



Ethnic Kitchen

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Ethnic Kitchen

DOCUMENTARY FILM "ETHNIC KITCHEN"

Ethnic Kitchen is a documentary about five women who moved to Lithuania from different countries, at different times, and for different reasons. At first glance, the life stories of these women seem unbelievable, but a closer look reveals that it is something that could happen to any of us. How do we construct our world which we call home? Does it stem from our place in society based on our gender, skin color, age, nationality? Or could it be that home is any place where we find compassion, inspiration, talent, love, and a shared humanity?

Ethnic Kitchen is not just a movie, it's an invitation to reflect on the things that make us feel like outsiders. It is a reminder and encouragement to extend a helping hand to those around us having trouble fitting in.

HISTORY

Ethnic Kitchen was born in November 2012, at the annual "16 Days against Gender Violence" campaign when scriptwriter and director Aiste Ptakauske was asked to create a performance piece that would address key gender issues in Lithuania today. In her project Aiste chose to shine the spotlight on a rarely noticed group of Lithuanian women: migrants. How do they differ from Lithuanian women? How are they similar? What troubles and joys are they experiencing in their adopted homeland? Are these experiences particular only to them or are they common to Lithuanians too? In preparation for the performance, Aiste interviewed over a dozen women from various countries: Estonia, Moldova, Uzbekistan, USA, Ethiopia, Uruguay, and Chechnya, among others. On 8 of December 2012, seven of the interviewed women gathered at Dalia Tamulevičiute Hall of the State Youth Theatre of Lithuania to share their life stories with the public. The event generated tremendous interest and support.

We didn't know that there were such interesting people living around us!
We had no clue that such wonderful things were happening in Lithuania.
We saw ourselves and our country through different eyes.

These were the most common exclamations from the audience members. After the performance, the positive reviews spread throughout the country and people from other cities clamored for repeat performances of Ethnic Kitchen. This enthusiasm showed that Lithuanians often come across as cold and unfriendly not because it is somehow encoded in their nature, but simply because they know very little about foreigners living in Lithuania. But the willingness to know more is definitely there! This realization gave birth to another idea – to develop Ethnic Kitchen into a documentary which could reach all corners of Lithuania.

HEROINES

ALICIA GIAN

This actress, singer, director came to Lithuania on a student exchange programme and decided to stay when she found the love of her life here. Her biggest dream is to make theatre and have a family. In the US, having both things at the same time seemed impossible, but in Lithuania she believed her dream might come true.



AMINAT SAIJEVA

Aminat is a diplomat and Head of the Baltic-Chechen Association. As Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister for her country, she came to Lithuania as part of an official delegation, but violent conflict broke out in her hometown Grozny on the second day of her visit... She hopes to see a day when the countries of the North Caucasus are free from slavery, war, and brutality. To make this dream come true, she spends every minute of her life fighting tirelessly for freedom in her homeland.



BOŽENA KARVELIENĖ

Božena is the Head of Roma Integration House and mediator between the Roma community and middle schools in Lithuania. She wanted to choose her own path. She left the Roma camp where she grew up and bravely carved out her own future. She worked in retail, in casinos and faced constant discrimination and distrust because of her origins, but she worked hard and ultimately succeeded. She educated herself, started a family, and now dedicates her life to Roma integration in Lithuania.



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KEISHA LARAINÉ INGRAM

She built bridges in Jamaica, constructed roads in Afghanistan, and developed squares in Zambia. She came to Lithuania to get a master's degree in management and start her own business so that she can help those who are less fortunate than herself. She is a master's student and international students' ambassador at Mykolas Romeris University. After graduation, she hopes to live and work in Lithuania because she feels safer and happier here than anywhere else in the world.



MARISA LEONAVIČIENĖ

A travel expert and former Lithuanian Honorary Consul to Montevideo, she grew up hearing her grandmother's stories about Lithuania's beautiful landscapes and culture. So, immediately after graduating school, she set off for Lithuania to start her own business. She grew uncomfortable with the high corruption levels and retreated to her native Uruguay. But four children later, the lure of Lithuania was still strong and she decided to give her children a true Lithuanian life.



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AUTHOR



AISTĖ PTKAUSKĖ

She is a screenwriter, novelist, playwright, producer, director, in short – a storyteller. Story telling is her way of understanding the universe. It's her mode of living, surviving, and being in the world. No other occupation gives her more pleasure, more power, and more pain. For her, storytelling is work, leisure, and a huge responsibility. She believes that stories have magic, a power to heal, to teach, to change a person fundamentally, and in so doing, change the world. Ethnic Kitchen is her attempt at creating a world where all genders, races, nationalities, and ages peacefully coexist.

Her bibliography includes a collection of short stories, two novels, two plays, and the Lithuanian translation of Leonard Cohen's novel "Beautiful Losers". A winner of multiple awards such as a national prize for the best fiction debut of the year and a Fulbright fellowship, Aiste had her work presented at regional and state theaters in Lithuania as well as international festivals in Europe, Asia, and Northern America. She holds a Master's degree in Television, Radio, and Film from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University (NY, USA) and devotes the lion share of her work in film, theater, and television to promotion of mutual understanding among different cultures and communities all over the globe.

Her story continues at www.aiste-ptakauske.com

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IMMIGRANTS IN LITHUANIA

Foreigners in Lithuania represent 125 nationalities, though they only make up around one percent of the national population and constitute one of the smallest immigrant populations in the entire European Union (immigrants make up 6.6 percent of the EU population). Only Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovakia have fewer immigrants.

Increasing immigration figures can mainly be attributed to returning Lithuanian emigrants. The immigration of non-Lithuanian foreigners remains quite low with an annual average of between 2,000 and 2,500 people. There are currently around 32,000 foreign residents in Lithuania. Most of them are of Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian origin and moved to Lithuania during the reign of the Soviet Union.

In the past, Lithuanian society has struggled to welcome newcomers. As a nation, Lithuanians have been particularly hesitant to accept immigrants from distant countries, those who look different from them, and they are lagging behind the rest of Europe in their lack of open-mindedness. According to one poll, only 16 percent of Lithuanians consider immigration a positive thing. That small number of Lithuanians recognized some of the key benefits of immigration. According to them, immigrants breathe new life into the cultural and intellectual landscape, with new and exciting cuisine, technological advances and ideas, and new ways of tackling problems; even a small influx of immigrants can improve the demographic situation in a country. Instead, the majority dwell on what they perceive to be the negative aspects of immigration, and complain about the different culture of foreigners, the different religions of foreigners, the different traditions of foreigners, the fact that immigrants look different and dress differently, that foreigners demonstrate their own culture and customs too openly, that immigrants often come from less developed countries and provide cheap labor that could undercut the local labor force, that some foreigners are unfamiliar with the laws of Lithuania and have not learned the Lithuanian language, that foreigners can bring social unrest or increase crime rates.

In their turn immigrants say they appreciate good treatment and tolerance of faculty, peers and counselors who help them integrate into Lithuanian society, opportunities to participate in local events and be part of the community.

However, foreigners regret that majority of local people are reluctant to communicate and interact with immigrants, some Lithuanians are even hostile toward foreigners, immigrants feel unsafe in Lithuania and fear that their security is not guaranteed by the police.

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SET UP YOUR OWN ETHNIC KITCHEN!

We are thrilled that you liked our documentary Ethnic Kitchen so much that you want to show it to your friends, coworkers, neighbors, classmates or other people who care about cultural diversity in their lives. To make your experience of watching the film more fun and engaging, we prepared games and discussion points for you and your guests. Everyone who will send us pictures and impressions from their screenings of Ethnic Kitchen will get a special prize – an Ethnic Kitchen T-shirt!
Please, send all your material to info@pasauliovirtuve.eu

TASK
1

TELL THE FUTURE OF OUR HEROINES

Rules:

1. Choose one of the heroines of the film.
2. See what she has planned for her future in Lithuania.
3. Divide yourselves into two teams: SUPPORTERS and OPPONENTS.
4. Both teams are given 5 minutes for preparation: in complete silence members of both teams individually compile a list of pros and cons of the heroine's plan. If you are on the team of supporters, you compile a list of pros whereas if you are one of the opponents, you draw up a list of cons.
5. One of the supporters starts the competition: he or she identifies one of the advantages of the heroine's plan. Then one of the opponents steps up and criticises the argument that he or she has just heard. On given his or her critique, the opponent voices one of the facts that she or she sees with the heroine's plan. Then another supporter, who has not spoken yet, steps into the game. He or she criticises the argument of the opponent and gives a new argument in favor of the heroine's plan. In this manner members of both teams take turns until one of the team runs out of arguments.
6. The team that ends up with a bigger number of uncriticized arguments wins. The team whose all arguments are met with counter-arguments from the other team loses.
7. Draw conclusions: choose three main pros and cons of the plan of the heroine that you collectively picked. Please, explain your choice. Fill in the summary form.

Choose one of the below:

- a. **Alicia** and her husband decide to leave the US and move back to Lithuania to raise their kids.
- b. **Aminat** decides to gather all Chechens in exile and establish an official association of nations of North Caucasus in Lithuania.
- c. **Božena** and her second husband decide to sign up their children to a Lithuanian secondary school.
- d. **Keisha** decides to marry a Lithuanian man.
- e. **Marisa** decides that all four of her children should go to college in Lithuania.

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Which heroine's plan did you choose for your discussion? Please, explain the reason behind your choice:

SUPPORTERS:

Please, put down three pros of the plan of the heroine that you all chose.

1

2

3

9

OPPONENTS:

Please, put down three cons of the plan of the heroine that you all chose:

1

2

3

EVERYBODY:

Think about all arguments that you heard during the discussion and make your own individual decision regarding the plan that the heroine of your choice has. Do you personally agree or disagree with her? Please, put down at least two pieces of advice that could help the heroine in the future.

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NOURISH YOUR MIND

On watching a film, we are usually left with one or two unanswered questions. It is always more productive and fun to discuss possible answers to these questions with a help from your friends, colleagues, or family. Maybe they have noticed something you missed in the film! Or perhaps they have arrived to conclusions that have never crossed your mind! To make your discussion of the film smoother, we have prepared a few questions that you could discuss together with everybody who has been watching Ethnic Kitchen with you.

- Why, do you think, the director chose women as heroines of her film? How would the content of the film change if it told stories of male immigrants?
- All heroines seem to have very different reasons, motives, and consequences behind their immigration. Do you find any similarities among different experiences of these women? What are they?
- One of the heroines of the film is not an immigrant. The Roma lady, Božena, was born and raised in Lithuania. Why, do you think, the director decided to include her story into her film about immigrant women? In what ways Božena's story is different or similar to the life stories of other heroines?
- According to migration experts, immigrants' situation in a receiving society is a magnifying glass which points to problems experienced by that society in general. Can you identify any problems of the heroines of the film that are experienced by all Lithuanian women? What are these problems?
- What do you think of the fact that none of the four kids of Marisa sees their future in Lithuania, and what do you make of Alicia's decision to move back to the US? Do you agree with these choices? Why?
- Do you personally have anything to learn from the heroines of the film as a personality and as a member of a receiving society? What are the lessons that you will take from the heroines' life stories?

TASK
2

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INTEGRATE INTO LITHUANIA

TASK 3

You may play this game either on your own or as a group. Try walking in an immigrant's shoes: make your choices and find out if they are going to help you move forward. Or maybe you will face unforeseen obstacles that will make you go back all the way to where you started? Count how many times you will be forced to go back in the game and try to imagine how much time, energy, and money every such "unsuccessful" decision would cost you in real life. The goal of this game is to get to the end of the labyrinth with minimum losses, i.e. steps back.

For explanations of each choice you make, see Pages 16-17.

1 You are Serhij, a student from Ukraine. You got accepted to a master's program at a Lithuanian university. On your arrival at Lithuania, you have got a visa that grants you a permission to stay in the country for three months. However, it does not grant you a permission to study or work. If you want to get a permission to study and find a part-time job in Lithuania, you have to apply for a temporary resident permit at the Lithuanian Migration Department. You have two options: online registration or waiting in a line outside the door of a migration officer's office. What do you choose?

2A Online registration.

2B Waiting in a line without any prior registration.

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3 On inspecting your documents, a migration officer says that the letter of confirmation from your university is acceptable. However, if you want to get a temporary resident permit, you have to submit an official declaration of your place of residency. You do not have any permanent place of residency yet since you have just arrived. You are temporarily renting a room at a private apartment. As it is customary in Lithuania, you do not have any agreement of residential lease. What do you do?

4B You ask your landlord for a permission to declare your place of residency at his apartment without any agreement of residential lease.

4A You ask your landlord for an official agreement of residential lease signed and stamped by a notary. That would make it possible for you to declare your place of residency officially.

5 If you do not officially declare your place of residency, you will not be issued a temporary resident permit. In this case you will have to leave the country prior to completion of your studies. However, rumors has it, that you can "buy" a possibility to declare your place of residency in Lithuania. Some landlords would let you declare your place of residency at their apartments for a certain "fee". Will you support these people who take advantage of the difficult situation of many immigrants?

6A Yes, you will pay for a possibility to declare your place of residency in Lithuania.

6B No, you will not pay for a possibility to declare your place of residency in Lithuania because you do not have extra funds for that and you are not a supporter of illegal business. You will try to complete all necessary paperwork in a legal way.

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7 You successfully completed your two-year master's program. Your homeland is going through difficult times, though. Scientific research is underfunded because of the economic and political instability. You have made a lot of useful contacts in Lithuania. Thus, you can see a real opportunity for yourself to get a job in the field that you studied here. However, your temporary resident permit will expire as soon as you get your diploma. If you want to get a new permit, you have three choices:

8A Get a job in Lithuania.

8C Marry a Lithuanian citizen.

8B Start a business in Lithuania.

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9 Marriage does not grant you a permission to live in Lithuania. Since you still do not have a job, you have to prove that you are capable of supporting yourself financially for at least a year. You have to prove to your migration officer that you have at least 3,562 EUR in your bank account. In addition, you have to get a health care plan. All the necessary paperwork also costs money. In a nutshell, you have to have at least 4,000 EUR in your bank account in order to get a new temporary resident permit...

Of course, in real life the game would not end here... Serhij would have to make many more difficult decisions. What would you do in his situation? Would you try to borrow the necessary sum of money from somebody? Would you go back to your war-torn homeland? Would you take your wife and leave for Western Europe? What other options can you think of?

As a group, discuss the following:

- What benefits and disadvantages for a receiving country can you see in strict immigration laws?
- Think of three good things and three bad things that would happen to the Lithuanian society if Serhij stayed in Lithuania.
- How would the immigration rules differ for Javier, a student from Spain? Why?

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EXPLANATIONS OF YOUR CHOICES IN TASK 3

2A The earliest available appointment with a migration officer is in three months. Your visa will expire before that time. [Go back to Step 1]

2B You arrive at the Migration Department at 8 am. The waiting room is crammed with people of all nationalities and ages, some of them have brought their children with them. There are neither enough seats nor air. You will only get to see a migration officer if those who registered online do not show up. You miss all your classes, but at around 4 pm, just before the end of working hours, you get to see a migration officer. [Move on to Step 3]

4A Your landlord refuses to sign an agreement of residential lease because he does not want to pay taxes. [Move on to Step 5]

4B The landlord refuses you a possibility to declare your place of residency at his apartment because he is afraid of his property being damaged as well as of the authorities finding out that he is leasing his apartment without paying any taxes. [Move on to Step 5]

6A You close the deal: you pay a couple of hundreds of euros and declare your place of residency at an apartment you have never seen. The Migration Department accepts this declaration. You get your temporary resident permit and continue your studies. [Move on to Step 7]

6B You do not have any other possibilities to declare your place of residency. Thus, you cannot get a temporary resident permit. [Go back to Step 3]

8A You apply for a job. The employer says that you are qualified. However, according to the Lithuanian Law, he can only give you the job if he cannot find an equally qualified Lithuanian citizen. The employer announces the vacancy. A Lithuanian citizen applies for the job. He has the same qualifications as you do. Thus, he gets the job, and you do not. [Go back to Step 7]

8B You decide to start a business in Lithuania. If you want your business to be the basis for your temporary resident permit, the registered capital of your business has to be at least 28,986 EUR, and you have to employ at least 3 Lithuanian citizens or people with permanent resident permits. You are in no position to take on such obligations. [Go back to Step 7]

8C You propose to your Lithuanian girlfriend whom you have been dating for a while now. You always wanted a family. This situation only propelled your decision to pop the question. The girlfriend says: "Yes". [Move on to Step 9]

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LEARN MORE

If our film and tasks have made you curious about migrants' situation in Lithuania, we suggest you look up the following information that we have prepared for you:

www.pasauliovirtuve.eu/en/multicultural-lithuania/facts-and-figures/

www.pasauliovirtuve.eu/en/multicultural-lithuania/organisations/

www.pasauliovirtuve.eu/en/category/right-doers/

www.pasauliovirtuve.eu

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