The nature of the available evidence has inevitably drawn studies of national identity in the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries towards social and cultural elites: chroniclers, legislators, political leaders, university students travelling to Italy, and even individual intellectuals like Erasmus. Such studies can illuminate the development of identities amongst the wider population by inference. Those who read the chronicles, heard the ordinances proclaimed, were inspired by the leaders, or were taught by the students, presumably absorbed some of the ideas on the nature of their homeland. But it remains hard to test whether they did so.

Within these limitations, these studies have reached valuable and nuanced conclusions. They suggest that there was no agreed name for a nation inhabiting those lands; that the language of nationhood was far more often used of provinces or small groups of provinces than of any larger unit; and that provincial and dynastic loyalties were more powerful than any kind of national attachments, as we might expect from the comparatively rapid changes in the territorial composition of the Burgundian-Habsburg bloc. By the 1550s, terms suggestive of a single body politic including all the Habsburg provinces—le pays (rather than les pays) de pardeça; patrie, patria, or vaderlant; Belgium or Belgica—occur more frequently, which suggests an underlying change in attitudes. They argue plausibly that high noblemen and princely bureaucrats thought more readily in terms of larger allegiances than did those with less to gain from the exercise of princely power, and that those in the more recently acquired provinces felt less part of a common enterprise than those in the core Burgundian territories.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Karin Tilmans, ‘De ontwikkeling van een vaderland-begrip in de laat-middeleeuwse en vroege-moderne geschiedschrijving van de Nederlanden’, in Vaderland. Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940, ed. N.C.F. van Sas (Amsterdam, 1999), 7–53; Simon
A study of the effects of war on identity cannot overcome all the difficulties faced by these studies—indeed, many of its sources too must be the products of chroniclers, legislators, poets and politicians—but it does offer significant opportunities. War generated many of the 'boundary situations' referred to by Peter Hoppenbrouwers in his survey of the theoretical literature above. It provided a major stimulus for governments to deploy rhetoric about the unity of the polity and the duties of subjects towards it: in war, as one ordinance of Charles V put it, 'subjects are obliged to serve and stand by their own natural prince and fatherland before all other lords'.

War engaged large sections of the population in a common cause and demanded action from them, from paying taxes and celebrating victories to building fortifications and killing those they were told were their enemies. It demanded cooperation between different parts of the polity: different provinces, townsmen and countrymen, noblemen and urban elites, local populations and the foreign soldiers their prince sent to defend them. Again, government rhetoric stressed the need for cooperation. In 1535 Mary of Hungary proposed a union of mutual defence to the provinces gathered in the States General. An attack on one province, she argued, concerned 'the person and estate of the said lord emperor and of his other lands and subjects over here', so that 'all good and loyal subjects of the same should help and rescue him in this, and thereby assist the said invaded and attacked land'.

As the Burgundian-Habsburg polity