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The Journey of Memory. Migration, Postmemory and Family Relations in Mikołaj Grynberg's *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* [*I Blame Auschwitz. Family Tales*]

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– *Who are you?*
– *Polish Jew*
– *Interesting*¹

Mikołaj Grynberg's *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* (the title can be translated into English as [*I Blame Auschwitz. Family Tales*]) is a collection of twenty-four² narrative interviews with persons brought up by Holocaust survivors, which was published in Poland in 2014. Conversations included in Grynberg's work center around the issues of family relationships, memory, postmemory as well as migration, as his respondents live not only in Poland, but also in the United States of America and Israel. They share a similar experience of being born after Second World War (from the late 40s to 70s) and being raised by Holocaust survivors, but their narratives differ as they grew up in different countries and, thus, in different life circumstances. The aim of this article is to analyze selected narratives provided by Grynberg's respondents and compare how the parents' decision either to stay in Poland after the war or to

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- 1 Grynberg, Mikołaj. *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2014, p. 259. All fragments from Grynberg's work were translated by Anna Kuchta.
 - 2 Selected personally by the author from many more he has been collecting through many years. While Grynberg does not explain clearly on which criteria he based his choices whether to include an interview in *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* or not, he shares some insight in his decision-making process during the conversation with Doron and Roger. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 259. Grynberg also does not provide any analysis of the interviews – he presents them without comments (only revealing basic information about each respondent – name, country, the language in which the conversation takes place), perhaps hoping to stimulate the readers to form their own interpretation of the presented material.

migrate to the USA or Israel affected their lives – and via transgenerational transmission of memories – the identities of their children as well.

Analyzing *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* in the context of migration and memory may show how the experiences of the representatives of the “generation after” vary in different social, political and cultural circumstances depending on the place their parents have chosen to live in and can result in a better understanding of the phenomenon of postmemory.

Postmemory in Grynberg’s Collection of Interviews

The term “postmemory,” coined by Marianne Hirsch during her research on the phenomenon of transgenerational trauma transmission, can be defined as “the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they »remember« only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.”³ This so-called “second” or “next” generation is virtually shaped and defined by the damage that occurred in their parents’ life – the damage they have no personal knowledge of – and they “connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection memory.”⁴ As a consequence, such memories begin to influence – and often even dominate – their own daily lives. Thus, describing the situation of the second generation – of those who grew up immersed in their parents’ traumatic stories – is often a challenge. Their own emotions are marked by painful family narratives and – paradoxically – by memories “of not remembering and not being there”⁵ and a past that has not been their own, that they have inherited from the previous generation. While it is not possible for the second generation to experience the trauma identical with the one their parents had and postmemory (unlike the memories of survivors themselves) lacks a direct connection to the past,

3 Hirsch, Marianne. “The Generation of Postmemory”. *Poetics Today* 2008, vol. 29:1, p. 106. “Postmemory” is a term primarily used in the context of the Holocaust, however, as Hirsch states herself, it may be just as relevant in describing other generational trauma transmissions. Cf. Hirsch, Marianne. “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile.” *Poetics Today* 1996, 17,4 (Winter 1996), p. 662.

4 Eadem, *The Generation of Postmemory*, op. cit., p. 106.

5 Sicher, Efraim. “Postmemory, Backshadowing, Separation: Teaching Second-Generation Holocaust Fiction”. *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*. Ed Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes. New York: Modern Language Association, 2004, p. 264. Sicher describes postmemory as “memory of a void”, recalling Henri Raczymow’s concept of “memory shot through with holes”. Cf. Raczymow, Henri. “Memory Shot Through With Holes” translated by A. Astro. *Yale French Studies* 1994, 85: *Discourses of Jewish Identity in Twentieth-Century France*, pp. 98–105.

Hirsch notes that representatives of the second generation identify with the victims of Holocaust trauma and on some level adopt their memories⁶.

The cases described in Grynberg's work are no exception; his respondents struggle with memories that preceded their birth and yet contribute to shaping their own identities. They all carry the stories of their parents⁷ while, simultaneously, they are searching for their own places in history, trying to regain balance between the trauma from the past and the present challenges. However, their experiences differ due to different countries – different social and cultural context – they were growing up in. For the purpose of the interviews, Grynberg visits Warszawa, New York, and Tel Aviv, meeting with children of survivors from three very different countries. Each of these places has its own characteristics, distinctive history, and unique atmosphere and the comparison of selected conversations included in *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* shows that the parents' decisions either to stay in Poland or to migrate to USA or Israel has deeply affected the children lives.

Poland

The case of Poland, where – despite the painful memories and the trauma of Holocaust – a number⁸ of Jewish survivors decided to stay after the war is extremely

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- 6 Hirsch, Marianne. "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 2001, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 10–11. It should be added that the extent to which children of survivors identify with their parents' memories differ in every case and the process of adopting parents' stories is never an easy one. Raczynow explains that representatives of the second generation are in a difficult position – on some level they adopt their parents' painful memories but at the same time they know they have no direct connection with the trauma and thus they often question their right to speak. Raczynow, Henri., op. cit., p. 98.
- 7 It is common for the representatives of the "generation after" to feel burdened with the purpose of remembering and sharing their parents stories, protecting them from being forgotten. Grynberg's respondents express their feelings using various metaphors, Most often they choose the word "baggage" to describe how they feel having inherited their parents memories (Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 149, 211, 221, 270). Fire-related metaphors are also popular, for instance Doron mentions having to keep "memorial flame" (Ibidem, p. 260) alive and carrying his parents' past like a "torch" (Ibidem, p. 262) he will soon hand over to his own children (the third generation). For more detailed analysis of the language Grynberg's respondents use to express themselves, see: Kuchta, Anna. "Zawłaszczone narracje. Obrazy postpamięci w zbiorze *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne Mikołaja Grynberga*". *Konteksty Kultury* 2015, Tom 12, Numer 2, pp. 251–264. Cf. also the work of Suzanna Eibuszyc who, like Doron, metaphorically connects memory with fire and uses the term "memorial candle" to describe her role as a person from the second generation who carries and guards the story of her mothers' trauma. Eibuszyc, Suzanna. *Memory Is Our Home. Loss and Remembering: Three Generations in Poland and Russia, 1917–1960s*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2015, p. 65.
- 8 Numbers and statistical data in relation to Jewish population in Poland after the war is a complex issue itself and requires a more detailed commentary. First of all, a vast majority of Jews died during the Second World War and the Holocaust: Wolfgang Benz estimates the death toll of Polish Jews as 2,700,000 (similar numbers are provided by Norman Davies as well) while Gunnar Paulsson illustrates

complicated. As Grynberg's respondents collectively point out, on the one hand, it is important for them that as a result of their parents' decision to stay in Poland they were able to live in the same places, the same hometowns – and sometimes even the same houses – as their families lived. Thus they felt that they are a part of a family history that started long before the war. Grynberg, who is also a person from the “generation after” (born in 1966), states that he lives in Poland because this is where his parents lived⁹, and that thanks to this decision, his “children live in the house where my grandfather lived, and my father grew up.”¹⁰ Halina¹¹, one of his respondents, shares similar sentiments and mentions that her father had decided to stay Poland after the war, because he kept hoping that some of his relatives or friends survived the war and may still return to Częstochowa¹², their hometown.

On the other hand, it seems that geographical proximity does not guarantee the knowledge of family history or the understanding of the past tragedy. Grynberg's respondents explain that those who chose to stay in Poland were forced – by the political and social situation under Communist Party rule (repatriations, antisemitism¹³,

the scale of genocide in his study of the city of Warsaw during the years 1940–1945 and notes that 98% of Jewish people in Warsaw died. Those who survived could have either stayed in Poland or left the country – Polish sociologist Paweł Śpiwak estimates the number of Jews in Poland right after the war (1946) as between 250,000–400,000 and explains that about half of them chose to migrate to various countries during the next few years. However, any kind of data collected after the war has to be treated with caution, as it is reasonable to suspect that some survivors – especially those who decided to stay in Poland – kept their Jewish identity hidden and therefore may not be included in any statistics. Cf. Benz, Wolfgang. “Death Toll.” *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Ed. Walter Laqueur. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, pp. 137–145.; Davies, Norman. *Europe: A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.; Paulsson, Gunnar. *Secret City - the Hidden Jews of Warsaw 1940–1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.; Śpiwak, Paweł. *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czerwone i Czarne, 2012.

9 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 60.

10 Ibidem, p. 40.

11 To refer to Grynberg's respondents I am going to use names as they are provided by the author, despite the fact that some of the names that appear in Grynberg's work have been changed at request of the respondent to remain anonymous. Cf. Ibidem, p. 154.

12 Ibidem, p. 248.

13 The issue of antisemitism in Poland after Second World War was (and continues to be) a topic of various studies from historical, sociological, political perspective. For the purpose of this article it seems mostly relevant to mention Bożena Keff's remarks who addresses the subject of antisemitism on a very personal level, as she is a daughter of Holocaust survivor. In her autobiographical works Keff focuses on two painful subjects: her troubled relationship with her mother and her – equally troubled – relationship with the motherland. While describing the situation of Jews in Poland under Communist control she underlines the importance of March 1968 (also referred as “1968 Polish political crisis” in non-Polish sources and literature on the subject) – particularly the outburst antisemitic propaganda and campaigns – which forced Polish citizens of Jewish origin to chose between their Polish and Jewish identity and resulted in major emigration of them. Cf. Keff, Bożena. *Antysemityzm. Niezamknięta historia*. Warszawa: Czarna Owca 2013.

anti-Jewish riots¹⁴, and other “traumatic experiences of Jews in Poland *after* the war”¹⁵, as phrased by Tony Judd) – to hide the truth about their Jewish heritage. While the topic of the Second World War was widely discussed¹⁶, it was necessary for them to hide their Holocaust trauma and suffer in silence, which only contributed to their pain. As Dori Laub points out, the untold stories, “more and more distorted in their silent retention”¹⁷ often “contaminate the survivor’s daily life.”¹⁸ Thus, the children were growing up in the atmosphere of secrets, sometimes even deception (“At home we said our mother’s father was Italian and she was French,”¹⁹ “Mother has always said grandfather was an only child, today we know it is not true.”²⁰) and fear, without knowing the whole story of their parents’ tragic experiences. However, as postmemory may be transmitted involuntarily, nonverbally and even without awareness of the process itself²¹ – they still inherited some of their parents’ fears. Bella Brodzki notes that “omission, negation, deflection”²² can all serve as effective means of transmission of the trauma and Grynberg’s respondents recall that their parents’ secrecy had not saved them from receiving their stories (often it was just the opposite, as they tend to use the words “aggressive” or “brutal” to describe the silence they remember from their childhood²³). Silence, warns Krzysztof Szwejca, impairs communication and thus has

14 E. g. pogrom in Kielce on 4 July 1946.

15 Judd, Tony. “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe.” *Daedalus* 1992, Vol. 121, No. 4, “Immobile Democracy?” (Fall, 1992), p. 104.

16 It is important to point out that often the topic of the Second World War (and the collective memory of it shaped by official narrative) was used by the government to legitimize their decisions and maintain power. Anna Mach’s addresses this issue in the context of postmemory in her study *Świadkowie świadectw*. Cf. Mach Anna. *Świadkowie świadectw. Postpamięć Zagłady w polskiej literaturze najnowszej*. Warszawa-Toruń: Fundacja na rzecz Nauki Polskiej, 2016.

17 Laub, Dori. “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival.” *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Ed. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 79.

18 *Ibidem*.

19 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 43.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 49.

21 Hirsch writes specifically about “the language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and non-cognitive acts of transfer” that occur between survivors and their children. Hirsch, Marianne. *The generation...*, op. cit., p. 112.

22 Brodzki, Bella. “Teaching Trauma and Transmission.” *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 128.

23 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 203. Cf. Przymuszała, Beata. “Zagłada rodziny – Mikołaja Grynberga rozmowy z naznaczonymi traumą.” *Ślady II wojny światowej i Zagłady w najnowszej literaturze polskiej*. Ed. Barbara Sienkiewicz and Sylwia Karolak. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Nauka i Innowacje, 2016, pp. 245–269.

a deep impact on family relations²⁴. “At home we knew mother and grandmother were in Auschwitz. (...) I did not know they were Jewish,”²⁵ explains Piotr, whose mother told him about the war, but not about her Jewish identity. She offered her son a piece of her history – and, unintentionally, a fair dose of her suffering – but she also left him with gaps and persistent questions about his own identity. Dorota’s case is even more extreme, as her mother “kept her isolated from everything,”²⁶ which, as a consequence, made her feel that she had “no insight”²⁷ in her mother’s past and – even – present.

Respondents who grew up in Poland point to the importance of the year 1989 and the country’s transition from a Communist regime to a Western-style democratic political system. Then, many Holocaust survivors had started publicly speaking about their traumas and sharing their memories from the war (Michał Głowiński metaphorically refers to this moment as finally having “escaped from the cellar”²⁸) and long belated discourse about the trauma of the “generation after” could finally take place²⁹. For some families, it is only after the year 1989 when the parents openly admit their Jewish heritage to their children and thus, for those representatives of the second generation, it is only then when they learn the whole truth about their identities. As Anka Grupińska, who prepared an *Introduction* to Grynberg’s collection of interviews, diagnoses, being a Polish Jew – a person brought up with no connection to “Jewish world”³⁰ – poses a great challenge for representatives of the second generation. Grynberg’s respondents usually describe their reactions to having learnt the truth about their families’ Jewish heritages as general confusion, denial, and feeling lost. Ela recalls that it took her a decade from the revelation of her mother’s secret

24 Szwajca, Krzysztof. “Tortura i nakaz pamięci. Drugie pokolenie Ocalałych z Holocaustu.” *Pamięć wędrowniki. Wędrownika pamięci*. Ed. Anna Lipowska-Teutsch and Ewa Ryłko, Kraków: Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej, 2008, p. 17.

25 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 82.

26 Ibidem, p. 203.

27 Ibidem.

28 “Polskie gadanie. Z M. Głowińskim rozmawia T. Torańska”. *Gazeta Wyborcza. Duży Format* 2005 no 19: <http://www.otwarta.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Polskie-gadanie.pdf>. Web. 21 Sep. 2017. Głowiński (who belongs to so-called “generation 1.5”, those, who were children during the war and Holocaust) refers here his publication of *Czarne sezony* in 1998. For more information about generation 1.5 see, for example, Suleiman, Susan Rubin. “The 1.5 Generation: Georges Perec’s *W or the Memory of Childhood*.” *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*, op. cit., pp. 372–385.

29 Moreover, the Poland’s democratic transition allowed people to confront Polish narrative of the Second World War and the Western discourse about Holocaust and memory. For more detailed study on the issue of the belatedness of Polish discourse on postmemory see: Szczepan, Aleksandra. “Rozrachunki z postpamięcią.” *Od pamięci biodziedzicznej do postpamięci*. Teresa. Szostek, Roma Sendyka and Ryszard Nycz. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2013, pp. 319–320.

30 Grupińska, Anna. “Wysłuchiwanie Zagłady i rozmawianie o schedzie pozagładowej”. *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne*, op. cit., p. 11.

to finally reaching an understanding of what it means for her personally. “After I had heard my mother was »a Jew« it took me about ten years to realize, that this means I am Jewish as well,”³¹ she explains. For many representatives of the “generation after” this sudden discovery means revealing a whole new family history that has been hidden for ages, hearing about relatives previously not mentioned at all, or even having to change their everyday behavior and customs to embrace their newly discovered heritage. “Being a Jew” is a challenge for Piotr, who longs to be Jewish but believes he is not fully “allowed to use this title.”³² and especially in comparison with “people, who were growing up in families that were always Jewish”³³ he feels “not good enough.”³⁴ Similarly to Piotr, Ela recalls feeling torn and having to choose between her Polish and Jewish identity and family history³⁵. In the end, she chooses for the Jewish one, not unlike many other Grynberg’s respondents, who treat such choices as a kind of moral obligation to their lost relatives.

The United States of America

Unlike the situation in Poland, those who chose to migrate to the United States of America were able to speak freely – at least from a political point of view³⁶ – about both the trauma of war and Holocaust and about their Jewish heritages. Even if – for personal or family related reasons – some of the survivors kept their Holocaust trauma a secret, they did not need also to hide their Jewish heritage. Grynberg’s respondents recall that from early childhood they knew their parents’ religion, went to synagogues, attended Jewish schools, and – generally – felt that they belonged to much bigger (more or less traditional) Jewish communities that formed in American multicultural society. As noted by Natan Kellermann, the acceptance of survivors’ and their children’s Jewish identity and the possibility of discussing the parents’ experiences in “sympathetic communities”³⁷ may play a “mitigating role”³⁸ in the process of transmission and, therefore, allow the children to develop “coping mechanisms”³⁹ that

31 Grynberg Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 233.

32 Ibidem, pp. 89–90.

33 Ibidem.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem, p. 232–3.

36 Efraim Sicher gives a detailed report on how the topic of Holocaust fits into the American narrative. Cf. Sicher, Efraim. “The Future of the Past: Counteremory and Postmemory in Contemporary American Post-Holocaust Narratives.” *History and Memory* 2000, vol. 12, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2000), pp. 59–63.

37 Kellermann, Natan. “Transmission of Holocaust trauma – An integrative view.” *Psychiatry* 2001, no. 64, p. 264.

38 Ibidem.

39 Ibidem.

help to withstand the received trauma. Daniel explains that while his parents very rarely mentioned their traumatic war experiences (rather, they had put a lot of work into keeping their tragic past hidden⁴⁰), they were open and willing to celebrate all important aspects of Jewish religion and culture when he was growing up. Moreover, he confesses that “up to some moment [he – AN A.K.] had not one friend who was not a Jew” and that he “never thought one could feel so socially alienated”⁴¹ as those representatives of the “generation after” who were growing up in Poland, without knowing the whole truth about their families and without the possibility to manifest their religion and culture. Esther, who also grew up in the USA, has a similar observation, as she states that “one hundred percent of [her – AN A.K.] parents’ friends are other [Holocaust – AN A.K.] survivors.”⁴²

Lea, another American citizen interviewed by Grynberg, self-diagnoses that while both she and Grynberg are representatives of the second generation the differences between them are the result of different countries they were growing up⁴³ in and the challenges each of them faced. For Lea, it is important to note that thanks to her parents’ decision to leave Poland and migrate to the USA, she was allowed to be free as a Jew when she was growing up (“We [in the USA – AN A.K.] were free, also as Jews”⁴⁴). However, she realizes that the price she pays for that freedom is not having roots (“I never had and will never have roots⁴⁵”) and often she wonders about or perhaps even longs for the life that could have been if her parents had stayed in their Polish hometown, Częstochowa, along with other survivors they knew before the war⁴⁶. It is the loneliness they are left with that makes the “generation after” seek connections, explains Laurence L. Langer⁴⁷, and Lea wishes for connections both with people and places that would let her regain what the Holocaust took away from her family.

Grupińska notes that representatives of the second generation whose parents decided to migrate to the USA usually dislike Poland⁴⁸ – or sometimes entire Europe,

40 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 28.

41 Ibidem, p. 40. Grynberg’s conversation with Esther may also serve as a good illustration of these differences, as she asks him if he lives in Jewish quarter in Poland and he has to explain that “there are no Jewish districts in Poland anymore”. Ibidem, p. 134.

42 Ibidem, p. 119.

43 Ibidem, p. 216.

44 Ibidem, p. 216.

45 Ibidem, p. 208.

46 “I would be in Częstochowa, a daughter of a rich lawyer, I would marry a nice man,” she imagines. Ibidem, p. 208.

47 Langer, Laurence. *Holocaust testimonies. The ruins of memory*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, p. X.

48 Grupińska, Anna., op. cit., p. 11.

like Sara, who refers to it as “a continent soaked through with blood”⁴⁹. This is most likely because they connect it with their parents pain (“Do you know what they do to Jews there?”⁵⁰, asks Sara) and also because they blame it for their uprootedness and for losing the connection with family history. Lea’s longing is rather unusual, as most often their feelings are closer to “anger mixed with raw pain,”⁵¹ because – as explained by Doron and Roger who live in the USA but visited Poland together with their parents – “nostalgia cannot be inherited,”⁵² unlike pain and fear.

In addition, Grynberg points out that during the interviews he is often asked why first his parents and then he decided to stay in Poland, rather than choosing to leave the country where Holocaust took place. The question is sometimes asked with pure curiosity, sometimes in an aggressive manner, and often it is not even a question, but a bitter reproach (“I heard that Poland is not a place of the Jews, that one cannot live in the graveyard and how I can bring up children there”⁵³) or even in insults (“You are crazy! You have lost your mind! It is a high time you leave that place,”⁵⁴ “You are an idiot”⁵⁵).

Israel

Similarly to many American representatives of the second generation, Mosze, who lives in Israel, also makes a point to tell Grynberg that he should not be living in Poland (“Poland is not your country”⁵⁶) and explains that there is a different country for him. “Here is your country,”⁵⁷ he says, referring to Israel, another major place of postwar migration of Jewish people. Ela, who herself lives in Poland but sometimes wonders how her life could have been somewhere else, describes moving to Israel as finally reaching “peace with one’s identity”⁵⁸ for many representatives of the second generation, including her son⁵⁹, because – just as Grynberg has been told many times by his respondents – this is exactly the country they (as the postwar Jewish generation) should live in. However, the conversations included in *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* prove that leaving Poland does not equal leaving the traumatic memories behind and that survivors and their children continue to feel the trauma

49 Grynberg Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 58.

50 Ibidem, p. 60.

51 Grupińska, Anna., op. cit., p. 11.

52 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 274.

53 Ibidem, p. 39.

54 Ibidem, p. 55.

55 Ibidem, p. 59.

56 Ibidem, p. 295

57 Ibidem.

58 Ibidem, p. 243.

59 Ibidem.

and its consequences even after moving to the place that – unlike the one they had escaped from⁶⁰ – is supposed to make them feel safe finally.

Moreover, while representatives of the “generation after” who grew up in Israel mention that the topic of Holocaust was ever-present in their homes (Orit simply says that it was a constant element of her everyday life⁶¹, while Jossi uses a dreadful metaphor of being “brought up in Auschwitz”⁶² to describe his childhood in the shadow of his parents’ painful past), Grupińska points that it had not always been a welcomed element of public, national discourse⁶³ and that survivors often felt ashamed of their personal traumas. Their children also admit that it was particularly hard for their parents – and themselves – to adjust to a whole new reality, different country, culture, society, even climate (“everything there was different than in the parents’ world”⁶⁴). Dahlia mentions the struggle connected with learning a new language:

- Were your parents speaking Polish at home?
- After I was born they decided not to speak Polish anymore.
- Had they known Hebrew before coming to Israel?
- No.⁶⁵

Dahlia recalls that despite the fact her parents made a decision to stop speaking Polish after her birth – perhaps so that she would not receive their memories along with the language – she still heard it at home for many years as it was so hard for them to give it up. It was even more complicated in the case of Lili, as she recalls that the knowledge about her family being scarred by war trauma, and thus different, made her feel that she had never actually belonged in Israel. Instead, she struggled with overwhelming feeling of alienation, “otherness,”⁶⁶ as she describes it, because “not everyone came from Poland and not everyone was from families of survivors.”⁶⁷ Similar observations are noted by Yehuda who remembers that “[society was divided]

60 Lili, whose family also lives in Israel, recalls the time they visited and explains that “for this whole time my mother was frightened. (...) She was completely terrified”. *Ibidem*, p. 73–74.

61 *Ibidem*, p. 291.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 19.

63 Grupińska, Anna., *op. cit.*, p. 12. Grupińska diagnoses that the acceptance of the topic of Holocaust in the public discourse was limited due to the fact that it did not correspond with national objective of building “a new, strong country” which needed to be founded on something else than suffering. Grynberg’s interview with Dahlia may serve as a good example here, as she mentions that during her childhood Holocaust survivors (like her mother) were considered to be a weak link of Jewish society in Israel. Grynberg, Mikołaj., *op. cit.*, p. 179.

64 Grupińska, Anna., *op. cit.*, p. 12..

65 Grynberg, Mikołaj., *op. cit.*, p. 178.

66 *Ibidem*, p. 64.

67 *Ibidem*.

into two groups: those, who came before the war and second-class citizens, those who came after the war.”⁶⁸ Moreover, those who came after the war often felt that they do not belong, that they are not really in their own country.

Conclusion

Grynberg explains that his respondents share the fact that their families lived “in the shadow of a great mourning”⁶⁹ and that Holocaust trauma was ever-present in their lives. However, the ways they manifest their grief, the ways they respond to such trauma – both in private and in public space – differ. Often, despite evident and profound similarities they share, it seems hard for them to reach an understanding.

- And could you understand the fact that I was the only Jewish kid at school? Or that we had no Jews among our neighbors?
- I am sorry.
- Nothing to be sorry about, we all missed something. Did you had Jewish friends at school or in the neighborhood?
- Of course. I had no other friends. I attended Jewish school with Yiddish language⁷⁰.

In the interview with Daniel, Grynberg stresses the differences between himself (born and brought up in Poland) and his respondent, who grew up in the USA, and later he explains that each of them missed something, as there is no ideal solution, no place that serves as a perfect cure for those affected by the trauma of war and post-memory (“each alternative is burdened with certain flaws”⁷¹). The interviews selected by Grynberg show a multitude of reactions the “generation after” may show when confronted with their parents’ trauma and the variety of approaches to received memories. As explained by Sicher, the second generation has a chance to reclaim their parents’ past⁷² and create their own stories – and the comparison of interviews collected in *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* in the context of migration shows that the place where children of survivors were growing up proves to be a crucial factor contributing to their narratives. Therefore, aiming for a better understanding of the phenomenon of postmemory it should be analyzed in national context and with attention to historical and cultural circumstances the process of transmission happened, which as Aleksandra Szczepan shows in her analysis of the second generation of Pol-

68 Ibidem, p. 280. The story of Zygmunt, who lives in Poland and whose mother kept her Jewish identity hidden, is also akin, as he recalls that while visiting Israel he felt like „half-Jew” only. Ibidem, p. 53.

69 Ibidem, p. 17.

70 Ibidem, p. 10.

71 Ibidem, p. 39.

72 Sicher, Efraim., *Postmemory, Backshadowing, Separation...*, op. cit., p. 268.

ish Jews, may provide additional insights to Hirsch's concept⁷³. "The personal story and the national are interconnected"⁷⁴ and, depending on the country representatives of the second generation lived in, they faced different problems, different difficulties, and challenges which deeply impacted both the process of trauma transmission itself and their experiences and thus shaped their identities. Those, who stayed in Poland had to suffer through prolonged silence and secrecy and were denied real knowledge about their identities until adulthood. Those, who lived in the USA had to face the challenge of living in a land so far from their hometowns that they felt deprived of important family ties and roots. And the ones who lived in Israel struggled with the lack of sense of belonging and constant feeling of their own inadequacy.

However, despite the differences, every story, every interview shows that representatives of the second generation are torn between looking back and reliving their parents' stories and memories and creating their own narrations. No matter where they live and what challenges they face, they always struggle with the same thing – postmemory, their "primary wound,"⁷⁵ and its consequences: the ever-present trauma that shaped their families' narratives and that overwhelms their emotions and identities. The stories they shared during their interviews show their journeys to reclaim fragmented memories they received in the process of transmission and create their own narratives. In the words of one of Grynberg's respondents, Daniel, one may say that they share "completely different stories that were totally similar."⁷⁶ Thus, it is important to point out that the interviews presented in *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* prove that representatives of the second generation strive to understand each other, despite said differences and difficulties they face when trying to communicate with one another. The conversations often end with Grynberg and his respondent calling each other "brothers" (or "brother" and "sister")⁷⁷, which is both a sign of mutual understanding and also a way of seeking connections, as described by Langer. It may suggest that the representatives of the second generation consider the very fact that they are children of Holocaust survivors as more important than the dissimilarities connected with their different upbringing. Their shared experience of postmemory allows them to communicate and connect with each other, which shows that what used to alienate them while growing up may also serve as a common ground leading to understanding each other and (on a symbolic level) creating "family ties" they long to have.

73 Szczepan, Aleksandra., op. cit., p. 319. Hirsch's concept of postmemory was initially created basing on her research concerning graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and her own experiences, therefore had an American national and cultural context.

74 Sicher, Efraim., *The Future of the Past...*, op. cit., p. 60.

75 Ibidem, p. 67.

76 Grynberg, Mikołaj., op. cit., p. 41.

77 Ibidem, p. 38, 99, 219.

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Summary

The subject of the following article centers around the issues of migration and post-memory (a term by M. Hirsch), using, as a research material, Mikołaj Grynberg's *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* (2014), a collection of narrative interviews with persons brought up by Holocaust survivors. Grynberg's respondents were born and grew up after Second World War and in Poland, in the USA or in Israel. The authoress analyses selected narrations provided by Grynberg's respondents and compares how the parents' decision either to stay in Poland after the war or to migrate to the USA or Israel affected their memories – and via transgenerational transmission of trauma – the memories and identities of their children. Analyzing *Oskarżam Auschwitz. Opowieści rodzinne* in the context of migration and memory may show how the experiences of representatives of the second generation vary in different social, political and cultural circumstances depending on the place their parents have chosen to live in and may result in better understanding of the phenomenon of postmemory.