Introduction

Ksawery Pruszyński (December 4, 1907– June 13, 1950) was one of the leading Polish journalists in the first half of the twentieth century. According to Ryszard Kapuściński, it was thanks to him that reportage became not only a product of the eye, but also of the mind. Pruszyński was born into a Polish aristocratic family in what is now Ukraine, but the Bolshevik Revolution forced the family out of their estates and, rather impoverished, they settled in the newly independent Poland. His widowed single mother, in spite of financial difficulties managed to send both Ksawery and his brother Mieczysław to the Jagiellonian University, where they studied law.

It was there, while active in a conservative student organization called *Myśl Mocarstwowa* (Aspirations to Great Power Status)¹ that they met Mojżesz Pomeranz. Formed in the 1920s, Aspirations to Great Power Status (AGPS) was a political movement active in academic centers across Poland with a largely upper- and middle-class membership. Akin to today's think tanks, it engaged in outlining a political agenda for the new Polish state to be developed and implemented by its young elites. While its main goal was to build a strong modern state, at the same time it idealized the old Jagiellonian Polish-Lithuanian Union which functioned as a multiethnic and multinational commonwealth. Unlike its rival National Democracy (ND), which wanted to fuse the ethnic and the national as the core of Polish identity and the foundation of the state, AGPS's leading thinkers (such as Rowmund Piłsudski and Jerzy Giedroyc)² proposed an inclusive civil platform representing all ethnic strands

1 Aspirations to Great Power Status Group—this translation of *Myśl Mocarstwowa* tries to capture the leading thought at the foundation of the group, namely Marshal Piłsudski's warning: "Poland will be a Great Power or she will not exist." Piłsudski thought it was only then that Poland would be able to resist the relentless imperialist pressures from Russia and Germany.

2 Jerzy Giedroyc (1906–2000)—Polish journalist, political activist, and legendary editor of the highly influential political and literary magazine *Kultura* (1947–2000), which was pub-

within the structure of state. At the international level, it aimed at a modern kind of commonwealth, a federalist structure comprising former nations of the pre-Partitioned Poland, such as Lithuania and Ukraine, as well as those of the Russian Empire, such as Georgia. This new formation of a string of independent states was supposed to create a secure buffer for Poland stuck between Russia and Germany.

The standard-bearing periodical in which AGPS debated ideas was the tellingly titled *Bunt Młodych* (Rebellion of the Young), run by Jerzy Giedroyc. As well as Giedroyc and Pruszyński, the periodical's other leading authors were Ksawery's brother Mieczysław and the Bocheński brothers Józef Maria, Aleksander, and Adolf. Seen from today's perspective, the extent to which Pruszyński and Giedroyc shared their political roots and direction of evolution is remarkable.

National Democracy's antisemitism was one of the key reasons Ksawery joined AGPS; and it was a street fight with ND activists, in which he was wounded, that cemented his friendship with Mojżesz Pomeranz. It was later—and with the help of Pomeranz, who organized support from his Jewish colleagues—that Pruszyński successfully campaigned for the position of chair of the University's Association of Law Students, which was planning to remove Jewish students from its organization. This victory was especially satisfying as only a few months before Hitler had come to power in Germany. Ousting the ND leadership significantly limited their previously undisputed influence within the university.

Ksawery's and Mojżesz's friendship continued outside the lecture halls, when Ksawery and (his brother) Mieczysław often visited the Pomeranz family and, beyond graduation, when Ksawery got a job at Cracow's *Czas*, where he went from proofreading to reporting to writing his first book—*Sarajewo 1914, Shanghai 1932, Gdańsk 193 . . . ?* An early example of Pruszyński's prophetic gift, the book warned of the possible outbreak of another world war.

At the same time, Mojżesz opened his own legal practice and became increasingly interested in the Zionist idea of establishing and building a new state for the Jews.

By the early 1930s, Zionism had emerged as one of the main topics of political debate among Jews, as well as non-Jews, and naturally between Mojżesz

lished in Maison-Lafitte near Paris; from 1930, he was the editor of *Bunt Młodych* (later *Polityka*). Throughout his life, he supported the rights of Polish ethnic minorities and friendly cooperation between Central European nations, a political program based on Józef Piłsudski's Prometheist project. After the Second World War, he argued for the peaceful acceptance of Poland's new borders, but nevertheless decided to remain in exile. (Transl.)

and Ksawery. Being both deeply committed to the idea of the state as an intellectual and political construct—as distinct from the National Democrats’ stress on the primacy of the nation as defined by ethnicity—it didn’t take long for Mojżesz to persuade Ksawery about the value of on-the-ground reportage from the Zionist front lines in Mandate Palestine; they were both interested to see if the dream of returning to Eretz Yisrael had a chance of becoming reality and to find out how the Zionists were going about it.

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Pruszyński travelled to Palestine in 1932. Initially, he wrote his reports for the Vilnius weekly *Słowo* (The Word), subsequently collecting them in the book *Palestyna po raz trzeci* (Palestine for the Third Time) republished in 1936 by Warsaw’s Rój, a publishing house run by another pioneer of Polish reportage Pomeranz.

Palestine was the result of a six-week tour across the *yishuv* (Jewish Palestine), most of it on foot, during which Pruszyński visited all its legendary cities and famous *kibbutzim* and met all kinds of people—from Zionists, communists, and Arabs to disaffected Polish Jews who couldn’t wait to get out, or simply couldn’t. Pruszyński’s growing respect and enthusiasm for the Zionist project is palpable in the text. As a Pole born into a formally nonexistent country, but who had seen it resurrected after 130-odd years of partitions, he was particularly sensitive to the plight of a nation in need of a state; and as an educated, thinking man he was also interested in how the state should function to provide all its citizens with the conditions to thrive economically and culturally in a secure environment.

Based on his experience of his own native country, Pruszyński was very much aware that it would not be an easy task, but the more he explored the more he was impressed by the efforts of the pioneers, old and new, who were trying out new ways of life and new forms of statehood. He was struck by the economic success of the potential state machinery and noticeably moved by individual stories—triumphs and failures, successful (and unsuccessful) escapes from poverty and antisemitism—all of them lives devoted to making the dream come true. And being brought up steeped in history in an old Polish tradition and at the same time in a new multiethnic Polish state, he was also very much aware of the dangers of nationalism. In the case of Mandate Palestine, he understood the emerging conflict between, on the one hand, awakening Arab ethnic and national identity and, on the other, the Zionist project—both rooted in the idea that ethnic identity equals nation equals state.

The book is unusual not just because Pruszyński, a Polish aristocrat, was totally won over by the idea and saw that creating a modern State of Israel was a firm possibility, but also—and this is classic Pruszyński—in that it turned out to be quite prophetic in foreseeing that the foundations of that state had a built-in fault line. In conversation, he and an Arab nationalist consider that the political complexities of the Mandate and the balance of power in the Middle East could be “corrected” by another major war, just as the Great War altered the situation by demoting Turkey from its position as the major regional power. He also sensed that the fermenting Arab-Jewish conflict was going to be a time bomb, which no one would know how to defuse.

This was Pruszyński’s first truly successful book and, if it did not make him quite the household name he became later, it certainly advanced him into the first rank of journalists in prewar Poland. It had a big, if mixed, reception: ambivalent and confused in the Polish press; curious, even enthusiastic, in Jewish forums of all political shades. Following his return from Palestine and the publication of the book, the author embarked on a number of tours, mostly to the eastern borderlands, from Vilnius, through Lublin, to Lviv, drawing fascinated audiences everywhere, mostly Jewish, of course, but not exclusively. The popularity of the book among Jewish readers is attested to by a number of reviews, such as Heszal Klepfisz’s³ “Pruszyński na Szczęśliwej Wyspie” (Pruszyński on the Island of Happiness) published in his collected essays *Przedwojenny świat przez pryzmat młodego Żyda polskiego* (The Prewar World through the Eyes of a Young Polish Jew [Tel Aviv: Eran Reut, 1999]).

Palestine for the Third Time was not the last word Pruszyński had on the Zionist project or Polish Jewish relations, writing articles like “Przytyk i stragan” (Przytyk and a Market Stand), about a pogrom carried out in a small town near Radom in 1936, and short stories such as “Karabela z Meschedu” (A Sabre from Mashhad, 1948), about a Jew who joined the Polish II Corps to fight Hitler. But in summer 1936, Pruszyński’s attention was captured by the Spanish Civil War and in the autumn he set off for his next journalistic assignment, which resulted in another masterpiece of reportage *Inside Red Spain*.

3 Heszal Klepfisz (1910–2004)—Polish-Israeli journalist, philosopher, and historian; during World War II, he was an officer and rabbi in the Polish Army; after the war, he lived in Costa Rica and Panama. He was the author of *End of an Era: Eastern European Jewry Roots and Uniqueness* [Yiddish], 5 vols. (Jerusalem: n.p., 1989); he also wrote in Hebrew and Polish. (Transl.)

That might have been the natural end of his Palestinian adventure and preoccupation with that Zionist project. Then came the war and the Shoah and, in one of those fine twists of fate, Pruszyński found himself again involved in the Zionist project, and this time not only as an observer but quite instrumentally too.

In 1947, while in New York working as an advisor to the Polish mission at the UN, he was invited by the ambassador of the new communist Polish Republic to the US, Oskar Lange, to join the Ad Hoc Committee for the Palestinian Question, a newly formed part of the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). It was on the strength of *Palestine for the Third Time* that he was considered an expert on the question. It was also his experience as a diplomat during the war, when posted in Soviet Union and working with General Sikorski who was negotiating with Stalin, that made him uniquely qualified for the job. By then, Pruszyński's political position had evolved from the idealistic conservatism of the Aspirations to Great Power Status group of the 1920s through an increasingly critical and openly hostile attitude towards the post-Piłsudski colonel's regime, to pragmatic center-left statism. Following his experience of the Spanish Civil War and the deep disappointment of Yalta's *realpolitik*,⁴ he decided to work alongside Poland's new communist regime—for the good of the (next) new state.

Pruszyński was elected as head of one of the subcommittees—Subcommittee One tasked with preparing the legal groundwork and drawing up the geographical borders for a new state to be proposed following British withdrawal from the Mandate Palestine. He committed wholeheartedly to the work, believing that the Jews deserved a state of their own, while fully aware that the festering Arab-Jewish conflict required some kind of guarantee for the rights of the Palestinians; the final recommendation of his subcommittee was two separate states—one Arab, the other Jewish. He worked tirelessly in support of this plan; according to historical records, he had great negotiating skills, dealing with pressure applied from different, often directly opposed, directions, and always with the clear aim of bringing about the creation of a Jewish state. This is best illustrated by the two speeches he delivered as chairman of Subcommittee One: the first was at the final, closing session of the Ad Hoc Committee, where he explained in detail the complexities of the proposal

4 At the Yalta conference, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin divided their spheres of influence, turning Poland into a Soviet satellite state, which made many of Pruszyński's friends of a similar political outlook, like Jerzy Giedroyc, decide not to return to communist Poland (Transl).

and why it was still the best possible in the circumstances; the second was on November 29 before General Assembly's vote on Resolution 181, when he passionately argued for the creation of a Jewish state. Legend has it that this speech swung the vote—after all, the proposal was passed with a majority of one. The mechanics of the vote were probably less straightforward, but nevertheless, it has gone down in history as *the* defining moment in the history of the State of Israel, which was founded later in May 1948.

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In November 1947, Mojżesz Pomeranz wrote to Pruszyński:

I cannot express in this letter the admiration and enthusiasm inspired by each of your speeches. Someone said that if you came to Palestine, people would greet you with flowers, like another Balfour, only with greater love. Anti-Polish sentiments which are undoubtedly present in the Jewish society in Palestine, . . . are fading away today and doubtless it is thanks to Ksawery Pruszyński, who is saving the good name of the Polish nation and enhancing Poland's.⁵

Amidst the ensuing frantic protests of the Arab delegations and the increased pressure of, and arm-twisting from, the Jewish one, Pruszyński was quietly removed from his position by his superiors, somewhat alarmed by his determined support for the Jewish state while Stalin was still weighing his options. Nevertheless, in that final speech on the day of the vote he reiterated his—and what he believed to be Poland's—official position:

Gentlemen, you are right to claim that in this whole matter Poland has demonstrated more of a concern for the fate of Israel than have other nations. We accept these—presumably sarcastic—words as the highest praise of Polish foreign policy. . . . We have been defending and will always defend every just cause, which is why we have been defending and will defend the Jewish cause. . . . We also defended it for other reasons, namely because no other nation understands like the Polish nation the longing for one's own land, the land that belong

5 M. Pruszyński, *Mojżesz i Ksawery* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Twój Styl, 1999); from Bożena Szaynok, *Poland-Israel 1944–1968: In the Shadow of the Past and of the Soviet Union*, trans. Dominika Ferens (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IPN, 2012).

to one's ancestors, where one would not have to suffer the fate of an intruder or pilgrim.⁶

This book provides a fascinating vignette into what the Zionist dream was in the early 1930s and invites us to reflect on what has become of it now.

—Wiesiek Powaga

6 K. Pruszyński, "Polska a Erec," quoted from the Polish-Language Zionist periodical *Opinia* [Łódź; Tel-Aviv], no. 28 (1948), in Szaynok, *Poland-Israel 1944–1968*, 402–405c.