellectual history of geography, particularly as geography in the West lay ideologically dormant for twenty years through the positivism of the 1950's and the 1960's (Soja 2011). To understand the impact of Gumilev's theory on contemporary Russian politics then, we really need to appreciate that something special happened intellectually with Gumilev, and that there is an institutional path-dependency on an intellectual tangent parallel to anything in Western geographic theory.

We could position Gumilev in hypothetical opposition to Lefebvre and Gramsci and perhaps in alignment with Ernest Mandel's regional economic geography and critical human geography. Gumilev's ideas never made it to critical social theory and

are virtually unknown to the Frankfurt School, however the relationship of regions to economic development, and the process of legitimation of the concept of state through political geographic theory overlap here.

This is not an argument for Soviet exceptionalism, simply that throughout the Cold War this theoretical geography of Gumilev evolved, promulgated, took root, and flourished in an intellectual space that was sequestered from the western academic circles. However, with Russia idealising itself as the inheritor of Rome and Byzantium through the Orthodox Church, we have a specific space where the intellectual concept of geography is not easily othered away into orientalism, and neither is it integrated with the Western science. It has therefore largely escaped critique, by lying in the fault lines of multiple theoretical traditions. This makes Gumilev's theories at once extraordinarily powerful, and at the same time unbridled, running free in the post-Soviet space. From there it is all too easy for theoretical revisionists in Russia to appropriate the ideas, mould them to their contemporary wishes and weld them onto something entirely new. Much like the Steppe geographies that Gumilev's anthropological work describes, the wilderness is appropriated into a political narrative, and Central Asia is pulled towards Moscow.

Gumilev's theories suffer from a series of disconnects: from the Russian orthodoxy in their inception, from the Western theoretical sphere during their Cold War incubation, and again in contemporary theory a double disconnect in post-Gumilevian thought exists: evolution in isolation from Western geographic theory and then also appropriation into a Russian political narrative far removed from the original theses of Gumilev.

Gumilev's major theoretical contributions centre around a series of idiosyncratic words and ideas through which his wider work explored the linkages between natural geography, anthropology, linguistic history, and political geography. At the core of the Gumilev thesis is the intellectual struggle to explain the origins of the ethnic groups which historically clearly defined civilisational and nation state development. *Ethnos* and *ethnogenesis* is from where the appropriation of Gumilev into nationalist ideology stems. While individualism in post-Enlightenment European states may create better social structures, the concept of where did we come from still echoes unanswered. For Gumilev, it was impossible to rule out the group identity of tribal, ethnic, and race structures in human civilisational development. All modern nation states are comprised of patchworks of smaller ethnic groups, France has many ethno-linguistic subgroups all pushed into a unitary state; Germany is derived from the independence of multiple subnational units of the Holy Roman Empire into a federal system, and Russia is a complicated series of *ethnies* comprising many European and also many Asian ethnic subgroups. Gumilev was concerned with how these early ethnic groups determined the development of political identities and less interested in how those political identities were to be used in contemporary political philosophy.

If we take Gumilev's *ethnos* as the basic unit of analysis, then he offers a series of complementary ideas through which to place this unit. Gumilev argued that physical

geography was the principal determinant of social structures; that wherever humans settled, the imprint of the surrounding landscape on their civilisational, linguistic, political, economic and social institutions was indelible. Bassin gives the example of Norse fisherman settling in lower European lands, those in Normandy became land-working peasants, while the same peoples who settled in the Scottish lowlands became shepherds (Bassin 2016: 41). For Gumilev, his time in the Arctic in Norilsk affirmed this thesis that geography determined human structures, not vice versa.

The biological force driving these human institutional rises and falls Gumilev termed *passionarnost'*. *Passionarnost'* is the collective energy of an *ethnos* that is driving the historical process of civilisational development. *Passionarnost'* introduces and explains time to the Gumilevian spatial model. So that if the landscape determines the ethnic structure of peoples, and the interrelation between ethnic peoples and landscape determine social structures, then *passionarnost'* drives this ethno-landscape institution forwards so that it evolves, develops, burns brightly and then eventually burns out. It is an attempt to explain why an *ethnos* might outshine and displace another, more established *ethnies*. The answer for why peoples in history rise and fall, and yet the landscape and human habitation remain the same.

Gumilev takes these concepts and tries to develop them. With the *ethnos* as the basic unit of analysis and the biopolity and the core institution driving human political structures forwards, Gumilev tries to weld it all into an *ethno-landscape totality*, by simply putting the two concepts of *ethnos* and *biopolity* together. If the landscape determines the ethnic structure, and if ethnic structure is the principal unit of analysis for the development of human cultures, then the combination of landscape and ethnicity yields the institutional interrelationality which drives individual human cultures forwards through history. The landscape forms the *ethnies*, but it also limits them, so that Steppe peoples develop along one course, while taiga forest and river peoples develop along the another. Once this historical process is set in motion, then the institutions determined by geography simply play out over time and result in idiosyncratic human social structures, i.e. different “nations”.

Superethnos is probably the most controversial and even “dangerous” concept of Gumilev because it seems a reactionary justification of the Russian state. The argument is that *subethnies* and *ethnies* can combine to form *superethnies* but that *superethnies* cannot combine with each other. Thus we get Russian as a *superethnos*, and perhaps a modern European Union identity as a *superethnos*. This “mosaic totality” though seems perfectly designed to justify first the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union’s amalgamation of ethnic minorities into a strong State. It remains difficult to see Gumilevian ideas of ethnic identity and macro ethnic analysis in neofunctional or constructivist senses, and instead Gumilev falls easily to the ethnonationalists who can “strip” the mosaic, and “leave” the totality.

These Gumilevian modes of ethnic interaction are really like accounting for the processes of institutional change. The inability to engage with the ethnic, linguistic and cultural identities at play in the Eurasian Heartland would be to yield ideological

supremacy to Russia. Instead there is something in Gumilev that could nourish and develop a sense of self in the various Eurasian polities that independence movements, neo-authoritarian post-Soviet governance, and limited access to globalisation 1.0 have yet to build.

Ideas need to be challenged, an idea in isolation will wither and die. Gumilev's biosphere has survived and flourished within the wider stream of Eurasian ideology is testament to the core strength of his ideas. However the closed nature of the wider Soviet and post-Soviet intellectual spaces in which his ideas have been forced to compete, have stunted its growth, not pruned them. These ideas will not easily disappear either, and without adequate critique to strengthen them, they will receive instead inadequate critique and continued misappropriation into lesser ideological purposes. Gumilev's ideas, at the same time, deserve better than misappropriation into nationalist ideologies, they deserve a wider audience and a braver critique that they might reenter the contemporary geographical theory debates, and realign with the future of human, linguistic, and political geography.

Neo-Eurasianism's ideological misappropriation

The difference between describing an object and describing a self-reflexive subject is huge. Classical Eurasianists wrestled with the idea to define themselves as "other" from the Europeans they lived amongst as white Russian émigrés. This is a reflexive use of Eurasianism to define themselves as "not European". Gumilev used Eurasianism not on his own background, but on an object, the Mongol, Xiongnu, and other nomadic peoples that had impacted the historical development of the Russian state.

However the neo-Eurasianists of the contemporary Russian ethnonationalist far right have reinvented Eurasianism to redefine and relegitimise their own subjective position. This is the fundamental flaw in the neo-Eurasianism of contemporary Russian ethnonationalism: it is self-serving and thus ideologically defunct. Classical Eurasianism challenged an existing paradigm, a theoretical challenge which was forcibly put down by Bolshevik political security. Gumilevian Eurasianism challenged an existing paradigm, that of the mythologisation of the Battle of Kulikovo as a victory of the Russian Principalities over the Mongol Golden Horde which had ended Russia's subjugation to the "East". Gumilev instead argued that significant institutional inter-relationship existed between the Mongols and the Russians before and after Kulikovo, essentially that modern Russia, geographically and institutionally, is the successor state to the medieval Mongolian Empire. For this, and many other reasons, he was semi-ostracised from the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Conversely, neo-Eurasianism seeks to strengthen an existing paradigm, that of a Russian ethnonationalism, of which its main proponents and adherents are a part, and for which the movement and people involved are rewarded and inculcated into the existing State-sanctioned paradigm. This is why neo-Eurasianism is fundamentally a weaker idea than either Classical Eurasianism or Gumilevian Eurasianism.

Gumilev's work has since the end of the Cold War become a controversial lynchpin in a secondary countermovement – appropriation into a new Russian right ethnonationalist movement to reclaim the spirit of Eurasianism for the Russian “ethnos” – as a tool for Russian exceptionalism rather than a holistic redefinition of historical geography. The nucleus of both a movement to strengthen the Turkic and Mongol peoples in the history of Eurasia, as well as the restrengthening of the Russian claims to historical geographic legitimacy in Eurasia.

Bassin argues that what is left of Gumilev in contemporary Russian ethnonationalism is more like a crude, malformed, coarse monster, the rotten heart of Frankenstein's monster (Bassin 2016). This ground is also well covered by Bassin's edited volume, with the first two chapters in particular focused on this search for identity in post imperial Russia (Bassin, Pozo 2017). Laruelle's introductory history chapter also goes a long way to covering the ground needed to examine the entry onto the stage of Aleksandr Dugin and the appropriation of first neo-Eurasianism and later the contemporary version of the Russian ethnonationalist agenda.

Bassin's best contribution is the identification of Vadim Valerianovich Kozhinov's 1981 essay as the bridge between Gumilev's Eurasianism and contemporary Russian ethnonationalism, although Clover also expands on Kozhinov's appropriation of Gumilevian Eurasian and his influence on its reception and development, first through *Literaturnaya Gazeta* and later through *Nash Sovremennik*. Kozhinov's essay “And All Her Languages Shall Speak My Name...’ Notes on the Spiritual Peculiarities of Russia”, written in 1980 and published in 1981 in *Nash Sovremennik* is the beginning (and intellectual end) of the Eurasianism of Dugin. It was Kozhinov who first appropriated Gumilev's Eurasianism as a defence for Russian ethno-nationalism. But while Kozhinov faded into history, the link between Gumilev and Russian ethno-nationalism remained – a gross misappropriation of Gumilev's core thesis. It was this misappropriation of Kozhinov that Dugin has seized upon and expanded in his “fourth theory”.

Ultimately both Gumilev and Dugin are wrestling with the same problem: Russian exceptionalism, Russian historical revisionism, and the deeper and thornier problem of Russia's origins. There is a political philosophical inertia in both the latent ethnonationalism across the Eurasian sphere, and in the post-Cold War soviet space. Eurasianism is essentially a rejection of orthodox Russian historiography, which had placed ethnic Russians as the centerpiece of Eurasian development. While Gumilev's historical geography has been misappropriated by Russian nationalists, his own work still offers much for the states, societies and individuals of Eurasia. Far from condemning Central Asia to a simplistic cooptation into Moscow's Grand Strategy, Gumilev's Eurasianism can still be read by contemporaries as offering an alternative to both Russian ethnonationalism, and “Atlantic” liberalism.

Gumilevian Eurasianism as a universal historical geography

Eurasianism is not simply Russo-centric historical geography and historical revisionism. There is a real genesis of a universalisable historical geography in Gumilevian

Eurasianism. There is still much to be discovered through thinking in terms of *ethnies*, *ethnogenesis*, *biopolities*, and even *passionarnost'*. Continual adaptation of the *ethnos* to its landscape is a process not a stasis, where ethnonationalism seems everywhere concerned with conservatism, stasis, and reactionary responses to “outside others”. The progressive process of Gumilevian Eurasianism is readily integrative with contemporary institutional theory, Schumpeterian capitalist creative destruction, and anthropological human-nature interrelationality.

Gumilev is neither the intellectual property of Russia nor of Russian ethnonationalists. Gumilev articulates the ethnography of Eurasia, the geographical *ethnogenesis* universal to the human condition and the relationship between peoples, states and landscapes. For that his work should be celebrated, not denounced as a tool of a radical group of Far Right. Eurasianism itself represents not only a way of thinking about post-Soviet geographies, it is itself a form of theoretical Soviet political geography, distinct from any Western geography theory.

Bassin argues that some institutional forms are dependent on the *ethnos* which is determined by the landscape, and that if these institutional forms are incompatible with a foreign universal social construct, then the foreign must give way, the *ethnos* cannot break its symbiotic relationship with the landscape (Bassin 2016). *Ethnies* may take on universal social constructs, but only where they do not invoke a logical cognitive dissonance. It helps to understand the limitations of globalisation, and why some elements of universal, pan-human culture succeed while others encounter stern resistance and fail.

On Russia, post-Soviet geographies, and Eurasia, Western academia continues to persist in a 20th century mindset of geopolitical theory with little theoretical basis, while the ideology of Eurasianism has one-hundred years of theoretical use within the geographies themselves. The English-speaking world has thus really missed something important with Gumilev's influence on Russian political geography. Fundamentally, the interpretation and transmission of Gumilevian Eurasianist thought can be a positive post-Soviet political geography, not simply a tool of neo-Eurasianist revisionist ethnonationalism. Gumilev's works highlights the connection between peoples and nations, humans and landscape, history and geography.

In terms of macro critiques of the works covered, Clover relies heavily on the English-speaking Western reader to fill in the backstory with Cold War mystique (Clover 2017). Yet in requiring this historical backlog, it also requires the reader to stop there – no understanding of the Golden Horde, of Tsarist history, of Cossack Eastern migratory exploration, or national minority development in Dzungaria, Qara Khitai, or industrial landscape projects in Western Siberia are needed. The Bassin monograph is excellent but does often dwell on the author's own understanding of Eurasianism rather than fully agenting Gumilev and his sources (Bassin 2016). The edited volume is the weakest of the three books reviewed, a volume full of promise to explore the application of Eurasian ideology in multiple geographies attached to Eurasianism either by steppe ethnicity (Hungary), post-Soviet space (Kazakhstan) or majoritarian ethnog-

raphy (Russia). In reality, it underdelivers and instead of a coherent understanding of Eurasianism in contemporary politics, we instead have a series of disparate, disjointed and ultimately unfulfilling essays (Bassin, Pozo 2017). The ground that all three works cover though is sparsely populated, and if these first attempts have not quite landed, then there is ample space for further studies of an ideology, geography, and ethnography position that needs to be understood by the Western academy more broadly if geopolitics, geoeconomics, governance, public policy, neoliberalism and globalisation studies are to integrate analyses of the geographies of Eurasia and the ideologies of Eurasianism into their studies.

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Eurasianism does not belong to Gumilev, but it also certainly does not belong to the Russian ethnonationalist Right. There is much positive agenda in Eurasianism that can benefit the peoples of post-Soviet spaces and which could help to construct post-nationalist identities and new political geography. To engage with Gumilev's work is not to abandon the gain of multiculturalism or individual agency, it is rather to reinforce the power of peoples over states, and of cultural institutions over national ones.

Can we not reread Gumilev and instead of a Russian ethnonationalism find something closer to the imagined communities of Benedict Anderson? To see something of worth for ethnography and ethno-centric interpretations of historical geography? A European Union *superethnos* identity is certainly embedded with some ethnic feeling. Could a genuine Eurasian Economic Union tap into the Turkic, Mongol and Russian *ethnies* to create a post-nationalist identity, political order and economic integration? Not destroying the ethnic heritage of the *biogenesis* of peoples from landscape, and treating ethnogenetic drama seriously could result in a more nuanced, powerful and useful form of post-ethnic identity and post-nationalist political economic structure. However, the continued misappropriation of the concept could equally create a reversion to ethnic islands of nationalism and the degenerative effects of small state protectionism.

Nobody in an industrial economy would want to go back to ethnocentric thinking, and the power of the individual in the modern multicultural and globalised world is clear. But that nagging question of where did we come from, has some element of both ethnicity and geography that remains unsatisfied by liberal individualism and contemporary political geography. We are all stronger for a better understanding of the ethnogenetic drama that Gumilev would lay out for us, particularly as it comes from an area of historical geography that we have little historical record of, the Eurasian Steppe. Gumilev is a light from a distant world, both Soviet and Eurasian, that might help to reform and renew the study of historical geography, ethnogeography and anthropogeography, ultimately asking questions of ethnogenesis and development that none of these disciplines can answer alone.

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