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EMBRACING A LACK OF CONTEXT? REFLECTIONS ON THE EXHIBITION "SOME WERE NEIGHBORS. CHOICE, HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE HOLOCAUST"

In connection with the 81st anniversary of the annihilation of the Kielce Ghetto, planned and carried out by the German occupation authorities from 20 to 24 August 1942, a ceremonial opening of an exhibition entitled "Some Were Neighbors. Choice, Human Behavior and the Holocaust" was held on 19 August 2023. The initiator of the undertaking intended to mark the commemoration of this tragic event was the Jan Karski Association in Kielce. The exhibition, prepared by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, was displayed at Plac Artystów [Artists' Square] in Kielce, and the occasional lecture introducing the theme of the exhibition was given by Dr. Alina Skibińska, a representative of this institution. The exhibition "Some Were Neighbors…" has previously toured many Polish cities and institutions, including the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II. This prompts reflection on its overall message and meaning.

The questions of the reception of this exhibition become all the more pertinent when one becomes acquainted with the goals that the authors have set for

themselves. These are very ambitious; in a single exhibition, covering the whole of occupied Europe, they decided to provide an overview by way of an answer to fundamental questions that trouble many a scholar dealing professionally with Holocaust Studies, but which are also important for the average person with a limited interest in the subject of the Second World War. These rudimentary problems are indicated already on the first poster, where we can read:

> The central role of Adolf Hitler and other Nazi leaders is indisputable, but they depended on countless others. What role did ordinary people play? Why were there some zealous participants in the persecution of Jews, while most simply went along or joined in? Why did so few help the victims? How did people respond to the plight of their Jewish classmates, co-workers, neighbors, and friends? What motivated or prompted them to act as they did during the Holocaust?

These questions are illustrated by a photograph depicting the humiliating forced labour of Jews scrubbing the pavements in Vienna in March 1938.[1]

The Polish version of the exhibition consists of 22 posters. The entire exhibition is clearly divided into three parts: The Third Reich (including annexed territories, posters 2–8), Eastern Europe (East, posters 9–15), and the rest of the continent under German occupation or collaborating with the German state, and countries such as Norway (posters 16–21). The issues were presented in a chronological and subject order. Towards the end of the exhibition, this arrangement was slightly disrupted, and the emphasis shifted to specific topics – the clash between the smiling "Nazis" and the drama of the Jewish victims – and to the message about the possibility of choice and resisting evil (posters 20–21). The final part of the exhibition (poster 22) focuses on the USHMM's educational efforts to oppose hatred and prevent genocide. It is important to note already at this point that although the exhibition was intended for the Polish audience, the Polish state and society under German occupation were not specifically highlighted. Instead, they were

[1] This photograph, held at the Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (DÖW) in Vienna, is also the "nucleus" of the stories about the social attitudes of the Viennese and, more broadly, of Austrians towards the Nazi authorities and their policies,.

considered part of the East, which, while objectively accurate, carries significant implications that will be discussed further.

Theoretically, the division of the exhibition into these three parts – given the challenges that the authors posed to themselves – may seem quite natural. Here, on the one hand, we have the Third Reich, the "heart of darkness," the place where the Holocaust was planned, and on the other, we follow the reactions of the occupied nations (and the collaborationist states) – those in the East and in the rest of the continent – to this unprecedented genocide. In practice, however, the authors' attempt to cover such a wide-ranging issue universally, to build a certain generalizing message, forced them to use far-reaching simplifications and abbreviations in the sphere of concepts, facts, and in the textual layer, which was detrimental to the accuracy of the historical message and the message of the exhibition as a whole. The introduced division between the East and the rest of Europe seems artificial and adds little to the understanding of the mechanism of the Holocaust, especially the social attitudes that are at the center of the authors' interest. The viewer who intends to get acquainted with the exhibition should have considerable knowledge of Holocaust studies and World War II. Otherwise, the juxtaposition may sometimes be illegible, unclear, and even capable of falsifying actual occurrences, especially that of the occupation, i.e., on the occupied Polish territories. For these reasons, several general and specific comments can, and indeed should, be made on the exhibition concept to determine whether the authors have answered the questions they posed.

This reviewer will begin with their presentation of objections to semantic issues or interventions that result in serious consequences in the interpretative layer. Then, the discussion will move on to strictly historical ones. In attempting to answer the questions presented in Poster 1, the authors make the fundamental historical error of using the highly controversial (and at the same time not reflective of the facts) term "domination" in the very first sentences, which does not reflect the nature of German state violence and Occupation terror in almost all of Europe and does not bring us any closer to understanding what German totalitarianism was before and during the Second World War. "Within Nazi Germany and across German-dominated Europe," as we can read on the poster, "people behaved in a variety of ways […]." Yes, indeed, people behaved in a variety of ways, but is it legitimate to

call the German occupation "domination"? Is this the result of a mistranslation from English, or is it a conscious effort to create a new image of the role of the Third Reich during the World War II? The introduction of the term "domination" instead of "occupation" in the case of Polish lands, e.g., in relation to the General Governorate (GG), has serious consequences for the understanding of what the German presence in these territories actually was, and the extent to which the various countries conquered by the Germans differed in this respect. The use of the term, which has much weaker overtones, clearly changes the perception of the rules and laws, which practically amount to lawlessness, introduced by German totalitarianism against conquered nations. The question must, therefore, be asked how the authors want to explain individual social attitudes towards the Holocaust if they present them in isolation from German policy as if it had not been instrumental in shaping the types of behaviour of European societies. The general and factually incompatible thesis of German "domination" has thus created the possibility of developing a vision of unified social attitudes towards the Holocaust, in which similarities and differences have become blurred, and pointing them out is no longer relevant. This was clearly expressed by Dr. Skibińska:

> The problems that affected the inhabitants of this land also affected other people, and these are universal problems. We are an exception when it comes to the course of the Holocaust; we are not an exception when it comes to people's attitudes, and this is the main theme of the exhibition.[2]

The second issue in the semantic layer is the problem of the scrupulous avoidance of the terms "Germany" and "German" in favour of "Nazis" and "Nazi." This perhaps unintentional procedure implies serious consequences in the reception of the exhibition: the element of a state's – read German – responsibility for the Holocaust disappears, and the phrase about "the role of Adolf Hitler and other Nazi leaders" quoted in the introduction does not change this. The self-imposed regime of political correctness (or perhaps German historical policy) has led the authors

[2] http://jankarski.org.pl/obchody-81-rocznicy-zaglady-kieleckiego-getta/, accessed 13 September 2023.

to build a narrative that completely falsifies the causes and course of the second stage of the Holocaust. The following peculiar sentence appears: "After Nazi leaders decided to annihilate all the Jews of Europe, Germans deported the inhabitants of ghettos in occupied Poland to the SS-run killing facilities at Chełmno, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Auschwitz and Majdanek." The visitor to the exhibition learns of the existence of some unspecified "Nazis" who give the Germans the order to deport Jews to extermination camps, "run" also by an unidentified "SS" unit. All of this unfolds in front of Poles, and – as will be elaborated further – with their widespread indifference (insensitivity). With this interpretation, the question can be raised as to who is actually the perpetrator of the Holocaust. Are the perpetrators the Germans or, on the contrary, are they not?

The disproportion in terms of causality is even more pronounced at the structural level. Now, here we come to remarks unrelated to the linguistic layer. Neither in the section of the exhibition dedicated to the Third Reich nor in the one focused on occupied Europe is the German terror apparatus responsible for the Holocaust, and the repression of the conquered nations systematically distinguished or presented. The names of the various formations do appear sporadically, but their descriptions are neither orderly nor precise. A poster in the section on Eastern Europe would have been particularly valuable. The authors also made some significant omissions. When discussing the Holocaust carried out by the Third Reich in the Eastern territories after the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, they failed to mention the *Einsatzgruppen* (Security Police Operative Groups), which were the primary formation responsible in this context. This omission is notable, especially since the main focus of this part of the exhibition (posters 9–15) was on German crimes against Jews in 1941 and the public's response to these events. An indication of the German forces and their deployment would have shown the total dimension of the occupation in the East in 1941–1944. It would have clearly highlighted the differences in the course of the Holocaust between different parts of Europe, determining the attitudes of the occupied societies towards the Holocaust.

It is astonishing moreover, to find that the symbolic term *Aktion "Reinhardt"* (Operation "Reinhardt"), referring to the murder of approximately two million Jews in the GG and Bezirk Bialystok, also did not appear in the exhibition. Another issue concerns the main theme of the exhibition, namely social attitudes.

The narrative begins with a description of the situation in the Third Reich. This part of the exhibition is entitled: "True Believers, Opportunists, Conformists, Dissenters." When confronted with knowledge about the Holocaust course of events, this title is very vague and obliterates reality. One could ask: "And where are the perpetrators in all this? Where are the initiators of this genocide?"[3] In addition to general statements about the persecution of Jews and representatives of other nations (Sinti and Roma) or groups (homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses), the authors dwell on trying to portray the Germans' reaction[4] to the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazis. They rightly named in the title and elaborated upon certain types of attitudes: support for anti-Jewish ideas, opportunism, conformism, and dissent. They discussed in more detail the exclusion of Jews from the German national community (Volksgemeinschaft), the shameful marking of Jews with the Star of David, the so-called Aryanisation of property, and reactions to anti-Jewish violence and the deportation of Jews as well as Sinti and Roma from the German Reich[5] to the occupied Polish lands. In line with the classic principles of poster exhibitions, the captions under the included photographs also contain many important additions and supplementary information.

From the descriptions and the narrative thus built, a picture emerges of a German society that, in its mass, supported or tacitly accepted the actions of the Nazi authorities towards ethnic and social minorities. Only a few were able to stand up against evil, such as policeman Erich Troch from Felsberg, who, in November 1938, defended Sigmund Weinstein and his relatives from persecution. In this context, the question can be posed about what happened to him afterward (poster 4). Did he face any harassment from his superiors, expulsion from service, etc., for this act? Among the factors motivating the Germans' choices, the authors most often emphasise conformism, opportunism and acquiescence to persecution, and vio-

[3] Paradoxically, the permanent exhibition in a place symbolic to the Holocaust – Die Gedenk- und Bildungsstätte. Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz in Berlin – does not raise such doubts.

[4] With this term, I also refer to the Austrians, who automatically became the Third Reich's Germans after the Anschluss.

[5] The enclosed map shows the German Reich within its 1942 borders. The use of such a short-cut, without a detailed explanation that this also refers to deportations of Jews from the Polish western territories incorporated into the Third Reich to other Polish territories, called by the Germans the *Generalgouvernement*, further obscures the course of the Holocaust.

lence. Unfortunately, in this instance, no detailed statistical data were provided to enhance the analysis in this area. Instead, the authors relied on general quantifiers like "many."[6]

In describing the response to persecution and the Holocaust in the Third Reich, in the context of the roundups of Jews in deportation operations already organised in Germany during the war and the Holocaust, the following sentence is extremely telling: "There were few individuals who expressed solidarity or said goodbye to former friends and neighbors."[7] Symbolically, only one person is mentioned who dared to embrace a Jewish woman in the street and say goodbye (poster 8). The above words are illustrated by photographs of Germans calmly walking next to persecuted Jews or people standing by and watching the dramatic events. The authors of the exhibition thus convince us that on the street of an average town in the Reich in 1940 or 1942, there was no atmosphere of fear, terror, or any threat from the Nazis for a gesture of solidarity with the Jews. A shake of the hand, a smile, or any other small display of kindness towards persecuted persons was not sanctioned by any summary punishment or systemic order. Compassion, or the absence of it, stemmed from the willingness to express it rather than being influenced by external political circumstances. We are free to ask, therefore, whether the overall message of the exhibition in its "German" part lies in the observation that there was simply not enough empathy and compassion on the part of German society, which pushed aside the problem of the fate of Jews. Perhaps, however, instead of appealing to the realm of emotionality, it would have been more appropriate to explicitly address the mass support for the idea of an all-out war and its consequences in the form of the involvement of ordinary Germans in the participation in the Holocaust and the persecution (and even extermination of certain social groups, e.g., in occupied Poland) of conquered peoples?

Poster 8 concludes the authors' reflections on the attitudes of Germans towards their authorities' anti-Jewish policy, while the subsequent ones take the viewer to completely different areas – to annexed and occupied territories, almost to a differ-

[6] Very important data on the exchange of medical personnel willing to implement policies against disabled persons and Jews was presented at an exhibition held at the Gedenkstätte Am Steinhof in Vienna.

[7] As many as two posters have been focused on these issues (7–8).

ent world. The presentation of social reactions to the persecution of Jews and the Holocaust in occupied Europe begins. The first poster of this part is titled "German Occupiers, Local Recruits ▪ Neighbors." The subtitle reads: "Nazi Terror Heightens Ethnic Conflicts, Self-Interests and Fear." The graphical layout makes it impossible to tell whether the authors have placed an equal sign between collaborators and neighbours or whether they have placed a full stop, separating the latter from those who, for various reasons through an act of voluntary cooperation, took part of their own free will in the implementation of anti-Jewish policy. However, the territory to which the title refers is not in doubt. We have been transferred to the "epicenter of the Holocaust," i.e., the eastern areas of occupied Europe – the General Governorate, the Reichskommissariat Ostland, the Reichskommissariat Ukraine, and further areas conquered by the Wehrmacht in the Soviet Union (posters 11–15). It is a great pity that the administrative affiliation of other territories marked in green was not given on this occasion. The less historically sophisticated viewer may not know that these are areas of the Soviet Union under German military administration.

On the other hand, posters 16–21 focus on the remaining part of occupied Europe under the general title "Leaders ▪ Public Servants Onlookers." Once again, the graphic layout makes it impossible to determine the type of symbol placed between the public servants and the onlookers, whether it was intended to be a full stop, a dash, or some kind of equal sign. It is also unclear why the inhabitants of these areas were categorised en masse as "onlookers" rather than as "neighbours" or collaborators. Such simplifications are completely inconsistent with the reality of the Occupation. It is common knowledge among specialists, but, as can be seen not among the exhibition's authors that in occupied Poland there was no state collaboration, only individual collaboration, unlike in Hungary or the French State (Vichy France). By the way, the latter name does not appear anywhere in the exhibition (!). One can only speculate and ask questions about the omission of the term "collaboration" in the title of the section on Western Europe.

The exhibition's creators barely notice the differences in the policies/activities of the German state authorities towards the conquered states and peoples of Eastern Europe, treating all these areas as a kind of socio-political monolith (posters 9–15). The country-specific context is relegated to the margins of consideration.

Let us turn our attention to poster 9 with the subtitle "Nazi Terror Heightens Ethnic Conflicts, Self-Interests, and Fear," under which the motivations of collaborators and German Holocaust helpers are listed. The attempt to generalise about these behaviours may be questionable. The last of the factors indicated is "Nationalist aspirations for independence." So here we enter a completely different conceptual category, i.e. we move from the collaboration of individuals or groups to entire nations. Which nation (or nations), then, collaborated with the Germans in carrying out the Holocaust to regain their independence? The authors should clearly answer such questions and not leave the viewer to his or her own guesses. Similarly blurred is the category of "ethnic conflicts" in the East mentioned in the subtitle. It must be clearly emphasised that the uniqueness of the Holocaust should not obscure the antagonising of non-Jewish peoples conquered by the Germans against each other. In the occupied Polish territories, the German authorities favoured Ukrainians, Lithuanians, or Belarusians at the expense of Poles. These conflicts, and thus the occupation-era background, taking an extreme form in the case of the Volhynian massacre, had a very real impact on the sense of one's own security and thus on the reactions to the Holocaust and the possibility of providing assistance to Jews.[8]

The authors also considerably trivialised the description of the situation in the East between 1939 and 1941, when half of Poland and other Eastern countries were entering the Soviet sphere of influence. When listing the factors that motivated locals who collaborated with the Germans, they mentioned: the "Desire to avenge suffering under Soviet rule." The tensions, it should be noted, related to the attitudes of the various nationalities towards the Soviet occupiers that emerged at the time also had an impact on mutual relations after the Germans entered the area.

Even more incomprehensible is the omission from the analysis of the East of the Polish western lands incorporated into the Reich (the so-called "incorporated territories"), to which the authors repeatedly refer (e.g., Poster 9 and 10) but do not mention explicitly. The crimes against Polish elites mentioned on Poster 10 were committed by the Selbstschutz, mainly in the territories incorporated into the Reich

[8] *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką. Przegląd piśmiennictwa*, ed. T. Domański, A. Gontarek (Warsaw–Kielce, 2022).

in the autumn of 1939 (the Pomeranian crimes). Moreover, the scale of the terrorisation of Polish society in this area was far greater than in the neighbouring General Governorate, which further limited the possibility of providing any aid to Jews.

In contrast, the authors treated the rest of Europe with much greater understanding (Poster 18) and suggested, for example, the existence of a whole range of intensities of collaboration with the "Nazis," varying from country to country. They also approached the analysis of the motivation of negative attitudes in a completely different way than in the previous posters. They did not devote any deeper thought to this issue; they merely wrote: "War and Anti-Semitism Impact the Will to Collaborate" – thus pointing out the factors motivating the collaboration of Western countries and their citizens in the context of the Holocaust, and therefore that their response to the Holocaust should be the so-called salt of this exhibition.

There is also a lack of reflection on the Occupation-era conditions under which the majority of non-Jewish citizens of the eastern territories found themselves – and these varied considerably from country to country. As the authors rightly noted, the survival strategies of Jews depended on the conditions imposed by the "Nazis" (Poster 10). However, it should be remembered that they also determined aid strategies. It is not only about German laws and penalties for helping Jews but also about everyday life under the German occupation, which consisted of widespread terror and the poor material condition of the population. To the latter issue, in the context of the occupied Polish lands, the authors devoted barely one sentence: "The Germans imposed harsh living conditions on the population, and the situation of the majority of society deteriorated." Such a diagnosis can just as well be successfully applied to wartime France, but there were colossal differences in living conditions between, for example, the occupied Mazovia and German-occupied Burgundy. The visitor to the exhibition will learn nothing of the extremely extensive and elaborate policy of exploitation and economic plunder of the conquered Polish lands, the millions of tons of food drained from there to Germany, of the rationing of basic foodstuffs, the ration card system, high prices and of the several hundred percent increase in prices (on the black market) compared to the pre-war prices.[9] Only

[9] This issue is covered extensively in: G. Berendt, "Cena życia – ekonomiczne uwarunkowania egzystencji Żydów po 'aryjskiej stronie'," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 4 (2008), pp. 110–143.

the following sentence will be remembered: "Most Jews paid for aid, housing, and food, but some individuals made helping Jews a source of income" (poster 14).

Too little space has been devoted, in the reviewer's opinion, to the category of fear as a factor motivating human choices in the face of the Holocaust in occupied Poland. In the realities of the German occupation in Poland, fear for one's own life and the life of one's loved ones meant that the most common attitude towards the Holocaust was passivity (a lack of reaction); but it was the kind of passivity forced precisely by the above considerations. The authors take a slightly different view of this issue. According to them, terror led to "an epidemic of social insensitivity" and to "indifference to the suffering of others." However, this is an overly extreme assessment. For we are not talking about free societies in democratic countries, but about the brutal reality of a war. In an extreme situation, everyone has the right to care for themselves and their loved ones first and foremost. This is not a matter of insensitivity but rather a social atomisation triggered by a powerful external stimulus – in this case, the social brutalisation of the German occupation.

In addition, many sources emphasise sympathy for the victims while not reacting due to paralysing fear. Meanwhile, the attitude of passivity towards the Holocaust, which was dominant in Polish society, was reduced to an absolute minimum in the description, and reactions were presented through the prism of extreme attitudes. On one side of the scale are those who behaved shamefully towards Jews, on the other heroes who risked their lives to save them. No attempt was made to present the scale of negative and positive phenomena, although when reading the individual descriptions on the posters, one gets the impression that the former were much more numerous and were certainly mentioned much more often by the authors of the exhibition (on seven out of eight posters). An evident example of the construction of such a narrative is Poster 15, "Two Types of Neighbors," depicting events in the village of Gniewczyna Łańcucka. The attitude of "the third type of neighbors," i.e. the majority of the inhabitants of this village, paralyzed by fear, was completely ignored.

Apart from this, the authors have not attempted to explain to the reader how they actually define helping Jews, what it is that they refer to as "aid," and what it is that they refer to as "rescue." They state: "In the German-occupied territories of Poland, Serbia, and the USSR, hiding Jews was punishable by death; in other

conquered countries, helping Jews was also risky" (Poster 14). In the area of aid/rescue activities, they left out a rather important thread. Not only aid, as the authors themselves state, was punishable by death, but any contact with persecuted Jews, including trade. The German anti-aid regulations, the so-called Occupation law, which was brutally enforced, were crucial here. From 1941 onwards, the German authorities and their police formations not only threatened citizens with the death penalty for helping Jews in the occupied Polish territories but put this criminal law into practice by murdering entire families or individuals, often burning their buildings as well. These scenes of horror happened in public, in broad daylight, in front of "locals." The glow of burning houses and the cries of murdered people were supposed to be enough of a warning to those trying to give any help to the pursued Jews.

A few sentences should be dedicated to the strongly exposed word "choice," which appears on posters 14 ("Choice: Should I Take the Risk to Help?), 19 ("Choice: Helping Victims"), and 21. The final sentence of this last poster is the statement of a Jewish woman rescued in France: "This is something that I want the post-Holocaust generation to know, that people have choices." Unfortunately, choices are not equal. The authors are aware of this and have therefore emphasised that the risks in helping Jews in the East were greater than elsewhere. The entire exhibition, however, lacks an answer to a fundamental question: Why did the German authorities in Western Europe not impose such severe restrictions penalising aid to Jews as they did in occupied Poland and parts of Eastern Europe?

It is also worth recalling that the Germans in the occupied Polish territories, in their attempt to combat the "primary ideological enemy of the Third Reich," i.e., Jews, built a whole mechanism to implicate Polish society in their own anti-Jewish policy. It was even punishable not to report on Jews who were hiding or being hidden.[10] These essential historical circumstances are not reflected in the exhibition's narrative regarding the realities of Polish-Jewish relations during the Occupation. Poster 9.5 states: "Others [Poles – T.D.] cooperated with the Germans, for instance, to help hunt down escapees." However, it would also be appropriate to write that on many occasions, participation in such actions took place in an

[10] More in B. Musiał, *Kto dopomoże Żydowi…*, in collaboration with O. Musiał (Poznań, 2019).

atmosphere of fear or German coercion and did not stem from anti-Jewish views. Of course, there were also voluntary actions, but without a broader background, the reader was not fully informed.

Similarly, one should be critical of abbreviations and simplifications in poster 12, "Non-German Helpers in the Supervision and Liquidation of Ghettos." The following sentence is unclear: "Non-German auxiliaries and local police forces helped the SS and German police to empty the ghettos. Many of them supported the deportations of Jews, although some were against it." The process of extermination of particular ghettos and deportation to death camps, although a complex phenomenon, is quite well-researched. Therefore, nothing prevented a somewhat more in-depth description and an indication of what this help consisted of. Was it voluntary or forced? Because the quoted sentence in Polish as it reads implies a far-reaching voluntariness. Who specifically, which, for example, units grouping Poles, took part in the deportation operations and the murder of Jews in the death camps voluntarily? The exhibition's authors rightly drew attention to the forced incorporation of Slavic peoples into various German formations, but one wonders why they only referred to former Soviet soldiers. Leaving this question aside, there were indeed many former Soviet soldiers who volunteered for German service, having to choose between German service or death.[11] The actual situation, however, was more complex. A great number of people volunteered there completely without having had to face such dramatic choices. Even in the description of the Hungarian gendarmes deporting local Jews to the extermination camp, it was underlined that they acted on orders (Poster 18).

Such "nuances," however, were missing when talking about the so-called "Blue Police" (*Polnische Polizei im Generalgouvernement*) operating in the GG. The authors did not devote even one sentence of explanation to the circumstances of establishing this formation and the compulsory nature of the service. In organisational terms, it was part of the German police. What is most baffling, however, is the central photograph of Poster 12, depicting – one presumes – Poles "watching" the burning ghetto in Warsaw. The subject matter and the overtones of the photo are nowhere near the leading issue of the board, which concerns "helpers in the

[11] Caption for the middle photograph.

supervision and liquidation of ghettos." The civilian population, as it is widely known, did not take part in these actions. Such "flaws" build in an inexperienced viewer an alternative story of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the caption referring to the attitudes of the Polish residents of Warsaw towards the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising raises doubts. It reads: "The attitudes of Polish residents varied; some showed sympathy and were ready to help, but most were indifferent, and some were even contemptuous. In addition, ghetto escapees were in constant danger from informers and blackmailers." In this case, we have an already classic discrepancy between the accuracy of an individual caption and the overall historical narrative presented in the exhibition. Let us ask why the majority was "indifferent" – or rather passive – and what was the reason for this. Was it due to the brutal anti-aid law and the exceptional, even by the standards of the occupied Polish lands, German day-to-day terror in Warsaw, or to a free "choice"? Juxtaposed with the drama of the burning and destroyed ghetto, this "indifference" is even a moral burden. Meanwhile, research by Gunnar S. Paulsson shows for example, that in Warsaw, having a population of about six hundred thousand non-Jewish residents, there may have been three to four thousand blackmailers, while seventy to ninety thousand were involved in helping.[12]

Finally, a few minor additional comments. On Poster 16, which depicts occupied and "German-dominated" Europe, occupied France is shown within its contemporary borders. During World War II, after France's defeat in 1940, the long-contested regions of Alsace and Lorraine were incorporated by Germany. Another inaccuracy relates to the aforementioned Vichy State, or more precisely to its absence from the map, even though Europe's poster refers to 1942, i.e., when it existed. One cannot create an image of France as an administrative monolith in contradiction to the facts. Another minor comment concerns the name Szczecin, which should be written as Stettin, as it was a German city at the time.

The exhibition "Some Were Neighbors…" prompts the question: is it possible to build a single coherent narrative about the social attitudes of the population towards the Holocaust, which takes almost no account of any differences between Eastern and Western Europe? Is it possible moreover, on its basis, to answer the questions

[12] G.S. Paulsson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie warszawy (1940–1945)* (Cracow, 2007).

posed on the first poster about the extent of complicity in the Holocaust and to draw conclusions about the reasons for the scant assistance provided to the victims? The above-discussed over-interpretations, exaggerations, and the marginalisation and exclusion of the covered events from the German occupation context lead to a negative answer. In such an approach – to quote Dr. Alina Skibińska – it is indeed true that we are "an exception when it comes to the Holocaust course of events; we are not an exception when it comes to people's attitudes." What does this specifically imply for the understanding of the Holocaust process and its social context?