ÉVA KOVÁCS and JÚLIA VAJDA

# "Blacks Are Not Usually Labeled Jews" – Why Does a Colored Boy Go to a Jewish School?[1]

ABSTRACT: *Emma was born in 1956. Her parents survived the Holocaust with the help of false documents and their Slavic appearance – goes the family legend. Emma was brought up by her parents, according to communist principles. She is already 17 when she first learns from her aunt that she is Jewish. She meets her husband, Ben, a Nigerian, in 1976, and they leave for Nigeria. A year later Emma returns alone, pregnant, and from then on, her relationship with Ben is almost completely cut off. In 1990, Emma sends her child to a Jewish school.*

*The analysis of the narrative interview reveals that for Emma, the meaning of choosing a stranger from a different culture was to get rid of a stigma. The presence of the colored child born from the relationship comforts her – if she manages to hide the Jewishness of the child, this covers her Jewishness as well. Along with this, she seems to be trying to protect her son from her identity problem: the color of his skin gives clear evidence of who he is and where he comes from. A decade later, she changes her strategy: now she wants the hidden stigma to be revealed and seen. And once more she uses her son to achieve this: if her son attends a Jewish school, he becomes Jewish. And if he is Jewish, that means that she too is Jewish.*

ANDRIS: *They didn't call me a Jew. Which is understandable, because I don't look Jewish. There are people who think that you need sideburns and a big nose and black hair, but anyone can be Jewish, like if you are blonde... Some people I can*

*recognize, concretely... I don't know whether they're Jewish, but they have all the characteristic features, but that doesn't mean they're Jewish. It's just likely. They make good money, they're smart... When I heard about the Jews, I usually heard that they are very smart, smarter than average. And their appearance, they have big noses. That's the average... Religious people think that they are a separate group, and that they are the chosen ones, and that they didn't get baptized then. That leaves me cold. I don't understand, maybe they need faith, but I have no need for it. Any company is good for me.*

*I didn't know anything at all about Jewry. I knew there was a Second World War, that there is a different calendar, so I knew about the big things. I don't know much more even now, but don't tell anyone.*

*It wasn't separated for us, because when we spoke about religion maybe, I really don't like it, I still hate it, I don't like religion, I don't believe in God, and we were talking about Christianity and Judaism too.*

*There are Jews in our family. My cousins are Jewish, and my mother, and my grandmother, and apparently my great-grandmother, but not many in the family, more acquaintances. I don't know when I found out, probably it came up by accident, maybe grandmother... but for sure, nothing influenced me at all... It didn't mean anything to me, so I don't like matzo ball soup because it's the symbol of Jews, but just because I like it.*

*We don't talk about the war, and I don't talk about... the past at all, about what's happening or what happened a couple of years ago or a long time ago, so that to me is a subject for history, which doesn't really interest me.*

Since 1989, Jewish primary schools operate in Hungary again. Originally only one school was planned, but ideas on what it should be like differed to such an extent that teaching has been going on in two places.[2]

The regime change offered a chance to reformulate various individual and communal identities, but, at the same time, a situation was created in which no one could sidestep a rethinking of his/her identity. The extension of social publicity and the gradual construction of a civil society led to the pluralization of communal identities. The change in the political system and the growth of democracy increased the choice of political identities. The ethnic and religious renaissance of the eighties meant that notions of ethnic identity had to be reformulated.

Earlier research into the Hungarian Jewish identity has shown that one can no longer speak of a group that can be clearly and quantitatively described in sociological terms.[3] However, there are certain marks of collective identity which continue to characterise Jews, perhaps now more than ever before. Perhaps the most important element is a reactive sense of identity, which derives from the Shoah and anti-Semitism.[4] A new feature of the eighties was that the social environment also favored certain positive aspects of identity.

Sociologists of migration in the West look on the revival of ethnicity as a "third generation" phenomenon. Following the desire of earlier generations to assimilate – perhaps because this had failed – this new generation rediscovers or mobilizes its ethnic identity, returning to the symbols of its grandparents, or creating new ones. The Hungarian Jewish renaissance can also be considered a third generation phenomenon, in the sense that this renaissance primarily concerns the third post-Shoah generation. Parents belonging to the second or third generation can once again send their children to Jewish schools, freely practice their religion and join Jewish cultural associations or Zionist organizations. Following the collective silence of the grandparents and their desire to assimilate, they can now own their Jewish identity or create pluralist forms of identity without precedent in 20th century Hungary. Their children – the third and fourth generations – are the first for whom pluralist forms of identity are a given fact.

The schools are just part of a process in which a group that is very heterogeneous in its sociological characteristics or lifestyle makes an attempt to reformulate its collective identity, creating new symbols for their purpose. Their true significance – in contrast to other alternative schools – is therefore not found in the difference between the education they offer and that available in state schools, but in their role in the reorganization of the Jewish identity of three generations (children, parents, grandparents) and of Hungarian Jewry as such.

The reason for the latter is that such a step by parents is by no means considered "normal" in Hungarian society: the parents themselves become "norm-breakers" in the eyes of those in their gentile environment. We searched for an answer to the question: why do parents do this? What is their individual motivation to do so?

The answer lies in the individual life stories of the parents. Below we present an individual case history. (With changes in particular names and sites, in order to protect the individual rights of the interviewee.)

⋆

The analysis of our interviews was focused on the above issues. The narrative life history interviews were conducted and analyzed with a method based on structural hermeneutics.[5] This means that the subject speaks freely about his or her life story, i.e., it is he or she who 'edits' the narrative – both the topics and the chronology. The role of the interviewer is 'restricted' to supporting the subject by his or her presence and attention. All we said to our subjects was that we found *the given school attractive* and that was why we were interested in what kind of parents took their children there. We then asked them to relate their life history, thereby outlining the frame of the conversation. We deliberately did not say that we were specifically investigating a *Jewish* school; the emphasis was put on the *attractiveness* of the school. We let the subjects themselves explain what the school meant for them.

Thus the main emphasis in the analysis was laid on understanding the internal logic of the interviews, formed by the speakers themselves. This was preceded by the assessment of biographical (family historical) data collected from the narrative and put into chronological sequence. These two together helped us to form hypotheses on the structure and interrelation of the narrated and real life histories. The hypotheses gained this way were tested by the fine-grain analysis of parts of the narratives.

⋆

In the spring of 1994 we contacted Emma and Andris to interview them. Emma was one of the parents who, following our request, expressed willingness to talk to us concerning the Jewish school. During our preliminary telephone conversation Emma appeared exceptionally helpful and open. She also apologized repeatedly for not knowing much about the school.

As it happened, we met Andris first. Therefore, at the time of our conversation with Emma, we were already aware of the fact that Andris was a mulatto boy, born from the marriage of a Nigerian man and a Jewish woman.

Emma was born in the spring of 1956, as the third child of parents belonging to the nomenclature.[6] Her father, Andor Kállai, was a university student at the time of the so-called "Act of *numerus clausus*" (1920). As he could not study in Budapest, he read economics in Vienna. During the German occupation (1944) he was hiding in Hungary and, being an activist of the resistance movement, was commissioned by the Party to forge documents. This is where he met his future wife, Etelka, Emma's mother, who was attracted to the communist movement as a young woman. Later on the mother, Etelka, worked for the „Pioneer Association" and in 1980 she retired from the Party Headquarters. The father, Andor, worked as an engineer at „Tungsram" factory, where he finally became the head of a major department.

The family shared their upper middle class flat with Etelka's aunt, Zsófi. Etelka's mother had died in childbirth and her father – in accordance with Jewish tradition – married his deceased wife's younger sister, Zsófi. It was she who brought up Etelka.

Among the members of the parent's (Andor and Etelka's) families, only a few survived the Holocaust. Etelka, whose Slavonic appearance hid her Jewish identity, delivered forged passes to those in need, dressed as a nun. None of them wore the yellow star. Auntie Zsófi returned from Auschwitz by herself. The other surviving relatives emigrated to Australia or to Israel. Auntie Zsófi continues to light the candles every Friday, attends the synagogue, pays the religious community contribution and keeps a kosher household for herself, while cooking for the rest of the family as well.

Emma is a young girl with average abilities. After leaving primary school she goes to grammar school, where she specializes in Russian. After a year, however, she moves to a class where they follow the non-specialized curriculum. She takes an active part in the activities of the Young Communists' Organization at the school and in its district. Her suggestions are rejected in a debate over the nomination of the members of the delegation to the World Youth Festival (VIT). She quits the Young Communists'

Organization and never returns to the movement. As an adolescent she does not share the political views of her parents.

She is offered a place at the mathematics and physics department of Lóránd Eötvös University (ELTE) with the help of personal connections only. After a year she gives it up and transfers to the College of Finance and Accounting. While still at ELTE, she meets her first great love, who, shortly after they split up, emigrates to Israel with his new girlfriend. Emma tells Auntie Zsófi about her misfortune in love – this is how she discovers that they, as well, are Jewish.

At college Emma has an eventful social life. They frequently go on excursions, to clubs, or to discos. At a summer camp by Lake Balaton in 1976 she meets her future husband, Ben. Ben is a Nigerian man, a medical student at Moscow University. For Emma's sake he transfers to the University of Medicine in Budapest, albeit with considerable difficulty. This is where he completes his final year.

They get married at Christmas in 1977 and Ben moves to Emma's flat. According to their plans, Emma is to take a year out of College and go to Nigeria with Ben. In the spring of 1978 Ben flies home to make the necessary preparations for Emma's arrival, who duly follows him in the summer. They stay with Ben's family. Emma soon gets pregnant. Two months later she returns to Budapest and moves back to her parents, where her brothers and Auntie Zsófi also live. She decides not to take the year off and continues her studies.

Not long before her final examinations Andris is born. At the time of the child's birth Ben comes to Hungary for a fortnight. Emma soon receives her degree and stays at home with her son for two years. Auntie Zsófi dies shortly thereafter. After the two years at home Emma finds a job with the district's state-owned property management office. Andris goes to nursery school, but he is often ill and Emma often takes sick leave. She falls in love with an old friend from grammar school, and they go out together for three years.

At junior school Andris practices swimming competitively and most successfully. He is 8 years old when they visit Ben in Nigeria, where Andris meets his father and his father's family. Finally, after a two-month stay, they return home. Andris takes up fencing instead of swimming and soon becomes a member of the national team.

In 1986 Emma's father dies. In 1988 Emma enrolls in a management-training course at the University of Economics. In 1992 she applies for a position as a company director in Szolnok and she is accepted. She moves to Szolnok, and spends only her weekends in Budapest. In 1993 she enrolls Andris at a Jewish school.

During the interview, Emma mentions more than once that she is *uninformed* about the school, but it is not the only topic that she cannot talk about. We asked her to tell us the story of her life.[8] She finds this question difficult, and often asks us to clarify what we mean. She cannot give herself up to her story. Her short, interrupted communications initially concern the times when her parents met. She begins her story with the parents' story – they met in the resistance movement in 1944. She thus immediately brings up the subject of Jewry. Her evaluating comments, which interrupt her narrative time after time, suggest that she is undecided as to what extent her parents' Jewish origin was important for them. Presumably, she regarded the interview situation as a challenge. She felt she needed to give an account of her Jewish origin.

Indeed, she goes on to talk about her father, specifically about the period between the two world wars, about her father's studies in Vienna. She interrupts her story, however, with the comment that her parents never talked to her about their earlier days. Emma believes that the reason for this could be her parents' *confused* attitude towards their own origin. She explains that her parents regarded Jewishness as a religion, which was of no concern to anyone in the 1950s. Therefore, they could concentrate on their professional lives and the movement. Next, Emma tells us about her parents' professions and communist careers, closing her account with the remark that her *parents worked all the time*. She then attempts to describe their family life. She does not, however, get around to recalling concrete experiences. What her short reports convey is that she had an *ordinary* childhood. In this context, she starts to speak about her parents once again. Through her explanations an idyllic picture soon unfolds about her childhood. In this picture her mother is *friendly and sociable*, while her father is an *abstracted character*. The adjectives used by Emma suggest a kind of distance, since these adjectives are unusual in characterizing a parent-child relationship. They seem more suitable for describing the sentiments of one adult toward another.

Later on Emma is still unable to relate stories from her childhood. She prefers to evaluate. Other important personal relationships in her life appear in her narrative in a similar fashion. She cannot talk about Auntie Zsófi, her sisters, Ben or Andris without keeping a greater or lesser distance. Then Emma herself seems to be alarmed by this distance, and she turns to her parents' defense. *The grandchildren loved* Emma's mother and her father was a *very honest* person, she goes on to say. She completes their characterization with the statement that *after all, her parents had a very good marriage*. After a short pause Emma adds *their work and the movement was very important for them*. Following these fluctuations we had the feeling that she cannot talk about her parents from close, perhaps because she could never get close to them, or perhaps closeness would only evoke painful memories.

When the movement comes up again, it indeed evokes negative memories. Emma recounts that as an adolescent she had serious political debates with her parents. She does not give the details of these perhaps painful conflicts, but returns to the subject of their Jewish identity instead. She points out that her aunt was of *Semitic persuasion* and that in spite of this she still was not aware of their Jewish origin. In her opinion, the reason for this was her parents' prim attitude towards everything. Jewishness and the movement were not the only things they could not talk about openly in the family: talk of sex was also taboo. There is a prolonged pause again in her narrative. Then she goes on to report on her parents' Holocaust experiences. From this broken discourse we learn that her parents were hiding and helping others as part of the illegal movement. Emma emphasizes that what made this feasible was the fact that her parents did not have visible Jewish features, and that they worked in "disguise". This is where it first emerges that for Emma the questions of origin and visibility are closely related. As if the stigma existed only if it could be seen, as if one's origin could be put on and taken off again. All this emerges from allusions only. She cannot leave the subject but perhaps its proximity alarms her, too. The remarks interrupting her reports explain that she does not know more about this because it is one of those subjects which was treated primly by her parents. They did not boast of their deeds, not even in retrospect. In her evaluating comments, Emma emphasizes how *humane* her parents were in those times.

Next, Emma gives an account of the family's losses in 1944. The succession of subjects suggests that she is concerned with survival.

Contrasting her parents, who escaped from the Holocaust, with the lost members of the family, shows the inheritance of the survivors' sense of guilt. She tells us that her parents went so far in not talking, that she was already at college when she had to find out from her aunt that she is Jewish. Why is it at this point that she can relate a fragment of her story coherently for the first time? Possibly, this is when she has first departed from her attempts to describe her childhood, the moment when the secret determining her childhood has been revealed. The taboo subject of Jewishness could be one of the reasons she cannot talk about her childhood. A new detail comes to the surface, that her *Semitic* aunt has the knowledge of the secret – and it is her to whom Emma could turn with her disappointment in love. Emma is ambivalent, however, about revealing the secret: she cannot recount the story itself, even though she emphasizes repeatedly how little it worried her. From her narrative, which is rich in allusions, what exactly it was that did not worry her cannot be reconstructed: that the secret had been revealed, or Jewishness itself.

After this episode there is a long pause in her narrative, she is waiting for us to help. When, however, we want to ask her about her aunt, she interrupts us with the information that Auntie Zsófi did not talk much about this, either, that she *held back* her religion. Emma interprets this with ambivalent feelings. On the one hand she respects Auntie Zsófi for being able to do this – for the sake of peace in the family -, and on the other hand she tries to justify her parents having compelled Auntie Zsófi to do this. The motif that her parents must be forgiven for everything returns, since who knows what they had to go through in those days? As we listen to Emma defending both sides, we feel that as a child she experienced the ideological conflict between the two generations as a choice between her parents and Auntie Zsófi.

Emma is so concerned with the secret, that following her only story about the unveiling, she returns to the subject with her next narrative. She tells us that not long before her father's death, she *demanded an explanation* as to why they had concealed that she was Jewish from her. Her father replied that he was glad neither of his daughters had married a Jewish man, which, as her comments reveal, upset Emma to a great extent. Finally, just as before, she defends her father's reaction by noting that he lived through different times than did she.

From then on, Emma stays with the subject of Jewishness for a long time. First she tells us about another conflict with her father. She explains that *perhaps* she would have liked to have her son, Andris, circumcised *for medical reasons*, but her father disapproved. She then notes again how important it was for her father that his children should not choose Jewish spouses. We are again faced with the problem of visibility: circumcised men can be recognized as Jewish, there is no disguise that could hide it perfectly. In Emma's intent to have Andris circumcised, the wish to make her origin visible and irrevocable if not in herself, then at least in her child, may play a role. As a bizarre twist of life, this same child is one whose origin could be "seen" right from the moment of his birth, since he inherited his father's black skin color and features.

It is through this subject that Emma's son, Andris, first appears in her story. Next, we hear broken stories about Emma's attempts to clarify her origin within her environment, which invariably failed. Finally, she talks for a relatively long time about a Jewish girlfriend who took her to a few Jewish gatherings in the university years, and who later married an Orthodox Jew. From Emma's comments we find out that she did not consider these gatherings really important. She preferred to go out. She is ambivalent about her own attempts: she seems to be angry with those who were unwilling to talk about the subject, but at the same time she cannot really accept submitting to Jewish identity. The way she does not differentiate between the "Friday nights" and going out not only suggests that she is trying to lessen the significance of these gatherings, but also shows certain associations in seeking a partner. The context also implies a fantasy about choosing a Jewish partner, which is rejected together with the meetings. Emma's ambivalence about Jewishness appears in her comments. She is jealous of those who are religious, she says, and she would like to bring up her son in a similar vein, but she herself is unable to do it. That is why she enrolled him in a Jewish school.

In the end she concludes that, as she could not have her son "visibly" Jewish, she will arrange Jewishness for him in the form of religion. If one cannot see it, at least one can believe in it. Religion can be put on and taken off again, and can be held back the way Auntie Zsófi held it back. By regarding Jewishness as a religion Emma returns to the old family model: her adult environment consisted entirely of "believers", the religious Auntie

Zsófi and her fundamentalist communist parents, who could reconcile the two fundamentally different ideologies in everyday living presumably on this same basis.

What is the significance of the Jewish school in Emma's relationship with her son? With her choice Emma wants to turn Andris into a Jew, to strengthen this thread of his origin and with it the connection between them. Due to this family constellation, she does not experience her Jewishness as an inherited ethnic identity, and it is understandable that she sees religion as a mediator, through which she may be able to rediscover her Jewish identity. At the same time, due to her choice of school, Jewish identity becomes somewhat "visible" for her as well. Andris is not only Nigerian, but Jewish as well, and both can be seen.

In the final section of our interview we asked Emma about her first meeting with Ben. As previously, she begins with forced laughter. "*Just when we were on holiday at Lake Balaton* (*laughs*), *the usual things, nothing special…*" she answers. Then she remains silent for a long time. Finally, she begins a broken narrative about the problems they had: it was difficult for them to put together the necessary documents for their marriage, they lived with her parents, Ben finally went home to look for a job, while she continued her studies at college and enrolled in an English course with her girlfriend. *As I said, it was important for her that she was Jewish and they, for example, had the children circumcised, but properly, I mean not in the hospital but ritually, yes and then I went to Nigeria*. *[She closes her story before a long pause.]*

When we ask her about Ben's two-week visit, she gives a short answer again: *It was nothing special,* she says and then falls silent. It can be seen that Emma cannot really talk about her relationship with Ben. That story is not part of the picture she has created about herself. Only the long pauses and her forced laughter allude to her embarrassing experiences. Her motherhood and her Jewish origin seem to be much more important for her. It is this, again, that she contrasts with the enclosed story of her marriage. The sudden appearance of the subject of circumcision can only be interpreted as the rejection of the non-Jewish Ben.

We asked Emma to tell us about the period when they lived together in Hungary. *It was all quarrelling…* she begins after a short pause, because Ben had a large company of young men, which she did not like. She immediately adds that her parents did not mind, because they were *very good*

*natured*, and they did not have much of a family life anyway: *We lived like two children*, she finishes. She then goes on to say that everyone liked Ben, even Auntie Zsófi, because he was a *friendly chap*. Emma does not depict their relationship as man and woman living in matrimony, but rather as the loving relationship of a brother and sister. She does not like to talk about the quarrels. She returns to the idyllic picture with which she would like to characterize her childhood. She keeps a distance in presenting Ben and mentions Auntie Zsófi again. What part could her aunt have here? Is she just one of those who liked Ben or did her appearance show Emma's attachment to the Jewish context? Could it be that Auntie Zsófi's approval of Ben justifies Emma's choice for her?

We ask Emma about the day when Ben moved in with them. She becomes irritated and starts arguing with us: *I've no idea, perfectly normal, listen, someone moves in with you, either a boy or a girl, from this point of view it doesn't really affect you, at least I can't remember, the whole thing's like, I can't remember…* Then she becomes apologetic, that in general there are a lot of things that she does not notice. Then she turns to us, *just ask me more!* Next, she mentions that a Jewish girlfriend of hers also stayed there for a while, *So people can come here any time, it's not a problem, there's nothing to notice, that someone else sleeps here, too*, she says.

Emma really cannot talk to us about their marriage. It in part may be due to her idea that she needs to appear as a Jew in front of us. She would like to lessen the weight of her past choice. She presents Ben as one of many friends. The meaning of the reappearance of the Jewish girlfriend may be three-fold. First, it plays a role in de-emphasizing Emma's relationship with Ben. Second, it implies that the presence of Jews in the family flat was nothing remarkable. Third, it may be a message to us, in the interview situation. Taking the associations further: if Jewishness was not dealt with in Emma's family, why should they have been concerned with Nigerian origin at all?

*My parents had a large circle of friends as well*, continues Emma, further decreasing the importance of the relationship, *…though Dad wasn't a very social type, maybe Andris takes after him a little*. Andris, therefore, has the outside features of his African father, his nature, however, is from Emma's father, a person who is ambivalent about his Jewish origin.

At the end of the interview the second trip to Nigeria comes up again, for the last time. Emma emphasizes again that it was *unpleasant*, but did not

change anything in their lives. *Ben and Andris got to know each other and decided whether they wanted to keep in touch… I'm not against it, either…*

It seems that Emma cannot bear the burden of their trip and of her unfortunate marriage. She feels guilty for taking Andris's father away from him, but she cannot let him identify himself with him. She thus creates a situation where her son is confronted with a task, which Andris cannot possibly cope with at his age.

Andris*: It was eight years ago. It was good then, because it was the first time in my life that I flew, and I liked that, and I saw the whole city there, and I swam in the Lake, so I had a good time there... I thought it wasn't him, because several people came to pick me up, and I didn't know who he was, he was the tallest, and I thought that's him, and it was... I don't know what day we left... in the morning we went out to the airport, and I had to transfer in London. That was good. I remember the food, because it was really great. Arriving in Budapest was a big event, because Mom made cake. That was the trip, really. I only think about it when I look at pictures or some object, I remember the lake, my Father's brother was a stock agent, so I was at the stock market, and my Father's other brother worked in a gem buffing plant, and I was there, and I really liked that. We were in other places too, like a ranch, that was good... We don't talk about me being Nigerian. No, we don't talk, we don't even talk about my father at all... They're used to it, that's how they know me. I'm used to it too, this is how I was born, that's it... I could become disadvantaged because of this. If you think about it, about opportunities, then no. I don't know. I didn't even know I was Jewish. There are so many different kinds of people in our class.*

During the interview we asked Emma about Andris several times. The subject finally comes up twice, in very similar ways, as if 'by chance'. Finishing the story of her latest successes at work, she tells us about her having the child. For a long time, it is not clear what she is talking about. She starts her narrative with adjectives suggesting an uplifted emotional state, such as *superb* and *I felt wonderful*, which appear again and again in her story. These adjectives – as before – are followed by calmer, less emotional evaluative comments. We do not know whether she is talking about her pregnancy or the trip to Nigeria. Then she mentions her coming home. It is not clear to what event she attributes the happiness that she tells us

about: to her pregnancy, to her trip to Nigeria or perhaps to her return, or maybe to the fact that she became pregnant soon enough. It is also possible that she felt relieved as she had returned home and it was this relief that the superlatives express. Later she tells us how nice it was that she could continue her studies and *it* did not show. Emma’s classmates at college, who learned about the *event* from her, were also *pleasant and friendly – in their own way,* she says. Emma’s words suggest loneliness; even if her pregnancy gave her pleasure, she had no one to share it with other than her (*in their own way*) pleasant classmates, who did not notice the *event*. Our impression is that she would have had to be grateful to her classmates for simply not hurting her, even though they knew about the event. But what is this *event* that her classmates could only acknowledge in their own way? Perhaps it is not simply the fact of being pregnant, but the hidden, not yet visible stigma.

After a long pause Emma tells us about childbirth, qualifying it with all positive adjectives. At the same time, the recalled experiences suggest suffering and pain. She then goes on to describing Andris as *a beautiful, adorable baby*, who she often *lent* to close or distant relatives. In these stories her son does not really appear as a flesh and blood child, but rather as a doll with beautiful hair. As his story unfolds, Andris still does not come alive.

In the present as well, Emma only sees her son from outside. She emphasizes more than once that she does not know what happens to him at school, or how he experiences his mixed Jewish and Nigerian origin. *He is a big boy, he can decide what he wants, I can’t worm it out of him*, she says more than once.

The narrative, of course, shows that these are not the words of an irresponsible mother. As Emma is worried that she cannot solve the problem of his origin and that she might weigh down her son in her loneliness, she chooses to leave the big questions of life to Andris. This is also evident from the fact that the episodes and experiences related to the adolescent Andris are embedded in the story of Emma’s new life. While she does not emphasize her job or career at all during the period when Andris was a little boy, and talks about her informal, social life only, in the recent past she also becomes a career woman. In those days Andris was a social link, a *beautiful baby*. Now he is a grown-up partner, who supports her in her successes at work. In this role Andris appears as a real person.

It can be seen from the radical change of jobs and Andris's enrolment at a Jewish school that Emma alters her life fundamentally, and this is reflected in her altered narrative. Up to this point her life was determined by the play of identities and stigmas. Making visible the stigmas she previously wished to hide enables her to shape her own self. In doing so, she also tries to transform her relationship with her son. While she urges Andris to become an adult, perhaps prematurely, and pushes their personal mother and child relationship into the background, placing it on a different level, she also gets closer to her son. From now on their Jewish identity (as well) connects them.

Interviewer*: Tell me about this drawing. (A woman and a young boy sit facing one another.)*

Andris: *They share feelings. They look a little sad, maybe it's a mother and child. They belong together, the boy looks sad. That's it. Maybe they called him Jewish. That's what I think. Maybe he did something wrong. Maybe he failed his homework assignment.*

Interviewer*: What are they saying?*

Andris: *'Don't do that…' or something like that. The child is nodding, and saying, 'sure'.*

Interviewer*: Here's another drawing. (A man and a small boy facing one another.)*

Andris: *The father is taking, saying something interesting, and the boy is listening with interest. He's saying something interesting or very important, and the boy is sitting and listening. Maybe the father is teaching the boy something…*

Interviewer*: Here's the third drawing. (A man, a woman, between the a small boy, adults facing the boy.)*

Andris: *It's actually two parents who are proud of each other, because the boy loves them. That's why the boy is looking like that. There's a look of praise on his face… Both are really saying what a bright and good-looking boy they have… The boy is just listening. Only they believe the boy is really on their side. The boy is actually not even there…*

## NOTES

[1] Our research project was supported by the National Foundation for Scientific Research (OTKA). The present study was conducted using the hermeneutic case-reconstruction method. This method was also employed in our study entitled "'Leigazoltam a zsidókhoz' – A társadalmi zsidó identitás élettörténeti gyökerei," *Thalassa,* 1994, No. 1-2. (Appeared in English as: "'I Have a Certificate of Not Being Anti-Semite' – Identity of a 'Social Jew': its Its Roots in Life History," *East European Review*, Special Issue (II), 1998.)

[2] See Éva Kovács and Júlia Vajda, "Jewish School – Jewish Identity," *BUKSZ, English Edition*, 1993.

[3] For information on history and identity research see the following volumes, Nathan Katzburg, *Hungary and the Jews. Policy and Legislation 1920-1943* (Ramat-Gan, 1981); Viktor Karády et al., *Jewry in Hungary after 1945* (Paris: 1984) – published in Hungarian; Balázs Fűzfa and Gábor Szabó (eds.), *On the Jewish Question* (Szombathely: 1989) – published in Hungarian; Ferenc L. Lendvay (ed.), *Seven Decades in the History of Hungarian Jewry, vol 1, 2* (Budapest: 1990); Péter Hanák (ed.), *Jewry, Identity, History* (Budapest: 1992) – published in Hungarian; Jenő Lévai, *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (Zürich: 1948); Ferenc Erős, András Kovács and Katalin Lévai, "Comment j'en suis arrivé ŕ apprendre que j'étais juif?," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales,* (56), 1985.

[4] On the losses of the Hungarian Jewry in the Holocaust, see Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: 1981). On the Shoah-identity, see Teréz Virág, "Children of the Holocaust and their Children's Children," *Dynamic Psychotherapy*, vol. 2., 1984, pp. 47-60; Ferenc Eros, Júlia Vajda and Éva Kovács, "Intergenerational Responses to Social and Political Changes: Transformation of Jewish Identity in Hungary," in Yael Danieli (ed.), *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1998).

[5] See Ulrich Oevermann, "Die Methodologie einer "Objektiven Hermeneutik" und ihre allgemeine forschungslogische Bedeutung in den Sozialwissenschaften," in H. G. Soeffner (ed.), *Interpretative Verfahren in den Sozial- und Textwissenschaften* (Stuttgart: 1979). Also by the same author, 'Zur Sache. Die Bedeutung von Adornos methodologischen Selbstverstandnis für Begründung einer materialen soziologischen Strukturanalyse', in L.V. Friedeburg (ed.), – *Habermas, J. Adorno Konferenz*, (Frankfurt: 1983); F. Schütze, 'Biographieforschung und narratives Interview,' *Neue Praxis,* 1983, 3. On the empirical application of the method see Gabriele Rosenthal (ed.), *Die Hitlerjugend-Generation. Biographische Tematisierung als Vergangenheitsbewaltigung* (Essen: 1986). The same

author, 'Geschichte in der Lebensgeschichte – Leben mit dem "Dritten Reich" gestern und heute,' *Bios*, 1988, vol 1-2. The same author, 'The Biographical Meaning of a Historical Event,' *International Journal of Oral History,* 1989, vol. 3. The same author, 'Als der Krieg kam, hatte ich mit Hitler nicht mehr zu tun' Opladen, 1990, 6. *Methodischer Anhang,* 246.

[6] Emma's biography was reconstructed and arranged in chronological order on the basis of the narrative life history interview made with her.

[7] Words and expressions taken word by word from the interview with Emma are marked by italic typeface.