
Hidden Children during the Holocaust – Historical Considerations of a Transnational Phenomenon

Ort	Kaunas, Lithuania
Veranstalter	Prof. Dr. Ruth Leiserowitz, German Historical Institute, Warsaw and Dr. des. Gintare Malinauskaite, German Historical Institute, Warsaw / Branch Office Vilnius
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Von

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In many European countries, during the persecution and extermination of Jews throughout the Second World War, Jewish children were destined to hide in improvised settlements, such as secret attics, Catholic convents, or live openly with foreign Christian families. They had to struggle with a sense of being in constant danger and spent their childhood living under life-threatening conditions. They not only endured fear of the Nazi persecution, but in some cases, they also experienced physical and sexual abuse by their “saviors”. In the postwar years, these hidden children, while adjusting to a new life, experienced double trauma. Firstly, many young children were hidden as infants, and, therefore, they could not remember their parents, while others lost their families, who were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. Those hidden children, who returned home to their parents, grandparents, or siblings experienced significant psychological problems and had to adapt to their new way of life with their war-traumatized relatives. Secondly, during the war, these children had not only to live separately from their relatives, but they also had to change their identity, and in some cases were demanded to forget their language. Thus in the postwar years, hidden children faced the double hurdles of adjusting to their psychologically damaged parents and to reaccustoming themselves to their prewar Jewish identities.

After the war, in many countries, the fate of these secret survivors of the Holocaust, who grew up and lived their own lives, have been forgotten, or has scarcely received any attention. Only a few personal testimonies with painful memories were published, often in literary form. This memorialization changed, when the generation of former hidden children reached their retirement age. Since the late 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, the subject has been examined increasingly, primarily (auto-) biographically. The establishment of organizations like the “Hidden Child

Foundation” (1991 in New York) or the “Child Holocaust Survivors” (1991 in Poland) has had a significant impact on this process.

The German Historical Institute in Warsaw will hold a workshop on this issue in Kaunas, Lithuania, on June 25-27, 2018 in cooperation with The International Centre for Litvak Photography. This location has been chosen intentionally, as a significant number of children were hidden in Kaunas and its surroundings during the war. In the Soviet times, in Lithuania, Sofija Binkienė who, along with her family, hid Jewish children from the Kaunas Ghetto, published an important contribution on this topic, titled *Soldiers without Guns*. This book contained the memories of the protectors and their hidden children. This workshop aims to revisit and reclaim the stories of the hidden children in the respective countries and to examine the impacts of their hiding experiences for their postwar lives. For this workshop, we encourage all participants to present their newest research on this topic. We particularly welcome papers, which introduce unknown source material, develop new concepts or methods, and explore the history of hidden children via a comparative, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach.

We invite scholars representing historical disciplines and other social sciences to submit proposals under one of the topics mentioned above.

The workshop will be organized by:

Prof. Dr. Ruth Leiserowitz, German Historical Institute, Warsaw and Dr. des. Gintarė Malinauskaitė, German Historical Institute, Warsaw / Branch Office Vilnius

The workshop will be held in English.

Abstract proposals of no less than 250 and no more than 500 words with a short bio should be sent to: leiserowitz@dhi.waw.pl; malinauskaite@dhi.lt

Deadline for submitting abstracts: 31 January 2018

Notification of acceptance: 28 February 2018

Conference dates: 25-27 June 2018

Conference venue: Kaunas, Lithuania

For further information, please contact:

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