

**DE MUNCK, VICTOR; TRINI DE MUNCK; RASA ANTA-
NAVIČIŪTĖ AND LINAS SVOLKINAS. *EXPERIENCING
VILNIUS: INSIDER AND OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVES*.
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First a word of caution to the unsuspecting reader: notwithstanding the book's title, this is not a book about the city of Vilnius that can be compared to ethnographies of cities or urban life and identity in other parts of the world. Rather, it is about experiencing Lithuania by individuals who happened to be living in Vilnius in the early 2000s, two foreigners – Victor de Munck, an American Fulbright professor of anthropology and his wife at the time, both Lithuania first-timers – and two natives – a student of de Munck's and the daughter of their landlady. Once this initial confusion (which could have been prevented by the choice of a different title) has been overcome, the book proves to be a highly readable and enormously interesting introduction to life in contemporary Lithuania as experienced by outsiders and insiders. It is an also exercise in postmodern ethnography that constructs an image of the social world through various narratives from different perspectives.

The book is organized around six "reports" (four by Victor and two by Trini de Munck), i. e., lengthy reflections on certain aspects of experiencing life in Lithuania, which make up about two thirds of the book), and "responses" or comments by the two Lithuanians, with occasional rejoinders by the Americans. What we find is thus something like a sophisticated dialogue about Lithuania and the Lithuanian way of life. The final chapter, written by Victor de Munck, is devoted to an effort to analyze the dialogue in terms of the dichotomy of self and other as fundamentally different perspectives on the social world.

As a whole, the book is an enjoyable read and provides interesting insights into both Lithuanian life and how this life is perceived by foreigners and natives. However, there are some methodological problems, raised mostly by the extremely postmodernist style of presentation: the book rests somewhat uneasily on the dividing line between journalism and anthropology. This makes it easily accessible and entertaining, but casts some doubt on its value as a scholarly investigation of the theme of sameness-otherness, which appears to be the academic rationale behind the project. Some readers may applaud the experimental style of writing, but others may share the reviewer's impression of a lack of cohesion, rambling descriptions of irrelevant details and a sometimes problematic connection of the reports and the native interlocutors' responses. In several instances the latter are confined to the correction of minor factual errors rather than providing substantial comments, or they are no responses at all but new stories whose link with the foreigners' reports remains unclear. Amidst a plethora of anecdotes and minute details I was often wishing for a more clear-cut structure that would organize the different narratives around a few clearly defined key issues. As the book looks now, it often leaves the impression of going little beyond illustrating the fact that native and foreign views of Lithuania are different in many ways, something the observant reader is likely to have suspected anyway. A more serious concern is raised by the authors' use of the notion of otherness which seems to be understood exclusively in ethnic terms (Lithuanian vis-à-vis non-Lithuanian). Such ethnic essentialism ignores different axes of sameness-otherness that might

have produced very different impressions, e. g., the sameness of class of all four authors. Also the gender axis remains unexplored, although the gender composition of the authors' collective would have invited such a perspective.

Such criticism – to which can be added that more thorough copy editing would have been desirable in order to eliminate the numerous language mistakes – aside, the book can be highly recommended to anyone wanting to read an entertaining and sophisticated account of Lithuania from the “outside”. The postmodernist experiment of a native-foreigner dialogue that juxtaposes different voices outside the confines of a rigid analytical framework has its shortcomings but the reader is invited to form her/his own opinion of its value. In all, this book offers a valuable addition to the small collection of anthropological studies on contemporary Lithuania.