

“Public Health Problem or Human Rights Claim? Considering the Biosocial Dimensions of Food Poverty in Russia”

Melissa Caldwell

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October 24th, 2012, 5:30-7:00 pm

Building 50, Room 51A

Despite promises of plenty in both the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, Russia has long been plagued by food shortages. Today, food poverty continues to be a pressing problem, as growing socioeconomic disparities and migration create new communities that require food assistance. A diverse group of organizations provide assistance ranging from food bags, soup kitchens, and stipends. Over time, aid workers in these programs have recognized that food poverty is only one factor affecting the lives of recipients, and they have expanded their food assistance programs to include a range of services to address the related medical, emotional, legal, and social problems faced by their clients. These more comprehensive programs raise intriguing questions not just about the nature of food poverty in Russia and whether it is a problem of public health or a problem of human rights, but also about whether aid programs are service providers or political action programs.

Melissa L. Caldwell is Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Russia since 1995. Her research focuses on poverty in transitioning societies, the postsocialist welfare state, international food aid, charity and philanthropy, and religious welfare organizations.

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