

What can popular songs uncover about wartime nationalism in Belgium?

THE WAR: A KEY MOMENT

- World War I was a **key moment for nationalism** in Belgium, representing both the summit of Belgian nationalism and the cut-off point where a competing Flemish nationalism gained momentum.
- Yet, until now, these nationalisms have **primarily been studied top-down**. By result, too little is known about the impact of the war on the national sentiments of the masses.
- Also, little attention has been paid to the important surge of **Belgian nationalism**, as research has focused primarily on the rise of Flemish nationalism.

INTRO



THE SUFFERING OF THE NATION FOR THE SAKE OF THE NATION

FIRST RESULTS

- The songs are various and blend different themes. But there is a dominant leitmotiv: **suffering**.
- **Highly emotional themes** of misery (material deprivation at home or on the front), the parting of loved ones, and death (emotional deprivation) are clearly dominant.
- Importantly, this **suffering was consistently framed in national terms**. Its deep bitterness was complemented with its 'higher goal': the Fatherland.
- Thus, in the process of giving meaning to suffering, **individual war experiences were often 'nationalized'**.

GETTING A GRIP FROM BELOW

OBJECTIVES & SOURCE

- Explore **how nationalism was functional**, for broad strata of society, in a context that had been radically altered by war.
- More specifically: Can nationalism be seen as an **adaptive strategy** to deal with the material as well as psychological deprivations of war? And if so, how did that work?
- Sources: around 1000 popular wartime songs, from the whole of Belgium (in French as well as Dutch)



IMAGES

Above: The Fatherland in mourning by Alfred Ost, May 1915
Collection: In Flanders Fields Museum

Left: Market singer Achille Coppenolle and his daughter Marianne, and unknown market singers
Collections: R. Hessel and S. Top



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Refrain