INTRODUCTION

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We were sitting with Magda at a dinner table in her kitchen. With a smile on her face, she told me she can already imagine how this table will be covered with stains and doodles, and will come to represent her family's happy life. We were in her newly renovated flat in one of the outer neighbourhoods of Warsaw. It was a warm summer midday. The sun was bright, but not too hot. There was a nice breeze coming from the open windows. Magda's husband was at work. Her 3-year-old daughter was out with her grandmother, and her baby son was sleeping in his crib. Magda noticed it was unusually calm. In her late twenties, she was just a few years older than me. We were talking about food, about what it was like to move out of her family home, about her likes and dislikes, her daily and weekly routines. We were chatting and laughing a lot, both at ease. Then suddenly the atmosphere in the room changed. Once our conversation steered towards feeding her children it got more tense. I saw her whole posture change. She became at once agitated and stiff. 'I'm so stressed about it', she told me, 'there is so much pressure to do it right! And I already constantly feel that I'm failing'. We had talked before about her husband cooking for both of them. He enjoyed it, she did not like to cook. But with children something changed. 'I have been indoctrinated into being a cooking and feeding mother', she observed. 'And I hate it'. She told me how anxious she already was about what will happen in the future. 'I don't know how it will be when my children will be ten and twelve... Why can't they stay at the age of two, when it is easier to control what they eat? I don't know how I'm going to do this!'. After a longer pause, she continued: 'I think it comes from home. I prefer that my daughter eats even a whole bar of chocolate, rather than a pack of white and pink marshmallows. So hopefully she sees that I eat chocolate rather than other things. I'll let her go to school only after removing all crisps from the school shop' – she said laughing – 'and I will prepare a packed meal for her instead of giving

her money to buy food'. She stopped laughing and again repeated, 'I don't know, it really scares me!'

I could feel her discomfort and concern. I immediately became tense myself. Not being a mother myself, I was puzzled by this situation. It struck me that, unprompted by my questions, Magda expressed so many negative emotions about feeding her children. She clearly needed to vent. But why did she feel as if she was failing? Failing at what exactly? Failing whom? What was she so scared of? The juxtaposition of marshmallows and chocolate was still vivid in my head, when I started wondering why feeding Gosia and Kuba caused their mother so much anxiety.

My meeting with Magda took place in the summer of 2010,[1] and it inspired me to do research on the social and cultural dynamics of feeding children in Poland. Feeding children might seem like the most intimate, private and primal act: a banal occurrence of daily life.[2] And yet, while private and intimate, it is also a deeply politicized sphere, one in which many social actors are engaged, not only parents and children, but also other family members, schools and other state institutions. It also involves politicians, media outlets, market agencies and the food industry, non-governmental organizations, or even international corporations and agencies, such as the World Health Organization or the European Union. These various actors often have very strong, sometimes even contradictory, ideas about what 'proper' feeding entails: eat a lot of dairy or limit dairy consumption; ban all sugar or allow sweets. These are quite extreme examples, but there are many more subtle discrepancies. With all these contrasts and diverse expectations, feeding involves power struggles, tensions and negotiations that happen at multiple scales: from a family table or a shopping aisle to food companies' international offices and parliamentary chambers.

The main argument of this book is twofold. Feeding is political. That means that what and how children eat is of interest to many private and public actors who want to make claims about and shape the way in which children eat. Possessing this influence is supposed to enable shaping the minds and bodies of the future generation. So the stakes are high. Because feeding is so political and contested, while feeling very personal and intimate, it elicits anxieties. The politics of children's food lies at the root of the anxieties that mothers experience perhaps most intensely, but that permeate different parts of society, and are experienced differently by various actors: children themselves, families, schools and other state institutions, and the food industry. Feeding anxiety links these different actors and spheres, and for many people and institutions becomes one of the ways of being in the world. It becomes a new form of sociality. In this book I uncover what makes children's food such a political issue, and how different actors experience and deal with its consequences: feeding anxieties.

Feeding anxiety is as much about the practices of feeding and eating and related expectations, as it is about food, about what it signifies and what kind of a person it, literally and symbolically, makes. As John Coveney (2006) demonstrated, through food people construct themselves as certain kinds of 'good' and 'bad' subjects. Food is tangible, material, easy to spot and judge. That is partly why it evokes so many emotions and moral judgments (Boni 2021). Take the chocolate and marshmallows pointed out and juxtaposed by Magda. Each of these foods not only tastes differently, but is also perceived to influence the body and the character of the child in a different way. Marshmallows are considered by many 'improper' food, connected with the negative influence of the food industry. They appeared in Poland as the materialization of the images about American family lifestyles. They are 'fake', not natural and unhealthy, and do not even resemble food anymore. But they are loads of fun. And chocolate is a more acceptable sweet treat. It has a longer presence in Poland, seems more natural and by some is even considered healthy. That is why Magda prefers her children to eat chocolate and not marshmallows. Contrasts like that, between diverse expectations of feeding and eating, and between different kinds of food, produce feeding anxieties.

Feeding anxieties are not limited to any particular national borders. They occur in various shapes and forms in many places where there are local and global political interests in children's food (see e.g. Jing 2000). But Poland provides a particularly fertile ground for feeding anxieties to develop, with its semi-peripheral geopolitical status, ramifications of post-socialist and neoliberal transformations, and still prevailing aspirations to be modern and 'Western'. Food is particularly strongly connected to the expressions of home, care and love. There are very strong cultural norms about mothering, exemplified in the figure of *Matka-Polka* (Polish-Mother), who completely devotes herself to her family, and through that sacrifices herself for the nation. The tensions between the family, the state and the market around children seem to be ever increasing. Poland, and Warsaw more specifically, is where I did uncover feeding anxieties. And although they are shaped by and connected to many international institutions and global trends, they are deeply localized and guided by cultural and social norms and understandings related to food, motherhood and modern personhood, which I delve into in this book.

During my fieldwork in Warsaw, people in diverse contexts related to varied conceptions of 'good food', 'proper feeding' and 'bad' food habits. Food, and particularly children's food, evokes multiple normative assumptions and moralized judgements. I will be unpacking these cultural assumptions one by one in this book, demonstrating how relational and contextual, as well as how emotional such opinions are, and how they reproduce social

hierarchies. When relating to these normative judgements expressed by my interlocutors, I put the adjectives good, bad, proper and not proper in inverted commas to emphasize that these are not my own sentiments. In fact, in this book you will not find a recipe for what is a proper diet for children or how good feeding should be organized at home or at school. This book rather unpacks and critically studies such assumptions to demonstrate why feeding children is indeed such a contested issue.

The experiences and stories presented in this book are depictions of love, care, fun and pleasure, on the one hand, and struggle, concern and self-doubt, on the other hand. These are not, however, the stories about struggling to put food on the table. Rather, they are about attempting to control what food is placed on that table while being pulled into tens of different directions. Feeding anxieties to a large extent are about control and restriction, about creating particular kinds of people with the means of food. And in that sense, they are about daily life in a neoliberal context which places value on individual success, development, life-projects, slim bodies and self-discipline. With all of that, the book is also about what feeds our anxieties about children, responsibility, mothering, 'good food', health, the 'right' kinds of bodies, and being 'proper people'.

FEEDING ANXIETIES

Anxiety is an undirected emotion of uneasiness and worry about the future. It is a general state of mind and body, often not focused on a specific person or entity. In this book, I do not use anxiety as a psychological concept, but rather as a social concept. I use the notion of anxiety to describe what is happening to individual people, particularly mothers, but also what is happening at a larger societal scale. As a social concept, feeding anxiety is experienced by individuals and institutions. This book focuses in particular on families, schools, the state and the food industry.

Just when I started my fieldwork in 2012, the research report about the future costs incurred by the Polish state due to the current 'bad' food habits was published (KPMG 2012). It was predicted that the current generation of children are likely to die at a younger age than the generation of their parents, and that the 'bad' food habits people have today will supposedly lead to health problems in the future, which would be very costly for the state. At the same time the World Health Organization published their research showing that the overweight and obesity rates among children in Poland have risen at the quickest rate in Europe (Currie et al. 2012). This was followed by a conference in the parliament, entitled dramatically 'Can we afford to feed children badly?' In one of the parliamentary conference rooms, on the podium,

experts and politicians discussed how badly children in Poland eat and that it is not affordable to the Polish state in the long run.

In these parliamentary discussions, children were positioned as not informed, not even fully aware of what adults were doing to them, as if feeding children was something that is done to them without their will or even acknowledgement. There were few mentions of the food industry and the schools as contributing to this 'bad' situation, but parents featured in most of the statements. They were presented as not knowledgeable about how to feed their children and not aware that their feeding practices might shape the food habits of the future generation (Szymańczak 2012: 43). Parents – implicitly meaning mothers – were portrayed as responsible for what was seen as a great public problem caused by their carelessness.

This is just one example illustrating how parents, mainly mothers, are portrayed in a public domain, and how the state becomes anxious about feeding children, and in turn causes anxiety in others. Fear and anxiety have been identified by many – from Ulrich Beck (1992) to Li Zhang (2020) – as a shared emotion that extremely well characterizes contemporary lives. One of the great empirical examples of anxiety has been provided by Röttger-Rössler et al. (2015), who study anxiety as a socializing emotion that children among the Tao in Taiwan must learn. Children need to constantly be on their guard to be able to identify approaching dangers in time, dangers which lurk in the natural environment, as well as those coming from social and supernatural actors. Children can protect themselves from these multiple dangers only by keeping everything around them in sight and by not taking any risks. While Röttger-Rössler et al. (2015) show us how Tao children are socialized through anxiety into being adults, in this book I show – among other things – how women in Poland are socialized through anxiety into being mothers.

I am certainly not the first person to make the connection between anxiety and food. Chad Lavin (2013), a political scientist based in the US, pointed to various anxieties around food – connected for instance to identity, cultural authenticity, obesity and meat consumption – to demonstrate that contemporary food politics are actually a response to what is perceived as threats to individual and national sovereignty. He treated what has been happening around food as a response to the political anxieties surrounding globalization.

Peter Jackson (2015), a human geographer from the UK, studied consumer anxieties at a range of scales, from international food markets to individual families and households. He analysed different cases of food fears, for instance the 2013 'horsemeat incident', and how these affected people's consumer choices. He saw the roots of contemporary food anxieties in the increasing gap between food producers and consumers, and studied the historical and social context of food safety.

While Lavin (2013) studied food discourses and treated food anxiety as a political concept, Jackson (2015) focused on consumers and different scales of production-consumption chain that created anxious appetites. This book adds a new ethnographic and theoretical perspective to these broader discussions about food and anxiety in contemporary societies, by focusing on multiple feeding anxieties around children's food in Poland. Similarly to Lavin, I am interested in the connections between food anxieties and politics, but I take a more focused, ethnographic and detailed look at how exactly the broader politics and discourses around children's food are connected to children's and adults' daily practices. Similarly to Jackson, I study different scales of feeding anxieties and treat this as an important social issue to be explained. But I also approach it as an explanatory term, a social concept that is about much more than food safety, but is about modern aspirations, tensions and personhoods, and as such it grasps what I have encountered during my fieldwork in Warsaw.

Although my research focused on Poland, feeding anxieties in different forms occur in many places of the world. In *Feeding China's Little Emperors* (2000), Jun Jing and other authors studied the impact of the policy of one child on the changing family relations and food cultures in China, and how the new parenting styles, children's roles as well as societal tensions were exemplified with the means of food. Anne Allison (2008) vividly described how in Japan, she and other mothers were expected to create elaborate lunchboxes for their children to demonstrate their own investment in their children's wellbeing, their development and their future. Allison James, Anne Trine Kjørholt and Vebjørg Tingstad (2009) studied children's and their parents' food practices, and family dynamics mediated with food, in Northern European countries. Jo Pike and Peter Kelly (2014) analysed the ambiguous figure of Jamie Olivier, and the political and moral economy of children's school food in the UK and Australia. Sarah Bowen, Joslyn Brenton and Sinikka Elliott (2019) critically studied the idealized conceptions of homemade food and family meals vis-à-vis the realities of children's food and maternal foodwork among working class families in the US. Jennifer Patico (2020) studied the contradictory expectations middle-class families have to deal with, and the politics of parenting and feeding and their connection to the neoliberal capitalist ethic in the US. These are just a few examples that demonstrate that feeding anxieties, in their many forms and shapes, are a global or Global North phenomenon. They might, but do not necessarily have to, take different forms in the Global South (see e.g. Bosco 2007; Remorini 2015; Baviskar 2018).

This multitude of different perspectives and accounts of anxiety confirms that indeed it is a concept that accurately describes the contemporary ways of being in the world. I did not look for it, but it is what I have found when

studying the politics of children's food in Poland. Feeding anxiety is an etic concept. My research participants talked about and expressed *stres* (stress), *lęk* (fear), *niepokój* (anxiety), *napięcie* (tension), *obawa* (worry), *złość* (anger), *poczucie niepowodzenia* (a feeling of failure), *poczucie winy* (guilt). I came to interpret all these emotions and feelings related to children's food as feeding anxieties. I use the concept of anxiety to analyse and understand what is happening around children's food and mothering: to grasp something ephemeral that relates to how people think about their bodies and their food, but also about their futures.

Similarly to Sarah Ahmed's work (2004, 2014) on collective feelings, I approach emotions as not solely private matters. As she explained,

> Emotions do things, and work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and collective. (Ahmed 2004: 27)

Feeding anxieties are emotions felt and embodied both by individuals, be it mothers, and institutions, such as schools, and what holds and binds the social body and the collectives together. I treat feeding anxieties as a new form of sociality, a way of engaging with oneself, as well as with each other, and with the world.

The state of anxiety that many mothers live in and possibly experience most intensely also draws in and concerns others. Feeding anxieties cross many boundaries and move through different scales in Warsaw. Many institutions, including the state and schools, are anxious about children's eating, although their anxieties take different shapes. Their uncertainties and worries about the future are related not only to individual children – as in the family domain – but to the whole generation, the future adults. Those multiple anxieties feed off each other. Feeding anxiety is connected to broader social tensions and expectations placed on parents (Furedi 2002; Cucchiara 2013; Hryciuk and Korolczuk 2015). And the state's anxiety related to feeding children, as noticeable in the parliamentary discussion recounted above, is connected to parents' behaviour. Children are pulled more and more into this overwhelming state of anxiety by their mothers and fathers, by the school and other institutions. Children too experience anxiety by dealing with many expectations, worries and tensions about food.

In contrast to Ahmed's (2004, 2014) analysis of collective feelings, feeding anxieties do not create a bounded and supportive collective. Even though it is a shared emotion, it is deeply individualizing and alienating. Feeding anxiety encompasses the feeling of failure related to not feeding children in the perceived right way, as well as the feeling of worry for being judged because

of that, and fear for the child who does not eat in a proper way. Feeding anxiety includes both very tangible fears about particular foods, given to children by grandparents or friends at school, that might cause dental caries, and more abstract fears about children's future.

Even though different actors might have similar emotions, albeit expressed and experienced in varied ways, it does not mean that this shared feeling creates a bounded and binding sympathetic group. Rather, what makes this experience so powerful is the fact that it alienates specific actors, as everyone else is deemed a threat to 'proper feeding', responsibility for which is individualized. So while for a mother, other family members, other adults and children, as well as public and market institutions, might seem harmful to 'proper feeding', so are the other mothers who might be perceived as judging and scrutinizing actors. And for the state institutions, mothers are seen as at fault, and so it goes on. The object of feeding anxiety is often difficult to name and grasp, because it is multiple and ephemeral, so the solution is to control the subject of that anxiety: children themselves.

Anxiety is also connected to trust, or rather lack thereof. Frank Furedi (2002) pointed out that the expert alarming rhetoric has deprived parents – and other groups of adults I would add – of a much-needed trust: trust in other people, but also trust in themselves that they are able to engage in parenting and in feeding children. And it seems that adults in general do not trust children to make the 'right' food decisions. Such lack of trust in other adults, in children as well as in one's own abilities, lies at the core of feeding anxieties.

Another way of thinking about it is through what Manpreet Janeja calls a food-trust nexus. Janeja (2010) shows how food is embedded in the familial and school networks of trust and distrust, and how the conceptions about 'normal' and 'not normal' food influence people's daily lives. She demonstrates how the relations of power, notions of health and the politics of belonging and nation-building are entangled with the dynamics of trust, distrust and mistrust in food. There are important connections between such issues of trust, as they are discussed by Janeja in her forthcoming book in relation to school food in the UK, and what I discuss as feeding anxieties in Poland (personal communication).

Feeding anxieties are experienced by individual people, but are also connected to public health. The raising rates of childhood obesity are an important element of these worries, fears and lack of trust, as demonstrated above. Childhood obesity, as children's food in general, is a highly politicized and contested topic. Fat children are often used in public and private conversations, and media representations, as props to scare mothers into 'proper' feeding and children into 'proper' eating. The varied aetiologies of childhood obesity, connected to genes, hormones and metabolisms, systemic

inequalities and structural violence, are often reduced to mothers' and children's individual food choices (Warin et al. 2008; Maher, Fraser and Wright 2010; Yates-Doerr 2020; Boni 2022a). This certainly exacerbates feeding anxieties by adding pressure to what and how children eat.

When Furedi (2002) wrote about trust, he mainly referred to paranoid parenting in middle-class families. Indeed, the internalized expectations about raising 'healthy' children, dealing with multiple social pressures and aspirations, are often discussed in the literature as middle-class phenomenon (e.g. Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik 2013; Fischer 2014; Patico 2020). But most parents, from various social and economic backgrounds, attempt to feed their children well. What they understand as 'good', and to what extent they are able to achieve and practise these ideas, might be diversified, but many of them experience some kinds of feeding anxieties, either related to health aspirations, social recognition or access to food. Bowen, Brenton and Elliott (2019) demonstrated for instance how poor working-class families in North Carolina, in the US, struggle to feed their children in the 'right' way, and how part of that struggle is an immense pressure placed on parents, mothers in particular, by the society at large. So while the public perceptions of class, parenting and food entanglements often seem to fall along the lines of health obsessed upper middle-class families on the one side, and working-class families dealing with financial constraints on the other side, the realities are much more complicated. Wealthy families might be equally worried about access to the 'right' kind of food – for instance organic, local, or in any other way special; and working-class families might be similarly preoccupied with healthy food. Nevertheless, as Biltekoff (2013) demonstrated, the dominating perspectives on 'good' food and feeding are to a large extent informed by middle-class ideals. And the situation is similar in Poland.

I use feeding anxieties as a social concept that encompasses tangible and abstract fears and worries about children's food. Feeding anxieties stem from multiple conceptions and expectations of what is 'good food' and what 'proper' people should eat. They are also fuelled by fears about failing at 'proper' feeding, being criticized and judged by oneself and others. In diverse forms and shapes, feeding anxieties are shared by individuals and institutions. But even though they come out of concern and care for and about children, these collective emotions do not create a supportive group. The processes of individualization, responsibilization and alienation are ingrained in feeding anxieties. As such, this new form of sociality creates an alienated community, and social relationships characterized by tension, distrust and harsh judgements.

RELATIONAL APPROACH TO FEEDING-EATING

In order to uncover the politics of children's food, and understand the feeding anxieties it elicits, I take a relational approach to feeding and eating. Such an analytical and methodological perspective assumes that these two processes should not be separated, but rather treated as always intertwined. After all, it is the eating of chocolate or marshmallows that is the source of fear. Children in many intentional and unintentional ways influence the process of feeding (see e.g. Keenan and Stapleton 2009; Vaghi 2019). They are not the passive recipients of the feeding process. And the societal interest in children, and how they eat, is what implicates their parents and their feeding practices in the politics of children's food. Therefore, in order to understand feeding anxieties, we have to analyse eating as well.

Both feeding and eating consist of a multitude of intermingled practices, such as planning, shopping, preparing food, choosing what to eat, putting food in a mouth, chewing and swallowing, and digesting it.[3] These practices are the result of people's embodied dispositions and the contexts of the interactions in which they occur (Lahire 2011: xi). As Marjorie DeVault (1991) argued in her seminal book *Feeding the Family*, feeding and foodwork consist of both mental processes and physical activities that stretch over time. And I would add that feeding is not possible if eating does not occur, both conceptually and practically.[4] Though feeding and eating are biologically grounded, they are also deeply cultural and social practices filled with social and symbolic meanings (Douglas 1975; Strathern 2012; Abbots and Lavis 2013).

The negotiations about food, feeding and eating practices happen within a particular system of meal patterns and food categorizations. As Mary Douglas (1975) indicated, the shared cultural ideas about what constitutes particular food occasions and meals, and how they relate to each other, are the bedrock of any particular food culture. As Chapter 3 demonstrates in more detail, the repetitive food rhythms become particularly important for adults when feeding children. The typical meal pattern in Poland consist of three main meals (Domański et al. 2015). There are also two additional ones, often organized when feeding children. Breakfast (*śniadanie*) usually consists of sandwiches or cereals with milk or yogurt during the week, and often of eggs during weekends. This is followed by *drugie śniadanie* (a second breakfast), a smaller snack usually comprising of sandwiches or fruits. Many children take *drugie śniadanie* to school, as you will see in Chapter 4. *Obiad*, the main meal of the day, is typically eaten around 2–3pm. The Sunday dinner would be eaten at such a time. But during the week, this pattern tends to change in an urban context, with a smaller lunch eaten during the day, and a larger diner (*obiad*) eaten in the evening. In its ideal type, *obiad* consists of two warm dishes, a soup and a second dish comprising of meat,

potatoes and vegetables, although more and more often during the week this consists of just one dish. This is followed by a desert, served either right after the main meal, or few hours later. And finally, in the late afternoon or evening, many Poles eat supper (*kolacja*), often consisting of sandwiches. This pattern fluctuates and changes, but when talking about food all of my interlocutors referred to these meals. The daily and weekly food rhythms are dictated by such a cultural coding, as well as by daily occurrences and plans which tend to change quite often.

Feeding-eating negotiations, which happen within and around the above-mentioned food pattern, are embedded in the past, influenced by what parents ate as children, and anchored in the future – they influence how today's children will eat, and possibly how they will feed their own children. In that sense, the relationality of feeding-eating stretches over time. These relationships not only extend to the past and the future, but are indeed entangled in many ways in the present. A mother feeds her child at home, while at the same time feeding a (future) Polish citizen. The way in which she feeds can be influenced by an article she reads or by a promotion in her grocery store. The way in which a child eats might be shaped by an education programme implemented in school or by her friends' food habits. Moreover, the individual actors engaged in feeding and eating are in fact plural, that is, they are not completely the same in different contexts of social life, for example home and school (Lahire 2011). Children often eat differently at home and at school. Parents feed their children differently at home and in public places. Feeding-eating constitute very dynamic and fluctuating relationships with multiple actors involved; they are not a static configuration.

Feeding and eating practices are the daily stuff of family or school life. They involve adults, children and food in everyday dealings and negotiations. But they are also the subject of state policies and programmes, be it agricultural ones or those directly connected to children's food and health. Feeding-eating relationships are also influenced and play out in the realm of the food industry. And they may take a different life in the media. In each of these domains feeding and eating are imagined and practised differently. And yet these different ideas and expectations interact throughout the scales. A child might want to buy particular breakfast cereals – allowed for sale according to the state regulations – as a result of marketing campaigns, while a mother might not allow it after reading a newspaper article referring to dietary advice about the sugar content in cereals. Feeding-eating relationships, as do feeding anxieties, play out in and connect different registers and scales.

Such a relational approach to feeding and eating links in a meaningful way with the relational approach to women's and childhood studies. Rachel Rosen and Katherine Twamley, in their Introduction to *Feminism and the*

Politics of Childhood: Friends or Foes?, pointed out that in academic discussions and public debates, women and children are often constituted as one entity – as 'womenandchildren' (Enloe 1991; see also Oakley 1994): 'There are many parallels between the social position of children and women, who have been similarly constituted and subjected to treatment as vulnerable victims, or valorized as angelic innocents of home and hearth, and the subject through which hopes for national development flow' (Rosen and Twamley 2018: 3).

Or, alternatively, women and children are positioned antagonistically, in a sense that we can develop the rights of one group (children) only at the expense of the freedoms of the other group (women). Together with the other contributors to the book, Rosen and Twamley argue that exploiting these dependencies positions both women and children in a particular relationship to men, patriarchy and capitalism. Instead, they suggest rather conceiving of women's and children's positioning as relational, and engaging 'in the complexity of social relationships and relations which can be simultaneously ones of love, reciprocity, oppression, struggle and exploitation' (2018: 10).

Feeding often continues to be relegated, in academic and public debates, to the consumption sphere, as a solely 'private' domestic matter, even though the public-private division has been criticized, blurred and stretched for a long time not only by feminist scholars (see e.g. Rose 1987; Pateman 1989). This book shows that children's food, and feeding anxieties, are not only a matter of private consumption, or rather that the 'private consumption' is never really private. What might be viewed as private and personal is indeed political. Research over the years have demonstrated that feeding work is part of an unpaid care work conducted to a much greater extent by women than men (Murcott 1983, 2000; Titkow, Duch-Krzystoszek and Budrowska 2004). The monetary value of women's unpaid care work globally has been estimated at $10.9 trillion in 2020 (Coffey et al. 2020). I am not convinced that this is something we could and should monetize; nevertheless, this demonstrates well the scale and the importance of this phenomenon. Feeding and foodwork constitute an important part of women's unpaid labour. It is in many respects about production and reproduction. And as such, studying feeding-eating relationships, and the politics of children's food, is certainly not only a domain of consumption.

With love and care embedded in feeding practices comes the experience of oppression and the feeling of failure. Because women are primary caretakers and feeders, any interest in children's food – be it from the position of the state, the World Health Organization, the food industry or other parents – draws in the focus on mothers and families. As such, any political interest in children and their eating elicits an interest in women, and contributes to,

as well as gains from feeding anxieties. When mothers become anxious and doubt themselves with regard to feeding their children, it might be easier to control them and exert one's influence over the feeding-eating process. Controlling children's bodies and minds, and shaping the way in which women position and think of themselves, and as mothers care for their children, is a source of power. Feeding anxieties help to produce and exert that power.

Feeding children is not only a matter of domestic consumption, but it is simultaneously a much bigger political issue. It is political because it is about power – power over children and women. It is political because it builds on and exacerbates gender inequality, as well as age inequality. By arguing that we have to look at feeding and eating relationally, I want to put children in the picture. They are too often omitted from academic and non-academic discussions about them. The class politics are also involved in feeding children, as the dominating perspectives on 'good' and 'proper' food are usually dictated by upper middle-class ideals, and the access to food and food information is shaped by people's socio-economic situation. By taking a relational approach to feeding and eating, I also want to demonstrate how many actors influence these practices; how deeply feeding and eating are intertwined with many power struggles and social relationships. This book explores these connections and disconnections between different scales and actors engaged in the feeding-eating relationships, and the tensions between them.

THE FIELD AND METHODS

The encounters I recall in this book took place in Warsaw, Poland's capital, over a period of twelve months in 2012 and 2013. My fieldwork was based on researching different actors engaged in the process of feeding children, and different field sites: families, primary schools, state institutions, food industry, NGOs and media. It was a multi-sited (Marcus 1995, 1998), and relational ethnography, focusing on fields rather than places, boundaries rather than bounded groups, processes rather than people, and cultural conflicts and negotiations rather than group culture (Desmond 2014).

In practice this meant researching different field sites in a period of twelve months, which was at times an organizational challenge. I frequently spent the first part of the day in school, and in the evening spent time with families, or conducted interviews with state or food industry representatives. Sometimes I had two or three meetings in one day, and I had to travel throughout the city, from one end to the other. I also had to switch from one role and mindset to another, for instance from participating in a non-governmental cooking workshop to interviewing food producers. I became tuned into my interlocutors' various voices, refraining from judgements or critiques. My

research was guided by the rhythms of different places, homes and schools, private and public, personal and commercial spaces and actors, their food-ways and food routines. And then there were days and even weeks when seemingly nothing happened and I was anxiously waiting to hear from my interlocutors. My time was not entirely my own, which I guess is the prerequisite of any intensive fieldwork.

A Glimpse into Family Life

I had my first dinner with the Podolscy family on a cold December day. We ate almost immediately after my arrival. I asked if I could help, but was told to sit at the table with the children, 7-year-old Bartek, and his younger sister, 4-year-old Zuzia. Food was already prepared and ready to eat. The table was set up in their living room. Małgosia and Mikołaj, both in their late thirties, were in the kitchen, putting the portions of fried fish on our plates, and then they brought them to the table where I and the children were sitting. I was invited to serve myself, while Małgosia put *surówka* (a salad made from raw vegetables) and boiled potatoes on her children's plates. This was followed by a discussion:

– 'No, I don't want *surówka*, I'm not going to eat it', said Bartek.
– 'Try at least a little bit. I will give you some. How many potatoes do you want?' responded Małgosia.
– 'Fifty spoons, a lot, a lot!'
– 'You won't eat so much, I will give you three, and if you want more, I'll add more.'

We started eating. One more fish was still in the pan, so from time to time Małgosia went to the kitchen to turn it over. Zuzia wanted to change seats, so Małgosia, and later again Mikołaj, switched seats with her. She also complained that she wanted more fish, and more *surówka*, though she still had not eaten what was on her plate. She played with the *surówka* ingredients pretending that they were worms. She put a piece of cabbage under my nose, while asking if I would like to eat a worm. Everyone talked at the same time. Bartek was telling me about his school. At some point he stood up from the table and went to his room to get a book he wanted to show me. His father asked him to get back to the table and sit up straight. After a while Zuzia said that she could not eat anything anymore:

– 'Can I go now? I don't want to eat anymore!'
– 'Eat a little bit more', answered Małgosia.
– 'But I don't want to.'
– 'You have barely eaten anything.'
– 'I can't eat more.'

'Eat a piece of fish and a bit more of *surówka*, and then you can go. You can leave the potatoes', said Małgosia while indicating with a fork on Zuzia's plate what she should eat. Zuzia put all of it in her mouth at once and left the table.

This is a fairly typical example of family meals I joined throughout my fieldwork: events filled with little dramas, expressions of love and discipline, curiosity and playfulness, conviviality and control. I often witnessed such verbal and non-verbal negotiations at family tables. I explore these family dynamics in more detail in Chapter 3.

During my fieldwork in Warsaw I conducted research with fifteen families. I conducted participant observation at their homes, and interviewed children, their mothers and fathers and on a few occasions also their grandparents. I was always very clear that I wanted to do research on/with families, but still everyone assumed that they should put me in touch with mothers – the assumption was that they know the most about feeding children. Indeed, that was usually the case. Nevertheless, it is striking that I gained access to more than twenty families, and except in one case, it always happened through a woman.

Out of the fifteen families participating in my research, I talked to children in fourteen of them, both my research participants aged between 6 and 12 years old, and their younger siblings. I managed to talk to only four fathers. As their wives told me, they either would not have time for an interview, or did not know anything about feeding children and therefore could not contribute anything to my research. Feeding children is certainly considered to be women's expertise, a virtue out of necessity perhaps. As Walczewska (2008) noticed, women in Poland have very limited power in most realms of their lives, but they do indeed have power in the kitchen, and cherish it dearly, sometimes not allowing others access to it.

My conversations with parents were often interrupted: somebody constantly wanted something. Dogs ran around the apartment, wanted to play and needed to be scolded or walked. Children and their friends often wanted to join us and constantly interrupted with diverse questions or arguments. They climbed on their parents, or on me, played with my recorder, looked into my bag, and played with my phone. Their younger siblings needed to be breastfed. Unless the mother or the father was alone in the flat, those initial meetings and interviews never went easily and were always interrupted. Both their attention and mine was always divided, and that was just a glimpse into their everyday lives. This of course made conducting research more difficult, but at the same time provided an insight into their daily experiences, as well as making the interview situation more relaxed and casual.

I worked more closely with three families, spending time together over the period of a few weeks or months. I call them Szymańscy, Podolscy and

Marciniak – their names and surnames, as well as everyone else's, have been pseudonymized. I was introduced to 40-year-old Natalia Szymańska through a colleague of mine. We met for the first time in the cafe next to her work – she worked in public administration. Later on, I joined her, her husband Tomek, who worked in the restaurant business and was also in his early forties, and their two daughters, 9-year-old Julia and 5-year-old Kasia, for many food occasions at their home. I also talked to the grandparents on both sides and to the nanny who took care of Julia and Kasia, and was considered by the family to be the third grandmother.

I was put in touch with Paweł Marciniak, a 43-year-old musician, by a friend. Paweł was separated from his wife Paulina, also a musician in her early forties. They have two children: 11-year-old Adam and 5-year-old Basia. Both parents travelled a lot for work and they shared childcare. I met with them on separate occasions, in their two households, and also met Paweł's girlfriend.

I met 37-year-old Małgosia Podolska through a friend. We met to talk near her work – she worked in a non-governmental organization. After that I arranged a meeting with her husband Mikołaj (aged 38), a photographer. Later, I came to their home for meals, and also talked and drew with their 7-year-old son Bartek and 4-year-old daughter Zuzia – whom you have already met above.

In these three families both mothers and fathers were involved in feeding children, which was a fairly atypical situation for families living in Warsaw, and in itself was a source of some tensions, which I explore more in Chapter 3. I met other families either through schools where I did research, or through acquaintances, and through a snowball technique. In general, my meetings with the families were not as frequent as I would have hoped. I was also hoping to be able to work with the same children at home and school, which in the end worked out only with three children, and to a very limited extent. When starting my research, I had a romanticized idea about what fieldwork and research with families might look like. But I was not able to spontaneously meet with them, walk children to school, or even spend as much time with them as I would have liked. I was not able to join them for shopping excursions. Both the parents and the children had very busy lives, and then someone got ill, travelled or something else came up, and our meetings were much fewer than I had hoped for and anticipated. Nevertheless, we established a sense of familiarity and intimacy, and even friendship. I joined the family foodways, learning about their daily, weekly and monthly rhythms, and power negotiations at the table. I joined them for lazy breakfasts during the weekends, when children were still in their pyjamas, and for dinners during the week. I helped with preparations or setting up the table where we all sat down. Parents set up the rules, which I followed but

children challenged, as Bartek and Zuzia did in the ethnographic vignette above. They often got up from the table to bring something to show me. They have usually negotiated what food was put on their plates, and what they ate in the end. They shared their food with me, while I was trying at the same time to participate and observe. It seemed that everyone talked at the same time. These were joyful and loud research encounters.

'How weird is that?' – commented 11-year-old Adam Marciniak during our first meal together. And truly, it is a weird experience to come to strangers' homes and join them for a meal. Particularly when research is about food, things might become a bit more tense and the research participants become more self-conscious. Although, after the initial intimidation and embarrassment, the atmosphere is always relaxed. Young children are especially helpful in such a situation. Not long after I arrived at the Podolscy home, Zuzia was climbing on my knees, and Julia and Kasia were fighting about who would sit next to me at the dinner table in the Szymańscy home. I always emphasized that they should not prepare anything special and out of the ordinary to eat when I joined them, and I think all of the families accepted that. This relatively relaxed atmosphere during our initial meetings and their acceptance of inviting a researcher to their home was facilitated by the fact that we were more or less from the same social group: not only was I introduced by their friends or acquaintances, but also all three families were educated upper-middle class. If there had been be a larger social difference between us, they might have felt more judged and behaved more out of the ordinary, which was my impression when I visited some of the other families.[5]

Social class is an important issue in the context of politics of parenting, social judgements and health, and certainly, albeit sometimes implicitly, informs people's ideas about how others feed and eat, as well as how one does it oneself. Families participating in my research were diversified in terms of their economic, social, cultural and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu 1984). Some of them were single-parent households, others were divorced, many were nuclear families. Most, though not all, of the parents had higher education, and they worked in diverse fields: from florists, cleaners, truckers and nurses, through accountants, teachers and small business owners, to academics and creative freelancers. They were all in their thirties or forties, lived in flats in different parts of Warsaw or in the outskirts of the city. They stretched throughout the vast spectrum of who constitutes, and who considers themselves, the middle class in Poland,[6] although some of them might be identified as working class, and others as at the high ends of the upper middle class.[7] And even though the Szymańscy, Marciniak and Podolscy families were stereotypically middle class, this book is not about middle-class anxiety per se. I am interested in their practices of feeding and eating

as an expression of personal dispositions (Lahire 2011), rather than class affiliations (Bourdieu 1984; Warde 2015; Domański et al. 2015). The families participating in my research were diverse, but it was a fairly specific group of people who agreed to talk to me about feeding their children, allowed me to talk to their children, and invited me to their homes.

Going Back to School

Besides working with families, I carried out participant observation in three public primary schools in Warsaw, spending from nine to twelve weeks in each of them.[8] At the time of my fieldwork, primary schools in Warsaw had six grades attended by children between the ages of 6 and 12. They were all ethnically homogenous, with few children who were not white, Polish and nominally Catholic attending the schools. To some extent the experiences of doing research in different schools merged into one, although each school was a different social world where I established particular relationships and certain routines.

The first school I researched was situated in a neighbourhood considered one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged. It was one of the poorest districts of Warsaw. The school occupied two buildings located close to each other. Overall, there were 690 students. I gained access to that school through one of my interlocutors' family members who used to work there. I arranged a meeting with the principal during which I explained my research. I was asked to supply an official document with my university's logo, explaining my presence in the school, which the principal displayed in school and shared with parents. Compared to other places (e.g. Kennedy-Macfoy 2013), once I was put in contact with a principal through someone they knew, gaining access to schools in Warsaw was a relatively easy process.

The first day of my research felt as if it was my first day of school. I was not sure how to prepare. In the end I decided to take with me not only a notebook and a pen – attributes of an anthropologist – but also a bottle of water, and I made myself a sandwich. I was not sure what to expect in terms of food. When I arrived on the appointed day I had to wait for a while for the principal who was supposed to show me around, whilst my tension and anxiety grew. A janitor had mistaken me for somebody's child, who has already graduated, but still I could not decide if it was an advantage or a disadvantage that I looked so young. To put it simply: I was terrified. I felt that I had no idea what I was doing. It was loud. Children were running everywhere. There were all these routines and rules, movements around the school which I did not know about, and which with time I learnt to understand. When the principal arrived, she led me to the small room where the food supervisor was working – and that is how I met Mr Bronisław.[9] Mr Bronisław

was a very opinionated man in his sixties. He had been working in this school for two years as a food supervisor.[10] He had held different jobs before, but had no previous experience with food or cooking. He welcomed me in a very friendly way and was always extremely helpful: he invited me to participate in the official announcement of tender results for the food suppliers; he provided me with information about all the necessary laws and regulations related to organizing work in the school canteen; and he was always more than happy to chat with me. I became his protégé of sorts, which sometimes proved problematic when other people in school did not want to discuss him or the canteen freely with me.

I spent most of my time in the canteen, usually observing cooks and children, the line in front, sometimes talking to teachers, and chatting with Mr Bronisław and the cooks. I also helped a couple of times in admitting children to the canteen. Moreover, I walked around the corridors during the breaks, mostly near the vending machine which was based on the ground floor. As the school was based in two buildings, I also spent some time in the other building where children from grades 0 to 3 were taught. There was a separate canteen there, where I observed what was going on, and talked to teachers, children, workers and the owner of the catering company which serviced that canteen, Mr Piotr.

The second school was based in the neighbourhood nearby, but it was considered one of the best schools there. There were 409 students. Natalia Szymańska, one of my main fieldwork brokers and interlocutors, facilitated my access to that school. As with the first school above, I met with the principal to discuss my research and facilitate my entry to the school. When I arrived at that school to start research, the principal walked around the school with me and introduced me to all the teachers, who were already informed about my arrival – unlike in the other school, where for quite a long time people were not sure who I was, looked at me with suspicion and kept asking me if I was evaluating the school, or if I was an intern studying to be a teacher. She also showed me the canteen and introduced me to the main cook, Mrs Krystyna, who in this school also played the role of the food supervisor, and to Mrs Teresa who worked in the school shop. In this school I mostly divided my attention between the canteen and the school shop. Mrs Teresa, in her late sixties, proved to be an especially helpful and friendly interlocutor. We usually chatted whilst the lessons were going on, as during the break it was too busy. I think she was often bored, and found my presence an interesting distraction. Additionally, I helped her with her English assignments – she was taking night courses in order to be able to communicate with her son-in-law. Moreover, I walked around the corridors and also went into classrooms: I visited two classes during the Easter celebrations. I also spent a bit of time in Julia Szymańska's classroom observing

how children eat their *drugie śniadanie* (second breakfast) brought from home. Furthermore, I spent some time in the teachers' room talking informally to teachers.

The third school was situated in a central and relatively wealthy neighbourhood. I contacted the third school through my friend's mother. So once again, I was introduced to the principal by someone familiar, which influenced the way in which I was welcomed. The school had 484 students. On my first day of school the principal introduced me to Mrs Hanna, the food supervisor, in her late thirties, and she introduced me to the cooks. Mrs Hanna was a nutritionist who had recently changed the school canteen into the catering business which she led. She had attended the school as a child and her mother was still one of the cooks. Two of her sons also went to the school at the time of my research. Here I spend most of my time in the canteen, often talking to Mrs Hanna, other cooks or the teachers. I also participated in serving the meals to the pre-school children, which was organized in their classrooms. Additionally, I observed the life around the school shop and talked to Mrs Iwona who worked there. I also participated in the Health Food Picnic organized by the school one Saturday during the school year. Moreover, I conducted interviews with the owners of school shops in the two schools where I did research.

I entered the lives of the schools with both a sense of familiarity and astonishment. My perspective had changed of course since I was a primary school student in Warsaw. I was no longer in that role, however, I was also clearly not in a teacher's role, which was sometimes problematic. People reacted differently to my presence. All three principals were very friendly and helpful, and they introduced me to the food supervisors. Initially, some of the teachers looked at me with suspicion and were convinced that I was evaluating the school in some way – a common situation when doing research in schools (see Messerschmidt 1981; Hume and Mulcock 2004). After a while everyone got used to me and I became a part of school life. When I was ill for a long time – one of the results of doing research in schools and being surrounded by children's germs – and returned after a long break to the first school, people were happy to see me and said they had been worried about where I was. I was often asked how my research was going, though the research itself was understood in different ways and some people could not quite grasp what I was doing. Children especially, though at first suspicious, very quickly got used to my presence, and many of them talked to me and played with me during breaks. Some of them offered me food. All of my interviews in schools, with principals, teachers, food supervisors, cooks and children, were casual conversations. I did not record them, only made field notes during and afterwards. I discuss the school food rhythms in more detail in Chapter 4.

Though my experience in schools was rewarding, it was also very challenging. Talking to children and positioning myself among them was only one of the difficulties. There were many others I did not anticipate, for example being knocked out with balls flying along the corridors, the laughs and inappropriate comments, and overeating in the school canteens because of the large portions I was served.

When spending time in the canteen, I was offered a meal. In some of the canteens, I was invited to eat for free and my attempts to pay for the meals were ignored; in others, I was invited to buy myself meals. I did not expect a full bowl of soup and an enormous second dish around noon, on each of the days I was in the canteen – despite my requests I always received 'an adult portion', that is bigger than the portions given to the children. The cooks sometimes joked that I had to give them back an empty plate, although this was not a joke for me. Of course, the generous portions were a gesture of fondness and acceptance on the part of cooks. I was invited to eat what they had prepared as part of a very significant social interaction with important cultural meanings. My role in that interaction was to eat everything and compliment their cooking. That is what a good guest does, and in this scenario I was a guest. So, of course I complied with what was expected from me. But there was a cost. I was not used to eating so much at lunchtime. My stomach bulged and I overate. I found myself assuming the role of a child: I picked at the food, I tried to hide the uneaten pieces of meat under the potatoes, and I strategically chose the best time to return my plate, so that nobody would see which one was mine, and that I had left some of the meal uneaten, for that would be unacceptable. Of course, I would not be sent back to my seat to finish eating, as the children were. Nevertheless, it would be considered rude if I did not eat everything which was so politely offered to me. After eating so much for lunch, I was not able to eat anything substantial for the rest of the day. My whole daily food pattern changed and needed to be adjusted to canteen foodways. At times, when I was not particularly hungry, when I had special dinner plans, or when something I did not like was being served, I strategically avoided the canteen at certain hours, in the same way that some children did.

Another challenge was the noise at school, and particularly in the canteen. Around sixty people, the maximum that could fit into a canteen at one time, talked and tried to outshout each other, banged cutlery on the plates. Stacks of plates, large pots and bowls filled with forks and knives were moved around in the kitchen by the cooks. And this lasted for a few hours. The din often rose to almost unbearable levels, and then the teachers imposed order by banging on the table, banging a spoon on a plate or – in the case of PE teachers – whistling. These methods were in themselves quite noisy. A secretary from one of the schools told me that she was astonished how I could

sit in that noise for hours. In response I just nodded my head and smiled. I am still not quite sure how I did it.

Venturing Outside of Home and School

The home and school settings were the most important parts of my field-work, and most ethnographic ones, but I also researched other spheres. When studying the state, I started with collecting and analysing documents, laws and regulations concerning children and food, some of which were supplied to me by Mr Bronisław. I visited different state institutions all over the city, and conducted interviews with officials from the Warsaw City Council, the National Food and Nutrition Institute, the Sanitary Inspectorate, and the Ministry of Education. The interviews were semi-structured and recorded, and then transcribed. Talking to nutritionists and administrative officials was sometimes difficult, as I was often scolded for not approaching the issue of children and food in the established, 'proper' and expected way. That is, I was not a nutritionist or dietitian, and I was not interested in the nutritional aspect of feeding children, nor was I knowledgeable about it from their perspective. As a result, some of these meetings were not pleasant. Nonetheless, many others were very interesting, helpful and enjoyable. I met a lot of people who were passionate about their work.

Another part of my fieldwork included studying the food industry. By the food industry, I understand food producers, food marketers and retailers. My focus was mainly on food companies producing sweets, snacks and other children's food. And with regard to food retailers, my main focus was on school shops. I gathered and analysed information about the main companies producing food for children. I also conducted interviews with food producers from a few food companies, and with marketers working in marketing companies for various food industry clients. The interviews were semi-structured, recorded and later transcribed. My interlocutors are pseudonymized – that is what they have asked for – and often the companies they work for are pseudonymized as well. Some of the offices I visited were the most guarded parts of my fieldwork, much more than schools. I often had to go through multiple gates, receive name badges, and talk to the guards before being able to talk to my interlocutors from the food industry. In a way, access to children seemed easier.

I also conducted a series of expert interviews with nutritionists and organizers of food education programmes for children, or other leading food related initiatives directed at parents or children. This included interviewing people working in many non-governmental organizations. These interviews were also semi-structured, recorded and later transcribed. I worked more closely with one of the NGOs, *Szkoła na Widelcu* (School on the Fork). The

founder of this foundation was a cook who proudly assumed the role of the Polish Jamie Oliver. He was a celebrity chef whose aim was to change the ways in which children in Poland eat. I participated as a volunteer in a number of cooking workshops for children organized by that foundation. I also participated in the out of town conference for school principals and food supervisors.

During the twelve months of my fieldwork, I not only had to navigate between different field sites and people, but the boundaries between my personal life and my fieldwork were also often blurred. This is a specific feature of doing 'anthropology at home' (e.g. Narayan 1993; Peirano 1998). For example, there were various expectations from my family and friends which disturbed my fieldwork. I had some duties as a daughter and a granddaughter, and sometimes I had to choose which obligations I would fulfil: those related to being an anthropologist or those ensuing from family ties. When I ate an enormous meal in the school canteen, I was not able to share a meal with my partner later in the evening. When I was invited to eat with families participating in my research, I often missed meals with my own family, especially during weekends. Because of all the sweets I tried as part of my fieldwork, I had more dental problems than ever before. Food was always present in my research, as a topic and as a tool.

Studying different field sites requires a certain split in personality and frequent role switching. I was often a guest in people's homes, but I was also considered a friend. When in school I was perceived as a researcher, as an evaluator, as an intern, as a teacher, and sometimes as a spy. When doing expert interviews, I was usually given the role of the researcher, and sometimes clearly a researcher with a foreign, UK affiliation – which often facilitated my access. Overall, I did more than sixty interviews, not counting many more informal conversations and participation in a multitude of events across the city.

My relational approach to feeding-eating and feeding anxieties mirrors my relational ethnography. I described these different field sites I studied to demonstrate how and where I looked for the politics of children's food, and where I encountered feeding anxieties. I attempted to remain open to all the voices and perspectives I encountered during my fieldwork, and not judge any of them. During conversations with parents, children's food evoked care and love, but also struggle and worry; for school staff, it was also about care, as well as efficiency; state officials were concerned about children, but more often talked about health and regulations; while food producers and marketers talked more about target consumers, access points and benefits. All of these voices and perspectives fill out the pages of this book.

RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

The book is also filled with children's voices and perspectives. My main focus was on children between 6 and 12 years old. At the time of my research, this constituted the age range of primary school children in Poland. This is a group which is considerably understudied (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 177). Even though my research was to a large extent focused on adults, I assumed I could not study the politics of children's food without including children in the research process. My approach builds on childhood studies in recognizing children as independent people, knowledgeable about their own and others' lives (Mayall 1994; James and Prout 1997; James, Jenks and Prout 1998).

While most methodological and ethical matters that arise in work with children are also present in work with adults, there are important differences related to gaining consent and access, reliable methods and power relations (Thomas and O'Kane 1998). Children are similar to adults, but possess different competencies (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 189). Therefore, the most effective way to carry out research with children is to combine traditional, 'adult' research methods, such as interview or participant observation, with the techniques more suitable for children, such as drawing. Such techniques, however, need critical reflection when used (Punch 2002: 332).

The issue of consent is especially problematic during research with children (Alderson and Morrow 2011: 100–22; Maciejewska-Mroczek and Reimann 2016). I was always put in contact with parents who made the decision on behalf of children, often without asking them, although I did witness some of them being asked. There was no other way for me to contact children; for ethical and practical reasons I had to access them through their parents (Hood, Kelley and Mayall 1996: 122–26). When meeting children for the first time, I explained to them again what I was doing and why we were meeting and asked whether they wanted to participate in my research. Not all of them agreed, or they were clearly asked to do it by their parents, and did not actually want to participate, in which case I did not continue the research. I also asked them if I could record our conversations – only one of them refused, which in my opinion was an interesting, empowered expression of his agency. I also talked to children, rather informally, in schools. In schools, I often talked to children in the hallways and rarely in the canteens, which had been my initial plan. In the corridors I was always approached by children, while in the canteen I approached them, and it felt as if I was invading their space and taking over the little free time they had, so I retreated (Punch 2002: 329). I stayed in the role of a distant observer; however, many children came up to me and talked to me. Ania and Wojtek, two 8-year-olds, followed me throughout the school one day, until they found the courage

to approach me during one of the breaks. They were curious about who I was and what I was doing. We ended up chatting often, and they sometimes shared their food with me. Similarly, 11-year-old Gosia, a bit of a loner, developed a habit of chatting with me during breaks.

Interviewing children required the adoption of a flexible approach, so I took into consideration the fact that they might get bored faster and that they may not be able to concentrate for as long as I can (e.g. Gallagher and Gallagher 2008). I tried to be creative and flexible in my approach to each interview. I treated children as interactional partners (Waksler 2012), although I had limited influence over the interview situation, as in the family setting this was usually decided by the parents or was negotiated by the parents and children before my visit. So, I talked to some children on their own, whilst during my conversations with others parents were present or nearby. If I was offered a choice, I explained that I preferred to talk to children without their parents present. This usually allowed them to talk more freely to me, discuss their transgressions or even take sweets and snacks out of hiding, and share them with me.

I used drawings as a method of communicating with younger children and accessing their food worlds (James 2007; Christensen and James 2008; Punch 2002; O'Kane 2008; O'Connell 2013). I asked them to draw their favourite and least favourite foods, the best and worst possible lunchbox they could imagine – this was inspired by Dryden et al. (2009), a typical meal, their associations with food, and to fill out a vignette of a shopping basket. I did not focus on drawings as objects in themselves; rather, I was interested in talking about what is drawn, and why. I always brought papers and crayons with me, which I later left as a gift. I usually included the younger siblings of my research participants in this encounter, as they wanted to be included and to draw as well. All the children were clearly familiar with the practice of drawing. They often brought more paper or other colours of crayons, needed for the specific elements of their drawings. The drawings below illustrate the 'typical meals' that Zuzia and Sylwia drew. They demonstrate the various ways in which the children presented food. We sat in their rooms or in the living rooms, usually on the floor, drawing and talking at the same time, sometimes for hours. The drawing and talking was usually interspersed with running, jumping, bringing different objects to show me, quarrels with younger siblings and admonitions from parents. We also usually ate snacks prepared by mothers. These were intensive, loud and extremely joyful research encounters.

There was, however, a very important difference between doing research with younger and older children. The younger children, 6- to 10-year-olds, usually talked a lot, not necessarily about food, but also about their daily life in what sometimes seemed, from my adult perspective, a completely random

Figure 0.1 Drawing of a typical meal by 11-year-old Zuzia. Published with permission.

Figure 0.2 Drawing of a typical meal by 8-year-old Sylwia. Published with permission.

way. I found it interesting that during the interviews they often asked me many more questions than adults did, and more personal ones too. They asked where I lived, with whom I lived, how big my apartment was, how old I was, what I liked and disliked to eat, etc. They were keen on playing with

the interview situation, and switching the roles. The older children, 11- and 12-year-olds, were more distant (Harden et al. 2000). They answered all of my questions, but some of them did not create any kind of narrative, which most adults and the younger children did in different ways. The older children were much more conscious of the interview situation than the younger ones, probably exacerbated by the fact that I talked to them rather than drew with them. When I asked about food, they often talked about what they have learned in school, about 5-a-day, food pyramids and different nutrients. It was not always the case, but sometimes it did feel as if I was quizzing them, which was certainly not my intention. I dealt with that by repeatedly emphasizing that there were no right and wrong answers, and that I was simply interested in their opinions.

Besides methodology, there are other potentially problematic issues regarding research with children related to ethics and positioning oneself as a researcher (Lewis and Lindsay 2000; Fraser et al. 2004; Alderson and Morrow 2011). One issue is the inequality between me as a researcher and my young interlocutors, derived from generational differences and power relations. This was especially difficult to deal with in schools, where the relations between children and adults were very strictly defined. There were, however, several ways to reduce those differences and facilitate research with children. For example, the fact that I look very young could have worked to my advantage, in the same way as my short stature. Throughout my fieldwork, when working with children I tried to become a 'non-official adult' (Mayall 2008: 113) or take 'the least adult role' (Mandell 1991: 42). I tried not to exercise adult authority over children, and not to take on disciplinary or caring attitudes, especially in schools. I tried to assume a 'friend-like role'. I never broke their trust and did not tell their parents or teachers things told to me in confidence. Still, being like their friend was sometimes a difficult experience, when children laughed at me and teased me, for example about my small speech defect or my height (see Mauthner 1997; Connolly 2008; Corsaro and Molinari 2008). Moreover, it was sometimes challenging to deal with my own assumptions about childhood and children's culture, especially since I was a child in Warsaw years ago. But the fact that I was a child myself does not mean that I can take children's experiences and perspectives for granted (Fine and Sandstrom 1988: 35). This experience taught me that doing research with children makes it possible not only to learn more about their social worlds, but also to better understand the worlds of adults. Children indeed are important and knowledgeable actors of social life.

OUTLINE

The rest of the book takes the reader on a journey through different sources, sites and scenes of feeding anxieties. Each chapter focuses on a different field and social actors – the family, the school, the state and the food industry – the contradictions and tensions of each field, their own feeding anxieties and connections between them. This way of organizing the book should make it easier for readers interested in one specific realm of the politics of children's food, although the chapters are intimately connected with each other. Together they paint a more comprehensive picture of feeding anxieties than each chapter alone could do, as the power struggles and negotiations between these different actors constitute the politics of children's food.

Chapter 1 begins the careful analysis of feeding anxieties by pointing to the connections and tensions between citizenship and consumerism. By analysing the post-socialist and neoliberal changes that took place in Poland since 1980s, I demonstrate how the shifting ideas about citizenship and consumerism, and expectations put on consumers and citizens, created the politics of children's food. I study what kinds of meanings have been attached to the changing conceptions of childhood, motherhood, parenting and food in Poland, and how these shape people's everyday lives. I delve into what constitutes 'good' food and feeding, and what informs these normative and moralized assumptions.

Chapter 2 studies the food industry and the processes of making and becoming young consumers. It unveils how the food industry, starting in the 1990s, created the family as a new consumption unit and invented children's food, and how it affects multiple feeding-eating relationships. The chapter analyses different feeding anxieties that the food industry experiences, and how it adds to and shapes the anxieties about children's food of other actors, be it families or the state. By focusing on shopping practices, particularly in school shops, the chapter discusses children's and parents' engagement with consumer cultures, and the diverse tensions and negotiations that stem from that.

In Chapter 3 the focus moves to the family. The chapter studies different expectations about and ideals of family meals, and the realities of such encounters. It discusses how feeding and eating is organized, contested, celebrated and negotiated in the daily lives of parents and children in Warsaw. The chapter analyses the intergenerational power struggles, verbal and non-verbal negotiations and tensions between and among parents, children and grandparents. It focuses on the gendered and intergenerational physical, mental and emotional foodwork within the domestic sphere, and points to the intermingled relations of care, love, control and discipline that

characterize family food experiences. It analyses how families in Warsaw deal with and reproduce feeding anxieties.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus from home and family to schools. It delves into multiple anxieties around school food which entangle the local and national state institutions and officials, parents and children, non-governmental workers, and school staff. The chapter unveils the food rhythms of schools in Warsaw, to discuss how adults at home and school negotiate how to feed children through lunchboxes with *drugie śniadanie* brought from home, and meals served in school canteens. It also demonstrates how children adapt to, affirm, resist and negotiate the many attempts at feeding them with their own eating and non-eating practices, and how for them food in schools is mainly about sociality with their peers. By ethnographically focusing on home and school, these two chapters show how intense the politics of children's food gets and how it affects people's lives on a daily basis.

Chapter 5 is about the state's anxieties with regard to children's food, their varied sources, including international guidelines and expectations, and the multiple attempts at dealing with them. The chapter studies the dietary politics of nutritional norms and food education programmes, and why drawing food pyramids is a contested issue. It shows why and how the state attempts to raise healthy citizens, who are supposed to be educated consumers making 'proper' individual choices, and what that means for children, parents and school staff.

The conclusion revisits the main themes of the book and makes connections between the chapters. It unveils the politics of children's food, the logic of feeding anxieties and their multiple sources. It reflects on how is it that something as social as food becomes so alienating when it takes the form of feeding anxieties.

In this book, I try to give as much space as I can to my interlocutors: children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, teachers, principals, cooks, school food supervisors, school shop sellers and owners, food marketers and producers, state officials and civil servants, and nongovernmental workers. It is their time, their experiences and emotions, their devotion and their willingness to share all of that with me that created this book. They accompanied me on this journey over the years, even long after I actually met them for the first time.

NOTES

Some of the analysis featured in this chapter was initially introduced in my previously published work (Boni 2018a), but it has been substantially reworked and developed.

1. I was conducting interviews about the intergenerational changes in food practices in

post-socialist Poland for my MA thesis, defended later that year in the Department of Sociology, University of Warsaw.

2. There is a lot of anxiety and debate around breastfeeding and feeding infants. A rich body of research uncovers the changing cultural and social norms that guide the politics of breastfeeding (see e.g. Zdrojewska-Żywiecka 2012; Faircloth 2013; Cassidy and El Tom 2015; Van Esterik and O'Connor 2017). But this book focuses on older children, aged between 6 and 12 years old.

3. I build here on practice theory; see Bourdieu (1977, 1990); de Certeau (1984); Ortner (1984, 2006); Reckwitz (2002); Lahire (2011); Warde (2015).

4. Although the situation might be different when considering people fed through tubes for instance (see e.g. Mol 2011; Rajtar 2017).

5. This is not to say that such research could not, or should not be conducted; on the contrary, see e.g. Bowen, Brenton and Elliott 2019.

6. The class consciousness is limited in Poland, though, therefore I use it rather as an etic concept (see Gdula and Sadura 2012).

7. The working class includes blue-collar workers and most of the farm owners, whereas the upper class consists mainly of wealthy businessmen. The middle class is hugely diversified which often makes it hard to define, so it is often characterized as a social category which is still in the process of formation in Poland after the historical turbulences of two world wars, the socialist system and the post-socialist transformations. From the occupational perspective, it consists of doctors, lawyers, marketing experts, journalists, artists, teachers, and people working in administrative roles etc. (Domański et al. 2007).

8. There are three types of schools in Poland: public, which are free of charge; private which are usually very expensive; and schools which are owned by an educational trust and in terms of tuition expenses can be placed in between. Usually, children from one area would go to the nearest public school, but this system is often challenged and worked around. In 2014, there were 311 primary schools in Warsaw, 217 of which were public schools (Biuro Edukacji, 2014a, 2014b). The private schools are usually much smaller. I decided to focus only on public schools; however, some of the children I interviewed attended private schools, so I did also study them indirectly.

9. In Poland, there is a specific way of addressing people more formally but when you are already familiar with them, which includes combining the prefix Mr/Mrs with their first name. That is how I addressed my interlocutors in schools and state institutions, and how I was addressed by them.

10. Another term used for this position is *intendentka*, used in the feminine form since mostly women hold these positions. The food supervisor is responsible for planning the meals in school, organizing the tenders for suppliers, organizing the deliveries, accepting payments for the meals and overseeing the cooks and the canteen. The term I use, food supervisor, is not a direct translation of the Polish term *kierownik żywienia*. The latter relates to the socialist terminology used when these positions were first created. Elisabeth Dunn has discussed at length the fascinating differences and the juxtaposition between *kierownik* and manager introduced in Poland in the 1990s, in relation to constructing new persons and new sort of employees under capitalism (2004: 69–75). I have decided to use the term which avoids this symbolic juxtaposition, and which sounds more familiar to the English-speaking audience.