

PHD RESEARCH

VERA HAJTÓ

Milk Sauce and Paprika: Migration, Childhood and Memory of the Inter-war Belgian-Hungarian Child Relief Project

KU Leuven. Supervisor : Patrick Pasture. Co-supervisor : Idesbald Goddeeris.

Shortly after the First World War, transnational and national social institutions set up a humanitarian child relief organisation between Hungary and Belgium. Within this project, thousands of Hungarian children moved between the two countries. Some of them spent their holiday in Belgium and then returned to their Hungarian families, others remained with their foster families forever. The relief project and its national and transnational organisers (the Catholic Church and community for the most part) significantly influenced the lives of families and the lives of all of the children regardless of the children's later trajectories.

The main question of the present study is how experiences of migration influence the representation of childhood. This study explores the relationship between migration and childhood and explicitly demonstrates these two social constructions are significantly interconnected. This interconnectedness is strongly motivated by the observation that creation and negotiation of identities are central to both migration and childhood and that the realm of memory has a decisive influence on the conceptualisation of the two.

Based on many different sources, such as official documentations, contemporary newspapers, public and private collections of photographs, family correspondences,

biographies and interviews, this work discovers the political, social and cultural impacts of the Belgian-Hungarian child relief project on the two countries and on the participating families. The research reveals that one of the crucial influences of the relief project was turning the Belgian holiday into a migration experience regardless of the trajectories of the children. Even those children who returned to their home country after their temporary stay abroad, tended to relate and remember about their holiday as a life-changing experience; a journey that took them across national and cultural borders and defined their memories of childhood.