
Daiva Kristina Kuzmickaite begins her book by comparing the three major waves of migrants from Lithuania—“greenhorns” before World War I, “DPs” (Displaced Persons) after World War II, and the “Little Soviets” (*tarybukai*) after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and then, using a “story-telling method,” she presents a compelling account of the ways in which the *tarybukai*, both illegal and legal immigrants, have worked to find their way through the problems of adjusting to the practices of American capitalist society. She vividly describes both their jobs and their concerns.

Readers around the world of course know the story of Jurgis, the central figure in Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle*, a Lithuanian who, at the beginning of the 20th century, struggled to make a place for himself in the Chicago’s capitalist world and eventually found happiness as an international socialist. Kuzmickaite’s account, while echoing many of the same problems that Sinclair described, offers a rather different picture as she concentrates on the internal life of the immigrant community rather than with the problems of just one person. For Sinclair, women were of less concern than the men; Kuzmickaite’s account pays much more attention to the women. Her subjects, moreover, are considerably more sophisticated than Jurgis was, and they are much more resourceful in coping with their problems. In addition, many of them, in Kuzmickaite’s judgment turn to religion as a rallying point for establishing their own identity in this new world.

The persistence of the pattern of problems arising from emigration from Lithuania and from immigration into the United States throughout the 20th century is quite striking. Like the emigration a century ago, the emigration that Kuzmickaite describes is largely driven by economic motives, a search for a better life. Like commentators of a century ago, Kuzmickaite paints a picture of consi-
derable personal travail and struggle. To be sure, while authorities in Lithuania today worry about a “brain drain,” the émigrés at the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries were mostly uneducated. Nevertheless, many of the complaints about life in Chicago at the end of the twentieth century that Kuzmickaite reports seem to echo the warnings and complaints recorded in the years before World War I.

Two major differences between the old and the new immigrations would seem to be the role of women and the relations between parents and their children. In the immigration a century ago, single men predominated; in the current immigration women play important roles in all stages of the phenomenon, ranging from the decision to leave home to being the bread winner in some families. The immigrants also have some problems in adjusting to the American standards of parental obligations and responsibilities.

Yet despite the problems and complaints, the flow of emigrants from Lithuania continues. Emigration is essentially a constant factor in Lithuanian history, and Kuzmickaite emphasizes that the history of emigration in fact encourages more emigration. Some émigrés, moreover, try to justify their decisions by sending back false, glowing accounts of their “happy” lives, thereby encouraging still more people to leave home. Some commentators try to insist that the flow will taper off as life in Lithuania as part of the European Union improves. Others warn that progress is too slow, and that the emigration will indeed drain the country of considerable intellectual and productive potential.

The study also touches upon a great many secondary questions that may be of great significance to specific groups of readers. I can well imagine that American government officials would be carefully examining the stories of Kuzmickaite’s principal informants. Some of the conditions she describes, however, have changed. She tells how potential migrants obtained visas at the American embassy by showing letters of invitation and recommendation. In the spring of 2004, an American diplomat told me that “our consuls must make their decisions on an applicant’s personal circumstances, and not the personal guarantees of the people who invite them.” What was a successful tactic a decade ago may not work today.

As in any such study, an author’s generalizations may be contradicted by specific stories, or “hearsay” evidence. Kuzmickaite emphasizes that immigrant workers receive lower pay than established Americans do. A young Lithuanian woman once proudly recounted to me her illegal stay in the United States and declared that while an American received only some 65 cents of any dollar he earned, she and her friends received the full dollar because they paid no taxes. This of course does not refute Kuzmickaite’s conclusion: It emphasizes the absence of any health insurance or social security payments, and it ignores the question of just how many dollars are being considered. But it is relevant in considering the special cases of individuals who stay in the United States for only a brief time with the aim of accumulating more money more quickly than they could at home.

The problem of the movement of young workers across national frontiers is topical for many cultures, and Kuzmickaite’s study offers significant insights that have validity even for studies that have no relationship either to Lithuanians or Chicago.