



## Niebo

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### Introduction

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The systemic transformation initiated in Poland in the late 1980s led to many changes in the political, economic, and religious spheres. Mass privatization, the unstable situation in the labour market, the arrival of new ideas from the West, and a decrease in trust towards the Catholic Church led to the emergence of alternative religious movements in the 1990s. One of the most famous was the Zbór Leczenia Duchem Świętym "Niebo" (Community of Healing with the Holy Spirit "Heaven"), founded by Bogdan Kacmajor. Its leader predicted the imminent end of the world and the advent of the Kingdom of God on Earth, where members of the group would enjoy a happy life of peace and prosperity.

### Life of Bogdan Kacmajor before Niebo

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Bogdan Kacmajor was born in 1954 in Elbląg, in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. His youthful life was difficult. Before the age of three, he already lost his father. Not placing much hope in education, he dropped out of school and took a job in an art gallery. As a result, he received a call up for basic military service. However, due to his refusal to obey orders, he was sent to a forced psychiatric examination, during which he was found to be fully sane. His continued evasion of duty resulted in him being sentenced to two years in prison in 1978. While in custody, he devoted his time to designing furniture, painting, and writing school essays for guards (Koper and Stańczyk 2022, 289–290).

After his release, Kacmajor began working in the theatre for children, and in his spare time focused on spiritual development. In 1982, after a two-week fast, he experienced his first vision where he claimed to see his lookalike standing before him and turning dead fish into living birds that flew off towards the sky (Dzich 2018). It is likely that the vision was inspired by the biblical story of the revival of dried bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14). This mystical experience completely changed Kacmajor's life. He discovered a gift for healing people by laying his hands on them. Elbląg was an ideal place to start this type of activity, as the memory of the Franciscan, Czesław Andrzej Klimuszko (a famous healer and clairvoyant), was still strong among its residents (Kamiński 2008). Kacmajor maintained that laying-on of hands was insufficient to heal permanently and that in order to effectively eliminate the disease, patients also had to change their behavior (Biliński 2009, 198).

After some time, Kacmajor moved his business from Elbląg to the village of Kruszewnia. There were times when he received as many as 400 people a day, which made him quickly reach a satisfactory financial situation. Representatives of the Catholic Church initially looked favorably on his activities, as he claimed to heal with the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ. Soon, however, Kacmajor came to the conviction that he should establish his own religious association. He divorced his wife and acquired land in the village of Majdan Kozłowiecki in the Lublin Voivodeship, where he and a group of believers decided to imitate the life of the apostles. In 1991, Kacmajor registered his activity and established "Niebo" (Heaven), or more accurately Zbór Leczenia Duchem Świętym przez Nakładanie Rąk (Community of Healing with the Holy Spirit by Laying on Hands) (Kowsz 2015, 99).

## Establishment of the Group in Majdan

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There were about a hundred people living in Majdan. Within a few months, with the help of a local businessman, local officials, and the police chief, Kacmajor built a house in which he lived with a little over fifty people. Initially, everything went well. The villagers were pleased with their new neighbors, as the latter would buy agricultural products from them, plus they could use the healer's services. There was a friendly atmosphere in the community. The faithful addressed each other with respect, and it was said that a smile never left their faces (Keller 2011, 87). A variety of people were admitted to the group—lost, struggling, ailing, and drug addicts, but there was also a place for those with a certain reputation in society. The most famous member of the group was poet Zbigniew Sajnog, co-founder of the *Tranzytoryjnej Formacji Totart* (Totart Transitory Formation) specializing in scandalous happenings. In the fight against censorship, Totart associates broke social conventions, using, among other things, fecal matter or improvising sexual activities in public places.

Kacmajor gave the impression of being a normal and approachable man. However, his talent as a healer caused the faithful to accept uncritically all the miraculous accounts circulating about him. He was said to have restored sight to the blind, cured cancer, and even raised the dead. On top of that, he allegedly possessed the gift of predicting the future (Porzeziński 2018). He desired a return to ancient Christianity. For example, he undermined the worship of Mary, as he considered that her worship was incompatible with early Christianity. In Kacmajor's view, religion should not be based on elaborate worship. He encouraged the faithful to recite the Our Father prayer in seclusion. On the other hand, he did not overlook the group dimension of religion. Members would end the day with a communal dinner, during which bread and wine were consumed, which was a clear allusion to the Last Supper. Bible passages were then read, and those who claimed to have experienced visions shared their spiritual stories (Keller 2011, 72).

Niebo was modeled on the community of shared goods associated with apostles in Jerusalem according to the Book of Acts but also found in other new religious movements (Barker and Harvey 2021). At first, money was not an issue, as everyone who joined the community donated their property, with the rest of the income coming from healing activities. It was used for current expenses and invested in agricultural equipment. Soon, however, there were people who wanted to make money from the healing business. To avoid this kind of situation, Kacmajor found it necessary to dispose of assets to see if group members were ready to make radical sacrifices. According to him, only those who were completely devoted to the cause could live in the millennial kingdom that was soon to come. Their activities should be based on selfless help to others, which is why the believers called their community Państwo Jutrzenki Pomocy Nieustającej

(State of the Dawn of Perpetual Help) (Doktor 1999, 68).

Like the heroes of the Bible, Niebo members were given new names to emphasize their break with their previous lives. The new monikers were striking for their peculiar associations. In some cases, they were taken from newspapers, movies, or even car brands. These included Bonanza and Audi. Others were more extravagant, for example, *I Śrubokręt Nie Pomoże* (Even Screwdriver Won't Help), *Tęcza Atomowa* (Atomic Rainbow), *Sianokosy Przestrzeni* (Space Haymaking), or *Ewidencja Stanów Pozagrobowych* (Records of the Afterlife States). The prophet took the name Nie, and called his new wife Bo, which when combined formed Niebo. Their children were given the names: Idzie (Go), Do (To), Nas (Us), Co Dzień (Every Day), Nowe (New), and Świtem (Dawn). There were cases when the names were changed. Sajnóg was initially called *Anioł Rowerowy* (Bicycle Angel), and later *Ambasador* (Ambassador). It was also concluded that members should use a language understood only by initiates. Therefore, an attempt was made to create a newspeak in which the conventions found in the Polish language would be ignored. Letters without diacritical marks were used (they got rid of, for example, ę, ą, ń, ł) and digraphs (e. g. sz, cz, ch, dź) were abandoned. As a result, members of the community lisped, and their language was unintelligible (Biliński 2009, 198–199).

Kacmajor taught that each member of the group had already lived in the world before. Moreover, each of them was said to have lived during Jesus's time. The men were apostles, while the women were female followers of Christ. Apparently, apocalyptic sentiments remained with them from that period. The prophet predicted that the end of the world would come in the year 2000, and there were to be 144,000 believers left alive (Revelation 7:4), who, along with Jesus and Kacmajor, would dwell in *Majdan Kozłowiecki*, forming the Millennial Kingdom (Koper and Stańczyk 2022, 298–305).

## Emergence of Problems

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Niebo was, to a large extent, a hermetic group. The press, radio, and television were abandoned by its members, so there was a lack of opportunity to confront their ideas about the world with others. No one went to work, which quickly brought about a poor financial situation. Refusal to seek treatment from doctors and to use medicines worsened their health. All these factors led to the building of strong bonds with the group, but also created a fear of existence in the outside world. Nobody thought of leaving Niebo, even when the situation was critical. Certainly, the figure of the charismatic leader played an enormous role in all this. Kacmajor was not only regarded as another incarnation of Elijah, but foremost as God's representative on earth. He bore honorable names, such as *Mąż Boży* (God's Man), *Apostoł* (Apostle), and *Drzewo Życia* (Tree of Life), and being in his company was an honour for the faithful (Nowakowski 2016, 236). However, he was not a typical messenger of God. He made no attempt to hide his faults, consumed alcohol, and used vulgar language. In doing so, he referred to Jesus, emphasizing that the latter also called the Pharisees a tribe of vipers (Matthew 12:34) when the situation required it. He maintained that he was given by God not only the power to take away diseases, but also to impose them, the power to bless, but also to curse. In addition, like other leaders of new religious movements, he claimed the right to break conventions related to sexuality (Harvey 2021). For example, he ordered a 14-year-old boy to marry a 25-year-old woman. Under Polish law, these unions were not recognized as marriages, since Kacmajor had no authority to grant them.

Patriarchal ideology existed within the group. Following the apostle Paul, it was assumed that the man was

the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). A biblical interpretation in which κεφαλή (*kephale*) could mean beginning or source was not taken into consideration (Peppiatt 2015, 85 – 112). It can be inferred that only the Polish translations were used, and no attempt was made to interpret the text differently from what suited the group leader. In Niebo, it was the man who made the final decisions, and the women and children had to submit. If they disobeyed, they could face punishment by flogging or confinement to dark rooms for several days (Połec 2018). This was due to the conviction found in the Abrahamic religions that the man was responsible for the spiritual well-being of his wife and children and should discipline them so they could avoid spiritual harm (cf. Proverbs 13:24; Didache 4:9; Quran 4:34; Ehrman 2003, 425; Nasr 2015, 206; Mellen 2017).

## Trouble with the Law

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Reports to the police from concerned parents, failure to register newborns, refusal to serve in the military, destruction of identity documents, and failure to send children to school caused the security services to take an interest in the group. There also began the first conflicts with Majdan residents. Members of Niebo refused to buy products from villagers who, in their view, led immoral lives. To make matters worse, they also threatened to send diseases upon them (Sokołowski 2005, 61). The degree of punishment depended on the offense—for lighter ones, a person was threatened with diarrhea, for stronger ones even with death from cancer. When one of the local landlords died, members of Niebo put up an effigy with his likeness along the road with the inscription: "He didn't want to play with us." This was to suggest to others that his death was not accidental. Since Kacmajor had a monopoly on spiritual truth, his followers did not care about the religious feelings of others. On Sunday mornings, they jumped out from behind trees scaring people heading to church. On the Day of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they interrupted the procession, shouting obscene words and bleating like rams. Lying in ditches, they pretended to shoot at the faithful from rifles made out of wood (Dzich 2018).

The outside world was beginning to turn against them, but Kacmajor seemed to have expected this for a long time. It is more difficult to determine when doubts began to invade the group's members. Sajnog was unable to pinpoint a specific moment when the turn in his perception occurred (Porzeziński 2018). It seems, however, that hunger, led to by reckless disposal of wealth, played a major role. One day, the prophet simply ordered that all precious items be carried out of the house and sold for a low value. This was to get rid of the attachment to material things. Kacmajor also gradually curtailed his healing activities, which had hitherto brought in considerable income. Instead, he ordered his believers to heal, but they did not have the same bioenergetic abilities. Kacmajor traveled to Ukraine to expand his mission to a new location, but the money he brought back was not enough to meet the needs of the group's members. Then thefts began. The prophet argued that even detentions would create new possibilities for them to share the good news with police officers or others arrested. Animals, clothes, or hay belonging to Majdan residents started to disappear, but they had no hard evidence to convincingly accuse the faithful of Niebo. It was not until July 1993 that fifteen members of the group, along with Kacmajor, were arrested in connection with the theft of a tree from the forest. It was not an easy intervention, as during an attempt to search the property, Kacmajor's followers came out to the police with axes (Koper and Stańczyk 2022, 316).

During the leader's absence, the community began to experience even greater hunger. For a time, only

apples were eaten. Electricity was cut off due to unpaid bills. Despite such deplorable housing conditions, they did not leave. They were afraid of tragedy and the diseases that awaited them outside. In addition, they did not want to leave other members of the group, with whom they sometimes had family relations. When verbal persuasion was not enough, violence was involved. Disobedient members were sentenced to hunger strikes of many days (Sokołowski 2005, 61). Severe beatings also occurred. When someone managed to escape, he or she was harassed with anonymous phone calls, windows of the house were broken, and even physically assaulted (Połec 2018).

Several members of the group or people associated with it passed away. In January 1993, four young people connected to Niebo lost their lives in a car accident. One member of the group had to undergo regular dialysis due to a severe kidney condition, but Kacmajor persuaded him to stop the treatments. The man died due to poisoning of the body. Other faithful tried to revive him by laying on him their hands, but this did not have the desired effect. Another man, after being released from jail for theft, was not allowed into the community's headquarters, after which he took his own life in a nearby forest. One woman, who entered Niebo under the influence of her husband, threw herself from the top floor of a skyscraper. Kacmajor was also suspected of murdering newborns or selling children abroad, but these allegations were never confirmed (Pasztelańska 2018). Concealment of Janusz Ochnik, who shot four soldiers, can though be verified. After escaping from a psychiatric hospital, he hid in Majdan until the prophet decided that his upkeep was too expensive (Dzich 2018).

## The End

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In 1995, there was a split in Niebo. Several members left the group's headquarters accusing Kacmajor of embezzling money intended for common needs. They moved to Podlasie, where they tried to continue the mission without the prophet. However, they were quickly caught stealing, and one of the members was charged with cohabitating with a minor and keeping children hidden from their biological father, which resulted in the death of the latter. Meanwhile, Kacmajor began to lose control in Majdan. Due to limited access to food, weaker individuals were expelled, leaving Niebo with adherents experiencing anxieties and mental breakdowns. The prophet's trips to the Eastern Carpathians in order to heal people there could not stop the hunger. Ominous themes began to dominate his speeches and sermons. He scared the faithful by warnings of the diseases and tragedies that awaited them outside, but this did not stop the exodus of the believers. Furthermore, the family court forced Kacmajor to send his children to school. The prophet, however, was not about to give up without fighting. In September 2002, he leased a house in Majdan to a neighbor, and together with his family moved to the Podhale region. They settled in Stare Bystre, where an attempt was made to reactivate the group. Several believers joined Kacmajor, including a Ukrainian family that was soon sent back home after a failed theft attempt. Soon Kacmajor's 14-year-old son left the community with his mother. He admitted that he was most frightened by his father's words concerning the possibility of collective suicide. The further fate of Grażyna (Kacmajor's wife) is unknown. There have been rumors that she either was killed by her husband, or that she took her own life. There is also a possibility that she might have joined one of monasteries in Cracow (Koper and Stańczyk 2022, 324).

The whole situation made it impossible for the members of Niebo to stay a long time in the new place. They left without settling their debts, leaving behind only a washing machine and a few blankets. Soon Kacmajor was deprived of the rest of his children. In 2005, he was last seen in Majdan Kozłowiecki. At the

time, the house where the community once lived was in a deplorable condition. The windows had been broken, the locks destroyed, the pipes ripped out and the floor removed. It is not known where the bioenergotherapist stayed for the next few years. He is said to have lived in Nysa for a while, and then moved to Ukraine, where he would have returned to his healing activities. He eventually landed in the UK, where he was preparing to exhibit his work in an art gallery (Pajuro and Galek 2016). His Facebook page states that he currently lives in Northampton (Kacmajor 2024).

## Analysis of Niebo

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Unfortunately, Niebo has not yet been the subject of in-depth academic analysis. Most of the information stated in this study came from old newspaper articles. The cited academic papers treated the group collaterally, focusing on other phenomena such as the popularity of new religious movements, the image of the father in such groups, or the function of their language. The book *Mistycy, prorocy, szarlatani* is certainly helpful, but not always reliable. It does not attempt to capture sufficiently the perspective of some of the movements described, such as the [Mariavites](#). The aim of some sources was not so much to analyse Niebo as to warn against its negative influences. In the case of former member Sebastian Keller, this is quite understandable. Hopefully, this situation will change in the future, and the group as well as its leader Bogdan Kacmajor will become the subject of a reliable, critical, scholarly study.

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