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# Post-Russian Eurasia and the proto-Eurasian usage of the Runet in Kazakhstan: A plea for a cyberlinguistic turn in area studies<sup>☆</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on the theoretical discussion of common features of cultures in the post-Soviet space, this paper proposes to refocus on the linguistic dimension and to investigate post-Russian Eurasia. Is not the role of the Russian language coming under serious challenge in the post-Soviet context, where independent states are downgrading the status of Russian in administration and education and where ethnic Russians are 'remigrating' from former Soviet republics to the Russian Federation? There is, however, one medium in which Russian is gaining new significance as a language of inter-regional communication: the Internet. Albeit to a lesser degree than English and Chinese, Russian serves as a means of communication between Russian-speaking communities all over the world. What is more, the Russian Internet (Runet) offers access to elaborated resources of contemporary culture (video and music downloads etc.).

The paper discusses the role the Russian-based Runet plays for Eurasian webcommunities outside the Russian Federation, mostly relying on Kazakh material, and asks whether post-colonial anxieties about Russian cultural imperialism through the Runet are justified or not and what the Kazakh, possibly post-colonial strategies of coping with this situation are. Essential to this essay is the notion of cyberimperialism, which combines aspects of media studies with post-colonial studies. The interdisciplinary approach to Internet studies is completed by a linguistic focus on the performativity of language usage online for creating situational language identities. The essay rounds off by offering an analysis of Nursultan Nazarbaev's ambiguous inclusive-exclusive logic of argumentation and confronting it with Russian Eurasianism.

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## 1. Introduction

"Nowhere in the world has the management of multi-ethnic states, especially those which have a bilingual divide, proved to be a simple matter: [...]" (Akiner, 1995, p. 81)

"[...] Eurasia is also a trope, a figure of speech. Future hegemon might still, under certain circumstances, find it useful." (Gleason, 2010, p. 32)

In which medium have we observed the most significant transregional cultural dynamics in the first decade of

the 21st century? On the Internet. This diagnosis is true not only in global respects but also with regard to contemporary Eurasia. That is why it seems appropriate to address the question of cultural dynamics in contemporary Russia and Eurasia by focussing on the Internet. In this paper I aim to discuss the role the Russian-based Runet plays for Eurasian webcommunities outside the Russian Federation, mostly relying on Kazakh material.<sup>1</sup> With the focus on new electronic media, I intend to reformulate the common research agenda of Kazakhstan's "Russian problem" (see Kadyrshanov, 1996, p. 7; Eschment, 1998) or the Kazakh-Russian "dilemma" (Kuzabekova, 2008, p. 167) by narrowing the perspective to the question of whether Kazakhstan has a problem with the Russian Internet. To answer this question I turn both to statistical data about Runet usage in Kazakhstan and to the webpage of the Kazakhstani president Nursultan Nazarbaev.

Based on the findings, I will ask whether post-colonial anxieties about Russian cultural imperialism through the Runet are justified or not and what the Kazakh, possibly post-colonial strategies of coping with this situation are. Essential to my essay is the notion of cyberimperialism (Rusciano, 2001) which combines aspects of media studies with post-colonial studies. The interdisciplinary approach to Internet studies as postulated by Pavlenko (2008a, p. 305–306) will be completed by a linguistic focus on the performativity of language usage online for creating situational language identities. Instead of a conclusion I will round off by offering an analysis of Nazarbaev's ambiguous inclusive-exclusive logic of argumentation<sup>2</sup> and confronting it with Russian Eurasianism.

## 2. New paradigms for Eurasian studies?

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the cultural Sovietisation of Central Asia, which was most evident in Kazakhstan, the "most thoroughly Sovietized" Central-Asian culture in the Soviet period (Akiner, 1995, p. 51), was no longer accepted common ground. The breakdown of the Soviet Union demolished the plausibility of the tacit identification of everything Soviet with Russian, which had been practised for decades (cf. Gleason, 2010, p. 28). Since neither Russian studies nor Sovietology could provide convincing models to describe the new reality in the Central-Asian post-Soviet countries anymore, a debate about alternative concepts began.

In the wake of this debate, concurring constructions of common features of the former Soviet countries and cultures such as post-socialism, post-communism and post-colonialism were proposed, all of them in one way or the other using the communist past as their starting-point.

Without doubt the countries of the Socialist Second World share a political legacy of totalitarian experiences,

but does "post-totalitarian Eurasia" (Saunders, 2009, p. 1) still constitute a coherent "Second World", a world living in the mode "After" (Kujundzic, 2000)? Does the feature of post-communism as advocated by Boris Groys (2005) really predetermine the future of the former communist countries by redirecting them back from the communist utopia to the past?<sup>3</sup> The exclusive focus on the past – on historical trauma and memory politics – clearly ignores hi-tech offensives, for example in Estonia, but also in Kazakhstan (cf. Halbach, 2007, p. 77).

The same orientation towards the past affects post-socialist or post-Cold War studies (Hann et al., 2002, p. 17). Here the main problem concerns differences in regional economics: the effects of the colonial exploitation of Central Asia for agriculture differ enormously from the problems the industrialised Central and East European countries faced during transition:

"The implication is that the central insights gained from analyses of state socialism and post-socialist transformations in Central and Eastern Europe have little or nothing to offer for the study of Central Asian societies." (Kandiyoti, 2002, p. 240)

Although Hann et al. regard post-Cold War Studies as a concept broader than post-colonialism (Hann et al., 2002, p. 18), the varying forms of hegemony, colonialism and imperialism which the Soviet Union applied to Central-Asian regions in comparison to East Central European regions demand a differentiated post-colonial approach. In the case of East European post-colonial studies, the temptation is less the juxtaposition of post-colonial features in Eurasia with the "classical" post-colonial countries of Africa or Latin America (Moore, 2001) but rather the ascription of global features to all post-socialist regions.<sup>4</sup>

A proponent of East European and Eurasian post-colonial studies, David Chioni Moore, acknowledges that the various post-socialist and post-Soviet regions display huge differences, most palpably between the East Central European new member states of the EU and NATO on the one hand and Belarus and Turkmenistan on the other. This chasm becomes even more obvious if one looks at media technology:

"[...] it is clear that there is no simple explanation for the current state of new media penetration in the Second World. One must look deeper to understand why Shanghai, St. Petersburg, and Split bristle with cyber-café, mobile phone users, and hipster digerati, while Tirana, Tyumen', and Tashkent languish in virtual cul-de-sacs far from the information superhighway." (Saunders, 2009, p. 2)

From this one might deduce the necessity of a regional turn in the various models of post-totalitarian, post-Second World, post-communist, post-socialist, post-Cold War and post-colonial studies.

<sup>1</sup> My focus is exclusively on language performance, whereas other relevant aspects of Kazakhstani identity and politics such as religion, economics, citizenship, authoritarianism, Pan-Turkism or the transfer of the capital from Almaty to Astana cannot be taken into account (for an overview see Dave, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> As defined in Uffelmann (1999) and applied to (Neo-) Eurasianism in Hölwerth (2007).

<sup>3</sup> "[A]us der Zukunft in die Vergangenheit" (Groys, 2005, p. 48). All translations from Russian, French and German by the author, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> "[Z]ones, by their rarity at least, stand not outside but *in relation* to a global (post)coloniality" (Moore, 2001, p. 123, emphasis in the original).

Possessing some common features with the other “post-countries”, the Central-Asian republics share other characteristics with South Asia, with the Muslim world, etc. which makes it attractive to describe them in terms of in-betweenness. This notion occurs as an implicit diagnosis in many research texts, not only in those that are informed by post-colonial studies:

“Kazakhstan is a country at the periphery of three major civilizations, the Arab-Iranian Muslim, the European Christian and the South-Asian Buddhist world. A whole range of oppositions define its present status. Kazakhstan is not Europe, but not Asia either; it is a post-Soviet, but at the same time a post-colonial country; [...]”<sup>5</sup>

Could a similar in-betweenness serve as a distinctive feature of a more strictly confined region, including Russia and the former southern republics of the Soviet Union but excluding the Baltic and East Central Europe? Might the notion of in-betweenness, which is so prominent in post-colonial studies, provide a new definition for the Russian (Neo)Eurasianists’ suspicious hegemonic concept of Eurasia?

As the spatial turn reached Slavic studies it seemed that the hitherto dubious geopolitical construction of a distinctive Eurasian entity as promulgated by Eurasianists and Neo-Eurasianists could be rehabilitated for heuristic purposes in cultural studies and political science. The first signs are appearing that the disregard of Central Asia, practised in cultural and social sciences over decades, is now being countered. The most recent step in this direction was the decision taken by the members of AAASS (American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies) to change the organisation’s name to ASEES (Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies) – a change which became effective in 2010.

The new global label, however, is not accompanied by a new all-embracing conceptualisation of the cultural peculiarities of post-Soviet Central Asia. It rather provides the general framework for specialised, regionally differentiated area studies. One of the research fields which has not gained much attention yet is Central Asian Internet studies.

The Russian concept of (Neo)Eurasianism is viewed in different ways in the Central-Asian republics. It is either identified as an ideological mask for Russian hegemonic aspirations or as a promising synthesis (cf. Hann et al., 2002, p. 14). Kazakhstan’s official state ideology is built around the notion of Eurasia but remains vague (cf. Laruelle, 2008, pp. 176–187). This means that research in Central Asian Internet studies must be conducted in a way which differentiates both according to different regions and to divergent understandings of the notion Eurasia. One has to ask in each case: are we dealing with a phenomenon of the Eurasianet which includes or excludes Russia, the Russian language and/or the Russian understanding of Eurasianism?

<sup>5</sup> “Kasachstan ist ein Land an der Peripherie der drei großen Zivilisationen, der arabisch-iranisch muslimischen, der europäisch christlichen und der südasiatisch buddhistischen Welt. Eine ganze Reihe von Oppositionen bestimmen seinen gegenwärtigen Zustand: Kasachstan ist nicht Europa, aber auch nicht Asien; es ist einerseits ein postsowjetisches Land, aber zugleich auch ein Postkolonialland; [...]” (Ibraeva, 2005, p. 407).

### 3. Kazakhstan beyond Russian?

But is not the answer to this question obvious because Eurasia tends more and more towards a post-Russian political and linguistic situation? Is not the role of the Russian language coming under serious challenge in the post-Soviet context, where independent states are downgrading the status of Russian in administration and education and where ethnic Russians are ‘remigrating’ from former Soviet republics to the Russian Federation?

After the breakdown of the Soviet Union, millions of Russian native speakers<sup>6</sup> found themselves in a “beached diaspora” (Laitin, 1998, p. 29), about six million in the former Kazakh SSR. The new independent Republic of Kazakhstan consisted of over 100 ethnic groups, among which Kazakhs and Russians are by far the biggest, which gives one the right to speak of an almost bi-national Kazakh-Russian populace in Kazakhstan. Ethnic Russians are concentrated in the North and the East of Kazakhstan (Kadyrshanov, 1996, pp. 15 and 26), the only area in Central Asia where there is a common border with Russia. Suddenly the longest state border in the world cut the ties of the Northern territories of the Kazakh Soviet Republic with the Russian Federation. The North’s economy is directly dependent on the neighbouring Russian industry (Olcott, 1997, p. 113), and roads connect Kazakhstan’s North with Russia rather than with the rest of Kazakhstan (cf. Olcott, 2002, p. 195). Thus on the mental map of the North-Kazakhstan Russian population the old orientation towards Russia remained eminent (Braun, 2000, p. 92).

This mental map was challenged by what appeared at first glance to be typical post-colonial attempts of Kazakh officials towards “a deliberate ‘removal’ of the ‘colonial’ language from the public sphere” in the Central-Asian republics in the early 1990s (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 282). Russian toponyms were Kazakhised (for example Tselinograd – Akmola – Astana; Akiner, 1995, p. 61) and traces of Russian in Central-Asian languages erased (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 283), while calques from Kazakh in the Kazakhstani’s spoken Russian language increased (Shaibakova, 2004). Simultaneously the role of Russian in administration and education was downgraded (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004, pp. 126–129, 146–140; Pavlenko, 2008a, pp. 282–283). Nevertheless the generalisation of all Central-Asian states as “nationalising regimes” which prevailed in studies of nationalism in the 1990s (cf., for example, Smith et al., 1998, pp. 139–164, still defended in Dave, 2007, p. 140) is evidently inconsistent with regard to bi-national Kazakhstan, because the “ethnic redress” (Schatz, 2000, p. 493) is only one side of the coin in Kazakhstani internal policy. Justified fears of a “logic of titular nationalism”<sup>7</sup> and Kazakhisation arose in the mid-1990s (Akiner, 1995, pp. 71–72), but in the long run

<sup>6</sup> Since this article is devoted to tropes of argumentation and performative situational identities there is no room to discuss the sometimes outdated, sometimes unreliable and divergent numbers provided in empirically oriented research literature on the Kazakh-Russian language question, let alone to contrast them with new field research.

<sup>7</sup> “Logik des Titularnationalismus” (Kadyrshanov, 1996, p. 6).

Kazakhstan witnessed fewer linguistically motivated conflicts than the neighbouring republics (Halbach, 2007, p. 89). Thus the impression that the Russian milieu in Kazakhstan is “narrowing” is deceiving (Ileuova, 2008).

Despite government support for the Kazakh language in official contexts the media situation remains plural. The media law of 1999 prescribing that 50% of all media programmes must be in Kazakh and only 20% may consist of rebroadcast material from abroad could not be fulfilled by the media (Adams et al., 2007, p. 85) or is fulfilled subversively by broadcasting in Russian during primetime and in Kazakh late at night (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004, p. 114). A majority of the mass media still publish or broadcast in Russian (Bensmann, 2007, pp. 536–537; Brauer, 2010, p. 7; Kaftan, 2004; Shaibakova, 2004, p. 180; Shaibakova, 2005, p. 51). Whereas newspapers from Russia have become less available in Kazakhstan (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004, p. 109), the blocking of Russian TV from Kazakhstan’s broadcasting network in the mid-1990s was neutralised by satellite receivers (Bensmann, 2007, p. 533), and Russian TV has regained its popularity in Kazakhstan (Brauer, 2010, p. 8). The banning of publications like the journal *Lad* in 1995 or *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* in 1996 (Eschment, 1998, pp. 61–62) occurred occasionally, before in the early 2000s the state made more systematic efforts to subordinate the free media to state control (Ibraeva, 2005, pp. 434 and 452). The main instruments for organising and filtering information are half-state, half-private media holdings such as *Alma-Media*, *Khabar* or *Shahar* (cf. Bensmann, 2007, p. 538; Dave, 2007, p. 144) and “state orders” (*goszakazy*) for journalistic coverage of politically desirable topics (Brauer, 2010, p. 4).

The demographic situation changed in the 1990s due to the emigration of members of the “beached diaspora” of Russians who after 1991 found themselves as minorities in post-Soviet states other than the Russian Federation, due to the immigration of Kazakhs from other countries and to higher birthrates among Kazakhs than Russians (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004, pp. 241–246; Smagulova, 2008, pp. 446–447).

Nevertheless there is and will be<sup>8</sup> a high percentage of ethnic and – what is even more important – cultural Russians. If one argues in terms of language skills and not ethnic self-description, the numbers of members of the titular nation and of the “linguistically russified” minorities (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Tatars, Germans, Koreans and others; cf. Smagulova, 2008, pp. 446 and 459) are roughly equal. Even more impressive are the numbers cited by research literature on the secondary Russian skills of non-Russian Kazakhstanis: Braun estimates that 2/3 of ethnic Kazakhs in urban areas use Russian as their daily language (Braun, 2000, p. 110), while Altynbekova guesses that the figures concerning linguistic self-information given in official contexts are too low and that probably more than 3/4 of Kazakhstanis know Russian (Altynbekova, 2004, p. 83). Laitin adds that in their private lives many representatives of the titular nation subvert the official imperatives of Kazakhisation and deploy “slyness” to

avoid becoming more familiar with the state language and use Russian instead (Laitin, 1998, pp. 137–138). Although independent surveys suggest a certain “deterioration in Russian proficiency” (Smagulova, 2008, pp. 462–463), according to official data the level of Kazakhs fluent in the Russian language increased from 64.2% in 1989 to 75.0% in 1999/2004 (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 289).

There is no need to check the reliability of such statistics, suggestions and estimations in detail to understand that the sheer size of the minority and the widespread command of Russian in the titular nation is a factor which cannot be ignored in Kazakhstani language policy. The reality of a bilingual populace demands a smoother, nuanced language policy towards the Russian language than in other post-Soviet countries (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 297). This is echoed in Nazarbaev’s rhetorical question “How could there be a separate problem of the Russian-speaking population, when all Kazakhs are Russian speakers?” (quoted in Dave, 2007, pp. 104–105).

The early period of independent Kazakhstan’s language policy continues late Soviet traditions. As early as before the end of the Soviet Union, in September 1989, Kazakh was elevated to the rank of official state language of the Kazakh Soviet Republic. This move was reinforced in the 1993 constitution, which mentioned only Kazakh as a state language. In response to Russian protests and the peak of the emigration wave of ethnic Russians, this was corrected in § 7 (2) of the constitution of 1995: “In state organisations and organs of local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language.”<sup>9</sup> The same status was conferred in the 1997 *Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan*, which constitutes the basis for all subsequent legal acts concerning mass media etc.<sup>10</sup> In all these documents the interrelation of Kazakh and Russian remains more or less vague and indistinctive.<sup>11</sup>

President Nazarbaev, who, from the very beginning, favoured a double solution with Kazakh and Russian as official languages, was forced into compromises but again

<sup>9</sup> “В государственных организациях и органах местного самоуправления наравне с казахским официально употребляется русский язык.” ([http://www.akorda.kz/www/www\\_akorda\\_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id\\_doc=DB26C3FF70789C84462572340019E60A&lang=ru&L1=L1&L2=L1-7](http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=DB26C3FF70789C84462572340019E60A&lang=ru&L1=L1&L2=L1-7), the English translation is taken from Nazarbaev’s website: [http://www.akorda.kz/www/www\\_akorda\\_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id\\_doc=DB26C3FF70789C84462572340019E60A&lang=en](http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=DB26C3FF70789C84462572340019E60A&lang=en), accessed 1 June 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Kuzabekova, 2008, p. 170. For a list of legislative acts see Smagulova, 2008, pp. 449–450.

<sup>11</sup> “In diesem Gesetz [vom Juli 1997] fehlen fixe Termini [...] völlig.” (von Gumpfenberg, 2002, p. 101, cf. also Olcott, 1997, p. 115, Dave, 2007, p. 102). But in 2006, in his *Kazakhstanskii put’ [The Kazakhstani Way]*, Nazarbaev admits that the legally non-binding term “language of interethnic communication” had to be made more precise in the constitution of 1995: “[...] русский язык, как объективно наиболее распространенный, перестал называться юридически ничего на значащим термином «язык межнационального общения» и получил конституционные гарантии равного с государственным языком функционирования.” [(...) the Russian language, as the language that, objectively speaking, was the most widespread, ceased to be defined by the legally non-binding term ‘language of interethnic communication’ and received the constitutional guarantee of equal functioning with the state language.] (Nazarbaev, 2006, p. 80).

<sup>8</sup> Olcott estimates that despite all demographic factors the future will still see 20–25% Russians and other Slavs in Kazakhstan (Olcott, 2002, p. 222). Cf. also Kolsto, 2003, pp. 126–127.

and again promoted a double solution (Eschment, 1998, pp. 36–38). He has tirelessly repeated the compromise formulae in his publications and speeches since the mid-1990s. His rhetoric of equality does not, however, exclude ongoing support for the Kazakh language in administration and education. A specialized plan of Kazakhisation for the years 2001–2010 seems to have been “relatively successful” in fostering the Kazakh language (Kuzabekova, 2008, p. 172), but the question of the parallel function of Russian remains.

#### 4. Trans-regional Russian communication online

So far my overview of the bilingual situation in Kazakhstan has ignored one major factor – mediated language usage, especially in the new interactive media which transcend the one-to-many communication scheme of the traditional mass media. What is the role of Russian in Kazakhstan’s Internet usage?

Albeit to a lesser degree than English and Chinese, Russian serves as a means of communication between Russian-speaking communities all over the world. Speaking about Kazakhstan, one cannot confine the definition of the Russian Internet or Runet to communication inside the Russian Federation or on sites with the domain name *.ru*. Referring to the broadest possible Runet definition as proposed by Schmidt, Teubener and Zurawski – “all Russian language communication flows (including e-mail etc.)” (Schmidt et al., 2006, p. 125) – I understand the Russian Internet as consisting of all Russian-language-based Internet activities taking place anywhere in the world.

The Kazakhstani Internet or Kaznet shared the developmental lag with the Russian Internet; the domain name *.kz* was registered on 19 September 1994, half a year after the registration of the neighbour’s *.ru* (17 March 1994). The first webpage in Kazakh ([www.sci.kz](http://www.sci.kz)) was designed three to four years later. For 2009, the website for international Internet usage counted 2,300,000 users in Kazakhstan, which corresponds to a penetration of 14.9%.<sup>12</sup>

Access to the Kaznet is controlled by an oligopoly of providers, with Kazakhtelekom in an almost monopoly position (Kurgannikov, 2009). During the 2000s the state established centralised control over the Kaznet by transferring responsibility for the domain *.kz* to the state Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Informatisation and Communications<sup>13</sup> in 2004 and by merging this agency with the Ministry of Culture and Information<sup>14</sup> into the Ministry of Communications and Informatisation<sup>15</sup> in 2010. Since 2009 private blogs have been subject to the same juridical liability as mass media.<sup>16</sup>

How far does this control by the Kazakh state concern the Russian Internet as defined above? It cannot but affect Internet use in Kazakhstan due to the popularity of webpages from the Russian Federation in the Central-Asian republic. Spylog data from 2005 reveals that 1.1% of worldwide Russian site visitors access them from Kazakhstan (Schmidt et al., 2006, p. 126), and the Alexa ranking lists 15 *.ru*-addresses among the 40 most popular websites in Kazakhstan, but only 8 *.kz*-addresses.<sup>17</sup> When it comes to active individual blogs written in Russian, in spring 2009 Almaty ranked eighth (3425) behind Moscow, St Petersburg, Kiev, Minsk, Novosibirsk, Ekaterinburg and Samara (Yandex, 2009, p. 5). The Runet offers access to elaborated resources of contemporary culture (music downloads and video-sharing, for example from RuTube), whereas the Kazakh section has – apart from poor access speed (Kurgannikov, 2009) and the comparatively small number of Kaznet sites (Dmitrienko, 2006) – a serious quality problem which expels about 80% of the Kaznet-users to non-Kazakhstani sites (Bekirova, 2010). The most popular website in Kazakhstan is [www.mail.ru](http://www.mail.ru), while [www.vkontakte.ru](http://www.vkontakte.ru) takes fourth place (30 May 2010). Even if at first glance there is a Kazakh domain name this does not automatically mean that the site has an administrator inside Kazakhstan. For example [www.odnoklassniki.kz](http://www.odnoklassniki.kz) leads directly to [www.odnoklassniki.ru](http://www.odnoklassniki.ru) (30 May 2010, Alexa-rank 11), a site on which Kazakhstan appears only in the bottom-right-hand corner, beneath all the regions of the Russian Federation.

As far as Internet control is concerned, Kazakhstan adopted the Russian model of special registration software obligatory for all Internet providers (Deibert et al., 2008, p. 181). Kazakhstan’s centralised Internet control became discernible in 2005 when Kazakhtelekom blocked the webpage [www.borat.kz](http://www.borat.kz) (Saunders, 2007, p. 236). This censoring strategy was subsequently questioned by (younger) Kazakhstani officials (Saunders, 2007, p. 242; Schatz, 2008, p. 60), but the practise was revived when Kazakhtelekom banned ZhZh (*Russian LiveJournal*) in 2009 because of Nazarbaev’s former son-in-law Rakhat Aliev’s blog [rakhataliiev.livejournal.com/](http://rakhataliiev.livejournal.com/) containing compromising materials against the Kazakhstani President (Taratuta and Zygar’, 2010). This strategy of “‘event-based’ information control, which temporally ‘shapes’ Internet access”, is viewed by Deibert et al. (2008) as characteristic of many countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (p. 183).

But is access to Russian websites which are critical of President Nazarbaev that dangerous for the Kazakhstani government? Or to broaden this out: how does Runet use affect the political, cultural and linguistic self-positioning of its users?

Robert Saunders argued in 2006 that the prevailing understanding of the Internet usage of minorities as “a cause of resurgent nationalism” (Saunders, 2006, p. 49) is misleading – at least for the majority of the users. Saunders refers to an advanced group of globalised digerati (digitally literate users; Saunders, 2006, p. 63, note 6) whose Internet use does not imprison them in “virtual ghettos” (Saunders,

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm>, accessed 29 May 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Agentstvo RK po informatizatsii i sviazi.

<sup>14</sup> Ministerstvo kul'tury i informatsii.

<sup>15</sup> Ministerstvo sviazi i informatsii.

<sup>16</sup> *O vnesenii izmenenii i dopolnenii v nekotorye zakonodatel'nye akty Respubliki Kazakhstan po voprosam informatsionno-kommunikatsionnykh setei [On the Introduction of Changes and Completions in Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Information-Communication Networks]*, N 178-4 of 10 June 2009, (<http://www.pavlodar.com/zakon/?dok=04418&all=all>, accessed 31 May 2010).

<sup>17</sup> The rest goes to the domain names *.org* and *.com* ([www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/KZ](http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/KZ), accessed 21 May 2010).

2006, p. 45) but makes them more open to the globalised world. Saunders' optimism is based on a positive version of media determinism in the sense of MacLuhan: if one is to believe him, the "emancipatory medium" Internet has "inclusionary rather than exclusionary" (Saunders, 2006, pp. 46 and 51) effects. The Russian aspect of the users' identity is not emphasised by being integrated in a transnational and deterritorialized network:

"Rather than being 'Russified' by their cyberspatial experiences, ethnic Russians roaming the electronic corridors of the virtual near abroad are instead being 'globalized', that is, undergoing identity shifts which promote the inclusion in the deterritorialized community of transnational elites [...]" (Saunders, 2006, p. 50)

It would demand extensive and representative empirical research to prove whether Saunders' statements about Russian Internet usage in general apply for the suggested transnational identity of ethnic Russian Internet users in Kazakhstan. What is certain is the fact that for the near abroad and for the digital diaspora (cf. Schmidt et al., 2006, pp. 122–123) in general the ethnic criterion is insufficient because Russian webpages are not only visited by ethnic Russian minorities in the near abroad:

"In addition to ethnic Russians, a generation of lapsed cultural Russians, i.e., *homo post-Sovietici* [sic], are also drawn to the RuNet. Russian is the dominant language of the Internet use in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and a number of other CARs [Central-Asian Republics]. Due to the robustness of Russian-language cyberspace, Russo-phones from all over the FSU [Former Soviet Union] choose to spend their cyber-time in the RuNet rather than their indigenous cyberspaces." (Saunders, 2009, p. 18)

As far as a more advanced understanding of identity than the one adopted in this quote is concerned, one needs to say farewell to the outdated idealistic notion of cultural subjects who – determined by their identity – must perform certain cultural actions. It is much more promising to approach cultural identity as a performative category. Russian as a medium of communication (online and offline) is relevant not only for cultural Russians (cf. Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 298) or the actively "Russian speaking-population" (Laitin, 1998, pp. 263–264; Pavlenko, 2008b, p. 60), but for all people who at least occasionally communicate in Russian or consume Russian cultural and commercial offers. I suggest calling them *virtual Russians*, giving preference to this term over "kiberruskie" [cyber-Russians] (Saunders, 2004, p. 189) because the notion of *virtual habits* better reflects the potential of coexistence with other situational identities. Russian virtual habits contribute to the patchwork identities in contemporary Kazakhstan which Sally Cummings describes as "primarily relational rather than intrinsic" – with Russia, Russians and the Russian language in the role of the "significant 'other'" (Cummings, 2010, p. 183).

## 5. Normative trilinguality

To what extent can such a performative and situational linguistic cyberhabit pose a threat to the country's

official language policy? On the one hand, Nazarbaev, who originally voted against the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has since 1991 made major efforts to stay on good terms with his Russian neighbour (Cummings, 2010). On the other hand, the Internet is actively used by Kazakhstani officials for the creation of a Kazakhstani state brand (Saunders, 2007, p. 226), promoting a particular understanding of Kazakhshilik (Kazakhness). The Internet is one of the arenas of Nazarbaev's hi-tech feudalism (cf. Ibraeva, 2005, p. 429), with its ambitious Norwegian-style investment program.

In order to achieve the ambitious goals of this hi-tech programme, skills in languages other than Kazakh are essential, and Nazarbaev acknowledges this very clearly in *Novyi Kazakhstan v novom mire. Poslanie prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan Nursultana Nazarbaeva narodu Kazakhstana* [A New Kazakhstan in a New World: Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan] in 2007: "Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the language of successful integration into the global economy."<sup>18</sup>

One may find this trilingual strategy utopian (especially when it comes to English competence, but also to Kazakh proficiency among non-Kazakh citizens),<sup>19</sup> but its rhetoric is definitely not exclusivist. What is more, languages are not regarded as a goal in themselves but as means for other – rather economic – purposes, something that becomes clear from the addition of a fourth postulate: of advanced computer competence (cf. Khruslov, 2006, p. 146). In 2006 Nazarbaev emphatically linked the Kazakhs' nomadic tradition with the mobility and multilocality of Internet communication (2006, p. 366). Therefore one cannot but agree with Edward Schatz, who assumes that "the imperatives of globalisation and the concomitant need to create a technocratic elite" have tempered the ethnicisation process in Kazakhstan (Schatz, 2000, p. 495).

There is another level where the trilingual programme is clearly not a utopian postulate but a consistent practise – official state webpages, with their embracing trilingual strategy such as *Ofitsial'nyi sait Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan* [Official Site of the President of the Republic of

<sup>18</sup> "[...] казахский язык – государственный язык, русский язык как язык межнационального общения и английский язык – язык успешной интеграции в глобальную экономику" (<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200703010020>, accessed 31 May 2010). The reappearance of the adjective "interethnic" which Nazarbaev himself criticised a year before shows the exchangeability of rhetoric formulae and the inclusiveness of his rhetoric.

<sup>19</sup> In his 1998 autobiography, Nazarbaev presented himself as a utopian thinker in terms of trilinguality: "I believe that while both Kazakh and Russian should be state languages, it would be even better to give some other, although lesser, status to English as well. Unfortunately, however, society is not yet ready for this." (Nazarbayev, 1998, p. 126). As the strategy targets the youngest generations (children's books are published in three languages: [www.almatykitap.kz](http://www.almatykitap.kz), accessed 31 May 2010) this utopian character may at some point be overcome in the wake of the ongoing "language ideology transformation process" diagnosed by Smagulova (2008, p. 469).

Kazakhstan] [www.akorda.kz](http://www.akorda.kz).<sup>20</sup> It transpires that the staff behind this webpage (employees of the company RealSoft) are working in Russian first with English translations appearing later and even the Kazakh version being less complete than the Russian one.<sup>21</sup> The page title in the top line of the browser remains Russian in all language versions.<sup>22</sup>

## 6. Towards a cyberlinguistic definition of Eurasia

Nazarbaev links his trilingual strategy to an alleged Eurasian quality in the multi-ethnic Kazakhstan. In his 2005 book *V serdtse Evrazii [In the Heart of Eurasia]* he ascribes an information mission for the “Eurasian super-continent” to the new capital Astana:

“Kazakhstan is a Eurasian country, its new capital one of the geographical centres of the huge Eurasian continent. [...] In the new century the economic, technological and information streams of the emerging Eurasian space will flow through our capital.”<sup>23</sup>

The geographic European dimension of Kazakhstan is comparably counterfactual as the postulated English proficiency. What helps to maintain the vision of the imagined Eurasian space is less the indisputably European language English than the linguistic reality of the Euro-Asian language Russian. Thus one might deduce that Nazarbaev’s notion of “Eurasia” is co-constituted by the Russian language and that the connection of Russian with Internet usage justifies referring to a proto-Eurasian function of the Russian Internet. To provide a – slightly provocative – definition: *Eurasia is the post-Russian space where a virtual community occasionally turns to the Russian language in online communication*. The Russian-language section of the Kaznet can thus be regarded as a *sine qua non* component of a Eurasianet (which, however, is not embracing all of the Eurasian real space).

This thesis encompasses a re-linguistication of the spatial turn. When it comes to the Internet, the connection of space and language cannot be described in terms of geolinguistics, but of virtual linguistics. Due to the decentralised nature of the web, this communicative, cyberlinguistic space

<sup>20</sup> Accessed 30 May 2010. The same trilinguality concerns other official webpages such as [www.parlam.kz](http://www.parlam.kz), [www.government.kz](http://www.government.kz) or [www.astana.kz](http://www.astana.kz) (accessed 1 June 2010).

<sup>21</sup> When accessed on 31 May 2010, the column “Official Documents – Decrees of the President” in the English version listed 63 times the Russian negation “нет” in Cyrillic before providing the first available document “On conferring State Premium to the Republic of Kazakhstan in the area of science and technology” ([http://www.akorda.kz/www/www\\_akorda\\_kz.nsf/sections-main?OpenForm&ids=380&id\\_doc=3FD5E7ADC12680BD062576F7005B68E0&lang=en&L1=L3&L2=L3-24](http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections-main?OpenForm&ids=380&id_doc=3FD5E7ADC12680BD062576F7005B68E0&lang=en&L1=L3&L2=L3-24)). The Kazakh version seems to be secondary to the Russian one as well although in the Kazakh equivalent “Ресми құжаттар – Президент Жарлықтары” there were less scattered “нет” than in the English version ([http://www.akorda.kz/www/www\\_akorda\\_kz.nsf/sections-main?OpenForm&id\\_doc=3FD5E7ADC12680BD062576F7005B68E0&ids=380&lang=kz](http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections-main?OpenForm&id_doc=3FD5E7ADC12680BD062576F7005B68E0&ids=380&lang=kz)).

<sup>22</sup> In the case of [www.astana.kz](http://www.astana.kz) the top line appears in Russian first as well. Only if one clicks the link to the Kazakh version [www.astana.kz](http://www.astana.kz) this changes to Kazakh (accessed 1 June 2010).

<sup>23</sup> “Казахстан – евразийская страна, его новая столица — один из географических центров огромного Евразийского материка. [...] через нашу новую столицу будут протекать в новом столетии экономические, технологические, информационные потоки развивающегося евразийского пространства.” (Nazarbaev, 2005, p. 107).

can only vaguely be circumscribed because its concrete localities are extremely difficult to grasp. For the proto-Eurasian Russian webspace national boundaries are relevant only in the case of filtering (Deibert et al., 2008).

When developing similar *cyberlinguistic criteria for the Eurasian virtual space*, one must not fall back into the assumption of stable identities or even continuous linguistic habits. As in the case of the multiple identities which the multinational citizens of Kazakhstan combine in themselves (cf. Schatz, 2000), there are *multiple cyberlingual habits* as well. The linguistic identities of the Russian-using web community vary depending on the communicative, interactive or consumerist purpose of their Internet usage. The Russophone identity of the Eurasian web community provides no more than a situational linguistic habit.

## 7. Cybercolonisation of Eurasia via the Runet?

Have we thus, thanks to cyber-Rusophonía, arrived at a harmonious coexistence of situational language habits without any hegemonic implications?

If Marx is right that quantity transforms into quality, the impact of big linguistic cybercommunities like English, Chinese or Russian on other national communities does imply possible hegemonic tendencies. Thus simple diffusion models of technological development (Ellis, 1999; Perfil’ev, 2003, pp. 97–135, Rose, 2006) cannot grasp the power implications of cyberglobalization (Ebo, 2001). What is more, supra-ethnic linguistic identities as “Russophones” have been seen as “politically incorrect” by many in Kazakhstan.<sup>24</sup>

In all the cases mentioned, associations with the colonial past come as a reflex. The colonialist use of Russian mass media in Soviet propaganda (cf. Saunders, 2009, p. 3) is vividly remembered in Kazakhstan, which justifies asking whether there is any continuity of Soviet strategies in the present media policy of the Russian Federation. Is there a Russian cyberimperialism following the American model (Saunders, 2009, p. 5)? The theoretician of cyberimperialism Rusciano (2001) gives a critical answer because of the decentralized structure of the Internet (p. 15) and of its potential to be used by grassroots organisations. One might add the widely practised anti-disciplinary use (in the sense of de Certeau 1990, p. XL) of the Internet, for example in jokes about Russian politicians available on the Runet.<sup>25</sup> What then about jokes about Nazarbaev, stored in the Runet?<sup>26</sup>

Glitches aside, might the linguistic dimension of the sort of cyberimperialism which Rusciano calls “metrocentric

<sup>24</sup> Kolstø 1998, p. 63; Shaibakova, 2005, p. 41. This is connected with the “banal nationalist” (in the sense of Billig, 1995) assumption that an ethnic Kazakh must be able to speak Kazakh, and if s/he fails, it is regarded as justified to stigmatise him/her as a *mankurt* (Dave, 2010). For the other side of the term’s medal, the Russian discourse on Russophonía with its recent paradigm shift to aggressive internationalism, see Gorham 2010.

<sup>25</sup> See [search.anekdot.ru/?query=%EF%F3%F2%E8%ED&rubrika=j](http://search.anekdot.ru/?query=%EF%F3%F2%E8%ED&rubrika=j), accessed 1 June 2010.

<sup>26</sup> For example <http://search.anekdot.ru/?query=%ED%E0%E7%E0%F0%E1%E0%E5%E2&rubrika=j> (accessed 30 May 2010). For a possible confirmation of this suspicion see [www.gorychiy.narod.ru/2001/K/0033.htm](http://www.gorychiy.narod.ru/2001/K/0033.htm), accessed 1 June 2010. For more on [www.anekdot.ru](http://www.anekdot.ru) and its “tremendous popularity”, at least within Russia, cf. Gorny (2006).

cyberimperialism” not be relevant to the Russian-Kazakh case as well? Do Russians from the Russian Federation like representatives of other “[...] core nations consciously or unconsciously define and disseminate language and linguistic constructs for understanding the world through the media of cyberspace” (Rusciano, 2001, p. 11) and perform acts of linguistic imperialism in so doing?

Historically, Soviet (Russian language) TV included the Soviet Republics as a culturally Russian territory. Such inclusive TV entertainment can be understood as a non-dividing strategy of cultural hegemony. In contrast to the hegemonic strategy of *divide et impera*, in this case cultural hegemony is established by non-exteriorisation. In this sense, Russian politicians from all parts of the political spectrum have demanded support for the external-internal Russian diaspora in the near abroad ever since 1991 (cf. Saunders, 2005, p. 174).

After Russia’s withdrawal from the Central-Asian scene in the 1990s due to internal political and economic priorities and a long period of ambiguity towards the “compatriots” in the near abroad (Laruelle and Peyrouse, 2004, p. 277), one could observe Russia’s return to Central Asia in the 2000s (see Matveeva, 2007). Russian TV entertainment is once more used for promoting the former common Soviet space (Hutchings & Rulyova, 2009, pp. 42, 94 and 169), combined with Russian cultural hegemony. Moscow’s political strategists [*polittehnologi*] are looking to the near abroad once again.

As some of the present political strategists are trained computer specialists, use of the Runet can be understood as a tool of soft power as well: “[...] language and the Internet are being viewed and used as tools for ‘soft power’ in promoting Russian interests both at home and abroad” (Gorham, 2010). Thus what Michael Gorham calls “virtual *Rusophonia*” is not just a consumers’ and communicators’ decision alone. *Rusophonia* has been promoted since the Putin administration’s “international turn” with the declaration of the “Year of the Russian Language” in 2007.

A special target is the near abroad. The website of the state organisation responsible, Fond “Russkii mir” [The Russian World Foundation], founded in 2007, explicitly says of its target group:

“Russkii mir’ is not just Russians, not just citizens of the Russian Federation, not just compatriots in the countries of the near and far abroad, emigrants, natives of Russian and their descendants. It is also foreign citizens who speak Russian, who study or teach it, all those who are sincerely interested in Russian and who are concerned about its future.”<sup>27</sup>

This broad and inclusive notion<sup>28</sup> obviously comes very close to my earlier definition of virtual Russians, but in the

<sup>27</sup> “Русский мир – это не только русские, не только россияне, не только наши соотечественники в странах ближнего и дальнего зарубежья, эмигранты, выходцы из России и их потомки. Это еще и иностранные граждане, говорящие на русском языке, изучающие или преподающие его, все те, кто искренне интересуется Россией, кого волнует ее будущее.” (Russkii mir, <http://www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/fund/about>, accessed 30 May 2010).

<sup>28</sup> As Michael Gorham (2010) demonstrates, “Russkii mir” also makes use of traditional topoi of communality and conciliarity (*sobornost’*) borrowed from the Slavophile axiology of inclusion (cf. Uffelmann, 1999), the same source which inspired the inclusive rhetoric of Eurasianism.

case of “Russkii mir” the broad definition is envisaged as a means of metrocentric cyberimperialism in the sense of Rusciano (2001). The Diasporas are a special goal of the foundation, mentioned directly after the promotion of positive public opinion about Russia around the world.<sup>29</sup>

The advocates of a Russian world have detected the implicit, subcutaneous “propaganda” effect of the Runet, based on the Russian language as an online carrier of a certain world view (cf. Trofimova, 2004, p. 55):

“The Runet is an ‘impersonal’ but highly effective carrier of the language, the very .ru-zone which gives all users the possibility to get information and communicate independently from citizenship and at the same time to broaden the Russian-speaking space.”<sup>30</sup>

On 9 April 2010 “Russkii mir” held a conference devoted exclusively to *Ruskoiazychnye v Tsentral’noi Azii* [Russian Speakers in Central Asia].<sup>31</sup> So far, however, the actual effects of “Russkii mir’s” linguistic imperialism in the near abroad seem insignificant.<sup>32</sup> But the possibility that the Russian minority in Kazakhstan could be targeted by “Russkiy mir” as a “fifth column” and that the foundation’s traditional linguistic imperialism may advance to more modern means of linguistic cyberimperialism cannot be denied.

## 8. Resistance by emulation

What are the Kazakhstanis’ strategies of resistance to the potential new Russian linguistic-cyberimperialistic threat?

It would be misleading to return to the research stereotype of “nationalising regimes” all over Central Asia, which suggests an antagonistic post-colonial attitude towards the former colonialist in the sense of Fanon (1991) and Chatterjee (1986). If one concedes an early period of national-ethnic orientation (1990–1995), this was, however, followed by a more multicultural conception in the second period (since 1995; cf. Shaibakova, 2005, pp. 40–42). Accordingly, Adams et al., who try to describe the Kazakhstani strategy with a deductive pattern of post-colonial resistance directed simultaneously against international consumerism and the previous colonizer, admit a specifically defensive gesture instead of antagonism:

“[...] we can explore the dimensions of cultural conflict in post-Soviet Kazakhstan as an example of a post-colonial resistance to cultural globalization: the target is

<sup>29</sup> “[...] формирование благоприятного для России общественного мнения, распространение знаний о нашей стране; / взаимодействие с диаспорами” (Russkii mir, <http://www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/fund/about>, accessed 30 May 2010).

<sup>30</sup> “Рунет – это «неодушевленный», но весьма эффективный носитель языка, та самая зона .ru, которая даст возможность воспринимать информацию и общаться всем пользователям независимо от гражданства и тем самым расширять русскоязычное пространство.” (Iatsenko, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> [www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/new/fund/news0274.html](http://www.ruskiimir.ru/ruskiimir/ru/new/fund/news0274.html), accessed 30 May 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Even inside the Russian Federation the technologically rather undervalued “Russkii mir” website, which possesses only a few interactive offers, ranks no higher than 31,596 on alexa.com ([www.alexa.com/siteinfo/ruskiimir.ru](http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/ruskiimir.ru), accessed 26 May 2010).



both internal (the colonized mentality and the remaining settler population), and external (the continuing colonial domination of the culture markets); the actions tend to be proactive, intended to reaffirm and bolster local culture rather than being concerned with 'pollution' [...] the tone of the response tends to be defensive, in part because of continued dependence on the colonizer and, again, in part of the colonized mentality." (Adams et al., 2007, p. 84)

As shown above, the presidential administration of Kazakhstan addresses the "Russian problem" with a non-antagonistic and rather inclusive strategy. It tries to avoid a direct opposition between Kazakh (nation) and Russian (language) and "appease both the Russian-speakers and Russophone Kazakhs" (Dave, 2007, p. 166). After a period of concessions to Kazakh ethnic nationalism around 1993, Nazarbaev returned to his inclusive strategy for constructing Kazakhstani identity from the early 1990s (Akiner, 1995, p. 69) and has since then been preserving his rhetoric of trilinguality. But is not the Russian component of this trilingual constellation a paradoxical or even counter-productive means of "resistance" against Russia?

No, because Kazakh identity has over centuries developed by departing from a Russian or Soviet starting point. Kazakh national identity was invented in early Soviet times – during the so-called *korenizatsiia* – by Russians in Russian (Saunders, 2007, p. 244) and in distinction from the Russian identity. The Sovietisation of Kazakhstan followed a "dual course, enacting russification policies at the same time as maintaining and strengthening national institutions" (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 281). Nazarbaev, former general secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh Soviet Republic, based his early politics on the Soviet model, from which he made small steps towards Kazakhisation. Kazakh identity has thus developed by starting from a Russian or Soviet model, by first emulating this model and by slowly introducing non-Russian aspects such as nomad identity or clan lineage. In contrast to what Homi K. Bhabha describes as the hegemonic imposition or else subversive appropriation of a "not quite" identity of the colonized in comparison to the colonizers (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87), the Kazakhstani way of resisting and gaining agency starts from the "almost exactly" and then introduces small steps of differentiation. This defensive, slow tactic refrains from the more widespread overtly antagonistic post-colonial attitude (cf. Schatz, 2000, p. 489). It is more post-colonial in the temporal than anti-colonial in the antagonistic sense.

One expression of this emulative-defensive strategy can be found in the inclusive and embracing logic of argumentation of the "both ... and..." type. On the object level this was already observed in the existing research literature, for example concerning Nazarbaev's "balancing act between russification and nativization" (Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 302) or his deliberate avoidance of "making a choice between an ethnic and a civic nation concept" (Kolstø, 1998, p. 56). By "sponsoring Kazakh ethno-cultural regeneration and maintenance of a multi-ethnic polity defined by the centrality of the Russian language" (Dave, 2007, p. 163), Nazarbaev tried to give the impression that he

pursued "both a multinational society and a homeland of the ethnic Kazakhs at the same time" (Kolstø, 1998, p. 56).

The vagueness and apparent contradiction of Nazarbaev's inclusive arguments as diagnosed in research literature is not a problem for understanding this strategy but the solution for a better understanding itself. Differing from antagonistic post-colonial attitudes, this "both... and..." strategy tries to overcome the being "in the gap" as it is known from Petr Chaadaev's famous first *Filosoficheskoe pis'mo [Philosophical Letter]*, according to which Russia belonged "neither to the Occident nor to the Orient".<sup>33</sup>

## 9. Towards a Eurasianist post-colonial logic of argumentation?

In contrast to the geocultural gap envisaged by the Russian Westerniser Chaadaev in 1829, the Russian traditional Eurasianism of the 1920s implemented an argumentative strategy which is predominantly inclusive. This becomes obvious at first glance from the manifesto of Russian Eurasianism of the 1920s, *Iskhod k Vostoku [Exodus to the East]*. The argumentation starts with a self-exclusion from Europe comparable to Chaadaev's:

"Russians and those who belong to the peoples of 'the Russian world' are neither Europeans nor Asians. Merging with the native element of culture and life which surrounds us, we are not ashamed to declare ourselves *Eurasians*." (Savitskii et al., 1996, p. 4)

But then the authors Savitskii, Suvchinskii, Trubetskoi and Florovskii advocate a new figure of "inclusion of a whole circle of East European and Asian peoples into the mental sphere of the culture of the Russian world" (Savitskii et al., 1996, p. 4). The functional relationship between the argumentative tropes of exclusion and inclusion becomes clear from the following quote: "[...] Russia is not merely 'the West' but also 'the East', not only 'Europe' but also 'Asia,' and even not Europe at all, but 'Eurasia'" (Savitskii, 1996, p. 6). Internal inclusion (Eurasia) serves as a means for external exclusion (of Europe).

Despite obvious differences on various levels (cf. Laruelle, 2008, p. 205), a comparable functional sequence of inclusion for the sake of exclusion can be found in Russian Neo-Eurasianism, as Alexander Höllwerth described in his analysis of the logic of Aleksandr Dugin's argumentation: "The 'logic of connecting' is always an instrument of the 'logic of division'."<sup>34</sup>

Although in the case of Dugin the alleged internal inclusion jeopardizes Kazakh independence and masks Russian cultural and political expansionism, the Russian Eurasianism has served as a philosophical model which the Kazakh government propagated actively (Khruslov, 2006, p. 148). That can be institutionally seen in the example of the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University in Astana, which in its self-description links the Kazakhstani president with the Russian Eurasianist Gumilev in embracing rhetoric:

<sup>33</sup> "[N]i de l'Occident, ni de l'Orient" (Chaadaev, 1991, p. 89).

<sup>34</sup> "Die 'Logik des Verbindens' ist dabei stets ein Instrument der 'Logik des Trennens'." (Höllwerth, 2007, p. 702).

“The president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, N.A. Nazarbaev, gave the Eurasian National University the name of Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev. [...] The head of state is a convinced supporter of Kazakhstan’s national revival and of the Eurasian idea. [...] The most important point for Kazakhstan is that he [Gumilev] worked [...] on the problem of the mutuality of Turks and Slavs in the context of the unity of the peoples of Eurasia.”<sup>35</sup>

Since Gumilev’s theory of ethnicity is no less incompatible with a pan-ethnic notion of Eurasia than Dugin’s Neo-Eurasianism (cf. Bassin, 2009, pp. 894–895), Nazarbaev has apparently learnt less from the content of Russian Eurasianism than from its argumentative forms: he includes Russian language in his internal trilingual strategy while the Kazakh information space is protected against Russian newspapers, Russian cable TV and against certain Russia-based websites, as Khruslov points out:

“At the same time the national mass media have to fulfil the task of gaining information independence from the Russian mass media and to form a homogeneous information space of the Republic [of Kazakhstan].”<sup>36</sup>

Nazarbaev’s “Authoritarianism 2.0” (Kalathil, 2003, p. 43) deploys cybertrilinguality for the sake of excluding critical media from abroad. Kazakh webpages are written in Russian to promote the president’s world view (parallel to the dozens of translations of his books into foreign languages), but the domain name .kz is supposed to remain an emblem reserved for the privatized state brand Kazakhstan/Nazarbaev.

In camouflaging the purpose of division under a cover of multiple connections, Nazarbaev is diplomatically more successful<sup>37</sup> than the Russian Eurasianists who – in every generation – have not held back from declaring that among the Eurasian peoples “the Russian people has the central position” (Savitskii et al., 1996, p. 4). Nevertheless the similarity in the connecting-disconnecting or including-excluding strategies is striking. One might risk providing a second provocative, rather abstract, non-spatial definition of ‘Eurasianism’: *Eurasianist is a rhetoric of inclusion for the sake of pragmatic exclusion.*

## 10. Unsurprising coincidences

The related Kazakhstani “Eurasianist” logic displays rather unsurprising coincidences with various Russian,

Soviet, post-Soviet and post-colonial argumentative logics. As seen above, the Kazakhstani and the Russian Eurasianisms share a connection-dividing logic. The Nazarbaev administration’s ambiguous Eurasianist inclusionary rhetoric, which serves as a “newspeak” “masking” practical Kazakhisation (Laruelle, 2008, pp. 172 and 181), cannot deny its origins in Soviet language policy. As Schatz diagnoses:

“Post-Soviet Kazakhstani internationalism was shaped by many of the discursive and institutional legacies of its Soviet-era predecessor. As in the Soviet era, the Kazakhstani elite propagated ambiguous cultural categories designed for universalistic appeal and broad resonance.” (Schatz, 2000, p. 491)

The Kazakhstani preservation of the “colonial” language Russian as a means of interethnic communication is akin to the majority of African post-colonial countries which retained the former colonial languages for the analogous purpose of transregional, interethnic and international communication (cf. Pavlenko, 2008a, p. 300).

What is more surprising is that Nazarbaev’s “both... and...” strategy meets with approval from a Western perspective focussing on human rights. Eschment echoes Nazarbaev in 1998: “A rational solution would be a ‘both... and...’, a balanced bilinguality.”<sup>38</sup> The German scholar even subscribes to the topos of Kazakhstanis as predestined to think in Eurasian inclusive categories (Eschment, 1998, p. 117).

Less surprising is the last – but politically most relevant – coincidence: the structural similarity of the Kazakhstani linguistic internationalism and the recent Russian media expansionism. The new Russian embracement strategy of non-distinction and the Kazakh rhetoric of non-exclusion come – as far as the logic of connection is concerned – close to each other. The two authoritarianisms – the post-Soviet Kazakhstani and the Russian of the Putin era – share a comparable embracing rhetoric designed for exclusive purposes. This makes it possible for Russian Neo-Eurasianists to quote Nazarbaev’s renewed 23 May 2010 appeal to the Kazakhstani people to learn Russian and English authoritatively on their website [evrazia.org](http://evrazia.org) ([evrazia.org/news/13273](http://evrazia.org/news/13273); accessed 31 May 2010).

Time will show whether the two inclusive strategies – the Russian and the Kazakhstani – will engage in open conflict with each other or whether, eventually, the decentralized structure of the Internet wins out against both unfriendly inclusion strategies.

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<sup>35</sup> “Президент Республики Казахстан Н.А. Назарбаев присвоил Евразийскому национальному университету имя Льва Николаевича Гумилева. [...] Глава государства – убежденный сторонник национального возрождения Казахстана и евразийской идеи. [...] Для Казахстана первостепенное место имеет то, что он [Гумилев] работал [...] над проблемой взаимодействия тюрков и славян в контексте единства народов Евразии.” (Selivestrov, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> “Одновременно перед республиканскими СМИ поставлена задача обретения информационной независимости от российских СМИ, формирования единого информационного пространства республики [Казахстан], [...]” (Khruslov, 2006, p. 147).

<sup>37</sup> One needs to distinguish this authoritarian strategy of inclusion from a postmodern paradoxical inclusion of contradictions. Nazarbaev, however, made a postmodern attempt of self-refuting when he changed Kazakhstan’s politics towards Borat, becoming self-ironic and therefore ultimately embracing all contradictions (Saunders, 2008, p. 127).

<sup>38</sup> “Eine rationale Lösung läge in einem Sowohl-Als-Auch, in einer ausgewogenen Zweisprachigkeit [...]” (Eschment, 1998, p. 45).

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