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Jidisze Mame. Two Biographies of Polish Jewish Women

Abstract:

The article presents the biographies of representatives of the third post-war generation of Polish Jews. It attempts at reconstructing the experiences of becoming a religious Jew, choosing a Jewish path in adolescence where there is no or incomplete transmission of intergenerational cultural heritage in the family of origin. The two women's biographies were analysed in terms of independent acquisition of cultural (religious) knowledge and the possibilities and limitations of Jewish education in our country. The research was carried out based on the biographical method and unstructured/in-depth interviews (2018–2022). Exemplifications in the form of the two biographies serve to distinguish the stages of “becoming a religious Jew and mother” in the “found generation”, to show individual biographical events and common biographical sequences (mostly educational and parental).

Keywords:

motherhood, *Jidisze Mame*, Jewish upbringing, biography, generations

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INTRODUCTION

In the Jewish community living in Poland, there is a revival of religious practices, as an increasing number of people participate in religious services, including young people who “learn Hebrew, undergo conversion, and try to implement the principles of Judaism on a daily basis” (Banasiewicz-Ossowska, 2015, p. 187). The activities of the Ronald Lauder Foundation, which in the 1990s dealt with the renewal of Jewish community life, as well as the 1997 Act on the Relationship of the State to Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland, which gave financial independence to the communities and increased authority of the Union of Communities, were greatly important for developing the Jewish minority in this aspect (Datner, 2012). Currently, apart from the Orthodox communities, there are also other religious organisations: Beit Polin (progressive Judaism) and Chabad-Lubowicz (Hasidim). All of them organise religious education for children and young people. However, there is still a lack of formal Jewish school education (there are only two schools in Warsaw and Wrocław), as well as higher level religious education. Therefore, for some Jews, it is necessary to emigrate, especially to Israel, so that they can continue their education and live fully under Jewish law (Hebrew: *Halacha*).

In this article, I describe two biographies of persons from the third post-war generation of Polish Jews. I try to reconstruct the experiences related to choosing the Jewish path in adolescence, becoming a religious Jew, with no (or little) transmission of intergenerational cultural heritage in the family of origin. The following two biographies combine Israeli educational paths, intensive acquisition of cultural (religious) knowledge, and encountering limitations in developing religious identity. Moreover, an important part of the interviews was the subject of becoming a Jewish mother and the related home religious practices and forms of passing on the heritage to the younger generation.

Cultural knowledge, apart from the theoretical aspects, has a practical dimension, resulting from the participation of the individual in cultural practices. There are two ways of transferring knowledge: passive – when specific actions of the subject are mediated and reproduced only by knowledge (often “automatically” inherited), and active – when the subject’s actions result from an efficient transformation of knowledge to adapt it to the context of the recipients and re-actualise it (Herman, 2019). In the family homes of the third generation of Jews, Jewish holidays were not usually celebrated, and knowledge about Judaism was not even passed on in a passive way. Therefore, learning a new religious identity was based on the individual introduction of particular elements of the Jewish

tradition (e.g., not eating pork, separating meat from dairy, lighting candles on the Sabbath), gradually expanding them by gaining knowledge during meetings in the community, trips to Israel, or during Jewish colonies (Banasiewicz-Ossowska, 2016). Importantly, the narrators, as adult women, try to pass on to their children the knowledge of Jewish culture and religion and to lead a religious lifestyle with their husbands, actively introducing the next generation to the world of Judaism, while introducing individual adaptations of some of the rules.

1. *JIDISZE MAME*, GUARDIAN OF RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

According to tradition, the Jewish home is the most important place where religious ritual is concentrated. All Jewish holidays are full of domestic rituals, and the Sabbath is centred around family meals. The home was the kingdom of women, as the husband was mostly at work or, more often, in the synagogue for worship, or *Torah* study (Uterman, 1989). In a Jewish family, it was the woman who taught the children the principles of religious life, took care of the whole family, and carried out religious recommendations regarding housekeeping. The man had to pray at a certain time three times a day, and the caretaker of the home could be prevented from caring for the children. Therefore, she was exempted from the positive commandments. Bella Szwarzman-Czarnota (2006) explains that in social practice, exemption from certain duties has come to be understood as a prohibition, as has been the case with *Torah* study.

A Jewish mother was obliged to pass on the basic principles of faith, cultivate traditions and celebrate religious holidays at home. She prayed the *Mode ani* morning prayer with her children and encouraged her sons to study *Torah*. “A woman’s role is to support her husband and sons in their religious studies, as expressed in the obligation to pray while lighting the Sabbath lights so that God will help the woman’s children become *Torah* scholars” (Keller, 2021, p. 30). She should have given care and love to her offspring, but gradually increased her demands, combining love and severity. After early childhood, the father took over the educational responsibilities, particularly the responsibility for the spiritual education of the sons (Kugelman, 1990).

Most of the 613 commandments are binding on both sexes, especially the Sabbath observance, kosher laws, and the prohibition of idolatry. However, in the sphere of domestic life, *Jidisze Mame* had three distinct main duties (Heb. *mitzvots*): lighting Shabbat candles *hadlaka*, separating a portion of Shabbat *challah* (a reference to the offerings made in the Temple of Jerusalem), and taking care

of marital chastity so that intercourse does not take place during the time called *nidda* (the period that includes menstruation and a few days after it) (Szwarcman-Czarnota, 2017). Running an exemplary Jewish home, she had to take care of kosher, i.e., follow the rules of nutrition established based on *Torah*. Involving children in the care of “house cleanliness” and observance of kosher is the most important way to learn moral discipline (Kameraz-Kos, 2001).

Life in a religious Jewish family was based on a permanent division of social roles. Everyday life was governed by religious regulations: from birth through wedding to death, ritual sanctified every important moment of Jewish family life” (Renzl, 1992, p. 108). The burden of household chores fell on the woman. In the pre-war shtetl, the myth of *Jidisze Mame* was perpetuated, the stereotype of strong, domineering women in control of family matters. The guardian of *Yiddishkayt* (Jewishness) was responsible for the upbringing of Israel’s faithful sons and daughters (Lisek, 2010). It symbolised the minority’s ability to survive religiously, and was idealised as a custodian of cultural identity in a hostile environment. She gave her children moral and ethical guidance, ran the household, and regulated finances. She was busy, bore the main burden of support, and enabled her husband to devote himself to the study and incessant discussion of Talmudic content (Herweg, 1995). The woman was burdened with too many responsibilities, her daily activities included preparing meals, taking care of the children, supporting her husband and the whole family, running an exemplary Jewish home observing the principles of kashrut, educating children up to the age of five, taking care of the household, and making various necessary household items on her own (Borzymińska, 2004). This multiplicity meant that in practice, the Jewish family was governed by a duumvirate, i.e., two-person rule. Jewish men used to call their wives – *do you hear?* (Heb *hersdu?*), inviting them to participate in all events and making them feel that they really matter in the family (Petrovsky-Shtern, 2014).

In contemporary Western Jewish diasporas, the *Jidisze Mame* try to combine the requirements of tradition with modernity, especially their own careers with raising children. They are also among the most educated women (in the United States, for example, 85% of religious Jewish women have graduated from college). As a consequence, the division of roles and tasks in the family, and therefore also parental duties, changes, even in Orthodox environments. Women face numerous normative dilemmas (e.g., different social expectations, overload of responsibilities, finding the right amount of time for the family, reconciling professional life with the Jewish calendar) (Geffen, 1994).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The designed research consists of 15 in-depth interviews with people of Jewish origin with preschool and school children, and is placed in an interpretative paradigm. Their implementation was carried out using the biographical method. Between 2018 and 2022, I collected life stories grouped around common themes (e.g., transmission of cultural content in the family of origin, transmission of Jewish cultural/religious heritage in my own family) and performed a comparative analysis of life stories (Włodarek & Ziółkowski, 1990). The main research questions in my project were:

1. What is the process of becoming Jewish and building a socio-cultural identity in the third generation after the Holocaust?
2. What does the transmission of cultural heritage look like in the family of origin and in the families formed by the “found generation”?

In the course of the analysis of the collected material, I identified three main thematic fields:

- 1) stages of building Jewish identity (motivations, acquisition of new socio-cultural identity and cultural knowledge, obstacles and limitations, including institutional/educational aspects);
- 2) the experience of becoming a secular/religious Jew (and then a Jewish parent);
- 3) the transmission of Jewish traditions in the family of origin and one’s own (contents, mechanisms, and transmitters of tradition, patterns of family life, consequences of the lack of intergenerational transmission).

The statements were transcribed, coded, and categorised. The collected material was grouped in tables with categories and their properties (Gibbs, 2011). In this article, I focus on the biographies of two religious women, representatives of the third post-war generation of Polish Jews, who built their family life based on the model of ethnic upbringing, in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism.

3. TOWARDS RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC UPBRINGING

The interviews show that becoming a religious Jew in this generation is associated with several biographical breakthroughs – an unexpected discovery of one’s ancestry or an individual search for one’s roots based on the family memory of one’s grandparents, withdrawal from Catholicism, first steps in the Jewish community and synagogue, mystical experiences during the Shabbat service, and then

– engaged religious education, conversion and “observing” Jewish life models in Israel. A change of religion means a transformation of one’s entire life, the introduction of new rules (a more modest appearance in a woman, a kosher diet, a new religious name, a weekly routine ordered to the Sabbath). The biographical metamorphosis in the third generation requires the “kosher of one’s own life”, the introduction of the rules of the traditional Jewish home, the obligation to observe the weekly Sabbath in one’s own family, as well as the permanent maintenance of faithfulness to religious orders and prohibitions in the broader social environment (school, professional, and social).

The biographies of the men who built their religious identification also fit into this trajectory. Becoming a religious Jew in the dominant type of biographies collected is evident, among others, in Isaac, who learned about his ancestry while growing up. His family had distant Jewish roots on his grandfather’s side, and his educational paths begin with self-education, and his religious identity is strengthened through active participation in non-formal education organised by the R. Lauder Foundation. It was also necessary for him to find personal religious role models and complete his search – to be educated in an Israeli yeshiva. The decision to return to Poland and build a Jewish family was related to the mission of renewing Jewish life. A less typical biographical situation is the fate of Aaron, for whom the following biographical moments are important: his formal education at the Lauder Foundation school, his mother’s activity in intergenerational transmission, and his later education in a foreign yeshiva. In contrast to Isaac, the educational stay turned into a permanent emigration. What both biographies have in common is active learning and reflective becoming a religious Jew. The motivations are also similar – a return to the roots and traditions of the ancestors and a fascination with Judaism in its orthodox version. In both biographies, we are dealing with a ultimately positive solution to the search for identity. However, the educational experiences and family memory are different, and the narrators’ final decisions regarding their return to the country of birth and the choice of the educational environment for their children are different (Cukras-Stelągowska, 2022).

Becoming a Jewish parent looks different in the second model of modern family life – in mixed marriages. The study participants, most often brought up in homes without Jewish traditions, developed their Jewish identity (usually non-religious) in a youth/student peer group and through participation in education (usually informal). Those who are in relationships with Catholics feel an inner necessity and responsibility to maintain the Jewish intergenerational transmission in Poland. At the same time, in their families, through the celebration of double holidays, they maintain cultural dualism, recognising such a solution primarily as culturally

attractive for children and, to some extent, as a solution to potential dilemmas of cultural diversity in marriage (Cukras-Stelągowska, 2023).

In all the collected biographies, we are dealing with a re-culturalisation, a return to ethnicity, the traditional culture of the ancestors (Nikitorowicz, 2005, pp. 58–59). Young people independently search and acquire cultural knowledge, engage in various forms of cultural activity, and as parents, choose different models of upbringing. Jerzy Nikitorowicz (1992, pp. 376–378) highlights four possible educational paths in ethnic communities:

1. **Socialisation and upbringing that isolates and separates in the religious-ethnic circle:** providing a sense of belonging with the religious and ethnic culture. Socialisation and upbringing are aimed at systematically providing a sense of belonging, strong identification with ancestral culture through positive historical evaluations, involvement in religious practices, conscious religious activity, and active participation in ethnic organisations. Socialisation and educational activities are aimed at preserving as many elements of religious and ethnic distinctiveness as possible, and protecting cultural values.
2. **Socialisation and dualistic upbringing:** providing positive examples of mutual recognition of diversity and religious tolerance, concessions and respect for culturally different values. Socialisation and upbringing that bring individuals and groups together, uniting due to the mutual benefits of interaction, pointing to common features, to the positives and negatives of both, leading to identification with two cultures. At the same time, the use of values represented by different groups while maintaining and cultivating their own cultural distinctiveness. Socialisation activities aimed at preserving and cultivating selected elements of “their” culture with simultaneous introduction to the use of the culture of the majority group.
3. **Socialisation and upbringing are scattered, undirected:** it means the helplessness of parents in determining what is good and desirable for the child, there is no clear cultural orientation in socialisation and upbringing. The transmission of cultural values is unclear and indecisive, not leading to identification with any of the cultures, lack of specific religious and ethnic behaviours.
4. **Socialisation and upbringing withdrawing from ethnicity,** integrating with the culture of the majority group. It means resignation and systematic loss of elements ascribed to ethnic culture, succumbing to the unifying influences of the culture of the majority group.

The analysed biographies represent the first model, a type of classical ethnic socialisation, with religious content dominating. However, being brought up in the spirit of Judaism does not mean that motherhood “in the Jewish way” takes place in an intercultural vacuum, without contact with the dominant culture. In all the biographies, the initial stages of becoming a Jew are similar, but following a *strictly* religious path in our country is a special challenge. As was the case with the biographies of religious men, further religious education of women requires the decision to emigrate, while the models of mother and family assimilated in the family home need to be reformulated and directed towards Jewish values.

4. FIRST BIOGRAPHICAL EXEMPLIFICATION: MARTA¹

Family of origin: Marta has Jewish ancestry on her mother’s side. She describes her family as open-minded and atheistic; no religious holidays were celebrated in her home. Since she was a child, she has been aware of her grandmother’s Jewish roots. She was raised by her mother and grandmother, practically without her father’s presence.

Identification: She identifies herself as the third generation of Jews after the Holocaust. She is an Orthodox Jew and mother of five children. She ran a Jewish kindergarten for several years and is now a Jewish educator working for several Jewish organisations.

Becoming a religious Jew: Marta developed a religious identity under the influence of her religious Jewish partner. Her mother and grandmother had many fears that she wanted to become the wife of an Orthodox Jew. At home, she was taught to believe in female power. My mother gave me a lot of freedom, she respected my choices, but she did not impose discipline.

My mother had a freelance job, our home was quite chaotic, she treated me as a partner, so I wanted something different for my children, specific rules, and this was given to me by an Orthodox husband.

Marta likes the clear religious precepts of Judaism and its philosophy, the opportunity to study texts and interpret them. At the same time, she would like to rebuild the Jewish history of her family and show that pre-war assimilation does not mean the end of Jewish life.

¹ The names of the study participants have been changed.

Breakthrough moments: In Marta's case, becoming a religious Jew meant entering adulthood and a relationship.

Initially, her identification was non-religious. As a student and an active member of one of the Jewish organisations, she met her future husband. Encouraged by her partner, she began to explore Judaism and then adopted its principles in everyday life. She began to eat kosher and observe the Sabbath and build more distance from the opposite sex. She adopted a more modest outfit, more delicate make-up, and the habit of covering her hair with a scarf. It was a radical change, as she recalls:

It was not always easy or obvious, because I grew up in a Catholic country and a secular home. This change was initially difficult for the family as well as for me.

Jewish education: The narrator crystallized her religious identity after living in Israel for several years. There, she began her education in a yeshiva for women:

I graduated from such a good school, but I do not have a rabbinical certificate, and I studied as much as my husband.

They spent four years together in Israel, where two children were born. Marta emphasises that Judaism should be learned throughout one's life, including regular reading of *Torah* fragments, i.e., weekly *parshas*.

Her own family: Her family is traditional, based on Jewish law. There is a me-zuzah in front of the entrance to the house. The most important thing for a family is faithfulness to the commandments of *Torah*. On a daily basis, they cultivate all the principles of Judaism, recite prayers and blessings at appropriate times, eat kosher food, observe every Shabbat and all the rules associated with it. They celebrate all Jewish holidays in turn, and children receive school leave for the holiday season. At home, there is a traditional division of duties, but it is quite flexible (e.g., the husband cooks). They have their own reference group centred around Jewish organisations. The children were given Polish-Jewish, biblical names:

we explained in Israel that these were also Polish names (they were surprised); we try to reconcile families, the future and the past, we include our mothers, and in Israel, these are very popular names.

Conjugal and parental love is placed above all else, especially when confronted with material values. In Israel, Marta learned that children sometimes get dirty and do not need very expensive designer clothes:

modesty, our son has a lot less toys, he has not seen many movies, but we offer him other interesting things, for example, three hours with his father and singing together. In the upbringing and appearance of girls (long skirts, tights even in summer), here the mother is the model, you have to show your daughter that this is a value.

Marta values respect in marriage and towards children, for whom it is necessary to make time. In Judaism, they find this time together, without distracting media, in the peace of the weekly Sabbath. It is also important for her to respect her own body and to treat her spouse as a physical and spiritual partner.

Defining herself as a mother: She describes herself as both an Orthodox Jew and a feminist. Her upbringing is based on the tradition of Judaism, but – as she emphasises – in a modern version, considering gender equality:

It is an individual matter for the parents, but when the family is religious and focuses on the boy, more will be demanded of him in the future. I try to introduce my son to all household chores, I do not want my daughters to do it for him; I want my son to go to a yeshiva, but my daughters should also go to good religious schools (...). The husband teaches his son separately because he is older and is a boy. As a woman, I get upset when I hear from my friends that the boy does not have to help in the kitchen. For example, I make sure that my son also has such responsibilities, it always depends on the couple.

An important point of reference in terms of education is still Israel, where she received a lot of help after giving birth to her children. In her opinion, Israelis are more open, direct, and she is fascinated by the “educational laxity in Israel”. From there, he draws his educational models:

My mother and mother-in-law are not Jewish, I observed how Jewish mothers function in Israel. I come from a multicultural family. I chose Judaism as an adult. I do not see any objections to parents who previously had nothing to do with Judaism to decide to pass on to their offspring values derived from Jewish culture.

However, her mother and grandmother had a huge impact on her life and are also part of the children's educational environment. They now participate passively in the family's religious rituals. Similarly, mothers-in-law (who are also irreligious):

In all cultures and religions, values are similar. They are universal, but there are differences that stem from different roots. No one said that one culture is better than another.

Domestic transmission of religious heritage: Marta lives by the preparations and weekly observance of the Sabbath. In the conversation, she points to the sanctity of the Sabbath, the role of prayer in the synagogue, the requirement of elegant clothing on a holy day, and a common, solemn meal. Being a mother of five children, she is very busy and that is also why Saturday is particularly respected in her home:

it is a time for the family, Shabbat is for children, we play cards, go for walks, read together. It is a sign of respect for children – you have to give them time together without TV, computer, or phones. In Poland, Shabbat looks a little different – different vegetables, some of them are harder to get and more expensive, and in Israel, there is constant access to vegetables and fruits, but in Israel, for example, there are very expensive herrings, strawberries, cherries, and apples, it is easier to find in Poland, of course, hummus is the best in Israel, halva, falafel, hot peppers, herbs, spices – we miss it. There is one Jewish restaurant here. Everything has to be checked, even gelatine-free yogurt, we have our list of what is kosher.

So far, the family has not had any major difficulties in observing the Sabbath in Poland. The problem arises with maintaining the rules of kashrut in public space (e.g., during a stay in the hospital, in the school canteen, at a friend's birthday party).

Marta tries to give freedom to children to the extent permitted by the principles of Judaism. In her opinion, rules and principles adapted to the age and perceptual abilities of the child:

Parents should minimise the child's sense of loss, for example, there is non-kosher food at school, our children cannot eat it, so they should get something else that is equally attractive to them. A religious ceremony has

to be interesting, non-stressful, it has to be conducted well, it has to be well managed, so that children do not treat it only as prohibitions. We need to show that limitations help us control ourselves.

In addition to religious values, the legacy of Holocaust remembrance should be passed on to the offspring. It is also very important for them to know what Jewish life was like before the war. In her opinion, it is possible to show it through the biography of people, reminding us of Irena Sendler, for example. In Israel, on the other hand, Marta learned that the legacy of the triumph of the Exodus from Egypt is also important:

I would like our children to grow up on what happened before and during the Holocaust. It is very important for my children to know how many Jews there were in Europe before the war, what the shtetls were, about the murders in Auschwitz. On the other hand, I want to show them other important historical events that build national pride.

Israel and Poland: Marta sees a problem in Poland in the context of further religious education of children, as well as communication in Hebrew on a daily basis. She considers the benefits of her son's education in Israel and his graduation from the yeshiva. He wants the same for his daughters. He believes that young people should go to Israel to learn how to be Jewish. She had the opportunity to do so, and now she goes there as often as possible. She and her husband had to find their way back to Poland, because there are few Jews living in their hometown, and almost no one speaks Hebrew surrounded by their children. The son attends a non-Jewish school:

He has sidelocks, wears *cicit*, so far there have been no problems with it, although sometimes they think it is a girl because he has long hair. My son is aware, he explains, he wants to wear sidelocks, even though everyone is looking at him with curiosity.

According to Marta, in our country, there is a need for greater tolerance towards otherness, for example, towards people who do not eat meat, long-haired boys, girls in very long skirts, etc. Israel and the US are more open in this regard:

Israel is a country closer to me in this respect, it is multicultural, there is a lot of immigrant community. Neighbourly help, support for women in childbirth,

donating clothes to each other are fantastic. You do not gossip. I do not have such help in Poland. I do not want children to get negative Polish traits and vices. Israelis are more open, helpful, direct, and there is less need for material goods.

However, she and her family want to stay in Poland to prove that it is possible to be a Jewish family while belonging to a religious minority. Moreover, she wants to continue to educate and remind people about the Jewish tradition, as she herself had little knowledge of Polish-Jewish history at school.

5. SECOND BIOGRAPHICAL EXEMPLIFICATION: SARA

Family of origin: Her mother has Jewish roots; her father is a Pole. As a child, Sara was a very religiously committed Catholic, she was not aware of her Jewish origins.

Identification: Sara defines herself as a representative of the third generation of Jews after the Holocaust. Growing up, she felt like a “tree without roots”, without an inheritance. Having learned about her origins, she felt a strong need to learn about her mother’s family history. She learned that her grandparents had been hit hard by the war, and after it was over, they had “erased” their Jewish origins and converted to Catholicism. The narrator characterises Polish Jews primarily in terms of trauma. In her opinion, it is extremely difficult to rebuild the Jewish community.

Becoming a religious Jewess: Her older brother began attending Hanukkah meetings in the Jewish community, where he volunteered. When she was twelve, he also took her to the synagogue. The Hanukkah evening in the synagogue made a great impression on her. Then, when she returned home, her mother admitted that they were also partly Jewish. After this information, she began to regularly go with her brother to visit friends for Shabbat, and she became increasingly curious about Jewish culture. For some time, she continued to attend church and experience religious dilemmas, but soon she ceased to be a Catholic.

Breakthrough moments: Her mother sent her and her brother to Jewish colonies, which was an epiphany for her. Upon her return, she began to go to synagogue regularly and observe the Sabbath. On her way, she met significant people:

My friendship with the rabbi’s family was a turning point, because I could observe the model of an Orthodox Jewish family. The rabbi’s wife suggested that I go to the yeshiva and help organise the trip. At the age of 16, I already

had a very clear plan for my life, I wanted to develop religiously and create a Jewish family.

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Jewish education: Sara decided to study at a Canadian yeshiva for women. She recalls that complying with the new, restrictive rules was difficult at first. However, she was glad that she was in the Jewish community and could deepen her knowledge. During her education, she lived with an Orthodox family. After graduating from the yeshiva at the age of 20, she moved to the United States and a few years later to Israel. Sara had to undergo an Orthodox conversion because she could not prove her roots, she lacked the appropriate documents. Her mother was particularly outraged by the situation. After her conversion, she adopted a new Jewish name. She emphasises that she is constantly deepening her knowledge about Judaism on her own.

The revival of identity was influenced by many people, both rabbis and ordinary members of the community. From them, I learned who the Jews are, what they believe, how they live and look. Until I started attending the Nożyk synagogue at the age of 12 or 13, I did not have such knowledge – what a real Sabbath looks like, a celebration. I also learned any rudiments of Judaism, Hebrew, or Jewish culture at the Lauder Foundation camps.

Being a Jewess in the family: Sara’s biography is an example of attempts to integrate parents into Jewish culture:

We studied a bit in turns, first my brother, we used to come together for a while, but my brother moved to another city quite quickly. From that time until my departure from Poland (I was 17 years old at the time), I attended the synagogue alone. My mother became a little interested in religion, but she did not practice it. In order to be able to observe the Sabbath, I slept for several years in one of the synagogue offices. It was more difficult with food, I tried my best, following the most (at the time, it seemed to me) main rules. My mom did not cook kosher. In fact, until my departure, I ate “kosher friendly”, as much as I could afford as a child at home. At this point, I am the only Orthodox one in my family, but my mom is friendly to my lifestyle and thinks it is the right one.

Her own family: It was extremely important for Sara to look for a Jewish partner. She has been married for eleven years and has three children. Her husband had not been religious since childhood, although he came from a Jewish family. He became religious in adulthood. Their wedding was religious, with the approval of her family.

Having a Jewish partner for me is elementary. I do not think I know anyone from a mixed family who has children equally involved in both cultures. Anyway, I do not see it as a culture, it is our way of life. As far as the culture is concerned, it may be possible to raise a child in this way, but the Orthodox Jewish lifestyle is 100% involved in virtually all spheres of life. There is hardly any room for other ideas. I do not know how someone could be here and there.

For the first few years of their marriage, they lived in the US due to her husband's work. Now, they are raising their children in Israel, which they see as a "safe haven, without anti-Semitism". Sara is an Orthodox Jew, but not ultra-Orthodox. She covers her hair, dresses modestly, does not reveal her cleavage, arms, or legs. Family and marriage are sacred to her:

12 clean days – that is what I like. In Judaism, women are treated as subjects. Women's and mother's rights are put first in Judaism.

At the entrance to the house hangs a mezuzah. The family observes all religious requirements. There is a traditional division of responsibilities in the family. Sara considers raising children to be her main task, but her professional work is also important (although she is currently on maternity leave, she is raising her youngest child). But, as she emphasises, it is a completely conscious and mutual decision:

I take care of most of the house, kids, and school stuff. My husband spends a lot of time with his children on the Sabbath, they study *parshas* together, play board games, ride bicycles. He helps me, but mostly during the weekends, because he works remotely during American hours.

Defining herself as a mother: The narrator admires several female mothers. One of them is the rabbi's wife, whom she had the opportunity to meet and observe when she lived in the capital. "I think he is the person who had the biggest impact on the path I took". Sara thinks she learns a lot from my mom:

You do not have to be an Orthodox Jew to be a good parent. Yes, my mother gave me a lot of freedom and trust, the opportunity to learn from my mistakes. She taught me consistency and striving for my desired goal.

In her role as a mother, she tries to be “empathetic, listening, present, and non-judgmental”. She is also close to Janusz Korczak’s principles: “Treat a child like a human being, with your tastes, views, thoughts. Respect him and never belittle him”. She describes her style of upbringing as liberal:

We are not Hasidim, it would certainly be a bit different there. My two daughters are completely different – one is «girly» in the traditional way (ballet, drawing), the other is more «boyish» (dinosaurs, lego, and ninjago). I like it very much, each of them is what they are, they dress as they want (still according to Orthodox rules). I accept their interests, whether it is something most girls are interested in or not. My son often wears girls’ clothes, I do not like the stereotypical division into things/colours/activities for women and men. I am also not a fan of patriarchy.

Domestic transmission of religious heritage: She and her husband run a kosher home. In domestic situations, they speak both Hebrew and English. The house is perceived by her as a “small temple”:

The equivalent of a temple is not a synagogue, but a Jewish house. For us, religion is intertwined in virtually every sphere of life. Every time we go to the toilet, we say a blessing, thanking God for our body, which is functioning properly. The children are involved in all of this – preparing for Shabbat, cleaning, cooking, baking – my older daughter (10 years old) bakes desserts every Friday. The younger one (8 years old) vacuums, cleans the terrace and the room. The son (3,5) helps to set the table and clean up after Shabbat meals.

In education, the most important thing is the transmission of *Torah*. She defines the values she wants to pass on to her children as follows:

Love God and His creatures – people and nature. Respect the traditions of your ancestors – there are dozens of generations of Jews behind you. Try to repair, not break. We need to build, not divide. Do not judge, because you do not know what situation someone is in. Always try to do the right thing, even if it is an unpopular opinion. Love and appreciate the existence of Israel – two

generations before you, your ancestors died in concentration camps (yes, even young Jewish children know what the Holocaust is, for us it is a very important part of basic education).

Sarah's family week is defined and subordinated to the festive time of the Sabbath, and the year to the cycle of Jewish holidays:

Because we live in Israel, where everyone observes these holidays, we can enjoy them. I love Sukkot when the weather is beautiful and we practically move to the terrace to sukkah (the children also sleep on mattresses there). Pesach, when we kosher the whole kitchen together and sit at the table until 1–2 o'clock at night doing the Seder. Hanukkah – when you can often see a few lit menorahs in every window, everyone celebrates and gathers with their families, eating countless doughnuts and potato pancakes.

Imitation and daily contact with Judaism plays a key role in religious education:

Fortunately, school does a lot for me. But during the pandemic, when the children were at home for months, we did everything together. Morning prayers, blessings before and after eating, and *parsha* study. But it is not like in Christianity that religious practice takes place in a specific time and place.

Sara and her husband want their children to continue the tradition as adults:

This is not only very important to them, but critical. Without the continuation of Jewish tradition, there are no Jews. Those who broke away from it mostly no longer have Jewish grandchildren. It is just the only way to exist. Assimilation is worse than Hitler's because it happens imperceptibly. And the result is the same – the number of Jews is decreasing.

Contact with Poland: The narrator does not introduce elements of Polish cultural heritage into her family life. She comes to Poland only for holidays: “to her mother, as to another world, she feels anti-Semitism because of her different appearance, besides, there is a kosher problem”. Her argument is as follows:

It never occurred to me to go back to Poland. This stage is over for me. I do not see any future for Jews in Poland. My children do not have Polish passports and do not speak Polish. This is my conscious decision. I like to go there

once a year because I have a lot of nostalgia, a few old friends, but I could never live anywhere but Israel. The children are brought up in an environment where everyone observes the Sabbath, there is no anti-Semitism. I am glad I left at the right time.

6. CONCLUSION

Becoming a Jew and building a socio-cultural identity in the third generation after the Holocaust in the light of the mentioned biographies begins with discovering the roots or expanding the family memory and genealogical search for Jewish ancestors, then – reconstructing one’s own cultural identity under the influence of mystical religious experiences, learning Jewish culture and religion on one’s own, conversion (Sara), through – education in Poland and abroad, to the point of introducing elements of Jewish culture and religion into her own family. Choosing a Jewish religious path of life requires making serious decisions about educational emigration. It signifies an internal and external transformation. In this process, it is also important for Sara to accept her parents and give them permission to continue her education away from home, in an unfamiliar social environment.

Marta gained knowledge from literature, meetings in Jewish institutions, trips to Israel, and studies in the humanities, while Sara attended Jewish summer camps as a teenager and benefited from the informal education of the R. Lauder Foundation. She also had the opportunity to meet the rabbi’s wife in Poland, i.e., a “significant person” who set new religious goals and tasks for her. The search was completed by finding a partner and creating a traditional Jewish family in Israel. On the other hand, the biographical anchor directing Marta towards the new religion was her husband. Both narrators learned “Jewish life” in the larger Jewish diasporas, where they also graduated from religious schools for women.

The transmission of cultural heritage in Marta’s family of origin was limited to the awareness of origins, while in Sara’s case, there was a situation more characteristic of this generation – the disclosure of information about Jewish roots by parents during adolescence, gradual “learning” of Jewish culture with the child, and inclusion in education by enrolling in Jewish colonies. In both cases, the parents accepted their identity choices, participated passively in the narrator’s religious transformation, and in Marta’s case, they are increasingly active participants in Jewish culture in the roles of grandmother and great-grandmother. In the families created by the “found generation”, we can distinguish two educational models: dualistic upbringing and ethno-religious upbringing in a closed circle. It

is possible that there is also a type of socialisation and upbringing that is dispersed or withdraws from ethnicity. However, people who did not identify well with the Jewish part of their identity refused to participate in the study, explaining that they did not see themselves as Jewish mothers or families. Agnieszka Krawczyk and Magdalena Matusiak-Rojek (2023), in the light of their research on Jewish motherhood, emphasise that the stronger the mother's religious beliefs, the more clearly they are reflected in the cultural and religious upbringing of the children. The researcher cites interviews with three women: an Orthodox Jewish mother (a single-cultural mother), a bicultural mother (in a relationship with a Catholic) and a multicultural mother. The biography of the latter shows that she is influenced by the culture of the majority group, in which she currently resides in various migration contexts. The cultural identity of the family is fluid, the upbringing is diffuse, and the religious practices are selective.

The narrators and their families celebrate religious holidays, follow kosher rules, and fulfil all the duties resulting from the principles of Judaism. The interlocutors emphasised that strong cultural and religious self-identification is important, which is a condition for proper intergenerational transmission. The children of my interlocutors fully participate in "Jewish everyday life". A Jewish partner means a guarantee of bringing up children together in tradition, being rooted in the community, conducting daily religious home education by both parents, through daily being together in prayer and celebration. Education in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism is also a necessity to be included in Jewish formal education and community life. A big problem in Poland is the small Jewish community, which for Sara excludes the possibility of building an Orthodox family. For this reason, her circle of culture and educator is exclusively Israel.

Sara and Marta use both Jewish and non-Jewish models of motherhood. In their opinion, certain life patterns are universal, which gives them a chance to draw on their own family experiences, to "dress" them in Jewish identity. Both participants in the study traditionally perform feminine tasks. They focus on the home, watch over kosher, the Sabbath, preparations for holidays, and children's religious education. They are aware of the importance of the domestic transmission of tradition for the existence of the Jewish people. At the same time, they represent a new model of *Jidisze Mame* – a professionally and socially active woman who combines several roles. They have secular higher education and religious studies, and study *Torah* and *Talmud* on their own. They value the active participation of fathers in their children's upbringing. Less important to them is the traditional approach to educating boys and girls separately. They adapt religious requirements to the age and individual needs of each child. Without a doubt, for Marta, cultivating

the Jewish tradition in a country dominated by Christianity is more challenging. Being a *Jidisze Mame* has to confront other models of motherhood on a daily basis, particularly the contemporary variations of the Polish mother's model.

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