

CONCEPTUALISING 'ANTI-ZIONISM': PIASECKI'S GROUP  
AS AN INTELLECTUAL RESOURCE FOR THE 1968  
ANTISEMITIC CAMPAIGN IN PEOPLE'S POLAND\*

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The topic of this article, unfortunately, does not need a justification of its relevance. Antisemitic idioms<sup>1</sup> have been circulating within the Eastern European political space until now. Moreover, one can find these not only in the pages of the right-wing press but also in the public discourse of politicians in some Eastern European countries. All of this has caused an increase in the interest, among historians and other scholars, in the deconstruction and historicisation of antisemitic idioms. The theme of this paper is also important historically. It is not possible to speak of the intellectual atmosphere of 1968 if one ignores the 'anti-Zionist' campaign of this time, not only because it had a significant impact on the political rhetoric of the time, but also because it caused essential changes in the social structure of the Polish state.

Considerable research exists on the student movement and the authorities' struggle against it. There are several valuable publications on the political propaganda and institutional aggression of the security services against Polish people of Jewish descent. Additionally, historians have formulated many important concepts concerning both the sociological aspects of 1968 and the intellectual creativity of the student activists.<sup>2</sup> In this article, I would like to examine

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<sup>1</sup> As the historian Joanna Michlic defines it (See: J. B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of The Jew from 1880 to the Present*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2006, pp. 1-23.).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: J. Eisler, *Marzec 1968: geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje*, Warszawa, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991; P. Madajczyk, *Cień roku '68*, Warszawa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2012; Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967-1968*, Warszawa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000; *Spółczesność żydowska w PRL przed kampanią antysemicką lat 1967-1968 i po niej*, red. Grzegorz Berendt, Warszawa, IPN, 2009; M. Głowiński, *Marcowe gadanie*, Warszawa, Wyd. Pomost, 1991; Hans-Christian Dahlmann, *Antisemitismus in Polen 1968: Interaktionen zwischen Partei und Gesellschaft*, Osnabrück, Fibre, 2013. See also: *Marzec 1968. W poszukiwaniu programu odnowy: satyra studencka*, Warszawa, NZS PW, 1981.

another aspect of this issue. This paper covers the participation of a Catholic group headed by the charismatic figure Bolesław Piasecki in the ‘Anti-Zionist’ campaign of 1968. This will be analysed both within the socio-political context of 1968 and *in retrospect*, with a detailed examination of the *intellectual genealogy* of Piasecki’s group. This approach – contextualisation and historicisation – aims to help to understand both the internal logic of the development of antisemitic idioms and its function in the public space. Thus, I will attempt to develop, to some extent, the current historiography of this topic, although significant progress has been made in this area in recent years.

The question of antisemitism is probably one of the most sensitive issues for Polish historical memory.<sup>3</sup> I would prefer not to engage in discussions on the social status of antisemitism in the inter-war period, but I should mention several of the most essential aspects of this problem to contextualise my subsequent narrative. It is clear that the Jewish question became a vital political issue at the turn of the 19th century. The idea of ‘the Jewish threat’ played an essential role in social mobilisation, especially in the discourse of the “National movement” (“Ruch narodowy”) and among the clergymen.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish people were understood as an obstacle to maintaining the coherency of nation and religion. In their works, Jan T. Gross and Marcin Zaremba show that antisemitic idioms did not disappear from Polish everyday life following the Second World War,<sup>5</sup> and Johanna Michlic demonstrates the presence of these in the discourse of both the clergymen and the party functionaries, despite the measures to combat antisemitism conducted by the new authorities.<sup>6</sup> The post-war political and geographical landscape of Poland led to many nationalistic references when constructing the new political image of the Polish Republic.<sup>7</sup> The concept of a mono-national state in the public

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<sup>3</sup> The public discussion on the Jan T. Gross’ books could exemplify this statement. See: J.T. Gross, *Wokół “Sąsiadów”*: *Polemiki i wyjaśnienia*, Warszawa, Pogranicze, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> P. Brian, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, New York and Oxford 2000, pp. 189-222; J. B. Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other...*, cit., pp. 24-68; J. Majchrowski, *Silni Zwarci Gotowi. Myśl polityczna Obozu Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, Warszawa, PWN, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> M. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Znak, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2012; J.T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton University Press, 2001. Clearly, the historiography on this topic is not limited by these publications.

<sup>6</sup> J.B. Michlic, *Poland’s Threatening Other...*, cit., pp. 196-229.

<sup>7</sup> See: M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warszawa, Trio, 2005.

speeches of Polish politicians<sup>8</sup> also problematised the status of the Jewish question in Poland under the new political conditions.

The Catholic presence in the public space of the post-war Polish state was also not homogeneous. Three most significant centres emerged that claimed to be the 'defenders of the Catholic interests' in the public discussions after the war: The Krakow Catholic group of the weekly "Tygodnik Powszechny" which attracted mainly the young intellectuals of non-nationalistic attitude; the Warsaw group of "Tygodnik Warszawski" led by the famous priest Zygmunt Kaczyński;<sup>9</sup> and Bolesław Piasecki with his following. During the so-called 'Stalinization', the Warsaw group was arrested and disbanded; sometime later, "Tygodnik Powszechny" was temporarily closed,<sup>10</sup> and Piasecki's group experienced some splits.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, during the whole 'People's' period in Polish history, one could see active Catholic participation in the public life of the Polish state, and Piasecki played a unique role in this. This is why his activity should be examined particularly closely.

It is necessary to pay attention to the biography of the main protagonist of this paper. Bolesław Bogdan Piasecki was born in 1915 in Łódź. From his youth, according to his friends' accounts, he organised different school clubs and underground communities. The biographers of Piasecki A. Dudek and G. Pytel argue that his coevals remarked upon Piasecki's belief in his special destination from childhood, and one of them called him a "philosophical maniac" ("filozofujący maniak").<sup>12</sup> During the early interwar period, Piasecki was an active member of the different national-democratic institutions headed by the nationalist Roman Dmowski. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied with playing second fiddle and soon became one of the leaders within the group "ONR-Falanga" (the most radical right-wing organisation). Piasecki experienced severe conflicts with other leaders of this movement but was always able to maintain his position on the political scene.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: J.B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other...*, cit., pp. 196-229.

<sup>9</sup> By the way, in the interwar period, Kaczyński was a church commissioner for the Freemasonry, see: M. Bieleśko, "Nie dam się złamać", "Nasz Dziennik", 110 (2823), May 12-13, 2007 ([http://mtrojnar.rzeszow.opoka.org.pl/ksieza\\_niezlomni/zygmunt\\_kaczynski/](http://mtrojnar.rzeszow.opoka.org.pl/ksieza_niezlomni/zygmunt_kaczynski/); accessed on: 14.1.16]).

<sup>10</sup> More precisely, it was passed under the control of Piasecki's group.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance: A. Friszke, *Między wojną a więzieniem. 1945-1953. Młoda inteligencja katolicka*, Warszawa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> A. Dudek, G. Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki. Próba biografii politycznej*, Londyn 1990, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, his struggle in the national-democratic camp of the interwar Poland (Ibidem, pp. 100-102).

During the war, Piasecki worked on justifying the collaboration with the Nazi authorities against the Soviet Union,<sup>14</sup> but soon was arrested by the Gestapo. According to one version of events, he was released from prison after the personal intercession of Mussolini, because of Piasecki's contact with Italian fascists.<sup>15</sup> After that, Piasecki took part in the underground resistance and headed one of the partisan units. Nevertheless, he had come into conflict with the Home Army generals and created an independent guerrilla army of sympathisers.<sup>16</sup> With the coming of Soviet troops, Piasecki was arrested by the NKVD but was able to get an opportunity to speak personally to the Soviet general Ivan A. Serov. Piasecki proposed a political project to the general which he had written during the imprisonment. He used unusual tactics: he blamed the Polish Committee of National Liberation<sup>17</sup> for its wrong information policy and asserted that nobody explained the real aims of the Red Army to Polish society. According to Piasecki, the new government should have emphasised the fact that Poland was an independent state, and would not be included in the Soviet Union, nor would rebellious persons be deported to Siberia, destroying the political diversity of the Polish state. Only after this would the Polish intelligentsia call for cooperation with Poland's eastern neighbour.<sup>18</sup> This act of political art was successful. It is clear that Piasecki was able to interest General Serov in his project (and in his personality), and it was commonly believed that the Soviet military named him "a genius boy".<sup>19</sup> The politician proposed to the communists, in fact, an ideological strategy for the removal from the underground movement of the young Poles, who considered the new regime to be an occupation. The head of the V Department of the Ministry of Public Security Julia Brystiger wittily re-

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<sup>14</sup> He did not sympathise with the Third Reich: He hated Germany and Germans. According to several records, he strove to create a legal institution for protecting his underground activity See: *Ibidem*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 132-138.

<sup>17</sup> Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (PKWN) – the Polish authority created under the Soviet patronage.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this secret document is available only in the retelling by the member of the special commission on rehabilitation of victims of political repressions. His book about general Serov was published in an extended version in Polish (See: N. Pietrow, *Stalinowski kat Polski Iwan Sierow*, Warszawa, Demart, 2013, p. 51).

<sup>19</sup> This story circulated through the different narratives. It was said, for instance, by one of the leaders of PPR Jakub Berman during the interview with T. Torańska (See: T. Torańska, *Oni*, Londyn, Agencja Omnipress, 1989, p. 88).

marked later that Piasecki "sold to the Soviet comrades what he did not have"<sup>20</sup>.

After the war, Piasecki got the opportunity to create a legal political organisation that allowed for the meeting of like-minded intellectuals and the creation of a publishing house. This institution, "PAX", attracted many young intellectuals who strove to participate actively in the political life of the Polish Republic beyond the communist movement. According to the historian Andrzej Friszke, Piasecki could finance his new project from the funds which remained after his underground activity and was allowed to fund his organisation by an underground private transportation business.<sup>21</sup> It should be remarked that Piasecki occupied a specific position in the socio-political landscape of post-war Poland. The Soviets released him from prison, and there is evidence that he continued contact with the Soviet embassy<sup>22</sup> that protected him, to some extent, against the Polish authorities. At the same time, he established direct contact with some chiefs of the security services that allowed him to survive the so-called Stalinization, even though his group was characterised as a 'reactionary' one in the secret reports from the beginning of the post-war period.<sup>23</sup>

The "Polish October" of 1956<sup>24</sup> provoked the great split within Piasecki's institution "PAX". Some intellectuals<sup>25</sup> left the group and organised a separate one. Nevertheless, Piasecki maintained his political position and was able to fund a publisher which produced both Catholic and socio-political literature. His attempts at mediation between the church and the authorities in fact led to a breakdown of his relationship with the Episcopate, which regarded his activity as a provocation of the authorities against the Catholic Church. On the other hand, the authorities sympathised with Piasecki's public critique of the politics of the bishops, and gave him an opportunity to rep-

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<sup>20</sup> This story was mentioned in the interview with Stefan Kisielewski (*Stefan Kisielewski o Bolesławie Piaseckim i jego rozmowach z Sierowem*, in *Archiwum Stowarzyszenia PAX*, T. 1, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Komandor, 2006, p. 76).

<sup>21</sup> A. Friszke, *Między wojną a więzieniem...*, cit., pp. 246, 261.

<sup>22</sup> See: M.S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red. Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in 20th-Century Poland - The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2012, pp. 77-180.

<sup>23</sup> A. Friszke, *Między wojną a więzieniem...*, cit., pp. 243-263; A. Dudek., G. Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki...*, cit., pp. 151-189; M.S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red...*, cit., pp. 77-110.

<sup>24</sup> *Polski październik*, the process of 'destalinization' in Poland in 1956.

<sup>25</sup> The future Polish prime-minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki left, among others, Piasecki's group and created the new group around the journal "Więź".

resent the Secular Catholic movement (*ruch katolików świeckich*) at the political level.

An ideological project of justification accompanied Piasecki's political formation. He rewrote his political program at each stage of the way to fit the changing political landscape. There are several essential components of Piasecki's writings from the interwar period which should be mentioned in this paper. B. Piasecki understood a people/nation (*naród*)<sup>26</sup> as an emotional and spiritual unity of the persons who are united by views, ideas, kinds of thinking.<sup>27</sup> Piasecki was sure that this concept should *shape a political system*. His axiology system was represented in the following way: "1). [...] God is the highest aim of man, 2) the way of man to God is the service of the nation, 3) the creation of the mightiness of the nation is the happiness and development of man".<sup>28</sup> Piasecki understood Catholicism as a marker of Polish national identity, and his understanding of the "historical mission" of Poland was very similar to the well-known interwar nationalistic interpretation of the romantic concept "Poland is the Christ of Nations" ("Polska Chrystusem narodów").<sup>29</sup>

It is clear that the Jewish question played a significant role in Piasecki's works. According to him, it was not possible for the Jews to be assimilated into the Polish nation. Their "spoiled nature" did not allow for assimilation at all. The problems with Jewish assimilation in the other countries served as an argument in favour of this idea. Piasecki was sure that the Jewish problem needed a radical resolution, and thus that the Jews had to be deprived of Polish citizenship.<sup>30</sup> He understood the very concept of *democracy*, both in communist and liberal versions, to be a Jewish idea. He defined this as "The Jewish bastard of the 19th century" ("żydowski bękart XIX wieku").<sup>31</sup> In line with his concept of democracy as a Jewish idea, he argued that a state system that implies pluralism in the political and cultural spheres was invented by

<sup>26</sup> I find the word "nation" is closer in meaning to Piasecki's "naród" than "people".

<sup>27</sup> "Wspólnota emocjonalno-psychiczną jednostek charakteryzująca się jednolitym systemem wierzeń, idei, sposobem myślenia" (J. Kunstetter, *Nacjonalizm polski*, "Młoda Polska", 1937, 2, pp. 20-22).

<sup>28</sup> *Zasady programu Narodowo Radykalnego*, Warszawa 1937, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> See: P. Brian, *When Nationalism Began to Hate...*, cit., pp. 200-232.

<sup>30</sup> *Zasady programu Narodowo Radykalnego*, Warszawa 1937, p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> J. Korowiec, *Małopolska – bastion ruchów ludowych – staje się terenem ekspansji Ruchu Narodowo-Radykalnego*, "Falanga", 1938, 39; J. Srokosz, *Model państwa totalnego w myśli Bolesława Piaseckiego*, "Studia Erasmiana Wratislaviensia", 3 (2008), p. 74, available here: <http://www.bibliotekacyfrowa.pl/Content/24598/006.pdf> (accessed: 14.1.18).

the Jews in order to degrade individual nation-states, because they do not have a nation-state themselves. A nation which is divided by pluralism, according to Piasecki, could not serve its historical mission, because pluralism means the death of a people.<sup>32</sup> This pattern was not changed radically when Piasecki created the concept of the 'Slavic state' during the Second World War. According to him, all Slavic peoples had to be united around the Polish, because they were the most independent of all Slavic peoples. The idea that all Slavic peoples had similar "historical aims" was laid down as a justification for this attitude.<sup>33</sup> The Jewish people had to be excluded from this state so as not to 'spoil' the spiritual unity of all Slavic nations.

The post-war reality required a radical change of the former attitude. As was mentioned above, Piasecki continued his "game" under the new conditions following the world war. The first document (except the project that was given to General Serov) which included the new ideological model was prepared in July 1945. It is remarkable that the axiomatic first section of the *General Principles of Worldview (a program declaration)*<sup>34</sup> seemed very similar to the pre-war one: God – Humanity – Nation – Family (*Bóg, ludzkość, naród, rodzina*). It is striking that 'humanity' ('ludzkość') took the second place in this rank. Moreover, democracy was no longer an absolute evil but a point of the new paradigm. In the new paradigm, democracy guaranteed the coexistence of *materialistic and Catholic attitudes* in the public space.<sup>35</sup> Piasecki understood that he could not dictate the rules of the game, and his new scheme was a protective one. Democracy served as an argument to prevent the monopolisation of the public space by Communists and Socialists. At the same time, Piasecki's group maintained its monolithic image of the Nation. The *Program Declaration* contained the idea that "Poland is a nationally monolithic state". This meant that the axiological hierarchy remained unchangeable in its most essential points: the aim of a person was, according to the *Program Declaration*, the service of the Polish nation.

The ONR-Falanga was well-known for its antisemitism, and the new regime were prosecuting those involved with reactionary national-democratic

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<sup>32</sup> A. Dudek, G. Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki...*, cit., p. 52. About the changes in Piasecki's understanding of the Catholicism in the different periods of his political activity, See: A. Jaszczuk, *Ewolucja ideowa Bolesława Piaseckiego 1932-1956*, Warszawa, DiG, 2005, p. 63 and the next.

<sup>33</sup> A. Dudek, G. Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki...*, cit., pp. 142-144.

<sup>34</sup> *Ogólne zasady światopoglądowe (deklaracja programowa)*, in B. Piasecki, *Kierunki 1945-1960*, Warszawa, PAX, 1981, pp. 7-10.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

politics. There was a special section that dealt with “endecja elements”<sup>36</sup> within the Ministry of Public Security.<sup>37</sup> This is why the intellectuals could not avoid clarification of their attitude towards the Jewish question under the new conditions. Piasecki’s group had to formulate a new interpretative pattern for the Jewish question that could allow them continuing a public activity. In such a way, Piasecki’s group declared a change of their pre-war attitude towards this issue.<sup>38</sup> The *Program Declaration* contains this statement: “Any manifestation of racial hatred against Jews should be condemned”. The authors also argued that “This fact acquires a particular moral significance against the background of the experiences of the Jewish people”.<sup>39</sup>

The new attitude towards the Jews was formulated in the phrase: “Every Jew should have the right to choose leaving Poland or working for the Polish state”.<sup>40</sup> It should be clarified that this right to leave Poland was a substantial privilege afforded only to Jewish people. However, this statement seems like a recognition that, theoretically, the Jews were deemed fit to be assimilated into the Polish state. At the same time, Piasecki’s group remarked:

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the new source of antisemitism is too much participation of Jews in the ruling apparatus, motivated by their qualifications, and disproportionate to their total number in the country.<sup>41</sup>

This statement demonstrates that the very idea of Jews as representatives of “Jewish” but not “Polish” interests was not rejected at the theoretical level. People of Jewish origin were potentially classified as representatives of the “Jewish people.” On a related note, it is important to remark that the argument of “disproportion” in the state institutions would play a significant role in the antisemitic discourse during the whole period of People’s Poland.

A complete presentation of the new approach concerning the Jewish issue was published on the pages of the “Dziś i Jutro” immediately following the Kielce Pogrom. The publicist and Piasecki’s co-worker Witold Bieńkowski discussed the Jewish question under the title “Neither anti-Semitism nor Philo-Semitism”. Bieńkowski argued that these two terms were unacceptable in this discussion because they implied an external perspective of a speaker.

<sup>36</sup> The word “Endecja” is formed from the abbreviation for ND – National Democracy.

<sup>37</sup> Z. Nawrocki, *Struktura aparatu bezpieczeństwa*, in *Aparat bezpieczeństwa w Polsce. Kadra kierownicza. 1944-1956*, T. 1, Warszawa, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005, p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> B. Piasecki, *Po prostu*, “Dziś i Jutro”, 1, 25 listopada 1945, p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Id., *Kierunki...*, cit., pp. 7-10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8-9.



The author proposed considering this question from the Jewish perspective. According to Bieńkowski, the Jewish people possess the equal right to keep their traditions and "to have self-respect" ("Poczucie własnej wartości"). Meanwhile, having described his experience of contact with the Jewish organisations during the war, the author argued that the Jewish people as with any other people, has *its special interests* which *don't correspond* with the interests of the Polish people.<sup>42</sup>

Bieńkowski distinguished three categories of Polish Jews: 1) Those who had been assimilated or had been striving to be assimilated; 2) Those who did not want to be assimilated and were striving to their statehood; 3) Those who wanted neither to be assimilated and nor to emigrate. The author remarked that "from the *point of view of the Polish interests*", the first and second categories could be regarded as positive ones, but the third should be regarded as a negative one. Bieńkowski didn't deny an opportunity for coexistence of the two peoples, but mentioned that "the *second nation*" had to be searching for the realisation of "its interests" beyond the field of interest of "the *first nation*". The author asserted that the days of racism are gone, but the problem of competition between the interests of the two nations couldn't be ultimately resolved until two nations coexisted.<sup>43</sup> I would argue that this ontological understanding of the nation and its 'interests' is one of the most remarkable traits in the writings of Piasecki's group after the Second World War.<sup>44</sup>

It could be said that the public discussion on the issue of antisemitism was under the special control of the government and the censors as a politically dangerous one. In contrast to the interwar period, the Jewish question was neither the most significant component of Piasecki's political strategy, nor a subject under regular discussion. Nevertheless, there are some records of the security services which could help us to be sure that this idea of the Jewish problem continued to circulate among Piasecki's milieu during the post-war period almost unchanged. Antisemitism was declared vanished from ethno-racism, but the logic of conceptualising the "nation" implied an exclusion of Jews from the Polish national community. The documents from

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<sup>42</sup> W. Bieńkowski, *Ani antysemityzm – ani filosemityzm: Sprawa ludzka*, "Dziś i Jutro", 1946, 32, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> See, for instance in this context the understanding of the human's role: Love for the nation, the concrete service to its needs, cultural, economic interests, political tasks are the duty of each person and the measure of its value (B. Piasecki, *Precyzujemy parę pojęć*, "Dziś i Jutro", 1949, 12, p. 1).

the archives of the Ministry of Public Security processed by Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki testify to the regular separation, among Piasecki's group, of 'Polish' and 'Jewish' comrades in the discussions on the processes that occurred within the party or in the state.<sup>45</sup> Mikołaj Kunicki thinks that this evidence justifies arguing for Piasecki's disbelief in the reality of Jewish assimilation.<sup>46</sup>

It is remarkable that all of Piasecki's intellectual justifications depended upon an 'imagined' Jewish people who possessed a singular identity, ethos and set of traditions. Nevertheless, the conclusions of such reflections were intended to criticise the high position of the 'Jewish comrades' among the high officials all of whom had little to do with Jewish 'ethos' and 'identity'. On the other hand, these 'Jewish comrades' (who spoke Polish, were educated at the Polish schools and universities, i.e. were highly assimilated) were unlikely to be sympathetic to Piasecki's nationalistic understanding of 'national interests' and his version of the 'people's state'. One could agree with Kunicki's statement that Piasecki did not believe in the possibility of Jewish assimilation with Polish people in the context of his understanding of this term: the readiness to serve the 'ontological aims' of Polish people. From the interwar period, the party members of Jewish origin understood nationalistic projects as potentially intended against them, and were opposed to nationalistic projects as a result. Therefore, Piasecki's group, which was prone to theorising, directed their basic concept of 'the nation', initially latently, against their 'Jewish' opponents in the state apparatus. The fact that the opposition between 'Jewish' and 'Polish' party members was a part of the slang among some groups within the Communist party must have motivated Piasecki's conceptual creativity.<sup>47</sup>

By the early 60s, the PAX was already one of the most numerous non-communist public organisations (1965 - 3152 active members; 1967 - 7253; 1968 - 9230).<sup>48</sup> By this time, Piasecki saw himself as a great theorist. His articles and speeches demonstrate his striving to be a representative of the new direction within both Socialism and Catholicism. The ontological concept of the 'national historical aims' and 'national interests' was laid down in the basis of the sophisticated concept of the "Socialist-Patriotic formation" ("formacja patriotyczno-socjalistyczna").<sup>49</sup> *Even before* the activation of the

<sup>45</sup> M. S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red...*, cit., pp. 111-161.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem, p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 141.

<sup>48</sup> D. Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968*, Warszawa, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000, p. 22.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance: B. Piasecki, *O rozwój formacji patriotyczno-socjalistycznej*, in Id., *Siły rozwoju*, Warszawa, Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1971, pp. 5-16.

'Anti-Zionist' campaign, Piasecki had formulated his critique towards the 'Zionist' tendencies in socialism. According to him, 'Zionism' and cosmopolitanism (Piasecki used two terms almost as synonyms despite the significant difference between them) attempt to accuse their opponents (i.e. him and the whole 'socialist-patriotic camp') of antisemitism, but this is a trick used in the ideological struggle against "patriotic socialism." He argued that Zionism and cosmopolitanism are *political concepts*, and that their adherents work for non-Polish interests.<sup>50</sup>

It is significant that Piasecki's group was the only legal organisation of intellectuals that had access to public debates despite its clear nationalistic genealogy. There were many people among communists and socialists who sympathised with a nationalist understanding of socialism.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the Marxist discourse did not allow for a consistent conceptual alliance between nationalist, and especially "anti-Zionist" attitudes, and Marxism; despite well-known antisemitic propaganda slogans such as those during the antisemitic campaign in the Soviet Union. Moreover, the most active representatives of the 'patriotic' camp did not like the theory at all. For example, the well-known 'patriotic' institution "the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy" ("Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację") headed among others by Mieczysław Moczar, who was the face of the antisemitic campaign of 1967-1968, was nothing but a club of military men and "brothers in arms".<sup>52</sup> The communist journalist and later prime minister Mieczysław Rakowski mentioned in his *Political Diaries* Piasecki's contact with the representatives of the patriotic camp, and remarked upon his influence on the de facto second-in-command within the party, Zenon Kliszko, among others.<sup>53</sup> Piasecki not only associated himself with this 'patriotic camp', but also attempted to be a theorist among these "non-theoretical" comrades, feeling more independent from the party language. Nevertheless, Piasecki was sure that he was working on the 'improving' of the Marxist theory and used the Marxist language as an auxiliary tool to describe his ideology.<sup>54</sup>

This situation may be illustrated by the discussion on the book *Marxism and the Human Individual* written by Adam Schaff. In his research, one of the most famous Polish Marxist theorists emphasised the nationalist threat

<sup>50</sup> B. Piasecki, *O rozwojową ciągłość historii Polski Ludowej*, in Id., *Sily rozwoju...*, cit., p. 267.

<sup>51</sup> M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, cit., p. 289.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example: J. Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949-1969*, Warszawa, Trio, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> M. Rakowski, *Dzienniki Polityczne, 1967-1968*, Warszawa, Iskry, 1999, p. 112.

<sup>54</sup> See: B. Piasecki, *Sily rozwoju*, cit.

that had become so popular in Poland. His book contained a resolute condemnation of the nationalistic and antisemitic tendencies in Polish society and a statement of the impossibility of combining Marxism and nationalism.<sup>55</sup> The nationalistically orientated functionaries, Andrzej Werblan and Zenon Kliszko, critiqued Schaff's attitude on the pages of the main theoretical party journal "Nowe Drogi." They argued that antisemitism was a marginal phenomenon in Polish culture, which was intentionally exaggerated by A. Schaff. Kliszko attempted to formulate the argument with an opposition between the 'nationalism of oppressors' and 'progressive nationalism of the oppressed nations'. According to Kliszko, the latter was based on the love for a nation that would lead to the liberation struggle and ultimately to the internationalism about which Marx spoke.<sup>56</sup>

Piasecki had prepared his version of an answer to the book by Schaff. In his speech to the members of the PAX, Piasecki argued that Schaff ignored the evolution of Marxism and the new approaches to its interpretation (he meant, of course, his 'concept of patriotic socialism'). Moreover, Piasecki claimed to have the influence of the 'bourgeois existentialism' on Schaff's concept of the 'classless and nation-free individual'. It is remarkable that Piasecki appealed to his own understanding of the nation and socialism while critiquing *Marxism and the Human Individual*. According to Piasecki, the first task for socialism (and for the proletariat) is to *admit the whole people* to build a 'national community' (an expression that is absent in the Communist lexicon) that was earlier an objective only of the 'privileged classes'.<sup>57</sup> In his speech delivered in 1966, one can see documented evidence of his logical link between his concept of a people/nation and his approach to the Jewish question. Piasecki repeated the familiar argument about the disproportionately large number of Jews in the government and hinted at the potential disloyalty of this group when serving the 'Polish interests'. Piasecki argued that Adam Schaff intentionally ignored this Polish context in his work. The

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<sup>55</sup> A. Schaff, *Marxizm a jednostka ludzka: przyczynek do marksistowskiej filozofii człowieka*, Warszawa, PWN, 1965.

<sup>56</sup> See about this discussion: M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm...*, cit., pp. 299-300; M.S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red...*, cit., p. 146. The mentioned contacts of Piasecki with Z. Kliszko allow supposing the influence of Piasecki's concept on Kliszko's attitude, but the idea of "progressive nationalism of the oppressed nations" was formulated by Lenin in the discussion on *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (See: V.I. Lenin, *O prave nacij na samoopredelenie*, in Idem, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, t. 25, Moskva, Politizdat, 1969, pp. 277, 275-276, 319.)

<sup>57</sup> M.S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red...*, cit., pp. 146-147.

leader of the PAX explained this by saying that Schaff cited in his book "only foreign specialists on Marxism, *always of Jewish origin*."<sup>58</sup>

The theoretical scheme that Piasecki intentionally popularised among the "patriots" was basically formulated by the mid-1960s. It should be remarked that the *public* condemnation of Zionism immediately following the Six-Day War did not have yet such strong antisemitic connotations as it did later. Initially the antisemitic campaign, which seemed to originate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs,<sup>59</sup> was conducted at the institutional level. The Poles of Jewish origin were removed from their positions (first from the army, and then from other state institutions) and some of them were forced to emigrate. The idea that the Zionists are the 'internal enemies' was broached to the full extent in the public discussion during the student demonstrations in March 1968. It is no accident that Piasecki's "Słowo Powszechne" published the first article with an emphasis on Jewish origin of the student leaders. The theses of the article were formulated very carefully: the authors (there is no signature) supported the students for their activism, praising their aspiration to participate in the political life. While characterising the student activism, Piasecki's journal also remarked: "It should also be noted with appreciation that antisemitic sentiments are alien to them". At the same time, the article contained a complete set of propaganda clichés, about to be deployed in the more active phase of the public campaign against the 'Zionists'. Above all, the authors paid attention to the Jewish origin of the student leaders Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer. Moreover, the edition published *the list of names* which included the children of the 'Jewish comrades' who participated in the student demonstrations. They argued that the Stalinists' children<sup>60</sup> "are acting now for foreign interests", and the "Zionistic organisations inspired the student demonstration".<sup>61</sup>

Dariusz Stola supposes that this list of names was prepared within the Ministry of the Internal Affairs. There are no documents to prove this, but this statement seems plausible. This article was published before the famous speech of Władysław Gomułka (19.3.1968) which signalled the possibility of condemning the "intrigues of the Zionists" openly. It was most likely a dummy run intended to influence the First Secretary. Several days after the publication, Gomułka repeated in his speech not only the condemnations to-

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<sup>58</sup> See the documents, examined by M. Kunicki, *Ibidem*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>59</sup> See: D. Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968*, cit., pp. 47-69.

<sup>60</sup> According to one of the antisemitic concepts, the Jews were the main organisers of the repression during the Stalinization in Poland.

<sup>61</sup> *Do studentów uniwersytetu Warszawskiego*, "Słowo Powszechne", March 11<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

wards the Zionists, but provoked great rejoicing among the audience by mentioning the Jewish origin of the student leaders.<sup>62</sup> After that, all publications which were under the control of the “patriotic camp” filled their issues with declarations of solidarity with comrade Gomułka in his struggle against the Zionists. After Gomułka’s speech, Piasecki’s “Słowo Powszechne” and “Kierunki” routinely re-published letters from different worker organisations stating support for Gomułka’s anti-Zionist policies to maintain the atmosphere of struggle”. Within the articles, Piasecki’s group argued that the ‘instigators’ of the disturbances (i.e. Zionists) attempted to destroy the Polish state through their influence among the young people and intelligentsia.<sup>63</sup>

The publications in “Słowo Powszechne” could not be regarded as an in-depth conceptualisation of the Jewish question. It was rather a kindling of the ‘people’s indignation’, and the making of a moral panic. It is more interesting that Piasecki, as a Sejm deputy, used the situation to promote his socio-political ideology. In his speeches in the Sejm, the leader of the secular Catholics wanted to utilise the opportunity to speak openly about those things which could not previously be said in the public space. Piasecki advertised his concept of ‘patriotic socialism’ which, according to him, was denied by the ‘Zionists’. Interestingly, Piasecki accused the Zionism of a *nationalistic attitude*. He formulated this, at first sight very contradictory, thesis like so: “Zionism is nationalism, which means that, like any nationalism, it exhibits its characteristic features. One of these features – from the point of view of Zionism – is *the imaginary inadmissibility of any allocation of people of Jewish nationality* (emphasis mine – A.L.). That is why the Zionists have a bad attitude towards the people who relate to their fellow citizens of Jewish descent *in accordance with their conviction and behaviours* (emphasis mine – A.L.)”.<sup>64</sup> Thus, according to Piasecki, the Zionists are Jewish nationalists who wouldn’t like to be classified as Jews.

It is remarkable that Piasecki, in his speeches, had been using ‘nationalism’ in the negative sense of the word to protect his ‘patriotic socialism’ against the Jewish ‘Zionism’. In an interesting way, both Zionism and *cosmopolitanism* (the words which were taken from the contemporary propaganda dictionary) were nothing but words promoting the same idea: Jews potentially represent ‘the Jewish interests’ but hide it by resisting a secession

<sup>62</sup> See the video of these speeches: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=livaHrj2kg4> (accessed on: 5.9.2018).

<sup>63</sup> See, for instance: *Młodzież i rozwój demokracji socjalistycznej*, “Kierunki”, 12, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>64</sup> B. Piasecki, *O twórczą kontynuację ustroju i władzy (przemówienie wygłoszone na plenarnych obradach Sejmu)*, in Id., *Siły rozwoju...*, cit., p. 351.

from the Polish nation. Piasecki (like many others) strove to apply the authority of the First Secretary and argued that Gomułka's speech about the "Polish citizens of Jewish origin" was a "quantum leap" ("milowy krok") towards the 'patriotic socialism' he was speaking about. Having rejected all accusations of antisemitism which, according to him, was not characteristic for Poles, Piasecki emphasised the necessity *to exclude the "Zionists" from the state institutions* because their activity was "very harmful to the interests of the state and the people". It is remarkable that he didn't propose to carry out a repression against the usual people of the 'Zionist attitude':

If the Zionists, who live with us, would be ordinary citizens with no public influence, which gives participation in power, then, frankly speaking, taking into account our centuries-old national tolerance, this problem would not appear today.<sup>65</sup>

The last remark demonstrates Piasecki's strong aspiration to use this public campaign to remove from power his 'Jewish opponents'. He had already experienced several conflicts with Gomułka<sup>66</sup> and needed both to strengthen his position within the state apparatus and to promote his ideology at this new level. The minister of internal affairs Moczar and his colleagues convinced Gomułka that antisemitic propaganda could help to mobilise the masses for the struggle against the student movement. At the same time, they strove to purge Jews from the party and state apparatus, which corresponded to Piasecki's interests.<sup>67</sup>

The public campaign against 'Zionism' was finished soon after it began. Gomułka had realised that the harm of the campaign exceeded the 'benefit'. Meanwhile, hundreds of Jews had to leave the state and military service; thousands had left the country. After several administrative measures, all condemnations of the "Polish Zionists" disappeared from the public pronouncements of the Polish state.<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, for Piasecki's group, the participation in the public hounding campaign was an important tactical trick to promote the ideology formulated during the after-war decades and to deal with the political opponents. As was shown above, the core of this ideology was an ontological concept of a people/nation which possesses its special interests, and the idea that its interests do not correspond to the interests of 'other (Jewish)' nations. Piasecki denied a racist antisemitism in his post-war writings, but his new sophisticated concept of 'patriotic socialism' (which, at

<sup>65</sup> B. Piasecki, *O twórczą kontynuację ustroju i władzy...*, cit., pp. 351-352.

<sup>66</sup> See, for example: M.S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red...*, cit., pp. 126-127.

<sup>67</sup> D. Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967-1968*, cit., pp. 145-255.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 235-257.

the same time, was intended to legitimise the public existence of his group) implied the necessity of serving the ‘nation’s interests’. Piasecki’s men were probably the only public group of intellectuals with a coherent ideology which allowed ‘justifying’ the purges of the Jewish people from the state-system during one of the most brutal antisemitic campaigns of post-war Eastern Europe.

#### Abstract

Conceptualising ‘Anti-Zionism’: Piasecki’s Group as an Intellectual Resource for the 1968 Antisemitic Campaign in People’s Poland.

March 1968 has become one of the most significant dates in Polish history in the 20th century. The student demonstrations and antisemitic campaigning caused considerable changes in the social, political and cultural landscape of the Polish state. This article covers the participation of the Catholic group PAX headed by Boleslaw Piasecki in the ‘Anti-Zionist’ campaign of 1968. This question will be analysed both within the socio-political context of 1968 and in retrospect, with a focus on the intellectual genealogy of Piasecki’s group.

Keywords: Poland, Antisemitism, anti-Zionism, March 1968, Bolesław Piasecki, “PAX”, Secular Catholics.