

*'We, workers, have always been workers': new managerial practices and old hierarchies*

During the last two decades new production and managerial practices of flexible capitalism are being applied in privatised companies across the ex-socialist countries. This transformation includes, inter alia, employment flexibility, contracting out and delocalisation of parts of the production. Along with them, new managerial techniques aim at the creation of new models of employment and labour ethos. Some of the new trends that are being applied by companies' managements in cooperation with business consulting companies are the 'empowering techniques' and 'team-building trainings'. The proposed paper relies on anthropological research (2008-2009) conducted in a recently privatised factory in Bulgaria. As a starting point, this presentation will take an ethnographic account of two team-building trips, organised by the company's human resources sector for workers and managers respectively, based on the management's assumption that the trainees' have diverse lifestyles and needs. According to mainstream managerial discourses, these trainings would create stronger bonds among the workforce from various levels of the production and awareness of the company's organisation while they would challenge rigid power relationships. However, these trips revealed and reproduced hierarchies, inequalities and conflicting relationships already reflected at the shop-floor while they enforced previously existing fears of further firings. This paper will discuss the 'newness' of these managerial practices by revealing continuities and discontinuities with the past. It will further discuss the discrepancies between discourses on team building trainings, found in consultants' manuals, and practices during the trainings. It will question what kind of 'teams' and hierarchies may such 'team building trainings' generate in the context of intense stress of staff minimisation, increased insecurity and antagonistic relationships.