

An Ethnologist in the Face of Migration Challenges: Evidence from Antanas Mažiulis's Letters

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Abstract. Focusing on the experience of the Lithuanian diaspora in the mid-twentieth century, the article explores the challenges that forced migration poses to the formation of community and the preservation of personal identity. As evidence of individual experience, letters become the foundation for studies that seek to understand how an individual adapts emotionally and culturally to a new environment without losing connection with his or her origins. The study is relevant within the fields of cultural, migration, and identity studies, in which increasing attention is directed towards subjective narratives and autobiographical sources.

Keywords: Antanas Mažiulis, letters, culture shock in the USA, cultural identity, forced migration

Introduction

Antanas Mažiulis (1914–2007) was a renowned researcher of Lithuanian folklore, an ethnologist, a Lithuanian language and literature scholar by education, as well as a dedicated social activist and bibliophile. He studied at Vytautas

Magnus University and Vilnius University between 1938 and 1943 and graduated with a degree in Lithuanian philology from the University of Tübingen in Germany in 1949. Escaping Soviet repression, in 1944 he fled to the West together with Česlovas Grincevičius.¹ Although initially he did not plan to go to the USA, he did not feel safe in Europe and, following the example of his friends, he moved to America, hoping not to stay there permanently and return to a free Lithuania or to collect research material in European archives. However, he was unable to return to Europe and spent the first two years living in Brooklyn, New York City.²

Reflected in his letters, Mažiulis's first experiences in the USA are unique in that they were recounted not to his relatives in Lithuania, but to his comrades, friends, and colleagues living in free countries, and therefore the letters openly and bluntly describe the environment, his personal emotions, and experiences. The uniqueness of these letters was emphasised by a number of his correspondents. From 1933, Mažiulis had distinguished himself with his journalistic talent³ writing for various Lithuanian and émigré publications and encyclopaedias. His contribution to the methodology of collecting folklore and material of regional studies, numerous reviews, and scholarly articles demonstrate his broad academic field.

In examining the multi-layered and complex problem of the impact of crises on the expression of community spirit, this study pays particular attention to the experience of forced migration. As a social and cultural phenomenon, migration fundamentally transforms an individual's relationship with their community, identity, and social environment. One of the main ways of investigating this problem is analysing the ways forced migration affects human integration into a new community, the challenges posed by culture shock and social adaptation, and the manner in which the migrants reflect on their opportunities to pursue personal goals in a new environment. The most effective method is a case study based on research on the personal experiences of a migrant, which makes it possible to reveal the impact of the culture shock, individual experiences, and adaptation strategies. By recording emotional states, worldviews, and sociocultural reflections, migrants' letters become an important source of cultural and social documentation.

The article draws on theoretical approaches to migration, social memory, and cultural identity. Robin Cohen (2019) describes migration as a comprehensive, multi-layered process that affects both individuals and global structures.

He emphasises that migrants often face identity crises as they try to reconcile their own culture with that of their new country, which can lead to conflict or become a source of cultural diversity. Kalervo Oberg (1960) described the culture shock experienced by migrants by distinguishing several stages of adaptation, from euphoria to frustration and final integration. These stages find their reflection in migrants' letters, which display ambivalent emotions, doubts, longing, and efforts to maintain a connection with their past identity. In developing his theory of collective memory, Pierre Nora (1989) points out that collective memory evolves through symbolic signs and personal testimonies, such as letters, diaries, or memoirs. Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues that collective memory is constantly reconstructed in social interaction and that migration experiences become an important part of this memory. In his research on identity formation, Stuart Hall (1990) emphasises that migrant identity is a constantly changing process of negotiation and reflection, especially when faced with culture shock and the norms of a new society.

As one of the components of egodocuments⁴ letters often exhibit subjectivity, autobiographical and emotional expression, and the ability to reveal authentic experiences and individual perceptions of the world. According to Waldemar Chorańczewski and Agnieszka Rosa, when applying anthropological approaches to egodocuments, it is not facts or their veracity that are addressed but rather how writers experience reality, how they perceive and reflect on it (Chorańczewski, Rosa 2013: 31). Letters are regarded as documents that reflect a particular era, culture, and social practices, but at the same time, they are partly literary texts with rhetorical and stylistic features. Egodocuments play an important role in migration studies. An article by Edith Saurer and Annamarie Steidl analyses the ways egodocuments (i.e., personal testimonies such as letters, diaries, autobiographies, etc.) provide valuable insight into individual migration processes that are often overlooked in official historical sources. Egodocuments allow readers to delve into migrants' feelings, moods, memories, and personal insights of migration processes. The authors note, as does David Gerber (2006), that they may contain distorted or biased experiences that depend on personal perspective (Saurer, Steidl 2013).

The object of this study is Antanas Mažiulis's letters written in 1951–1952, immediately upon his arrival in the United States, when he lived in Brooklyn. The letters reveal the unique experience of Lithuanian émigrés in the mid-twentieth century; some of them can be considered texts of a reflective or

imaginative nature. As Fatemeh Pourjafari and Abdolali Vahidpour (2014) note, such texts “reflect a complex and ambiguous reality, and therefore convey people’s feelings and understanding much more reliably than most academic artifacts.” Letters are analysed in terms of their ambivalence: as a long-term emotional condition, a situational attitude, or even an existential position.

A set of 42 letters selected for analysis⁵ is interpreted using a contextual and thematic content analysis method. The letters are analysed not only as a means of communication but also as emotional and cultural texts capturing the subjective experiences of migration: reflections on identity, emotional states, and forms of expression. These egodocuments reveal both individual and collective experiences of the émigrés, for example identity crises, ambivalent relationships with American society and the Lithuanian community, efforts to preserve cultural identity and continue scholarly vocation under new conditions.

The aim of this study is to show how the ethnologist’s reflection and humanitarian stance in exile become a form of resistance to superficiality and the fading of cultural identity. The main themes raised in Mažiulis’s letters, which reveal his conception of reality, are analysed. The study raises the following questions: how are experiences of culture shock and integration expressed in these letters? What emotional states dominate the letters in the early period of migration?

Based on relevant theoretical approaches and contemporary migration studies, such a study contributes to a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Lithuanian diaspora and the effect of migration on identity and cultural memory.

The addressees, the style, and the themes of the letters

During the period under review, letters were written to various addressees: friends, comrades, colleagues, clergymen, and professors residing in free countries. Letters are considered egodocuments: they are subjective texts that record not only personal experiences but also the broader cultural, political, and social field of the diaspora. Aistė Kučinskienė notes that letters are a “medium of self-expression and self-creation” in which writers do not so much reveal their existing identities as shape them through their relationship with specific addressees (Kučinskienė 2019: 35). Therefore, the object of the

study encompasses not only the content of a letter, but also the building of the relationship with the reader (addressee) through language, tone, style, and communication structure.

The letters analysed clearly reveal such themes as the search for identity, migration insecurity, political disappointment, and cultural resistance. This is reflected in the following quotes: “We are Europeans, so everything seems strange, especially when you start thinking with your stomach.” ((To Ivinskis)⁶, 20 May 1951);⁷ “I’ll paint a new tail for some devil of mine” (to Juozas (Lingis), 28 May 1951); “I serve no emperor but suck a bear’s paw” (to Česlovas (Grincevičius), 21 September 1951). It is through such vivid expressions that Mažiulis conveys not only his emotional state but also an immigrant’s inner struggle against the values of a new culture.

The language used in the letters is informal, demotic, brimming with metaphors, irony, and humour, revealing the writer’s literary sensitivity and his cultural reflexivity. A specific manner of speaking is chosen for each addressee: familiar, witty, full of slang and nicknames for friends; respectful, intellectual, often argumentative, as well as emotional and critical for priests and professors; gentle, sensitive, thoughtful for women.

The influence of the addressee on the form of communication. A summary table

Type of the addressee	Language style/tone	Features of the forms of address/place names ⁸ /signatures ⁹
Professors	Formal respect, intellectual analysis	“Dear Professor”/“Brooklyn”/signature – “Yours”
Clergymen	Merged respect (sometimes warm, other times formal)	“Dear Priest”, “Revered”/“Brooklyn”/“Yours”
Juozas Lingis ¹⁰ (a colleague)	Direct, professional	“Dear Juozas”, “Juozas”/“Brooklyn”, “Velnyne” (devils’ lair)/“Yours”

Friends (in Germany)	Familiar, ironic, emotional charge	“To my remaining friends”, “Hello those who haven’t sold their souls”/“The trash heap”/ no signature or “Yours”
Associates (from the Šatrija association)	Caricatured, with pseudonyms, patriotically ironic	“Apuokėlis” (owlet), “Murza”, “Untė”/“Biesynė” (devils’ place), “Pasaulio šiukšlynė” (world’s garbage dump), “Vėlnių šiukšlynė” (devils’ garbage dump)/sometimes signed “Your Brisius”
Women¹¹	Intimate, gentle, nostalgic	Diminutive names/“Golden city”/“Your Tūlis”, “Karšinėlis” (old man in need of care)
Česlovas Grincevičius (a friend)	Mixed – critical and witty	By name or “Dear Česlovas”, sometimes “Hello Martyr of Martyrs”, “Noble creature”/“Doghouse”/“Antanas”, “Karšinėlis”

Letters to Grincevičius and some of his female correspondents most clearly reveal his emotional and value conflict and his inner non-reconciliation with the realities of migration. Alongside academic discussions, political deliberations and social critique dominate his letters to professors (in particular to Juozas Brazaitis,¹² Antanas Maceina¹³). For example, in a letter to Brazaitis, Mažiulis writes that he is delighted at the achievements of the Lithuanians¹⁴, seeing this as an important step that could influence international politics; however, that same letter reveals internal criticism and competition between various political figures and groups, which points to certain political struggles and disagreements (9 November 1951).

Letters become a communicative space where Mažiulis conveys his knowledge or emotions and simultaneously constructs his place between different worlds: Lithuanian and American, academic and mundane, personal and collective. They are a multifaceted form of narrative that combines autobiography, cultural criticism, ideological commentary, and emotional self-reflection.

In Antanas Mažiulis's letters that I analysed, themes recur (for instance, he described his first visit to a museum to Ivinskis, Grincevičius, and two women – A. and R.), although it is possible to distinguish the dominant topics by the groups of addressees. This helps reveal the thematic distribution of the narrative and changes in emphasis depending on the communication partner. The table below is based on data from the analysis of 42 letters.

Distribution of dominant topics in letters by group of addressees

Group of addressees	Most frequently discussed themes	Nature of themes
Professors	Reflections on migration, culture shock, social issues in the USA, politics, requests for recommendations, academic deliberations	Intellectual, analytical, critical
Clergymen	Spiritual quests, the moral situation of the Lithuanian diaspora, the relationship between religion and nationalism, political commentary	Ethical, reflective, partially apologetic
Colleagues	Academic news, ethnological deliberations, preservation of Lithuanian culture, job search in the USA	Theme-based, professional, matter-of-fact
Friends (in Germany)	Nostalgia, wartime and post-war experiences, daily challenges, the theme of resistance, irony, memories	Emotional, witty, nostalgic
Associates (from the Šatrija association)	Social criticism in the USA, living conditions, work experiences, national self-awareness, literary metaphors, satire	Ironic, culturally engaged
Women	Personal experiences, emotional loneliness, adapting to a new environment, nostalgia for relationships	Intimate, gentle, autobiographical
Česlovas Grincevičius (a friend)	Deep political analysis, details of daily life, psychological tensions, personal identity conflict, criticism of the diaspora	Combined – emotional and analytical

The table shows that letters are multi-layered acts of communication in which the subject matter and style of expression are closely related to the identity of a specific addressee and their relationship with the author.

This multi-layered analysis of texts allows the study to pinpoint key issues, such as how identity, worldview, ideological stance, and cultural affiliation are reflected in letters; how the figure of the addressee functions in the dynamics of the narrative; and how both personal and collective experiences of exile are revealed through epistolary practice.

I Analysis of American society from an ethnological point of view

First impressions, the environment, and contrasting values. “For me, as for many, the beginning was more than bitter, especially after settling in this city” ((to Brazaitis), 9 May 1951). Mažiulis describes his experience of arriving in the United States as a particularly strong culture shock. Upon arrival, he is constantly asked, “Do you like America?”, and at first he responds with an un-informed ‘like’, but he soon realises that he should say ‘very like’. This becomes a metaphor for Americanisation, polite but superficial adaptation. He was also bothered by the climate, which was unusual for him:

I am bothered by hardships, as before. It is hard to imagine a bathhouse like the one here now. You sit there and sweat pours off you. It doesn't seem that hot, only about 36 European degrees, but there's that water that saturates the air. The worst thing is that you can't sleep because it's fiercer than in a bathhouse (to Tadas (Alinskas),¹⁵ 17 July 1951).

Another strong impression is that of a world resembling a “dump”, both literally and metaphorically. According to him, the trash here symbolises not only physical pollution of the environment, but also a deep spiritual decline arising from a consumerist and materialistic model of society. Mažiulis notes that European and especially Lithuanian values¹⁶ remain strong, but the encounter with the new environment causes existential turmoil and drives him to despair. He is critical of the American notion of freedom¹⁷, which he considers simplistic and often reduced to an individualistic, self-serving pursuit of ‘freedom’ detached from deeper values. In his view, the American way of life is too heavily based

on material goals, and money becomes the central social unit of measurement. According to him, migrants often 'sell their Lithuanian soul' by adapting to a new system in which consumption and financial success become the most important aspects.

As Mažiulis describes, the urban environment appears to be repulsive: it is depicted as overflowing with trash, aesthetically unappealing, and chaotic. Here, the architecture of skyscrapers is not a result of aesthetic expression but rather an expression of functional planning. The author notes that due to natural conditions, in particular strong winds, piles of rubbish often accumulate in the city, interfere with daily life, and point to a lack of urban planning. This view of the city seems to him to be significantly different from the more orderly, aesthetic, and human-friendlier urban environment in Lithuania. Mažiulis interprets this situation as an indication of the chaos of industrial civilisation and alienation of humans from their environment.

When reflecting on the American notion of freedom, the author contemplates the paradoxes of work and freedom. In his opinion, many migrants arrive with illusions of greater opportunities and personal freedom, but in reality they encounter a situation where 'freedom' manifests itself as coercion to work non-stop in pursuit of material well-being. According to Mažiulis, this situation creates dependence on work and money but brings neither spiritual fulfilment nor meaning to life. He expresses his disappointment with a social system in which human existence becomes enslaved to constant demands for productivity and lacks deeper existential motivation.

Yet Mažiulis notes another, more positive aspect of freedom in American life: work, which is perceived not only as a necessity, but also as a source of joy. He points out that in US culture, work is often seen as the main purpose of life, and hard physical labour does not inflict misery but brings satisfaction. In his words, "the hardest work here brings joy to people", and this means that work becomes a means not only of securing a livelihood but also of spiritual self-expression. He finds this approach fundamentally different from that of Eastern Europe, especially societies influenced by the Soviet legacy, where work was perceived as an imposed duty inseparable from coercion and constant dissatisfaction.

Social reality and working conditions in the US context. In the letters dated 1951/1952, Mažiulis consistently reveals the difficulties he encountered in trying to establish himself in the US labour market. He is critical of a system

in which social status, personal connections, and recommendations become essential factors even when seeking even the lowest-skilled job. He says that without the so-called 'American papers' and relevant recommendations, even the simplest duties remain unattainable. He draws attention to the requirements of some jobs, which he considers unreasonable or even absurd, for example, one's appearance or age become decisive selection criteria regardless of competence or work experience.

These aspects reveal Mažiulis's deeper disappointment with American work culture, in which, as he points out, human value is often reduced to financial expression. He sums it up succinctly: "A person's value is based on the amount of dollars they have." Hard physical labour, low pay, and constant fatigue become the main aspects of his migration experience. Reflecting autobiographically, Mažiulis mentions summer jobs for one dollar an hour, comparing them to his previous, better-paid, and socially more stable jobs in Europe. Speaking about the Lithuanian diaspora, the historian Daiva Dapkutė noted that "many countries were looking for a manual labour force after the war, and Lithuanians had to reorient themselves while experiencing social degradation as few were able to find work within their professions." (2017: 66). Furthermore, as Mažiulis's letters show, his pride and his desire to preserve his personal dignity stop him from taking advantage of social benefits, even though this could alleviate his situation. He is unable to "tell lies in the American way" ((to Ivinskis), ? December 1952) in order to receive unemployment benefit, which demonstrates both his ethical idealism and his inability to adapt to the new system. He conveys this inner conflict with an ironic statement: "Your *žilvinas*¹⁸ doesn't know how to deal with pigs, he still behaves like a noble ..." (to Juozas (Lingis), 23 October 1952).

Criticism is also directed at the US bureaucratic system, which, according to Mažiulis, is based on an employer–employee dependency model. He is of the view that although individuals in the United States are formally considered free, in reality they are constantly monitored and registered according to their employer rather than their independent identity. This, he believes, creates control structures that limit personal autonomy, contrary to what is declared in public discourse.

Racism and social inequality: ethnic minorities in US society. Along with analysing working conditions, Mažiulis devotes considerable attention in his letters to the topics of racism and social exclusion. He says that discrimination

is deeply rooted in American society, affecting not only black people but other ethnic and cultural minorities as well. He notes that various groups, including immigrants, often face preconceived stereotypes that limit their opportunities in the labour market and social life. This problem is particularly acute in the southern states, where, in his view, racial differences still carry significant social weight.

Although he acknowledges that the values declared in the United States – tolerance, racial equality, recognition of cultural diversity – exist in theory, in practice they often remain unfulfilled in everyday life. He notes critically that American culture tends to overemphasise its own values but lacks an open and sincere attitude towards traditions of other nations. Such value-based closed-mindedness contributes to social exclusion and intolerance.

Mažiulis pays particular attention to the situation of Lithuanian migrants (displaced persons, or DPs). He says that this community often faces various obstacles arising from ethnic origin, religious beliefs, or even historical associations, such as the stereotype of ‘fascists’. For these reasons, the integration of Lithuanians into American society is slow and often painful. He describes how this group experiences exclusion on both social and cultural levels and how combating stereotypes and establishing themselves in a new environment becomes a complex and emotionally draining task.

Cultural and social differences through the eyes of an immigrant. Mažiulis’s letters reveal a deep cultural and value conflict between the Lithuanian worldview and American society, where, he believed at the time, he resided temporarily. He describes American society as highly consumerist and materialistic, where money becomes the main measure of an individual’s worth. In his opinion, this economic logic destroys spiritual values, and issues of morality and ethics are often marginalised. Mažiulis notes with some sadness that secularisation and the weakening of the significance of faith indicate a broader crisis of values, which is reflected at both the individual and societal levels.

In his letters, he goes on to reflect on the cultural differences between Americans and Lithuanians, particularly with regard to the concepts of family, religion, and community. Lithuanian immigrants are often forced to change their traditional values¹⁹ or abandon them in order to adapt to their new environment. He notes that this adaptation is not uniform: the older generation often feels disconnected, while younger people of Lithuanian origin tend to integrate quickly, even forgetting their origins. At the same time, he criticises certain

tensions and disagreements between the Lithuanian and American clergy, especially regarding the interpretation of religious practices and traditions.

Mažiulis criticism extends to Americans' relationship with money and its sacralisation. Here, the dollar acquires not only economic but also symbolic significance by becoming a moral compass. Mažiulis observes that many Americans live isolated in their routines, and money becomes not a means to an end, but an end in itself. In his opinion, "Maceina should have lived here for at least a year, then he would have been able to write more vividly and accurately about the three temptations of devil, which are so evident in the life of this free country" (to Antanas Styra,²⁰ 17 November 1951).

The letters convey details of everyday life that expose cultural paradoxes. For example, Mažiulis describes the freedom enjoyed by children when out on the streets, which sometimes evolves into disregard for behavioural norms. The phenomenon of waste management is also discussed. When playing with discarded objects, children creatively reconstruct their environment, for example, by turning old sofas into playgrounds. In addition to providing an illustration of cultural differences, these observations ironically reflect on the attitude of American society toward consumption and the transience of objects.

Mažiulis notes that despite industrial growth, the social and economic situation in New York remains difficult. A significant proportion of the population is unemployed, and the labour market is unstable and difficult for immigrants to access. He plans to work only until Christmas, aiming to accumulate enough money to return to Europe. This temporary residence strategy reflects a lack of adaptation to the US way of life and social system.

Mažiulis provides an observation on the cultural and academic environment in the USA. In his opinion, museum exhibitions lack the systematic approach to science that is characteristic of Germans: they are often fragmented, unfounded and, in some cases, vulgar. For example, he considers the depiction of the menstrual cycle to be excessive and inappropriately conveyed. The dominance of Darwinist ideas, the treatment of human culture as a natural phenomenon, and the merger of anthropology with palaeontology or mineralogy seem to him to be a distorted understanding of human history and culture. He is particularly critical of the reduction of folklore to commercial forms and considers the cowboy-style storytelling tradition not to be folklore but a commercial imitation.

The letters go on to criticise the internal cultural state of the Lithuanian diaspora. He views the Lithuanian press with sarcasm, calling it worthless, and national consciousness superficial. Parochial thinking, indifference to cultural activities, and unwillingness to invest in meaningful projects are considered signs of community weakness. However, he acknowledges Lithuanians' ability to endure and suffer, at the same time urging them to speak out, because suppressed experiences of pain, especially those related to deportation and spiritual humiliation, can turn into inner alienation.

Mažiulis's criticism does not spare **religious practices and the Catholic tradition** either. He notes that American Catholic practice focuses primarily on money, donations, and church statistics, and that religion often becomes a mechanism associated with social status and traditions that do not always correspond to the depth of faith. Priests are hypocrites, seekers of power and money, and parish houses are run not by priests but by the "little ladies" (housekeepers) who manage everything from parish organisations to monitoring people's "loyalty": "God rules only heaven, and he gave the earth to the parish priest, who in turn ... handed it over to the little lady" (to a woman I., 14 August 1951). Mažiulis criticises priests and newspapers, which only report on picnics, name days, and "toilet matters". He writes: "Let those grunTERS read that there is another science besides engineering and the priesthood" (to Juozas (Lingis) 13 June 1951). This satire is directed at the "American horns", i.e., priests who have turned religion into a convenient, commercial, empty form.

Mažiulis's criticism also covers social inequality as he notes that even after death, people remain divided by their monetary value. He observes ironically, writing to a woman, I., that on a monument in the cemetery, "the initial of the name cannot be carved because he is a beggar." This is a cruel caricature of reality: even a name is not allowed for a beggar because he or she does not deserve an identity. Mažiulis notes that even the symbols of justice become slaves to money when "the angel wants a little bribe..." and "the beggar is unnecessary" (to a woman I., 1951. VIII. 14.). This phrase is bursting with irony: even the messengers of heaven are corrupt – they would only collect sweat and tears from the rich, because they would give 'tips'.

Thus, the letters convey the cultural distance between the migrant and the host society. Mažiulis is sceptical about the values declared by the USA – tolerance, equality, cultural diversity –, which, in his opinion, often remain unfulfilled in reality. He gives examples of how religious or faith-based public

figures often attract negative reactions, which points to the contradictions between public rhetoric and everyday practice. Finally, in criticising American anthropology and its approach to culture, Mažiulis emphasises the need to view the evolution of culture and science not only rationally, but also sensitively: as a living and meaningful part of human existence.

II Academic activities, personal struggles, and maintaining identity in exile

Mažiulis's letters as documents of cultural resistance. In exile, Mažiulis experiences academic and social exclusion. He feels unwelcome, unfit (*"trefnas"*) in the scholarly community, which instead of fostering creative cultural revival becomes a source of disappointment. For him, the publication of the encyclopaedia, which was supposed to be the pinnacle of cultural activity, becomes a sad reminder of internal issues among the editorial board. He describes the editorial team as unproductive and superficial, and some of the editors as individuals who adapted to the Soviet regime of 1940 and were appointed as 'professors' not for their merits but for their loyalty to the occupying power. In his letters, he encourages his colleagues to speak out about inappropriate editorial decisions.

Despite these challenges, Mažiulis does not abandon his main mission to consistently collect, systematise, and interpret Lithuanian folklore and elements of material culture. His correspondence discusses specific topics related to wooden architecture, folklore, and religion. He comments on the term *Kupolis* to his colleague, and his letters contain linguistic, etymological, and semantic analyses.

In his letters to colleagues, Mažiulis critically assesses the lack of competence in ethnography among some experts. According to him, important aspects of ethnic architecture are often ignored, and scholars tend to interpret Lithuania's ethnic heritage superficially or incorrectly. Even living in unfavourable conditions, Mažiulis remains faithful to scholarly idealism, nurturing the idea of compiling an ethnographic lexicon, striving to maintain academic integrity and leave behind a valuable scholarly legacy.

He is interested in comparative studies and analyses Slavic and Germanic cultural influence on Lithuanian religious tradition, emphasising the influence

of Eastern Christianity, which is often confused with paganism. He is critical of Western scholarly developments, which are still dominated by the outdated ideas of Taylor, Frazer and Darwin, and welcomes new trends in ethnology, especially the work of the Swedish researcher Albert Eskeröd. Mažiulis encourages Juozas Lingis to participate in international congresses and seek visibility for Lithuanian culture in the international context, without limiting himself to the circle of 'our own'. He writes articles for the magazine *Aidai* and is considering publishing in the American academic space. He also writes to a youth magazine: "I wouldn't write, as others do, but I can't help myself. Secondly, when you write, you free yourself from America and return home. When you write, you devote Saturdays and Sundays to your book and the library, spend a dollar or two you have saved on books (to Vincas (Natkevičius),²¹ 15 November 1951). He is delighted to find here the press and literature that was lacking in Germany (Tübingen), but is now constrained by his health.

Notwithstanding financial uncertainty (for example, unpaid academic work – "[they] will pay with a shovel after death"), he encourages others to work guided by idealism. Mažiulis is actively involved in the creation of the Institute of Lithuanian Studies, which, despite doubts about its success ("building castles in the sand"), he considers to be a potentially important centre of Lithuanian culture and science in the diaspora.

Despite his health issues, Mažiulis's letters reveal distinctly his fervent dedication to research: he continues his search for folkloric material, takes an interest in religious texts, and quotes historical sources. However, scholarly work in the American environment appears to be hardly possible as people are too much occupied, they have neither time nor desire to share:

Taking a break from work, I read or go round Brooklyn in search of folklore. However, people in Brooklyn are too proud, and I have no success. They are educated and wise, of course, because they've spent many years in America, while you are just a newcomer [grinorius]. Only one or another is sincere, but very difficult to catch, because even after the age of 65 they are still doing all kinds of extra work, even overtime ((to Jonas Balys),²² 17 April 1952).

He notes that, compared to Lithuania, cultural activities in America are often considered less significant and everyday life is permeated by commercial motives.

He is critical of advertising and the influence of television; he is of the view that the latter is often a substitute for religion, and even doctors are judged not on their professional competences but on their ability to represent themselves through advertising channels.

These scholarly endeavours are inseparable from Mažiulis's personal experience of life in exile, on which he reflects in detail in his letters. His attempts to adapt to the American environment unfold against a backdrop of constant tension: low-paid jobs, health problems, and rigorous social and cultural standards. He is open about his inability to establish himself in the labour market due to his accent, lack of citizenship, or even his 'incorrect' appearance, which, according to him, prevented him from obtaining an academic position. He feels tired and exhausted, calls himself lazy, although this is clearly not laziness but fatigue brought on by physical and emotional stress.

Emigration was so urgent that it was no longer possible to postpone. And so I left. Upon arrival, I started a philosophical life in the humanities, doing a little bit of everything. I've even given my share to society. Now I've been lazing about for two months already. The doctors are feeding me with digitalis, while I am railing at American haste and the steps of New York, which unravelled my heart like an old bast shoe (to Jonas (Znotinas),²³ 17 April 1952).

Economic hardship, debt, and constant physical fatigue highlight social instability and vulnerability. He directs his critique at the mechanisms of American work culture: employers appear ruthless, wages are low, immigrants often become a marginalised workforce. While working as a sweeper, he also experienced culture shock: he is amazed by social behaviour, which he finds liberated and even vulgarly open. He mentions the moral discomfort arising from the sexualised communication that prevails in workplaces, which he describes as "pan-sexualism", a phenomenon pointing to the fundamental difference between Lithuanian and American values.

Practical concerns are coupled with an increasingly apparent personal identity crisis. "I am still alive and single, only fishing with my tail like a wolf in an ice hole. I pull it out or it freezes, then all the consequences", he wrote to a newspaper editor (to Juozas (Prunskus?),²⁴ ? 1952). Mažiulis acknowledges the emotional loneliness, the inability to maintain close relationships, and describes life without a family as an "old bachelor's" existence, accompanied

by existential emptiness. Frustration is compounded by missed opportunities. He regrets unfulfilled relationships, unmet expectations, while adjustment to the new social order poses both practical and identity difficulties.

Yet even in this contextual exclusion, the author remains faithful to his ethnic and academic identity. In his letters he calls for Lithuanian values to be preserved, the pressures of American materialism to be resisted, and moral backbone to be maintained despite the circumstances. In his view, the orientation of American society towards economic success contradicts the deeper spiritual values cherished in Lithuania. Emigration therefore becomes not only an existential challenge, but also a moral test: it is an opportunity to remain himself, even if it means constant resistance to the prevailing system.

Political frustration: the fragmentation of the émigré community. Mažiulis's letters reveal deep political reflection that combines a critique of both American domestic policies and political activities of the Lithuanian diaspora. He writes about his frustration at the corruption and moral decay of the US political system, stressing the prevalence of bribery and the links to communist groups. These observations reveal his pessimism about America's ability to solve its domestic issues. He is equally disapproving of both Smetona's authoritarian regime in Lithuania and the Soviet occupation and voices his disappointment with the political situation both in Lithuania and the diaspora.

In his letters, Mažiulis discusses the internal conflicts and political disagreements within the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (*Vyriausysis Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas*, VLIK). He describes how, while striving for the freedom of the nation, the VLIK was influenced by personal interests and political intrigues. He criticises the partisan divisions between the Christian Democrats, the populists, and the Social Democrats, which, in his view, hamper the united purpose of the nation. The moral upheaval, when political goals were achieved by destroying idealists and ridiculing freedom fighters, caused him particular anguish. This experience raises the existential question of the importance of conscience in politics, stressing that without conscience politics becomes destructive. The letters reveal fragmentation, selfishness, the pursuit of power, even at the expense of the national interest. "Now we are lying down in the trough and grunting that we are liberating the nation" (to Brazaitis, 9 November 1951). Here, irony and sarcasm turn into a weapon against hypocrisy and political opportunism.

Mažiulis's letters reveal the political disintegration of the diaspora. He resents ideological intrigues, party reckoning, and group interests, which, in his view, destroy the unity needed to liberate the nation. He calls for conscience to be brought back into politics, stressing that without it the nation can expect neither freedom nor an honourable return to Lithuania.

III The immigrant's spiritual crisis: existential testimony through the eyes of an ethnologist

Mažiulis's correspondence with his closest friends is remarkable for the candid revelation of his spiritual struggles.

Letters addressed to women (close friends) reveal the deep crisis experienced by Mažiulis, a migrant, which encompasses not only physical aspects (the nature of the work, the hardship, the alien cultural environment), but also intense spiritual discomfort. He finds himself caught between two disparate cultural spaces: his native culture, which becomes inaccessible due to physical distance and social exclusion, and the new American culture, which he finds superficial, consumerist, and spiritually empty.

The letters show that this experience becomes exhausting for the author and provokes a reaction of rejection. He writes in one of the letters: "Life is getting hard in the golden city...", where the metaphor "golden city" (a reference to New York) is used sarcastically, conveying frustration and a critical attitude towards materialistic reality. Here, gold becomes a symbol of consumerist culture, which the author deliberately rejects: "I have never liked gold, it did not tempt me..." (to a woman R., 16 March 1951).

He shares negative attitudes, which are evident in his assessment of the urban environment, with his women friends: "Here, people enjoy garbage around them and in their hearts" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). The physical and symbolic motif of garbage becomes part of a broader critique of civilisation as a reference to spiritual degradation that, according to the ethnologist, pervades American everyday life. The letters divulge a profound value conflict between a rationally-based Western worldview and the author's own more metaphysical, existential way of thinking. This tension is particularly evident in the description of the museum-visiting experience when, instead of the expected beauty and order of the natural world, he encounters explanations of human origins based on

the theory of Darwinian evolution, which seems to be ideologically imposed: "...also obsessed with Darwinian evolution. And this is called science..." (to a woman R., 16 March 1951).

Mažiulis does not confine himself to a critique of his surroundings. He observes himself from the outside, as an individual who has deliberately opted out of the "game". The letters voice the position of an observer and a lone thinker: "I want to be free, free within myself, and to understand the meaning or meaninglessness of silence and suffering..." (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). This withdrawal from society shows the characteristics of existentialist thinking in that Mažiulis chooses moments of silence, suffering, and self-reflection as tools for self-analysis and the search for meaning. It is not about physical but about spiritual, inner, freedom from social pressures, external expectations, and cultural norms. This is particularly relevant for individuals who experience cultural or existential alienation.

One of the recurring themes in Mažiulis's letters is the pain of the migrant, the reality of physical labour: "Work makes me tired and takes away my loneliness..." (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). He has an exhausting physical job (working 11 to 12 hours a day), yet even in this context he is looking for spiritual meaning or an opportunity to spend time in solitude, in silence. Garbage – physical and spiritual – becomes a symbol of cultural critique, signifying the decline of civilisation.

Extreme sensitivity to the environment and to the phenomena of the world leads to a permanent feeling of pain. This emotional intensity leads to a desire to withdraw, not as an escape but as a defensive reaction. The letters clearly articulate the issues of meaning, faith, and God: "If I believe in God, then I can still allow for some meaning, but when I don't believe, when God is dead to me..." (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). It is the expression of an existential crisis, an experience of spiritual emptiness and a collapse of values. Such a condition correlates with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of the 'death of God', in which the human has to create a new meaning in the existential void.

When it comes to relations with women, Mažiulis maintains a distance, justifying his detachment by his total commitment to research: "I married ethnology and now I am raising my children" (to a woman I., 20 May 1951). This metaphor reveals that for him, ethnology is not just a profession, it is a way of life, and even if painful, it was a conscious choice. Even at moments of

weariness, he refers to the library as his “inn.” It is a form of maintaining his cultural identity, while his academic work is the basis of his existence.

Declaring loneliness in letters sounds like a cry for help. The statement “I’ve moved out of the way” becomes a symbolic gesture, a conscious withdrawal from the structures of ‘normal’ life. Mažiulis chooses to live on the margins, refusing to participate in the race of the modern world. The sentence “I rejoice in my loneliness, in those short last moments before death...” (to a woman I., 20 May 1951) is ambiguous. On the one hand, loneliness becomes not a void, but a space for self-observation, existential reflection, and on the other, it conveys a sense of the nearness of the end of life.

The letters to women highlight Mažiulis as an existentialist, a thinker who explores not only a different society but also the meaning of human existence. His rhetoric reveals irony and pamphlet criticism against social and religious duplicity, especially among the Lithuanian diaspora. The letters paint a portrait of a man whose cultural ideals, spiritual quest, and loyalty to scholarship and God clash with the rationality, superficiality, and existential emptiness of American life.

Letters to a friend, i.e., Mažiulis’s correspondence with Česlovas Grincevičius, reveal his evident emotional and intellectual development in 1951–1952. The letters of 1951 abound in optimism, even though they are permeated by the mood of deep fatigue and despair. The author is still struggling, trying to retain his ideas and values despite physical and psychological challenges. In 1952, his emotional state changes dramatically as he becomes increasingly worn out and defeated, although, despite the growing loneliness and weariness of life, he remains critical and analytical.

The letters of 1951 clearly show that the author’s life in America was difficult and full of daily stress. He describes his working conditions, often in unskilled, manual jobs such as sweeper, dishwasher, and the like, which reflect the problem of professional devaluation. Humanitarians like him were forced to do any job to survive. In his letters he regularly mentions his material difficulties: constant changes of housing, struggles with debt, constant financial shortages and the need to borrow.

In the letters to Grincevičius, he unreservedly condemns American materialism and its culture, which he sees as a place of greed, superficiality, and worship of the ‘golden calf’. He opposes turning culture into a commodity, where even art museums seem to him to be “material without a system” only

“showcasing wealth.” He is very critical of the community of the Lithuanian diaspora, especially priests and the ‘patriots’. Mažiulis believes that priests, although they speak of love of the neighbour, overshadow these values with their wealth, and that the church acts as an institution rather than a genuine community.

Despite these difficulties, in 1951 Mažiulis still shares with his friend his intentions to continue his mission of collecting folklore and preserving Lithuanian culture, and how he plans to give lectures and seminars on Lithuanian studies, although without funding.

However, life in America is causing him ever increasing frustration and pain due to his exclusion from the Lithuanian community. His letters of 1952 to Grincevičius reveal an even more aggravated state of mind. Loneliness becomes a permanent leitmotif of his life: “I live in terrible, terrible loneliness”, “I don’t want to meet a human”, “I’m too sensitive to write letters”. He feels estranged from the Lithuanian family next door not just by a wall, but also by a symbolic cultural abyss. He feels that national and cultural identity is disappearing in America; it is no longer an ideal but a painful memory and burden.

The letters provide an overview of the social and political landscape in the diaspora. With sharp irony, he criticises the activities of the Christian Democrats and the members of the Lithuanian Front, highlighting their hypocrisy and ideological emptiness: “politics is a mess and a pig-baiting business”. He also regrets the reluctance of the Catholics to support Lithuanian cultural projects, seeing their activities as political rather than spiritual.

Mažiulis reveals his health problems to Grincevičius. He is suffering from heart conditions and often regrets his frail body, but he is never prepared to accept state benefits as he finds it humiliating. His only remaining principle of honour is to remain debt-free: “I want to die without debts”. At the same time, he experiences an inner contradiction in the form of the desire to remain human, even if it means becoming a “living ghost”, a spiritual refugee, a wandering soul.

Comparative analysis of the themes of the 1951–1952 letters to Česlovas Grincevičius:

Topic	Letters of 1951	Letters of 1952
Everyday life and becoming established	Physical, exhausting work; efforts to persist, support others, organise lectures	Physical weakness, fatigue, loneliness; little activity, more resignation
Critique of life in the USA	Criticises materialism, superficiality, the cult of the 'golden calf'; retains the desire for change	Deep frustration: "the world is ruled by dogs"; irony turns to despair, rejection
Relationship with the Lithuanian community	Criticism of priests, <i>pilviniai</i> (i.e., those who prioritise eating much and living comfortably), yet a desire to act in the community	Isolation, exclusion, disappointment: "the nation is already dead"; the community is alien
Preserving Lithuanian identity and culture	Attempts at collecting folklore and preparing lectures; the ideals remain	The desire to preserve culture, yet without hope; Lithuanian-ness is a painful burden
Emotional condition	Tense yet still combative; irony, sarcasm, spirit of resistance	Profound loneliness, existential pain, depression, hopeless moods
Philosophical reflection	Social criticism, reflections on the crisis of values, yet faith in the mission of culture	The meaninglessness of life, devaluation of the human, the desire to die with dignity
Style and language	Picturesque, metaphorical, humorous; the language is archaic, folkloric	Even richer metaphors, but much gloomier; dark images predominate

These letters reveal not only the personal vicissitudes of Maziulis's life, but also a deep philosophical and social reflection on the Western world, the Lithuanian diaspora, and cultural identity. He remains faithful to his ideas, which, unfortunately, are becoming more and more difficult to realise both because of the external conditions of life and internal struggles with himself. This theme of Maziulis's letters resonates with Vytautas Kavolis's observation that "the main reality of the exiles is a state of profound hopelessness. At the same time, it is also the source of their strength. The exiles are all those who no longer deceive themselves" (Kavolis 1968).

Conclusions

In his letters, Antanas Mažiulis clearly articulates a response to the value and social hostility arising from the encounter with paradigms of a different culture. He is critical of the values espoused by the USA, such as tolerance, equality, and cultural diversity, describing them as a rhetorical construct that often does not correspond to social practice.

The devaluation of notions of religious faith and spirituality in the American context is particularly striking in the letters. The author regrets that religion, which he hoped would be a source of spiritual solace, turns out to be an institution driven by commercial logic that has lost the features of a community of faith. Similar criticism is addressed to work ethics: Mažiulis speaks ironically about the so-called American freedom defined as the involvement of the individual in an economic system in which work becomes an end in itself, while the search for existential meaning is marginalised. In this context, he formulates the relationship between work and freedom as a phenomenon of spiritual captivity in which the individual becomes part of a system of productivity and loses the ability to reflect on the deeper aspects of human existence.

In response to the cult of rationality, the superficial nature of interpersonal relationships, and the commercialisation of religion in American society, Mažiulis consistently defends European humanist values, national identity, and academic integrity. He is particularly critical of the community of the Lithuanian diaspora, which, in his opinion, only declaratively upholds national values while effectively subordinating them to personal well-being. In the context of such a position, Mažiulis chooses the image of a *veluoka*, i.e., a ghost, a spirit, a marginal yet intellectually independent subject who thinks critically and is loyal to his values.

The letters under scrutiny turn into a statement of resistance, not of adaptation. They are a document of intellectual protest, evidence of active spiritual and cultural resistance to de-nationalisation, spiritual emptiness, and cultural alienation. Antanas Mažiulis's position is not conformist, it expresses a consistent stance of cultural, moral, and intellectual resistance against ideological pressures of a foreign environment. Notwithstanding his physical decline, he continued to uphold the principles of scientific idealism, strove to preserve

Lithuanian cultural identity, and reflected on the issues of the meaning of human existence under conditions of migration.

Mažiulis's experiences correlate with the 'idealist' personality type identified by Cirtautas, who is motivated by the pursuit of spiritual values, as opposed to the 'utilitarian' personality type who is oriented towards material well-being. Cirtautas points out that eventually, both the idealist and the utilitarian are assimilated into the structure of the new society and adopt its values and way of life (Cirtautas 1958). In his early years as an immigrant, Mažiulis remained consistently critical, rejected conformism, and maintained his moral compass. The experience and stance of Antanas Mažiulis gain significance in the broader context of existential reflection on immigration.

Notes

¹ Česlovas Grincevičius (1913–1994) was a Lithuanian writer, bibliographer, and an active cultural figure of the Lithuanian diaspora. Having fled to the West, he headed the Lithuanian People's University in Salzburg, studied pedagogy at the University of Salzburg and edited the newspaper *Mūsų žinios*. After moving to the USA, he lived in Cicero, Chicago, taught at Lithuanian schools, worked for the newspaper *Draugas*, was the director of the World Lithuanian Archive and the chair of the Lithuanian Writers' Association.

² In addition to Brooklyn (New York City, USA), he lived in Philadelphia for several years, where he worked at the University of Pennsylvania Library. In 1956, he settled in South Boston, Massachusetts, where he continued his work on the editorial board of *Lietuvių enciklopedija* (Lithuanian Encyclopaedia, hereinafter LE). From 1953 to 1966, he was the editor of the ethnography section and proofreader of the first volume, and was one of the editors of the 37th volume. He wrote over 680 articles for the Encyclopaedia, and also wrote for *Encyclopedia Lituanica* and contributed to *Mūsų Lietuva* (Our Lithuania) prepared by Bronius Kviklys. From 1967, he worked in the library of the Carroll School of Management, a division of Boston College. From 1958 to 1969, he taught at the Boston Lithuanian Saturday School, which he headed from 1963 to 1964.

Antanas Mažiulis was a committed social activist: he collected folklore, antiquities, and words for the Lithuanian dictionary; he headed a cell of Pavasaris (Spring), the Lithuanian Catholic Youth Federation, was a member of Ateitis (Future), a Lithuanian Catholic organisation for personality development. He was also a member of Šatrija, the Ateitis organisation's art society founded in Kaunas in 1926 and approved by the

statute of the Lithuanian University in early 1927. Thanks to the efforts of Vincas Kazokas, Antanas Mažiulis, and Stasys Šelenas, Šatrija's activities were revived in Germany.

From 1941 to 1944, Mažiulis participated in underground activities, represented the Lithuanian Unity Movement in VLIK, gave lectures at the events of various organisations, and supported Catholic activities in the USA.

³ For one year, Mažiulis was a member of the editorial board of the magazine *Ateitis* (from No. 6 in 1951 to No. 6 in 1952); after the revival of the magazine *Į laisvę* (To Freedom) in 1953, he was a member of the editorial board for three issues of this magazine (1964, No. 34–36).

⁴ In this work, egodocuments are defined as personal sources that provide a direct insight into an individual's experiences and feelings. The main feature of egodocuments is that they provide a subjective, personal view of the world and historical processes that have taken place.

⁵ Copies of the letters are kept in Antanas Mažiulis's archive at the American Lithuanian Cultural Archives (ALKA, b. 342, 344–346, 348, 367) in Putnam, CT, USA.

⁶ Zenonas Ivinskis (1908–1971) was a Lithuanian historian. A member of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences (1933), he taught at universities in Lithuania and Germany, was active in the Lithuanian liberation movement, worked in the Vatican archives, edited the section on the history of Lithuania up to 1600 in the LE. He lived in Rome.

⁷ Citation references indicate the addressee, salutation, or surname of the person identified in secondary brackets, and the date of the letter.

⁸ As mentioned above, Mažiulis lived in Brooklyn, NYC, in 1951 and 1952, although he referred to it by various names.

⁹ The surviving copies of Mažiulis's letters under scrutiny often lack the author's signature.

¹⁰ Juozas Lingis (1910–1998) was an ethnologist and professor. He studied at the universities in Kaunas (German studies and linguistics) and Stockholm (ethnology, ethnography, archaeology). He taught at Stockholm and Uppsala universities and worked at the Nordic Museum (Nordiska Museet) and elsewhere.

¹¹ We don't write women's names for ethical reasons. The study uses Mažiulis's correspondence with three women, I., R., and A.

¹² Juozas Brazaitis (Ambrazevičius until 1955) (1903–1974) was a Lithuanian politician, public figure, and literary scholar. He taught at Vytautas Magnus University, was prime minister of the provisional government of Lithuania, wrote textbooks and literary studies, and participated in anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance. He lived in Brooklyn, USA.

¹³ Antanas Maceina (1908–1987) was a Lithuanian philosopher. He taught at Vytautas Magnus University, the University of Freiburg, and the University of Münster (Germany),

led the *ateitininkai* (members of Ateitis) Lithuanian émigré association and edited the magazine *Ateitis*.

¹⁴ It is about the September 1951 protest by the Lithuanian American Council and the Lithuanian American Information Centre (LAIC), headed since 1951 by Marija Kižytė, against the draft law proposed by the so-called International LAW Commissions under the name of the United Nations Code to Protect the Safety and Security of Humanity.

¹⁵ Tadas Alinskas (1924–?), a Lithuanian American, chemist, and actor. After moving to the United States, where he lived between 1952 and 1988, he worked in laboratories and companies in the chemical industry. An actor at the New York Drama Studio and later at the Brooklyn, NY, theatre company.

¹⁶ Lithuanian values encompass all aspects associated with Lithuanian identity and the preservation of Lithuanian cultural heritage.

¹⁷ The American notion of freedom: an analysis of how freedom is conceptualised and understood within the United States.

¹⁸ The name of the male protagonist in the Lithuanian folk tale “Eglė the Queen of Grass Snakes”.

¹⁹ Traditional values refer to elements of Lithuanian culture that have been transmitted across generations.

²⁰ Antanas Styra (1918–2003)? joined Ateitis's Šatrija society in 1938. He emigrated to Cleveland, OH, USA. He was a Christian Democrat and a long-standing member of the board of the Cleveland branch of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Union.

²¹ Vincas Natkevičius Natkus (1918–1999) was a scholar of Lithuanian studies, educator, literary researcher, philosophy enthusiast, active member of the Ateitis organisation and social activist. In 1944, he fled to Germany, where from 1945 to 1957 he taught at the Lithuanian February 16th Gymnasium in Hüttenfeld, Germany, serving as principal of this school from 1967 to 1980. In 1973, he was invited to teach Lithuanian language and conduct a seminar of Lithuanian studies at the University of Frankfurt am Main.

²² Jonas Balys (1909–2011) was a researcher of Lithuanian folklore. He worked at universities and libraries in Lithuania and the USA. He founded and edited the scholarly journal *Tautosakos darbai* (Folklore Studies).

²³ Jonas Znotinas (1913–?) was ordained a priest in 1940 in Tübingen, where he served as spiritual leader of the *ateitininkai* (members of Ateitis) and chaplain of the college. In around 1952, he left for the United States, where he worked in St Peter's parish in Washington, and from 1966 was the parish priest of St George's parish in Valley Lee, Maryland.

²⁴ Juozas Prunskis (1907–2003) was a priest, a prominent figure in the Lithuanian community in the USA, and a journalist. In 1945, he graduated from the Catholic University

of America in Washington, D.C. He edited newspapers and magazines, taught journalism, and was a member of the Lithuanian Catholic Academy of Sciences.

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