



## What is Lubartworld?

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Our objectives

# What is Lubartworld

by [Claire Zalc](#)



Immigration en Israël © The Palmach Archive

The Lubartworld project combines a transnational history perspective with a microhistorical methodology by reconstructing the individual trajectories of each and ever Jewish inhabitant from the Polish village of Lubartów between the early 1920s and the early 1950s, whether they emigrated or stayed behind, and whether they were exterminated or survived the Holocaust.

## Combining two historiographies



This project is at the intersection of two fields currently undergoing major renewal: the microhistory of the Holocaust and the transnational history of migrations. It will help to bridge the divide between these two historiographies, and to combat what some have labeled a tendency “to sequester the Shoah”<sup>[1]</sup>.

## The microhistory of the Holocaust

A stable and abundant historiography<sup>[2]</sup> has described the stages, actors, and means used in the destruction of European Jews during the Holocaust<sup>[2]</sup>. However, the context has now changed with the opening or gathering of an impressive array of archives and testimonies, leading to a series of more fine-grained studies that have contributed to a profound renewal of Holocaust scholarship<sup>[3]</sup>. Frequently taking a defined and limited space for their framework, such as a ghetto, city, or a region, they shed light on the interactions between the victims and perpetrators. A change of scale entails a change of paradigm in how to write Holocaust history<sup>[4]</sup>: it places individual behavior within its social environment, thereby helping to understand the killing process by situating it within local configurations. However, these studies have faced a specific challenge, for enclosing the series within a restricted space and time amounts to ignoring one of the essential characteristics of behavior in the face of persecution: flight and the search for support from outside the group. The goal of this project is precisely to go beyond the boundaries of the shtetl in order to follow the persecution victims along their biographical and migratory trajectories. In this way it is tightly linked to the history of migrations.

## The transnational history of migrations

Transnational approaches helped reinterpret migratory phenomena across space and time: research emphasized migration beyond the Western space<sup>[5]</sup>, globalization from below<sup>[6]</sup>, as well as the role of the family<sup>[7]</sup>, transnational migrant communities<sup>[8]</sup> and diasporas<sup>[9]</sup>. The point of view has nevertheless remained to a large extent macrostructural. This project proposes a radical change of focus. Microhistorical approaches to migration are essentially the work of histories of the modern period<sup>[10]</sup>, the comparative histories of groups of the same origin settling in different urban environments<sup>[11]</sup>, or the reconstitution of the individual lives of particular migrants<sup>[12]</sup>. However, one of the truly original aspects of this project is precisely its scale: it does not plan to follow an individual or a family, but a whole group of 3,000 ordinary people.

## Chronological framework

The project spans from the aftermath of World War One early 1920s, with the disappearance of multinational empires, to the territorial, political, and identity-based reconfigurations ensuing from the Holocaust in the mid-1950s<sup>[13]</sup>. The goal is to explore this chronological sequence in its original

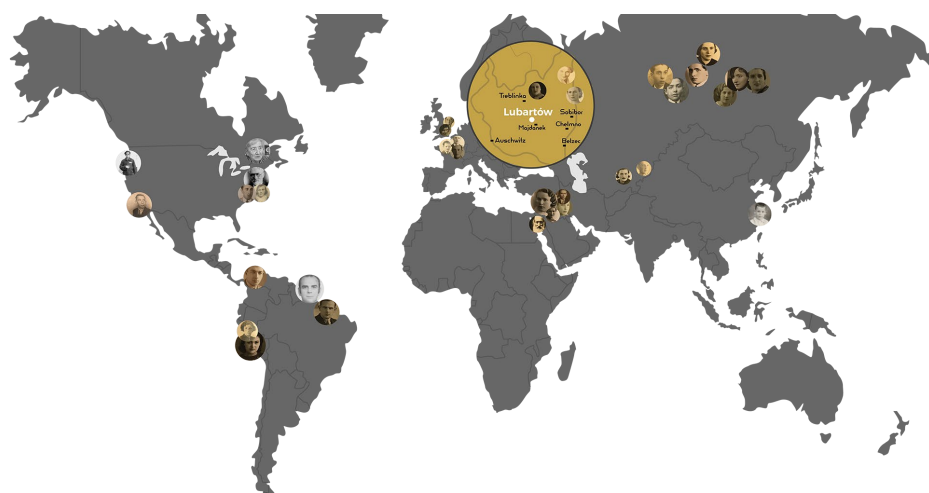
biographical density, and to present the viewpoint of those subjected to migratory events and the process of persecution in its different stages. Although the project begins in Lubartów, it extends to the world in its globality: Lubartów residents crisscrossed the globe, their trajectories delineating and embodying the upheavals experienced by Europe and the world during the 20th century, including the creation and destruction of borders and Nation-States, mass murders, and reconstruction or resettlement policies after the war.

## Epistemological framework

From an epistemological perspective, the Lubartworld project aims to demonstrate the heuristic advantages of a transnational microhistory. It will try to simultaneously and exhaustively compare migrants from the same origin across approximately twenty different countries, thereby seeking to renew the global history of migrations using a “case-study” approach. Consequently, this project addresses important challenges both **methodologically**, as it proposes to apply the prosopographic method in a transnational way, and empirically, as it applies it to a central topic in both Holocaust and migration research.

## A better understanding of the dynamics driving the persecuted to migrate

The project's primary goal is to examine the dynamics of a social structure undergoing major disruption by studying social conditions and the consequences of a group's destruction. Who fled? When and where? With whom? Who survived and who did not? It is not simply a matter of counting how many individuals left or stayed, were deported or not, but rather of relating trajectories to the familial, economic, and neighborly environment in which they were situated. By proceeding exhaustively within a group, the project will enable the comparison of trajectories, and thereby identify the role of socio-economic status, gender, family group size, degree of religiosity, or political activities in the various reactions to persecution. What explanations can be proposed for the different migratory directions (internal or external) that were taken? One of the original aspects of this investigation consists of reflecting on the effects that interpersonal links had on the behavior of persecution victims. This broaches the question of “who knew what” among the victims, namely by studying the circulation of information among them. To this end we will also explore the role of hometown associations (*landsmanshatfn*). There is nothing trivial about the approach, for emphasizing these collective determinations and seeking to define the range of possibilities illuminates how actions and behaviors, even in extreme situations, were not the sole act of isolated individuals.



## Exploring the migratory aftermath of the Holocaust

The project will also explore the territorial, political, and identity reconfigurations ensuing from the Holocaust on the level of individual journeys. The itineraries do not conform to a single model and cut across different histories,

from the Iron Curtain closing borders in Europe to the creation of the state of Israel. A prosopographic approach helps understand the dislocation of bonds and networks following the Holocaust, in addition to their potential reconstruction for the rare survivors. In this sense the Lubartworld project aims to deepen our understanding of European and global recompositions during the 20th century.

## A transnational history of the administrative construction of alterity

This research sheds new light on the history of ordinary relations between individuals and state administrations. Was there a transnational circulation of anti-Semitic and xenophobic legislation? It also takes into account the role played by administrations that were sometimes not specifically in charge of anti-Semitic discrimination—immigration police, ordinary tribunals, naturalization services [14]—and helps posit a transnational history of the identification of migrant populations and the persecution of Jews during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exhaustive reconstruction of the cross-border itineraries traveled by men and women helps explore the different national practices for managing foreign populations and (for some of the countries) persecuting Jews, in addition to their effects in shaping individual trajectories.

## A social history of belonging in a global world

This project helps reflect on the connections between the construction of belonging and migratory experiences. By presenting the ground-level interactions between state institutions and the migrants who were identified, discriminated against, or persecuted, this investigation offers a good vantage point for observing the everyday construction of belonging. What room for maneuver did people have in their confrontations with the administration? The accumulation of sources for individual journeys helps explore how people expressed their social, ethnic, or national affiliation in accordance with the time or place. One primary challenge is to identify the latitude that was available in a particular territory at a specific point in time, an issue that is simultaneously historical, epistemological, and eminently topical.

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**lubartworld**

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