

## **The role of food in the Polish migrant adjustment journey**

## **Abstract**

In 2015, there were 916,000 Poles living in the UK, making them the largest group of non-UK nationals at 16.5 percent of the population. Though increasingly research has focused on the consequences of this migration for both migrants themselves and the receiving country, little research has looked at food habits. This paper will explore the role of food in the Polish migrant adjustment journey. A qualitative approach was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with nine Polish migrants.

In this study, Polish migrants described the move to a new culture as a time of stress and loneliness. Due to a lack of money, they were forced to eat local food, which exacerbated their unease, as they found it to be tasteless and unhealthy. As soon as their financial situation improved, they reverted to a Polish diet, relying on ingredients brought from home, from London, or more recently, purchased from local Polish shops. This gave them comfort, and all participants acknowledged the vital role of food in their adjustment to life in a new culture.

## **Key words**

Polish migrants UK food adjustment

## **Introduction**

On May 1 2004, Poland joined the European Union together with seven other eastern European countries. The 2004 UK census recorded 69,000 Poles, which rose to 916,000 in 2015, making the Poles the largest group of non-UK nationals at 16.5 percent (Annual Population Survey, ONS, 2015), and constituting one of the largest migration movements in contemporary Europe. Records for the Accession Monitoring Report (Home Office, 2009) show that between 1 May 2004 and 31 March 2009, the highest proportion of approved applicants to the UK Workers Registration Scheme was from Poland (66% of the total 965,000), which means that over half a million Polish migrants registered to work in the United Kingdom. The Statistical Bulletin issued by the Department for Work and Pensions (2015) shows that in 2014 the total number of National Insurance Number registrations was 768,000, an increase of 23% on 2013. According to the Migration Observatory (MO, 2016), the Polish-born population in the UK is widely spread across the UK, although London accommodates over 390,150 Polish-born residents (4.59% of London's population). The Midlands meanwhile is noted for hosting many industries that provide employment to about 102,473 Polish migrants, while Scotland accommodates 75,231 Poles (MO, 2015). Polish migrants to the UK are aged mainly between 20 and 24; this contrasts with the older cohorts aged 25-29 and 30-34, who tend to go to the Western European countries such as Germany (Department for Work and Pensions, 2015).

Research on Polish migrants has grown significantly over the last few years, covering a variety of topics related to the way Poles have negotiated their lives following transition to the UK. Research has focused on the social interaction patterns of Polish migrants, with Garapich (2007) and Ryan (2010) exploring social networks, and Ryan et al. (2008) and White and Ryan (2008) examining links between the origin and host country. The structure of the Polish community in the UK has been investigated by numerous authors (Brown, 2003; Spencer et al., 2007; Garapich 2007; White & Ryan, 2008; Temple and Koterba 2009). Meanwhile Rabikowska (2010) has considered the importance of traditional food to migrants, whilst Rabikowska and Burrell (2009) have explored the proliferation of Polish shops in British cities. Identity issues have been the subject of research (Kosic 2006; Eade et al. 2006; Kempny 2010; Egger 2011), related to which are studies of church attendance (Burrell, 2006), economic income and status (Eade and Grapich 2007; Bobek & Salamonska, 2008;

Nowicka 2012), and language difficulties (Janta et al., 2012; Lyon & Sulcova, 2009). Finally, the extent of Polish migrant integration with the host community and other ethnic groups has been the subject of research attention (Burrell 2009; Datta and Brickell 2009; Ryan 2010; Nowicka 2012; Nowicka 2014).

This paper will explore the role of food in the Polish migrant adjustment journey. A literature search shows that there is a gap in knowledge on the role of food in the Polish migration experience. As Locher et al. (2005) point out, food and emotions are interlinked, therefore it is to be expected that it will occupy an important role in the migrant adjustment process.

## **The Adjustment Journey**

Migration is a global phenomenon. Between 2010 and 2013, around 1.4 million non-EU nationals, excluding asylum seekers and refugees, immigrated into the EU each year (Eurostat, 2015). In the United Kingdom, the number of migrants reached 7,550,000 in 2011 (ONS, 2013). According to the UNPD (United Nations Population Division, 2015), an international migrant is someone who has been living for at least one year in a country other than the one, in which they were born. Moving to a new cultural environment is one of the most traumatic events an individual can experience, provoking some degree of culture shock (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Culture shock is defined as anxiety that results from losing the familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse, and their substitution by other cues that are strange (Hall, 1959). It is likened by many writers to a period of mourning for the home world, characterised by feelings of grief and separation anxiety (Garza-Guerrero, 1974). The severity and duration of difficulties experienced during this period is influenced by many factors including personality, purpose of visit and cultural distance (Hofstede, 2001; Sulkovski and Deakin 2009).

There is limited consensus and clarity as to what adjustment means, as the construct has been described and measured in varying ways and from several perspectives and various models have been put forward. Once arrived in the new culture, migrants are faced with several acculturation strategies. According to Berry (1997, p. 31), acculturation is: *'the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or*

*more cultural groups and their individual members.*' Berry offers a fourfold model of acculturation distinguishing four adjustment approaches, namely: *assimilation* - rejecting the legacy of the old culture and adopting the new culture; *segregation* - maintaining ethnic identity, heritage, and traditions; *integration* - adopting certain aspects of the new culture, while maintaining some cultural identity; *marginalization* - rejection of heritage and refusal of an association with the leading group. An additional strategy is that of *multiculturalism*, which implies the willingness of all cultural groups to be accepting, tolerant and accommodating of other cultures and, at the same time, preserving their own ethnic identity. Brown & Holloway (2008) emphasise that that no one model can accurately describe or predict the adjustment journey, which is experienced differently according to a host of individual, environmental and cultural factors. In addition, it is important to note that migrants may adopt different strategies in differing parts of their life.

## **Food and adjustment**

Anthropologists highlight the role of food in group identity (see Toussaint-Samat, 2008; Tannahil, 2008), with food habits being ingrained in group members during the process of socialisation (Fieldhouse, 1995). Food habits represent a central element of culture: overall they are stable, enduring and resistant to change (Hall, 1995; Finkelstein 1999). The move to a new culture however may alter or challenge dietary practices (Edwards et al. 2010). There may be a tendency among migrants towards food neophobia, defined as the rejection of foods that are novel or unknown (Dovey et al., 2008). Rogers et al. (2009) qualify this definition by stating that openness to change is more common in industrialized countries and among the higher socioeconomic groups of a society. Nevertheless, some change may be inevitable, at least in the early stages of transition to a new culture (Brown 2009).

Changing food habits has been linked however with negative health effects among migrants. Research has shown that migrants are unlikely to be overweight or obese upon arrival in a western country, but that they slowly converge to native-born levels over time (McDonald & Kennedy, 2005). This is supported by Rabikowska (2010) who observes a link in Polish migrants between eating British food and gaining weight gain. A higher incidence of obesity and diabetes among migrants has been associated with an increased consumption of Western style food (Burns, 2004; Gordon-Larse et al., 2003; Kedia, 2004; Saleh et al., 2002).

Researchers have also focused on changes in diet among the growing number of international students worldwide, and a similar association between weight gain and the adoption of a western diet has been made (Pan et al. 1999; Brown et al., 2009; Edwards et al., 2010).

There is a relationship between diet and adjustment level, according to McDonald & Kennedy (2005) who found that Hispanics with higher levels of acculturation ate less fruits and vegetables than those with lower acculturation levels. Fat usage was also different; the less adapted used less fat and oil products when preparing food than non-Hispanic highly adapted peers. Ayala et al. (2008) also note that the health of Latinos' diet deteriorates during the acculturation process. Meanwhile, a reduction in the number of meals eaten has also been observed: Pakistani and Sri-Lanka migrants to Norway reduced their consumption of three daily hot meals to one-and-a-half, to meet the host country rules, mainly due to work pattern changes but also the type of weather (Wandel et al., 2008). Pérez-Escamilla (2009) asks a pertinent question then: does acculturation make people sick?

Returning to the focus of the current study, Burrell (2009) states that Poles in the UK integrate quickly and successfully into British society and include British citizens in their social networks. This does not imply that Polish migrants assimilate into British culture and give up their Polish identity, however. Indeed, offering support for the claim that dietary habits are highly resistant to change (Finkelstein 1999), Burrell (2009) and Sklepynawyspach (2016) observe that Polish migration has been accompanied by a rapid proliferation of Polish food shops, delis and cafes on British streets. Rabikowska and Burrell (2009) use such evidence to indicate the important role that food plays in maintaining emotional links with home. In her ethnographic study of Polish migrants in London, Rabikowska (2010) notes that the act of preparing and consuming Polish food bolsters a sense of collective identity at the same time as denoting a distinction and a distance from the host culture. Food, according to Rabikowska, allows a migrant to feel belonging with the culture they left behind. Particularly important to Polish migrants are food objects from home which evoke nostalgia such as traditional sweets. As Rabikowska notes, Polish shops allow Polish migrants in the UK to buy traditional foodstuffs, which is vital to their ability to replicate traditional dishes. Rabikowska also indicates the importance of food parcels sent from home, and the food items that 'dominate in the hand luggage on the cheap flights between the UK and Poland' (p. 389).

## **Methodology**

The aim of this study was to explore the role of diet in the adjustment process of Polish migrants. A qualitative approach was adopted because it was felt that only in conversation would participants be able to fully express their relationship with the food that they choose to eat. A quantitative approach could capture the food eaten every day, the cost of such food, and the interaction surrounding food consumption but it could not access the meanings associated with food choices, and the emotional reactions to the food available locally. As Locher et al. (2005) point out, food and emotion are strongly intertwined, and as Warren and Hackney (2000) note, only the qualitative approach can adequately explore issues of emotion and identity.

Face-to-face interviews were selected as the method of data collection, the intimacy of which would help participants to feel comfortable and encourage them to be open (Mason, 2002), particularly as the interviewer (the second author) is a Polish migrant. Access to the Polish migrant network was facilitated by the interviewer's own status as a Polish migrant, and by familiarity with Polish culture as well as with the adjustment journey that many of the participants followed. During times of stress, the interviewer had found that traditional Polish food enjoyed with her son was the only factor that helped her to survive. Remembrance of home, family and friends helped to overcome this critical phase. Being interviewed by a fellow Pole who had undergone a similar journey could reassure participants of the interviewer's empathy and would help to instil trust. As Jones, et al. (2013) observe, gaining access to and building rapport with participants are vital processes in obtaining high quality data. According to Fylan (2005, p 65) 'interviewing is one of the most enjoyable and interesting ways of collecting data', and indeed, many participants commented that they had enjoyed the interview experience and the opportunity for reflection that it afforded them.

A semi-structured interview format was chosen and an interview guide was prepared with questions focusing on the migration and adaptation experience and on food habits in both Poland and England. Sections 1 and 2 of the interview focused on demographic information and food habits in Poland; sections 3 and 4 explored participants' feelings upon arrival in the UK, as well as their eating and shopping habits, and how these have changed.

A sample of nine Polish immigrants was interviewed, purposively chosen to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Male and female,
- Different levels of education and background,
- Adults with the ability to make their own choices concerning food, cooking and shopping habits,
- Originating from different regions of Poland,
- With and without children.

The above criteria were identified in order that a range of experiences might be captured: men and women might experience the move to a new culture in different ways; being a parent might influence food choice, as might education and status; where participants came from in Poland might influence the extent of their exposure to various cuisines and therefore their openness to new food. Finally, it was important that participants should be adult and in a position of independence regarding food and shopping habits. A snowball sampling technique was used. Participants were recommended by friends and acquaintances in the interviewer's social network.

The topic was communicated to participants ahead of the interview and the interviewer made it clear that data were to be used for research, that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw at any time. All participants gave their written permission for both being involved in the research and for being recorded during interviews. A participant profile is presented below; pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality (Jones et al. 2013).

## Participant profile

Name	Gender	Age	Years In the UK	Education level	Place of residence in Poland	Occupation Poland/UK
<b>Dorota</b>	Female	26	2	PL Bachelor degree	Jastrzebie	English teacher/curtain maker
<b>Irena</b>	Female	33	9	PL Bachelor Degree	Cracow	Receptionist/factory worker
<b>Aleks</b>	Female	37	15	College /no A-level	Zary	Office clerk/own company
<b>Teresa</b>	Female	47	10	PL Master degree	Szczecin	Pharmacist/pharmacist
<b>Jan</b>	Male	46	10	Trade college	Village near Warsaw	Electrician/Electrician
<b>Piotr</b>	Male	25	9	UK master degree	Szczecin	pupil/civil engineer
<b>Adam</b>	Male	29	10	College/A-level	Zary	Student/own company
<b>Andrzej</b>	Male	28	8	Trade High School	PL/German border town	Student/electronic engineer
<b>Krzysztof</b>	Male	33	8	PL master degree	Village near Olsztyn	IT support/maintenance engineer

When conducting the interviews, participants elected to use both English and Polish. Participants were comfortable and adept in speaking English, as they had been in England for

quite some time, apart from Dorota, who is in any case an English teacher. However, they occasionally reverted to Polish for vocabulary whose equivalence couldn't be found in English. This was the choice that participants made, and given that the interviewer is fluent in both languages, she acquiesced to their request. The interviewer left the choice of setting to the participants so that they could choose what would be for them the most relaxing and comfortable environment (O'Reilly, 2005). Interviews lasted between 22 and 47 minutes.

Data were subject to thematic analysis, involving four stages: organising, ordering, and storing the data; listening to and reading collected data repeatedly; transcribing materials; coding and categorising; building themes (Jones et al. 2013). When transcribing the data, and presenting the quotations in the following section, the language of the participants has not been amended: any small errors in grammar or vocabulary are preserved, and these help to add to the authenticity of the study. In keeping with inductive qualitative research, a dialogue with the relevant literature is held within the thematically-led sections of the Findings part of the paper.

## **Findings**

As the above profile shows, participants were from the central and western part of Poland, from the big cities of Cracow or Szczecin and the small towns or villages of Jastrzebie and Zary. Their education level varied from A-level equivalent to Bachelor and Master degrees obtained either in Poland or England. The youngest participant was a 26-year-old man and the oldest a 48-year-old woman. Participants came to the UK between 2005 and 2007, excluding Aleks who came in 2000 and Dorota who came in 2014. Before arrival in the UK, all spoke only basic English except for Dorota, who was an English teacher in Poland, and Teresa who had the Cambridge English: First qualification. Everyone was motivated to migrate for financial reasons.

## **Food habits in Poland**

Although they came from different parts of Poland, participants' eating and shopping habits when in Poland were very similar (only one participant, Krzysztof, came from a village and he had moved to a city to study before moving to the UK). Traditionally Poles eat three times a day, a practice that would not change following migration, as Dorota (26) expressed:

*Three meals per day: breakfast, dinner and supper. We tried to eat at least one meal together, usually dinner during the week. It was better over the weekends. Sometimes we ate all three meals together. Time was more or less fixed.*

These were hot meals, almost universally consumed at home, as confirmed by the Public Opinion Research Centre for Poland (PORC 2014). Participants ate most of the time with family, and all the meals were freshly made, and mostly by mothers:

*I was banned actually cooking at home, yeah by my mother. She didn't like anyone walking around the kitchen. She was a queen of the kitchen.* Andrzej (28)

*In Poland, we always tried to cook dinner every day. I think because of the tradition. I don't know. That was the way it was.* Aleks (37)

Eating out was rare, due to cost, and if undertaken, it was '*usually in Polish restaurants*' '*where there is Polish, good food*'. Restaurants offering different cuisines were sometimes tried, but there was not much enthusiasm, as Dorota (26) said:

*I tried ethnic restaurants like Chinese but they are disgusting for me.*

Adam declared that he '*was not interested in ethnic restaurants*' and '*bought fast foods but only occasionally like once per 6 months, as an emergency only*'. This study's findings corroborate previous research which states that 66% of Poles do not eat fast foods or dine in restaurants (PORC 2014)

All participants stated that they used to shop in small local shops for '*chiefly raw products*' or at markets for '*fresh things like vegetables or eggs*' and in big supermarkets, but '*nothing ready to warm in microwave or so.*' (Alex). This study again reflects the above-mentioned

research by PORC (2014), showing a correspondence between the buying habits of the chosen sample and those of the wider Polish population. The study by Rabikowska and Burrell (2009) on Polish migrant shopping habits also reflects this phenomenon.

## **Leaving home behind**

This section considers the impact of migration on participants' well-being, which as will be shown, held implications for the way they would view the food they ate.

*I felt really bad and depressed because I was alone without my family and friends. I had problems with finding proper work at a very beginning. Besides I didn't have enough money to buy and cook proper meals. So, my beginnings were very, very difficult here. What is more, everything was different: buses, roads, people, customs, everything, even the weather. You know altogether it was very depressing for me.*

Dorota (26)

Dorothy's experience typifies that of most of the participants upon arrival in the UK, with this period being variously described as *weird*, *scary*, *difficult* and *challenging*. Most of the participants were alone and had never been to the UK before. They reported struggling with loneliness and nostalgia, missing family and friends in Poland. Even Teresa (47) who had a job waiting for her stated:

*Oh, I was very sad. I felt isolated because I didn't have any friends around me. I left my family in Poland and that didn't help either. That was a problem.*

Two factors further aggravated their situation: the language barrier and participants' new status. According to Hofstede (2001), the higher the level of host language fluency, the greater the chance of acceptance and integration. Indeed, the lack of communicative ability was cited frequently as a stressful factor by participants. It caused not only difficulties with day to day life like finding a job, but also a loss of self-esteem, anger and isolation. This echoes Janta et al.'s (2011) study of migrants' relationships in tourism. Potential employers often celebrate Polish workers 'work ethic' but cite their language skills as a problem.

A new status was also discomfiting, as Dorota (26) explained:

*I used to work as an English teacher (talks with pride) and suddenly I had to work as a cleaner (her voice changed; she seems to be annoyed and surprised), so it was depressing.*

Participants complained that they were forced to undertake jobs below their qualifications and usually as physical labourers. Similar results were presented in Janta et al.'s (2011) study, which found a link between low status in the host country and lowered self-esteem.

Participants found themselves overwhelmed with sadness and persistently fighting a depressive mood, often exacerbated by the poor weather conditions, as Andrzej's (28) comment illustrates:

*I was surprised about length of the day actually. I thought the day would be a way shorter as we are closer to the North Pole. It wasn't. I was well surprised about the weather, forgive me a stereotype but I was expecting fog. Rain actually broke me: rain, rain and rain all the time! Winter was awful, days was shorter, it was wet all around and windy!*

Despite the hardships participants faced during transition, all were determined to stay in England. When participants felt overwhelmed, they sought support and consolation from family and friends in Poland.

*I could talk and see my family on Skype or Facebook. That was very helpful.*

Dorota (26)

*We live in a very good age of internet so I still could communicate with my friends. They helped me a lot adjusting to a new environment.*

Piotr (25)

Despite their poor English in the beginning, all reported finding employment quickly and even though these first jobs didn't meet their expectations, the money was important because it allowed them to revert to a Polish diet.

*Well, when I had more money, I could again cook. I could afford to buy food in Polish shop and my meals looked more familiar, like in Poland.* Dorota

*I was excited; it was something new when I got my first salary that was great. I was happy at some stage and I decided to stay. Two months later my daughter arrived with my girlfriend; by this time, I had my own place as I left bed and breakfast. It was like starting a new home.* Teresa (47)

Self-esteem and confidence were growing. Participants believed themselves to be *important again, you know, I wasn't invisible anymore; I felt normal again* (Aleks). Reflecting the widespread reference to chain migration among Poles (White and Ryan, 2008), Aleks brought her mother, whilst Teresa brought the whole family (her husband and two children), and Andrzej persuaded his girl-friend to join him in England. Nevertheless, there was variation in the sample about happiness level, with Krzysztof and Irena still feeling strained and isolated years later. Rabikowska (2010) similarly indicated a high degree of isolation among Polish migrants in the UK, but this is not supported by Burrell (2009) who indicates that Poles integrate well into British society.

### **Local food: tasteless and unhealthy**

None of the participants had eaten English food before coming to the UK but were forced to eat it at the beginning of their sojourn in England due to financial constraints:

*I don't like English food really but it was cheap back then - we had to buy it and had to eat it. It was just basic food really, cheap from Tesco. You know, we couldn't choose like organic stuff. There was not enough money.* Krzysztof (33)

*Oh, very cheap food. All the time fish and chips - I smell it everywhere. When it was really poor at home, when we had nothing to eat, we eat chips, always fish and chips on Friday.* Irena (33)

*I remember the time when we came, we had no money so we were depending on cheap products in Tesco or ASDA and that's not very healthy at all.* Aleks (37)

The response to English food was unanimously negative:

*I have tried it and I don't like the taste!* Adam (29)

*I tried many times English pies and I didn't like it. I thought it was horrible and dodgy. Not my kind of thing. I haven't touched that sort of stuff!* Andrzej (28)

*I am not a big fan of English food.* Teresa (47)

*At the beginning, well we wanted to try English food anyway, so we tried most of the things from the shops like sliced meat for sandwiches or even English bread or things like Scottish eggs or pastries. I didn't like them really.* Krzysztof (33)

This study therefore echoes findings from other studies of responses to English food (see Jamal 1998 and Brown et al. 2010). Recurrent phrases found in the transcripts include the following:

*Unhealthy, tasteless, I did not enjoy it; I didn't like them really; I don't like its taste and look, they don't use any spices; It is too plain for me; It doesn't look nice; It is not my taste; There is nothing special in English food; It doesn't have enough flavour; It's not very entertaining; It looks the same; It's kind of boring and plain.*

This study offers two explanations for these reactions. First, food shock: Polish food culture is very different from the English (Rabikowska 2010). Indeed, Brown (2009) uses cultural distance theory to help understand sojourners' aversion to host country food. The second explanation is that the rejection of English food created the opportunity and justification to follow a Polish diet. Food was the only aspect of the new life that participants could reject without being perceived as impolite or ungrateful; it is the only aspect they could control.

Moreover, most participants reported gaining weight during the initial period of their sojourn, which only deepened their aversion:

*After a year, I was like really big!* Irena (33)

*Yes, I gained 20 pounds on. That was the biggest effect.*

Andrzej (28)

*Yes, I gain pounds. When I came here I used to work in Tesco and I started to eat English breakfast which I believe is packed with calories, the daily allowance only for breakfast! It's a fat dish that's why I believe I gain weight.*

Adam (29)

Participants did not associate overweight with a higher food intake but with *cheap English food* and a shortage of funds for *proper Polish cooking*. Rabikowska's study (2010) found that Polish migrants gradually meet native-born levels of obesity following transition. Our study goes further by showing that such weight was lost again by *resigning from English food and coming back to Polish food*. This was explained by Adam:

*When I realised I was gaining weight, I stopped eating there and started to prepare my own meals.*

The return to Polish food products took place as soon as participants' financial situation improved; once they had a job, and enough money to buy the Polish food they preferred. None of them tried to buy better quality, and therefore more expensive, English products. Perhaps this is because home country food was not only perceived to be healthy, but it was also comforting, helping them to cope with the difficulties they faced in England.

As well as being fattening, English food was also perceived to be unhealthy, a significant reason for its eventual avoidance:

*English foods usually require way more oil or saturated fats to cook. I would not deep fry my food every single day like my English friends did.*

Piotr (25)

*I found that English food contains a lot of unhealthy oils and it is processed in a wrong way. It has many additional chemicals. It did not affect me but I know many people who were I believe affected because of the diet change they've done. They have problems with intestines. I read about that and know that it is especially attached to the UK and couple of other developed countries in Europe. You know it is dangerous and can even lead to cancer. It is not very known diseases in Poland so it must be connected with their diet here.*

Krzysztof (33)

An interesting comment is that *unhealthy food is more easily accessible here than in Poland* (Krzysztof). There was a view that supermarkets and takeaways in Britain offer food that is substandard to that available in Poland, and a clear association was made between processed, fattening food and ill health. Furthermore, participants were damning about the quality and freshness of the food available in England, as shown in Krzysztof's (33) comment:

*Well, I still regret that I cannot find here a proper market with local farm products like I used to have in my town. People sell like really fresh stuff, purely organic, from small farms around, which I can't find here. You know, I think that stuff at markets here are almost the same as in Tesco. I missed that really. I have been in many different places. You know they claim that they have fresh good fruits or veggies but I don't really believe it. It doesn't look nice. Once you've seen something really good and fresh in proper market, you know what is good. You know what I mean?*

Jan (46) made a similar comment on the availability of a wide range of fish:

*I was surprised that Britain is an island and when you go to supermarket you have like 4 types of fish. In Poland, we have like 10 or 12. It is weird, isn't it? Moreover, their fish is always coated with something. They like only fish which doesn't smell and does not look like a fish. That is not a fish! That is really funny thing about English people*

Participants' definition of Polish food was usually *normal*, something native and known. It is also better and healthier because it is cooked at home:

*I eat always Polish food. Even if I had no opportunity to buy Polish food I would always try to cook Polish meals from English products. Now Polish shop came, so it was easier and we use more Polish products. I had my little boy so I cook Polish food for him. You know I always try to cook healthy food.* Aleks

Participants defined good food as Polish food: homemade from fresh ingredients and therefore healthy.

## **Food and home**

This study found that eating home country food was a comforting reminder of the happy years of childhood, of being at home, of shared identity. The following extracts are indicative of participants' feelings:

*Polish food is part of us, our background, heritage and traditions. The smell of some kind of dishes reminds us of our home. I remember a couple years ago when we were preparing something Polish, straight away you had a memory of, I don't know, childhood.* Aleks

*I feel comfortable eating Polish food. I do not need anything else.* Teresa

Locher et al. (2005) describe food as 'nostalgic objects' for migrants, carrying the power to manipulate emotions. For many participants, the word 'food' was synonymous with home and happiness, as illustrated below:

*I don't know if it is just the taste that you remembered from your childhood that, you know, you dream about and makes you smile, because that's the Polish food for me.* Adam

Foods carry emotional labels and can carry happy memories of times past, as pointed out by Verbeke and López (2005). Importantly, Polish food was also associated with duty, habits and heritage.

*I have been doing this for 45 years. I got used to it and I love it.* Dorota

*I repeat my mother's patterns, whatever I remember from home, what my mother cook - I do it the same way. I would like my son and daughter do it the same way, too. It is our habit and our heritage. I think this is proper way to do it. It is important for me and I'd like it to be important for my children.* Teresa

The findings are echoed in the research by Jamal (1998) into the perceptions of English and Pakistani foods among British-born Pakistanis, which showed home food to be associated with family unity, maternal love and cultural belonging.

Many participants declared that they eat the same food as they used to eat in Poland:

*Nothing changed. We eat Polish food, traditional Polish meals. I like this food; that's why I eat it (smiles).*

Adam

*When I come back, my wife cooks normal, Polish food, proper food.*

Jan

*Now I've got a child, I'm try to cook him normal food, healthy food. Because he likes Polish dishes, I cook him Polish food. Generally, we eat the same food we used eat in Poland.*

Aleks

When asked to name the dishes that evoked home and which they continued to eat, participants were eager to share the names of dishes:

*Umm, usually we eat fish during weekends like whole fish without any cover with rice or potatoes. Sometimes we make goląbki (a mixture of rice and minced pigeon meat wrapped in white cabbage leaves) or bigos (sour white cabbage with meat and/or sausages) or dumplings or Polish soups like kapuśniak (sour white cabbage plus potatoes in stock) or ogórkowa (sour cucumbers plus potatoes in stock).* Krzysztof

*Yeah, I eat buraki, a beetroot salad prepared in a Polish way. Beetroot is grated, mixed with salt, pepper and cream and eaten together with meat and potatoes. I prepare Polish soups like kapuśniak, and schabowy (pork schnitzel) or goląbki, things like that.*

Irena

Rao (1986) states that food habits tend to transform most quickly among young people who are influenced by their peers. This was reflected in Irena's comments about her 6-year-old son's evolving taste following different food experiences at school, and in Piotr's reference to adapting his food habits when he went to university in England:

*Well, I had to cook for myself, basically anything I kind of felt like eating or anything I could find in my fridge. It's not like I would make only Polish food because I am Polish. I would just cook anything I really felt like.*

This study therefore suggests that younger migrants are more flexible, more tolerant of changes in dietary habits.

### **Bringing back a little bit of paradise**

Participants' determination to retain their home culture diet was reflected in bringing ingredients from Poland especially before Polish shops appeared on English streets.

*I bring everything what I can put in my bag; a lot of cut meat for roast or ready cut meat in small packages or sausages. It is frozen and I take it because that's much different. I take as much as I can put into freezer later.* Irena

*I have everything fresh from the farm, food my mother prepares for me. We are always packed up to the roof really, a lot of jars and even sometimes we bring homemade smoked sausages or smoked ham.* Krzysztof

*We usually bring słodycze (sweets) and miód (honey). My grandparent he's a bee keeper, I bring honey from him every time I can.....It a special kind of jelly covered with chocolate, just not available here* Piotr

Alternatively, as Aleks explained, a trip to London always saw him returning with '*a car full of food because we missed normal, Polish food very much.*'

Trips to Poland were made by car and air. As Burrell (2008) observes, air transportation to Poland is accessible to migrants, as several regional airports offer affordable air travel. However, this study observes a decline in visits to Poland and/or to London in order to buy food as access to Polish food grew through the appearance of Polish shops in British towns and cities. This is reflected in Teresa's comment: *we don't need to do that anymore. At the beginning, yes, as there was not so many Polish shops*'. Similarly, Jan commented that '*this was no longer necessary. Now you can buy everything in Polish shop.*'

Participants stated that at least half of their weekly shopping comes from Polish shops; the other half from supermarkets.

*Well, as I said, some in Polish shop, some in supermarkets and we have some food from our allotment. We have now here our vegetable garden and grow things like at home.*

Krzysztof

*I buy mostly in Polish shop, sometimes I buy like similar things in Tesco but it never tastes the same. Last time I bought rice and tried to make gołąbki and was so awful I cannot eat this one; that's what happened.*

Irena

At the top of the list of purchased products was bread. All participants complained that English bread was inedible and fattening.

*Oh, no after a year I was like really big but that was because of bread, I think. It wasn't like now that we have Polish shops everywhere.*

Jan

*Well, I stopped eating that toast bread. I take sandwiches with bread from Polish shops.*

Adam

Next on the list were typical Polish products such as herring (*śledzie*), sausages (*kielbasa*), chicken pâté (*pasztet drobiowy*), black pudding (*kaszanka*), sauerkraut (*kapusta kiszona*), dried wild mushrooms (*grzyby*), Borscht (*barszcz*), sour cucumbers (*ogórki kiszone*), and even Polish eggs or apples. Many participants reported buying from Polish shops daily, particularly sweets such as *krówki* (a kind of fudge) as they are their *beloved treats, known from childhood* (Jan).

Despite a preference for Polish food, all participants described themselves as feeling safer and more comfortable in England than at home. Though they didn't want to return to Poland, there was nevertheless a longing for the abandoned Polish home perhaps expressed through food: *life without Polish food would be horrible* (Teresa). This study thus exposes the performance of Polishness in food rituals in the form of food making and food consumption. This is perhaps best poignantly expressed by Irena:

*We still had spent most of our lives in Poland. Even if not consciously we miss our country. We could buy many products in English shops because they either taste the same or even sometime better. We don't because we want that piece of our country. Let's say I buy yellow cheese. Why? Because on the package is written 'żółty ser'. So, in fact I buy that paper where is Polish language on, I buy my memory of a small shop around the corner in my street in Warsaw. That reassures me, makes me happy, gives me an illusion of home.*

Participants' attachment to tradition and heritage was strong: they didn't want to give up their identity as native Poles.

## **Conclusion**

Few studies have explored the place occupied by food in the life of Polish migrants. This research therefore makes an important contribution to knowledge by examining the role of food in the adjustment journey of Polish migrants in the UK. Following an initial stage of eating food available locally through supermarkets and cheap takeaways, the whole sample group reported a preference for buying raw, unprocessed, and perceived to be healthy food which was then cooked at home using Polish recipes. English food was characterised as unhealthy, tasteless and fattening. Despite a desire to stay in the UK, all participants spoke of a preference for Polish food which was associated with home, comfort and heritage, as well as health. Polish food was a necessary and irreplaceable part of their life. It served as a coping mechanism in the early stage and helped to create nostalgic memories of the homeland. Food was also associated with Polish heritage with the performance of Polishness in food rituals. Key to understanding the role of food in the migration experience is that without Polish food preparation and consumption, the process of adjustment would have been slower, more difficult and for some impossible. The variation sought in the participant sample was not reflected in a variation in the findings: there was a commonality of experience across the sample, regardless of age, gender, education, profession and origin. It must be noted however that some openness and tolerance to new foods was observed in

younger migrants and children of migrants, who are exposed to diversity in cuisine outside the home.

The findings are understood regarding anthropological studies of the role of food in identity formation and in associations with home and cultural background (Toussaint-Samat, 2008; Tannahil, 2008; Brown 2009). This study also echoes the findings of other studies of the role of food in the migrant experience, where attachment to home country food is noted and where negative health implications are associated with adopting a western diet (Saleh et al., 2002; Gordon-Larse et al., 2003; Burns, 2004; Kedia, 2004; McDonald & Kennedy, 2005; Edwards et al., 2010). Returning to Berry's (1997) model of adjustment, this study reveals that in food habits, Polish migrants tend for a variety of reasons to adopt a segregation strategy, which is characterised by the maintenance of ethnic identity and heritage.

This research indicates the importance of Polish shops in the everyday life of Polish migrants, and in this, it supports the research by (Rabikowska (2010) and Rabikowska and Burrell (2009). These shops are not only a place where Poles buy food, but they are also information centres for the local community. Moreover, they provide a shipping service or the chance to order special products from Poland. The access these provide to the food migrants rely on throughout their time in the UK has an influence on migrants' adjustment journey and on their link with the mother country. There is less need to return to Poland (or to visit London) to bring back ingredients, although visiting friends and relatives continues to be important.

This study has practical implications. To facilitate better knowledge of the food culture of the UK, much of which is in fact flavoursome and healthy, it is suggested that the British Government considers including in the 'Test for Citizenship' a section on British food to encourage migrants to get to know more about the cuisine and food habits of the new country. Local education providers could include in their English language courses for new migrants' information on British food, including recipes for traditional English dishes. Meanwhile the Polish Embassy and the Anglo-Polish Society could organise English food festivals. This would help to introduce migrants to the dishes that people eat at home rather than the cheap and possibly unrepresentative food that they eat at the beginning of their stay.

The Polish Embassy and the Anglo-Polish Society could also supply flyers showcasing recipes of easy, national dishes. At the local level, councils could organise food festivals that bring migrants and members of the host community together to share their national foods. Such initiatives could help to foster bicultural bonds, which would ease the adjustment process.

This study's findings could be transferable to migrants of other nationalities who may face a similar adjustment journey and for whom food may be similarly important. Research should be conducted however on other nationalities to see if the findings change greatly. Research could also be conducted on the Polish migrant experience in other countries, where the cultural distance is smaller, for example in Germany where food habits are more like the Poles': responses to local foods may possibly be neutral or even positive. A longitudinal study, repeated with the same sample in five and then ten years to track changes in eating habits and the reasons behind consumption, is also recommended. Finally, the participants in this study varied in terms of age, social status and education level. Research using a homogeneous sample could yield a different data set, especially given comments on the age of migrants and adaptability.

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