

Chapter 1

SCHOOLS, LANGUAGE AND CHILDREN DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR



The shot fired by a young Serbian patriot that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, on 28 June 1914, sparked the First World War. In the month that followed, the two coalitions of Great Powers on the European continent, the Triple Entente of France, Russia and Britain (later called the Allied Powers), and the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy (later called the Central Powers), mobilised their military forces. On 2 August, Germany demanded free access through Belgium so that its armies could invade France. When Belgian politicians refused to give up the country's neutrality, the German army invaded Belgium a day later and declared war on France, whereupon the Belgian government declared war on Germany.

Children experienced the German invasion of Belgium differently than adults. While German troops were marching through the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy, fifteen-year-old Leonie Schmetz wrote in her diary that children were playing war games on the streets.¹ German soldiers were confused by what they found in the Belgian-German borderlands. Most were unaware that French was the language used by the inhabitants of Prussian Wallonia, and it also came as a shock to them to discover that people on the other side of the state border line spoke German but did not endorse Germany's invasion of the neutral Belgian state they inhabited.² In a letter sent home by a German soldier, he recalled his time in Malmedy as follows: 'The population assured us again and again: "Nous sommes de vous Allemands" (We are Germans), but already during a stop at the marketplace, a little boy shouted to me, "Just you wait, when the French arrive, then you'll fill your pants"'.³ The local boy dared to publicly express the loyalty towards France that local inhabitants had increasingly started to develop, and could get away with it unpunished.

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The German invasion took the shape of a total war, bringing about vast devastation and the murdering of soldiers and civilians. A rumour at night that the enemy was close by, followed by a random shot in the dark, was sufficient to provoke a wild killing spree.⁴ After shooting at some houses in the Wallonian village of Soiron, German soldiers found a family with a one-year-old child hidden in the cellar, snatched one man and shot him in the neck. The young mother used her child in the hope of invoking compassion in the soldier: 'She held up the child she was carrying in her arms, while holding the soldier's hands so that he would show mercy on them all: "Take everything we have, take everything," she shouted, "but let us live".'⁵ The worst act of atrocity towards civilians was committed in Dinant, where 674 inhabitants were killed by German soldiers, regardless of their age or sex.⁶

The German invasion was stopped at the end of October when Belgian troops flooded the Yser River. A 750-kilometre front line was established from the North Sea over the flooded lowlands of the banks of the Yser to the French state border line, crossing through the Vosges, and reaching the French-Swiss border line further south. Whereas the greater part of the pre-war Belgian Kingdom stayed under German occupation for the next four years, a small part in the south-west (the Westhoek) remained unoccupied. During the German invasion, one and a half million Belgian soldiers and civilians fled the country, mainly to the Netherlands, France and Great Britain. Among the first refugees arriving in the Netherlands were up to 80,000 German citizens who had been living mostly in the cities of Brussels and Antwerp.⁷ Their fear turned out to be justified: under the German occupation, Belgium transformed from a liberal state where immigrants did not need to hold Belgian citizenship to be considered an equal member of the national community into one where descent and national identification were the main criteria for inclusion.⁸

In Upper Silesia, it remained remarkably calm during the opening days of the war. Apart from the conscription of men to the German army, everyday life continued unchanged. Poles in Central Eastern Europe joined one of the three imperial armies, such as the military unit set up initially within the Austro-Hungarian army, called the Polish Legions, one brigade of which was led by the man who would later become the de facto leader of the Second Polish Republic, Józef Piłsudski. Despite the legal minimum age for recruitment being seventeen, the only factor that counted in practice was a height of 140 cm, which resulted in children as young as eleven joining the forces.⁹ The high number of young recruits, estimated at tens of thousands, was already apparent at the time, and favoured the propagandistic image of the Legions' leader, Józef Piłsudski, as a grandfather taking care of his sons.¹⁰ Other Polish army formations were

less numerous. Following an agreement between Austro-Hungary and Germany in April 1917, a Polish military unit was formed within the German Empire, but it never counted more than 3,000 soldiers. Meanwhile, Piłsudski's counterpart in interwar Polish politics, Roman Dmowski, took the initiative to launch a Polish military contingent for volunteers in France in 1917, called the Blue Army (*Błękitna Armia*), which first fought at the Western Front and later in the Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Soviet wars over the state border lines of the newly independent Polish Second Republic.¹¹

In order to support the Allied Powers fighting against the German army in Belgium and northern France, the tsarist army invaded Prussia from the east. In Upper Silesia, rumours about atrocities circulated, fueling the fear that Russian troops could cross the German state border line at any moment, but the Battle of Tannenberg at the end of August 1914 set minds at rest and consolidated the belief that Emperor Wilhelm II would be able to protect the security of Upper Silesia's population.¹² The German Emperor indeed envisioned the creation of an independent buffer zone from East Prussia to Upper Silesia linked to the Reich.¹³ On their way east, German troops entered Congress Poland and felt no compunction about causing the deaths of civilians, such as happened during the bombing of the Jewish quarter of Kalisz.¹⁴ The tsarist army was quickly pushed out of part of Congress Poland but was able to secure control over almost the whole of Galicia between December 1914 and the summer of 1915. In Przemyśl, where civilians gathered whose houses in the surrounding villages had been burned down by tsarist soldiers, the Austro-Hungarian army defended the fortified city for 133 days. One of those trapped during the siege, the Austrian writer Ilka-Künigl Ehrenburg, wrote: 'How often do officers, beaten in their coats, bring in lost children from the villages! There, in the middle of the rain, a three-year-old boy, all alone, laughing and playing in the field. Soldiers who found him could not get anything out of him, just the words "Babbo America".'¹⁵

Of all the inhabitants of the multiethnic and multireligious region of Galicia, Jews suffered the most. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Galicia became a place of refuge for Jews fleeing pogroms in the Russian Empire, accounting for a third of the local population at the time of the invasion.¹⁶ Russian violence against Jews included the killing of civilians, the stealing or burning of their belongings, and deportations to areas beyond the Dnieper River. While the Russian Empire's allies, Great Britain and France, knew about the tsarist army's atrocities in Galicia, they did not call for an end to them. Instead, they preferred to keep international attention focused on the atrocities taking place much closer to their homes, in Belgium.¹⁷ Up to 300,000 Galician Jews fled westwards

in search of safety, with approximately a third of them settling in Vienna. With shortages in the supply of milk and potatoes already visible in the autumn of 1914, Galician Jewish children queuing in front of shops, sent by their working mothers, became part of the everyday life of the city.¹⁸

In the summer of 1915, the German and Austro-Hungarian armies reconquered Galicia and evicted the tsarist army from Congress Poland, where they erected a German zone, including the city of Warsaw, and a smaller Austrian zone to the south.¹⁹ A pivotal battle leading to Russia's defeat took place in Gorlice-Tarnów, during which the tsarist army bombed civilian houses, killing hundreds of men, women and children in the process.²⁰ On their retreat, the tsarist army burned down villages and deported local inhabitants en masse to the Russian interior. On his way to Bielsk Podlaski, a British attaché witnessed a twenty-mile uninterrupted procession of horse carts filled with families and useful materials.²¹ In the turmoil of the Russian withdrawal from Galicia, the remaining local civilians started to attack each other. For Poles and Ukrainians, Jews became once again unwanted neighbours.²²

With the Central Powers' occupation of Congress Poland, a new chapter began. Enjoying more decision-making power, primarily in the domains of education and welfare, the region became a laboratory for experiments in what future Polish statehood might look like, and how it might be constituted. Several concepts of political thinking developed at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century were tested out within the everyday war reality of poverty and hunger. Policies towards children were prioritised, as children were to become the backbone of the new Polish state. Within that process, the Polish child gradually took shape.²³

Away from the front lines of the war, the everyday life of children continued. By situating the everyday life of children living in the two case study borderlands within the broader context of the everyday life of children in the political entities of relevance for this study (namely, the German Empire, Belgium, the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia), similarities and differences can be detected. The everyday life of children living on the fringes of the German Empire during the First World War was in many aspects similar to elsewhere in the empire. Their fathers were conscripted to the army, while boys aged sixteen to twenty were trained to follow in their footsteps by attending a military preparation course.²⁴ Initially, the war attracted the fascination of local inhabitants. Karl Kaisig, a librarian from Gliwice (Upper Silesia), remarked: 'My neighbour had never even previously looked at a map . . . Now she's asking me, for example, whether Brussels is bigger than Belgium or whether Bavaria is fighting with us or against us.'²⁵ As the war went on, however, agrarian production decreased

by up to a third and food supplies became irregular. Children saw how compulsory levies on milk and wheat influenced their nutrition.²⁶ Eventually, approximately 56,000 conscripts from Upper Silesia and 1,800 from the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy would not survive the war.²⁷ When Hermann Heutz's wounded father returned to his home in the region of Eupen in the spring of 1918, the boy remembered: 'I doubt that our father's return significantly boosted our very meagre bill of fare. Father couldn't make flour, bacon or butter either. Even in matters of education or punishment, we children didn't notice any changes.'²⁸

The war also made it into the classroom. Initially, it eased the introduction of reform methods in primary education, such as the collective reading of newspaper articles and the writing of personal narratives instead of the composition of essays within rigidly enforced rules prescribing content, style and thesis.²⁹ But it did not take long before teaching personnel ran short and oldest sons were relieved from compulsory education in order to take care of the family farm.³⁰ By now, the war was not only discussed in the 'war hour' added to the school curriculum, where the heroic deeds of individual German soldiers were described, but found its way to other subjects as well.³¹ A mathematics textbook printed in 1917 asked: 'A machine gun fires eight shots a second. How long does it take for 300 cartridges to be fired?'³² Pupils were also given an active role in alleviating the shortages of a war economy. Whether by saving coins, collecting berries for the production of juice for injured soldiers, or gathering the pits of stone fruits for the extraction of oil, children could do their bit for the German nation.³³

When nutrition was scarce during the winter of 1916–1917, the various private welfare organisations that had provided treatment camps for children growing up in cities throughout the German Empire were replaced by the Reich Central Office Country Residence for City Children (Reichszentrale Landaufenthalt für Stadtkinder), which in 1918 sent 575,000 German children to the countryside, either to treatment camps or to a stay with a farmer's family.³⁴ A leaflet addressing German farming women appealed to them to open their homes and hearts to urban children: 'The German people thank you rural women in the north, south, east and west of our fatherland for your charitable deeds for the sake of Germany's youth . . . Welcome them, you German rural women, as our fatherland needs powerful youth.'³⁵ The fact that the provinces of Silesia and the Rhineland were still receiving urban children as late as the summer of 1918 in similar numbers to the other provinces of Prussia indicates that they were not yet considered unsafe places.³⁶ Children were officially recruited on the basis of their malnutrition and weakened health, but even the yearly report of the Reich Central Office admitted that the children's

contribution had made the potato harvest 'significantly better' than the previous year.³⁷

For children in the regions of Eupen, there were constant reminders that a war was taking place: the two military airports, with planes regularly taking off in the direction of Belgium, and the railway station of Herbestahl, transporting German soldiers to the Belgian front line, bringing injured German soldiers home, and taking Belgian prisoners of war deeper into the German Empire.³⁸ In the north, where the region of Eupen bordered the Netherlands, Belgium and the condominium of Neutral Moresnet, the German military installed a lethal electric fence of over two hundred kilometres, colloquially referred to as the Wire of Death (*doden-draad*), in order to block migration from occupied Belgium to the neutral Netherlands.³⁹ The wire not only wounded any child who touched it out of curiosity, but also opened a window of opportunity for children, who played a special role within the smuggling activities coordinated from the city of Eupen, known at the time as the smuggling Eldorado.⁴⁰ Border guards were not particularly eager to shoot at children smuggling butter or cigarettes, and if they did, they mostly shot in the air. Nevertheless, the Dutch administration in the province of Limburg estimated that by 1917 there had already been five hundred casualties of the wire, a death toll that included children from the region of Eupen.⁴¹ Other local children were not directly involved in the smuggling, but were the beneficiaries of its results, and found milk, eggs and white bread on their breakfast tables.⁴² In the region of Malmedy, on the other hand, children born after 1915 needed to be given a German instead of a French name, and the conscription of young local Belgian citizens to the German army that began in the autumn of 1916 provoked at least some to reflect on their loyalties. Awaiting his conscription, one young man from Malmedy pleaded with the Belgian king to be allowed to join the Belgian forces instead: '[in order] to allow me the opportunity to prove the extent of my desire and my right to be counted among the numbers of other Belgians, even if it means sacrificing my life'.⁴³

Children in the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy found themselves in a more privileged situation than children in Belgium. Whereas most children remained in Belgium during the German occupation, there were also children among the 600,000 pre-war inhabitants of Belgium who stayed in exile during the war. In occupied Belgium, the quality of education very much depended on local circumstances: the knowledge of the uncertified teachers taking over educational responsibilities from the pre-war teaching personnel drafted into the Belgian army, the degree to which school buildings were destroyed or used by the military, and the physical condition of children in a time when cattle and grain were

seized by the occupiers.⁴⁴ Outside their schools, children were reported using sticks as swords in their war games and testing out ammunition, a practice which, for example, caused the death of fifteen children in Waregem in March 1918 (West Flanders).⁴⁵ The occupying regime also brought about language tensions in primary education. The right of a guardian to choose freely whether to send his child to a public or a subsidised private (i.e. Catholic) school, and whether to have his child taught in French or Dutch, as prescribed in the Belgian compulsory education law of 1914, was subjected to a crucial test in the city of Brussels.⁴⁶ The German occupying forces dictated that guardians must choose Dutch as the language of instruction for their children. When Emile Jacquemin, the alderman of education, tried to justify his refusal to grant that decision-making power political authority on the basis of the new Belgian law, he was deported to Germany.⁴⁷ In the Flanders countryside, however, people did not experience similar hardships, and for that reason appeared more likely to be in favour of the *Flamenpolitik* that sought to win the sympathy of people in Flanders, by means of supporting a proliferation of the Dutch language, among other policies, in order to dissolve the country.⁴⁸

Out of a concern to keep the children away from fighting and violence, the biggest campaign in the history of the Belgian Kingdom was launched to evacuate children and provide them with a safe shelter and the opportunity to continue their education.⁴⁹ In Great Britain, about 50,000 children of Belgian immigrant families received primary education, most in English schools under the supervision of a Belgian teacher. 10,000 of these were educated in a Belgian school system set up by the Belgian Catholic Church, where children were taught in their own language, whether that be French or Dutch.⁵⁰ In France, thanks to the support of Belgian authorities and various relief associations, an estimated 14,000 children from Belgium were enrolled at boarding schools. These associations included the Children of Flanders Rescue Committee set up by the American writer Edith Wharton, the Belgian Civil Aid (*Aide Civile Belge*), the Franco-American Committee for the Protection of Children of the Border (*Comité Franco-Américain pour la Protection des Enfants de la Frontière*), and the Scottish Home / the Children of the Fire Zone Organisation (*Le Foyer Ecossais / Œuvre des Enfants de la zone du Feu*) set up by the Scottish nurse Georgie Fyfe, who worked together with the French Red Cross. In addition, two Roman Catholic nuns from Roesbrugge, a Belgian town near the front line, who had fled their monastery, set up a boarding school for the children of their neighbourhood in Normandy.⁵¹ In the Netherlands, about 15,000 immigrant children went to schools offering education in Dutch, subsidised by the Dutch government, including the children living in family camps erected for interned Belgian soldiers who had crossed

the Belgian-Dutch state border line.⁵² The last international destination for child refugees from Belgium was Switzerland, where about 1,400 children were placed under the supervision of the Hospitalisation of Belgian Refugees Organisation (*L'Œuvre d'hospitalisation des réfugiés belges*), partly funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the Swedish Committee for the Relief of Belgian Children in Switzerland (*Comité suédois de secours aux enfants belges en Suisse*).⁵³ Children were also evacuated from the non-occupied area of Belgium. Two schools of Queen Elisabeth (*koninginnescholen*) were erected twelve kilometres from the front line in order to provide education to 600 children away from the trenches.⁵⁴

One common element of Belgian schooling during the war years, regardless of whether education was provided in the country or abroad, was the development of patriotic teaching content for the masses. In a country where compulsory education had only been decreed in 1914, and where inhabitants were for the first time taking up arms to fight for its existence, teachers experimented with the provision of patriotic images of Belgium outside history lessons: through gymnastics, singing and even the making of traditional Belgian bobbin lace.⁵⁵ Their efforts contributed to the inclusion of a new course in civic education in the post-war teaching plan of 1922.⁵⁶ Although the 1914 law prescribed that children needed to be taught in their mother tongue, the realities of wartime life meant many of the children in exile received their education in a language they did not speak at home, which led to difficulties in continuing their education once the war had come to an end.⁵⁷ Another aspect of the wartime experience that resulted in a new policy after the end of the war was the alleviation of the living conditions of abandoned and physically weakened children.⁵⁸ With the war risking an increase in child mortality and child tuberculosis patients, the National Committee for Aid and Food (*Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation / Nationaal Hulp- en Voedingscomite*) (since 1914), and especially its Aid and Protection of Children section (*Aide et protection des œuvres de l'enfance*) (since 1915), organised the distribution of imported and mostly American-sponsored food as well as mother's breast milk.⁵⁹ It also arranged at a national level for sick and endangered children to attend treatment camps at the Belgian seaside.⁶⁰ The fact that infant mortality in Belgium decreased during the war convinced politicians that preventive child welfare was worth public investment after the war had ended.⁶¹

Meanwhile, although children in Upper Silesia found themselves in a safer and more economically prosperous situation than children in Congress Poland, they missed out on the experimental policies of childhood launched in order to establish which children were to be considered Polish and what role these children would have in a future independent Polish

state. From the very beginning, there were differences between the educational policies pursued in Upper Silesia, Congress Poland and Galicia. Whereas in Upper Silesia, primary education in the German language was mandatory at the time, when compulsory education for children was introduced by the Citizen's Committee (Komitet Obywatelski) in Warsaw, for the first time in the history of the city and only eighteen days after the German army had taken control, it was not specified in which language that education was to be provided.⁶² This gave a boost not only to education in Polish but also education in Yiddish and Hebrew, significantly revitalising and diversifying the Jewish school landscape beyond Jewish orthodox schooling, and laying the foundations for an important interwar Zionist school network called the Tarbut.⁶³ A year later, a German edict issued in September 1915 separated German-speaking schools from Polish-speaking ones and assigned Jewish children to the German-speaking schools as they were considered a religious, not a linguistic minority. According to the historian Carole Fink:

In an age in which language had become the key to national identity, the most explosive issue between Poles and Jews involved schools . . . There was an immediate outcry from the local population. The Poles were furious over competition with the master tongue. Polish Jews, many of whom preferred that their children be instructed in Yiddish, Hebrew, or even Polish, resented their exploitation as tools of *Deutschtum* by the occupiers as well as by German Jews.⁶⁴

In the Austrian zone of Congress Poland, on the other hand, the soldiers of the Polish Legions highlighted the social differences that could prove difficult to bridge in a future Polish state. They were disappointed that connecting with the local rural population turned out to be so difficult: 'The conservatism of the village fostered faith in the good tsar, just as it once did in Galicia – in the just emperor.'⁶⁵ And when in November 1916 the German and Austrian zones were absorbed into the newly established Kingdom of Poland, thereby giving rise to a quasi-independent satellite state without clearly defined state border lines, and without the support of the Allied Powers, the inhabitants of Upper Silesia were far from enthusiastic. They knew the Kingdom of Poland did not include Upper Silesia, and nor was it foreseen to do so. Thus, after the soldiers from Upper Silesia conscripted to the German army had seen the precarious living conditions of its population, the question was whether such an inclusion was worth striving for.⁶⁶

Another initiative contributing to the quest to establish the meaning of a Polish child in the occupied Kingdom of Poland was child welfare. The locally established Central Welfare Council (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza), upon whose experiences the public child welfare system in interwar Po-

land would be founded, used the image of a Polish child as an emblem promising national unity between people with different geographical or social backgrounds. Addressing farming women with slogans such as ‘All of Poland calls out: “Save the children!”’, it presented the task of caring for hungry city children as an obligation decisive for the prosperity of the nation.⁶⁷ Financed by philanthropists, self-help organisations and the occupying forces, the Central Welfare Council had 125,000 children and youngsters under its care in 1918 and placed 11,000 urban children with rural families between 1915 and 1920.⁶⁸ The suspicion of city dwellers at the idea of having their children raised by what they considered to be uncultivated peasants, and the fact that city children continued to be referred to as ‘foreign’ in rural communities, ought to give us a clear indication of the extent to which a national Polish child was not yet considered a self-evident social category.⁶⁹

In international circles, this understanding was also lacking. The ethnographer Bronislas Paderewski, wanting to differentiate Polish children from other children belonging to the Habsburg Empire, looked for examples matching this definition among the hundreds of children transported from Galicia to a Swiss treatment camp in the summer of 1917. After failing to find any, he started an international fundraising campaign to pay for Polish children to be sent there, but it failed to gather the necessary funds.⁷⁰ With the Great Powers funding the evacuation of Belgian children, children from Galicia, the Habsburg Empire’s poorest province, were far more likely to be sent abroad. Approximately 20,000 Polish speakers from the vicinities of Przemyśl and the Bukovina, for example, found refuge in the Czech-speaking village of Choczeń, where a local priest encouraged pupils to express their war experiences in their drawings. While most of the drawings depict tanks, ammunition, planes and bombs, mostly targeting civilian houses, others focus on the evacuation process, depicting trains or columns of horse-drawn carriages.⁷¹ Meanwhile, for those children who stayed behind in Galicia, the situation rapidly deteriorated. The National School Council chronicle produced during the war years reads: ‘Children were anaemic, cadaverous and exhausted, with more and more visible symptoms of tuberculosis, which especially in the cities had spread in an alarming way: the mortality rate increased to unprecedented proportions.’⁷² The most important function of the remaining Galician schools became to care for pupils’ hygiene, with a basic school hygiene programme being introduced that would later be copied in interwar Polish schools.⁷³

When Piotr Bojarski, a Polish-speaking seven-year-old from a village near Radom, heard from his neighbours that the Russian Revolution could bring back home his father, who was serving in the Tsarist army, he wrote in his diary that he ‘immediately ran off to mum and repeated the words

of Rybicki. Busy with her work, [his] mother replied, "My child, if we pray, that is what will happen."⁷⁴ The ambitions of inhabitants within the Kingdom of Poland were fuelled by the Provisional Government in Russia, which as early as a month after the Russian Revolution spoke in favour of an independent Polish state. A little later, the United States became militarily engaged in the war effort.⁷⁵ As a belated response, in the late summer of 1917, the occupiers of the Kingdom of Poland widened the decision-making power of local inhabitants by installing a three-member Regency Council prior to the future appointment of a monarch, a council which together with the prime minister shared responsibility over educational policymaking.⁷⁶ As a result, in the last months of the war, Polish officially became the universal language of instruction in the primary schools of the Kingdom of Poland.⁷⁷ A more pressing matter at the time, however, were the border lines of the kingdom. The first peace treaty bringing the war to a halt was concluded in February 1918 between the Central Powers and the semi-independent newly created Ukrainian state, which included parts of Galicia. It was accompanied with a secret agreement between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ukrainian People's Republic ensuring, *inter alia*, the right of Polish, Jewish and German minorities to school education in their own language.⁷⁸ During the peace negotiations in Brest-Litovsk, it was agreed in March 1918 that the region of Chełm would become part of the Ukrainian People's Republic. This decision was made without the consent of the Kingdom of Poland, which had not been invited.⁷⁹

While some German troops stayed in Central and Eastern Europe, others were now transferred to the west, and on 21 March 1918 a new German offensive started at the Yser River.⁸⁰ For the children in the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy, the war became visible again in November 1918. Between the German Revolution replacing the monarchy with a parliamentary republic and the armistice of 11 November calling for the cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of the German army to behind the Rhine River, Allied forces bombed German railway tracks in the region of Eupen. The bombs missed their target and killed a little girl, Elise Verbert.⁸¹ During the retreat, children supported the German soldiers on their way back from the pre-war Belgian-German border in Garnstock: 'where we children . . . helped lift them onto a truck taking them to the railway station in Eupen'.⁸² After the German soldiers had left, it took four days until Allied forces arrived, a time when children played with the guns that were lying around.⁸³

While accompanying the British troops arriving in Eupen, war journalist Philip Gibbs reported that, although adults kept their distance, children ran out to greet him.⁸⁴ The English, French, American and Belgian troops installed an occupation zone in Germany encompassing the left bank of

the Rhine River and some 30 kilometres on its other side. The Belgian sector covered 10 per cent of the occupation zone and included the city of Aachen.⁸⁵ Very early during the Peace Negotiations in Paris, on 17 January 1919, the Belgian delegation publicly expressed its wish to include the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy in the Belgian Kingdom, but it would take until the middle of February before the news was printed in the local press.⁸⁶ The war was over, and a new chapter in the history of the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy was beginning.

In Central Eastern Europe, however, the same story continued. Peace did not come to the borderlands that found themselves free from imperial rule. Now various nationalist groups fought over their claims to the territory. There was to be no cessation of violence; instead, if anything, the violence escalated because what was at stake had changed. Whereas in the First World War, parties had engaged in conflict in order to force the other to concede to specific demands, what followed afterwards were 'existential conflicts' with the ultimate goal being to exterminate the unwanted other.⁸⁷ As a consequence, this violence was increasingly targeted at paramilitary groups and civilians instead of traditional army forces.⁸⁸

The establishment of the Polish independent state in late 1918 was from the very beginning entangled in conflicts over the contours of its state border lines. Józef Piłsudski's power base in November 1918 barely exceeded the border lines of the old Congress Poland from 1815, augmented by the western part of Galicia. Whereas its western state border lines were scheduled to be negotiated in Paris, its other state border lines were not.⁸⁹ In the east of the country, the Great War literally transformed into a civil war overnight. The young Poles who defended the city of Lwów in Galicia between 1 November 1918 and May 1919 can serve as an example here. When in the last days of the First World War, Ukrainian soldiers from the Austro-Hungarian army proclaimed an independent Ukrainian state, 6,022 volunteers took up arms in order to fight for the Polish cause. Among these Lwów Eaglets (*Orlęta lwowskie*) were 1,374 pupils, students and scouts.⁹⁰ Among them was Zofia Nowosielska, born in 1900, who joined the Polish Women's Voluntary Legion (*Ochotnica Legia Kobiet*). She wrote in her diary that the Polish heroines her grandfather had told her about when she was a girl, such as Anna Henryka Pustowojt (1838–1881) and Emilia Plater (1806–1831), now motivated her 'to follow in the footsteps of these great women and show the boys that it is not their exclusive privilege to fight for the freedom of their country'.⁹¹ Lwów was eventually assigned to the Second Polish Republic, but the experience of Ukrainian independence galvanised Ukrainian nationalists in the interwar years, as well as their campaign to have the Ukrainian language taught in primary schools within the Polish Second Republic.

In the conflicts involving Central and Eastern Europe in the period between 1917 and 1923, violence could be used in order to ensure national self-determination, such as in Lwów in 1918–1919, or to generate a circulation of power. Characteristic of such periods, according to Robert Gerwarth, is the ‘simultaneous occurrence and frequent overlap of these two currents’.⁹² It was territory and industry that were at stake during the conflict in Upper Silesia, not the suppression of Polish freedom fighters by local German holders of power. In Upper Silesia, both German and Polish nationalists had illegal military forces at their disposal at the beginning of 1919. Initially, the Upper Silesian branch of Piłsudski’s Polish Army Organisation (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa Piłsudskiego*), including youngsters who had fought in Lwów, was more numerous, but the German army defending the state border line between Germany and the new Polish independent republic soon mobilised more locally recruited voluntary border guards.⁹³ During three uprisings between 1919 and 1921, Polish and German statesmen outsourced the implementation of violence to paramilitary groups in order not to burn their fingers at the negotiation tables in Paris.⁹⁴ Upper Silesia plunged into a civil war where, unlike during the Great War, children also would die.⁹⁵

As was the case elsewhere in Europe, the First World War had a decisive influence on the way in which children were approached by adults in the political entities relevant for this study, but that turning point took different forms for different children.⁹⁶ Whereas in the German Empire, it resulted in a wider acceptance of the child-centred approach in reform pedagogy, in Belgium, it primarily concerned experimenting with a civic education for the masses, and in the Kingdom of Poland, it revolved around the questions of who and what a Polish child was, and, to a lesser extent, in which language the child was to be taught.⁹⁷ Over the course of the war, various private welfare initiatives joined forces and provided a blueprint for the national child welfare bodies established in its aftermath.

On the whole, everyday life during the war was easier for children growing up in Upper Silesia and the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy than for most of the children living in the other parts of their respective countries. This was because children could stay where they were, they were relatively safe, and their schools continued to operate. Even so, in the summer of 1918, their location close to the state border line did not prevent Upper Silesia and the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy from being included in the activities of the Reich Central Office Country Residence for City Children. Whereas in the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy, children witnessed healthy soldiers marching west and helped injured or captured soldiers being transported east, in Upper Sile-

sia, the war remained an event taking place somewhere else, until a civil war broke out with the three armed uprisings of 1919, 1920 and 1921.

Notes

1. Wichert-Schmetz, 'August 1914', 74.
2. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 181.
3. Leitzen, *Der große Krieg*, 56.
4. Böhler, *Auftakt*, 161.
5. Vinche, *1914–1918*, 28–29.
6. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 246; Derez and Tixhon, *Villes martyres*.
7. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 319.
8. Caestecker and Vrints, 'National Mobilization', 145.
9. Chwałba, *Legiony*, 196–97.
10. *Ibid.*, 252–53; Wołosik, *Bagnet*, 30.
11. Chwałba, *Legiony*, 167; Valasek, *Haller's Polish Army*.
12. Kortko and Ostałowska, *Pierony*, 57.
13. Leslie, *History of Poland*, 112–13.
14. Fink, *Defending*, 71.
15. Künigl-Ehrenburg, *Przemysl*, 64–65.
16. Bihl, *Der Erste Weltkrieg*, 83–88.
17. Fink, *Defending*, 72.
18. Borodziej and Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1, 208 and 340; See also Herwig, *First World War*, 270.
19. Wandycz, *Partitioned Poland*, 351–52; Herwig, *First World War*, 146.
20. Borodziej and Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1, 151.
21. *Ibid.*, 157.
22. Fink, *Defending*, 76.
23. Niziołek, 'Higiena i zdrowie'; Sosnowska, *Opieka*, 182.
24. Keutgens, 'Eupen', 20.
25. Karl Kaisg quoted in Kortko and Ostałowska, *Pierony*, 58.
26. Dornhof, 'Jugendjahre', 2.
27. Borodziej and Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1, 208; Kortko and Ostałowska, *Pierony*, 58; O'Connell, *Annexation*, 38.
28. Heutz, 'Jugenderinnerungen', 32.
29. Donson, 'Reform Pedagogy', 74–75.
30. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 450.
31. Kronenberg, *Kampf der Schule*, 376.
32. Rechnungsaufgaben aus der Kriegszeit. Zur Ergänzung der eingeführten Rechenbücher (Paul B. Fischer, Leipzig-Berlin 1917), quoted in Flemming, Saul and Witter, *Lebenswelten*, 231.
33. Kronenberg, *Kampf der Schule*.
34. Rauch, *Ferienkoloniebewegung*, 285–86.
35. Reichszentrale für die Vermittlung von Landaufenthalt für Stadtkinder, *Jahresbericht*, 'Landfrauen helft!', 5.

36. Kortko and Ostałowska, *Pierony*, 58; Brüll and Kontny, *Eupen-Malmedy im europäischen Vergleich*, 42–43. Whereas Silesia sent out 21,230 and welcomed 18,035 children (in the rural Lublinitz district, no children were sent out, but 234 children arrived), in the Rheinland, 51,415 children were sent out and 25,461 arrived (including 19 children from Essen finding temporary lodging in Eupen, and 652 children from other places in the Rheinland coming to Malmedy), Reichszentrale für die Vermittlung von Landaufenthalt für Stadtkinder, *Jahresbericht*, 30, 38 and 48. See also Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 451; Braumann, *Kinderlandverschickung*, 17 ff. and 399.
37. Reichszentrale für die Vermittlung von Landaufenthalt für Stadtkinder, *Jahresbericht*, 81 and 87.
38. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 435.
39. Abbenhuis, 'Where War Met Peace'.
40. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 413, 426 and 472.
41. *Ibid.*, 467–70.
42. Heutz, 'Jugenderinnerungen', 31–35.
43. Belgian State Archive in Brussels, Classement BD/331/287, René et Berthe Beckman Steinbach to His Majesty King Albert I, 4 April 1917 (quoted in O'Connell, *Annexation*, 38).
44. Vanhoebroek, 'Koninginnescholen', 99.
45. Barbry, 'Lager Onderwijs', 117 and 127.
46. Wils, *Vlaanderen*, 463.
47. Dominguez, 'Comment les imprécisions'.
48. Vrints, 'All the Butter', 230–49.
49. Amara, 'Belgische kinderen', 21.
50. Declercq, 'Belgische vluchtelingen'.
51. Quartier, 'Roesbrugge Dames', 55.
52. Barbry et al., *Naar school*, 179.
53. *Ibid.*, 171.
54. Vanhoebroek, 'Koninginnescholen', 99.
55. Kuyle, 'Kantonderwijs'.
56. Vanhoebroek, 'Koninginnescholen', 113.
57. Amara, 'Belgische kinderen', 21.
58. Vermandere, *We zijn goed aangekomen!*, 57; Jamin and Perrin, *Les politiques publiques*, 30.
59. The Commission for Relief in Belgium was an international organisation chaired by Herbert Hoover that shipped food to occupied Belgium and northern France during the First World War (den Hertog, 'Commission', 593–613).
60. Vermandere, *We zijn goed aangekomen!*, 31.
61. Infant mortality decreased from over 170 deceased children per 1,000 births to somewhere between 130 and 150 during the First World War (Meslé, 'Mortalité infantile', 252; Jamin and Perrin, *Les politiques publiques*, 31).
62. Borodziej and Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1, 411; Molenda, 'Children and Youth', 169, 181 and 184.
63. Frost, *Schooling*, 27–30.
64. Fink, *Defending*, 77.
65. Borodziej and Górny, *Nasza wojna*, vol. 1, 281.
66. Hauser, 'Zu Fragen', 108.
67. Rada Główna Opiekuńcza, *Ratujcie dzieci!*, Warsaw, 1916, quoted in Przeniosło, 'Wielka Kwestia', 95.
68. Szymczyk, 'Opieka', 59.

69. Hibbard, *Child Rescue*.
70. Plater-Zyberk, *Fonds Paderewski*'.
71. Dalibor, *Když jsou slova zbytečná*.
72. Kronika Rady Szkolney Krajowej za lata 1916–17, 1917–18, 1918–19, Lwów, 1919, 40, quoted in Niziołek, 'Higiena i zdrowie', 123.
73. Niziołek, 'Higiena i zdrowie', 133.
74. Bojarski, *Życiorys Piotra Bojarskiego, Miejska Dąbrowska*, 1989, 112–13, quoted in Bojarski, 'Dzieciństwo w dobie Wielkiej Wojny', 232.
75. Schaffer, 'USA', 110–11.
76. Wandycz, *Partitioned Poland*, 357.
77. Fink, *Defending*, 82–83.
78. *Ibid.*, 93.
79. Wandycz, *Partitioned Poland*, 360–61.
80. Van Ypersele, 'Belgien', 48.
81. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 458.
82. 'Eupen vor 75 Jahren. Siebenjähriger erlebt den Waffenstillstand', *Grenz-Echo*, Schlembach, 10 November 1993.
83. Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 533.
84. Philip Gibbs as quoted by Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 521.
85. O'Connell, *Annexation*, 53; Ruland, *Der erste Weltkrieg*, 524.
86. *Eupener Nachrichten*, vol. 11, 24, 15 February 1919.
87. Gerwarth, *Vanquished*, 13.
88. Böhler, *Wojna domowa*.
89. Borodziej, *Geschichte Polens*, 95–100.
90. The 14-year-old Jerzy Bitschan became an icon in Poland during the interwar period. His grave can be found in the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów (Nicieja, *Lwowskie Orleża*).
91. Nowosielska, 1929, 19, quoted in Paul, Johnston and Short, *Children's Literature*, 262. Anna Henryka Pustowojt fought in the January Uprising of 1863 against tsarist rule and for Polish independence. Countess Emilia Plater was a captain in the Polish insurgent forces during the Uprising of 1830, who fought and died in what is now part of Lithuania.
92. Gerwarth, *Vanquished*, 10.
93. Böhler, *Wojna domowa*, 154. On the youngsters in Lwów travelling to Upper Silesia in order to fight for the Polish cause, see Wołosik, *Bagnet*, 129.
94. Böhler, *Wojna domowa*, 156.
95. *Ibid.*, 260.
96. Audoin-Rouzeau, 'Kinder', 135–42; Stekl and Hämmerle, 'Kindheit/en', 35–44; Wołosik, *Bagnet*.
97. Donson, 'Reform Pedagogy', 80–81.