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History, culture and alcohol: Drinking patterns in Poland and Australia

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HISTORY, CULTURE AND ALCOHOL: DRINKING PATTERNS IN POLAND AND AUSTRALIA

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Lekarz medycyny

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of Master of Health Science at the Faculty of
Communications, Health and Science at Edith Cowan University.**

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

It is a widely held view in Poland that for centuries those in power have promoted heavy drinking among their subjects in order to achieve their various goals and that this contributed to the development of Polish drinking patterns. There is some empirical evidence that the political economy of alcohol in Poland promoted heavy drinking among the Polish population. Drinking alcohol in Poland was an important aspect of social situations. The most popular beverage was vodka(s). Social pressure to drink in the extreme was attributed to the tradition of hospitality. Cultural norms encouraged very heavy drinking among men and imposed heavy social sanctions on women who were supposed to display virtues of abstinence. The typical model of drinking was intermittent very heavy drinking, leading to intoxication on most occasions. These norms reinforced the notion that "we can drink more because we are Poles" and the view that safe drinking messages are designed for other nations because "Poles are accustomed to drinking strong alcohol, unlike others".

Adult male informants reported drinking much less in Australia than in Poland. The biggest change was a lack of social pressure to drink. Although men claimed that they drink less, some still drink in an unsafe manner. These were largely those whose English skills restricted their employment and friendship networks. Women, on the other hand, admitted that in Australia they drink more often and more alcohol at a sitting than in Poland. Although informants did not mention any alcohol-related family problems in Australia, others reported alcohol-related violence within some families. Some safety messages about alcohol do not reach this sample of people. Many view drink driving rules as purely revenue raisers for the government. However, advice from their medical practitioners to reduce their alcohol intake for serious health reasons is given more credibility.

Young Polish Australians formed two groups in their attitude to drinking. The first group consisted of people who attended tertiary educational institutions and consumed alcohol in a similar fashion to other Australian students. It is likely that the university environment influenced their drinking patterns. Those who witnessed drinking at home and perceived it as a good thing, modelled their drinking on their parents' and other adults at home. Others, who perceived their parents as non-drinkers, learned to drink from their friends and displayed similar drinking patterns to their peers. The second group was older, some were in the workforce and manifested drinking patterns akin to those in the general Australian population in the same age bracket. Both groups of these young Polish Australians were much more aware of alcohol health messages and more likely to modify their behaviours such as not to drink and drive, than was the older population. However, other drinking-related health warnings were largely disregarded.

This research demonstrates the negative impact of reduced government funding for English programs and ethno-specific services for migrant groups. More research is needed on migrant drinking in Australia, specifically among those groups whose drinking continues to be problematic.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material

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Research in general, and in social and health fields in particular, does not take place in a vacuum. It concerns the researcher and the participants of the study. It also draws in numerous other people.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After 15 years in Australia, in 1997 I went back to the country and city of my childhood and early adulthood. Within a minute of stepping out of the taxi I was greeted by a very intoxicated middle-aged man, one of eight males sitting on a bench in front of an apartment block of 26 flats in the city in northeast Poland where I grew up. “Welcome home Ms Basia”, he cried. Although it was only four o’clock in the afternoon, all of the men were already noticeably intoxicated. I recognised the man who greeted me as one of the sons of our neighbour who lived above us. I remembered that every month, each payday our neighbour would drink four to six days and nights in a row until he ran out of funds, and he was not the only one drinking from the neighbourhood. (This neighbour was murdered three years ago, after this study had started, while drinking in the company of three other men) The family always struggled, as the mother had to feed her six sons. Three of them were sitting on the bench all those years later. It seemed as if time had stood still for that place. Only the people on the bench changed. During my visit I saw intoxicated men in the parks, on the streets, in the stairways, sleeping off their drink, passers-by carrying on with their business, as if they did not exist, so used were they to the sight.

With the harm so visible on the streets and many media reports about acute alcohol-related harm in Poland, my thoughts returned to Australia, to my friends and acquaintances from the Polish community. I thought about Polish-Australian drinking patterns and decided it would be worthwhile to explore if and how their drinking patterns changed on leaving Poland. I had a feeling they had, and if so, I wanted to know what influenced the change: new friends, the media or a different lifestyle? What about those migrants who arrived in Australia as children, unaffected by the environment in Poland? What had the greatest influence on their views on drinking, their friends or their family or other factors?

I was a medical practitioner in Poland. During my studies and work I learned about the impact heavy drinking had on the health of people. In Australia I continued with my interest in health and its promotion by studying health science. My main interest was the prevention and reduction of harm in the addiction field. My interests evolved further as I tried to explain what makes people behave the way they do. If we are to target heavy drinking populations, what makes some of them change their ways without any intervention from health professionals? This, then, led to my interest in culture and the influence of the social environment on one's behaviour.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was the exploration of the emergence and patterns of alcohol consumption among two groups of Polish migrants in Perth, Western Australia; those who arrived in Australia as adults with presumably established habits and those who arrived as children, with limited socialisation around drinking. The aim was not to focus on medical or epidemiological aspects of alcohol use, but to introduce the faces and stories behind drinking patterns and their possible relevance to recent harm minimisation strategies.

Organisation of thesis

Chapter 2 sets the scene by presenting an overview of alcohol consumption in Australia, around the world and in Poland, and examines different drinking patterns in Europe and elsewhere.

In Chapter 3 the methodology used in the study is described and justified. Primarily this involved in-depth interviews, but limited participant observation was also employed.

In Chapter 4, the genesis and development of drinking patterns in Poland are explored. The historical factors that influenced and facilitated the formation of

drinking patterns in that country are examined; in particular, the way in which the political economy entrenched the use of alcohol.

Chapter 5 presents the informants' views of the meaning and place of alcohol in Poland. This includes their understandings of historical and cultural contexts to drinking.

In Chapter 6 the changing meanings of alcohol for those migrants who arrived in Australia as adults, are examined. This includes a discussion of adult informant's opinions about their and other migrants' drinking practices.

A similar discussion is included in Chapter 7, in which the drinking patterns of young Polish Australians, who arrived in Australia as children, are explored. Influences on the formation of drinking patterns are also examined in this chapter.

Chapter 8 draws together the findings of the study. It also recommends more intensive and extensive research on the nature and extent of migrant drinking and its consequences.

Throughout this thesis there is reference to the geographical regions of Europe, such as northern Europe, and southern, wine drinking countries and these will be spelt with a lower case. However, Eastern and Western European countries, when they refer to a political system, will be spelt in an upper case.

CHAPTER 2

ALCOHOL IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

This study of the changing drinking patterns of Polish people who have migrated to Australia needs to be contextualised in order to fully understand the dynamics of drinking behaviour. Accordingly, this chapter provides a historical overview of alcohol consumption in the western world and notes the varied and changing reason for state control of drinking behaviour. Furthermore, it explains the resistance to control and reasons for the perpetuation of alcohol use, with particular reference to its social and health benefits. This study arises from concerns about the power of cultural norms to sustain heavy drinking, despite clear evidence of alcohol-related health and social harm. To explore this, this chapter presents the role of alcohol in human life, and will address the evidence of the problems of heavy drinking.

A Short History of Alcohol

Alcohol has been a part of the human diet for thousands of years. According to some archaeological discoveries the fermentation process was already known in some early hunter-gatherer cultures in Europe. The earliest alcoholic beverages may have been made from fermenting berries (Gossop, 1996). The development of agriculture in around the eighth millennium, which produced a food surplus for the first time, made it possible to add beer and wine to the diet (Austin, 1985). Most information about alcohol production comes from the ancient world of Asia Minor,

North Africa and Southern Europe, regions hospitable for vine growing. Archaeologists report that the first vineyards were established on the slopes of the Caucasus Mountains of present Armenia around the fourth millennium BC. The book of Genesis attributes the development of vine growing to Noah after the flood. It gives a lively description of the “shameful” behaviour of the father of viticulture after overindulging in wine. In the early years, the general population drank mostly beer because wine was expensive. Wine was only used during religious festivals. It became more popular with the commercial development of vine growing and wine production in Greece (Gossop, 1996, Plant, 1997, Musto, 1997).

The ancient countries valued alcoholic beverages, however, they also noticed the negative aspects of drinking. The first recorded attempts to control drinking took place in Egypt. An Egyptian priest decreed in c. 2000 BC:

I, thy superior forbid thee to go to taverns. Thou art degraded like the beasts (cited in Gossop, 1996, p 152).

In some Greek states intoxication was frowned upon and regarded as degrading. As an example one can use Sparta, where in the seventh century BC, Lycyrgus established austere laws that prohibited wine drinking for any reason other than thirst. On the other hand, democratic Athens allowed drinking to go unabated, and drinking in the morning, a custom introduced by Alcibiades in the fourth century BC, was the norm. Athenians often organised social meetings that were called symposia, and these consisted of a banquet with drinking and conversation. The culmination of drinking occasions was the Dionysian festival with plays, celebrations and drinking to honour the god of wine (Musto, 1997).

The love for wine extended to Rome, where the Greek customs and festivals were keenly adopted. The festival of Saturnalia was the main time for feasting, drinking and enjoyment (Gossop, 1996). Romans planted vineyards everywhere where conditions were favourable. In a short time the colonies in Gaul produced more wine than the whole of Italy (Plant, 1997). By the first century vine growing was so extensive that it took over wheat growing. Domitian, the emperor of Rome at that time, ordered the destruction of half of the vineyards, replacing them with cereal

crops to provide enough bread for the empire and to control to some degree the widespread drunkenness of Rome's citizens (Gossop, 1996)

In brief, one can see that in many countries wine drinking has a long tradition, lasting a few thousand years. In northern European countries vine growing and therefore wine production was not possible due to the climatic conditions, and instead people produced mead from honey, and beer from barley and hops. Drinking beer as a beverage influenced the development of specific drinking patterns in these regions. It spoiled quickly and had to be consumed shortly after it was made. Poor people mainly consumed beer. Mead, and later wine, were restricted to nobles, as these beverages were both rare and expensive. Wine drinking spread throughout the whole of Europe. There is a legend that Volodimir (978-1015 AD) the Grand Prince of Kiev, who converted Rus¹ to Christianity, rejected Islam in part because of its ban on wine drinking. He declared: "wine drinking is the joy of the Russe. We cannot live without that pleasure" (Austin, 1985, p.76).

In the course of history rules governing wine drinking were different for men and women and they changed in different times and places. In ancient times, in Greece and Rome women were not allowed to consume wine (Gossop, 1996, Plant, 1997). However, in the early Middle Ages women were responsible for brewing drinks in Europe and were an integral part of social gatherings where drinking took place. Their presence was thought to have acted as a social control measure of alcohol consumption (Jellinek, 1945). This situation changed in the twelfth century. Women were excluded from the drinking occasions of men in an effort to protect their innocence. Alcohol drinking became more of a domain of males who consumed it alone or in the company of other males. Drinking contests became a frequent occurrence, and it was thought that these feasts could damage women, who were increasingly seen as gentle and delicate creatures. It was the time of the emergence of male dominated drinking, very often to excess when violence and aggression while drinking became a socially accepted phenomenon. A male who could consume copious amounts of alcohol, was regarded by many with admiration.

¹ Rus: early Eastern Slavs, who in the tenth century had a principality in the area of present Ukraine (Austin, 1985).

This social attitude persists until the present day in many societies (Bjerer, 1992. Plant, 1997; Sulkunnen, 1992)

In the fourteenth century there was a further escalation of alcohol use. Some researchers attribute the increased consumption of alcohol to the Plague, an epidemic which claimed two-thirds of the population of Europe. People noticed that the only safe drinks at that time were beer and wine, which were thought to burn the disease. Alcohol was also a substance that altered the mood, removing fear of death and sadness at the loss of family members. The prologue of Boccaccio's *Decameron* provides the explanation for drinking during the plague. According to him, some people thought that the only cure was to be merry, to amuse themselves, to eat and drink to complete intoxication, to do only the things that pleased them. They felt doomed anyway, so they wanted to have as much fun as possible before they had "to join St. Peter" (Austin, 1985; Boccaccio, 1975, p. 5; Plant, 1997).

At the same time a Franciscan chemist, John of Rupescissa distilled pure alcohol - the fifth essence, *aqua vitae*. He reported its medicinal and preservative properties. *Aqua vitae* quickly became popular with doctors who prescribed it in cases of plague. In later ages gin, whisky and other spirits were thought to protect against disease and were given to children during various epidemics (Austin, 1985). Belief in the beneficial role of spirits persists to the present day in many communities, with suggestions, for example, of a shot of spirit with pepper for a severe cold or an infusion of raspberries in strong *himber* (Polish moonshine) for high fever (personal experience, as told by my grandmother).

Spirit drinking became popular at the end of the fifteenth century in central Europe. At first spirit was made mainly from the distillation of wine and was expensive, but later also from different kinds of grains, which facilitated the spread of the drink throughout northern Europe. By the sixteenth century the north-eastern countries of Europe, particularly Russia and Poland, started the production of vodka, which translates as "little water", from grains (Austin, 1985; Faith & Wisniewski, 1995).

The seventeenth century saw the production of new spirits made from different types of fruit, calvados from apples and pears, kirsch from cherries, *slivovitz* from plums, and rum from West Indian sugar. In the middle seventeenth century, increasing production of grains enabled the development of gin in Holland. Distilling became integrated into the rural economy. It utilised surplus wheat and the by-product of distillation, the mash, was an indispensable supplement to enrich the fodder of cattle, which produced a better milk yield. The drink spread through the Hanseatic ports of the Baltic Sea to all countries of northern Europe and later to the West Indies and the English colonies (Austin, 1985).

Spirits spread not only within Europe. Moscow introduced vodka to the Siberian tribes living in northeastern Asia, after their subjugation in the seventeenth century. These peoples traditionally used beer and *kumis* (fermented mare's milk) (Austin, 1985). The introduction of vodka was disastrous to the native people of Siberia as with indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world (Saggers & Gray, 1998a). The effects of that process are still felt today. Data from Russia indicate the highest per capita alcohol consumption occurs in the far-eastern regions of the country (Bobak *et al.*, 1999). By the end of the seventeenth century the brew of the traditional beverages in these regions was suppressed. The local *kabaks* (taverns) were established with official saloonkeepers. At the same time the “*kabak spy*” was introduced to the tavern to officially oversee that there was no bootlegging, which would undermine the profits of the tavern and through that the revenue of the state (Austin, 1985).

Alcohol Regulation

Europe

In the eighteenth century the overproduction of wheat in many parts of Europe and the introduction of potatoes in the production of spirits resulted in lower prices of alcohol. Spirits became widely available. Gin-houses and inns, where men were encouraged to drink, sprang up everywhere. Many countries of Europe

experienced problems with drunken populations and drinking control measures were introduced (Gossop, 1996). Generally drinking was not considered unhealthy at that time, although the first voices of concern were rising among doctors. The first one to declare brandy and tobacco as poisons was Carl von Linne (Linneus), naval physician at Stockholm. He observed that the prohibition of distillation in the 1740s in Sweden resulted in a ten per cent decrease in crimes committed by sailors and a 59 per cent reduction in illness (Makela, 1980).

It should be noted that the first drinking control measures introduced by some governments throughout the history of alcohol were not because alcohol was considered harmful, but because it was a public nuisance and control was called for at times of public disorder (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). In the early eighteenth century there was a dramatic increase in alcohol consumption in England, and references to this period write of a “gin epidemic”. Concerns about the health effects were raised and laws restricting the availability of alcohol were introduced. Taxation and a number of regulatory and licensing laws drastically reduced alcohol sales. Although pressure from the landowners producing grain for distilling led to revocation of those laws in 1751, they are thought to have played a part in reducing spirits consumption in the eighteenth century (Musto, 1997).

During the industrial revolution, safety concerns while operating machinery, led to renewed interest of the authorities in regulating the alcohol market. This coincided with the voices of newly formed religious groups after the Reformation, which targeted alcohol as a danger to salvation (Musto, 1997). While the Catholic Church did not regard alcohol as inherently bad, various Protestant groups branded alcohol as evil. In countries where these groups had many followers, their role in temperance movements were particularly strong (Levine, 1987; Musto, 1997).

Religious attitudes toward alcohol were much more consistent than that of various governments. Governments had different approaches to alcohol, from country to country and from one historical period to another. Ancient Persians believed that alcohol provided courage and energy in battle (Musto, 1997). These beliefs were shared by the Russian Red Army command, during the Second World War. It was manifested by the government supplying a hundred millilitres of vodka

to the soldiers before each battle (Godorowski, 1992). However, at different times and in different places, states claimed that alcohol endangered State security and their governments introduced partial prohibition. In Britain during the First World War, all public houses in the vicinity of any munition factory were ordered to close and further restrictions were introduced to the opening hours of public houses. These new laws were strongly supported by the factory owners (Gossop, 1996). Similarly, in 1914 in Russia, there was concern about the impact of alcohol consumption on the war effort. In the days preceding the First World War, the commander-in-chief of the Russian army decreed officers responsible for the sobriety of the soldiers in their units. In the first days of war all alcohol was to be destroyed in the regions near the front (Godorowski, 1992).

Australia

During the early days of European settlement in Australia, the approach to alcohol by colonial governments was similar to that of many western European countries. Alcohol was viewed as a valuable economic resource. The government was legally permitted to supplement wages in spirits, usually rum. Alcohol quickly became an important part of the economy in the colony, and it was a good source of income from production and sales (McAllister *et al.*, 1993).

As in many societies, hand in hand with drinking came alcohol-related social problems, which sparked the development of the sobriety movement in Australia. Temperance societies formed in the 1830s and 1840s but were not particularly influential. It took 30 years of activities of temperance groups to influence community attitudes and government policy. However, the process to introduce restrictions in the distribution and sales of alcohol was slow. The benefits that alcohol brought to manufacturers and the colony took precedence over the perceived harm drinking had on Australian society. It must be said though, that temperance societies had an impact on public opinion by agitating against alcohol and fostering Sunday school education, where children were taught the evils of alcohol (McAllister *et al.*, 1993).

The end of the Second World War saw the emergence of systematic research on alcohol consumption and its effects. After the war, with the improvement in standards of living in western countries, alcohol consumption started to rise. In tandem, the temperance and sobriety societies in many countries began to lobby their respective governments to reduce the availability of alcohol. Until the 1970s, the main anti-alcohol policies were focused on prevention and treatment of alcoholism, and other chronic alcohol-related problems such as liver cirrhosis and alcoholic psychosis (Sulkunen, 1976).

In Australia, there has been at least some control over alcohol production sales supply and consumption, since colonial times. Some of the control measures, such as taxation and levies on licences were introduced because they brought significant revenue to the state. Other means of control, like restrictions on trading hours, prohibition of sales of alcohol to minors and intoxicated people, prohibition of public drunkenness and of alcohol supply to Indigenous people, were undertaken because of the perceived danger to society. These policies dominated up until the 1970s (Powell, 1988; Saggers & Gray, 1998b). This state of affairs changed in the 1980s when harm minimisation approaches took centre stage, in line with the principle: “drink if you want but make sure you do it in a safe manner” (Powell, 1988, p. 59). Since then many innovative measures have been undertaken with harm minimisation as a dominant feature. Policy objectives were grouped into a number of areas such as public and professional education, research, and a variety of control measures: alcohol taxation, controls on alcohol availability and marketing, and legal measures such as the introduction of random breath testing (Kingdon, 1993, Plant *et al.*, 1997a; Hawks & Lenton, 1995).

Alcohol in Contemporary Life

Alcohol is a favourite drug in many societies and most people derive benefits from drinking, but at times many suffer negative consequences, and this in turn has an impact on general society (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). Measuring alcohol-related harm is not a simple task for epidemiologists, both in medical and sociological fields.

Causality in alcohol-related harm is rarely associated with a single factor. For many years consumption levels of absolute alcohol in a population were used as an indicator of harm. Unfortunately this measure is not very specific, as it has been shown that at very low levels of regular drinking, morbidity and mortality risks actually decrease (English *et al.*, 1995; Rehm *et al.*, 1996)

In order to establish measures for categories of harm, it is necessary to determine that the consequence is harmful and that there is a causal link between alcohol consumption and these harmful consequences. However, this is not as simple as it seems. In medical epidemiology the causality is determined by cohort or case control studies, based on the statistical association of exposure and disease (Greenberg *et al.*, 1996). In social research, problems arise because there are cultural differences in what is generally perceived as harm in a society and on an individual level (Heath, 2000b).

To add to this difficulty, there has never been uniform data collection in most countries. This is particularly the case in developing countries, and countries of central and eastern Europe (CCEE) (Edwards *et al.*, 1995, Lehto, 1997). These countries often use prevalence of alcoholism as an indicator, but unfortunately, do not explain what is defined as “alcoholism” (Bielewicz, 1993). Other regions have accepted the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM IV) as diagnostic criteria (APA, 1994). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association IV is an updated form of DSM III (APA, 1987), and is internationally accepted as diagnostic criteria for psychiatric conditions and alcohol dependency. DSM IV consists of a structured clinical interview, self-reported quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption, and alcohol-related problems (APA, 1994). It is widely used in Australia by mental health professions

Alcohol-related health indicators are easier to determine and liver cirrhosis mortality has often been used as a measure of heavy drinking in many countries and it is the only comparable data of alcohol-related harm. It has estimated that up to 80 per cent of all deaths from liver cirrhosis are due to alcohol damage (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Wurm, 1990). There is empirical evidence that countries that have a high per

capita consumption of absolute alcohol also have a high mortality rate from liver cirrhosis and when alcohol consumption falls, health indicators improve (Ledermann, 1956; Hawks, 1993; Moskalewicz, 1985, Iontchev, 1998)

For a better understanding of alcohol-related harm, it is important to distinguish different patterns of consumption. Edwards and colleagues (1995) and Room (1998) point out the significance of acute problems related to intoxication, such as car crashes caused by driving while intoxicated, and chronic social problems such as family dysfunction. This prompted a shift of interest in the research world away from aggregate consumption to a focus on the prevention of high-risk drinking (Stockwell *et al.*, 1997). There is empirical data which show that duration and intensity of drinking carries with it short and long-term consequences (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). However, it is also important to take into account who does the drinking, what their accompanying diet is, where the drinking takes place, and what the accepted behaviour after drinking is (Heath, 2000b; Rehm & Fisher, 1997).

Alcohol consumption is a social activity and has positive and negative effects. These can be on an individual level, such as physiological, psychophysical and mental consequences. The negative effects can also be experienced at the population level as harm to others, because of an individual's drinking (Rehm & Fisher, 1997).

Social benefits of drinking

The review of alcohol use from antiquity to the present day suggests that the custom of drinking is very strong and enduring. The survival and spread of drinking as an integral part of normal life, suggests that it has played a positive role, at least from the perspective of drinkers. Alcohol use has survived severe opposition from many governing bodies of past civilisations, which fought to control or prohibit its consumption (Pittman & White, 1991).

Why has drinking survived as a valued social custom over so many centuries? It was treated, and in many instances still is, as a food. In addition, many people when asked what is the value of alcohol will say: "Because it is fun to get drunk!"

In some situations alcohol use is an attempt to control mood and behaviour, as is the case with the first drink on walking into a party to unwind. It facilitates social interaction, or at other times helps people to cope with, and occasionally escape from, the difficult situations in life (Wilkinson & Saunders, 1997).

For these reasons alcohol is currently the favourite legal drug in western countries. In many societies it is an integral part of social activities. Most births and marriages are celebrated with alcohol. In everyday life alcohol is a normal feature of social gatherings and relaxation. People unwind with a glass of wine, they celebrate a promotion or a win in the lottery by drinking alcohol. Many individuals use it for its pharmacological, beneficial effects such as relaxation, facilitating social interaction, and relief of stress. For many people it is hard to imagine a party without the relaxing effect of alcohol. People are usually too shy and self-conscious to let go of the learned inhibitions, the feeling that everybody is watching and judging them. As one person told me: “After a drink I don’t care and I can have fun”.

Others find it easier to start conversations and talk to unfamiliar people. Most find the relaxing drink after work invaluable to unwind and forget about everyday problems. Sitting at a nicely laid table with a good meal and a drink is the image many have for a romantic, relaxing night. The media often enforces this image, by portraying a handsome man and a beautiful woman having a candle-lit dinner with wine. One can often find the guides to “the best reds or whites”, and with which foods they can be enjoyed the most. The atmosphere of drinking is portrayed as warm, friendly and loving, something we humans have always aspired towards. Drinking beer with one’s mates while watching a sporting event emanates a feeling of friendship and belonging. It is common to read in popular press quotations that reflect the popularity of alcohol “Wine, I love wine because it is a good excuse to sit down with friends, talk and have a good time” (*Sunday Times*, 13 August 2000).

Health benefits of alcohol

San Jose and colleagues (2000) studied drinking patterns and their health outcomes and concluded that the benefit to health by regular drinking is not due to

alcohol influencing the tissues of the drinker. They argue, instead, that drinking is a social event and social interaction enhances mental health and through this physical health as well.

There is a growing body of evidence, however, that light-to-moderate drinking may have health benefits, such as reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease (Doll, 1998; Goldberg *et al.*, 1995; Maclure, 1993, Renaud & de Lorgeril, 1992; Roche, 1997; Simpura, 1997). Although Bondy cautions against accepting these findings without criticism, they are supported by experimental studies which show the reduction in atherosclerotic plaque and thrombus formation, two processes leading to myocardial infarction in moderate drinkers (Bondy, 1996; Goldberg *et al.*, 1995; Rubin & Rand, 1994; Puddley *et al.*, 1999). Stockley (1998), in an extensive review of the recent literature, concludes that there is epidemiological and *in vitro* evidence that moderate consumption of alcohol has beneficial health effects, which outweigh the harmful effects for the general population.

In brief, the moderate use of alcohol can be both pleasurable and beneficial for the social and biological well-being of humans. Most people use alcohol with no detrimental effect on their lives, but some drinkers, even those who consume alcohol in moderation, will experience some problems at some point in their lifetime.

Alcohol-Related Harm

It is a known fact supported by many studies that unwise use of alcohol contributes to alcohol-related problems. There is no simple explanation of cause and effect in alcohol-related problems. The consequences vary from chronic ill health, acute health harm and various social problems. Each outcome depends on a range of causal factors. One of the main factors is the pattern of consumption and duration of drinking career. Acute harm, such as road crashes, work-related accidents, acute pancreatitis or sudden cardiac arrest can be caused by the consumption of large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time. Chronic problems arise from long-term

exposure, with continuing damaging effect of alcohol on tissues (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Heather & Robertson, 1998).

Drinking can result not only in harm to the drinker but also to others. The family of the drinker or society in general, bears the burden of the cost of health care, loss of productivity and financial support for the drinker, the drinker's family or other victims of drinking. The *1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey* found that excessive drinking of alcohol is rated as the drug issue of most concern to the general public. The main reason for this concern was domestic violence and crime attributed to alcohol, road safety issues and general health problems (Collins & Lapsley, 1992, Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Makkai & MacAllister, 1998; Makkai, 1998b).

The risk of harm increases with the amount of alcohol consumed (Giesbrecht & West, 1997). The National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) in Australia defines low risk drinking as four standard drinks for men and two for women per drinking session, or 28 and 14 standard drinks respectively per week. A standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol, which is 30mL of spirits, 100mL of wine and 285mL of beer (Pols & Hawks, 1991). The NH&MRC defines drinking four to six standard drinks per day, or more than 28 per week by men and two to four standard drinks per day, or 14-28 per week by women, as hazardous. It means that this type of drinking has not necessarily yet been associated with problems, but that there is an increasing risk of problems in the future. Harmful drinking is defined as drinking more than six standard drinks per day, or more than 42 a week by men, and more than four drinks per day or more than 28 per week by women (Pols & Hawks, 1991; Roche, 1999; Stockwell *et al.*, 1997).

After tobacco, alcohol is implicated in most drug-related deaths in Australia. There were over 4 000 alcohol-related deaths in Australia in 1998. Alcohol-caused hospital morbidity is increasing and in 1998, 86 000 hospital admissions had alcohol-related problems as the primary diagnosis (Chikritzhs *et al.*, 2000). It is estimated that alcohol use was responsible for 25 per cent of deaths related to all psychoactive substance use, with 62 per cent in the 15-34 year age group. It is postulated that it costs Australia \$3 245.3 million in production loss, health care, law enforcement,

person-years of life lost², research and health campaigns (Collins & Lapsley, 1992; AIHW, 2000). Between 1993 and 1995 the cost of hospitalisation for all alcohol-related causes in Western Australia was approximately \$26 million per year, which is \$15 per head of population. Over 60 per cent of the cost of alcohol-related hospitalisation was caused by preventable injuries (Unwin, *et al.*, 1997).

With some understanding of the complexities of the causality of alcohol-related harm, the following section will review Australian and international literature on chronic, acute and social alcohol-related harm.

Chronic health problems due to regular use of alcohol

There is a common perception that heavy drinking increases the risk of life threatening and disabling diseases. This view has been supported by many studies of the effects of long-term alcohol use on health. These have shown that alcohol has a toxic effect on the heart, nervous system, pancreas and liver (Edwards *et al.*, 1995, English *et al.*, 1995). It is important to note that many alcohol-related health problems at the beginning of the drinking career are temporary, occurring while drinking takes place, or are due to nutritional deficiencies caused by the consumption of alcohol. Such is the case in pathological changes to the liver and nerve tissue, which are reversible with the early interruption of heavy drinking. The longer the drinking, the more likely is permanent damage. There is also a clear dose and effect relationship with the accumulative life-dose effect and number of heavy drinking episodes affecting the degree of alcohol-related damage (Grant *et al.*, 1985). Chronic conditions are said to contribute to the majority of alcohol-caused deaths (Catalano *et al.*, 2001; Chikritzhs *et al.*, 2000; Unwin *et al.*, 1997).

Many countries use morbidity and mortality data with primary alcohol-related diagnoses as an indicator of the severity of alcohol-related problems (Anderson, 1995; Norstrom, 1998b; Smart & Mann, 1992). The indicators used most often are liver cirrhosis and alcohol dependency syndrome. Data about mortality due to liver

² A measure of total life expectancy lost within a particular population because of premature death (Greenberg *et al.*, 1996).

cirrhosis is collected world wide and although not all liver cirrhosis is due to heavy drinking, it is the only comparable indicator of alcohol-related harm between countries (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). According to the World Health Organisation in Australia there were 8.1 deaths per 100 000 in 1988 due to liver cirrhosis, which is average for the western world (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). Liver cirrhosis is responsible for 20 per cent of alcohol-related deaths in Western Australia (Unwin *et al.*, 1997).

In Western Australia stroke accounted for 18 per cent of all deaths between 1984 and 1995 associated with the use of alcohol. High blood pressure is the main causal factor in stroke (Unwin *et al.*, 1997). Anderson and colleagues (1993) showed that there is a dose-response relationship between drinking and blood pressure among the males and among half of the females they studied. Heavy drinking also increases the risk of cardiac arrhythmias, cardiomyopathy, and sudden coronary death (Bobak *et al.*, 1999; Anderson *et al.*, 1993). Long-term alcohol use can also be a factor in the increased risk of many other diseases, with many cancers receiving the attention of researchers (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; San Garro & Lieber, 1990). Some studies attribute harm to the kind of beverage that is consumed. For example, drinking large amounts of beer is associated with increased risk of cancer of the colon (Norstrom, 1998a).

In summary, it is clear that chronic alcohol-related problems have a bearing on the general health and wellbeing of society, but many effects are reversible and health institutions usually have time to address these problems. On the other hand, societies have no such luxury when dealing with acute problems arising from acute intoxication.

Acute alcohol-related problems

Most acute alcohol-related harm is due to consumption of large amounts of alcohol in a short period of time. Fatal road crashes and work-related accidents are the most widely recognised consequences of alcohol intoxication. The physiological effects include sensory, motor and reaction changes that have a negative effect on a person's ability to drive and operate machinery. These changes are visual impairment, decreased ability to focus and concentrate, and reduced possibility to

process information and make correct decisions, reduced reaction time and fine motor control (Julien, 1995). Studies show that the risk of an accident increases sharply with the increase of blood alcohol concentration (Zador, 1991)

In Western Australia in 1995, road injuries accounted for 18 per cent of alcohol caused deaths. It was shown that 25 per cent of drivers and 34 per cent of pedestrians involved in fatal road crashes had a blood alcohol concentration above 0.05 per cent (Traffic Board of Western Australia 1996, p.22). The worrying trend is the involvement of people under 25 in those deaths and injuries, accounting for 14 per cent of deaths (English *et al.*, 1995). Pols and Hawks (1991) estimated that although alcohol was responsible for only 26 per cent of all drug-related deaths in Australia in 1990, it was responsible for 40 per cent of the relevant years of life lost. This trend appears to have a rising tendency over the last eight years. Chikritzhs and colleagues (2000) noted that although there has been a reduction in the number of alcohol-related deaths in recent years, the number of person-years of life lost due to high risk drinking has risen to 46 per cent. This means that most people dying from alcohol-related acute causes are young, and males in particular are affected. The reason behind such a large number of deaths among this group is believed to be binge drinking (Chikritzhs *et al.*, 2000).

Other conditions that are causally associated with heavy drinking are fire injuries, drowning and suicide (Unwin *et al.*, 1997). Murphy (1992) postulates that heavy drinking evokes social disapproval and thus leads to deterioration of social ties and support, resulting in an increased suicide risk. Another aspect of that increased risk is a direct link between acute intoxication, which reduces an individual's self-control, and triggers the suicidal intent, which already exists. Studies by Nortstrom (1995), Rossow (1993), and Skog and colleagues (1995) show a link between heavy drinking and suicide in, as they call it, “dry” drinking cultures of Sweden and Norway. In the “wet” drinking cultures of Portugal and France, where per capita consumption is high, the alcohol effect on suicide is weak. Pirkola and colleagues (2000) also support the link between male suicide and alcohol misuse.

Social harm

Drinking affects thinking and reasoning processes, which in effect shortens the drinker's time horizon causing concentration on the immediate events at the expense of the distant ones. Drinking also affects mood and emotions. The important aspect of drinking to intoxication is that the effect is usually much stronger in occasional heavy drinkers than in regular heavy drinkers due to acquired tolerance to alcohol. This can lead to impairment of the individual's performance in major social roles, which include work with reduction in performance, absenteeism, dismissal, unemployment, and accidents at work. Drinking can also lead to inability to perform as a parent, a spouse, and a contributor to the functioning of the household (Bielewicz, 1993; Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Room, 1998; Vroublevsky & Harwin, 1998).

Some studies postulate that alcohol-related crime and disorder in our society is very common (Graham *et al.*, 1998; Makkai, 1997; 1998a), whereas others argue that the connection between alcohol and crime is not certain (White & Hymaniuk, 1994; Young, 1994a). Stockwell (1995) and Makkai (1997; 1998a) report that nightclubs, taverns and hotels were high-risk places for the occurrence of violent assaults as compared with restaurants and social clubs. Victims and perpetrators of assaults were younger, single, male and reported consuming alcohol at harmful levels or being binge drinkers.

There is a general belief in society that alcohol causes domestic violence (Young, 1994b). Domestic violence is particularly prevalent among Australia's Indigenous population, where it is reported to be 40-62 times more likely than in non-indigenous communities. In most cases, people involved in these situations point to alcohol as a causal factor (Saggers & Gray, 1998a). There is little published research on alcohol-related domestic violence within migrant families in Australia. One such study of domestic homicide statistics in South Australia found that there were more overseas born offenders, particularly those born in New Zealand, Oceania, Turkey, Lebanon, Italy, Poland and Yugoslavia (Wallace, 1986 in Young, 1994b). Some studies report that in 10-20 per cent of cases of child abuse, misuse of alcohol was involved (Young, 1994b). Alcohol is also believed to contribute to

many cases of child neglect with malnourishment being the most frequent factor cited (Saggers & Gray, 1998a)

Harm due to an individual's drinking can also affect members of the public, such as victims of drink-driving crashes, alcohol-related industrial accidents or victims of crime committed under the influence of alcohol. Finally, one should take into account the cost the whole society bears, which is brought on by drinking, such as welfare, health costs, insurance, law enforcement, and loss of production (Collins & Lapsley, 1992)

Consumption Levels and Drinking Patterns

It is evident that alcohol-related harm is dependent upon drinking patterns. In recent years there has been a growing interest in drinking patterns and related harm, which culminated in an international conference on drinking patterns and their consequences in 1995. Patterns of drinking refer to:

the type and amount of beverage consumed, the frequency, timing, setting of use, the symbolic or cultural meaning, or whether one's drinking matches social norms (Bondy, 1996, p.1663).

Patterns of drinking change constantly, due to advertising campaigns, fashion, and forces such as globalisation. For example, it has been noted in recent years that in many traditionally wine drinking countries, Italy, France and Spain, under-thirty-years-olds predominantly drink beer, and that per capita consumption in these countries is falling (Grant & Litvak, 1998; Simpura, 1997)

Some researchers also attribute alcohol-related harm to the expectations of the effect of alcohol, which is different in various cultures. Room (1997) suggests that in the northern European cultures, where drinking is intermittent, alcohol is regarded as a powerful substance able to transform behaviour, while among drinkers in southern European wine cultures, where daily drinking is common, few changes in behaviour are expected (Room, 1997). Also, intoxication is regarded differently. In Italy, drunkenness is regarded as a personal and family disgrace whereas in France,

where it is said the rate of alcoholism is four to five times that of Italy, it is seen as amusing and is tolerated (Arria & Gossop, 1998). In Eastern Europe, public drunkenness is a familiar sight and is usually accepted, or at least tolerated, by society (Iontchev, 1998).

Alcohol and culture

Alcohol use is a social behaviour that varies greatly among societies. Historical and cultural influences from a very distant past are said to have helped form drinking patterns (Iontchev, 1998). Culture usually refers to shared meanings, beliefs, and knowledge of ways of life that emerge from a group experience and are transmitted from one generation to another (Chu, 1998). Alcohol use has been linked to rules governing behaviour of various groups of humans for thousands of years. The diversity of regulations (who can drink, when, how much and with whom) between societies is enormous (Heath, 1990; 2000b). Drinking is often an ethnic marker, for some it means drinking to intoxication, as for many Indigenous people in Australia “for black people drinking alcohol is to be Aboriginal” (in Brady, 1992, p.703). For others, drinking is a part of diet and is treated on an equal footing with other foodstuffs (Heath, 2000a). In many societies, the sharing of drinks can be a way of building social credit and gaining vital information by social exchange while drinking (Banwell, 1997; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Mars, 1987). Serving alcohol to visitors is an absolute requirement of hospitality in some parts of Europe (Mars & Altman, 1987; Thornton, 1987).

Four drinking models have been distinguished in Europe. There are spirit drinking countries from the north and east (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic countries, Norway, Island, Poland, Slovakia, and the former East Germany). Beer drinking countries are located in western Europe (Czech Republic, Germany, and Austria), wine countries in southern regions (Greece, Italy, Romania, Moldova, Bulgaria, France, Spain, and Portugal) and mixed drinking countries elsewhere in Europe (Hungary, countries from the former Yugoslavia, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Britain and Ireland) (Simpura, 1995). Products used in the preparation of each beverage determine drinking models in these regions. Levine (1987) noted that

in the northern countries alcohol production was dependent on the agrarian surplus. The beverage had to be consumed within a few days of preparation as it spoiled quickly, and that set a matrix for an intermittent, excessive drinking pattern. In the wine drinking countries, vine growing was specifically for the production of wine, which could be stored over long periods of time with no need for excess drinking (Room, 1997).

The way alcohol affects members of a cultural group is also diverse. It is argued that the biological effect of alcohol is different due to varying drinking patterns. The build-up of tolerance in regular, moderate drinkers has a weaker immediate effect on their behaviour than intermittent drinking of the same amount of alcohol. Some studies from Italy report drinking of eight glasses of wine a day in rural areas with no acute ill effect on the community (Farchi *et al.*, 1992). Other researchers have argued that psychoactive reactions to alcohol are dependent on cultural framing and expectations (MacAndrew & Edgerton, 1969; Room, 1997).

Cultural expectations are often reflected in social policies on alcohol availability. In southern Europe, where wine is regarded as a part of everyday meals, taxes are low or non-existent, and media interest in alcohol-related problems is directed at “imported” customs of excessive beer drinking among young people (Simpura, 1998). At the other extreme, some indigenous communities in North America and Australia where excessive drinking is extremely disruptive, aim at prohibiting all alcohol (Saggers & Gray, 1998a). Cultural expectations about drinking are often longstanding and resistant to change (Room, 1997). For example, traditional heavy vodka drinking in the Russian Federation has remained unchanged after the collapse of the Eastern Block (Simpura, *et al.*, 1997).

Australia

Australia belongs to those countries where the favourite beverage, particularly of males, is beer. In 1997/98, Australians consumed 94.5 litres of this beverage per capita. However, Australians have not always been beer drinkers. The early settlers brought alcohol and drinking traditions with them from the old country. At the beginning of colonisation of Australia, England was just coming out of the

grips of the “gin epidemic”. Australian drinking patterns evolved from the Australian lifestyle in early colonial times, and have been linked with beliefs about egalitarianism, the image of an ideal male, and the relationship between males, culminating in the notion of mateship - a special friendship bond (Sargent, 1987).

The drinking pattern in the colony was typically intermittent, with large amounts of spirits, mostly rum, consumed, which at most occasions led to intoxication. The mostly male population endorsed this form of drinking. At the beginning of the colony in 1788, there were five and a half men to every woman in Sydney (Powell, 1988). Working in isolated places, on farms, mines, or prospecting for gold, in mostly male company, and with no other entertainment than the nearest pub (which was often a great distance from the workplace), enforced this drinking pattern. This pattern of employment also had a significant influence on the social pressure to drink among Australian men. The hard work associated with conquering the outback, fostered the emergence of drinking as a symbol of equality among white men. This facilitated development of “the shout”, which required all men in the group to buy a round of drinks for everybody and drink until all had the opportunity to fulfil their obligation (Sargent, 1973; 1987).

Improvements in beer quality in the late nineteenth century changed the beverage preferences of Australians. Australia became a beer drinkers’ country, with its consumption peaking in 1975 to 136.5 litres per capita. Beer remains the beverage of choice of the working class. Alcohol consumption data indicate that in 1997, 60 per cent of Australians nominated beer as their preferred drink, but the levels of per capita consumption are slowly dropping (AIHW, 1999; Sargent, 1987; World Drink Trends, 1999).

Over the last twenty years wine has become increasingly popular, with vineyards sprouting all over southern regions of Australia, like mushrooms after rain. In 1997/1998 Australians consumed 19.7 litres of wine per capita (World Drink Trends, 1999). This tendency is attributed to an emergence of new customers, the affluent, new middle class (Sulkunnen, 1992). Sargent foretold the emergence of this group: “the new development could take a course where a separate educated class would set itself apart from the mass” – by declining to participate in the “shout”

(Sargent, 1987, p. 82). In 1997 forty seven per cent of the Australian population drank wine (AIHW, 1999).

Spirits are the least popular beverages with 1.28 litres per capita consumed by Australians. In 1997/98, 37 per cent of Australians identified spirits as their first choice beverage. Spirits are also slightly increasing in popularity among young women, secondary and university students in particular (McBride *et al.*, 2000; Roche & Watt, 1999). Total per capita alcohol consumption in Australia in 1998 was 7.6 litres of pure alcohol, ranking 19th in the world (World Drink Trends, 1999)

In 1997, most people in Australia reported having used alcohol, with 86 per cent of the population having tried it at one time, and 76 per cent having used it within the last 12 months. Forty three per cent of Australians are regular drinkers who drink at least once a week. Over half of regular drinkers are male and a third are female. Thirteen per cent of male and twelve per cent of female drinkers consume alcohol at potentially harmful levels, using the guidelines recommended by the NH&MRC (AIHW, 1999).

Most information about drinking patterns in Australia, particularly the type of beverage, is general, with no age differentiation. This seems to be a serious omission, as it has been shown that young adults, 19 to 24 years old, are most at risk from acute alcohol-related harm because this population is most likely to binge drink (Heale *et al.*, 2000). The type of beverage consumed seems quite important because it does make a difference whether a person will drink eight standard beers throughout a night or whether they will drink five neat vodka “shoties” (30mL drink) before a night out. Although both would be defined as harmful drinking, the former is spread over a long time and the drinker might not feel the effects of alcohol, whereas in the latter situation the drinker will most probably get intoxicated very quickly (Heale *et al.*, 2000; Heath, 2000a; Roche, 1997; Roche & Watt, 1999).

This thesis examines the influences on drinking patterns among a group of Polish migrants. In this context, it is important to discuss not only the drinking patterns in the host country, Australia, but also those in the country of origin to see

what “cultural baggage”, as far as drinking is concerned, this group has brought with them (Kamien, 1986, p. 60).

Poland

Traditional Polish drinking has been classified as a northern European model, with intermittent consumption of spirits (mostly vodka, produced locally) in large amounts each session (Iontchev, 1998; Musto, 1997; Wald *et al.*, 1985; Moskalewicz & Simpura, 2000). Until recently, spirit consumption accounted for 60 to 70 per cent of all alcoholic beverages consumed in Poland. Ten per cent of drinkers in Poland are said to consume 50 per cent of all alcohol. Males drink six times more vodka than females in Poland. Three million people in Poland are said to be intoxicated daily, and of those 300 000 are women (Główny Urząd Statystyczny (GUS), 1996; Lewicki, 1996). In 1983, Poles spent 34.9 per cent of their income on food and 15 per cent on alcohol (GUS, 1983). Unfortunately, similar detailed figures from recent years are not available. Iontchev (1998) described Polish alcohol consumption as “weekend drinking”. This means that people get drunk once or twice a week. Public drunkenness is accepted as a norm, particularly around payday. This phenomenon is very noticeable on the streets of Polish towns and cities on the first day of each month when people usually get their wages (Bielewicz, 1993; Falicki, 1985).

In 1998, Poles consumed 41 litres of beer, 5.9 litres of wine and 3.4 litres of spirits per capita. Total consumption amounted to 6.2 litres of pure alcohol. Researchers agree that those figures do not represent real consumption in Poland. Reports from developing economies of the old Eastern Block state that 30-50 per cent of spirits consumed in the Baltic States and Poland come from illegal production and distribution. This consumption does not appear in the official records (Bielewicz, 1993; Falicki, 1985; Lehto & Moskalewicz, 1994; Lehto 1997).

An interesting pattern emerges from Poland. Swiatkiewicz (1997) noted that during 1992-1994, the early years of the market economy in Poland, thousands of litres of spirits were imported from Western European countries. Due to legislation

and control loopholes. After changes in the taxation laws³, the “current of the spirit river” (Simpura, 1997; Parliamentary Commission for the Fight with Alcoholism, 2000) changed and started flowing from the east and south, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and Slovakia, from illegal distilleries. This alcohol is of poor quality, often contaminated with methanol. It contributes to 72.5 per cent deaths among these under 45 in Russia due to acute alcohol-related causes, with alcohol poisoning being the most frequent (Vroublevsky & Harwin, 1998). In support of these statements Bielewicz (1993) and Habrat (1996) argue that health indicators of persistent high alcohol consumption in Poland are very high and rising. Alcohol-related mortality was also high, with the death rate due to liver cirrhosis of 13.9 per 100 000 population in 1991. As a comparison, in the same period in Australia, there were 8.1 deaths due to liver cirrhosis per 100 000 population.

Information about drinking patterns in Poland presents a rather disturbing picture. The biggest problem is that, on one hand, some in Poland lament “the alcohol problem” in their country, but on the other, drinking of large amounts of vodka is said to be traditional and specifically Polish (Bielewicz, 1993; Falicki, 1985). Polish migrants to Australia, particularly those who grew up in Poland and migrated as adults, spent the developmental period of their life in a society that accepted drunkenness and drinking to intoxication as part of everyday life.

Australia as a Migrant Country

Australia’s population is a “rainbow” of people. They came from many regions of the world and from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Although most speak English, over a hundred languages are spoken in Australia (Reid & Trompf, 1990). Migrants are usually healthier at the time of migration than those born in Australia, as they have to go through strict health requirements to be accepted into the country. However, according to Reid and Trompf (1990), after a few years of

³ In Poland excise on spirits is 95%, and on wine and beer 70%. All alcohol products have to have an excise band. Until December 1994, individuals were able to bring alcohol into the country for private use without paying tax, and without a licence. This loophole in the legislation led to the importation of millions of litres of spirits. It severely depleted the state budget, and led to increased consumption and total unreliability of official records of consumption and alcohol sales (Swiatkiewicz, 1997).

residence their health is likely to converge with that of Australians. In agreement Rissel (1997) stated:

The health of a migrant to Australia generally declines the longer the migrant lives in Australia, until his or her health is similar to that of the Australian-born. This change in health status is thought to be due to some extent to acculturation towards the western lifestyle and corresponding behavioural risk factors (Rissel, 1997, p. 606).

By acculturation, migrants and their children acquire behavioural norms of the host society (Rissel, 1997). This concept might be understood in tandem with social learning theory, which posits that social reinforcements provided by other people have an important influence on much human behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Social learning theory seems well suited to examine why groups of people drink in a particular way (Akers & La Greca, 1991; White *et al.*, 1991). A host society can influence the drinking patterns of new settlers. So, too, does the cultural environment in which a person grew up. The relative importance of the country of origin and the host country to the construction of drinking patterns lies at the heart of the present study.

In an early study Krupinski and Stoller (1965) found a higher incidence of alcoholism in male migrants from Eastern Europe as compared with Australian-born men. Another study from South Australia, between 1983 and 1987, noted a much higher incidence of alcohol-related problems such as higher alcohol-caused mortality and morbidity, and higher usage of sobering-up units, among some migrant groups (Wurm, 1990). In both studies people with the most problems were from Central and Eastern Europe. Some academics argue that the reasons behind excessive drinking and related harms include difficulties with adaptation in the new country, such as an inability to find appropriate work and trauma associated with conditions in their home countries, especially among refugees (Bottomley & de Lepervache, 1990; Bruxner, 1997; Giddens, 1992; Reid & Trompf, 1990).

Unfortunately, very little is known empirically about alcohol consumption levels and drinking patterns among migrants. Morrissey (1993) noted a lack of

research in the area of drug and alcohol use among the migrant populations. He described a current research project in these terms:

The results of this study were almost totally negative. It turned out to be an examination of what we don't know and reasons why we don't know it... The current statistical knowledge permits virtually no firm conclusion about comparative rates of substance abuse on an ethnic basis (Morrisey, 1993, p. 8-9).

Although ten years have passed, little has changed. On the contrary, there are even fewer recent publications about migrant populations and alcohol use and misuse than a decade ago.

This study aims to rectify this to some degree. It is not in the scope of this study to determine the levels of alcohol consumption among migrants, nor to find out to what degree drinking patterns change after migration. The aim is to bring some understanding to the historical and cultural aspects of the emergence of Polish drinking patterns. It also aims to present migrants' understanding of the impact of migration on their drinking patterns and their perception of harmful drinking. Some research has indicated that there is little knowledge about harmful levels of alcohol use among Spanish and Greek speaking communities in Sydney (Spathopoulos & Bertram, 1991; Bertram & Flaherty, 1993). In addition it has also been argued that there is a need for better health education and approach to migrants:

Our research - and in particular the survey of doctors - indicates a great need for education of the health care community both about drugs and alcohol and about the needs of NESB clients and appropriate ways of thinking and responding to them (Morrisey, 1993, p. 18).

Alcohol and other drug related harm appears to be on the front line of government health policies. Unfortunately, migrant groups seem to be invisible in discussions about preventing alcohol-related harm. Given the fact that migrants form over 25 per cent of Australia's population and 31.7 per cent in Western Australia, this is a regrettable omission (Visser & Beer, 1999). The significance of this study of Polish drinking patterns in Australia is that it addresses, at least in part, that

omission. It may also renew academic interest in the specific health needs of migrant groups.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study is concerned with the impact of a major life change - migration, on drinking patterns. In this chapter the methodological approach and a variety of data collection tools are described.

Rationale

Drinking patterns within any given cultural setting change constantly. Market promotion, movement of people from one country to another and the age profile of the population affect them, with young people drinking more than the elderly (Heath, 1995). In order to understand people's behaviour we must have an insight into how people understand and explain their actions and the world around them. A qualitative methodology should provide an opportunity for informants to talk about their experiences in order to create rich data.

If our aim is to understand alcohol use and its outcomes better, scientists would do well not to ignore the beliefs and behaviours of that vast majority of drinkers around the world who drink responsibly and gain a variety of benefits - social and physiological as well as physical - from doing so. To focus on morbidity and mortality in that connection is not inaccurate - but it is like trying to understand what is happening in a building by peering through a keyhole (Heath, 2000b , p.1265).

This study explored the influence of the social environment on the development of drinking patterns among two groups of Polish migrants, those who arrived in Australia as adults with presumably established drinking habits and those who arrived in Australia as children, with limited socialisation around drinking in

Poland. Rather than a statistical study, the aim of the research was to “share the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their lives” (Berg, 2001, p. 7). Human beings communicate what they learn through symbols, and the most common is their language, as Blumer, father of symbolic interaction explained:

The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. The actions... define the thing for the person (in Berg, 2001, p.8).

To ascertain Polish constructions of drinking, this project was carried out among a group of Polish migrants. To obtain a rich understanding of the informants’ world, the interviews were carried out in either Polish or English, in accordance with the informants’ wishes. The need to use the language of participants in order of better understanding their meanings, has been recognised by many researchers. Anna Wierzbicka wrote about the importance of the language in “seeing” and understanding the “true” world:

Every language provides a window for looking at the world. But the glass in this window is not transparent or pattern-less... every window has its own colour and its own design. We view the world primarily through the window of our native language. Our perception and experience of the world is coloured by our language... Languages differ from one another not just as linguistic systems but also as cultural universes, as vehicles of ethnic identities (Wierzbicka, 1985, p. 187).

This study employs a range of methods to explore the genesis of contemporary drinking patterns among Polish migrants in Western Australia, including documentary sources, in-depth interviews and limited participant observation. This design has been chosen to incorporate the influence of historical and social aspects of drinking. Different data collection methods reveal a slightly different aspect of the same reality. This process is known as triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For the social sciences triangulation means the use of multiple data gathering techniques as was done in this study.

It is important to have a clear view of people's perceptions about alcohol to target these in planning further research and health programs. Any harm reduction intervention designed to reach a distinctive cultural group should have an understanding of human behaviour in context. The knowledge of how much per person a group consumes is not enough to design an effective health program (Boyle, 1994; Isaac & Michael, 1990).

Sampling

Information about the sample

Polish migrants in Australia were the group of interest in this study. Data from the 1996 census state that Polish Australians constitute a small number of migrants in Australia. In 1996 there were 65 119 Polish born Australians, of which 6984 lived in Western Australia. They were in lower paid jobs than the general population, 67.1 per cent had incomes under \$300 per week, as compared with 48 per cent of Australian-born people. Nearly fifteen per cent of the Polish migrants were unemployed (compared to 8.1 per cent for all West Australians for the same period), 12.8 per cent spoke no English. However, their level of education was higher than that of other Australians, 18.5 per cent of Polish Australians had a degree or a diploma compared to 16.1 per cent of the total Australian population. Although Polish Australians worked in lower paid jobs and were more likely to be unemployed, they had a higher rate of home ownership than other Australians, 71 per cent compared to 69 per cent. Polish born migrants are older than the general population (31.7 per cent were over 65 years old, as compared with 10.4 per cent of all West Australians who are over 65) (Visser & Beer, 1999).

Informants in this study were chosen from a population of Polish migrants living in Perth, Western Australia. They form two main groups. One migrated to Australia just after the Second World War. The first group consists mainly of ex-servicemen and displaced persons after the Second World War. The majority of people in this group were young at the time of arrival to Australia, with little formal

education. Many of the displaced persons came from small villages in the poorly developed eastern regions of Poland. At the beginning of the Second World War, the eastern regions of Poland were overtaken by Soviet Russia, in the event called 'The Invasion of the 17th of September 1939, and the inhabitants were transported to Siberia. In 1940, General Anders led several thousand Poles out of Siberia through Asia to Africa. Those who survived migrated to the United States, Australia and Canada (Price, 1985; Sussex & Zubrzycki, 1985). Most of those migrants were expected to fulfil their obligations to the host country by working on government projects for two years. Some managed to obtain educational or trade qualifications later, but many did not (Price, 1985; Sussex & Zubrzycki, 1985).

The second significant wave of migrants in the 1980s consisted mainly of people who had some knowledge and often exaggerated expectations of the "West". One of my informants, a recent migrant to Australia, expressed her views in this manner:

People in Poland think that "money is found in the streets, in the West" and one does not have to work, life is supposed to be so easy here. They have no idea (Krycia, 51).

Those who were familiar with western culture either had family members who spent some time working abroad or worked themselves as "guest" workers¹. This group went through a transit country before migrating to Australia spending some time in France, Austria, Greece, Germany or any other country they happened to be staying in during the closure of Polish borders between 1981-1984. Life in transit was characterised by insecurity, worries about the families the informants had left behind and their unknown future.

Choosing the sample

The Polish community in Perth has strong social networks and a snowball sampling technique made it possible to access the required number of people. A snowball sample uses people from the group of interest as guides who introduce the

¹ Usually working for a short period of time, usually illegally in any of the western countries during the socialist era. For unskilled labour in the West, Poles earned 10 to 20 times their wages in Poland.

researcher to the main informants. Then those people introduce the researcher to further prospective interviewees. A convenience sample is an accessible group from the group of interest (Burns, 1998; Rice & Ezzy, 1999). In a strict sense, sampling is not an issue in qualitative research. The aim is to secure rich data from people who have experience of the issue, in this case Polish drinking patterns before and after migration to Australia. In general, sample size in qualitative research is determined by the outcomes of the data collection process. When saturation is achieved it is unnecessary to continue (Berg, 2001; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

The first informants were selected from a group of people known to me personally, and they referred me to their friends. The total number of people chosen was twenty. The number was chosen to enable in-depth interviews, which explored a number of issues. Also four workers from the Polish Club provided information about the activities of the club, the guests and their drinking choices in the club. One of the informants from the club who had worked as a social worker provided information about alcohol-related social problems within the community. Qualitative research of this kind is usually characterised by relatively small sample sizes. In addition, time and budgetary constraints prevented a larger sample (Berg, 2001).

All informants migrated from Poland before the introduction of the market economy in their country. Researchers from Poland and other countries from Eastern Europe suggest that up to the 1990s drinking customs in Poland were stable and were not subject to change as was the case in Western Europe, Australia and the United States, due to the isolation of the political system (Bielewicz, 1993; Vroublevsky & Harwin, 1998; Wald *et al.* 1986).

Adult informants. Ten informants were chosen from a group of people who migrated as adults, five from each gender. The aim was to recruit people who were of legal drinking age before migrating. The age when they left their homeland ranged from 16 years to 70. The youngest informant to leave the country was a man who was displaced during the Second World War. Their age when interviewed was between 40 to 88 years old. Time of residence in Australia varied from 12 years to

50. Three people were retired. All had at least secondary education and four had university degrees.

They formed two loose groups, one that left Poland during the adventurous twenties and was eager to taste the world beyond their own country. These people were single, usually had secondary or tertiary education and were not yet working. The second group was older, people were in their thirties usually with young children. They had well-established jobs in Poland. Some had small family businesses such as mechanical workshops, building firms, and small-scale clothes production. They were well off compared with the rest of the population and felt they were unable to develop their businesses because of the restrictions of the political system in Poland. In Poland during the socialist era, one could have a business employing only family members not exceeding five people. Others in this group were also professional people, lawyers, doctors, engineers and teachers, who thought they were getting nowhere as far as financial security was concerned. Among these people there was also a small number who were just fed up with the lack of democratic rights. I will be referring to this group as adult migrants to differentiate them from the second group who left Poland as child migrants.

The migrants' professional status changed in Australia. Seven informants were working, three were retired, and one of the females was a homemaker. Most who gained their education in Poland were unable to obtain professional registration in Australia. Only Anna (46) reported working in the profession she was educated in, in Poland. Two other people completed a second university degree in Australia in a similar field to the one they already had from their country of origin. Among the men who were unable to get professional registration, driving a taxi was the most popular job. Two male informants reported doing this kind of work. Women stated they could only find manual jobs such as cleaners or factory workers even though they had university degrees. Only two people out of six in the workforce reported being satisfied with their jobs.

Both groups of migrants lead active social lives in Australia. All admitted they do not mix between the two groups. Some explained it was due to different age groups, others attributed it to different migration experiences.

Young informants. Ten young people, five men and five women aged between 18 and 24, were interviewed. The initial plan was to include those who arrived in Australia under seven years of age (school age in Poland). This age category was chosen on the assumption that these young people would have had limited socialisation and exposure to alcohol in Poland. The start of schooling is important in people's development because social contacts with peers have an increasing influence on their lives. I wanted to include informants whose main social interaction with peers would be in Australia. The family is a major agency for socialisation in early infancy and childhood (Giddens1992). From the moment a child starts school, peer groups slowly take over and they have a strong impact on shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviour. The choice of the second group posed problems because it was difficult to find sufficient young people in this category. Three young people were older - fourteen, twelve and eleven at the time of migration. However all said they had not drunk alcohol before they migrated. Despite not fitting the set criteria, which was limited socialisation in a peer group in Poland they were included in the sample to ensure a sufficient number of informants. They fitted the criterion in that they were too young to drink in Poland and their inclusion provided an interesting comparison to the perspective of children who arrived in Australia at a younger age.

The information obtained from this group of young Polish Australians was not as rich as that from the older migrants. The biggest hurdle seemed to be my age. I am 48, I belong to the generation of the informants' parents and this appeared to inhibit their responses. Some participants were shy when they were talking to me; they needed a more structured form of the interview. They answered questions but did not tell "their story". The girls, in particular, seemed very careful not to say anything that would put them in a bad light. All portrayed themselves as being very responsible drinkers, never getting drunk. This was despite reporting drinking six vodka "shoties" (30 mL glasses). The boys seemed to be less concerned about having their drinking portrayed negatively and were therefore less protective about the information they gave me. On the contrary, they boasted of their drinking achievements. Although the data from these interviews is not as rich as that from the

adults, I believe the informants revealed some valuable insights into the nature and extent of their drinking.

They arrived in Australia at different ages. Four informants migrated as very young children from six months to three years old and did not remember life in Poland. Darek (19), Veronica (18) and Janya (18) were less than one year old when they left their homeland. Their families spent some time in other countries before settling in Australia. Darek lived in Germany for two years and Veronica in Britain, also for two years. Janya lived in Africa with her parents from the age of six months. Her family moved to Australia when she was six years old. Only Kuba (19) came to Australia directly from Poland when he was three years old.

The other six migrated directly from their country of origin and were eight to fourteen years old at that time. Maya (24) and Pola (22) were eight years old when they arrived in Australia; Martin (19) was nine, and Dora (18) was ten. Vladi (22) was fourteen and Gienek (21) was twelve when they settled in Australia and were the oldest when they had left their homeland. These young Polish Australians attended school in Poland and had memories of life there. They remembered family celebrations, including details of food and drinking.

The four migrants from the first group and the two older females from the second were the longest residents in Australia, 14 to 16 years. The others, Martin and Dora, came to Australia ten years ago, and Gienek and Vladi have been living in Australia nine and six years respectively.

All informants had finished secondary education, four were university students, one was a postgraduate student, and two were attending Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions. Apart from studying, they also had part time jobs ranging from sales assistants, to waiters and bartenders. Two young women were in full time employment. One was a university graduate, the other having graduated from TAFE. Only one of the young informants was looking for a job and was still undecided what he wanted to do in life.

All participants were still living with their parents at the time of the interview and were fully economically dependent on them. Generally, it is not customary in Polish families that the adult children pay board or share upkeep expenses. Of course, there are exceptions when the children do help their parents financially, but it is more as help rather than an expected payment. When young people have jobs and they still live at home, the money they earn covers their own needs, usually for entertainment. Some of the young people were still getting pocket money from their parents, despite earning their own income. Martin was getting an equivalent of a full Austudy (financial study assistance) from his parents as an incentive to study.

Methods of Data Gathering

This study explored both behaviours and beliefs about drinking. In order to understand people's beliefs about drinking, historical, political and social issues, which impacted on the evolvement of Polish drinking models were examined. This research project was concerned with people's experience of social reality and their interpretation of it. Therefore three forms of data gathering were used: in-depth interviews, limited participant observation and collection of documentary sources. These three techniques of data gathering were used as methods of triangulation to obtain more rich data (Gifford, 1996; Rice & Ezzy, 1999).

Interviews

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of people's views. Therefore in-depth interviews were chosen as the main method of collecting data. Rice and Ezzy (1999) describe in-depth interviews as a conversation where negotiation of meaning and understanding takes place and the interviewer takes an active role in encouraging the respondent to talk (Berg, 2001; Rice & Ezzy, 1999; Smith & Hope, 1992). My previous experience in counselling in a service for clients with alcohol and drug issues made this process relatively problem free.

In-depth interviews were based on an interview schedule of open-ended questions about the role of alcohol in people's lives (Appendix 1). The informants

were contacted by telephone and the aims of the study were explained. Interviews with the older group explored family drinking customs, participants' own views on drinking, their own drinking patterns before migration, any changes in drinking patterns over time in Australia, and factors influencing these patterns.

Most of the interviews with adult migrants were conducted in their private homes; one was at the workplace, and another interview was conducted in a car. These venues were at the informants' request. All interviews with the adult migrants were in Polish, as they felt more comfortable in that language, although two stressed they were equally happy to speak English. Some participants expressed their concern they might be required to speak English during the interview: "I hope you don't want me to speak English!" Others said that speaking Polish about Polish matters (drinking) was much more appropriate even though they felt they were fluent English speakers. The interviews were tape recorded, later translated to English and then transcribed.

I translated the interviews myself because it was not possible to find a native Polish speaker to translate who would not be familiar with the community in Perth. It would not be possible to guarantee confidentiality to the informants if somebody from the community was trusted with the translation. To ensure greater objectivity of the translation it would have been preferable to send the interviews interstate for translation. However, lack of funds made this impossible.

The interviews with the adult migrants, who in most instances were people from my generation, took the form of life stories with some people relating chronologically their whole life, memories from childhood and adolescence, family problems, which were often alcohol-related, and the trauma of resettlement. Some people told me afterwards that it was good to talk to somebody who had experienced similar life events, as they felt they were understood better and did not have "to break their tongue" in the effort to explain. Most were oblivious to the tape recorder after a few minutes. I gave people the opportunity to talk not only about alcohol, but also about their lives as migrants, which in many cases appeared to influence alcohol consumption. Some informants, however, were not comfortable with the taping of the interviews and gave most information once the tape recorder was switched off.

They wanted their views included in the study, but did not want their voice recorded for fear somebody might recognise them. This reinforces concerns about the importance of confidentiality.

Interviews with the younger group explored the influence of their families on the development of their drinking patterns, their perception of their parents' drinking, their views of their own drinking patterns and the influences on these patterns, and their views on intoxication. All but two interviews with the younger group were in English, which saved a lot of time and work in translation. The two interviews in Polish were with two informants who migrated to Australia when they were 14 and 12 years old. They preferred to speak Polish. The interviews with the younger migrants were decidedly more structured. These informants did not feel like sharing their life stories with me. The biggest hurdle seemed to be that my age is similar to that of their parents. These informants provided information and their views about alcohol. They described their social events and drinking occasions as a short report and they needed more structured questions to talk. Some interviews with the child migrants took place in their own homes, when their parents were not at home. Generally the younger people were more comfortable to talk outside the family residence in locations such as a park, library, and café.

Community workers, as key informants, provided information about their views on drinking patterns of the members of the Polish community in Perth. One of the informants was a person who worked as a social worker among the Polish community for many years. The position is no longer funded. She talked about alcohol-related problems, highlighting the need for emergency accommodation for women and children from homes with alcohol-related violence. She stressed the need for Polish language speakers among the social workers as many women from those families did not speak English well enough.

The workers from the Polish Club talked about the role of the Club in the social life of the migrants and gave their observations about drinking choices and patterns during the events there. They also described problems with drunken patrons and the ways in which they solved them. One person, who was a co-funder of the

Club 50 years ago, provided information about the history and the importance of the Club in the lives of the migrants.

Documentary techniques

Documents are a valuable source of information. They provide an important element for triangulation of findings with other forms of data gathering (Smith & Hope, 1992). In this study the use of fictional and non-fictional documentary sources provided accounts of historical, social and political events that shaped contemporary patterns of alcohol consumption in Poland. I used Polish and Russian classical fiction by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Moczarski, which provided rich descriptions of the place of alcohol in social life in various historical periods. Non-fictional sources, in addition to academic literature, included magazine and newspaper articles. As the migrants arrived to Australia with a "cultural matrix" of drinking patterns these documents provided popular perceptions of and opinions about drinking customs in the past and in the present in Poland.

I faced a problem in accessing the scientific literature from Poland. To get a clear picture about the role of alcohol in Polish life, drinking patterns and alcohol-related problems in Poland before my informants left their homeland, papers published before 1985 were needed. I worked with whatever I managed to get with the help of family and friends in Poland. The academic papers published before the collapse of the socialist system were of limited value. Most papers and journals were not referenced, and I never knew whether the material in the paper represented the opinion of the author or was independently supported. It is only during the recent two decades with the fresh interest of the international academic world in the newly opened Eastern European countries that Polish publications started to appear in international journals.

Participant observation

Limited participant observation provided an additional source of information about Polish drinking. This approach relies on the observation of behaviour in the context in which it occurs, with the researcher gaining access to the everyday life of

the researched group (Minichiello *et al.*, 1992; Boyle, 1994). Although participation in the lives of people under study is vital, at the same time it is necessary to maintain some professional distance for the researcher to carry out observations and data recording (Berg, 2001; Morse, 1994). Traditionally it meant immersion in the culture or way of life of the group for a long period of time and with researchers having direct personal involvement with the people in the study. Ethical and financial limitations have restricted this type of fieldwork and it is now far less common (Berg, 2001). The events observed for this research were community dances in the Polish Club, private parties, dinner parties and picnics. The community dances usually attracted about 300 guests. The observed parties in private homes involved twenty to thirty people. At some parties, usually at homes where there were young or teenage children, the guests brought their own children

I have been a member of the Western Australian Polish community for the last 18 years, being a Polish migrant myself and am directly involved in the informants' world. Some of the informants who made this project possible are people I have known for many years, and with whom I meet on a regular basis. Perth's Polish migrant community is small and most people who participated in this study I have met at least once, or I have heard about them. I am not a frequent visitor to the Polish Club. I had been there once before I commenced this study, about 17 years ago when my young children were performing in a Polish community school show. I consider myself to be a part of the community, I took part in the social events described but did not drink alcohol.

The observations were apparently quite successful. People did not appear to alter their behaviour during them and they did not seem to notice that I did not drink alcohol. The comparison of the observed events with the previous ones I attended before this research supported my impressions. Participants in the observations were quite comfortable with the fact they were being observed. There are two reasons for this, one being the very public aspect of drinking and drunkenness in Poland, where there was no stigma attached to public intoxication. In the words of some informants: "everybody (male) gets drunk from time to time". The adult migrants whom I observed learned to drink in Poland and they were not ashamed of the fact that they were being observed drunk. On the contrary, one man declared "show

those wussies how we Poles drink”. The second reason was that these people trusted my professional standing and were sure of confidentiality. Those included in the observations were also in many instances informants in the interviews. People who were not informants in this project often came up to me during the events observed to enquire about the progress of my work and offered their views on drinking. These people wanted to have some input into this study too.

The disadvantage of this strategy was the extreme tiredness I felt at times. Some events lasted until 5 a.m. At these times I was unable to make the field notes straight after the event, as I had to have some sleep to write the report. Feedback sessions with some of the participants after these socials helped to make these reports more complete. Most descriptions, though, were written straight after the observations. The transcriptions of the conversations and information obtained during these events were completed after I had had some rest.

Some unobtrusive observations were used to build upon participant observation. Agnew and Pyke (1994) define unobtrusive observations as observing people’s behaviours without them knowing. In this study unobtrusive observations in that sense were carried out during public events to assess a larger group of people, and sometimes in private homes. According to Berg, unobtrusive observations are very important strategies to learn about people’s behaviours

What people do, how they behave and structure their daily lives, and even how humans are affected by certain ideological stances can all be observed in traces people either intentionally or inadvertently leave behind (Berg, 2001, p. 177).

In this study I used limited unobtrusive observations, mainly to assess the amount and variety of alcohol drunk. This included actions such as counting empty bottles after particular events.

Data Analysis

Thematic and content analysis was used for the data collected. In-depth interviews and observations were systematically rewritten and condensed. The information was sorted according to emerging patterns and concepts related to the research questions (Smith & Hope, 1992). The aim was to identify themes, topics, time devoted to them, and the importance of each to the participant. This was a sorting and categorising process and it was done manually rather than using a computer program. It was important to distinguish between the informants' views of their own drinking and their views of other people's attitudes and behaviour. During this process meanings and explanations began to emerge.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the value and believability of the findings that have been established by the investigator through prolonged observations or lived through participation. Credibility is the "truth" known, experienced and deeply felt by people being studied. This includes the emic perspective, interpreted by the researcher as "the truth in reality", and the etic perspective which brings in outsiders' accounts about drinking (Leininger, 1992). Credibility in this study was promoted through the use of open-ended questions, which enabled the informants to introduce their own "truths". After the interviews, the informants were able to reflect on their statements from the transcripts of the interviews and whether or not they agreed with their content.

Investigator credibility

This study is my first research project in the qualitative research paradigm. My academic background is in physical sciences (medicine), which made the process of qualitative research difficult for me. The problem was the tendency to report the pathological "symptoms" with omissions of "normal" behaviours, particularly in the analysis of the findings from the observations. I had to reprogram myself and be vigilant throughout the whole process of data analysis, with frequent validating of the information with key informants. Information from the interviews did not pose this

problem as I was reporting people's views and words and it was easier to verify my findings with the informants

I am a member of the community under study, which had both advantages and disadvantages. The issue of insider/outsider researcher was discussed in detail by Minichiello and colleagues (1992). They stated that the "native-as-stranger" researcher is in the best position to access culturally different cues and meanings. This means that the researcher from the same ethnic group needed to distance herself/himself to become a stranger to maintain objectivity. In this study the advantages were the in-depth understanding of language and meanings of the messages given by the informants. I share the lived experience of their life as a migrant refugee. My knowledge of historical events facilitated the process of analysing the political and social influences on the emergence of drinking patterns in Poland (Minichiello *et al.*, 1992).

The difficulties of being an insider researcher was "knowing" and "hearing" but not reporting some of the messages, as they appeared to me to be self-explanatory. I had to be vigilant to consciously take steps back, and observe and attempt to report behaviours through the eyes of an outsider. The biggest disadvantage, though, was that at times I was too emotionally involved in the aspect of being a migrant, feeling too strongly some of the emotions of my informants. At these times I had to leave the material studied to "rest", to distance myself from it, and occupy myself with the theoretical aspect of this study, a process that is known as "bracketing". For me it was regaining the perspective of the researcher (Glasser & Straus, 1967).

Transferability

This study can be transferred to another similar situation. The findings are likely to be encountered in a wider community and could be tested among other populations to determine the extent to which these patterns are similar or different. The goal of this study was to form in-depth understanding and knowledge of the perceptions and beliefs of the group of Polish migrants. Similarities with other groups can contribute to future research and harm reduction strategies.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers have an ethical obligation “not to harm” their study population, therefore they must ensure the rights, privacy and welfare of the people and communities which are the focus of their study (Berg, 2001, Patton, 1990). An ethics committee at Edith Cowan University approved the research. It was carried out in a small Polish community where most people know each other. The essential ethical requirement for this study was to ensure confidentiality. Informants gave their informed consent to participate in the study. Every participant was given a pseudonym. In cases where very sensitive issues were disclosed such as domestic violence, “problem drinking” by self or a significant other and the informants agreed to the use of this information, no pseudonyms were used to avoid any possible recognition of the speaker. The informants were referred to simply as male or female. Parts of conversations where the information might be linked to the informant were not used.

The observations were carried out mostly in public places, but also in private homes during large social events where the host and the guests were informed about my research topic. As I was invited to these events with them being informed, I assumed passive consent. During these social events many people enquired about the progress of my work and offered more comments about the subject.

Summary

This research used a qualitative approach to provide some understanding of the influence of migration on the drinking patterns among a small sample of Polish migrants in Perth, Western Australia. Three different methods of data gathering were used to enrich and triangulate research information. Documentary sources explored the formation of the so-called “Polish drinking model”, in-depth interviews provided an opportunity for participants to describe how their drinking patterns have developed, and observation provided an insight into actual drinking behaviours.

CHAPTER 4

THE STATE AND ALCOHOL IN POLAND

“Give them vodka, let them get drunk, they will protest less, they will know less” (Marta, age 46)

Introduction

This study is about the influences affecting drinking patterns of a group of Polish migrants living in Perth, Western Australia, who grew up in Poland and presumably was influenced by drinking patterns in their homeland. This chapter will present the historical, social and political aspects that shaped what the informants in this study defined as “Polish drinking patterns”.

It is a widely held view in some countries of Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland, that for centuries those in power promoted alcohol consumption by the population to achieve their various goals. Polish literature is full of accounts of the government’s support for the supply and promotion of alcohol (Falewicz, 1982; Falicki, 1985; Swiecicki, 1968). Moskalewicz voiced some of these views when he wrote in 1985:

Our people have been accustomed to alcoholism by its subsequent rulers - by the gentry, by the partitioning powers, by the Nazis during the occupation and later by the Soviet backed regime (Moskalewicz, 1985, p.117).

Some knowledge of Polish history is necessary to understand the significance of the above statement. The next section presents a brief account of the historical events that shaped Poland.

A Short Introduction to the History of Poland

Historical accounts since the tenth century relate how Poland was pushed in an easterly direction by the Germanic expansion overtaking the western parts of Poland. Peaceful treaties through intermarriages or through military action directed Polish expansion to the east. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Poland expanded, annexing land of the present Ukraine as far as the Black Sea. In this process, large numbers of Cossacks and Tartars¹ were enslaved partly by force and partly by absorption of their leaders into the Polish gentry. Large scale peasant rebellions followed from the middle of the seventeenth century onward. The expansion to the east, annexation of large amounts of land with hostile peoples, the frequent rebellions, the internal problems and weak central power resulted in diminishing political and military control (Krawczuk, 1965).

Some historians attribute weak central power in Poland to the presence of free elections (Krawczuk, 1965). All Polish nobles enthroned the Kings in free elections. The Piasts, a dynasty in the Middle Ages, introduced this form of choosing the Polish ruler, and in 1572 it became law. All nobles, foreign or Polish, could run for the position of the King and bribery flourished, with the gentry gaining more power and privileges. One of the most important privileges the nobles extorted from the kings was the ability to break the sitting of the Parliament with just one call from the galleries "*Liberum veto*" (Lat.) – "I do not allow". By this privilege no reform or tax could get through. Most elected kings used their position only for personal gain with a complete disregard for the country and its people. The disintegration of the State climaxed at the end of the eighteenth century when three neighbouring countries, Russia, Prussia and Austria annexed Poland in three moves in 1772, 1793 and 1795. The Russian sector was called the Kingdom of Poland, the Austrian part - Galicia, and the Prussian sector - Greater Poland (*Wielkopolska*) (Krawczuk, 1965; Levine, 1987).

The annexation of Poland led to strong opposition against the partitioning powers, predominantly among the gentry, who organised, fought and lost two

¹ Seminomadic peasants. Tartars were descendants of Genghis Khan's army.

uprisings for independence in 1831 and 1863. The loss led to the banishment of a great number of men to Siberia with the resulting impoverishment of their families (Krawczuk, 1965). After the last dash for independence in 1864, a new movement was started in the Prussian sector, the National Renaissance Front with the call "a Pole can do better". This movement supported the modernisation of the agrarian sector and the industrial development of land and factories owned by Poles. At the same time serfdom was banished in the Kingdom of Poland, which enabled the free movement of peasants, many of who moved to the cities "in search of bread" (Krawczuk, 1965, p.286). Thus the Polish Industrial Revolution started, still under foreign rule, independence being the ultimate goal for those whose position and future was starting to look better. The peasants and the new working class were quite indifferent about who was at the helm of power, as their situation was one of extreme poverty and misery (Krawczuk, 1965).

The modern history of Poland started with the regaining of independence in 1918, which lasted till September 1939, a short period during which the new government tried to cement three parts of the country, which had been separated as different States for 123 years. These attempts came to an abrupt end with the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany on the 1st September 1939. The German occupation of Poland was characterised by a strong underground resistance movement with enormous losses on the part of Polish fighters. At the end of the war the Yalta agreement between the United States of America, Great Britain and the Soviet Union, assigned Poland to that part of Europe under Soviet influence, therefore it became an independent country in name only. In fact it was totally subordinate to Soviet politics, both internationally and internally. Thus the division of Europe into East and West became a fact (Paczkowski, 1998, Roszkowski, 1999).

After the Second World War there was a continuous threat of Russian invasion, particularly during the workers' and students' revolts in 1956, 1968, 1970 and 1980, with the culmination of events on 13th December 1981, when Martial Law was announced. By that time, about half a million people had left the country in search of peace and a better life. During the following eight years there was a constant struggle between the government and its subjects as the people's fight to achieve a democratic Poland went underground. This situation was resolved in 1989

by the new Soviet General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev who decreed: "Let a million flowers blossom", by which he meant that all dependent countries under Soviet rule had the right to self-determination. In June 1989 Poland held the first democratic election since the Second World War and entered the path of the market economy (Paczkowski, 1998; Roszkowski, 1999).

The Role of Alcohol in the Economy of Poland

Alcohol has played an important role in the Polish economy for centuries. It was produced from surplus grains and was a convenient product to store and later exchange for other produce. Drinking alcohol quickly entered the public sphere. The tenth century saw the establishment of local taverns called *karczma* (karchma). Among western Slavs each market place had one, some cities more than one. The old *karczma* was a place where people came to drink and eat, to talk and celebrate with singing and dancing. Important official orders were proclaimed there, judges held court and these taverns served as council chambers and guest houses (Austin, 1985; Baranowski, 1979).

Among the Slavic people the most popular drinks were made locally from barley and honey. They included beer, ale, mead and *kwas* (a fermented drink made of bread and water). Most people made their own beverages, but the wealthy had cellars for mead and imported wine. Every discussion, community affair and public occasion began with drinking, which was often copious. Sixteenth century reports by travellers to Poland cite that drunkenness was widespread, equally among peasants, priests, nobles and the king. Peter Mundy described drinking excesses of Polish peasants in these words:

A crew of them will spend a wekke, a Month or a yeare, as some say, drincking, drunckes, sleeping, vomiting, til they bee sober and they drinke till they bee druncke againe, soe continue using their best witts to play beasts and to exceed them in beastly Fillthinesse (Mundy, 1647/1925, p.196 in Austin, 1985, p.229).

Bishop Cromer in *Description of the Polish Kingdom* also complained of the excesses in eating and drinking and relates that Polish festivals often ended in bloodshed because of drunken brawls. No guest dared to refuse a toast. The evening was considered a failure if the guests did not go home dead drunk (Austin, 1985).

Alcohol was an important element in the Polish economy from the early sixteenth century. It is speculated that distilling was first developed in Cracow, in 1405 and later spread throughout the whole country. A century later Gdansk had so many "spirit boilers" that in 1620 there was a local shortage of firewood and the price of fuel jumped. The city authorities then introduced concessions for vodka distillation. Some researchers attribute such popularity of distilleries in Gdansk to its position as a port. All rye exported from the whole country had to go through Gdansk. With the falling demand for grain on the European markets some grain already transported to Gdansk had to be utilised, and the best way to do so was to turn it to another profitable product - vodka - which could later be exported. Later, other distilleries sprang up on the nobles' estates, obviating the need to transport grain to Gdansk (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995; Levine, 1987). The nobles and the Church owned breweries and distilleries in which mead, beer and vodka were produced.

Propinacja

The earliest reports of the organised production and distribution of alcohol can be found in the sixteenth century, when the nobles extorted from the kings the exclusive right to produce and sell alcoholic beverages to their subjects, which became to be known as *Propinacja* - *propinatio* (Lat.). In practice, it meant the serfs were obliged to buy a specified amount of vodka and beer at the inn belonging to the landowner. The income from the alcohol sale rose a hundred times in two centuries from 0.3 per cent of overall income from the royal properties in 1564 to 37.6 per cent in 1764. In some estates it was the main source of income for the gentry (Baranowski, 1979; Bystron, 1960; Komuda, 1997). Prince Jozef Czartoryski summed up the importance of *Propinacja* in a statement in the middle eighteenth century:

Without the sales of vodka under *Propinacja* laws, we would not be able to assure ourselves of our regular income in currency. In our country the vodka distilleries could be called mints because it is only thanks to them that we can hope to sell off our grain when there is no famine (in Levine, 1987, p.258).

The primary customers for vodka were enslaved peasants, which explains frequent reports about peasant intoxication. When peasants drank in a “foreign”² inn they were punished by flogging and fines. The quality of the drinks produced for serfs was very low, so on special occasions (christening, wedding or wake) some liberal masters allowed their peasants to make a one time purchase in a nearby town, after paying a fee (Levine, 1987).

The groups upholding the monopoly were the landowning nobles and clergy, but the manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers were mostly Jews. This practice of employing a culturally different group paid off for the landowners, as the Jews were often blamed for inducing the peasants to drink while the invisible owners reaped the financial benefits of the monopoly (Levine, 1987).

Annexation of Poland and its influence on the alcohol economy

The alcohol monopoly was further enforced by the new powers after the annexation of Poland. The governments of the occupying countries decided to benefit from *Propinacja* by introducing excise on vodka production, first in the Prussian sector of partitioned Poland in 1819, later in Galicia, the Austrian sector, in 1836, and in the Kingdom of Poland, the Russian sector, in 1844. These taxes were regulated so that they did not reduce consumption, but maximised revenue (Musto, 1997). It was the first step to the introduction of the state’s alcohol monopoly. Private inn concessions (*propinacja*) were later formally abolished in the Prussian sector in 1845, in the Austrian sector in 1889, and in the Russian sector in 1898, with the State taking over all rights to run inns and distilleries. From that moment all liquor stores and distilleries became known as the State *monopol*. In practice, the inn concessions persisted in some regions and estates until 1910. This law had to be policed and executed, and this was not always the priority of the authorities. By the

² An inn belonging to a different owner than the peasants’ lord.

end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century there was mounting unrest among the working class and the Revolution of 1905 concerned the police more (Baranowski, 1993; Faith & Wisniewski, 1995).

The annexation of Poland by Russia resulted in social and cultural exchange, descriptions of which can be found in Polish and Russian classical literature. There are similar descriptions of alcohol use in the literary works of both countries. There appears to be a similar perception about the economic importance of alcohol and the state's inducement for people to drink to maximise the revenue. In the nineteenth century Alexei Tolstoy wrote in *Peter the Great*:

In the front room, at the counter, there is shouting, uproar, swearing. Drink as long as you pay up. The Treasury is strict. No money? Then off with that fur coat. And if you've drunk more than your possessions are worth, the tavern keeper winks at the under-clerk, who sits down at the table with a goosequill behind his ear and an inkpot dangling from his neck, and he starts scratching away. Come to your senses, you drunken fool. That clever under-clerk will scratch out a bondsman's deed. You've walked into the tsar's tavern a free man, but you'll go out of it a penniless serf. "It's easier nowadays" says the tavern keeper, pouring vodka into a pewter mug. "nowadays, a friend'll come for you, a relative or a wife'll hurry in to get you out before you drink your soul away. Nowadays, we let that sort go. Good luck! But under the late tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, some friend would come to take the drunk away so that he didn't spend his last copper... Hold it. A loss to the Treasury... Even that copper's heeded by the treasury... You'd shout for the guards at once. The constables would seize the man trying to talk the drunk out of it and they'd march him off to the Criminal Commission. They'd investigate the case there, cut off his left hand and his right leg and throw him onto the ice... Drink my brave lads, drink, never fear; we don't cut off arms and legs any more..." (Tolstoy, 1974, vol I, pp. 40-42).

In the nineteenth century potatoes replaced grain in the production of vodka. Potatoes were a much cheaper raw material than rye in alcohol production and in effect the cost of spirits fell dramatically. In 1704 a gallon of vodka cost the equivalent of over two bushels of rye, but in 1844 a bushel of rye could buy 2.5 gallons of vodka. Due to the reduction in production costs there was an increase in consumption. It was said that Poland was swept by "distilling fever". At the

beginning of the State excise on vodka in 1844 there were 4 980 distilleries operating in Galicia, producing 60 million litres of pure alcohol. Some anti-alcohol activists from those times report³ that per capita consumption, in some parts of Poland in 1840 was 35L of pure alcohol. The data was based on the amount of tax collected from different regions and is an estimate only (Swiecicki, 1968).

The economic importance of alcohol in the Russian Empire was noticed by Karl Marx who wrote in a letter in 1849:

The Syberian mines bring only 700 000 pounds a year, whereas the tax on vodka brings ten times as much (Marx and Engels, 1968, vol. 27, p. 584)

Nearly a century later, L. Sobolev wrote about pre-revolution times, 1914:

A glass of vodka became an economic and political phenomenon. A Russian cannot live without vodka - vodka accompanies him, from the christening to the wake, it bubbles through the immense space of the Russian empire, they (the authorities) take it to the farthest part of the country, where there is no church yet, where there will never be a school, there already is the "green sign"⁴ of the government monopoly. The income from vodka sales brings one third of the State's budget (Sobolev, 1978, pp. 98-100)

Sobolev suggests that the State was more concerned with maximising revenue through vodka sales, than the education or other needs of its subjects.

Alcohol as an economic tool in 20th century Poland

The economic importance of alcohol in Poland fell during the period between the wars as rebuilding of the independent state was the priority of the new government and the three parts of Poland had to be integrated. Alcohol consumption between the wars remained low and was about 1.5 L per capita in 1938⁵ (GUS (General Statistics Biuro of Polish People's Republic), 1966). During the Second

³ Fr Piotr Sciegieny pushed for political reform just before Poland lost independence and later became a social and temperance activist.

⁴ The "green sign" was the sign in front of the tavern, where the state alcohol monopoly was enforced.

⁵ For further explanation see the State control section of this chapter.

World War alcohol regained its status and it is said that consumption went up drastically, although no data is available for the six years of Nazi occupation. Many people produced their own *bimber*⁶ as is recounted by one of the informants in this study, Maria (80): "During the war I lived with people who distilled their own *bimber*, I drank it then".

Another informant was often paid for his services in bottles of *bimber* during the war. Some say that by producing their own spirits, Poles robbed the Nazis of substantial revenue during the war. Others argue that an average person could not buy vodka in the shops and the revenue from the alcohol sales during that period was minimal. Alcohol was easily available in the restaurants for very high prices, but most Poles did not go to the restaurants. As vodka was a rare commodity, the occupying Nazis used it as a reward for "professional achievements". It quickly gained the status of a product convertible to other goods, such as salt, flour and meat (Moczarski, 1998; Moskalewicz, 1985).

After the Second World War there was yet another "occupation" when the Red Army entered occupied Poland and installed a new Soviet backed government. The new government was quick to re-establish the Polish Spirit Monopoly in the area under the control of the Red Army. On December 12, 1944, the Polish Committee of National Liberation decreed a statutory order against distilling liquor by individuals. The illicit production of alcohol could lead to a penalty of five years of prison, gainful distilling of alcohol fifteen years of imprisonment, and knowledge or suspicion of illicit production of alcohol one year of imprisonment (Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1944). Officially the introduction of the new law was justified by the need to save food resources for the war and to secure State income from the production and sales of alcohol, as stated in one of the interviews published in one of the first newspapers in 1945:

...In good economic periods the spirits monopoly provided 20 per cent of the state budget. And every citizen knows that its role in the general role of the state is highly positive... We only started on November 16 and aside from heavy supply of spirits to the army, we have already amassed considerable reserves of vodka for

⁶ Polish moonshine, containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.

the population... It is in the well-understood interest of the state and agriculture to expand agricultural distilleries as widely as possible... It is therefore our intention in the future to expand the distilling industry. This is our duty towards the state and society (Moskalewicz, 1985, p. 123).

This fragment suggests how important the prospective revenue from the production and sale of alcohol was to the newly formed government. The notion of constant availability of vodka in shops, regardless of the food shortages before the end of Second World War, was supported by Zdzislaw (88) who remembered these times

...next to the factory there was a little shop, no food there mind you, but always plenty of vodka.

From the late 1940s to 1989 all goods and services, including alcohol production and sales, were under the State's control. The most centralised production was that of distilling spirits. The State monopoly POLMOS had 17 plants in Poland in 1975. Between 1970 and 1975 spirit production increased by 52 per cent. In 1975, six per cent of spirits produced were exported and only 2.1 per cent of spirits consumed were imported. The imported spirits were 50-100 per cent more expensive than those produced in Poland (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983)

Wine production was less centralised, but there was a centrally planned fruit and vegetable industry, and local and cooperative enterprises could produce wine. This was fruit wine, mainly comprised of apples to which pure alcohol was added, a practice, which was abolished in 1989 by the resolution of the Polish premier, Piotr Jaroszewicz. Two per cent of all wines produced in Poland were exported in 1975, mainly to the Soviet Union, and 16 per cent of all wine consumed in Poland was imported, mainly from Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Greece and Spain (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983).

The Union of Brewing Industry produced beer during the same period. Two per cent of all Polish beer was exported and less than half a per cent consumed in Poland was imported. It is not possible to obtain evidence of the revenue alcohol brought to Poland's economy during the socialist regime. Alcohol problems became

evident in the 1970s and 1980s and the State was not keen to give any details to the public (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983; Moskalewicz, 1993).

Politics and Alcohol

Alcohol was not only important to Poland's economy. There remains a general perception in Polish society that the State used alcohol to suppress political dissent. Although the evidence for the above statement is not available, there are indications from recent Polish history of the use of alcohol to discredit social unrest by attributing strikes and public protests to drunken comportment.

It is said that in Poland alcohol became the means of maintaining the *status quo* of the dominant noble class and preventing the peasants from rebelling. According to Levine, Poland on the crossroads of East and West was atypical of other States. Poland did not have a strong centralised power, the main power was in the hands of the nobles, each being the king on his land, and having more income than the Crown (Krawczuk, 1965; Levine, 1987).

As the nobles were rulers on their own lands, they had to keep their serfs under control. *Propinacja* was an excellent tool to do just that. The need for an alcohol monopoly was explained in the *Roczniki Gospodarstwa Domowego* (*National Economic Annual*) by Count Ostrowski:

Moderate drinking of vodka is beneficial to simple folk. Our people, given to heavy farm work, exposed to the rain, winds, cold and heat, eating poor vegetable food, need that incentive (*Roczniki Gospodarstwa Domowego*, 1843, in Baranowski, 1979, p. 16).

The reasons for this promotion might be twofold: financial gain, plus dulling the rebellious feelings due to the unhappy position of the peasants. Levine (1987) suggests that the deteriorating position of the serf provided the background to rebelliousness and malicious destructiveness of the dispirited and malnourished peasants:

It might even outline the psychological climate in which an increase in drunkenness among the serfs took place and the political environment in which the lord made greater quantities of intoxicants available. Drunken peasants are more easily beaten into sullen obedience (Levine, 1987, p.255).

1830-1848 were the years of bad harvest and a worsening situation for the peasants with widespread famine. There are reports of children being given a glass of vodka as their only source of nourishment in the morning. Vodka was cheaper and easier to obtain than bread and gave children the feeling of warmth (Ciembroniewicz, 1913; Roszkowski, 1913)

For many Poles, the partitioning powers replaced the aristocracy as the main “body of oppression” in the nineteenth century. The class struggle, so prominent in other European countries at that time, became a fight for independence in Poland and all social ills, including the extreme poverty of the people, were blamed on the occupying states. The feeling of “us” (Poles) and “them” (the foreign authorities) became a dominant feature of the State - people relationship, cemented by 123 years of occupation (Krawczuk, 1965).

There was also a general perception that alcohol was used to extract information from the subjects as described by A. Tolstoy in *Peter the Great*:

Romodanowsky would invite the *boyars* (Russian nobles) to the banquets flowing with vodka. The guards stood at the door, to prevent the guests leaving too early. Feasts lasted days and nights, the fools under the table, listened to the conversations. Between the drunks, a trained bear served the drinks, if anybody refused it threw the mug away, scratched the victim, and tried to bite his face... but even when drunk people did not say anything that was unnecessary (Tolstoy, A, 1974, vol I, pp. 252).

According to writers such as Tolstoy, the state had a purpose to promote alcohol because demoralised people are easier to rule:

Drunkenness is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit the People but also to demoralise them (Tolstoy, L. 1972, p.457).

Dostoyevsky shared these views, describing the degeneration of the people in *The Possessed*.

Russian God surrendered to booze People are drunk, mothers are drunk, the Churches are empty We need two generations of dissipation Immense dissipation, the worst possible, the one that makes a man, a foul, cowardly, cruel, egotistic creature This is essential We proclaim total destruction (Dostoyevsky, 1972, p 413-415)

Sobolev, who was a sailor himself, wrote in 1914 about the way the Russian navy systematically induced the Russian sailors to drink

During the five years of service the Russian sailor gets two glasses (50mL) of vodka a day, an amount which is strictly dosed to get the proper physical and mental effect alcohol slowly ruins the nervous system, impairs the memory, slows down the function of the brain - that's the way it should be, the sailor should not think too much ... the first thing the sailor does after he finalises his service, he goes to the tavern and gets drunk, where he returns the money invested in him by the wise government At the same time his fancy to alcohol protects him from conspiring against the authorities and from understanding complex issues there is no need for him to understand That way the wise policy of the government creates peace among its recruits, and at the same time gets new customers for its produce - vodka (Sobolev, 1978, pp 98-100)

The above description was not isolated to Tsarist Russia In 1941 (at the beginning of the war with Germany) the Soviet Ministry of Defence issued an order to allocate 100ml of vodka to each serving soldier According to Godorowski, vodka was to give courage, but also served to dull the feelings of young inexperienced soldiers According to him, all soldiers going into battle were drunk (Godorowski, 1992)

Godorowski was also of the opinion that a toast raised by one of the Soviet generals; "let's drink for the Motherland"⁷ induced the participants of the communist party receptions to drink. He argued that nobody present was brave enough to refuse

⁷ Godorowski - an anti-alcohol activist saw the toast as inducement to drink, given the custom of not refusing a toast and the alcohol problems in Russia. He thought that drinking even during the State ceremonies should be discouraged. For people who lived through the Stalinist era the threat of imprisonment for not conforming was real

as this would mean that the person was an enemy of the State and was risking a long-term “holiday” in the snows of Siberia (Godorowski, 1992)

The invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany on the 1st September 1939 returned sentiment to the old mode of “us” and “them” Many Poles explained the increase in the consumption of alcohol during the occupation to the policies of the Nazis. Peasants were paid for the compulsory supply of food products in vodka tickets. For one vodka ticket a person could buy a bottle of vodka (500 mL) in special shops (Moskalewicz, 1985). Workers employed by the Germans in factories also received vodka once a month as a special “reward”. Moczarski was convinced that alcohol was used as means of keeping people quiet during the occupation (Moczarski, 1998, Moskalewicz, 1985). As an example, Moczarski cited General Stroop who saw the need to provide spirits to the conquered nations. Poles and Ukrainians, during Second World War in order to contribute to degeneration of the Slavic nations^{*}

Why shouldn't we give the Ukrainians vodka if they want it so much? If vodka, strong vodka was cheap and available everywhere, the Ukrainians would be grateful to us for providing them with such bliss... Special liquor stores should be open round the clock to sell alcoholic drinks at low prices, but exclusively in exchange for books ... (Moczarski, 1998, p 161)

Moczarski later explained that he understood that the former Nazi governor of Ukraine wanted to spread alcoholism among the Ukrainians and lead that nation to complete degeneration and that Hitler had the same plans for Poles (Moczarski, 1998)

This strong conviction of the use of alcohol by the German occupiers was not isolated to journalists and lay people. A professor of Hygiene and Public Health at the University of Marie Curie-Sklodowska in Lublin wrote in 1948

^{*} Moczarski (1907-1975) a Polish lawyer and later journalist was jailed by the Soviet backed Polish authorities in 1947 for membership in the Polish Home Army, the largest resistance movement in Hitler occupied Europe. He spent 11 months awaiting the death penalty, in the same cell with General Jurgen Stroop, the annihilator of the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw and the former governor of Ukraine. Moczarski's memoirs from that period were later published in *Conversations with the Executioner*. Moczarski was freed in 1956 after the change in the Polish Politbiuro. From 1956-1974 he was active in the Polish Society for Sobriety, publishing papers in the journal *Fight with Alcoholism* later *Problems of Alcoholism* (Moczarski, 1998).

The example of the tragedy of the People can be seen when Nazi Germany flooded the occupied Europe with alcohol, and they presented themselves as incorrigible drunkards, void of any morality, honour and religion (Chodzko, 1948, p 8)

This statement was further reinforced in the Polish popular press of that time, with articles explaining the need for eliminating illicit spirit production

The Nazi authorities tolerated the illicit distilling because they were interested in destroying the Polish nation. The Germans induced Polish society to alcoholism because they aimed at its depravity. Illicit distilleries must completely vanish from Polish life (*Życie Warszawy*, 1945, pp 2-3)

Fifty years later, similar explanations may be found in scientific publications written by renowned Polish academics in the education field

The partitioning powers were interested in inducing Polish society to drink. The Nazis occupying Poland did the same thing, by pushing vodka the occupants wanted to lead the Polish nation to biological annihilation (Bartkowiak, 1995, p 348)

The use of alcohol to keep “people quiet” during Nazi occupation may be disputed but it is a persistent belief in Poland that alcohol was used by those powers to lead the Polish nation to destruction and submission. This belief was systematically enforced by the media, the Church, and well known anti-alcohol activists, even by academics in the alcohol field. It might have originated in the calls of early revolutionaries to curb drunkenness among the workers, whom they wanted to engage in revolutionary action. According to the early activists an intoxicated working class is “unconscious”, and will not participate in revolution, and will be bought off by the ruling class (Barrows *et al.*, 1987)

The strongest expression of the belief that the state used alcohol to control people and in attempts to discredit the social unrest of workers, came during the shipyard strikes in Gdansk, in 1980. The strike committee introduced total prohibition in the striking shipyards and refinery on the first day of the strike when there was an accusation by the management that the strike was being organised by a

drunken mob. Solidarity⁹ demanded from the authorities a total proclamation of prohibition in the province of Gdansk before any talks could start. At first the local government refused but the workers at the refinery used the release of 50 000 litres of gasoline for the ambulance service as a bargaining point. Finally, on the sixth day of the strike, prohibition was proclaimed in the whole province. The reason behind the demand for prohibition was that striking workers feared provocation by the Polish authorities through the use of drunken agents to cause unrest, as was the case in previous strikes. Authorities discredited social unrest by attributing it to drunken comportment during the strikes in 1956. Evidence of such reporting may be found in *Gazeta Poznanska* 1 July 1956

I have been listening all night to interrogations of people arrested by the security forces suspected of bloody riots and robbery. Most of whom were still intoxicated, 12 hours after the arrest. I have heard statements by old gangsters, criminals who few days earlier left the prison, their look wild, smell of alcohol strong in the air (Bielewicz & Moskalewicz, 1985, p 373)

The student pro-democracy demonstrations in 1968 were also described in *Trybuna Ludu* as a drunken riot

Groups of dirty hooligans that usually stand by the kiosk with beer (Bielewicz & Moskalewicz, 1985, p 373)

During the shipyard strikes in 1970 in Szczecin and Gdansk, people lost their lives when the security police opened fire at crowds in the streets and railway platforms. On 19 December 1970 a local daily newspaper *Głos Szczeciński* explained the need for the use of firearms to stop the drunken mobs

... a delicatessen was broken into from which alcohol was stolen and a food store was plundered mostly of alcoholic beverages. Drunken scum of all sorts started for public buildings, with the Militia headquarters being the first goal (Bielewicz & Moskalewicz, 1985, p.373).

⁹ Solidarity was the first independent trade union in socialist Poland. It was founded in 1970 in Gdansk during the December strikes, was illegal until an agreement was reached during the next social unrest in 1980, and was made illegal again during martial law in 1981. The role of the union at that time was mainly political.

In Radom in 1976, when the government attempted to regulate food shortages by steep price rises, there were similar press accounts of the events. These examples indicate how the authorities claimed that strikers were drunken hooligans and justified use of force to “protect” law abiding citizens (Bielewicz & Moskalewicz, 1985).

The view that the government actively promoted the drinking of alcohol is reflected in some of the participants’ statements in the present study. Anna (47) believed that the easy availability of vodka and limited choices of other beverages was part of a purposeful policy of the regime

During socialism we were very limited in our choices and then I think it was done on purpose. . vodka was cheap and easily available, a drunk person does not think, it was done on purpose by the government, to induce people to drink heavily like in Russia now they are paying the teachers in vodka, as I’ve heard on the news recently. Then nobody questions the governmental policies. I think it’s complicated but I think the government had its goal in keeping vodka prices low

Marta (46) was of the opinion that the State had its interest in promoting alcohol use among the people:

...and there was a theory (in Poland) that the vodka was cheap, it was better to give them (workers) vodka. let them get drunk they will protest less, they will know less.

Zdzislaw (88) who entered the workforce in the region already “freed” by the Soviet army at the end of the Second World War also saw the use of alcohol as a means of control by the newly formed authorities, which were backed by the Soviet Union

I felt I was forced to drink, I was afraid not to, it was the first time I understood what was in store for us.

He explained that he was afraid to refuse to drink with the workers, as it might have been understood that he was against the working class and therefore an anti-revolutionary element. This was similar to those army officers described by Godorowski (1992) who did not dare refuse to drink the toast for the Motherland

The evidence presented above supports the persistent notion in Poland that occupying powers used alcohol for political reasons. For many people “alcohol pushing” applied equally to the socialist regime as it did in previous occupations. It was yet another occupying power that the people did not choose. The government was imposed on them by the Soviet State during the Red Terror of the Stalinist Era (Roszkowski, 1999)

This history of the political economy of alcohol makes it easier to understand the stereotype among many Poles that alcohol makes ruling easier for the ruler, and that a drinking society is easier to manipulate and more yielding. This strongly held belief seems to dominate in the countries where the authorities did not have the support of the people and where people were subordinate to their rulers for centuries, as was the case in Poland. The rulers of Poland did not have the support of the nation for two hundred years but the Church was always held in very high respect. Over the centuries many priests working among the people saw the impact of drunkenness on members of their parishes and their families. These priests were the first to call for temperance among peasants and nobles alike

The Temperance Movement in Poland.

Before discussing the role of the Church in the temperance movement in Poland, it is important to mention that 95 per cent of Poles identify themselves as Catholic (GUS, 1999). Unlike in Western Europe, the religious Reformation movement in Poland was non-existent. The Catholic Church was a powerful and long established institution, and one, which had large estates and revenue coming from these estates. The Church as landowner was equally involved in the *Propinacja* with the nobles and often blamed the suppliers of drink, the Jewish innkeepers, for the peasants' poor standard of living, low productivity, rebelliousness and destructiveness (Levine, 1987).

However, there were some orders in the Church that worked with the peasants and other destitute sections of Polish society. These monks noticed the tragic consequences of alcohol use (Moczarski, 1983). Some priests blamed the substance itself for alcohol-related problems. One of those priests was Fr Jan Papczynski, the founder of the temperance movement in Poland. In 1699 he founded an Order of Marians, members of which had to pledge abstinence. By abstinence it was meant not drinking vodka. The role of the order, among other religious roles, was to help the poor and fight alcoholism among them. Fr Papczynski attributed the political decline of the State and the moral decline of its people to alcohol abuse (Moczarski, 1983).

The Church became more involved in the sobriety movement after it had lost the income from the distilleries and taverns, when the private concessions had been abolished (Levine, 1987). In the years 1830-1848, the time of the "Distillation fever" in Poland, the time of big famine and the peasants' 1848 revolution (Springtide of Nations), many temperance fraternities were formed, inspired by the Church. This was later called the "Church-public anti-alcohol action". Calling on Christian morality and virtues, the founders linked national temperance with national liberation and patriotism. Noteworthy was the increased activity and popularity of the temperance movement preceding and during social unrest. After the 1848 revolution, the temperance movement gradually lost popularity, springing up again before the last independence uprising in 1863. The importance of the Church during the division of Poland was paramount, with the Church calling for moral improvement of the individual and for a patriotic movement in the nation. The Church was a safe place where Poles could be Poles, they could speak their language, sing patriotic songs, and they could meet to conspire against the authorities (Moczarski, 1983).

After the last uprising in 1864, the activity of the Church in the temperance movement diminished, although it did not cease completely. In its place scientific and medical professionals became prominent in the fight against what was termed as alcoholism. New publications abounded many of them still of value today. What is most impressive among these papers written ninety years ago, is the scientific format with referencing and the use of other contemporary European publications in support

of some recommendations, which meet contemporary international requirements

● One of the most prominent activists in that area was Dr Sokolowski. Sokolowski (1849- 1924) was a Polish physician, who from 1913 was a professor of the Warsaw University and lectured on the “social epidemics” – tuberculosis and alcoholism. In his lectures, *Social disasters and the fight against them* (1917) he recommended the encouragement of the moderate use of low alcohol content beverages and discouragement of spirit drinking, by increasing the taxes on alcohol sales, reducing the number of distilleries, restricting the sales of spirits, and introducing new laws against public drunkenness. Sokolowski also supported the idea of disseminating information about the effects of alcohol among the general public, through lectures, displays, and by introducing alcohol education in schools (Bystron, 1960, Sokolowski, 1917)

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Sokolowski reports that the most active temperance movement was in the Prussian sector of Greater Poland with a society called “Liberation”. Liberation can mean two things, liberation from addiction but also from invading power. This society spread from Poznan to Eastern Prussia and later to Westfalia. A similar society in Silesia was persecuted by the German authorities, who saw it as a Polish national organisation. The two most active temperance movements in Galicia were *Eleuteria*, founded in 1903 and *Eleusis*, founded in 1906. The first society united mainly young people, students, young workers and professionals. It combined the temperance movement with a national patriotic one. The second society *Eleusis*, opened Tea Houses, reading clubs, organised lectures about the effects of alcohol on people's health and social wellbeing, and ran many educational programs.

Galicia is in the south of present-day Poland. The biggest city of the region, Cracow, has been an academic centre for 600 years. It has the fourth oldest university in Europe, so it is not surprising the temperance movements there based their activities on raising people's awareness. These were social movements organised and founded by anti-alcohol activists. The Kingdom of Poland differed from those two sectors because the temperance movement there was initiated by a section of the medical school in Warsaw, the Warsaw Hygiene Society, in operation from 1904. The social movement started later and was centred in two industrial

cities, Lodz and Radom. Lodz had the largest alcohol excise tax, amounting to one million rubels, which means it had the largest alcohol consumption in the Kingdom. Ms Daszynska-Golinska initiated the movement among the peasants, in the Kingdom of Poland. She wrote in her book *Ten years of fight with alcoholism on the Polish lands*, 1912:

Anti-alcoholism is not a private matter, it is of significant national importance, which may impact our national survival (Daszynska-Golinska, 1912, in Sokolowski, 1917, p. 370).

Poland regained its independence after the First World War and the anti-alcoholism movement in Poland flourished. The national renewal movement formed a society called Polish Society Fighting Alcoholism - "Sobriety". It was an active temperance society, publishing its own journal under the same name. It had a number of successes in the field, the 1920 Anti-Alcohol Act was the most important one. The act forbade the sales of alcohol on Sundays, Church holidays, and before 1 p.m. on a working day. The renewed activities of the temperance movement in Poland were short lived. All their work ceased with the start of the Second World War (Moczarski, 1983; Wald *et al.*, 1986)

After the Second World War there was a resurgence of Polish temperance movements, supported by the Catholic Church. The Church considered heavy drinking a threat to Christian values. The temperance societies did not last long, however. The government prohibited all independent societies and they vanished between 1947-48 (Moczarski, 1983). To replace these societies, the centrally controlled Central Trade Union Commission founded a new temperance organisation called "Social Committee for Fighting Alcoholism". It is important to mention here that the trade unions in socialist Poland were not independent organisations representing the interests of the workers. The trade union was directly under the authority of the local committee of the United Polish Worker's Party, which made running of any anti-alcohol programs very difficult. For every project there had to be an approval from the party. No funds were made available to run any projects. The creation of a single state controlled temperance organisation curbed the only independent voluntary activity in the country. It was important for the authorities to control these movements based on Christian philosophy, as it was against the

orientation represented by the new system. In 1965 the “Social Committee for Fighting Alcoholism” under strong public pressure started publishing a quarterly journal *Fight with alcoholism* (Moczarski, 1983; Moskalewicz, 1985; Wald *et al.*, 1986).

The temperance campaigns run by the Church continued regardless of State orders, but within the confines of religious activities and were particularly strong during Lent. These campaigns led to a noticeable drop in alcohol consumption during the forty days preceeding Easter (Moskalewicz, 1985)

State Regulation and Restriction on the Availability of Alcohol

Temperance societies were not alone in their attempts to restrict alcohol consumption. All states have at different times also attempted to regulate alcohol availability for a variety of reasons (Hawks, 1993; Stockwell, 1995; Saggars & Gray, 1998b).

For centuries, Polish society has been exposed to alcohol promotion by the rulers on the one hand and to warnings and calls for sobriety from temperance fraternities and societies, and the Church, on the other hand. While governments induced the population to drink during the partition of Poland, there are some indications that by the mid-nineteenth century, the partitioning governments also saw many problems related to the significant increase in the consumption of vodka. It became increasingly clear that unchecked consumption of vodka affected the social behaviour and health of the people. The Russian tsar, Nicolas I was disturbed by the ill health of the army recruits from the Kingdom of Poland and attributed this to alcohol. In 1844 and 1848, in addition to the high excise tax, including the established alcohol concession sales, drinks stronger than 46 per cent were banned, inn opening hours were limited, and serving alcohol to inebriated people was prohibited. The number of distilleries was reduced from 2 094 in 1844 to 569 in 1875 (Bystron, 1960). These restrictions were criticised by some contemporary authors who stated that the Russian State Monopoly did not achieve the goal of

reducing alcohol consumption. On the contrary, income from excise tax on alcohol trebled in 30 years. The pattern of use changed, and drinking moved from the tavern to the home and to the street. Public drunkenness became an increasing problem in the Kingdom of Poland from the end of the 19th century, and the production of illicit *himber* increased in many regions. The reasons for the failure to reduce the consumption of vodka was that reputedly the State did not want to reduce the revenue brought in by alcohol (Sokolowski, 1917).

With independence after the first World War many people lobbied the government to introduce sales restrictions on alcohol and on the 23rd of April 1920, a new act was introduced which forbade the sales of alcohol on Sundays, Church holidays, Christmas, Easter, and before 1 p.m. on a working day. There was strong opposition among the inn owners and the producers of alcoholic beverages to the new act but the law had such strong public support that it went through the Parliament unopposed (Wald *et al.*, 1986).

Scientific publications in the field abounded, as did lectures of psychiatrists¹⁰, and social medicine specialists. Scientific congresses on problems of alcoholism were organised in 1921, 1924, 1930 and in 1937. the 21st International Anti-Alcohol Congress was held in Warsaw. Unfortunately, all proceedings were lost in 1939 during the siege of Warsaw. After the First World War, the combination of new alcohol control policies and the economic depression contributed to a significant decline in alcohol consumption to 2.3 litres per capita in 1923 (from 5L in the Polish Kingdom in 1907, and 4.5L in Galicia in 1913). It continued to fall, reaching 0.7L per capita in 1932. In 1932 another Act was introduced prohibiting the home production of spirits. After 1932 with the depression over, alcohol consumption started to rise, and in 1938 it reached 1.5L per person (Chodzko, 1948; Ciembroniewicz, 1913; GUS, 1966; Roszkowski, 1913; Sokolowski, 1917).

In the 1950s, further alcohol control measures were introduced because of problems with public order. In 1956 the most widely known contribution to dealing with the problem of public drunkenness was the introduction of the sobering-up station. A law was passed that persons found intoxicated in public could be detained

in the sobering-up station without penalty. Medical staff serviced the sobering-up stations¹¹. In 1956 there was one station with 7 608 admissions, but by 1975 there were 35 stations with 291 958 admissions, and in 1980 there were 317 768 admissions (Moskalewicz, 1989).

Measures for controlling the availability of alcoholic beverages were undertaken in 1959. *The Prevention of Alcoholism Act*, which was introduced in December 1959 was active until May 1983. All sales and consumption outlets for alcoholic beverages over 4.5 per cent were to be licensed. The hours during which alcohol could be sold and served were shortened and were determined by local authorities. Spirits could not be sold on Saturdays and Sundays or on paydays, which fell on the first and fifteenth of each month. Local government could also impose restrictions for reasons of public safety and order, for instance, on election days. Consumption of stronger alcohol was not allowed in the workplace but directors could grant exemptions on special occasions. Under the 1959 Act it was not permitted to serve or sell alcoholic beverages above 4.5 per cent to people less than 18 years of age (Moskalewicz, 1989).

During the socialist regime the advertising industry was very small and served the state. An Act of Parliament prohibited anything in the media that might offend public morality, and alcohol abuse and alcoholism were considered offences against public morality. Only the “dollar shops”¹² were exempt from that law and were allowed to advertise vodka on their premises (Morawski, 1983, Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983).

The State Prices Commission controlled the prices of alcohol beverages. Spirits were 30 per cent more expensive than wine and 50 per cent more expensive than beers. The Prevention of Alcoholism Act required the State to systematically increase the prices of alcohol to control consumption and prevent alcohol-related problems. However there were only nine increases in prices from 1950 to 1975 and

¹⁰ Psychiatrists have dealt with problems of alcoholism and alcohol treatment in Poland since 1907.

¹¹ This system is still working in Poland today, although in the times of the market economy there is a chronic lack of funds to run the stations at the same level as during the Socialist regime.

¹² These were shops with merchandise from western countries and export quality Polish produce, which could be bought with western block foreign currency.

in real terms in 1975 the cost of vodka fell 15 per cent. In the 1960s when the relative price of alcoholic beverages increased, the consumption levels stabilised between 6.2 - 6.35 litres of pure alcohol per person aged 15 years and over, but started to rise dramatically in the 1970s, reaching 10.62 litres in 1976 (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983)

Some claim that although *The Prevention Alcoholism Act* of 1959 was one of the best for the time, it had flaws. The act did not treat beverages of 4.5 per cent as alcohol. Children were allowed to consume these beverages, as did workers who could drink 4.5 per cent alcohol in the workplace. Spirits were also allowed after obtaining a special permit from the manager. The most important problem with the act was that it was not adequately executed and policed (Moczarski, 1983).

It is said that research in the alcohol field was not the priority of the government in the 1960s and 1970s. In the 1980s when alcohol problems became evident, there were no funds to carry out any research. Also, although there were recommendations to carry out alcohol education, there were very few resources allocated to this in Poland. There were plans, never realised, to introduce alcohol and health education programs into the school curriculum. The only health education promoted abstinence (Moskalewicz *et al.*, 1983)

Contradictions between Polish sentiment towards alcohol and official alcohol policy are evident. Alcohol regulation acts were good on paper, but in practice the law was not executed nor was it policed. Drinking on the job was a frequent occurrence. A worker who endangered the safety of others while intoxicated would not be dismissed. He would be transferred to a safer job where he would no longer pose a threat to others (Morawski, 1976).

Papers published in the early 1990s (Bielewicz, 1993; Moskalewicz, 1991; Pekala, 1993) blame the government for passivity, claiming that although the anti-alcoholism act obliged the State to fight alcohol misuse, there was no education to change social attitudes to drinking, no money for alcohol research, and no real attempts to reduce vodka consumption. For the people it meant one thing, when the government is doing nothing to prevent drinking, and when the only method of controlling alcohol consumption is by price regulation, the government is interested

in keeping the “vodka flowing”. Moskalewicz (1991) argued that increased prices did not restrict alcohol availability in Poland, as is the case in many countries based on the market economy. There was a lack of alternatives on the market to direct the demand elsewhere. The rise in alcohol prices, he argued, led to the pauperisation of many Polish families (Moskalewicz, 1991; Stockwell *et al.*, 1996)

Another aspect was the inclusion of vodka in the ration system. Some saw this as inducement to drink (Moskalewicz, 1991). Vodka is not the food product of first need, the Church argued, but for the government the threat of social unrest was real if vodka was not made available. It was the workers’ right to drink, if they were denied their right it might have been a trigger for more social unrest. There were instances of riots and lynching mobs when the availability of vodka was greatly reduced by alcohol supply problems associated with increased demand (Moskalewicz, 1991; Wald & Moskalewicz, 1984).

Moskalewicz (1991) claimed that the General Censorship Office did not inform the general public about alcohol-related problems

At the same time some temperance activists spoke dramatically about the nation's biological existence being in danger. Both opinions were unknown to the general public. Most information on the subject could not break through the general censorship (Moskalewicz, 1991, p. 313).

Alcohol research projects that were carried out were not published, due to the role of the Central Censorship Office. Moczarski’s *History of alcoholism and the fight against it*, was taken off the press by the censor in 1974 and published only after the death of the author in 1983. Even medical textbooks were censored. An example here is a 1985 edition of *Social psychiatry*, a textbook for medical students by Zbigniew Falicki (Falicki, 1985; Moczarski, 1983; Moskalewicz, 1991)

In the late 1970s mounting alcohol-related problems prompted health and social scientists to lobby the government to close the loopholes of the 1959 act. The recommendation for the new law, Ignacy Wald’s *Report about the problems of the state alcohol policy* waited three years for publication, but finally reached the

attention of the proper authorities. It became possible after General Jaruzelski, a teetotaler, came to power after the 1980 Solidarity strikes. The new *Law on Uphringing in Sobriety and Counteracting Alcoholism* was introduced on 26 October 1982. It dealt with the flaws of the first act in particular described above (Wald *et al.*, 1986, Dziennik Ustaw, 1982.)

Concern about alcohol at the beginning of the 1980s suddenly became a public issue. After decades of silence and even a ban imposed by censorship the public debate on alcohol was unusually stormy (Moskalewicz, 1991, p. 407)

Moskalewicz sums up the alcohol policy of the socialist regime by stating that it had primarily financial interests as a goal, rather than being socially and health directed. He argues that there is a conflict of interest when the State controls production and distribution and when, at the same time, alcohol policy is entirely dependent on the State. He points out that the only policy that was executed was the prohibition of illicit distillation and frequent price increases, which he says primarily took into account the economic concerns of the State. Contrary to the reports from other countries about the importance of price regulation as a consumption control measure, Moskalewicz (1991) reports that in Poland, this policy had adverse consequences such as leading the families of heavy drinkers to extreme poverty, reinforcement of alcohol as a commodity convertible to other scarce articles and services, and was conducive to consumption of non-beverage alcohol (methyl alcohol, acetone) (Edwards *et al.*, 1995, Moskalewicz, 1991, Siggers & Gray, 1998a, Stockwell *et al.*, 1996, Stockwell *et al.*, 1997). Moskalewicz's arguments reflect similar statements from Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sokolowski, 1917)

In Poland the State generated alcohol revenue not only from taxation, but also from its production and sales. In countries with a market economy, it is in the interest of the alcohol industry to increase sales. Prevention initiatives are met with the producers' strong opposition (Stockwell *et al.*, 1997). Moskalewicz (1991) argued that because the State was the producer of alcohol in Poland, it had an interest in keeping the financial benefits coming from the sales of alcohol. The revenue from

alcohol sales was vital for the Polish government, as the country had a mounting foreign debt and increasing economic problems at that time (Moskalewicz, 1991)

The last decade of the twentieth century was a rather stormy period in Polish life, not only in the alcohol field. Poland entered the market economy and many reforms were introduced. Unfortunately, the economic situation of most people worsened as a result. Swiatkiewicz (1997) reported that the total rejection of the previous rules governing the economy created premature and inconsistent changes in legislation. The previous legislation, which was good in principle, was viewed as a relic of the past and its violation did not lead to social disapproval. This created a "wild" (uncontrolled) market, particularly in the areas previously monopolised by the State, such as alcohol sales and distribution. A new, socially accepted businessman emerged, one who could make large fortunes overnight. Millions of litres of alcohol were imported into the country between 1989-1991, giving the new entrepreneurs enormous untaxed profits. This became known as "schnapsgate" (Swiatkiewicz, 1997). It is not difficult to explain the sharp increase in alcohol-related problems, despite low official alcohol consumption levels.

New groups with large capital became very influential in Poland, seeking to repeal some of the restrictions of the *Upbringing in Sobriety Act*. Some softening of the alcohol supply restrictions was achieved with the liquidation of the State monopoly of bulk sales of alcohol and restrictions on trading hours. The trend of the times is very well represented by the formation of the Polish Beer-Lovers' Political Party, founded by a well-known cabaret actor in 1989. At first people treated the whole affair as a joke, particularly when the party's activities resembled a cabaret show, with the actor appearing frequently on television talking about the "ridiculous" regulations of the Sobriety Act. This situation ceased to be funny when the party's leader and several members were elected to Parliament. These people turned out to be businessmen who proposed many legislative initiatives aimed at further liberalisation of alcohol policy (Swiatkiewicz, 1997).

Another problem arose in the free market economy, the advertising of alcohol. Alcohol advertising was banned by law in 1985 and upheld in 1993. Unfortunately there is no effective method of enforcing the law, which is constantly

broken by Western producers. As there is no penalty for breaking the law, the Polish press and the streets are smothered by alcohol advertisements. The same situation applies to selling alcohol to minors. It is forbidden to sell alcohol to people under 18 in Poland, but this law is constantly broken and beer promotion and advertising is directed at the youth market (Swiatkiewicz, 1997)

Summary

It is a common belief in Poland that for centuries those in power have promoted heavy drinking among their subjects in order to achieve their various goals. There are numerous examples of this in classical literature, historical documents, the media, and in scientific papers published after the Second World War. Journalists and researchers in Poland, among others, assert also that alcohol was used as means of political control. This belief was enforced by the new government to discredit old regimes. The view that rulers, whatever their political persuasion, attempted to induce their subjects to heavy drinking, rendering them powerless, appears to be common. The statements of the adult participants of this study supported this notion. They claim that this attitude of the government led to the promotion of harmful drinking and helped to develop the “Polish drinking model”

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLE OF ALCOHOL IN TRADITIONAL POLISH LIFE

“ and of course there was vodka ” (Zbigniew, age 40)

Introduction

The context of alcohol in Poland is important because it sets the scene for the atmosphere and attitudes to Polish culture and drinking at a time when most of the informants in this study left their homeland. Since that time the socialist system collapsed, in 1989, and the borders of Poland opened up to the influences of Western capital. Poland embraced the change to a market economy trying to make up for lost time (Lehto, 1997; Swiatkiewicz, 1997). Therefore this chapter is not concerned with the most recent events influencing drinking patterns in Poland. All data about alcohol consumption and drinking patterns concentrate on the period from the 1950s to 1989 (Parliamentary Commission for the Fight with Alcoholism, 2000). Wald and colleagues (1985) report that the drinking pattern in Poland was intermittent, with low frequency drinking of large quantities of vodka. In other words binge drinking, according to the definition of the NH&MRC (Wald *et al.*, 1985). Another aspect of Polish drinking was the social acceptance of public drunkenness, which is still very visible on Polish streets (Bielewicz, 1993).

Before any attempt is made to discuss the drinking patterns in Poland of this group of people, it is vital to analyse cultural influences in that country over the last fifty years. Poland is a country in the geographical centre of Europe. The two lines spanning Europe from east to west and from north to south cross near Poznan, a big

city with a one thousand-year history in western Poland. Culturally, Poland is on the crossroads of mostly Eastern European and Western European cultures, the dominance of either depending on the dominant political power in the Polish State. For 44 years after the Second World War, Poland was one of the satellite countries of the Soviet Union and was separated from the rest of Europe by the "iron curtain". All political, economic and cultural influences came from the East. Those from Western Europe were considered "the rotten fruit of capitalism" (*Gazeta Poznanska*, 1956, p. 4). Polish leaders underwent years of training in the Soviet Union and the "Russian way" of drinking (Iontchev, 1998, p. 184) became a part of the image of a successful individual (Bielewicz, 1993). During that period there was strong pressure to preserve Polish identity. Drinking vodka was portrayed as "a right of the Polish working class". As wine was not the local product, the authorities did not support it. People in Poland used to say "No wussie wine or beer for us, we are Poles who can drink strong beverages" (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 289; Iontchev, 1998; Wald *et al.*, 1985).

The only study available about drinking patterns from the period before the informants' migration, in 1976 indicated that 11.5 per cent of men and 25.2 per cent of women in Poland were abstainers. Janik also estimated that in 1976 eight per cent of the Polish population were considered problem drinkers (criteria unspecified), who drank fifty per cent of all alcohol consumed in Poland (in Davies & Walsh, 1983). This study is somewhat at odds with other research discussed previously, which depicts infrequent heavy drinking as the norm.

People who took part in this study grew up in a country where binge drinking has been characteristic (Iontchev, 1998; Moskalewicz, 1989; Wald *et al.*, 1985; Heath, 1998). This is where they acquired their attitudes to alcohol. All but one were of legal drinking age before they left Poland. This chapter will explore the role of alcohol in their lives before migration to Australia.

Having presented the context in which the informants in this study grew up, the question for this chapter was how this sample of people saw themselves as drinkers in Poland and what, in their view, influenced them in their drinking choices. The data for this chapter was based on the stories of the migrants themselves. It was

impossible to verify their stories as none of the informants was known to me before they migrated to Australia. The important issue was informants' perceptions of the place of alcohol in their lives before migration to Australia.

Social Life and Drinking Patterns

According to the participants of this study, social life in Poland was more formal than in Australia. Alcohol was served during most socials, which were rare family celebrations, or when friends dropped by, usually after receiving their pay packet. All male drinking took place outside the family home, in the work place, in the parks or just outside the apartment block where some of the drinkers lived. Those better off went to restaurants and drank alcohol (vodka) with food. This section describes social events in Poland, the contexts in which drinking took place and the meaning of alcohol in everyday life.

Some social events in Poland remembered by informants were organised by their parents, as they were too young to lead an independent adult life. Some people left their country of origin in their late teens or early twenties, ages when adult children normally continue to live with their parents in Poland. Others had independent households in their homeland and were responsible for organising parties, dinners and other receptions.

Most socials were organised to celebrate a special occasion. Nameday was the celebration mentioned most frequently when friends were invited to the house or apartment. A nameday is a day in the calendar assigned to the patron, a saint in the Catholic religion, of the person's name (Doroszewski, 1998). Traditionally in Poland, a nameday is celebrated by receiving gifts and throwing a party. Jan Stanislaw Bystron, a Polish ethnologist and sociologist in the first part of the twentieth century, wrote in his *History of Polish customs*:

A nameday was an important annual celebration in the 16th century: it was a religious celebration by giving honour to one's patron saint, but it was also an opportunity to invite guests and have a feast (Bystron, 1938/1960, p. 163).

Most people in Poland lived in small apartments in large apartment blocks. Every unit consisted of two to three rooms at the most, which served as dining rooms, sitting rooms and bedrooms at different times of the day. These apartments often housed three generations of the same family. While the adults were having a party, all other activities of the rest of the family had to cease because of lack of space. Children were usually not present during the event. Dana (51) had to visit her aunt when her parents were having a party. “I helped prepare the food but later I had to leave”

Others were put to bed in the last room in the apartment, out of the way of adults. One informant told me that one had to cross another room, usually the one where there was the party, to go to the rest of the apartment, the bathroom and the kitchen. Some people who were responsible for the preparation of parties in Poland, wondered how they managed, considering the living conditions. Marta (46) lived in a two-room apartment with her four siblings and her parents. She described evenings when her parents had guests at home

We had to stay in one room during the party and stay very quiet
The apartments were so small we were all squashed in a small
room while my parents were entertaining

The children participated in family celebrations such as Christmas, christenings, First Communion and weddings. Some of the interviewees remembered extended family reunions, when 30-40 people attended. Zbigniew (40) mentioned those parties with happiness. He said he could still see his grandfather rubbing his hands together in a happy satisfied manner because he had his whole family together at the same table. Zbigniew remembers playing with his cousins under the lavishly set tables, and he also mentioned that the children were actively involved in the family celebrations. One of the uncles organised various games for the younger members of the family.

We were never left out of the celebrations. We were actively
involved. One of my uncles organised games and competitions
for us children.

Stanislaw (70) remembered the parties organised by his parents before the war. He mentioned the abundance of food served then. Many participants attribute such displays of abundance to Polish hospitality when the host would lose face if the tables were not full. In their homeland, the party would be predominantly sitting at the table and the food would be served hot. A party for friends took place in the evening and if one lived in an apartment, the number of guests could not exceed 10-12 people as one would not be able to fit more in the room.

For a family celebration the event was also sitting and eating at the table, but the main meal would be served at the traditional time in the early afternoon, 2-3 p.m. Zosia (48) said: "We would sit the whole day at the table eating constantly, one meal just melted into the next". Although most social events were "at the table", one woman in her eighties described how she organised dancing parties for no other reason but to meet with some friends and dance the night away till four in the morning. She mentioned that from time to time the neighbours complained that their parties were too lively. Another remembered that her parents regularly met another couple to play cards, which was always a good opportunity to have a small meal and a few drinks together.

Food in Poland "Cut a dash and pawn your possessions"

This section describes food prepared for social events in Poland. Food is very important, as Zosia (48) stated "without serving plenty of food one just cannot have social life". For a dinner party, regardless of whether the guests were expected or not, the hosts had to make a special effort with copious amounts of food and alcohol to prove their generosity. As Stanislaw (70) said "I have never seen that much food being served here, the tables groaned with food".

Dishes that were served with neat vodka, deserve an in-depth description as people held the view that this kind of food enabled them to drink plenty of strong alcohol in their homeland. Rich and fatty food was also said to keep people warm in the cold climate. Zosia (48) used an expression that food was: "not for human stomachs", it was so heavy. In retrospect she viewed the food as unhealthy.

Preparations for a party involved all the females in the household cooking, including young girls who helped their mothers in the kitchen. Women usually had a less favourable view than the males of serving so much food. The females remembered preparing very traditional dishes: *bigos* - stewed saurkraut with meat, *pierogi* - dumplings with all kinds of filling; meat, potatoes with onion, and cabbage with mushrooms. These were usually served with *skwarki* - fried pork fat (some people licked their lips when they talked about it). One woman admitted that sometimes she goes to the Polish Club to have this special treat, but sadly, she said she now gets sick after eating it. She says that her stomach ceased to be Polish and she cannot digest this food any more.

A typical dinner party in a household in Poland would be a dish or two of herring, herring in cream sauce, tomato and mustard sauce, and in oil or roll mops. There would be eggs with mayonnaise, various smoked cold meats predominantly pork, such as *poledwica*, which is smoked pork loin either cooked or raw, several kinds of smoked sausages and pork or veal aspic. A very traditional spicy paste served with the cold meats was *czwiki*, a paste of mashed beetroot and horseradish. For soup people usually mentioned borscht - beetroot soup served either clear with baked *piroshki* or as rich soup with vegetables and beans. Some people remembered so-called white borscht cooked with white sausage. The main course would be roast veal, roast pork loin, or pork schnitzel. These would be served with cooked potatoes, saurkraut and cucumbers in brine. Another dish served hot as a main course would be tripe, prepared in a spicy way, in a lot of sauce served with dark rye and sourdough bread. Cabbage rolls filled with meat or mushrooms were also mentioned. It does not mean that only those dishes were served, simply that the participants in this study mentioned these dishes with sentiment. People said veal and pork was the most popular meat. According to Marta (46)

Veal is different in Poland it is from very young animals, still only milk fed. The meat is pale pink and very delicate, it is very difficult to buy real veal in Australia, this what they sell here as veal is young beef in our understanding.

The family celebrations would be most often organised for Christmas, Easter, baptisms and First Communion. The dishes served during family celebrations would

be similar to those served for friends with the exception of Christmas Eve dinner, which is the main event and meal during the festive season

Christmas Eve is a special feast in the Polish calendar. According to Polish tradition it is a fast day for the Catholics as they are still awaiting the birth of Christ. A fast day means that no meat or alcohol is allowed on that day. Traditionally people can start this important meal when the first star is visible in the winter sky, so while the adults are busy preparing the feast, the children wait impatiently outdoors for the first star. The dinner can start at around 4 p.m. as the days during the northern winter are short. Some women who had young children in Poland said they reinforced the tradition of the first star. They said that at least the younger children were out of the way from the small apartment during this busy time. The older children stayed at home helping with the preparations.

Traditionally one had to prepare at least thirteen dishes for Christmas Eve. Meat was replaced by fish and wild forest mushrooms. For the entrée people usually served herring dishes as described above, pike in aspic, smoked eel and other fish and potato salad. Soup was either wild mushroom or fish soup with noodles or borscht with *piroshki* – pasties filled with mushrooms and cabbage. For the main course one could not do without fried carp, considered a delicacy in Poland, served with potatoes and cabbage with mushrooms. People related early experiences in Perth when they tried to buy carp in fish shops. They were told one does not eat this fish here, it is not nice, it smells of mud.

As a sweet, people had dried fruit compote or sour cherry *kisiel* made from stewed fruit with starch. Others had noodles with sweet poppy seed paste. In the eastern parts of Poland, instead of noodles with poppy seed one would prepare *kutia*, which is gruel cooked with honey, raisins and nuts. There would also be a variety of cakes, the most important being *makowiec*, a sweet bread with poppy seed paste, or poppy seed torte, baked cheese-cake and fruit-cake. My informants treated all the dishes described above as light food with which one cannot serve vodka, as all the drinkers would get intoxicated very fast. Only Wojtek (41) mentioned breaking the rule of no alcohol on Christmas Eve in his mother's household:

I know the Church said one should not drink vodka during Christmas but my uncle liked vodka with his food so he always brought a bottle with him. My mother would have two to three glasses (ladies glasses, 25 mL) and my grandmother one glass, he would drink the rest. It was our custom.

Christmas was always the most traditional family feast in terms of the choice of dishes, which were served in a particular family for generations. Nearly all informants, young and older, mentioned Christmas first when asked to talk about family celebrations in Poland. During other family celebrations like christening, First Communion and weddings “alcohol flowed in a wide stream” according to Zosia (48).

Knowledge of traditional food was held and passed by females of the family. The men talked with pride about the amount and kind of food served in Poland. They remembered with sentiment:

We always had plenty of food, always very good, my grandmother was a very good cook (Zbigniew age 40)

Serving plenty of meat during other celebrations reinforced the importance of the occasion and the generosity of the host. Meat was difficult to get during the socialist regime and was expensive. One female made it clear that neither her immediate family nor her friends ate dishes described in the earlier section very often. Everyday food would include more flour and potato dumplings with curd cheese, vegetable or fruit fillings, potato pancakes, buckwheat or barley with some meat or fried pork fat. For a celebration one had to make a special effort, even if it meant borrowing money. One could not risk the accusation of stinginess, which is one of the worst insults. Stanislaw (70) explained it:

You know the Polish tradition, the table always had to be full, the old proverb says it all “Cut a dash and pawn your possessions”

Serving alcohol was just as important as food was during the receptions in Poland and the beverage served most often was “white” vodka. Zbigniew (40) said as a matter of fact: “and of course there was vodka”.

Beverages

The majority of the statements about beverages in Poland concentrated on vodka. Only a small number of informants mentioned wine as a beverage that women might occasionally drink. The next section assigned to beverages in Poland is therefore devoted mostly to vodkas. The plural is used on purpose, because in Polish understanding there is more than one vodka.

Polish vodkas - The frozen spirit of the North

Vodka is the national Polish drink. It is said Poland is vodka's native land. Some speculate that the earliest production of vodka started in Poland in 1405 and later spread to Russia and Scandinavia, two other regions where vodka is the most popular beverage (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995). Poles like to claim that they consume the largest amounts of vodka in the world. This is not so far-fetched. According to the World Health Organisation office for Europe in 1991, Poles consumed 4.5L of spirits per capita. This figure indicates that Polish people lead the world in spirit consumption¹. Statistical information from Poland for the same period differs quite significantly. The Institute of Neurology and Psychiatry reported the amount of 11.4L of all alcohol per person. Lehto explained that this discrepancy was due to the inclusion in Polish data of unrecorded consumption of illegally imported and produced spirits (GUS, 1994; Lehto, 1997; World Drink Trends, 1993). When most of the informants migrated in the early 1980s, vodka was the most popular beverage. The demand for vodka in the early 1980s was so large that during the economic crisis and shortages in the supply of vodka in early 1981, the Polish government introduced rationing of vodka to prevent social revolt (Wald & Moskalewicz, 1984).

For a Pole, vodka is much more than the neutral alcoholic base it is for his² counterpart in the West. It is not intended to be drunk with mixers or as a speedy and inexpensive way to intoxication. It is an inherent part of social life. Vodka is designed to be drunk neat with appropriate foods. There are at least a hundred

¹In 1991, Australia was in 17th place in the world in per capita alcohol consumption with 7.7L of pure alcohol. This comprised: spirits- 1.5L, wine- 18.6L and beer- 101.9 L.

different varieties of vodkas on the Polish market. What would be called vodka in Australia is called white vodka in Poland and it is usually rye based. The other vodkas are called coloured and sweet, depending on the ingredient used in flavouring. Flavouring vodka with herbs, fruit and honey has a very long tradition in Poland. Early distillers were unable to purify spirit. To conceal the unpleasant flavours and aromas they added aromatic ingredients and used honey as a sweetener (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995). The most often used ingredients are rowan berries, juniper, pepper, lemon, blackcurrants and morello cherries. Some vodkas such as *Starka* are aged in old oak barrels with a minute amount of Malaga wine. "Coloured" vodkas are made by an infusion of herbs. One of the best known is *Zubrowka* – Bison Brand Vodka, an amber coloured beverage with a blade of bison grass floating in the bottle. This grass grows only in the Bialowieska forest and is harvested by hand in the early summer. The base ingredient - unflavoured vodka - is produced from the best rye grain (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995).

Sweet and fruit vodkas are made from freshly pressed juice with purified spirits. Sometimes honey or sugar is added. This method is often used in the home production of sweet fruit vodkas, the most popular being blackcurrant and morello cherry vodka. Another popular fruit vodka has an infusion of rowan berries - *Jarzebiak*. *Gold Wasser* - Gold Water, a famous sweet vodka from Gdansk, has been produced since the seventeenth century. Fifteen herbs and spices are added in the production of this liquor and there are thin flakes of gold floating in the clear liquid. It is not surprising that so many spices were used in the production of this vodka. Gdansk was a merchant port city and all those ingredients were at hand for the producers of this beverage (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995).

Another famous vodka, produced illegally, but easily obtainable in the region where it is made, is Lacko Slivovitz, a sixty per cent alcohol content beverage. According to the local story, in the region of Lacko a parish priest decided to improve the wellbeing of his flock and for penance he ordered his parishioners to plant fruit trees. Soon all roads were lined with plum trees. At this stage the devil stepped in and advised the farmers how to make the strong liquor and still today

² Male form used on purpose, according to social rules in Poland vodka is not meant to be important to women.

people say it is a drink with a heavenly taste and a devilish kick. On the label of the illegally distilled liquor one can read:

Peps you up, colours your cheeks
That's our Lacko Slivovitz (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 178)

Faith & Wisniewski state that vodka is a part of Polish culture and that Poles treat vodka in the same way as the French treat wine, as an aperitif, served with snacks, with the main meal or drunk as liqueur after the meal (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995). This mirrored the statements of the informants in this study. Stanislaw (70) summed up the importance of vodka. "For Poles vodka is like wine for the French, one just cannot serve a Polish dinner without serving vodka to the guests". There is a difference, though, when one compares the importance of vodka with that of wine. In France wine is served every day with every big meal, whereas vodka in Poland is served only when friends visit and on special occasions. One of the informants said that in Poland drinking every day by household members was treated as problem drinking. He used the statement: "drinking alone, with no visitors is not accepted in Poland".

For some men in this study, white vodka (unflavoured) was the only alcoholic beverage they encountered in their homeland. It was served with food, neat and ice cold. Men drank the beverage but it was the women's role to provide enough alcohol to satisfy all the drinkers. Women preparing a party in Poland would count 250 millilitres of vodka per guest when planning a reception. Zosia (48) explained how her mother, and later she, would accommodate heavier drinkers

It would be just enough, as women drank less, 50-75 millilitres, so the heavier drinking males could have their half a litre

Others talked about sweet vodkas, which were served after the meal. Stanislaw (70) remembered his mother drinking cherry vodka before the war. It appeared most women liked to drink sweet fruit vodkas on special occasions. Sweet and some flavoured vodkas were often prepared at home by one of the participant's parents. Zosia's mother, a good housewife, always prepared blackcurrant vodka. Zbigniew remembered watching his father prepare lemon bitters from lemon peel

and lemon tree leaves for his parents' parties. Most of the homemade vodkas were made from 96 per cent alcohol, which one could buy in liquor stores in Poland in 500mL bottles. Some people in Poland also drink 96 per cent alcohol as a beverage, it is not treated as a poison, just as a beverage one has to get used to in order to drink it freely³. Some informants said that the popularity of vodka as a beverage was due to the old Polish tradition of drinking stronger alcohol. Zbigniew (40) said "In Poland we did not have the tradition of other drinks". It is easy to conclude that vodka was an important element in the lives of many of the informants in Poland.

Wine

All informants agreed that wine was not popular as a beverage in their country of origin. This is supported by the figures of per capita consumption of wine in Poland, which amounted to only 7.4L in 1991. This compares to 18.6L drunk by Australians (World Drink Trends 1993). Only women who stated they did not drink in Poland sipped wine when they felt obliged to honour a special guest. Marta (46) who said that she definitely did not drink in Poland, admitted she would drink a glass of sparkling wine to celebrate New Year.

Others thought they could not drink wine due to the shortages in the shops during the socialist era. Anna (46) said,

...it was the availability on the market, there was mainly vodka, the wine one could buy was terrible so we did not drink much wine in Poland.

At times, usually before the festive season, imported wines were available in the shops but these formed a small percentage of the alcoholic beverages on the market. The imported wines were usually sweet Hungarian Tokays, some red wine, sweet Bulgarian wines, and Russian champagnes. Only females mentioned drinking these drinks.

³ Such drinking patterns are not isolated to Poland. In Russia drinking spirit is a frequently encountered phenomenon, and Southern Slavs drink 60 % Slivovitz. Drinking spirit, with an 86% alcohol content has also been a long tradition among Camba Indians (Heath, 1958).

Beer

Beer was hardly mentioned in the statements of the informants as a beverage they might drink. The only person who mentioned beer was Zdzislaw (88) who studied in Belgium and drank beer during his studies, before the Second World War. Younger informants, like Wojtek (40) reported that beer was drunk by outcasts (on skid row) who could not afford vodka or by young boys who wanted to prove their “maturity”, who either had no money to buy vodka or the shop assistant would not sell it to them. The legal drinking age in Poland is 18 years old, the same as in Australia (Davies & Walsh, 1983). The figures from the World Health Organisation for 1991 do not record any beer consumption for that year in Poland.

Social Pressure to Drink in Poland

“One has to have a medical certificate not to drink in Poland” (Wojtek, 40)

Serving copious amounts of food and alcohol as proof of hospitality is characteristic of many cultures, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, social pressure to drink is usually explained as an old custom of hospitality. Accepting a drink is expected because it honours the toasting person. Not drinking is an affront to the host. Some statements from my informants indicate that serving alcohol and pressuring the guests to drink, under the pretence of hospitality, was also a means of achieving one’s goals such as obtaining favours from important people or signing a business agreement. Zbigniew (40) remembered when his mother needed a surgical operation:

I wanted this particular surgeon to operate on her, he was known to be the best in our city. I had to invite him to this very expensive restaurant and we ate and drank, I think we had two litres of vodka that night, it was very expensive vodka, mind you, the best quality. After that we were friends, we drank together so he operated on her and she is fine till the present day.

Others felt compelled to drink with their workmates or clients, as “one could not do business without drinking”.

Hospitality and drinking.

The main reasons given for serving copious amounts of food and alcohol was due to the old tradition of hospitality. The host was usually trying to outdo his friends in the preparation of the reception to gain respect as a generous person. Zosia (48) described how her father entertained his guests

In my parents' home vodka flowed in a wide stream. My father liked to have vodka on the table. He liked to serve vodka. He did not drink much himself, but was proud of himself when the guests left the house drunk.

Serving so much alcohol that the guests left the house completely drunk was described by an eighteenth century Polish chronicler, Jędrzej Kitowicz. He wrote that it spoke ill of the host, be it a peasant treating his friends at the inn, an apprentice feting the guild masters upon becoming a journeyman, or a magnate winning a favour from the legislator, if even one guest could leave the table under his own power:

It was the host's greatest satisfaction, when the next day he heard from the servants how none of his guests left sober, how one trundling off, tumbled down all the steps, how another was carried to his lodgings as if dead, how this one banged his head on the wall; how those two, quarrelling, slapped each other's faces, how finally, that fellow tripped and fell in the mud, and on top of that broke a tooth on a rock (Kitowicz, 1778, in Bystron, 1938/1960, p178).

Wojtek (41) attributed such heavy drinking to Polish hospitality, a national trait of which he was proud:

It's the Polish hospitality. Everybody I visited served large amounts of vodka, I just could not avoid drinking, they served never-ending amounts, there could always be more.

There are similarities in the descriptions of the feasts from other cultures to those described by the informants in this study. The extravagant expense of food and drink for a feast in Georgia is explained as a rational use of scarce resources that serves to maintain and extend prestige and contacts. A man is said to gain respect

among his peers by consuming copious amounts of alcohol and women gain honour by the exercise of feminine duties through preparation of the feast (Mars & Altman, 1987).

Thornton (1987) paints a very similar picture to that of Polish hospitality, but this time the description comes from a village in Austria. Hosts in an Austrian village would press more food and drink on the guests than they could ever physically need and would find refusals insulting. The etiquette governing hosting guests is nearly identical to that described by the informants in this study. Austrian hosts are expected to accept guests regardless of inappropriate timing of the visit and to provide unlimited quantities of alcohol. On the other hand, the guests should finish whatever he⁴ is given. Every social gathering is characterised by the host pressing beverages upon the guests, the guests feigning refusal, and the host eventually winning (Thornton, 1987). This description was identical to the stories related by my informants. "The guest has to refuse at the beginning not to appear greedy" I have been told. The ritual of refusal and repeated invitation continue for some time. The invitation becomes increasingly pressing until the invited person surrenders. It meant that in social situations people were forced to drink even if they did not wish to do so. Wojtek (41) described this situation

There is an assumption that the guest will not refuse a drink. It is cultural, it is the Polish tradition, one cannot refuse to drink, it is just not done. One has to have a medical certificate not to drink in Poland.

Krysia (51) recounts the times when she could not refuse to drink with her friends

I remember the balls at Uni for New Year and the Carnival. I had to induce vomiting to last the whole night. I was quite qualified and practiced in that, when I started to notice that I was losing control, that I was feeling intoxicated, not that I was drinking my own vodka, I had so many friends, I had to drink with every one of them. That was the Polish culture, I mean that was our perception "come and drink with us", the drink was already waiting for me, one could not refuse.

⁴ Male form is used on purpose as a female's refusal to drink is accepted.

A refusal to drink was often understood to mean that one does not hold the toasting person in high regard. A description from the sixteenth century by a visitor to the Kingdom of Poland, the Venetian envoy Hieronimus Lipoman, explains

If someone from the guests does not drink, the host considers it the greatest insult and impoliteness, and in Ruthenia and other places, where this old habit is faithfully preserved, it often comes to fistfights, and it happens that swords are drawn against he who has not answered the toast with a glass (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 98)

Already described as an “old habit” in the sixteenth century, this custom survived another four hundred years

Alcohol as an informal exchange mechanism in Poland

In Poland, social drinking with co-workers, and as means of obtaining goods and services from other people, was common. Drinking usually took place in different settings, which depended on the profession of the drinkers. Those who were well off and worked as lawyers and engineers, and sometimes had to entertain clients, usually drank in restaurants. Some invited their co-workers home. Many drank in the workplace, in secrecy, in the change-rooms. Those who initiated drinking sessions had usually finished their work day but those who joined in, for a “quick one” were still on their work shifts.

Zosia (48) was responsible for organising receptions in a big building company where she worked when her bosses wanted to sign business agreements. The aim of those receptions was to bring the business partners to a state when their judgement would be distorted by intoxication, and then accept faulty materials or produce. She described it in these words:

They (her bosses) organised regular receptions for the presidents of Housing Cooperatives when they were supposed to take over the new apartment blocks. Many of those (apartments) were still unfit for living. The directors served so much vodka until the presidents were semiconscious. They had the signing of the papers on their mind, of course. After reaching their goal and after they had sent their guests on their way, the directors could

drink themselves stupid, which they usually did because they were celebrating.

Those who were unable to drink in the workplace because of stricter enforcement of the anti-drinking rules and those who could not afford a restaurant meal drank outside (Moskalewicz, 1982) In summer the drinking may take place in a local park or woods Wojtek (40) remembered

When it was warm, around the first day of each month there were numerous groups of men drinking in the woods We used to play there so we watched them drinking vodka

In winter the drinking sessions happened in the basements of the apartment blocks. The biggest influence on whether the drinking took place at home was the women and their position in the household A single mother brought up Wojtek (41) She was considered the head of the family and disapproved of drinking This man mentioned that he learned to drink from the men in the streets, as he was not allowed to drink at home. On the other hand Zosia (48) explained that her mother had no say whether her husband invited people to drink at home because in Zosia's opinion, as a housewife, she brought home no income and was totally dependent on her partner Marta's (46) mother used emotional pressure, such as frequent arguments and tears, on her drinking husband As a consequence, Marta's father never drank at home openly He drank in his workplace and secretly at home later in his life, when, according to Marta, he needed a drink in the morning to function

Because of her father's drinking problem Marta did not drink in Poland and neither did her husband, but people from her work did drink after work She said that non-drinkers were usually social outcasts and were viewed by their workmates with suspicion:

The people who worked with us were afraid of us because we did not drink. We were isolated, we were their enemies (means people at work), everybody kept their distance.

Another male informant (51) said a very similar thing

I was an abstainer in Poland, people thought I was an internal militia spy, if I came up to a table during a reception people would fall silent

The distrust towards the non-drinker seems to have a long history in Poland. A traveller in the sixteenth century, the papal nuncio Fulvius Ruggieri wrote about the Poles in 1568:

Among them, getting drunk is a praiseworthy custom, certain proof of sincerity and good manners; on the other hand sobriety, considered bad manners, is often a sign of secretive character and deceitfulness (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995, p 98)

Zdzislaw (88) was of the opinion that he had to drink so as not to offend the workers and risk his position as an engineer after the Second World War

...the workers decided to celebrate the May Day, the glasses were big, 100mL and I had to drink with every worker: "ah, dear engineer have a drink with me' or 'won't you drink with me?'" After a few glasses I started to feel unwell so I had to put two fingers down my throat so I could drink on so as not to offend anybody. I had to drink with each and every one of them

Zdzislaw explained that as the manager of the factory, he had to drink with the workers to be accepted by them. According to Zdzislaw, during the Dictatorship of the Proletariat⁵, the worker in the factory was an absolute power and the manager could lose not only his job but also his freedom and life

Some of the informants voiced satisfaction that they no longer have to perpetuate the old tradition of entertaining at any time of the day, nor are they obliged to drink when they do not feel like it. Some said that if they had stayed in Poland longer they would not have been alive today because of the heavy drinking patterns to which they were obliged to conform.

On the other hand, those who were included in the drinking circle were happy with the support they perceived that they received from their fellow drinkers. A man

⁵ The time just after the Second World War during the so-called "Stalinist terror" when the slightest denunciation could send the victim to his/her death (Moczarski, 1998)

at a party boasted: "...he will do everything for me and I can say anything to him... we drank together". Mars (1987) described this phenomenon where a drinking social circle provided its members with support in several spheres - work, family and leisure. Those who did not drink were often viewed with suspicion and were excluded from social life as "loners". For informants in this study, it was not always the matter of being accepted in the workplace by other workers, it was also important as a means of getting work at all (Mars, 1987)

Alcohol as means of gaining favours and services

Most informants said that doing any business in Poland required drinking. Zbigniew (40) remembered his father, a lawyer, coming home tipsy on most days of the week:

It was generally accepted that the clients would invite their lawyer for dinner, heavily sprinkled with alcohol. Heavy drinking was the must, if he refused that would have meant that the case was lost and he would not get any more to work on. No meeting went without drinking. People drink on the job. One cannot do business without drinking. A non-drinker gets isolated.

Ewa (46) related a very similar story about her father:

I always remember him drunk as a child. He had to do business, without a bottle he would not have had work, it worked like that, who you know, who you drink with.

Alcohol was an indispensable part of life in Poland. Drinking was important as it could secure a job. A gift of a bottle of vodka was expected as an additional payment for tradesmen's services and when one needed to buy a product that was rare on the market. A bottle of cognac as a "thank you gift" for hospital care was a frequently practiced custom. Zbigniew (40) described the importance of vodka in everyday life: "...Anywhere you wanted to get something, be it hospital care to buying timber, you had to give a "gift" of vodka or cognac".

People remembered from their childhood when it was customary to serve a glass of vodka to the postman on the day when he brought the pension money

(imagine the poor postman after the full round), or the man who supplied coal to the household. Some treated vodka as the “lifeblood” of Polish society. It could clearly be seen during the food and other commodity shortages in the 1980s when vodka was rationed. It quickly became a form of currency to barter for goods or services. This attitude about the importance of vodka persists among many migrants who, until the present day, say, as a female informant did during a party in Perth: “I will ask Mr. Kowalski to fix my car for a bottle of vodka”. Some women said that the obligation to drink led to problem drinking of some male members of their families.

Drinking and Family Life

A majority of the interviews with the female participants turned out to be stories about the problem drinking of a close family member. Talking about alcohol-related family problems is still a shameful subject for many informants. The pattern described was usually heavy to extremely heavy drinking, often to a complete blackout and intermittent drinking with bouts lasting days in some cases. In one case the drinking sessions lasted weeks, as long as there was money for alcohol. One of the women described her husband’s drinking:

...My husband liked to drink, I think he was an alcoholic. He was drinking nearly every day. A small amount was enough to make him “normal”, to improve his mood. He had “downs” without drinking, his mood lifted even on the sight of alcohol. He used to start drinking during the day. He liked to drink. He never let the bottle go unfinished. He drank as long as there was alcohol in the house. And when he went out to drink, his mates would bring him to the door, prop him up, ring the bell and disappear. When I opened the door he would just fall in. It’s not a husband. It’s a strange body, drunk, stinking, unconscious..

Another woman described her partner’s drinking to complete blackouts. He used to drink non-stop for two weeks and that led to physical emaciation:

I had to take him to hospital for an IV line after each drinking bout. I used to find him in the street completely wasted and sick. He drank so much, non-stop, that in the end he drank himself to death.

One woman said of her husband that: "...He drank one glass and that one glass led to the fact he could not stop". The notion that men cannot control their drinking is also prevalent in Scandinavia, particularly in Sweden and in Norway (Sulkunnen, 1992)

In Poland women were morally responsible for their men's drinking. The Church required that:

A Polish woman and mother should set an example by always abstaining from alcohol, and never letting anybody get drunk in her home, as this brings shame onto her, her home and her entire family (Falicki, 1985, p. 297)

The early socialist propaganda also made women responsible for their "weak" men's drinking:

Alcoholism ... was treated as an essentially male problem ... and women as role models for men; by their abstinence and by their moral influence, they could wean the otherwise weak men, prone to temptation, from their bad habits (Snow in Barrows *et al.*, 1987, p. 254)

Brought up in such a fashion, women in this study tried to control the men's drinking. Some poured alcohol down the drain, others stored beverages so that their husbands would not find them. Sometimes they tried to drink with their men so that there was less to drink for them.

When he invited his mates I would pour vodka down the drain if he did not see it. Sometimes I joined in the drinking so that he had less to drink, but I did not enjoy it. I don't think I ever got drunk during those sessions with him, whereas as a student it happened to me several times.

One woman even got drunk so that her husband could see what it feels like to have a drunken partner. Two other women reported fathers who were problem drinkers. One stated as a matter of fact: "...my father was an alcoholic, I had to leave home because of his drinking". The second woman described her father's drinking in a more emotional way:

My father was like many Polish males, a “lost” man ... he drank like most Polish males... he drank nearly everyday, he was dependent. Drunkenness, it’s terrible for the family, it’s a total tragedy, it’s a huge shame, I’ve been through it. Drunk from early in the morning. It was terrible, my mother cried a lot, it affected my whole life.

These women’s experiences are replicated elsewhere in the world. Banwell’s (1997) study reported the negative impact on women’s lives by their husband’s drinking. In her study, women reported the violence of their significant others which they connected with drinking alcohol, others told stories about the failure of their partners to provide for their families.

Interviews with five male informants suggest heavy drinking by their male family members, but to the male participants it did not present as a problem. On the contrary, they admired the male figures in their lives for being able to drink as much as they did.

My father drank nearly every day. He came home tipsy, so he must have had more than half a litre of vodka... my father liked to party and drink too. He had a very high tolerance of alcohol. I inherited it from him.

This attitude to heavy drinking points to a gendered view of drinking with females seeing it as a big issue in their lives. Women viewed vodka as an evil that was able to destroy lives. Some women had a negative view of drinking generally. One decided not to drink at all in Poland due to her father’s problematic drinking.

Women and drinking

Since the Middle Ages in Europe, there has been strong social pressure on women not to drink. The crusades seemed to influence the initiation of single sex (male) drinking, with drunkenness being a frequent occurrence. Drinking women were viewed as being of “loose” morals, bad wives and mothers. Many European cultures, particularly those in the northern parts of the continent, adopted this gendered attitude to drinking, which in many societies persists to the present day

(Plant, 1997) This attitude is reflected in the informants' views of women's drinking, particularly excessive drinking, which was described as "shocking", "disgusting", "not nice", and indicating that women were "easy" (sexually available). Women were expected to set an example, to drink only minute amounts. Zbigniew, (40) who boasted that he could drink two litres of vodka in a sitting, described mature women drinkers in these words:

Women drinking? they were always very moderate drinkers, to say the least. My mother hardly ever drank at all. my grandmother was the same. well the women drank a drink or two, 25ml. glasses, "a ladies drink", some drank champagne like my mother.

Ewa (46) explained why women in Poland could not drink. "It was only men who could get drunk and have fun. The woman had other responsibilities and should not drink." A woman who drank heavily was a "black sheep", marginalised from society. Kazek (40) remembered one of the female members of his family:

There was only one woman in the family, she got really "wasted" because of alcohol. She was the black sheep in the family. She started drinking after her husband died before her son was born.

Her family pitied this woman, and her drinking was blamed upon the tragedy in her life. Wojtek on the other hand was of the opinion that only women from the margins of society drank.

I think there was one woman in the neighbourhood who drank, but it was not typical, the whole family drank there, the children were neglected. It was the only case. She was lying there on the street and my grandma decided to call the militia to take her away, nobody would call the militia to take a man away, but with a woman it's a different story, my grandma wanted the disgrace removed as soon as possible.

Similar attitudes to drinking women and those females who were perceived to have a drinking problem are reported from other countries. Strong beverages were not drinks for women in Scandinavia. 'The ladies' drinks were traditionally sweet liqueurs for the older generation while wine was a preferred drink for younger

women. Women were not allowed to drink too much Bjerén (1992) reports in her study:

...alcoholism is shameful; to be labelled an alcoholic is a condemnation beyond words for a woman since women by definition do not drink and therefore cannot/should not become alcoholics (Bjerén, 1992, p. 162).

Although over the last twenty years anti-drinking laws have been gradually relaxed in Sweden and Finland, social drinking is still viewed as a dangerous activity which should be avoided and a woman drinking in public attracts disapproving glances (Bjerén, 1992; Sulkunnen, 1992)

Negative sanctions against Polish women were not universal, however. Young women such as university or secondary school students who drank alcohol were viewed negatively by general society, but were admired by their male friends for trying to keep up with them in their drinking. For males it meant that the female friends valued their friendship and honoured them by drinking together. Zbigniew stated with an air of admiration about his female friends during his university years "...the girls kept up with us, perhaps not as much as us guys, but a lot as well"

This approval of drinking was directed only at young women from their own social circle. A stranger would be criticised and described as being "easy". Wojtek made it clear that he meant his friends drinking in his company, not young women in general: "...with young women, I mean my friends it was OK for women to drink" The female drinkers felt they challenged the female roles forced upon them by drinking on an equal footing with the males. Their drinking usually meant the disapproval from people outside their social circle (Banwell, 1997; Plant, 1997; Sulkunnen, 1992).

For most females interviewed, the first drinking episode was a non-event. They either did not recall it or thought it was not a very important moment in their lives. Other matters like obtaining an education seemed to be more important than learning to drink. For others while it was important to drink alcohol in their social

group in order to belong, they did not boast of their drinking “achievements”. Ewa (47) recalled:

I don't remember much about my teenage parties, we brought a plate usually of herring, cucumbers in brine, cold meats and wine. My life in Poland was quite difficult because of family circumstances, I wanted to finish high school. I remember one event, once my friends played a trick on me, a person had to enter a circle and drink something. I had a go at it in one gulp as I wanted to show that I can drink and it came out it was neat spirit (96 per cent alcohol content). I thought that I would die, it was a whole glass of spirit, a small one but nevertheless it was neat spirit, you can kill somebody with a trick like this.

It was usually friends who introduced young women to alcohol. For those who were studying at university, it was important to comply with the requirements of the group. Anna (47) was of the view that she had to drink

I tried at home and experimented at school with some horrible wine, during my university studies we drank what was available. It was the peer pressure.

Dana (51) had her first drink when she was invited to a café by her first boyfriend

I had my first drink when I was about 16, I had a boy-friend who used to bring a bottle for every social gathering. It was the time I got acquainted with alcohol and cigarettes. I remember one thing, I must have been very young, I was in a café, with my boyfriend, drinking coffee, eating cakes, I even remember the cake I was eating, it was apple strudel with whipped cream, he ordered cherry vodka, we had two to three cherry vodkas. I was OK mentally, but my legs did not work at all, I could not go to the toilet, I had “cotton knees”,.... I still think it was cherry vodka

Women informants in this study did not think learning to drink was important but they felt they had to participate in the drinking because their peers pressured them. These women did not boast about drinking large amounts of alcohol. Once their “young irresponsible” age passed and these women got married they “stopped” drinking, that is drank only minute amounts. Krysia (51) remembered: “I liked to drink during my university years, but later I was strongly against drinking”

Women in Poland experimented with alcohol during their young, “unattached” years, but quickly assumed the “non-drinking” female roles that society expected of them. Their male counterparts on the other hand were admired for being able to drink large amounts of alcohol

Men and drinking - “A real man has to drink”

For males it was paramount to learn to drink and to be able to hold large amounts of alcohol and not appear drunk. Zbigniew (40) said with pride “The whole family could drink⁶”. Men from different generations told similar stories. Zdzisław (88), who was a university student in the 1930s, related this story

I drank more beer than anybody I know during my student years we visited the same tavern everyday, we had our spot there and we drank beer, not in today's glasses but bigger, they could fit one litre of liquid. They were made from very thin glass and one had to hold them competently so as not to break them. The person who did not know how to handle them could not drink. It was Heineken beer, after three glasses like that one had to “go”, and where did one have to go? There was a niche with handles and a sink so one could throw-up, and there were tissues to wipe one's mouth after the process. It was done because beer is “heavy” on the body and after the first time one had to “go” after each consumed glass. Nobody was surprised when each one of us had to “go”. It really helped as I was never so drunk that I was unable to get home. Drinking in those times, I think, helped to develop our intellect and academic thinking. But after uni I lost the taste for beer.

This 70 year-old story is remarkably similar to stories reported by many studies from the Western world (Roche, 1999). Zbigniew (40), a generation apart, boasted:

My first drinking was unlike other people's who usually start with wine. I started with the heavy stuff, but I decided to do it with flair, not just neat vodka. I read somewhere about an infusion or mixture called “Lithuanian liverwort” – “*Tris de vinis*”, I really liked the name, I bought the herbal infusion in a herb shop, mixed it with vodka and pure alcohol, as was in the recipe. I suggested

⁶ Drank a lot and held their drinks well. One should note that in the Polish language nouns, adjectives and verbs have a female, male and neutral form, so from the speech one knows immediately which gender the speaker is talking about. in this case the informant used a male form for the “whole family”.

to my grandma that she deserves a rest and should go visit my aunt in the country. After she had gone we had a party! Everybody got really drunk. Another time I bought the first bottle of whisky in my life in a dollar shop with a friend. I hated the taste, I thought it was vodka made out of tyres. It cost \$2. We drank it pretending it was soooo goood!

Although Zbigniew said it was unusual to start drinking with the “heavy” stuff. Wojtek mentioned a similar experience:

I was about 13... my friend and I, we found an unfinished 250mL bottle of vodka among the leaves in the woods. So we decided to drink it and see what it's like, children were forbidden to drink alcohol in my home. It was the two of us and we drank it like lemonade... we finished it in a few gulps, it was about half full, after a few minutes I wanted to get on the bike to go home, but I couldn't, I was very dizzy, anxious, well I managed to get halfway home but I had a blackout somewhere in the street.

Peer pressure appears to be a strong element in this early male drinking. Zdzislaw (88) said that when he was young, in the 1930s, heavy drinking was regarded as a proof of being a real man. He participated in drinking competitions, drinking 10 neat vodkas in a row to prove just that:

I drank because I wanted to keep up with others, others drank so I had to drink too, they used to say “a real man has to drink” and “such a man and you don't drink”.

Wojtek (40) described a very similar situation:

I think that there was social pressure on young men to prove they are grown, real men, who can drink a glass of alcohol fast, in one shot. It worked in our group ... they would laugh at you if you couldn't drink any more, they would make fun of you... we laughed at each other trying to outdo one another in deed and in talk.

Zbigniew (40) was proud of being able to drink large amounts of vodka:

I inherited it from him (father) I can drink copious amounts, I have exceptionally high tolerance of alcohol. We drank all the time, perhaps not everyday but every second day for sure and we had

parties all the time... we played cards a lot one year and we would have two to three bottles of vodka per four people. One time we prepared the “tears of Stalin”: two parts (in 750 mL bottles) of vodka, one part of spirit (pure alcohol), one part of cinzano and one can of grapefruit juice⁷. It was really nice but the effects were shocking, all of us “lost the film” (blacked out) The most I have ever had it must have been about 2.5L of vodka

The responses of these informants about female and male drinking indicate that a heavy drinking male was treated with amused tolerance or admiration, whereas a drinking adult female produced a negative reaction from most. This acceptance of male drunkenness is clearly visible in public places in Poland

Public Drinking

“Drunk as a Pole”

Not much has been written about public drunkenness in different countries of the world, however, the problem seems to be persistent in Poland. There are many studies relating to driving under the influence of alcohol, the risk of being a victim of violence or a perpetrator of a crime whilst being intoxicated but these do not mention the prevalence of public intoxication. Some studies report public intoxication and associated problems among the indigenous populations of Australia, the United States of America and Canada. Such drinking is frequently attributed to the marginal position, displacement and discrimination of these peoples. Not much has been written about persistent public intoxication of the dominant population within one country⁸ (Brady, 1992; Norstrom, 1995; Room, 1997; Siggers & Gray, 1998a; Young, 1994b).

In Poland, public intoxication has been treated as a problem of public order culminating with the introduction of the sobering-up stations in 1956 where intoxicated persons could be detained without penalty for 24 hours. Over 95 per cent of the patrons of these so called “Drunkard’s Hotels” were male (Davies & Walsh,

⁷ Anybody not used to high alcohol content drinks attempting to try this cocktail should secure an emergency life support. I take no responsibility for the effects of this drink on the functioning of their vital organs.

⁸ Poles form 97.6 per cent of the population living in Poland (GUS 1999).

1983). In Poland public drunkenness of men is still a common phenomenon, so common that nobody is surprised when they see a comatose body lying on the street. People will step over the person or circle around him. It would never occur to anybody that it might be a victim of an accident, it is "always" a drunkard. Most of the informants mentioned drunk men in the streets:

...one could see many drunk people, staggering or lying around, in the parks, on the streets, it was very common in Poland, no women, only men, all ages

This public drunkenness is so visible in Poland that one of the young informants in this study, who left Poland as a young child and returned for a visit to her homeland as an adult, commented: "I am ashamed to admit I am Polish, it's a nation of drunks". Public drunkenness seems to have a long tradition among Poles. Dana (51) who spent some time in France before migrating to Australia, said that in France people use the expression "drunk as a Pole" to describe a completely intoxicated person:

In France they say "drunk like a Pole". The saying comes from the time of Louis XVI, he married a Polish noblewoman who brought her court with her⁹. The Poles drank so much that till present day the French say "drunk as a Pole".

Some of the informants in this study described drinking outside in public. The reason given for drinking in public was that in Poland, there were no pubs or bars where people could drink in a friendly atmosphere. There was an ambivalent attitude to drinking. On the one hand, serving copious amounts of alcohol, mainly vodka was proof of Polish hospitality, on the other hand drinking meant the danger of being accused of alcoholism, and for many it was shrouded with the attitude of shame and secrecy. For over two centuries the Church in Poland has claimed that alcohol and drinking leads to degeneration of self, family, the Christian spirit and national identity and this sentiment is keenly felt by many in the country. When Wojtek described his drinking in public places, he mentioned his mother's disapproval of drinking at home. He did not have a male figure in his life. His mother was the head

⁹ The noble woman Maria Leszczyńska, was the daughter of the Polish king Stanisław Leszczyński who married Louis XV, not as stated Louis XVI, in 1725 (Krawczuk, 1965).

of the family. Wojtek could only participate in drinking on very rare occasions at home when the non-drinking rule was broken during his uncle's visits. He explained that the only "safe" places where he could drink with his friends were parks and woods.

There were drinking dens, but not safe at all. Not only disgustingly filthy but what we described as "slaughter houses". We did not have nice pubs and bars. I think, I don't know for sure as I have never been there, that there were nice restaurants in the city, but these were too expensive for us and we would have to travel by bus or tram to get there, which is not good on your way back, after you've had a few too many.

The older informants in this study accepted public drunkenness of males as normal. Women, on the other hand, were not allowed by society to drink in public. Wojtek explained:

Generally it was only men who could drink like this, it was unacceptable for women to drink in the street, they would not have liked to be seen in such a situation. It's simple, no women drank or were seen drunk in the streets, only men, all ages. One did not see drunken women in the streets, men it was normal, generally accepted. I think if I saw a woman drunk I would feel shocked and disgusted.

All the statements from this sample of people support the notion that drinking copious amounts of vodka by men in Poland was accepted, even expected. Women were expected to display the female virtues and adult women who drank were viewed negatively.

Summary

Drinking alcohol in Poland was an important aspect of social situations for most of the informants in this study. The most popular beverage was vodka(s). Drinking was perceived as part of the Polish custom of hospitality and many informants felt they had to drink so as not to offend the host. Social pressure to drink in the extreme was also attributed to the tradition of hospitality. Learning to drink by

men and later keeping up with their male friends was a very important aspect of “Polish” drinking. The typical model of drinking was very heavy intermittent drinking, leading to intoxication on most occasions. The NH&MRC would classify most informants who reported consuming alcohol in such a way as binge drinkers. The belief that a male had to drink copious amounts of vodka and could not refuse to drink, led to problem drinking. This belief also reinforced the notion of specific national pride that “we can drink more because we are Poles” and the strong opinion that health programs and recommendations are designed for other nations because “Poles are accustomed to drinking strong alcohol unlike others”. Women drinkers were usually viewed negatively, particularly those who had family responsibilities. Therefore most female respondents stated that they “did not drink in Poland”. Many of the women were also made responsible for their male partners’ problematic drinking and felt it was their duty to intervene. These people left their homeland with some clearly formed ideas about the role of alcohol in everyday life. For most leaving their homeland and customs meant learning new norms in the new adopted country.

CHAPTER 6

DRINKING IN AUSTRALIA

"Did they teach you not to drink there? Aren't you Polish any more?" (Ewa, age 47)

Introduction

The question for this chapter concerns the impact of migration on the drinking patterns of a group of Polish migrants who settled in Australia as adults. This group was already familiar with alcohol in Poland. They were of legal drinking age, which is the same in Poland as in Australia, when they left their country of origin. Reid and Trompf (1990) state:

Culture is "built up", it also changes. Culture is dynamic, flexible, variable and adaptable. It changes through interaction with peoples of other cultures as a result of trade, intermarriage, warfare, colonialism and migration. These changes are reflected in patterns of and responses to health and illness (Reid & Trompf, 1990, p. xii).

This being so, the drinking patterns of Polish migrants might be expected to converge to the Australian model, in which beer (94.5L per capita), followed by wine (19.7L) and finally spirits (1.28L) are consumed. As a comparison, per capita consumption of beer in Poland for the same period was 41.0L, wine 5.9L and spirits 3.4L (World Drink Trends, 1999). However, the real consumption in Poland was estimated to exceed the official data by 40 to 50 per cent (Bielewicz, 1993; Falicki, 1985; Lehto & Moskalewicz, 1994; Lehto 1997). It is also important to note that most informants left Poland before the change to the market economy and therefore it was necessary to take into consideration the patterns of alcohol use twenty years ago because this was the model of drinking with which the informants were familiar.

Drinking patterns in Poland before 1989 were stable, and spirits comprised over 60 per cent of all alcohol consumed (GUS, 1986). Recently these patterns are changing, consumption of spirits is declining and beer is gaining more popularity. The percentage of spirits consumed in 1999 fell to 50 per cent of all alcohol (Parliamentary Commission for the Fight with Alcoholism, 2000)

Polish people who migrated to Australia came with hope of a better life and better future for their children, but the migration process was not simple for many. Some people migrated to Australia as displaced persons after the Second World War and started life in a foreign country of which they had heard little. Others left Poland in the late 1970s and the first two years of 1980¹, during the disintegration of the socialist system, and became refugees, unwilling to return to their country during the political upheaval. All those aspects are reported to influence drinking patterns (Kamien, 1986; Reid & Trompf, 1990). This chapter discusses the influence of migration on the drinking patterns on the adult Polish sample of this study.

Alcohol is an important element of many social occasions in Australia. People drink alcohol when they meet for a meal, play cards, or just relax after work. Alcohol acts as a social lubricant intensifying social interaction. For many people drinking alcohol is a social event and drinking alone indicates problem drinking (McAllister *et al.*, 1993). For Polish Australians living in Perth, Western Australia, drinking alcohol is just as an important social event as it is for other Australians. Poles are proud of their “strong heads” meaning that they express the view that they can drink much more strong alcohol than other nationalities and not show signs of intoxication. For some, drinking alcohol is a social marker of their ethnic group, as one of my informants asked rhetorically: “Have you seen an Australian drinking like we do? They would be on the floor unconscious if they drank as much as we do” (Zbigniew, age 40).

The type of drinking described by many migrants as “Polish”, which is defined by Australia’s leading health authority, the NH&MRC, as binge drinking, is a cause for concern among health authorities. For the last ten years there has been an

¹ In December 1981 Martial Law was declared in Poland (Paczkowski, 1998; Roszkowski, 1999).

increasing interest in the research world about patterns of alcohol consumption and the harm associated with specific models of drinking (Bondy, 1996) Binge drinking has been shown to be a more sensitive predictor of alcohol-related harm than per capita consumption (Roche, 1997; Stockwell *et al.*, 1996; Wald *et al.*, 1986).

Language, Ethnic Identity and Friends

The fluency of spoken language of the host country determines not only the jobs new migrants are able to find but also has an impact on the choice of friends from either the ethnic group or the wider English speaking community (Sussex & Zubrzycki, 1985). White and colleagues (1990) reported that peer groups at all stages of life affect people's behaviours, therefore it is important to establish the friends and social networks of informants in this study.

All interviewed identified themselves as Polish living in Australia, preferring to speak Polish. People working in white collar positions felt equally comfortable in using English, but chose to speak Polish during the interview. Those who spoke English well were usually younger, in their early twenties as opposed to early thirties when they left Poland. Those who spoke of language difficulties usually did not have satisfying employment, doing jobs they felt were far below their capabilities, given their education.

The most important factor in choosing friends was fluency in English. Those who spoke English well tended to have more English-speaking friends. They talked about having two groups of friends, one Polish and the other English speakers. They reported they did not mix these two groups. Ewa explained that she switched to speaking Polish and neglected the English-speaking guests in mixed company. There was only one described case of an Australian man who attended all the parties organised by one particular Polish social group. Wojtek was of the opinion that this man "belonged" and did not appear to mind that people spoke mostly Polish and very often forgot that one should speak English not Polish to him. After a few years he started responding in Polish and he became, as Wojtek described him, "our

Australian Pole who drinks like us” This man appeared to be influenced by the group of which he became a member.

On the other hand, those migrants who did not speak English well did not have close social contacts with English speakers. Zosia (48) never had friends among English speakers and stated it was not likely:

I don't speak English, I mean I can communicate but I don't speak it. It is very difficult to develop friendships when you can't talk. I had small children when I arrived here so I never had time to learn it, now it is too late, I am too old and if I need to fill forms or things like that, my children will help me. My friends are only Polish, I meet them at church mostly and of course we invite each other to our homes.

For other people it took 15 years to gain enough confidence and develop friendships outside the Polish community, but the Polish group was still dominant. Dana (51) was one of these and she said about her friends:

It took me all these years to get my own friends, before they were always my sister's friends, people from the Polish community. Now I meet regularly with a group of people from my course, we go for coffees, go on short holidays together. But I can't meet them too often as I get very tired when I have to speak English all the time. My best friends are Polish and when I have parties I invite only Polish people, they can drink better and the atmosphere is more relaxed or...I guess I am not as close with the English-speaking friends to invite them to my parties.

Marta (46) on the other hand, despite having “English language deficiencies” as she described it, reported that she had mostly English friends. She was not in the workforce but had interests outside her home. She attended craft and holistic health courses through which she made many friends:

They are women at the groups I attend, mostly English migrants. I think they are lonely like me and this draws us together. I don't have many Polish friends. I had two Polish girlfriends and we were friends with their families but they both died. After that the husbands found new partners and we sort of drifted away. And then we don't drink so it is difficult to have Polish friends.

She stated that to have Polish friends one has to drink, otherwise one does not belong. It is an interesting notion, which was repeated in several statements from other informants. Some people said they did not continue friendships with other Polish people because they did not drink. It appeared that they were of the view that drinking large amounts of alcohol was necessary to belong to a Polish social circle. These people did not mean that they completely abstain from alcohol, they meant they do not get drunk:

My wife does not drink at all, she might have a small glass of port when it is cold or a glass of cold beer when it is hot, but no, she does not drink, that is the reason why we don't keep in touch with other Poles.

Two groups emerge in this sample. One consisted of people who migrated at a younger age, who can speak English well. Two of these informants gained tertiary education as a second degree in Australia and held good professional jobs. This group had Polish and Australian friends with whom they meet frequently, attended dinner-parties and other social occasions. These people also seemed to have adjusted to life in the new country much better than those who did not speak English well. They appeared to be happy and satisfied with their life in their adopted country.

In the second group were people who were older when they migrated, usually had small children born in Poland and often were unable to find jobs that fitted their education. These people had only Polish migrants as close friends, were not satisfied with their life here and tried to make their own "Poland" in Perth. Zosia (48) described it as "building her own place here":

This is my Poland, here I belong, I know the people, I can talk to them, they understand me.

The social life of informants in this study depended to a large degree on the cultural background of their friends. This evolved during the whole migration process. Just after leaving their country of origin, people reported socialising mostly with other recent Polish migrants, later with increased confidence in the new environment, the group grew larger and often included other nationalities. The next section discusses the changing situation of this group of Polish migrants.

Social Life and Drinking Patterns

In transit

When exploring changing patterns of alcohol consumption among Polish migrants it is important to talk about the stages of the migration process. Chu (1998) states that loss of family support due to being uprooted from one country and relocated to another and prolonged stress prior to migration intensified many problems. For many people in this sample during the traumatic time of living in transit, drinking alcohol was an important part of life. Some participants described an escalation of their drinking but they still chose the same beverages as in Poland. Most often they chose vodka, but drank much more of it than in Poland. Some said that they spent all their money on alcohol, drinking as long as the money lasted. Wojtek (40) lived nine months in Austria when he was in transit. He described living with ten young Polish people, all in their early twenties while he was waiting for his Australian visa:

We did not have much to do during this time. We preferred to spend our money on alcohol than on food. Without our mothers as a whip, we learned a lot about life and drinking, we used to drink strong alcohol there, mainly spirits, hardly ever wine. As for drinking, that period was a total degeneration, we drank everywhere, with everybody, at any time of the day with total disregard for consequences. I am surprised that so many of us managed to survive it.

Wojtek's statement suggested that mothers of many young people acted as a moral and social restraint against excessive drinking in Poland. Once this restraint was removed by leaving the home country, their drinking escalated. Gossop (1996) describes similar social pressure in reference to heroin use among American servicemen in Vietnam. Those young Americans were removed from the environment, family and friends, which regulated their behaviour. With easy availability of heroin during their tour of duty they used it freely. Once they returned home and the social restraints were reinstated most of the ex-servicemen stopped using (Gossop, 1996).

An important aspect of life in transit for many informants in this study was the fact that they were in limbo, unsure about their future. Most stated they had no everyday responsibilities. They did not have working permits and could not work. They also had no families with them for whom they were obliged to provide. Either their partners and children stayed behind in Poland or they had not yet started families. Getting together and drinking was the only means of entertainment and a way of forgetting worries and insecurities about their situation. The notion of “there was nothing we could occupy ourselves with”, was repeated by many informants. Excessive drinking during the transit period was a way to kill time. The pattern remained the same, large amounts of alcohol as long as there were funds for it.

For others this time was not as traumatic and they were happy to experience the western world without such excess. Dana (51) discovered wine drinking when she left Poland:

Before I came to Australia I spent nine months in France and really learned to drink wine there... we tried all sorts of wines... I always had a glass of wine before dinner and I really liked that custom, it was totally new to me.

Some migrants manifested excessive drinking after leaving their home country. For males, specifically the younger ones among whom family members acted as a control mechanism, the total freedom meant escalation of drinking with long bouts of intoxication being the norm. Those who left Poland as mature adults, particularly women, were happy to learn to drink a new beverage, wine. Reaching the final settlement destination, Australia, meant yet another adjustment for informants.

In Australia

The initial adjustment meant that the new Polish migrants felt lost and lonely, and they looked for support among their compatriots with similar experiences. Social meetings were important, but informants noted that they lost the formal flavour of Poland, where one usually meets to celebrate a special occasion.

Informants did not feel obliged to prepare excessive amounts of food as they did before. They needed to meet with other Polish migrants to exchange information about vital services in their new country. Many of the informants stated that they introduced what they perceived as an Australian custom where people bring a dish with them to a social. Marta (46) remembered one of the first barbecues she was invited to in Australia. People told her to bring a plate with her:

I didn't know what they meant, I thought, they were really poor and did not have enough crockery at home, so I took a knife and fork just in case. Imagine the fun they made of me afterwards!

Drinking was an important part of these informal meetings. It helped them forget everyday troubles and everything seemed easier. Ewa (47) remembered the early years of migration:

I drank the most when my sister and her family joined me in Australia. We got drunk during those socials most of the time.

The most important venue to meet other migrants was Polish Saturday School, where most enrolled their children straight after arrival, and the Polish Club.

Social life in the Polish Club

Polish migrants who arrived in Perth just after the Second World War founded the Polish Club Cracovia. The driving force behind the foundation of the Club was the need of the new migrants to socialise in a familiar environment. They wanted to speak their own language and to “have a Polish island on the Australian mainland” as described by Margaret Wajs in a paper on the adjustment of Polish migrants in Australia in the 1960s (Wajs, 1984, in Sussex & Zubrzycki, 1985, p.5).

The Club is used mainly by the older generation of migrants, 60 years old and above. According to Krysia, an activist in the Club, these people say that the Club is their “second home”, particularly for the single people. Social contacts are easier at the Club, she explained, mainly due to the ease of communication in Polish. The workers also commented that this group of migrants does not mix with the younger group, who arrived in Australia within the last twenty years. They thought that it

was due to different migration processes and different life experiences. The older generation appears to be a group from a bygone era to those who migrated in the 1980s. The language is different and the image of Poland these older migrants still nurture is vastly different to the one the younger migrants experienced. For people who left their homeland, time stands still and the country in their memories does not change (Sussex & Zubrzycki, 1985). Those who left Poland in the 1980s and later returned to visit admit that it has changed very much. To some it appears like a foreign country where they do not belong any more.

The younger and smaller group frequenting the Club consists of people from their late thirties to fifties. They use the club most often when they have young children playing sport in the local club or performing in the Polish Dance Group. Those who come to the Club on a regular basis for weekend drinks are usually recent arrivals who are not fluent English speakers, with a small network of friends in Perth. Most of the people in this age group visit the Club for bigger events, such as performances of visiting artists from Poland, community balls and dances, which happen once or twice a year. Sometimes there is a viewing of a Polish movie or a show prepared by a local group, which is usually followed by a dance.

All members of staff in the Club commented that it is very difficult to attract people in their late teens and early twenties to the Club dances. They said that the discos, which are supposed to be designed for young people, usually attract only middle-aged persons. The workers commented sadly that the younger generation became more Australian, preferring to speak English and meet in the Australian context - pubs, clubs and private homes.

The Club is a big, single storey building, located among rural properties and paddocks in the eastern suburbs of Perth. It has two soccer fields, which are used by the local soccer clubs. The Club has a licensed bar open on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays 5 to 9 p.m. and on Sundays from 1 to 7 p.m. Next to the bar there is a small restaurant, with about ten laminated tables and plastic chairs. A strong light from the ceiling lights the room. One can eat a traditional Polish dinner in this restaurant; *pierogi* - piroshki, *bigos*, *flaki* - tripe, *barszcz* - borsht, dishes that take a lot of time to prepare at home. Food served in Cracovia is also traditional in that the

amounts served can be described as plentiful, one dish can satisfy the hunger of several people. A British Australian female guest at one of the recent dinner dances at the club described the food in the following way:

... There was this... chicken in aspic as an entrée, later a choice of beetroot soup and chicken noodle soup... I've never seen such amounts of food served. The soup bowl looked like a wash basin. For the main there was schnitzel with potatoes and cabbage. I couldn't believe how big it was, the meat was larger than the plate and it was hanging over the edges. Then there were cakes and ice cream, in a wash basin again. I was bursting at the seams, though I ate only a third of what was served.

The attitudes to the amount of food served are strikingly different between people from various cultural backgrounds. I overheard a conversation at a Polish party by a male guest in his forties describing the food served at a dinner he recently attended at a restaurant:

It was beautifully presented but the amounts would not satisfy a child. I was hungry when I got home. For the amount one pays, one might expect to at least satisfy one's hunger.

During the dinner dances people order their alcohol from the local bar. The barman stated that the amount consumed and kind of beverages preferred, vary. With food the most popular drink was vodka and people drink it undiluted, "the traditional way", and wine, which is ordered "for the ladies". The tables seat eight to twelve people and some tables order four bottles of vodka and one or two of wine, others one bottle of vodka and one of wine. One of the workers in the club reported having problems with drunken patrons when he took over the management of the club four years back. He solved the problems by employing security personnel unrelated to the Polish community.

These were usually hot-headed males who were fighting over a lady. Sometimes it got out of hand and it was difficult to intervene because we all know each other. The problem makers would either ignore us or would get violent against us and it would be carried over to our normal social life. So we employed a private company to keep order in the place. Since then we have not had any major problems.

Social events in the club have their disadvantages; the most important one is the distance one has to travel to get there. This is the main reason the club does not play the role of a social meeting place as is frequently encountered in the local suburban pub. Due to these problems, having socials in private homes was a much more frequently encountered phenomenon.

Changing Social Patterns

With employment and financial security came stability for many migrants. Many took out loans to buy houses and adjusted to this new reality in Australia. As lifestyle was seen as different in Australia some aspects of Polish traditions changed in the adopted country. The concept of hospitality in particular, changed for many migrants in Australia. The main change noticeable at Polish parties and dinner parties is the amount of food and drink served, which is never as overwhelming as it used to be in Poland. Some informants thought it was due to the climate in Australia where one does not have to eat and drink as much as in Poland to keep warm. There are remnants of the tradition when the host forcibly pours a drink for a declining guest, arguing that it is his duty to make sure everybody has a full glass even if they do not wish to have one, but I witnessed only one such occasion. One of the male hosts, when asked why is it important to pour this unwanted drink said:

I don't care whether he drinks or not, but I do not want to be seen as a mean person who counts all the wasted wine.

His ways have not gone unnoticed among the members of the Polish community. Zbigniew (40) remembered: "there is this one guy who is happiest when he pours more and more alcohol into the glasses".

Another Polish custom of dropping in unexpectedly is not accepted in Australia any more. Zbigniew noted the change:

People in Poland have no privacy, friends drop in without warning with a bottle, you have to drop whatever you are doing, provide food and another bottle once the first one is finished. When a person wanted a drinking partner, they would just visit. Here it does not happen, it is simply not done.

According to Zbigniew the end of unexpected visits influenced the amount of alcohol consumed. Other informants also thought that they drank less because of changes in the way people entertain guests in Australia.

The number of planned socials was reported to be much higher than in Poland. Many social events take place in private homes, but those migrants who are better off go out to restaurants. In many instances social life remained informal in the first years after arrival, but increasingly many started having big parties similar to those held in their country of origin. The informants said that they appreciate better living conditions and a more relaxed attitude to organising big social events. All agreed that lifestyle in Australia is easy-going and that they can meet more often as they live in houses which are much bigger than the apartments in Poland. As an added bonus, everybody has a backyard. The informants said that they meet in small groups, for dinners, to play cards when only three to eight persons attend, or for bigger events such as birthdays, Christmas parties or New Year's Eve celebrations, when twenty to forty guests are invited.

Big parties

The biggest occasion for a party tends to be a birthday, which is an introduction of an Australian custom, or a nameday, a Polish equivalent of the feast. During big parties people mentioned that after a few drinks they dance to Polish or other pop music and sing songs. Sometimes they listen to performances by some talented migrants. The atmosphere was reported to be lively and most people said they enjoy themselves. Wojtek (40) stated that alcohol enhances the atmosphere, relieves stress and helps people to have fun, do crazy things: "without drinking I wouldn't be able to be silly, dance and things like that".

Those who enjoy having big parties, regardless of income and education, organise one big reception a year. It requires a considerable effort and financial means to prepare such an event because the host prepares all the food and supplies some of the alcohol. Cooking is done predominantly by women, who spend the

whole day preparing for the party. Dana (51) described her preparations for a big party in these words:

I spend 12 hours cooking before hand, I would be totally dead during the party if I did not have a drink when I am cooking.

Men put the tables and chairs together, and they buy alcohol. All participants admitted that they adopted what they perceived as the “Australian custom” of a buffet, with the dishes set out on the kitchen benches or tables, a way of serving food which was never encountered in Poland. They were of the opinion that it is much easier for both the host and the guests when everybody can help themselves to the food. Some people voiced the view that it was an important aspect of reducing the amount of alcohol they drink by serving food this way because people do not sit at the table. By mixing constantly with other small groups one is not observed by other drinkers and is not prompted to drink more. At a buffet party people do not have the opportunity to toast each other and therefore they are not forced to drink as was customary in Poland.

Food is a very important element in setting the mode of the drinking pattern, as when food is more traditional the drinking pattern is more traditional too. Vodka is usually drunk “the Polish way”, undiluted, in situations when the host wants to manifest their national identity. Dana (51) mentioned with sentiment

I usually drink wine, but when I organise a party, once or twice a year, then it is vodka as a sentiment for a Polish custom.

She reported that she cooks traditional Polish dishes for those special occasions. Some of the traditional dishes that people remember from Poland cannot be prepared for parties as the food has to withstand high temperatures. Dana (51) told a story about one of her first Christmases when she prepared fish in aspic. The aspic did not endure the hot December temperatures and the dish ended up all over the table. Another dish people tried to make which did not work out was *tatar* – finely minced beef steak with egg yolk and spices, eaten raw. The woman who mentioned *tatar* also said that the Australian butcher refused to mince the high quality beef, telling

her it was an insult to his meat. When one eats *tatar* one “has” to wash it down with a glass of vodka for better digestion

Dishes that have the traditional feel and are easily prepared in Australia include herring in cream and onion sauce or just in oil. This dish was served as a very Polish entree at one of the birthday parties observed as part of this study. At one of the parties the host greeted entering guests with a shot of vodka, a piece of herring and sourdough dark rye bread, putting the guests into a party mood from the beginning. Dana (51) explained:

In Poland one drinks vodka, vodka neat with *zagrycha* – a bite of bread or with a piece of smoked sausage and cucumber in brine. It is the three steps move: a shot of vodka a bite of bread and a bite of herring or sausage. At other times it might be an egg with mayonnaise.

Women stated with relief that these dishes can be served in Australia without any problems, as they do not spoil quickly and are easy to prepare.

For less traditional parties there seems to be a more relaxed attitude to the preparation of the food. Most female informants adopted some Australian dishes, mostly various fresh salads, which were not known in Poland. In Australia these women take advantage of the constant availability of fresh produce. Most women mentioned that they do not feel pressured to prepare as much food as was customary in Poland. Some participants stated that they had problems explaining their “lack of hospitality” when they had visitors from Poland, however. It was quite a challenge to make it clear to the guests from their homeland that it was not necessary to prepare as much food as the visitors expected.

Women who migrated in the 1980s try to prepare more traditional food than those who are recent migrants or on extended holidays such as Polish partners of Polish Australians. The latter prepare more international food, which was unknown in Poland before the 1990s or was too expensive for an average person to buy. These women prepare exotic seafood, Asian and other international dishes. This type of food is rarely encountered in the houses of the earlier migrants from both groups.

those who migrated just after the war and during the collapse of the communist system. A third group might be emerging, one which wants to be seen as less ethnic by turning away from traditional food. Although these younger women try to embrace a more international attitude to food preparation, men who are responsible for the supply of beverages were reported to be more traditional and supplied mostly spirits. At a Polish party beer is hardly ever encountered.

With this more relaxed attitude to food preparation, some of the informants reported that guests drink less alcohol “with less fatty and rich food one cannot drink so much as in Poland”. They meant that food in Poland slowed down the absorption of alcohol and people could drink much more and not be intoxicated. There appeared to be a wider variety of beverages, including wine, during the less traditional parties. At these events women reported drinking mostly wine, some drank mixed spirits, mostly whisky with coke, while some had other spirits mixed with fruit juices.

Men agreed that when food was more “Australian” they drank mixed spirits not undiluted vodka. Wojtek perceived drinking whisky and coke as an Australian custom and as he saw himself as an Australian he said:

I drink whisky and coke, like all Australians, more as an Australian custom not because of the taste.

For one of the big parties I observed there were 26 guests present to celebrate the birthday of the host. At the beginning of the party men congregated around the bench where the bottles were placed. They encouraged each other to drink. The smallest amount observed for those men drinking spirits was 300mL, which amounts to ten standard drinks, but some males drank a whole bottle of whisky or vodka. Women sat at a table discussing family and household matters while some talked about their jobs if asked. The women drank mostly wine, but some chose spirits mixed with soft drinks. Kate was known to “drink like a sponge” but never appeared to be intoxicated; one could hear murmurs of admiration. She poured half a glass of whisky, topped it up with coke and joined in the female conversations. I noticed that the female drinks were half to one third the size of the male drinks, although of the

same substance. Men poured over half a glass of whisky topping it up with coke, whereas women poured only about two to three centimetres of whisky.

Some people danced to the music in pairs, others in a circle. Guests started to leave around midnight. The hosts tried to prevent their departure but after 30 minutes they eventually left. Others stayed much longer; most of the guests went home at three in the morning. Many men left the party intoxicated, some were unable to drive home and slept in the car in front of the host's house. One man was completely drunk. He was clutching the leftover bottle of gin to his chest like the most beautiful and desired lover, refusing to let it go. The hosts took him to his car, suggesting a taxi to take him home. He refused, strongly and aggressively. He got into the car. The hosts were too tired to watch him drive off, so they left him there in the street. In the morning it became clear that the intercourse with the bottle continued as he was still in the car, in the same spot, sleeping soundly, still clutching the now empty bottle tenderly.

There were a few females who also showed signs of intoxication. One was quarrelsome and argued loudly with a male guest, and another refused to go home. Her husband virtually carried her out to the car. This time it was her turn to drink. Usually it was the other way round, he sang loudly or slept somewhere in the corner and she prompted him to go home. Usually women reported they drive their husbands home so they drank less and more often they chose wine

After the party only three male guests could be described as unaffected by alcohol, the rest were clearly intoxicated. Only three women guests appeared to be affected in this way. What is interesting is that although some of the women drank large amounts of whisky (some had eight large drinks) they behaved as if they had had nothing to drink but water during the whole evening. These women drove their husbands home after the event. Big parties like this were organised only occasionally to celebrate special events, but when people want to meet with friends they have small socials.

Small social gatherings

Other social events organised by Polish migrants in this sample were small socials: dinner-parties, playing cards, and going for picnics and barbecues with whole families. A dinner party was reported to be the most formal small event, in a group of six to ten. Two informants said that they stopped having big parties. They prefer to organise dinner parties instead. For such an event the host prepares all the food and supplies at least one bottle of wine. The guests bring with them their favorite wine if they wish. Food would most likely be international, not traditionally Polish. My female informants stated that Polish food takes too much time to prepare, others said it was not healthy, so they stopped cooking the traditional way for these small events. Dishes that could be encountered during the dinner parties were stir-fries, various fish and meat dishes based on recipes from Australian women's magazines.

The biggest change in serving alcohol with food was reported by Stanislaw (70). He stated that during small dinner parties hosts served wine with food, not undiluted vodka as would have happened in the migrants' homeland:

In Poland during a dinner one would serve vodka with food, but in Australia at dinner-parties people do not drink spirits, they drink wine and do so moderately.

Drinking was usually moderate, two to four glasses of wine, most informants said, but occasionally some guests were reported to drink to intoxication. I have observed two situations when a guest drank a full bottle of wine. People who drank to intoxication during dinner parties were also observed drinking more than eight standard drinks during big events such as birthday parties.

From the sample of my informants, and other migrants I observed, emerged a group of six very heavy drinkers who sometimes organised socials where drinking was central. These people meet regularly to play cards once or twice a week, usually at weekends, later in the evening after people have eaten their dinner. They usually have snacks like crisps and nuts but drink large amounts of alcohol. This group has male and female members, who form a close social circle. They meet regularly and

they can drink to their satisfaction as they reported they take a taxi home. This group would be classified as binge drinkers by Australia's main health advisory body, the NH&MRC (1992), each drinking at least a bottle of wine or half a bottle of whisky. One of the male informants from this group stated that these were his friends who drink heavily too, so he can get drunk in front of them. He admitted that these sessions were planned, they just wanted to get drunk. All members of this group are middle aged, not teenagers learning to drink. Another man mentioned that all his close friends were heavy drinkers:

I have always had heavy drinking friends. I've never had a friend who was a non-drinker.

He was not sure if the group influenced his drinking or whether they were friends because their drinking patterns were similar. White and colleagues (1990) analysed the role of adult peer groups on drinking patterns and state that heavy drinkers were more likely to socialise with other heavy drinkers (White *et al.*, 1990). It is likely that heavy drinking Polish migrants choose the company of other heavy drinking compatriots and form close friendships with them. Wojtek summed up the phenomenon described above:

...I know with whom I can get drunk, and with whom I have to control myself... with some people being drunk is accepted as they behave the same way you do... with non-drinkers you lose face when you are drunk.

These socials were mostly in the company of other adults, but at times children were also present. Picnics and barbecues, when the whole family was involved, took place during the day. People stated that they cook steaks and sausages, make salads and bring garlic bread. My informants said they "did not drink" during the day, they might just have a beer or two or a couple of glasses of wine. For most, drinking meant either drinking spirits or drinking to intoxication.

The prevailing notion from most informants was that after the initial escalation, their drinking stabilised in Australia. Some thought that starting a new stage in their lives prompted them to reduce alcohol use. Wojtek said about his drinking: "I was starting a clean page of my life". Many migrants said that the most

important moment when they reduced their drinking was when they obtained employment and could not afford going to work with a hangover for fear of losing their job. Even those informants who would be defined as problem drinkers, who drank on most occasions the equivalent of over eight standard drinks, were able to reduce their alcohol consumption drastically once they found a job. Kazek (40) was of the opinion that most people he knew fitted into this category:

Starting work was very important, most people I know who drank, stopped (drinking to intoxication). One cannot afford to have a hangover at work.

The association between employment and reduced alcohol consumption is supported by much research in this field (Heath, 1958; Levy & Kunitz, 1994; O'Connor, 1984).

Beverages

It became clear that this group of Polish Australians drinks mostly in private home situations and they drink all kinds of alcoholic beverages offered on the Australian market. Many informants in this study did not treat beer as alcohol and although they drank it they did not mention it in the interviews. When asked about how much beer they might have they expressed surprise that I was interested in it.

Spirits

In 1997-1998 Australians consumed 1.28L of spirits per capita (World Drink Trends, 1999). Among Polish migrants in this sample spirits appear to be more popular. All male informants reported drinking mostly spirits although other men drank other beverages during social events and were not observed consuming spirits. All but one woman in this sample stated that they did not drink spirits but later were observed drinking neat vodka and other mixed spirits.

Spirits were usually drunk in party situations when people wanted to achieve a pleasant party atmosphere quickly. Vodka, as a Polish national beverage, was usually served with traditional Polish food. Some informants stayed faithful to

vodka “the national drink”, because they were of the opinion that it is much healthier than other spirits. As one man at a party lamented:

I drink only clear spirits; it clears your blood, as my father used to say. I never get a hangover the next day, after clear drinks. All of them, they will be sorry for drinking the coloured (whisky) stuff (Kazek, age 41).

Ewa (46) said she still likes vodka much better and hardly ever drinks wine. She uses alcohol for the effect rather than to make an occasion special:

I drink only neat vodka or mixed with juice. It might be the Polish tradition that we prefer vodka...why drink wine, after vodka one does not get a hang-over, and the effect is much better.

Some informants were keen to drink what they perceived as an “Australian custom”, mixed spirit drinks after work “for relaxation” as a “long drink” with their partners. Others offer it to guests who come for a short visit. A “long drink” was an unknown way to drink alcohol in the informants’ homeland. Only one female informant remembered her father drinking whisky. A “long drink” is not associated with preparing copious amounts of food and alcohol when friends call by. It is enough to offer one or two drinks and have the social contact with others.

The amount of alcohol consumed at events varied. Some men admitted that on a special occasion they might drink half a bottle of spirits and they appeared to be proud of this. Most people do not count standard drinks, they use instead the volume in each drink, measures which were widely used in Poland. Some people knew what a standard drink meant. As Zbigniew (40) explained:

Who has such small glasses as those recommended?! And then who would bother to count each drink, one just pours as much as one pleases.

Nearly all informants said they drink less in Australia (about 30 per cent less) at one sitting than they used to in Poland. Many attribute this to the hot climate, saying that the heat makes the alcohol “go to your head” faster and to the diet, which contains less fat. They were of the opinion that eating fat slowed the absorption of

alcohol in the stomach. Although many said that they definitely drink less in Australia, when asked how much they drink in one evening, half of the males interviewed described large amounts of spirits drunk at weekends. Some had 250-500mL of spirits per sitting: "When I want to be in a really good mood, I prefer to drink spirits... I drink a whole bottle then" (Wojtek, 40).

Those who thought that they drink less, reported that they drink much more than the recommended amount by the NH&MRC (1992) of not more than two standard drinks for females and four for males. Zbigniew (40), who is familiar with recommended safe drinking levels, when questioned, shrugged his shoulders dismissively saying:

When you compare our drinking with the Australian recommendations of course we drink more, but we Polish can drink more... In Poland we would not be considered drinkers with the amount we drink here.

For men, the drinking choices remained very similar to those in their country of origin and they chose spirits over other beverages. All stated that they drink less at any given occasion than they used to in Poland, but they tend to drink more frequently, which did not mean that they drink every day.

Wine

Wine was as popular as spirits among the informants, particularly women. As a comparison Australians consumed 19.7L of wine per capita in 1997-1998 (World Drink Trends, 1999). Wine was reported to be much more popular among Australian women than men (AIHW, 1999). Informants in this study who said that they drink moderately might have been influenced by the popularity of wine in Australia as many reported that wine was a new beverage they learned to drink once they left Poland. Women "learned to like wine". Anna (46) said that she was lucky as a knowledgeable person introduced her to the beverage:

At first (in Australia) I experimented with different wines, but later I met a person who is a wine collector and he introduced me to the art of wine knowledge.

Marta (46), who chose not to drink in Poland, started to drink wine in Australia. She explained she did not drink in Poland because her father had a drinking problem. The only alcohol she was familiar with in her homeland was vodka and that in her mind caused all the problems in her childhood home.

Here everything changed... We don't drink vodka, we never did, we drink wine and it is only one or two glasses, we never serve spirits.

Discovering wine was also important to some of the men. One man, who was a known heavy drinker and was observed to have been very intoxicated at a few parties after he migrated to Australia, now drinks only wine in moderate amounts. Someone commented on his new ways and his reply was: "I don't drink any more (he meant he doesn't get drunk), I prefer to spend my money on recreation". He had recently bought a boat and was inferring that when one has other recreational activities, drinking is less important. In Poland this man had no such opportunities, whereas in Australia he can spend his hard-earned money on sport.

Beer

Beer, the most popular alcoholic drink in Australia, was the beverage that was hardly ever mentioned by the informants. In 1997-98 Australians consumed 94.5L of beer per capita (World Drink Trends, 1999). The theme that emerges from the statements of the Polish migrants in this study was that they did not treat beer as an alcoholic beverage. Only those people who stated that they abstained from alcohol in Poland mentioned that they drank beer occasionally. Informants who reported drinking mostly spirits were of the opinion that beer was not strong enough to count as an alcoholic beverage. I have not observed people drinking beer during evening social situations. The host never supplied beer for a party and guests did not bring it with them for the event.

Attitudes to Drinking

Although the social situations and the choice of beverages changed in Australia, the most important attitude towards drunkenness appears not to have. Most male and some female informants voiced the opinion that getting drunk once in a while was perfectly all right and that most males needed to do so. They definitely frowned upon drinking every day claiming that it led to dependency on alcohol. One of the statements by a man at a party supported this attitude: "We, Poles here, are not alcoholics; we are just drunkards". He meant that people don't drink every day, which would mean they are dependent, just every now and then to intoxication. Most drank during the weekends or at parties. The drinking situations in small groups would amount to double the number of drinks recommended, while during parties for most males it would be binge drinking as classified by the NH&MRC (1992), with some drinking a whole bottle of whisky or vodka. Most male informants did not perceive drinking large amounts of spirits as dangerous, but regular drinking of even small amounts of wine was perceived as indicating an alcohol-related problem

There appeared to be a very fine line in people's perception between drinking and being branded as an alcoholic. A male informant was very worried about his son's drinking. The son was advised by a doctor to drink a glass of red to lower his cholesterol level: "...he will die young if he drinks like this. Drinking every day leads to... you know what..." (he meant alcoholism)

Many informants said they were non-drinkers, when approached and asked to talk about alcohol. Zdzislaw (88) said it would be a waste of time for me to talk to him because he was a non-drinker. In the interview it became clear that he does drink occasionally, a glass of beer or a glass of red but at this stage of his life he does not get drunk. Most moderate drinkers said they did not drink, which in every instance meant they do not drink to intoxication (Moskalewicz & Zielinski, 1995)

From the statements of the informants it also became clear that a drinking woman is a more frequently encountered phenomenon nowadays than it seemed to have been in Poland.

Women and Drinking in Australia

“...now we can drink too”

Migration had a strong impact on the drinking patterns of female migrants in this sample. Many left their country of origin at an age in their late teens and early twenties when young people are still learning to drink and when there is a very strong social pressure in Poland on females not to drink (Corti & Ibrahim, 1990, Roche & Watt, 1999). The greater acceptance of women drinking to intoxication in Australia is reflected in Ewa's statement:

These times it's okay for women to drink, before (in Poland) it was not accepted, and a woman drinking would get negative comments, it's only men who could get drunk and be happy, the woman had other responsibilities, but now it has changed, I think it has changed, especially here in Australia, but on the other hand I have not seen drunk women in Australia, well I am not talking about my friends who might have been drunk at some party, I was drunk a few times too, but generally I have not seen drunk women.

Some children had a more negative view of drinking by their family members, particularly by their mothers. This can be illustrated by some responses of younger participants in this study who arrived in Australia as children. Maciek (14) said in desperation during one of the parties: “not my mother again!”, when his mother, clearly intoxicated, started to sing loudly.

Another group of women who migrated at a later stage of their lives had already started families in Poland and had set ideas about female roles. These women reported drinking moderately, choosing wine over spirits. They also viewed their heavier drinking sisters negatively. The women used harsh words when they talked about unaccompanied females at parties or pubs drinking alcohol: “she is such a whore” or “she will get into trouble” (meaning she will get raped or attacked, and she deserves it). Krysia (51) illustrated these views when she said:

Depends who is drunk, a woman, if she gets drunk to the point of speech slur and staggering, I don't criticise as everybody who drinks knows why they drink, but I think it is not OK for a woman to drink to intoxication.

Male informants shared her opinion. Kazek said that drinking women with family responsibilities were inviting sexual advances, which a “decent” woman should not do:

...a woman drinking... well it's not good... (needed prompting)
well, I didn't want to say it as not to offend anybody, I am a
gentleman.... but it means that she is “easy”... (Kazek, age 40).

Drinking women in different cultural settings are perceived as being sexually available (Plant, 1997). Polish migrants have been noted to hold similar expectations. During one of the private parties I observed a male pouring a drink for a female saying: “drink girls, you will be easier” and using his drinking as an excuse for sexual advances which included remarks and unwanted touching.

Many Polish migrants still hold very strong views about women's role in society and negative perceptions of women drinking alcohol. I encountered the strongest expression of those after a short announcement on the radio that I was looking for people interested in sharing their views and experiences around drinking. I received two calls from male listeners absolutely enraged that a woman was interested in drinking. “A woman”, I was told, “should not even mention drinking. Her main role in life is giving birth to healthy children. If she ever drinks, even one glass of wine she will give birth to monsters who will turn out to be alcoholics”. I believe the callers were serious. These men refused to give me their age. Similar views persist in many societies in the world despite the “westernisation” of drinking customs (Plant, 1997)

There was a discrepancy between what women reported about their drinking and their observed behaviour. Most said they drink mostly wine. These women hardly ever mentioned spirits as beverages they might choose over wine during specific situations. However, they were observed to drink spirits during big parties, in accordance with Banwell's (1997) reports that drinking at parties entailed a different set of drinks and behaviour. During big parties one “traditional” group of women drank mostly neat vodka with very Polish dishes but they were also observed to drink wine and mixed spirits during less traditional occasions.

For most women, moving to Australia meant starting to drink alcohol as they “discovered” wine. These women drink much more often than they used to in Poland. They drink wine with their partners to make an occasion important, and with their children when they come of age, or alone just to relax after work, during cooking, a pattern that was never encountered in Poland. Most of the women from this study drink at parties where on occasion some get intoxicated, a phenomenon, which would not have been socially acceptable in their homeland.

Drinking and Family Life

It is evident from the statements of women in this sample that they drink more than they remembered women drank in Poland. Female informants did not report alcohol affecting their family life as they did about their life in Poland, although some reported everyday heavy drinking due to loneliness and disappointment with their lives. Zosia (48) admitted that she drank a bottle of wine every night for many months after her husband left her with two young children: “I wanted to drink myself to death, but I stopped when I realised I would have to leave my children behind”.

It is not clear whether alcohol poses no problems in family life, or that these women accept some alcohol-related effects as normal. They might be more tolerant of their partner’s drinking because they drink too, whereas in Poland they would have been sober and their partner’s drinking would not have been acceptable “I will accept my partners drunken behaviour, because he has to accept mine”. Another explanation might be that they did not want to talk about any alcohol-related family problems, because it is still a shameful subject. In direct interviews with the women there seemed to be a perception that alcohol poses no problems in the migrants’ family life. However, the migrant social worker (who is no longer working in this position due to funding cuts) interviewed claimed there is alcohol-related violence in some Polish families. According to her, several women required refuge facilities at some stages:

The worst thing is domestic violence, it is this male self-pity, and they let the frustration out on their children and wives. There are a substantial number of domestic violence cases because of alcohol. I had really bad cases in the course of my work, when for example the male destroyed everything in the house with an axe, the woman ran away to the refuge, terrible. Many of those men are unemployed, they can drink half of their benefit, they drink the cheap alcohol, the cow (4L cask wine).

Despite these statements by the social worker at present there are no Polish migrant services to assist Polish families with alcohol-related problems other than the mainstream ones designed for all Australians. Those women who arrived in Australia in the 1980s have no access to these because of language problems. They are usually women who had small children when they arrived and were unable to work or to access language programs. Drinking problems remain a taboo subject among many migrants and many women are reluctant to seek help from the mainstream programs, be it for their own alcohol-related problems or a family member's problems. They would have to admit that a member of their family is an "alcoholic" which carries an enormous stigma in the small migrant community. This might be the reason why nobody mentioned alcohol-related problems in Australia but talked freely about these problems from their previous lives in Poland.

Safety and Health Alcohol-Related Issues

Safety while intoxicated was usually not a big issue for the informants although some mentioned the problems involved with travelling after a party (Stewart & Sweedler, 1997). Kazek (40) noted how the distances impacted on drinking: "Here we have to travel long distances, so we can't really drink that much. In Poland we could walk or catch a bus and there was no problem". At nearly every party or smaller socials, couples discussed who would be driving home, but after a few drinks both parties disregarded the recommendations of not driving drunk and concentrated on having fun. Most observed people had drunk more than four standard drinks when they got behind the wheel. Some boasted that they did not remember how they got home, after driving forty kilometres, as did one of the male informants at a party:

I really don't remember how I got home, I think it was thanks to the person who sat next to me, she talked all the time so I didn't fall asleep.

Many were of the view that random breath testing was done only to increase police revenue, not to save lives (Homel, 1993). As one man said.

...and you think it is done for the people, you must be joking, it (RBT) is the best money spinner for the police, do you know how much they get from catching people like us (informant at a party, age 44).

However, these people, most of whom were in their middle age, were aware of some alcohol-related health harm. One woman "could not drink any more" (drink to intoxication) because of a liver problem she had, another man reported that the doctor advised him to stop drinking altogether because of his hypertension (he was still observed drinking 10 standard drinks per session). Ewa (46) summed it up in one sentence: "We are getting old, we can't drink as much".

Summary

This chapter analysed the impact of migration on the drinking patterns of a group of Polish migrants. The participants in this study were of the view that in Australia, Polish people drink much less than in Poland. The biggest change in respect to drinking which took place in Australia was lack of social pressure to drink, a phenomenon that the informants defined as hospitality when they talked about drinking in Poland. Although men thought that they drink less, some still drink in an unsafe manner of over eight standard drinks per session. Women, on the other hand, admitted that in Australia they drink more often and more alcohol at a sitting than they would have in Poland. A drinking woman is more accepted in Australia and there is a wider choice of beverages than they remembered from their homeland. Although informants did not mention any alcohol-related family problems in Australia, a social worker reported substantial alcohol-related violence within some families. Some safety messages about alcohol do not reach this sample of people.

For instance many claim that drink driving was made an offence to raise revenue for the government. However, they accept the views of their medical practitioners when they advise them to cut their alcohol intake for serious health reasons

CHAPTER 7

ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE

“I don’t drink often, but when I do drink, I drink a lot” (Gienek, age 21)

Introduction

The younger group of informants in this study arrived in Australia as children with presumably little socialisation around alcohol. They learned about alcoholic beverages like most young people in Australia, observing their parents in drinking situations and from their peers during their own social activities. This chapter reports on young Polish Australians’ drinking patterns, and examines the influence of their migrant status on drinking behaviours.

For the last two decades, alcohol use by young people has been of concern to health authorities in many western countries. Studies report that young people are at an elevated risk of alcohol-related harm such as violence, injury and traffic accidents (Heale *et al.*, 2000; Roche & Evans, 1998; Roche & Watt, 1999; Wichstrom, 1998). Schulenberg and colleagues (1996) regard excessive alcohol use among adolescents and young adults as a natural stage in the passage into adulthood. They state that once young people assume their adult roles as breadwinners, partners and parents their drinking stabilises. Roche and Watt (1999) also note that alcohol is central to the social life of young people and plays an important role in socialisation and in the rites of passage into adulthood. They regard university students as being at most risk of harmful alcohol use as university life facilitates a unique social setting for excessive drinking. Young school leavers are particularly at risk because, within a short span of time, they finish school and are granted permission to drive and drink.

Further, entering tertiary institutions means that many leave home and gain freedom with no social pressures not to drink from their parents. In many cases excessive drinking and occasional binge drinking is culturally accepted as a natural process of growing up (Quigley & Marlatt, 1996; Schulenberg *et al.*, 1996). Windle (1996) described this period as a natural stage of “storm and stress” and reported that people past this stage usually adopt moderate drinking behaviours.

The focus of this chapter is the extent to which young Polish Australians’ drinking conforms to those patterns, and/or whether the influence of their Polish families and culture has any impact on their drinking.

Language and Ethnic Identity

Much research indicates that drinking patterns are culturally determined. Many researchers in the alcohol field use the phrase “wine, beer or spirit drinking cultures” (Norstrom, 1998a; Moskalewicz & Zielinski, 1995). If this is so, the cultural self-identification of migrants should have an impact on the formation of drinking patterns among migrants and their children. Therefore, it is important to explore the cultural belonging of this group of young Polish Australians. The next section examines the extent to which language and cultural identity appear to have influenced this.

Age of migration and command of Polish language is said to determine cultural affiliation (Johnston, 1985; Wierzbicka, 1985). Johnston (1985) also noted that fluency in either language determines the choice of friends by the children of migrants. Those who do not speak English well choose friends from their own ethnic background. Others, who speak both languages, feel best among other migrant children, keeping both cultural elements. The remainder, who speak mostly English, will try to fit in and forgo their ethnic background (Johnson, 1985). This section explores whether fluency in Polish and English had an influence on the cultural self-identification of these young people and in turn influenced their choice of friends.

These young people arrived early in their life and going to school in Australia had a significant impact on their cultural identification. Participants were asked which language they preferred to use during the interview, which they spoke at home and whether they felt they could speak Polish well. In order to explore whether fluency in their native language had any impact on the cultural identity of these young people they were asked if they identified themselves as Polish, Polish Australians or Australians.

Fluency in Polish varied among the informants. I am in a position to assess the degree of fluency in Polish language. Polish is my native language. I gained all my education in Poland from primary school to a university degree. Teaching grammar and Polish language structure is part of the curriculum in high school in Poland. For the purposes of this study, fluency in Polish means being able to speak fluently in most everyday situations, using correct sentence structure, and a wide vocabulary. There is also a definable Polish accent, which is characteristic of fluent speakers. Less fluent speakers are less able to speak well in everyday situations, their sentence structure is sometimes incorrect, and they have a more restricted vocabulary. They are also more likely to use English, rather than Polish, accents while speaking and to incorporate more English phrases in their conversations.

Two of the young people elected to speak Polish in the interviews. Both were males who had lived in Australia for the shortest period. Unlike the other males who immediately identified themselves first as Australian, Vladi (22) described himself as Polish living in Australia. Migrating at 14, he was the oldest of the sample at the time of resettlement. In addition, he has been living in Australia for the shortest length of time, six years. Vladi (22) who spoke impeccable Polish said that he had noticed that many young Polish migrants do not speak Polish.

I don't speak English to people who understand Polish, but many, mostly girls, respond in English.

Gienek (21) was also a shorter-term resident, having been in Australia for nine years. He migrated at the age of twelve. He admitted that his command of English was not as good as he would wish, but he identified himself as Australian "I am Australian of Polish descent but I prefer to speak Polish". Gienek spoke Polish

relatively well, and he said he could express himself better in Polish. He had a smaller vocabulary than Vladi and had to use English words when he did not know the Polish equivalents.

The other eight participants claimed they spoke Polish language reasonably well but chose English in the interviews. Martin (19) and Darek (19) spoke Polish at a similar level, although they differed in the age they had left their home country. Darek was two years old when he arrived in Australia. He said he tried to speak Polish at home but sometimes he noticed he switched unconsciously to English: “I speak predominantly Polish but sometimes... Mum talks Polish to me and I respond in English. It seems we are talking in Polish but I am not”. Martin, on the other hand, arrived in Australia when he was nine years old. He speaks mostly English at home and even his father addresses him in English: “My mother wants me to speak Polish and she speaks only Polish to me. My father? It depends, sometimes it is Polish, at other times it is English”.

All the girls preferred to speak English, and three used some Polish expressions in their speech. Maya (24) spoke Polish well and could read and write in her first language. She said she preferred to speak English however, because: “It is much easier and quicker to say what you want, my vocabulary is not as wide in Polish. Two years in a Polish school can’t compare with 13 years of studying here”. Two girls did not use Polish at all during the conversation and later the interview. Although they stated they could speak it, I did not have any opportunity to verify their statements. Pola (22), who migrated at the age of eight stated she could speak Polish but she preferred English. She did not use Polish when she talked with me and her explanation was that she did not need to use Polish because everybody understands English: “I use mostly English, my friends are not Polish and my parents understand English so Polish is really useless to me”.

Veronica who left Poland as a six-month-old infant said that she speaks half-English and half-Polish at home, but she refused to speak Polish to me. This may be similar to Darek’s (19) description “it seems it is Polish but it is not”. Usually it is the parents who speak Polish to their children and the children respond in English. To the children it seems they are talking Polish.

Dora (18), who settled in Australia as a ten-year-old girl reported exactly this form of speaking at home. She speaks English with her siblings, her parents speak to their children in Polish, but the children respond in English. Dora realised she used predominantly English and she did not claim she spoke Polish at home as did the previous girl. She claimed, though, that she could speak Polish. She said a few sentences in Polish, but her Polish was limited and she found it difficult to say what she wanted. She quickly switched to English. Janya (18), one of those who left their country of origin as an infant, could speak Polish reasonably well. She admitted to using both languages at home "I use the language whichever gets the message across better". She was quite glad she could speak both languages but she did admit that her English was much better than her Polish.

Fluency in Polish did not appear to influence the ethnic self-identification of these young people. Dora (18) and Veronica (18), whose command of Polish seemed limited, felt very strongly about being Polish. Others, who spoke Polish well or very well felt, or at least described themselves as Australian. They acknowledged their Polish background but declared their allegiance primarily to the new country.

Some young people declared strongly that they were Australian, even though their command of their native language was excellent. Kuba (19), who came to Australia as a three-year-old boy, and who speaks Polish very well, summed up most of the statements made by other boys:

I have a Polish background... I guess... but it does not count that much. I don't feel I am Polish in any way... I don't feel any ties to it emotionally. Australia is always going to be home.

Maya (24), who was fluent in Polish, also saw herself as Australian. She felt very strongly about it when she mentioned stickers of national flags displayed on the cars indicating the origin of the person driving it. She appeared agitated, aggressive in her manner of speaking, and spoke loudly.

It is wrong. I don't feel I am Polish. You can't be Polish and Australian, loyal to both. You have to make a choice, one or

another. When you live here you should make this commitment
(to the new country).

On the other hand, others like Janya, Veronica and Dora, less fluent in Polish, identified first as Polish.

The question here is what influenced the way they felt about being either Polish or Australian? Their parents' activities and the parents' choice of friends in a mostly Polish social circle might have influenced these young Polish Australians. They also stated that they took part in the activities of the Polish Club as a family. This seemed to have the biggest impact on the ethnic self-identification of the young informants in this study.

The club was important to the older group of informants as a social venue. For the younger people it was a place for cultural connection. For people with young families who arrived in Perth with limited knowledge of English, the Club provided support and the comfort of social life within their own cultural group. The new migrants enrolled their children in Polish Saturday school, soccer club, or folk dancing groups. They organised summer camps for the children. For many, the Club was the centre of their life, and their children were strongly encouraged to continue their association with it. These people were very active. They organised plays, discos and other events for adults and children. At first the children attended the community school and camps as participants. Later, when they grew up, they became organisers, carers and instructors of the next generation. These young people developed a strong need for interaction with the Polish culture.

Janya (18) was a long time member of the Polish Dance Group with which she travelled several times to the eastern states for multicultural dancing festivals. She also said she teaches younger children to dance for the same group "I enjoy dancing Polish dances, it really connects you with the Polish culture". She said that because of this strong cultural connection she often felt out of place in Australia.

Sometimes I feel I fit in... but then other times I stand out because
I am Polish... Australia is home but I also feel that Poland could
be my home if I were to live there.

Veronica (18) took part in the Miss Polonia contest organised by the Polish Club. Last year's contest gathered 300 guests with twenty young women participating. Each contestant had to introduce herself in Polish and possess physical attributes to win the first prize, which was a trip for two to Bali. A dance followed the contest. The young woman participating in the beauty contest said that neither she nor her friends stayed for the dance, and that only the "old" people stayed.

I did not stay for the dance, everybody watches you there, you can't relax and have fun, it was not a social with my friends, and it was more cultural among Polish people.

Veronica (18) also has a Polish boyfriend, whom she met through her parents' friends. He likes the atmosphere of the Polish Club, where they occasionally go for a drink, mainly due to the comfort of communication in Polish. Dora (18) also has strong connections with the Polish migrant organisations. She attended Polish Saturday school when she was younger and still takes part in the events organised by the Polish community. She said that she goes to summer camps as a carer for younger children. The three girls felt a strong connection with their Polish heritage, a connection that appeared to have been formed by the frequent contact with the Polish Club and its activities. These girls were proud to declare that they are Polish and had their closest relationships with other young Polish people.

Two male informants used the Polish Club as a social venue because they were more comfortable among Polish language speakers. Vladi's (22) reason for active involvement was the opportunity it gave him to converse in the Polish language "I like to relax and in Cracovia my brain can have a break from English". Gienek (21) used to socialise in the club after he had finished high school "I used to go there to drink and for discos but now I don't, I have more other (not Polish) friends". He, like Vladi, preferred to speak Polish and liked to go to the Polish Club when he did not feel self-confident among other English speakers, but he admitted that he managed to find a new group of friends. This enabled him to socialise outside the club. These two young men chose the Polish Club as their social scene because they felt more comfortable surrounded by people who spoke their language.

Some Polish Australians drifted away from this hub of cultural activity as they settled in their new country, gained self-confidence and made new friends among other Australians. Kuba vaguely remembered going to the Polish school on Saturdays.

I think that I used to go there after we'd arrived here but I did not like it, so I stopped...no my parents never go to the Polish Club...it is not their scene.

Foxcroft and colleagues (1997) reported that peer groups are the key psychosocial influence in determining drinking patterns of teenagers. It is important to examine whether the ethnic background of the peer group has an influence on the drinking patterns of the young people in this sample.

Friends

To get a clear picture about close friendships among the young people, they were asked what influenced them in their choice of friends. I also asked the young people about their parents' closest friends. It was particularly important to find out whether they met other young, Polish migrants during family socials and therefore have had opportunities to develop close relationships with them.

The young participants who reported that their parents do not go to the Polish Club and have a limited number of Polish friends with no children their age, reported that there were no Polish migrants within their peer group. The parents' social group appeared to influence whether young Polish Australians in this sample had an opportunity to meet and get friendly with other Polish children. Young Polish Australians appeared not to seek out other young Polish migrants as their peers, as their parents did. They made friends with other Polish migrants because they liked them and had common interests, not primarily because, like their parents, these people came from the same ethnic group.

Informants in this study socialised with people from school, university and work. Time spent at school with other children facilitated the formation of long-lasting friendships for some. For others, university, TAFE or work provided a better

environment where they could form close friendships because people had more common interests. Half of the young participants in this study also formed close friendships with other young Polish migrants. Usually those groups did not overlap, as it is not often that Polish migrants live in the same areas and therefore send their children to the same schools. Only in one case did the families of two girls live for some time in neighbouring suburbs. This was enough time to enable the development of a lasting friendship. Some young informants had just one group they always went out with, whereas others had a number of different groups.

Veronica had friends from high school, university, and work and friends of her boyfriend, who was Polish. She has just finished high school and she clearly had not had enough time to get close to her new group at the university. She was still more comfortable with her old friends from school.

I have a few groups of friends. I do not really go out with my uni friends, perhaps for a beer or two. I usually go out with my school friends.

This theme of different groups was dominant among the younger informants who were recent school leavers. Martin, Dora and Veronica's closest peer group was the one from school. They had not yet formed strong relationships with people in their new educational institutions, but they were working on it. Darek changed his peer group just recently "Now I got to know people from uni, who are more laid-back, and we meet every Friday". It appeared that most of these young people did not have enough time yet to develop fresh social networks in the new environment.

Close family friendships with other Polish migrants appeared to have an impact on the choice of friends by some of the young people. There was a small group of informants who formed their strongest friendships with people from the Polish community, who they met at family functions. Polish families in Australia do not usually have extended families with which they would traditionally spend important celebrations like Christmas, birthdays, baptisms, First Communion, or weddings. Other Polish families form the surrogate extended family, and they spend all those important events together. Children from these families mix from an early age and often form long-term friendships. These young people shared mutual

interests in the activities of the Polish community. Dora (18) reported going to Polish summer camps with her friend, who was a daughter of her parents' friends. This friendship was further cemented by going to the same high school for some time:

Our families have been spending Christmases and birthdays...things like that... ever since we came here We like each other, she is my best friend and we can have fun together.

Dora was also friendly with a group of other Polish girls with whom she went to summer camp. She defined the rest of her peer group as Austrians with whom she was not really close "these are people from school. I don't like them any more, I want to find a new crowd." It appeared that with other Polish girls her friendships lasted through many years, whereas she found she did not have much in common with other young people from school.

Janya, Veronica, Gienek and Vladi had Polish friends among their peers. They also described their group as mostly migrants. As one girl said "my friends are from all over the place. They are totally different. They are from South Africa, Europe". Gienek explained in part why he was comfortable among other migrants: "My friends are mostly migrants from Eastern Europe: Poland, Russia, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, we understand each other better. I have a number of Asian friends too".

Friendships with other migrant children were a dominant theme that emerged from the statements of the young Polish Australians. Eight appeared to feel most comfortable among other young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Statements such as: "we understand each other better" were persistent among those who formed friendships and peer groups with people from school, university or work.

Two of the women who were in full time employment, however, socialised with people from work and with their best friends they had met during their studies. None of their friends was Polish. There were no other young Polish migrants at their schools or during their studies, and they did not meet any at their parents' homes.

Pola meets socially with her work mates at least once a month. Maya (24) was another working woman who mentioned socialising with people from work.

We go for a drink or coffee after work quite often .. we also go out for dinners. I work with people from many countries so we have 'theme' dinners: German, Mexican, Chinese or whatever we can come up with. Some people entertain at home. They prepare food from their countries...it is fun.

Both women did not consider people from work as their closest friends, they were simply part of general socialising. Both mentioned having best friends. Pola's were two girls from high school. Maya said that hers were three girls and their partners from university: "We can't meet very often, two moved over East, the third one lives here but is very busy, we catch up once a year maybe, it's for the gos (gossip), we talk all night then". Martin (18) also mentioned that he did not have any Polish friends, although his parents had Polish friends, but there were no young Polish people who would visit his home. Martin's peers included mostly migrants. Maya's comments explained the reasons why many young Polish Australians might be attracted to other migrant children: "I always stood out. I looked different, spoke with an accent. I always felt more comfortable with other migrant children, mostly from south-east Asia".

Darek and Kuba were long-term residents of Australia whose families did not have close social relationships with other Polish families. These young people had mostly Australian born friends, it just happened that people they met were mostly from English speaking families. Kuba described his friends as Australians "my friends are mostly Australian, but their families come from Britain".

This sample of young people formed three loose groups. Those who regarded connection with the Polish culture as important formed close relations with other young Poles, and this was a natural process. However, they also had friends from other cultural backgrounds. Those who stated they were Australian but seemed not to fully fit in the Australian peer group, tended to choose other migrants as best friends. People from the third group were long-term residents who had no connection with the Polish community and described themselves as Australian. People in this sample were not influenced by Polish language in their choice of

friends. However, the perception of being “different” from other Australians and the involvement in the activities of the Polish community had an influence on their selection of friends, who were mostly other migrants

Drinking alcohol usually takes place in a social context and drinkers influence each other’s patterns of consumption (Akers & La Greca 1991, Bandura, 1977; White *et al.*, 1990). Therefore it was important to determine the closest social group of the young informants. Drinking patterns also change with the social situation, people drink differently during a party and during a quiet relaxing evening with a couple of friends (Bondy, 1996). The next section discusses the social life of the young Polish Australians and their drinking patterns

Drinking Patterns and Social Life

When asked about their socialising some of the informants, particularly the three university students, did not think that they had very active social lives. They stated they did not have time. Studying at university was an involved process and it did not leave them much time to go out. Darek, (19) for instance, stated “I don’t go out that often, once every two months. The university studies. it’s really involved, you don’t have much time left for entertainment”

Although some stated that they did not go out very often, I had the impression that these Polish Australians like to socialise and some did, indeed, mention going out every week. Some said that they liked to go out to town, to the nightclubs, others enjoyed private parties or they just met with friends in a pub or a private home. One person mentioned going to university balls, which happened twice a year.

They distinguished social events as “normal socials” and “big nights”. During a “normal night” one met friends to talk, “have a few laughs”, listen to music and have a few drinks. A “big night” was planned ahead, usually to celebrate an event, a birthday and the end of semester. The purpose of it was to have as much fun as possible. The two different classes of events were important as the “big nights” happened only every two months for some people, whereas weekly “normal

nights” were the norm. Bigger events were possible every two or three weeks only during holidays for the older university students. The school leavers usually found enough time to go out for a “big night” more often.

Big nights

Among the younger participants, those around 18-19 years old, the most popular venues for a “big night” were nightclubs and occasional private parties. “Big nights” were usually planned ahead and associated with “having fun”, dancing, “being silly”. “Having fun” during a “big night” was associated with consuming larger amounts of alcohol. This drinking pattern was meant to facilitate getting into the party mood fast. Two ways of drinking emerge from the statements of the informants. One included the young people drinking substantial amounts of alcohol before going out to the city, to save on drinks in the nightclubs. The second one was drinking at a party, in a private home, where people could drink much more because they could stay at the house the whole night.

Nightclubs were popular with the younger participants. Dora (18) said “It does not put any pressure on any of us to organise a party, and then you know some parties, nobody wants their parent’s house trashed”. She meant that having a party at home carried a risk of having something damaged in the parents’ home. There were two regular nightclub goers, Martin (19) and Veronica (18), who went there nearly every week. Martin reported: “It depends what is going on, if there is something more interesting, then I don’t go, but if there is nothing to do we go to clubs on Fridays and Saturdays”.

It appeared that the lack of adult supervision was the biggest drawback of the nightclubs for the 18-19 year-olds, particularly for the younger females. The expression that “nobody is watching us” was persistent in some of the statements. Veronica said that the biggest advantage of going to the nightclubs was the separation from the adults, “when we go to the nightclubs, we have our privacy.”

Dora (18) met her friends for drinks before going out, at one of the homes where they began their evening. This was usually dictated by the lack of funds to

buy drinks in the clubs. People usually shared a bottle of spirits with their friends and drank all the alcohol before the trip to the club. Most of the people who went to the nightclubs drank mixed spirits with soft drinks to get into the party mood. The amount of alcohol drank on such occasions, as reported by some of the informants, amounted to six to eight standard drinks for each person. Dora and Veronica claimed they drank in a very similar way, mostly mixed vodka with juice. Despite drinking up to six drinks in a short span of time neither girl reported to ever having been drunk. It is likely that they were brought up in a similar way as young women had been in Poland twenty years ago that “nice girls” do not get drunk. According to Veronica: “I have a couple of mixed drinks before we go out and later I might have five to six or more... no I never get drunk”.

Dora also liked to drink neat vodka “shoties” (30 mL glasses of undiluted vodka). She described drinking neat vodka as a “hit”:

Vodka is stronger for me, nice taste... Absolute Vodka is *heaps* stronger and nicer. ... It's the effect it really hits you. the shoty...it takes less, you can feel it. . straight into the party mood, more relaxed, don't worry about anything

What Dora described was characteristic of the drinking pattern mentioned by the older generation of Polish migrants. She connected her drinking pattern with her ethnic background: “I think it is where you are from. the Aussies like Jim Bean...most girls I know... they are Polish and all of them like vodka. it's the background... where you are from”.

Not everybody who went to nightclubs drank large amounts of alcohol however. Janya (18), stated that she did not need to drink to have fun when she went out :

I live on a natural high. I just go out and I have fun. When I do drink it is I think because my friends expect me to drink. The most I drink during the night is two mixed drinks, bitter lemon or similar... and I like to remain in control.

The same reason for drinking only small amounts was given by Maya: “I never drink much on such evenings... I sip the same drink throughout the whole night. I like to

be in control all the time. I am a control freak”. Being in control was an important aspect for these two women. This prevented them from drinking in a hazardous manner.

“Big nights” in the city had some disadvantages. For most of my informants lack of money was a big problem. Only Martin was in a good financial situation. He went out to nightclubs nearly every week. He was studying only part-time, had no responsibilities, and his parents provided for all his financial needs: “I get the equivalent of a full Austudy from my parents as pocket money, I live at home and life does not cost me, so money for drinks is not an issue”

Kuba, a 19-year-old man, represented the majority of young people in this study who found going out for a “big night” to be expensive. He said that he and his friends go out for a “big night” only for special events “It is too expensive, we go there for special celebrations, for a birthday, usually we have a dinner out and later go to a nightclub”. Dora and Veronica also mentioned the cost involved and that they had to plan ahead for such an event.

Parties at home did not happen as often as the outings to nightclubs in the city. There had to be a special celebration to hold a party, such as a birthday or the end of the academic year. Private parties happened usually every two months or so. Dora and Veronica described parties at private homes as big events where a large number of people, up to fifty, were invited. The “big nights” at private homes were usually characterised by drinking larger amounts of alcohol throughout the whole night by people who drank five to six drinks on a “night out”. Both Dora and Veronica mentioned drinking more when they did not have to travel home. Veronica said “I drink much more at home parties, it is cheaper and travel is not a problem.” Dora admitted to finishing the bottle of vodka, that she shared with her friend during a home party, which would amount to eight standard drinks. Both women felt safe in a home environment, so they drank more.

As the age of the informants increased the frequency of “big nights” decreased. The older informants in the 21-24 year old age bracket did not mention frequent “big night” events. The events that were mentioned were balls from work,

university or a wedding of a friend. These happened about once a year and were not the norm. The usual socialising took a form of a “normal night”, which meant a few drinks with friends at home or at a pub/hotel or, for those already working, going to a restaurant.

Normal nights

“Normal nights” were socials preferred by my male informants as a way of socialising. They took place in a small group of friends where people might have a couple or more drinks. The main reason for a “normal night” was to relax and mix with friends. In most situations it did not require large amounts of alcohol. Although during most “normal nights” drinking was moderate, some had the elements of binge sessions described previously among the older migrants.

The most popular venue for a normal night was a pub after lectures or work and a private home, when people had “a couple of friends over for a few drinks”. Kuba (19) described his “normal nights” in these words:

We meet quite often, usually weekly at different homes each time or sometimes at a pub. We have a couple of beers, have a laugh or sit at a pub and have a laugh. I have my friends over when I finish my homebrew...no I don't drink much then, I have one or two beers.

When asked how much specifically was consumed, it turned out to be two “long neck” beers (500mL bottle), per person, as it was too much work to use small bottles in home brewing. Kuba stated that during these nights neither he nor his friends get drunk, they simply get to the open, talkative stage: “You have to be careful though... you are much more relaxed...you can talk about more stuff with your friends when you've had a couple, but when you have too much you talk too much”.

Kuba's “normal nights” appeared to be warm, friendly social interaction with close friends. Gienek (21) gave a similar reason for meeting with his friends “we listen to music, talk and drink”. The previous informant's accounts concentrated on the interaction with friends “having a few laughs, talking” whereas one of Gienek's

reasons for meeting with friends was drinking: “I used to meet with my friends every week. I drank half a bottle of scotch per night...I usually got drunk... I’ve stopped now, after the last time when I was totally off my face”. When asked what he meant by “stopped drinking” he reported drinking less frequently “now I drink a lot per session but rarely (once every three to four weeks).” Gienek (22) also mentioned that he went to pubs during the week for a couple of beers with his university friends “I go to pubs but I don’t go there to drink.” He, like the older Polish migrants, did not consider drinking beer as drinking alcohol.

Going to a university pub was a frequent way of socialising for the university students, but none of them considered it as fun, more as a social obligation. Darek explained that, although he did not like beer, he went to the university pub on Fridays and had an occasional beer then. He liked the relaxing hour with his new uni friends when he felt he could talk about things: “We meet on Fridays...we go to a pub, by that time we are tired and we kind of just relax, talk”.

Some respondents occasionally had drinks with their parents on Fridays. Kuba mentioned sharing a glass of beer with his father and Gienek said that sometimes he has mixed spirits with his parents on a Friday night. Veronica, (18) described having drinks occasionally with her parents on a Friday night, when she introduced her parents to different mixes of alcoholic drinks “I bought a recipe book about cocktails for my parents and we experiment together”.

The young women in this sample claimed that they drink wisely and they never get drunk. Men, on the other hand, stated that they were drunk at least once in their lives, an event that was embarrassing to some. Their view was that if somebody gets drunk to the point of vomiting, it was an indication of inexperience with alcohol. Martin still regarded himself as a learner:

I started drinking later than my friends... I got really drunk once... I threw up...it was a disgrace... we stayed in a cabin there and I could drink more...I will not do it again. Later I talked to my friends... asked them for advice.

Martin saw himself as a moderate drinker. He stated that he shares a bottle of brandy with four or five friends or a carton of beer. He described himself as somebody who does not tolerate alcohol well: “I can’t drink more than two drinks...after two ciders... I feel them so i can’t really drink that much. I go out to have fun not to be sick and go home... it spoils the night for everybody”.

Darek’s story related to drinking before going out. He explained the event in terms of his inexperience around alcohol:

I had a few horrible experiences. I threw up in a friend’s car on the way to going to a nightclub...I felt really disgusting...my friend he was really angry with me for a very long time and after that I toned down on the drinking...I try not to drink as much.

Young people from this study stated they drink alcohol to relax, get into the party mood, because it was social “sharing with friends” and “because my friends expect me to drink.” The amount consumed depended on the situation and the person. For the young Polish Australians having a “big night” meant drinking more and a different beverage, usually larger amounts (four to eight standard drinks) of mixed spirits than on a “normal night.” Drinking with friends also meant drinking more than with family members but less than during parties or out on the town.

Beverages

The question for this section is whether the young Polish Australians’ beverage choices differ in any way from other Australians. Although much research indicates that young adults, 18-23 year-old, are most at risk from alcohol-related injury and harm, there is surprisingly little research about the consumption patterns of this group (Heale *et al.*, 2000; Saunders & Baily, 1993; Wilks, 1989). Most interest is directed at the drinking patterns of teenagers, the 12-18 year-old group.

Spirits

Spirits mixed with soft drinks were the favourite beverages of the young Polish Australians. Bourbon or whisky and coke were popular among the boys, while girls preferred vodka with juice. Some people made their own cocktails at home from a recipe book. One person in this sample liked neat vodka. The main reasons people gave for their choices was the taste and the quick effect of the drink on the mood.

Taste was often the main reason why women preferred to drink spirits. They could mix their beverages with their favourite sweet soft drinks. The sweet taste also had an appeal to Darek who did not like alcohol, but drank it, and the best way to do so was to cover the sharp taste with sweet soft drinks. He mentioned drinking pre-mixed commercial drinks “poppy drinks, sub-zeros...just soft drinks with alcohol...you can’t feel alcohol too much.” The pre-mixed commercial drinks were also popular among the two older girls. Maya liked Bacardi Breezer and Pola’s choice was Lemon Ruski. These choices supported the view of some researchers that the beverage market is tailored to the tastes of young people (Roche & Watt, 1999).

The kind of spirit chosen depended not only on the tastes of my informants, but also on those of their friends, as was explained by Vladi (22):

It is different when I buy drinks and different when I share a bottle with friends. I like to try different beverages so I might order Stolichnaya (vodka) or Lemon Ruski. When I share with friends it will be Scotch with cola.

Darek (19) described a similar situation to the one presented above, but I had the impression he was not happy about it. He seemed to go out of his way to please his friends not himself: “If I had a choice I find gin and tonic has an interesting taste, but my friends like bourbon and coke so I have to drink it”.

Other Australian young people report drinking less spirits than the young Polish Australians in this study. A majority of young informants preferred spirits.

According to a study of beverage preferences among Australian teenagers, twenty three per cent of Australian boys over 15 years drink spirits (AIHW, 1999). This is similar to a study by the Health Department of Western Australia (1996), which found that twenty per cent of teenage (12-18 year-old) girls and twenty two per cent of boys in Western Australia reported drinking spirits.

Beer

Beer was not very popular as a beverage among respondents. Three young men drank beer from time to time, but only Kuba described himself as a beer drinker:

I really enjoy the taste, I try different beers and I brew my own. It is an acquired taste, one has to learn to like it. At the beginning I did not like it, but later my friend got me into home brewing and now I really enjoy it.

For Kuba, brewing beer and later drinking his own produce with his best friends was an important social event. It was done only in the company of other male friends. As a reminder, it is important to note that Kuba's friends were young people born in Australia from English speaking families. Martin was another young man who occasionally drank beer with his friends "we share a carton of beer usually when we go camping... I mean when we are away from home." It also happened in male only company. But unlike Kuba, Martin did not describe himself as a beer drinker, he drank beer because his friends chose it.

Two other boys drank beer in a university pub when they wanted to relax with friends after lectures. Gienek (21), though, said: "I drink beer only sometimes but it is not strong enough. I drink beer in the pub because everybody does". He did not like beer, and what was more important, he said it did not serve the purpose of drinking. Drinking for him meant drinking spirits and getting drunk.

The other six informants said they did not like beer. Darek found it very hard to drink "I had to force myself to drink it, it was really disgusting, beer was the worst...". All the girls disliked beer and did not drink it. Janya's statement summed up the attitude of girls to beer: "beer is really gross."

The beverage of choice for young Polish Australians differs from the general teenage population in Australia. The AIHW (1999) reports that the majority of Australian boys over 15 years of age chose beer as their favourite beverage (40 per cent). Teenage (12-18 year-old) girls in Western Australia chose mostly beer (55.9 per cent) as did boys (71.7 per cent) (Health Department of Western Australia, 1996).

Wine

Wine was the least popular drink among these young Polish migrants. Only the two older women, Pola (22) and Maya (24), and one young man mentioned drinking wine occasionally during meals. Maya reported that she sometimes drank sparkling sweet Italian wines because “these are the only wines that I can drink”. It appeared that these people did not really like wine, but drank it because it was the right thing to do. Darek explained “it is the tradition to drink wine with food. I drink it because my mum likes it.” The rest of the informants did not like wine and did not drink it. They differ from the general population, according to Health Department of Western Australia (1996) which revealed that wine was a popular beverage among Australian-born teenagers. Nearly fifty six per cent of teenage (12-18 year-old) girls and forty one per cent of boys in Western Australia chose wine as their favourite beverage.

Learning to Drink

Influences

Much research has been conducted on the influences of the social environment on drinking practices of young people. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, family socialisation has a formative role in the development of drinking behaviour by providing young people with their first experiences with alcohol. Initiation to alcohol use happens within the family home where parents

provide powerful models of drinking behaviour (Foxcroft *et al.*, 1997) There are two major theories given for the development of drinking patterns and motivations for drinking of young people. One states that adolescents are introduced to drink in their family home on special occasions when they are still underage, and they imitate the behaviour of their significant others. The other is that they try to assert themselves as adults and drink in order to rebel against their parents who forbid them to drink (White *et al.*, 1990; 1991)

The question for this thesis is what influenced the drinking patterns of these young Polish Australians? Two groups emerge from the stories related by the informants. One was where children witnessed their family members in drinking situations. Indeed, some were invited to drink by their parents. In the second group the family members were perceived as non-drinkers. Young people from these families stated that they learned how to drink and what to drink outside the family home, from their friends.

Family

Young Polish Australians who recalled drinking situations in their homes remembered the lively and happy atmosphere with talking, singing, and dancing. Some informants stated that this atmosphere ended when people became intoxicated. Women were usually seen as moderate drinkers, whereas men drank heavily, often to complete intoxication. Two young people remembered drinking situations in Poland when men drank copious amounts of vodka. Gienek reported that a happy atmosphere in his home lasted for some time, but at some point it changed into a sad and weepy party, when people had had too much to drink.

When they (parents) entertained another couple, they would only drink a bottle of vodka for four people, but when it was a bigger party you wouldn't be able to count how much they drank. Men would usually be completely drunk, to the point of being weepy, not being able to walk and they would be talking rubbish.

According to Gienek, his parents' drinking did not change in Australia. They drank just as much at one drinking session with friends. The only difference was that they also drank regularly on weekends alone, without guests.

In Poland they never drank alone (the two of them) as they do in Australia. In Australia life is very relaxed and one can drink on weekends. In Poland, I think it wasn't fitting to drink alone, one had to have a reason to drink, and friends dropping in, was the reason.

His parents introduced Gienek to alcohol at home, at the age of 14. He described the situation: "I got completely drunk, the first time, I drank vodka and it was at home when my parents were having a party".

During his unsupervised drinking he also chose vodka "when I was 16 we drank vodka because one drinks vodka in Poland and we were Polish". Once he grew up he began to experiment with other beverages, but also mostly spirits. He regarded drinking spirits as "drinking" and he did so in large amounts to the point where he stated: "I don't know when to stop". His drinking pattern is very similar to the one described by the older generation of migrants, and his words are to the point "I drink rarely but a lot".

Dora's familiarisation with alcohol also took place in the family home in Poland, when she watched adults drinking at family functions. Her observation of drunken behaviour was different to Gienek's who described drunken family members as sad. For Dora drunk meant happy. She remembered, "My father and uncle would be singing, dancing and telling jokes. It was good, everybody was happy". She noticed a change in her parents' drinking choices after they had settled in Australia:

Now they drink usually wine on a special occasion, not vodka any more. My dad doesn't drink near as much as he used to in Poland. He is more into beer now. They buy vodka only for a big party and it is vodka not whiskey.

For both Gienek and Dora their fathers' drinking provided a model that drinking enhances the mood of a party, and it was good and accepted to drink during

such occasions. They also noted that women from their families did not drink much and usually drank moderately in Australia. This notion that women were not supposed to get drunk emerged in several statements of the young people. During one of the parties a 15 year-old boy lamented “not my mother again” when his mother started singing loudly, clearly intoxicated in a “happy” way. The image of women not getting drunk appeared to worry Janya, who said of her mother during parties: “Sometimes she gets plastered and I take her home, at home she does not have to go anywhere (so she can drink)”.

Her mother’s drinking appeared to have evoked the carer response, because Janya felt responsible for the safety of her mother and her friends when they were intoxicated. She said about herself: “I am the responsible one who looks after them when they are drunk”. Although her mother changed her group of friends, Janya did not think it influenced her mother’s drinking, despite the new friends drinking less

We (means her mother) changed the crowd just recently. It is mixed now, English and Polish speakers. Now we have mostly dinner parties at home and they drink mostly wine, it would never get out of control, people would not usually get drunk. With the Polish they would just drink, and drink, and drink, just totally off their faces. Really loud, and they would sing and dance, and play loud music and go “hay-wire”. (Question: What is “hay-wire”?) They would behave in the ways they would not behave if they were sober; extra friendly, they act totally different.

Although Janya did not say that her mother was a problem drinker, she was not comfortable with her mother’s “getting plastered” episodes. Darek, on the other hand, was the only young informant who stated that his father had a problem with drinking. His parents separated when he was still a young child. His mother brought him up but he remembered his father’s drinking:

He drank a lot... I wouldn’t call him an alcoholic then...I’ve always seen an alcoholic as a person who couldn’t function in their daily life...but he couldn’t go a day without. It caused a lot of relationship break-ups, and the demise of the relationship with his partner at the moment.

The message Darek got about drinking was that it caused a lot of problems in his father's life, which was further reinforced by his mother whom Darek described as a very moderate drinker.

The expectations of the effect of alcohol and the young people's attitudes to alcohol depended on the ways they viewed their drinking parents. When the effects were perceived as positive then the attitudes were positive and the young people were likely to imitate their drinking patterns, as did Dora and Gienek. Parents also have an impact on the behaviour of their offspring, by approving or disapproving drinking by their children. Gienek's parents accepted his drinking from the age of 14, when he got drunk for the first time at a family function. A similar acceptance of their children's drinking was observed during one of the parties

The occasion was a birthday of the host. 26 people were present. Three couples came with their children, two girls of 15 and 16 who were clearly invited to keep the host's 15-year old sister company. The 16-year old girl looked much older than her age. She had stunning looks and a posture indicating she was aware of them. The two other girls looked their 15 years. Both appeared to be shy. The other child was a 10-year-old girl, who was clearly bored by the whole event. I gathered that her mother did not have anybody she might leave her at home with.

At around nine o'clock the older girls decided to go to a nearby nightclub. The hosts and the parents of the other two girls thought it was a great idea so one of the adults drove them there. The young guests returned just after one o'clock in very high spirits. I noticed their pupils were huge, black and liquid, indicating recent use of a psychotropic substance. They still wanted to have fun. The eldest girl demanded vodka. The adults obliged by pouring them three shoties (30 mL) of vodka. The two younger girls sat at the table giggling, the third one danced with the older guests at the party. I observed all three girls drinking three more vodkas each.

Soon after one of the younger girls asked to be taken home, the other just fell asleep on the couch. The third girl seemed unaffected by drink. She

was talking with other guests at the party, enjoying the attention she was getting. At that time, the mother of this girl, very intoxicated, was trying to explain some very important aspect of life to another guest (field notes)

Those observations are clearly in conflict with the statements of a number of people, particularly the younger ones, that they do not drink spirits in front of their parents. They reported that wine was the beverage that was accepted by their parents. Dora gave an example of an approved drink: “Sometimes my parents invite me to drink wine, but I don’t like it so I don’t. I wouldn’t really have spirits in front of my parents, or...(defiantly). I would if I were invited to drink but they don’t”

Although Dora witnessed her father’s drinking her parents clearly disapproved of her drinking spirits. This attitude was very dominant among parents, four of whom were described by informants as non-drinkers. These young people were not invited to drink because, according to them, there were no drinking situations at home when they were underage. Kuba was of the opinion that his father started drinking beer after Kuba reached a legal drinking age. “I think he drinks beer sometimes just to keep me company, I don’t remember him drinking before, he might have but I never witnessed”.

This notion of not witnessing their parents in drinking situations before they could drink was persistent in the statements of five of the informants. These young people had their first drinking experiences outside the family home with their friends.

Peers

Some research indicates that peers influence a young person’s alcohol use, particularly during the initiation to alcohol (Foxcroft *et al.*, 1997). Participants in this study often mentioned that friends introduced them to alcohol, and in the initial stages they drank what their friends chose. Kuba had his first drink when he was 16

Year 11 and 12 pretty much it started. We got our drinks ourselves, we kept trying... it was...put on the look like you own the place (bottle shop) just go in, get what you want, pay for it. They ask for ID... no loss, you try a different place. I did not

drink at home, my parents did not like me drinking...first I started drinking vodka because all my friends were vodka drinkers and so I drank it.

Kuba drank the same beverages as his friends. The choice of vodka, in the initial stages of drinking alcohol, had no meaning to him as a Polish beverage, as he was not familiar with it at home. His friends were Australian born children and according to Kuba, they chose vodka because they liked the taste.

Janya “learned” the taste of alcohol from her friends. She was introduced to alcohol by “tasting” other people’s drinks. All her friends were older than she, so she did not have to go to all the trouble of obtaining drinks before she reached 18. The theme of relying on friends to choose the beverage was persistent among those informants who were not allowed to start drinking at home when they were teenagers.

Nine of the informants treated the introduction to drinking as a natural process of starting adult social life, and appeared to enjoy an occasional drink. Only Darek had to force himself to drink, and after some time is slowly getting used to alcohol:

It is a peer pressure thing...I don’t like the taste of alcohol ... I like the effect it produces...it lets you keep the conversation with people, it makes things a lot easier... I have people at uni that I know, but I don’t know them all that well and it (alcohol) helps to get them know a bit better.

For Darek, drinking with friends was very important. It helped him feel he belonged to the group. One of his statements illustrated his feelings: “You just don’t feel as happy as these people look, you don’t belong. I don’t like to drink but I have to drink”.

Young Polish migrants appeared to be late starters as far as alcohol is concerned. Most reported that their friends were already familiar with alcohol when they joined in. Therefore friends usually had a deciding role in the choices of beverages during the initiation to alcohol. A number of the participants mentioned

that when their experience with alcohol grew, they started to choose other beverages, irrespective of their friends' choices. Some changed their group of friends and were introduced to other beverages, as Kuba reported. He learned to like beer because he made new friends with people who liked beer. Others made their own choices because they decided they liked the taste better, like Janya who likes port

The peer group appeared to have an influence on the drinking choices of the people in this sample. Seven out of ten young informants were university students and the drinking pattern they described, binge drinking at most weekends, was similar to the one described for Australian university students. Unfortunately these studies (Roche & Watt, 1999; Heale *et al.*, 2000; AIHW, 1999) do not report on the kind of beverages consumed by Australian students, they only state the amount of standard drinks consumed. Therefore a comparison between this sample and other Australians could not be made. Roche and Watt (1999) report binge drinking by 39 per cent of male and 56 per cent female, 20 to 22 year-old university students in Queensland, as compared with 29 per cent of males and 39 per cent of females in the general population, in the same age bracket (Heale *et al.*, 2000; Roche & Watt, 1999). It is likely that the university environment, where alcohol is central to the social life of many students, determines drinking patterns of these young people. However, it is also possible that it is their mostly migrant peer group, from a variety of cultural backgrounds, from various states in Europe, Asia and Africa, that sets the scene for a specific drinking culture.

Safety and Health Alcohol-Related Issues

All young informants were aware of the dangers of driving after drinking. Most people either avoided drinking to excess when they had to drive home, or they drank in larger amounts (to intoxication) only in private homes when they did not have to drive. These reasons were given by Gienek (21), who stopped going to the Polish Club for a "couple" of drinks, and prefers to do it in the safety of his or his friends' home: "I stopped going to the club, I had to drive forty kilometres to get there, it was too much of a trouble... in a private home you can sleep your drink off, somewhere on a sofa".

Females were also aware of the dangers of driving while intoxicated. Janya (18) was always the skipper: "I am the responsible one, I look after them (friends who have had too much to drink), and I can always drive, I never drink too much". Another young woman, Maya (24), who reported going to a pub quite frequently explained that she usually did not drink alcohol there. Her explanation was "I always get very sleepy after drinking so it's no good when I still have to drive home. If I drink I usually drink at home, it is safer". It appeared that after a party, or a small social at a private home young people could stay the whole night and did not have to get home if they did not feel like it.

For many young informants the biggest disadvantages of city entertainment were safety issues for the girls and driving when intoxicated for the boys. Veronica described getting home after a night out as a real problem: "When we go out to the city travel is a real problem. It is not safe on the train, particularly for the girls". Dora stressed "when you go out you can't drink as much, as you still have to know what you are doing, get home safe".

The notion that the young people could drink much more at home weaved through many stories related by informants. Veronica was one of those "I drink much more at home parties, it is cheaper and travel is not a problem". Dora also admitted to finishing the bottle of vodka that she shared with her friend during a home party, which would amount to eight standard drinks. Both women felt safe in a home environment, so they drank more. They talked about the dangers of travelling alone at night on public transport. Dora's statement illustrates it succinctly: "If you go out it is less (you drink less), you still have to know what you are doing, get home safely. If you are at someone's house you have more drinks, you finish the bottle off".

Safety messages about drink driving appear to have reached most of this group, and the young Polish Australians were aware of them even if they did not always follow the rules. However, health warnings about safe drinking levels were not believed or dismissed as irrelevant. Gienek (21) questioned these "once in a while, how can it (binge drinking) harm me if I drink at home?"

Summary

This chapter illustrated the beverage choices and drinking patterns of young Polish Australians. It reports on influences of family and friends on drinking patterns of these young people. This sample of ten young Polish Australians formed two groups in their attitudes to drinking. One consisted mostly of recent school leavers who radiated hunger for “having fun” and going out. People from the second group were less fascinated with going out at every opportunity and drinking. The environment appears to have had an influence on the drinking patterns of this sample. Those who witnessed drinking at home and perceived it as a good thing, modelled their drinking on their parents’ and other adults at home. Others, who perceived their parents as non-drinkers, learned to drink from their friends and displayed similar drinking patterns to their peers. Most people were studying at universities, and it is likely that the university environment influenced the drinking patterns of these young people. However, it is also possible that it is their mostly migrant peer group, from a variety of cultural backgrounds, which facilitated a specific drinking culture. This group of Polish Australians reported drinking mostly spirits, whereas those with an Anglo-Australian peer group preferred to drink beer, indicating the possible influence by peer groups on drinking patterns. While some health education messages, such as those related to drink driving, appear to have reached their target, other drinking-related health warnings were not believed.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This study was concerned with the influence of a dramatic change in peoples' social and cultural environment such as migration on their drinking patterns. There is abundant research indicating that such a change should have a strong impact on drinking behaviours (Akers & La Greca, 1991; Bandura, 1977; White *et al.*, 1990; 1991). The question was – what aspects facilitate the emergence of specific drinking patterns and what factors influence their change? This conclusion draws the findings of this study together. Firstly, it summarises the evidence for the history and political economy of alcohol in Poland. Secondly, it shows how this history has resulted in the cultural embedding of alcohol in Polish traditional life. Thirdly, it discusses the drinking patterns of these migrants in Australia, analysing familial, peer and cultural influences. Finally, it proposes some future research possibilities.

Alcohol and the State

As in other pre-industrial European countries, alcohol production in Poland was an excellent income-generating resource, using up the surplus of grain (Musto, 1997). Alcohol was widely promoted as healthy for both body and soul. It is a common belief in Poland, held also by informants who took part in this research, that those in power have promoted, at times quite aggressively, heavy drinking among their subjects. An extensive review of documentary sources, such as historical documents, classical literature and contemporary academic papers, justifies some of these beliefs.

It is apparent that alcohol was treated as a valuable financial resource in the economy of Poland, from around the sixteenth century until the present day. In Poland, unlike in Western Europe, the economic benefits to the landowners from alcohol increased dramatically with the introduction of *propinacja* laws. Those laws made it possible to force peasants to buy vodka in the landowners' inn (Levine, 1987; Musto, 1997; Powell, 1988). *Propinacja* was comparable to a similar law in Russia, where the State had the monopoly on all alcohol sales (Godorowski, 1992). It had no equivalent in Western Europe and appears to have had a significant impact on the development of severe alcohol-related problems among the poorest sections of the Polish population, particularly among peasants. This state of affairs has persisted until contemporary times (Bielewicz, 1993).

Alcohol continued to have a significant economic value in later historical periods, with annexing powers interested mostly in alcohol-generated revenue, as was the socialist government during the years 1944-89 (Bielewicz & Moskalewicz, 1985; Moskalewicz, 1991; Moskalewicz & Simpura, 2000; Wald & Moskalewicz, 1984). After the Second World War, most Western countries, in the face of growing alcohol consumption among their populations, rising related harm, and increasing pressure from health and welfare professionals, took steps to regulate alcohol supply, and through these steps, to reduce alcohol-related harm (Hawks *et al.*, 1993; Lang *et al.*, 1994; Partanen, 1993; Stockwell *et al.*, 1997; Stockwell & Beel, 1994; Stockwell, 1995).

In Poland, however, most alcohol-related harm was dismissed as being a problem of capitalist states only (Wald & Moskalewicz, 1984). It has been argued that this might have been due to the traditional Marxist interpretation of alcoholism, set out by Engels (Snow, in Barrows *et al.*, 1987). He stated that alcoholism was a function of economic and social deprivation among workers, and consequent lack of political and economic rights, and that once these rights were won, alcoholism would cease to exist (Engels, 1854/1969). However, as is evident from the Polish data on alcohol consumption and related harm during the socialist era, this appears not to be the case (Davies & Walsh, 1983; Moskalewicz, 1989; Moskalewicz & Simpura, 2000; World Drink Trends, 1993; Wald *et al.*, 1985; Wald *et al.*, 1986).

In Poland, and it appears in other post-totalitarian States as well, there seems to be a deeply held belief that alcohol was used as a political tool to “kill the fighting spirit” within their population, rendering the people powerless through drink (Snow, in Barrows *et al.*, 1987). There is little empirical evidence to support this, however, such a belief was encouraged by new governments to discredit previous regimes by using it as a propaganda argument. Statements that the annexing states and Nazi Germany induced Polish people to drink, to demoralise them, are still expressed in academic papers of the present day (Bartkowiak, 1995; Godorowski, 1992; Moczarski, 1983; Moskalewicz, 1991; Iontchev, 1998). The statements of the participants in this study supported this notion. They were of the opinion that this approach by the government led to the promotion of harmful drinking, as is illustrated in the expression “let them drink, they will protest less”. It was this long history of the role of alcohol in the political economy of Poland, which resulted in what has been termed the “Polish drinking model” (Bielewicz, 1993).

The Role of Alcohol in Traditional Life

Drinking alcohol was an important aspect of social situations in Poland for most of the informants in this study. The traditional Polish beverage was, and still is, vodka(s) (Faith & Wisniewski, 1995; Iontchev, 1998; Moskalewicz & Simpura, 2000). To the informants vodka in Poland was like “wine to the French”. As I have indicated above, the history of alcohol in Poland facilitated the development of heavy drinking among many sections of Polish society. In the informants’ view, every male Pole drinks to intoxication (otherwise it is not drinking), or at least has this potential within himself, and this type of drinking is cultural, that is intrinsic to being Polish. This view has been supported by other research, which noted the common understanding of “drinking” in Poland. Researchers found that an abstainer, in Poland, always means a person who does not drink vodka. They can drink beer or wine, or both, but only vodka drinking, in large amounts, usually leading to intoxication, is considered to be “real drinking” (Moskalewicz & Zielinski, 1995).

Some Polish customs appear to encourage very heavy drinking among the population. Hospitality obligations were identified by my informants as a custom most likely to exacerbate heavy drinking behaviours. In some cultures, particularly in Eastern Europe, hospitality takes a form of absolute excess, with “tables groaning with food and drink”. The guests are expected to eat and drink everything they are offered. Refusal is taken as an insult to the host (Mars & Altman, 1987; Musto, 1997; Thornton, 1987). All adult informants could remember occasions such as this in Poland, and recounted the way in which excessive alcohol consumption was integral to these events.

Drinking in Poland during times of economic difficulties took on additional importance. The provision of alcohol enabled people to receive goods or services, otherwise unavailable to the general population. Drinking to enforce social belonging to the group, and to enhance social capital, has been reported in other parts of the Western world. Douglas and Isherwood (1979) note that alcohol becomes an exchange mechanism for goods, services, information and inclusion in the workplace. This is exemplified in the saying of one of the informants that it is: “not what you know, but who you drink with”. Iontchev (1998) argues that in Eastern Europe, the “Russian” everyday drinking of copious amounts of spirits by professionals who made career moves while drinking with their superiors, became so pervasive that it even affected drinking patterns in countries with traditionally wine drinking cultures. In 1991, Bulgaria and Hungary, typically wine producing and drinking countries before the Second World War, were just behind Poland in per capita consumption of spirits (World Drink Trends, 1993; Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Mars, 1987; Iontchev, 1998; Moskalewicz & Simpura, 2000)

As in other parts of the world, drinking in Poland was a gendered activity. Women should display virtues of restraint and they should drink only minute amounts (Heath, 2000a). Those women who acted against this cultural norm were usually viewed negatively, particularly those who had family responsibilities. Therefore most female respondents stated that they “did not drink” in Poland. By this they meant they did not drink vodka, but that they had an occasional glass of wine when it was available. Most often it was a home-made wine or alcoholic fruit infusion, but they never drank vodka and never became intoxicated. Many of the

women believed they were responsible for their male partners' problematic drinking, and thought it was their duty to intervene when that drinking became potentially hazardous (Falicki, 1985; Snow in Barrows *et al.*, 1987)

Men were expected to drink large amounts of alcohol and not show signs of intoxication. Learning to drink and later keeping up with the drinking of their male friends was a very important aspect of Polish drinking, according to my adult male informants. The typical model of drinking was intermittent, very heavy drinking, leading to intoxication on most occasions. The NH&MRC (1992; 2000) would classify most informants who reported consuming alcohol in such a way as binge drinkers. This belief also reinforced the notion of specific national pride that "we can drink more because we are Poles" and the strong opinion that health programs and recommendations for alcohol limits are designed for other nations because "Poles are accustomed to drinking strong alcohol unlike others" (Heath, 2000a, Iontchev, 1998).

The belief that a male had to drink copious amounts of vodka and could not refuse to drink, led to problem drinking in many cases. The combination of heavy drinking males, who would most often drink to intoxication, and virtuous, non-drinking females, made responsible for their partners drinking, led to many problems within the families of these people in Poland. Men still drank, and women felt they failed in their gender role, as wife, mother and woman (Falicki, 1985. Barrows *et al.*, 1987).

Drinking in Australia

Adult participants in this study left their homeland with some clearly formed ideas about the role of alcohol in everyday life. For most, leaving Poland meant learning new social and cultural norms in Australia. These people reported that in Australia they drink much less than in Poland. They identified a number of reasons for these changing drinking patterns. For most informants the largest factor influencing their reduced drinking in Australia, and supported by many studies, was

obtaining employment, as "one cannot afford to go to work with a hang-over" (Heath, 1958; Levy & Kunitz, 1974; O'Connor, 1984). Some people found spending their income on sport and recreation preferable to spending it on alcohol. They reported they did not have such opportunities in Poland. In Australia new possibilities became available to the migrants and some eagerly adopted them (Powell, 1988; Saggars & Gray, 1998a). Another important reason noted, was lack of social pressure to drink in Australia, the phenomenon identified by informants as hospitality when they talked about drinking in Poland. Other factors given for the reduction of alcohol consumed and the way it was consumed (diluted not neat) was the climate and diet in Australia. Informants believed that drinking in hot weather and eating less fat led to intoxication, so in effect they could not drink as much as in Poland.

Although informants claimed they have significantly reduced their alcohol consumption since migrating to Australia, observations of drinking and interviews with community workers still found harmful drinking among this group. In some cases, drinking patterns from Poland appeared mostly unchanged. Some migrants, men in particular, have reported drinking up to a bottle of spirits during a single drinking session. Many were observed to drink eight to ten standard drinks over the course of an evening. Most males who would be defined as drinkers by Poles appeared to be intoxicated after such amounts. Some women also drank large amounts, up to eight standard drinks. Heavy drinking women and moderately drinking men were in the minority among the sample in this study.

Two groups emerged in this sample of adult Polish Australians. One, which was resistant to change, displayed what has been described as Polish drinking patterns. People in the second group appeared to be converging to Australian drinking patterns in the way they consumed alcohol (Reid & Trompf, 1990). Among this first group males, in particular, who had predominantly other Polish migrants as friends, frequently drank spirits to intoxication, once or twice a week. Reasons for this are complex and interdependent, but appear to be associated with problems of adjustment in Australia, particularly with respect to gaining suitable employment and friendship networks. People who do not have a good command of English were not able to secure the same level of employment they had had in Poland. This in turn

influenced the possibilities of forming friendships with other Australians. Without freedom of communication, migrants are stuck in the same social group, determined by their linguistic and cultural background. When people are not happy with their jobs, when they feel they do not belong, they socialise with other people from their cultural group and tend to persist with the “cultural” behaviours to point out their “otherness” (Moore, 1993; Brady, 1992). Although satisfying employment appeared to be very important in influencing the drinking patterns, for some informants friends had an even stronger impact. In some instances, men in managerial positions, or owners of small businesses who employed other Australians, were not at ease with their command of English. They preferred the company of other Polish migrants, with whom they could relax and they were more likely to drink “as Poles do”

Among this group of dissatisfied people were a small number of women. Most did not speak fluent English, were either unemployed, or in very low status jobs despite having a university education, or were unhappy with their life/family situation. These women frequently drank to intoxication during social events, and some also reported that they drink alone, up to a bottle of wine, in the evenings after they had done their household chores, to forget their “sorrows”. In one case a significant change in life circumstances (divorce) and a resulting change in this woman’s social circle led to a drastic reduction in alcohol consumption, as has been reported elsewhere (Banwell, 1997; Plant, 1997)

The second group of migrants who were more content with their lives in Australia had drinking patterns that appeared to be comparable to the general Australian population (Heale, *et al.*, 2000). Many women embraced the greater freedom available to them in Australia, particularly the absence of social pressures for female restraint in drinking. They reported that they drink more often and more alcohol at a sitting than was the case in Poland. Female informants noted a wider choice of beverages in Australia than they remembered from their homeland, which meant they could drink wine or other beverages they liked. Most female informants appeared to adjust more easily to Australian life. More women than men in this study spoke good English. They were happier with their jobs than their male counterparts, and also reported going out for drinks with people from work, which adult men did not do. Among this group of satisfied people was a small number

(three) of men who had high status jobs and spoke fluent English. Some had two social circles, one Australian, and the other Polish. One male informant stopped seeing his Polish friends to avoid heavy drinking situations. There were also three instances where the adult children claimed they introduced their non-drinking parents to Australian drinking. These people occasionally join their children for cocktails or a beer.

The younger Polish Australian informants in this study consisted of two distinct groups with respect to their social behaviours and drinking patterns. One, consisting of mostly recent school leavers, radiated a hunger for “having fun” and going out as frequently as possible. People from the second group were less fascinated with going out at every opportunity and less focused on drinking. A majority of people in the first group chose mixed spirits, and they usually drank in large amounts (up to nine standard drinks). Their choices were different from those reported for the general young Australian population, who choose beer and wine as the most popular beverages (Makkai & McAllister, 1998; Makkai, 1998b). However, the drinking patterns and beverage choices of young informants in this study were remarkably similar to those of Australian university students who also drink predominantly spirits in amounts frequently leading to intoxication (Roche & Watt, 1999).

The environment, both familial and that provided by peers, appears to have an influence on the drinking patterns of this sample. Young people who witnessed drinking at home (usually to intoxication, by at least one member of the family), and perceived it as a good thing, modelled their drinking on their parents' and other adults at home. Those who viewed their parents as non-drinkers, learned to drink from their friends and displayed similar drinking patterns to their peers. Nine out of ten people in this sample were studying at universities, and it is likely that the university culture has influenced the drinking patterns of these young people (Roche & Watt, 1999). It is also possible that it is their mostly migrant peer group, from a variety of cultural backgrounds, which helps to set the scene for a specific drinking pattern (drinking spirits in a risky way). As a comparison, those with an Anglo-Australian peer group preferred to drink beer, indicating the possible influence by peer groups on drinking patterns.

Health prevention messages do not reach the majority of adult informants. Most men were of the opinion that driving while intoxicated was not very dangerous and that random breath testing serves only to raise revenue for the state. During the study many were observed driving home very intoxicated (Homel, 1993, Stewart & Sweedler, 1997). They were also proud that they could drink much more than the average Australians and according to them, not show signs of intoxication. Their views about drinking remained largely unchanged, in that they were of the opinion that drinking occasionally to intoxication was not harmful. While this pattern of potentially hazardous binge drinking was considered normal, adult males were more likely to state that drinking every day, even small amounts of alcohol, was a sign of dependence (Roche & Evans, 1998). Most men talked with contempt about beer drinking, which in their minds did not constitute “real” drinking, and they dismissed the notion that they could change their beverage choices. A majority of the informants, both female and male, was ignorant of what constitutes a standard drink (Stockwell & Beel, 1994).

The younger group differed from the adult sample. Health intervention messages appeared to have had more impact on these young Polish Australians, than was the case with the adult group. They were much more aware of the dangers of drink driving than was the older population, and most altered their drinking patterns according to their mode of transport. However, drinking-related health warnings were not believed by many young people, or dismissed as irrelevant (Plant *et al.*, 1997a; 1997b). These young people, like those elsewhere, appear to operate on the present day, and safety is not considered important today, as they are young and healthy, and the distant consequences of drinking seem unimportant (Schulenberg *et al.*, 1996).

Changes in government policy with respect to support for migrants may be jeopardising attempts at health interventions, particularly among adult migrants. The main problem is the diminishing infrastructure for migrants. Twenty years ago more programs aimed at facilitating settlement in the new country were available. These included language courses directed at people with various levels of English competence. At present only basic English classes are offered, limited to one course

of 510 hours per migrant. For many people this period of instruction is insufficient to allow them to become fluent English speakers

In the past there were also bilingual social workers, funded by government, to work within the community for those experiencing problems of adjustment. These positions are now no longer funded (Office of Multicultural Interests, 1998). Many migrants, especially those from a non-English speaking background (or culturally and linguistically diverse, as they are known) do not use mainstream services, due to shame and communication problems. A mine of knowledge is wasted among those migrant people with health professional backgrounds who are unable to acquire registration in this country. These people could be employed in such services to the benefit of the communities and society as a whole (Morrissey, 1993)

With respect to the younger group of Polish Australians, this research poses more questions than it answers. There are indications that the social environment is a powerful agent influencing their drinking patterns. However, there is not enough information about alcohol use among young adults, and from migrant communities in particular. There is a need for more data about the levels of alcohol consumption within those groups, knowledge of alcohol-related harm and strategies used by young adults to minimise it. Young people should be included in all the stages of the planning and implementation of this research as they are the main stakeholders

Implications

Recommendations that emerge from this study need to distinguish between two groups of people, those who migrated as adults, and those who came to Australia as children. This differentiation, made during the planning stages of the study, was deliberate. Statistically, all the people in this study are defined as migrants born overseas. However, this obscures potentially important differences between the groups, as for most of the young people, relatively little of their formative years were spent in Poland (Rissel, 1997). More knowledge about alcohol consumption and alcohol-related problems within migrant groups in Australia would provide a

background for planning adequate health programs for these people. Specific issues worth explaining include adult Polish attitudes to “alcoholism” and drunkenness”, cultural notions of differential capacity for alcohol within the Polish community, perceptions of and reaction to safer drinking health promotion, changing patterns of Polish women’s consumption levels; and the emerging drinking patterns of young Polish Australians. Full involvement of the communities would enable the development of more effective strategies, as they have the best insight into the extent of problems and appropriate ways of dealing with them.

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Zycie Warszawy. (March, 1945)

APPENDIX 1

Interview Schedule

Adult migrants

1 Language

Which language do you prefer to speak?

2 Sociodemographic details

Personal details:

- Age, gender
- What did you do in Poland: occupation, studies?
- Information about family, occupation of parents
- How long have you been living in Australia?
- Occupation in Australia
- Ethnic self identification
- Who are your friends, how did you meet, ethnic background?

3 Past family drinking

What do you remember about your parents' social events, what was served as food, drink?

- What was the preferred beverage?
- How much people drank, parents' friends, parents, other family members?

4 Own drinking

Describe your drinking in Poland.

- What did you drink?
- During what occasions?
- Who with?
- What did your friends drink?

What do you think about your drinking in Poland?

5 Stories around drinking

Can you remember any stories around drinking from your homeland that you would like to share?

6 Comparison between parents and self in Poland

Do you see any differences back in Poland between your drinking and your parents' drinking?

If yes, what do you think influenced you in your drinking?

7 Drinking in Australia

7.1 Describe social occasions in Australia:

How often and who participates?

What is served as food and drink?

What do people drink? Do they bring their own beverages?

How much do they drink?

7.2 Personal taste

When do you usually drink?

What is your preferred beverage?

How often do you drink?

How much?

7.3 Variations due to what and how different is drinking?

8 Comparison with Poland

Seems there is a difference between what you liked in Poland and how you drank in Poland and in Australia. Let's explore it, what do you think made you change your ways?

9 Attitudes to drinking

What is harm? How much can people drink? What is intoxication?

Child migrants

1 Language

Fluency in Polish, English, which one do you prefer to speak during the interview?

2 Sociodemographic details

Tell me a bit about yourself:

- age, gender
- Where were you born?
- How old were you when you left Poland?
- How long in Australia?
- Language spoken at home
- What was your parents' occupation in Poland? What is it in Australia?
- Cultural belonging?
- What do you do, occupation, studies?

3 Family drinking situations in Poland if remembers.

- What were the occasions?
- What did people eat, drink?
- How much did they drink?

4 Family drinking situations in Australia

- When do they take place? What occasion? How often?
- Who participates (English speakers, Polish speakers, other migrants)?
- What is served as food, drink?
- What people drink? How much?
- What do parents drink, in what amounts, how often?
- What is your opinion about your parents' drinking?

5 Comparison with Poland as far as parents' drinking is concerned

- Did your parents' preferences about alcohol change in Australia?

- If yes, what did you notice?

6 Own drinking

- Social situations, where, how often, with whom?
- What do you drink with ...?
- How often do you drink with...?
- Cover different drinking situations, pub, party, nightclub etc.
- What is it about drinking that you like, dislike?

7 Factors influencing drinking patterns

Do you see yourself drinking more like your parents or friends?

8 Attitudes to drinking and intoxication

What do you think about intoxication/ being drunk? Tell me more about it.

What do others think?