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The Twisted Mirror of Perception: Social Science in Service of Political/Ideological Expediency -- The Case of Russian Eurasianism

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There are many reasons why certain creeds or phenomena from foreign countries remain unknown in the West. They could be almost totally ignored for decades before becoming interesting to the scholarly community and general public until, eventually, works about them become published by the leading presses.

Some explanations are clear, a sort of “self-evident truth”; it takes time before events in distant and exotic lands can attract the attention of Western observers, and it takes time before these events become researched and understood, of course, in the context of Western political culture. One could also say that social scientists need time to master exotic languages, understand the symbols of foreign cultures, assemble the materials, write the text, and find a publisher. This could be the case with some researchers, who spend their entire careers studying the often-convoluted cultural matrices of foreign lands.

Even foreign-born and educated authors would need time for extensive research, writing and finding a publisher. Thus, there is an objective reason for delayed publication. Still, this is not always the case. In some instances, Western researchers have demonstrated exceptional agility in choosing their subjects and writing books, even when dealing with foreign subjects and languages.

Thus, the problem is not always the exotic nature of the land, difficult languages or related matters. Of most importance is to what degree the facts/events correspond to the political needs of the American, Western public in general, and of course the Western elite. If the facts do not fit the preconceived “politically correct” theory, they are often ignored, or marginalized. The fact that the narrative could hardly be related to reality often does not bother the author, publisher or public.

These specifics of Western historiography can be observed in the approach to Eurasianism, a peculiar philosophical-political creed. The goal of this article is to demonstrate how interest in this creed has changed in tune with the evolution of the political discourse or, to be precise, political/geopolitical needs; and how, in general, knowledge is produced in the modern West, especially in the USA.

Eurasianism as Political and Philosophical Creed

Eurasianism emerged among Russian émigrés who fled the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent Civil War. Eurasianism was an idiosyncratic creed, different from those creeds which had dominated Russia since the early 19th century.

Members of the Russian intelligentsia had split at that time into two major groups. The first, called Slavophiles, regarded Russia as a part of the Slavic world. The other group, the Westernizers, assumed that Russia belonged to the West and, plainly, was delayed in its development. Most, if not all, of the country's intellectual/political trends had been related to these two doctrines.

Eurasianism was different from all of them. The major difference was Eurasianism's approach to Asia. Neither the Slavophiles nor the Westernizers paid much attention to the Asiatic part of the Russian empire and non-Slavic peoples of the realm, most of them Muslim and Turkic from an ethnic point of view. Russian historiography and the general public's outlook on Asia were usually quite negative, and Russians, at least the Russian intellectuals, viewed Asians in a way similar to Europeans. This was even the case with Slavophiles, who regarded the West as morally "rotten" and primitively one-dimensional, and for this very reason, unable to understand the mysterious Russian soul.

Yet, even Slavophiles had mostly condescending views on Asian, non-Orthodox residents of the empire and from this perspective were not very different from Europeans, who saw their Asian colonial subjects as savages, regardless of, as some of them could state, their benign characteristics.

They could teach Europeans to live in harmony with nature and themselves. They could be courageous and noble and, in fact, have much more moral fiber than Europeans. The legacy of Asian sages and philosophers, especially those from the distant past, could be depositories of mysterious wisdom. Still, the vast majority of Asians were "children," if one remembers the Kiplingian expression, who must be led by "adults"—Europeans. This was the attitude of the majority of Russian intellectuals.

Even those who approached Asians positively, with a sort of Rousseau-esque sentimentality, saw them as beneath Russians in broad civilizational development, or at least saw them as an alien cultural, ethnic and political force. In their view, Russians were absolutely alien to them. While venturing into the past, the majority of Russian historians also saw nothing promising in Russia's relationship with Asians. The East was a perennial threat for Russia and competed well with the West as the country's major enemy.

Eurasianists took a critical view of this assumption. To start with, they proclaimed that Asians inside the Russian empire, and later the USSR, are organically connected with Slavs; at the same time, not just the Western Europeans but even Slavs outside the USSR's borders are actually alien to the Slavs of the Soviet/Russian empire. Finally, Eurasianists took a fresh look at Russians dealing with Asians in the past, and their view of the Mongol invasion in the 13th century was clearly different from that of both Slavophiles and Westernizers. In Russian historiography, as in the historiography of most other nations, the invasion was a great calamity, possibly the greatest calamity in Russian history.

Eurasianists took a different look at the event.

They proclaimed that Mongol destructiveness was overestimated. In fact, the Mongols were a great benefit to Russian society. Mongols had united all the peoples of northern Eurasia – Slavs and Turkic people first of all – into one state and instilled in them a sense of belonging to one state and a common “Eurasian” culture. The strong power of the Mongol Khans instilled all the residents of the empire with an *ideocratic* feeling, the sense that each individual lived not just for himself but for a cause, which transcended his personal life.

One could wonder why such views emerged. The reason could be found in the situation on the ground. In the beginning of its history, the USSR was a “rogue state” for practically all the major players, the defeated Germany possibly among the few exceptions. The country was cut both from Eastern and Western Europe and was truly isolated as never before in its modern history.

At the same time, minorities had played a considerable role in the regime's first years. Jewish commissaires, elite Lettish riflemen, Chinese executioners, and other minorities of the empire, many of them of Asian origin, were visible elements of the political landscape. For many minorities, the Bolsheviks were the force which protected them, and they were anxious to reciprocate. From the very beginning of its existence, Bolsheviks clearly exhibited “Mongolian” features. They were an egalitarian, brutal and totalitarian power, compelling citizens to live for the great goal designed by the state.

And here were the roots of the Eurasian vision of the Mongolian empire as an “ideocratic” state. Eurasianism was a peculiar manifestation of Sovietism and it was not accidental that Eurasianists' critics called them “Orthodox Bolsheviks.” Eurasianism was practically unknown in Soviet Russia, even among dissident intellectuals, and for an understandable reason: Soviet authorities prevented receiving, or at least severely limited receiving, books from abroad, especially by émigré writers.

Thus, books became practically inaccessible for the majority of Soviets, unless they had access to “*spetskhran*,” the special holdings in major Soviet libraries. These were closed to ordinary readers, and special letters of introduction were required from one’s university or government office for those who wanted to use them.

There was not much interest in Eurasianism in the West, regardless of the fact that Eurasianists, as many other émigrés of the so-called “first wave,” were quite productive and produced many books and periodicals. There were quite a few works in Russian by those émigrés who criticized the creed. Still, the Western public, with few exceptions, was mostly oblivious to Eurasianism.

The reason was that in the prevailing mood—at least this was the case in the 1920 and 1930—the USSR’s evolution had been placed in the context of Western or Russian history. The Western model, which seemed to dominate throughout the 1920s and 1930s, implied that Russia was basically a Western country, and the Western model was universally applicable. In this context, Bolsheviks were a peculiar modification of the French Jacobins, and would inevitably experience their “Thermidor.” As a matter of fact, the dreams about a Russian “Thermidor/Brumaire” would continue through the 1940s, as demonstrated by the success of Nicholas Timasheff’s book.¹

Moreover, nationalistic Slavophiles/neo-Slavophiles, while confronting the Western model, actually had a lot of similarities with it. This model implied that what was going on in Russia was a peculiar repetition of the Time of Troubles, the chaotic events in the beginning of the 17th century, marked by uprisings, the spread of banditry, general chaos and foreign intervention. The country was in turmoil until the Russian people ended it by willingly electing a new tsar.

Consequently, both Westernizers and Slavophile monarchists often saw Stalin either as a new Napoleon or a new tsar. Eurasianism does not fit well in any of these paradigms, and this explains why very few works on it were published in English.²

Lev Gumilev, who is usually known as “the last Eurasianist,” developed Eurasianism, in his own idiosyncratic form, practically independently from its émigré version. There were clear similarities and differences between pre-WWII and Gumilevian Eurasianism. Both regarded the USSR, or at least the biggest part of the country, as the organic whole. Still, while in pre-WWII Eurasianism all people of the USSR constituted one quasi-nation, Gumilev regarded Soviet Slavs and Turks as being essentially different, still living in the condition of benign “symbiosis.”

¹ Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: the growth and decline of communism in Russia*. E.P. Dutton & Company, 1946.

² Among these few works was a volume authored by Pavel Miliukov, one of the leading Russian liberal intellectuals and politicians. See P.N. Miliukov, *Eurasianism and Europeanism in Russian History*, Bonn, 1930.

Gumilev, similar to pre-WWII, found the positive aspects of the Soviet regime in keeping the variety of nations of the USSR together. He accepted the positive side of the regime despite his own predicament: his father was shot, and he spent many years in the *Gulag*. The interest in Eurasianism became increasingly strong in the 1990s and reached its peak from approximately the late 1990s/early 2000s.

One could indeed state here that Eurasianism became one of the leading creeds and influenced, to varying degrees, the majority of Russia's leading politicians and thinkers. It also became quite well known to the general educated public. It was not surprising that publications on Eurasianism, mostly in its pre-WWII variation, proliferated in Russia.

There was implicit interest in Eurasianism and related subjects among Russian expatriate scholars who lived and worked in the West and continued to maintain a strong personal relationship with Russia.³

It would be wrong to assert that the creed was absolutely ignored in the West by Western scholars. Still, it was seen as a rather marginal curiosity, and no major monographs in English were published, either on the pre-WWII version, the Gumilev version or on the major protagonists of post-Soviet Eurasianism. The reason was not a lack of information – major works of pre-WWII Eurasianists were available in the West, and a huge amount of literature was published in Russia.

The reason for marginalization was clear: Eurasianism did not fit into the Fukuyamian “end of history,” the triumph of American-type capitalism, which shall be the *omega point* of all of humanity, including Russia. Western observers approached Russia from this perspective. The very facts on the ground did not bother them at all. Gorbachev and Yeltsin were deeply hated by the majority. Still, in the works of political scientists and historians, both were seen as heroic liberators, loved by the populace.

The economy collapsed, millions were impoverished, while the few tycoons amassed enormous fortunes; whereas most American economists, such as one Swedish-American professor, Anders Åslund, asserted that privatization was a great benefit in itself⁴ and implied that Russian industrial cities should look like Detroit, the not-so-pretty ruins of which heralded the advent of an advanced “service economy.”

The ethnic strife and war which erupted in post-Soviet space was also ignored or marginalized, for the USSR was the last oppressive empire and its collapse should be hailed regardless of everything.

³ For example, see A.P. Tsygankov, “Mastering space in Eurasia: Russia's geopolitical thinking after the Soviet break-up,” *Communist & Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, March 2003.

⁴ See, for example, Anders Åslund, *How Capitalism Was Built: the Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, and Central Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Eurasianism, with a tinge of neo-Sovietism, had addressed these problems and interest in the creed— especially the Eurasianist belief that the USSR was an organic whole which benefited all of its members—was a peculiar form of Soviet nostalgia. And the very nature of this nostalgia contradicted the predominant “party line” that the USSR was a *bona fide* “evil empire” and most, if not all, of its ethnicities should be happy to be free from Moscow’s totalitarian grip.

For these reasons, the study of Eurasianism was marginalized in the West, especially the USA, and the creed was related to “red to brown”—what Communists and Nationalists had been called by their enemies—and a few crackpots such as Alexander Dugin. While interest in Eurasianism in Russia had reached its peak by the early 2000s – and it was related to the peak of nostalgia for the USSR – interest in the creed started to decline sharply in Russia by approximately Putin’s second term.

The reason for this was manifold. Still, the most important reason was the fading away of the Soviet legacy of multi-ethnic “symbiosis.” Moreover, increasingly assertive Russian nationalists led to increasing clashes between ethnic Russians and what they called “people of the Caucasian nationality,” the term often applied to all residents of the Caucasus, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or citizenship.

Later, Central Asians were added to the list of undesirable foreigners, and when members of the Russian elite occasionally used the word “Eurasianism,” it hardly meant friendly “symbiosis” between Russians and the numerous ethnicities of the former USSR, but plainly indicated that Russia should control the area of the former USSR as the 19th century European powers controlled their colonial empires, or commonwealths of dependents.

It also looked quite similar to the American “Monroe Doctrine,” which made the Western hemisphere an exclusive sphere of American influence.⁵ This approach has hardly anything to do with Eurasianism, either in the classical or Gumilevian reading. The proponents of Eurasianism also moved away from the original creed. This was the case with Alexander Dugin, who, in the beginning of Putin’s tenure, emphasized the idea of multi-ethnic “symbiosis” as the major element of Eurasianism, and this was the reason why Dugin was especially fond of Nursultan Nazarbaev, Kazakhstan’s president, whom he regarded as the major initiator of Eurasian “symbiosis”/integration in the 1990s and early 2000s.⁶

⁵ Paul Kubicek, “The evolution of Eurasianism and the ‘Monroeski Doctine’ under Vladimir Putin,” *Conference Papers – International Studies Association*, 2004 Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada, 2004.

⁶ Aleksandr Dugin, *Evraziiskaia missiia Nursultana Nazarbeva*, Moscow: Evraziia, 2004.

Later, Dugin's interest moved away from the focus on the mighty empire of kindred Eurasian nations which should confront "Atlantism," epitomized by the USA, to the more Russo-centric and rather parochial nationalism, albeit the elements of Eurasianism continued to be present in his philosophy, together with other creeds.

His emphasis was now on how Russia and the country's numerous ethnicities could preserve their unique cultures and return to their true selves, their archaic primordial core. The same should be the case for all nations on the planet. At the same time, modern capitalism should be outlawed, and society should return to pre-modern conditions, when the spiritually noble elite ruled, instead of the cynical and shallow capitalists and the middle class, who ruled most of the globe now.

It is true that Dugin supported Russia's invasion of East Ukraine, but plainly because he became convinced that confrontation with the "Atlanticist" USA and Donald Rumsfeld's "old Europe," which forsook its benign Eurasian essence, would spiritualize Russia and clean it up from the cultural pollution of the present and recent past. Still, Putin's plans were different.

Putin engaged in conflict with Ukraine only because the majority of Russian-speaking East Ukrainians indeed wanted to be closer to Russia than to Kiev; losing the Black Sea fleet Crimean ports would have been a strategic blow against Russia's geopolitical position. At the same time, there was no desire for further expansion to territories with non-Russian-speaking people hostile to Moscow. Soon after Crimea's annexation, Dugin's views of Putin and his regime grew darker.

Still, long before Dugin's final alienation from the present-day regime, Dugin's view had little, if any, influence on Russian foreign policy and his connection with the Kremlin was marginal since the early 2000s.

Dugin's Rise and Decline in Russia

Dugin indeed was quite close to the Kremlin in the first couple of years of Putin's first term. The reason was simple: Dugin's theory of a grand Eurasian empire and happy "symbiosis" between various ethnicities harkened back to the Soviet era, and support of Eurasianism by the Kremlin created the illusion that the USSR was back.

This was quite important for Putin at a time when he was not sure about the stability of the regime and when nostalgia for the USSR reached its peak. At that time, Dugin could be helpful in leading the masses away from true restoration of the old socio-economic arrangements. Indeed, the specter of nationalization was still haunting the Russian elite, whose interests Putin represented.

Thus, Putin needed peculiar mimicry, and this was why Dugin enjoyed real favor with Putin for a short while. Later, Putin, or at least members of his inner circle, apparently lost interest in Dugin, plainly because the fear of nationalization had subsided, and for the maturing post-Soviet generation, private property had become axiomatic.

Dugin was not of much use for Putin in the new era. Consequently, he might on occasion use Dugin for this or that purpose, but only for a limited time. Dugin and scores of other intellectuals or public figures with similar views could be used on occasion in the same way that universities could use a part-timer to teach a course or two, without it meaning that they are part of the permanent staff, and they are usually dismissed when the job is done.

Indeed, if one would look at the way Putin treats those whom he regards as close to him, one can understand Dugin's comparative political marginality, even in the early 2000s. Those whom Putin loves, he provides with positions in the bureaucracy, gives money to build think tanks with privileges to serve the Kremlin, encourages to be regularly published in leading newspapers and shown on leading television channels. Finally, he graces them with his august presence, as was the case with Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whom Putin not only visited, but made it clear that the public knew about these visits.

These signs of the Kremlin's benevolence were indeed clear in the very beginning of Putin's term, when the Kremlin provided – either directly or indirectly – funds and support for Dugin's Eurasian movement and later Party. Still, soon after, the Kremlin lost any visible interest in Dugin and his political or quasi-political activity, the Party quickly collapsed and what replaced it – the International Eurasian Movement – was a virtual construction, mostly existing as a website with most of the articles penned by Dugin himself.

The Union of Eurasian Youth, another Dugin project, was actually more of a burlesque political charade, a peculiar carnival show. It was quite possible that the Movement received some funds from pro-Putin businessmen. Still, the funding was apparently quite modest, and the Kremlin played little, if any, role in these financial arrangements.

During the Russo-Georgian War (2008), Dugin was noted for a while. Still, Dugin's insistence that the Kremlin should send troops to Tbilisi and occupy Georgia was not what Putin and Russian elite desired. Consequently, Dugin was once again moved to the second- or possibly third-tier pool of potential "political adjuncts." Dugin, however, continued to support Putin and played some role in Putin's re-election. Rewards followed. Dugin became a professor and the chair of a department at Moscow State University, the leading or at least one of the leading universities in Russia.

Dugin was the best-known professor, or at least one of the best-known, at the university. Still, he was clearly at odds with the majority of the faculty, and he could not have been able to get the job without an approving nod from the Kremlin. Nonetheless, by the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, Dugin angered the Kremlin once again by his passionate plea to deal harshly with enemies of East Ukraine, and actually start a full-fledged war in Ukraine. As in the case with the Georgian crisis, the Kremlin did not want an escalation, and Dugin, with his pretense that he spoke on behalf of the Kremlin in his position at a leading university, was dismissed from his job. Undoubtedly, the Kremlin sent signals to the university administration.

Later, Dugin was employed by the TV channel *Tsargrad*, funded by a friendly oligarch. However, the show, with Dugin's participation, soon became extremely rare, and the Kremlin provided neither funds nor any other encouragement to make show more visible. By late 2017, Dugin himself expressed his deep disappointment with the Kremlin. He stated that for almost 18 years, he had put too much hope in Putin, believing that he would reverse the course of not just recent Russian history, but actually all of modern history, following what Dugin called the "Fourth Political Theory," which emphasized spiritualization and archaization of society.

Dugin, however, acknowledged that nothing of the sort had happened, and Putin had plainly used Dugin and similar intellectuals to maintain what was defined by Antonio Gramsci, Italian Marxist, as Caesarism.

The system, while pretending to be opposed to the liberal capitalist West, actually followed the "globalism" of modernity and plainly delaying its triumph. Dugin stated that he now had no hope in Putin. One could, of course, note that Dugin had made similar critical statements about Putin in the past and resumed his praise, albeit with reservations, later on. Still, it appeared that Dugin's disappointment with Putin was deeper than before, and he noted that he had entertained illusions about Putin in the past and had behaved as a child, and that now was the time to be an "adult" and face the unpleasant reality.

Putin's latest term not only transformed Dugin to an almost political zero (one could wonder if Putin even remembers his name), but also represented a time of sharp decline in public interest in Dugin and similar minded folk among Russian intellectuals.

One should be clear here: the Russian educated public has marginalized Dugin and similar people because they disagreed with Dugin's critiques of the West. Dugin was blasted as being "reactionary," "fascist," and clearly not a supporter of Western democracy. Still, these political labels have hardly prevented Dugin from being highly popular in Russia, and what Russians called the "near abroad," the republics of the former USSR, in the 1990s and early 2000s.

A good part of the Russian population is quite skeptical of the Western democracies, as a matter of fact, following populist waves in Europe and in the USA.

It is true that now the early fascination with Putin is mostly passé. For the average Russian, Putin did not follow his implicit promise to be the ruler of the people. The Oligarchs continue to prosper, whereas the economic conditions of the majority have hardly improved. For the disenfranchised and economically and socially marginalized new generation of Russian youth, the alternative is not Western democracy as it is visualized by the mainstream Democratic Party in the USA,⁷ but radicals of all stripes, including ISIS – as the Russian FSB, the descendant of the Soviet KGB, asserted recently with concern.⁸

The reason for Dugin's declining popularity in Russia was not in the Russian intellectual elite's embrace of democracy, but for a different reason: Russian society, including intellectuals, became increasingly Westernized or, to be precise, Americanized.

They might be skeptical, or even cynical, in regard to democratic institutions and see in Washington's proclamation about Moscow's imperialism just a Freudian desire to transmit Washington's intentions to its geopolitical opponents. They could assert that the West in general and the USA in particular should remember that Russia is a huge, nuclear state and has a great culture and a long history, and definitely should have the right to be not just a regional, but a global power, with an appropriate sphere of influence.

⁷ One might add here that even here, the liberal elite became increasingly apprehensive about democracy as the rule of the people, plainly because the people transmogrified into “deplorables” could well make “bad” authoritarian choices. Yascha Mounk, a contributor to *The New Yorker*, the quite prestigious leading liberal publication, published an article with the telling title “Is more democracy always better democracy?” (*The New Yorker*, 12 November 2018.) The threat to democracy, as he understands it, would not come from tyrants who would emerge as usurpers coming from outside political discourse. The danger comes from the people who, surprisingly, could well be predisposed to alienate easily their inalienable rights and install a tyrant. Thus, one should save “democracy” by restraining or limiting “democracy,” i.e., people's participation in politics. He implicitly endorses the view that there should be some rules which would make “it easier for legislators to shut the people out – at least a little bit, from time to time. Making it harder for activists to launch primary challenges against incumbents in safe districts, for instance, really would make it easier for Congress to fulfill its constitutional duty of checking an errant executive.” (Ibid.) To demonstrate the point graphically, the illustration in the article represented a benign-looking elephant, the symbol of the Republican Party and, implicitly, “true” democracy. The animal was assailed by vicious pygmy-like people, implicitly all “deplorables,” and instead of crushing them, the animal is not moving, and is implicitly in danger.

⁸ “Vremeni u nas net: FSB predlozhit reshenie problemy radikalizatsii molodezhi,” <https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3080836>, 8 November 2018.

Still, the Russian middle class, and the intellectuals' existential and related behavioristic transformation, have become increasingly Western-oriented; mainstream members of the emerging post-Soviet Russian elite increasingly have grown to resemble their American counterparts. And the environment became radically different from that which nurtured Dugin in his formative years in late Soviet Russia. The description of this milieu, Dugin's environment and related knowledge production, inevitably leads to oversimplification, and the author is aware of this. Still, it should be noted to understand how Dugin and similar intellectuals are perceived in Russia.

Researchers usually ignore the existential and behavioristic aspects of knowledge production. Still, it is quite important in understanding the internal logic of the narrative. In our view, the internal logic of knowledge production is deeply connected with the application of power. The totalitarian rulers, especially of what could be called Oriental Despotism, such as those in the USSR, China and North Korea, were absolutely alone as Karl Wittfogel noted in his seminal work on Oriental Despotism some time ago.

The ruler has no reference beside himself, and what he himself defined as "sacred text," e.g. the works of Marx. He does not require election or popular approval, and his work does not need quotations, references to peers and consequently "peer review." Paradoxically enough, totalitarian rule was the role model of intellectuals, especially dissident intellectuals. The dissident hates power, and at the same time, duplicates power. Similar to the ruler, he is alone, barring a few trusted friends. His text could well ignore any professional rules, at least as they are defined in the West. And he would not care how "peer review" would evaluate his work; for him, institutionalized scholars were not different from those in power and the *hoi polloi*; all of them are just concerned with their material success, formal approval and cushy jobs.

All of them, in the view of Alexander Zinoviev (1922-2006), mathematician and dissident writer, were animal-type imbeciles, whose views should be ignored.

Zinoviev became known in the West for the publication of his two books, *Yawning Heights* and *Homo Sovieticus*. Both presented Soviet society in which the *hoi polloi*, institutionalized intellectuals and authorities are a bunch of primitive zombies who are "ebantsy" (screwed up), and resemble creatures created by Hieronymus Bosch. There was no opposition between the state and the masses: they were similar to each other. The true intellectual, the man with talent and moral fiber, could hardly prosper in this society.

Zinoviev's views represent the outlook of many Russian dissidents, and not only them. Indeed, in their view, the very fact that one's work is published – past the "peer review" of officials/institutionalized experts – and that he receives a cushy job plainly indicates that he either has no real talent or is just prostituting himself.

The true intellectual should live in poverty, engage in manual, low-paying work, live in obscurity and never be published. His manuscript – usually a couple of typewriter-typed copies, the proverbial “*samizdat*” – could be shared with a few trusted friends or possibly no one. This vision of the world and the role of the intellectual in society was profoundly anti-Social-Darwinist/Calvinist which, in this or that way, permeates the behavior and creates the existential framework for knowledge production in the West, especially the USA.

The elements of this old Soviet model had existed during the early Soviet era and explains why Dugin’s works, published by “on-demand” press, were as popular as those produced by more established publishers. These “on-demand” published books were the direct descendants of the Soviet-era “*samizdat*,” and the very fact that they were not subject to “peer review” of any type just indicated that the author was absolutely free, expressing himself.

However, with the development of capitalism in Russia in its peculiar form, all of this started to change with increasing stress on the Social-Darwinian/Calvinistic model, which defines the life and model of knowledge production for the majority of Western, especially American, intellectuals.

The new model started to affect Russian intellectuals. It was not just the increasing access to and interest in Western scholarship, but also the desire to study in the West and find a job at American universities. It went along with the desire to publish in English and an increasing awareness of the ranking of the various presses and journals. There was also increasing acceptance of “peer review” practices which indicated that the work is “scholarly,” and therefore quite different in its scholarly value from those which are not “peer reviewed.” All of this influenced Dugin’s perception in Russia.

For most Russian intellectuals it became clear that Dugin’s influence in the Kremlin was zero, and Putin most likely did not even know his name. Moreover, it is quite likely that for some people in the Kremlin, Dugin had emerged as a liability due to his ideological pranks. Affiliation with Dugin did not entail some cushy job in the Kremlin-affiliated think tanks. He also had no university affiliation, and thus his recommendation could hardly secure a job in academia in either Russia or the West. As a matter of fact, it could actually scare off potential employers. And at that point, since most of Dugin’s publications continued to be published “on demand” they are now placed in the conventional American context: they are “vanity press” stuff, and could be dismissed, together with their author.

One shall, of course, be clear: even present-day Russia is not the USA. Moreover, even Europe is not the USA and, at least in continental Europe, there is still a notion, which also has long historical roots, that great minds and unorthodox thinkers could emerge outside the conventional academic box.

Still, in Russia, the trend toward Americanization is clear; and it marginalized Dugin's role in the intellectual discourse of present-day Russia almost to zero. The same could be said about Eurasianism, the receding light of the dead USSR, based on the "symbiotic" relationship of various ethnicities; this is also almost on a par with the high level of xenophobia "especially toward *gastarbeiters* from Central Asia."⁹

Thus, the views of Dugin as the force behind the Kremlin hardly stands the trial of the facts. Nevertheless, the interest in Dugin and related subjects (Eurasianism) in the West contrasts with Dugin's influence in the Russian establishment, and his role in the country.

Dugin as Rising Political and Intellectual Star

From the beginning of the 1990s, Dugin became increasingly visible in the country's intellectual circles as one of the founders of the *National Bolshevik Party*, and as a man who was engaged in quasi-political life. As of that time, he was mentioned in the West.¹⁰ By 2001-2002, Dugin's influence and political clout had reached its peak. Indeed, by then Dugin had created his own Party, an endeavor hardly possible without the Kremlin's direct involvement. His *Foundations of Geopolitics* became a bestseller, and has been accepted as a textbook in military colleges. For some Russian observers, even those who were hardly fascinated with Dugin, he was a rising star. Still, not much about him was published in English.¹¹ In the West in general, he was seen mostly as a freakish right-wing curiosity, unable or unwilling to adjust his view to the era of "transition," i.e., the transition from totalitarian "abnormality" to democratic "normality."¹²

By 2003 or so, Dugin's romance with the Kremlin was over. His Party disintegrated and he soon was marginalized by the Kremlin. Still, it was at that time that Dugin became increasingly a person of interest in the English-language press, including scholarly ones.

⁹ Paul Goble, "Xenophobia among Russians higher now than in 1991, but directed at different targets, Levada Center polls show," *Johnson List*, 29 October 2018.

¹⁰ Nikolai-Klaus von Kreitor, "Elements of the new Russian nationalism," *Telos*, Issue 96, Summer 1993.

¹¹ Alan Ingram, "Alexander Dugin: geopolitics and neo-fascism in post-Soviet Russia," *Political Geography*, Vol. 20, Issue 8, November 2001; Jacob W. Klop, "Aleksandr Dugin and the ideology of national revival: geopolitics, Eurasianism and the conservative revolution," *European Security*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, Autumn 2002; John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's 'neo-Eurasian' textbook and Dmitri Trenin's ambivalent response," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, Vol. 25, Issue 1/2, June 2001; John B. Dunlop, "Aleksandr Dugin's *Foundations of Geopolitics*," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, Winter 2004.

¹² Jardan Ostbo, "Det er sott og vakkert å do for Stalini," *Nordisk Ost-Forum*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, 2004.

He was often studied, not just as one of the most interesting and prolific Russian philosophers and public intellectuals who could be well studied in the context of Russia's recent intellectual and political history, but as an increasingly influential person who implicitly guided and inspired people in the Kremlin.

Some Western authors expended considerable energy in unmasking the reactionary essence of Dugin's philosophy and its increasing influence on Kremlin folk. This was, for example, the case with Andreas Umland, who defended his Ph.D. dissertation at Cambridge University¹³ and started to actively publish about Dugin, presenting him as quite a dangerous chap.¹⁴ The same could be said about Anton Shekhovtsov, who often collaborated with Umland.¹⁵

Other Russia-watchers also became interested in Dugin, seeing him as a rising intellectual and political star in Russia. Dugin's appointment to Moscow State University was seen not just as an academic appointment case in Russia – but as an important and ominous political sign.¹⁶ Dugin's appointment implicitly indicated, in the view of some Western observers, that right-wing imperialists were on the rise in the Kremlin, and that their ideas should be studied in earnest.¹⁷ Dugin's importance for Western readers was underscored by the fact that he started to be published in English.¹⁸

Despite Dugin's work at Moscow State University and his never-ending attempts to advertise himself as the guiding light for the people in the Kremlin in general and Putin in particular, Dugin's influence on Russian politics continued to be miniscule. The same could be said about his influence on Russia's intellectual life. Even at Moscow State University, most of Dugin's colleagues – as one professor told the article's author – looked at Dugin mostly as a peculiar curiosity, out of touch with reality.

¹³ Andreas Umland, "Post-Soviet 'uncivil society' and the rise of Aleksandr Dugin: a case study of the extraparlimentary radical right in contemporary Russia," University of Cambridge, 2008. <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.611980>.

¹⁴ Andreas Umland, "Pathological tendencies in Russian 'neo-Eurasianism,'" *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 47, Issue 1, January/February 2009; Andreas Umland, "The formation of a fascist 'neo-Eurasian' intellectual movement in Russia: Alexander Dugin's path from a marginal extremist to an ideologue of the post-Soviet academic and political elite, 1989-2001," *Ab Imperio*, Issue 3, 2003.

¹⁵ Anton Shekhovtsov, "The paligenetic thrust of Russian neo-Eurasianism: ideas of rebirth in Aleksandr Dugin's worldview," *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions*, Vol. 9, Issue 4, December 2008; Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland, "Is Aleksandr Dugin a traditionalist? 'Neo-Eurasianism' and perennial philosophy," *Russian Review*, Vol. 68, Issue 4, October 2009.

¹⁶ Melanie Newman, "Russian hawk ascends to position of influence," *Times Higher Education*, Issue 1892, 16 April 2009.

¹⁷ Valery Senderov, "Conservative revolution in post-Soviet Russia: overview of the main ideas," *Social Sciences*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, 2008; John O'Sullivan, "Bear right," *National Review*, Vol. 61, Issue 16, 7 September 2009.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Dugin, "After Tskhinvali: interests and values," *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 47, Issue 3, May/June 2009; Aleksandr Dugin, "Pax Russica: for a Eurasian alliance against America," *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Vol. 25, Issue 4, Fall 2008.

It is true that by the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, Dugin and similar individuals had received a brief blessing from the Kremlin, and this was noted in English-language publications.¹⁹

Dugin himself observed the beginning of what he regarded as a new world order, in which his expertise and insight would be of great importance. Still, as was already noted, the Kremlin's interest in Dugin was brief and then declined sharply and he, together with similar-minded individuals, was demoted in this or that way. Dugin, as was already noted, lost his position as a professor at Moscow State University and this was noted by Western publications.²⁰ Still, the publications which indicated Dugin's real position were overshadowed by many more publications, which stressed that Dugin continued to be a man of influence who in many ways shaped Putin's policy. Indeed, Dugin as the man behind Putin would lead Western civilization to catastrophe.

Dugin as the Man of Extreme Danger to the West

The beginning of the Ukrainian crisis appeared to have transformed Dugin into the man who actually runs Russia. It was his presence which made Putin so dangerous. "Indeed, Dugin emerged as "Putin's Rasputin."²¹ Here, Dugin was implicitly compared with the Siberian monk who, some historians believed, totally controlled Nicholas II, the last tsar of Russia, and who was, in this reading of events, responsible for the collapse of the dynasty.

It was not surprising that in this interpretation of events, he manipulated Putin almost completely. This was, for example, the case with Anton Shekhovtsov who, together with Prof. Umland, continued to spend considerable time in unmasking Duginism and its dangers for Russia and implicitly mankind,²² and indicated the dangerous spread of Dugin's ideas.²³

Indeed, for a contributor to the influential *Foreign Policy*, Dugin's nefarious influence could be compared with that of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS.²⁴

¹⁹ "Yalta, February 1945: beginning of a new world?" *International Affairs: a Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy & International Relations*, Vol. 56, Issue 2, 2010.

²⁰ Paul Sonne, "Russian nationalists feel let down by Kremlin, again," *Wall Street Journal – Eastern Edition*, Vol. 264, Issue 4, 5 July 2014.

²¹ Robert Zubrin, "Putin's Rasputin," *Skeptic*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, 2015; Mervyn F. Bendle, "Putin's Rasputin," *Quadrant Magazine*, Vol. 58, Issue 9, September 2014.

²² Anton Shekhovtsov, "Putin's brain?" *New Eastern Europe*, Issue 4, September/October 2014.

²³ Andreas Umland, "Alexander Dugin and Moscow's new right radical intellectual circles at the start of Putin's third presidential term 2012-2013: the Anti-Orange Committee, the Izborsk Club and the Florian Geyer Club in their political context," *Europolity*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 2016.

²⁴ "The Agitators," *Foreign Policy*, Issue 209, November/December 2014.

It was not surprising that Dugin's writings – he is an extremely prolific writer – were taken seriously. This was the case, for example, with Dugin's *The Fourth Political Theory*. Here, Dugin, who could hardly be accused of excessive modesty, proclaimed that he had finally revealed the path for all of mankind, which should discard all previously dominant creeds, at least those which had dominated humanity for the last 200 years or so. Dugin's claims were taken seriously, and *World Affairs*, the well-known liberal American periodical, published a review of them. Curiously enough, it was authored by Israel Shamir, a Russian Jew who upon emigration to Israel – and as one could assume, as an ardent Zionist – became an equally ardent anti-Semite and Holocaust denier.²⁵

Dugin's philosophical ideas had been continuously discussed with implicit indication that they had direct implication for Russia's and possibly the global flow of events.²⁶ It is not surprising that Dugin's claims about his paramount role in the Kremlin's policy has been taken at face value. Dugin, for example, claimed that the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey was mostly due to his efforts, and the respected *Bloomberg Businessweek* took this claim seriously enough to publish an article about it.²⁷ Dugin's direct influence on the Kremlin and related Eurasianism's influence on the Kremlin was a subject of scholarly monographs.²⁸

Dugin and Eurasianism and Knowledge as a Case of Political Expediency

How did Dugin and other similar-thinking people seem to become a formidable force behind Putin and make him appear as an almost insanely reckless imperialist who needs to be stopped by any means necessary?

²⁵ Israel Shamir, "The Fourth Political Theory," *World Affairs*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, Spring (January-March) 2014. On *The Fourth Political Theory*, see also R.R. Reno, "The public square," *First Things: a Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life*, Issue 271, March 2017; Salvatore Babones, "Russian regret," *Quadrant Magazine*, Vol. 60, Issue 10, October 2016.

²⁶ Jeff Love and Michael Meng, "Heidegger and post-colonial fascism," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 45, Issue 2, March 2017; Andrey Tolstoy and Edmund McCaffray, "Mind games: Alexander Dugin and Russia's war of ideas," *World Affairs*, Vol. 177, Issue 6, March/April 2015; Francesco Aqueci, "Tra Dugin e Huntingdon. Epistemologia dello scontro di civiltà," *Notizie di Politeia*, Vol. 31, Issue 119, 2015; Sina Kisacik and Furkan Kaya, "Russian Eurasianism versus American Eurasianism within the perspectives of Brzezinski and Dugin: a case study on the recent Ukrainian crisis," *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, 2016. The interest in Dugin's intellectual output went along with the renewed interest in those European intellectuals who had direct connections with Dugin. See Arthur Versluis, "A conversation with Alain de Benoist," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, Fall 2014.

²⁷ Henry Meyer, "A Putin fixer claims success with Turkey," *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Issue 4512, 20 February 2017.

²⁸ See, for example, the review of the Charles Clover book. J.W. Peterson, "Black wind, white snow: the rise of Russia's new nationalism," *Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries*, Vol. 54, Issue 1, September 2016.

To understand this, we need to return to the beginning of our article, when we noted the interest in Eurasianism in general and Dugin in particular in the early post-Soviet era. In the 1990s, when Eurasianism and Dugin were quite popular in Russia, they were marginalized in the USA, plainly because they did not fit into the prevailing model of the “end of history” – Western capitalist democracy. Russia was weak, almost on the brink of disintegration, and completely powerless. At that point, Western intellectuals ignored Eurasianism and similar political creeds as either absolutely irrelevant or as wishful thinking of marginalized Russians who lamented the end of the empire.

After the 2008 war with Georgia, it was demonstrated that Russia was not a weakling, nor a failing state, and it could defend its interests. By that time, the interest in Eurasianism reemerged even though its representatives, such as Dugin, continued to be seen as crackpots. Yet there were implications that they would be taken seriously, due to their influence upon Putin. Finally, after the conflict over Crimea and Russia’s involvement in Ukraine, Eurasianism and Dugin became an inspiration for Putin.

In this narrative, Russia was not just a strong state, but had other features. It was not just an aggressive but “insane” country. It was engaged or ready to engage in conflicts which could well lead to global war. The Moscow elite thus does not think about the long-term results of its actions and is driven by just the wishful thinking of the leaders or simply by their instincts.

This theory juxtaposed “rational” Washington to “irrational” Moscow, and this was one reason why Duginism emerged as the Kremlin’s guiding light. Actually, it was, in a sort of Freudian way, Washington’s desire to attribute and transmit its own geopolitical behavior, especially in the Middle East, and which ended in spectacular disaster, to its geopolitical rival. The image of “insane” and intrinsically aggressive Russia was a good propaganda ploy and has other practical implications. Europeans should accept the USA’s leadership at a time when the tension between Donald Rumsfeld, Bush’s Secretary of Defense and “Old Europe,” especially Germany, became especially heated. Dugin’s importance for U.S. propaganda was also important for other reasons and was connected with the election of Donald Trump.

Trump’s critics often stated that they could not stand him because of his outrageous behavior and dictatorial propensities. Some, like Prof. Timothy D. Snyder, from prestigious Yale University, implicitly compared him to the Roman Caesars or Mussolini. Some, and this was especially the case during his campaign, compared him to Hitler and predicted the dark night of despotism if the electorate chose him as the next president. The elite’s revulsion was overwhelming. Not only Democrats, but even Republican elites were outraged.

However, a closer look at Trump's presidency indicates that he had not done anything that had not been done by any other Republican president. He cut taxes, mostly for the rich, from which the economy would hardly benefit in the long run, and engaged in aggressive foreign policy posturing, if not in action, then at least in verbal expression.

Still, the hatred of Trump is much stronger than even for George W. Bush, who started a disastrous war in the Middle East. At least there was not serious talk about his impeachment.

Why was there such dislike of Trump among all segments of the elite? The point here is that Trump's original popularity was due to serious economic problems. It was the decline of the "real" economy; the production of steel, machines, cars and similar products had reached its peak several decades earlier – and the real income for most Americans had declined sharply since the 1960s.

The elite was able to control the masses, providing some few pre-selected candidates who, while proclaiming their differences from each other, were actually quite similar to each other, for none of them were willing to change the socio-economic arrangements which made this economic decline possible. Trump was elected against the will of the elite, and this election indicated that the "uncontrolled" masses whom Hillary Clinton called "deplorables" could potentially be engaged in socio-economic and political changes against the will of the elite.

And these changes could be violent. As a matter of fact, the influential magazine *The New Yorker* discussed the possibility of a civil war in the USA, a subject absolutely taboo only a few years earlier. Elaborating on the possibility of civil war in the USA, Evan Osnos, a contributor to *The New Yorker*, noted that a visible segment of American society, mostly rich folk, were taking the possibility of civil war quite seriously, and engage in concrete actions to protect themselves in the case of cataclysm.²⁹

While the protagonists of Osnos' article see clear domestic roots of the potential cataclysm, most members of the American elite hardly think this way. For them, the reasons for a potential crisis are not internal, but external. And the reason for their blindness is clear. Unwilling to change the socio-economic make-up of society and proclaiming it axiomatic—the "end of history" notion—the USA's elite finds Putin and his associates to be the major reason for Trump's victory, and the cause of potential problems in the future.

²⁹ Evan Osnos, "Doomsday prep for the super-rich," *The New Yorker*, 30 January 2017.

Putin, in this reading, became increasingly sophisticated and enjoyed almost superhuman qualities. And here, Dugin and similar intellectuals had emerged as the force which made Putin to rule over not just Russia but over the USA, by using Trump as his puppet, and implicitly all over the world. It was they who could wreck the entire Western civilization.

Indeed, in this reading, Putin and implicitly Dugin became somewhat demonic personalities who could almost rule the world in general and the USA in particular, just by creating a narrative different from that of the mainstream; the generation-long domination of postmodernism instilled in quite a few members of the Western elite the idea that socio-economic problems could be bypassed if the elite designed an appropriate “text” which could “deconstruct” any reality, depending on the elite’s interests.

In any case, the “discourse” is the power and, due to modern technology, the wrong “discourse,” one that could be spread from any part of the globe. In this context, Dugin, as Putin’s agent, could influence either directly or indirectly such influential populist American intellectuals as Glenn Beck³⁰ and Steve Bannon,³¹ who could mislead naïve “deplorables,” leading them to the destruction of democracy and its transformation into “populism,” with an authoritarian or even totalitarian tinge.

Conclusion

The goal of our study is not an attempt to relativize the intellectual history, social sciences in general, in postmodernist fashion. Many studies on Eurasianism and its major representatives, Dugin in our case, indeed tried to present reality “as it is,” if one would paraphrase Leopold von Ranke’s expression.

Still, if one would assemble what seem to be the disconnected pieces of the puzzle, the picture becomes clear: the intellectual trends and related picture of reality is often only tangentially related to the facts on the ground. The constructed reality relates not to facts, but to what “consumers,” in the broad meaning of the word, e.g. academia, government, society in general, etc., want to receive from the producers of the narrative.

The case with the image of Eurasianism and its major representative (e.g. Dugin) could be a good example. Eurasianism and Dugin were clearly very popular in Russia in the late 1990s and early 2000s when nostalgia for the USSR and, implicitly, Soviet arrangements, had reached its peak.

³⁰ “Charlie Rose talks to... Glenn Beck,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Issue 4497, 31 October 2016.

³¹ Owen Matthews, “Brothers in Harm,” *Newsweek Global*, Vol. 168, Issue 16, 5 May 2017. On the implicit connection between Dugin and Trump’s election and danger of totalitarianism, see Sam Leith, “Rebooting liberalism,” *Prospect*, Issue 252, March 2017.

At the same time, Eurasianism and Dugin were still rather marginal players in Russia, according to the majority of Western observers, mainly because Russia, together with the rest of the world, were supposed to march toward the Fukuyamian “end of history.” Europeans, especially Eastern Europeans, were already skeptical of this vision. Still, their works were regarded as rather marginal in comparison to Anglo-Saxon scholarship.

By the middle of the 2000s, Eurasian influence in general and Dugin’s influence in particular started to decline sharply, regardless of the Kremlin’s occasional interest in him during the 2008 war with Georgia and the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. By that time Eurasianism in general and Dugin in particular reemerged in English-language publications as being extremely important from all perspectives. The explanation was simple: reassertive Russia would emerge as an “insane” state ready for everything to rebuild their empire and the elite was deeply hostile to the West.

This distortion of reality was not just a Western or, to be precise, American, phenomenon. It could well be found in authoritarian/totalitarian states. Nevertheless, one could assume, the ruling elite of these states suffered less from distorted information than did those in the USA.

The point here is that in authoritarian and totalitarian discourse, there is a clear difference between public and private information. In the USSR, for example, Party officials always publicly proclaimed that all ethnicities of the USSR lived in harmony with each other and all Soviet people felt that they belonged to the same Soviet nation, regardless of their ethnic membership.

The official propaganda also asserted that the vast majority of Soviets were deeply attached to the regime. Nonetheless, the Secret Police undoubtedly provided information to the inner circle of the Soviet rulers that the reality is quite different, and that the relaxing of the iron grip of the Secret Police and Party could lead to dire consequences. Soviet rulers had never been brainwashed by their own brainwashing, and they made a clear difference between public statements and operational philosophy; at least this was the case until Gorbachev.

The story is different in the West; at least this is the case in the USA. The political scientists of the early 1990s who publicly preached the “end of history” and the USA as the paragon of democracy did not change their paradigm in their capacities as government advisors: they repeated the same vision of the past, present and future as they presented in their public lectures, articles and books.

The distortion of reality is here, paradoxically enough, stronger than in totalitarian/authoritarian states. Consequently, distortion of reality could be seen not just in visions of foreign countries but also in their own societies. A good example could be Trump's election. Until the very last moment, almost 100% of American pundits were sure that Trump, with his clear authoritarian bent and outlandish behavior, would never enter the White House.

When this happened, American political scientists failed to find even a single English-language scholarly monograph published in the last 50-70 years which clearly dealt with the possibility of an authoritarian or totalitarian transformation of the USA. Thus, the study of Western perception of Eurasianism tells us not only about the creed, but in a way, how knowledge is often produced in the West and how Western society works.