
This book examines the social life of the Russians, the impact of neoliberal economic policies on society, political transformation, the state’s deliberate abandonment of social welfare following the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991, unemployment, rapidly rising rates of homelessness, poverty, crime, drug abuse, alcoholism, environment degradation, traffic problems, domestic violence, political and economic corruption etc.

The author discusses how the shared values and practices of care and kindness have remained central to daily Russian life under the present circumstances, and explains what links members of diverse group of individuals and organizations, that have a common concern of caring for others, what constitutes faith-based compassion in Russian life today, and the meaning of living faithfully while struggling to correct social injustices.

This work is an ethnographic investigation of how members of a faith-based community in Moscow have utilized faith-driven ideals about compassion, service and social action to create an alternative system of social welfare and social justice that is making a significant contribution to Russian society.

The author recounts acts of benevolence and compassion in the period prior to the creation of the Soviet Union carried out by and through religious institutions. During the Soviet period, benevolence and compassion lost their official connection to religious traditions and were transformed into state-sponsored activities; the state encouraged (and even obliged) citizens to practice compassion as a type of moral citizenship in schools, workplaces and neighborhood associations. The writer argues that these obligatory acts of compassion often backfired as citizens participated grudgingly in voluntary activities, and toward the end of the Soviet period community ethics of compassion shifted...
Finally, the author discusses the efficiency of the work carried out by faith-based communities and their secular counterparts, their achievements, and what benefits their formal recognition by the Russian state would bring. From her comparison of faith-based institutions with secular organizations she concludes that faith-based organizations appear to be more concerned with ensuring social stability and attempting to improve the world a little for everyone, whereas secular ones seem to be more concerned with enforcing tradition and morality.

This book makes a valuable contribution to the study of ethical life, faith-based groups and secular organizations in modern Russian society. The writer presents a compelling depiction of private, social welfare activities combined with a detailed ethnographic analysis.

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