

## Hüter ihrer Nationen. Studentische Verbindungen in Deutschland und Polen im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert

By Sabrina Lausen. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2020. Pp. 507.  
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The image of a German man with a scar on his cheek is a familiar one—from photography, to the paintings of George Grosz, to Colonel Wendt in *Babylon Berlin*. These trophies of the *Mensur* and membership in a fraternity are also generally understood as symbols of a conservative and nationalist elite. Sabrina Lausen examines whether this was a “uniquely German” (13) phenomenon, or whether German fraternities served as a model for Polish student associational life in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In analyzing the structures, practices, and values of German and Polish fraternities, Lausen is attempting a study that is at once comparative, relational, and transnational (or transcultural). Rather than undertaking a comparison of specific universities, such as Sonja Levsen’s and Thomas Weber’s studies of German and British universities, she focuses on the German umbrella organizations of the *Burschenschaft*, the Corps, and the Catholic fraternities; Polish fraternities at German-language universities in Prussia, the Baltic, and the Habsburg Empire; and three interwar Polish umbrella organizations.

Lausen’s study offers an in-depth and richly detailed examination of German and Polish fraternities, drawing extensively on both the archives and publications of the organizations themselves and the existing historical scholarship. The thematic chapters at the center of the book explore the fraternities’ self-understandings; attitudes towards ethnic and religious minorities, in particular their shared antisemitism; gender as both constructions of masculinity and the role of women; and understandings of honor and attitudes about the *Mensur* and the duel. The comparative framework reveals considerable similarities but also has its limits. The reality of a partitioned Poland creates an asymmetry between German students in German fraternities at German universities in German states and Polish students studying at (primarily German-language) universities under the partitioning powers until the founding of the Second Polish Republic after the First World War. The comparative framework thus works best for the author’s discussion of the interwar period, but even then, Lausen must confront an imbalance in the source material, with the source base for the German organizations being much richer than for their Polish counterparts. It is a testament to the work that Lausen did to piece together surviving archival sources that she is able to offer such a thorough investigation of the Polish fraternities.

Lausen’s primary argument is that a comparative analysis reveals that Polish students experienced the German model of fraternities while studying at German universities, adopted it as the model for their own organizations, and then carried that model forward into the interwar period. Lausen deploys considerable evidence to show the similarities in structure and practices and to explore how Polish students adapted German forms to make them meaningful for the Polish context. She argues, persuasively so, that the adoption of German models did not constitute Germanization. Rather, she shows how Polish students adopted the customs and traditions of German fraternities while still maintaining and cultivating a Polish identity, which helps explain the survival of the German model at Polish universities in an independent Poland of the interwar period (436). Lausen’s argument raises interesting questions about the nature of Polish nationalism and national identity in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In adopting the German model, were Poles

embracing empty forms that could be filled with Polish values? Or were they also embracing specific values around education, honor, masculinity, and the like? Lausen's analysis suggests the latter: rather than defining Polishness in opposition to Germanness, the self-image developed by Polish students in the fraternities was one that shared values with their German counterparts, which has broader implications for our understanding of Polish nationalism.

Lausen also argues that both German and Polish fraternities saw themselves as training grounds for future elites. Of particular interest is Lausen's discussion in the final two thematic chapters of notions of honor and masculinity—a chivalric ideal divorced from one's rank at birth and rather formed through the male fraternity member's embodiment of specific virtues and behaviors. These virtues and behaviors were increasingly the subject of debate, often generational in nature, between traditionalists and reformers, in particular about alcohol rituals, the *Mensur*, the duel, and sports. These debates were focused not just on the individual's moral education but were also intertwined with concerns about the moral and physical health of the nation. Much could still be explored here, especially around how these debates played out in the broader context of debates about military readiness and fears of "racial degeneration" and the development of specifically Catholic notions of honor and masculinity. Lausen's thorough discussion of the debates in the fraternities provides a strong foundation for future work.

The argument that the fraternities saw themselves as essential for the formation of a new vanguard of leaders is not surprising, but Lausen provides extensive evidence to demonstrate how the fraternities sought to fulfill that role. There is nonetheless the question of the fraternities' self-image and their actual impact, and here Lausen's argument is stronger for the German fraternities than for their Polish counterparts. Lausen notes, "While as many as 60 percent of the male students in Germany were members of a fraternity in the 1920s, this was true for only 12 percent in Poland" (31). While the difference in the number of members does not undermine the significance of Lausen's study of the fraternities' self-understandings and activities, it does complicate some of her claims about the significance of the fraternities for the formation of a Polish national elite. Further research about the significance of the fraternities in the broader context of Polish associational life and for Polish leadership circles can build on Lausen's work.

Sabrina Lausen's *Hüter ihrer Nationen* is a thorough and detail-rich examination of German and Polish student fraternities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her comparative analysis and resulting argument that the Polish fraternities followed the model of German fraternities is an important contribution to the existing scholarly literature. It will be of particular interest to historians of nationalism, masculinity, and student life, for whom it will serve as a solid foundation for further research.

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## **Der kranke Rand des Reiches. Sozialhygiene und nationale Räume in der Provinz Posen um 1900**

**By Justyna Aniceta Turkowska. Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2020. Pp. xi + 426. 79 Euros (PB). ISBN: 978-3-87969-436-5.**

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In 1899, the government established the Hygiene Institute in the province of Posen. As Justyna Aniceta Turkowska recounts, this marked the start of a new era in German efforts