

# OUT OF THE SHADOWS: EXPLORING THE LIVES OF THE BIRMINGHAM POLISH

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A thesis submitted to the  
University of Birmingham  
For the degree of  
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

The Institute of Applied Social Studies  
College of Social Sciences  
University of Birmingham  
May 2013

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

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## **Dedication**

This completed thesis is dedicated to my son Alex, my siblings Caroline, Susan, Tony, Julia, Nina, Jennie and Lisa. With a special dedication to my partner Ashley who has supported me through this experience.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the continued support and guidance given to me by my research supervisors Dr. Surinder Guru and Dr. Malcolm Dick. I would also like to thank the people I worked alongside in the Centre of Excellence in Interdisciplinary Mental Health for their ongoing support and humour.

I would especially like to acknowledge and thank all the Polish people and the people of Polish background who have allowed me to listen to their stories and who have shared information with me; without them this study would not have been possible.

With special acknowledgment to three of my friends who have continued to believe in me when I often couldn't; Caroline, Rachel and Sandy, let's hope that there are good times ahead.

## **Abstract**

Using an oral history methodology this thesis explores the lives of the Birmingham Polish people. The first wave Polish migrants who arrived in Birmingham post 1939 were distinctly affected by the consequence of the Second World War. The importance of Polish history was pertinent for many of the respondents of this study and the thesis identifies the relevance of loss and trauma, resulting from this history to all four waves of Polish migrants in Birmingham.

These experiences of loss, trauma of war and ethnic conflict, although unique to the Polish and other migrants fleeing both Stalin and Nazism, resonate with those of new migrant communities of refugees and asylum seekers today, who also face issues of loss, trauma and abuse and this affects the way that they live their lives in the private and public sphere.

The four waves of Polish migrants are not homogeneous and yet are linked by the Catholic faith which has served to both include and exclude members of the Polish communities. The four waves independently ascribe negative values to behaviours that measure them against the 'other'.

Having been invisible in the host society for over sixty years, the arrival of the post 2004 Polish migrants has increased the confidence of the Polish as a community. They are more knowledgeable and informed than previously; particularly about forming voluntary organisations, accessing funds and linking to outside organisations. In Birmingham, Black and Asian voluntary groups and the statutory sectors assisted the Polish club to gain access to funds for housing, employment and crime concerns, and so there are encouraging signs for both the Polish and other migrant communities, as well as for social cohesion and mutual learning and support for shared problems and opportunities, faced by migrant communities.

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# **Out of the Shadows: An Exploration of the Polish in Birmingham.**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction gives the focus of the thesis and the researcher's personal and professional reasons for the choice of topic and the chosen methodology. To illustrate the focus of the research an overview of one person's story is related and the chapter introduces the context of the research and research questions.

The focus of this thesis is the Polish people who have migrated to Birmingham England since 1939. My personal and professional interest in people and how they exist in this world is a constant in my life, this particular journey began with a conversation with my father, a Birmingham Pole. At the age of seventy four Boleslaw Smojkis had told his eight children very little about his life before his arrival in England in December 1946, he had not passed on his language or the traditions he had been brought up with and we knew little of the Polish culture. What we did know was that he was different from our English friends fathers, that sometimes we had to translate what he was saying despite the fact that he was speaking English and that we sometimes ate Polish food which was very different from English food and that this was something to be explained to teachers and friends. In 1971 he took six of his children and my mother to Poland to visit his Polish family, that was the first and last time we met our Polish grandparents.

My father, Boleslaw Smojkis, like many working class men of his generation was not a great talker, unless he was in the company of his Eastern European male friends,



then they all spoke in Polish, a language his family could not understand and so we were to a large extent excluded from his pre 1945 world. In recent years he began to talk about some of his early life experience, it was as if his memories were starting to overwhelm him and spill out in relatively unrelated conversations. In January 2001 I listened to and recorded his early life story and his account of his journey from Poland to Birmingham for my sisters, my brother, my father's grandchildren, including my own son, and his great grandchildren; this appeared to be the right time for him to tell his story. I was surprised at his openness and the accounts of the experiences he had gone through, they appeared to be as alive to him in the present as they had been in the past. I feel sure that if I had tried to record this information twenty years earlier he would not have agreed probably adding "what do you want to know that for?", it was his way.

Boleslaw Smojkis's story was one of poverty, war, enforced labour, loss and displacement. In 1941 at the age of 14 he had been transported to France from Wilno in Poland by the Germans. Here he was forced to work in a iron ore mine, he was given very little food or warmth and he tried to commit suicide twice by running towards the electric fence; he observed the death of many people. When he arrived in England in 1946 he was nineteen years old. His journey had started in 1939 when his country was invaded by the Germans and the Russians and eventually in 1945 at the end of the Second World War, Poland was under Soviet domination and remained so until 1989. Wilno where he was born was no longer Poland it was now Vilnius, but under the Soviets, and the home he had before the war was not there to return to. He did not know until later that his father was forcibly relocated to Bydgosz in the west of Poland his mother was sent to Siberia by the Soviets and his

only brother had died of pneumonia at the age of 14, thus his pre 1939 family was shattered irrevocably.

Having heard my father's story I became interested in the untold stories of other Birmingham Polish people, I thought that because they were clearly ageing rapidly if these stories were not captured they would be lost, I was curious about the social exclusion from the host society that was evident in the Birmingham Polish club and why it appeared to be so important for them to maintain their Polishness. The Polish migrants were the first large group to arrive in Birmingham post Second World War in the following years smaller groups of Polish people affected by Communism, Solidarity and Marshall Law and later larger numbers arrived as a consequence of the entry of Poland into the European Union (EU) in 2004.

I grew up in a working class family in Birmingham during the 1950s and 60s and having an English mother and a Polish father, we children were always told by our parents that we were half Polish and half English, so that is what we said to people when we were asked. It is not possible to represent this on official documentation, so like many people in a similar position I am British; this does not really represent who I am or how I see myself as a person but that does not cause me any distress, it's just the way it is. We were not classed as mixed race or considered to be from an ethnic minority, and so in many ways our Polish cultural heritage was ignored, the only constant has been the inability of people to say my family name correctly which often causes confusion and laughter and usually ends with me asking people to "just call me Maureen", because it's easier for them. My father was renamed Barry by his

English work colleagues as the shortened version of his Polish name Boleslaw is Bolek.

This research is influenced by my personal, professional and academic life; I am a nurse, a counsellor and an academic. I have chosen to spend the majority of my adult life being paid to listen to people in distress, to work collaboratively with them to discover an understanding of that distress and if possible to assist them to move forward. Academically I work with professionals in health and social care.

There has been a Polish presence in the United Kingdom for over two hundred years, prior to 1918 the majority of these people would have come from a partitioned Poland, they were mainly Polish Jews fleeing the persecution of the Russian Tsar and the Jewish Pale; the Polish Catholics and the Polish Jews were at that time a mixture of Intellectuals, trades and crafts people and peasants (Davies 1972). The focus of this work will be the years following 1939, when the largest numbers of Polish people arrived en masse in the UK. Polish migration has remained a constant issue following the events of 1939-1945 for different reasons, including the communist regime and lack of Polish political independence, the rise of the Solidarity movement (Ascherson 1987) and culminating in the massive upsurge post 2004 with Poland's entry into the European Union.

How an individual forms an opinion of whom they believe they are within British society is influenced by many things, in this transition period from the twentieth to twenty first century one of the most significant influences is the advances in technology and the media. People are no longer bound by local or immediate

influence, if they do not like who they are, they can reconstruct themselves virtually or surgically. They can create a personality based on the influence of others or if they want to be a complete virtual person they can create themselves from scratch to become a new persona. With the onslaught of reality television many people have the ambition to be a 'celebrity', be known and identified by people who they have no connection with. The individual is positioned within the political, social and psychologically influenced world and with world travel becoming increasingly accessible the British population has become radically more influenced by what they see on television, on holiday and also by the migrants from other countries who settle into the host society. By the year 2026 for the first time in history white British people will be a minority in more than one large city (Barrow Cadbury Trust BCT 2006) influencing how individuals view themselves and where they position themselves in society.

Boleslaw Smojkis was one of over 3,000 Poles who were displaced and living in Birmingham, England as a consequence of the outcome of the Second World War. They were not a homogenous group of people and they lived, worked and socialised in different ways. The intention of this thesis is to explore what influenced the Birmingham Polish people; the study focused on the lived experience using oral history interviews as a method to collect data. The transcribed interviews were thematically analysed and interpretations were supported by observation, literature and archive material.

## **Research questions**

1. What social, political and personal reasons have influenced Polish migration to Birmingham England?
2. What individual and collective experiences in Poland have shaped the lives of the Polish in Birmingham?
3. What individual and collective experiences in England have shaped the lives of the Birmingham Polish?

When the individual or group that is being studied are migrants it is pertinent to examine the effect of the host society on how they live their lives and the effect of the migrants on the host society. The question of whether people begin to act in the way that society expects them to as in the stereotyping of national identities has been asked by Cameron (1999). Within British society negative stereotyping has been evident with the Irish, the black and South Asian communities (Hickman & Walter 1997; Foner 1977, 1998; Ballard and Ballard 1977). Polish people were viewed negatively in the initial years of their arrival post Second World War (Patterson 1977); however the way that they have been viewed over the decades has fluctuated between admiration, indifference and negativity. The influx of Polish migrant's post 2004 has generated mixed views of Polish in Britain which has been influenced by the media; recently this was in connection, with the coverage of the football Euro 2012. There is evidence of the post accession Polish migrants receiving unequal treatment in Birmingham and in the wider public arena (Staniewicz 2007, Garapich 2008). These changing representations, therefore, have impacted on how the existing and new Polish migrants view themselves in the host society.

Immigrant groups are not homogeneous, even when originating from the same country they may share commonalities but also have differences of regional origin, dialect, class, politics and religion. When negotiating the ethnic boundaries within the host society the symbolic umbrella of the ethnic culture has to be flexible enough to service several, often contradictory, purposes, to provide the basis for solidarity, to mobilize the group to defend cultural values and to advance claims to power, status and resources (Neils Cozen, Gerber, Morowska, Pozetta, Veroli 1992)

Within the Polish community in Britain subgroups have developed dependent on which part of Poland they came from, the reason for migration, class, education, and employment, the armed forces and political groups. However the majority religion of this group is Catholic and this has become a unifier in the celebration of religious traditions and festivals.

In the post Second World War Polish community in Britain many people did not become naturalized Citizens because they maintained they would return to Poland once it became free (Zubrzycki 1988, Sword 1996), this decision contributed to decisions not to mix with or held them apart from the host community. The post Second World War Polish migrants in Birmingham settled in disparate locations and therefore, whilst being clearly more visible in certain areas where they have set up shops and small businesses are also spread across the city.

In 2013 the political view in Britain emphasises the necessity to integrate new migrants into the host society (Home Office 2005, 2009) developing cohesive communities by bringing together old and new communities and different ethnic

groups (Cantle 2005). However, although migration has been a constant in Britain the numbers have increased exponentially in the past eighty years. Vertovec (2007) suggests that Britain can now be characterised by its 'super-diversity' underlying a level of migrant complexity surpassing anything previously experienced, characterised by large well organised African-Caribbean and South Asian Communities of citizens originally from Commonwealth countries or formally Colonial territories. Previously, between 1955-60, the home office estimated that a net influx of 160,000 West Indians, 33,000 Indian and 17,000 Pakistanis migrants came to Britain a total 210,000 (Kershaw & Pearsall 2000), these were large groups of highly visible people in the present day however, smaller numbers of migrants are now arriving from a larger number of locations.

The reason for migration is, therefore, significant to the migrants experience in the host society. The post Second World War large group of white central and eastern European people who were not in Britain through choice; they were refugees and exiles identified politically as displaced people, retrospectively, there was government legislation in place around accommodation, employment, education and assimilation. By 2004 when the large influx of new Eastern European migrants began to arrive in the UK this post Second World War migrant group was largely invisible, but if you look carefully in most major cities they can be found. Some have assimilated, others are living between two cultures (Watson 1977) some have been marginalised others have spent the entirety of their stay on British soil in psychiatric care (Winslow 2001).

In June 1947 having been demobbed from the army, Boleslaw's first place of residence was, Blackshaw Moor Polish Resettlement Camp, in Leek Staffordshire this was a converted army barracks; where he lived for three months. After this Boleslaw was offered work with fellow Poles in Birmingham and from the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 1947 this was where he lived and worked until his death in June 2003. From the time he left the British Army in 1947 because he was Polish my father had to produce his Certificate of Registration document (Appendix 1) at a police station every time he changed job or accommodation; he did this from 1947 until 1962 when the requirements changed, by that time he had been married to my Birmingham born mother for eleven years. I do not know how it made him feel, or what impact it had on his life but I do know that he had to send it with his application to become a British National in 1999. This was fifty three years after he arrived in Britain as a Private in the Polish army under British command and as a consequence of being displaced from his home following the outcomes of the Second World War.

The timing of migration, the stage of development in the country of origin and in the country of destination, what is happening politically and economically are all significant in how the migrant is included or excluded in the host society (Anthias 2002). The first generation of Polish people arrived as a consequence of the Second World War, they were displaced people, they did not choose to migrate and the UK, the host country, were ill prepared for their arrival. Despite this, many policies and procedures were put into place to help them adjust to life in a new country. The Polish Government in Exile had a view that the Polish people were in Britain on a temporary basis that they would return to Poland, because of this they set up their



own organisations and they told the Polish people to avoid assimilation into British society.

Many years ago while I was studying for a qualification in Counselling I read Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl 1949), the focus was his story of the time he spent in concentration camps during the Second World War; it was a book that had a profound effect on me. I never associated my father's story with Frankl's, he was not classed as a survivor of the holocaust and yet he was a survivor of Hitler's and Stalin's invasion of Poland. My father's story is also filled with loss of liberty, deportation and forced labour that affected him and the way he viewed himself. He and the other first generation Poles were survivors of an attempt by Stalin and Hitler to destroy Poland and the Polish people, the effect of what they did has had a profound effect on the way they viewed themselves and the way that following generations of Poles in Poland and Birmingham have lived their lives.

The researcher is not detached; they have their own understanding, their own convictions and their own conceptual orientation, it also has to be recognised that they live within a cultural group at a specific time (Miles and Huberman 1994). This thesis was not originally intended to be a personal journey however, it became one. I am the researcher and my father was Polish and lived in Birmingham this connection needs to be acknowledged from the outset and the reflexive process commented on with the research process. I discovered my father's history and this has impacted on how I view myself in the world and how I view other people, most importantly it has enabled me to pass on his story and the stories of other Birmingham Polish people not only to his family but to a wider audience.

Using oral history methodology this thesis explores the lives of the Birmingham Polish. The thesis has seven chapters including the introduction, chapter two is a review of the literature, chapter three the methodology. In chapter four the experience of loss and the impact of history on Poland and the Polish people is explored including the onset of the Second World War, the reconfiguration of Polish borders and the reasons for the forced migration. Journeys made from home to Birmingham are told in the persons own words and we see the beginning of the Birmingham Polish community. Chapter five continues with the story of the Birmingham Polish people and how they established organisations over the next forty years. In chapter six Poland enters the EU and there is a huge influx of new migrant Poles, their story and journey are quite different to the first arrivals in Birmingham, however they share commonalities with the first arrivals. Chapter seven draws out the conclusions of the thesis, highlighting the most salient features of the research and considers the implications for current debates.

In conjunction with the Midlands Polish Community Association (MPCA) and supported by a successful Heritage Lottery bid I have been involved in an oral history project 'Collected Memories of Birmingham's Poles' (MPCA 2011). There is now an archive of the first generation Birmingham Polish people in the Central Library in Birmingham. The archive includes recordings and transcripts of the first generation Birmingham Polish people which have been summarised in a booklet. A mobile exhibition of the project, 'In War & Peace' Collected Memories of Birmingham's Poles, has been, located at the Central Library and Castle Vale in Birmingham, the Main Library University of Birmingham and finally at Newman

University College where it will be permanently located. The Birmingham Polish are coming out of the shadows and if the process continues instead of becoming increasingly assimilated (Patterson 1977, Sword 1996) they will become increasingly visible to the wider community.

## **Out of the Shadows: An Exploration of the Polish in Birmingham.**

### **CHAPTER 2**

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a long history of migration to and from England with many changes to the policies that govern the process and the rights of immigrants. At present the emphasis is on integration for people migrating to England (DCLG 2012), this emphasis on integration echoes the past. The chapter outlines the debates on the Polish migration in the US and UK and provides an account of the political terrain against which immigration generally and Polish immigration in particular is currently discussed, giving an historical context for the 'push' (and 'pull') factors of Polish migration to the UK together with the emotional impact incurred by them and how this has shaped their lives.

The literature review begins with the subject of migration, moves on to Polish history and migration, then looks at the existing research that has been carried out on Polish people living in the USA and in Britain and ends with a review of the literature on loss.

#### **Migration**

The present British coalition government states that they want to build a society where nobody is held back because of who they are or where they come from (HMO 2010). The integration policy statement is about creating the conditions for everyone to play a full part in national and social life and that this is achieved when neighbourhoods, families and individuals come together on issues which matter to

them (DCLG 2012). The five key factors, common ground, responsibility, participation, social mobility and tackling extremism, are identified as being necessary to integration and the government identifies the long history of migration and tolerance as two advantages that England has in achieving their aims (DCLG 2012).

Applications for Asylum once constituted the majority of net migration to the UK but by 2009 they were less than 5% (Migration Observatory of Oxford 2011). Since May 2004 the migration debate has increasingly been around the large influx of European migrants from the 8 accession countries, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia plus Cyprus and Malta and since 2007 have included the A2 countries Bulgaria and Rumania. The costs of resources for accommodation, education and the effect on employment of the indigenous population fuels the European debate which is marred by stereotypes, the supposition that Europe is full and that Asylum seekers can be separated from economic migrants (Emmer 2004). The present leader of the Labour opposition, Ed Miliband, has stated that it was wrong to allow unchecked immigration from the new European Union in 2004 and the then Labour government underestimated the effect this immigration would have on housing, schools and community cohesion. He went on to state that it is not right for recruitment agencies to boast that all their potential employees for the construction and agricultural industries are Polish or to denigrate the talents of those who are living locally and he went further, to promise new immigration measures to protect British workers (Independent June 2012).

British attitudes to migrants were tested in seven different regions (Ford 2011) and it was found that there was a hierarchy of preference between groups with less opposition to white and culturally more proximate groups than towards non-white and culturally more distinct groups. The findings varied depending on the age, education and ethnic diversity of the respondents with younger Britons being, on average, less authoritarian and ethnocentric. According to this study the younger age group were less likely to oppose immigration and it was found that they regard different migrant groups more equally (Ford 2011).

The reasons for migration are historically and culturally diverse with commonalities and differences across time and among peoples. For some a nomadic life is part of their cultural being with the home seen not as a fixed building, location or space but with individuals, families or groups moving from location to location carrying or travelling in their home. For these people the process of movement is part of their cultural identity, for example the nomad's gypsies, and Irish travellers.

Migration in modern times is a major symptom of basic social change. In the West industrialisation resulted in the vast movement of populations from rural to urban areas (Jansen 1970). The necessity to move from rural to industrial areas has decreased with the improvement of roads and public transport; there is an increase in commuting from out of town to work in the city. In the United States the reasons for and effects of migration have been extensively studied and include the seminal works of Thomas and Znaniecki (1996), Park and Burgess (1921, 1969) and Park (1928), the work of the Chicago School remains relevant in the present. British

research and academic writing on migration are more prolific post Second World War.

Relocating on a temporary or permanent basis for work is a worldwide phenomenon, with long established patterns in Africa, Asia and Europe. Lucassen (2005) explored the integration of Old and New migrants in Western Europe since 1850 and the established processes in Western Europe including the Irish travelling to Britain and the Poles travelling to Germany as seasonal workers. These people are described as temporary migrants leaving their home and travelling for specific allocations of time, mostly for agricultural work, then returning at the end of the season. In some cases temporary migration became permanent but this may not have been the original intention. It was once established that the majority age group and gender of these migrants would be young adult males between the ages of 20-34 (Jansen 1970) although the age range has remained constant women have become increasingly more visible as independent migrants. Irish and Scottish women have historically travelled for domestic labour, light industry and to train and work as nurses (Ryan 2001, Barber 2005) and since 2004 Polish women have formed an increasing number of the temporary and permanent migrants who travel to the West to work as domestic workers and carers (Coyle 2007, White 2011).

The UK began the post Second World War years with a non-white population of about 30,000 and at the end of the twentieth, century together with France and Germany it has among the largest ethnic populations in Europe (Hanson 2000, Castle and Davidson 2000) argue that discrimination based on class, gender, ethnicity, religion and other criteria has always meant that some people could not be

full citizens. They suggest that as the nation state model is being eroded basing citizenship on singular individual membership in a nation state is no longer valid (Castle and Davidson 2000).

The Push and Pull theory of migration (Castles and Kosack 1973) continue to be referred to when exploring migration patterns. A strong push stimulus indicates less option for the migrant in their country or origin and the strong pull indicating the individual has a choice of going or staying but there may be more options for them in the country they are choosing to migrate to. People either move through necessity or obligations which are generally political or religious or secondly that people move because of need related to economics (George 1959).

Isaac (1954) subdivided immigration into 'free' in which he included seasonal, nomadic, temporary and permanent and 'forced' which includes refugee, slave, and population transfer. Peterson (1970) describes the two polar factors as impelled, when the migrant retains some power to decide whether or not to leave and secondly forced migration when they do not have this power.

The political, socioeconomic and personal reasons for migration will affect how the person or group adapts to their new environment, the strategies or phases they go through are not conscious decisions. Multidisciplinary perspectives of these issues have been explored over many years and while the authors demonstrate different views on the process there are commonalities. The process of conflict, accommodation and assimilation of the migrant's adjustment into a new society Park and Burgess (1921, 1969) underpinned early research into migrant communities and



influenced the contemporary debate. These stages are not necessarily expected to be passed through in a linear process nor are they all expected to be achieved. During the conflict phase the individual or group may feel alienated from the host society with little or no social organisation in which a sense of belonging can take place, this may take place on an individual basis if a person arrives alone to a new place with no contacts from an established migrant group or if the migrant group is the first to arrive from their place of origin. In the accommodation phase the migrant has access to an established group or community, this phase does not include integration into the host society but does imply the maintenance of equilibrium in the relations between the immigrant group and host community. The third phase, identified as assimilation, describes the process by which an individual or group adopts the culture of the host community to become, depending on the host country, 'Americanised, Anglicised or Germanised' a process of interpenetration and fusion in which a person and group acquire the memories, sentiments and attitudes of other persons or groups and by sharing their history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life (Park and Burgess 1921, 1969 p735). Zubrzycki (1956) describes conflict, accommodation and assimilation as dynamic tendencies in the process of adjustment by immigrants to the conditions of life in the receiving community (Zubrzycki 1956) Berry (1997) describes the stages in the Acculturation process as Assimilation, Separation, Integration and Marginalisation.

- Assimilation: individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures
- Separation: individuals place a value on holding on to their own original culture and avoid interaction with others

- Integration: some degree of cultural integrity is maintained, while seeking to participate as an integral part of the local network.
- Marginalisation: little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in having relations with others (exclusion/discrimination)

The adaptive behaviours in acculturation are explored in cross cultural psychology looking at what happens when people who have developed in one cultural context attempt to re-establish their lives in another cultural context. The host society, the established culture, is described as dominant and the migrants or new groups, as non-dominant (Berry 1997).

The psychological consequences of acculturation depend on the social and personal variable in the society of origin, the society of settlement and the phenomena that exist prior to and during the course of acculturation (Berry 1997)

- If culture is such a powerful shaper of behaviour, do individuals continue to act in the new setting as they did in the previous one?
- Do they change their behaviour to be more appropriate in the new setting?
- Is there some complex pattern of continuity and change in how people go about their lives in the new society?

(Berry 1997 p6)

Bhatia and Ram suggest that acculturation is “The formation of immigrant identity within a historical context, bound up in a set of political positions based on negotiation, dislocation and conflict” (Bhatia and Ram, 2009 p143).

Prior to the Second World War migration to Britain was limited; entry as a permanent resident was subject to severe restrictions under the Aliens Act of 1920, labour permits were only granted to Aliens in exceptional circumstances despite the fall in unemployment figures. Many of the refugees who arrived in Britain from Nazi Germany, during the years 1937-1939, were not granted labour permits, or allowed to take any paid or unpaid work and as such were regarded as temporary visitors rather than immigrants (Isaac 1954).

By 1939 there were 18,000 Italian born immigrants in Britain (Lucio Spaza 2003); most were involved in the catering and food services as waiters, cooks, cafe and restaurant owners and hotel managers. However when Italy entered the Second World War on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1940 all Italians in Britain were classed as enemy aliens; windows of restaurants and shops were smashed and nearly 5,000 people, mostly males, were interned on the Isle of Man with other groups considered to be a threat to national security.

There are no official figures for black and Asian migrants living in the UK prior to 1939; it is known that the British Empire and Commonwealth significantly affected the numbers of emigrants and immigrants to and from the UK. These numbers included people from India because of the English and the East Indian Railway Company and small numbers of black people living in Britain as a consequence of

slavery. These communities were small and identified mainly in ports such as Liverpool, Cardiff and also in Manchester and London; (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000). The Second World War has changed the make up the British population beginning with Jewish refugees from Nazism. The British Government began to face increasing public pressure to help the Jews escape from the Nazi's systematic mass murder operations from the late 1940's onwards (London 2003). However their policy making energies were invested in finding ways to avoid ways of assisting them because they did not know what to do with them; since 1933 British policy was to admit only such refugees as could be conveniently disposed of (London 2003 p75). At the end of the war there were 40,000 Jewish refugees in Britain who had not been allowed to settle; they were deliberately excluded from the large scale post war labour recruitment schemes for Displaced Persons (DP) (London 2003).

During the years 1940-1951 Britain experienced an inward movement of about one million people as a consequence of the Second World War. These were white Europeans linked to Nazi Germany's tyranny over large parts of Europe and the Allied victory in the Second World War (Steinert and Weber-Newth 2003). These migrants included members of the Polish army; Displaced Persons, former Prisoners of War from Italy, the Ukraine and Germany, and were recruited under schemes such as the Balt Cygnet and Westward Ho programmes; this group received unlimited permission of residence whereas the North Sea Scheme which recruited women for the health system and hardship households were initially only granted a two year stay (Steinert and Weber-Newth 2003).

At the end of the Second World War the gap between supply and demand affected labour shortages in the vital industries of mining, steel, iron and textiles as well as the agricultural sector and as a consequence the determining factor of the British post war immigration policies was the shortage of labour. The European Volunteer Worker scheme was started in order to address the shortage; these people were wanted for work and this affected the selection criterion which was made on the basis of professional qualification, age, state of health and family status and by December 1950, 76,987 Displaced Persons had been recruited from fourteen national groups, the majority were men with 26% (19,883) being women (Kay 2003).

There were approximately 60,000 German nationals in Britain during the immediate post war years, these people had been Prisoners of War, women recruited under the North Sea Scheme to work in public health systems, German female work permit holders and war brides who had married British soldiers or members of the control commission for Germany, (Steinert and Weber- Newth 2003). Although most of the people surveyed from this group expressed the feeling that they did not belong to British society, Stewart and Weber Newth suggest that they have assimilated well into British society whilst remaining German nationals, that they wanted to be accepted and were prepared to adapt and that they saw their migration as an inevitable result of war (Steinert and Weber Newth 2003).

There have been many changes in the notion of diversity in Britain over the last thirty years. Vertovec (1997) suggests that Britain can now be characterised by 'super-diversity' to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced (Vertovec 2007). Super-diversity is a significant

development in the analysis of immigration and refers to the diverse range and mode of immigration taking place in the context of globalisation and war (Vertovec 2007).

Vertovec suggests that many areas of social science and policy frameworks and public understanding have not caught up with recently emergent demographic and social patterns, conventionally characterised by large, well-organised African-Caribbean and South Asian communities of citizens originally from the commonwealth countries or formally colonial territories; there are now smaller numbers of people arriving from a larger number of countries (Vertovec 2007).

### **Birmingham and Migration**

Irish and Jewish migrants are recorded in Birmingham from the 1700s, a 'black bachelor' was buried at St Martin's in the city centre in 1774, the death of Jacoba Swellengrebal, is recorded in Handsworth in 1796 who was the wife of John Fothergill, her father was Dutch and mother Indian (Green and Searle 2008). However the majority of the population was white English.

In the Second World War Birmingham was the second most heavily bombed city in the country and along with the whole of Merseyside it lost more of its citizens to enemy action than any other place outside London (Chinn 1999). The Blitz killed over 2,000 Birmingham people and seriously injured over three thousand; over twelve thousand houses, three hundred factories, thirty four churches and two hundred other buildings were destroyed; thousands of properties were damaged (Chinn, 1999).

The population in Britain began to rise steadily after 1945; the national average of the rise in population for the years 1951-1961 was 5.1% but in the Midlands this rose to 7.2% (Moindrot 1970) this was in part due to an influx of people from other regions of the British Isles, Scotland, Wales and Ireland but also from citizens or dependents from the commonwealth. At this time Birmingham had a vast diversity of industry and was known as a city where hard work led to success.

By 1955 the unemployment rate in Birmingham was 0.4%, the number of unfulfilled jobs was constantly higher than the number of unemployed and as a consequence, despite the acute housing shortage and the slum clearance, the demand for immigrations continued (Moindrot 1970). During the post Second World War years a large number of companies in Birmingham were offering jobs to men and women, to suit all tastes, with good chances of re-employment should a crisis hit a particular section of the economy (Moindrot 1970). Birmingham was renowned for its diversification of industries from a two woman workshop in the Jewellery Quarter to the Austin car factory in Longbridge that employed 20,000 workers (Wise 1949).

Large numbers of migrants, who entered the UK as Displaced Persons or having been actively recruited to fill the growing gaps in the workforce, came to Birmingham to find work in the local industries. It was following on from this group and in part as a consequence of the removal of the British from India and the partition of India into India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1947 that there began an influx of people who had lived under British rule. The British Nationality Law 1948 enabled a massive increase of immigration to the UK from countries formally under British rule, the British Empire or British Colonies. Large numbers of Irish and Caribbean people

were actively recruited to fill vacant jobs in agriculture, mining, industry, transport and health ([www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories](http://www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories)).

This growth in migrant populations from the Commonwealth after 1945 was as a direct result of government policy connected to recruiting workers from the British Commonwealth to fill vacancies in British industry. For the years 1955-60 the Home Office estimated a net influx of 160,000 West Indian migrants 33,000 from India and 17,000 from Pakistan (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000).

The effects of the large increases in population continue to be monitored; in 2006 the Barrow Cadbury Trust (BCT) drew together the population predictions that have been made for individual British cities and produced the report Cities in Transition, focusing specifically on Britain's increasing plurality. The report states that in the 1930's the proportion of people living in Britain born in foreign countries, were primarily from Ireland or the Indian Empire, and was around 2.5%, by 2006 this number had risen to over 10% with no one dominant ethnic group. The research highlighted the increased diversity of Britain, and predicts that Leicester will become the first 'plural' city with no one ethnic group comprising a majority of the city's overall population within the next decade.

The 2026 projected population plurality growth of Birmingham is driven by increases in the size of the city's longstanding ethnic minority communities, with the biggest growth coming from those of Pakistani descent which is estimated to grow from 7.1% to 21% of the total population (BCT 2006).



In May 2008 the BCT wrote a further report on integration and diversity in Birmingham which was collated from interviews and focus groups; this report showed a balanced view of immigration and diversity whilst acknowledging the problems associated with changing demographics (BCT 2008). The BCT suggest that in cities like Birmingham, diverse communities have far more in common with each other than the amount of differences that drive them apart. The report states that 60% of people living in Birmingham across all classes and communities (including white) believe their city's different ethnic communities have a lot or fair amount to do with each other. However a minority among white and working class groups (10%) state that they do not have friends from other backgrounds, with 19% stating that they never socialise with people from a different background to their own (BCT 2008). One of the difficulties with accurately analysing demographic statistics is the categorisation tool; regardless of place of birth, white people are classified as White British or White Other with six categorisations for non white participants, this does not allow a true picture of the diversity of the white group, the BCT 2006 report estimates that the white population of Birmingham will be 47% in the year 2026.

Karner and Parker (2011) looked at the lived realities of ethnic pluralism, social marginalisation and activism in one particular area in Birmingham, Alum Rock. Alum Rock is in the east of Birmingham with a majority of the population being South Asian, mainly of Pakistani and Bengali descent, the minority of the population are longstanding white English, Irish and Afro Caribbean working class with and in more recent times, the arrival of refugees from Somalia; in comparison to other part of Birmingham there is far less settlement of new EU migrants (Karner and Parker 2011).

Karner and Parker (2011) suggest that the social realities in Alum Rock are defined by three ambivalences; an ambivalence between undeniable local conflicts and simultaneously the everyday 'conviviality' of boundary-crossings and inter ethnic solidarities; the second ambivalence is that the local economy is shown to enable both cohesion and ethnic exclusion and the third is that local politics and religious practice also display contradictory tendencies towards boundary maintenance and the new inclusive alliances. In this qualitative study where the researchers interviewed local residents and entrepreneurs over a three year period the representation of Alum Rock by external media as lacking 'community cohesion and fostering 'parallel lives' was challenged; it showed that people were working together to achieve common aims through the local residents group which was headed by the Catholic priest (Karner and Parker, 2008, 2011, Parker and Karner 2011).

Since 2004 there continues to be large groups of new migrants in Birmingham, and there is evidence to suggest that ethnic minorities in Birmingham are disadvantaged in education, the labour market and in relation to health and housing, despite the efforts of the local authority to ensure all citizens are provided with equal opportunities (Abbas and Anwar 2005) however, Polish migrants in Birmingham have not been included in the research profile of the city.

### **Research on the Polish abroad**

Research on Polish migrants has been carried out across the world however for the purpose of this study the research literature from the United States of America (USA), as one of the largest receivers of Polish migrants, and Britain has been reviewed, beginning with the USA and moving on to Britain.

## **The Polish in America**

The Polish Americans are a well established migrant group, the politics of migration and ethnicity in the USA are significantly different to that of Britain, however, there are commonalities in some of the experiences and useful comparisons can be made in the observation of the Birmingham Polish community for example the reaction of the established Polish community to Polish newcomers when the different generations did not necessarily see themselves as an homogeneous migrant group (Erdmans 1989).

Polish people have been evident in the USA for at least two centuries and this large Polish migrant population is a focus on a number of interesting studies. One of the earliest social history studies carried out at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the USA was published in five volumes between 1918 and 1920 and is a study of Poles, mostly single males, who originated from what was the East of Poland but then was known as Russia or the Congress of Poland. Thomas and Znaniecki's study explored the significance of family, neighbourhood and other community ties and offered evidence to later social historians on the place of immigrants in shaping the American industrial working class. Coming primarily from rural areas and agricultural background many of the Polish migrants pooled their resources and shared letters with each other and these were explored in the research to give an insight into the lives of the Polish migrants (Thomas and Znaniecki' 1996).

Using archive material and transcript interviews Versteegh (2000) explored the importance of family and ethnic networks in the settlement and assimilation of Polish

migrants to Pennsylvania between 1890 and 1940. As with the Chicago Poles (Erdmans 1989) the first generation had predominantly arrived from the rural regions of partitioned Poland. Originally the Polish migrants were heterogeneous and focused on their region of origin as a collective sense of identity and belonging, however as their time in America prolonged they focused more specifically on their nation and the host society viewed them as a homogeneous group. As with other migrants who had left partitioned Poland regardless of region the shared goal was to continue to fight for a Free Poland, however when Poland became a republic in 1918 there were very few who returned (Versteegh 2000).

Wrobel (1975) explored the lives of an established working class Polish community in Detroit in the 1970's, he found that despite being third and fourth generation Polish the community led a way of life that was entrenched in Polish culture and traditions (Wrobel 1975). Being Polish American influenced behaviour, attitudes and choices and had implications for gender, family and community relations as well as on church practices (Wrobel 1975). Wrobel's study is of interest because it explored the lives of a white working class migrant community that had been established for some time and yet was little understood by the wider community. The study produced a negative backlash from the older established Polish community outside of Detroit as they felt that Wrobel had portrayed a limited view of Polish life in the USA.

In the Chicago Polonia of the 1980s Erdmans (1989) also explored the lives of established ethnic Polish Americans. These were third, fourth and fifth generation and the newer aspects of the Polish community, arrivals from communist Poland in

the wake of the Solidarity movement. The study took place during the backdrop of some significant changes that were taking place in communist Poland, specifically the emergence of Solidarity, and eventually the downfall of the communist regime. The work explores the politics and organisations of the different groups and how they communicate with each other; Erdmans found that Polish ethnicity influenced the everyday lives, social behaviours, sense of self and served as a basis for solidarity even in the third generation Poles (Erdmans 1989). Erdmans argued that after the Second World War two events interrupted the fading and assimilation process of the Polish community in Chicago. The first set of events was the renewed interest in Poland when the Polish Pope, John Paul II was elected and the formation of Solidarity, Martial Law and the collapse of Communism. The second event she identified was the influx of new Polish migrants to the USA, Chicago, who were more intimately connected to the homeland than the established ethnic Polish Americans. Erdmans study is of interest to this research because she looked at relationships between an established Polish community and new Polish migrants; she stated that immigrant identity is non voluntary unlike that of the third generation Polish American who can choose to emphasise their Polishness on holidays or at weddings – the immigrants identity is visible because the Polish accent is involuntary (Erdmans 1989). Both Wrobel and Erdmans lived among the communities they were studying and got involved with their day to day lives using ethnographic research methods. Aroian (1990) used a grounded theory method and took a purposive sample of 25 Polish immigrants, stratifying them according to three historically distinct time frames; they all resided in Seattle US and had been there for periods ranging from 4 months to 39 years. The three subsamples and the associated time frames of arrival were post Second World War era, arrival mid to late 70s and subsample three being

those who arrived during the period 1980-88. The intention was to explore the conditions under which migrants experienced psychological distress and the sources for their well-being. A later paper by Aroian (1992) focused on the sources of social support and conflict for these Polish immigrants, the significance of social relationships to their experience of resettlement. As with other migrant groups it was found that the co-ethnics, as described by Aroian, were indeed a major source of support during the early period following arrival (Aroian 1992). Despite being in different cities these groups of Polish migrants shared common experiences with the host society and were inclined to spend time with people of Polish background in the private sphere.

### **The Polish in Britain**

There are an increasing number of research studies looking at the Polish in Britain, using different research methods; the following is a brief chronological overview of some of the academic research that has been conducted on the first generation of Polish migrants who arrived following the Second World War. Much of this research has been conducted by researchers who can speak the Polish language either because they are Polish, are children of Polish parents or have married a Polish spouse. Language is a significant issue when researching migrant groups who do not have English as their first language or when the researchers do not speak the language of the interviewees, this will be explored within this thesis. The Post Second World War migrants were unique as exiles from a country that was under communist rule and therefore their choice to stay was legitimised. This view of the Poles altered in 1941 due to the position of Stalin as one of the significant players in the defeat of the Nazis.

Zubrzycki conducted the first significant study on Polish people in Britain following the Second World War; the field research conducted by Zubrzycki (1956) looked at the lives of the post Second World War Polish migrants and was conducted in the homes of his fellow Polish compatriots; he observed them in the Polish clubs, hostels and social functions. Influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology, Zubrzycki explored the process of conflict, accommodation and assimilation of the Polish émigré, he concluded that because of their unique position as exiles they would never assimilate into British society (Zubrzycki 1956). He also suggested in his findings that the sociological significance of Polish emigration lies in the closeness of cultural ties with the mother country and the resistance to cultural assimilation.

Zubrzycki focused on the Polish Catholic Poles stating that early exploration of the Polish Christian and Polish Jewish migrant to Britain as distinct groups had some difficulties because the collection of statistical data did not distinguish between the two groups on arrival (Zubrzycki 1956). Large numbers of Polish Jews had come to Britain following the introduction of the May Laws in Russia in 1882 when residence was denied to all Jews who lived in rural areas prior to 1882. In Russia these people were forced to move to larger towns within the Jewish Pale an area consisting of 15 Russian provinces lying to the east of the ethnographic Polish border of 10 Polish provinces. The consequence was massive overcrowding, lowering of living standards and lack of employment; as a result migration became a prospective option for many (Zubrzycki 1956).

Patterson (1977) carried out an anthropological study of the exiled Polish community in Britain. The existence of the established organisational nucleus of exiled Poles in Britain at the end of the Second World War was an important factor in maintaining group unity and social control after the withdrawal of British recognition of the Polish government-in-exile and the gradual demobilisation of the Polish forces. Patterson, whose husband was Polish, used participation observation and described herself as an honorary member of the Polish community. Her research took place over thirty years; in 1977 she expressed the opinion, in contrast to that of Zubrzycki (1956) that if there were no major changes in Eastern Europe, the usual processes of adaptation and acceptance would continue to the point of integration, assimilation and ultimately absorption of the Polish people in Britain (Patterson 1977).

The funded study conducted by Zebrowska (1986) focused on the second generation Poles and explored whether or not they remained connected to the Polish community or not. Using a convenience sample found through a variety of contacts within the Polish community in the North and South of England Zebrowska included psychological scales and in-depth interviews to gather information. The non standardised in-depth interviews supplied the most useful data, the scales were either supportive or not useful (Zebrowska 1986). Many of the respondents found difficulty in reconciling the model of Polishness into which they were socialised with their present effective biculturalisation. The findings revealed that while the majority trend was towards assimilation, integration was a realistic option for a proportion of the respondents. Integration was associated with existence of affective ties to Polishness in interaction with domestic and community circumstances rather than any single aspect of their Polish environment taken in isolation. Zebrowska



suggested that Polishness could be identified as 'weak' or 'strong'. Those who do not behave in certain ways, such as speaking Polish well or taking part in the organisations established by Poles who have settled in Britain would be 'weak' Poles. Those who subscribe to a particular life style, a particular 'Polishness' that works to exclude those who do not agree with an agreed upon set of 'Polishness' attributes would be identified as 'strong' Poles (Zebrowska 1986).

The Polish Migration Project was set up at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London in 1982, and presented the main themes and topics that arose from an investigation into the origins of the Polish Community in the UK during and following the Second World War (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989). The report was divided into three sections; the first was the chronology of the arrivals and departures of the various categories of Poles and Polish citizens who formed the post war Polish community in the UK, the second looked at the political problems that arose from the establishment of the Polish Government in London during the war and the decision to resettle large numbers of Poles in the UK at the end of the Second World War. The third and largest section explored the administrative and sociological problems involved in the process of resettlement (Sword et al 1989).

This was a significant research study about the Polish Community in Britain and was supported by funding by a grant from the M.B. Grabowski Fund. It used public and private archives, literature and interviews to give an insight into the lives of the Poles in Britain who formed the post war Polish community. What differentiates this study from later work is the production of significant statistics on the demographics of the

post Second World War Poles residing in Britain; of particular interest is the information on minority groups, identity and religion. Sword et al (1989) give the figures from the Sikorski institute of the Polish refugee settlers from minority faiths to be 20,000 in 1949 which is 14% of the total Polish population in Britain. The figures include Orthodox, Evangelical and Lutheran, Evangelical Augsburg, Jewish and Moslem; they suggest that the antagonisms and rivalries of pre-war Poland had continued in exile during the war and had resulted in significant defections from the Polish forces in Britain during 1944 (Sword et al 1989 p 454).

Temple examined Polish households in Rochdale and addressed epistemological issues arising out of the use of different methods of looking at households; she used surveys and in-depth interviews that were carried out around a list, as a means to collect data. The analysis was influenced by Feminism and Constructionism (Temple 1992). Temple stressed the importance of including the researchers intellectual and autobiography and social location in order to be able to critically engage with the research. The issue of traditional gender and roles distribution in the household activities were explored. A later article relating to the research concluded that the respondents sense of who they were was tied to their journey from another country (Poland) and that the journey was frequently the main focus of the interviewees dialogue (Temple 1995).

Concentrating on the period 1945-1961, Hanson (1995) considered the British response to the Poles and the Ukrainians who came to Britain as a result of the Second World War and the Hungarian refugees who arrived in Britain in 1956. As well as providing a national overview Hanson used the responses of the Yorkshire

community to these groups as a case study. The research was carried out by examining responses in Bradford and Sheffield that were reported in newspapers and interview transcripts from the Bradford Heritage Recording Unit. Hanson found that the responses to Poles, Ukrainians and Hungarians were more positive than they may have been if they were not white; but that all three groups found it difficult to initially gain acceptance, they spoke unfamiliar foreign languages and had their own distinct cultural backgrounds which may have fuelled some racism (Hanson 1995). The arrival of the Black and Asian immigrants to Britain from 1948 onwards turned attention away from the Eastern European group; in Hanson's opinion the second generation fared particularly well in comparison to their counterparts of Black and Asian descent. In her conclusions Hanson states that the attitudes in 1995 to the three groups she studied were characterised by a sense of indifference, as largely invisible communities they received little public attention, with the Polish community being the group that had at the time gained the most academic interest.

Sword (1996) revisited the Polish community in Britain in the 1990s as part of the Polish Migration Project, interviewing first and second generation Poles. Political changes had taken place in Poland and following fifty years of the Polish exiled community in Britain, Sword was interested to determine what direction the community was taking. Sword explored the notion of ethnicity and suggested that there had been a growth of interest in the subject since the Second World War and that there were difficulties defining the Polish community in Britain as an ethnic group. At the time of this report the Polish minority had not attracted a great deal of attention from academics and had remained a largely invisible group because they are white, the intention of the project was to focus on the issue of ethnic identity and

to try to anticipate the extent of involvement by the younger generation in future decades. Sword suggests that Polish scholars tend to measure the degree of Polishness by retention of cultural traditions, language skills, attendance at Polish church, purchase of Polish newspapers, books etc, but not recognising that minorities in a host society develop their own culture, that the Polishness of second and third generation Poles will be different from that of, for example, a young Pole being brought up in Poland (Sword 1996).

In his concluding chapter Sword brings to the attention that in this and other studies is the suggestion that the Polish community in Britain is in decline, indicated by the organisational membership and participation in Polish derived activities. He stated that there has been a failure to hold the loyalties of the younger members or to tap into the energies of new arrivals. He also suggested that the established community offered little in the way of attraction in terms of interest, resources, social or material advancement or emotional pull. He ends with the prediction of the likelihood that 'unless unforeseen changes take place – that only London and a handful of provincial metropolitan centres will retain organised Polish communities of any viability in twenty years time' (Sword 1996 p233).

Smith and Winslow (2000) published the findings of Winslow's PhD, tape recorded life stories, memories and reflections of Polish émigrés nationally, their children and grandchildren. The work was supported by photographs that brought to life the atrocities, the upheaval and the vibrant Polish culture that has remained until recently, largely undocumented. Winslow highlighted the incidence of mental illness amongst the Polish émigré and how the trauma of the Second World War adversely

affected the older Polish population's lives. Using oral history she emphasised the value of the Polish people having an opportunity to tell and retell life stories enabling a process of making sense of the past, she suggests that recall of the past is a normal process that in old age can have a more developed role and perhaps more significant outcomes (Winslow 2001). It is however important that the researcher is mindful of the possible effects of this process, the reliving of past events can prompt the re-emergence of traumatic events that have been repressed subconsciously to enable the person to keep themselves safe. Reliving those events can lead to bad dreams, nightmares and flash backs, which could go on to affect every life and relationships. In her oral history study Winslow found that the past was still very much the present for many of the Polish émigré living in Britain today (Winslow 2004) this may not have been as evident using an alternative methodology but the findings would not have been so deep.

Lane (2001) centred his work on assimilation of the Polish people who remained in Bradford post Second World War, looking at many of the issues covered by Hanson (1995); Smith and Winslow (2000); Winslow (2001). Lane concludes that amongst the first generation many factors combined to preserve rather than dilute Polish culture and identity and that the group has become the Polish-British community (Lane 2001). The 2004 Polish migration had not occurred so could not be discussed and in his conclusions Lane discussed how the third generation of Poles, in the main, were not being sent to Polish Saturday school, being taught the Polish language or being sent to Polish church, the suggestion he makes is that any sense of a Polish identity would be derived from their parents awareness of a different inheritance. Lane emphasises the invisibility of the Bradford Poles and concludes

that the process of assimilation is far more likely to destroy cultures than identities (Lane 2001 p57).

Staniewicz (2001) used a case study approach to examine Polish migrant populations in two locations, one in the West Midlands UK and the other in South Michigan USA looking at how occupation and social class, health and 'race and ethnicity' are constructed. A triangulation of historical sources, questionnaires and ethnographic methods were used by Staniewicz who offered to conduct the interviews in either English or Polish as she was bilingual. The participants were asked to complete six questionnaires which may have contributed to the low return. As a participant observer Staniewicz also attended religious and secular events stating that, in some instances, she got her 'foot in the door' purely on the basis of being a second generation Pole. The findings suggested that the two Polish case study groups have not assimilated and lost their sense of ethnicity; that there were parallels of racist attitudes toward the Poles in the USA and the Irish in the UK, there was discussion as to the possible reasons; Staniewicz produced a set of key data on an ethnic group (British Poles) that had been previously under researched. As with other researchers studying the first generation Polish in the UK, Staniewicz expressed concern that because of attrition it will soon be too late to study firsthand the rich data constituted by the first generation Polish (Staniewicz 2001).

Burrell (2003) looked at three migrant groups living in Leicester, Greek Cypriots, Italians and Poles. The aim of Burrell's thesis was to uncover and explore a series of everyday experiences of migration. Oral history interviews supported by other sources produced four overlapping themes; the migration process, national identity,

memories and experience of homeland and the fourth was the different experiences of community life in Leicester (Burrell 2003). Burrell highlighted the tensions felt between collective ideals and personal autonomy and asserted the continued importance of national identity in migrants everyday lives and the flexibility of the collective constructs which allow each person to experience migration, nation and community individually, (Burrell 2003). Describing her study as anthropological in style Burrell spent time among the different groups investigating the various networks that maintain close cultural bonds away from the homeland. As she did not speak the first language of the interviewees Burrell conducted the majority of the interviews in English and occasionally used a translator, she felt that there were some occasions when the use of English made the communication of experiences more difficult for the interviewees by not speaking their first language.

The lack of visibility of the post Second World War Poles generated interest from a number of researchers which has continued to some extent but has been superseded by the arrival of the migrant Poles following the accession of Poland into the European Union in 2004. The following is a selection of the current research chosen because of the relevance to underpin my own research.

Three years after the accession into the EU Staniewicz (2007) explored the lives of Poles in London and Dublin. She identified inequitable treatment of new Polish migrants by the host population resulting in multiple discrimination, tensions and conflict both within and between ethnic and faith communities. There were wage differentials estimated to be up to 45% between nationals and new migrants. Worrying trends of rising levels of homelessness, overcrowded, overpriced and

substandard housing, illegal working practises and incidents of racial discrimination (Staniewicz 2007) these finding were substantiated in other research, (Eade 2005, Garapich 2008).

Garapich (2008) suggested that the post accession influx of Poles into the UK should be regarded as a continuation of a process that began in the 1990s. Many of the Polish migrants that arrived post 2004 needed assistance with filling in forms, accessing work and accommodation and finding social contacts. The migration industry became big business; oiling the wheels of the migration system between post Communist countries and Western Europe (Garapich 2008). Garapich found that some Polish immigrant advice centres in London developed into respectable business ventures while others turned out to be run by smugglers and organised groups providing migrants with false documents (Garapich 2008).

Mogilnicka (2009) gave an insight into the attitudes among recent Polish migrants to Britain towards ethnicity and 'race' underpinned by a qualitative research design; she used focus group interviews. She found that for the recent Polish migrants ethnicity was understood in terms of nationality and race; the Polish nation was seen as one culture and one race and this reflected on the way they viewed other ethnic groups. White English people were perceived as superior to non white British people; South Asian and Black Britons were perceived as inferior. The Polish migrants viewed themselves as somewhere in between white English people and non white. Mogilnicka argues that the negative attitude towards non white minorities could be explained by the endemic 'racial' inequality in the UK (Mogilnicka 2009). While this is not contested the responses from the focus groups clearly indicate that the lack of



ethnic minorities in Poland has an effect on the way that Polish people view themselves.

Temple has researched a number of issues with the post 2004 Polish migrants (Temple and Koterba 2009, Temple 2010, 2011). On the issues of Polish identity Temple suggests that there is a need to widen the debate about influences on learning English to include non-instrumental issues of self and other identification. Language was used to differentiate between 'us' and 'others' including in terms of values and the ways in which these perceptions of difference influenced social interactions (Temple 2010). With the group of Polish interviewees, self ascriptions of identity changed during the course of interviews according to the context of the discussion, being Polish was important in different ways even though the significance of Polish identity varied (Temple 2011).

The extent of participation in a social life with people from other communities was influenced by the participant's views about the lifestyles and values of people from other communities. Those with a strong belief about their Polish ethnicity were less likely to want to mix with people from other ethnic groups (Temple 2011). This research gave examples of the things that Polish people accepted as either Polish or English behaviour and how they ascribed negative or positive values to particular lifestyles. The differences were mainly around family values and leisure time spent drinking and concerns about safety in the evenings; drunken and antisocial behaviour on the streets being ascribed as English behaviour and values (Temple 2011).

Galasinska (2010) explored the emotional coexistence of three groups of Polish migrants and how this is reflected in narrative-in-interaction; she chose to conduct her research in Polish clubs, Polish shops and restaurants across the UK. Her study concentrated on how Polish migrants in the UK talk about other waves of newcomers from Poland. Galasinska looked at how their narratives are used as forms of emotional evaluation of these other groups as well a 'bonding making' process between these groups. She noted that these Polish places are multifunctional, regarded by Poles mainly as places to meet, exchange gossip including gossip about the Polish community (Galasinska 2010).

A two site study was carried out with Polish working class people in Poland and England by White (2011) she explored the reasons for migration, the choice of whether to stay in England or to return to Poland. The study found that English language skill was fundamental to the discussion of whether to migrate or not, and the need to know English was emphasised repeatedly by all UK interviewees (White 2011).

The lack of English language skill has been noted as a negative issue for the new Polish migrants in a number of studies (Staniewicz 2007; Garapich 2009; Mogilnicka 2009; Galasinska 2010; White 2011). This may impact on different issues in integration, but White (2011) identifies that particularly in Polish working class couples there are ways to get around this with partners taking different roles. However language can be used to signify identity and the notion of 'us; and 'other' in the lives of Polish migrants (Temple 2010).

Although the research indicates that there are commonalities among Polish American and the Polish Britain experience, Temple (1999) argues that being Polish in Poland or America is not the same as being Polish in England. Temple contested Zebrowska's (1986) notion of weak and strong Poles (Temple 1994) in part because this may suggest that what it meant to be Polish was objective and the researcher irrelevant.

### **Loss and Trauma.**

Loss can be an integral feature of migration – leaving one's home, family, friends and a whole life behind to emigrate to another country can result in an immense sense of loss and trauma, amidst which migrants have to rebuild their lives, identities and communities. For some Polish migrants who were forced into migration, loss has often been accompanied by trauma. The historical conditions of Poland as a nation have meant that its people have been heavily traumatised and deprived of a sense of identity and safety and these experiences have shaped the ways in which they have developed as individuals and communities in the countries of their migration. Before developing these themes, it is important to understand the historical context from which many Poles arrived in Britain; the push factors that 'forced' their migration.

Polish identity has been configured in relation to its historical past; Davies suggests that Polish national consciousness relates to church, language, history and race (Davies 1996). Polish history is inextricably linked to the way that Polish people view themselves in the world. Apart from the start of the Second World War and the fate of Polish Jews this history has remained open to limited scrutiny.

Poland's geographic and political location predestined it to the struggle and interplay between the West and the East, in both historical perspectives and economic and social contexts (Iglicka 2001). Historians have documented the sometimes tragic events that have changed the political and social position of Poland (Davies 1982, Bubczyk 2002, Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006) which has resulted in fluctuations of Polishness and who can and does call themselves a Pole and the decision of whether to migrate or not.

For Polish people one of the most important periods was during the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, this was the largest realm of early modern Europe (1569-1795). United by common political and civil rights, nobles of Polish, Lithuanian and East Slavic origin described themselves in Latin or Polish as of the Polish Nation (Snyder 2003), it was a time of great wealth for the nobles and freedom for the Jewish people of Poland who often held positions of authority. The commonwealth came to an end as the third partition of Poland between Russia, Prussia and Austria began (1795 -1918); this was a time that caused huge changes in how those who called themselves Polish perceived themselves and a time when large numbers of nobles and peasants migrated. In the absence of a National State patriotic goals significantly shaped private and public spheres in partitioned Poland and during this time Polish national consciousness drew on four fundamental sources of inspiration, church, language, history and race (Fidelis 2001, Davies 1982).

During these years the numbers of ethnic groups attached to Poland was constantly changing; in the eastern provinces, a Catholic peasant would be called a Pole

despite saying his prayers in Latin and speaking Byelorussian or Ukrainian at home (Davies 1982). But as patriotism and nationalism became more significant for ethnic Poles, the ethnic minorities that had lived alongside them for centuries were increasingly being perceived as a threat to Polish identity and the Polish nation. The years of oppression, invasion and division by the partitioning powers led the Poles to develop a sense of their nation's martyrdom to rival the Jewish sense of being singled out for special suffering; the symbol of Poland as the Christ of Nations competed with the allegory of eternal Jewish wandering (Hoffman 1999). The Poles saw themselves and Poland as suffering at the hands of their neighbours, particularly Russia and Germany and the continued disagreements of which territory belonged to who continued.

At this time Polish men were seen as soldiers fighting to free Poland and the Polish women's major sphere was the family; women were presented as *Matka Polska* (Mother Poland) whose main function was to produce the sons and soldiers for the Nation and militant women were marginalised (Fidelis 2001). The Polish mother was seen as the chief factor in the preservation of the Polish tongue and traditions, in days when to speak Polish and to teach Polish history was a crime and the woman was also the mainstay of religion in the family (Gula 1993). Historically male Poles are portrayed as courageous, involved in political life, having a sense of responsibility for nation and state, providing solidarity and a common front when facing friends or enemies, and having pride in being Polish and a love of freedom; loyalty to the family, to the Catholic Church and moral precepts are also important (Gula 1993).

From 1918 once Poland was reinstated on the world map the Poles believed that the Polish nation could never secure its place in the world until it was as well educated, and as prosperous and as united as its neighbours and a strong emphasis on education, self improvement, science, economy, social reform and work developed (Davies 1982). The Second Republic of Poland had inherited a largely illiterate population and compulsory education delivered in the Polish language was introduced in the 1930s with an increase in the number of schools, the establishment of Higher Education and the building of new universities. Poland witnessed an explosion of Polish intellectual creativity an increase in the number of libraries, museums and archives for public use; and the Polish contribution to literature, art and music aimed to strengthen Polish society and Polish culture (Davies 1982, Bubczyk 2002). However the political debates and differences continued to be a significant part of Polish life in and outside of Poland.

Political and historical frameworks are important when exploring identity within a migrant community; individuals develop a sense of self in relationship to others and this is as much to do with difference and exclusion as sameness and inclusion (Hall 1999, Hall and du Guy 1999, du Guy, Evans and Redman 2000), particularly in relation to self and community and self and the host society. The notion of identity is central to how individuals and groups construct, negotiate and defend their self-understanding (Edgars and Sedgwick 1999) within a broader framework.

The need for positive social identity motivates a search for and the creation and enhancement of positive distinctiveness for one's own group in comparison with others (Turner 1982). At the end of the partition of Poland ethnic groups increasingly

began to measure themselves against the other, with patriotic and nationalistic Polish groups forming at all ages, in the east this was influenced by socialist views and was headed by the Polish patriot Marshal Pilsudski a son of Lithuanian nobles, in the West the more right wing views of Dmowski and the Nationalistic party were evident (Coutouvidis and Reynolds 1986). This new Poland fought for and established between the Wars (1918-1939) was a country released from the years of Partition and having once more regained its independence Poland was engulfed with a wave of renewed patriotism that had a consequence of increased tension with the ethnic minorities which was exacerbated following the onset of the Second World War.

From the outset of the Second World War in September 1939 the people living in Poland, Poles and ethnic minorities, were thrown into a period of six years of trauma, loss and devastation, when the war ended for many of them it was not over. The people who returned or who had remained in Poland lived in an unfamiliar society with an unelected government under a political regime they had fought against. The demographic makeup of the country was no longer multiethnic but largely homogeneous reconfiguring the pre Second World War cultural norms. Many Jewish and Catholic Poles were unable to reclaim their possessions or property; what was once eastern Poland was no longer, so that those who had lived in the east had lost their homes. Many Polish people had to reconstruct a meaningful life outside of their place of birth; those who were displaced from Poland had to do so in a place without familiar language, traditions or culture.

What happened in Poland and to the people of Poland during the Second World War was unprecedented in modern times; between the years of 1939 and 1945 people were faced with the possibility of their own death and the loss of the family and friends every day. The effects of the atrocities, the incarceration, the humiliation, torture, human experimentation, death and displacement of whole populations have been studied but clinical understanding of the symptoms people were displaying was in its infancy. In the First World War returning soldiers were said to be suffering from shell shock and the notion of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was not constructed until after the Vietnam War and the observation of the consequences on the returning American military personnel.

The introduction of PTSD into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III) in 1980 stated that the essential features were characteristic symptoms that occurred following a psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience such as bereavement, chronic illness business losses or marital conflict. The traumatic events described in the DSM (IV) manual are those experienced directly by the person and include, but are not limited to military combat, (sexual assault, physical attack, robbery, mugging) being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp (DSM IV, 1994, p 425). These experiences on such a scale were new phenomena in the Post Second World War years and the world was not prepared for how this would affect individuals and communities.

Muller (2010) explains how people may behave if they have had early traumatic experiences, they may become detached emotionally from the experience and when



they are talking about something that happened to them do not show the normal emotions of sadness, anger etc. He describes this as avoidant defences; the person defensively excluded the emotion from the traumatic experience as this would be too painful.

The experience of loss is a normal process; however when this loss is sudden, prolonged and traumatic this can have a negative effect on the person. The consequences of the treatment of the people of Poland during the Second World War and beyond have potentially affected their way of interacting with others and establishing themselves in Britain and as individuals or a community in Birmingham. Traditional theories of loss and bereavement suggest that people need to adjust to and recover from their loss by working through the progressive stages of grief (Kubler-Ross 1969, Worden 1991, Parkes 1996) or the tasks of mourning (Worden 1991) and the process may be affected by the persons early attachment experience (Bowlby 1951, Parkes, Stevenon-Hinde and Marris 1991, Muller 2010). Contemporary writers on the subject state that life is characterised by transitions, losses and grief and that loss is a broad concept not relating solely to death and bereavement (Stroebe and Schut 1999, Niemeyer 2001, Thompson 2002) it is a process that will be part of each individual's life in one form or another.

The dual process of coping with loss (Stroebe and Schut 1990) suggests that the bereaved person has to cope with the loss experience itself and with other changes and adjustments that result from it and they link their model with Worden's four tasks of mourning (Worden 1991). They describe the two phases', loss orientation and restoration, as aspects of how the survivor assimilates the enormous change in their

life following a major loss. Worden's four tasks of mourning describe the grief journey, and include accepting the reality of the loss, working through the pain of grief, adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing and finally emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life (Worden 1991). Walter's (1996) notion that the purpose of grief is not detachment from the deceased, but resolution through finding an appropriate place in the life of the survivor for the person who has died will fit with many people who feel that to move on, as some of the models suggest, would be to forget the deceased person.

The constructionist therapeutic approach to Post Traumatic Stress reactions proposes that traumatic experiences disrupt meaning construction in both social and event domains; central human expectations of life are invalidated and anticipations of "with whom and how I am socially related" are no longer the same (Sewell and Williams 2007). Within this model the present is dramatically incongruent with how past processes are remembered and the person finds it hard to make sense of the world; the way people dealt with the world no longer works and their view of the world and their identity within it are changed (Sewell and Williams 2007).

Telling of the person's story of the event/s in a therapeutic encounter becomes a collaborative life review focussing on who this person was prior to their traumatic experience (Neimeyer 1995). In their daily lives people who have experienced trauma may speak of the event in a detached way which often keeps the person where they are without moving forward. Talking within the experiences, trauma reliving enables the person to give voice to the traumatic story with all its associated pain, confusion, and fear and shame (Sewell and Williams 2007).

Disruption of the person's real or imagined future is often a consequence of trauma (Sewell and Williams 2007) and they can feel their past is invalidated by the presence of the trauma in flashbacks or dreams. For some the act of writing about a traumatic experience, even outside the context of therapy, is associated with improvements on subjective and somatic function (Pentebaker and Francis 1996). By reliving the experience in the written form the person feels better emotionally and becomes freer of physical symptoms.

The limitations of previous stage models of the grief process that have a conclusive ending with recovery have been recognised (Neimeyer 1998) and the identification of a normal grief pattern is inconclusive, the later theorists suggest common elements of unpredictable emotional adjustment and recognition of the potentially healthy role of continued bonds with the deceased person. They acknowledge the cognitive process of mourning in support of the emotional consequence of loss and the importance of cultural practices. They have become more aware of the implications of major loss on the individual sense of identity, the possibility of 'post traumatic growth' and they have a broadened focus on the experience of individual survivor and importantly the patterns and process by which loss is negotiated in families and wider social contexts (Neimeyer 2007).

A number of Polish migrants who spent time in forced labour camps of either Hitler or Stalin have published their own accounts of their personal history (Hart 1981, Krystyna 1989, Karski 2001, Zygodlo 2001, Rowicz 2007) these memoirs from Jewish and Catholic Poles are filled with evidence of loss and trauma. Studies of oral

and written testimonies exploring life in Poland prior to the Second World War and in these camps offer evidence of trauma and of loss of a way of life, culture and tradition that were entwined in Jewish and Polish identity (Browning 2010).

An individual's beliefs can be challenged when large scale traumatic events occur; the basic assumptions that are developed during the normal life cycle cannot be used to explain them, and can often lead to high levels of stress and anxiety in the individual. Assumptions and theories of reality are shattered producing psychological upheaval; victims experience a 'loss of equilibrium', things no longer work as they used to (Bard and Sangrey 1979) and people become aware that 'bad things' can and do happen despite a deep and enduring sense of faith, trust and belief in the divine (Wilson and Moran 1998).

Migration is of continuing interest in the political and social world; academic writing has included the notion of accommodation, acculturation and integration. Specifically exploring Polish migration, whilst there are commonalities with other countries (USA) there are clearly differences, primarily based around the political and social position in the host society. The present British government's emphasis on integration does not account for the psychological process that individuals and groups experience as refugees, exiles or economic migrants. An oral history gives the opportunity for individuals to tell their story of the reasons for and the experience of migration without the agenda of the researcher being at the forefront.

A variety of studies have been conducted on the Polish migrants in the UK since the Second World War; and this has increased significantly with the arrival of the post

accession Poles in 2004 generating new life to the research on the Polish migrants in Britain, this literature has added a new dimension to how the Polish in Britain are viewed and will inform the thesis. However the exploration of how the experience of loss affects Polish migrants is under represented in the literature, therefore this thesis will add a new insight.

## **Out of the shadows: An Exploration of the Polish in Birmingham.**

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This thesis explores the lives of the Polish people who have migrated to Birmingham England since 1939. The thesis focuses on the lived experience using an oral history approach to the interviews and their interpretation. The transcribed interviews were thematically analysed and interpretations were supported by observation, literature and archive material. Focusing on the time period from the Second World War to the present day the following questions have been explored.

#### **Research questions**

4. What social, political and personal reasons have influenced Polish migration to Birmingham, England?
5. What individual and collective experiences in Poland have shaped the lives of the Polish people in Birmingham?
6. What individual and collective experiences in England have shaped the lives of the Birmingham Polish?

Oral history stems from a variety of approaches and is used by different disciplines to underpin scholarly and fiction based literature. The evolution of the approach in America and Europe has taken similar yet individual routes and includes documenting the lives of many including politicians, the wealthy, those living in poverty and people released from slavery. Oral history crosses educational, class and gender divides and offers a global insight into the lives of a cross section of society (Abrams 2010).

Stories have been passed down in families through generations; social scientists and historians have chronicled peoples experiences and lives for centuries. The oral history process can be a powerful tool for discovering, exploring and evaluating the nature and process of historical memory (Perks and Thomson 1998). The introduction and continual updating of audio recording equipment has enabled the capture of people's voices, keeping the past in the present. During the twentieth and into the twenty first century an international body of work has been collected under the theme of oral history.

Traditionally history has been written from above by the powerful privileged few, but oral history enables a more authentic view, written by the people involved in creating that history from below (Humphries 1984). Oral history specifically engages with the past, and is both the act of conducting the interview and the product of the interview, the record (Abrams 2010). With a long interest in people and their stories through my work and in my personal life it was natural that oral history would underpin my research.

A discussion with my father (Boleslaw Smojkis) prompted me to record his story for the family and from that my curiosity about Polish people in Birmingham grew. My father was in his seventies when I came to the realisation that none of his eight children had an account of his early life, we did not know the exact place of his birth or how he came to be living in Birmingham England when he met my mother in 1949. This was the signifier for recording his story over two meetings in January 2001, the following year he was diagnosed with lung cancer, in June 2003 he died. However his story has remained central to the study. During the course of continuing

through my PhD I discovered many things about his early life, the poverty, trauma and loss he experienced, which would have been lost to his family if I had not carried out this particular research study. One personal outcome from this thesis is that it has enabled me to understand a little about how he came to be the man his family knew.

Although I had already started on my PhD journey and made the decision that interviews with Birmingham Poles would underpin my study, I had little knowledge of Polish history or the collective and individual journeys made by the Birmingham Polish people. The history I had been taught at my Birmingham Grammar school in the early 1970s was incomplete; excluding much of the Polish experience prior to, during and after the Second World War, most significantly the absence of the role of Stalin and the Soviet Union or the role of the Polish armed forces during the war. The ongoing situation in Poland was never adequately covered in school or in the press and although I saw firsthand what Poland was like in 1971 I never understood what it was like to live through the communist era. With the downfall of communism I have visited Poland several times and observed the changes that have occurred at what seems like a rapid pace and added to my growing knowledge of Poland and Polish people.

Using oral history has given me the opportunity to hear, to record and to interpret the testimony of different groups of Polish migrants. Each person interviewed has their own individual story influenced by the social and political situation in which they lived. The content of these testimonies has allowed me to fill the many gaps and expand on my existing knowledge beyond that which could have been achieved



through only reading existing literature, which can distance the person from the written word.

Throughout my professional career I have remained curious about how individuals perceive themselves in relation to self and others. When working collaboratively with people in distress I integrate the humanistic paradigms (Rogers 1951, Yalom, 1980) and Solution Focused Brief Therapy (de Shazer 1988, O'Connell 2001). Over a period of more than thirty years I have listened to many people's stories with a therapeutic ear and one of the challenges was to transfer my existing skills to that of the researcher; to use my skill as listener with a different intent. The oral history approach situates the researcher as listener, there is an expectation that questions will be asked but that these will be minimal, and the interviewee's voice will be dominant. The oral history researcher offers the possibility of both affirming and destabilising a personal narrative (Rickard 1998) this fits with the role of counsellor, but although the researcher may validate the person's experience there is no requirement to interpret what the person is saying or offer an understanding of the possible reason for their words or symptoms. When listening to stories that may include reflections on traumatic or taboo issues, there are implications for the robustness of both the interviewer and the interviewee (Rickard 1998 p35). Having worked alongside people in distress for many years I have ensured that I remain mindful of how things people tell me will affect me, in my practice as a counsellor I would use clinical supervision, in research I used the reflective/reflexive process.

## **Research on Polish people in the UK**

Prior to 2004 the research on Polish migrants in the UK was limited; different methods have been used to study Polish people in the UK. Although introduced in the literature review, the following is a brief chronological overview of the academic research that has been conducted in the UK on the Polish community between 1956 and the present day with an emphasis on the chosen methodology and outcomes.

The majority of reviewed research on Polish people in the UK has been conducted by Polish speaking researchers (Zubrzycki 1956, Patterson 1977, Zebrowska 1980, Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989, Temple 1992, Gula 1992, Staniewicz 2001, Mogilnicka 2009, Galasinska 2010) with other research conducted by non Polish speaking researchers (Hanson 1995; Winslow 2001; Burrell 2003). The research has covered issues of connectedness to home or the host country (Zubrzycki 1956, Patterson 1977, Zebrowska 1980, Sword et al 1989) in which face to face interviews with interviewees were conducted alongside the use of surveys, psychological scales and archive material.

Hanson (1995) looked at the response of the Yorkshire community to the displaced Polish and Ukrainian migrants after the Second World War and the Hungarian refugees in 1956. Information was collated from the responses in newspapers of Bradford and Sheffield and the existing interview transcripts from the Bradford heritage recording unit.

Temple (1992) used surveys and in-depth interviews with first and second generation Polish men and women to examine gender roles within households and

found that they were quite traditional. Women continued to take on the majority of household and domestic duties often while maintaining full time employment outside of the home. Temple (1995) also used her interviews to explore the importance of the journey for the first generation Poles she interviewed and emphasise the significance of what happened to them on their journey from Poland to Britain.

Mogilnicka (2009) gave an insight into the attitudes among recent Polish migrants to Britain towards ethnicity and 'race' underpinned by a qualitative research design she used focus group interviews. She found that for the recent Polish migrants ethnicity was understood in terms of nationality and race; the Polish nation was seen as one culture and one race and this reflected on the way they viewed other ethnic groups. White English people were perceived as superior to non white British people; South Asian and black Britons were perceived as inferior. The Polish migrants viewed themselves as somewhere in between white English people and non white. Mogilnicka argues that the negative attitude towards non white minorities could be explained by the endemic 'racial' inequality in the UK Mogilnicka (2009). While this is not contested the responses from the focus groups clearly indicate that the lack of ethnic minorities in Poland has an effect on the way that Polish people view themselves.

The recent research on the Polish people who have arrived since accession of the A8 countries into the European Union in 2004 has explored many issues including the inequalities of life experienced in the host country (Staniewicz 2007, Garapich 2008) language (Temple 2010, White, 2011) values and identity (Temple 2010, 2012, Galasinska 2010). These studies have predominantly used interviews and

qualitative methodology to explore the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the new migrant Polish in Britain.

A variety of studies have been conducted on the Polish migrants in the UK since the Second World War; the majority of studies examining the lives of the earlier Polish people have been carried out by first or second generation Poles, or in the case of Patterson a spouse. The recent research has been carried out by people with a connection to Poland through birth or parents or who can speak the Polish language. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been utilised with mixed results; of those researchers who have used both methods the usefulness of qualitative interviews has been reinforced. A connection of the researcher to the Polish community appears to be particularly useful in gaining access to the community and also if the research includes an interview or observation as part of the data collection.

## **Methodology**

The choice of methodology is crucial to the research process, so when making this decision a number of issues need to be considered, most significantly what does the researcher intend to study. This research is exploratory and therefore better suited to a qualitative approach that relies on human perception and understanding rather than a quantitative approach which is underpinned by measurements and statistical analysis (Stake 2010). Stake distinguishes qualitative and quantitative research as being fundamentally separated by their aims and suggests that the difference is not based on the distinction between verbal descriptions and numerical data but by the

difference between the study of personal knowledge versus the study of objective measurements (Stake 2010).

The decision to speak with people about their experiences was taken early on, as a mental health nurse and counsellor the approach to practise I have chosen is primarily conducted through semi-structured non directive interviews. The purpose of the interviews I have previously conducted has been dependent on the aims of the service I have worked in (secondary mental health and primary care counselling) and therefore the approach may alter; it may be necessary to have a more directive approach when assessing a person's level of risk to self or others. As qualitative research methodologies share common ground with professional helping philosophy, processes, theories and ethical considerations (Gair 2012) I felt that I was able to maintain the philosophy behind my approach to practice, including the core conditions of the therapeutic relationship of non-judgmental positive regard, genuineness and empathy (Rogers 1951) within the research relationship.

As the majority of the research populations first language was Polish it was decided through discussion with my research supervisors that it would be useful to speak Polish. My Polish language skills were very limited, so in order to improve I began to attend classes at the Polish Club in Birmingham; it was through this initial contact that I had the opportunity to observe and participate in some activities at the Polish club and to meet some of the people who would take part in the research process. A process that Day (2008) found useful as an outsider looking for people who may be willing to participate in an oral history study on the Island of Tristan Da Cuna.

I also attended language classes in Poland in blocks of three weeks on three occasions over a three year period. Twice at the Jagiellonian University summer school in Krakow which were self funded and once at the Maria Sladowski Catholic University in Lublin as part of a scholarship from the Polish Consulate in London. I made the final decision to carry out the interviews I conducted in English as did Wheeler (2008) when he carried out his cross-lingual oral history study in China.

Five out of the eight interviews conducted with the post 2004 Polish migrants were carried out by a third party, a Polish speaking woman who was instructed in the process and who translated the interviews into English. I carried out three interviews with post 2004 Polish migrants in English as these women felt confident to do so.

Wheeler (2008) identified four central problems when interviewing people who's native language is different to your own,

1. The role of the interpreter
2. Gaining access
3. How to conduct the interview and in which languages
4. Getting the meaning right

The use of translators in the research process needed to be actively thought through, the translation is significant in that it creates the original text, rather than the original text being the starting point (Temple 1997 p613). It was important that the person understood the purpose of the research and that they were skilled in interviewing. I was able to secure funding for this aspect of the study and the woman who took on the role was a post graduate student of Journalism. As a new Polish migrant she had access to other post 2004 migrants that I did not. She understood that it would be useful to have a gender mix and educational mix although at that

time there were new migrant Poles who although educated to Masters level were working in low skilled jobs and some were self employed.

The relationship with a third party interviewer and translator in research has been discussed in the literature (Temple 1997, 2002, Wheeler 2008, Lutz 2011). Temple is critical of the lack of the mention of the issue of language and the shadowy presence of the translator. She suggests that there is no one correct way of translating, translation is more than an exchange of words from one language to another; it is also about interpretation and that translator's as much as researchers produce texts from their own perspectives (Temple 1997, 2002). Wheeler, like me, had intended to conduct his interviews in the language of the interviewees, Chinese, but despite spending two years in the classroom he decided to use an interpreter to help to cross the linguistic divide because his linguistic progress was too slow (Wheeler 2008). Some of the difficulties that Wheeler (2008) identified when using an interpreter included, giving up control and allowing the interpreter to identify and make initial contacts with the participants. The interpreter may change the meaning or content of the questions or if for example, if they were a relative, they may add information based on their personal knowledge (Wheeler 2008). In my study the interpreter was asked to find suitable participants among people she knew had arrived post 2004, to discuss this with me and if I was in agreement she interviewed them using the agreed interview schedule, she then translated and transcribed the interviews. We then discussed the interviews together giving me the opportunity to clarify any questions I may have.

The interviews are supported by existing literature and public documents, diaries, letters, photographs, archives and personal information. Personal archives have often been left to libraries to ensure they are open to a wider audience (David and Sutton 2004) but the personal materials used in this study are not available to the public and apart from the items relating to my father the majority of items were shown to the researcher rather than loaned or copied. I felt very bound to ensuring confidentiality of the people I interviewed in the production of this thesis. Jones (2004) discusses the ethical responsibilities to the narrator, the audience and to the content of the narratives when publishing oral history interviews and stresses the importance of keeping the purpose of the project and the audience as one of the governing principles.

### **Sampling and data collection**

Following the initial contact with the Birmingham Polish Club the possibilities of gaining access to and identifying research participants became apparent. However the Birmingham Polish community is not exclusively made up from people who attend the Polish club or who are active members of the Polish club; the population is broader than this. Some of the Birmingham Polish have made a decision not to be involved with the club and some would have been excluded because of life choices they made which did not fit with the expectations of the people who were more dominant in the organisation. It was important to think about the choice of research sample, Boyatzis (1998) states that

“The adequacy and appropriateness of the sample as regards the larger population, whether of individuals, organisations, cultures or events, is in the hands, heart and mind of the researcher before collecting information”



(Boyatzis 1998 p 55).

Initially the participants were identified through the snowballing process, where the researcher identifies a small number of people with the required characteristics and then these people act as informants to identify others who qualify for inclusion in the research (Cohen and Manion 1994). Cormack (2000) suggests that snowball sampling is often used when access to the research population is difficult; initially I felt that this was the case but it soon became apparent that there was the possibility of access to sufficient numbers of Polish people living in Birmingham. Ideally the sample should be representative of the population from which it has been selected so that the results from the research can be inferred to apply to all cases in the population (Cormack 2000) and I was also mindful that as Temple suggested (1992, 1995) organisations can be male dominated and I felt it was important to have a gender mix and also a generational and time of arrival mix.

Using people from the Polish club also had the possibility of limiting the sample to the first wave population and for these reasons purposeful sampling was included at a later stage. At an early stage of the data collection I was interviewed by Carl Chinn on his West Midlands based Sunday radio programme about my research and I asked for people who might be interested to contact me. One person phoned in to the radio show on the day, a woman who had sat behind me at school, her father was Polish and I interviewed her. I had no further responses from this request.

The sampling became more purposeful later in the research process as I became more familiar with what was missing from the interviews; this approach is deliberately non-random and aims to sample a group of people, or settings, with a particular

characteristic (Bowling1997). Researchers handpick the cases to be included in a purposive sample on the basis of their judgment of their typicality; in this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to the needs of the research (Cohen and Manion 1994). As the data collection progressed it became clearer to the researcher that there were certain elements of the Birmingham Polish who had not been represented and this was addressed by purposefully looking for appropriate representatives, for example people who were Polish Jews. Further examination revealed that there were very few Polish Jews who settled in Birmingham. I contacted the Jewish community by email and eventually I interviewed one man from the area, who is the son of a Polish Jew who had settled in Palestine in the 1920's. Through the same contact I carried out one further interview with a Polish Jewish man in London. I also attended seminars at the University of Birmingham on Polish Jewish relationships which were organised by a Professor of Jewish and interfaith studies and I reviewed the prolific literature on Polish Jewish experiences and relationships.

### **Oral history interviews**

There are a variety of ways people can be interviewed for qualitative research purposes including oral history (Thompson 2000), life history (Miller 2000), narrative (Lieblich and Josselson 1997), and biography (Roberts 2002). All of these approaches were examined for their appropriateness to the proposed study and whilst there are many commonalties in regard to the interview process, oral history was chosen because it fits not only with the research but with the researcher.

## **Oral history and migration**

Migration emerges as one of the most important themes of oral history research and it is often the changes within established ethnic communities and the contested relationships with the dominant culture that motivates the researcher to record stories of migrant origin and arrival (Thomson 1999). Oral history has been used with many different migrant groups both by researchers and through community groups. Perks (1993) explored the lives of the Ukrainian community in the West Yorkshire textile town of Bradford and Keighley, a group that like the Poles had remained quite invisible until the fall of Communism. Nocon (1996) and Winslow (2001) looked at the lives of the Polish people in the UK with different intent and showed how lived experiences had affected the mental health of Polish people in Britain as both individual's and as a group. Barber (2005) explored the lives of migrant Scottish women to Canada who had gone to work there as domestic servants between 1912 and 1929. All of these and others have given rich material about lived experiences that cannot be found through statistics.

The oral history interview process is underpinned by my previous education and experience of asking questions in a clinical setting. As the first generation of the Birmingham Polish are aging it was felt that capturing their memories was something that needed to be done early on in the research. Due to their lesser ages there was not such an urgency to record the interviews with the other groups of Polish migrants however one group was never interviewed in isolation; some of this depends on the availability of the interviewees.

Thomson (1988) suggests that the historical value of the remembered past rests on three strengths

1. It can and does provide significant and sometimes unique information from the past
2. It can equally convey the individual and collective consciousness which is part and parcel of that very past
3. The living humanity or oral sources gives them a third strength which is unique, the reflective insights of retrospection are by no means always a disadvantage – allowing assessment of long term meaning in history

By transforming the 'objects' of a study into the 'subjects' of a study oral evidence can achieve something more pervasive and more fundamental to history, making a history not just richer, more vivid and heart rending but truer (Thomson 1988). It is suggested that history is not just about events or structures or patterns of behaviour but also about how these are experienced and remembered in the imagination; what they believe might have happened in an alternative past and so Thomson suggests that an alternative present for some people may be as crucial as what did happen (Thompson 1988 p 161-162).

Other examples of oral history research which support Thompson's views include those of Chamberlain (1983) who researched the lives of women living in the Fens in England. Chamberlain felt that as a woman it was natural to use an oral history approach, as the woman's voice is often missing from traditional historical texts. Chamberlain felt that it was important that the stories stood as extracts from life histories that were continuous, interacted with each other and were located in a time and place. The work was divided into segments that follow the life process and

included reference to politics, work religion and recreation; it is filled with verbatim interjections from women of age ranges 10-86. The women's words bring colour and life to the stories and give the reader a picture of a world that was disappearing when the research was carried out in the 1970s.

The work of Gittins (1998) is a history of Severalls Psychiatric Hospital from the opening to closure and the dispersal of service users and staff to smaller modern sites. The use of narratives of service users, ancillary staff, mental health workers and included diaries and the words of the once Medical Director, this brings the hospital back to life in a way that would not have been possible using a quantitative approach. Gittins interviewed sixty people in total and the narratives are interjected within the text to support statistics and factual information. Gittins felt that it was important to present as wide-ranging a view as possible, to offer a balanced account by letting people who had lived, worked and were confined within Severalls the opportunity to speak in their own words of the memories and impressions of their experience (Gittins 1998).

O'Neill (2007) was part of the history her interviewees were talking about; she describes how people can challenge the truth of oral history and how important it is to acknowledge that truth is individual. The memories a child has of a situation will be different from those of an adult, this was evident in my own study where in some instances it was clear that the person was recalling past events that were elaborated on with things that they had heard or read about throughout their life. She also stressed the importance of collecting stories when the opportunity arises, she felt

that 'It's easy to take other peoples stories for granted, to undervalue them, when you think they will always be there' (O'Neill 2007).

Understanding the purpose of the interview you are conducting should not be understated. It is important firstly to know the intent of the interview, the reason the interview is being conducted and what will be done with the completed interview. An interview for research purposes will be different to that of a job interview, for a place at university, for a role in a play or in the interview in clinical practice. The research interview can be underpinned by quantitative methodology and may be a survey looking for information that can be quantified, these questions are often closed and require a one word answer, and the collected data can be analysed using statistical measures. The purpose of the questions seeking quantitative information will be quite different to those underpinned by qualitative methodology where usually the questions will be more open and less directive and the responses will be analysed to identify reoccurring themes.

Mishler (1986) offers a comprehensive exploration of research interviewing and stresses the importance of the interviewer understanding the how and why of conducting interviews. He states that the interview is a pattern of interaction in which the role relationship of interviewer and interviewee is highly specialised and emphasises the point of the interview as discourse; meaningful speech between interviewer and interviewee as speakers of a shared language (Mishler 1986). Mishler's emphasis on the explicit recognition of the cultural patterning of situating relevant talk is particularly relevant to the interviews I conducted as the participants agreed to be interviewed in English, their second language. This may have caused

some difficulties but as my father's first language was Polish I am familiar with a Polish way of speaking English, not only his accent but the way he would leave out certain words; there are no definite articles (the) and indefinite articles (a, an, some) in the Polish language and this can change the speech pattern. Some prospective participants, particularly older women, felt that their English language was not adequate to be interviewed and declined the request on this basis.

Exploring the redistribution of power in the interview relationship, Mishler (1986) identified three sets of alternative roles for the interviewer and interviewee. The first is informants and reporters, Mishler suggests this relationship is found in ethnographical research where the interviewee is viewed as a competent observer and the interviewer reports the participants understanding of their cultural realities as accurately as possible. He suggests that the power is shifted towards the interviewee rather than the interviewer directing the content of the interview. In this relationship the interviewee decides on what it is important to say. The second relationship Mishler identifies is that of research collaborators, the interviewer and interviewee collaborate, with the interviewee acting as a full participant in the development of the study in the analysis and in the interpretation of the data. The interviewee will have knowledge of how the data will be viewed and used and will be shown drafts of reports for comments; this type of interviewee relationship is more aligned to the process I would use in clinical practice. The third and final relationship identified by Mishler is that of learner/actor and advocate. The purpose of the interview is to document and study a group of people to assist them to move forward or to attain a shared goal. Mishler (1986) sites the work of Erikson (1976) who was hired by a law firm in America representing residents who were suing a local company following a

flood disaster; his objective was to study, document and assess the social and psychological effects of the event to assist in the claim.

There are significant differences in content of the responses which are dependent on the role of the interviewer. Using Mishler's analogies I describe the interview relationship I held with the participants as informant and reporter, the interviewee or participant being viewed as competent observers. Mishler (1986) suggests that this type of relationship is often found in ethnographic research; in my research study I was reliant on the information gathered from the participants and then it was important for me to report their cultural realities as accurately as possible.

### **Data collection**

When trying to develop an understanding of an established community, it can be useful to speak with people who are considered to hold relevant information; a number of characteristics of the 'key' informant, for instance willingness to participate, relevant knowledge of the culture, a particular social position are important (Roberts 2002). At the outset certain key people were suggested to me and were interviewed; but in order to gain a broader view of the Polish community people who were not considered prominent in the community or who were outside of the community were also interviewed including first wave second generation children with one Polish parent, and some of the fourth wave Poles. In fact although many of the post 2004 economic migrant Poles used the Polish Catholic church and brought their children to the Polish Club for Saturday school they did not become members of the club or consider themselves to be part of the established Birmingham Polish community.



In order to differentiate between the groupings that became apparent throughout the research process the work of Staniewicz (2001) was built upon. Staniewicz identified three waves of Polish migration to Britain (see table below). I added a fourth wave to account for the post 2004 Polish migrants. The numbers column states the numbers of primary interviews that were conducted and transcribed.

Wave	Time of migration	Numbers interviewed	Men	Women	Age range
1 <sup>st</sup> wave	Mid 40's-50's	15	7 first Gen 3 second gen	2 first gen 3 second gen	75-90 Mid 40s-60
2 <sup>nd</sup> wave	60's -70's	2		2	50-60
3 <sup>rd</sup> wave	Post Solidarity	1		1	50s
4 <sup>th</sup> wave	May 2004 onwards	8	6	2	mid 20s-40s
Total		26	16	10	

### Table of Interviewees

**Key:** Gen= Generation

Reason for migration First to Third Wave as Staniewicz (2001)

First wave: WWII army personnel and civilians

Second Wave: People who had arrived over a longer period of time throughout the Communist regime

Third Wave: When freedom was no longer restricted

#### Addition of Fourth Wave: Accession migrant workers

Demographic information revealed the information shown in the table; there were twenty six people interviewed in total; sixteen men and ten women. The ages ranged from ninety to mid twenties. The location of where the interviewees came from is indicated by red dots on the map of Poland Changing Borders (Appendix 2).

In addition to the interviews the research is supported by two unpublished autobiographies and five recorded oral interviews given to the researcher. Other sources include documents from the Polish club, 25 year and 50 year celebrations written documents which have been partially translated from Polish to English for the purpose of the study. Written biographies, autobiographies and relevant academic literature and newspaper articles have also been used.

It was very difficult to find Jewish Poles in Birmingham, in addition to the people mentioned previously the only other Polish Jewish person I heard about who had lived in Birmingham was Kitty Hart (1981) her story is in the public domain and I have referenced this. I contacted Anthony Josephs a prominent member of the Jewish community in Birmingham; he felt that even if I looked through the existing information on the Jewish community in Birmingham it would be unlikely that I would be able to find reference to Jews as Poles, so this was not pursued any further.

#### **Oral history interview schedule**

Formulating the questions that will illicit the expected information takes thought and consideration; there are two general types of questions open and closed. A closed question will usually illicit a yes or no answer or will give the person who asked the

question no more than the information asked for. For example 'what is your name?' only requires the person to respond with their name and no more.

The open ended, non directive questions allow the person to offer as much information as they choose rather than the yes no answers that might be given in response to closed questions that seek to find quantitative data. An open question will allow the person answering the question to add something more; 'can you tell me about your early life in Poland?' will give the person the opportunity to tell what they wish to say and as much as they want to say about their early life. If the interviewer wants to ask more they can ask 'is there anything you would like to add'? Whilst it is important to use non verbal cues, paraphrasing and summarising the interviewer must be careful not to divert the person from their path. For example it is not useful in this instance for the interviewer to disclose information about themselves unless it is to support what is being said; if a person is telling their story and it is emotive, empathic utterances rather than sympathetic statements should be used.

The age, gender and language of both the interviewee and the interviewer need to be taken into consideration and as the research population has a shared history, some of whom belonged to the same organisation, it was important to have core questions that would be asked (Ritchie 2003). For example

"Tell me about your early life in Poland"

This was usually enough to generate a lengthy response from the interviewee, for some it would be the only question; they appeared to have rehearsed their responses and continue to speak coherently and with little pause for some time. If more questions were necessary then a selection of the following were used

How did you know that the war had started?

What changed for you when the war started?

Other questions would focus on their journey to Birmingham.

“How did you come to be living in Birmingham?”

“Tell me about your life in Birmingham?”

See interviewee schedule (Appendix 3)

The questions for the later migrants groups used the same schedule but did not include questions about their knowledge of the Second World War but asked questions about their parent's early life, their own journey from Poland and their life in Birmingham as children of Polish parents. The fourth wave questions were about reasons for migration and how they lived their lives in Birmingham (Appendix 4).

The oral history approach allows for flexibility and the more I learned about the experience and history of the Birmingham Polish people the more curious I became about certain aspects of their stories and the check list was adapted. Keeping to the original oral history interview schedule became less important as the research process progressed, however it did strongly underpin the interview process. The more information I gathered the more able I became to ask further questions and collect deeper data. However it was important to keep in mind the research questions and not to go off track but to stay as close to the oral history interview schedule as possible.

### **Other research material utilised**

During the process of this study I worked with a colleague to establish the Midlands Polish Community Association; we successfully applied to the Heritage Lottery fund to collect the memories of the first generation of the Birmingham Poles. Throughout the project I was the Volunteer Project Officer and worked very closely with the Project Manager. In all twenty one new interviews were conducted, 10 men and 11 women with ages ranging from 70 to 92 years. I conducted three of the interviews and the rest of the interviews were carried out by the members of the project team. I have used these interviews as secondary research material as the primary reason for the project was to collect the memories and archive them in the Central Library Birmingham to add to the existing information on the diverse communities, the Birmingham Polish up until now were not part of the collection. The project culminated in a mobile exhibition and a booklet ([www.mpca.eu](http://www.mpca.eu)). I also used information from a HLF project conducted in 2010; The Polish Expats project 'From Exile to Freedom' and a small project funded by the Polish Catholic Circle in Birmingham by Smith (2008).

### **Ethics**

Thompson has suggested similarities within the oral history method to psychoanalysis and systemic family therapy, however I believe it is important to be clear about the nature of the reason for the interview that is being conducted, research is not therapy. As a mental health nurse and counsellor I felt it important to be clear about the boundaries of the interview process as the interviewer needs to be clear to themselves and this clarity needs to be reiterated to the interviewee. The interviewer is facilitating the interviewee to tell their story; for some this may be the

first time they have had an opportunity to express themselves openly and it is important that whilst validating the experiences and the feelings associated with that experience the interviewer does not get sidetracked or probe too deeply for reasons other than those agreed with the interviewee. This was significant, particularly with the first wave Poles, because of the possible emotional content and also because of the researcher's practitioner background; whilst it is important to validate the person's experience these were research interviews and not counselling interviews.

All those who were interviewed were given information about the study verbally and for some this was given in writing, they were also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 5). If there had been an indication that the interview was moving beyond the scope of the research, particularly with the older Polish people, appropriate action would have been taken which may have been to re-clarify or to end the interview and reconvene at a later date; always being mindful of the needs of the interviewee.

The issue of recording a person's history and keeping this for use in research needs careful consideration. Rapley (2007) offers guidelines around the ethical issues surrounding the recording and storage of interviews used in research.

- Seek permission to make the recording and get consent for any use or disclosure
- Give participants adequate information about the purpose of the recording when seeking their permission
- Ensure that participants are under no pressure to give permission for the recording to be made
- Do not participate in any recording made against a participant's wishes

- Stop the recording if the participant asks you to or if is having an adverse effect on the participant or research setting
- Do not use the recording for purposes outside the scope of the original consent for use, without obtaining further consent
- Ensure that the recording does not compromise the participant's privacy and dignity
- Make appropriate arrangements for storage of recordings.

All information about the interviewees, in this study, including the recorded interviews and the transcripts are kept at the researchers home in a cabinet with a facility to be locked, all interviewees, except the interviewers father are anonymous with pseudonyms being used in the written thesis.

The information collected for the Heritage Lottery project used the person's name and permission was gained to archive the recorded interviews, the transcript and the translations along with any photographs and documents in the Birmingham Central Library archive. The research was carried out before the Research Governance Framework came into force.

### **Self as researcher: insider/outsider**

We all have many different types of relationships with their own patterns of communication and levels of disclosure (Strasser and Strasser 2002), we can decide to be open and honest and reveal ourselves freely or we can decide to conceal

ourselves and hide behind a mask and much of this is dependent on the type of relationship. The intention of the research or the therapeutic relationship is markedly different; the intention of the therapeutic relationship is to create a condition for the client to disclose themselves unguardedly (Strasser and Strasser 2002). Although this can also be said of the qualitative research relationship to a certain extent; the therapist has clinical responsibility to contain the client's emotions within the session so that they are not left with unexplained negative feelings. It was my intention that the core conditions of the therapeutic relationship identified by Rogers (1951) were present in the interviews relationship but that the boundaries of a research relationship were maintained.

It was important for me to have an understanding of the history of the first generation's migration journey. My knowledge of this was initially limited but through the interview process and reading the relevant literature it increased sufficiently so that if I was told about something that happened in a particular time and place I was aware of the significance. For example the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1939 when Stalin invaded Poland from the East and the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1940 when the deportations to Siberia began; these dates were not as visible in the public domain until recently but they are embedded in memories of the first generation of Polish people from the east of Poland.

Particularly with the first generation participants it was evident to me from the outset that the possibility of them becoming emotional within the interview was very real. My experience as a counsellor has equipped me to deal with situations as they arose;



allowing the person to express the emotion, validating their experience and giving them time without trying to explore beyond the remit of the research relationship.

It is also important to know what you are prepared to disclose about yourself in the interview. The personal information I gave was related to myself as researcher, where I worked, what I was studying and an overview of the research. However all of the first generation Poles asked for more information about the origins of my surname, where my father was from, what his experience was of the war and if he had been in the Polish Resettlement Corp. At the beginning of the research I did not have all this information, in fact some of my information was inaccurate, it was only when I had access to my father's army papers that I realised he had been a member of the Polish Resettlement Corp. Some interviewees, both men and women, asked where I lived and others asked about my marital status and whether I had children. I was mindful of the reasons for the questions and that I was being assessed for credibility and social status and as such whilst being truthful in my answers I was selective on which issues I was prepared to elaborate.

The potential subjectivity of qualitative research calls for the researcher to be mindful of their position within the research process from the initiation through to the writing up of the findings. Reflexivity offers one way to transform the issue of subjectivity into an opportunity, demanding acknowledgment of how researchers co-construct their research findings (Finlay and Gough 2003). My clinical practice has called for me to examine my position within the role of nurse and counsellor; through the guidelines of the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and guided by the process of Reflective Practice which has been evident within nursing for the past three decades. Reflective

Practice enables the practitioner to reflect on and in their practice and it supports the constant examination of the reasons behind the interactions with the person with whom they are working (Patient, Client, and Service User).

The commonalities between reflective practice and reflexivity encouraged me to ensure that I was situated within the research process whilst maintaining ethical boundaries. It was important that I should build upon existing personal and professional resources rather than attempting to embark on structuring a completely new self. The integration of previous reflective practice experience into the new experience of reflexivity allowed me to be fully engaged in the research process whilst exploring the relationship of self to the research and research to self. To explain this further, the qualified healthcare practitioner agrees to a process of continuing professional development in order to practise, a significant part of this is reflective practice; through reflective practice the practitioner comes to see the world differently and based on these new insights may come to act differently as a changed person (Johns and Freshwater 1998).

Focussing on reflexivity in research Davies (1999) defines it as turning back on oneself a process of self reference; reflexivity expresses the researcher's awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and their effects upon it. McKay, Ryan and Sumison (2003), three Occupational Therapists, explored the links between reflection and reflexivity; building on their individual experiences of reflective practice in their practice they transferred their knowledge and skill in to the reflexive process while being involved in research.

There are commonalities between reflection and reflexivity and if as suggested by (Gyahe and Lillyman 2000) reflection can generate really useful knowledge that is derived from the context in which the healthcare professional is working, then the assumption can be made that reflection by the researcher can generate really useful knowledge from the context in which the research is derived. As with reflection, reflexivity involves the practitioner/researcher examining their perceptions and motivations underpinning the research questions, taking time to sensitise subjective investment in the research topic, in order to clarify the research focus (Finlay and Gough 2003).

Within the research I took notes following interviews meeting or conversations and took time to examine these after a period of time had passed. A significant issue for me within the research process was the situation I found myself in as an outsider with a group of people I felt I should have some connection to because my father was Polish and I had a Polish name. Sherif (2001) suggests that it is increasingly unclear where and how the boundaries of the research relationship should be maintained. Those partial insiders who have background ties to the culture being studied provide certain insights into what can happen in the research process, raising questions about the boundaries or understanding and interpretation (Sherif 2001). At the outset I felt that my link to the Polish community in Birmingham was tenuous although everyone I met was friendly and polite to me one of the biggest issues of demarcation was my lack of Polish language and I had limited knowledge of Polish history, culture or traditions.

The commonalities I shared with the first generation of Polish people were my father's history and the Catholic religion. Although it wasn't stated to me personally I felt that my position at the university and my professional background helped to make me acceptable.

Sherif had lived in America for most of her life, when carrying out her ethnographic study in Egypt; she felt that because her father was Egyptian she was expected to dress and behave in a certain Egyptian way, and not to behave how she would with her fellow American student colleagues. When I was visiting the Polish club or interviewing an older Polish person in their home I was mindful that I should not dress in too casual a way, not just because of the generation difference, but also because I felt I would be judged as a woman of a Polish father and there were certain standards to be upheld. This was not a stated expectation but an intuitive one that I put upon myself; like Sherif (2001) I felt I should not deviate too much from the norms by which I may be judged.

It was important to consider the power relationship in the research (Pitman 2002, and Spalek 2005) specifically when using oral history methodology (Turnbull 2000) as the process can unpick past experiences that the person has chosen not to think about in the present. I was mindful that this could be a difficult issue particularly with the first wave of Polish migrants, and this was increasingly evident with the women who were generally less guarded with their emotions. When someone became emotional it was important to allow them time and to validate their feelings through acknowledgment of how difficult that experience may have been for them.

Knowledge is produced jointly by researchers and subjects and in order to critically engage within a research text the researcher must intellectually and socially position herself within the research text (Temple1994). Although I felt a connection, in fact I knew very little about Poland or Polish people, apart from the Polish women I met on a family trip to Poland in 1971 and a holiday in 1995 I didn't know any Polish women. Unlike Temple (1994) Polishness was a peripheral aspect of my life.

As an inside or outsider of the group involved in the research process taking the time to build relationships and be trusted requires time and patience (Pitman 2002). As a health care practitioner with many years of experience in mental health this is something that I did not find difficult and acknowledged the importance of reflecting on my own defences when building relationships.

My position in the Polish club has evolved over time from feeling that I shouldn't really be there because I did not belong to being recognised and spoken to by some of the members and staff. I am now the Chair of the Midlands Polish Community Association a group that is formed from a cross section of Polish migrants, a black American woman and English people and a position I would not have thought possible to hold prior to beginning my research study.

## **Analysis**

The interpretation of oral history interviews can take many different forms and draws on a wide range of disciplines including ethnology, anthropology, sociology, health care studies and psychology (Abrams 2010). Qualitative data analysis is an 'interplay' between the researcher and the research data and it is important that the researcher

brings to it knowledge of life and literature along with the necessary technical skill (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy 2004).

The digitally recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed; the majority of the interviews were conducted in English by the researcher. Five of the interviews with the fourth wave participants were conducted in Polish by a third party and transcribed into English. Having listened to English being spoken with a heavy Polish accent by my father and his friends throughout my life, as a researcher I was at an advantage in being able to understand the nuances of the interviewee's dialogue. This is important not only in the analysis process but more significantly at the interview stage, it was not necessary to ask people to constantly repeat themselves because their use of language was unclear; however with an 'untrained' ear this may have happened with the possibility of negatively affecting the interview process. For this reason I transcribed the interviews that I had carried out rather than paying a third party to transcribe them for me and the translator transcribed the interviews she conducted with members of the fourth wave group who arrived post 2004, discussing these with me so that I could check for accuracy.

### **Thematic analysis**

Widely used as a method of analysis within qualitative research thematic analysis was chosen to examine the oral history transcriptions that was collected as data within this research study. The analysis began from the initial interview with the researcher noticing and looking for meaning and issues of potential interest in the data which are labelled as themes. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned

response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke 2006). During the data collection of this study two themes were identified from the beginning; the repeated links to Polish history and the experience of loss that many of the first generation Poles had experienced and as a consequence relevant literature was read around the subjects as potential themes emerged.

Interpretations in the qualitative research process depend on a good understanding of the surrounding conditions, the context and situation (Stake 2010); when exploring how Polish people in Birmingham view themselves it is important to understand the personal, political and social contexts in which they are positioned. I attended training to use a computer package to analyse the qualitative data but I chose to code the data manually because I felt that this kept me in contact with the data more completely.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six phases of analysis which are described and I have summarised them in the following table

### Table of Analysis

Phase 1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Immersion in the data to the extent of familiarity if the breadth and depth of the content
Phase 2	Generating initial codes	An initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about it
Phase 3	Searching for themes	This phase re-focuses the analysis at the broader and orders the codes into themes
Phase 4	Reviewing themes	Having identified a set of candidate themes some will be discarded and others may merge
Phase 5	Defining and naming themes	Define and refine to identify the themes to be presented in the analysis
Phase 6	Producing the report	Tell the complicated story of the data in a way which will convince the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis

From the beginning I read and reread the data and noted initial ideas, I identified features of the data that appeared to be interesting to me and organised it into meaningful groups (Tucket 2005) the initial codes are generated from the data and changes later to become broader units of analysis or themes (Braun and Clarke 2006).



The transcriptions included a column in which I wrote notes and I used coloured pens to indicate potential patterns. I later used 'post it' notes to identify segments of the data putting these on large flip chart paper, arranging and rearranging them as the codes became themes. I also copied extracts from the transcriptions and put them in a book under the headings of the different themes and colour coded them to identify which of the four waves the interviewee whose extract was being used came from.

### **Reliability and Validity.**

It is important for any research to be seen to be reliable and valid; in comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research has been challenged for the rigour of its methods and methodology. Yardley (2000) explored the notion of quality control of qualitative methods and proposed the following criteria to be used flexibly by researchers to promote validity within the framework of various qualitative methods and I proceeded with these in mind.

<b>Characteristics of good qualitative research.</b>
<b>Sensitivity to context</b> Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants' perspectives; ethical issues.
<b>Commitment and rigour</b> In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.
<b>Transparency and coherence</b> Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.
<b>Impact and importance</b> Theoretical (enriching understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers. Health workers).

## Summary

The existing research on Polish people in the UK has been examined for content and methodology; there are varieties of methodology which are consistent with the area under scrutiny, and the researcher's discipline. This chapter has given a rationale for, and an overview of, my own chosen theoretical, methodology and analysis which have been used within the thesis. Oral history and qualitative methodology fits with my world view and the chosen method of data collection allowed the possibility of the transfer of existing knowledge and skill contributing to my own lifelong learning.

Oral history allows the personal testimony of the interviewee to be heard validated, and to pass on the lived experience and which can be archived so that it is available to others, I believe that this is paramount.

Qualitative methodology allows individuals to tell their story and underpinning the interviews with an oral history approach provides a realistic and fair reconstruction of the past and offers a challenge to the established account (Thompson 1988), in the case of Birmingham's Polish there is no written account in the public domain. This is therefore, of particular importance with the Polish émigré in Birmingham whose voice has not been heard but also with those waves of Polish migrants who came afterwards.

The initial intention was to conduct the interviews with the Polish émigré in Polish; however my attempts to learn Polish did not provide me with adequate language skill to do so. The insider/outsider aspect of research is also significant in the engagement of individuals who took part in this research and this has been discussed; each person was curious about my connection with Poland. The fact that my father had lived in the pre war east of Poland that he had spent time in a German hard labour camp and had been a member of the Polish army appeared to give credibility to my interest in the Polish community in Birmingham. The fact that my mother was English gave me some dispensation for not being able to speak the language, being able to speak some Polish and to understand what people were saying if not to respond in Polish helped to show commitment and that this was more than a passing interest. In the end I felt that despite not being fluent in Polish I was not at a disadvantage during the research; I was neither an insider nor an outsider and felt that my position as a part- Polish person enabled me to build relationships with the people I interviewed.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **WAR, DEPORTATION, MASS MURDER AND LOSS**

This chapter introduces the first wave Birmingham Polish, the reasons for their forced migration and the stories of their journeys from Poland to Birmingham. Prior to the Second World War there were very few Polish Christians living in the UK and there was no established Polish community present in Birmingham; in the ensuing decades the numbers have grown, decreased and grown again as a consequence of political and social changes in Poland and Europe.

#### **The Polish in Birmingham**

The Polish people who came to Birmingham in the early post Second World War years represented a cross-section of Polish Catholic society: professional people, workers, intellectuals, they included career army officers (including two Generals), professors, judges, teachers, and doctors who had arrived by various routes (Fr. Kącki 1972). The majority came from what was the pre-war east of Poland, the Kresy region, via Siberia, Kazakhstan, Africa and Palestine. Those who had lived in the west of Poland either arrived via forced labour camps, concentration camps, or had been conscripted into the German army and some were Prisoners of War (POW) others came via the European Voluntary Workers Scheme (EVW). However, the majority were Polish military personnel, who had fought under the British, and their families; all were Displaced Persons.

The Birmingham Polish people who agreed to be interviewed came from all over pre-war Poland (Appendix 2) their experience of living in the Second Republic of Poland was diverse. The occupations of fathers in Poland were mixed as was the social background, ranging from living in shared accommodation to owning property or businesses. Many of the Catholic Poles came from military families in the east of Poland and had lived an agricultural way of life, those interviewed from the west of Poland came from a mix between urban and agricultural life style. One person's family owned a factory in a small town, my father Mr. Smojkis lived with his family in Wilno a large city; his family shared a cellar with four other families. The Jewish Poles who were interviewed came from families who owned either a business or a part of a business and were in many ways integrated into Polish life. The oldest of those interviewed was twenty years old when the Second World War began the youngest was four years old. The second generation, who were interviewed, were all born before 1960.

In order to differentiate between the Polish migrant groups I adapted the terms used by Staniewicz (2001) who conducted a case study of the second generation Polish migrants living in the West Midlands in Britain and the United States of America. Staniewicz studied a large but potentially discreet Polish migrant group who arrived in the host country within a specific time period (Staniewicz 2001). In the British aspect of her study Staniewicz described the different groups of Polish migrants by using the term 'wave' to describe the time phase of their arrival in the following way

- First wave: during the years of the mid 1940's – mid 50's; these were a mixture of army personnel and civilians who arrived directly as a result of World War Two (WWII).
- Second wave: these people arrived over a longer period of time from the early 1960's to the mid 70's
- Third wave: these were people who arrived post Solidarity and up until her study in 2001 when freedom was no longer restricted.

To identify the people who arrived post 2004 I added a fourth wave to the definitions of Staniewicz

- Fourth wave: the Polish people who have arrived post 2004 as a result of the addition of Poland as an accession country to the European Union. These people are described as economic migrants.

### **The Second Republic of Poland, history and changing relationships**

The majority of the first wave Birmingham Polish people comes from the east of pre war Poland. The Second Polish Republic had espoused equality under law for all Polish citizens in respect to their economic, political, cultural and religious interests irrespective of race, national origin or creed (Piotrowski 1998) but the reality of daily life was different. In the interwar years (1918-1939) the Polish population included a third of ethnic minorities, the majority were in the east; the Ukrainians were the largest in number at about five million (16%), three million Jewish people (10%) and one million five hundred thousand Byelorussians (5%) and more than one million Germans (4%) (Bubczyk 2002).

The Minorities Treaty of June 28 1919 and the Polish Constitution of 1921 stated that there were imposition of responsibilities and obligations including co-operation with the legitimately established government, there should be loyalty to the nation that was to be their home, military service, national defence and the obligation to obey the laws of the land and preserve public order (Piotrowski 1998, p3). Poland's abrogation of the treaty in 1934 was consistent with the Pilsudski regime whose policies were predominantly aimed towards assimilation; ethnic schools decreased in number, replaced by bilingual Polish and non Polish schools, preference was now given to ethnic Poles in the professions and proportionate quotas were imposed in universities, restricting Jewish, Ukrainian and Belorussia minorities (Piotrowski 1983).

These historical changes in Poland affected the minority groups and most significantly the Jews of Poland. The Jews of Europe had wandered from country to country and were often expelled, Poland had welcomed the Jewish people and indeed they lived on Polish soil for centuries, they were part of the Polish reality for more than a thousand years (Hertz 1988). It is estimated that twenty percent of the world's Jewish population were on Polish soil by 1939, this was the largest Jewish community in the world; and although there was evidence of assimilation in many areas of Poland the communities remained quite separate (Hoffman 1997). A quarter of the Jewish population lived in the large cities but the largest numbers, particularly in the east, lived in small towns and villages known as shtetl; the inhabitants of a shtetl were predominantly Hasidic Jews living among and with traditional Catholics peasants (Orla-Bukowska 1994, Hoffman 1997). In the shtetl the Jews and the Poles had lived alongside each other for centuries, working, trading and socialising. In the

interwar years with the increase in emphasis on education they were attending school together learning and being taught in the Polish language apart from religious education when they would be taught separately, in some cases the Jewish children would leave an hour early to attend Jewish religious studies (Orla-Bukowska 1994).

With the formation of the Second Polish Republic some ethnic groups had been separated from their homeland by changing boundaries and they resented their separation from their native countries (Davies 1982). The Ukrainians aspired to their own state and under the Ukrainian Military Organisation they carried out terrorist attacks against the Poles (Bubczyk 2002). Military action continued in the eastern territories and six wars were fought between 1918 and 1921; including the Polish – Ukrainian war, the Polish-Soviet War and the Polish–Lithuanian dispute over Wilno; following the Polish success these became territorial gains for the Poles (Piotrowski 1998). As a reward for their loyalty in these disputes the men who fought in Pilsudski's Polish legions were given land and a small monetary grant, and as they usually brought their families to live with them from other parts of Poland, they became known as the military settlers. These settlers often lived on the edge of an existing Ukrainian or Belorussian village; here the Poles were often in the minority and were under constant threat of Russian revenge (Jesmanowa 2000). The resentment and conflict was added to because the land was given to Poles in preference to ethnic minority groups (Piotrowski 1983). After 1939 both the Russians and the Germans used the difficult historical relationships that existed between the Polish people and the ethnic minorities to encourage the ethnic minorities to become their allies against the Poles. For example, the Russians recruited Ukrainians into the army to assist with the transportations of Poles to Siberia. The guards in the hard labour camp in France, that my father was in were Ukrainian.



There was some evidence of integration and assimilation of the Jewish people at different times in history but during the interwar years with the increase in Polish nationalism the situation for Jewish people began to deteriorate. Unemployment among Jews increased as unassimilated Jews were not welcome in state employment and they were banned from a wide range of occupations; during the 1920s and 1930s influenced by the Zionist movement large numbers of Jews emigrated from Poland, many were on their way to Palestine (Davies 1982). There was an increase in open and covert anti-Semitism at this time. Polish national radio was constrained in the material it was allowed to broadcast, forced to ignore its multicultural audience, agricultural programmes for the Ukrainian's and Belarusian's were acceptable but when a slot of five minutes every two weeks was allocated to a talk for Jews the storm of protests caused it to be quickly withdrawn (Milosz 1988).

The fledgling Second Republic of Poland had experienced many political and social difficulties during its life time; internal and external relationships had continued to be strained. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of non aggression (August 1939) between Germany and the Soviet Union included the agreement to carve up Polish land between them. Historical relationships had affected this agreement as Stalin wanted the eastern territory that had previously belonged to Russia and Hitler wanted to reclaim what had once been Prussian cities (Davies 1982, Piotrowski 1983).

## **The Second World War**

When the Second World War began in 1939 an entire generation of Poles had been brought up to believe that national independence was the norm and to observe the

regeneration of rail, roads and the creation of a Polish airline (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). Following the German invasion from the west on September the 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 the Polish people were stripped of all rights. The Nazi's espoused that the Poles were subhuman's who were to be murdered or enslaved, (Lukas 2004 p4). A broad list of Polish elite to be slated for execution or imprisonment included teachers, writers, government officials and anyone who had attended secondary school (Lukas 2004 p5). In support of their allies Britain declared war on Germany on September the 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939 but neither the French nor British used military force against the Germans at this point, the Poles struggled on against the enemy pushing towards the east. Within three weeks, on September the 17<sup>th</sup>, in full knowledge of the Germans, the Soviet army invaded Poland from the east declaring to the world that they were helping their neighbours; a Nazi-Soviet agreement of September the 28<sup>th</sup> 1939 divided Poland fairly equally along the rivers Narwa, Bug and San (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). The Polish nation and its people would never be the same.

In the Nazi imposed hierarchy the Poles were next to the Jews and Gypsies in the order of inferior races, slated for complete subjugation and eventual extermination (Hoffman 1997) this had an effect on the ongoing treatment of and relationships between the Jews and the Poles during the period of occupation. The cities were divided into German, Polish and Jewish sections with the living conditions in the non German sections deteriorating at a faster pace; white Russians and Ukrainians were treated better than the Poles with the Jews receiving the harshest treatment of all (Coutouvidis and Reynolds 1986).

In the east, the Russian Gulag camps and exile villages were already well established by 1939, they were filled mainly with Russian nationals and people considered to be enemies of the state. Within the early months following Stalin's invasion of what was a multi-ethnic eastern Poland, Bessarabia and the Baltic States the Russian Secret Police (NKVD) began to pluck Poles, Balts, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Moldavians out of their bourgeois or peasant worlds and dump them in large numbers into the Gulag and exile villages (Applebaum 2003 p382). Large numbers of people from the territories of eastern Poland were arrested and sent to the camps and deported to exile villages in the far north and Kazakhstan; families were deported en masse from lists that had been drawn up, some exiles were given one days warning others a few minutes, some were told to take enough warm clothing for three years, others were told that they would never return (Applebaum 2003).

The Nazi's and the Soviets targeted certain elements of Polish society; the Nazi intention was to remove the Polish elite, political, social and spiritual leaders, the intelligentsia, representatives of culture and science, people in the resistance and officers by exportation to hard labour and death camps known as the AB Aktion (Kolek 2002). On taking Krakow the Nazis called a meeting of the professors of the Jagiellonian University removing 183 of them to a concentration camp. Between May and August 1940 3,500 Polish professors, teachers, administrators, priests, writers and intellectuals were sent to concentration camps in Germany and 2,500 political leaders and city council members were executed in Palmiry near Warsaw (Kolek 2002), this area later became an area for mass execution of Jews.

The Soviets also targeted the elite in their deportations to Siberia and most significantly they separated the Polish officers from their men. During the September 1939 invasion 14,500 Polish officers and policemen were taken prisoner by the Soviet army and held in three Prisoner of War (POW) camps, 7,300 were held in NKVD jails in the western region of the Soviet Socialist Republics of the Ukraine and Belorussia; under the orders of Stalin they were murdered in the spring of 1940 in what became known as the Katyn Massacres, Soviet involvement was denied up until 1990 (Cienciala, Lebedeva, Materski 2007; Rees 2008).

The onset of the war created a position where in order to keep themselves and their families safe individuals were forced to make choices about their allegiance and this would often be linked to the person's ethnic group. Poland was the only country in German occupied Europe where the death penalty was automatically imposed upon gentiles who helped the Jews (Lukas 2004). The interviews in this study illustrated how Polish relationships with ethnic minorities began to change in the west and east of Poland as alliances were made with the occupiers.

### **The events of September 1939 underpinned by the voices of the first wave Birmingham Polish people**

Many references in the interviews were made to history; the lost political power of Poland, the historical external relationship with Poland's neighbours Russia and Germany and the internal relationship with the ethnic minorities in Poland. During the initial meeting with a member of the first wave Birmingham Polish, the conversation often resulted with a historical discussion about how the Second World War began and their own journey to the UK. This fits with the work that Burrell completed with

the Polish people of Leicester (Burrell 2003). As this first generation of Polish who settled are ageing happier memories can be overshadowed by the need to make sense of past events (Winslow 2001) and this retelling of their story supports the notion that losses become part of who we are (Harvey, 1996) their past experience has integrated into their sense of how they perceive themselves. The amount of referencing to history within the interviews conducted with the first and second generation Birmingham Polish people drew me to conclude that history is not only prevalent but is also relevant in the themes that emerged (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Following the German invasion those men who were born in the west of Poland were forcibly conscripted into the German army, people who were not born there were relocated to central Poland. Two of the men who were interviewed were conscripted into the German army; Mr Knaczek now in his 80s, talked of what happened in Chojnice the town where he was born which was situated on the pre-war German Polish border, he described the change in relationships with his German Polish neighbours and his own conscription into the German army:

*“So when the Germans entered Poland, they knew exactly everything where is, where Polish soldiers intend to fight, where they are stationed an all this, the Germans know everything.....so you see Poland was all betrayed in 1939... when the Germans was entering Poland the local Germans was greeting them with flowers, greeting them you see and on the list is everybody already who is going to be arrested, who is going to be shot” (Int: Mr Knaczek).*

Mr. Knaczek stated that the Germans held marches of celebration through the town every Sunday when people were expected to join in; when he refused to join them he was beaten by the crowd. He spoke of how he was conscripted:

*"This German give the orders from Hitler that he had to cleanse the territory of anybody who was not born there, throw them out to part, to Warsaw. And who was born (in the area) they would have to serve for the German army, so I was born there; they called me to German army.....they sent me for training course. (Int: Mr Knaczek).*

The German and Polish people had lived side by side in this area prior to September 1939. Mr Knaczek was forced to fight against the allies, including his fellow Poles. He was captured by the allies during an operation and taken as a Prisoner of War (POW). The Poles were separated from the Germans and they were all interviewed, he subsequently joined the Polish Army and was sent to Southampton and on to Scotland eventually becoming an army instructor in England.

In the east of Poland Mr Grzyb was twelve years old when he and his family were deported to Siberia on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1940, a date on which many Poles were forcibly removed from their homes; his story was similar to those of other Poles from the east. Mr Grzyb was the oldest of four children, he had two younger brothers and a sister who was three years of age, his father was a carpenter and musician, his mother was a homemaker. In the town where they lived in the Tarnopol region, the population was mixed of Poles, Ukrainians and Jews. On their arrival in Siberia his parents were forced to fell trees and it was the task of Mr. Grzyb to look after his

siblings; he recounted stories of hunger and cold, being so hungry that he stole potatoes and at one time they caught a cat and ate it. He also recounted that a Ukrainian family who they had known back home sent them a food parcel, demonstrating that there were ongoing good relationships between ethnic groups. When the amnesty with the Soviets happened following Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941, General Anders called for the Poles of Siberia to join him, and so the father of Mr Grzyb went to join his emerging army; the family never saw him again. On the way to Palestine all the children became ill and his two brothers died of Typhoid, he was so ill he could hardly walk on his release from hospital. His mother pushed Mr Grzyb to join the army telling the authorities that he was a year older. His mother and sister were sent to Uganda, he came to England in 1946 with the armed forces and his mother and sister joined him in 1948; they lived in hostels and Displaced Persons camps until they could afford to buy a house. Throughout his interview, although Mr Grzyb had been only twelve years of age in 1939, he verbally expressed his anger and contempt towards the allies and to 'Uncle Joe Stalin' for their part in the loss of Poland.

Although many of the interviewees were quite young at the time, the arrival of the Russian soldiers and the forced eviction from their homes remained a clear visual and emotional memory; they gave details of the perilous journey to Siberia, squashed into cattle trucks, using a hole in the floor for a toilet, with hardly any food or water and they recounted the deaths of people along the way, their bodies were often thrown from the train and they left without graves.

Mrs Artista's father was a military settler, she was four years old in February 1940 and described her life in Poland as idyllic, saying that her father exploited the land that they had, and that her aunt and her family lived nearby also on a farm. Mrs Artista recounted her story and as she did so she held back the tears, her voice was shaking as she stated:

*"In February, I don't remember exactly the day err the Russians broke into the house at about 4 O'clock in the morning, of course shouting with guns and err as children because we lived next to the Ukrainian village so we picked up quite a lot of Ukrainian language and they were shouting and saying 'you've got to get up and get all your belongings' and of course, they were looking for guns in the house and they were, because my brothers were still with us at that time and my father. They couldn't find any guns err so of course as children we were crying my mother was in a shock and she didn't know what to do and I remember very clearly one soldier with a helmet, pointed helmet on his head was sitting on the chair next to the window on the right hand side of the bedroom and he was shouting to my mother, and saying to my mother, you'd better collect everything, collect as much as you can and pack as much as you can because you are not coming back"* (Int: Mrs Artista).

The return to that night brought a vivid picture and emotions that were difficult for her to suppress. She went on to describe this soldier as kind because he told them to take everything as they would not be coming back; she later knew that others were allowed only to take a few belongings.



The Soviets had quickly recruited the Ukrainians as soldiers, telling them that they were liberating them from the Poles. Mrs Artista explained that she could understand what the soldiers were saying because they had picked up the Ukrainian language. Stalin claimed the Ukrainians as Soviets and as such they became enemies of their Polish neighbours.

### **Changing Relationships**

In interwar Poland to be Polish was synonymous with being Catholic and the relationships between the Polish Jews and the Catholic Poles became increasingly difficult. Leading Polish political parties were nationalistic, the National Democrats were anti-Semitic and the country was coping with intense poverty, economic backwardness and ethnic divisions (Lukas 2004). The following section will look at how some of these difficulties manifested themselves in the lives of the people who were interviewed.

Poland's boundaries have changed since 1939 and all the interviewees prefixed Poland with 'pre-war' when talking about their place of origin. The places the majority of people who were interviewed lived in are now in Ukraine, Lithuania or Belorussia; post Second World War they would have been under Soviet domination.

Mr Niebieski explains what happened in September 1939 on his return from Warsaw, where he was studying, to his home town near to Wilno. At the outbreak of the war he made his way back to Lida in the North East of Poland when he arrived in his home town on the twentieth of September 1939 following the invasion by the Soviets on the seventeenth things had already begun to change:

*“And I got back to Lida...as I came into town I saw one of my colleagues, a Jewish fellow, as a Soviet policeman with a rifle under his arm and I didn’t talk to him and anyway things were.....this was under Soviet occupation”*

According to Bauer (2009) the Jews rightly saw the Soviets as their liberators and welcomed them in some towns and villages with flowers, they were however also among the numbers of those deported during Soviet occupation. The Soviets exploited the position of the ethnic minorities in Poland during the interwar years to their advantage, bringing them alongside against the Polish population. In the east of Poland the Soviet invasion gave some Jews the opportunity to gain material advantage, elevated status and positions of leadership that they had not had under the Polish system (Jolluck 2002).

Not far from Lida was the city of Wilno, known previously as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, Wilno was an important centre of Jewish culture. In the inter war years when Wilno was a Polish city, Jews made up 40% of the population and Yiddish or Hebrew was the second most spoken language (Polish Research Centre 1940). There was a Jewish Institute of study and eight private Jewish secondary schools; from the 114 newspapers and magazines published in Wilno, 74 were in Polish, 16 Jewish, 12 Belorussian, 9 Lithuanian and 3 Russian illustrating the rich diversity of the population (Snyder 2003, Polish Research Centre 1940).

The Lithuanian Poles of Wilno, whose roots were of Lithuanian nobility and traced back to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, viewed themselves as superior to the Poles in the centre and the west of Poland (Snyder 2003). Like Pilsudski many were Polish

patriots; during the Second World War the Polish intelligentsia of Wilno were deported to Siberia by the Soviets during their occupation of 1939-1941. When the Germans occupied, the Jews were forced into two ghettos and were murdered in Ponary, a wooded region on the edge of town, they were shot and buried in a mass grave by the Nazis and the Lithuanian collaborators (Piotrowski 1998).

The following extract from the interview with my father, Mr Smojkis, illustrates events in Wilno from 1939 when Wilno was invaded by the Soviets and tells of the changes when the Germans attacked the Soviets in 1941, and the difference in Wilno under German occupation. The grandparents of Mr Smojkis owned a small farm where he grew up until he had to leave the farm to go to school in Wilno and live with his parents. He loved the farm and his grandparents; when he moved to Wilno his family were impoverished, sharing a space in a cellar with four other families. The building was owned by a Jewish man and it had no running water or electricity; he was seven years old and said that he cried for three months until he made some friends at school. The onset of the war changed his life again:

*“When the war broke out with the Germans there were a lot (Jews) coming from Warsaw and the other different towns, coming to our town because to our town the Russians come and the Jews used to love the Russians, well the Communists, there was over a hundred thousand during the war when the Germans come. Jews started showing off that the Poles got nothing to say that it’s a Communist world now and all that” (Int. Mr. Smojkis)*

Jewish people were moving eastwards from the German dominated west to where they thought they would be safe, however when Hitler attacked the Soviets in 1941 and occupied what had been Wilno the situation changed drastically for the Jewish people. Mr Smojkis goes on to say:

*“Germans left the Jews alone for the first six months I think, then they started making the ghettos, two parts of the town they closed and put all the Jews; and all the Jews could take from whatever they could carry, nothing else, and err they made ‘em work hard; after maybe, after six months in the ghetto they started shooting ‘em”* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

He gives his own explanation of what he saw happening:

*“See what they done the Germans they put the young ones, Jews, give them the different band on the arm and say you’re a policeman over your people, sort ‘em out for work and you’ll be free, he said, and they used to run ‘em to work looked after how many they took and how many they brought back”* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

Polish people were under threat if they helped the Jews, in some cases they would be shot or imprisoned and he gives an example of an incident with a Jewish boy who was his friend:

*“I had my mate that Jewish kid, he did break away a couple of times when he was going to work, but he must ask this one policeman, I want to get away for the day, and he might have let him go. One day I took him round the farms to get some food*

*for his mother and his father, he gave me his bicycle. So he said would you help me and I said, help you yes but I might get shot, because if you wanted to help Jews they shot you with the Jews. I said if nobody, I said if you see people then you stay behind me but if not then we can walk together and I took him round the farms to my uncle. He took some roubles to exchange for the food and he put the Rosary on the cross on, to pretend he was a Catholic. I said they will know you're a Jew I said because you look like a Jew anyway, he was ginger and he got freckles on his face and I said they will know. I took him to the farms and they said straight away and I said no he's not a Jew and we did get him a couple of loaves or something to eat. I think err we had to sleep, we had to stop the night in a barn, we stopped there, I stayed with him; the next morning I took him to me granddads there, me granddads not got much... then we went to town and we see his Jews coming from work in the night time, he joined them going to the ghetto took his family whatever" (Int: Mr Smojkis)*

I asked him what happened to this boy he said:

*"He got shot with his family. That's why my mate told him to get out and join the, the, go to the forest and join the partisans but he, he wouldn't leave his family" (Int: Mr Smojkis).*

The Jews in some of the ghettos reacted by Amidah (standing up against) unarmed and armed reactions intended to keep the community and its components functioning despite the threat posed by the German regime, for example education, cultural and religious traditions, food supply, medical aid and social welfare (Bauer 2009). Later when he was in the forced labour camp Mr Smojkis heard that there was an uprising in the remaining Wilno ghetto but he said it was too late. The

majority of the Jews of Wilno, 60-70,000 were taken to Ponary and shot and buried in a mass grave (Piotrowski 1998). Mr Smojkis visited the memorial in Ponary on one of the few visits he made to see his mother in Wilno before she died.

The fate of Mr Smojkis was also governed by the German invasion of Wilno. Under the Soviets because his family were not elite, intelligentsia or military settlers they were not on the early lists for deportation to Siberia, as they were not Jewish they were not removed to the Ghetto by the Nazis but in 1941 when he was fourteen years old he was taken from the streets and sent to a German forced labour camp in France:

*“They just took us off the street; they wanted some people to work and they just took us, took us, first we was in prison for a few weeks maybe more then when they had about three hundred people they put us on a train and took us to a hard labour camp, when the Russians was closer they took from that camp right up to the French border, well that was in France, in the line of the Maginot there was a big army camp there, well living quarter, we had to go all night to the ore mine”* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

To clarify I asked, “Was it Germans or Russians who took you?”

*“They was Lithuanian police was err well I don’t like to say It, they was terrible, what you call what go with the Germans?”* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

I responded “Collaborators”:

*“Yeah they was helping Germans, that’s how it was, they couldn’t care less about if you was in the partisans or in the underground army and they needed people to work and they grabbed anybody, they had some volunteer what went to Germany to work”* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

Collaboration with the oppressors was not unique to one group; there was corruption, collaboration with the murderers and a decline in societal and personal norms in the Jewish community, the Ukrainians, the Poles and the Belarusians (Hilberg 1992, Bauer 2009).

The majority of the literature separates the written history of the Jews and the Poles; however their experiences were inextricably linked. Mr Podroz the son of a Polish Jewish man talked about the town Turek in the west of Poland near to the German border where his father had lived up until 1935, this town at that time had about three thousand Jews, roughly one third of the population, one third were ethnic Germans the final third was Poles (Int: Mr Podroz). As Zionists many of his father's family left Poland for Palestine but not all of them were able to:

*"My uncle he died in the Holocaust together with his two children and his wife. My father was lucky together with two of his sisters and two of his brothers they managed to leave Poland well before the war started...the reason for that is because his father and the whole family were religious Zionists, members of a group called like the Zionist worker...so they were very active in it as young children and my father was as a young man and they actually emigrated to Palestine legally with a capitalist visa, they left in October 1934 and they arrived Palestine in 1935". (Int: Mr Podroz).*

Despite being born in Poland and spending his early life there the father of Mr. Podroz had no affinity with the land in which he was born. He never spoke Polish but his sister, who also went to Palestine, always spoke Polish and ate Polish food. As

Zionists his family had immigrated to Palestine from Turek following others who had begun to leave Poland in the 1920's. Mr Podroz stated that the Zionists were a strong group in Turek who dedicated themselves toward a return to Zion, the land of Israel.

It was the grandparents of Mr Podroz, who instigated the move to Palestine:

*"I'm very grateful that my grandfather and my grandmother had the foresight to make the effort and go to Palestine, especially because later on it became harder, after 1936 it was much harder... 1920's was a good time for the Jews (in Poland) 1930's was a bad time because Marshall Pilsudski....died yes and also and obviously the Nazis were rising and I think they just felt it was their duty to emigrate whatever happens... and there was no future for them in Poland... its only about 10% made it to Palestine and 90% just went elsewhere"*

This was also referring to the time in the 1930s that the Treaty for the Protection of the Minorities was abrogated and there were increased difficulties in relationships with all minority groups (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006).

A second Polish Jewish man Mr Harrow remembers that anti-Semitism was visible and palpable in his home town in Poland in the inter-war years. There were about 15,000 Jews in a population of 55,000 people in Piotrkow Trybunalski where he lived:



*“When I say visible because there was graffiti on the walls, ‘get out; go to Palestine’ where you belong”* (Int: Mr. Harrow)

He goes on to describe what happened to him as a member of a Polish Jewish family when the Germans arrived:

*“When we had to move into a ghetto, not only did we have to move into a ghetto but Jews from the surrounding areas were deported to it and also there were many who left what used to be called the Volksdeutsche the part of Western Poland which was included in the Third Reich and so in the ghetto there were 28,000 Jews in an area before the war there were 4,000 people, also it was the oldest part and therefore the apartments were not large, on average there was one room and kitchen, two rooms and a kitchen and so a lot of families had to live together”* (Int: Mr. Harrow).

The statements of the three men (Mr Smojkis, Mr Podroz and Mr Harrow) illustrate that under the Nazis the Jews were separated from the rest of the population and treated differently (Gross 1979). The Nazis transformed Poland into the chief killing ground in their efforts to rid their future Europe of those they considered to be undesirable, human ‘vermin’ the Jews, eastern Slavs, gypsies, political opponents, among others through methodical extermination (Hipchick and Cox 2001).

The Nazis created eight concentration camps in Poland; the most infamous camp is Auschwitz Birkenau. Auschwitz was built by the Germans in mid 1940 in the suburbs of the Polish town of Oswiecim, an area with a pre war population of 12,000, out of these about 60% 7,000 were Jewish. Poles and Jews were evicted from the

area and houses were demolished in order to build the camp and house the German SS officers who would be employed there.

Initially it was mainly Poles the Nazis regarded as being particularly dangerous, that were sent to Auschwitz: members of the Polish elite, political, social and spiritual leaders, the intelligentsia, representatives of culture and science, people in the resistance and officers. Others were rounded up and taken to the camp during street raids or during operations to remove people from their homes.

Auschwitz became the largest concentration camp in Europe extending over three sites the largest being Auschwitz II-Birkenau, this was where the largest installations for mass murder were built and where the majority of the Jews who had been deported to the camp were exterminated

<b>The Victims of Auschwitz (Minimum Estimations)</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Deportees</b>	<b>Number of those Murdered</b>
Jews	1,100,000	1,000,000
Poles	140-150,000	70-75,000
Gypsies	23,000	20,000
Soviet POW's	15,000	14,000
Others	25,000	12,000

(Auschwitz Memorial and Museum booklet, 'A Brief History and Basic Facts').

There were some successful escapes from Auschwitz by Poles and Jews of different nationalities which were often aided by the local Polish people and underground organisations. Reports from escapees about the atrocities committed there were written, translated into several languages and distributed around the world including to the Polish Government in Exile, the Vatican, and the League of Nations in Geneva, the World Jewish Congress and the International Red Cross (Swiebocki 2002). As early as 1941 the Polish Government in Exile requested that attacks from the air be made on Auschwitz and repeated their request, but they were rejected on the grounds that resources were needed for the war effort and that the attacks would not achieve the results hoped for (Swiebocki 2002).

Under what would be perceived as normal circumstances positive social identity is important to a person as it enhances self esteem and self worth and gives a sense of belonging in the social world (Tajfel and Turner 1986). And also under normal circumstances group conflict usually arises because of competitions for resources (Pennington, Gillen and Hill 2003); throughout Poland's history this struggle for resources between the different ethnic groups has been evident. However the Second World War brought about extra ordinary circumstances when behaviours became exaggerated, friends and neighbours and sometimes families were in conflict with each other for survival under two occupied forces.

With the onset of the Second World War, membership of cultural or ethnic groups became more prominent in Polish society because of the categorisation imposed by the occupiers; the emotional attachment a person holds to belonging to a certain group affects their self concept and how they view themselves in society (Turner

1982). Hostility between ethnic groups was not always evident in Poland but the extraordinary situation created by the Second World War contributed to and compounded the difficulties that had been evident during the interwar years. The excerpts from the interview of Mr Smojkis express his confusion about the behaviour of people he had lived alongside; how the Jewish people behaved towards each other and their acceptance of the rules enforced by the Nazi regime; and of the Lithuanian police who collaborated with the Germans and ultimately took away his liberty.

### **Experiences of Loss**

The first wave Birmingham Polish who were interviewed had all suffered some form of traumatic loss. The interviewees were not questioned directly about symptoms, and it is not my intention to pathologise their ways of coping; however these experiences have impacted on how they reconstructed their lives in Birmingham. Harvey suggests that people do not 'get over' major losses but those losses become part of who we are, over time individuals begin to understand their new identities assimilating these major stressors or losses into their lives (Harvey 1996).

Contemporary theories of grief try to understand the more complex individual patterns of adaptation and have moved away from the notion that successful grieving needs the bereaved person to move on from the person/s who has died, recognising that it is OK to have a continued bond or symbolic relationship with the deceased (Neimeyer 2000). All of the first wave of Birmingham Polish who were interviewed lost at least one member of their family in many cases they lost more, they also lost their liberty, their home, where they came from was no longer Poland, those cities

which are now west of the previous Curzon line and part of Soviet occupied Lithuania, Belarus and the Ukraine. Recent theories of loss supplement the traditional focus of the emotional consequences of loss and pay attention to the cognitive process of mourning and most significantly recognise that there are local or cultural ways of grieving. There is an acknowledgment of the possibility that the person integrates the lessons of loss into their life and that they may experience 'post traumatic growth' something that has been lacking in previous models. Fundamentally the models include families and wider social contexts in the understanding of the mourning experience of individual survivors in their quest for a personal narrative that makes sense of a changed reality (Neimeyer 2000).

In this approach it is important to engage with the bereaved person's experiential world as a precondition to its reconstruction, in other words it is fundamental to understand the persons experience in order for them to begin to move forward. Within a therapy relationship:

"Human beings are viewed as (co) authors of their life stories, struggling to compose a meaningful account of the important events of their lives and revising, editing or even dramatically rewriting these when presuppositions that sustain these accounts are challenged by unanticipated or incongruent events"

(Neimeyer 2000, p263).

Bereaved people often seek safe contexts in which they can tell (and retell) their stories of loss, hoping that the therapist can bear to hear what others cannot,

validating their pain as real without resorting to simple reassurances (Neimeyer 2000).

Many of the first wave of Polish people were quite young in 1939, or were born in transit from Poland to Birmingham, the trauma that they experienced occurred during the period that attachments with important figures are being made, when a child is developing the foundations that will form who they are and how they relate to others. When a trauma occurs during this phase it can have lifelong consequences on how relationships develop. People who have experienced attachment related trauma, intrafamilial abuse or neglect and traumatic losses can develop avoidant attachment behaviour or learn to pretend that everything is OK; when the person speaks of the traumatic event they have experienced the tendency is to minimise the events meaning or its perceived negative impact (Muller 2010):

“Painful stories are discussed in an emotionally detached, intellectualised manner often rationalised in one way or another or avoided altogether by focusing on other less threatening material. Having developed a world view that others cannot be depended on, the individual tends toward a pattern of self-reliance and a view of self as independent, strong and normal. Along with this pattern, there is a tendency to dismiss and devalue experiences of closeness intimacy and vulnerability”  
(Muller 2010 p2)

Ultimately, Neimeyer suggests, people search for ways of assimilating the multiple meanings of loss into the over arching story of their lives, looking for fresh perspectives on their losses for themselves and others (Neimeyer 1998b). Forgetting

certain kinds of betrayal experiences can be necessary for the individual's adaptation within a traumatic or emotionally damaging environment (Freyd 1999, 2001) and inability to recall childhood events are quite common for individuals who have experienced early trauma (Muller 2010). People can develop subconscious behaviours to protect themselves; they may exclude some things that have happened to them when recounting experiences or shift attention away from events that arouse difficult feelings, by pushing away potentially painful episodes the person will avoid possible threat (psychological or emotional) to themselves (Muller 2010), this can affect how they develop relationships.

On an intellectual level understanding of the positioning of Poland between Russia and Germany and the historical context of the three countries may offer some explanation of what happened to the people of pre-war Poland; however an emotional understanding is not so easy. One of the significant shared wishes of those who survived was to keep Polish identity alive and to continue the fight for a free Poland; many expected a third world war and others kept a packed suitcase ready to return to Poland at short notice (Engels 1993).

The stories of the first wave Birmingham Polish people were filled with descriptions of loss; beginning with the loss of their liberty, the loss of home and belongings and continuing on with accounts of lost lives of siblings, parents and grandparents. The following extracts illustrate some aspects of loss experienced by the first wave Polish people.

Mr Slownik a second generation man gave an account of his mother's journey from Siberia and of her having had to work from the age of nine cutting trees:

*"Yes, well she had three brothers and all of them died, mainly from typhoid and other diseases. Her parents were in Africa with her, I don't know whether they came out together or separately as the school she was in was an orphanage so they must have been a time when they were separated"* (Int: Mr Slownik)

His mother's parents and her sister who was deported with them to Siberia survived and came to England; her older sister who had remained in Poland was *"re-settled into land that Poland got from Germany"*. This story gives examples of the loss of the family home and way of life, the deaths of three children and the re-settling of his aunt resulting in the loss of her home.

Mrs Artista recounted the death of her newborn brother in Siberia, her mother placing her in an orphanage and later the death of her mother and older sister in Teheran:

*"Then I remember my mother going into hospital, what sort of hospital I don't know, but then I know when she came back the baby didn't come back...and I remember my father making a little coffin for the baby...then the whole family we went and in the Tundra we buried our little bother, he was called Tomek...."* (Int: Mrs Artista)

Later in the interview she states:

*"And the next thing I remember too, that happened later, my mother must have made the decision to put me in the orphanage. Now they started to split the family..so, my*



*mother kept the eldest sister, ...she kept her, my brother joined the army so he was not with us any longer. My father was with us, then my sister joined the cadets; and my sister... and myself my mother put in the orphanage.*

She goes on:

*“But my mother took me to the orphanage with my sister...and I hated it, oh I really hated that, I thought my mother really loved me and she wouldn’t.....I remember and she was trying to make her way home, I run in front of her... and she had a battle with me, I just would not stay. About twenty times she had to go backwards and forwards, I just would not go into this orphanage, but eventually I was forced to” (Int: Mrs Artista)*

She did not give up trying to go back to her mother; she saved half of her bread ration in her pillow every night thinking that if she got home with the food her mother would take her back. One day she did make her way back to where the family had been living to find everyone was on the move; this was following Stalin’s amnesty agreement with the Poles to allow them to put an army together. But when she asked for her mother she realised she did not know her own surname and so people were unable to help her. She went back to the orphanage and found they were also moving on to Tehran.

In Tehran there were different camps and she was still not reunited with her parents and older sister for about three months, then her sister came and found her and they were together as a family except for her brother who was in the army; they were now classified as a military family. The family reunion was not to last, her mother and younger sister died in the camp hospital. Mrs Artista gave an account of how in order

to see her mother in the hospital she had to be a good girl for her father; she did see both her sister and her mother before they died:

*“So in Tehran I’ve lost my mother, I’ve lost my younger sister; people were still suffering from hunger and dysentery and my mother was so weak, she died and my sister and my mother both of them died....so in 1942 within two weeks I’ve lost my sister and my mother....I was devastated...”* (Int: Mrs Artista).

Her mother and sisters were buried in Teheran, the camp was moved on at the end of 1942, she and her remaining siblings and her father were in Africa and eventually sent to Britain as a military family.

Mrs Drzewo was born in a Displaced Persons camp in England, both her parents are Polish and she spoke only Polish until she went to school in England. Asked about how her parents had come to be in England she stated that:

*“My father was taken by the Germans to a work camp. He escaped from there, crossed over the, to the part of the Curzon line back to the part of Poland where he was born, which is now the Ukraine and he got caught by the Russians who caught him as a spy and he was interred there. But when the amnesty came in 1941 he was released, joined General Anders army and found himself in the Middle East, found himself in Italy was injured, was sent back to the Middle East and came to the UK in 1948, January 1948.”* (Int: Mrs Drzewo)

In this short extract from the interview we hear her father's story which includes capture under one oppressor, his escape and then capture once again by the second oppressor. The statement that he found himself in the Middle East leaves out the incredible journey that he will have made over land and sea to join the allied forces, a journey where many lost their lives. Then she briefly tells her mother's story, a woman who was born in the part of Poland that is now Belarus:

*"My mother on the other hand, she was taken to Siberia with my grandparents, my grandfather actually died out there. Mom and grandmother actually survived everything. My mother was a lumberjack; she basically worked chopping down trees and having to work very hard because she had to upkeep her parents as well".* (Int: Mrs Drzewo)

Mrs Drzewo's mother told the authorities that she was two years older than she was so that she could work to support her parents. Her father died of hyperthermia having been discharged from hospital after an illness and her mother survived the War and lived with the family in the UK until her death. This woman's parents are now in their 90's, they have never mastered the English language and their children acted as interpreters for them, they have always socialised with Polish people. Mrs Drzewo married a Polish man and she has ensured that her three children now in their twenties and thirties all speak Polish and all attended the Polish Saturday school. She and her husband are active members of the Polish club in Birmingham, the history and the stories have continued for three generations.

Boleslaw Smojkis described his life in the German forced labour camp which was in France and how he saw people die every day:

*“I saw people die, every day taking out three, four or five people taking out every day and I used to stand and watch and say ‘lucky they won’t suffer anymore’...some died of starvation, some got beat up but most died of starvation. My legs was swelling up from hunger, working in the ore mines got no shoes, damp, cold and we was wearing Dutch clogs all wood, you couldn’t walk with them. We used to carry on our back and we used to, when we got to the job we used to wrap some cement bags and with them Dutch clogs we used to just shuffle around and the Germans used to shout ‘Schnell, Schnell’ “ (Int: Mr. Smojkis).*

He also said that he had tried to commit suicide twice by running toward the electric fence but that he had been stopped by the guards; by the time he was released from the camp he was seventeen years old, his formative years interrupted by War having experienced hunger, disease, cruelty and watching people die. At the end of the War Wilno and Poland were under Soviet domination, his younger brother had died of pneumonia, his father had relocated to Bydgoszcz in the west of Poland, his mother was sent to Siberia for a second time and he would never live there again.

Mr Podroz talks of the death of his father’s brother and his family in Chelmno extermination camp and how their loss affected his father for many years:

*“I think he had a brother and his wife and a sister and her family, that remained and promised to come over legally or otherwise and never did. And I believe that my, his*

*older brother...came over in 1939 for a visit and then went back to Poland and he died in, I think it was 1941. And so I think my father was very upset about that and always when we were young he kept looking for his long lost niece; he was convinced that she survived but of course she didn't, they were taken to Chelmno and killed, but he hated Poland he sort of almost blamed Poland for co-operating with the Nazis and so on"* (Int: Mr Podroz).

Chelmno was an extermination camp established by the Nazis in 1941, when the father of Mr Podroz and his family left for Palestine in 1934 they would not have known the fate that awaited members of their family and the other members of the Jewish population. It gradually became harder to leave Poland for Jewish and non Jewish Poles.

The intention of the Second World War, by the occupiers, was to reintegrate Poland into Russia and Germany. The Nazis intention was to destroy the Polish people and Polish culture; they liquidated Polish libraries, demolished historical monuments and markers, forbade the teaching of Polish history and geography and destroyed many of the Polish archives (Lukas 1986). They raided the museums and looted Polish national art treasures; music by Polish composers was banned and the majority of legitimate theatres were shut down (Lukas 1986). Under the German occupation all the Polish cities were de-Polanised and names changed from Polish to German; scientific, artistic and literary institutions were closed and the property and finds plundered. Over 923,000 Polish citizens were forcibly removed from the German annexed territories and replaced by the Volksdeutsche and German settlers from Germany, Soviet Latvia, Estonia and other territories and over 200,000 Polish

children with blue eyes and blond hair were kidnapped and taken to the Reich for Germanisation (Lukas 1986).

As a consequence of the Second World War Poland lost approximately six million of its Jewish and Christian citizens, about 17% of its total population of thirty five million; the Polish Jewish population had been reduced by up to 85% and the ethnic Poles by about 10% (Piotrowski, 1998). The affect of the German and Russian invasion on the Polish nation and the Polish people was without precedence; the reconstruction of the borders, and importantly a change in the ethnic mix from being 33% minorities in 1939 to 1% in 1945. The redistribution of ethnic groups, following the Yalta and Potsdam agreements of 1945, meant that millions of people were relocated from their area of origin to different parts of Poland. Those from the previously eastern Poland were moved to the newly constructed western areas which had been populated by Germans and those ethnic Germans who were in what was now the west of Poland were moved further west to what remained German land; in Europe alone it is thought that over eighteen million people were displaced at the end of the Second World War (Schechtman 1962).

In 1945 with a Soviet dominated government the awful reality in Poland was that one totalitarian tyranny had been replaced with another, only this time with British and American approval (Stachura 2004). The examples of loss given by the Birmingham Polish are congruent with the population living in Poland during the Second World War. There was no opportunity to mourn or to discuss explanations of why these things were happening. People had to continue to live day by day and to find their own purpose to survive. These stories are not unique for the first generation of

Birmingham Polish people and they offer an illustration of the losses people were experiencing every day, there was no time to grieve or to move through the bereavement stages; in many cases there was no opportunity for them to carry out what would have been the normal cultural rituals around death. Many of those who were interviewed were below the age of fifteen when the war started, when they recounted the stories there was little emotion expressed, occasionally non verbal expressions of anger or sadness, which was quickly controlled, but none of those who were interviewed ever verbally expressed their anger or sadness of what had happened to them, indicating that they had defended themselves by denying the fear associated with the situation.

Polish people who had survived the Second World War were distributed around the world; people who had been deported to Siberia by the Soviets were either still there or had joined the allies following the amnesty in 1941. Families of those who had joined the forces were relocated to Teheran, Africa, and India. There were numbers of Polish people who like my father had been taken as forced labour to the west, some were in concentration camps. My father was released from the forced labour camp in France wearing nothing but a pair of trousers made from paper, he was with two older Polish men and a man he described as a Polish gypsy. Over a few days they made their way further into France, sleeping in barns and taking whatever food they were given or could find. My father said that the Polish gypsy taught him how to beg for food, he stole bread from the window of a French house. The small group of men were given shelter and beetroot soup by a French man who had very little himself and who let them sleep in his barn; my father remembered how wonderful that soup tasted. They were eventually picked up by the American troops and

having spent some time in a camp with liberated Russians; my father left and made his way to Paris to join the Polish army.

Mr Harrow and his father were in a concentration camp, his mother and one sister had been killed in a German concentration camp, his father was shot trying to escape one day before the end of the war. His younger sister survived having been sheltered by neighbours. On his liberation from Theresinstadt concentration camp Mr Harrow made his way back to his home town, there were hardly any Jewish survivors, he heard that people were being picked up and taken to England. 732 'boys' as they called themselves travelled under the auspices of the Central British Fund, a Jewish organisation which had been active in helping refugees since the rise of Hitler in 1933 (Gilbert 1996).

On their arrival in England the first wave Birmingham Polish people, Jewish and Catholic, reconstructed a meaning for their lives (Niemeyer 2001) which makes sense to them and includes the continuance of the Polish history, language, culture and traditions.

## **Summary**

The political reasons for the first wave Polish migration to Birmingham England was the onset of the Second World War; in some ways this created a situation familiar to the people of Poland because the memory of occupation under Russia Prussia and Austria was not that far in the distance; but what happened during the next six years went far beyond any experience that had gone before. In Poland prior to 1939 regardless of partition or independence there was both diversity and segregation



within the regions from which Birmingham Polish migrants came. The actions of both the Nazis and the Soviets through deportations, genocide and ethnic cleansing destroyed historical regions, emptied multicultural cities and the mass murder and displacement of elites uprooted traditions (Snyder 2003) creating in 1945 a homogeneous ethnic Polish Poland for the first time in its history. This was done at the expense of losing, through murder and relocation, the majority of its ethnic minorities and its cultural diversity, the Jews of Poland as a great national and cultural community, a numerous social group, were now a part of the past (Hertz 1988).

Millions of Polish people were displaced from their original home, those who were living abroad, felt there was no free Poland to return to; in Britain they felt they were marooned in a country without a common language, whose customs and traditions were alien to them and who's people, surprisingly to them were sometimes openly hostile (Stachura 2004). The huge losses experienced by Displaced Persons was manifold, the majority of the Polish people arrived in Britain having lost at least one member of their family as a consequence of the Second World War either a sibling a parent or a spouse, or all and everyone of them had faced the possibility of their own death daily. From the outset, in their view, the Poles preferred to be identified as émigré or exiles as it was the political situation that prevented them returning home, and their aim was to return one day to a free Poland. One of the issues that united the Poles together was the feeling of betrayal by the allies and at the end of the Second World War in the eyes of many Poles while being on the so called 'winning side' Poland ended up being treated as severely as the defeated Germans (Stachura 2004).

The Polish people who settled in Birmingham were casualties of the Second World War; forced to leave their homes they continued to believe that one day they would return, in the mean time they began to create a community supported by what was familiar to them. One of the key symbols of 'community' is the presence of formal community institutions, such as community centres, religious and cultural organisations (Alexander, Edwards and Temple, 2007); the Birmingham Polish Community began to establish all of these from 1946 onwards.

The journey from Poland to England was always the main focus of the interviews for the first wave Birmingham Polish. This was also the case in a study conducted with Polish people by Temple (1995) who suggested that the respondent's sense of who they were was tied to their journey from another country.

As well as establishing new roots in an alien country the Birmingham Polish had to deal with the process of psychological and sociocultural adaptation to the country they had found themselves in (Searle and Ward 1990) through the process of forced migration. For many Poles in Britain the struggle to maintain their own and their families mental and physical well being was a struggle, some started off life in Britain by making contact with the psychiatric services and for some of these Polish people this contact would remain constant until the end of their lives (Winslow 2001). The majority managed to organise their daily lives in the new context, acquiring some level of skill with the English language, gaining knowledge of the British culture and establishing a network of social relationship both in and out of the Polish community.

People who have experienced extreme trauma may be psychologically defended and often search for an expanded and more meaningful existence and even in the most bitter, cynical and angry psychological results of trauma the traumatised person will desperately demand some sort of indication or proof that meaningful life is possible (Decker 1993). Recovery from psychological trauma depends greatly on the ability of the survivor to establish a sense of continuity between the pre-trauma past and the post-trauma present (Wilson and Moran, 1998). The Birmingham Poles had specific aims; they constructed a new meaning, to keep their beloved Poland alive by passing on the traditions, language, history and Catholic religion within their own community; and working towards a free Poland. Making sense of the atrocities of the Second World War would be a difficult task for anyone, for the Poles many questions would remain unanswered, but creating a little Poland wherever they lived outside of their home country appears to be consistent with the Birmingham Polish and others groups in the UK (Hanson 1995; Winslow 2001; Burrell, 2003). From the beginning the effects of their traumatic experiences affected how they situated themselves, within the host society and this continued to impact on them and following waves of Polish in Birmingham both in the private and in the public sphere.

## CHAPTER 5

### HOME FROM HOME

The process of migration for the first wave Birmingham Poles shaped the way that they lived. The psychological consequences of acculturation depend on the social and personal variables in the society of origin, the society of settlement and the phenomena that exist prior to and during the course of acculturation (Berry 1997). Immigrant identity forms within a historical context, bound up in a set of political positions based on negotiation, dislocation and conflict (Bhatia and Ram, 2009 p143).

The first wave Polish people who arrived after the Second World War did not leave Poland through choice, they arrived as a consequence of the Second World War during the 1940s and through to the mid 1950s they were a mixture of army personnel their families and dependents and other civilians. The second wave Polish migrants arrived over a longer period of time from the early 1960s to the mid 70s and the third wave were people who had lived in post Solidarity Poland when freedom was no longer restricted.

Despite some returning home the total number of Polish people, including soldiers and their dependents, who arrived in the UK through the process of forced migration following the Second World War is estimated to be over 200,000 (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000). At the end of the Second World War for the Polish people in the armed forces the decision to return to Poland or not depended on three basic considerations (Ostrowski 1996); a moral issue of appearing to support the Communists which would be tantamount to treason or betrayal of the cause of an

independent Poland. The consideration of how to survive in post-war Poland where there was a chronic housing shortage and poor living and working conditions. The third was that many did not have homes to return to particularly in the east and if they returned to what had been their homes then they would become citizens of the Soviet Union, or they could start life in the land that had been 'recovered' from Germany (Ostrowski 1996).

In the early years of the war the British government, press and community were largely sympathetic to the plight of the Polish people, however the sympathy changed in 1941 when Stalin exchanged loyalty from Hitler to the allied forces. Pro Soviet propaganda was increasingly delivered by the press and accusations of right wing fanaticism against the Poles began and there were organised marches against Poles by the Left (Sword, Davies, and Ciechanowski 1989). The Poles who had centuries of first hand contact with their eastern neighbours, gave warnings to Churchill and Roosevelt that Stalin could not be trusted but this went unheard (Stachura 2004). The first episode of women in London spitting at Poles in uniform was recorded in 1944 (McGilvray 2004). Mr Knaczek started his life in Britain in Scotland and remembered a march in Edinburgh where Poles were being spat on in the streets. These incidents not only changed the way the British public felt about the Poles but how the Poles felt about being in Britain.

### **Political and social position in Poland post Second World War**

Poland had lost a fifth of its pre war population and for the first time in its long chequered history Poland was homogeneous, now instead of being a country whose

population was a third ethnic minority there was a ninety percent Polish majority. Over the coming years the private industry was nationalised and land was seized from the pre-war landowners to be redistributed to the peasants (Sword, Davies, and Ciechanowski 1989) Communist principles were enforced, religious education in schools had ceased by 1961 (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006) but as had happened under the previous occupations certain aspects of Polish life continued being carried out subversively.

The newly established Peoples Republic of Poland did not deliver what Stalin had told the world it would, within the newly announced borders there was confusion and chaos and there would be no free elections. Instead of returning to home and family people returning from war were classed as spies or enemies of the Soviets many disappeared without trace (Davies 1982, Ascherson 1987, Garton- Ash 1999). Tens of thousands of AK members, former officers, political workers and landowners were arrested, interrogated, tortured and murdered (Zamoyski 2001).

The relationship between the grossly diminished Jewish population and the ethnic Polish in post Second World War remained difficult; Jewish survivors returning to their home towns experienced widespread hostility including murder at the hands of their neighbours (Gross 2006). The shtetls had been destroyed by the actions of the Soviets and the Nazis and the majority of Jews had been murdered in mass shootings or the Nazi death camps. In Kielce in July 1946 a building sheltering Jews who were on their way from the USSR to Palestine was attacked and forty Jews were killed with debate over who was responsible to follow (Ascherson 1997, Zamoyski 2001). The Ukrainians were living within the new borders of Soviet

dominated Ukraine, in Poland the Soviets focused on the Ukrainian atrocities against the Poles to minimise the discussion about their own participation in the Polish suffering (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006).

Many Poles continued to view the Jews as Soviet sympathisers and the Soviets encouraged this view by establishing a high percentage of Jews in prominent positions and reinforcing the Nazi involvement in the invasion of Poland until the last large exit of Jews in the late 1960's (Wolak 2004). The Jews were unable to work, in order to migrate they had to pay the equivalent of two months' salary, denounce Polish citizenship and pay back any tuition fees their children may have received for higher education (Wolak 2004). During the years 1967-68 there was forced removal of the remaining Polish Jews, numbering about 20,000, and considered to be scapegoats for the failing government instigated by the communist regime (Sieradzki 2002, Wolak 2004).

There were about 900 Polish Jewish ex-servicemen in Britain in 1945, these people mainly settled in the London area and are described by Zubrzycki as two distinct groups of Polish Jews, those of working class background who had been conscripted into the military prior to the outbreak of the Second World War and Jewish professionals, doctors, lawyers, dentists and engineers. The working class Polish Jews who remained in Britain usually took early discharge from the forces and settled in the East End of London where they spoke either Polish or Yiddish and mixed easily with the established Jewish groups many of whom had arrived from the Jewish Pale of settlement and once they found employment they lived a life similar to their pre-war life in Poland (Zubrzycki 1956).

There is no official record of exactly how many Polish Jews arrived in Birmingham post Second World War or any established Polish Jewish organisation (personal correspondence with Anthony Josephs 2010). One Polish Jewish woman Kitty Hart has written extensively about her own experiences in Poland and she did settle in Birmingham, she recalls how on her arrival she was told by her uncle not to speak of what had happened to her and her mother in Auschwitz; she found the existing Birmingham Anglo Jewish community unwelcoming and unsupportive of her and her mother and also unwilling to listen to their story (Hart 1981).

In Birmingham the first Polish language Catholic Mass was conducted at the Oratory Catholic Church on the Hagley Road in 1947 by Father Krause he later moved the mass to the St Michael's Church in New Meeting place where the English priest offered him the disused rooms next door to the church as an office and meeting place for Polish people. It was here that Father Krause called the first meeting of the Polish Circle and also where they began to sell sandwiches and tea, hold regular meetings and later they established a small shop selling Polish groceries; they held dances, opened a bar and a mobile shop in the form of a van that travelled to Handsworth, Sparkhill, Small Heath and Erdington where Polish people were known to be living (int: Mr Niebieski 2008).

The Polish people who were displaced as a consequence of the Second World War clearly saw themselves being in Britain as a temporary situation and the importance of preparing for their return one day to a 'free Poland' was paramount; the notion of integrating or assimilating into the British way of life was for many, in particular those active in politics, unthinkable. Following the withdrawal of the British government's



recognition of the Polish government in exile in 1945, all social, occupational and welfare organisations came under the umbrella of the Federation of Poles of Great Britain; from that time until 1990 the Federation represented the interest of Polish immigrants with respect to the British authorities ([www.zpwb.org.uk/en/Historical](http://www.zpwb.org.uk/en/Historical)). The aim of this organisation was to set up a system of Polish institutions to take over all such functions normally carried out by the state and to encourage in every way the creation of distinct and self-contained Polish communities in various parts of England (housing estates in rural districts and Polish urban Parishes); to safeguard against assimilation and ensure that the membership of the Polish association would reduce the contacts between Poles and the British people (Zubrzycki, 1956).

There were over 40 organisations that were under the Federation, with the largest being the Polish Combatants Association; their main aim was to maintain the identity and national distinctiveness of the Polish Community in exile. They stated that Poles must resist all assimilative tendencies of the British people at all costs; that their main concern was for the future of the younger generation of Poles who were undergoing education in English schools. They go on to state “our countrymen in Poland are unable to preserve the identity of Polish cultural values in the face of forced Sovietisation and it is therefore our duty to perform this historical task” (Zubrzycki, 1956).

### **Establishing the Polish Community in Birmingham**

Immigrant groups originating from the same country are not homogeneous even when they arrive at the same time, they may share commonalities but have differences of regional origin, dialect, class, politics and religion; when negotiating

ethnic boundaries within the host society the shared symbolic umbrella of the ethnic culture has to be flexible enough to service several, often contradictory purposes to provide the basis for solidarity, to mobilise the group to defend cultural values and to advance claims to power, status and resources (Neils Cozen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozetta and Veroli 1992). This was the case with the Birmingham Polish community some of the migrants had lived in the same town or village and in some instances were members of an extended family, and others had spent time together in Siberia, in forced labour camps, in the army or in the Displaced Persons camps of Africa and India. The second and third wave Poles had shared the experience of Communism and in some cases Marshall Law.

By the 1960s the numbers of first generation post Second World War Birmingham Polish were estimated to be around 3,000, they represented a cross-section of Polish Catholic society (Fr. Kącki 1972). The first wave of Polish migrants in Britain were treated differently to migrants groups who came later in part because Churchill had personal feeling about the way the Poles were treated at the end of the Second World War. Churchill felt that Britain owed a debt to the Polish troops who fought under British command, and wanted to be able to offer them citizenship and freedom of the British Empire (Sword et al 1989).

Churchill's 'pledge' caused concern in the Foreign Office, the general feeling of the Post War British Government was that as few Poles as possible should remain in Britain and that everything should be done to ensure their removal, including negotiation with the Dominion and Commonwealth countries; offers of provision of free passage to repatriates following discharge from the forces was accompanied by

56 days pay and allowances plus a war gratuity according to the years of service and rank in the Polish forces while under British Command (Sword et al 1989). Large numbers of Polish people began to return home but the lack of cooperation of the Warsaw Polish government prior to the January 1947 elections in Poland was hindering the process which suggested that they were anxious of the effect the returning Poles would have on the outcome; by the end of 1949 out of the estimated 200,000 only 105,000 Poles had returned to Poland, (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000).

There was growing concern about immigration numbers in Britain and one of the ways of addressing the issue of allowing so many migrant Poles to stay in Britain despite the laws of immigration was to rename them, along with Jewish, Baltic and other people who were not able to return home following the Second World War, they would become Displaced Persons, people who because of their persecution and suffering were regarded as having been loyal to the Allied cause (Jacobmeyer 2003). The Poles were the largest group and the problem of registration, supervision and settlement of the Poles imposed a great burden of work on the Aliens Branch of the Home Office and the Police Forces throughout the UK (Kershaw and Pearsall 2000). To address this issue the Polish Resettlement Act 1947 was formed and gave the responsibility for meeting the needs of Poles and their dependents that had come to Britain since September 1939, either by cash allowance or maintenance in camps or hostels to the Assistance Board. The Act also ensured that the health needs of the Poles and their dependents were met and that certain Polish pharmacist's and doctors were to be given temporary registration to practise in Britain. Under the Alien Registration Act all Poles were required to carry a registration document and report to the local police station when they moved house

or changed employment, this carried on until 1962 when the requirements were changed.

In the early years of living in Birmingham the Polish émigré established three Polish Clubs. The first to be established was Dom Polski (Polish House) on Gravelly Hill in Erdington, this was initially where sport was organised, there was a restaurant and regular dances were held there; the club was more likely to be attended by the younger generation of Polish people particularly the men, there was a Volley Ball team, and Basket ball team. Dom Polski continued for many years but eventually became a home for the elderly and is now closed. The second Polish club was situated on the Soho Road in Handsworth and was known as the Polski Inwalida (Polish Invalids club), this club housed lodgers in the upstairs rooms and was also where the table tennis was played, the club was controlled by London and the Red Cross (Int: Mr Rzecznik), the club eventually closed and since the 1970s the building has housed the Guru Nanak Sikh temple. The third Polish club, the largest of the three and the only one that continues to function is the Polish Catholic Circle situated on Bordesley Street in Digbeth in Millennium House; linked to the Polish Catholic Mission. This is one of the largest clubs of its kind in Britain, there is currently a membership of 3500, although some of the members have died and the numbers have not readjusted this makes an accurate number difficult to attain.

The remaining club is linked to St Michael's Roman Catholic Church in New Meeting Street in Birmingham city centre where the Polish church services continue; it was here in a three storey building that the first meetings took place. During the early years of post Second World War this was where the Polish community would gather;

there was a canteen where people could buy refreshments, a room to hold meetings and a small shop to buy Polish food. In 1958 a new President was voted in and it was at this time that the organisation and collection of funds to acquire the land and build the existing Polish Millennium club began, there was a membership fee of half a crown (two shillings and sixpence or twelve and a half New Pence) monthly, there were regular collections in the church and people went from Polish house to Polish house, eight thousand pounds were raised from the first club to which was added the individual donations from Poles (Int: Mr Niebieski). The Chairman gave the speech at the laying of the foundation stone, the date of September the 17<sup>th</sup> was chosen specifically as a reminder of the day that the Soviets under Stalin invaded Poland from the east and not the first of September when the Germans invaded from the west.

On December 9<sup>th</sup> 1962 the Millennium House was officially opened, the club was built and paid for in cash by the donations from the Polish exiled community and became the new anchor of the Polish Catholic community in Birmingham. Birmingham's Public library holds some of the yearly reports of the Polish Catholic club dating from 1953- 2004, however they are not a complete record and are in Polish which makes them inaccessible to non Polish readers. In 1972 the Polish Community commemorated 25 years of Poles in Birmingham and in 1997 50 years both with a celebratory magazines which are also only available in the Polish language and so are inaccessible to non Polish speakers; however in order to inform this study I have had them partially translated into English.

## **Relationships with the host society**

Zubrzycki (1956) identified two events that had great emotional effect on how the Poles viewed Britain; one was the failure of the Warsaw Rising in August-September 1944 when Britain was blamed, by the Poles, for not giving adequate material assistance to the insurgents and for not exerting strong enough pressure on the Soviet Government to allow landing facilities in Russian held territory for British and American planes dropping supplies over Warsaw. The second is the Yalta conference of February 1945 when the agreement was reached that ceded one half of Poland's pre-war territory to Soviet Russia, the Poles blamed the previously hero worshiped Churchill (Zubrzycki 1956). Zubrzycki believed that the pattern of adjustment between the Polish and British community would have been very different if it were not for these two factors:

“Thus from the very start, the Poles, whilst recognising the generosity of the British people in admitting them to this country, were antagonistic to any change of their views, usages and standards; they were determined to uphold their cultural and national distinctness as the only way in which their political mission of a ‘fighting emigration’ could be accomplished”

(Zubrzycki, 1956, p84).

Unlike other countries who were sponsoring resettlement of the Poles (Australia, South Africa, Canada) Britain was not selective and was obliged to accept practically every Pole who decided not to return to his country including a large group of dependents, disabled and aged people (Zubrzycki 1956). Also unlike other countries

Britain did not have a planned assimilation policy for the 150,000 Poles; government sponsored agencies as discussed above and some voluntary organisations were expected to prepare the Poles for normal life and economic security.

The process of reconciling the cultural differences between country of origin and adopted country can be difficult for migrants (Leiber, Chin, Nihira and Mink 2001). Migrant communities establish themselves around the familiar, people who share a language, faith and values and from this they build institutions that enable them to continue engagement with religion, culture and traditions (Wirth 1928, Wrobel 1979, Whyte 1981).

### **Anglo-Polish Societies**

One organisation that aimed to work alongside the Polish migrants and help them to feel accepted by British society was the Anglo-Polish Society. By 1954 there were 60 voluntary Anglo-Polish societies in England and Wales; the first of which were established in 1940 as a spontaneous expression of hospitality and sympathy felt toward the Poles as the only allies Britain had during the dark days. At the end of the war the Anglo-Polish societies adapted to the change of circumstances and the hostility expressed toward the Poles in some circles. There was nothing in the nature or constitution of the Anglo-Polish society that referred to assimilation only to promote the economic adjustment of the Poles to British life (Zubrzycki 1956).

The object of the Anglo-Polish Society in Birmingham was to, promote and consolidate friendship and understanding between the Polish and British peoples

and to formulate and encourage arrangements for mutual exchange of information in respect of language, arts, science and other cultural activities of the two countries (Birmingham Central Library archive). The membership of the society was open to 'all who are interested in the work of the society and whose application is accepted by the association'. The group organised fundraising events, public lectures and meetings. The examples in the records show that free public lectures were offered in 1944 at the University of Birmingham Edmund Street. It would appear that these were mainly middle class individuals and that the organisation was focused around the University of Birmingham.

Mr. Knaczek who was stationed in Scotland was invited to Birmingham to attend a Christmas dinner at the Birmingham Council House he said the society was very prominent in Birmingham, but began to decline when key positions were taken over from English members by the Polish members (Int Mr. Knaczek). There are still Anglo Polish organisations in England but the Birmingham group did not continue and despite records for 1944 I have been unable to find any further information about it.

### **Relationships and work**

The numbers of first generation post Second World War Birmingham Polish included professional people, workers, intellectuals, career army officers, including two generals, professors, judges, teachers, and doctors (Fr. Kački 1972). Despite being highly skilled in Poland apart from the doctors and dentists most would either have to take unskilled work or retrain, which many found to be difficult or they thought of it as



demeaning, some highly qualified men were working as labourers sweeping factory floors, they were intent to ensure that their children would not do the same.

The Trade Unions had become increasingly powerful in Britain and in order to introduce new migrants into the workforce it was important that good relationships were established; however trade unions and workers were often openly hostile to the Polish workers. Initially some of the trade unions were unwilling to accept Polish members and operated a closed shop principle; an exception was the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) whose Executive Committee appointed a full-time Organising Secretary of Polish Branches in 1947 and by 1949 there were 6,000 Polish members in three all-Polish branches and numbers of Poles in local branches of the Union (Zubrzycki 1956).

The success of the TGWU to engage with the Polish workers may have been influenced by the appointment of a fulltime secretary, the positive drive to recruit Polish members but significantly the TGWU was an anti-communist organisation. They held Sunday schools for Polish members to assist them with the English language and issues relating to employment and the law (Sword et al). Zubrzycki contended that the work of the British government and voluntary agencies was a factor that promoted accommodation rather than complete assimilation and the Polish organisations functioned to actively retard the assimilation of Polish people into British society (Zubrzycki 1956).

Polish men and women in Birmingham had a variety of skilled and unskilled work; they worked in factories, offices, became nurses, teachers and professors in the university. There were many factories in Birmingham at that time and the interviewed Poles worked in Cadburys, Southall's, and Lucas's, Cincinnati, Longbridge, British Steel and others. Because of the employment situation in the early years, it was possible to walk out of a job one day and into another the following day; but some would spend their working life in one company; Polish workers built up a good reputation and would find employment through word of mouth (Int: Mr Rzecznik ).

When asked about his first thoughts on Birmingham Mr Smojkis replied:

*"Of course it was, was big town an err the people I met was friendly at work even though we couldn't speak English but err they give us the old chap he was about sixty four or five, he was nearly retiring anyway and he was looking after us, taking us, we was only doing like labouring cleaning up, then we picked up a little bit of English they give us different jobs"* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

Mr Slownik a second generation man tells how his father got work as a lathe turner in a factory and stayed there for over 25years:

*"There was bit of discrimination in the workplace... he did have English friends at work but he did not bring them to the home".* (Int: Mr Slownik)

When Mrs Szkola talks about her Polish father she is sad about what might have been:

*“Well he started off as a grinder then he became a press operator but I always felt, you know, he could have done better ..... he was a mechanic, he was a senior engineer in the army and he got promoted to Corporal..... you know if things had turned out different, he was more than happy to have gone back to Poland...I think he was being set up to carry on with what his dad was doing” (Int: Mrs Szkola)*

Many Polish people did not achieve what they may have achieved if the Second World War had not happened, but many took opportunities that they would not otherwise have had. Mrs Artista tells of how she passed the Eleven Plus while she was living in a Displaced Persons camp and then following her ‘O’ levels she decided to move to Birmingham to study as this is where her older sister had settled she went on to study for five years at Art College and became an art teacher.

There were some employers in Birmingham who were predisposed to employing Polish workers and jobs were found for friends and acquaintances through word of mouth. In 1949 it was reported that over seven thousand Poles were working in the mines, foundries and the factories of the Midlands. The Birmingham Gazette reporter, Dennis Irving, spent two days interviewing them and found that many felt they were isolated and that they were condemned to the life of a labourer because of agreements that had been made between the trade unions and the employers; conditions that were imposed to protect the British workers. Irving reported that employers thought highly of the hard working Poles but that they would be the first to go with redundancy regardless of how long they had worked for the company; a welfare officer was quoted as saying “we are building up a class of semi-slave labour, the trade unions who encouraged it should look beyond the present and call

a halt to it. We talk about equal rights and fair play and here we are withholding those rights from the Poles” (Birmingham Gazette 1949). All over the country many older Poles who were indeed professionals or highly skilled workers in Poland were forced to take low paid employment as night watchmen, hotel kitchen hands nursing orderlies or gardeners (Sword 1989).

As time moved on first wave Birmingham Poles did have responsible positions, they took the opportunities to educate themselves and their children and in some cases they established their own businesses. It was the aim of many of the first wave Poles that their children would succeed and move upwards educationally and socially.

### **Relationships and Accommodation**

According to the agreement in the Polish Resettlement Act (1947) the War Office made an undertaking to bring the dependents of Polish ex servicemen from the war time camps in India, East Africa and the Middle East and Poles were also admitted for residence in Britain as European Voluntary Workers (EWV) and a marginal group of Polish Nationals who entered Britain under the Distressed Relatives Scheme.

In 1947 National Service Hostels were acquired to house Poles and their families as part of the Polish Resettlement Corps; but there were also people from other nationalities housed in these hostels. There were a total of 315, with a capacity to house 70,074 people; the largest number of these, ninety one, was in the Midlands and Central regions of England <http://www.virtualmuseum.co.uk/hostels/Midland> .

One of these hostels was Causeway Green on the New Wolverhampton Road in Oldbury on the outskirts of Birmingham; it was classified as standard and industrial and accommodated eight hundred workers including Irish, Welsh, Scottish and

English. In 1949 the numbers included 200 Poles and sixty five Jamaicans living at the hostel (Birmingham Gazette 1949). There is recorded evidence of difficulties between the Poles and other migrant workers and in 1949 Causeway Green hostel was the site of what was at that time described as 'racial rioting between Poles and Jamaicans'.

The difficulties appear to have been ongoing over a period of six months and were dealt with by management segregating the Jamaicans from the white residents; this was not considered to be the right thing to do particularly by the Jamaican residents who felt that to get along with each other the groups should mix. The difficulties culminated, on the night of Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1949 when a group of Poles armed with sticks, razors and chairs surrounded the Jamaican quarters yelling threats and breaking windows in order to get to them and cause them physical harm, a number on both sides were badly injured, particularly one Jamaican man who was attacked in his bed with bricks by the Poles. The reports in the Birmingham Gazette cover a period of one week; during this time it is stated that the Jamaicans have been asked to leave because they are in a minority of sixty five whereas the Poles number over two hundred, some of the Jamaicans were so distressed they went back to Jamaica but others refused to leave stating that they were not the instigators. By the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1949 the Birmingham Gazette headline read "Evict Poles or we may Act, say Hostel Britons, Jamaicans have a right to stay". More than one hundred and fifty English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish residents attended a meeting to protest against the rioting. Many complained that the Poles had too much to say in the running of the hostel and were for the most part the cause of the trouble and the other residents wanted protection. A Birmingham born resident stated "while the

Poles remain, there will be no peace at the hostel” a further statement “we don’t like the way the Poles behave and feel that the hostel should be run by British people for British people” and “the Jamaicans as British subjects should be allowed to stay” these statements suggest that the Poles were clearly seen by the other residents to be the outsiders “the Poles seem to think that although they are in England, they can carry on with their own traditions and customs at the expense of other people. They do not seem to mix with anybody. Few of them learn to speak English and they are insanely jealous of the Jamaicans”. The fact that the Poles wanted to keep their traditions and their lack of English language was clearly seen as a negative; although there are statements from residents in the articles there are not any comments from the Polish residents.

There is a contrast to the newspaper article from the extracts of a Polish woman’s memoirs Emilia Paklos-Gagola who lived at Causeway Green at the time of the riots, she describes the National Services hostel as being on several acres of land near to a golf course; and says that, “Irish, English, Germans, Ukrainians and demobilized Polish soldiers all kept each other company”. She worked as a domestic there, in the all women barrack; the men were housed in long wooden buildings on a brick foundation they had radiators and slept two to a room. There was a common room for socialising and as male or female guests were not allowed in the rooms surprise searches were common. Emilia describes the dance hall upstairs where the weekly dances took place, she states that with so many nationalities and religions living in one hostel disputes were not uncommon and describes what must have been the event of the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1949 “one particularly nasty brawl occurred as the result of a Jamaican stealing an Irishman’s girlfriend. The Police were notified and several

men were taken to hospital suffering from injuries such as lost teeth, bruising and bloody noses” [www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/ludfordmagna.htm](http://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/ludfordmagna.htm) . This is a description that bears only a slight resemblance to the newspaper report, but as Emilia got married and left the hostel in October 1949, it appears very likely that it is the same incident.

The newspaper reports state that the Poles did not like the Jamaican men bringing young girls back to the hostel and local residents suggested that a lot of the trouble was caused by young girls hanging around the hostel, Emilia stated that the men in the hostel outnumbered the women and that women from outside the hostel were frequent guests at the dances, but that the Polish men wanted to marry Polish women and guarded their Polish girlfriends well. I contacted the Police museum in Birmingham but there are no records available about the Polish community at that time, the Causeway Green incident is the only evidence of extreme difficulties that have been found during the study, and was clearly instigated by the Poles. There have been some disclosures of discrimination against the Polish people in the interviews but nothing on the scale of the Causeway Green incident.

Although many Polish men and women lived in the hotels and camps some new Poles arriving in Birmingham would be directed to private lodging houses, often near to where they would be working. Mr Smojkis told of his first experience of finding somewhere to live in Alum Rock Birmingham where there was a Scottish landlord; the Polish men were expected to sleep two in a bed:

*“Six of us come to Birmingham; they put six of us in the boarding house all in one room.... we sleep, two beds was, three beds yes” (Int: Mr Smojkis).*

When two of his fellow Poles found alternative accommodation the rest of them were asked to leave:

*“Two chaps, I think found another lodging so they left, so he throwed the lot of us out, the Scottish chap, he said if you can’t live in one room, he said it doesn’t pay me” (Int: Mr Smojkis).*

All the other rooms in the house were full of lodgers from different nationalities, although he was not pleased at being thrown out he did not complain that they had been expected to sleep two in a bed, other interviewees had been expected to do this; also both men and women. Mr Smojkis and his colleague clearly found it difficult to find alternative accommodation:

*“But err they should, they done wrong, throwed us out. The two chaps found a digs; me and other chap Stan.... we couldn’t get no digs, we went to the police station, police said we can’t do nothing about it, it’s his house he can throw you out. We could speak a little bit English; they said we can’t do nothing about it”. (Int: Mr Smojkis).*

In 1947 there was no Polish club and no established Polish community in Birmingham for the men to turn to for help:

*“So they give us address to go to YMCA, they said go there, was up Bristol Road, half a crown a night, was a bed and breakfast, supposed to be breakfast was toast*



*and marmalade. We stopped one night there but the next night we slept on the cement bags in the place where we was working... then somebody took the pity on us and gave us the digs” (Int: Mr Smojkis).*

Having slept on cement bags in the factory he and his colleague were offered lodgings by one of his English co-workers and then they found a new house in which to lodge in Tyburn Road, Erdington where he said he was happy and he stayed here until he got married three years later.

Like other migrant groups many Polish people saved to buy their own house and then let rooms out to other Poles Mrs Szkola said of her father:

*“My dad lived in Victoria Road (Handsworth) for a while in digs, as they all lived in digs... they were all mostly English owned and he had a room; whether he was on his own, I wouldn’t have thought so, I think he was probably with fellow Poles as they do now....he met this chap (a Polish man) they bought a house which was unusual in them days, especially for foreigners, you know, but he was always of the opinion that you should buy your own house, he never wanted to live off anybody or rely on anybody he was very independent” (Int: Mrs Szkola)*

Owning a home was important to the majority of first wave Poles who agreed to be interviewed but there were Poles who chose to live in rented accommodation; these were often single men living in council flats. The second and third wave Poles who were interviewed also owned their own homes; they had all come to England to

marry people who were either English or Polish people who were already established here.

In the early days many Poles lived in Erdington and Aston sometimes buying large houses so that they could rent out rooms to fellow Poles (Int: Mr Rzecznik) but generally Polish people lived all over Birmingham, as they became more upwardly mobile they moved into what were perceived to be better areas, Sutton Coldfield, Kings Heath, Moseley and Handsworth Wood.

The interviewees suggest that on the whole the Poles were accepted in Birmingham. Apart from Causeway green there are no recorded incidents of disagreements; eventually as more migrants came to Birmingham the Poles became increasingly invisible; over the past sixty years little attention has been drawn to them. When Mr Smojkis was asked:

“So what were people like to you in Birmingham?

He laughs:

*“Some was good some was bad, it all depends... they on average wasn’t bad we did mix up mix with people alright, course some of em calls you some names:*

*“What would they call you?*

*“What? Pole... yeah....oh well there was one or two, three of us could make friends with anybody because we used to like to have a drink, and go out to the pubs with them; have a drink and laugh and a joke and that was alright, but some of them what didn’t drink or if not wasn’t sociable like they stuck more with Polish people used to go a lot to Polish Church in town St Michaels”. (Int: Mr Smojkis)*

Indicating that some in the Polish community would prefer to stick together or exclude themselves. Often the first wave of Polish people would speak with English colleagues at work but keep to their Polish friends outside work; but to some extent the first and second generations were also separated. The first generation kept a hierarchy and was reluctant to hand over the reins of power; this is similar to other Polish communities in Britain (Zebrowska 1986).

When asked specifically if there was trouble between Poles and Birmingham residents one man said that if there was any it was usually about girls; the Polish men, particularly those who had been in the Polish air force, were handsome men that attracted the girls and this did not go down well with the locals (Int: Mr Rzecznik) this also fits with the reports of the events at Causeway Green Hostel and may be considered to be more acceptable than possible alternatives.

There were some tensions between the first wave Polish and other groups; although some indicated as such none of the first wave Poles explicitly talked of prejudice towards them. In the Polish Circle twenty five year celebration magazine Father Kącki states:

*“They arrived in Birmingham from 1946 until about 1950 or 1951. The beginnings were not easy. The hostility of some, perhaps small but vociferous, local groups, the shortage of accommodation which was felt in Birmingham at the time, the unpreparedness for manual work in local circumstances, lack of knowledge of the language, nostalgia for the homeland, sometimes the lack of information about family members, resentment towards the super-powers for their handling of Polish affairs –*

*all this contributed to the feeling of despair, which occasionally led to a tragic conclusion (suicide). Nevertheless, they didn't give in. It was difficult, but things had been even more difficult before. They often took on work about which they had not the faintest idea, but thanks to their Polish stubbornness, they broke through the barriers. The Pole began to be valued as a worker", (Fr. Kącki 1972).*

None of the Birmingham Polish who have been interviewed mentioned suicide, however research carried out in the 1970s indicates that the largest number of suicides recorded in the UK was of Polish men; the numbers of Polish women who committed suicide at that time were the second largest group among the women (Cochrane 1977).

The first generation men and women have expressed feelings of loss of happier times that they spent in Poland in their early years and the loss of what might have been. Temple (1999) suggests that remembered places can form part of ourselves via our memories and that these memories are worked into our narratives of our lives this fits with Niemeyer's contention of the bereaved individuals quest for a personal narrative that makes sense of a changed reality that finds support in the social domain (Neimeyer 2000).

## **Religion**

People of the Catholic religion were the largest number of those Poles who settled in Birmingham; the Polish Catholic Mission in London has continued to hold a powerful influence on the Polish Communities in Britain, they are involved across all age groups. They care for the Polish Catholic Educational Society which runs the Polish

Saturday Schools of which religion is an integral part; the preparation of children to take their first Holy Communion is carried out between the Parish and the Saturday school, if a Polish child attends an English Catholic School they will be expected to celebrate their Holy Communion in the English and the Polish parish.

In 1947 the first Polish Priest arrived in Birmingham, Father Bronsilaw Kreuze, the first Polish language Mass was said at the Oratory Church on the Hagley Road in Edgbaston, then they moved to the more central location of St Michael's Church in the city centre, the Polish community were also offered free use of the Parish buildings. It was this first priest Father Kreuze who set up a committee later named the Polish Catholic Association aimed at maintaining the parochial needs of the Birmingham Polish community. Mr Smojkis describes the Church and the first meeting place:

*"Polish people used to go a lot to Polish Church in town, St Michael's, that was in a state, we had no club then but was little rooms upstairs over the church but they repaired it, it was falling down. The Polish people start doing it they repaired it and made a little canteen after"* (Int: Mr Smojkis)

The first priest was replaced in February 1949 by Father Franciszek Kącki who had been the Chaplain of the Polish Air Force; he took over the duties of Parish Priest until his death in October 1981, he was sent to Birmingham by the Catholic Mission in London and took a great interest in the organisation of the Polish community, he was very involved in how things were organised and stated his disapproval of activities he did not agree with (Int: Mr Rzecznik).

The British authorities had a positive attitude towards the Catholic religion and the Poles. In these first years the Polish chaplains endeavoured to encourage their flock to assume a positive approach to their uncertain future and to understand their problems in the light of their faith, to be strong and maintain their faith in the ultimate triumph of good over evil (Gula 1993). The strength of the Catholic Church in the Birmingham Polish community is evident; it is identified as 'The Polish Parish' and it continues to have an allegiance to the Catholic Mission in London, all the first wave people who were interviewed attend St Michael's church.

In the People's Republic of Poland, the Catholic religion also continued to be important under Communist rule, when the Polish Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978 this strengthened the role of Catholicism in Poland, he visited Poland for the first time in 1979 It had a profound effect on reaffirming the Poles in their spiritual and cultural values, acting as a catalyst on a number of processes which were changing the position of Polish society and its view of itself; it brought millions of people together at open air Masses and opened new channels of communication (Zamoyski 2001).

The strength of the Catholic Church in Poland was evident in the interviews of the Polish people who arrived in Birmingham in the 1980s despite having been brought up under Communism they had maintained a strong Catholic faith. The following statement gives an example of the historical political role of the Church and the importance of its role in Polish identity:

*“Religion was very important in my family life, my parents were very religious and even it was a Communist time the people, all the people, were coming to the church, but the Polish church had the political role in the past, Poland was partitioned in the past for over one hundred years and at that time the church played a very important role because it kept the Polish identity the Polish language and really helped to survive the Polish people somehow yes so I think all the time the Polish church played very, very important role”.* (Mrs Zyczliwy)

Other Polish religious groups had differencing experiences; Kitty Hart a Polish Jewish woman recalled how on her arrival she was told by her uncle not to speak of what had happened to her and her mother in Auschwitz; she found the existing Birmingham Anglo Jewish community unwelcoming and unsupportive of her and her mother; although not a practising Jew in Poland after her experiencing of the Holocaust she felt an obligation to keep the Jewish community alive and to tell of the horrors that she and others had endured (Hart 1981).

From the 1940s onwards the Catholic religion had been dominant among the Polish community in Birmingham and from this community the Polish Catholics who instigated the establishment of the Polish Catholic Circle were in the main from the pre-war Eastern territories of Poland. There were Polish Catholics who were not members of the Polish Club at Millennium House, these were either people who self selected not to be there either for political reasons or because they were members of the other two clubs in Birmingham, Dom Polski and Polski Inwalida; or people who felt uncomfortable at the club because they had married outside of the Polish Community or they were people who no longer practiced the Catholic religion.

## **Education**

The importance of education both in Poland and in Britain is a recurring theme within the interviews and is supported in other studies particularly as a way for the second generation Polish children to improve on their parent's lifestyle (Zebrowska 1986, Burrell 2003). Many Birmingham Poles had their schooling interrupted by war and continued their education in Britain but there are also many who once they arrived and began to work, were unable to fit further education into a schedule of working shifts and supporting their families. There are Poles who said that they felt cheated of their education by the war; Mr Harrow felt he had lost six years of his education by the time he arrived in England and had to make that time up, he did this with support and direction of his school teachers by studying subjects that he found easier, he eventually went on to university to study economics; as a Polish Jew he did not access the system organised by the Polish Resettlement Corp and so used the English state system.

Some of the Birmingham Polish people who were interviewed did take advantage of the support offered by the British government and the Polish Resettlement Corp for their own education; there were schemes that allowed them access to skills training and higher education. Mr, Niebieski, who was in the air force, travelled to Birmingham in a spitfire plane with his friend so that he could be interviewed for a place at engineering college; a profession that was taken up by a number of young Polish men from the first wave of the Birmingham Polish.

Many of the second generation Polish children in Birmingham began to attend school with no English language skill during the post Second World War years, one Polish



woman who attended Polish Boarding school did not speak any English until she was eleven; however she achieved a place at Birmingham University and eventually became a teacher. Mr Slownik who was born in the 1950s went to a Catholic Primary School in the early 1960's and spoke of the teachers attitudes towards non English speaking children:

*"One thing I do remember, that does stick in my mind, is that the teachers at the time weren't open to minority cultures and languages at all. They certainly didn't make it easy for me, they deliberately used long words they knew I wouldn't understand and the general idea was that if you don't speak English and you don't understand it means you're stupid, there was no other possibility"* (Int: Mr Slownik)

For the parents of these children the priority was that they should speak Polish and the interviews indicate that some felt the responsibility for their children learning English lay with the school teachers.

Some of the first wave Birmingham Polish had completed higher education, taking advantage of the system that had been set up and in some case going to extreme lengths to ensure that they had the opportunity. Others who had gone straight to work did not access the language classes or go on to further education; for some making money and buying a home to relocate their family who were still living in displaced persons camps was a priority and therefore their own education was a secondary issue. The majority of the second and third wave Poles who were interviewed had completed higher education in Poland.

## **The Polish Saturday School**

By 1960 the Birmingham Polish Saturday School was one of about 150 across the country attended by about 5000 of the 16000 children who were born of Polish parents (Smith and Winslow 2000). The Birmingham school was established in Milk Street Digbeth in 1950 for children aged 4-18 years old; later when Millennium House was built the school moved to the Polish Centre. At its highest point the school was attended by 300 pupils who were taught Polish up to 'A' Level standard but by 1997 the numbers had dwindled to about 80. The school was run mainly by women teachers and some male teachers most of whom had been highly educated in Poland, many of the pupils attained GCE and A level qualifications in Polish.

Some of the second generation who were interviewed found the teaching methods at the Saturday school somewhat old fashioned and refused to attend:

*"When I was started at Primary school my mother started me off at the Saturday school in the equivalent of their reception class, I didn't like it at all; I was always crying and running out of class..... I didn't go back until I was in Grammar school and the idea was that I was going to study for 'O' Levels, so from the age of eleven I started going back to the Polish Saturday school" (Mr Slownik).*

Both of Mr Czarny's parents were Polish and he was one of seven children, they were all sent to the Polish Saturday school, with varying results, some of them learnt to speak Polish and others were not so successful. He had quite strong opinions about his own experience:

*“I hated Polish school. I mean I couldn’t answer any of the questions, I mean I’m asked to, you know, do inflexions of, of nouns that meant nothing to me, erm I mean the punishment for not getting a question right in Polish school was to kneel down with your hands up like this at the blackboard, you know pre-war methods”* (Int: Mr Czarny).

The experience of attending Polish Saturday School was clearly a negative one for Mr Czarny but he goes on to say he eventually understood the language in the last year when he was completing his GCE in Polish, and is now a fluent speaker.

None of the second generation children interviewed who had one non Polish parent, who was in all cases the father, attended the Polish Saturday school and none were fluent in the Polish language. The Polish Saturday school in Birmingham has continued to play a large role in the lives of established and new Polish migrants continuing to educate the children in Polish history, geography language and religion without this the language and the traditions would certainly have disappeared within the first or second generation as they have in some Polish communities in America (Wrobel1975, Erdmans 1989).

## **Language**

In Poland during the partition years the Polish language had been forbidden in some areas, but the Polish people would speak Polish at home. All of those first generation people interviewed had been born after independence when Polish was the recognised language but other languages of the minorities, Yiddish, Ukrainian, and Russian were more dominant in some regions.

As a boy growing up in Poland Mr Harrow loved the Polish language, his grandparents spoke only Yiddish; his parents spoke Yiddish and Polish but they always spoke in Polish to the children:

*“I had two younger sisters and to us they spoke only Polish, and I usually played mainly with boys who were speaking Polish, so my Polish, and I loved the Polish language...and whenever I can I read and it’s a language that I really love to use when I can”* (Int: Mr Harrow)

He describes the Polinisation that took place from 1918 onwards and the impact of compulsory schooling when everybody had to go to school for seven years:

*“And there they had to learn Polish; it was all in Polish.... Where Jews started reading Polish, where they read books and speaking and reading it, they loved it, and they were good at it, and they made a great contribution and some of the great writers were Jews..... there was this desire to speak more Polish and if the war hadn’t have taken place, the Jews would all have been speaking Polish, and speaking it very well”.* (Int: Mr Harrow)

There were Jewish families who did not speak Polish to the extent that the Mr Harrows family did. Mr Podroz the son of a Polish Jew who migrated to Palestine in the 1920s said his father, despite being fluent, never spoke Polish or wanted to acknowledge his Polish roots, however his father’s sister, his aunt, who immigrated at the same time always spoke Polish in the home and embraced her Polishness (Int Mr Podroz).

While some second generation children in Britain attended local school others went to Polish run boarding schools where everything was conducted in the Polish language and therefore there was less need or opportunity to master the English language. In Birmingham the children born into families in which both parents were born in Poland, the Polish language was spoken at home and the children were usually sent to Polish Saturday school in this way the children eventually spoke Polish and English.

For those second generation Birmingham Polish, who had one Polish parent, it was less likely that the children would speak the Polish language, particularly if the father was Polish and mother of a different nationality, then Polish would not be learnt in the family and the children would not usually attend the Polish Saturday school. When the mother was Polish but not the father it would be more likely that the children would speak Polish, attend Polish Saturday school and follow Polish traditions.

Mr Slownik was born in the early 50s in Birmingham his mother and father went to work and he would spend his time with his maternal grandparents:

*"I remember my mother used to go out to work and my grandparents used to look after me at home, they taught me all the traditions and the prayers and all the rest of it....when I started going to Primary school, I remember that was the first time I used any English, I don't think until then I had used any English you see, and this is a common story with lots of people of my generation". (Int: Mr Slownik)*

Despite speaking only Polish before starting at primary school Mr Slownik's cousins, who had both Polish parents, spoke more English once they all went to school as this was the language they were in contact with during the day and then would speak it together at home, and later they lost much of their Polish language skill.

Older Polish people often found it difficult to master the English language, neither of the Parents of Mrs Drzewo were never competent English speakers and as a child her skill at the English language would be utilised by them for shopping, filling in forms, discussions with the teachers. Both of the parents of Mr Slownik spoke English well and had some English friends that they had made through their work. Talking of his father Mr Slownik said:

*“Well he wasn't much of a book man, and he didn't like writing letters but his spoken English was very good, very sort of colloquial although you don't notice at first but it had a sort of an accent even though he was very fluent in English”* (Int: Mr Slownik)

The ability of ethnic minorities to speak English has increasingly become a political issue over recent years, the Crick report (2003) placed an explicit emphasis on 'integration' with the English language facility as both a key tool and a primary measure of an individual's worth for national inclusion; Alexander, Edwards and Temple (2007) explored the changing roles of English language in debates around citizenship, nationhood and belonging and argued that it is used as a cultural boundary marker which both defines minority ethnic communities and excludes them from the re-imagined national community (Alexander, Edwards and Temple, 2007). Many of the first generation Polish in Birmingham did not master the English

language and this certainly excluded them from the broader aspects of British society; some of the women who were approached during the research were reluctant to be interviewed because they felt their English was not good enough.

One of the key ways of ensuring the promotion and continuation of language is through the written word, in pre-war Poland; the Poles were prolific producers of written material, books, journals and newspapers. On their arrival in Britain they immediately began to produce newspapers, between the years 1939-49 there were 202 different publications available in the Polish language but following the withdrawal of support for the government in exile funds were limited; the Polish language press then had to rely on support from readers, voluntary organisations and advertising, reducing the numbers of publications to 33 by 1960 (Patterson1977). In Birmingham there is a magazine produced monthly in Polish and sold in the Polish shop at Millennium House.

### **Birmingham Polish Organisations**

Many of the Polish groups that were set up in Birmingham are the same as those in other cities across Britain. There are a number of different groups that have met regularly at the Polish Millennium House over the years including the Polish Combatants Association (PCA). The PCA wanted to set up a complete system of Polish institutions to take over such functions which are normally, in a sovereign state, carried out by the state and to encourage in every possible way the creation of distinct and self contained Polish communities in various parts of England (housing estates in rural districts and Polish urban parishes (Zubrzycki 1956)

As discussed earlier they held the belief that the implementation of this policy was the only safeguard against assimilation and the only guarantee of integrity of their group (Zubrzycki 1956) this group was very strong in the early years and despite the deaths of the original members and some of those who established the group the group continued to meet.

During the first twenty five years many Catholic organisations were set up, including the Roses of the Living, the Legion of May, the Alter Servers' Circle and the youth organisations, the Catholic Association of Polish Youth. The Catholic Circle bought national costumes for the folk dancing group, who entertained not only the Birmingham Polish community but travelled around to other Polish groups.

The first Polish choir at the club was mixed gender but split into a male and a female choir in 1958. The Lutino, established in 1958 and Echo choirs, established in 1950 represent the Polish community during the international Carol service that is held in October in Birmingham. This group continues to meet but with an aging population the numbers have dwindled and there is now just one mixed choir again who are predominantly women.

The majority of what would be considered to be senior positions in the Polish club were held by the men, however it was the women who held the language and traditions and passed these on to their children. In the majority of cases when the mother was not Polish the language and traditions have been lost.



The Polish women have ensured that their children attended the Polish Saturday school regularly and that they spoke to them in Polish. The women have cooked Polish food, followed Polish traditions and celebrated Polish festivals and name days. Although none of the first wave of Polish women inferred that they were treated differently it was clear from observation that demarcation of roles was very traditional up to present day. Temple (1992, 1995) explored this and showed clearly that the expectation of Polish women to work outside the home and to carry on the traditional role of a housewife was a reality for some Polish women with the Polish men traditionally working out of the home and 'helping' their wives in an ad hoc way; the pressure on the second generation women to conform to the expected role of a 'good Catholic Polish woman' caused some to move away from the established community. The importance of Polish identity being more than its organisations which were mainly dominated by males in positions of power was identified in Temple's early work (Temple 1992).

When a new community begins to take shape invariably there will be some people who are more active than others; talking of his parent's relationship with the Polish club Mr Slownik stated that:

*"Neither of my parents were very active in the Polish community at all, they weren't big wigs or anything, you probably know the Polish community, there are people who are important and they fill the top jobs; and then there are the grey masses that just come along and disappear and have their meals and that kind of things. So they were among the latter"* (Int: Mr Slownik)

He expressed his own personal feelings of isolation within the community which he felt related to not staying at the Polish Saturday school as a child and moving away from Birmingham for a period of time, although he is an active member of the club now.

By the time the fifty year celebration of the Polish Catholic community in Birmingham had taken place the numbers were already in decline, the committee was now mainly run by second generation Poles, and second and third wave Polish migrants, their views and perceived needs for the Polish community had changed; they are considered to be the younger generation although they were in their fifties. With the downfall of Communism in Poland the need for the Poles abroad to offer support either psychologically or practical was no longer necessary as Mr Niebieski stated, *“I fought all my life for Poland to be free, now it is, what do I do?”*; the loss of sense of self through loss of belonging to the Polish cause is evident.

The organisations continued with numbers becoming fewer each year as the members died, in some cases the second generation took their parents place but for some of the groups this is inappropriate. By the late 1990's and the early 2000's researchers were concerned that the Polish populations in the UK were depleting to such an extent that the communities would not survive (Zebrowska 1986, Hanson 1995, Sword 1996). As with other Polish communities all over Britain the Birmingham Polish community appeared to be dwindling.

## **Summary**

During the first twenty five years the Polish Circle bought land and built a place where the included Polish community could carry on a lifestyle that they had only begun to get accustomed to in Poland, they founded their club on what Davies described as Polish National Consciousness, Church, Language, History and Race (Davies 1996) and this excluded some people. The next twenty five years saw the second generation and some of the second and third wave Polish people take over some of the senior positions within the club but this was not an easy transition; the first generation had high ideals of what is necessary to be Polish and some of the newcomers did not fit.

In post Second World War Britain there was a reluctance to build new accommodation for the Displaced Poles and so the majority were housed in what became Displaced Persons camps or National Service Hostels (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989). In 1947 National Service Hostels were acquired to house Poles and their families as part of the Polish Resettlement Corps. These ex military camps were often unfit for the new purpose they were expected to fulfil, they were sometimes old Nissan huts, with a partition between families and the plumbing and water supply would be limited. They would be cold in the winter and warm in the summer with damp being a frequent visitor (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989). As it became clear that large numbers would not be returning to Poland discussions were started with the unions. This was a time when the Unions of Britain were becoming increasingly powerful and when British men were returning from war looking for employment. The General Municipal Workers Union (GMWU) had established links with the Polish equivalent as early as 1943, and the Transport and

General Workers Union (TGWU) actively recruited Poles from the resettlement camps from 1947 onwards, enabling many Poles to find employment at a time when other unions were opposed to their introduction to the work place. Lack of competent English language skill limited the possibilities of work, particular with the older Polish people and qualifications gained in Poland were often redundant, this would be addressed by some but other Polish people would never become proficient as English speakers (Sword, Davies and Ciechanowski 1989).

The importance of education to the Polish people had continued from the role of Matka Polska during the partitions, the Polish mothers, teaching children the Polish language, history and geography; the establishment of a flying university, illegal printing presses and the smuggling of books during the years of partition (Zamoyski 2001). Education had carried on in Siberia and when the Poles were liberated they formed schools in Persia and Africa; the Birmingham Polish people who had spent their formative years in Africa or India spoke very highly of the education they received from some highly educated Poles; there was an elementary, secondary and high school and courses for older people (Int: Mr Rzecznik ) all lessons were in Polish and included, Polish history, literature, geography and maths, English was not taught until much later and only for one or two hours per week.

British Post Second World War studies of the mental health of migrants found that the Polish had the third largest number of hospital admissions per 100,000 population in England and Wales, more than one third above the native level (Cochrane 1977). Polish men had the second highest numbers of diagnosis of schizophrenia which would have been the most common psychiatric diagnosis at

that time, as did the Polish women. Most alarmingly the statistics for rates of suicide show the Polish men with the highest rates and the Polish women second highest following the German women (Cochrane 1977). During the first twenty five years of arrival there were people in the Birmingham Polish community who committed suicide (Fr. Kącki 1972), but the numbers are not stated.

Littlewood and Lipsedge (1997) noted that soon after their arrival the first generation of Polish men were five times more likely to be admitted to psychiatric hospital than were men in the general population but that the incidence was more common in the smaller communities where support systems were less developed. This is supported by the work of Hitch and Rack (1980) who found that first generation Polish people in Bradford who were admitted to psychiatric hospitals had insufficient protection against the normal crises and losses of later life; which they partly explained as resulting from their marginal identity. In Bradford the Poles were said not to be integrated with the host population and had vigorously retained a separate group identity.

In some areas where the numbers of Polish migrants were small the Poles were often socially excluded from the host society enhancing a marginal identity and increasing the evident symptoms of paranoia which were exacerbated by not being able to speak English, there were numbers of Polish people admitted to psychiatric hospitals on arrival in the UK post Second World War and who remained there throughout their lives (Winslow 2001). For some of those who did not suffer with an early diagnosed mental illness their past history continued to adversely affect their present lives in different ways; the way that the past was remembered influenced

attitudes and as the Polish émigré aged the mental health problems associated with their experiences began to emerge (Winslow 2001). The testimonies collected by Winslow demonstrated the sense of anguish and turmoil the interviewees had lived through had significantly affected their lives, and that they had been affected by their treatment in the host country in response to the Second World War. The political decision made by a succession of British governments, who were sensitive to east-west relationships, not to allow a monument to victims of the Katyn massacres of 1940 to be erected until 1976, and the decision to exclude the Poles from the Victory Parade in London in 1945 reinforced the view among the Polish émigré that their contribution during WWII was officially omitted from British National memory (Winslow 2001). The experience and sense of loss of the Polish people emerged through the interviews as a significant influence shaping their lives in Birmingham and this also impacted on the way that they interacted with the second, third and fourth waves of Polish migrants who arrived at a later date. To deal with their loss the Polish continued to live and develop the types of relationships that had established in pre Second World War Poland.

## CHAPTER SIX

### NEW ARRIVALS

Small numbers of second and third wave Polish migrants began to arrive in Birmingham from the 1970s onwards. The losses that had occurred as a consequence of the Second World War continued to affect the people living in Poland. The numbers of ethnic minorities were now negligible and many Polish people had been relocated to other parts of Poland leaving their homes, their history, and their friends. Mrs Czekolada, a second wave Polish woman, was born in 1934 in Warsaw; she came from a wealthy family her grandfather was a jeweller and prior to the Second World War he owned his own shop and the apartments in the building where his shop was situated. Her father went to the Polish army at the outset of the war and never returned; they found out in 1948 he had been killed somewhere near the Russian border. Her mother was taken to Auschwitz where she also died. She remembers going as a school child on an organised trip to Auschwitz museum and the distress that it caused her:

*“When I was school girl I did that trip to the Auschwitz; It was miserable day and I couldn’t go inside I wasn’t able to go any further, there was a corridor and a room which one was full of hair one side and one was full of glasses and one was shoes and the other was glasses and God knows what, all over and when I walked down there I couldn’t go any further. That was too much for me and naturally I never went back again and I never ever went near that town where it was happening”* (Int: Mrs Czekolada)

Mrs Czekolada went on to describe Auschwitz and what went on stating that she didn't see it but her friends had told her about it. Mrs Czekolada left Poland in the 1960s, she had witnessed communism but had never been part of it, her grandfather would not allow her to join any of the communist groups; and when the guides group she was a member of changed their tie to a red one she had to leave.

Mrs Zyczliwy described how the 1980s during Martial Law, were dreadful times, there was nothing in the shops, only the very cheapest tea, pasta and coffee and these would run out too so there was nothing. Political activists were disappearing; this was the time of the suspicious death in 1984 of the Priest Jerzy Popieluszko who was the Chaplain for Solidarity (Kolek 2002).

The second and third wave Polish migrants had experienced loss in Poland that was not acknowledged in Poland or when they arrived in Birmingham, they were not considered to be part of the group that had suffered the terrible atrocities metered out by Hitler and Stalin, although clearly they had been directly affected by what had happened during the war and the situation in Poland meant that they continued to suffer the loss of freedom under the communist regime.

The interviews with the first wave Birmingham Polish community have demonstrated some suspicion of Polish newcomers, even those who arrived in the 70s and 80s. Having met her husband in England, when they married, Mrs Drugi returned to Birmingham but her social life was very much outside the Polish community with either English or Irish people, although she kept a Polish house and her son speaks



Polish and attended the Polish Saturday school attaining 'A' level Polish, but because he never joined the Polish Scouts she felt that this was not looked on well by the Polish Clergy. She commented that when attending a New Years Eve party for the first time at the Polish centre she found the experience very strange with people using outdated titles and when one of the first generation Polish men suggested that she "was a Red" she did not feel at all welcomed:

*"I had some mixed feelings about the Polish centre because the people at the club were a bit suspicious about every newcomer from Poland, because the people who established the Polish centre they suffered a lot because of Communists and they thought many people who were coming from Poland were Communists so it was very difficult, the people were not how I expected they would be".* She continues:

*"And that was really strange, these old, well they were not old really, probably middle aged, calling themselves by their military and aristocratic titles. To me it was just so odd, these titles, these estates didn't exist anymore, these armies didn't exist anymore, but they still maintained"* (Int: Mrs Drugi)

Although the first generation could see that their numbers were falling they found it hard to accept the Polish people who had lived under the communist regime into their community, this may have been because they wanted to continue to preserve their 'little Poland' and they were afraid that somehow these new Poles may try to change things.

Some of the second generation people, who have not been involved with the Polish community, feel disconnected from the Polish community as Mrs Szkola whose father was Polish and her mother Irish indicates:

*"It's difficult because I don't really feel part of anything. I've not really ever been .... I suppose my parents; they never really were part of the Irish club scene or the Polish club scene, so I've never been attached to one or the other. Because Polish people are white nobody sees them as different, you just mingle in, so they never think to ask you 'how do you feel culturally – do you feel Polish, Irish, English - do you have any leanings towards where your mother or father came from?' Nobody thinks of that because to look at you, you could be English, you know. They don't know". (Int: Mrs Szkola)*

Mr Slownik, who went to the Polish church but did not go to the Polish Saturday school until he was eleven, stated that:

*"I think I missed out on those middle years when all the other Polish kids were forming their lifelong friendships and they're the ones who are in the management of the club now and I often feel there is a resistance to people like myself who weren't there, didn't form the relationships all along, I feel very much an outsider" (Int Mr Slownik)*

His statement indicates that insiders can often feel like outsiders too.

Some of the second and third wave Poles felt more accepted by their non Polish friends and neighbours; Mrs Czekolada did not find it easy to mix with the

established Polish community and despite working among some Poles she and her husband made more friends with English people, they did not go to the Polish club and had mostly English friends:

*“Believe it or not I meet so many lovely English people, not Polish, was many Polish people but somehow the Polish people that was great big gap between us. The people that, was come from, say Siberia and then all over..... I become something like a stranger to them, stranger... I got English people, lovely people believe me lovely beautiful people”* (Int: Mrs Czekolada)

Polish Catholics who arrived in the second and third wave sometimes felt excluded because they had different experiences in Poland. Mrs Jezyk who married an English man and came to live in Birmingham in the 1970s, stated she was accused of being a Red by an older first wave Polish man at the one function that she attended at the Polish club; Mrs Czekolada who came in the 1960s and married a first wave Polish man felt she had nothing in common with people from Siberia; although both women continue to have some contact with the Polish club they have many English friends with whom they feel they have a stronger connection.

The social, political and personal reasons for migration, and the experiences of the person shaped how the second and third wave Polish lived in Birmingham and contributed to their lack of connection with the first wave Polish; however they also remained largely invisible.

### **Life in Poland Following the Collapse of Communism.**

Social and political life in Poland changed significantly from the end of the 1980s, as of the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 1989 Poland had ceased to be known as the Peoples Republic and had recovered the crowned White Eagle as its emblem; when Lech Walesa won the 1990 presidential election he chose to receive his insignia of office not from the outgoing Jaruzelski but the last president in exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, establishing a symbolic constitutional link with the pre-war Second Republic residing in London; and as this event signalled the completion of their historic mission, the Government in Exile, was dissolved (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006 p318). In the same year Solidarity as an organisation ended; it had been shaped by the interaction between workers and intellectuals in particular Walesa and his intellectual advisers and the break up created a split between the workers and the intellectuals (Garton Ash 1999).

Under communism living standards in Poland fell further behind those in Western Europe despite high levels of steel and coal production, Poland continued to have chronic shortages of basic goods (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). In 1990 when the people and the politicians of Poland lost Solidarity, they also lost the need to unify against a common enemy, which had been part of their identity and their emotional life since 1945 (Garton Ash 1999).

In the early post communist era the move towards a market society was visible in Poland, the economic reforms were relatively successful and the standard of living was rising alongside the emergence of the middle classes (Ivano 2003). This situation was not to last, the collapse of communism had triggered hopes of radical

improvement of conditions of life in Poland but the rise in unemployment and increase in poverty resulting from the change from communist to a capitalist society had effects across urban and agricultural areas (Kwasniewicz 2003). Educated Poles were unable to find work, or if they did the pay was insufficient for them to live independently and consequently many had no choice but to live with their parents or to move abroad for work.

### **Relationships in Poland**

Poland had been a homogenous country for more than sixty years, generations of Polish children had been born into a country in which there was little opportunity to view self as distinct from the other, the effect of this can be seen in the work of White (2011) and Temple (2010). Because of Poland's past experiences, repression and occupation by its neighbours, there was evidence that Polish people were less tolerant towards ethnic minorities (Mogilnicka 2009). All historical contacts with other nations had been through war and occupation and therefore the negative attitudes, particularly toward Germany and Russia, were thought to be justified and the isolation through the years of communism contributed to this situation (Mogilnicka 2009). These negative attitudes have travelled with them to Britain where the migrant Poles have negative stereotypes of black and Asian British people and believe that being white in Britain is an advantage (Mogilnicka 2009, White 2011).

The media continued to portray negative stereotypes the Jews; however the *Tygodnik Powszechny* weekly and the monthly *Wieża i Znak* promotes dialogue and reconciliation between the Jews and the Poles (Kwiatkowska 2008). The newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* has made claims that the Jews are responsible for the

Stalinisation of Poland and the crimes committed by the security apparatus under the communist regime (Kwiatkowska 2008). The Catholic Radio station Maryja run by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk and whose followers were mainly older and mostly women, who were uneducated and impoverished, also nationalist intellectuals and scholars who were marginalised by Polish academia (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006, Kwiatkowska 2008). The radio station and Father Rydzyk were viewed by Polish elites as eccentric and an embarrassing exception to the rule (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006, Kwiatkowska 2008).

When Jan Gross published *Neighbours* in the Polish language in 2000 it caused a great deal of disbelief and controversy; people found it hard to believe that in a small town, Jedwabne in Poland, in 1941 the Polish inhabitants had murdered their Jewish neighbours, who were half of the town's population. Eight members of the Gestapo were involved in the instigation but the pogrom was carried out by the Polish inhabitants of the town and the Jewish homes were ransacked by their neighbours. Before the Second World War 1,600 Jewish men, women and children lived in Jedwabne, in 1945 seven remained having been saved by a Polish family who were eventually derided and driven from the area (Gross 2003).

The president of Poland publicly apologised for the crime of Jedwabne; but despite this and the extensive coverage in the media the results of a nationwide survey carried out in August 2001 showed that 28% of respondents believed the sole and only perpetrators of the Jedwabne killings were the Germans (Gross 2003).

Nasz Dziennik printed the following interview of May 2001 which took place with Cardinal Josef Glemp the Primate of the Polish Catholic Church in Poland:

'Polish-Jewish antagonisms used to happen for economical reason. Jews were shrewder and knew how to exploit the Poles, at least that is how they were perceived... should not the Jews admit to their guilt towards the Poles, especially for the period of Bolshevik collaboration, for helping in the deportations to Siberia, for sending Poles to prisons for degrading their co-citizens etc. the fact that Poles took also part in those repressions does not change that in UB (security office) the leading role was played by Jews' (Kwiatkowska 2008:18).

So it can be observed that the three countries to the east of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus, that were at least in part Polish between the First and Second World Wars, continue to have interesting and complex relationships. In the Ukraine the city of Lvov was Lwow, in Lithuania Vilnius was Wilno and in Western Belarus there were Polish military settlers. Polish Ukrainian relationships have a shared history of bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and negative stereotypes (Wolczuk and Wolczuk 2002) relationships between the two countries have had difficulties but the joint declaration about reconciliation which was signed in May 1997 between Ukraine and Poland led to a strategic partnership and in 2000 a Ukrainian-Polish peacekeeping battalion was sent by NATO to Kosovo (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006).

When Lithuania gained its independence in 1990 Vilnius adopted a negative attitude to Lithuania's historic links to Poland and demonstrated hostile administration

against the Polish minority which had voiced separatist aspirations, they also demanded that the Polish government should condemn the inter-war Polish 'occupation' of Vilnius; these issues were dealt with by later governments and the Polish-Lithuanian treaty was signed in October 1994 (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006). There continues to be a Polish minority in Western Belarus; when Poland had to end the no-visa arrangements with Belarus and the Ukraine on entry to the EU, they offered free visas; the Ukraine' accepted but Belarus did not (Lukowski and Zawadzki 2006).

Once Poland had gained its independence from the Soviets the country was keen to move towards the west and to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and after several years of negotiation became members in 1999, eventually deploying Polish soldiers to Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan; they were one of eight European countries who sent a letter to President Bush supporting his policies in Iraq to the displeasure of France and Germany (Bubczyk 2002, Kapiszewski 2003). The next big issue that Poland and the Poles had to face once it was a member of NATO was joining the EU. People whose livelihood was in agriculture and the fact that the political situation in Poland was unstable caused some concerns, but most Poles appeared to accept the historical significance of the referendum and separated it from their lack of confidence in the Polish government, over 70% voted to join (Szczurbiak, 2005). In 2004 Poland entered alongside seven other countries.

When they looked back at their history Poles continued to feel that they were treated unfairly, summed up in the following paragraph written by an academic in Krakow the year before Poland was admitted to the EU:



“Poles remember that Europe decided to betray Poland several times, because the continent feels real respect only for Russia. They also remember that the democratic United States (as well as Great Britain) signed a shameful Yalta treaty which in 1945, sold the country for 50 years to the Soviet Union. This is why, today, Poles try to pursue multilateral politics – their best security for the future”  
(Kapiszewski 2003:25).

The Polish people have long memories whether they are living in Poland or not; experiences of trauma and loss are evident in the history and demonstrated in the interviews. The Polish people who were living in Birmingham had been brought up on past memories and had focused on the freedom of Poland, from communism, when this freedom came for many it was too late to return and the younger Poles had lived all their life in Britain. Many of the aged Poles had lived the majority of their life in Britain, the Poland they left behind no longer existed and the post communist Poland was not influenced by them. With the integration of Poland into the EU the next chapter began for the Polish of Birmingham.

### **The arrival of the ‘Polish Migrant Workers’ in Birmingham**

Linked to the idea of return, temporary migration has become an increasingly identified aspect of movement between East and Western Europe; the temporary employment contracts and high unemployment in Poland contributed to the increased economic migration patterns (White 2011). Poland has had established patterns of temporary and seasonal migration by men and women to Italy, Germany and Norway since independence from the Soviet Union (Lucassen 2005, White 2011). Although men make up the majority of the migrants, Polish women have

made up a large undocumented migrant workforce in Europe often as domestic workers and carers (Coyle 2007). Whilst migration to the UK was a component of Polish migration patterns prior to 2004 this was not in large numbers.

In May 2004 Poland was one of eight new accession countries along with Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia to join the European Union (EU). With the new legislation surrounding migrant workers the British government estimated that there would be a slow and steady movement across the borders, in fact the October-December 2004 figures showed an overall increase of 130,000 from May 2004; 40% of these were thought to be resident in the UK prior to May of that year and had now legitimised their status (HO press 028/05).

In many cities in the UK including Birmingham, in what appeared to be a relatively short period of time, there were increasing numbers of Polish shops, an influx of skilled Polish trades people and, in the city centres, you would usually be served in a shop by a young Polish person at least once a day. The Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) statistics for 2005/06 showed that the largest numbers of new National Insurance Number Allocations of all nationals entering the UK were from Poland at 171,380 making 63% of the total numbers. 2,470 of these Polish people were residing in Birmingham; the largest age group is among the 18-34 with numbers of men and women being equal; in the years 2000/01 Poland were not in the top ten, (DWP 2006). Immigration of Polish people was at its highest in 2007 at 96,000 declining to 39,000 in 2009, the numbers are now stable; the Polish migrant population is one of the three largest non UK born groups (National Statistics Online 2011).

In 2004 the statutory and voluntary organisations were not prepared for the large numbers of Poles who began to arrive in Birmingham. The changes to the benefit system meant that the new EU migrants were subject to new legislation; they had to be in employment for twelve months before being able to access state benefits and the hostels for the homeless could not take people who were unable to register for benefit.

Large numbers of Polish people had been recruited in Poland via newspaper or internet advertisements, they had been promised work and accommodation in exchange for money, when they arrived at their English destination they handed over their money and were left stranded by the perpetrators. The police were depositing Polish people on the doorstep of the Polish Millennium House sometimes on a daily basis, believing that the club would be able to take responsibility for assisting them. Despite having no funds to support these vulnerable people the older Polish population often offered shelter and support, housed people temporarily until they were able to find work and accommodation or returned to Poland. Quite quickly the numbers became too large to cope with in this ad hoc way and alternatives needed to be arranged.

Until this point the Polish Centre in Birmingham had never applied for or received outside funding, everything had been organised through volunteers, using membership subscriptions and voluntary donations. Using a proactive approach to what was envisioned as a potentially increasing problem I worked with the manager supported by the University of Birmingham to apply for Big Lottery Funding to

employ a part time support worker. The application was unsuccessful and the manager continued to make links with statutory and voluntary organisations to try to stem the ever increasing flow of people seeking help.

The migrants from the eight accession countries have consistently received inequitable treatment to the host population in terms of work, accommodation and access to education; this resulted in multiple discriminations and contributed to conflict both within and between ethnic and faith communities (Staniewicz 2007). The findings in the study conducted by Staniewicz with Polish migrants in London and Dublin are consistent with trends that were found among the fourth wave Birmingham Polish in the initial years. They experienced rising levels of homelessness, overcrowded, over priced and substandard housing, illegal working practices and incidents of racial discrimination (Staniewicz 2007).

The manager of the Birmingham Polish club began to try to find support through the council, the local benefits office and the Trade Unions. Following the exploitation of many through unscrupulous employment agencies, reputable agencies were invited to come to the club and interpreters assisted them, paid for from the clubs dwindling funds. The Trade Unions found funds to offer education on employment law and offered weekly contact for people who had difficulty; all sessions were assisted by paid interpreters.

Eventually contacts were made with the voluntary sector groups working with black and ethnic minority communities in Birmingham, through these contacts the manager was offered training and support on how to apply for funding to assist with the

growing needs of the new migrant community. A successful application was made to the Community Development Foundation funded by the Office of the Third Sector for a Grass Roots grant for a Polish Support Services Project. The project provided professional free services, once a week, at the Polish Millennium House from an advisor from the Birmingham TUC centre for the unemployed. They provided direct support through advice and guidance on employment, housing, family, social and health care, benefits, council tax, writing letters and telephone calls on behalf of those who could speak little or no English ([www.mpca.eu](http://www.mpca.eu) ).

### **Reasons for migration in the words of the fourth wave Birmingham Polish**

The Poles who arrived in Britain post 2004 migrated for economic reasons, at that time about one fifth of the Polish workforce was unemployed, with some locations having unemployment rates as high as 20%, jobs were insecure and often it was necessary to take a second job just to make ends meet (White 2011). The Polish people who came to Birmingham were often coming to be with family, on the promise of a job, for education or to join a friend. In the early years the exchange rate was good for Polish migrants, seven Zloty for every GB pound, many were able to earn in a week what it would have taken them a month to earn in Poland. The following excerpts are typical of the reason people were coming to Britain in 2004:

*“Because I was living on my own and had to pay bills and living expenses I could save hardly anything and I did want to save money for my future family”*

(Int: Mr Brazowy).

*“After graduation I decided to come again and stay in the UK for a year to earn some money so that I could move out from my parents and start my independent professional life in Poland” (Int: Ms Bialy).*

For skilled workers on low income it was a way of being able to move upwards:

*“I had some debts in Poland... I wanted bigger salaries so that I could pay off my debts quicker, I met up with my friend in February 2005 and he mentioned that I could come to England, he found me a job in the restaurant where he was working ....I could also stay in his flat “. (Int: Mr Czerwony)*

Some of the migrants had been to London first and then came to Birmingham and others came to Birmingham and moved on to London. Many of the fourth wave group who were interviewed had either relatives or friends who were able to support them with advice, work or somewhere to live, these migration networks contribute to the choices of which towns and cities people choose to live and work (White 2011). One restaurant chain in Birmingham whose manager was Polish had deliberately employed a large number of Polish workers because she found them reliable and hard working, she found her employees through both new and established networks.

Many of the Polish people who were working in restaurants and care work had higher education qualifications, at least a first degree but sometime a Masters level degree, this was the same with the people interviewed by Mogilnicka (2009) and White (2011). Although this would appear to be a similar situation to the first, second

and third wave of Birmingham Polish migrants the difference was that for the fourth wave this was a choice, a temporary arrangement with a means to an end. They said that they would either be returning home to Poland to take up more suitable work or when they became more fluent in the English language they would increase their opportunities for employment in Britain. The other significant difference with the fourth wave Polish migrants is the numbers of self employed people, doing a variety of work from semi-skilled manual work to retail and interpreting. The amount of Polish food shops that have opened in Birmingham is numerous; in the area I live in there are three Polish shops where previously there were none. A negative consequence of the opening of Polish food shops has been the decrease in people shopping at the small shop at the Polish club, the established Birmingham Polish can now choose where to buy their Polish food and the numbers that use the shop have dwindled to such an extent that they have considered closure.

### **Relationships and work and accommodation**

From the outset, in 2004, there were large numbers of new migrants who came on the promise of work and somewhere to live and then were sadly disappointed, being robbed and stranded or made to work for low wages and to live in appalling conditions. It became known that the new migrants were living in substandard accommodation, sharing a room and sometimes sharing a bed in shifts, one person working the night shift while another has the bed and when they return the other person gets up for work and leaves the bed for them, this was also happening across the country particularly in rural areas. By 2007 this had become an identified issue

across Britain (Staniewicz 2007) and was being discussed in the wider public domain.

The majority of Polish workers who have migrated to Britain post 2004 were unskilled or semi skilled, there were however large numbers of skilled workers, plumbers, carpenters and electricians. There were also numbers of educated construction workers, Information technology workers who organised employment before they travelled and took up well paid work in Britain. There were also married couples who decided to settle and older couples who brought their children to live in Birmingham. Once it was recognised that there were difficulties, in contrast to the experience of the first wave migrants, the Trade Unions were available to give assistance right from the beginning.

The situation for the fourth wave Polish migrants who have moved to Birmingham has differed across the spectrum; some were single and live in shared accommodation, others rented houses or bought their own homes. In the early days many Polish people settled in Handsworth and Erdington but as with the first wave Birmingham Polish they have not clustered in just one area but are distributed across the city, this is similar to the first wave Polish migrants but different to the second and third wave.

From May 2004, for a least twelve months the Police continued to leave stranded Polish people on the doorsteps of the Polish Millennium House; the manageress made contact with the local police and organised a meeting to discuss the situation, there was little practical help on offer although the police regularly attended meetings



and did work with the local bus station to try to stem the flow of unaware Polish people travelling to Birmingham. Homelessness and sleeping rough was a problem, in part because the new Polish migrants were not entitled to benefit and so could not secure a bed in a homeless hostel; except for one hostel that held an emergency bed that could be accessed for one night only, the situation was very frustrating, and therefore it was important to maintain and develop links with the statutory and voluntary agencies.

The fourth wave Birmingham Polish people began to live in multi-occupancy shared accommodation often in a house with other new Polish migrants, as the first wave Polish had. A number of couples saved to buy their own homes and in many cases they have been selective of the areas that they choose to live in, moving into the more affluent areas more quickly than the first wave.

The older fourth wave Polish migrants were born in a Communist Poland and the younger group were born to parents who had lived in communist Poland, evidencing differences with the first wave Polish migrants. From the interviews it was clear that the changes in Poland since 1989 have been significant. With the loss of the common cause against communism and the loss of the structure that communism gave them, this did affect the way that people were living in the private and public sphere. From 1990 onwards, due to an economic downturn, many Poles lost their jobs and any sense of financial security, higher education was less available and for those who were working terms and conditions were less favourable so that long hours and fewer holidays became the norm.

Ms Uczyc arrived in the UK in 2004, coming from a small town in the North West of Poland; she was one of three children. During the years of communism her mother worked in a factory and her father was an administrator; speaking of their early life she said:

*“Our parents were relaxed after the war the future was predictable, nobody was stressed about losing job, another thing was nobody was rushed or stressed about getting promotion, it wasn’t the way...everyone lived on more or less the same level, so err it wasn’t really motivating people to do more....”* (Int: Ms Uczyc)

The picture she gives of family life in Poland describes the separation between the public and private sphere and how many people were anti communist:

*“And because you... in my family it was important not to comply with that, with the communist system....my mother’s family, they had very strong principals and even my mother was in Solidarity and, which my father’s family they were more conformists one of my uncles he was member of the Communist party he admits it now because now he is like a critic of people who joined, he admits now it was never, it was never a case of politics it was just he wanted to make progress in his career”* (Int: Ms Uczyc)

Moving to Birmingham she has chosen, unusually for a fourth wave Polish person, to live in a shared house with non-Polish people; she has Polish and non-Polish friends. Having been educated to degree level in Poland she found it very difficult to

gain employment in her chosen career, when she came to England she worked in a fish and chip shop and also as a care worker for people who have learning disabilities. While she carried out this work she completed the associated National Vocational Qualification level qualification and learned to speak English. She now works as a Senior STAR worker with the local Mental Health Trust and is completing a Masters degree. In her work she has noted that there is a lack of inclusion of the Polish community in any of the equality and diversity training.

### **Relationships between the new migrant Poles and the existing Birmingham Polish community.**

Although the fourth wave Polish migrants are more visible than the first wave group there are commonalities in how they conduct their lives in the private and public sphere. In both groups they socialise with English co-workers when they are at work but in the majority of cases, of those who were interviewed, outside of work they socialise predominantly with Polish people.

The fourth wave migrants made comments about the behaviour of English people and were shocked by the difference between Polish and English people, commenting on their morality, or lack of it, an issue that has been identified in the work of Temple (2010) when exploring the values that Polish people identify as Polish (Temple 2010).

Miss Pisac was quite shocked by the behaviour of her English contemporaries when she came to England for the first time. As an exchange student she stayed in student accommodation and noted:

*“Well, err, I shouldn’t say it but you know I was 21 and I know I had a boyfriend and everything but... I mean it was just I would never think that, you know, that the way they would go out and just sleep with people and get people round the house, it was very, very shocking...I still remember it and that’s probably why my opinion about... England and English people in general is still not a very good one, although I do know lots of lovely English people now”* (Int: Miss Pisac)

Miss Pisac would email her friends in Poland to tell that what her English housemates were doing and she said they did not find it funny but were disgusted. When she came back later to do further study she made some English friends but she said that her views had been affected by her first experience. These types of comments were made by other fourth wave Poles and one of Temple’s interviewees noted the amount of ‘shagging’ that appeared to be the norm in the lives of young British people (Temple 2010).

Mr Czerwony was concerned about the effect English adolescents behaviour would have on his own children who are teenagers:

*“My older son is seventeen...in fact he is still very shocked by the difference between Polish and English teenager; he cannot believe that there are some seventeen year olds in UK who are having babies and live adult lives already. I know*

*that he does not approve of wasting your youth in such a way so I am quite confident that he will not go this route in Birmingham now” (Int: Mr Czerwony).*

However he was concerned that his younger son who was twelve may be more influenced by his English peers and he stressed the importance of his children keeping what he described as Polish behaviours:

*“I want to see my children being polite to everyone rather than loud and rude as some English children can be; I want them to respect older people and always remember that they should give their seat to an older person, but if they ever forget this rule they learnt in Poland I will remind them straight away” (Int: Mr Czerwony)*

One of the women interviewed was married to a second generation Polish man who was born in Birmingham:

*“I have to admit that I find it easier to make good friend with Polish rather than English friends...I suppose the way Polish girls think and behave is very different to English ones. My English friends from work for example cannot understand why I am ironing my husband’s shirts for him or cook dinners. In Poland we are brought up in traditional families where it is obvious that a wife should look after her husband...I think there is too much freedom in the UK, are no moral barriers and it can be very shocking for Polish people”. (Int: Mrs Zielony)*

And in Birmingham she and her extended family live a Polish way of life:

*“We are really living like a Polish family here; I always cook Polish food when I am at home. My husband loves golabki (stuffed cabbage) and pierogi (dumplings). We don’t like eating out, nor do we eat curries. We speak Polish at home although my husband speaks Polish with an English accent” (Int: Mrs Zielony).*

The noted Polish behaviours are set against British behaviours which in Birmingham include eating curry. They set themselves apart from the negative behaviours that she ascribes to the English.

The fourth wave Polish migrants, who were interviewed, all shop at Polish shops, cook Polish food, and continue with Polish traditions, they socialise mainly with Polish friends and do this in what they have described as the ‘Polish way’, meeting at each other’s homes eating Polish food, drinking Polish alcohol and listening to Polish music. Sport appears to be important to them and in the local area where I live Polish men get together and play football and they have also started up a Polish Aston Villa supporters group which is the local football team:

*“Our socialising often remains Polish style, meeting with friends as we usually organise house parties with some food and vodka of course. We used to meet up once or twice a week, depending when we have time off work. One of us would prepare some food, others would bring vodka and we would be chatting in Polish and having fun. We go out to English pubs sometimes but we prefer our house parties”. (Int: Mr Czerwony)*

This was reiterated by Miss Zolty:

*“We prefer big house parties rather than going out to pubs or restaurants...we always prepare lots of Polish food for any celebrations...of course the boys always have some Polish alcohol with them and the whole evening is great fun, lots of chatting, laughing and sometimes even dancing to the Polish music”.* (Int: Miss Zolty)

The fourth wave Polish migrants continue with the Polish traditions in the same way that the first wave Migrants; most important in the Polish calendar is Wilaglia, the Christmas Eve celebration:

*“There is always Christmas Eve supper prepared at one house where we all gather. All the girls are involved in cooking so we do have all twelve traditional meals on the table...It used to be difficult to get all the ingredients for Polish dishes before but not anymore, we buy our sour cabbage, wild mushrooms, dried prunes, curd cheese etc in Polish shops now. We start the meal with sharing the ‘Holy Bread’.* (Int: Miss Zolty).

There are clearly noted differences in how Polish men and women are perceived to be spending their time in the private sphere which connects with the study by Temple (1992) and identifying clear demarcation of gender role and behaviour that appears to be acceptable across the four waves.

In Polish tradition Christmas Eve Wigilia is the main Christmas meal and is both a religious and family occasion; traditionally fasting took place from morning, when preparations were being made, until the evening meal, and food was only taken

when the first star appeared. There may be straw on the table to symbolize the manger, in which Christ was laid and there should also be an extra place setting, either to honour the dead or to remind participants that the Christian is always ready to aid the needy (Sword 1996). I attended a Wigilia supper at the Polish Club in Birmingham, this used to be a big celebration with many people attending primarily for those who did not have family to spend Christmas Eve with, when I attended in 2009 there were about twenty people including one of the Polish priests, mostly second and third wave Polish and including some English people. Following on from the meal everyone attended Polish midnight mass, for this there was standing room only.

At the Easter celebration when one of the fourth wave Polish migrants wanted to buy a small basket to take food to the church on Easter Sunday for the traditional blessing. She found it difficult and when she went to St Michael's Church for the celebration she found that the established Polish community had large baskets overflowing with food; something that she said would not happen in Poland. It may be that the first wave of Polish migrants felt it was important to show their wealth to prove that they are doing well; a large basket may indicate that the person has enough money to pay for the food in it and so they are successful.

Polish people from all four waves who were interviewed have kept up with the Polish traditions throughout the year except those who had a Polish father and a mother who was not Polish. Some of these interviewees knew what the traditions were but did not follow them and others did not know what the Polish traditions were.



The fourth wave migrant workers are in Birmingham because of the 'pull' factor, they have chosen to come to migrate and therefore, in the majority of cases, the loss they have experienced is different to the first wave Polish people. However they have experienced loss of security, home and family who they have left behind. In stark contrast to the first wave migrants this present population have access to the Polish television stations, Polish films via the internet, being able to speak with family on the telephone and on Skype and also being able to travel back to Poland when funds allow, and family and friends can visit them too.

## **Language**

Not speaking the language of the country in which you are living is one of the biggest barriers to integration and from their arrival English language classes were available to the fourth wave Polish migrants at Polish Millennium House; there were many groups and collaboration was initiated with the South Birmingham College who as well as offering classes in their local buildings came to Millennium House and gave English lessons because they did not have enough vacant rooms for the required numbers.

The availability and funding of language classes has changed in line with government funding. At present one of the positive initiatives in Birmingham is that the Digbeth Trust is offering free level 1-2 English as a Second Language courses for professional unemployed migrants living permanently in Birmingham and this funded through the Working Neighbourhoods fund; the programme also offers a work placement (Digbeth Trust 2010). Full funding is now only available for unemployed people on job seekers allowance or on employment allowance; people

on other benefits, for example, Income Support or workers on low wages and their spouses will have to pay at least 50% of the cost of the course.

When I first visited Krakow, in 2002, it would not be usual for retail staff or those waiting on table to be able to speak in English but over the past few years as English has been taught in Polish schools for some time, I have noticed a dramatic increase in the amount of English that is spoken by younger Polish people working in the hotel and retail industry.

Prior to May 2004 the Polish community in Britain were pessimistic about their survival, the younger people were less interested in keeping the traditions alive or participating in cultural life, in 1996 Keith Sword wrote of the Polish community

“The community is in decline it seems likely that – unless unforeseen changes take place that only London and a handful of provisional metropolitan centres will retain organised viability in twenty years time” (Sword, 1996 p233)

One might have expected that the influx of new Poles would regenerate a flagging Polish community but this has not been the case for the Polish Millennium club or in other British cities, for example, the Northampton Polish club closed in 2009 despite there being a large influx of Polish migrants.

Zebrowska (1986) had identified a split between the established Polish communities and those who had arrived in the recent years up to 1986, she felt this was influenced by negative stereotyping and this was clearly an issue for some of the

second and third wave Birmingham Polish who did not feel welcome at the Polish club, and particularly for one person who was called 'a red'. The fourth wave Poles who have arrived in Birmingham have been selective about contact with the existing Birmingham Polish, they will use the club as a port of call to gather information and to attend the various classes that have taken place there but they have not engaged with the club in the same way as the first wave Polish migrants did.

However the large numbers of Polish Catholics has meant that the church of St. Michael's now has three new Polish priests. The older priests were sent back to Poland, having spent thirty years serving the Birmingham Polish community and the Polish Saturday school now has a least 160 members where previously the numbers had been diminishing year on year, the small shop which had previously been the only Polish shop in Birmingham is under threat of closure and the shop that sold Polish books and gifts closed in 2009. The restaurant and Polish Bistro was open only until 3.00pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays and until 7.00 on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, until very recently when the lease was taken over by two of the fourth wave Polish migrants and is now flourishing with prices to match other city centre restaurants.

It was evident in the interviews that the relationships between the first wave migrants and the second and third wave migrants did not become any easier with the arrival of the fourth wave Polish migrants in Birmingham:

*“There is a big visible divide between young Poles and Poles of our age, it’s like oil and water, they have been here since 2004 when the expansion happened but they don’t seem to have mixed even slightly. There’s nobody from that younger generation on the Polish club committee, very few of them sign up to become members of the club or contribute to the covenant scheme to support the church; and of course they have their own interests and reasons to be here, they come to here for the work and they want to learn English, they want to mingle with English society and that’s what’s keeping them away” (Int: Mr Slownik)*

As he went on to explain, Mr Slownik felt that the difficulty was the fault of the established Birmingham Polish community who had very negative attitudes towards the people who had lived through the communist years in Poland:

*“During the years of communism among the émigrés there was...’Poland is going to rack and ruin because of the communists, education is second rate because they’re not teaching them the right things, they’re not teaching them history, they’re not teaching them religion and all that’ (Int: Mr Slownik)*

These views have continued on, even after the fall of communism and included thoughts about the new young priests who replaced the older priests who had been part of the Birmingham Polish community for over thirty years

*So they always assumed that anyone educated in Poland, including our two priests I might add, saying ‘they’re not good for us, they’re totally different from us’ and one person had this colourful phrase that meant that they were soaked through with*

*communism, because they had spent all that time. The expectation was that they would be no good for our community at all, they would be on the take and on the make and all the rest of it, amongst all these other prejudices.” (Mr Slownik)*

The new Parish Priest appears to have a traditionalist view of his role, leading from the top, and sees the established community, the first wave, as quite different to the fourth wave Polish migrants because they come from pre Second World War Poland. However there have been some significant moves toward helping the fourth wave Polish community, mostly instigated by the manageress who is herself a third wave migrant; the project monies have come from external agencies; this would not have happened prior to 2004.

### **Polish Migrant Workers project in Birmingham**

The project began in 2005 between the Trade Unions Congress Midlands Region, the Birmingham Centre for the Unemployed and the Polish Centre as a response to enquiries made by the manager for support for the growing numbers of people who were coming to seek help for a variety of reasons. Weekly advice sessions were held with relevant staff offering advice through a Polish interpreter. In the years 2004/06 the majority of queries concerned job-seeking and finding accommodation and the gender split were about even. In the first six months of 2007 over one hundred clients were seen with some having more than one session, the majority were in the age group 25-34. The majority of issues were related to either work (wages, contracts, unfair dismissals) or benefits and Tax credits (PMP 2007).

In March 2008 the Management Committee of the Polish Catholic Centre commissioned a piece of research exploring ways that the existing community could adapt to the increase in the numbers and changes in demography. Three different surveys questionnaires were distributed to the first generation that arrived post Second World War, the second and third generation who were born in UK and the post 2004 arrivals. Smith (2008) also conducted four focus groups with the post 2004 arrivals, the original post Second World War settlers, the second generation and the young people.

There was less response from the older people, but Smith put this down to lack of communication. However the majority of the older people who responded were willing to help the new arrivals, they stated that the Centre could provide education, advice and seven day a week drop in service and some were willing to offer their own support with English classes, advocacy, advice and the practicalities of a pre-school and an after school club.

They themselves wanted more social events at the club and they felt that the building needed to be more accessible to the elderly and the disabled. These are some of the comments made:

“To me, it is my second home; I helped to build this club”

“It is very important to have this place where we can come and socialise and share ideas”

“We are the people in exile, we had no choice but to come here, and we had no help when we came here”

“They don’t take an interest in this club and don’t take up membership”

“They had a different upbringing to us and want everything for free”

“Don’t take it that we don’t want to help them, we love them but we are annoyed with them”

“We are an old generation and in any country the old don’t get on with the young and fail to understand the young. They are our people from our country and we should help them. They will get dispersed and will eventually mix in. Eventually we will all live together”.

The responses from the older Polish people show the strong attachment to the Polish club and demonstrate that they feel annoyed with the new migrants for leaving Poland and for not taking interest in the Polish club. Despite some of the negative statements there are many of the older generation who have helped with the practicalities of clothing, bedding and other essentials, helping to find work and others have helped with interpreting all on a voluntary basis.

The second and third generation

The majority of this group indicated dissatisfaction with some services provided at the club; the main issue was with the size of Saturday school classes which had become too full with the inclusion of children of the new arrivals. Overall this group had a fairly negative response to the new arrivals, the majority mentioned them disparagingly; and they were less willing to provide support.

“This is a second home for us: when I was young my grandfather used to tell me I should take my bed to the centre”

“This is a safe place where ourselves and our children can come, unlike some centres in the city”

And with the younger generation Smith stated that there was an obvious gulf between the younger people and the new arrivals with one person saying that they were being invaded by ‘real Poles’. They were not impressed with the behaviour of their Polish counterparts.

“They organised special festivals and dances which they dress up for in Polish costumes and smart outfits. The young Poles who have come over recently upset them by turning up in jeans and trainers with some of them getting drunk. This was something that they had never experienced here before”. (Smith 2008 p12).

The Polish Saturday School was discussed in the project, the school was established in 1950 for 4-18 year olds; at its highest point the school was attended by 300 pupils but by 1997 the numbers had dwindled to about 80 and with the influx on the post 2004 migrants the numbers have risen again to about 160. This has caused mixed reaction, as the needs of the different groups are so diverse; some of the new migrant children attending the school will not need the practice in language skill to the extent the children from the existing Birmingham Polish community do, and in Smith’s report parents expressed the feeling that the classes were becoming too large now and that the existing facilities are inadequate to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of children (Smith 2008). People involved with the running of the school expressed fear that the needs of the established Polish community were not being met and that the different groups of children were not mixing. Because of the increasing numbers and limited accommodation the school has now moved out of



the Polish club building to a Catholic School in the north of the city which will make it less accessible to some people.

The new arrivals stated what they wanted from the club was mainly Information on employment, housing, education, health, police and the law, welfare Services, consulate services, advocacy. They would like English classes for adults and children, a pre-school toddler/playgroup and an after school club; many of these things are already provided by external funding.

Following the migrant workers project a vision for the future of the Polish community was declared contributed to by all groups:

*“Our vision is of a Polish Centre where the Polish Community, together with their families, friends and local people, may celebrate their culture, and find appropriate support, activities and inspiration that will enhance their quality of life and contribute to the community cohesion of the City of Birmingham”*

This was agreed to by the management committee but the process of fulfilling the stated vision has not begun.

The social, political and personal reasons that have influenced Polish migration to Birmingham England have been critically analysed in chapters 4, 5, and 6; and whilst there are differences across the four waves of migrants there are clearly some commonalities. Regardless of the reasons for migration one of the predominant reasons for choosing Birmingham in Britain continues to be the prospect of work. Post Second World War Birmingham was being rebuilt and employment in industry was plentiful, men and women could walk out of one job and into another on the

same day. Post 2004 the work may be of a different kind but the new fourth wave migrants who were interviewed have, in the main, found successful employment.

The individual and collective experiences in Poland that have contributed to the way that the Birmingham Polish view themselves have been explored within the thesis and the location and historical relationship with its neighbours continue to have an effect on how the Polish live their lives in Birmingham; the influence of Church, language, history and race continue to be evident. The experience of loss on the first wave and the effect of loss are central across all four waves.

The four waves of Polish migrants have different individual and collective experiences of life in England; in the post Second World War years the Polish migrants were reeling from the consequences of the agreements at Yalta and Potsdam, the Polish Government in Exile and other Polish organisations instigated a process that facilitated self exclusion from the host society. The experience of the second and third wave people with the established Polish community led them to integrate into the host society and they were on the outskirts of the Polish community. The fourth wave Polish migrants are very visible in Birmingham but they continue to live their lives as they would in Poland, they show disapproval for some English behaviour and isolate themselves socially in Polish groups of friends outside of work.

Migration continues to be an issue for social and political discourse. The Polish people who arrived as a consequence of the Second World War were perhaps fortunate that Churchill felt he owed the Poles for the way they had fought alongside

the allies and how they had been treated at Yalta. The stringent application of government control, through the Polish Resettlement Act (1947) and the Polish Resettlement Corp, that was disbanded once it had fulfilled its original intention, can be looked at in hindsight as a clear advantage. The relationship with the Polish Government in exile, the Polish Federation and the Polish Catholic Mission allowed the establishment of migrant community organisations who offered support to their own community whilst in many ways preventing the assimilation into British society. Housing the Poles in displaced persons camps across the UK meant that exclusive Polish communities were established contributing to the prevention of integration into the host society. The later second and third waves of Polish migrants were not as visible to the host society and often felt disconnected to the established post Second World War communities. The visibility of the fourth wave post 2004 Polish migrants has had a profound effect not only on the host society but also on the established first wave Polish migrants who had all but disappeared from public awareness.

The rapid changes in communications' technology and availability of affordable travel have enabled migration to become circular (Staniewicz 2007), this was not the case with the first wave of Polish migrants or many of the post Second World War migrants who established homes in Birmingham from the Commonwealth or the later refugees and asylum seekers who did not leave their country of origin through choice.

The differences and commonalties the Polish migrants share with other post Second World War migrants are to some extent shaped by racial stereotypes that set them apart because they are white. Migration is a part of the fabric of the city of

Birmingham, migrants have been invited and welcomed at different times and they are part of the workforce that has shaped the landscape and cultural activity. The way that different migrant groups position themselves in Birmingham is affected by national and local government policy towards migrants who arrive either through 'push' or 'pull' reasons.

The arrival of the fourth wave Polish migrants in Birmingham has created a new dimension to the established Birmingham Polish. Prior to May 2004 the numbers of Birmingham Polish was decreasing and the Polish club was being underutilised. As a visitor to the restaurant during the day prior to 2004 I would see numbers of older Polish men sitting separately, sometimes in small groups eating a meal and then reading the newspaper; taking their time, the older Polish women would attend their regular meetings and would be seen in the Polish shop buying food for the week. The Saturday school, the Scouts and Guides, and the choir although small in number were active. These were some of the people, who through support and organisation had established the Polish club and built Millennium House.

When Poland entered the EU there was a lot of activity around the Polish Centre usually with people seeking advice, looking for work, wanting to advertise themselves for work on the notice board. As more and more Polish people were finding themselves in difficulty the manageress began to organise help around employment and housing law, the benefits system and language. As time moved forward and the numbers increased other organisations began to get involved including statutory and voluntary groups.

There were efforts to try to raise funds and to include the migrant Poles, some discos were organised but apart from the first one or two these were not well attended and they did not succeed in promoting integration between the different groups. A recent dance (2012) at the Polish club with a Polish band was very successful but attended almost entirely by fourth wave Polish migrants.

Poland's history is filled with experience of loss and the individual and collective way of dealing with this has an impact. The loss of Poland as a nation during the years of partition in some ways was dealt with by collective denial, and individual and collective behaviours around this. The refusal to join in the partitioning powers view that Poland no longer existed allowed the Polish language and education to continue. The importance of education has been a recurring theme in Poland's history. 'Flying' universities that began during partition, continued during the Second World War were reinstated once again under Martial Law in the 80s.

Following the downfall of Communism there has been a re-emergence of Jewish culture and tradition in Poland (Webber 2009) on my own visits to Poland over the past ten years I have witnessed the growth of materials that tell the story of the Jews of Poland.

There are now a variety of groups run by outside agencies at the Polish centre, with the use of a translator, these include NHS smoking cessation classes, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are run twice each week in the Polish language and Aquarius has worked with the Polish centre developing understanding of the Polish community and funded the training of Polish speaking psychologist to work on a voluntary basis.

There has also been funding for the Polish older people by the NHS, it can be observed that non Polish outsiders are being invited in for the first time in the Polish clubs history.

Until recently debate on ethnic minorities in Britain continued to be dominated with Asian and Black experiences compared with an assumed homogenous white group who have generally disappeared in official statistics and research (Temple 2001) since the arrival of the large number of migrants following the entry of the eight accession countries into the EU in 2004 the focus has changed, the literature on this group continues to expand.

Identities are produced in specific political and historical space, and they are constructed by the discourses present in the culture (Burr 2003) and in relationship to the 'Other' (Smith 1991, Hobsbawm 1995, 2005, Barker and Galasinski 2000, Yuval-Davis 2001). The different waves of Polish migrants began to arrive in Birmingham at particular points in history, the political and social in Poland and in Britain have continued to move forward but for some of the first wave Polish people it was important to remain psychologically in pre 1939 Poland.

Prior to the 2004 influx the Polish in Britain founded the view of themselves on Polish history and on the expulsion from Poland as a consequence of the Second World War, and played a particularly important role in the temporal construction of a Polish collective 'we' (Temple 1996). The effect of this on the first wave Polish migrants in Birmingham has led to isolation and invisibility from the host society. The arrival of large numbers of predominantly young Polish migrants in the fourth wave bought the

older Polish migrants into the public eye; something for which they were not prepared.

This thesis supports the findings of other research on the Polish communities in Britain, that the Polish people in Britain would not move past the accommodation phase (Zubrzycki 1956) appears to be the case with many of the first wave Polish migrants in Birmingham. During the interviews I was told more than once by people I spoke with that 'we wanted to build a little Poland' and 'we were too insular' and this has clearly had an effect of self inflicted social exclusion from the host society. What began to stand out to me early on and became more apparent the more I read and the more people I spoke with, was the overwhelming loss that Poland and the Polish people have suffered historically but most significantly since September 1939, the loss of liberty, land, home and identity and it is this that I believe has affected the way that they live their lives in Birmingham. They have continued to defend themselves from the expected harm from others by building an impenetrable but invisible wall around themselves.

The established Birmingham Polish built the community on the experience of loss; at the direction of the Polish Mission in London and the Federation of Poles in Great Britain they worked hard to keep the Polish culture and traditions alive, this meant being a Catholic, attending church, educating their children in Polish history and geography and importantly keeping the Polish language alive. When the second and third wave Polish migrants arrived they were surprised that long forgotten aristocratic and military titles were still being used and they as Poles who had lived under the

oppressive communist regime were accused of being complicit. Each new wave of Polish migrants have brought with them their collective experiences of loss, the second and third wave had been living in communist Poland; this Poland had been reconfigured in 1945 losing the east of the country and observing the relocation of many Poles from what had been the east to the west of Poland. Poland had lost its democracy and freedom of speech, the freedom to worship the Catholic faith openly. Then with the downfall of communism came the loss of the only political system that many were familiar with.

Poles from all four waves of migrants have been affected by the loss of the ethnic minorities in Poland; the first wave were the most connected to the different minorities, living in close proximity to the Lithuanians, the Ukrainians, the Belarusians, the Germans and the Jewish Polish people. The people who remained or who have been born in post Second World War Poland viewed themselves and others differently as a consequence of living in a homogeneous Poland; this is evident from the research of Mogilnicka (2009), Temple (2010), and White (2011). The effect of Poland losing its ethnic minority population has had a profound effect on the way that the present Polish migrants view themselves, they have lived in a predominantly homogenous country with little opportunity to view themselves against other ethnic groups, and the 2002 census showed that only 3.3% of the population were ethnic minorities Mogilnicka (2009) as opposed to one third ethnic minorities in pre-war Poland (Bubczyk 2002).

I found it most striking in the literature and when visiting Poland that Polish and Jewish history is recorded separately and yet they are clearly inextricably linked.



When I interviewed the older first wave Catholic Polish people there were references to the Jewish people of Poland, and when I interviewed Polish Jews there was a sense that something significant has been lost from Poland. The literature on the Jews of Poland has grown; some of it is negative and focuses on acts of anti-Semitism; however with the effort of Ben Helfgott and Jonathon Webber working towards Polish–Jewish reconciliation the positive aspects of Jews in Poland will become more visible. The traditional theories of loss and bereavement (Kubler-Ross 1969, Worden 1991, Parkes 1996) are useful for some people, however I believe that contemporary view of assimilating the enormous change into the life of the survivor is pertinent across the four waves of Polish migrants in Birmingham.

Despite some of the fourth wave Birmingham Polish migrants being born in the Third Republic of Poland they will have experienced the changing political system, their parents were born into the communist regime and their grandparents will have either been born in the Second World War or in the Second Republic of Poland. Interestingly the different research studies shows that they are aware of Poland's turbulent history and from the work carried out by Mogilnicka (2009) and this knowledge has shaped the way they view Poland's relationships with its neighbours.

The established Birmingham Polish identify strongly with their historical past and they dissociate themselves from the post Second World War Communist Poland. Although not discussed widely among the Birmingham Polish, the Poles as with the other migrant groups have experienced prejudice and discrimination from within the host society and Zubrzycki (1956) suggested that this was one of the reasons why the exiled Poles would never become assimilated. Although there are no statistics

available of racially motivated attacks against the earlier Polish migrants the numbers against fourth wave Poles appear to be high; the Polish Express listed sixty incidents of racially motivated attacks against Poles that had been reported in newspapers from across Britain that had occurred in 2008, ranging from verbal abuse to murder, 70% of which were in smaller towns (Polish Express 2009).

Like the Poles interviewed by Temple for some of the Birmingham Polish, British-Polish ties to Poland via family and friends is not strong enough to make them Polish because they do not feel it (Temple 1994, 1999) and also because they are not accepted either because they married out of the community or because they did not attend the Polish Club or the Polish Mass at St Michael's. This appeared to be more evident in the second generation with both parents being Polish, as children they had no choice but to go to the Polish Saturday school, join Polish Scouts or Guides and attend Polish functions. However the second generation in Birmingham who had a Polish father and a non-Polish mother missed out and searched for a link to Poland and their fathers Polishness. For some of this group it was too late to hear their father's story directly because he had died and they were finding it difficult to search themselves because of the lack of Polish language.

It is also of interest that in discussion with the Polish Women's Circle, the members of which were predominantly from the first wave of Polish migrants, that when asked how they viewed themselves they all said they were British. They did not however feel that their English was good enough to be interviewed for my study and yet women from the fourth wave group who had been here for just over four years were confident to be interviewed in English. However some of these older women did

agree to be interviewed in Polish for a later study and their stories were translated into English (MPCA 2010).

Coming to Britain was an informed decision for the fourth wave Poles but many of the first wave Birmingham Polish community found it difficult to understand why this group were choosing to leave Poland often expressing feelings that they were abandoning Poland. During the initial stages of the fourth wave Polish migrants arrival Britain was not prepared; in Birmingham it was difficult to get assistance from either statutory or voluntary organisations. As the time has moved on the wider British community have embraced the new migrants and many statutory and voluntary organisations have provided assistance.

Some of the first wave Birmingham Polish acknowledges that they have been an insular group and that maybe they could have done more to welcome the new Polish migrants and the new migrant Poles found it difficult to understand the established group and the Polish club, they had little understanding of their experiences. There has been some moving together of the intergenerational groups, the Midland Polish Community Association's [www.mpca.eu](http://www.mpca.eu) successful bid to the Heritage Lottery and the oral history project, 'Collected Memories of the Birmingham Polish' has facilitated people from the fourth wave and the children who attend the Polish Saturday School including those from the established Birmingham Polish community and the children from the fourth wave Polish migrants to find out about each other. The membership of this group is predominantly new migrants, second generation and third wave Polish people.

The Polish Expats Association in Birmingham [www.polishexpats.or.uk](http://www.polishexpats.or.uk) has been set up by the fourth wave Poles, there has been some discussion and negotiation between the groups but they function independently of each other. It is interesting that after being invisible for over sixty years and being unsuccessful in securing funding for projects the Birmingham Polish community has managed to secure funding from different groups including the Lottery.

People may choose different aspects of identity within a context and come in and out of focus at different times; the significant markers of commonality and difference can change (Temple 2001). In my own research I met second and third generation Polish speakers who had never been to Poland and yet described themselves as Polish; however it was clear in some encounters that I was not considered to be Polish despite having a Polish father and visiting Poland on numerous occasions.

This study explores the lives of the Birmingham Polish from the arrival of the first wave migrant's as a consequence of forced migration following the Second World War to the present day. Community cohesion in Birmingham, I would suggest occurs on a need basis and the arrival of the fourth wave Polish migrants created a situation in which the Polish people who belonged to the established organisation reached out to non Poles and found assistance. The Black and Asian voluntary community groups assisted in training and supporting the manager of the Polish club to apply successfully for funding to assist the new Polish migrants into an easier transition and avoid some of the inequalities that have happened across Britain.

The Birmingham Polish from all waves continue to exclude themselves from the wider community and to measure themselves against the 'other'. This way of being does include the other waves of Polish migrants at different times. Polish 'values' are ascribed to belong to each wave independently and English 'values' become ascribed to Polish people as a negative to support their own waves aspirations of Polishness. These behaviours can be understood as through the contemporary models of grief (Neimeyer 2000) and offer an opportunity for further analysis.

# **Out of the Shadows: Exploring the Lives of the Birmingham Polish.**

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

This study adds to the growing body of research on Polish migrants in the UK and is an academic oral history exploring the lives of the Polish people in Birmingham. The research is cross generational, focused on listening to adults from four waves of Polish migrants who arrived in Birmingham between the years 1940-2010.

The research questions which the work aimed to address were

1. What social, political and personal reasons have influenced Polish migration to Birmingham England?
2. What individual and collective experiences in Poland have shaped the lives of the Polish people in Birmingham?
3. What individual and collective experiences in England have shaped the lives of the Birmingham Polish?

Reference to the 'individual' in these questions acknowledges the fact each person's experience was unique, however, this was in the context of the socio-political and economic circumstances which positioned the Polish people collectively, which was also crucial to recognise. The oral history method was chosen as it would allow respondents to speak about their often unacknowledged histories, in the best way they thought relevant to them.

This concluding chapter highlights the most salient features of the research and considers the implications for current debates. Previously, the introductory chapter set the context in which the study began and chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature highlighting the denial of loss and trauma in terms of understanding particularly early Polish migration, which is the main contribution. Chapter 3 explored the application of oral history as a method for collecting data and explored the impact of the researcher's biography on the research process. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explored the themes that arose from the data: history, loss, relationships, religion and language. After summing up the discussion of the preceding chapters, this chapter draws together the conclusions across all four waves of migration.

The limited literature on white European migrants in Britain prior to 2004 was largely related to the Jewish experience; this has been counterbalanced by the rise in academic interest in post 2004 Polish migrants. The historical background of Polish migration shows that Polish people have migrated from Poland by choice for generations, responding to the political and social position in Poland. Birmingham has a high percentage of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees who have attracted academic and media interest; however there is only limited academic writing on the Polish people living in Birmingham.

Whilst Polish immigrants can be identified as a 'community' in terms of their cultural and religious practices and the residential and commercial areas they may occupy, they are not a homogeneous group in Birmingham. They do not come from the same regions in Poland and they did not arrive at the same time or for the same reasons,

the term 'wave' of Polish migrants as described by Staniewicz (2001) was used to discern the time and reason for migration (chapter 3 p74).

A large number of Polish Catholics and Jewish Poles migrated during the years of partition (1795-1918) and in between the World Wars (1918-1939) large numbers of Jewish Poles migrated to Palestine in response to increasing anti-Semitism. The forced migration that occurred during the German and Soviet occupation of 1939-1945 was without precedence and resulted in large numbers of Jewish and Catholic Poles being displaced across the globe.

During the years under Soviet domination (1945-1989) permanent migration was difficult; however smaller numbers of people left Poland for personal and political reasons. 1968 witnessed a significant number of prominent Jewish Poles leaving in response to anti-Semitic actions by the government. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the entry of the eight accession countries into the EU in 2004 gave Polish people the freedom and choice to travel and they can be categorised as economic migrants, as they sought to maximise employment opportunities across Europe.

It can be argued that the first wave of the migration were distinctly marked by loss and trauma, as much of the migration was a response to anti-Semitism and conditions of war, in which the position of Poland as a country was always precarious. In this context, migration can be seen as a casualty of Polish history and goes some way in explaining why the importance of Polish history was so pertinent for some of the respondents of this study and why this study chose to focus on the relevance of loss and trauma, resulting from this history.



My part-Polish identity made me an 'insider' of this community. It helped, as I was accepted by the respondents more easily and this facilitated them to develop enough trust in me to share their experiences with me; but as a second generation 'part' Polish person, I was also an 'outsider', particularly as I was not able to speak Polish.

My experiences, knowledge and my identity to some extent enabled me to become an 'insider'; as a partly Polish woman. Being part Polish also made it easier for Polish people to identify with me and perhaps enabled them to agree to be participants more easily than might otherwise have been the case. The research process itself not only enriched my knowledge about Polish people generally, but also helped me to develop relationships with the four waves of migrants; this was previously difficult to envisage.

The self and the researcher identities often overlap, especially in cases where the subject matter is of personal and emotional importance to the researcher. The subject of Polish migration was one to which my personal life was inextricably linked as a daughter of a Polish migrant. The research questions I was interested in related to my own life as much as that of some of the respondents and in some cases I was the 'participant observer' and so had to be careful of being aware that I did not take anything for granted. I was immersed in the Polish community, for instance attending the Polish club to improve my Polish language. When the new Polish migrants began to arrive in 2004 I became involved in assisting people who were looking for help with benefits, housing or employment. I listened to the difficulties they experienced in accessing benefits and resources; I listened both as a concerned member of the

community but also as a mental health professional, as well as an academic. I was able to assist the manageress of the Polish club to make links with voluntary and statutory organisations who could assist the fourth wave Polish migrants. Not all of these roles are conventionally seen as 'appropriate' in the research role, though much of the feminist literature refutes these conventions (Oakley, 1981).

Although I shared characteristics with the people who I interviewed I do not class myself as an 'insider' researcher as defined by Atfield, Brambhatt, Hakimi and O'Toole 2012. I consider that in this research my writing and interpretations come from the view of an interested outsider with a link to the Polish people that assisted me in building relationships with them. Nevertheless, the insider/outsider position helped me to build relationships and trust with the respondents.

Because of my lack of Polish language, I was not able to speak confidently to the Polish people in their first language and I was not able to read Polish texts and documents adequately. Winslow (1999) interviewed first generation Polish people in English and felt that her lack of Polish language contributed to being treated as an outsider and was also the cause of many Polish history lessons that she had from her interviewees. I also had history lessons from most of the first wave Poles but interestingly also from some of the other people from each of the second, third and fourth waves. These lessons helped with building relationships with potential interviewees and contributed to my growing knowledge of Polish history and understanding of the significance of Polish history in the lives of Polish people.

Being a part of the 'community' may also mean that the respondents may want to know information about the researcher before providing information themselves. The disclosure of personal information was influenced by my personal and professional experience. I was selective about what I disclosed within the research interviews; I was also selective about what I elaborated upon. For example, with the first wave Polish respondents following my request to interview them they often asked me one or more of the following three questions. The first, was my father from the east of Poland? Was he sent to Siberia? and the third, was he in the Polish Resettlement Corp? I also had several conversations instigated by the interviewees about the origin of my surname.

On reflection, my previous clinical practice affected my questioning and to some extent my interpretation of what I was hearing and seeing. As a practitioner who has worked predominantly in mental health I was mindful not to make interpretations that might pathologise what were normal reactions to very abnormal situations, particularly in relation to the first wave experience of forced migration. At the time of their arrival in Britain the understanding of the psychological effects of trauma was limited and there were no counselling services. The Polish people identified by Cochrane (1977), Rack (1993) and Winslow (1999) had entered the Psychiatric services at a time when the medical model, medication and physical treatment were dominant and talking therapies were available to the very few. The Polish people in Birmingham who had experienced war, displacement, loss and trauma had learnt their own ways to cope, which included creating Polish communities in which they could talk about their experiences without judgement. These were not designed as therapeutic strategies, but unwittingly, they may have served therapeutic purposes.

Whilst the themes that emerged from the data (discussed below) were based very much on the information the respondents provided and upon existing literature, my own clinical background as a counselling practitioner also contributed significantly toward their identification.

## **Loss**

First wave respondents spoke of stories of separation, loss, and mistrust as well of kindness amidst the trauma suffered, as members of families were deported or simply disappeared and where some of the Soviet Ukrainian soldiers, the enemy were 'kind'. For example, reports of mothers who were appreciative of being informed on the night of deportation, that they should take all their belongings as they would not be returning. Others narrated experience of anti-Semitism, Jews having to face abusive graffiti that told them to 'get out and go to Palestine where you belong'. It was a mark of remarkable resilience that despite these experiences many of the Polish Jews retained their love for the Polish language and have maintained long and fruitful relationships with Polish people. Poland's unique position and the experience of its people during the Second World War was extraordinary, the relationships and behaviour of friends, neighbours and sometimes family members were influenced by their struggle to survive.

At the end of the War the trauma did not end for people living in the Soviet dominated Polish People's Republic, large numbers of people continued to be deported to the Soviet labour and prison camps of the Gulag. Many Poles were forcibly relocated from what had been the East of Poland to the West which had

previously been Germany and they experienced loss of community, kin and family ties. The imposition of a communist regime on the people living in Poland following the agreements made at Yalta at the end of the Second World War caused a loss of independence of movement, voice and choice both in the private and public sphere.

Post War Poland became more homogeneous than at any other time in its history, the reconfiguration of borders and relocation of such large numbers of people contributed to the loss of multiethnic populations that had lived on Polish land for generations. The interviews demonstrated that life in Poland under Soviet domination became increasingly difficult, many of the shops were empty, food was unavailable or much of it was of a low standard. Institutional ant-Semitism and the imposition of Martial Law increased the difficulties of the Jewish and Catholic Polish and contributed to further migration. The people that remained in Poland and those who migrated both faced loss, trauma and separation which would leave an indelible mark on their future lives.

In Birmingham the permanent loss of family and kin was a dominant feature in the lives of the first wave Poles and contributed to them creating relationships that provided a substitute. As young mothers the women built on relationships formed in displaced person camps and continued to build close bonds through the mother and toddler group and these friendships have continued through to them becoming members of the group for older people. The formation of two choirs and the other groups under the Federation of Poles which were exclusively Polish reinforced the importance of the need to belong to a cultural group. For the children, joining Polish Scouts or Guides and attending Polish Saturday school set them apart from their

British peers and in some cases caused distress. Conversely some of those who did not attend these Polish groups activities felt they missed out on forming strong relationships with people with a shared experience. This was less important for those with a different history, the children of the second, third and fourth wave Polish in Birmingham generally did not join these social groups, but across all waves, many did attend the Polish Saturday school.

These experiences of loss and trauma of war and ethnic conflict were unique to the Polish and other migrants fleeing both Stalin and Nazism and yet they resonate with those of new migrant communities of refugees and asylum seekers today, who face the same issues of loss, trauma and abuse, in face of which they must forge new communities (Palmer and Ward 2007). As such the experiences of the Polish community, as those of refugees who arrived after them, can be helpful in assisting new communities in their settlement in the UK and Polish communities can learn from the new arrivals about the need and the ways in which to develop therapeutic strategies.

## **Religion**

Religion is often a tool that binds a migrant community together as it allows civic institutions such as churches and temples to build, which help to forge new communities (Prescod 2008). Yet, religion does not guarantee cohesiveness. The stories of Polish migrants tell experiences of both inclusion and exclusion. In Birmingham from the outset, there were efforts by Polish people to cohere around the Catholic faith and this brought a sense of belonging and solidarity. Regardless of which region the Polish person originated from, or the experiences they endured

during the Second World War, as a Catholic, they could attend Mass. The first Polish Mass in Birmingham was conducted in the Oratory in 1947 and would have been the one place where the Polish language was heard openly in public. The first Polish priests were dominant in seeking out volunteers to set up the canteen, the shop and library facilities in disused buildings belonging to St Michael's Catholic Church in the city centre, this is still the Polish Parish Church.

The majority of the first wave Poles who lived in Birmingham were Catholic and came from the east, known in Polish as the Kresy (Bauer 2009). In this region lived large numbers of ethnic minorities, Ukrainians, Byelorussian and Jews. It was also in this region that about a third of the Polish Jewish population lived; the small townships with a large Jewish population were called shtetl, Yiddish for small town (Hoffman 1999; Bauer 2009) it was here that Polish Catholic peasants and predominantly Hasidic Jews were more likely to live side by side and yet retain their individuality (Orla-Bukowska 1994). They would learn enough of each other's language and customs to forge relationships in trade. Poland lost 10% of its ethnic Polish population including up to 85% of the Jewish population; by 1945 the ethnic minorities were reduced from 33% to 1% (Piotrowski 1998).

Polish Jews were highly visible and had a socially significant presence in Poland for eight hundred years; they created impressive religious institutions, political movements, a secular literature and distinctive way of life (Hoffman 1997). The total destruction of the unique shtetls which were predominantly Jewish is a great loss to Poland and has had an impact on the traditions, language and customs.

Small Jewish cemeteries and monuments to the Jews who were rounded up and shot by the Nazis can still be found on the outskirts of towns and villages that were previously home to a Jewish community (Hoffman 1997). Following accession to the EU these are becoming increasingly visible with the return of some Polish Jewish families and the work of some of the non Jewish Polish.

At the end of the war those Jewish Poles who were among the ranks of the Polish army often disappeared into the established Jewish working class community of London's East End which shared the language, traditions and customs that were familiar. The officer class of the Jewish elite of pre-war Poland, did not mix with either their British counterparts or those among the ranks, they preferred to create their own groups influenced by their experience in Poland (Zubrzycki 1956). In Birmingham the numbers of Polish Jews who arrived as a consequence of the Second World War are not recorded, but it seems that they did not have close relationships with the other Polish people or the existing Jewish community. The post-war population in Birmingham did not want to hear about the atrocities that the Jewish people had experienced and there was no financial support available to them (Hart 1981).

Hence the Jewish Poles were excluded from the Polish community by virtue of their religion and position in pre-war Poland and also from the existing Jewish community who were reluctant to either assist or hear about the atrocities they has suffered. Some British people in academia and the media have chosen to emphasise the negative aspects of the Polish story, that millions of Jews were murdered on Polish soil during the Second World War, the lack of connection between the old and the



new Polish migrants, the racism in Poland and the Ukraine during the Euro 2012. These types of statements are often made out of context and leave people with a partial picture of the reality. The atrocities meted out on Polish soil were instigated by the Nazi and Soviet regimes and the complex relationships with the ethnic minorities in Poland were built on and influenced by a tragic Polish history of invasion, partition and occupation. Many Jewish Poles, including those who were interviewed, were not Orthodox and spoke Polish rather Yiddish, however under Nazi regulations they were Jewish and therefore their fate was sealed.

Other forms of exclusion existed too; respondents from the first wave of Polish men and women who married outside the Catholic faith or to a non Polish spouse were less welcome by the Polish Catholic circle or by the Polish Parish Priest in Birmingham. Those who were interviewed formed their own smaller Polish or Eastern European group of friends with whom they socialised and spoke Polish. This practice often excluded their non Polish spouse; none of the English or Irish spouses of those who were interviewed had learnt Polish. The first, second and third wave of Polish men who married a non Polish spouse either married a woman who was Catholic or was prepared to bring the children up in the Catholic faith. The second and third wave Polish women who married non Poles maintained their Catholic faith by attending non Polish churches, and if they had children they were brought up in the Catholic faith. This group of Birmingham Polish was more connected with the host society and the English spouse had learnt Polish in all cases. Some of the younger fourth wave respondents had become more relaxed about their Catholic faith in Birmingham and being away from their parents, some did not feel that they needed to attend Mass every Sunday.

With the destruction of the Jewish Poles, Catholicism was unchallenged as the dominant religion in the People's Republic of Poland despite communist oppression. The election of the Polish Pope, John Paul II in 1978 reinforced and strengthened their faith for Catholic Poles across the globe; the churches in Poland have continued to recruit young people to train to be Priests and Nuns and to have high attendance at Mass. Since the arrival of the fourth wave Poles the Catholic churches in Birmingham have a renewed vitality and the Polish Catholic church has increased its Sunday service in number from one to three. The older members of the fourth wave interviewees frequently attended Mass and all parents wanted their children to be brought up in the Catholic faith and to attend Catholic schools.

As a consequence, Catholicism has been the link between the four waves of Poles in Birmingham and served to both include and exclude members of the Polish communities. In terms of religion, adherence to the Catholic faith meant that Polish communities were perhaps less conspicuous than migrants in Britain who were of a different faith, 'race' or culture.

## **Language**

Language is an important part of culture and can be used to differentiate between 'us' and 'others' (Temple 2010). For all cohorts of the Polish migrants the ability to speak the Polish language was noted as a key aspect of gaining access to employment and other resources and for feelings of belonging to the Polish community. Those that were unable to speak English lacked the ability to find suitable employment opportunities and to relate to English speaking people in the

wider community. This was true of older Polish migrants and for younger people where both the parents spoke Polish, although the children learned to speak English proficiently if they had started school from an early age. On the other hand, those who were unable to speak Polish felt that it inhibited them from feeling confident members of the Polish community. The respondents who were not able to speak the Polish language particularly those who had a Polish father and a non Polish mother, lacked the confidence to visit the Polish club or to buy from Polish shops. In many cases the second and third wave of Polish migrants spoke English before their arrival in Britain and respondents from these groups reported that they often socialised with English people, and where they were married to English people, their spouse often spoke Polish. Therefore they could interact with both English and Polish people with greater ease.

English language skill was identified as a key signifier of increased access to work by the fourth wave Birmingham Polish. This need to speak English was also emphasised as important when making the decision to migrate to England by Polish migrants in Bath and Poland (White 2011). Across all cohorts of Polish migrants those whose employment did not require fluent English, either in factory or labouring work found it more difficult to learn English. Language classes were provided by the government through the PRC for the first wave and English lessons were initially free to the fourth wave migrants. However the difficulties accessing the classes, because of work or child care arrangements was evident for men and women in both the first and fourth wave migrants. This contributed to a lack of confidence in speaking English particularly among the first and fourth wave Polish women. The fourth wave women in Birmingham improved their language skill by watching English TV and

helping their children with their homework as did the Polish women in Bath (White 2011).

The lack of English language can make people more conspicuous. As white migrants, Polish people were indistinguishable in the host society; however, the first generations of all cohorts of Polish migrants in Birmingham did, in the main, carry a Polish accent and so were distinguishable when they spoke. However their children did not carry an accent and like the third generation Polish Americans (Erdmans 1989) they could choose where, when or when not, to emphasise their Polishness. As a consequence, in terms of being targets of xenophobia, they may hold an advantage over other Polish counterparts and over other migrant groups.

It is evident therefore, that language has remained an important indicator of the level of integration and access to resources that migrant communities can exercise. Different factors such as marriage choices, access to different types of work, levels of education, access to English language facilities pre and post migration, have all been important in determining the extent to which members of the Polish community were able to acquire English as a means to economic and social integration within the wider society, these continue to be important considerations for migrant communities today (Phillimore and Goodson 2008).

## **Relationships**

Relationships within and between groups are important in determining collective identities and for building on. They are also significant in marking distinctions and boundaries between groups. It is relationships that form the basis of communities;

whilst positive experiences help to build positive relationships, negative ones do the opposite. The social and economic circumstances in which people find themselves are therefore important in shaping the relationships that develop. A country's past and present social and political situation are significant. The disjointed encounters experienced, both in Poland and England, by the different waves of Polish migrants illustrate the complexity of the 'migrant experience' and contributes to how they live their lives in Birmingham.

In Poland itself, relationships between Catholics and Jews were congenial at times and in some large towns there was evidence of integration. The Polish Jews who were interviewed were not Orthodox and had friendships and relationships with Catholic Poles in Poland. For instance, Kitty Hart, a Polish Jew who settled in Birmingham was both helped and betrayed by Polish Catholics. A Catholic priest organised false papers for them to enable them to leave Lublin with a forced labour transport; but during the time they were working in a forced labour factory in Germany a Polish Catholic gave information that led to both Kitty and her mother ultimately being sent to Auschwitz. In Birmingham Kitty Hart used the Polish shop at the club to buy food that was familiar to her, although she never attended any social functions or joined the Polish groups. However she did not forge links with the established Birmingham Jewish community who were, like many of the post Second World War population, reluctant to hear the distressing details of her ordeal (Hart 1981).

The Polish community, despite its relative inconspicuousness, has suffered from xenophobia, discrimination and isolation at the hands of the host community; on the

other hand, its own perceptions about other migrant communities have led it to exclude them from building relationships with Polish communities.

In terms of discrimination against the Polish there have been instances connected to housing and employment. Difficulties in finding suitable employment could lead to extreme desperation and suicide (Fr. Kącki 1972). New migrants from the same country tend to settle in the same area; this is true for White British migrants of the old and New Commonwealth and other countries, as it is for migrants to the UK. In Britain, migrant communities have settled in areas where cheap accommodation can be found (Stillwell and Phillips 2006). The Polish community in Birmingham historically dispersed across the city, but with each new wave the Polish migrants settled with other migrant groups. In Birmingham, inner-city areas provided cheap housing where migrants settled, but the shortage of supply increased competition and conflict between groups (Rex and Moore 1967). The competing demands on housing meant that Polish people were evicted when it was no longer profitable for landlords to house them (Mr Smojkis p153). Sometime this bought them into sharp conflict, as was demonstrated by the 1949 Causeway Green hostel incident (Birmingham Gazette 1949), these exclusionary practices continue. Today there are multiple discrimination, tensions and conflict within and between ethnic and faith communities involving Polish people (Staniewicz 2007). There are wage differentials, rising levels of homelessness, overcrowded, overpriced and substandard housing, illegal working practices and incidents of racial discrimination (Eade 2005; Garapich 2008).

The exploitation and oppression, however, was not always at the hand of other communities. Polish people could now be exploited by members of their own communities. There was evidence of inequitable treatment of fourth wave Polish migrants in Birmingham, including Polish people being left stranded in Birmingham after being promised work and accommodation by other Polish people. In London too there were some Polish immigrant advice centres which provided migrants with false documents (Garapich 2008). Whilst these experiences were relatively new for Polish migrants in Britain, they reflected those of other such as the South Asian communities.

Whilst there is much that Polish people shared with other immigrants they themselves also had hostile and racist perceptions that prevented alliances and integration. Poland was a multicultural space for hundreds of years; in-between the two World Wars there was increasing conflict between the Poles and the ethnic minorities, however in the majority of cases there was evidence of integration, interracial marriage, friendships and productive working relationships, this was supported in the interviews with the first wave. The loss of the minorities in Poland, however, created a homogeneous society and influenced the experience of following generations. Limited interaction with non Polish groups contributed to perceptions that the British behaved in antisocial ways and had inferior values (Temple 2011). The homogeneity of Poland also meant that the fourth wave Polish migrants lacked an understanding and tolerance of minorities; they did not identify Poland as multicultural and viewed white English people as superior to non-White British, South Asian and Black British people (Mogilnicka 2009).

The social, political and personal reasons for Polish migration to Birmingham differ across the four waves and this has contributed to how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the host society. The first wave of Polish migration, though having lived amidst cultural diversity, was less able to integrate with British people. Their migration resulted from the push phenomena, as a result of the Second World War; this group classed themselves as exiles, political refugees or the Polish émigré; they saw their presence in Britain as temporary, as 'sojourners', until Poland became free from Soviet domination. They can be distinguished by their often traumatic experiences which left them with a great deal of insecurity, distrust and inability to be open as communities. The possibility of assimilation or integration of the first wave Polish was limited because the Polish Federation and the Polish Catholic Mission functioned to actively retard the assimilation of Polish people into British society (Zubrzycki 1956). In Birmingham even those people from the first wave who did not fully engage with the Polish Catholic Circle were reluctant to become British citizens or to make non Polish friends outside of the work place.

Internal divisions have also been evident. The reasons for migration have contributed to the lack of connectedness between old and new Polish migrants Birmingham. The first wave of Polish immigrants in Birmingham was refugees; political exiles and the resulting loss and trauma contributed to their defensive behaviour. However this pain and loss was not officially or formally acknowledged, within or outside the community and so it was largely ignored. One of the repercussions of this may be that this generation of Polish people became more introvert and inward looking, wanting little interaction with 'outsiders' whom they often distrusted. This was further compounded by the fact that they felt they could



not return to Poland and hence had little sense of home and belonging, though they yearned for Poland and were patriotic and nationalistic in their sentiments. When the second and third wave Poles arrived from Soviet dominated Poland they were faced with an almost impenetrable wall. For instance, the Polish club in Birmingham established by the first wave, allowed members only and the second and third wave Poles used it rarely, only for shopping for specific Polish food, rather than to engage in organised activities.

The second, third and fourth waves of Birmingham Polish migrants came as a result of the pull phenomena, either to marry an English spouse or in search of employment. These latter three waves have more in common with each other than they do with the first wave; they are able to return to Poland and to keep in regular contact with friends and family. In contrast, for many of the first wave migrants, the Poland they had known, no longer exists. They tend to be more isolated and self contained with little desire to socialise and relate to other communities.

The much smaller numbers of second and third wave Poles living in Birmingham relied on the friends they made through their spouse or work colleagues; it was unusual for them to socialise with the first wave Polish. There was little shared history of Poland between the first and latter cohorts. The first cohort tended to have strong nationalist, militaristic sentiments which the latter cohorts felt were outmoded. The arrival of the large numbers of fourth wave Polish migrants in 2004 was in some way a shock for the first wave Poles, who found it difficult to understand why so many would leave Poland by choice.

There were situations of first wave and fourth wave Polish in Birmingham coming together. The process included the identification of shared aims which could be organised into projects that elicited funding (Smith 2008, MPCA 2010). Two examples of Polish based organisations accessing funds are the Midlands Polish Community Association (MPCA) and the Polish Expats Association (PEA). Although there has been some discussion, between the MPCA and PEA, they functioned independently of each other. After being invisible for over sixty years and being unsuccessful in securing funding for projects, the Birmingham Polish community managed to secure funding from a number of organisations including the lottery and this brought different factions of the larger community together.

Hence, relationships of Polish people, within their communities were shaped by both the internal differences between the different waves of migration and the motivations for migration. Relationships with host and other communities were formed by the economic and social discrimination they faced, as well as their own perceptions about other minority migrant communities.

There are unique and specific features of Polish migration. There are also shared experiences that are common with other migrant communities. It is difficult to say how internal relationships within Polish communities will progress. The latter cohorts are mobile, transient and transnational communities. Whilst some within this group, and within the other cohorts, are settled in the UK, it will be interesting to see how these dynamics play out amidst current moral panics about immigration and the austerity measures. To what degree the Polish people here cohere as a community

and to what extent they build alliances with other migrant group's remains to be seen.

## **Conclusion**

As England's second city, Birmingham has consistently received significant numbers of migrants. As White migrants, the first wave Birmingham Poles arrived in the 1940s and 1950s and numbered around 3000; by the 1970s they had dispersed across the city and by the 1990s their numbers were depleting. With the arrival of the South Asian and Caribbean migrants from the 1950s onwards the Polish migrants became increasingly invisible. The political discussions on migration have focused on race and colour; following the disturbances in the North of England in 2001 and the events of 9/11 interracial relationships and religious faith has increasingly been at the fore. Whilst on the one hand Birmingham celebrates its diversity there are also discussions around the drain migrants impose on health, housing, employment and education. In some areas of Birmingham it has been suggested that migrant communities live parallel lives, working with people from the host society but choosing to spend their leisure time exclusively with people from their own culture.

Integration and community cohesion are currently the dominant discourses in British migration discourse, where the desire is to severely limit the number of immigrants now seen to constitute 'super-diversity'. The expansion of EU countries and the inclusion of A8 and A2 countries have changed the previous gaze on non-white immigrants to include white Eastern European immigrants too. Polish people, along with other immigrants are under increasing scrutiny.

There are significant differences within Polish immigrants in their migratory experiences and new challenges are presented with new opportunities. The growth of the Polish community is marked by its increasing confidence on the High streets of immigrant areas. But for some of its members, the situation is highly precarious, in terms of exploitation, where poverty is rife. The earlier cohorts of Polish migrants, like others in migrant communities generally, may find this difficult to understand, accept and address. How the internal differentiations are resolved may contribute to the ways in which new challenges are faced, but also it is dependent upon how bridges are built with other communities. The Polish community is now more confident, knowledgeable and informed than it was previously, particularly about forming voluntary organisations, accessing funds and so on. There are examples where it has successfully worked across different cohorts of Polish migrant groups and with other mainstream migrants groups to address the difficulties faced by some of its members. In Birmingham, Black and Asian voluntary groups and the statutory sectors assisted the Polish club to gain access to Grass Roots and Heritage Lottery Funds for housing, employment and crime concerns, and so there are encouraging signs for both the Polish and other migrant communities, as well as for social cohesion and mutual learning and support for shared problems and opportunities, faced by migrant communities.

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## Interviews

Conducted by M. Smojkis (MS)

Pseudonym/name	Date	Pseudonym/name	Date
Boleslaw Smojkis	Feb 2001(MS)	Mr Brazowy	July 2006
Mr Znaczek	July 2008 (MS)	Mrs Drzewo	July 2008 (MS)
Mr Grzyb	March 2004 (MS)	Mrs Szkoła	August 2007 (MS)
Mr Niebieski	July 2008 (MS)	Mrs Zyczliwy	May 2007 (MS)
Mr Podroz	June 2009 (MS)	Mrs Czekolada	July 2008 (MS)
Mr Harrow	May 2010 (MS)	Mrs Drugi	July 2008 (MS)
Mr Słownik	October 2008 (MS)	Mrs Rozowy	August 2007 (MS) (MS)
Mr Rzecznik	October 2009 (MS)	Ms Bialy	August 2006
Mr Charny	August 2008 (MS)	Ms Uczyc	August 2008 (MS)
Mr Czerwony	August 2006	Miss Pisac	July 2006 (MS)
Mrs Artista	September 2008 (MS)	Mrs Zielony	August 2006
Ms. Zyczliwy	August 2008 (MS)	MS Osmy	September 2008 (MS)
Mr Stolarka	June 2006 (MS)	Mr Stolarki	June 2006 (MS)

Telephone correspondence with Anthony Josephs May 2009.

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[www.virtualmuseum.co.uk/hostels/midland](http://www.virtualmuseum.co.uk/hostels/midland)

[www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/ludfordmogna.htm](http://www.polishresettlementcampsintheuk.co.uk/ludfordmogna.htm)

[www.mpca.eu](http://www.mpca.eu)

[www.polishexpats.org.uk](http://www.polishexpats.org.uk)

[www.connectinghistories](http://www.connectinghistories)

#### **Newspapers**

Birmingham Gazette 1949

## Appendix 1

### Certificate of Alien Registration Belonging to Boleslaw Smojkis.

**NOTICE TO THE HOLDER OF THIS CERTIFICATE**

- Before you effect a permanent change of residence (from the last address shown in this Certificate) you must give the Police of the district in which you reside your new address and the date on which you intend to move.
- If your new residence is in another Police District you must, within 48 hours of your arrival there, report to the Police of the new district.
- A temporary absence of less than 14 days from your permanent residence need not be reported; but if such absence exceeds 14 days you must report your temporary address and all subsequent changes of address (including your return home) to the Police of the district where you are registered. This may be done by letter.
- If you stay at an hotel, lodging-house, boarding-house or other place where lodging is provided for payment, you must, on arrival, write your name, nationality, the number of this Certificate, and the address from which you have come, and, before leaving, must write the address to which you intend to go on the form provided for the purpose.
- You must report to the Police of the district where you are registered within 48 hours, any change in any of the personal particulars given within (including profession or occupation), also marriage, divorce, or death of husband or wife.
- Your children, if not British, must have separate Certificates when they reach the age of 16.

Failure to comply with any of the above requirements, making any false statement with regard to registration or with regard to this certificate, altering this certificate or any entry upon it, refusing to produce this certificate when legally required to do so, or having in possession or using without lawful authority any forged, altered, or irregular certificate, passport, or other document concerned with registration, will render the offender liable to be detained in custody, and to a fine of £100 or six months' imprisonment.

11630. WL 37719/249 100,000 Bks. 1/47 H.W. G.51

**A 001667**

**Aliens Order, 1920.**

**CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION**

You must produce this certificate if required to do so by any Police Officer, Immigration Officer, or member of His Majesty's forces acting in the course of his duty.

Registration Certificate No. 7001664

Issued at Leek Staffs

on 24th June 1947

Name (Surname first in Roman Capitals) SMOJKIS Boleslaw

Alias \_\_\_\_\_

Left Thumb Print (if unable to sign name in English Characters).

PHOTOGRAPH



Signature of Holder } Smojkis B

Nationality Polish

Born on 2/5/1927 in Poland

Previous Nationality (if any) \_\_\_\_\_

Profession or Occupation { No occupation

Single or Married Single

Address of Residence Blackshaw Moor Camp, Leek Staffs

Arrival in United Kingdom on 12 Dec 1946

Address of last Residence outside U.K. \_\_\_\_\_

Government Service Italian Forces

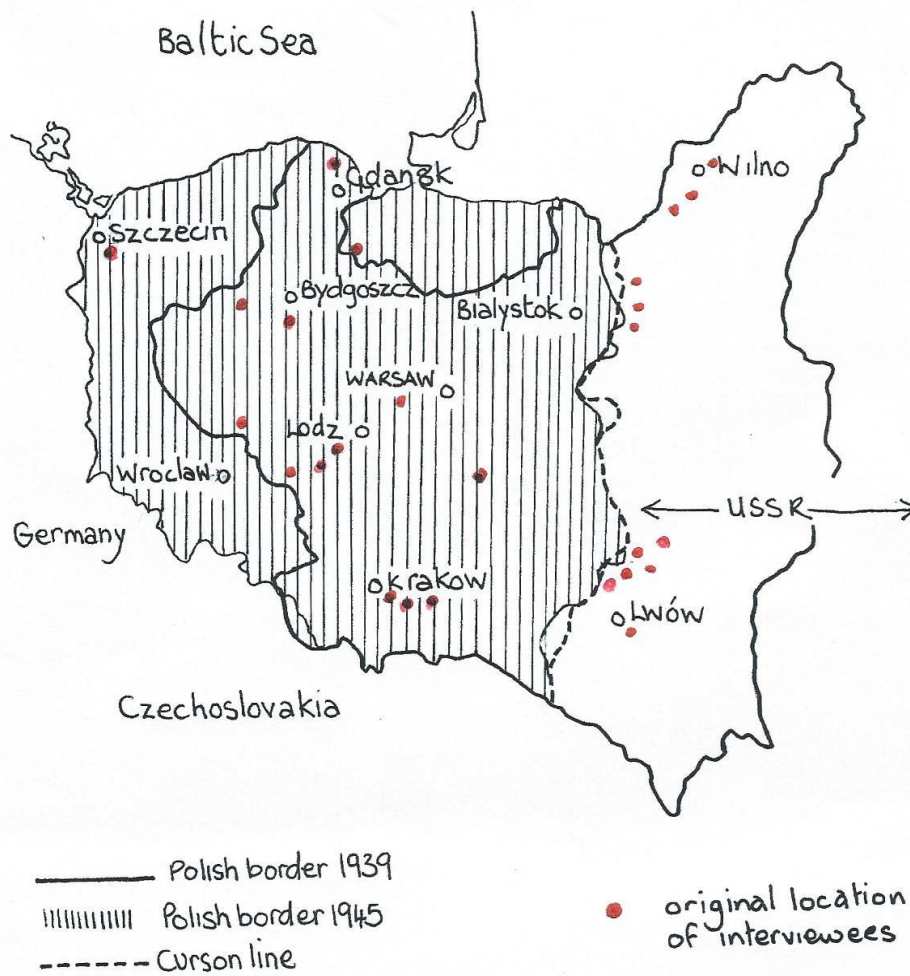
2 yrs to date

Passport or other papers as to Nationality and Identity. Army Form X201 Polish issued 20/5/47

OTI 6645380



## Appendix 2



### POLANDS CHANGING BORDERS

CAF 2011

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview schedule for first wave**

Tell me about your early life in Poland

How did you know that the war had started?

What changed for you when the war started?

How did you come to be living in Birmingham?

Tell me about your life in Birmingham?

What are your ways of keeping your Polish traditions?

The questions were expanded to ask about religion, going to church and language.

This schedule was adapted for the second generation of the first wave and also for the second and third wave Polish people.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Interview schedule for the fourth wave Polish migrants.**

When did you come to the UK?

What made you come to the UK?

How did you find a job and accomodation?

How was your life in Poland different to what it is in the UK now?

How long do you intend to stay in the UK: do you want to settle down here?

Do you try to keep Polish traditions in Birmingham?

How important is it for you to mainitain your Polish identity?

What are you ways of keeping 'Polishness' in the UK?

These questions were a guide and were adapted for each interview.

## **Appendix 5**

### **Interviewee information and consent form**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study; my name is Maureen Smojkis and I am in the process of completing a PhD in the Institute of Applied Social Studies at the University of Birmingham, exploring the lives of the Polish people who have settled in Birmingham since 1939. In order to do this I am asking people who originate from Poland or who are second or third generation Polish people to tell me their story and to allow me to record the interview.

If you have any questions please contact me on [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

#### **Consent**

I give permission for this recorded interview to be used by Maureen Smojkis in the completion of her PhD and other related papers, conferences or articles. The recording or transcript will not be available to any other person or kept in a public archive.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

## Appendix 6

### Historical Chronology of Important Events in Poland

Date	Event
1918	Poland regains its independence. Josef Pilsudski become head of state
1919	Poland's borders with Germany are decided at the Paris Peace Conference
1919-1921	Polish- Soviet war
1939	German and Soviet invasion of Poland; Polish Government in exile formed under the leadership of Wladyslaw Sikorski
1941	Polish- Soviet accord signed in London
1943	The Katyn Massacre
1944	The Polish Committee of National Liberation formed in Moscow
1944	The Warsaw Uprising
1945	Poland's Western borders on the Oder and Neisse rivers decided at the Potsdam Conference
1946	The falsified referendum legitimises Communist rule in Poland
1947	The fraudulent general elections to the parliament
1948	The beginning of Stalinism in Poland
1952	Passing of the Constitution of the Polish People's Republic
1956	Strikes and mass demonstrations in Poznan
1968	The 'Polish March' – the outbreak of students' demonstrations
1970	Strikes on the Baltic coast
1976	Strikes at Radom, Ursus at Plock
1978	The election of Karol Wojtyla to the papacy
1980	The birth of the 'Solidarity' workers union
1981	General Jaruzelski declares Martial Law
1983	Lech Walesa awarded the Nobel Peace Prize
1989	The round table negotiations ; the end of Communism in Poland
1990	Lech Walesa becomes President
1997	Passing of a new Constitution
1999	Poland joins NATO
2004	Poland joins the European Union

(Adapted from Bubczyk 2002 p 149/50)