

Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon

Miodrag, Marko

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2023

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **University of Zadar / Sveučilište u Zadru**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:162:811237>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-11-23**



Sveučilište u Zadru
Universitas Studiorum
Jadertina | 1396 | 2002 |

Repository / Repozitorij:

[University of Zadar Institutional Repository](#)



zir.nsk.hr



DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJ

Sveučilište u Zadru
Odjel za anglistiku
Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij Anglistike

Marko Miodrag

Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon

Završni rad

Zadar, 2023.

Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku
Sveučilišni prijediplomski studij Anglistike

Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon

Završni rad

Student:

Marko Miodrag

Mentor:

Prof. dr. sc. Mario Vrbančić

Zadar, 2023.



Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

Ja, **Marko Miodrag**, ovime izjavljujem da je moj **završni** rad pod naslovom **Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon** rezultat mojega vlastitog rada, da se temelji na mojim istraživanjima te da se oslanja na izvore i radove navedene u bilješkama i popisu literature. Ni jedan dio mojega rada nije napisan na nedopušten način, odnosno nije prepisan iz necitiranih radova i ne krši bilo čija autorska prava.

Izjavljujem da ni jedan dio ovoga rada nije iskorišten u kojem drugom radu pri bilo kojoj drugoj visokoškolskoj, znanstvenoj, obrazovnoj ili inoj ustanovi.

Sadržaj mojega rada u potpunosti odgovara sadržaju obranjenoga i nakon obrane uređenoga rada.

Zadar, 27. rujna 2023.

Table of contents:

1. Introduction.....	5
2. The theory	6
2.1. What is diaspora?.....	6
2.2. What is identity?	7
2.3. What is diaspora identity?	8
2.4. Who is the stranger?	8
3. The books.....	10
3.1. Why Aleksandar Hemon?	10
3.2. Why <i>The Book of My Lives</i> ?	11
3.3. Why <i>Nowhere Man</i> and <i>The Question of Bruno</i> ?	12
3.4. Close reading <i>The Book of My Lives</i>	13
4. Conclusion	18
5. Works cited	19
6. Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon: Summary and key words	20
7. Identitet dijaspore u djelima Aleksandra Hemon: Sažetak i ključne riječi	20

1. Introduction

In today's open world full of opportunities, the number of people who make the decision to live their lives in a country different than the one they were born in keeps increasing year after year. In the past, people chose to migrate primarily because of the reasons which were out of their control. Those included things such as unemployment, poverty, wars and their consequences. The war also happens to be the reason which made Aleksandar Hemon, the author who will serve as an example in this paper, make the move from Sarajevo, Bosnia to Chicago, USA. However, it is important to note that particularly in the 21st century, many people choose to migrate not because they have to but because they want to. Internet has enabled people to see what the world has to offer and an individual might choose to migrate just to enrich their life, as is the case with many young people studying and living abroad. The reasoning might be varied, but the experiences and consequences of diasporic life tend to be quite similar. This is so because most diasporic individuals are going to face the lack of integration in their host country, which usually stems from different culture, national history, religious or other beliefs, traditions, and sadly even race, which is particularly seen in the USA. On the other hand, they are also cut off from their home country, because people in their homeland do not see them as belonging to that nation anymore, since to them they have made the decision to detach themselves. Suddenly, individuals find themselves in a situation where they do not truly belong anywhere, and that is the moment when the question of identity, or lack of thereof, comes into play. Expats are caught between two vastly different cultures which can make their lives unbearable. Even though they would like to keep both their home and host identities and not have to choose between them, what happens is that they lose their given identity and are not able to form the new identity, because they do not even know who they truly are or what they want to be. Even though the clear-cut answer to the concerns raised above simply does not exist, in this undergraduate thesis I will attempt to deconstruct the diaspora identity.

Second chapter will present the theoretical framework that shapes identity, diaspora and diaspora identity while the third chapter will exemplify the theory on the example of Aleksandar Hemon. Firstly, Hemon's three works will be presented: *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno*, after which the *The Book of My Lives* will be close read with a goal of demonstrating diaspora identity.

2. The theory

In order to better comprehend the representation of diaspora identity in Hemon's works, it is crucial to be familiar with the theoretical framework that supports and shapes it. Therefore, the first two sections of this second chapter will analyse both terms independently, after which they will be joined and interpreted together in the third section. The final section will examine the concept of the stranger, which is a crucial part in understanding diaspora identity.

2.1. What is diaspora?

The word diaspora stems from ancient Greek and has a proto-Indo-European root (Kenny 21). It is a compound which consists of the Greek words "dia" meaning over or through and "speirein" meaning to scatter or to sow. The term was used to describe any sort of dispersal in the negative context, sometimes even going as far as complete destruction, be it of some matter or human communities. That, at least in the sense of population movement, differentiates this term from the terms such as migration, as diaspora specifically denoted involuntary movement (Kenny 22). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines the term diaspora in two ways, firstly as "the movement of the Jewish people away from their own country to live and work in other countries" and secondly as "the movement of people from any nation or group away from their own country". Although the second definition spoils this chapter in a way, it is important to note that the major progress in that change happened during the last century. According to Kenny (21-27), until the 20th century, the term diaspora used to denote a specific and restricted meaning, primarily referring to the dispersal and exile of the Jews. In the 20th century, the term gradually expanded to cover involuntary dispersals of other populations, such as Africans and Armenians. However, in the last few decades, the term diaspora has prospered to the point that it can now be applied to practically any migrant. One might wonder, in its current state, what makes the term diaspora any different compared to migration? That question is answered by Kenny (21): "Diaspora is best approached not as a social entity that can be measured but as an idea that helps explain the world migration creates."

2.2. What is identity?

It is practically impossible to analyse the term diaspora without analysing identity, as, in a way, diaspora shapes the identity of people, on both conscious and unconscious level. Identity is defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as “who or what somebody or something is”. According to Coulmas (23) the topic of identity nowadays is more relevant than ever. One can argue that it has very much become ubiquitous, which is shown by the increasing number of books published on this topic: thirty-seven in the 1950s and more than 10000 since 2010 (Coulmas 23). To keep this section brief and relevant to the topic of this paper – diaspora identity, the focus will be on who – the human identity, as without the movement of people there would be no diaspora, and therefore no diaspora identity to speak of. To start with, it is very important to differentiate between legal identity and identity as a concept. Legal identity is exemplified in Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (qtd. in Coulmas 96): “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This citation could be interpreted in a way that “every human being has a legal personality with rights and duties” (Coulmas 96). Coulmas (96) also states that throughout history that was not always the case as some pre-modern societies considered slaves to be objects rather than people. Although very problematic, this fact is not relevant as Aleksandar Hemon was born in 20th century and is classified as a member of modern society. Much more important for this paper however is the identity as a concept. Coulmas (23) states that the explicit meaning of the word identity is sameness. Based on that, assumption could be made that identity is something “that should always stay the same” (Coulmas 23), but in reality, that could not be further from the truth as the word has metamorphosed into completely different meaning. That meaning of identity as a concept is best explained by Gilroy (qtd. in Woodward 301) who does not try to define it, but instead states that it “provides a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and cultural and historical settings in which that fragile subjectivity is formed.” Therefore, it could be concluded that identity is formed by one’s social circle but is also very much dependent on one’s inner mind. That is the reason why two individuals, even if they hypothetically had the same exact experiences would share just a small part of their identity.

2.3. What is diaspora identity?

Based on the separate analysis of the terms diaspora and identity in the sections above, one could conclude that these terms are very much co-dependent. Diaspora shapes the identity of diasporic individuals, sometimes referred to as migrants or strangers, as well as all the other people, who may be called natives, who happen to encounter the first kind. This paper will try to examine the co-dependency of diaspora and identity, as well as, even more importantly, explain the relationship between strangers and natives – and even question the meaning of these two entities. The information in the previous section about one's identity being formed by both experiences and inner mind also applies to diaspora identities. That is precisely the reason why each diaspora experience is unique, but at the same time, shared elements do exist. One could go even further and argue that there is an element of sameness to every migrant experience in general, which can then be connected to the original meaning of the word identity: sameness (Coulmas 23); which one could argue contradicts the fact that each immigrant experience is unique. The question of sameness and difference will not be further discussed in this particular paper, as the main aim is not to provide a comparative analysis, but to examine the work of only one author: Aleksandar Hemon. The purpose of raising this question is purely to show how the term diaspora defines identity and is able to give more context to it as well as question its core predispositions. More relevant to this paper, however, is the identity of strangers and natives which are going to be discussed in the following subchapter.

2.4. Who is the stranger?

When discussing strangers, the obvious definition which comes to mind is that stranger is a person one does not recognize. Ahmed (79) challenges this definition by arguing that a person who is declared a stranger is in fact recognized as such figure, and if they were not, they would not be deemed a stranger and some other noun would have been used to describe them. Before the term stranger is further analysed, it is important to raise the question of home – as general knowledge implies that home is one place where one cannot be a stranger. However, that general knowledge may not apply to persons with diaspora identities, as can be seen in the example (1):

- (1) I strolled around in the Invalides for quite some time after my father's departure. There was always something comforting, familiar about airports and air terminals. They

give me a sense of purpose and security. I was there with a definite destination – usually home, somewhere. In London, I came ‘home’ at the end of the day. During the holidays, I came ‘home’ to Paris and family. And once every two years, we went ‘home’ to India on ‘Home leave’. India was ‘real’ home, and yet, paradoxically, it was the one place we didn’t have a home of our own any more. We always stayed as guests. Of course we’d had a home once, but, when India was divided, it was all lost –the house, the city, everything. I couldn’t remember anything. (Dhingra qtd. In Ahmed 77)

The example (1) above serves to show how easy it is for an individual with diasporic identity to lose home in a traditional sense of that word, and through that process become a stranger to even themselves, not just to other people. Based on this passage alone, one could conclude that “the stranger is universal because of having no home” (Sarup qtd. in Ahmed 79); which can serve as a proof to Ahmed’s theory that this view of a stranger figure contradicts the basic definition of a stranger – one that is not recognised, because they are very much recognised – as strangers. Ahmed (3) defines this occurrence as stranger fetishism and goes on to suggest that the only way to avoid fetishising strangers is to “refuse to take for granted the stranger’s status as a figure”. An important discourse connected to this is the question of home and away. The model presented by Chambers (qtd. in Ahmed 88) assumes that there is an unbreakable opposition between home and away, in which “home would be a familiar space and away would be a strange land”. According to this model, when one is at home, they are native, while by leaving home one automatically becomes the stranger. Ahmed (88) finds this approach problematic, because when scaled up to a national level, it brings up the question of purity, which is unacceptable in modern societies, because if there is no option of finding another home, there should be no migration and no diaspora to speak of. Keeping this in mind, the airport mentioned in the example (1) could be seen as a melting pot as implied by Dhingra himself, but also as a limit of one’s home, and when one crosses that border, there is no home to speak of anymore and one automatically becomes the stranger. To deconstruct this apparent opposition, Derrida uses an example (2) of the host and the guest, who is presumed to be a strange, in host’s home:

(2) The hôte who receives (the host), the one who welcomes the invited or received hôte (the guest), the welcoming hôte who considers himself the owner of the place, is in truth a hôte received in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers in his own home; he receives it from his own home – which in the end does not belong to him. The hôte as host is a guest. (qtd. in Ahmed 190)

One way to look at this exchange is that the host is the one who receives the guest, making the guest the stranger in this exchange, but as implied by Derrida himself, at the same time, the owner is also receiving the hospitality of the guest, thus making him the stranger in his own home. At first, this example might not seem relevant to the topic of this paper, but it serves to prove that everything is in the eye of the beholder, and that the native may become the stranger, and the stranger may become the native.

3. The books

The aim of the third chapter of this paper is to provide practical examples of diaspora identity. The first section will introduce Aleksandar Hemon, the author who is the main subject of this paper and put him into the context of diasporic literature. As is already implied by its name, diasporic literature is a literary genre which demonstrates, reflects and reconstructs the immigrant experience of the author themselves in the form of a memoir or fictional character created by the author. The usual motifs are the loss of identity, hybridity of identity, gaining a new identity and nostalgia for old as well as new country. All of these motifs are very much present in the three chosen Hemon's works: *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno*. The second and third sections will present each of these titles separately and explain their relevancy to the topic of diaspora identity. After that, the final section will contain a chronological close reading of *The Book of My Lives* with the aim to demonstrate an example of a life a diaspora identity might lead an individual into.

3.1. Why Aleksandar Hemon?

Aleksandar Hemon is a Bosnian-American essayist, published book author, television writer and critic who was born and raised in Sarajevo by Bosnian-Ukrainian father, who was an engineer, and Bosnian-Serb mother, who worked as an accountant. After graduating general literature from the University of Sarajevo and working as a journalist in Sarajevan youth press, Hemon left his hometown Sarajevo in order to take part in the journalist exchange program in Chicago. He planned to stay in the USA for only one month, but the outbreak of the war in Bosnia forced him to reconsider that decision and he ended up applying as a political refugee in Chicago. Given the fact that his English skills were basic at best, he struggled to find gainful employment and therefore worked minimum-wage jobs. However, with time, his English has

improved which in turn enabled him to rediscover writing again. These days, he is a published author working as a professor of creative writing at Princeton University. Just judging by these basic facts, it is easy to understand what makes him a good subject for this research: he not only was born into a diasporic family with limited means, but has also found success in life, making him more objective as a writer, as he in the end has no reason to feel any contempt or dissatisfaction which would be reflected in his writing. He has written many essays and collections on diaspora identity, but this paper is of limited scope, so the three chosen works include *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno*, of which *The Book of My Lives* will be close read in relation to diaspora identity.

3.2. Why *The Book of My Lives*?

The Book of My Lives is the main work chosen for this analysis, despite being the last one to be written out of the three works, originally published in 2013. It is being addressed as a work and not a novel because it is actually a collection of fifteen essays, fourteen of which have already been published separately. Even though Hemon has never officially called this body of work a memoir, it can and will be viewed as such for the purpose of this paper as it is the first out of the two non-fiction works he has written, the second one being *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* published in 2019. These 15 essays describe Hemon's childhood and teenage life in Sarajevo as well as his adult life in Chicago in great detail. Although these essays were written at different times in Hemon's life, he decided not to sort them chronologically, but in a way which, as the title may already suggest, reveals all his lives to the reader. For example, one essay depicts the life of his family and what they were going through during certain time period, and only much later in the book the reader finds the second essay depicting Hemon's life during the exact same period. Therefore, the reader is able to get to know Hemon as a son to his parents, a brother to his sister, a migrant trying to integrate himself into the new society, as well as, eventually, a husband and a father after the full assimilation into the new society. The book begins with the birth of Hemon's sister Kristina in 1969. At first, he could not stand her and went as far to attempt to kill her as a baby. However, during the process, he has realised that he was in the wrong and that his role was to protect her, and that is exactly what he did going forward. After that, the focus is shifted to his childhood. He explicitly mentions the family vacation in Italy where his father managed to lose all their money. Nevertheless, they still managed to have a good time. The next essay shifts to Hemon's

teenage years and depicts his group of friends called “raja”. The following essays follow Hemon into his young adulthood, serving in the army, attending university, working on a youth radio and so on. One of the parties he went to was Nazi-themed and therefore caused a very big trouble in the socialist Bosnia. While the war was culminating in Bosnia, Hemon got the opportunity to join a journalist exchange scheme in Boston. It was only supposed to last for a month, but given the raging war, it was unsafe for him to return to Sarajevo. Therefore, he decided to stay in America and apply as a political refugee, as was already mentioned in the first section of this chapter depicting Hemon’s biography. What was not mentioned, however, is the struggle he endured during the search of his diaspora identity. In the following essay, the focus is shifted to the difficulties he has faced just because of his diasporic identity; these included a language barrier, minimum-wage jobs, longing for his home country and old identity. This search of identity will be analysed in the close reading section pertaining *The Book of My Lives*. Eventually, Hemon managed to overcome the transition period and found his place in the new society. His first marriage was a total failure, but the second one worked for him. The final essay presents him as a father to his two daughters of which the younger one sadly passes away. It could be concluded that with this collection, being so raw, Hemon has really opened up his soul and let the world see all his vulnerability. Even though the essays were written during various periods of Hemon’s life, it could be assumed that this collection, which was published in 2013, comes from a good place in his life, which, as already mentioned, makes it a great example of struggling with a diaspora identity but eventually finding the middle ground, as will be seen in the close reading.

3.3. Why *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno*?

Nowhere Man was a logical second body of work to be examined in this seminar paper purely based on its title – there is a famous song also titled *Nowhere Man* written by John Lennon for the 1965 *The Beatles* album *Rubber Soul*. Based on the lyrics, the song could be interpreted as a reflection of identity and existential crisis, culminating in the verse “a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land”. Even though depicting diaspora identity was not Lennon’s intention, this particular verse could easily be interpreted as the stranger losing his home and struggling to find a new one. This thematic overlap could have very much inspired Hemon’s book title as this is what his book is about. Although Jozef Pronek, the main character in *Nowhere Man*, and one of the characters in *The Question of Bruno* is purely fictional, he

could very much be seen as Hemon's own reflection or even alter ego. The similarities include Pronek also being born in Bosnia, travelling to the USA on student visa, and ending up staying there because of the war breaking out in Bosnia, not to mention that the destination in the USA was also the city of Chicago. There are two ways these similarities could be approached. The first one, keeping in mind that *Nowhere man* was first published in 2002 and *The Question of Bruno* even earlier, in 2000 (more than ten years prior to *The Book of My Lives*) is to assume that Hemon was not yet ready to write about his own experience directly and using a fictional character made it easier for him, as in the early 2000s, he could have still been in the process of searching for his own diaspora identity. A second assumption is that using fictional characters enabled Hemon to retell experiences he did not have himself, but wanted to include them into his work to give a bigger picture, as it is simply impossible for one person to have taken all the paths diaspora identity might have lead them to – every diasporic individual takes their own path, and *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno* could be examples of that. It is important to mention that unlike *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man* could be classified as a proper novel, because it is a collection of interconnected short stories pertaining one titular character – Jozef Pronek, but from different perspectives. *The Question of Bruno* does not feature one titular character, it is a collection of independent short stories pertaining multiple characters and their experiences. This can perhaps be seen as a proof to a point made earlier about Hemon's goal not being to portray his own life, but the life of as many diasporic individuals as he could.

3.4. Close reading *The Book of My Lives*

The first three sections of this chapter have presented the circumstances surrounding Hemon's life and shortly retold his life story through the three chosen works, introducing his diaspora identity in that process. This final section will provide thirteen concrete examples from *The Book of My Lives* which show Hemon's and his parents' diaspora identities and demonstrate a path an immigrant might take during the assimilation to their new society. To start with, the example (3) demonstrates how easy it is to break one's identity and why the group identity is not something one should rely on. The example (3) also shows how being different from others makes it hard for an individual to preserve their identity, and how easy it is to become the stranger, as explained in the second chapter:

(3) But the moment you point at a difference, you enter, regardless of your age, an already existing system of differences, a network of identities, all of them ultimately arbitrary and unrelated to your intentions, none of them a matter of your choice. The moment you other someone, you other yourself. When I idiotically pointed at Almir's nonexistent difference, I expelled myself from my raja. (Hemon 16)

The fourth example shows what the first phase of assimilation into the new society might look like. Essentially, immigrants feel that they are lacking in many ways in comparison to native citizens, and they try to combat this sense of inferiority by depicting scenarios in which they are superior to the native citizens. This approach is very problematic because it creates the distinction between "us" and "them" and bringing people closer together, it steers diasporic individuals even further from assimilation. However, based on the second chapter, one could conclude that this is a necessary step and the one which all persons with diasporic identity take:

(4) Yet within months, my parents started cataloguing the differences between us and them—we being Bosnians or ex-Yugoslavs, they being purely Canadian. That list of differences, theoretically endless, included items such as sour cream (our sour cream—mileram—was creamier and tastier than theirs); smiles (they smile, but don't really mean it); babies (they do not bundle up their babies in severe cold); wet hair (they go out with their hair wet, foolishly exposing themselves to the possibility of lethal brain inflammation); clothes (their clothes fall apart after you wash them a few times), et cetera. (Hemon 17)

This approach does not assimilate an immigrant into society, and neither does it guide them to make a new home, but it at least gives them back a part of their identity they have lost during the immigration process, as shown in the example (5) below. Certainly, to diasporic individuals, having any kind of social life is considered to be a good thing in this part of their assimilation process:

(5) My parents, of course, were not the only ones obsessing over the differences. Indeed, their social life at the beginning of their Canadian residence largely consisted of meeting people from the old country and exchanging and discussing the perceived dissimilarities. Once I listened to a family friend in what could fairly be called astonishment as he outlined a substratum of differences proceeding from his observation that we like to simmer our food for a long time (sarma, cabbage rolls, being a perfect example), while they just dip it in extremely hot oil and cook it in a blink. Our simmering proclivities were reflective of our love of eating and, by extension and obviously, of our

love of life. On the other hand, they didn't really know how to live, which pointed at the ultimate, transcendental difference—we had soul, and they were soulless. The fact that—even if the food preparation analysis made any sense—they did not love committing atrocities either and that we were at the center of a brutal, bloody war, which under no circumstances could be construed as love of life, didn't at all trouble the good analyst. (Hemon 18)

As already mentioned, the behaviour exemplified in the examples (4 and 5) slowly diminishes as one manages to integrate themselves into the new society and starts forming bonds with the native citizens, as can be seen in the example (6) below:

(6) Over time, my parents stopped compulsively examining the differences, perhaps because they simply ran out of examples. I'd like to think, however, it was because they were socially integrated, as the family expanded over the years with more immigration and subsequent marriages and procreation, so that we now included a significant number of native Canadians, in addition to all the naturalized ones. It has become harder to talk about us and them now that we have met and married some of them—the clarity and the significance of differences were always contingent upon the absence of contact and proportional to the mutual distance. You could theoritize Canadians only if you didn't interact with them, for then the vehicles of comparison were the ideal, abstract Canadians, the exact counterprojection of us. They were the not-us, we were the not-them. (Hemon 18)

The next citation (7), taken from a joke, shows that diasporic identity does not disappear, it only changes its form and reduces itself to just a small part of a person's identity. When one finds themselves with a close person from their original home, they will still likely have the tendency to make the differentiation between the original home and the new home, despite the fact that they have assimilated well into their new home:

(7) “See that woman? That's my wife. And those beautiful children are my children.”
 “Very nice,” Suljo says. “But who is that brawny, suntanned young man massaging your wife and kissing her neck?”
 “Well,” Mujo says, “that's me.” (Hemon 22)

The example (8) confirms the fact that once a person becomes a diasporic individual, they no longer enjoy the same treatment in their country of origin, in a way losing their original home and with it a part of their identity. This can be particularly difficult to experience while a person is not yet assimilated into their new country and does not feel that they have a new home, which

leaves them in an in-between space, exemplified (1) with the airport mentioned in the second chapter of this paper. It is especially frustrating that one's achievements do not make any difference, as can be seen in the following example (8) of Hemon's sister Kristina in Bosnia:

(8) My sister returned to Sarajevo after the war and worked there equipped with a Canadian passport. Because of the nature of her work as a political analyst, she encountered a lot of foreign and domestic politicians and officials. Brandishing a somewhat ethnically confusing name, speaking both Bosnian and English, she was hard to identify and was often asked, by both the locals and foreigners: "What are you?" Kristina is tough and cheeky (having survived an assassination attempt early in her life) so she would immediately ask back: "And why do you ask?" They asked, of course, because they needed to know what her ethnicity was so they could know what she was thinking, so they could determine which ethnic group she was truly representing, what her real agenda was. To them, she was irrelevant as a person, even more so as a woman, while her education or ability to think for herself could never overcome or transcend her ethnically defined modes of thought. She was hopelessly entangled in her roots, as it were. (Hemon 25)

The example (9) demonstrates the unexpected, biased and unfounded love for one's original home after they are no longer there. The worst thing is that there is no plausible explanation for this phenomenon, one may lead a great life in their new country and still feel like they are missing a piece of their identity, and that identity, sadly, cannot be retrieved, as it was lost in the process:

(9) But what I made in this land of sad abundance was nowhere near what I remembered. I was always missing at least one ingredient, not counting the mystery one. More important, there is nothing as pathetic as solitary borscht. Making borscht for myself helped me grasp the metaphysics of family meals—the food needs to be prepared on the low but steady fire of love and consumed in a ritual of indelible togetherness. The crucial ingredient of the perfect borscht is a large, hungry family. (Hemon 38)

The example (10) perfectly illustrates the transition period. One attempts to make the host country feel like their home country and would do anything to make themselves not be the stranger. However, that is not possible because one needs to create new experiences, not crave for the old ones in order to assimilate into the new society. This phase is very hard on one's mental health:

(10) In this city, I had no human network within which I could place myself; my Sarajevo, the city that had existed inside me and was still there, was subject to siege and destruction. My displacement was metaphysical to the precisely same extent to which it was physical. But I couldn't live nowhere; I wanted from Chicago what I'd got from Sarajevo: a geography of the soul. (Hemon 100)

The example (11), like the example (8) before, illustrates the situation when one is expelled from the country of origin, but has not yet assimilated into the host country: (11) "I offered to resign, would crack the same joke: "Can I have that in writing?" But there was no writing coming from me. Deeply displaced, I could write neither in Bosnian nor in English." (Hemon 105). To end this section on a good note, the next example (12) shows that it is very much possible to have a successful life as a person with diasporic identity. Hemon has eventually fully assimilated in Chicago, and so can the other diasporic individuals if they are persistent enough:

(12) Showing Veba around, telling him the stories of Chicago and of my life in Edgewater, I realized that my immigrant interior had begun to merge with the American exterior. Large parts of Chicago had entered me and settled there; I fully owned those parts now. I saw Chicago through the eyes of Sarajevo and the two cities now created a complicated internal landscape in which stories could be generated. (Hemon 107)

In the end, one no longer distinguishes between the old and new home, it all just becomes the home, as demonstrated in the final example (13): (13) "When I came back from my first visit to Sarajevo, in the spring of 1997, the Chicago I came back to belonged to me. Returning from home, I returned home." (Hemon 107)

4. Conclusion

When taking everything into consideration, it can be concluded that diaspora identity is a very complex issue and that an individual who possesses it, no matter whether or not it was their choice, has to learn how to live with it. The second chapter discussed the theoretical framework behind diaspora and identity separately, before joining them in the third section. It was explained how the word diaspora, which was originally used to describe any type of dispersal in the negative context and later the dispersal of Jews, has evolved to practically define any migrant and their migration experience. The section discussing identity has explained the difference between legal identity and identity as a concept, during which the original meaning of the word identity, which is sameness, was questioned and it was concluded that the word has metamorphosed into a different meaning. It was concluded that identity is formed by one's social circle but is also very much dependent on one's inner mind. That is the reason why two individuals, even if they hypothetically had the same exact experiences would share just a small part of their identity. Finally, the meaning of the term stranger was discussed and it was concluded that the default definition of the word stranger – as someone who is not recognized is very questionable, simply because some individuals, especially the ones with diaspora identity, are automatically defined as strangers. This phenomenon is called stranger fetishism and the only way to avoid it is to not label diasporic individuals before getting to know them. After the theoretical part, the life of a person with a diaspora identity was exemplified in the third chapter with the help of the three works by Aleksandar Hemon. *The Book of My Lives* in particular gave us insight on how a person with diasporic identity sees the world around them and the difficulties they might face on the daily basis. Finally, even though Hemon's works are non-linear, a close reading section of the third chapter tried to provide a linear overview of assimilation into a new society, in this case from Bosnia to the USA and Canada. It was shown that diasporic life at times is very lonely, and individuals face difficulties they would not have to face in their country of origin; but it is also shown how rewarding it is, and that with enough effort, it is very much possible for a person to assimilate into a new society and find their new identity, and even though their old identity has never truly left them, they find their peace.

5. Works cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Routledge, 2000, pp. 3–190.
- Coulmas, Florian. *Identity: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 23–96.
- Hemon, Aleksandar. *Nowhere Man*. Vintage, 2009.
- . *The Book of My Lives*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013, pp. 16–107.
- . *The Question of Bruno*. Vintage, 2002.
- Kenny, Kevin. *Diaspora: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 21–27.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
- The Beatles. *Nowhere Man*. Parlophone, 1965,
music.youtube.com/watch?v=8scSwaKbE64&si=wc3vB7YurnqZlg7X. Accessed 27 Sept. 2023.
- Woodward, Kathryn. *Identity and Difference*. Sage; Milton Keynes, 1997, p. 301.

6. Diaspora identity in the works of Aleksandar Hemon: Summary and key words

This paper is concerned with the life and fate of people with diaspora identities. The goal is to explain the intricate interplay between the terms diaspora, identity and diaspora identity, as well as the use of the term stranger and exemplify them through the works of a Bosnian-American essayist, book author, screenwriter and critic Aleksandar Hemon, who was born and raised in Sarajevo and moved to Chicago in 1992. He initially came to Chicago on an exchange program, but due to the outbreak of the war in Bosnia permanently remained in the USA. In the next few years, he started to write in English and has since written several acclaimed works that deal with the theme of diaspora identity, three of which are used in this paper to exemplify the difficulties an individual might face in such circumstances. Those works are: *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man* and *The Question of Bruno*.

Key words: diaspora, identity, the stranger, Aleksandar Hemon, *The Book of My Lives*, *Nowhere Man*, *The Question of Bruno*

7. Identitet dijaspore u djelima Aleksandra Hemon: Sažetak i ključne riječi

Ovaj rad proučava život i sudbine ljudi koji žive identitet dijaspore. Cilj ovoga rada je objasniti složenu povezanost pojmova dijaspora, identitet i identiteta dijaspore, kao i upotrebu pojma stranac i prikazati to sve na primjeru djela bosansko-američkog esejista, autora, scenarista i kritičara Aleksandra Hemon koji se rodio u Sarajevu i 1992. godine preselio u Chicago. Prvotno je u Chicago došao putem programa razmjene, no zbog početka rata u Bosni i Hercegovini u SAD-u je i ostao. Kroz idućih par godina počeo je pisati na engleskom jeziku i otada je napisao više cijenjenih djela se bave temom identiteta dijaspore, od kojih su tri djela korištena u ovom radu s ciljem prikaza problema s kojima se osoba može susresti u takvim okolnostima. Ta djela su: *Knjiga mojih života*, *Čovjek bez prošlosti* i *Pitanje Bruna*.

Ključne riječi: dijaspora, identitet, stranac, Aleksandar Hemon, *Knjiga mojih života*, *Čovjek bez prošlosti*, *Pitanje Bruna*