

Thursday, May 2nd, 2013, 5 pm

## Islam and Secular Sensibilities in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Lecture by John Schoeberlein

The revival of Islam after 70 years of an atheistic regime was not a simple return to the forms of Islamic observance that prevailed prior to Soviet rule. People - individually and as a society - were changed by the Soviet experience. In this talk, I will argue that the particular ways of observing Islam that have seemed appropriate to people in the post-Soviet revival are very much a product of the experience of secularism as it took shape in the Soviet context. This is reflected in a number of ways: the particular practices and beliefs that are gaining strength now - often including those that are seen as "national", "moderate", "flexible", "personal", "moral" and "spiritual" - are those that are considered to conform with the contingencies of a secular society, post-Soviet style. Similarly, there is much about the way that "true" or "pure" Islam is conceptualized which is seen as incompatible with a secular context, but which nevertheless flows out of the ways that religion - particularly Islam - was conceptualized in the Soviet context. There is a tremendous diversity of different approaches that people are now taking in orienting toward Islam today in Central Asia and other Muslim areas of the former Soviet Union. In this talk, based on fieldwork conducted in different parts of the former Soviet Union since the 1980s, I will consider the roots of some of these various approaches in the experience of Soviet secularism.

**John Schoeberlein** teaches cultural anthropology at the Nazarbayev University School of Humanities and Social Sciences and is also working to develop a research institute at NU for Eurasian regional studies. Before moving to NU, he served as Director of Harvard University's Program on Central Asia and the Caucasus, and at various times as Visiting Professor at the American University in Central Asia (Bishkek), Tbilisi State University and the Eurasian National University (Astana). His research in Central Asia and other parts of the former Soviet Union since 1984 has focused on identity processes, cultural dimensions of conflict, national ideologies, Islam, Soviet legacies and emerging cultural orientations. He has led major analytical projects on conflict prevention in Central Asia (the UN's Ferghana Valley Development Programme and the International Crisis Group's Central Asia Project), and he was instrumental in founding the Central Eurasian Studies Society.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Zentrum Moderner Orient  
Kirchweg 33

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