

James Bjork (2020)

Flexible Fatherlands: "Patriotism" among Polish-speaking German Citizens during World War I

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This article examines the experiences of Polish-speaking subjects of the German Empire during World War I. Fighting for wartime empires tended to be retrospectively defined as involuntary service to a "foreign" cause. But the author of this article argues that it was very difficult to distinguish ostensibly passive "compliance" from ostensibly active "patriotism." The apparent tensions between a German imperial agenda and Polish nationalism also proved to be highly navigable in practice, with German war aims often seen as not only reconcilable with but even conducive to the Polish national cause. Drawing on a recent wave of relevant historiography in English, German, and Polish, and incorporating further analysis of individual testimonies, the article explores the various ways in which "non-German" contributors to the German war effort tried to make sense of their awkward wartime biographies.

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