Re-thinking the Concept of Diaspora: The Example of Lithuanian Migration History

Summary. The aim of this article is to re-consider the currently common idea that a diaspora, as William Safran’s 1991 definition asserts, is based on a very strong emotional tie with the homeland. As Lithuanian migration history shows, this applies well to the post-war Displaced Persons (DPs), ideological migrants who emigrated from European refugee camps rather than return to a homeland under Soviet rule. In their communities, the DPs set up organizations that are hierarchical and closely linked to their goal – to free Lithuania. However, this concept of diaspora does not work well with what can be called rhizomic migration, which is typical for Lithuanian migrants in the periods before and after the DPs. Rhizomic communities are ideologically diverse and form through many individual decisions, most often motivated by economic concerns. In this article, two examples of early 20th century Lithuanian communities formed in this way are analyzed, Bellshill in Scotland and Sydney Mines in Canada.

Keywords: diaspora theory, rhizomic migration, Lithuanian migration history, Lithuanian Displaced Persons, Lithuanians in Bellshill, Scotland, Lithuanians in Sydney Mines, Canada.

Introduction

As Rogers Brubaker explains, the term ‘diaspora’ is not new, but has become significant in migration studies only since the late 1980s. In 1991 the appearance of “Diaspora: A Journal of International Studies” signaled its increasing importance, while William Safran’s definition in the first issue of this journal encouraged a particular way of looking at diasporas that emphasizes the strong emotional link between migrants and the homeland. In

Lithuanian studies, on which the present study is focused. Safran’s understanding of a diaspora fits in well with one specific group, the Displaced Persons (DPs) who migrated from refugee camps in Germany and Austria after World War II. However, using the term in Safran’s sense makes it harder to understand the development of both earlier and later Lithuanian migrations. The aim of this article is to suggest that that, especially for Lithuanian studies, the term is often used in a way that is too restrictive. As concrete examples of kinds of diaspora that are different from the DP one, this article looks at two Lithuanian communities of the early 20th century, Bellshill in Scotland and Sydney Mines in Canada. To clarify differences among diasporas, this article applies the theory of the rhizome metaphor as first suggested by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in analyzing identity and later taken up by the migration specialists Lisa Anteby-Yemni and William Berthomiere.

Safran’s definition indicates six features that he feels characterize true diasporas. First, he states that members of such groups “or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign regions”\(^2\). In addition, such groups must feel partly “alienated” from their hostland\(^3\). His other four characteristics all refer to the migrant group’s attitudes to its homeland: it possesses a “collective memory, vision or myth about their original homeland”; it holds the conviction that this homeland is “their true, ideal home”, a place to which they may return; it has an equally strong conviction that it must help the homeland regain its “safety and prosperity”; and it believes that this sense of relationship is the basis of a group’s “ethnocultural consciousness and solidarity”\(^4\).

This view of the experience of migration is very different from one that provided the framework for studies earlier in the 20th century. The traditional question was why people migrate, with the answers summarized in the words ‘push’ or ‘pull’: migrants may be pushed out of their homelands by natural disasters or war, or they may be attracted to specific hostlands by a better quality of life. The trajectory of migration can be read as a journey away from the homeland to the hostland with several implications: that the homeland is a place that is left for a superior destination, that migrants move in only one direction and do not return, and that they migrate only once; the agenda it offers is assimilative. Migration studies became more sophisticated once it was understood that assimilation into a host culture is slow, complicated and most often incomplete. In particular, the growing popularity of diaspora studies shifted the emphasis from the process of migration to the creation of ethnic communities with continuing ties, both real and symbolic, to the homeland.

In the Lithuanian case, there are pragmatic considerations that have made the DP diaspora the model in Lithuanian migration studies, overshadowing both earlier and later waves of migration. One is the availability of an enormous amount of documentary material written by the Lithuanian DPs themselves. The DPs included many well-educated and historically self-conscious men and women who made sure that their organizations kept


\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid., 84.
careful records and regularly reported their activities in the DP press. This kind of documentation was not done to nearly the same extent by earlier or later Lithuanian migrants.

The predominance of the DPs in Lithuanian migration history has been supported by the way this field has been periodized. In recent years periodization itself has become the focus of controversy. Leonid Grinin\(^5\) admits that dividing the past into periods is “rather an effective method of data ordering and analysis,” but considers that “it simplifies historic reality” so that “any periodization suffers from one-sidedness”. Posing a very pertinent question, Ludmilla Jordanova asks, “who owns the past?”; she comments that “the past is routinely deployed for openly manipulative ends <...> committed history prefers one particular perspective and may not be terribly sympathetic to the other, competing ones”\(^6\).

The most common periodization used in studies of Lithuanian migration published before 1990 refers to two waves of migration: an older one and the DP one\(^7\). More recent studies have added a third wave to describe the large numbers who have migrated from independent Lithuania since 1990. In the case of Lithuanians in Canada and the USA, periodization reflects the DP view of migration history. When they arrived after the Second World War, the DPs were embarrassed to encounter Lithuanian leftist organizations, some of them communist\(^8\). The newcomers, fortunate to arrive during a postwar economic boom, underestimated earlier migrant difficulties. In terms of ideology, they refused to recognize any differences between the activities of communists in different times and places. They preferred to ignore the existence of groups that did not follow their own ideology. At the same time, the DPs became committed to an idealized picture of interwar Lithuania under the authoritarian regime of Antanas Smetona, of whom the earlier migrants were very critical\(^9\).

Are the DPs typical of Lithuanian migration pattern?
A personal comment

For a long time, probably because I come from a Lithuanian Canadian DP family, I took the DP model of a diaspora for granted. Still, in the 1980s, when I was collecting historical materials in Canada specifically on Lithuanian DPs, I came across information about earlier migrant settlements that did not fit this model. A particularly interesting community was one of the very earliest in Canada, the Lithuanians who settled at the start of the 20\(^{th}\) century in coal-mining towns of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia like Sydney Mines. The

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main published source is still the brief survey given in “Lithuanians in Canada” (1967) by Pranas Gaida, which is mainly about the DPs and their organizations. Instead of being solid communities, these earlier ones seemed fragmentary and transient, unlinked to the homeland and leaving nothing substantial behind them. I tried without success to find out more about Cape Breton Lithuanians.

It was only in the first years of the 21st century that I began to speculate that it was not the Cape Breton Lithuanians but the DP diaspora that was the anomaly in Lithuanian migration history. Except for the DPs, migration from Lithuania did not take place as a movement of large numbers of people united by a strong political ideology. In the summer of 1944, thousands of Lithuanians retreated into Germany from the oncoming Soviet army. At the end of the war, along with millions of other foreigners, these Lithuanians were placed by the Allies in Displaced Persons camps according to nationality. As historians note, when they were brought together physically, these Lithuanians quickly developed an articulate political position on their identity. Since Western powers did not feel able to force them back into a communist homeland, they eventually admitted them as immigrants.

Using the rhizome metaphor in differentiating migration patterns

Migration specialists Anteby-Yemini and Berthomiere suggest a helpful way of distinguishing kinds of migration, developing the rhizome metaphor explored by Deleuze and Guattari in 1980. The rhizome metaphor comes from the observation of root systems found in plants: while some have a single main root that grows straight down (a “tap root”, of which the carrot is the most easily visualized example), others have many roots, and these send out what are called rhizomes horizontally under the surface of the ground in all directions; from these rhizomes, new plants may grow. Deleuze and Guattari promote modes of thought that are not based on hierarchical or binary thinking, but are rhizome-like in their development: “the rhizome connects any point to any other point <...> it is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills”. As an example of plants with rhizome roots, they suggest looking at grass, which cannot be individuated like a tree; another common example is the strawberry plant. From these botanical remarks they move to ones that suggest the advantages of a mode of thinking that imitates rhizomes. In their view, this kind of thinking demands a new kind of consciousness and threatens accepted principles: “it is not easy to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above <...> History is always written from a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary state apparatus, at least a possible one.”

10 Van Reenan, Lithuanian Diaspora, 142–146.
12 Ibid., 1607.
It is not difficult to adapt this approach to distinguishing kinds of migration and the communities that migrants form. When Peter Heft states that rhizomes are “nonhierarchical” and that “a rhizome can always be broken and restarted” or Jeremy Dumont emphasizes that rhizomes do “not follow a hierarchical line of subordination”, do not have a centre and lack the pyramidal system which dominates in many societies, the application to the pre-DP migration is clear: these communities were individual, de-centred and lacking ideological unity. Anteby-Yemini and Berthomiere assert that such diasporas “re-inscribe <...> space in a new way”.

Instead of rhizomes, the contrasting image of a tap-root works very well for DP migration, from the dramatic journey to hostlands by large groups who remain ideologically connected to the homeland, and the creation of a hierarchy of institutions governed by a central executive. DP emigration from refugee camps in Europe was very much a block movement regulated both by external institutions like the International Refugee Organization and internal ones like the World Lithuanian Community. On March 4, 1946, less than a year after the official end of the Second World War, a preliminary constitution for the World Lithuanian Community was approved. Even before the first DPs left the camps, their responsibilities in the future were laid down for them. In Canada, where Lithuanians and their organizations were fairly small in numbers, the Lithuanian Canadian Community had little difficulty in setting itself up as the dominant structure for the DPs. There was more resistance in the United States, where ideologically diverse Lithuanian organizations already existed, but here too, as Antanas Kučas explains, the American Lithuanian Community was successfully established.

Furthermore, this kind of diaspora formed a network of regional Lithuanian communities who replicated each other, with similar organizations and in close contact. This kind of diaspora is an ideal object of study for historians as it produces multiple examples of the same structures in one place of settlement or another. Once one understands how this institutional structure works, what political, educational and cultural organizations it gives birth to, any research on an individual community is already organized in advance, because one can predict the annual and long-term activity of a community, and readily compare one community to another.

The hierarchy of local branches created according to the principles of the World Lithuanian Community is both simple and effective. This is easily studied in the yearbooks produced to commemorate Lithuanian Days in Canada, an annual event that began in 1953 in Hamilton. These volumes show how each of the individual communities in Canada had much the same core organizations, in addition to the executive of the local branch of the...
Lithuanian Canadian Community, these were a parish or religious committee, a women’s organization and a Saturday school; most had a choir and many organized folk dancing and sports. The hierarchical system typical of ‘tap-root’ communities is evident in the Saturday schools designed to strengthen the Lithuanian identity of the second generation; as Gaida indicates, the programs were supervised by the Education Branch of the National Executive of the Lithuanian Canadian Community. In general, communities formed according to a tap-root model of migration are easy to understand. Since they are centred on a specific kind of fidelity to the homeland, they are also strong and stable.

On the contrary, migrations occurring according to a rhizome pattern are far more chaotic and unpredictable; they create communities that are less stable, less similar and much less homogeneous. Typically, different combinations of conflicting ideological positions from left to right across the political field can make them quite diverse. For example, in the period before World War II, all the Lithuanian communities across Canada included a group of devout Catholics, but a Catholic organization did not dominate in all cases. In Montreal the St. Casimir Lithuanian Catholic society, founded in 1907, with its church built in 1916, was by far the strongest organization, while in Toronto it was only in 1928 that Lithuanian Catholics succeeded in building St. John the Baptist church, since liberal and leftist organizations in this city attracted a much larger percentage of the local Lithuanians. The earlier wave of migrants certainly created Lithuanian organizations, but these were often rivals and not connected in a hierarchy among themselves. Liberals and leftists sang in their own choirs, and there were no united song festivals as in the DP diaspora. Migration itself did not occur for ideological motives. Indeed, the rhizome concept suggests that the forms and directions which migrations take are only partly planned. Individuals more than groups move to a hostland, and then, after some time, often continue to migrate within it or from one hostland to another.

This was the kind of migration that took place among Lithuanians from the middle of the 19th century up to the Second World War, and which has again become the dominant form since Lithuania re-established its independence. For a closer analysis of rhizome migration, two communities from the early 20th century have been selected, Bellshill in Scotland and Sydney Mines in Atlantic Canada.

The Lithuanian community in Bellshill, Scotland

The decisions made in rhizome migration are often not recorded in historical documents. Why, for example, did Lithuanians come to Scotland and, in particular, Bellshill at the end of the 19th century? A local historian, John Millar (Jonas Stepšis) skillfully dismisses the more colourful legends, like those about Lithuanian immigrants to the USA who were

19 Gaida, Lithuanians in Canada, 91.
cheated by a ship captain and dumped on the Scottish coast. However, Millar, whose father and uncle were migrants from Lithuania, argues convincingly that, for many, Scotland was what could be called a transit hostland chosen out of financial necessity. These Lithuanians may have preferred to go to the USA, but the money that was so hard to earn in Lithuania went to the agents who guided them illegally out of czarist territory and others who took them to German ports. In 1900 a one-way ticket to the United States cost five pounds, but only one pound to Leith on the east coast of Scotland. But there are other reasons that Lithuanians came to Bellshill in particular.

Bellshill is a small town north of Glasgow. It does not figure in many histories of Lithuanian migration, but over a century ago it became well-known to would-be migrants in Lithuania as “Balselis”, the Lithuanian form of the name. Bellshill’s rich mineral deposits were already being dug up in the 17th century. The industrial revolution in Britain sent the demand for iron and coal soaring so that by the 1830s large-scale mining in Bellshill had begun, along with ironworks that refined the products. In 1880 an important step was taken with the development in Mossend of a new industrial process known as “the Siemans open hearth steel melting shop”. It is probably not a coincidence that it was about this time that the numbers of Lithuanian migrants rose. The Scottish historian Marjory Harper asserts that mine and iron works owners sent agents to Lithuania to attract agrarian workers to Lanarkshire, the county where Bellshill is located. Their reasons for wanting foreign workers were economic and political: they could pay these migrants lower wages, and they hoped to break the union movement that was sweeping through Scotland. They probably chose Lithuanians because Scottish companies like Merry and Cunninghame, owners of coalmines and ironworks, and the later Lothian Coal Company exported to the Baltic and so had connections that could be extended through local agents.

In the British economy Bellshill had real importance until the exhaustion of the coalfields before the Second World War. For nearly a hundred years, although never very big in terms of population, it was significant as an innovative industrial centre; in the mid-19th century the Mossend Iron Works was the largest factory of its kind in Scotland. Mossend was the newer part of Bellshill where companies built housing for workers, and immigrants formed ethnic enclaves: this was where Lithuanians settled, with the mostly Catholic Lithuanians belonging to Holy Family Roman Catholic parish and sending their


27 Fisher, “Old Bellshill”.
children to Holy Family primary school. Masses with part of the service in Lithuanian were celebrated at Holy Family church from 1904.

Those familiar with the history of early Lithuanian communities in North America would expect that Lithuanians in Bellshill to establish their own church. In 1902 Bellshill Lithuanian Catholics did make an official request to do this, but the British Catholic hierarchy was opposed to parishes created on ethnic grounds. Instead, Lithuanians had to regularly finance priests to come from Lithuania.

Like most of the communities formed by Lithuanians before the coming of the DPs, Bellshill was ideologically varied, a pattern characteristic of rhizome migration. Very often one can find three major groups, with the largest usually the Catholics, faithful to their homeland religion. Other migrants were anti-clerical and liberal, while a third group was socialist; after the Bolshevik Revolution, this was further divided into socialists and communists.

The development of organizations, which was so typical of DP communities, was held up in these earlier communities by ideological fragmentation and by the lack of potential leaders. Like other rhizome migrants, those with professions or at least more education often moved from one community or country to another. Even the Roman Catholic clergy of this period adopted a peripatetic manner of professional migration at odds with what one would expect of so strictly governed an organization. A rapid turnover in priests serving specific communities was common: in Bellshill, according to Kazys Barėnas, at least ten priests came and went from 1897 to the early 1930s, with in which no priest worked here. It was only in 1934 that the Lithuanians in Scotland attracted a long-term spiritual leader, Rev. Juozas Gutauskas (1896–1983), who worked very effectively here until his death.

Almost all the migrants to Bellshill were poorly educated and had very little time to devote to organizational work. Nevertheless, in the first years of the community, three organizations were set up. The earliest of these, St Casimir’s Society, 1898, was named in honour of a Lithuanian saint, combining piety with patriotism. However, Catholics, even if usually the most numerous group in a community, had to contend with the problem of persuading the British Catholic hierarchy to let them invite a priest from Lithuania. The names of the next two organizations, an 1899 co-operative society called “Sandara” (Harmony), and another in 1900 called “Šviesa” (Light or Enlightenment) identify these as liberal in ideology; as Gaida asserts in general, Catholic benefit societies would have had a saint’s name.

Two important figures in the Lithuanian history of the early 20th century did work for a time in Bellshill. One was the leftist Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas (1880–1935), then a member of the Lithuanian social-democratic movement, but later, after the Bolshevik

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31 Ibid., 346.
Revolution, a prominent Communist. In 1915 he gave political lectures and edited the local socialist newspaper “Rankpelnis”, which had been founded in 1907.

The other important activist was Dr. Juozas Bagdonas-Bagdonavičius (1866–1956), who combined studies and a career in medicine with writing for the earliest Lithuanian newspapers “Aušra” and “Varpas”. As more than one source indicates, Bagdonas also took part in illegal cultural activity related to rising Lithuanian nationalism, which led to his arrest in 1897. Released on bail, he continued this kind of work until 1899, when he had to quickly flee to the West to avoid arrest. A man of many talents, he frequently crossed ideological boundaries; although his sympathies were liberal, in 1900 he worked to get Lithuanians in London, England, a parish separate from the Poles. In the same year he made the final plans for the Lithuanian display at the Paris World Exhibition. By 1904 he was living in Bellshill where he became the president of the liberal organization, “Šviesa”, and helped establish a newspaper “Laikas” (Time).

As more Lithuanians wrote back to the homeland and brought out families, their numbers grew to about 5,000–6,000, a substantial presence in a small town. Millar describes how Lithuanians formed their own cultural community within the dominant Scottish society, establishing orchestras and celebrating weddings and christening according to Lithuanian practice. Within twenty years Lithuanians offered services as shoemakers and tailors and set up their own shops, an insurance company, a mutual benefit society, a shipping agency and a newspaper. The cooperative store, “Varpas”, set up through liberal initiative in 1902, eventually had branches in Glasgow; it was a modern store with its own bakery and facilities for refrigeration.

However, Bellshill was not seen by all Lithuanians as an ideal place for long-term settlement. More than one historian refers to manifestations of strong Scottish feeling against Lithuanians. One fundamental source of conflict was differences in religion: the Lithuanians were Roman Catholic, while in the Scottish Lowlands the Presbyterian religion was the dominant one.

Another issue between local Scots and Lithuanian migrants was that of unions; companies solicited and then hired Lithuanians because they hoped to undercut the miners’ unions that held strikes for higher pay. Probably this did not seem so important to Lithuanians who saw mining as a temporary way to earn money for further migration or a project back in the homeland. In later decades, when Lithuanians had been living longer they did enter the unions. Nevertheless, the prejudice did not disappear.

Scottish historians write about this with discomfort because many comments have a distinct racist tone. For example, the webmaster for the site Scottish Mining Communities

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33 Millar, “When, How and Why”.
35 Millar, “When, How and Why”.
36 “Bellshill (Scotland)”, 366.
37 Harper, “Lithuanian Miners”.
38 Ibid.
39 “Lithuanians in Scotland”.
apologizes for including such material in a section on immigrants: “We thought long and hard before adding this section as the majority of historical records on the immigrant mining community are very negative”, concluding that “we feel it is important to highlight these contemporary views so that families know what their ancestors faced”\textsuperscript{40}. The Scottish press of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century described Lithuanians as drunkards “most filthy in their habits of life”\textsuperscript{41}. In his research, Millar found contemporary newspapers full of “animosity, ill-feeling and prejudice” (Millar); he quotes speeches at miners’ meetings made by Keir Hardie, a labour organizer and later a well-known member of parliament, including allegations that Lithuanians had brought immorality and the Black Death to Scotland. Hardie described the migrants as primitive people who “ate garlic fried in lamp oil”; more seriously, he argued for a purist approach to hiring miners: “decent men are not going to be turned adrift to make room for beastly, filthy foreigners”\textsuperscript{42}. Even when more than a decade had passed, the migrants, almost always referred to as Poles though they were Lithuanian, were repeatedly said to be unskilled workers who would cause major accidents in the mines\textsuperscript{43}. 

Ethnic prejudice was also connected to the rapidity with which Lithuanian migrants changed their names to English or Scottish ones. Not all accounts show much understanding of the hostility which Lithuanians encountered on coming to Scotland. Kazimieras Barėnas’ “Britanijos lietuviai” (1978) criticizes these Lithuanians for not learning English and remaining within their ethnic communities, as well as for anglicizing their names\textsuperscript{44}. Barėnas was not aware that the change in names was imposed by their employers. Millar, a second-generation Lithuanian from Bellshill, testifies that his birth name of Jonas Stepšis was simply changed to John Millar, something that happened to all Lithuanians: “without even a by-your-leave, the Lithuanian names were anglicized turning Stepšis, Rusgis, Va- sauskas, Navickas, Domeika, etc. into Millar, Smith, West, Wallace, Brown, etc.”. He also remarks on the absurdity with which some of these English names were later further altered in “one Lothian parish” by the addition of the suffix ‘ski” to Millarski, Smithski and the like, probably to label the nameholder as an alien\textsuperscript{45}. Another historical source states that name changes frequently took place at the pit-head, as the migrants were being introduced to their work\textsuperscript{46}. 

However, the major blow to the Bellshill Lithuanian community came unexpectedly, during World War I, when Britain signed the Anglo-Russian Military Convention in July 1917 and classified Lithuanians living in Britain as Russian subjects. As Millar explains, all men between 18 and 41 were ordered to either join the British army or return to serve in the Russian one. This was a period of very high losses among British soldiers in the Western trenches so that it is not surprising that over a thousand Lithuanian men chose to

\textsuperscript{40} “Immigrants in Scottish Mining Communities”, \textit{Scottish Mining Website}, 2006–2018, www.scottishmining. co.uk/476.html.

\textsuperscript{41} “Lithuanians in Scotland”.

\textsuperscript{42} Millar, “When, How and Why”.

\textsuperscript{43} “Immigrants in Scottish Mining Communities”.

\textsuperscript{44} Barėnas, \textit{Britanijos lietuviai}, 345.

\textsuperscript{45} Millar, “When, How and Why”.

\textsuperscript{46} “Lithuanians in Scotland”.

70 \textbf{OIKOS LIETUVIŲ MIGRACIJOS IR DIASPOROS STUDIJOS}
return to Russia. Only about a third of them ever came back to Britain, while their wives and children suffered as paupers, some of whom were later sent to Lithuania.

The Bellshill Lithuanian community did not disappear, but it was further weakened by an economic decline as the coalfields were exhausted in the interwar period. The Lithuanian hall in Bellshill remained an important centre of activity into the 21st century, but the vibrant community of the early 20th century is not even well known historically.

**The Lithuanian community in Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, Canada**

Much the same fate awaited a smaller community in the Cape Breton region of Atlantic Canada. In Lithuanian migration history the settlement in Sydney Mines is interesting in part because it constituted the first real Lithuanian community in Canada. At first glance, Cape Breton is not friendly territory for settlement, as the soil is very rocky, arable land is scarce and the climate can only be described as severe. However, Sydney Mines, like Bellshill, was distinguished geologically by rich deposits of coal. Some of these were so near the surface that what later became a number of small towns was first simply known as ‘the Mines’; from 1766 coal was dug up for the local market. In the late 19th century Eastern Canada experienced the same demand for coal to heat homes, run trains and boats and provide energy for factories that took place in Britain earlier; this encouraged industrial companies to study the prospects for large-scale mining in Cape Breton.

Unlike Bellshill, Sydney Mines was in an isolated and thinly populated region, populated by indigenous people, French, English and especially Scottish settlers. As historians emphasize, the mining boom, along with the construction of iron and steel mills, altered the ethnic character of Cape Breton; what was still, in other parts of Nova Scotia, primarily a Scottish and English world, suddenly became a truly multicultural one. The alteration of Sydney Mines was particularly striking: from a quiet hamlet it became a proper town with paved streets, electricity, and the organization of water and sewer systems, while its population, along with Lithuanians, now included Italians, Poles, East European Jews, Germans, Austrians African-Americans and Barbadians.

Like Bellshill, Sydney Mines did not become very large: at its peak in 1932 its population was about 10,000. However, again like Bellshill, it was a significant industrial centre in its country. The Princess Colliery pit in Sydney Mines was in operation from 1875 to 1975 and produced 30 million tons of coal. It is calculated that by the end of World War I Cape Breton collieries annually produced 44% of Canada’s coal and its factories processed more than a third of Canada’s iron and steel.

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47 Millar, "When, How and Why”.  
49 “Industrial Cape Breton”.  
50 “History”, Sydney Mines Online.  
Nonetheless, as John Demont asserts, this was at a cost of human life and serious environmental damage. Enormous landfills and mounting heaps of waste poisoned the air and water in the nearby harbour. Work in both the mines and the steel mills was very unhealthy and dangerous. Accidents, which have always been a feature of mining, were commonplace in the first decades of the 20th century as owners took risky decisions in order to increase profits. The coalfields at Sydney Mines had a feature that heightened the usual danger of tunnels because some of these were extended as far as eight kilometers under the ocean floor.

As Gaida indicates, the Lithuanian history of the area began on September 14, 1903, when Anthony Glinsky took a job in Sydney Mines, leading the way for other Lithuanian migrants. Later in the same autumn of 1903 three other Lithuanian migrants, the Starka brothers, decided to settle in Montreal, beginning the permanent history of the colony there. But over the next years, many Lithuanians, after landing in Montreal, went on to Cape Breton; some of these brought families with them.

Although some websites written by Nova Scotian researchers refer to these migrants as being from Lithuania, A. Glinsky and other Cape Breton settlers did not come directly from Lithuania; it seems they had left their homeland years earlier and were now migrating from Scotland. Glasgow is mentioned in Gaida’s account, but given that they were miners, their most recent place of settlement was likely to have been Bellshill.

Why Canada? It can be assumed that most Lithuanians would have preferred the United States. However, the migratory trajectory to Cape Breton was grounded on strong links between Bellshill and Sydney Mines: both were places that needed men ready to take on the dangerous work of coal mining, and Lithuanians from Bellshill were already experienced miners.

Certainly, the Scots connection was significant. The Atlantic provinces of Canada and especially Nova Scotia, as its name attests, were heavily settled by Scots. Even more important, the development of Cape Breton mining was carried out by Scottish companies, who organized the migration of Scottish workers.

Seen as migrants in a rhizome pattern of migration, Lithuanians probably did not much care whether they worked as miners in Scotland or in Canada. As has been stated, life in Scotland was clouded by racism, with the Lithuanians a small minority within a large conservative Scottish society. In this newly industrialized Cape Breton they found themselves one of many ethnic minorities. In addition, further migration out of Scotland to Canada was easy since Canada was still very much a British colony so that migrants would not have faced the kind of strict immigration standards raised by the United States. Nor did the Lithuanians have to worry about competing with hostile local workers, as they did in Scotland. It is said that English Canadians put off because working conditions at Cape Breton steel plants were notoriously “dangerous and often deadly.” In any case, as the results show, foreign labour

53 Gaida, Lithuanians in Canada, 25.
54 Ibid.; also personal information to author of this article, Cape Breton, 1971.
56 “Industrial Cape Breton.”
was certainly encouraged. One historian asserts\(^\text{57}\): “In the 30 years between 1890 and 1920, Industrial Cape Breton became the most cosmopolitan area of Maritime Canada”.

One characteristic of this multi-ethnic society that would have reminded Lithuanians of their homeland was that East European Jews came here in relatively large numbers; according to Ben Rose, there were up to 2,500. The Jewish migrants did not take up industrial jobs, but started as peddlers and developed into owners of stores\(^\text{58}\).

Although the broad context of Lithuanian settlement in Cape Breton in the first decades of the 20th century is clear, the subject has still not been sufficiently researched to provide many details about the experiences of individuals or their organized activity. Still, from a historian’s point of view, the situation has altered in a positive way since my earlier investigations of the 1980s. Nova Scotian historians are taking an interest in studies ethnic minorities who worked in the mines. The establishment of the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University now provides a professional archive for local materials.

Another factor aiding research is the growth of websites that cater to the rising interest in genealogical research. This will make it possible to illuminate the Lithuanian past in Cape Breton through details about specific migrants and their families. For this article, A. Glinsky, who is identified as the first immigrant in Gaida’s account of Sydney Mines, offers a guiding thread to what was clearly a growing and active Lithuanian community, particularly for its Catholic side. Gaida’s account of contacts between A. Glinsky and Rev. Vyšniauskas, who was working in Montreal, raises some problems, as he indicates 1911 as the year of their interaction, while sources on Vyšniauskas place him in Montreal only in 1912 or 1914\(^\text{59}\).

In any case, even if A. Glinsky first wrote to a priest working earlier in Montreal, it would have been Vyšniauskas that corresponded with him later. Vyšniauskas (1881–1949) was another of the peripatetic, extremely energetic Lithuanian patriots like Juozas Bagdonas and the Rev. Juozas Gutauskas who played important roles in Bellshill. In Montreal, where the previous priests had failed to build a Lithuanian church, Vyšniauskas managed this quickly; he also established four Lithuanian schools supported by municipal funding. However, when Lithuanian independence was declared, he turned his energies to helping his homeland; by 1919 he was back in his homeland, a volunteer and chaplain in the army. Much later, he rose to the challenge of Soviet occupation by serving as the chaplain for the partisans of his region, which led to his arrest and death in a Soviet camp in 1949\(^\text{60}\).

A. Glinsky and other Lithuanian Catholics in Sydney Mines were encouraged to take the traditional first step to forming a Catholic parish by establishing a Catholic benefit society; Gaida states that the patriotically named St. Casimir’s Society was created on 3 April 1911\(^\text{61}\). The Glinsky family was both community-minded and pious; three daughters of the nine children of Anthony and Magdalen Glinsky entered a local branch of the

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\(^{57}\) Ibid.


\(^{60}\) Vaičiūnas, “Vyšniauskas, Juozas”.

\(^{61}\) Gaida, Lithuanians in Canada, 25.
Quebec-centred Congregation of Notre-Dame. It was one of these, Sister Magdalen, who showed historical consciousness by safeguarding the St. Casimir Society’s minutes and depositing these along with a badge of the society in the Beaton Institute archives.

Obituaries, which in general offer a good deal of information, suggest that the family was upwardly mobile, as it supported higher education for both sons and daughters. Aside from the three daughters who became nuns, George became a chemist and Nellie a nurse anesthetist. The obituaries for Nellie (1917–2005) and George (1927–2015) Glinsky specifically name Sydney Mines as their birthplace. Nellie’s obituary lists by name her five brothers and three sisters, while George’s refers to his “Lithuanian immigrant parents”. Religion was a defining element in their identity: both continued their parents’ involvement in local Catholic activities.

Another source of historical information is the local graveyard. As is shown by their choice of inscriptions on gravestones for their parents in St. Joseph’s Cemetery, the Glinsky children were raised to think of the family as Lithuanian. In a recently-compiled list of gravestone inscriptions in this cemetery, it is seen that Anthony and Magdalena’s children combined their parents’ Lithuanianism with their piety. The Glinsky stones are the only ones in a multitude of memorials with non-English words used in inscriptions compiled by Candace Boudreau and Beverly Darby-Brown (acc. 1 March 2019). They chose the opening line of the “Our Father” prayer in Lithuanian for their father’s stone (“Teve musu kurs esī dancuje”; language as in original) and the first words of the “Hail Mary” for their mother Magdalen (“Sveika Marija, malones pilnoji”; language as in original). The Glinsky stones are the only ones in a multitude of memorials using non-English words.

More research needs to be done on the St. Casimir’s Society created in Sydney Mines, now that it is known that its constitution and minutes were deposited in the Beaton Institute archive. Gaida’s account explains that between 1911 and 1919 the society had 79 members. Given that such societies did not admit women as members, this is not a small number. In comparison, in 1906 the St. Casimir’s Society in Montreal had 72 members, but it grew rapidly to 317 in 1913, when plans were made for establishing a Lithuanian parish. In Sydney Mines 79 seems to have been the highest number of members. Nevertheless, the more modest project of building a hall on Pond Street was carried out successfully in 1915. According to Gaida, this hall was closed in 1919 when mines shut down; with the end of World War I, it is likely that demand went down, at least temporarily but, in any case, many Lithuanians left the town. The Cape Breton area was more vulnerable economically than Bellshill, where laid-off miners might find other work in the nearby industrial city of Glasgow. In general, however, it is typical for those involved in rhizome migration
to move readily from one place to another according to economic fluctuations. For this reason, rhizome communities disappear easily: their members re-group in other settlements, but the communities may vanish from historical accounts as well.

Conclusion

This article considers that the current concept of a diaspora, with its emphasis on strong emotional links to the homeland, needs to be reviewed in the light of the diversity in migration processes and the communities that are produced. Looking at Lithuanian migration studies, it becomes evident that not enough attention has been paid to the differences between an ideologically-driven migration like that of the DPs after World War II and one governed by individual decisions, mostly economic, like those from Lithuania in the late 19th century and the earlier 20th century, as well as migration since 1990. The drama and single-mindedness of the DP diaspora makes those established before and after them pale in comparison. However, instead of judging these different migrants according to the DP model, it is helpful to use the rhizome metaphor; rhizomic migration is a horizontal, ongoing movement outside the homeland. In this case, too, a diaspora of Lithuanian communities exists, but it is a less-easily defined structure which sometimes can be characterized by impermanence and a broad range of ideological beliefs. This kind of diaspora is not inferior to the one formed by the DPs, but simply different. Indeed, for Lithuanian history, rhizomic migration is the rule and the DP migration the exception. This is important in analyzing and predicting migratory and institutional patterns in the present movement of Lithuanians since the re-establishment of state independence in 1990.

References


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DIAZPORA KAIP PROBLEMINĖ SĄVOKA: LIETUVIŲ MIGRACIJOS ISTORIJOS PAVYZDŽIAI


Raktąžodžiai: diasporos teorija, rizoidinė migracijos teorija, lietuvių migracija, lietuviai Belshilyje, lietuviai Sidni Mainse.

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