VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT

A German term, normally translated as “National Community” or “People’s Community,” that expresses an ideal image of a harmonious and united society. The term draws on German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies’s interpretation of *Gemeinschaft* as a social model characteristic of families, neighbors and small communities, in which relationships are based on selflessness, solidarity, and common values. *Gemeinschaft* (community) was countered by *Gesellschaft* (society), a term bound up with the rise of the capitalist modern state, in which social relationships are primarily economic, political, and instrumental in nature. The notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* became popular during the First World War and was used during the interwar period by all political sides to convey the need to overcome divisions of class, religion and ideology. The Nazi regime used the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* as a central pillar of its *Weltanschauung,* or world-view. Its sense of National Community was based on a unique Aryan race and on the values of health, strength, decency and absolute commitment to the Volk and the Führer. Despite never being clearly defined, the term was central to the Nazi fashioning of the German *Volk* asa living organism with singular traits and destiny, threatened by enemies from within and without.

Bibliography: Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler’s Community, 1918-1945,* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

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