

of chauvinism, a significant point in the history of Polish emigration, a period when communism turned against the intelligentsia, a period when democratic evolution (?!—*BFR*) of the communist system was stopped.” Finally, it was “a consecutive chapter in the history of the world student movement.”

Professor Kula recounts many specific stories. He offers stories about baby carriages and diapers, imprisonment of protesters and fights between police and students in Poland’s larger cities, anti-Semitic slogans coming from the communist party apparatchiks that were, he states, “approvingly met by Polish society,” and the ensuing emigration of persons of Jewish background. Professor Kula remembers by name party leader Mieczysław Moczar, the Soviet “scientist” Trofim Lysenko, Marxist indoctrinator Adam Schaff [portrayed by Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*, *Ed.*], party leader Władysław Gomułka, the so-called revisionist Marxism, Marxist propaganda and society’s jokes about it, as well as the so-called *volks-dozents* (my recollection is that they were called “March dozents”). He is undoubtedly correct when he mocks the communist party accusation that “a few youths from communist families of Jewish background brought out thousands of young men and women into the streets,” but he does not say a word about what really brought thousands of youths into the streets: he says nothing about January 30, 1968, when the performance of Adam Mickiewicz’s *The Forefathers’ Eve* [written in 1834! *Ed.*] was closed in the National Theater because it contained lines that could be conceived as anti-Russian. He says nothing about demonstrations of students from Warsaw University and the College for Theater Performance who made the following demands: “We want to hear Mickiewicz’s truthful words, we want freedom without censorship, and we want our theaters open.” Professor Kula conceals the fact that on March 8, 1968, a student demonstration was called in defense of two fellow students expelled from Warsaw University: Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlejfer, both of whom came from Jewish and Marxist families and later became well known figures in Polish political life. The March 8 protest was the beginning of so-called March 1968 events in which one group in the communist party tried to push another group away from power. Without these crucial facts to which not only I but also other participants can testify, an analysis of what happened in Poland in March 1968 is neither trustworthy nor correct, unless the goal is to remove certain historical facts from memory, a goal that would be in clear

conflict with the Institute of National Remembrance’s charge. It is this Institute that Professor Kula’s article represents. Δ

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Responsibility and bad taste

German journalist teaches Poles tolerance

Michał Karnowski

Quite a few German journalists take for granted the flattering words directed at them by fellow journalists from *Gazeta Wyborcza* [Poland’s leftist daily, *Ed.*]. Some of them were mightily surprised when they discovered that there are journalists in Poland who are not lying prostrate before them in spite of all the money poured into Poland by Germans, all the grants and fellowships meant to educate the locals. After all this, is it possible that not everyone has been properly trained? Alas.

Ms. Gabriele Lesser, a journalist representing, among others, *Berliner Tageszeitung* (the paper that used to vulgarly mock the late President Kaczyński), was truly irritated when she encountered in *Uważam rze* [a rightist Polish weekly, *Ed.*] an article by Sławomir Sieradzki about German correspondents in Poland and their manner of reporting. Appearing live on Polsat News, Ms. Lesser announced that she felt threatened by the article. In other words, when she expresses her opinions about Poles she merely practices freedom of speech, but when she herself is evaluated a coup against democracy is launched. Nasty Polish journalists! But Ms. Lesser overcame her fears and, during the same Polsat show, volunteered to explain to Poles the proper meaning of democracy and tolerance. She advised Poles to see themselves in the now-infamous BBC show [where a British sportscaster tried to discourage British football fans from going to Poland for EURO 2012 by saying that they might return in coffins, *Ed.*]. Ms. Lesser agreed with this view. Poland is a dangerous place for football fans, almost a death zone!

Incidentally, the British are in an awkward position for teaching others how to behave at football stadiums. The Manchester fans and their conduct have undermined Albion’s right to instruct others on how to behave in a civilized fashion at sports events. But even

British sportscasters have more of a claim on pontificating on stadium manners than German journalists pontificating on the issue of tolerance. If I may cite Jacek Kaczmarski [singer and composer, *Ed.*], “There are still people here who wake up during the night screaming.” We Poles saw three of our generations wasted because of German aggression in 1939. We saw our educated classes wiped out. I wish we could easily remove from our collective memory the unprecedented bestiality and aggression directed at us by the *Herrensvolk*. We are still coping with the corruption and demoralization that inevitably take root in a brutalized nation. We are still shouldering—and will shoulder for a long time—material losses that foreign occupation has caused. Should not a nation that three generations ago built its totalitarian system so perfectly learn a bit of humility? Yes, Germans are now engaged in building a perfectly democratic system, but shouldn’t humility be a part of their historical memory and of that system? Perhaps Germans will soon begin to teach us how to combat the kind of anti-Semitism that leads to extermination camps for millions.

Speaking of which, in recent years Germans have become all too willing to share the responsibility for the Holocaust with the rest of Europe. During her interview Ms. Lesser waved a periodical published by a society of professional antiracists, *Nigdy więcej*, demanding that Polish authorities take stringent measures against the alleged cases of racism described therein. The fact that a number of these cases were shown to have been staged is of no interest to Ms. Lesser. She only listens to one side; the other side is by definition racist. Ms. Lesser’s performance seems to have one goal: present Poles as being somewhere at the humanoid level and requiring the magnificent German journalists to teach them what tolerance really means.

I am far from maintaining that as a community we Poles are free of blemish, or that as individuals we do not sin, but with all our sins and blemishes we have avoided the totalitarian temptation in the twentieth century. Our streets are not as clean as German streets and our citizens are not as law-abiding as German citizens, but our political conscience is clean. We do not have to castrate our family histories and rewrite national history to show that, in fact, we were a brave anti-Nazi nation. By and large, the Polish educated classes had the courage to oppose both German and Soviet totalitarianism—oppose it not only intellectually but also physically. They did not fall for a primitive

mythology and they maintained their Christian identity. The Polish educated classes turned out to be wiser than their counterparts in Germany. Perhaps they continue to be wiser?

Therefore, even though we Poles have many shortcomings, Ms. Lesser ought to take advantage of the occasion to keep silent and abstain from teaching tolerance of one’s neighbor to Poles, especially since her comments on Polsat, deeply steeped in tactless and aggressive *Hochmut*, have the potential of harming Polish-German cooperation. Δ

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About the Authors

Lisa D. Chavez is Associate Professor of English at the University of New Mexico.

Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska is Professor of Sociology at the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Warsaw Polytechnic. She writes frequently for *Rzeczpospolita* and other Polish periodicals.

Michał Karnowski is a writer and journalist. Together with his brother, Jacek Karnowski, he edits a popular news portal <wpolityce.pl>. In 2010, he and Eryk Mistewicz coauthored a book titled *Anatomia władzy* (Anatomy of Power).

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) competes with Juliusz Słowacki, Cyprian Norwid, and Zygmunt Krasiński for the title of the greatest poet of Polish Romanticism.

Ferdinand A. Ossendowski (1876–1945) traveled widely in Russia and Asia. His most popular book, *Beasts, Men and Gods* [1922], had many English editions.

Margaret Peacock is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Alabama.

Piotr Wilczek is Professor of Polish Literature at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies “Artes Liberales” at the University of Warsaw. His books deal with Polish Renaissance literature, the problems of translation, and the literary canon.

Christopher A. Zakrzewski, a noted translator from Polish, teaches at the Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Academy in Ontario, Canada.