

## Some Viewpoints on Belgian and Flemish National Identity in Rolf Falter's *Belgium, a History Without a Country*, (*België – Een geschiedenis zonder land* – Bezige Bij Antwerpen, 2012

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In *Belgium: a history without a country* (Rolf Falter) presents an overview of the history of Belgium from the Roman period until 2011. His focuses are one on politics, conflicts and people. His ambition was to write an alternative and neutral history of Belgium.

In this lecture, I would like to summarize three theses on nationalism and national identity in Falter's book. First, according to Falter, Flanders was the origin of Western capitalism. —“Flanders” was an empty space until the Middle Ages. Before the Middle Ages, the eastern part of the Southern Netherlands were the most important players.

Second, Falter presents Belgium as a success story in the nineteenth century. The foundation of the kingdom in 1830 marked the end of an era of chaos from the Roman period until the battle of Waterloo (except from brief more peaceful periods, e.g. forty years during the Austrian rule), turning into one of the richest nations in the world at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Last but not least, Belgium was one of the creators of the Flemish identity. It stimulated Flemish nationalism because of its lack of national identity. Falter's point is that Flemish nationalism therefore is as little —“nationalist” as Belgian nationalism, and refers in a few recent interviews to the Belgian political crisis, which will be dealt with in this lecture as well.