

**NERINGA LIUBINIENĖ. *MIGRANTS FROM LITHUANIA IN NORTHERN IRELAND: CONSTRUCTION OF 'OWN SPACE'*. DOCTORAL DISSERTATION. KAUNAS: VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009**

(Neringa Liubinienė. *Migrantai iš Lietuvos Šiaurės Airijoje: „savos erdvės“ konstravimas. Daktaro disertacija. Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2009*)

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The end of August 2009 marked an important point in the development of the social sciences in Lithuania. The significance of this date is that it saw the defence of the first doctoral dissertation written from an anthropological perspective. The author of this work is Neringa Liubinienė, an associate member of the Social Anthropology Centre at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas. Liubinienė conducted her previous research in the fields of ethnology and sociology, and some of her varied research interests include expressions of collective identity, the anthropology of space and place, and the processes of migration. Therefore, this kind of debut looks promising for the future development of social anthropology in Lithuania where, according to Vytis Čiubrinskas, anthropology “is badly needed” (Khazaleh 2007; see also: Čiubrinskas 2009).

In Lithuania migration, and especially emigration and return migration are (and will, apparently, remain) the subject of numerous heated debates. Liubinienė’s anthropological research, and the dissertation based on it, suggests a new and promising analytical angle on these debates. Anthropological fieldwork methods allowed the author to gather valuable immediate knowledge of her research participants’ migratory experiences and, only with reference to them, to construct explanatory theoretical models. These very thorough research methods suggested to Liubinienė a master-key to the conceptualisations of the experiences of her research participants – the “construction of one’s own space”.

Not surprisingly, the title of this dissertation also reveals its anthropological approach. By calling her research participants “migrants”, Liubinienė tries to be as neutral as possible without using either *etic* pronouns (such as transmigrants) or those of sending (emigrants) or receiving (immigrants) countries (p. 9). Moreover, “Migrants from Lithuania in Northern Ireland” is not only directly relevant to both countries but also to international academia, and to anyone interested in the processes of migration. Firstly, in Lithuania there have not been any significant studies on Northern Ireland so far. Secondly, according to Liubinienė, the main focus of migration investigations in Northern Ireland (and also in the rest of the United Kingdom) is directed to social, economic, and policy-making issues (p. 17). Thus, her decision to look for *local knowledge* and to listen carefully to the migrants’ voices led her to several important considerations. That is, how do migrants attribute themselves to a certain place (or places) in their everyday life, what impact does the migratory experience leave on the perception of space, and how does the formation of one’s “own space” take place? In order to answer these questions, the author did much more than reviewing, systematizing and presenting all the relevant theoretical perspectives and empirical research on contemporary migration and space and place perception. She also brought to the light – and this is the undeniable enduring value of this

research – the instantaneous migratory experiences of particular people (migrants from Lithuania), of certain duration (13 10 2006 – 10 06 2007) and of an exact place (Northern Ireland).

This conception of the “construction of one’s own space” is unfolded through the five dissertation sections and summed up in the sixth. The sixth section is followed by an impressive list of over 200 references as well as visual and descriptive appendices, indicating how, with whom and where the research was conducted.

The first section sketches the issues of movement and attachment in the globalized world. It then introduces the dissertation’s objective, aims and tasks, provides a list of definitions, and synthesizes all the relevant current studies on immigration to Ireland and emigration from Lithuania since 1990. However, some of the dissertation’s aims and tasks repeat themselves, and the list of definitions is somewhat eclectic. Also, Liubinienė tends to overstate the quantitative nature of Au-dra Sipavičienė’s research (p. 18).

The second section, “Theoretical Conceptualization of Place, Space and Migration”, is particularly thought-provoking. Needless to say, perceptions of time and space are inherent in human cognition and, thus, any thorough analysis of how people make sense of their environment, what meanings they attach to them, and why, is very welcome. In this case, Liubinienė seeks to analyse the way in which a contemporary migrant experiences place and space. In order to achieve this, the section is divided into three chapters, covering the evolution of the concept of “place” in anthropology, transnational spaces, movements and multiple loyalties, and an individual’s connection with places through the “sense of place”, “home” and “livelihood”. Although the application of the *etic* perspective of the 19<sup>th</sup> century classical anthropologists to today’s consideration of migratory experiences appears dubious (p. 22–24), Liubinienė succeeds in providing a comprehensive and critical review of (trans)national migration and its impact on the perception of territoriality. She also detects several shortcomings in recent theoretical explanations of it. According to her, the idea of “home” has a lot in common with the “sense of place” notion, and yet outstretches it. Liubinienė points out that the concept of “home” implies quite a positive assessment of a place, excludes power relations, emphasizes emotional attachments, polarizes the reader towards either the country of departure or the country of settlement and, in general, reflects a sedentary way of thinking. In contrast, the concept of “livelihood” places more emphasis on movement yet also puts too much weight on the economical, i.e. rational, aspects of attachments to places (p. 45). Having noted this, Liubinienė suggests a new approach – the concept of one’s own space. According to this, one’s “... “own space” is a relatively safe, familiar and convenient zone of living and operating, which is created and maintained by a migrant (or a group of migrants), whereas its parameters – social, cultural and other – are formed and transformed by (trans)migration processes and its boundaries are drawn by experiences, emotions and identifications of actors themselves” (p. 18, English summary of the dissertation).

The third section brings in an overview of facts and figures relating to emigration from Lithuania and immigration to Northern Ireland extracted from academic literature, documents, decrees and the media. There is a closer look at the migratory issues in Northern Ireland, with two subchapters: one on migration policy in Northern Ireland, and another on immigration, public discourse, segregation and racism.

In comparison to other similar publications, “Migrants from Lithuania in Northern Ireland...” seems to be exceptional in its firm and consistent pursuance of anthropological methods and outlook, even though the author claims it to be interdisciplinary. The author herself, apparently, feels that she is doing quite a pioneering job and thus in charge of revealing the “politics and poetics”

of ethnography-making (i.e., its collection and writing). A subchapter, “Anthropological methodological approach” is devoted to this. While a professional anthropologist would find its content to be merely truisms, its general contribution to the popularisation of anthropology in Lithuania is considerable. This subchapter provides a way of introducing her own anthropological fieldwork. Such factors as who carried out the qualitative research, how, where and when have great influences on the nature of the data and how it is interpreted. To set them forth is one’s duty, and not an “unwarranted, narcissistic display” (Reinharz, 1997).

It also worth noting that the nature of Liubinienė’s research has major difficulties in fitting the established definitions of fieldwork. On the one hand, it is a conspicuous example of *anthropology at home*, because her research participants are from the same country as her. On the other hand, just as in classical anthropology, Liubinienė set out to do her fieldwork “over there in their place” (p. 58). She was from Lithuania, thus an *insider*, yet a researcher, a non-emigrant, thus an *outsider*. Despite all of this, it is clear that Liubinienė is capable of tackling all these contradictions and employing various research methods, both desk- (the analysis of media discourses, documents and literature) and fieldwork-based (participant/direct observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations). Interestingly, Liubinienė points out that during her research her role as a translator brought her positive and negative *experience* (Lith.: “*patirtis*”) because she had the opportunity to observe not only the way migrants interacted among themselves but also the way the local Irish employees and executives behaved towards them (p. 66). In this kind of research one might wonder whether such an experience should be considered as negative (or, indeed, whether *experience* can be negative at all).

In many regards the fifth section is the highlight of the whole dissertation. It demonstrates how the idea of one’s “own space” manifests itself in a certain transmigrant setting. Extensive quotes, and references to the participant observation data, provide the reader with many important pieces of information, forming a competent *thick description*. However, one might wonder who the “*flor staf*” (floor staff?) are and why they interact only with “*flor staf*” but not the “*bar staf*” (p. 81), while presuming that Arnoldas and Arnas are one and the same respondent. Further, one might wish for a more profound analysis of the data gathered, as in some cases there is an impression that the author has only summarized respondents’ ideas. An analysis of this kind would also benefit more from being supplemented by the insights of the reviewed literature. Despite all this, the good old truth about anthropology is that it advances not by getting better answers but by asking better questions. And Neringa Liubinienė clearly does that. Incidentally, Neringa writes that during her fieldwork research period she had some “existential questions” as well. She says there were times when she would ask herself about “what I’m doing here” and “does anyone really care about it” (p. 66). What kind of an answer could be suggested to the author of this mature and valuable doctoral thesis?

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