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Wife, Daughter, Sister, Smuggler:
Gendered Labour Mobility and Consumption across the Polish-East German Border, 1980-1989

Andrew S. Tompkins

Deutsches Historisches Institut Warschau

In March 1989, police and Ministry of State Security (Stasi) officers from the districts of Erfurt, Gera and Suhl gathered to discuss what they considered a large and growing threat to East Germany's foreign trade, the stability of its currency, and the supply of its domestic market: customs offences being committed overwhelmingly by foreign, especially Polish, nationals. To illustrate the magnitude of the problem, one officer rattled off a list of items allegedly "smuggled"[1] from Gera district in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Polish People's Republic by a single person between 1987 and 1989: they included 100 kg of pepper, another 100 kg of raisins, some 2,700 candy bars, 2,400 bags of gummy bears, 750 packets of coffee, 480 bottles of hairspray, 50 pairs of shoes, and a further 50 pairs of children's shoes. Worse still, the person in question represented only the most egregious offender within a group of 51 people who appeared to have much in common: all were Polish, worked at one of two nearby factories within the district, and had sold large quantities of Polish goods to second-hand shops in East Germany to obtain cash, which they then used to buy everyday items to take back with them to Poland. There, it was presumed, they resold the East German goods at a hefty profit. Fifty of the individuals in question also shared another characteristic: they were all women.[2]

How did gender relate to illegal trade between citizens of socialist states? Were the activities that East Germany, Poland, and other socialist countries criminalized as "smuggling" gendered, and if so, how? While a lack of gender-specific statistics makes it difficult to specify *how much* smuggling was conducted by women as opposed to men,[3] files from the customs offices and secret police of

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[1] References to "smuggling" in this text appear hereafter appear outside of quotation marks. However, my use of the term for the actions described here is historical and does not imply acceptance of the moralizing, criminalizing discourses associated with the term. As discussed below, many of these acts involved goods for everyday consumption whose transport would not be criminal today or outside of the specific context in which they took place.

[2] Bundesarchiv (BArch), Berlin, MfS, HA VII, Nr. 5195, Referat, 27 March 1989, 412–413.

[3] Communist authorities were prolific producers of statistics, owing partly to their faith that such information could guide successful central planning. However, the statistics they gathered tended to align with what Party leaders regarded as identifiable problems and foreseeable solutions. They seem not to have regarded gender as a useful category of analysis in their efforts to stem smuggling. See Shlyakhter (2020, 6–7); Rowell (2005)

both countries provide numerous indications as to *how* both women and men engaged in the informal economy, and thus how their activities might have differed by gender.

Smuggling was endemic to the shortage economies of both Poland and East Germany, which restricted the import and export of various goods in order to retain them for the domestic market. Cross-border trade was, by definition, a two-way process, but differences in supply, pricing, subsidies, wages, inflation, and exchange rates all combined to incentivise Poles spending money abroad, where they enjoyed greater purchasing power. As a result, most exchange took place on the East German side of the border, where competition among consumers fuelled one-sided, xenophobic discourses about Poles emptying GDR shelves.[4] The criminalization of cross-border consumption thus disproportionately affected Poles—or at least those who could actually cross the border.

Mobility across the Poland-GDR border varied considerably over time and depended greatly on who one was. Diplomats and athletes, for example, used their privileged mobility to engage in smuggling, but these groups were relatively small in number.[5] Tourists constituted the bulk of cross-border traders, but unilateral GDR measures and Martial Law in Poland severely limited their mobility for much of the 1980s. Polish workers employed in the GDR constituted the largest group that was consistently able to cross the border, even at times when travel was tightly restricted. Furthermore, these workers were employed through separate—and highly gendered—labour recruitment schemes that granted distinct forms of transnational mobility: how frequently one crossed the border, with what means of transport, and where one could stay in the GDR were all determined by what kind of work contract one had. The gender imbalance between these schemes meant that, in the aggregate, female and male workers had different mobilities, which in turn shaped the forms that their cross-border consumption could take.

This article thus argues that gender and smuggling were linked in important ways, though primarily indirectly, via the mobilities afforded to particular categories of workers. Discursive notions of masculinity and femininity did play some part, but they were decidedly secondary in importance to the structural differences created by state-to-state labour agreements, which were theoretically open to all genders but in practice placed women and men into certain kinds of jobs—and thus afforded each certain options for smuggling. The first section examines how gender and smuggling relate, both generally and in the specific context of 1980s East-Central Europe. It is followed by an analysis of the Poland-GDR border regime and the privileged mobilities tied to East Germany's

[4] Zatlin (2007).
[5] Kochanowski (2010b, 316–321); Lash (2022).

gendered labour recruitment schemes. The remainder of the article looks in greater detail at selected examples to examine how smuggling may have worked differently for women and men.

Gender and Smuggling

Ethnographer Caroline Schuster notes that there is "scant literature on women and girls in smuggling economies", in no small part because of assumptions that women are, at most, accessories to the criminal networks that conduct smuggling or, at worst, their victims. To a great extent, this relates to a broader phenomenon by which "men occupy the unmarked category" (in this case, of a "smuggler"), "while women's participation must always be marked and qualified"[6]—if it is even recorded at all.[7] Historian Ruth Leiserowitz notes that smuggling, like other forms of criminal activity, has also often been explicitly associated with manliness and masculine qualities.[8] Writing about smuggling as a form of corruption, political economist Cynthia Howson notes that the literature often posits a "tendency of women to be more averse to corrupt practice than men," based largely on unproven assumptions about gender norms. Howson instead notes the ways in which women are excluded from networks that conduct illegal activities, constrained in their opportunities to engage in corrupt practices, and simultaneously pressured to conform to ideals of femininity that limit the kinds of smuggling in which they might participate.[9]

While smuggling is often framed in moralizing terms as a criminal activity, much of it would be more accurately described as criminal*ized*. It is for this reason that scholars Itty Abraham and Willem van Schendel distinguish between economic activities that are socially condemned, or "illicit," and those which are merely "illegal" in the eyes of the state.[10] As Janet MacGaffey has argued, "while clandestine trade impoverishes the state, it brings considerable wealth to people who have no other means of acquiring it."[11] Women are overrepresented among low-wage workers, for whom small-scale, illegal importing can be a means of supplementing meagre incomes.[12] Particularly in times of economic crisis, smuggling can become a relatively ordinary economic activity or even a mass phenomenon, as it did in the 1980s between Poland and East Germany.[13]

These socialist states were centrally planned at the national level but only weakly coordinated internationally, leaving them ill-equipped to accommodate uncontrolled cross-border exchange.[14]

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[6] Schuster (2021, 169).
[7] Niger-Thomas (2001, 45).
[8] Leiserowitz (2006).
[9] Howson (2012).
[10] Abraham, van Schendel (2005, 17–20).
[11] MacGaffey (1991, 67), cited in Niger-Thomas (2001, 45).
[12] Schuster (2021, 174).
[13] Wagner (2010, 80–81).
[14] See, for example, Ładykowska, Ładykowski (2013).

They therefore criminalized the export of a broad range of goods as "smuggling" and labelled their sale outside of regular distribution channels as "speculation". Smuggling and speculation were regarded as perverse manifestations of capitalism that potentially threatened not only the state's monopoly on foreign trade but also its ideology and authority. The GDR thus portrayed smugglers as "criminal and antisocial" people with a "negative-hostile" attitude towards socialism who were striving for "a bourgeois, parasitic way of life" by seeking financial and material gain without performing work.[15] In Poland too the government launched repeated campaigns against speculation, which (as in the GDR) served to distract from the more fundamental problem of shortage.[16]

However, most smuggling had little to do with dangerous, valuable, or stolen items, nor even with heavily taxed items such as fuel, cigarettes, or alcohol. Rather, they usually involved legally purchased consumer goods whose export was restricted, often because they were subsidized by the state or otherwise deemed vital to domestic supply. Items commonly smuggled out of East Germany included children's clothes, underwear, shoes, baking ingredients, sausages, coffee, and chocolate. People of all genders purchased such goods for themselves and their families, and it would be a mistake to characterize them as inherently feminine or masculine. However, as Polish historian Małgorzata Mazurek points out, consumption in general—and the organization and supply of the household in particular—constituted one of the few domains in which women's competency was recognized, the sphere of production being assigned largely to men.[17]

Numerous historians have analysed gender relations under socialism, including women's factory work in the GDR and in Poland,[18] women as consumers within shortage economies,[19] and different forms of protest arising from a gendered division of labour.[20] Taken together, this research shows that women played an outsized role in provisioning their families, including through the time-consuming task of shopping for scarce goods—an activity that often necessitated participation in the informal economy. Several historians have also looked at East German-Polish relations under socialism in connection with cross-border "shopping tourism", efforts toward economic integration, border regimes, the black market, and everyday life.[21] These make clear how common it was for individuals in socialist countries generally, and in economically depressed Poland

[15] BArch, Berlin, MfS, HA VII, Nr. 5500, Text zur "Bekämpfung Schmuggel/Spekulation durch Arbeitsrichtung I der K", 160–162.
[16] Kochanowski (2010a).
[17] Mazurek (2010b, 149); Mazurek (2010a, 97–130).
[18] Kott (2001); Mazurek (2004); Fidelis (2010).
[19] Mazurek (2010a).
[20] Kenney (1999); Mazurek (2010b, 143–170).
[21] Ibid. (107–141); Keck-Szajbel (2013); Skalski (2021); Kochanowski (2010b); Logemann (2012).

specifically, to engage in illegal trade. They also provide anecdotal evidence that women's involvement in such exchange was significant. In his study of black market trade, Jerzy Kochanowski notes that "In Soviet, East German, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian customs reports listing Polish citizens who had broken customs regulations between 1976 and 1980, what stands out is the high percentage of women."[22] Daniel Logemann too notes the importance of women in small-scale illicit trade during the 1960s and 1970s, though he argues that their participation declined in the late 1980s as smuggling activity became more professionalized, criminal, and male.[23] This implies that women's smuggling remained smaller in scale, perhaps more widespread, and presumably less lucrative than men's.

The work of contemporary anthropologist Małgorzata Irek provides additional insights into smuggling practices under late socialism. Between 1987 and 1994, Irek engaged in participant observation aboard the so-called "Smugglers' Train" (*przemytnik*) that travelled on Friday evenings from Berlin to Warsaw. Though her principal interest was in smuggling from West Berlin, Irek was also attentive to the activities of Polish workers in East Germany. Her observations confirm, for example, the impression that female smugglers took this train in larger numbers during the 1980s (and again after 1991) than during the most active phase of smuggling around 1989.[24] Irek also noted several smuggling strategies by which women consciously exploited gender, such as by hiding contraband near intimate body parts or crying during negotiations with police.[25] Some women even flirted with male customs officers to distract from their smuggling activities.[26] However, strategies like this link a woman's power to her perceived attractiveness and thus reinforce male dominance in a situation where women may already face sexual harassment from men in positions of petty authority.[27] Exploiting femininity was perhaps one tool in the repertoire of some women who engaged in smuggling, but one should not presume that this constituted the sole or chief difference between women's and men's smuggling practices. Rather, the most significant differences among workers appear to have been tied structurally to employment-related mobility.

Smuggling is, by definition, a criminal activity, but in the case of illegal trade between Poles and East Germans, its criminality was generated as much by authorities banning the import or export of ordinary goods as by the citizens who moved contraband across borders. Within a context of economic shortage, smuggling was a form of cross-border consumption that may have been illegal but which was not necessarily illicit in the view of its participants, and it enjoyed widespread

[22] Kochanowski (2010b, 353). Translated quote taken from English edition (p. 363).
[23] Logemann (2009, 57–58).
[24] Irek (1998, 24, 31).
[25] Ibid. (27, 31).
[26] Ibid. (26).
[27] Howson (2012, 438); Niger-Thomas (2001, 60).

acceptance during Poland's long economic crisis in the 1980s. All genders were affected by that crisis, but women especially were burdened by the additional work of provisioning households in a context of shortage. For those with access to goods unavailable on the domestic market, smuggling represented a survival strategy for their families in addition to an opportunity for speculative profit. However, during the socialist period, only certain Poles consistently had access to the East German market.

Cross-Border Mobility and Gendered Labour Recruitment

In the course of the Cold War, the permeability of the Polish-East German border underwent multiple, dramatic changes that made it sometimes relatively easy, sometimes very difficult for different kinds of people to cross. Polish workers in the GDR enjoyed privileged forms of mobility, but these differed substantially depending on what kind of worker one was.

Though travel between East Germany and Poland was mostly restricted to approved delegations in the 1940s and 1950s, the first cross-border labour arrangements were established in 1966 (see below), and shortly thereafter it became easier for ordinary citizens to travel as tourists within the socialist bloc. Starting in 1972, both countries established passport- and visa-free travel along their so-called "borders of friendship."[28] However, within months of the new travel regime going into effect, Polish tourists began buying up significant quantities of goods from better-provisioned East German shops, and consumers found themselves pitted against one another along national lines.[29] East Germany responded by imposing ever tighter limits on how many goods Polish tourists could legally take back with them, though the allowances for cross-border workers were kept more generous.

Following the emergence of the independent trade union Solidarność, GDR authorities unilaterally declared "changed modalities in passport- and visa-free travel" in late 1980 requiring Poles to show their passport and an invitation from a GDR resident.[30] These supposedly temporary measures were never rescinded. Little more than a year later, General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared Martial Law in Poland, leading to a further clampdown on cross-border travel. However, authorized commuters and contract workers from Poland continued to travel to and from East Germany with relative ease, and their numbers actually increased until the mid-1980s.[31] Thereafter, Poland began liberalizing some of its own longstanding restrictions on outbound travel, which, for example, had

[28] Osękowski (2003); Trutkowski (2011); Keck-Szajbel (2013).
[29] Mazurek (2010b, 124–127).
[30] BArch, Berlin, MfS, HA VI, Nr. 83, Maßnahmeplan zur Durchsetzung zeitweiliger Veränderungen, 24 October 1980.
[31] See Röhr (2001, 262).

usually limited passport validity to socialist countries. In 1989, Poland's Passport Office began issuing passports with worldwide validity and stopped requiring travellers to return their passports after every trip.[32] This led to a sudden, dramatic rise in the number of Polish tourists travelling through East Germany to West Berlin, where citizens of socialist countries could stay without a visa for up to 30 days.[33] Kochanowski argues that, under these changed circumstances, Polish workers in the GDR ceded their previously dominant position in the black market to Polish tourists in the West.[34] However, Irek points out that Polish workers in the GDR continued to function as important go-betweens with privileged access to networks in East Germany.[35]

Despite constant changes to the border regime, Polish workers in the GDR maintained privileged mobility until the end of the Cold War. However, different workers had different mobilities, which were tied closely to specific labour recruitment schemes. The two most important of these were designed around "commuters", who were overwhelmingly female, and "contract workers", a less obviously gendered category which nevertheless long remained mostly male. Each category was associated with particular work arrangements affecting how often workers crossed the border, their means of transport, and housing—factors which all had significant implications for the forms that smuggling might take.

Commuters (overwhelmingly female)

The labour shortage that plagued East Germany throughout its existence led to a series of experiments with cross-border labour from Poland in the early 1960s, with selected GDR factories in the divided border towns of Guben/Gubin, Görlitz/Zgorzelec, and Frankfurt an der Oder/Słubice (each trialling the employment of hundreds of Polish women. In 1966, these experiments were formalized into a Commuter Agreement (*Pendlervereinbarung*) that allowed East German central planners to request an agreed number of Polish workers each year, who were individually selected by the employment offices of Polish prefectures (*województwa*) along the border. Though the text of the agreement did not state so explicitly, the scheme was designed with women in mind, who the Prefectural Council (*Wojewódzka Rada Narodowa*) of Wroclaw had described as a "surplus labour force" in the region, which was dominated on the Polish side by heavy industry that was supposedly unable to create "appropriate" jobs for women.[36] The

[32] Stola (2010, 169-176, 333-344).
[33] Alliierte Kommandantur, *Gesetz- und Verordnungsblatt für Berlin* (1 August 1967).
[34] Kochanowski (2010b, 167).
[35] Irek (1998, 30).
[36] Seethaler (1984, 59).

Commuter Agreement was also implemented very much in this spirit, with women consistently making up more than 90% of those employed under it (e.g. 90.6% in 1988).[37]

Officially, the purpose of the Commuter Agreement was to help low-skilled workers from Poland obtain a higher-level qualification through job training in the GDR.[38] In practice though, this aim was decidedly secondary in importance to meeting East Germany's labour needs.[39] About 3,000-4,000 Polish commuters were employed in the GDR at any given time from 1971 until 1987, after which their numbers dwindled as East Germany replaced Polish with Vietnamese labour.[40] Most worked in large factories that employed more than 100 Polish commuters, although groups varied from as small as 6 workers (in a restaurant in Küstrin) to as large as 800 (at Chemiefaserkombinat Guben).[41] These borderland jobs were mostly restricted to the GDR districts of Cottbus, Dresden, and Frankfurt an der Oder, which generally partnered with the Polish prefectures Zielona Góra, Jelenia Góra, and Gorzów Wielkopolski, though a handful of additional entities on both sides participated as well.[42] Many of these jobs tended to have low turnover: of 152 women employed at VEB Kondensatorenwerk in Görlitz on 31 October 1989, 63% had already been working there for more than 20 years; only two of the women were even hired in the 1980s.[43]

Those employed under the Commuter Agreement initially received 70% of their pay in Polish złoty and 30% in East German marks (DDM),[44] though the agreement was amended in 1973 to allow them to receive their full salary in DDM.[45] In practical terms, this meant they brought their pay home in the form of goods rather than cash, facilitated by special customs allowances for Polish workers.[46] Women in East Germany enjoyed several benefits that did not exist in Poland, such as a paid monthly "housework day", a practice that was ultimately extended to Polish commuters as well.[47] Employers such as Chemiefaserwerk Guben also organized shopping trips for female workers using the company bus, taking them into the city twice a week for two hours at the end of their shift before transporting them home.[48] Many workplaces had their own company shops, which served as a secondary distribution channel for goods, and Polish workers enjoyed the same

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[37] AAN, Warszawa, 2/1354/0/2.8.2/LXXVII-55, Sprawozdanie (1988).
[38] Pendlervereinbarung, I.2, in Röhr (2001, 218).
[39] Hence Röhr's choice of title: *Hoffnung, Hilfe, Heuchelei* ("Hope, Help, Hypocrisy").
[40] Röhr (2001, 262)
[41] BArch, Berlin, DQ 3/2041, Jahresprotokoll für 1980 (Beschäftigung in Grenzbezirken), 30 November 1979.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Archiwum Państwowe Wrocław (AP Wr), Jelenia Góra, 83/515/0/3/19, Wykaz pracowników.
[44] Pendlervereinbarung, I.4, in Röhr (2001, 218).
[45] Protokoll vom 1.10.1973, in Ibid. (222).
[46] Ibid. (79).
[47] Harsch (2007, 110); Mazurek (2010a, 108) The *Hausarbeitstag* was formally included in a 1988 revision of the labour agreements documented in Röhr (2001, 236), but employers may have granted it to Polish workers well before then.
[48] Ibid. (175).

access to them as their East German colleagues.[49] These were especially important when GDR shops limited or refused sales to Poles who cashiers suspected of engaging in speculative trade.[50]

Most commuters worked in shifts and crossed the border daily, either on foot or on buses that stopped at several East German factories. Those travelling on foot would have had difficulty transporting heavy, bulky items, but were well-positioned to engage in so-called "ant smuggling", bringing currency or small items like spices, meats, candy, and other foodstuffs across as they came home from work. This form of smuggling consists of moving "small quantities of goods through repetitive small trips across a porous border",[51] and it is well-documented across a range of contexts, from contemporary South America to West Africa, and in East-Central Europe from the 19th century to the post-1990 period.[52] Ant smuggling is often associated with women, for whom it works precisely "because women do not fit the expected template of a smuggler, and can thus slip past border guards and checkpoints".[53] Indeed, sometimes women play to the normative assumptions of customs officers, such as by slipping illicit goods inside a handbag, the folds of a blanket, or other items coded as feminine.[54] Many items, especially currency, would simply have been transported on the body. For example, a 49-year-old commuter who worked in Guben was caught by customs agents in 1982 with 13,000 złoty in her stockings, placed underneath the soles of her feet.[55] Carrying items on one's person was a possibility for anyone smuggling across the East German-Polish border, but for commuters travelling on foot it was usually the only viable option.

Buses brought commuters to workplaces that were further afield, some of which were not particularly close to the border: one Zgorzelec resident claimed that she lost 15 hours per week (1.5 hours per workday in each direction) travelling by bus to and from her job at the Vegro textile factory in Kirschau.[56] But travel by bus necessarily meant travel in a group, which came with certain advantages. According to a Stasi informant from Guben, "the Polish women on the bus swap quantities of goods that lie above the export regulations so that the value is evened out among them and then swap them back after crossing the border." Sometimes the items were redistributed to older women, who were considered less likely to be searched.[57] Successful smuggling on the bus depended on there being sufficient solidarity among commuters, who might otherwise be in a position to denounce one another. Both the East German Stasi and their Polish counterparts in

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[49] Pendlervereinbarung, Art. V Kap. 2, in Ibid. (219).
[50] Mazurek (2010b, 127–128).
[51] Schuster (2021, 173).
[52] Schuster (2021); Howson (2012, 422); Leiserowitz (2006, 104); Wagner (2010, 77); Schlögel (2013, 9).
[53] Schuster (2021, 174).
[54] Schuster (2021, 174).
[55] BArch, Berlin, DL 203/3081, Schreiben von Zollverwaltung an SAL, 26 May 1982.
[56] IPN, Wr 497/1508, Notatka służbowa, 17 September 1982.
[57] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Cottbus, Abt. VI, Nr. 1198/87, Information über Äußerungen…, 16 April 1987.

the *Służby Bezpieczeństwa* recruited informants such as bus drivers, supervisors, and ordinary workers for the express purpose of monitoring trade by Polish commuters. Frequent border-crossing and limited transportation options were the decisive factors shaping smuggling by commuters, which mostly took the form of "ant smuggling".

Contract workers (mostly male)

Following the Commuter Agreement but prior to the advent of passport- and visa-free travel, the GDR and Poland signed an additional Government Agreement (*Regierungsabkommen*) in 1971 making it possible to employ Polish workers in East Germany outside the border zone. This was the first of several state-to-state agreements that brought "contract workers" (*Vertragsarbeiter*) from other socialist countries, including Vietnam and Mozambique, to the GDR.[58] This recruitment scheme was not as obviously gendered as the Commuter Agreement, and the gender balance of Polish contract workers fluctuated over time: in the 1970s, less than a third of contract workers were female, and by 1984 this had only reached 40%.[59] As the GDR began phasing out Polish labour, the proportion of women increased to 61% of Polish contract workers in 1986 (at a time when they were also 95% of commuters) before dropping again thereafter.[60]

Planners may or may not have had a normative male worker in mind when designing this recruitment scheme, but firms from male-dominated sectors made extensive use of the scheme from the start. In 1974, very few women were employed as contract workers in the largest participating industries, mechanical engineering (1,300 men and 210 women) and energy (1,300 men, mostly coalminers, and 160 women), and there were no women at all in construction (350 men) or ceramics (150 men). Light industry employed the largest number and highest proportion of women (870 men to 830 women), but there were only half as many women as men in the next-largest industries, chemicals (950 men, 510 women) and electronics (1,080 men, 410 women).[61]

Contract workers were generally employed in large groups of 50 to 100 or more in a single location, and they were always more numerous than commuters: in 1980, there were 3,160 commuters and nearly twice as many contract workers (6,120); the gap narrowed slightly under Martial Law, when the number of Poles working in East Germany increased across the board (e.g. 1983: 4,100

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[58] See also Röhr (2003, 289–292).

[59] The gender balance of workers was not recorded in the protocols that the GDR and Poland signed annually. The percentages here and below come from reports by the Polish embassy. AAN, Warszawa, 2/1653/0/17/17/342, Problemy Importu z NRD, 20 April 1973; AAN, Warszawa, 2/1354/0/2.8.1/LXXVI-241, Sprawozdanie 1984.

[60] According to reports by the Polish embassy, women constituted 52.4% of Polish contract workers in 1987, and 54.1% in 1988. AAN, Warszawa, 2/1354/0/2.8.1/LXXVI-269, Raport o stanie zatrudnienia pracowników polskich w przedsiębiorstwach NRD w latach 1987-1988; AAN, Warszawa, 2/1354/0/2.8.2/LXXVII-55, Sprawozdanie z zatrudnienia polskich pracowników w przedsiębiorstwach NRD w 1988 roku.

[61] East Germany and Poland signed annual protocols stating how many workers were to be employed in which industries, but only in 1974 did this paperwork specify workers' gender. BArch, Berlin, DQ 3/2040, Jahresprotokoll für 1974 (Regierungsabkommen), 15 December 1973.

commuters to 7,300 contract workers). However, as the GDR reduced its Polish workforce, it shed contract workers faster than commuters, with only 3,800 of the former and 2,660 of the latter remaining in 1989.[62] In contrast to the commuters' contracts, for which no length was specified, workers coming under the Government Agreement were "in principle" to be given three-year contracts, though a subsequent amendment made it possible for GDR firms to arrange extensions with Polish labour offices.[63] Turnover within these jobs was much higher than for commuters: in 1988, 74.3% of Polish contract workers had been in the GDR for less than three years, while a similar proportion of commuters (72.6%) had already been there for *more* than ten.[64] Contract workers did benefit from an additional advantage though: they were issued passports, whereas commuters used an identification card from their employer to cross the border.[65] Polish authorities maintained tight control over passport access until the mid-1980s, often issuing documents only for a single trip or to a specified country. Even having a multiple-entry passport valid only for socialist countries might facilitate travel—and trade—further afield.

The Government Agreement did not specify which currency workers were to be paid in, but most appear to have received East German marks.[66] Like commuters, contract workers enjoyed access to the same company shops (as well as cultural, athletic, and social facilities) as their East German colleagues.[67] While in East Germany, these Polish employees were housed in worker hostels, where they were separated by gender.[68] Housing was offered even to those living relatively close to their own homes, such as workers from Słubice (which directly abutted the border) who worked in Fürstenwalde (a shorter distance than the aforementioned bus commute from Zgorzelec to Kirschau). Hostel rooms were often shared among two or more workers, meaning that these were, at best, semi-private spaces. They nevertheless constituted not only an important social space for contract workers in the GDR, but one in which they could also store goods between trips home.

Because it was assumed that these workers would be travelling much greater distances, different transportation was arranged: the GDR paid for workers' arrival and departure by train as well as for an annual visit home, for which an additional two days' leave were allotted.[69] However, many contract workers travelled home on a weekly basis. The Friday evening Berlin-Warsaw train was known as the "Smugglers' Train" precisely because so many Polish workers in the GDR took it to

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[62] Röhr (2001, 262).
[63] Protokoll vom 18.10.1973, in Ibid. (229).
[64] AAN, Warszawa, 2/1354/0/2.8.2/LXXVII-55, Sprawozdanie (1988).
[65] Regierungsabkommen, Art. 5, in Röhr (2001, 224).
[66] BArch, MfS, HA VI, Nr. 15190, Übersetzung aus "Express Wieczorny", 2 July 1984.
[67] Regierungsabkommen, Art. 7, in Röhr (2001, 224).
[68] Vereinbarung zum Regierungsabkommen, in Ibid. (230).
[69] Vereinbarung zum Regierungsabkommen, in Ibid. (230).

go home for the weekend, carrying household provisions, gifts, and goods for resale with them as they did so. In July 1981, the Stasi noted that the Friday evening train was regularly filled to nearly double the official seat capacity.[70] During the peak period of smuggling in 1989, train occupancy exceeded capacity by as much as 275%.[71] Hardly any East Germans were present, since the international train was closed to domestic traffic.[72] The train therefore existed as a largely Polish social space as it moved through the GDR.

Like the bus trip for commuters, the train offered Polish contract workers a useful anonymity, and one that was greatly amplified by being in a much larger group. They were joined on the train by a variety of other Poles, including tourists and residents of West Berlin. According to Irek, smugglers swapped goods with one another across categories to defy the expectations of East German customs agents, who principally checked workers for subsidized East German goods and others for illegal imports from West Berlin.[73] Irek argues that all Poles had a "claim to solidarity" on the train, which could be activated "not only in disputes with customs officers, conductors, and thieves" but also for shared eating, drinking, singing, and socializing.[74] However, they were also arguably not as dependent on this solidarity as bus commuters: goods in excess of customs limits could be left in a suitcase, perhaps in an empty compartment elsewhere on the train.[75] The train itself also offered numerous places to stash and conceal wares. A 1984 report by Görlitz customs officials identified more than 60 hiding places, from inside light fixtures to behind heating unit covers and even outside in the rainwater runoff pipe.[76] Whether workers traveled by bus or by train, East Germany's Customs Administration reported a "high latency" in their ability to detect smuggling by Polish workers travelling in groups, since "the concentrated arrivals and departures on weekends in trains or in the border region with buses at the beginning and end of work shifts" made it difficult to check more than a tiny sample of those crossing the border.[77]

If train travel facilitated smuggling for contract workers, access to a private car was the ticket to truly lucrative smuggling opportunities. One man returning to Poland by car in early 1982 at the end of his East German work contract was caught with 55 kg of spices, 35 kg of baking powder, 7 kg of vanilla sugar, 520 candy bars, 72 bottles of anti-corrosion spray, 11 pairs of shoes, and 50 packs of hair dye distributed throughout his vehicle. According to GDR customs agents, he had

[70] BArch, Berlin, MfS, HA VII, Nr. 9199, Operative Entwicklungsmaterial, 29 July 1981, 30–33.
[71] BArch, Berlin, MfS, Abt. X, Nr. 12, Operative Information 204/89, 23 April 1989, 219.
[72] Irek (1998, 13).
[73] Ibid. (14).
[74] Ibid. (15).
[75] BArch, Berlin, DL 203/3081, Information über Ergebnisse der Zollkontrolle…, 27 January 1984.
[76] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Dresden, Abt. VI, Nr. 3890, Vermerk, 14 June 1984, 5.
[77] BArch, Berlin, DL 203/3081, Information über Ergebnisse… im Jahre 1983, 27 January 1984.

planned to live for the next two years off the profits of selling these goods in Poland.[78] One could more easily hide items in one's own vehicle, parts of which could be dismantled and reinstalled in the relative privacy of a garage. Another (male) Polish worker was found with 343 silver coins hidden in the transmission shaft of his car;[79] others hid items inside door coverings or between the springs of rear seat cushions.[80] It is no accident that the aforementioned examples all involved male drivers, as car ownership was largely a male privilege at the time. According to Irek, until 1989 the Smugglers' Train was largely occupied by women, since "in Poland in the 1980s, a woman behind the wheel was an exception."[81] Car ownership was much less common in socialist Poland than in other countries anyway, and only those with access to resources and connections could obtain them. Women, who were usually pushed into lower-paid positions, were far less likely than their male counterparts to travel by car. In the shortage economies of paternalist state socialism, the most lucrative opportunities for cross-border trade were primarily a masculine preserve.

The recruitment schemes devised by GDR authorities to fill their country's labour shortage with Polish workers created specific forms of mobility. Whether one was a commuter or a contract worker largely determined how frequently one could cross the border, which means of transport were available for that purpose, and where one stayed in the GDR. Each of these variables affected what forms of smuggling were possible. Commuters could transport goods frequently, but even those who travelled by bus could only take relatively small amounts at a time, which mostly had to be carried on the body. Contract workers who travelled by train could smuggle larger items and greater quantities in one go, and in any case had much better opportunities to hide goods in the train. Workers with cars had an even greater advantage in this respect, and could also travel more frequently. Passports opened up further possibilities for travel and trade to contract workers, who were also given a place to stay—and thus to store goods—in the GDR. While the distinction between commuters and contract workers formally depended on where one lived and in what factory one was employed, in practice it depended at least as much on one's gender: commuters were overwhelmingly female, whereas contract workers were mostly male until the mid-1980s (and thereafter still more likely to be male than their commuter counterparts).

Ant smuggling

The structural differences outlined above shaped the concrete forms that smuggling took. Commuters who crossed the border on a daily basis could only carry so much, but crossing so

[78] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Dresden, StV Leiter, Nr. 30, Einschätzung zu Rechtsverletzungen, 12 July 1982, 309–313.
[79] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Dresden, Abt. VI. Nr. 7250, Abstimmungsantrag, 4 February 1988, 577.
[80] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Cottbus, AKG, Nr. 4740, Information zu Rechtsverletzungen, 10–14.
[81] Irek (1998, 24).

frequently affected how rigorously customs agents checked them. Indeed, after two Polish women who worked together at Oderfrucht in Frankfurt an der Oder were caught in March 1983 with large quantities of undeclared pepper, a GDR customs officer filed a report explaining that the women had rarely been checked at all in the past, since both were known to work in the GDR. One woman had worked at Oderfrucht for more than 10 years, and the report's author had known her for at least five, during which time she had only been checked once. Like other commuters living and working in towns divided by the post-1945 border, these two women usually crossed on foot, rarely carried much baggage, and so did not arouse suspicion.[82]

Interrogated about the 2.3-kg sack of pepper in her bag that she had failed to declare, one woman claimed she had simply found it walking across the bridge to the border crossing. According to her, tourist groups regularly abandoned excess goods there "so as not to have problems at the border. It is perhaps not nice to say it, but it's the truth."[83] Her friend, somewhat more plausibly, claimed that she had received her own 1.5-kg sack of pepper from her brigade leader as a gift after explaining to co-workers that pepper and onions were in short supply in Poland; she said she had simply forgotten to declare it because she was exhausted after working the night shift.[84] Indeed, because the women performed shift work at Oderfrucht, they crossed at varying times of day and customs agents could never tell if they were travelling privately to go shopping or just on their way to work.[85]

The report noted that customs officials on the Polish side did check the two women frequently, but usually only superficially: one woman's husband appeared to be friends with one of the Polish passport officers. Whenever East German agents asked the women questions, they usually claimed to be in a hurry because they needed "to get home to their children." The (male) officer writing the report noted that the two women were usually polite to him and his colleagues, but that "one always has the impression that it is annoying or beneath them to have a conversation with us."[86] While this assessment may have to do with the character of the individuals involved, it could also reflect the resentment of a male petty official towards women challenging his authority.

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[82] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Frankfurt/O., Abt. VI, Nr. 211, Kontrollbelege, 106 (Ergänzung zu Kontrollbelegen).
[83] The speaker is presumably referring to the feeling among many Poles that East German customs agents singled them out on the basis of nationality for more rigorous inspection. GZA Frankfurt/O., Ibid., 113 (Stellungnahme 2 March 1983). Polish tourists returning from West Berlin into the GDR were also known to abandon purchases in order to avoid problems with GDR authorities. BArch, Berlin, MfS, Sekr. Neiber, Nr. 653, Information, 2 March 1989, 88, 90.
[84] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Frankfurt/O., Abt. VI, Nr. 211, Kontrollbelege, 105 (Stellungnahme 2 Mar. 1983).
[85] Ibid., 106–108 (Ergänzung zu Kontrollbelegen).
[86] Ibid., 106–108.

Some workers used their daily commute to transport a steady stream of goods. Rozalia R. worked at a factory in Zittau, along the Polish-Czechoslovak-East German border, starting in 1974. During Martial Law in Poland, she used her privileged cross-border mobility to trade in Poland and the GDR. For a time, she seems to have done this by occasionally bringing a basket of Polish goods to work and selling the contents to East German co-workers. She then used the money to buy up East German goods that could be sold profitably on the Polish side of the border. However, when she and a co-worker were each caught bringing a dozen such baskets into the GDR within the space of two weeks in March 1982 and buying up some 600 DDM worth of textiles, GDR customs agents stopped them and held them in custody for nearly five hours. After being released, both wound up on a list of workers reported to East Germany's State Secretary for Work and Wages (*Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne*) who were to be fired under the terms of the commuter agreement.[87]

Nevertheless, Rozalia managed to stay in her job for nearly a full year thereafter, all the while continuing to carry items in both directions. This was not unusual: the procedure for firing Polish workers over customs violations depended on cooperation and consistency across multiple bureaucracies in both countries. Even when Poles were fired, some appealed the decision or simply convinced their local employment office to delegate them for work in the GDR again. In December 1982, Rozalia aroused further suspicion when an off-duty Polish customs agent overheard her discussing plans to bring East German shoes for Polish visitors who lived further inland, where they might fetch as much as 9,000 złoty—nearly a month's wages.[88] In January 1983, she was searched by a female Polish customs agent, who found three blank cassettes on her. According to an informant, Rozalia usually tried to time her trips to the GDR for when no female agents were on duty to search her.[89]

The last straw though was when Rozalia was caught by Polish (not East German) customs while carrying six electronic watches and two bath towels worth approximately 24,500 złoty in her "linens" (*w bieliźnie*).[90] On this occasion, she crossed the border on foot, claiming to be in a hurry to get to work after missing the bus. However, she had already visited the GDR the same morning and Polish customs suspected that she was only in a rush to avoid being searched. Subsequently grilled by a customs agent as to why she had engaged in smuggling, Rozalia claimed that her

[87] BArch, Berlin, DL 203/3081, Schreiben von Zollverwaltung an SAL, 26 May 1982.
[88] IPN, Wr 021/125, Notatka służbowa, 17 December 1982.
[89] IPN, Wr 021/125, Notatka służbowa, 15 March 1983.
[90] Men too sometimes smuggled items in their underwear. In 1983, Leszek S. was subjected to a body search after empty packages for watches were found in his luggage; the watches themselves were hung from a necklace, while the batteries were found "in the genital area." BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Frankfurt/O., Abt. VI, Nr. 211, Kontrollbelege, 78–79.

husband, a janitor, only earned about 10,000 złoty per month, and that the two of them together did not make enough to feed the family.[91] At the same time, she expressed dismay at being singled out for punishment, since, according to her, "hundreds" of such watches were being carried from Poland to East Germany daily: in her view, everyone was bringing goods across and she had done nothing unusual.[92] Economic need—and economic inequality between Poland and East Germany—created the conditions for "ant smuggling" by ordinary commuters to become commonplace.

An informant in the workers' hostel

Because contract workers typically did not cross the border as frequently as commuters, their places of residence in the GDR took on greater importance in shaping possibilities for trade. Stasi files offer a closer look at one men's worker hostel in Fürstenwalde, where the secret police recruited an informant (*inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*, or IM) in 1981. IM "Wladyslaw" was an East German citizen who worked at the hostel and had access to workers' rooms. Though he was recruited by the Stasi at a moment of political upheaval in Poland, he rarely delivered the information they requested about the political views of Polish workers, who tended to keep quiet for fear of losing their jobs. According to IM "Wladyslaw", "the Poles working here are not so interested in conditions in their country. They are primarily occupied with trade. Through that, they earn a very good additional income."[93]

The Polish men residing in the Fürstenwalde hostel spent their earnings in East German marks on goods, often amassing a small fortune in items that they would then take with them whenever they visited home: it was not unusual for the informant to find "20 pairs of children's shoes, 1 carton of lollipops, 1 carton of lolli-balls, 1 carton of cashew nuts, 2 packets of chewing gum" in possession of a single worker, as he did in mid-1981, or "11 cartons with 50 chocolate bars each, worth 1.00-1.20 M apiece", as he did in late 1983.[94] Indeed, the presence of *unopened* cartons of goods—which were not available off the shelf in GDR shops—presumably indicated that the Polish workers were availing themselves of direct connections to the salespeople.[95] This had certainly been the case earlier, as, for example, a Customs Office report for November 1980

[91] IPN, Wr 021/125, Notatka służbowa, 30 March 1983.
[92] IPN, Wr 021/125, Notatka służbowa, 20 June 1983.
[93] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Frankfurt/O KD Fürstenwalde V 107/81, Bd. 2, IM "Wladyslaw", 103–106 (Treffbericht 22 Nov. 1982)
[94] Ibid., 30–32, 140–42 (Treffberichte 13 Jun. 1981 and 22 Nov. 1983).
[95] Ibid., 121–3, 197–8 (Treffberichte 1 Jun. 1983 and 10 Okt. 1985).

mentioned two saleswomen who sold some 19,000 DDM *in Polish goods* over the counter in their shops.[96]

According to IM "Wladyslaw", the stored items would usually disappear from the men's rooms when they took a trip home. Not everyone waited for their annual vacation or even for the weekend to go: for example, the informant found "large amounts of Trink-Fix, Zigarillo, chocolate and bubble gum" in the room of two workers who "travel nearly every second day to Poland."[97] This may have been because they came from a nearby area (since borderland residents too could be recruited as contract workers instead of commuters, especially by heavy industry firms that wanted male workers). However, IM "Wladyslaw" later came to suspect that workers traveled only as far as the Polish border, where they either left the goods temporarily or sent them on to family members elsewhere.[98]

To purchase goods in the GDR, Polish workers obtained cash not only through their official employment, but also through the sale of goods brought back from Poland: some items, such as Polish porcelain sets or Quartz watches from Hong Kong (obtained in Poland or in West Berlin),[99] waxed and waned in popularity or supply, but jewellery and clothing, especially jeans, were popular among East Germans throughout the 1980s. The workers' hostel itself frequently functioned as a point of sale, and IM "Wladyslaw" noted repeated visits by East German youth, Soviet citizens, and foreign workers who came to the hostel to buy jeans, sell rings, or otherwise trade goods with hostel residents.[100] The informant himself purchased wallpaper, a watch, and spare auto parts for his Trabant from Polish workers.[101] While such items were usually purchased cheaply in Poland and then sold at many times the cost in the GDR, some could be had for "normal" prices, even though they were in short supply in East Germany: according to IM "Wladyslaw", the profit was made in these instances through currency exchange.[102]

Workers with access to cars were among the most active traders at the hostel where IM "Wladyslaw" worked. Indeed, on numerous occasions, the informant reported that "all those who have a car are involved in trade."[103] Logically, cars were used to transport ordinary goods like sweets and shoes back to Poland in larger quantities than would be possible in a suitcase. However, car

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[96] BArch, Berlin, DL 203/3082, Information über Maßnahmen zur Zurückdrängung…, 12 December 1980.
[97] BArch, Berlin, MfS, BV Frankfurt/O KD Fürstenwalde V 107/81, Bd. 2, IM "Wladyslaw", 30–32 (Treffbericht 13 Jun. 1981).
[98]Ibid., 313–315 (Treffbericht 12 Jan. 1989).
[99] Ibid., 30–32, 44–45 (Treffberichte 13 Jun. 1981 and 8 Aug. 1981).
[100] See, for example, Ibid., 9–12, 162–164 (Treffbericht 20 Apr. 1981 and 30 May 1984).
[101] Ibid., 5–8, 44–45, 118–119 (Treffberichte 1.4.1981, 8.8.1981, 19.5.1983).
[102] Ibid., 323–325 (Treffbericht 1.6.1983)
[103] See for example Ibid., 146–147 (Treffbericht 18.1.1984).

parts themselves, especially car radios, were among the more lucrative items that could be sold for speculative profit in East Germany. Cassette decks designed by the West German company Grundig were manufactured under licence in Poland, where they could be bought for the equivalent of 100 DDM and installed into one's own car. After driving over the border into East Germany, a worker could then remove the radio and sell it for seven times the price.[104] Cars themselves were, of course, also traded. Antoni K., who lived for a time in the hostel in Fürstenwalde where IM "Wladyslaw" worked, owned a Fiat (also produced under licence in Poland), which he traded up for a used Mercedes in 1982 before selling that in turn to obtain a Wartburg and surplus cash in 1984.[105]

For some Poles like Antoni K., work in East Germany opened up possibilities for further travel. While in Fürstenwalde, K. met and fell in love with a GDR citizen. Marrying her gave him permanent residency abroad, enabling him to obtain a "consular" passport (issued by the embassy instead of the passport office) with worldwide validity.[106] IM "Wladyslaw" lost track of K. for several months and reported rumours that he had been imprisoned after trouble with East German authorities.[107] However, K. may have spent that time in West Berlin or in West Germany, for which a three-month visa could be obtained with minimal effort.[108] Many Poles worked short stints there to obtain West German currency, which then flowed into the circuits of exchange they had built up in East Germany and Poland. A GDR job contract provided Poles with work experience, privileged mobility, and networks that could outlast their stay in the country. Former contract workers continued to stop by the worker hostel in Fürstenwalde on drives to and from home, meeting friends and family members who (like K.'s brother) still worked there.[109] When the Polish supervisor in Fürstenwalde decided to leave East Germany for a time, K. helped him find work in West Berlin.[110] The latter became a "Mecca"[111] to which workers, tourists, and others flocked after Poland liberalised its passport rules in early 1989, leading to an explosion of East-West trade. Though much of that trade was conducted by tourists, Polish workers in the GDR often facilitated it, such as by buying tickets for the overbooked "Smugglers' Train".[112] But those with cars didn't

[104] Ibid., 44–45, 103–106 (Treffberichte 8.8.1981 und 22.11.1982).
[105] Ibid., 99–101, 159–161 (Treffberichte 25.5.1982 und 26.4.1984).
[106] Ibid., 99-101, 111-113 (Treffbericht 25.5.1982 und 14.1.1983).
[107] Ibid., 155–164 (Treffberichte 31.3.1984, 26.4.1984, 30.5.1984).
[108] Ibid., 18–25, 208-209 (Treffbericht 5.5.1981 und 26.3.1986).
[109] See, for example, Ibid., 51–52 (Treffbericht 23.9.1981).
[110] Ibid., 208–209 (Treffbericht 26.3.1986)
[111] Irek (1998, 22).
[112] Ibid. (30).

have to wait: they simply drove to West Berlin, where Polish vehicles allegedly filled up eight full lanes of traffic at the border crossing.[113]

Conclusion

Cross-border consumption became a significant phenomenon for socialist states starting in the 1970s, when Poland and East Germany opened their "border of friendship" to passport- and visa-free travel. However, their planned economies remained only weakly coordinated across borders, and GDR authorities in particular regarded uncontrolled exchange by regular citizens as a threat to domestic supplies—even when, in practice, both Polish and East German citizens relied on cross-border trade to obtain scarce goods. By the 1980s, the GDR had implemented numerous export controls to limit the circulation of certain goods (especially subsidized ones), including many items of everyday use. This criminalized cross-border consumption in ways that particularly affected women, who bore the greater burden when it came to shopping for household supplies. Polish workers in East Germany enjoyed privileged cross-border mobility that allowed them to continue both legal and illegal consumption of GDR goods when other Poles generally could not even travel abroad. However, work in East Germany and the specific arrangements tied to it were substantially structured by gender.

Women constituted the overwhelming majority of Polish commuters working in the GDR, the result of a deliberate choice by the regional and national authorities that initiated this recruitment scheme. Contract workers, by contrast, were more of a mix of men and women, though their numbers initially skewed heavily towards men and the scheme was long relied upon by male-dominated industries. This suggests that the contract worker scheme may have been designed with an assumed male worker in mind. Regardless of planners' intentions though, the reality that these schemes produced was one in which women and men, in the aggregate, were granted different cross-border mobilities, which in turn created different possibilities for what their consumption—criminalized as smuggling—might look like.

The arrangements for commuters effectively placed them in a position where small-scale "ant smuggling" was usually their best, and in some cases only, option for transporting contraband: crossing the border frequently but on foot or by bus, they carried limited quantities of goods mostly on their person. In this sense, women's smuggling activities under state socialism in 1980s East-Central Europe seems to have resembled smuggling by women in other contexts, including post-socialist Europe and contemporary Latin America and Africa. Contract workers, on the other hand, had additional possibilities owing to their housing in East Germany, which could be used to store

[113] *Der Tagesspiegel* (26 February 1989).

goods for transport, and the fact that they traveled home by train or by car—both of which allowed smugglers to carry far larger quantities of goods than on foot or by bus. Significantly, it was overwhelmingly men who had access to automobiles, which generated the most lucrative opportunities for individual smugglers.

To be sure, there were also thousands of women employed as contract workers who would have enjoyed the same advantages of mobility afforded to men through this recruitment scheme. Furthermore, Polish commuters and contract workers in East Germany had much in common, including the consumption-related benefits both groups shared: they received some or all of their pay in East German currency, had access to secondary distribution channels at work, and enjoyed more generous customs allowances than other Poles. This placed them in a central position within the networks of Polish traders that developed over time and which grew to encompass the far more numerous tourists who simply passed through East Germany on their way to West Berlin. The mobilities of tourists and other groups also appear to have been gendered,[114] but they were constructed in different ways.

Yet an examination of only the subset of smugglers formed by cross-border workers illustrates the ways in which gendered structures and normative assumptions made themselves felt in terms of mobility, even when the labour agreements shaping that mobility were formally open to both men and women. The gender inequalities of society were not suspended even in situations where people engaged in "deviant", non-normative behaviours such as smuggling. Smuggling itself did not have a gender, but which opportunities one had to engage in it depended in no small part on whether one was female or male.

[114] Irek discusses at length the case of cleaning ladies (1998, 62–102).

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Abstract

Faced with problems of shortage on both sides of their shared border, East Germany and Poland imposed export bans and travel restrictions in the 1980s that criminalised as "smuggling" the cross-border circulation of even ordinary household goods. In this context, Polish workers employed in East German factories were among the few groups able to consume and trade across borders consistently throughout the decade. However, female and male workers had different mobilities owing to the gendered structure of separate labour recruitment schemes for commuters and for contract workers. These laid out different conditions for border-crossing, transportation, and

housing that also affected smuggling possibilities, making women more likely to engage in small-scale "ant smuggling" while preserving more lucrative options for men, especially those with access to cars. The article thus argues that smuggling itself was neither masculine nor feminine, but individuals' opportunities to engage in it nevertheless depended greatly on gender.