

# Ruthenians: Missing or Lost? An Analysis of Migrating European Minority in the XX and the XXI Century From the Documents Gathered by Miron Žiroš

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*Source / Izvornik:* **Journal of the International Symposium of Students of English, Croatian and Italian Studies, 2019, 16 - 33**

**Conference paper / Rad u zborniku**

*Publication status / Verzija rada:* **Published version / Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:172:825943>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-04-25**

*Repository / Repozitorij:*

[Repository of Faculty of humanities and social sciences](#)



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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN SPLIT

**JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM  
OF STUDENTS OF ENGLISH, CROATIAN AND ITALIAN  
STUDIES**



University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Split, 2019.



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**Print**

Redak d. o. o.

**Edition**

100 copies

**Editor address**

Poljička cesta 35, Split  
itheom.split@gmail.com

ISBN 978-953-352-037-7

UDK 82.09(062)

CIP record for printed edition is available in computer catalog of National and University Library in Zagreb under number 171005027.

Journal is published by University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split.

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**Ruthenians: missing or lost? An analysis of migrating European minority in the XX and the XXI century from the documents gathered by Miron Žiroš**

*Abstract: The problem of the contemporary world regarding small nations is not only national identity and ethnicity. The minorities which do not have a mother-country have often faced oppression in the past, and today, when they are encouraged to publicly show and celebrate their tradition, there are fewer people eager to participate, some even to speak in their native language. The problem that will be shown in this paper is the way that Ruthenians (or Rusyns) are losing in the battle to contemporary migrations and assimilation in intimate biographical stories gathered by Ruthenian journalist Miron Žhirosh (Miron Žiroš or Мирон Жирон). The goal in this paper is to show contemporary world from an angle of a small human without their mother country, and even though the person has grown up in a small and semi-closed community, they have to open to the world to survive, and the way the family and their value is changing and deteriorating in the contemporary world with traditions disappearing.*

**Keywords:** Ruthenians/Rusyns, minority, disappearing, national identity, globalization

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, multiculturalism is more than welcome as every country, every city at every time of the year has people of different ethnicities living in it. All around the world people are fighting for some form of freedom. These freedoms rarely consider the freedom to belong to a certain ethnicity, which, even though it has been officially considered as a part of human rights and identity, the reality does not reflect. Native Americans throughout the US live either in reservations which are a part of national parks, or are thoroughly assimilated by the American society, and have no freedom on or right to the land they have been using for hundreds of years before the 19th century. Many Amazonian ethnic groups share a similar problem. Their homeland is being destroyed and exploited by wood companies, but they, because of their way of life, are not able to understand governance issues and therefore it is easy for them to be used and even ignored by the officials. During the long history of colonizing, the conquerors oppressed the locals in order to “civilize” them, but, in actuality, it was through brutal oppression and assimilation the locals were forced to adopt the (colonizer’s) culture. By using these methods of “civilizing”, if any of these ethnicities remained to this day, they are considered minorities. These types of problems do not have an origin only in the colonization process, but also in the conquests throughout Europe and Eurasia. When a small country or a small ethnic group falls in the hands of a bigger country, they are, almost as a rule, assimilated. This paper will consider one problem of one such type of minority – ethnicity which does not have its own country and which is, because of different historical and contemporary processes, disappearing. The minority which this article covers is a Ruthenian minority, whose homeland is in the Carpathian Mountains in the contemporary Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania, even though they can be found all around the world. The number of Ruthenians is declining as there are fewer and fewer people who declare themselves as Ruthenians, and even fewer who use and practice their culture and language.

“I am from nowhere” (The Warhol 2018: n. p.). That is the response that people would receive if they were to ask Andy Warhol where he comes from. In reality, Andy Warhol did have a family and did have a place where his family came from. His parents were Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants who came from the part of the Carpathian Mountains which is the part of Slovakia today. Even though politically speaking, it is a part of the Republic of Slovakia, historically speaking this is the land of Ruthenian, the small ethnic group which has never had their own

internationally recognized country, although on some historical occasions it was possible. In contemporary Europe, Rusyn have their position settled as a minority in the countries where they live (such as Kashubs in northern Poland). They are not the only minority without a state and in this way not particularly interesting to study, although their history, intertwined with the countries they have been part of is completely different. Their voices during history, at least here in the Republic of Serbia, are rarely heard. Their migrations are so important and such a big part of their lives, especially since their migrations were usually forced<sup>1</sup>. Forcing and oppressing people during longer periods brings misfortune firstly, and, in this case, demise upon the oppressed in the end. By assimilating to survive, to give themselves a future, people go into so much assimilation that they become unsure about their own identity which leads to forming a new one based on the dominant culture, and leaving their native-born culture.

## MIRON ŽIROŠ

Miron Žiroš is a journalist, publicist and, let us call him the archivist of Ruthenian history. His books show the life of the Ruthenians, mostly in the XX and the XXI century, from data gathered while he was working as a journalist for a Ruthenian magazine called “Ruske slovo”. His colleague and friend Ćura Laćak says, “Велька часц того цо Жирош написал и публиковал представля еден фрагмент, едну сличку зоз филмскей пантліки живота наших людзох, котра ноши у себе и едну историйну димензию”<sup>2</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 10). This work is filled with different news, stories, reports, pictures, anecdotes, diaries, letters, confessions and many more intimate and conversational formats of storytelling. This is a life-long material and an archive worthy of a proud scientist. Žiroš’s work is really a marvelous garden of ideas for further research in many humanistic fields.

One of the interesting questions regarding Žiroš’s publications is the question of the genre. He himself says, “Я ше не намагал написац

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<sup>1</sup> Further informations on migrations acquired from: Маґочи, П. Р. (Magochi, P.R.) (2009). Народ нїюдкадз – илустрована история Карпатских Руснацох.

<sup>2</sup> “The big part of what Žiroš has written and published represents one fragment, one small picture from the film tape of our people’s life, which as well carries in itself one historical dimension.” Since the materials used for this paper were not translated, the author of this paper is translating the needed quotations.



историю, я писал цошка инше”<sup>3</sup> (Žiroš 2008: 92). This “else” is the aspect worthy of exploring. His work consists of, as we have already mentioned, testimonies gathered from the civilians of certain ethnicity about certain historical circumstances. This kind of work is not completely new. Furthermore, something similar has been just recently worldly recognized in the works of Svetlana Alexievich, the 2015 winner of the Nobel prize in literature. She is also a journalist who writes a type of documentary prose which she herself calls “novels of voices” (Alexievich 2016: n. p.), where she takes stories told by ordinary people (although in this way she is showing that no one is ordinary) and gives it a form on the paper and in the book by gathering the stories under the same or similar topic. She shared her view on the world,

“I see the world as voices, as colours, as it were. From book to book, I change, the subjects change, but the narrative thread remains the same. It is the narrative thread of the people I have come to know ... With thousands of voices I can create – you could hardly call it reality, since reality remains unfathomable – an image of my time, of my country... It all forms a sort of small encyclopaedia, the encyclopaedia of my generation, of the people I came to meet. How did they live? What did they believe in? How did they die and how did they kill? And how hard did they pursue happiness, and did they fail to catch it?” (Alexievich 2016: n. p.).

Svetlana Alexievich does essentially the same thing as Miron Žiroš. They both are illuminating the ordinary person, who is not ordinary. It does not matter what the person did or how “small” their life was; they were the witnesses of their times. When people read “The Diary of Anne Frank”, it is similar to stories written by these two people. We could see the connection with the literature and drama character type – the Everyman. The Everyman has a long tradition in the literature and drama, and it is a typical character with whom the reader should easily connect. Here, it is different. Even though their characters are Everymen, the authors are using them to show a collective spirit by applying inductive reasoning on collected answers from their informants who become silent heroes of the stories. From individual to collective, their approach serves a purpose of giving a lesson to their readers.

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<sup>3</sup> “I was not trying to write down the history, I wrote something else.”

## A PROBLEM OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN RUTHENIAN MINORITY

The definition of a national identity is a problematic one, since not only the laws, but also the minds of people are changing depending on the historical conditions, so this definition and the feeling of the national and cultural identity are changing as well. Žiroš provides this one, “Знанє о своїм єстве – фундамент националногo идентитета и интегритета”<sup>4</sup> (2008: 52), which indicates that a person receives their national identity in its surroundings, as a part of cultural and even basic knowledge. Supposedly, a person should know about themselves firstly from their family, and afterward to supplement knowledge while being in the process of education<sup>5</sup>. By the law of the Republic of Serbia, the minorities have equal rights as the dominant culture<sup>6</sup>. This is all well and good, but there is a problem. This right to be and live as a Ruthenian has one major flaw – there is no control over their education. Whether a child goes to a school where classes are taught in Ruthenian, they will learn about the Ruthenian culture. Whereas if the child goes to a regular public school, they often do not have the possibility to study Ruthenian. And even if they do, the grades from this language are not part of the regular system which means that those are not officially recognized nor relevant in their education, ergo children do not consider it a necessary skill to have. The problem, according to the teachers and professors is in the state finances as well in the system which is not controlling whether the children are attending classes. Furthermore, parents are the ones who do not apply for classes or educate their children. Moving away from financial and governmental problems, as they are not the part of this research, the question is – why Ruthenians cannot be themselves, and why is there not enough interest from the parents for their children to learn their own language and culture?<sup>7</sup> These examples of

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<sup>4</sup> “Knowledge about yourself (self as in your ancestors, your culture and language) is a basis of national identity and integrity.”

<sup>5</sup> As Hobsbawm has explained in his essay “Language, Culture and National Identity” our social knowledge is mostly formed during education, all up until the late adolescence.

<sup>6</sup> In Lotman’s theory the culture which is prevalent in different categories – quantitative or qualitative, and the culture which is changing the other, is the dominant one.

<sup>7</sup> Opinions were shared and conducted on a debate during Fourth Scientific Conference for Students, Young Scientists and Experts, in Novi Sad, May 26<sup>th</sup> 2018.

detachment are leading to tomorrow's adults who do not declare themselves or take part in Ruthenian cultural life as Ruthenians. In the recent study conducted by Pew Research Center,<sup>8</sup> "People throughout the continent say it is important to respect national institutions and laws and speak the dominant national language to be a true member of their country" (2018: 1). There is no country which is not a "salad bowl" – a mixture of different ethnicities that live in the same country, but as seen on the previous example, the problem of national identity and keeping the minority existing is a completely different story. We can talk about the culture, about the origin, the last name (or both), but the aspect of a nation which most of Europe considers one of the most important (since institutions and laws are somewhat similar nowadays) is the language. So, we should go back to Žiroš, who writes about the nation,

“А сущна ей означена територія, бешед и чувство єдносици, односно >медзисобного розуменя, газдованя и власного розвиваняу своїм оградзеним просторе, але и у обисцу, валалє, краю, обласци, покраїни, але у держави.< На концу шицко ше зводзи на одредзованє будуцого напряду политичного, привредного, културного и национального розвою, дзекуюци споконвичному традиційному розвою жительство новооформеней держави... котра каждого члена примуши робити и справовац ше так и почитовац таки порядок яки одредзела иснуюца политична... и национална власц нового обєдинєня територїї до националней держави“<sup>9</sup> (2008: 52).

If we follow his thoughts, every country is supposed to consist of only one ethnicity, which is not possible, although if we think wider, and follow further, it becomes clear that the ethnicity which did not develop into a country now has a problem to protect itself on an international level, since they, apart from international laws, only have themselves to demand their rights as ethnicity different from the governing one.

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<sup>8</sup> Additional information is available on: <http://www.pewresearch.org/>

<sup>9</sup> “And its key labels are territory, language and the feeling of unity, regarding >mutual understanding, governing and individual growth in its enclosed space, but also a home, a village, a neighborhood, a province, but still in the state.< In the end, all ends with the positioning of the future political, economic, cultural and national development, thanks to the serene traditional population development in the newly formed state... which makes every member work and do and respect that order which has been decided by the initial political... and national government of the new unification of the territory to the national state” (tr. from Ruthenian).

Additionally, they also depend on the contemporary government which in most republics changes every four years. Understandably, it is quite the race to protect the culture, precisely to protect the opportunities to use that specific language and culture. The liberalistic movements across the world are fighting for elementary human rights, but in the Human Rights Law,<sup>10</sup> ethnicity is also included.

A lot of questions arise – why are Ruthenians keeping themselves from their own ethnicity and why and how are their numbers getting smaller if the whole world is fighting for and winning to achieve the basic human rights for everyone? Where is the right to be of a certain nationality, ethnicity or culture and not to be discriminated on that basis?

## **RUTHENIAN MIGRATIONS/ASIMILATION PROCESS THROUGHOUT CENTURIES**

As it was already mentioned, Ruthenians are an ethnicity whose history is filled and marked by migrations, especially forced migrations. The Ruthenians from the XX and the XXI century about whom Žiroš writes are from the group that was forcefully moved from the Carpaths to the today's Vojvodina, the autonomic province in the Republic of Serbia, during the XVIII century by Austro-Hungarian government. One of the main reasons for the first migrations were,

“Кед ше пре материялни обставини и чежки газдовски живот, после розсельована знова велї нашли у материялней биди пре свою вельчисленосц и примушени су одходзиц на нови континент же би себе предлужели живот у своїх стредкох - змогли окрепни мастки и достоїнствено виховали свойо потомство “<sup>11</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 12).

The author himself is talking about the living standard and reasons to emigrate. The bravery and the need of the certain Ruthenians from the beginning of the XX century have taken them on their own will far away from any land they have seen and walk on. This case is nowhere unique in world history, but the story of this small ethnicity is different from,

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<sup>10</sup> Additional information is available on: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/>.

<sup>11</sup> “Because of the financial circumstances and hard servant's life, when after the first migration they had new material misery caused by big families they were made to go to a new continent in need of prolonging their lives – so they could buy their own land and raise their children with dignity”

for example, British or Irish migration for the most obvious reason they did not speak a language which was internationally recognized at that time. They only had their strong will and wish to make their and their families living standards better. The mass emigrations with the really small number of returnees have started mostly from the other part of the XX century. It is interesting to note that the emigration process was so massive that it was needed to divide it into periods. This division consists of,

- “1. Земледільська еміграція од 1895-1914. рок до ЗАД;
  2. Ремеселніцка еміграція од 1919-1930. рок до Аргентини, Канади и ЗАД;
  3. Роботніцка еміграція од 1970-1990. до жемох Европи и Австралий;
  4. Интелектуална еміграція од 1991. до Немецкей, Канади и других жемох”<sup>12</sup>
- (Žiroš 2008: I, 121).

The goal was to show what level of education and which living standard required to be escaped from, or required an immediate change for these emigrants. Sadly, the level of education has only grown since the beginning of the XX century and is showing the tendencies known in the rest of the Balkan region, even known to the rest of the world. Young or middle-aged people are emigrating from their countries which are in a war or the process of transition, more often than not leaving never to return. The countries who already have problems develop more complex problems and this vicious cycle never ends, at least not with a positive outcome. The countries become destabilized and disappear, with the remaining people becoming refugees.

Miron Žiroš has also written about a separate reason for disappearing, and that was the process of assimilation, mostly through mixed marriages. About those circumstances, Žiroš writes during the 1990s, “Живот у мишаних стредкох допомага векше число мишаних малженствох. Мишани малженства за Русиных у прешлосци були >трагични<. Поспишовали асиміляцію, односно хаснованє языка мацери, духовне вихованє у другей вири и траценє за руску

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<sup>12</sup> “1. The Farmer’s emigration 1895-1914. to USA; 2. The Craftsman’s emigration 1919-1930. to Argentina, Canada and USA; 3. The Worker’s emigration 1970-1990 to the countries in Europe and Australia; 4. The Intellectual emigration from 1991 to Germany, Canada and other countries.”

народносц”<sup>13</sup> (1997: 493). Later in the paper, this process will be shown in examples from Ruthenians in Serbia as well as the ones in emigration. Emigrations help these mixed marriages and assimilation, and vice versa. Ruthenians have, at least from this part of Žiroš’s gathered documents, already chosen their destiny.

## **INDIVIDUAL STORIES ABOUT TREATMENT OF RUTHENIAN EMIGRANTS**

The first and the second periods of emigration are an interesting example of fast development and even faster death of a newly formed community. The majority of the stories are about the city Barberton in Ohio, US, which is considered as one of the biggest communities of Ruthenians in the US at that time. The majority of Ruthenian emigrants there were from Vojvodina. The selected stories are mostly told by the people who were there or by their children. There are even examples of the following stories, what has happened with the family after the first years, all the way up until this millennium which the journalist uses to give compelling conclusions.

The first US immigrants were saving up a lot, so much that they did not take pictures. Even if they did, it would happen only on special occasions. Instead, they wanted to earn as much money as possible so they could send it back home. There are multiple pictures from funerals held for the Ruthenian who died in the US, “Людзе, хлопи, жени, легине и дзеци ище пооблекани так як ше ношели у Краю... Да нет отвореной труни и древеной хижи опрез котрей людзе сликовани ніхто би и не поведол же то сликоване у Барбитону у держави Охайо. у Зєдинених Америцких Державох, 1910. Року”<sup>14</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 151). This custom was developed because they were the place of meeting, no matter the occasion. This was the proof of staying united, of not abandoning your roots and your ways. These assembly photographs were taken at weddings as well, the second gathering place. They are proof of the existence of many people in this community. From the mentioned picture it is easy to conclude that it

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<sup>13</sup> “Life in multicultural circumstances is helping the bigger number of mixed marriages. The mixed marriages for Ruthenians in the past were >tragic<. They were helping the assimilation, ergo using the mother language, spiritual upbringing in other religion and disappearing for Ruthenian ethnicity.”

<sup>14</sup> “People, men, women, boys, and children are still in outfits that were worn in their motherland... If there were none uncovered coffin nor log house in front of which these people took the shot, no one would have told that it was taken in Barberton, Ohio the US in 1910.”

was not easy to find a well-paid job as well as that the Ruthenians in the US also lived in poverty. There are testimonies about how the clothes were changing, „По Першу войну, облєчиво им було ише бачванске... По Першей

войни пременєло ше, насампредз, облєчиво, а душа, навикнуца и традиция – остали исти”<sup>15</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 175). These testimonies stand in multiple places in the publicized papers, most of them quite similar. Therefore, if they were to be compared using the Rashomon effect, nothing would have been gained. Instead, we can conclude that the first Ruthenian emigrants in the US were genuinely attached to their own culture. The first immigrants maybe gained the most – they had been brave, they fulfilled their plans to earn much-needed money (for the most part), they gained the new knowledge and the experience of living abroad in a completely different state (at the beginning of the XX century Vojvodina was still the part of the monarchy).

When it comes to the statements about the treatment of the Ruthenians by locals, the stories are different. One of them catches attention. It is from a returnee named Mikola, “Ми, странци, там менєй вредзели... Американски дзеци кричалї... кричалї нам же зме >гунки<, странци... >дегов<, циган, “including shortly afterwards, „На роботу вше волелї вжац єдного Югославяна, як єдного Нигра. Але такой после нас приходзелї чарни”<sup>16</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 178-179). There is no doubt that discrimination was present, mostly because of the culture shock from the locals. When inspecting children’s nicknames for Ruthenians, it is easy to understand the discrimination level even without the additional example. To be one step above people with African origin, who were at that time still victims of racism, meant to be a little more than a slave. It is quite interesting how from such an old story (around 100 years ago), the superiority complex often seen in American popular culture is shown in actual life. Mikola is a witness of those as mentioned earlier actually happening. In this unsuccessful dialogue, the foreigners are the Other.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Up until the WWI their clothes were still from Bačka... Following WWI, the clothes were replaced, at first, but the soul, the customs and the tradition have remained.’ (Bačka is a region of Vojvodina)

<sup>16</sup> “Us, the foreigners, were of less worth there... American kids would yell... they would yell that we are >gunki<, the foreigners... >degov<, a gypsy”; “For the job they would rather take Yugoslavian then someone black. But right after us were the black people.”

<sup>17</sup> The Otherness is a term which describes a form of unknown for the person experiencing the certain “new circumstance” in their life. It can be shown with multiple examples. Firstly, in “Robinson Crusoe”, when Robinson meets

There are still more interesting examples of culture shock in Mikola's story, particularly concerning stereotypes that Europeans have for Americans. He is stating that "Америка не була >обещана жем< за каждого Руснака. Постала обещана и сполнела своё обещаня лем тому хто ше знал од ней чувац и зачувац", then he adds later, "Америку могло надвладац лем здрави Руснак. И здорового погляду на Америку, на ей понуканя и ей кламаня"<sup>18</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 177). Actually, there is an urban legend which is connected to the mass emigration. In addition, there is an urban legend connected to the mass emigration to the USA that has an origin in the idea of a democratic state, a supposed-to-be land with no aristocrats and their middle-aged system of governing – a widely known as the "American dream". It is the story of how only in America, whoever you are and wherever you come from, you can start afresh and live a comfortable and prosperous life. Even though Mikola most likely did not talk about the "American dream", this is the well-known example of the artificial glory that America could seem in one's point of view. Moreover, when considering used analogy "the promised land," Mikola is negatively comparing the USA to Jerusalem.

"American dream" and "the promised land" are the metaphors from different cultures. Whereas the first one tells the story about ideal materialistic life, the other one tells about the heaven on earth for the Christians. The Ruthenians live a hard life filled with an existential crisis, misery, hunger, mistreatment from the Hungarian and Austrian authorities, together with the forced assimilation to Hungarians. In spite of these circumstances, they live in their communities together tied by heritage, mostly poor living conditions and faith in Christ. By using the recent data, we can conclude about the past, "Central and Eastern Europeans of all ages are generally more likely than Western Europeans to tie their views on national identity to Christianity, birthplace, and ancestry" (Diamant and Gardner 2018: n. p.). As the conditions of living in the Austro-Hungarian Empire were the same for most of the Slavic ethnicities, it is no wonder that the cultural distinctions would keep

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Friday, he is experiencing the Other which he cannot comprehend. Secondly, in "Alice in Wonderland", all the creatures which Alice meets is the Other from her point of view. Thirdly, every encounter with the unknown can be that incomprehensible Otherness.

<sup>18</sup> "America was not the >promised land< for every Ruthenian. It became the promised one and was fulfilling its promises only to those who knew how to guard and keep safe from it"; "America could have been overpowered only by a healthy Ruthenian. And also, with common sense view on America, on her offers and risks."



them from assimilating completely. Furthermore, it is no surprise that all of these ties would remain an important part of national identity to this day. Returning to the narration from Mikola, going to the USA for most of the Ruthenians who used to work in fields or as servants, to the big industrial cities like Detroit was a cultural shock. Their culture is completely different. What makes Ruthenians assimilate is in no way the USA on its own; it is assimilation on their own will, because of the life that they have left in Europe with an iron-will decision not to return to that life, and not to leave their families to live that life. They went with the feelings of despair, excitement, hope, and will to earn a better tomorrow by working hard and go back home, not to stay there. The need to live in a community of your own is only natural. It is a need for family and for one's cultural code<sup>19</sup> which is part of oneself. Furthermore, the need to form their community is the need to keep oneself safe between your own.

There are more examples of these communities, and one of them tells the reasons for staying a part of such a community while in emigration,

“Носталгия не була за державу, за Югославию... Носталгия була за своїм валалом, за своїма родичами, братами, сестрами, и за своїм народом. А як нестала? Як и обично. Людзе кед ше дакущичко змогну, збогаца, кед ше уж знайду, уж знаю бешеду, купя себе авто, маю красни квартиру, вецка ше уж идзе на вилети, на пикники... Зоз своїма зме людзми, у кругу свойого народу, ведно зме ту, чувствуєме ше свойо, тримаєме ше ведно”<sup>20</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 184-185).

The nostalgia is a sensation quite popular as a motif in the Yugoslavian literature of the first half of the XX century. In the Ruthenian literature, nostalgia and similar sentimental feelings are a statement piece, which, derived from their history filled with forced movements and many farewells, are logical. Sentimental feelings are a bond for the Ruthenian

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<sup>19</sup> Cultural codes are the specific culture a person grew up in and is part of, as a part of a global communication sphere – semiosphere, which includes all cultures and civilizations which can communicate through similarities between their codes. It is a theory developed by Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman.

<sup>20</sup> “We have not felt nostalgia for our country, for Yugoslavia... We felt nostalgia for our village, our parents, brothers, sisters, and for our people. But how had it disappeared? As usual. As people become a bit more established, get some money, when they manage a bit, when they know the language, buy themselves a car, get a nice flat, then they are going to field trips, picnics... We are between our own people, in the circle of our ethnicity, together, we feel and act together.”

immigrants in the US. This bond between the people from the same country and origin is unusually powerful if they are surrounded by the unknown. They long for the same fields, the same villages, the same people. Witnessing the process of assimilation from the second generation of emigrants is proof of its fast pace. She is describing typical American gatherings – field trips and picnics, where she is even using the English word instead of Ruthenian. She is mentioning her family buying cars. Buying one, not to mention changing a few of them was nearly impossible for this family back in Europe. All of these American goods and assets did not have the goal to assimilate. It was their personal choice. Marvelously, these activities and commodities had only kept the Ruthenian bond strong and safe, because it had made it easier for them to gather. The first Ruthenians were the “ice-breakers” who returned home in the biggest number, which only determines that they longed for their homes the most.

## ASSIMILATION PROCESS

The city of Barberton is mentioned in multiple documents as one of the biggest meeting points for Ruthenians in the USA. The author goes so far to give it the symbolic name based on the biggest village and the most known Ruthenian center in Vojvodina, Ruski Kerestur<sup>21</sup> – “Американски Керестур”<sup>22</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 175).

In one story there is an estimation of the number of Ruthenians in Barberton, “У Барбитону, кельо нас шицкогo було, чежко можем повесц. Було нас вельо. Правела ше и руска цeрквa и шкoлa при Михaлa Мaкaя”<sup>23</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 137). The fact that they managed to build a church, a school, a butcher shop, including a few houses for renting, shows the importance of making communities for the best interest of everyone. Afterwards, they quickly started buying private family houses. That shows that after economic strengthening there were Ruthenians who chose to stay in the USA permanently. As mentioned before, the community was strong and they felt at home. The speed of their change was sometimes abnormally fast, although with a plan in mind, “Мoя мaц пoшлa дo Aмepики у ширoких сукньoх, у нaрoдних шмaтoх, a ютрe дзeнь тaкoй дoстaлa aмepикaнски шмaти и кaлaп. Aлe булo шмиху кoлo тoгo. Тeди шe нoшeли тoти кaлaпи зoз вeлiкимa кpисaми. Oцeц eй кyпoвaл и мaц вибpaлa нaйвeкши цo

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<sup>21</sup> ruth. Руски Керестур

<sup>22</sup> Amerikanski Kerestur

<sup>23</sup> “In Barberton how many of us were there, it’s hard to say. There were a lot of us. Ruthenian church and school were built by Mihal Makay.”

бул. Було то 1919. року”<sup>24</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 186). This example shows voluntary assimilation in order to find the job easier, as well as the need to adapt to the community which already had changed the traditional clothes for the worker clothes. In the stories of the people who went to Barberton we see similarities which help us to see the objective and historically documented story about immigrants in Barberton.

Of course, there were examples of people who quite easily not only adopted the clothes and habits for everyday life but who also chose to assimilate completely. Along with the abovementioned “American dream” story, there is a story that fights the odds of the urban legend staying the legend only. One lady told the story about her dear friend Irina. In Europe, Irina lived in misery, and she describes her as “слатка, лєм же кед була така худобенка”<sup>25</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 147). Her picture in an old dress, without any footwear, has seen one of the “bosses”<sup>26</sup> in America. He has fallen in love with her just by looking at the picture. He asked her to come to America to be his wife. She said yes, so he sent her the money to buy new clothes and everything she might need, along with the ticket to America. Afterwards she wrote to her friend back in Yugoslavia, “На гомбалки ше вожим. Ніч, ніч, ніч я не робим, ніч. Полудзенок нам принєшу, ані не варим. Ми шицко маме... Кед придзе поладне лєм шеднеме и єме”<sup>27</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 148). Irina really lived the “American dream” – from the poor girl to the rich madam, just based on a one look at her picture. Her story is a unique one, taking into account that she did not leave to work, to live, or to run away. Just like Cinderella from the fairy tale, she went from the dust to the castle. Furthermore, this too is an example of the culture shock, which showed to be successful and complete assimilation.

Going back to the testimony about nostalgia, the part where the person said, “Людзе кед ше дакушчицко змогну, збогаца, кед ше уж знайду. ... Зоз своїма зме людзми, у кругу svojого народу, ведно

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<sup>24</sup> “My mother went to America in a traditional dress, and immediately the next day she got American clothes and a hat. We were laughing a lot. Then women would wear those hats with big brim. The father was buying and she chose the one with the biggest brim in the store. It happened in the 1919.”

<sup>25</sup> “sweet, but she was so poor”

<sup>26</sup> The term used for the owner of the business.

<sup>27</sup> “I am rocking on the swing. There is nothing, nothing, nothing that I need to do, nothing. The lunch is brought to us, I do not even have to cook. We have it all... When the noon comes, we seat and eat.”

зме ту, чувствуємо ше свойо, тримаєме ше ведно“<sup>28</sup> (Žiroš 2002: 185). These two stories explain well the reasons people have decided to stay in America. The life in the micro-community creates a feeling of protection, as well as the comfortable atmosphere, there are no harsh dialogues with American culture without rest. In this way the Ruthenians can still keep existing as Ruthenians. “До Краю до Бачкей, були надумани врациц ше, але дзеци не сцели, та и вони остали у Америки и шицки постали Американци”<sup>29</sup> (Žiroš 2003: 199). This quote shows one of the main reasons why the families have stayed in the US. The generations born or raised in America, in most cases, wanted to stay, and not to return home. Along with them, their parents stayed, which resulted in all of them assimilating. Ruthenians who have stayed in the USA became Americans.

The last example of immigrant assimilation will be shown on the example of a genealogy of the Hromish line. In Europe, there were five siblings. The three of them moved to the USA and remained there. On approximately twenty pages, Žiroš is as accurate as possible in describing the origin of the family, completely up to the contemporary<sup>30</sup> descendants. The second generation in Vojvodina is the first generation in America, four out of five sons. Following the story about the first known member of the family are the stories about life of brothers in America. The final section is the genealogy, including several descendant testimonies. The latest generation included is the fifth one. Before presenting the last generation, the author came to conclusions concerning the assimilation process. He is showing it via monitoring practice of Ruthenian language and culture in everyday life of every generation. The first descendants are still Ruthenian. The next one in Yugoslavia remains the same, although, in America, they use English outside of the household. The next generation in America already uses quite small vocabulary at home, whereas, by becoming adults, they abandon the Ruthenian language. In the fourth generation, the circumstances are also changing in Yugoslavia. Ruthenian is used exclusively within the family. Most of the fifth generation lives in a mixed marriage, where the percentage of the descendants speaking Ruthenian is particularly low. In summary, hardly five generations were

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<sup>28</sup> “As people become a bit more established, get some money, when they manage a bit... We are between ours, in the circle of our ethnos, together, we feel and act together.”

<sup>29</sup> “They decided to return to their homeland to Bačka, but when their children did not want to, then, they stayed in America as well, and all of them became Americans.”

<sup>30</sup> Contemporary – from the time of writing and publishing the book in 2003

sufficient to almost completely lose Ruthenian heritage in Europe, whereas in America, barely two were holding onto the European inheritance.

The author has even explored his own family heritage. Already in the second generation, if there was a mixed marriage, the descendants were losing the Ruthenian culture. He, likewise, follows the genealogy from the first to the fifth generation. Likewise, one part of the third generation emigrated for work, where most of them stayed in the diaspora. The author says about the last generation,

“Пияте поколєня Жиросових твора дзєци родичох зоз штвартого поколєня. Медзи нїма нет анї єдного Русина. Спрам народносци родичох вони може же – Сєрби, Горвати, Югославяне, Канадяне, Австралиянци, Швайцарци... Родичи штвартей и дзєци пиятей генєрациї жию на вельо ширшим подручу як скорейши генєрациї. Жию на ширшим подручу Горватскей и Войводини, а дзєкотри з нїх и у иножємствє”<sup>31</sup> (Žiroš 1998: 304).

The case of the society in Barberton could be an example of how a small community has the same features as macro-community. Furthermore, it shows how important it is to have “your own kind” and to be with them. The feeling that a person is not alone in his/her fight was making the emigration easier, and in time, it made it easier to settle. Considering the examples of the Hromish and Zhirosh families, it is clear that larger and persuasive cultures or we could call them the dominant culture codes are taking over smaller ones, completely assimilating them. In emigration, this process occurs quite quickly, but even the homeland also has no time to spare. The emigration, even though important factor, evidently is not the crucial for disappearance of one ethnicity.

## **CONCLUSION: LOOSING THE IDENTITY, LOOSING THE NUMBERS**

The process of globalization is making minorities disappear. The fight for human rights, the mixed marriages, the migration process, the need

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<sup>31</sup> “The fifth generation of Zhirosh family consists of the children of the fourth-generation parents. Between them, there is not even one Ruthenian. Considering their parent’s nationality, they could be – Serbian, Croatian, Yugoslavian, Canadian, Australians, Swiss... The parents of the fourth and the children of the fifth generation live in a wider area than the previous. They live in a wide area across Croatia and Vojvodina, some of them even abroad.”

to be a part of a bigger society to fit in smoothly – all of these globalization factors are the factors eating identities. The ordinary human from a small community which does not have the mother country, which could internationally protect its national identity and integrity, in a battle to live a decent life and have good living standard most commonly has to give up on their national identity. Why is this happening? The human rights provide us with freedom to belong and express our own culture and ethnicity. Then how come the Ruthenians are not studying and spreading their own heritage? Why is it the less important one than any other in mixed marriages? It seems that if a person does not have its own state to go back to, that this person's heritage, ergo, this person is less worthy? The author of this paper does not believe this to be the case. Ruthenians are not lost. The international recognition of minorities and their historical and cultural backgrounds need to be shown, promoted and translated. Žiroš and “novel of voices” are a way to promote Ruthenian culture as any other culture of this planet. And the Ruthenians are not translating it. Raising the significance of spreading knowledge should lead to better cultural appreciation and taking more pride in their weak national identity. If globalism considers multicultural identity as a normal, every national identity can and should become the part of the person's mixed origin beautifully diverse and appreciative national identity.

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