



Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor (Culture and Society after Socialism)

By Elizabeth C. Dunn



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The transition from socialism in Eastern Europe is not an isolated event, but part of a larger shift in world capitalism: the transition from Fordism to flexible (or neoliberal) capitalism. Using a blend of ethnography and economic geography, Elizabeth C. Dunn shows how management technologies like niche marketing, accounting, audit, and standardization make up flexible capitalism's unique form of labor discipline. This new form of management constitutes some workers as self-auditing, self-regulating actors who are disembedded from a social context while defining others as too entwined in social relations and unable to self-manage.

Privatizing Poland examines the effects privatization has on workers' self-concepts; how changes in "personhood" relate to economic and political transitions; and how globalization and foreign capital investment affect Eastern Europe's integration into the world economy. Dunn investigates these topics through a study of workers and changing management techniques at the Alima-Gerber factory in Rzeszów, Poland, formerly a state-owned enterprise, which was privatized by the Gerber Products Company of Fremont, Michigan.

Alima-Gerber instituted rigid quality control, job evaluation, and training methods, and developed sophisticated distribution techniques. The core principle underlying these goals and strategies, the author finds, is the belief that in order to produce goods for a capitalist market, workers for a capitalist enterprise must also be produced. Working side-by-side with Alima-Gerber employees, Dunn saw firsthand how the new techniques attempted to change not only the organization of production, but also the workers' identities. Her seamless, engaging narrative shows how the employees resisted, redefined, and negotiated work processes for themselves.



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Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor (Culture and Society after Socialism) By Elizabeth C. Dunn Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1171647 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cornell University Press
- Published on: 2004-05-13
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.02" h x .53" w x 5.96" l, .73 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 224 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Privatizing Poland* is a study based on participant-observation of the takeover of Alima, a baby-food factory in the medium-sized Polish city of Rzeszów, by the Michigan-based Gerber Corporation. . . . Dunn succeeds admirably in presenting the clash between the frameworks of flexible accumulation and actually existing socialism. . . . It stands out as one of the best case studies of the process of privatization in Eastern Europe."?American Ethnologist

"This is a pathbreaking book. Elizabeth C. Dunn is the first to allow us to feel what postcommunist transformation is all about. Her detailed account of the concrete ways in which people's lives have changed makes dry social science concepts like 'transition,' 'class formation,' and 'privatization' come alive. How are people working differently? How are they made to think differently? How has 'democratization' been used to create a new, subordinate type of worker, as well as new types of managers? Postcommunism has never been captured like this before."?David Ost, author of *The Defeat of Solidarity*

"In this stimulating book, Elizabeth C. Dunn renews an anthropology of capitalism, and will stir debates about postsocialist transition. In the land of Solidarity, management techniques seek to remake labor discipline as well as Polish worker identities in accordance with neoliberal ideals of privatized responsibility. Workers, however, struggle to reclaim values that sustain a moral vision of solidarity. The author's vivid ethnography and engaging style make this book a pleasure to read."?Aihwa Ong, coeditor of *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*

"Well organized and well crafted, *Privatizing Poland* is an excellent addition to the literature on the postsocialist transition in Eastern Europe. Both participant and observer, Elizabeth C. Dunn worked side-by-side on the shop floor and behind the sales desk with those in the midst of the transition."?Martha Lampland, coeditor of *Standards and Their Stories*

About the Author

Elizabeth C. Dunn is Associate Professor of Geography at Indiana University Bloomington.

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