

Mirjam Moravcová

**Ethnic Diaspora
Festivities
in the Czech Republic**

Cultural Traditions
between Isolation, Integration
and Hybridization

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Integration and Hybridization

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Foreword

Migration represents a significant experience in the life of any individual. It confronts a person with many unknown matters, changes his or her cultural and social practices, and leads him or her to reassess and revise the values acquired through previous socialization espoused up to that point. It influences and impacts all areas of life, including the celebration of holidays. In the life of a migrant, holidays become a reflection of the migrant's attitude toward the society into which he or she has entered. They become a display of the migrant's relationship toward his or her own existence and a symbolic indicator of the migrant's idea of the form of his or her inclusion in the cultural space into which he or she has immigrated. At the same time, they present an opportunity, at a time defined by tradition, to repeatedly re-establish and clearly confirm the migrant's bonds with his or her family and with the society from which he or she emigrated. They provide an opportunity for contact that is respected bilaterally by these actors both in terms of content and the time of realization.

Festivities, specifically celebrations, holidays and special occasions, are an integral component of human and social life. They represent an interruption of stereotypical trivialities and enrich and spice up the everyday routine. They impact both the private and public sphere. They reflect the ideas of the society even as they situate the individual within that society. They are an instrument for the negotiation and reproduction of values, whether in the context of faith and religion or in the context of the secular life of a society. They bear meanings that either address the person and society through their up-to-date nature and/or reference memory of the past. Many celebrations and holidays are considered a component of cultural heritage; they comprise a part of social identity.

They are perceived as a certain continuum that overarches intergenerational rifts, even when their original forms and meanings transform and take on new content and interpretations. Newly introduced celebrations are, on the other hand, opportunities to make current attitudes and values present, to express them, to experience them, to establish social attitudes and to allow individuals and the society to adopt positions when they cannot find a platform for such attitudes within the repertoire of existing festivities. As meaningful practices, festivities enter into social space and co-create it. The nature of social space in a globalized world also facilitates the parallel presence of practices that are bound to different social fields. Hybridity is demonstrated not only by the repertoires of these practices and their forms, but also by the meanings ascribed to them.

Festivities of immigrants represent one segment contributing to the meanings and practices of the social sphere in the Czech Republic. They can be viewed from many angles. We will view them from the perspective of migrants who situate themselves as well as their holidays in a new environment (among others).

We will speak of festivities as indicators of a process that, in the life of an immigrant, is called forth by migration and settlement in the receiving society. Our aim is to follow the meanings ascribed by the migrant to the holiday experienced and to analyze the impact of that holiday on the life of the migrant as an individual and, especially, as a member of a community/diaspora of migrants. How shall we conceptualize a holiday with such an intention, though? According to the interpretation of philosopher Jan Sokol, the form of a holiday comprises of a broad dimension of aspects. This includes not just celebrations and holidays of a ceremonial character, i.e., special occasions that have a fixed formal framework and that are manifested and generally recognizable as a deviation from the everyday, but also practices for which there is no external evidence, practices that we might not identify as holiday-related if we are not part of the group or society that maintains and performs those practices (Sokol 2004: 21–27). We will begin our study of the festivities of immigrants in the Czech Republic from this interpretive position.

We will ask many questions in the context of our deliberations. What meanings do migrants ascribe to celebrations, holidays, and special occasions during the process of migration and after settling in their destination country? From what kinds of positions do they approach these occasions? How do they relate to holidays they celebrated in their country of origin, and how do they respond to the holidays of the society in which they have settled in search of space to apply themselves?

What kind of place do holidays occupy in their daily lives? Is what is considered a holiday in the life of migrants a factor in the process of their integration, does it reference their accepting the values of the elites of their destination country or of global society? Or, on the contrary, is there a tendency to remain in isolation and to strengthen their sense of belonging to their society of origin? Is the effort to maintain festivities that are not celebrated by most of the society a defense against their feeling of non-acceptance, one that essentially demonstrates the influence of the elites from their country of origin, or do such efforts serve a targeted purpose of the elites in the diaspora? Can festivities also be an instrument of emancipation for a group? How do migrants, through festivities, negotiate their engagement with all of the social fields mentioned above? We will seek an answer to that question as well.

In this paper, we will be reviewing holidays, celebrations and special occasions, synonyms for the concept of *festivities*. Analogically, we will also use the concept of the holidays, which we understand to mean a time full of festivities marking the opposite of the commonplace activities in the everyday life of a person and society.¹ Within the framework of our analysis of festivities, we will be speaking of their *ritual core*.² This concept refers to formalized actions confirming status and transformations of status; actions confirming interpersonal (mutual) relationships; actions manifesting received attitudes and ideas; actions demonstrating success;

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- 1 From the 19th century until now, the social sciences have used three basic kinds of unifying terms in academic discourse to refer to holidays, celebrations and special occasions: customs and habits, rituals and ceremonies, and festivities. Each concept involves a different preferential reference: the concept of customs and habits refers to intergenerational transfer and the “folk nature” of the actors, the concept of rituals and ceremonies references content in terms of ideas and social significance for the actors and their society, while the concept of festivities references deviation from the mundanity of everyday life. In Czech academic literature of the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, the usage of these terms changed over time. In relation to the specific research questions that researchers asked and pursued during these different times, the concept of rituals and ceremonies for non-church celebrations was promoted in nation studies/ethnography/ethnology at the turn of the 20th century, while the concept of festivities was promoted in ethnology and sociocultural anthropology during the last decades of the 20th century.
 - 2 In anthropological, ethnological and sociological literature on the issue of holidays, the term ritual is also normally used to refer to the broadest possible range of festive occasions in society during the postmodern era. The use of this as an umbrella reference for festivities was, of course, interrogated by Jack Goody (1977), Katy Gardner and Ralph Gavrillo (2002) and others. We are not working with the term ritual in that meaning. We speak of the ritual core as a constitutive part of a festivity containing the basic communication of its meaning and purpose.

or initiation actions that are accepted, established and upheld in a group or society as comprehensible norms of that society.

To simplify our construct here, we will refer to the members of ethnic minorities and immigrant groups living in Czech mainstream society who have not lost their bonds to the culture of the society they came from by using the term ‘*diaspora*’ – in accordance with the contemporary definition of the word.³ When discussing immigrants whose residency has been purposely defined as temporary, we will use the term ‘*migration group*.’ We have chosen these terms although we know that Czech academic discourse speaks of these, in association with the presence of different ethnic groups in the territory of the Czech Republic, as the presence of either “ethnic groups” (Hirth 2007) or “communities of foreign nationals” (Uherek a kol. 2008).

Czech law defines the presence of foreign nationals in the Czech Republic in terms of the kind of legal status they have been granted. In the case of citizens of the Czech Republic who are of other than Czech ethnicity, the law speaks of them as either members of national minorities (if the group has been awarded national minority⁴ status), or members of ethnic minorities (if the group has not been awarded that status). In the case of foreign nationals, the law speaks of “foreigners” (Sulitka 2009).

3 See, e.g., Brubaker (2000: 1); Reifer (2006: 142); Dufoix (2017: 135).

4 The law on minorities that created national minority status for citizens of the Czech Republic who are of other than Czech nationality was adopted in 2001 (Act No. 273/2001 Sb.). That year, the status was granted on the basis of historical rights (continuity of settlement) to Bulgarians, Croats, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Poles, the Roma, Russians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks and Ukrainians. In 2013, at their own requests, this status was awarded to Belarusians and the Vietnamese. The law on minorities guarantees national minorities with this status many social advantages as well as the opportunity to receive financial subsidies for their activities in the areas of publishing, associating and recreating (including convening for festivities). It also guarantees them representation in many government institutions. “Rada pro národnostní menšiny,” Vláda České republiky, <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rnm/historie-a-soucasnost-rady-15074/>.

Primary Sources, Data, Research

Our construction of the importance of festivities in the lives of immigrants to the Czech Republic is built above all on field research undertaken by a team of instructors and students at the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University from 2011 to 2019.

A significant part of the analyses created were then published in the volume *Festivity jako ukazatel identity a společenského směřování* [Festivities as an Indicator of Identity and the Direction of Society] (Bittnerová – Moravcová 2019). The authorial team of the publication followed immigrant opinions in fifteen socially defined groups from nine new ethnic diasporas⁵ that emerged in the Czech Republic after 1990. Periodically over the course of seven years, the team contacted members of the following diasporas: English-speaking expatriates (Hrdličková), Armenians

5 'New ethnic diasporas' is our term for diasporas created in the Czech Republic as a consequence of immigration after 1990. From the standpoint of continuity, the settlement of historically 'untraditional' ethnic diasporas emerged in the territory of what is today the Czech Republic during the existence of the state of Czechoslovakia (1918–1939; 1946–1990). After 1918, immigrants arrived in the Czech lands while emigrating abroad (Russians, Ukrainians) or migrating within Czechoslovakia (Hungarians, Ruthenians, Slovaks). During 1946–1990, migration on the territory of the Czech lands was initiated by the state mainly through different actions, whether domestic (Hungarians, the Roma) or involving bringing people from abroad (Bulgarians, Cubans, Greeks, Macedonians, Russians, Syrians, the Vietnamese, etc.). Some of the immigration from abroad between 1946 and 1990 was limited in terms of time by agreements between different states and did not establish the right to permanent settlement for such individuals. Despite this, these individuals remained in the Czech lands (Moravcová – Nosková 2005: 17–50). Our discussion is about the holidays of migrants who entered the territory of the Czech Republic after 1990. The limits established for this discussion are exceeded in cases where, at the time of our research, the immigrants perceived themselves within their framework of their diaspora as holding unifying attitudes and gave testimonies that bridged the gap prior to 1990 by differentiating the time of their arrival on the territory of what is today the Czech Republic (not just Bulgarians, but also Greeks, Syrians, and the Vietnamese).

(Dvořáková), Belarusians (Korecká – Šmídová), Bulgarians (Georgieva; Staneva), Chinese (Matějovská; Turková), citizens of the state of Israel (Segerová – Slowik), Russians (Kopecká; Rešetarová), Syrians (Charvát) and the Vietnamese (Burešová).⁶ For illustration, a commentary on the festivities organized currently by Czech institutions as presentations of the cultural individuality of the foreign nationals present here is included in this publication (Vrbková).⁷

However, the starting point for our considerations of the importance of festivities in the lives of immigrants to the Czech Republic was not just those analyses. We also built our conclusions on the basis of research performed among groups of Bulgarians, Poles and Russians⁸ and on the basis of research designed for these purposes that was conducted from 2011–2019 under our direction by students of the Faculty of Humanities at Charles University (among groups of Bulgarians, the Chinese, Croats, expats, Greeks, Hungarians, citizens of the state of Israel, Macedonians, Mongolians, Poles, Russians, Serbs, South Koreans, Syrians, Ukrainians, the Vietnamese and others). The data we assembled through these surveys and on which we primarily based our considerations testifies to the festive practices of migrants from ethnic diasporas that are distinct from one another according to the following parameters:

- a) number of members (large vs. small diasporas),
- b) geographic region of origin of the immigrants (Europe, Near East, Middle East, Southeast Asia, America),
- c) cultural determinations stemming in a transparent way from the influence of churches and religions of the world,
- d) the ethnic diaspora's or migration group's social structure within the Czech Republic and the degree to which its members are oriented in economic and professional fields, as well as,

6 We also paid research attention in that publication to *Romani people*, citizens of the Czech Republic who descended from migrants from Slovakia who arrived in the Czech lands gradually during the second half of the 20th century (Rádl 2019).

7 Lucie Hanzlíková (expatriates, Prague, 2011–2013), Zuzana Korecká, Michaela Šmídová (Belarusians in Prague and small communities in Moravia, 2011–2012), Romyana Georgieva, Boriana Staneva (Bulgarians, Prague, 2011–2014), Liliana Rešetarová, Liudmila Kopecká (Russians in Karlovy Vary and Prague, 2012–2013), Kristýna Dvořáková (Armenians, Laskava, 2013–2014), Vendula Segerová, Miroslav Slowik (citizens of the state of Israel, Praha, 2012, 2016), Petr Charvát (Syrians in Central Bohemia and Prague, 2012–2013, 2016), Anna Matějovská, Miloslava Turková (the Chinese in a Central Bohemian town and in Prague, 2012, 2014–2015), Petra Burešová (the Vietnamese, Liberec, 2014), Tereza Vrbková (Integration Center, Prague, 2013).

8 Research by M. Moravcová (Bulgarians, Poles), D. Bittnerová (Russians).

- e) the approach built by Czech society toward the country of origin of immigrants who first arrived during the 19th and 20th centuries, and toward those immigrants themselves during the beginning phases of their entry into the territory of the Czech Republic.

The collected data facilitates comparison, the establishment of unique identities, and the finding of causalities and dependent relationships.

The reflections on the festive practices of migrants from ethnic diasporas or migration groups that are based on our field research come from data acquired by surveying small groups of first and second-generation immigrants.⁹ The choice of these groups was determined by two basic conditions: their members' acknowledged ethnic or linguistic identity, and their awareness of the authenticity, in social terms, of their ethnic diaspora or migration group.

Within the framework of these established limits, we contacted groups construed as follows: a) relationships of a social nature (actual or perceived extended family members, friendships, affiliation with civic/religious groups), b) economic fields of activity particular to the group (represented transparently in some diasporas), c) affiliation with collectives of students or workers, d) generational position and local affiliation. We paid attention to groups brought together by their participation in the activities of associations run by their fellow migrants from their country of origin. The choice of which groups to study was based on the positions they occupied in Czech society. The selection was oriented toward the characteristic social types of new migrants. That being said, the internal social hierarchies particular to some new ethnic diasporas in the Czech Republic were taken into consideration when interpreting the data in order to compare attitudes toward the holidays practiced. The choice of localities was limited, above all, to the territory of Bohemia. We conducted research in Karlovy Vary, Liberec, Prague, and smaller towns in Central Bohemia, North Bohemia, and Vysočina. We conducted research on holidays in the territories of Moravia and Silesia in just a handful of cases. Within Bohemia, our choices were governed by the size of the new immigrant groups and their importance to the local population.

Of course, our reflections are also based on other analyses published in either book or journal article form and on the findings of other re-

9 We recorded the attitudes of third-generation migrants rarely during this research (mainly within the Macedonian and Greek diasporas).

searchers who have studied the issue of the festive practices of immigrants in the Czech Republic. Their work inspired our contemplations and gave us access to knowledge about situations in areas we had not researched. We also took into consideration research done by students who followed the subject of festivities in different associations, contexts and perspectives on specific groups of immigrants in their diploma works defended at various faculties of universities throughout the Czech Republic, e.g., in Brno, České Budějovice, Olomouc, Pardubice, Pilsen and Prague. Their studies provided us with data on the holiday practices of migrants not only in the territory of Bohemia, but also in the territories of Moravia and Silesia. They made it possible to record and compare local variations and initiated considerations about the causes of the birth and ongoing existence of such differences. Another data source for our considerations was print periodicals, whether produced for a specific group, a local area, or the mainstream press. These mainly provided factual data, although in some cases they also included information about the meanings ascribed to the festive events and the attitudes of those participating in them.

We also worked with information on social media that was posted by both central government and local institutions, associations and individuals. These posts provided data about the festivities being organized, their character and program. They made it possible for us to also look into the ideological approach of the stakeholders toward these festivities and the discussions that were held about them.

When referencing data from the literature, the press and social media, we use the dual citation method. As for the authors of academic and scholarly pieces, we reference them in parentheses (full citations are in the bibliography). References to information from the press and social media are footnoted so readers can find them more easily. We have not compiled a list of the latter sources.

To conclude this introduction of our primary sources, data and research, we consider it essential to state that our intention is to show the meanings, problems, and social impacts of festivities on immigrants in the Czech Republic and on the cultural and social profiling of the ethnic diasporas/migration groups to which they belong. Our intention defines the boundaries for presenting the in-depth analyses on which our conclusions are based.

We are fully aware that our construct is a selective and therefore an incomplete one, both from the perspective of new ethnic diasporas and migration groups that have entered the territory of the Czech Republic and from the perspective of their internal social structures and distribu-

tion. Within the context of the life of all new diasporas and migration groups (whether ethnic, linguistic, or defined by country of origin) currently residing in the territory of the Czech Republic, our construct is a limited one. These limits are related both to the number of the ethnic diasporas and migration groups that have been followed, as well as to their internal generational and social structures. The following text only testifies to segments of reality in the Czech Republic, both with regard to the choice of ethnic diasporas and migration groups and to the selection of the sets of informants followed from within those diasporas or migration groups.

The festivities of immigrants cannot be viewed as established actions that are codified by tradition. They are social constructs through which the members of ethnic diasporas and migration groups respond to their current social needs. They are therefore subject to change. Innovations, the constitution of new festivities, and the abandonment of festivities that no longer serve a purpose were documented through our research even as brief as the time period in which we performed these surveys was.

What we have constructed here is based on research undertaken over the course of nine years. Some festivities of groups of immigrants were, of course, followed for a shorter period of time. We are aware of the limitation of the fluctuations and scope, temporally speaking, of our findings. For that reason, the term of applicability for each documented data 'point' is indicated by the time at which the data was recorded.