


BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY: REFUGE AND ASYLUM IN POLISH-JEWISH HISTORY, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

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Between Experience and Memory: Refuge and Asylum in Polish-Jewish History, Politics, and Culture. Introduction

This issue “Between Experience and Memory: Refuge and Asylum in Polish-Jewish History, Politics, and Culture” explores the many ways in which Polish Jews experienced refuge and asylum and re-examines the memory of this experience and its multi-layered impact on modern Polish-Jewish history, politics, and culture. By complementing the discussion of refugeehood with an analysis of the experience of asylum and the memory of the two, it seeks to shift the scholarly focus from persecution and victimhood to a holistic approach to the phenomenon of displacement. Consequently, the subjects examined in the articles range from the hardships of exile to challenges of absorption, from experiences of relief and redemption to memory of tribulations and refugeehood as well as its cultural expressions and long-term psychological and socio-cultural influences.

The first introductory article offers a typological explication of the concepts of emigration, aliyah, and refugeehood and utilizes them to discuss the hardships of displacement and absorption and to trace the characteristics inherent to Jewish emigration as affected by the socio-political and ideological forces. The following articles reveal how exiles tried to make sense of their extreme condition, attempted to change it or find moments of relief in asylum; how they remembered their experiences or tried to forget them. Approaching the subject from various perspectives—historical, literary, or artistic—they examine the multifarious

recollections, deeply influenced by the changing socio-political context, and provide multiangled perspective on survival and reconstruction of lives, as well as on the genesis of refuge memory and its influence on the evolution of Polish-Jewish history and identity. Discussing nostalgia for the “Murdered Shtetl” and anti-nostalgia for a backward homeland, the articles examine different ways of remembering the refugeehood or “lost—physical and cultural—home” and coping with the long-term socio-psychological impact of displacement as shaping one’s experience of absorption. The issue concludes with a discussion of the unique artistic expression of refuge in the works of Arieh Merzer. A deep analysis of the relief medium and the artist’s aesthetic reveals the intricate dialectic of the refugee experience—one situated between external and internal realms, and alternately characterized by an inexorable sense of displacement and entrapment in a Penrose-like movement.

This issue hopes to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on migration and the experience of refuge and asylum, while challenging communal narratives, raising complex questions, and emphasizing the dualities embedded in the multifaceted challenges of exile, displacement, and absorption—all inherent to the fate of Polish Jewry.

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