



[Museum Aan de IJzer](#), [CEGESOMA](#) and [NISE](#) invite you to participate at the Scientific Conference on

## ***‘National forgetting and memory: the destruction of “national” monuments from a comparative perspective’***

**on 11 March 2021 in Diksmuide (Belgium)**

### **CONFERENCE PROPOSAL**

---

Starting with the work of Ernest Renan, the study of nationalism has always ascribed an important role to the process of forgetting in the construction or imagination of nations. ‘Forgetting’ however as an analytical tool has remained largely opaque in nationalism studies. This is not too surprising, as definitions of nationalism have generally put emphasis on elements and factors that create or engender a nation, most notably forgetting’s apparent antithesis, (collective) memory. The scholar of nationalism Anthony D. Smith for example once described collective memories as one the most ‘vital components’ in the formation of a nation or national identity. Consequently, elements that are considered detrimental to the formation or maintenance of a nation or national identity have been largely ignored.



*Destruction of the Yser Tower. 15-16 March 1946.*

During this conference, we want to highlight and delve deeper into the intricate and complex relationship between the formation of a nation and elements that might constitute its destruction by focusing on one specific case study: the destruction of ‘national’ monuments. Generally cast as an exemplary archetype of a nation’s collective memory, monuments provide an ideal locus to further explore this unattended field of research. Described as a motor for the formation of (national) identity by the anthropologist Anette Weiner, monuments form an intrinsic part of cultural heritage, and are inextricably connected to the process of collective memory. Viejo-Rose (2007, 102) explained how ‘cultural heritage in both its tangible and intangible manifestations, physical objects and structures as well as traditional knowledge, beliefs and forms of expression has become central to contemporary perceptions of collective memory.’ Moreover, monuments also act as social agents, as they constitute a locus for different social groups to gather and help to shape or alter the public space and its concurrent

ideologies.

Because of these qualities, the destruction of monuments has constituted a perpetual occurrence in history, and is a popular target for social and political groups that want to subvert

or exert political authority or influence, or challenge conventional practices of collective memory. The destruction of monuments in post-conflict times can be used by (new) political authorities to manipulate or alter traditional historiography, or can be used to represent a new interpretation of collective memory and society. Conversely, the destruction of monuments can be seen as an effort to address interpretations of history that have come to be regarded as problematic, and be considered as an attempt to turn the page in a society and its history.

The destruction of monuments, in concordance with the element of forgetting, thus pertains protean interpretations and motives, which is why the necessity of a comparative perspective is underscored. Comparing different modern cases – ranging from the Napoleonic wars to the two World Wars and recent conflicts in the Balkan, Middle-East and former Soviet states – allows to discern certain general trends in the formation of national identities (and the role of forgetting), whilst simultaneously stressing the intricacies of different historical contexts, and geographical, social, and political differences.

Some of the themes that can be addressed are (but are not limited to):

- The relation between forgetting and memory in the formation of national identity
- The different forms of forgetting, and their connection to the destruction of cultural heritage
- Monuments and (national) self-determination
- Monuments as social agents or as a locale that encourages social practices
- Monuments and different forms of destruction
- Restauration, reconstruction and nostalgia
- Protection of national monuments
- Relation between monuments and the malleability of the past
- Destruction (and forgetting) as an ideological cleavage
- Destruction and historiographical divergences

## PROGRAM

---

Keynote speakers are:

- [Ann Rigney](#) (Prof. dr. Comparative Literature at the University of Utrecht)
- [Thomas Cauvin](#) (Ass. Prof. of Public History at the University of Luxembourg)
- [Kasper Swerts](#) (Researcher at ADVN/NISE and Associate Editor of [Studies on National Movements SNM](#))

The program will be further elaborated.

The conference will take place on **11 March 2021** on the site of the Yser Tower, in Diksmuide (Belgium), or online if the COVID-19 crisis doesn't yet allow a physical meeting be held.

## SUBMISSION OF PAPERS

---

**18 December 2020 is the deadline to submit your proposal.** Please send it to [eva.bidania@nise.eu](mailto:eva.bidania@nise.eu)

Papers will be published in [SNM](#), NISE's peer reviewed scientific journal.

\*\*\*\*\*