

# Title: The Patchwork of Identity: Historical Migrations, Empire Collapses, and Scapegoating in the Rise of Nazi Germany

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## Introduction

The emergence of Nazi Germany in the 1930s is a complex phenomenon rooted in a confluence of historical, political, and psychological factors. While proximate causes—such as the punitive Treaty of Versailles, hyperinflation, and the Weimar Republic's instability—are well-documented, this article explores a longer historical arc. It posits that the fragmentation of Central and Eastern Europe, driven by the collapse of empires like the Khazarian, Mongol, and Holy Roman Empires, created a diverse and unstable socio-cultural landscape that struggled to coalesce into unified national identities. This "patchwork" of peoples, exacerbated by westward migrations, set the stage for psychological mechanisms of scapegoating, as articulated by René Girard, to unify fractured societies. The Nazi regime, under Adolf Hitler, capitalized on this dynamic, scapegoating Jews, Slavs, and other "outsiders" to construct a mythologized German identity tied to the delusional "Aryan" narrative. This article traces these historical and psychological threads, emphasizing the role of migrations and empire collapses in shaping the conditions for Nazi ideology.

## Historical Context: Empires, Migrations, and Fragmentation

### 1. The Khazarian Empire and Westward Displacement

The Khazarian Empire (c. 650–965 CE), centered in the Eurasian steppes around the Volga and Caspian Seas, was a significant power in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. As a multi-ethnic, semi-nomadic polity with a ruling elite that converted to Judaism in the 8th or 9th century, the Khazars played a pivotal role in regional trade and politics (Golden, 2007). However, their empire faced existential threats from the Byzantine Empire, which sought to convert them to Christianity, and the Kievan Rus', whose prince Svyatoslav destroyed the Khazarian capital of Sarkel in 965 CE (Brook, 2010). The final blow came with the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, which swept through the region, displacing populations westward to escape the horde.

This westward migration included remnants of the Khazars, as well as other groups like the Pechenegs, Cumans, and early Slavic tribes. The Mongols' control of regions like Ukraine and Kiev forced these populations into Central and Eastern Europe, creating a diverse and fragmented socio-cultural landscape. While historical records do not confirm Khazarian influence

as far west as the Rhine River, as some popular theories suggest, their displacement likely contributed to the ethnic complexity of regions like modern-day Poland, Hungary, and the Balkans (Behar et al., 2017). This migration pattern aligns with the broader phenomenon of “balkanization”—a term originally describing the fragmentation of the Balkan Peninsula but applicable to the broader Central European context of competing micro-states and identities.

## **2. From the Holy Roman Empire to Prussia**

The collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, following Napoleon’s victories, further intensified Central Europe’s fragmentation. Prior to this, the region was a loose confederation of semi-independent states, duchies, and principalities, often described as a “hodgepodge” of polities (Wilson, 2016). The dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire left a power vacuum, which Prussia filled through militaristic unification efforts in the 19th century under Otto von Bismarck. The Prussian state, emerging in the 17th century, consolidated power by absorbing smaller German states, but it inherited a region already marked by centuries of ethnic and cultural diversity due to earlier ascendancy of earlier nomadic and Slavic groups, created a volatile environment ripe for conflict.

## **Psychological Mechanisms: Scapegoating and Memetics**

### **1. René Girard’s Memetic Theory**

René Girard’s theory of memetics posits that human societies, particularly in times of crisis, use scapegoating as a mechanism to restore unity and stability (Girard, 1986). By projecting internal conflicts onto an “other”—often a marginalized or distinct group—societies achieve catharsis and cohesion. In the context of post-World War I Germany, the fragmented socio-cultural landscape, inherited from centuries of empire collapses and migrations, created an identity crisis that made scapegoating a powerful tool. The diverse populations—potentially including Khazarian descendants, Ashkenazi Jews, Slavs, and other minorities—became targets for exclusionary nationalist ideologies seeking to define a unified German identity.

### **2. Scapegoating in Nazi Ideology**

The Nazi regime, under Adolf Hitler, weaponized this psychological pattern to devastating effect. Jews, Slavs, Romani, and other groups were demonized as threats to a mythologized German purity. This scapegoating was not merely opportunistic but rooted in the region’s historical fragmentation. The patchwork of identities—stemming from the westward migrations of steppe

peoples, the collapse of the Khazarian and Mongol khanates, and the later dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire—created a long-term struggle for national cohesion. Hitler’s regime exploited this by constructing an external enemy to unify the German state, which had only recently coalesced under Prussia in 1871.

### **The Aryan Myth and Historical Delusion**

Hitler’s ideology hinged on the delusional “Aryan” narrative, which claimed a racial and cultural link between Germans and ancient Indo-Iranian steppe peoples, such as the Scythians and Persians. The Scythians, nomadic tribes roaming the Eurasian steppes from the 9th to 3rd centuries BCE, were indeed precursors to later groups like the Khazars and shared cultural ties with other steppe peoples, including the Galatians and early Celts (Cunliffe, 2019). However, Hitler’s appropriation of this heritage was a gross distortion, ignoring the complex intermingling of steppe, Slavic, and European populations over centuries. By claiming an “Aryan” lineage, Hitler sought to legitimize his regime’s authority while scapegoating groups like Jews and Slavs, who were themselves part of the region’s diverse historical fabric. Whether this narrative was a genuine delusion or a calculated manipulation remains debated, but its effect was to galvanize a fractured society around a fabricated identity.

### **Synthesis: The Patchwork and the Nazi Rise**

The rise of Nazi Germany can be seen as the culmination of centuries-long processes: the collapse of empires like the Khazarian, Mongol, and Holy Roman Empires, which drove westward migrations and created a fragmented socio-cultural landscape; the struggle for national identity in a region marked by ethnic diversity; and the psychological mechanism of scapegoating, which provided a unifying catharsis. The Khazars, displaced by Mongol invasions and earlier pressures from the Byzantine Empire and Kievan Rus’, contributed to this patchwork, potentially influencing the ethnic composition of Central and Eastern Europe. While their direct impact on Germany’s national identity is less clear, their displacement exemplifies the broader pattern of migration-driven fragmentation that set the stage for Prussia’s unification and, later, the Nazi regime’s exclusionary nationalism.

The Nazi ideology, with its scapegoating of Jews, Slavs, and others, exploited this historical chaos to forge a unified German state. Hitler’s Aryan myth, though rooted in a vague historical narrative of steppe migrations, was a delusional or manipulative construct that ignored the region’s true diversity. The psychological patterns of memetics, as described by Girard, provided the mechanism through which this unification was achieved, at catastrophic human cost.

## Conclusion:

The rise of Nazi Germany was not merely a product of immediate post-World War I conditions but a manifestation of deeper historical and psychological currents. The collapse of empires like the Khazarian, Mongol, and Holy Roman Empires created a fragmented Central and Eastern Europe, marked by westward migrations and a struggle for national identity. This "patchwork" of peoples set the stage for scapegoating, as articulated by Girard's memetic theory, which the Nazi regime exploited to unify Germany against perceived "outsiders." Hitler's Aryan myth, while historically distorted, drew on the region's steppe heritage to legitimize this exclusionary ideology. By understanding these long-term dynamics, we gain insight into the complex interplay of history, migration, and psychology in shaping one of the 20th century's darkest chapters.

## References

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