Reviews

Nicolette Makovicky, ed. *Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism: Enterprising Selves in Changing Economies*. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014. xi +209 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-6787-8, $165 (cloth).

For those interested in neoliberal capitalism and its discontents, the postsocialist societies of Central and Eastern Europe hold valuable lessons. Over the past thirty years, these places have been grappling with neoliberal reforms applied both by foreign "experts" and by local politicians eager to distance themselves from the socialist past. These reforms target not only the economy, but, as Elizabeth Dunn points out, "the very foundations of what it means to be a person."[1] The received wisdom is that state socialism produced passive and dependent citizens who need to be reengineered into active and enterprising individuals equipped to survive in a competitive environment while making only minimal demands on elites or the state.

Neoliberalism, Personhood, and Postsocialism presents nine rich ethnographic case studies from five newly marketized Eastern Bloc countries, one post-Soviet one (Estonia), and one still-socialist place on the other side of the world (Cuba). In the postsocialist context of changing labor markets, drastically reduced social welfare protections, and increased migration, how do people get by? How is the ascendance of neoliberalism as a political tool and economic philosophy reshaping values, subjectivities, and notions of belonging and exclusion? The essays in this volume collectively offer a stab at these complex questions.

One recurring theme in this collection is the way neoliberal discourses shape narratives of the self. Writing about the former German Democratic Republic, Gareth Hamilton discusses state financial initiatives created to address job shortages and long-term unemployment by urging East Germans to start their own businesses. According to these programs, becoming self-employed means emulating the qualities of successful entrepreneurs, even if their aggressive self-interest goes against local cultural norms. Jonathan Larson writes about Slovakian university students' encounters with the academic essay, a genre being promoted by top government officials and disseminated by

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1. Dunn, Elizabeth, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

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young foreign-educated English language teachers. Considering the essay a neoliberal "technology of the self" (72), Larson argues that it is part of a larger project of reshaping subjectivities by encouraging subjects to self-consciously conceive of themselves as the "authors of their own lives" (72). Zuzana Sekeráková Búriková's contribution on Slovak au pairs working in London considers the ways that narratives of the enterprising self can be deployed for strategic purposes. She finds that while young women tend to frame their temporary migrations as strategies of self-improvement and self-investment, their actual motivations to leave home often have more to do with their desire to establish independence from their partners and parents.

Another theme of this collection centers on changing work practices in the postsocialist era. Writing about the office culture of a multinational bank in Romania, Liviu Chelcea reveals the variety of corporate management techniques employed to discipline workers, from a differential bonus pay structure meant to encourage long work hours to a new office layout designed to minimize idleness and nonwork interactions. The upshot of these and other technologies of governance, writes Chelcea, is a change in bank employees' perception of time itself. Alina Petrovici also writes about the corporate workplace in Romania, unpacking the complex set of gendered expectations faced by female managers at a construction firm in Cluj. Despite neoliberal rhetoric about gender equality, female managers are expected to appear feminine and attractive in their self-presentation. However, these same managers often resort to abusive behaviors (which we would now associate with "toxic masculinity") toward subordinates as a show of assertiveness and efficiency. In the informal sector of the Romanian economy, however, certain traditional business practices continue to hold. Radu Gabriel Umbres's micro-ethnography of a Romanian rural entrepreneur trying to establish a small construction business describes his rejection of both legal contracts and upfront discussions of payments. Instead, this up-and-coming businessman strategically builds trust with current and potential clients by embedding himself in local social networks.

Other essays in this volume disrupt mainstream narratives that posit socialist citizens as passive and dependent. Aet Annist's contribution shows how the economic and social conditions of post-Soviet Estonian villages made people *less* entrepreneurial and resourceful than they were in Soviet times. Without the security of guaranteed employment in a Soviet state enterprise and the access to social and material resources that those jobs provided, villagers were largely cut off from

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the opportunities to supplement their incomes that were previously available to them. Writing about socialist Cuba, Maria Padrón Hernández points out that while the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to get by in the Cuban economy may formally resemble the neoliberal ideal of the enterprising self, the norms that guide informal income-generating activities and the moral anxieties that condense around them mean that her interlocutors in Havana must balance economic opportunity with social solidarity.

Finally, editor Nicolette Makovicky considers the way actors living on the Polish–Czech border secure European funding for cultural and environmental development programs. She argues that these funding schemes act as disciplinary agents in the region, privileging those municipal actors and organizations able to instrumentalize certain essentialized cultural traits while keeping others out of the loop.

Overall, this collection presents incisive critiques of neoliberalism as both an economic philosophy and a political tool, challenging our assumptions about economic "transitions" from socialism to capitalism along the way. As Don Kalb points out in the afterward, the essays in this volume show that "middle-class" aspirations are "fragile or illusory" (196) for most postsocialist citizens, belying the myth that the creation of market economies necessarily improves living standards.

These days use of the term "neoliberalism" is frequently critiqued within anthropological circles for its conceptual and descriptive shortcomings. While not every author's use of the term in this volume is equally productive or clear, in my opinion Makovicky's use of the concept is justified, in that it allows readers to identify and compare processes concurrently unfolding across the globe. A bigger obstacle to clarity, I would argue, is this book's lack of copy editing. Though surely a sign of a publishing industry itself squeezed by economic pressures, the many errors in the text may distract or frustrate close readers. Editorial glitches aside, this volume will be of interest for students of anthropology, history, postsocialism, and neoliberal capitalism.

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