



## Designing Empire for the Civilized East: Colonialism, Polish Nationhood, and German War Aims in the First World War

Nationalities Papers

MARK T. KETTLER

DOI: 10.1017/nps.2018.49

Published online: 27 May 2019, pp. 1-17

---

[Read this article for free](#)

### Abstract

This article critically reexamines how Germans understood Polish national identity during World War I, and how their perceptions affected German proposals for ruling Polish territory. Recent historiography has emphasized the impact of colonial ideologies and experiences on Germans' imperial ambitions in Poland. It has portrayed Germans as viewing Poland through a colonial lens, or favoring colonial methods to rule over Polish space. Using the wartime publications of prominent left liberal, Catholic, and conservative thinkers, this article demonstrates that many influential Germans, even those who supported colonialism in Africa, considered Poland to be a civilized nation for which colonial strategies of rule would be wholly inappropriate. These thinkers instead proposed multinational strategies of imperialism in Poland, which relied on collaboration with Polish nationalists. Specifically, they argued that Berlin should establish an autonomous Polish state, and bind it in permanent military and political union with the German Empire. The perception of Poland as a civilized nation ultimately structured Germany's occupation policy and objectives in Poland throughout the war, much more than stereotypes of Polish primitivity.

### How does Cambridge Core Share work?

Cambridge Core Share allows authors, readers and institutional subscribers to generate a URL for an online version of a journal article. Anyone who clicks on this link will be able to view a read-only, up-to-date copy of the published journal article.