

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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**The Ritualisation of Food, Home and National Identity  
among Polish Migrants in London.**

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**Abstract**

In this paper a process of negotiating identity among Polish migrants will be discussed in relation to their food habits: consumption, preparation and celebration. Through the ethnographic examination of food rituals the construction of meaning of home as both space and nationality will be observed and the attitude to the host culture will be revealed in the quotidian activities. The qualitative research based on interviews and visual ethnography has shown that there are three dominant ways of exchange with the local culture ranging from the least present to the ostentatiously conspicuous, named here as: orthodox, porous, and alternate. Each of them, however, is characterised by a perplexing degree of fluidity and sometimes contradiction which opposes the objectification of the models of culture, as had been already noticed by Bhaba (1994/2007) in relation to diasporic cultures and their tactics of adaptation. Home among Polish immigrants to the UK is a changing concept, open to negotiation, depending on their current

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personal situation, profession, gender, expectations, ambitions and even peer pressure. Yet (re)creating home requires a certain dose of familiarity conceived from the meaning of Polishness which needs to be materialised from the past memories on a daily basis. This research shows that such process oscillates between acceptance and rejection recognisable in the acts of mundane rituals, gaining their significance from the emotional engagement of the participants.

**Keywords:** home, ethnicity, ritual, consumption, adaptation, belonging.

## **Context**

The evidence of the connection between food and identity does not need to be defended, but it is worth looking into the role of food in creating a sense of inclusion and stability among migrants. In the field of anthropology, ethnology, ethnography and sociology, it has been indicated expertedly that food is an ethnic marker (Pollock, 1992; Krishnendu, 2004; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1993; Gabbacia, 1998; Capatti & Massimo 2003) which carries out productive meanings recognised by the members of the same group, who through food-related rituals celebrate their belonging (Douglas, 1984, Douglas, 1999; Certeau, 1998, Harbottle, 2000; Dietler & Haydessa 2001; Sutton, 2001). Multidisciplinary discussions on the relationship between identity, consumption and nation have added to the understanding of the social construction of space, locating home in particular cultural discourses and undermining the geographical borders of the homeland (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Civitello, 2003; Caldwell 2009). In social politics and cultural studies it has also been acknowledged, that food is a marker of status and class (Bourdieu, 1979/1982; Gronov, 2003; Veblen, 1899/1945, Counihan & Esterik 1997; Rapport and Dawson, 1998). Food consumption and home making have been strongly related, showing the role of gender and sexual politics in structuring the life of a family and the delivery of power (Counihan, 1999; Counihan & Kaplan, 1998; DeVault, 1991). In the following argument I do not discover new territory by saying that food consumption and the ways of its preparation manifest the relationship with home and nation, whether this manifestation renders nostalgic, mechanical, reflective, inauspicious, or idealistic. In any case our knowledge and experience of food comes first from home (whatever kind of home it was)

whose memory is later perpetuated, contested, and negotiated in different ways. This is both a social and a personal experience which among many other cultural, political or religious experiences contributes to the net of social relationships and to our identities. My point here is that food making and food consumption projects the concept of 'home', understood as a state of normalcy to be regained in face of the destabilized conditions of life on emigration. I consider strategies of reconstituting that 'home' verbal and non-verbal rituals of remembrance and stabilisation aimed at the restoration of the imaginary unity which migrants tend to miss. Food in its very sensual dimension serves as vehicle for the recreation of the abstract meaning of home through materially involved activities which alleviate the sense of fragmentation and discontinuity caused by displacement. National identity from that perspective comes with an idealised concept of 'home' which has been lost and becomes fragmentarily reconstituted through different practices, including daily rituals of consumption. There is no better comparison for realisation of migrant's identity as that proverbial one of the fish who when taken out from water, first time grasped what it means to be a fish. Similarly, an emigrant, after being relocated from the national-homely environment realises that what now he is she is recognised according to some categories which were not considered before (Fortier, 2000). Being simply immersed in a daily experience of the nation, we indubitably take the unity of nation and culture for granted, while national identity appears to us as rooted in a given timespace. When uprooted, we change our view of who we are, which in practice means that migrants' old identities must be questioned but the new ones cannot ever be fully adopted. In Anne-Marie Fortier's opinion (2000), who researched an Italian diaspora in London, there is an irreconcilable clash in that practice since migrants want to be peculiar and they want to avoid oblivion at the same time. My research inevitably confirms that observation, however, it also turns attention to

the figurative meanings of identity and home which are reproduced in myths and ideologies of national discourses. As a system of representation national identity is imposed on emigrants by the host culture that can identify the Other according to national or ethnic markers disseminated in the local discourses. Yet it is also a personal experience of being someone who belongs to a certain national grouping as opposed to other groups which surround them. Being what the locals see in the migrant and experiencing being of that migrant are two of many sides of the migrants' identity, which works in the same way for the locals themselves (Düttmann, 2000). Although there is an inescapable conflict between such different identifications, their meeting does not need to provoke a crisis: just on the contrary, their constant confrontations may result in an identity in progress which never settles but accepts more. In this paper it is argued that consuming and preparing 'Polish food' is an act of ritualising belonging and also delineating the difference between 'Poles' and 'others', and in that sense it is an act of both acceptance and estrangement. This unsettling condition of being "in-between" is seen as a challenge for migrants who are caught up with the pedagogic norms of national identity. This research shows that although aimed at achieving the state of normalcy, the life of a migrant is signified by otherness and as such will never find ontological reconciliation or the desired mythical totalisation which food consumption promises. As I indicate below, the performance of Polishness in the food rituals is that movement of identity that forecloses the range of possibilities and pulls migrants into the paradigms of national, gender and moral conventions, but what is very interesting it can also be played strategically as the movement of negation of and even liberation from the same paradigms. The analysis of the rituals involving food making and food consumption requires seeing them as both private and political practices, entwined between the structural and the sensual, the bodily and the social, the semantic and the

ethnographic. Not all these angles will be looked upon in this paper, but ethnographically, the ritual and the everyday will be combined in a single analysis, while the power of emotional investment, memory and habit will be discussed from a culturally assisting perspective.

## **Sample**

This case study is based on ethnography and participant observation (Laurel, 2003) conducted in a South Eastern suburb of Greater London. My research started in 2006 among a group of Polish immigrants gathered around a Catholic church which employed a priest of Polish origin in the same year and introduced masses in the Polish language to respond to the needs of a growing population of Poles in the area. This congregation led me to other groups of Polish people living in the borough who did not participate in church activities, but were members of the multicultural community using the same facilities, shops, and services, quite often adjusted to their needs. There were thirty-two Polish immigrants interviewed in this area, while ten of them were invited to keep a personal diary by the time of Easter for fifteen days. In parallel to interviews and the analysis of the diary, visual ethnography was conducted with the use of a video camera in one house occupied by a group of Polish immigrants (Banks & Morphy, 1999). The visual ethnography undertaken, captured over a period of one year, oscillated around the main celebrations in the Polish home, like Easter, Christmas, birthday parties, names days, New Year's Eve, and different kinds of smaller celebrations, like garden parties, barbecues, and family games (Pink, 2006). A snowballing choice of participants enabled an increase in variables which were identified in the due course of the research process. In terms of gender there was an even representation of men and women, in terms of class the group was surprisingly homogenous – being all representatives of what is defined in the UK as 'working class'. However, in Poland this classification has its confusing sides: a majority of participants had their

A-levels completed (Polish ‘matura’) and some of them had a higher education degree. In the UK they are filling manual jobs (in some cases trying at the same time to convert their qualifications to meet the British standards), or are unemployed and receiving benefits. Although all participants have been found through Church-related contacts, not all of them are practising Catholics. Nevertheless, in their consumption observed through the whole year, some religious rituals were visibly accentuated (especially during Christmas and Easter). A diary was purposefully designed for a short period of time: in two weeks keeping a diary can be expected to be more intense and more regular than when spread across many weeks. Participants were asked to notify every single food purchase or food acquisition on a daily basis and next they were to describe how they used it and why (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The diary reports differed significantly from each other in terms of style, form and content. Some participants decided to attach the receipts from their shopping and others provided packages of food offered to them which they recognised as new or even inedible. In a few cases the narrative applied in the diary changed into personal confession and, as was admitted by one participant, ‘it was like writing a book about life, not only about food’ (Rabikowska, 2007). Finally, the participants were asked to self-reflect on their diaries and their practices in an interview, which alongside videoethnography revealed more inconsistency and contradictions between discourse and experience and conferred more hesitation on what first seemed to be a congruous relation between home, nation and everyday life.

### **Taste, habit and obligation**

In this research practices involving food are seen as everyday life rituals contributing to the negotiation of a national identity and secondly to the retribution of normalcy, which is mythologised as 'home'. A typical definition of Polish food given by the immigrants in this research was accompanied by the word 'normal' in its description, signifying the native and the known as opposite to the unknown and the 'abnormal'. This simple semantic polarisation shifts onto the non-Polish local attitudes and lifestyles as well what was emphasised mostly in writing in the migrants' dairies. As the following case study shows, however, the exchange between the 'own' and 'normal' and the 'theirs' and 'abnormal' happens in multifarious everyday life practices anyway, including those ones in the kitchen. The attitude of Polish migrants to any kind of food which is not of Polish origin or does not remind them of Polish taste, texture, look or smell is very cautious and even hostile. It is taken for granted by most of them that Polish food is healthier and better because it is cooked at home. English food is seen as too greasy and void of 'real' unprocessed content. The following view expressed by Ewa, a twenty-one year old waitress in a traditional English cafe, represents a majority of opinions collected in this research:

I don't like anything here, everything is tasteless. English cuisine is not varied, there is nothing healthy in English food. I know what I need to eat: fruit, pineapple, vegetables, we bought juice maker and we drink carrot juice. It is important to have vitamins. We eat nuts as they have magnesium, calcium, we all try to have it. I am shocked they don't eat healthier since there is everything on the market and they can afford it. But most of them eat in fast food bars. They come to this café and they can eat sandwich with fried sausage and bacon, an egg in oil and beans at 7am! I have never tried it, although I work here. It all stinks. I make my sandwich with ham, tomatoes and green salad. But rice, puree, chips and spaghetti is our basics. For lunch I eat hamburgers and chips as I know it from home and I can swallow it. (Rabikowska 2007)



In this example taken from an interview a typical criticism of “their” bad food as opposed to “our” good touches upon most disputant points: taste, habit, and obligation. It is presupposed that English food does not taste good, mostly on the basis of smell and look, and it does not contain “anything healthy”, because it is prepared in a bar or bought ready made in the shop and reheated, and it is not served in any familiar manner. Good food should be like Polish food: made from fresh ingredients which are not processed and full of vitamins, important for health. Pleasure taken from food needs to be practically reasoned and derived from nutritious intake (“I know what I *need* to eat”) and significant amount of effort, if not sacrifice should be committed to its preparation. From a sociological point of view, this attitude to food and even experience of taste (“it all stinks”) is determined by *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1979/1982) which people later repeat in different modes and negotiate in a new environment. Repeating the same practices secure the sense of normality and continuity which are very important for migrants trying to settle in a new country. Being known from home, hamburgers and chips for lunch can be consumed without shame, even though they are not healthier than bacon and beans. A clash between home as a habit and home as an idealised myth is quite striking here. The “basics” pointed out by Ewa are not of Polish origin but have been approved as such by the repeatable acts of consumption at home and transferred to the new culture as already familiar. Interestingly, global food, such as burgers, rice, chips, or spaghetti, which has already been adapted as ‘home-related’ food, was popularised by the spreading network of McDonald’s and a foreign supply to Eastern Europe after 1989 and it does not meet with common acceptance among older generations in Poland. For them “home food” would be much more restrictive to what they practiced in their life span and under the economically enclosed system of Communism. Younger generations have been exposed later to a transnational influx of products which they have adapted as their own food

among other, more traditional food stuffs. Like in other Eastern European countries opening to the Western lifestyle, in Poland a combination of global and local has undergone appropriation in line with the cultural, individual, and social conditions of the people, bringing forward even more varied consumption habits. However, despite the generic internationality of food, its global uniformisation and individual variations, there is still a very strong emphasis on the national character of food consumption. An equation of home-nation interpreted from the perspective of a diaspora is adapted in the construction of identity and social relationships within the local identity, with outsiders and on a transnational level. For migrants the expression of collective identity becomes more important and more urgent than for the members of the nation at home. In the first place, a diaspora is identified in terms of otherness from the inside and from the outside (Düttmann, 2000). Migrants feel different just by being the members of a minority, equipped with their own concept of national identity brought from home, while externally national or ethnic discourse is imposed on them according to the local understanding of what their group represent. Under the pressure of this twofold perspective, migrants become interpolated to react and build a collective response under the auspices of common nationality. This interpolation may energise individual efforts, although it can also discourage some migrants. The need to be differentiated and assimilated, as Bhabha observes (2007), produces contradictory narrations of migrants' identity which might never be conciliated. Finding something similar with other members of the same diaspora can enhance the sense of belonging, but it also widens the gap between themselves and the host culture. Saturation of everyday life practices with national markers facilitates the process of continuity and enables the state of normalcy in a (re)created home. However, it is not that same nation which was left behind on a given territory and not the same home, but rather its symbolic interpretation and emotional

interpretation, shifted further onto the new environment where the local cultures expect migrants to be differentiable and to behave in a certain way and thus (re)produce their own vision of Polish identity. The discordance between these platforms can be a source of stress and disappointment. Some respondents admitted that in social situations at home or at work they decided to prepare Polish food which they might have not even liked in order to prove their belonging to Polish culture and Polish nation. The sense of pride in such rituals was coming not from the mythical power of their homeland, but from the semantic difference which the dishes reinforced. If any friends liked the Polish dish because of its taste and smell, the feel of connection with the homeland was increasing and the sense of responsibility was *then* emerging. Through the repetitions of such situations and the response from the others, the correlation of nationality, identity, and personal engagement meets the discourse of national unity and exceptionality already established by institutions and the state (Bhabha, 2007). In Poland this discourse is very influential and proudly disseminated at schools and in the dominant Catholic Church, particularly since 1989 when the Communist regime was abolished and opened the way to the rejuvenation of a traditional model of a patriot-Catholic fighting for the independence of the country (Millard, 1999). Willingly or not this model has been imparted on the Polish consciousness and has to be negotiated by migrants too (see Burrell, 2006; Galasińska, 2006).

### **Performing of Identity**

As the following comments show, the role of Polish products in everyday life is metaphoricised as a ritual but its is also an empirical practice which constitutes the ritual: “Polish

food which I cook at home makes me want to go back to my flat after a whole day at work; “I cannot wait to come back home and sit normally with my friends and eat normal dinner”. (Rabikowska, 2007). Many of these comments were made for myself – their reader and interlocutor, also of Polish origin. They were often constructed as abbreviations of cultural issues taken for granted between the members of the same nation. Remarks evoking our common past included nationalistically profiled generalisations like the one made by Peter, a forty-five year old mechanic working in the recycling centre: “As we know there is nothing better than a pint of cold beer after dinner, *Żywiec*, of course” (Rabikowska, 2007), or a comment by unemployed Barbara, a mother to four children living with a disabled husband: “we cannot eat the local food, but we Poles know how to find a way out from any situation, so we cheat a bit for the sake of it” (Rabikowska, 2007). A tone of irony could be sensed in such statements and it was even more striking in interviews where the connection between the respondents and myself was attempted on the basis of our common national ground. It is understandable that my interest in their food habits was used as a reason to express their identity, as it happens quite frequently in qualitative and ethnographic research. I was located within a definition of Polishness by those migrants and consequently my research happened to be a mirror in which they could reflect their own image and yet reinforce or reject their Polish attachments. Writing and speaking about food as much as ‘practising food’ contributed to the daily ritualisation of their national difference. Subsequently, a certain dose of performance has to be considered in the collection of findings. Yet, as Judith Butler argues (1993), social behaviour is performative and no member of society is free from it. In this specific circumstance however, the performance focused on Polish identity is formulated as doxa, which in this case can be explained as is the performance of the narrative of the home-space-nation triad, conceived by the nationalist pedagogy, and it is

interesting to observe which aspects of that narrative are stressed by the participants of the research and how the constructed myth of the organic unification is manifested. The rituals with food create a nexus of Polishness which is played differently by each of them. I have identified three main types of food rituals which involve different degrees of exchange with the host culture: 1. *Orthodox*, which wants to be closed to exchange and influence from the host culture - the emphasis here is put on 'normality' as value and on praxis being turned against "them". 2. *Porous*, which valorises 'normal' food in terms of Polishness but accepts some influence from foreign cultures, if it happens accidentally, but the practice of exchange is rarely initiated and may be a result of coincidence, like buying some foreign food by mistake or receiving it as a gift. However, there little initiative to repeat this exchange, even though the foreign food was liked. 3. *Alternate*, which consciously accepts exchange and even makes effort to initiate and repeat it: it takes place mainly within households where one spouse or tenant comes from a host culture. It is orientated strategically towards change, being seen as personal achievement and a positive turn on the social trajectory to create a home in the host culture. The latter type is still quite rare among the post-2004 immigrants. It requires verbal communication in the English language which is an obstacle for most of the working class Poles. These three dominating types of attitudes can overlap in one household or undergo inversion on certain occasions or in presence of different friends. They also extend to performing national identity in public places, like churches, streets, community halls, or schools. The choice of attitude depends on the socio-personal situation of the migrant, and such social determinants as gender, age, education, and the stage of assimilation.

Peter, who was mentioned above, invented his own recipe for a vegetable soup to which he added blue cheese and had to explain this extravagance in his diary:

I made this soup from all different vegetables I had in the fridge, and I made it in a Polish way as I used to do at home, but this time I decided to experiment and I added some stinky cheese to it, and it was lovely! Soups should be eaten daily and they should be nutritious, so this is how I made it healthy and tasty and since that time I apply this recipe every now and then and pass it to my friends. (Rabikowska, 2007)

Peter's porous approach towards food meets with his flexible approach to "normality". For him normality is a state in which "everyone can be happy and do what they want, which is not possible in Poland" (Rabikowska, 2007). Mixing different food stuffs in challenging new combinations gives him a sense of the freedom which he expects from life in the UK. He left Poland hoping to be able to live differently, which his interpretation means - 'normally'. He opts for the narrative of diversity and tolerance which he associates with the local lifestyle and even started learning English and joined the local volunteer group working for the community, in which he is the only Polish member. For him this way of mixing with others is a method of reaching a satisfying level of normality. He never mentions adaptation or assimilation, which he rejects as his objectives. It is 'normality' which is his aspiration, but he is also aware how different the local normality is from that one at home, therefore he makes the effort to adjust to the local environment by adapting the discourse of diversity and tolerance promoted by the British political system, but not verbalised so explicitly within the national discourse in Poland. This effort is both an ideological and a moral attempt to find stabilisation and as such is not different from Ewa's effort to separate from the local culture. Although Ewa had the same motivation for migration as Peter, in her eyes "living normally" does not require exchange with the local. Her hostile attitude to the local culture is shielded with protectionism of her Polishness. She is afraid her "identity may be under threat" if she transgresses onto the terrain of the local and become "like the English" (Rabikowska, 2007). During our interview she stressed

several times that she did not need “them” and that the life she shared in London with her boyfriend, Jarek, and a circle of other Polish migrants was fulfilling enough without further exchange. Regardless of this ontological difference in their attitude to Polishness and food, both Ewa and Peter assign for the same obligation developed at home which defines a healthy diet. The sense of duty and personal responsibility for what they eat reveal ethical entanglement, frequently underpinning their statements made in writing and during interviews. Their concept of national identity is delineated by ethics induced through the “discourse that *performs* the problem of totalising the people and unifying the national will” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 230), the emphasis is the author’s). Peter’s belief in tolerance, happiness, and freedom alongside his porous food practices and the work for the diverse local group enact the concept of pluralisation of identities within the frame of national differences. Analogically, Ewa situates herself on the other side of the curtain where pluralisation is negated on the same basis of national difference.

Nevertheless, the ethically modulated declarations of nationalist attachments meet the challenge in everyday-life exchanges which cannot be avoided. Ewa and her boyfriend, Jarek are a couple in their early twenties, who expect their first baby in London and they fear of the influence of the local English lifestyle on its future. They expressed their disgust towards English food and distrust towards English values, but simultaneously acknowledged a sense of independence they gained by settling in the UK and most importantly financial security which they cannot have in Poland. Ewa admits:

People are more relaxed here, they smile to each other, wear what they want and do not bother how it is perceived. They are at ease (“na luzie”) and we were really missing it. In Poland you always have to be on alert to what other people say. I would never be able to wash the windows or even decorate the house on the first day of Christmas, and here everything goes! People go for shopping on a Good Sunday and even refurbish their houses and

gardens! When we went back to visit our families at home, we immediately started missing our home in London. We cannot stand it anymore there. (Rabikowska, 2007)

“Home” in Poland is not “homely” anymore for Ewa and Jarek and they seem to be more and more detached from it. Although their cuisine, as noted in their diaries, is still dominated by Polish food and they said several times in the interview that their child will be brought with “Polish values” (Rabikowska, 2007). “Home” is less a place for them now and more a concept of normalcy which they cherish. They stress their national pride when speaking about values: Jarek says: “We are different because we respect our parents and teachers, and because we want to achieve something” (Rabikowska, 2007). In his separationist view he does not see discordance to his approbation of the local atmosphere of easiness and people who “are not bothered with values”. This conceptual separation is parallel to his choices of food of which he says: “Among alcohols we don’t drink anything but Polish beer and Polish vodka, and we cook only Polish food at home, we read Polish press and visit only Polish friends” (Rabikowska, 2007). In practice this indigenous purity is not possible and they incorporate lots of local and global signifiers from the surroundings without even noticing it (Appadurai, 1990), nevertheless they try to define their national identity as ontologically fixed quality. This orthodox identification with Polishness shows an effort of (re)creating a myth of organic unity in which national identity is framed against the host culture and the self is fashioned in a patriotic manner. Obviously, this hostile approach stands in contrast with the desire to achieve ‘normal life’ in the same environment, but the respondents do not consider it a conflict.

### **Exchange and vitality**



Negotiation of identity through food consumption can also have a more contingent, porous background. New and unknown products can be chosen as part of an individual strategy or may be a result of convenience, curiosity, or accident. Through either way, however, adding them to a Polish diet undermines the rules of normality, tradition, and continuity known from home and introduces a form of deviation to an everyday lifestyle. Even if deviation is not aimed strategically at the re-evaluation of one's national identity, it contributes to the self-fashioning of personal identity. As it was observed in the household of Gosia and her sister Mariola, living with a Korean flatmate, where a variety of tastes and recipes does overcome monotony and routine, the orthodox and porous approach can overlap. Mariola's curiosity led her to buy products which were unavailable in her small village. She always wanted "to try asparagus" which stood in her imagination for "something very exotic and very Western" (Rabikowska, 2007) and decided to purchase it among other Polish products before Easter. Mariola who works as a child minder in a Jewish family where "everything has to be kosher", decided to make Jewish dishes at home after she was served them at *Passover* in her employer's house. She fancied hot Jewish *maca* with fresh butter, which at home was an object of derision and symbol of poverty. At the same time, Mariola could not accept the organic vegetables which were served in her workplace during lunch breaks. Being mainly discouraged by their "funny look", she gave them many derogative names in her diary implying that they were of unnatural origin. Based on empirical experience from home her logic neutralised the paradox: "If they were natural, they would not need to be named "organic" and sold in shops. They would grow in one's garden like in Poland" (Rabikowska, 2007). She could not wait for "coming back home and eating normal food" which mainly contained fruit and vegetables anyway, English tea, and lots of chocolate. She did not see any contradiction in her practices and emphasised her distrust

towards “the local plastic food which looks nothing like home food”. On the other hand, Gosia, her sister, decided to try an exotic dish made by their new Korean friend and was very proud of herself, mostly for not telling anyone that “despite its beautiful colours, it was difficult to eat” (Rabikowska 2007). Both sisters have different attitudes to food and methods of negotiating home: from orthodox to porous. Mariola, a younger sister of 21, appreciated her financial independence and ability to buy “new things” which she could not afford in Poland. She mentioned several times her reasons to buy more expensive or original products: “I buy it because I can afford it now: I work and I don’t need to sacrifice so much. I can live like a normal person” (Rabikowska 2007). Whereas Gosia was more hostile towards the local food supply and even to other Polish dishes which she did not know before and to which she was introduced by other Poles. She was not able to approve any deviations from the diet she remembered from home as if she felt responsible for pertaining of ‘the old style’ in that new household of which she has become a tacit leader. Their brother lived in a separate flat and was a regular guest for dinners. He contributed with his choices of rice puddings, custards, canned plums, and glazed dry fruit which Gosia used to define as “fancy”. This judgement reinstated her dialectical attitude to exoticness but also revealed her suspicion about the feminisation of her brother’s identity and his weakening position in the family. But she never rejected those products from him and even tried to give them a more national and formal status by preparing them in a more traditional way, for example, sweetened rice with cinamonned apple for dinner, which her brother called “the most divine and homely dinner on exile”. In her diary Gosia writes a lot about how her siblings and her Polish friends appreciate her dinners. They admire her particularly for making fresh bread which is very important for her: “I need to know what I eat”, Gosia explains when asked why she does it when she can buy Polish bread in the shop. She also stresses that

the presence of a crusty loaf reminds her of 'home' and her siblings are attracted to it too. It is obvious that it is more than the product itself she needs to produce and they need to consume. Gosia feels obliged to look after them in the orthodox way she knows from home and takes over the role of a household's leader who also tries to perpetuate the sense of Polishness and belonging in the house. Although all three siblings have separate lives and budgets, they come to Gosia's kitchen attracted by her matriarchal power and sacrifice ingrained in the act of bread baking. Most households represented in this research had a similar figure, imitating to some extent a pattern of a Polish patriarchal family with a mother fully responsible for feeding her family and a father and children passively receiving her efforts. Yet among this new generation of Polish migrants in question many have come individually to join a house inhabited by other single Poles. They live together in such communes where their roles are negotiated depending on chores shared between them. They use timesheets with duties scheduled for each week which have to be filled by each room rather than by women in the house. Gender roles have been affected by new pragmatic circumstances and showed a significant shift from the traditional division of house labour attributed to women to such ones engaging men with cooking and shopping.

### **Epiphany**

As the practice shows - "our food" draws upon a collective identity which exists beyond the geographical borders of one national group. In fact, the relationship between home and nation reinforced by migrants undermines any territorial constraints of the homeland and complicates further its concept. The attitude encapsulated in Ewa's orthodox statement: "I know it from home, so I can swallow it" situates her relationship with the nation on the side of habitual

behaviour as much as her habitual language discriminating the local food reveals an arbitrary status of her habits. The effort invested in separating “our” food from their “food” feeds into the identity making process of migrants who never stop negotiating these two arenas. Theano S.Terkenli defines (1995, p. 325) this separating effort as the “measure of control” which enables differentiating home from non-home. The emotional and the symbolic effect of this process produce the gain of personalisation and attachment which renders it into a political and social currency when it comes to building a collective home. Over time the sense of belonging is developed to the group or the homeland through a series of routines and emotional commitment. The regular implication of meaning in certain recurrent practices serves as a frame of self-identification, rooted in a memory of a context where those practices were enabled. A moment of defining food between two semantic poles is not only a private decision, but also a result of the structuration of habits and practices which change under different political and economic conditions. As Richard Marienstras writes (1975, p.176), diaspora lives a “transnational mode of existence”, but what is even more important is that the identity of diaspora does not ever find satisfying stabilisation and in that sense its identity is always transitional. There are only moments of wholeness, captured temporarily in the experience of “the totality of the old way of life” (Fernandez as cited in Sutton, 2001, p. 75) where the past and present are integrated. A concept of “return to the whole” is used by David E.Sutton analysing the role of memory in food consumption among the Greek inhabitants of the island Kalymnos. He draws upon the research of James Fernandez (1982), an anthropologist who shows that among destroyed or isolated communities there is a strong need to reconstruct their identity creatively in the process of rebuilding their “old way of life”, which here, I call “normality”. Those moments of re-capturing “normality” can be seen in a phenomenological sense as epiphanies of the whole, where the

nation, the past and the home merge in an impossible totality of myths, bringing about the experience of completeness and safety. Mariola, who lives in London with her sister Gosia, feels this completeness every time she takes out a box of chocolates from under her bed. She describes that experience as follows: “It is just a box of sweets which my mum sent me; but its only presence under the bed makes me feel better and it links me with home. When I open it I feel more comfortable despite any problems around at home or at work” (Rabikowska, 2007). It is important to connote that this is a material object which becomes a vehicle of memories and strong feelings and using it in the context of personal transgression is like a ritual of enchanting foreign reality marked with tribulation in order to change it into a “homely” reality of peace and harmony<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the symbolic meaning of the ‘enchanting ritual’, coming from the system of representation within which the sign of ‘home’, ‘mother’ and ‘nation’ operate, meets with the individual experience of social life and discredits claims to universality. From the psycho-social stand the ritual of memorisation of home as totality is as much imposed on Mariola as having its own structuring power. In this argument I would follow the anthropologists, Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, who affirm (1979, p. 43) that “[R]ituals are conventions that set up visible public definitions”. The moment of connection in the act of cherishing the box is the epiphany of culture that provides material evidence of phenomenal experience of one’s identity. It is analogical to the recollection of sensual aura of food in Sutton’s account (2001), in which the smell, taste or sight of the original Kalymnian ingredients is endorsed to evoke strong physical sensation triggering the memory of home. Food ritual, as

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<sup>2</sup> A psychoanalytical critique of such transgression, seeking motives for consumption behind the rational sphere, would give a different meaning to the role of the box from the perspective of the unconscious in the analysis of ritualistic practices. Mariola’s unconscious desires, since they cannot be verbally explicated, are projected on the ritual of ‘connection with the whole’, whereas the box of sweets becomes one of “the aleatory object” (Scalia, 2002; Hills, 2005) which shifts her into the realm of the imaginary home. The Freudian critic would contend that the box is a fetish (Lash, 1980; Kunzle 1982; Dichter, 1960; see also Freud 1905/1977) or, from a cultural-economic point of view, a commodity fetish (Miller & Rose, 1997; Appadurai, 1986).

Douglas (1999) claims, is a repetitive habit which never stays the same, and as Sutton argues (2001), it is also a social ritual reaching for transgression.

### **Authenticity and collective memory**

Without “the epiphanic objects”, transgression into the past, into the imagined space “there”, enacted in the present “here” would not be possible. Therefore they need to be verified as ‘original’ Polish food. Authenticity also plays its part in the process of building social relationships inside and outside of their diaspora. On top of the list of indigenous products is bread. All respondents agreed that the local bread is “inedible and raw” (Rabikowska, 2007). One of the respondents exclaimed a warning for the whole Polish community in the UK: “we should not eat English bread as it can give us ulcers” (Rabikowska, 2007). For Poles the special “floury and sour” smell of bread and its crusty surface is the material evidence of its originality, yet it is not available in the UK in its fresh homely version, unless it is supplied from Poland by family or friends. After 2004 Polish immigrants can purchase so-called “Polish bread” in most supermarkets and newsagents in London. As the label on this product confirms, it is baked according to the “original Polish recipe”, but Poles buy it only if they do not have a fresh supply from the homeland and they purchase this “Polish-English fake copy” as the “lesser of two evils” (Rabikowska 2007). Some of the respondents decided to bake bread and appreciate naturalness of their “own” produce (“swojski”) as opposed to the unknown content of the local equivalents. The descriptive pronoun “own” (swojskie) used in the descriptions of food refers to both its healthy homeliness and its Polish indigenesness. The “own food” cannot be replaced and is expected to be made at home from exclusively Polish ingredients, although this is not always the case in practice. The presence of the “own bread” at home alongside other products sent to

migrants from Poland provides the same feeling of safety and connection as the “box of sweets” kept under the bed. Additionally it is the effort which adds to a journey to the Polish shops, spread across London, and the waiting time for a “Polish parcel”, which enhances the value of the original produce and emphasises the difference between “our” food and “their” food. Most immigrants coming to the UK try to appropriate the local products into some modulation of Polish meals as if they were trying to convert time and space: they reproduce materially the memory of home by means of ingredients, which link them in an emotional way with the past. Most of them would make the effort of going to a ‘Polish shop’ and buying more authentic ingredients which guarantee a ‘homely feeling’ when added to a daily diet. There are still many original Polish products like herring, sausage, chicken pate, black pudding (‘kaszanka’), sour kraut, dry mushroom, borsh, and even some infamous products from the time of Communism, like canned meat (‘mielonka’), canned rice with meat (‘paprykarz’), which Poles regard as “more Polish” than others. Some of these specialities have been already produced in the UK by Polish or global companies which quickly react to the changes in the market demographics, replying to the demand of new migrants. Yet there are a few rare articles, such as sour milk or giblets which are not imported due to their short life cycle or limited popularity. The ritual starts with the choice of these products over the local food stuffs: buying them, carrying them in a bag, talking to other Polish people in a Polish shop (or resisting them), cooking a meal which smells “like food at home”, memorising situations which involve food celebrations, or simply feeling the presence of Polish spices in the cupboard. Nevertheless, it is not Polish food *per se* that makes the ritual, but a situation and other people participating in it. The “post-communist” food stuffs are not even liked that much by Poles at home, but there is still demand for them in London since they carry out the feeling of familiarity and the common past. Having something in common

creates a sense of belonging among immigrants, while Polish food (in a similar way to the Polish language) crystallise the borders of national identity beyond the local and individual differences. For example, according to Ewa, “white borsh has to be served for Easter breakfast” in the way her mum used to do it, while “red borsh appears during Christmas with big white beans as the first course” (Rabikowska, 2007). But in Mariola’s memory neither of these two dishes was ever served on special occasions and she did not regard them as specifically Polish. The regional and local differences, however, dilute effortlessly during the ritual which unites people who participate in it. The act of celebrating Easter, with white borsh or without it, produces a frame for the recognition of collective identity. If a nation is the system of representation (Hall & Gay 1996), likewise home-nation, it represents the subjective or intersubjective experiences of those who inhabit it and thus it becomes the symbolic representation of selves and cultures (Terkenli, 1995, p.327). The products themselves with their multisensory characteristics are vehicles to the past “linked to experiential consciousness” (Bachelard, 1964) which is shared by migrants. Yet the memories of products themselves can be very different giving priority to the imagination of the collective ritual. From that perspective vodka, for example, is a signifier of sociality and social rituals: in Polish collective memory building social relationships involves drinking alcohol and any deviation from that practice causes a threat of isolation from the life of the group. Thus avoiding or refusing alcohol among Poles becomes a statement on its own, semantically related to a Polish identity or its rejection. Drinking vodka in the early morning hours on Easter Sunday implements a sense of understanding within the group and offers a point of identification. It can be possibly argued that the apparent increase in vodka’s consumption among Polish immigrants comes from that source too: not so much the need to drink it and become intoxicated, but rather to experience the ritual of identification with other Poles who share the same imagination of



socialisation. David E. Sutton argues (2001) that it is imagination that is a source of our memories and as such it underpins our concept of identity. His view on the role of food in creating the sense of nationalism contributes to the analysis of identity as imaginary work based around experience. In a collective imagination of nationality certain products and situations merge into the symbolism of identity; beyond that imagination rituals of consumption do not have recognisable meaning and authenticity of food loses its material and ethical value too.

### **Celebrating home**

The symbolic and emotional prominence of Polish products increases in the season of Easter and Christmas when Polish identity gains in a more ostentatious collective performance. It is the time that parcels are sent from home to immigrants and food dominates in the held luggage on the cheap flights between the UK and Poland. Products brought from home mainly include meats, dry mushroom, vodka, tea, cottage cheese, and sweets. Although they can be obtained in London, they “taste better when they are come from home” (Rabikowska, 2007). Parcels from Poland also embody the gestures of packing committed by a family and thus transpire their care and undisturbed relationship which reinforces the right to return. Easter is that time of a year when the recollection of family gatherings and memories of food preparation permeates daily chores and cooking practices. The need to be linked with home intensifies and the material evidence of belonging “there” is sought. As Elia Petridou argues (2001, p. 88) in her analysis of the meaning of the links with home among Greek students in London, relying on food supplies from home produces a supportive epistemological context in which the migrant can be situated and self-evaluated. A parcel from home is epiphany of the journey away from home and

epitomises the right to return to it. This journey, stressed by a material distance, is also symbolic of the development of the self. Kasia, a twenty-four year old respondent working in the local print centre, admits the shift in her understanding of that distance when searching for Polish food:

When I can finally get some thin sausage from the Polish delicatessen, I feel like in heaven. I did not think about it in Poland, it really did not matter; that kind of food was everywhere, but now it means something else, it is more important. (Rabikowska, 2007)

Although Kasia does not explain how the importance of the authentic Polish food had changed, her reference to the past reveals the dialectical relationship between home and nonhome, her assimilation and displacement. The intensified attempt at maintaining continuity of food-related practices helps to attenuate her estrangement and serves as a measure of self-identification. The realisation of the difference between the present situation and the condition from the past instigates the negotiation of home among migrants. Terkenli adds to it (1995, p. 328):

[A]way from home an individual may discover new aspects of the self that result in an inevitable reordering of the intimate world and a reevaluation of past, present and future situations. [...] A continuous process of synthesis between the home and the nonhome occurs, as parts of nonhome are embodied into home and as home is incorporated into new frameworks of understanding and new contexts of evaluation and identification.

Poles emphasise their preference of Polish food over the “unnatural local food” in private situations and in public, but it does not mean, however, that they prefer their home in Poland over their current situation in England, and they do not seem to be ready to return home and shift to their “natural” diet. They had emigrated from home in order to find a better *ergo* normal life

abroad. Current immigrants from Poland have not experienced war trauma or absolutely critical poverty which would be a reason for them to leave the country. They have chosen to change their lives “into better” (Rabikowska, 2007) and this aspiration spread across their economical, social, cultural and even emotional life, and they do not want to go back. Only a small percentage of migrants admit they ‘have failed’ and “did not make it” in the UK. Even at the time of market decline and economic recession in the West, they rarely feel tempted to go home. Living in the UK is satisfying enough for most of them and they regard London as their home now, but their Polish home is constantly occupying their imagination and determines their practices of ‘home-making’ here. As a diaspora they subsequently fetishise the original food and mythologise home and assign ethical meanings to both of them, essential for framing their identity. In this new situation ‘normal life’ and ‘normal food’ become alternations of each other, but they cannot substitute each other. In other words, the local food is regarded as ‘not-normal’, but the lifestyle as desirable and ‘normal’. This paradox lies in the difference between the past habitual practice known from home and the future aspirational identity to be achieved abroad. In her study of the Italian diaspora in London Anne-Marie Fortier argues (2000,p.87) that this existential split reflects the organic distinction between land and culture and it shows that one side of migrants’ identity is volitional and one is intrinsic. Fortier has heard many times from her Italian respondents what I have heard from Poles in London in relation to their homeland: “my blood and heart are Italian, my brains are English” (Fortier, 2000,p.87). The returning to the totalised ‘home’ where those platforms are united is not possible and can be played only in their imagination,

This puts into doubts definitions of indigenusness and raises questions about the relation of home and nation. What is home for those Poles and what is their “homely food”?

What is sought in certain smells and tastes? While researching conflicting imaginations of home among migrants, Avtar Brah differentiated (1996, p.180) “homing desire” and “desire for the homeland” which throw more light onto the definitions of indigenusness and national identity. What is Poles’ “homing desire” is a desire to re-experience the homeland away from that homeland. A classical myth of return does not apply to their situation, nor does it to any other diaspora which lives always ‘in-between’. These specific conditions cannot support the idea of primacy and stability of the place of origin and sees a break in the unity of home and nation. Feeling “like at home” is more immanent than “home” *per se* , while its nationally-orientated material performance enables filtering of all unwanted qualities of the national identity.

### **Transgression**

Performance of national identity takes place inside and outside of home, in private and public spaces, but for migrants it is more achievable and more individualised in a private space. However, by ritualising Easter breakfast and Christmas dinner at home, they also respond to and intervene with the external circumstances where their private identity is politicised – a socio-historical reality identified by Homi Bhabha (Bhaba, 2004, p.15) as a sphere of “unhomely moments”. According to Bhabha, the relation of “homely” and “unhomely”, crossing in a private space, reveal “the normalising, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police”. These techniques determine what can be bought in shops and how it can be used at home, while the festive seasons themselves impose their own rules which diasporas individualise. Easter, like Christmas, has to be celebrated in a Polish way – this is according to

all respondents, even those who do not go to Church on another occasion, they have no doubts that these two festive seasons are the most transparent symbol of their national identity, providing the sense of integration and belonging. They were quite surprised when they came to the UK, that Easter celebration is not known here as a public performance at all; people do not go to Church on Good Saturday with a basket (“święconka” to have their food blessed in holy water which is eaten on Sunday with family and friends. It is a traditional obligation, derived from early Christianity, to prepare a basket with the sample of bread, meat, salt, pepper, home made cake, horseradish and boiled eggs which together represent wealth and happiness. When blessed at Easter and shared with family, the basket guarantees a yearly dose of wealth for the household. This is what Aleksandra, a twenty-six years old unemployed migrant, wrote in her diary about celebration of Easter with her family in London:

Today Christ has risen, so we have a completely different breakfast. First, of course we shared the blessed food from the basket. By obligation, we had there: eggs, Polish bread, Polish sausage, horseradish, salt and pepper. We also had something sweet to be blessed by the rule, and this year it was a Mars bar. We divided everything into three portions since there is my mum, my brother, and myself. Later we had dinner: bigos (sour kraut with meat) which I cooked from Polish cabbage bought in the local Hindu store, ribs in sauce, almost like in Poland, but not the same, bought in Morrison’s, roast chicken, white borsh, and lots of different home made cakes. In the evening we visited friends who offered us so much food that I cannot remember it all; we had a salad made of rice and corn, stuffed eggs, and Polish vodka, and long drinks with apple juice. (Rabikowska, 2007)

The orthodox emphasis on Polish origin of products prepared for Easter is the first signifier of the desire for home and superiority of the “own” food. The space for free comments allocated in the diaries next to the category of the product was very often filled in by the descriptive expressions referring to the Polish origin of shopping or, in a polarised manner, its non-Polish and thus lower class. During the Easter period the amount of such expressions

increased as much as their emotive value. Exclamations like “meals by obligation Polish” (“jedzenie obowiązkowo polskie”), or “of course ham and sausage must be Polish, not like the local watery meats”, “we could not get any decent bread, so we had to lower ourselves to eat Hovis for Easter, what a misery!”, “Eggs had just no taste, not like homely eggs from the farm”, were characteristically applied as a measure of identification with home in a collective sense. In a group environment, like that of the church, the “ceremony of remembrance” (Sutton, 2001) was performed in a uniformed way by all participants. Walking across a diverse community with baskets filled with food, decorated with crochet doilies and fresh blackberry’s leaves, sometimes daffodils, equip Poles with collective power, worth slight derision expressed by onlookers. The fact that doilies are often made of plastic and some fresh eggs have been replaced by perfect wooded copies (“pisanki”) sent from home, does not change the impact this performance of national and religious indigenusness have on Poles themselves. “We all feel the same among others who look at us as if we were from a different planet” – explains one of the members of the parade (Rabikowska, 2007). An orthodox attitude to national identity increases in such situations and becomes a celebration of Polishness for and against the Other, who is forced in this way to acknowledge and appreciate the migrant. It explains popularity of national festivals among migrants, from film festivals, food festivals to celebrations of national anniversaries which might have been ignored in Poland but gain in special meaning in the UK. As Tim Edensor observes (2002, pp. 69-71), during such events national identity is “performed” drawing attention of the audience to the “subject” who when surrounded by other nationalities can see herself in relation to them. Transgression here would involve the realisation of the difference between “own” identity, lifestyle, traditions, and practices from those present in the host culture. Celebration of Easter among Polish immigrants follows the original pattern remembered from home: preparing

the basket, blessing it in the church, sharing food at breakfast and visiting family and friends for the rest of the day. Nevertheless the porous mix of products on the table takes away from the weight of the commonly claimed indigenoussness of that festivity and puts the purity of tradition into doubt. Aleksandra's Eastern basket containing a Mars bar instead of a labour intensive, and expensive, home-made cake is a blast to tradition, but it also shows an attempt at appropriating old habits in a new reality. However, adjusting a nostalgic memory of Polish Easter to the current circumstances, probably determined by economic and practical factors does not need to be always a painful process. In fact, replacing a traditional home made cake with a Mars bar can bring a certain kind of relief which could not be achieved at home. Aleksandra confirms that in her own way when speaking about Easter chores in Poland and in London:

We did not need to do everything like at home because there wasn't anyone to judge it. My mum did not need to work so hard before Easter and I wasn't bothered with all those traditional dishes which we would have to have at home. We could even hover just before a "Holy breakfast" and no body would notice. At home you would be "cursed" for such things by everyone in the neighbourhood, not to mention the priest. So we had maybe a less Polish Easter but it was so much more relaxing. (Rabikowska, 2007)

It is noteworthy, that moving away from home and settling in a new country can bring a sense of liberation from the constrains of original *habitus* which then delineated a frame for 'normality'. Women, who in Poland would be working hard towards the preparation of festivities, find their new position quite relieving. A relaxed structure of the Polish community which is mostly dispersed across the city, where migrants live with other single people or relatives, causes a break within traditional practices and organisation of social life. It responds to a porous and an alternate attitude to food identified in this research. Some respondents admitted that it was the first time they went for a long walk on Easter Sunday, "enjoying it immensely"

(Rabikowska, 2007), instead of the traditional visiting of their family members. The lack of visible normative powers at work - “there isn’t anyone who can judge”- produces an environment with a limited structuring agency which in stabilised conditions contributes to collective conformism. In Goffman’s theory of normality, the expected appearance of normality is more binding for the members of community than its actual application. As Barbara A. Misztal argues (Misztal 2008:314) in her discussion of Goffman’s concept of normality and trust, “[N]ormal appearances assure people that nothing around them is out of ordinary and life is predictable, so in the absence of anything unusual, they can continue their routines”. In the situation such as immigration, in which everything is unusual and life is rather unpredictable, the break in a “normal routine” releases reactions which could be seen as “abnormal” if compared to those ones practised at home. Adding a Mars bar to the Easter basket can be one of the porous strategies, while cleaning on Sunday or trying new types of entertainment which were strigmatised at home border with the alternate lifestyle. In their new home, Poles are not immediately punished for deviations from social rules and cultural traditions, and as Goffman explains (1971), stigma is an instrument of punishment securing the continuity and reliability of social order. The dispersion of Polish community across a diverse city of London enables its members to feel more independent and less responsible for preserving the ‘old’ lifestyle. However, this coin has its reverse side too: the members of such unbound community can feel so confused and unfitted that they either “fake normalcy” (Goffman, 1971, p.331), or break further rules to find acceptance, or they withdraw more drastically from a current situation which in this case would mean going back home. I have observed that through the appropriation of food rituals Poles try to achieve both: a creation of normalcy in a new environment and liberation from normality known from home. They criticise the local food on the ground of difference and



produce exhibitions of Polishness on the table to satisfy their “homing desire”. Yet they also appreciate difference when they need to free themselves from the burden of “the desire for the homeland”. Such practices change depending on individual choices and the pressure to pertain the collective identity. ‘Manipulation’ with national signifiers, such as food, contributes to the fashioning of both individual and collective identity but, as has been said before, it is also an effect of “normalizing regimes” (Goffman, 1971) which tend to be negotiated or even resisted. Performance of national identity can even have a counter effect if the displaced person or a family desire to detach from Polish culture. A couple of respondents decided not to participate in Easter parade because of this reason. For them “normalcy” was a stage to be achieved beyond Polishness, where old habits were to be overcome and replaced with new practices available in the West. Moving away from Poland was to guarantee separation from the past and was regarded as a personal achievement. In an inverted way, other immigrants feel guilty of not expressing their Polishness in a sufficient extent and blame themselves for not practising Polish traditions. They criticise other Poles for being too assimilated in the host culture and losing their “Polishness”. They used to say with derision about some more adapted countrymen that “They try to be more English than the English people themselves” (Rabikowska, 2007). The last case indicates sharply this paradoxical tension between the rhetoric of nationalism asserted under the pedagogy of identity and the individual performative strategy of social reference.

In a diary kept by Danuta, a 23-year old assistant teacher, there were very few Polish products notified throughout the project, and they were namely cigarettes and vodka sent from Poland. She even supplied the receipts from shops which were to prove her favouritism of transnational food stuffs. In an interview she tried to convince me of her full adaptation to the local culture during the last two months, namely since she moved in with an Indian man from the

local area. In a characteristic manner for the alternate lifestyle, Danuta admitted that she always wanted to be “cosmopolitan and cultured” (Rabikowska, 2007) but living in a small, impoverished town in Poland did not feed into her plan. After leaving the country she moved with a group of Poles, sharing a Victorian flat, where they “practised a typical Polish lifestyle of drinking vodka after work and eating greasy food” (Rabikowska, 2007). At that stage she was still going to the Church where I met her. However, she decided to move out from the Victorian accommodation when she “fell in love” and moved to her Indian boyfriend with whom she runs a household in their common flat now. Consequently, she separated from the Polish congregation and stopped seeing her old friends. For Danuta, Polishness carries a stigma which she wants to rid of and adapt a more “normal” life which was to be different from anything she knew from home. In her diary she specified recipes including exotic ingredients, like curry, sushi, sake, while among her favourite past times, she put “going out with friends”, knowing that this is the least popular form of socialising among Poles at home. Our interview took place in a Chinese restaurant where I had another meeting with the next Polish migrant from the same area. When this next respondent came, who was Danuta’s friend before, she did not acknowledge her at all, trying to imply in a nonverbal manner that they are on two different social levels now. Appropriating food in an alternate manner was a self-comforting evidence for Danuta of her being adapted to a host culture. At the same time, Danuta expressed her deep attachment to her Polish home and to her family, as much as to Polish traditions and values. In contrast to the “cosmopolitanism” of her receipts, she admitted that she cooked Polish dishes for Easter and Christmas since she wanted to impress her boyfriend and engage them with her national culture, but they also shared Indian dishes which her family liked when they came for a visit. During video ethnography she combined Polish food with other national food stuffs in the same relaxed

manner trying to obliterate any patriotic meaning from her cooking. Yet there was a dominant supply of food from ‘Polish shops’ and many products sent by her parents in their kitchen which were taken by Danuta for granted as “essentials”. This interesting negotiation of home-nation-identity which oscillates between rejection and acceptance expands the transitional mode of migrants’ identity to the contradictory motivations and practices which nevertheless correspond with personal ambitions and a political vision of “an adapted migrant”.

## **Conclusions**

In my research on food rituals among Polish immigrants, a classical question highlighting the ambiguity of the migrants’ putative commitment to the homeland, while they refuse to return to it, opens new theoretical issues concerning memory, displacement, and identity. It was shown above that as a cultural and national homogeneity homeland is a utopia drawing upon an organic pedagogy of totality and a social category of normalisation. Food rituals contribute to a creation of a habitual and habitable space of a new home where “normal” life is to unfold. Through the deployment of imagination and performative strategies these rituals change into experience of collective identity. Authentic Polish food plays an important part in perpetuating that experience when it triggers a multisensory memory of home and facilitates transgression to the past. Although my research has indicated a high degree of isolation among Polish immigrants within the host culture, it also revealed that mythical thinking accompanying attitudes to home in terms of space and nation can be seen as responsible for resistance towards the local, and valorising it in dialectical terms. The impossible purity of traditional Polish rituals was unintentionally ratified in Aleksandra’s Easter menu enriched with a Mars bar and by Ewa’s non-reflexive comment on the essential food stuffs her household consume: rice, chips, pure,

spaghetti, and hamburgers for lunch. None of them has ever been the basics of a traditional Polish diet, not any less than food which Eva pointed out as superior to that consumed by the English: ham, tomatoes or green salad. They have been adapted at different periods in history in that region of Europe and favoured in certain cultural and political circumstances by the nation. The approval of hamburgers as ‘edible’ food only because it was recognised and tested at home (the product was introduced to Polish culture after 1989) undermines the essentialist idea of ‘purity’ in ‘traditional’ Polish cuisine, which shifts into porosity and heterogeneity in the same way as national identity does. This shift is reflected in the fluctuation of habits, generational preferences, gender roles, moral judgements, as well as economic structuredness and political organisation of food making and food consumption. Videoethnography has revealed that there was a mixture of Polish products and global brands in every household regardless of the pronounced patriotic attitude to food among some participants. Even the most orthodox views undergo the challenge of confrontation with the local culture which leaves its mark on migrants. Very often this exchange passes unnoticed among Poles who tend to interpret their food rituals in accordance with the nationalist narrative in which they are the historical objects. Although the diaries produced for this research included lists with a variety of food stuffs obtained from different sources: from local Polish or other Eastern European stores, to Asian newsagents and big chain supermarkets, in interviews they emphasised strongly their attachment to ‘tradition’ and continuity as if they wanted to prevent a change which they undergo anyway. In both the written account and interviews, they used strong remarks to name the superiority of Polish food and Polish morality in creating the sense of “normal home” as opposed to the local - “abnormal” world.

Influence of normalising pedagogy resonating in their language discloses the discourse of the pre-given order through which national identity is shaped in opposition to other nations. Being polarised between estrangement and acceptance, the double narrative of migrants' identity is unavoidable, while the ritualisation of their practice aims at both eliciting particularity and staying the same. In between those poles, however, there is the social world conceived of a range of disjunctions and continuities which undercut oppositions and open the way to paradoxes and discrepancies. Mariola and Gosia's normalcy in London was constructed around the remembrance of the homeland, but was also informed by the challenges coming from the host culture. In this research it was observed that within all three approaches to food: orthodox, porous and alternate national identity was constantly negotiated but with stability as a defining feature. Meaningfully, the orthodox approach has proven to have its pragmatic permutation in which Polishness becomes a stigma and normalcy refers to anti-Polish lifestyle. Against her intention and in contrast with Clifford's interpretation of polarised diasporic identity, however, Danuta's verbally defined resistance towards home is not based on opposition. Similarly to other participants of this research, her practice clearly denies the dialectical understanding of diasporic situation in favour of transitionality and transgressiveness. In alignment with Tim Edensor's theory of national identity (2002, p. 29), the case studies presented in this argument indicate that identity is always in process, while its repetitiveness and collective performance ensures its ontological fixity. Finally, it has been pointed out that that national identity emerges between a double movement of history and rhetoric, in which people are both the subjects and objects of identity formation processes (Bhabha, 2007). In food rituals among migrants the historical and the discursive boundaries of identity fall into conflict only to be renegotiated into a syncretic, temporary formation which contests the mythical unity of home-and-nation and adds to the

amalgam of practices and memories consolidated in everyday-life repetitiveness. Between the material place which was left behind in the past and the present materiality of a life of a migrant there is a space of everyday rituals filled with old memories and contemporaneous habits that transform place into home.

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