

and Ukrainian musical identities after 2014 brought about yet another revision in the meaning of “the post-Soviet” itself.

Catherine Baker
University of Hull

Irina Mukhina, *Women and the Birth of Russian Capitalism: A History of Shuttle Trade*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2014. 224 pp.

Women and the Birth of Russian Capitalism: A History of Shuttle Trade offers a rare glimpse into a unique moment in the history of the transition from communism to capitalism by focusing on the evolution of female shuttle traders and the significant role they played in the formation of contemporary Russia. Shuttle traders are individuals who traveled abroad during the transition period and brought back bags of consumer goods for resale in local markets (4). Due to import restrictions, the traders were limited to the amount of goods they could wear and/or carry which is why monuments around Russia erected to the largely female based labor force depict women carrying heavy suitcases and wearing heavy clothing. Irina Mukhina’s slender volume uncovers the impact of this trade during the transition period, an influence unbeknown to most due to the semi-legal and black-market driven labor practices and the commodities it provided consumers.

While the book focuses mostly on trade in and out of Russia, many of the trading themes in the book were common across the entire post-Soviet region as economies expanded due to the lifting of visa and trade restrictions in the late 1980s. Mukhina divides the shuttle trade into three distinct waves with different characteristics and overarching goals. Push and pull factors of this temporary form of migration are prevalent during every time period pushing people towards this semi-legal industry and pulling them abroad to purchase goods. The first period from 1987–88 included a small number of traders who traveled abroad before it was legal and were able to do so because of their job or privileged status in the communist party. Since hard currency was difficult to obtain, this

period was also characterized by the bartering of goods and resultantly had minimal profits for the traders who usually traded to supplement their income. The second period from 1989–90, was characterized by economic shortages and a lifting of travel restrictions which led to an expansion of the shuttle trade. From these conditions, the shuttle trade evolved from supplementing incomes to providing the main income source to a new and emerging group of people with entrepreneurial tendencies. The commodities traded also transformed from cigarettes, cosmetics, and electronics in the first period to gold, antiques, and spare car parts with hard currency rather than bartering facilitating the transactions. The third “Golden Age” of the shuttle trade, as categorized by Mukhina, was from 1991–1998, opening with the downfall of the Soviet government and concluding with the collapse of the Russian ruble that made trading abroad unprofitable. The golden age was characterized by the decline of living standards and extinction of social safety nets provided in the earlier periods which laid the groundwork for the explosion of the shuttle trade (45). According to the book, approximately 30 million people or 41 percent of the Russian workforce was involved in some aspect of the shuttle trade by the mid-1990s (50). This demonstrates the significant role that this profession had on the trade in consumer goods and the economy of Russia during this period and also reveals why there are statues commemorating these traders, despite their reputation in Russian society as opportunists and schemers.

The book begins with an examination of the origins of the shuttle trade and many of the economic and political events that made it possible, including an impressive array of economic data from the late Soviet period. Chapter Two explores the elements of the trade and its global scope from Korea, China, Turkey, and Eastern Europe, highlighting the most profitable routes for traders and the types of commodities traded. Governmental regulation of the trade opened the floodgates for corruption with border guards, bus drivers, train conductors, and the exploitation of the mostly female traders from the mafia and criminal enterprises. Gender stereotypes led more women to get involved with the trade as women were the first to be dismissed in the transition and sources estimated that women traders constituted 70–80 percent of the

traders. Chapter Three more closely revealed the demographics of traders (age, education level, birthplace, and employment status), reasons for entering the trade, and the economic and material aspects of the trade. Chapter Four explores the different repercussions from the harsh working conditions in shuttle trade such as theft, assault, substance abuse, infidelity, abortions, child abandonment, and permanent joint damage due to lifting heavy cargo. Some of the causal links between these problems and the shuttle trade are difficult leaps to prove but it is clear that this industry supplied Russia with many of its consumer goods while at the same time the social problems list above prevailed. Many of the gendered labor aspects in the volume are very representative of the issues with female based migration. The author also presents a number of assumptions, such as, women were better suited for the trade compared to men or for women traders meeting a foreign in the trade was dream come true (119), that were not supported by sources or interviews leaving them more descriptive than definitive.

The author uses archival data from newspapers, a variety of secondary sources, public opinion data, and oral history interviews in Moscow, Khabarovsk, and Krasnodar. The methods section is underdeveloped as the recruitment of interview subjects and execution of the interviews was somewhat vague. The author states that number of formal interviews were limited (13) and the sample size of respondents was also unclear, a few of the graphs state that the $N=311$ but it is unclear if all these subjects were interviewed by the author. Additionally, the footnotes explaining the interviews were vague with no location or date and no standard questionnaire for the interview mechanism was included in the book. There are many pictures and excellent illustrations that elucidate the themes presented in the book and the only thing missing was a map showing the existent and most prosperous routes that could have visualized the trade. Many of these shortcomings are stylistic, overall, the book was thoroughly researched and well written and it would be of interest to historians as well as scholars interested in the economic and political transition, migration, and gender.

Laura A. Dean

Clayton State University