

The forgotten Genocide. The Fate of Sinti and Roma  
Digital exhibition:  
<http://www.romasinti.eu/>

Initiated by the Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei | The National Committee for 4 and 5 May, The Netherlands in 2012. With support of: IHR4 | *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*. Music by Hungarian Jazz guitarist and composer Ferenc Snétberger, "For my people" (1999).

Upon entering the digital exhibition "The forgotten Genocide. The Fate of Sinti and Roma" one is presented with a dark background; out of nowhere light letters materialize. Sentences that speak about the genocide erasing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Sinti and Roma, arresting, deporting, and murdering them, are accompanied by a melancholic and haunting guitar solo that evokes washed-out images from the South, from a time different than today's. The introduction is followed by a similar dark screen showing four horizontal wavy lines that move as if rippled by a soft wind. On the most prominent of these lines, dots with six names attached to them are to be seen. Moving over the names with the cursor reveals six small

black-and-white photographs of children. These six children whose lives were severely affected by the genocide become the mouth-piece of all the murdered Sinti and Roma.

Clicking onto one of the names takes you on a compelling journey to the past. The light wavy line turns into a time bar that winds and meanders back to the 1940s, showing on its way photographs from the life of the child chosen; a male voice tells the corresponding story. Zoni Weisz, born in 1937 as son of a Sinto in The Hague, represents one of the six fates of Sinti and Roma in Europe during the terrors of the Nazi regime. Zoni's story is told in five chapters entitled "Before the war", "Prohibition on movement", "Deportation", "Search", and "Internationally renowned", each illustrated with historic photographs and documents. Interviews and videos - one of them showing Zoni in 2011 delivering a speech at the German Bundestag as representative and advocate of the Sinti and Roma - enrich the presentation even further. Zoni was only seven years old when his entire family was deported via a transit camp in Westerbork to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.



Screenshot  
"The forgotten  
Genocide.  
The Fate of Sinti  
and Roma",  
Introduction:  
Four wavy lines  
and six photos  
of the children".



He only escaped deportation because he was staying in the neighbouring village at his aunt's house that day. The last year of the war Zoni spent hiding in forests and with local farmers. The fate of most of his family members has remained uncertain until today. Only decades later Zoni found the strength to speak in public about the loss of his close relatives and his trauma.

Apart from the life stories of the children, the digital exhibition also features an informative text about the history of Sinti and Roma in Europe. Visitors of the digital exhibition learn that the first accounts of "colourfully dressed, dark-skinned itinerant strangers" in Western-Europe date back to the early 15th century. Because they were skilled workers and talented craftsmen, they were well received in many Dutch and other European cities. In the 16th century, the nomadic lifestyle of the Sinti and Roma people was declared inappropriate by

many European authorities, which is why they were banished wherever they went. The fate of the Sinti and Roma did not change much over the next centuries. However, the Second World War, where an estimated 500.000 European Sinti and Roma were murdered, meant the tragic climax of their people's history.

Another valuable feature hidden in the digital exhibition - the link to enter this section is simply entitled "Archive" and located at the bottom right of the page - is an alphabetic list of terms, concepts, place names, and historic events connected to the topic of Sinti and Roma, genocide and World War II. An explanatory text with useful interlinks to other entries in the "Archive" as well as small pop-up windows that offer summarized information appear when clicking on one of the keywords that are arranged on a wavy line. Historic photographs or documents accompany most

Screenshot  
"The forgotten  
Genocide.  
The Fate of  
Sinti and Roma",  
The story  
of Zoni Weisz.



of the entries. From assembly camps, to Polish Roma, to the role of the Catholic Church, to Zigeuner, the visitor can read about all sorts of relevant terms.

All the texts in “The forgotten Genocide” are indexed; whenever one is coming across an unknown term or an event one wants to know more about one is directed to the archive section. In the section “About this exhibition” visitors are provided with a brief explanation of how this digital exhibition came about. “The forgotten Genocide” is aimed at drawing attention to a theme of World War II the general public is less familiar with: the mistreatment and prosecution of the Sinti and Roma was not examined and discussed until the 1980s. The online presentation succeeded extremely well in giving recognition to this hitherto overlooked group of victims of the genocide. Recognition and remembrance help strengthening the identity of Sinti and Roma

people and are a step on the way towards restoring the dignity and justice for members of this ethnic group. But even today, ethnic minorities referred to as gypsies have to face aggression and prejudices against them.

The digital exhibition “The forgotten Genocide” may also galvanize people into thinking about those current problems, making them aware of mechanisms of exclusion and xenophobia that have not been reflected upon. The clear, straight form and design of this digital exhibition that basically can be broken down into two animated introductory parts, the life stories of the children, and the background information sections including the archive, is bound together by the captivating guitar music which bestows upon the entire presentation an atmospheric, melancholic mood. A further merit of this exhibition is that it does not overwhelm visitors with too much information and material: photos and documents are



Screenshot  
“The forgotten  
Genocide.  
The Fate of Sinti  
and Roma”,  
Introduction  
to the story of  
Krystyna Gil.



carefully selected; the accompanying texts are objective and factual, avoiding any kind of judgment or accusation. In addition, visitors can choose to have the texts and audio files translated from English into a range of languages: Dutch, German, Czech, and Polish. Because of its open structure – the exhibition does not dictate the order in which the content has to be experienced – “The forgotten Genocide” is an excellent example of a well thought-out online presentation.

The message creators wanted to convey is understood, whether visitors only have the time to look at and learn about the life story of one of the six Sinti and Roma children, or whether they explore the entire exhibition. Texts, explanations, materials, and documents are suited for any age group; thus, the digital exhibition makes great learning material for

school children, enabling them to develop their own questions, perspectives, and conclusions. All this taken together makes “The forgotten Genocide” a pioneering achievement at the forefront of digital exhibition creation. What is more, it casts a light on a highly sensitive topic that has been ignored for far too long.

In 2012 the digital exhibition “The forgotten Genocide. The Fate of Sinti and Roma” received two Silver Lovie 2012 awards for best non-profit project and best use of flash design.

(<http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/news/493-double-lovie-awards-for-digital-exhibition-the-forgotten-genocide-.html>)

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Screenshot  
“The forgotten  
Genocide.  
The Fate of Sinti  
and Roma”,  
Archive: Ghettos.

