Mapping Religious Conflict in Eurasia, 1991-2017

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Religious Studies

This project uses innovative methods to map religious communities and their conflicts on the territory of the former USSR since 1991, when the Soviet Union ceased to exist. After the dissolution of the USSR into 15 independent countries, religion began to play an increasingly important political and social role in the post-Soviet space. Freed from the brutal antireligious persecution that characterized most of the Soviet period (1917-1991), religious bodies such as the Russian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, the Russian Council of Muftis, and the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia have taken advantage of their new-found liberty to restore and construct churches, mosques, cathedrals, monasteries, and stupas. These new buildings have transformed the Eurasian landscape in ways that can be clearly seen in satellite images taken over the last quarter-century. Religious communities have also shaped social and ethnic identities, engaged in moral and civic education, lobbied legislatures for financial support, and articulated moral visions for their societies. At times, religions have come into conflict, most dramatically in the Caucasus, but also in Central Asia, where radical forms of Islam, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, challenge the more nationalistic Muslim establishment. New tools available to scholars, such as Google Earth, satellite photography, geographical information systems, and government databases that are accessible via the internet, offer innovative possibilities for visualizing important cultural, geographic, demographic, and religious transformations. By combining these tools with traditional sources (travelogues, newspaper reports, scholarly articles and monographs), this project will develop an interactive digital map of ethno-religious communities and their conflicts in the former USSR.

Research assistant's duties:
Using the tools and sources cited above, the RA will maintain and develop bibliographical and demographic databases about Eurasian religious communities and religious conflicts. The RA will also assist me in mapping these communities and conflicts by determining their specific geographical coordinates. Using historical satellite imagery, the RA will determine how religion and religious conflict has transformed the Eurasian landscape. Finally, the RA will develop some of the explanatory written and visual content for the interactive digital map.

Required skills or qualifications:
Familiarity with ASU databases (and willingness to learn more about them); curiosity; strong critical thinking and English language skills.

Skills student will acquire:
Bibliographical research methods; methods for acquiring and analyzing quantitative demographic data; grant writing; methods for analyzing qualitative data.