Albanians in Albania and Italy: Neophobia and food consumption attitudes

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Abstract

As the title suggests, this work is aimed at analyzing food-related neophobia in terms of migration. We will try to explain if cultural differences of migration groups have an impact even in food choices; if, by living in a foreign country, amid other culinary attitudes, people become more open to the new recipes (less neophobic) of the hosting culture, or remain attached to the culinary attitudes of their original country (more neophobic).
Current research studies to scientific literature have never considered food neophobia in terms of migration experience. That is why we were induced to carry out this research. The research was conducted on a non-representative sample of 200 individuals, 100 Albanians residing in Italy and 100 Albanians residing in Albania (answering rate 100%). The first goal is to find out if there is a relation between food neophobia and general neophobia (fear from unknown people and places). So, to high levels of general neophobia (fear from new situations and unknown people) of participants even high levels of food neophobia (fear to try new recipes) should correspond, and vice versa. The second goal is to measure food neophobia differences between Albanians with migration experience (currently residing in Italy) and Albanians with no migration experience (currently residing in Albania).

Keywords: food neophobia, general neophobia, migration, food neophobia scale.

Introduction

The research is based in two main goals, each of which involves different experimental hypothesis. The first goal is to understand whether food neophobia and general neophobia (fear from new situations and unknown people) are correlated. To express such goal we relied on the research of *Pliner* and *Hobden* (1992) alleging a positive correlation between food neophobia and general neophobia.
The second goal of the research is to compare the degree of food neophobia in Albanians residing in Albania with that of Albanian immigrants in Italy.
The first hypothesis is that food neophobia and general neophobia are positively correlated to each other. Thus, to high levels of general neophobia (fear from new situations and unknown people) participants should also correspond high levels of food neophobia (fear from trying new foods) and vice versa.
As regards the results of the second goal, we have considered two opposite hypotheses.

- H2: The Albanians living in Italy should be more likely to try new foods (i.e. less neophobic). This is because, by living in another country, they are in contact with another culture, which gives them the opportunity to make new experiences, including that of trying new food experiences.
- H3. Albanian immigrants in Italy, compared to the sample of Albanians living in Albania, should show greater neophobia toward food, because, by living in Italy, they experience a greater need to express their ethnic identity, even through food

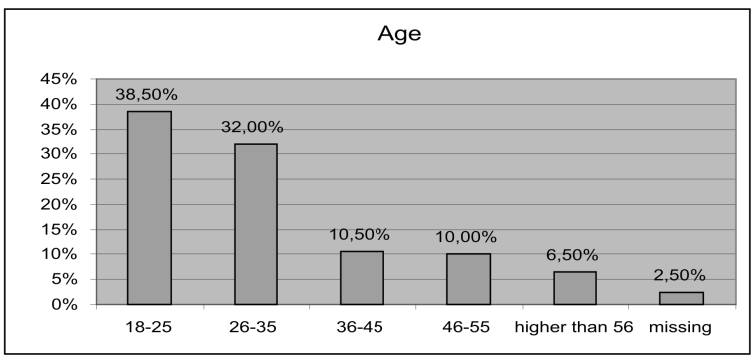
practices. That is why Albanians in Italy would not be likely to try new foods, but would increase the consumption of ethnic foods.

The procedure

The survey took place between 10 August and 10 October 2006. The participants were selected from two different populations located in two different countries. These are two convenient samples, the first sample extracted from the Albanian population living in Albania, the second from the Albanian population living in Italy.
The researcher has personally met with the participants of the first sample (between 10 and 30 August) who have been recruited in the city of Vlora (one of the largest cities in Albania). A questionnaire was given to each participant, who filled it on the spot. In order to diversify the sample (by age, by gender, by occupation and by level of education) we tried to select groups of people in different places such as at bars, hospitals, schools, among their relatives, in the neighborhood, at the hairdresser, etc. We explained the questionnaire to all participants describing what it was and clarifying any doubts.
Regarding the second sample, participants were recruited in the city of Reggio Emilia. It was not possible to respond to all questionnaires on the spot. This is because it was difficult to identify the participants, as they were Albanians living in an Italian town. The researcher was aided by a group of friends and relatives. The questionnaire was shown to this group of people (10), who was then engaged in handling it to the participants (who, in turn, filled it) between September 10 and October 10.

Participants

The research was attended voluntarily by 200 people, 100 adult Albanians living in Albania (in the city of Vlora) and 100 adult Albanians living in Italy (in the city of Reggio Emilia). The answering rate was 100%: 103 men and 97 women aged between 18 and 71 years (M = 31.90; SD = 11.82) completed the questionnaire.
For the purpose of analysis, we have classified the participants into five age classes: the first class includes 77 participants from 18 to 25 years (38.5%), the second class includes 64 participants from 26 to 35 years (32.0%), the third class includes 21 participants from 36 to 45 years (10.5%), the fourth class includes 20 participants from 46 to 55 years (10.0%) and the last class includes 13 participants from 56 years onwards (6,5%). 5 participants (2.5%) did not respond to (missing) the age-related question (graph 1).



Graph 1

As for the last qualification obtained, 101 individuals are high school graduates (50.5%), 72 individuals are bachelor graduates (36.0%), 23 are in possession of middle school certificate (11.5%), 1 (0.5 %) of primary school certificate and 3 (1.5%) reported having a second bachelor degree.
Regarding the occupation, the question of the questionnaire is open ended. Following an analysis of the answers, the occupation has been grouped into six categories: housewife; unemployed; employee; professional; traders or merchants; other. So, 56 participants (28.0%) were classified as professionals, 32 (16.0%) as employees, 32 (16.0%) as traders or merchants, 16 (8.0%) as housewives, 3(1.5%) as unemployed and 58 (29.0%) as others (students, freelance professionals, retired, caregiver, etc.). 3 participants (1.5%) did not respond (missing) the question for the last qualification obtained.

Tool

The survey tool used is a self-compiled questionnaire. There are actually two questionnaires with slightly different content: one addressed to the participants residing in Albania and the other addressed to the participants residing in Italy.
Since the participants asked to fill out the questionnaire are of Albanian origin it was necessary to translate the questionnaire from Italian to Albanian. To make sure that the translation was as accurate as possible we followed the Brislin method (1970), which consists in translating and re-translating the questionnaire. Three individuals participated in the translation process.
The researcher and a citizen of Albanian origin, graduated with the University of Parma, where she lives since seven years, have translated the questionnaire separately from Italian to Albanian. Then, another citizen of Albanian origin (who lives in Italy since 10 years), with quite good knowledge of Italian language, retranslated both questionnaires from Albanian to Italian language. The researcher compared the questionnaires, which showed small differences, and chose that version, which most resembled the original Italian retranslated questionnaire.
The first section of the questionnaire is divided into two parts. In the first part 10 *items* of the Food Neophobia Scale are listed (*Food Neophobia Scale, FNS*; Pliner and Hobden, 1992), which are standardized in almost all research works conducted on neophobia. The number of such *items* changes from one research to another depending on the context in which they are employed. The Food Neophobia Scale we have employed in this research helps us to measure the degree of food neophobia in Albanians of Albania and Italy. For each *item,* participants must indicate their position in a Likert type 5-point scale where '1' corresponds to the extreme negative and '5' corresponds to the extreme positive. Each point is marked with a label: '1' strongly disagree; '2' slightly agree; '3' neither agree nor disagree; '4' somewhat agree; '5' completely agree. Whereas the original questionnaire (Pliner and Hobden, 1992) is based on 7-points scale, but to simplify the answering task, we preferred to reduce it to a 5-points scale.
As we pointed out in the second paragraph, Pliner and Hobden (1992) found that there is a positive correlation between food neophobia and general neophobia. Accordingly, the concept of food neophobia can be studied in connection with general neophobia. So as to test the first hypothesis of the research, we have included the **general neophobia**

scale. In the second part of the first section 8 *items* are listed to measure the degree of general neophobia. The information collected from such questions serves to find out if food neophobia is positively correlated with the degree of general neophobia, as some researchers argue (Pliner and Hobden, 1992). Here, too, participants must indicate their position in a Likert type 5-points scale (labeled as above).
The second section is intended to collect socio-demographic information. The first two questions reveal the age (open ended) and gender (dichotomous). The third question refers to the last qualification obtained, to select among: primary school certificate; middle school certificate; high school diploma; bachelor degree; other. The fourth and last question concerns the occupation and it is open ended.

Results

General Neophobia

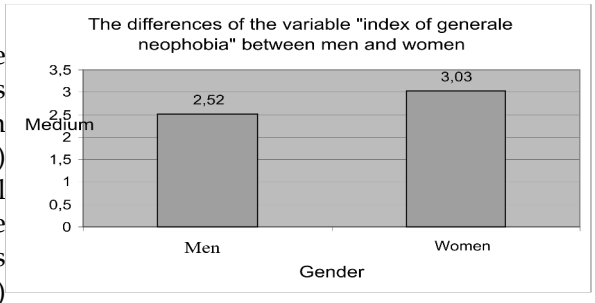
We have calculated an index of general neophobia, which consists of the average of the answers to the 8 items of the scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.66). The average of this index, for the entire sample, is M = 2.76 (SD = 0.93, range = 1-5): This shows that general neophobia is not particularly high among participants. Averages and standard deviations of the individual items are shown in Table. 1

Table 1. Averages and standard deviations of general neophobia scale *items.*

Nr	*Item*	Average	Deviation
1	I feel uncomfortable in unusual situations	2.98	1.35
2	Every time I'm away from home, I want to go back to my family	3.55	1.42
3	I am afraid of the unknown	2.55	1.33
4	I am very uncomfortable in new situations	2.59	1.24
5	Whenever I'm on vacation I look forward to go home	2.61	1.54
6	When I'm at a party I do not talk to unknown people	2.46	1.31
7	I feel uncomfortable in unknown places	2.69	1.92
8	I don't like to sit next to someone I don't know	2.67	1.43

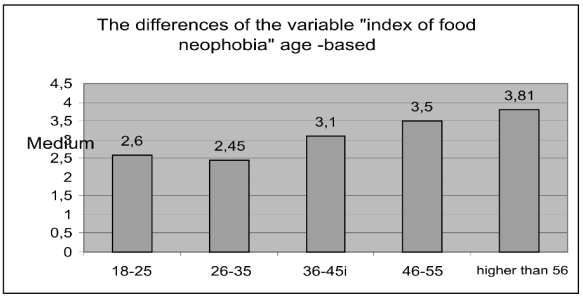
The analysis to the variance showed that women in our sample (M = 3.03; SD = 0.95) reached a higher level of general neophobia compared to men (M = 2.52; SD = 0.85), F (1,198) = 16:24, p <.05 (see graph 2). This suggests that women are more afraid of new situations and unknown people.

Graph 2

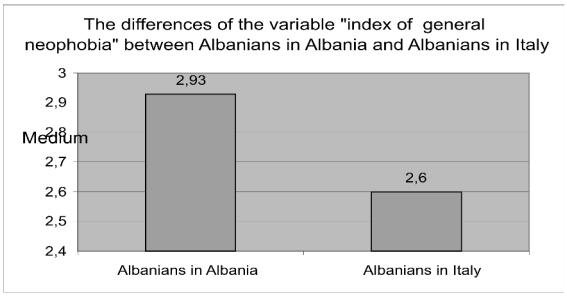


As regards the age-based difference of general neophobia, an analysis to the variance shows that such difference is significant, F (4,190) = 12.76, p <.05 (graph 10). General neophobia decreases when we move from the age group of 18-25 years old individuals (M = 2.60; SD = 0.86) to the age group of 26-35 years old individuals (M = 2.45; SD = 0.84), then it increases up to the age group of 56 years and older (M = 3.81; SD = 0.74).

Graph 3



As regards the difference in the level of general neophobia between Albanians residing in Albania and Albanians residing in Italy, an analysis to the variance shows that Albanians of Albania (M = 2.93; SD = 0.97) are more neophobic than Albanians of Italy (M = 2.60; SD = 0.87, F (1,198) = 6.51, p <.05 (graph 4).



Graph 4

Food Neophobia

Food neophobia scale is intended to measure the participants' reluctance to try new foods. To build a food neophobia index, we inverted the answers of the negative *items* (item 1, 4, 6, 9, 10) and we calculated the average of all scale *items*, with the exception of *item* 5 ("ethnic food seems weird"), which has been removed to improve the index internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.66). The average index of food neophobia, for the entire sample, is M = 2.45 (SD = 0.64).

Averages and standard deviations of the individual items are shown in table 2.

The table shows that item 9 ("I eat almost everything") has the highest average (M = 3.00; SD = 1.30). Instead, the lowest average (M = 2.12; SD = 9.1) is obtained for item 2 ("I do not trust new food").

An analysis to the variance shows that women (M = 2.56; SD = 0.66) reach a higher level of food neophobia compared to men (M = 2.35; SD 0.59), F (1,198) = 5.93, p <. 05. That is, women tend to reject new foods more than men do. (graph 5).

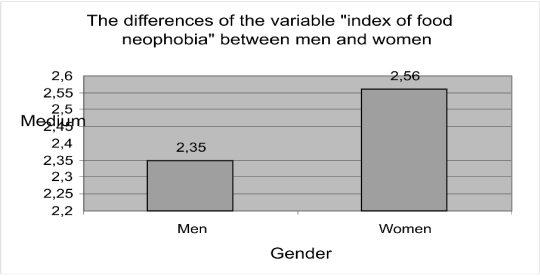
Table 2. Averages and deviations for each item of the variable "food neophobia".

Nr	*Item*	Average	Deviation
1	I always taste new and different food (I)	2.40	1.19
2	I do not trust new food	2.12	1.09
3	If I don't know what's in a dish, I don't try it at all	2.78	1.47
4	I like food of different countries (I)	2.50	1.15
5	Ethnic food seems wierd	2.50	1.20
6	During the holidays, I would be willing to try new foods (I)	2.30	1,14
7	I'm afraid of eating food I've never tried before	2.36	1.28

8	As to what I eat, I consider myself a difficult person	2.34	1.22
9	I eat almost everything (I)	3.00	1.30
10	I like to try new ethnic restaurants (I)	2.24	1.17

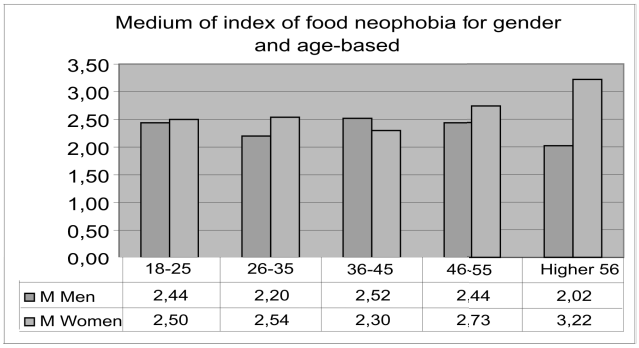
Inverted items have been marked with (I)

Grafph 5



No significant differences depending on the age of the participants are observed; however it emerges a significant interaction between gender and age group, $F(4) = 3.26$, $p < .05$. As you can see from graph 6, from 18 to 35 years old, the level of food neophobia appears to decrease for men and slightly increase for women; on the other hand, from 36 to 45 years old it appears to increase for men and decrease for women, and then fall again for the first and increase in a fairly consistent for the latter.

Graph 6



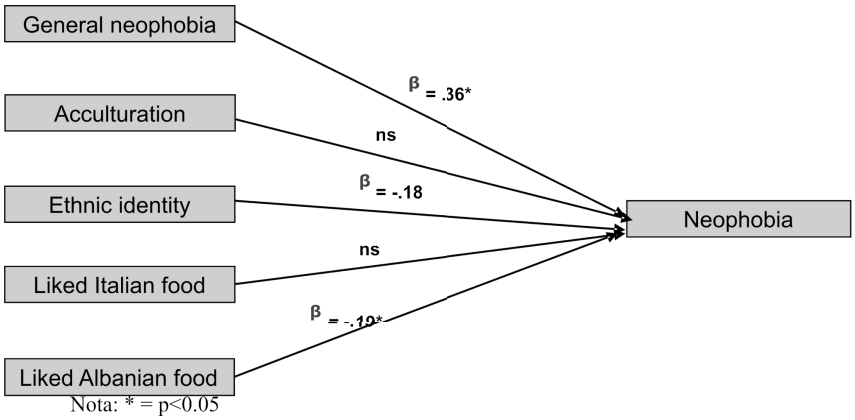
The difference between the degree of food neophobia in Albanians of Albania and Albanians of Italy is not statistically significant. Therefore, none of the two opposing hypothesis is confirmed by the obtained data.

Hierarchical regression

Following that there is no significant difference (in terms of food neophobia) between Albanians of Albania and Albanians of Italy, we analyze food neophobia of Albanians residing in Italy in connection with any other factors: socio-demographic and psychosocial ones. Accordingly, we conducted a hierarchical regression in two phases.

In the first phase we have included socio-demographic variables (gender, education, occupation, age) to understand if they are predictors of food neophobia. These variables were transformed into *dummy* so as to not necessarily assume linear relationships. It turned out that socio-demographic variables do not significantly

affect food neophobia, $R^2 = 0.13$, $F < 1$ (ns).
In the second phase, we have included psychosocial factors, to understand if any psychosocial variable (general neophobia, acculturation, ethnic identity, liked Italian food, liked Albanian food) affects food neophobia (figure 1).



Nota: * = p<0.05
Figure 1. The second phase of hierarchical regression.

The data show that such model explains a significant portion of food neophobia, $R^2 = 0.41$, $F(5,98) = 5.86$, $p < 0.05$. If we analyze the coefficients of each psychosocial variable, it turns out that general neophobia positively predicts (beta = 0.36) food neophobia, $p < .05$. The variable "liked Albanian foods" (beta = -0.19), $p < 0.05$ significantly predicts food neophobia, and potentially even ethnic identity (beta = -0.18).

Discussion and Conclusions

This research focused on three hypotheses. An analysis to the obtained data shows that the first hypothesis (according to which, general neophobia is positively correlated with food neophobia) is confirmed by the results. Thus, participants, who are generally afraid of new situations and unknown people, are also afraid of trying new food. All this is in line with the results of research conducted by Pliner and Hobden (1992).
As regards the second and third hypotheses, which oppose to each other, it has been deduced that: although Albanians of Albania are more neophobic than Albanians of Italy, such difference is not statistically significant in general. However, the difference between Albanians residing in Albania (M = 3.54; SD = 1.23) and Albanians residing in Italy (M = 3.90; SD = 1.3) is significant with regard to *item* ("I like foods of different countries"), $F(1,198) = 6.24$, $p < .05$.
From an analysis to the obtained data, we also see that women are more neophobic than men regarding both food and general neophobia. Such findings confirm the

results obtained by some researches (Frank and Van der Klaauw, 1994; Alley and Burroughs, 1991) according to which, men tend to seek new and unusual food more than women do.

However, it must be said that this research study is somewhat restricted. The scales we employed in this research (of food and general neophobia) were built *ex-novo* for the research conducted in Italy, and perhaps they need to be tested for validity and reliability. Nevertheless, we have no evidence to suggest that the concepts were not understood. On the other hand, we can say that our sample is not representative either of the Albanian population or of the Albanians in Italy. This means that we can not generalize our findings for the entire Albanian population.

Contrary to what we have hypothesized, the data show that food neophobia is negatively correlated with Albanian food liking; more Albanian food is liked, lower is neophobia. This counter-intuitive result can be a starting point for further research studies.

The last two hypotheses, although not confirmed by the results, are not to be discarded. This research is the first work that tries to study the phenomenon of food neophobia in terms of immigration. So as to better analyze food neophobia in immigrant populations, subsequent surveys should test such hypotheses in less adjacent cultures than Albanian and Italian culture.

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