

Another hidden history of Europe

Europe. A history of border nations

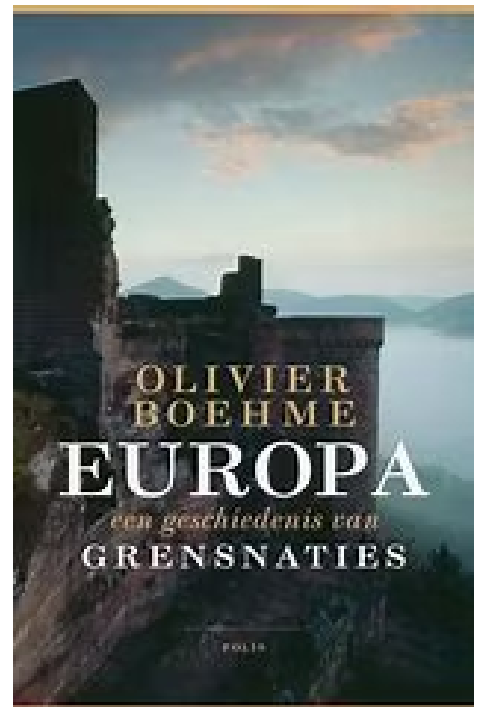
OLIVIER BOEHME

The shaping of national identity in states and peoples is a continuous process that evolves in relation to the geopolitical situation. Intellectuals, especially historians, have an important part to play in both creating and substantiating that national self-image, since history is a productive tool in the process.

Countries have borders, but some countries are borders in themselves. Historian Olivier Boehme describes how the history of Europe has been shaped to an important extent by what he calls 'border nations'. Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland take pride in their role as mediators, always in search of middle ground in describing a European identity. The same is true of regions in Central Europe that for centuries were dominated by the Habsburgs. Even Germany turns out to have been a border area between different European identities.

Olivier Boehme takes the reader with him to places where writers, historians, philosophers, ideologists and politicians have dealt in highly creative ways with the European identity. It is of course useful and fascinating to look at the differences and resemblances between ideas about identity (chronologically and reciprocally), both within each case that he examines and across borders. Boehme provides a unique view of other parts of Europe as seen from the Low Countries, especially the German-speaking world, and in doing so he points out previously overlooked connections. The comparison between small and large countries and regions also brings to light some remarkable similarities and insights.

This captivating and ambitious book makes possible a new outlook on Europe and on the diversity that stimulates and challenges it.



AUTHOR



Olivier Boehme (b. 1974) has a doctorate in history and works as a policy adviser at the Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Vlaanderen (FWO). His work is situated at the intersection of political, cultural, intellectual and socio-economic history. He has published work on subjects including the right-wing revolution in Flanders between the wars (1999) and the political-financial system in Belgium (2005). His award-winning book 'Grab for the Market' (2008) was considered an important contribution to the analysis of communal relations in Belgium. He also engages in the public debate by writing opinion pieces for newspapers.

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