

Abstract

The work builds on the scientific production on the theme of the resettled Czechs from areas of the former Soviet Union, which is continued treated on the soil of the Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, v.v.i., and introduces the latest conducted grant project, in which I focused on the area of health and folk medicine. The text deals with a specific group of the Czech populations predominantly from Ukraine and Kazakhstan (partially also Belarus and Russia), whose ancestors set out in the second half of the 19th century to seek a better living in the direction to the east from the borders of then Austro-Hungary. Through the use of commemorative narrations and life trajectories of the participating actors, the work maps the background of the arrival in new destinations, life in the 20th century, the change of the political and social conditions and the subsequent remigration to the Czech Republic. With a few exceptions, all of the actors figuring in this work became part of the resettlement processes – in the case of the Volyn Czechs after World War II in 1947 within the controlled exchange of the populations and in the case of the Chernobyl Czechs (and partially also some of the Czechs from Belarus and Russia) in the 1990s within the state-controlled resettlement after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Czechs from Kazakhstan followed their compatriots from Chernobyl within a humanitarian-aimed resettlement event also in the 1990s with an overlap to the beginning of the 21st century. The work is based on memories and interviews, which were recorded on the territory of the Czech Republic during 2008–2016.

The work points mainly to the significance of the phenomenon of folk medicine in the resettled groups of Czechs predominantly from Ukraine and Kazakhstan in the place of their origin, its transformation as a consequence of the changes of the environmental and social conditions and its reflection in the eyes of the resettled Czechs here in the Czech Republic. The work is enriched by knowledge acquired in interviews with individuals from the areas of Belarus and Russia and utilizes a comparative perspective with the available literature. The method of treatment of the Ukrainian and Kazakh Czechs entails a specific feature, namely a syncretism of archaic elements of folk medication of the Czech lands of the time of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy of the 2nd half of the 19th century along with elements of Ukrainian, Kazakh and partially also Russian and Polish folk treatment. In text, the remembered treatment methods and means are used in the medication of common ailments in an inaccessibility of medical care, whether due to the turmoil of war, adverse economic conditions or great distance of the providers of medical services. In addition to the description of the archaic and modern practical methods aimed at the restoration of health, which Czechs used in the new destinations, the work also informs on the spiritual realm with treatment inextricably linked and reflected in the thinking of people – in the case of healing in prayers, incantations and ritual practices.

Thanks to the unique phenomenon of ‘Czechs from Chernobyl’ the text also indicates the transformations of the treatment approaches and methods depending on the change of the milieu when other possibilities are not accessible and shows that folk treatment, which is often connected with the adjective ‘traditional’, is innovative and changeable in its methods, when the conditions of the surrounding milieu requires it. The situation after the explosion of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the presence of life-threatening radioactive radiation, intangible with the senses, thus *inter alia* became a catalyst for the adaptability and variability of the treatment methods, practices and means, which lose their labels as ‘traditional’ and also indicate the imperfection of the lexical understanding of the term ‘traditional’ as immutable and constant, implying inertia in time and space.

Keywords: folk medicine, folk magic, ritual, compatriots, resettlement, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Chernobyl, Czech Republic