I composed this monograph to the rhythm of my daughter’s growing into a schoolchild. She is on every page of this book.

I read most of Mezzadra and Neilson’s *Border as a Method*, referred to in the introduction, on Viennese playgrounds while looking after Maren and her older brother, Lew. After Maren found in my backpack a book with drawings of Polish-speaking children in refuge depicting their experiences of the First World War, she had problems falling asleep. My attention was triggered by the account of the girl writing an essay in German while using Polish orthography, mentioned in one of the chapters of this book, because a few days earlier my trilingual daughter had decided to stick to her neologism ‘poestijn’ – a combination of the Dutch word ‘woestijn’ and the Polish word ‘pustynia’ – even after finding out it was wrong, because she considered it more beautiful. An original source copy from the German Archive in Koblenz contains a hole Maren made after grabbing it from my desk. The archival documents from Katowice were gathered during a research summer Maren was too small to remember, but her four-year-old brother did. He put the city at the centre of his mental map of Europe and long continued to ask when we would finally move there.

Many of the books on the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmedy were gathered during a library visit to Eupen five months into my high-risk pregnancy, a trip that felt like an expedition to the moon but was made easier thanks to a librarian allowing me to borrow more than the maximum number of books. My daughter was with me, asleep in her pram, when I was denied access to the national libraries in Austria, Belgium and Poland in order to make copies of pre-ordered books. I gave up on trying the same in the German State Library in Berlin, where I may have had more luck. When research assistant Boris Stamenić called me to ask whether to copy the archival materials concerning the transnational
fairy-tale books discussed in chapter five, I was with Maren in the waiting room of her paediatrician, a place where we spent much time after she was born prematurely. My greatest source of inspiration has been the eagerness with which Maren has pursued the task of catching up with children her own age, practising on a daily basis in a way that probably only a child is capable of, as if yesterday didn’t exist.

I consider myself lucky to have been hosted at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of European History and the Public Sphere, where Muriel Blaive, Thomas Lindenberger and Libora Oates-Indruchova left no stone unturned in order to support my first application with the Austrian Science Fund, the Lise Meitner Grant. Later, I continued my research at the Institute of Eastern European History of the University of Vienna within the framework of an Elise Richter grant from the same fund, named after Austria’s extraordinary first female professor. I thank the Scientific Advisory Board of my project, Sabine Lee, Tomasz Kamusella and Pieter Lagrou, for flying into Vienna once a year in order to discuss my progress. I am grateful for the conversations about the history of borderlands with my Viennese colleagues, Börries Kuzmany, Elisabeth Haid, Johannes Florian Kontry and Alexandra Schwell. At the department, it has been a pleasure to discuss twentieth-century Central and Eastern European history with Piotr Filipkowski, Aga Pasieka, Fredrik Lars Stöcker, Tamara Scheer, Dean Vuletić, Stephanie Weissmann, Konrad Petrovsky, Ulrich Hofmeister, Christoph Augustynowicz, Matthias Kaltenbrunner, Rinna Kulla and Mojmir Stranský. Many words of thanks go to Joanna Wawrzyniak, Zofia Wóycicka, Anna Wylegala, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Maciej Górn and Dariusz Stola, who lent me their ears during my visits to Poland. In Belgium, Andreas Fickers, Carlo Lejeune, Christoph Brüll and Emmanuel Debruynè were always ready to answer my questions. In Germany, I found inspiring interlocutors in Maren Röger, Friederike Kind-Kovacs, Marcin Bogusz, Wendy Müller, Johanna Jaschik and Sabine Krause. External reviews of my habilitation thesis written by Catherine Lebow and Catherine Gousseff, as well as the comments of the jury headed by Philipp Ther and composed of Claudia Kraft, Wolfgang Mueller, Christa Ehrmann-Hämmerle, Wolfgang Schmale and Gabriella Hauch, helped me a lot while reworking the thesis into a monograph during a Long-Term Research Fellowship at the Imre Kertész Kolleg of the Friedrich Schiller University. In Jena, the manuscript was able to mature thanks to conversations with Joachim von Puttkamer, Michal Kopecek, Jochen Böhler, Natalia Aleksuin, Barbara Klich-Kluczewska, Agnieszka Jagodzińska, Paweł Machciewicz and James Krapfl.

Throughout my research, I could count on the enthusiastic assistance of Izabela Mrzygłód, Katarzyna Chimiak, Enno Lindemann, Manuel Neubauer, Boris Stamenić, Marcin Bogusz, Wendy Müller and Johanna
Jaschik, the thoughtful proofreading of Mark Trafford and the geographical skills of Malte Helfer. Equally essential to this project was the daycare for my children offered by Ewa Węch, Angelika Kupiec, Klaudia Pabasz, Goudou Souad, Kindergarten Liebhartsgasse, Kinderkrippe Spatzenest, Kindergarten Mittelgasse, the Flying Nannies of the University of Vienna, Bajkowe Przedszkole Katowice, and my children's grandparents in Poland and Belgium.

The last word of thanks is reserved for my first reader, supporter and father to our children, Krzysztof Marcin Zalewski, for the life we have carved out together.