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Inverted Nationalism: The Case of Contemporary Germany

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Abstract

Social groups and political entities have often identified themselves with reference to heroic figures or events. Such identification could give rise, among other things, to the formation of collective pride. Contemporary Germany presents a remarkable exception to these cases; it identifies itself not with something that ennobles it as a nation, but with the atrocities and crimes it committed during the times of the Nazi regime. Since World War II, Germany has increasingly identified itself as a “people of perpetrators” (*Tätervolk*). Paradoxically, such a negative identity, an identity based on national shame, still allows for the formation of a sort of inverted nationalism: Germany admits its guilt, and by doing this it becomes morally purer than all other nations who do not humble themselves in such a monumental way. Its inverted nationalism thus establishes an inverted national pride. The essay explores how this inverted pride and nationalism leads to the establishment of a civil religion that becomes historically significant and socially pervasive.

Keywords: *Germany, (inverted) nationalism, (people of) perpetrators, guilt*