

Transculinary Practices of Transmigrants in Aleksandar Hemon's "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls", "Family Dining" and *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You*

Nina Bostič Bishop

Abstract

In the present transnational world populated with transmigrants, food and foodways have assumed a new, hybrid role. In the process of transformation of transmigrant cultural identity of which food and foodways are a central element, the production and consumption of food that is often the result of Svetlana Boym's reflective nostalgia, may act as a bridge between the homeland and the host land as a material means for maintaining ties with the home country. However, while transmigrant food can assume an inclusive function in their exilic lives, it might also deepen migrants' sense of displacement and trauma and other them further. The article explores how transmigrants in Hemon's "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls", "Family Dining" and *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* experience food and foodways and what role culinary practices assume in the process of constructing their new, fluid and flexible hybrid identities in Homi Bhabha's liminal Third Space.

Keywords: Aleksandar Hemon, transnational literature, food and foodways, transnational culinary practices, transmigrants, exilic identities

EXILIC AND TRANSMIGRANT IDENTITIES

In “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said writes that exile is the “unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” and whose “essential sadness can never be surmounted” (137). Similarly to Said, who stated that we are living in a period of mass migrations, Salman Rushdie also claims that “the distinguishing feature of our time” seems to be mass migration and mass displacement (Rushdie 425). Furthermore, as a result of the development of telecommunications and transport in the contemporary globalized and transnational world, traditional migrants have transformed into transmigrants who may find it easier to maintain ties with what they had left behind beyond national borders albeit their loss of home, family and friends and all the familiar, should not be underestimated.

In the present transnational world the nation is no longer a straightforward and unambiguous phenomenon but rather an “imagined community” according to Benedict Anderson, signifying a community of people who view themselves as part of a group, existing simultaneously in the same national space (24), creating a common sense of ideology, history and culture even though they are members of dislocated communities, but nevertheless form a sense of homogeneity that extends through time to exist between many presents, pasts and futures by means of common views on for example, politics, ideology and history (6-7) and also food and foodways. Here, literature may have a role of negotiating borders that have become more porous and fluid and transnational migrant writers such as Aleksandar Hemon typically address subjectivities often marked by the loss of homeland and the transformation of cultural identity of which culinary practices form part, as well as displacement, fragmentation, notions of home and belonging, and trauma.

NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia is inextricably connected to exilic and migrant life and in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym defines it as a longing for a home that is no longer, so it is a “sentiment of loss and displacement” (19). Most of Hemon’s protagonists experience nostalgia for their lost homelands and past lives of which food and foodways are an important part. Here, it should be noted that Boym understands the concept of nostalgia paradoxically since there are two ways in which an individual can view their past and their imagined community. The first type is restorative nostalgia or unreflective nostalgia that Boym states “breeds monsters” (21), emphasizes national symbols and images and may be dangerous as it

generates extreme nationalism¹, while the second type is reflective nostalgia which focuses on an individual and cultures coming together, focusing on details rather than symbols².

Similarly, Hemon also states in his essay on the future of exile titled "Budućnost egzila" that it is the reflectively nostalgic way of dealing with exile that is productive, while the restorative type consolidates collective fantasies about the past until they become national myths and monuments that are indispensable for the production of nationalist ideology, so exile in this case does not only generate lyrical reflections, but also fascist utopian projects (Hemon "Budućnost egzila" 11)³.

TRANSMIGRANT CULINARY PRACTICES

Food consumption and preparation form an example of material and immaterial culture and may be viewed as practices of Boym's reflective nostalgia, contributing to forging diasporic hybrid identities, as Hemon writes in "My Parents: An Introduction" that reflective nostalgia is "private, personal nostalgia" (39) that is "privately constructed around the personal memories of sensory experiences: smells, tastes, visions, sounds, life in all its quotidian sensual detail" (ibid.), which inevitably includes migrant culinary practices.

Immigration typically brings a possibility for change in the lives of migrants as well as shifts in their self-conceptualization and social identity. If and how these changes occur, depends on migrants' level of agency, their personal circumstances

- 1 This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time. (Boym 130)
- 2 This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time. (Boym 130)
- 3 Reflektivni način bavljenja egzilom je zbog toga produktivan, te pripada domenu ne samo estetike nego i etike, budući da se zasniva na ličnom suverenitetu koji ostvaruje u supostavljanju ličnog odnosa prema prošlosti. S druge strane, restaurativni pristup konsoliduje kolektivne fantazije o prošlosti sve dok se ne skamene u nacionalne mitove i spomenike, bez kojih je nemoguće reprodukovati nacionalističku ideologiju. Mi sa ovih prostora dobro znamo kakve su posljedice fašizoidne nostalgije koja je u egzilu kvasala dok su nostalgijati maštali o etničkom čišćenju domovinskog prostora kontaminiranog prisustvom onih drugih, o genocidnim operacijama koje će poroditi totalni i totalitarni nacionalni suverenitet. Egzil je kategorija neutralne vrijednosti, iskustvo unutar kojeg se jednako kristališu lirske refleksije i fašizoidne utopijske projekte. (Hemon 2014a, 11)

but also on the reasons and context of their migratory experience. Although they are often characterized by a potential desire to maintain original cultural identities and practices, modification and cultural change are common (Vallianatos and Raine 356) and the preparation and consumption of foods and foodways are frequently central to the ways that immigrants deal with this change as food is an essential need and, as such, it defines the human experience and functions as a physical and symbolic act that generally communicates individuality or membership within a larger group (Wilk 245). Therefore, food may be a primary symbol in maintaining solidarity within a group as well as personal and cultural identity for members of diasporic and imagined communities. As a result then, food may for exiles and transmigrants act as a bridge between their host- and home- land with the production, preparation and consumption of foods possibly enabling migrants to recall their memories and diminish their sense of non-belonging. Consequently, activities related to food preparation and consumption may also be acts of reflective nostalgia since they allow migrants to remember the people, places and culture that they left behind in accordance with Holtzman: "Heritage food and foodways are a physical means through which immigrants maintain ties to and remember the world they emigrated from (Holtzman 369). Therefore, foodways are closely tied to migrants' homelands and serve as a way in which migrants can maintain connections although they are physically separated from their country of origin (Cook 824). On the other hand, the inability to produce and consume the food that is typical of migrants' home country may be associated with the change or even loss of one's cultural identity. As a result, the role of food in the formation of transnational subjectivity of transmigrants is double since it can either have an inclusive function by making migrants a part of the diaspora and connect them to their home countries, or it may exclude them by separating them from the dominant in the host country by 'othering' them, making them even more deeply displaced. Moreover, authenticity of food or lack of it might deepen migrants' displacement further if they are not able to recreate it in line with Bourdieu, who stated that eating habits are often amongst the most difficult to change:

And it is probably in tastes of food that one would find the strongest and most indelible mark of infant learning, the lessons which longest withstand the distancing or collapse of the native world and most durably maintain nostalgia for it. (Bourdieu 79)

In other words, food and foodways might provide migrants a domain where they can pursue continuity, which can contribute to their sense of belonging and rootedness because foodways make it possible for them to hold to the familiar at least

to an extent since food may serve as an anchor point in their fluid transnational world of exile on one hand, but may other and displace them further, on the other. Such food and foodways are what David Sutton calls 'migrant food', denoting food that accompanies people moving across borders literally or metaphorically, food that is sent from home, or food that is re-created and represented in a different context of the host country. According to Sutton, migrant food has the power "to evoke the memories on which identities are formed" (Sutton 75), so if and when food is recreated properly it may provide more stability to a fluid and changing identity of transmigrants.

Moreover, if, as a result of migration, migrant identities eventually hybridize in Bhabha's Third Space of in-betweenness, food and foodways, along with other elements of culture, are then also hybridized despite frequent attempts to recreate them traditionally as migrants' homeland culinary practices merge with those of the host country as well as with foods and foodways of the locals and members of other diasporas to become a fusion, often as a result of migrants experiencing reflective nostalgia. If it considered that "[u]nderstanding how and what people eat as a species cannot really be done without acknowledging that diets appear and disappear, diversify and converge, expand and contract, all as a function of cultural factors" (Allen 64-5), then culinary practices of migrants, their foods and foodways inevitably transform in the Third Space.

ALEKSANDAR HEMON

Aleksandar Hemon is a Bosnian-American author whose works have thus far generally focused on the subjectivities of exiles turned transmigrants, who are able to maintain real time contact with their friends and families in their homelands more often than migrants of the past before the development of modern transport and telecommunications, but nevertheless, continue to suffer from trauma, displacement and loss of their original cultural identity.

Culinary practices featured in the novella "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls" from *The Question of Bruno* (2000), a short story from *The Book of My Lives* (2013) titled "Family Dining" and finally, Hemon's dos-à-dos memoir *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong* (2019) are analyzed below to demonstrate how Hemon approaches transmigrant attitudes to food, whether foodways in the Third Space are a result of reflective nostalgia and whether they feature the double role of being markers of inclusion and exclusion, contributing to the hybridization of transmigrant identity by analyzing a few extracts focusing on food and foodways.

THE QUESTION OF BRUNO: “BLIND JOZEF PRONEK AND DEAD SOULS”

In this novella Hemon introduces food at the very beginning as a metaphor for Pronek's loss of homeland and identity as well as for the displacement and feelings of non-belonging and being the Other that the protagonist experiences in the host country. Firstly, *bourek* is included in the description of Pronek's arrival in the USA after he had just lost his luggage except for “a piece of three-day-old *bourek*, designed by his mother to sustain him on the trip, which was now – we can be sure of that – breeding all kinds of belligerent Balkan microorganisms in its entrails” (Hemon *The Question of Bruno* 144-5). *Bourek*, which is a Bosnian street food staple can be packed and transported quite easily. The most common varieties contain minced meat or potato or cheese. *Bourek* is quite greasy, so microorganisms can breed quite quickly, but here Hemon uses it to suggest a change in Pronek's experience as he has transitioned to a migrant, losing his past identity, here symbolized with *bourek* having rotten, so that it must be discarded upon the arrival to America. In other words, the spoiled *bourek* is used as a metaphor for Pronek's loss of homeland and past identity.

In addition, according to Simone Weil, staying rooted is the most significant, but least identified need of the human soul (1). Through the character of Pronek and other uprooted migrants in the novella, Hemon brings this need closer to the audience, while by up-rooting and spoiling *bourek*, metaphorically the protagonist is also up-rooted. The spoiled staple, therefore, functions as a metaphor for his lost self as he had known it, the loss of his previous identity and the path to nowhere-ness that began as soon he touched down on American soil.

THE BOOK OF MY LIVES: “FAMILY DINING”

In the short story titled “Family Dining”, Hemon first focuses on how food was consumed in his country of origin Bosnia and Herzegovina when he was growing up and where he and his sister “were never allowed to eat in silence, let alone read or watch television” since eating was highly important as it was the time when the family gathered around the table and discussed what happened to them during the day when they were not together (30). Also, they “were obligated to finish everything on our plates and thank [their] mother” (ibid.). Hemon, here being reflectively nostalgic remembers how for him and his sister, “the ideal dining experience [...] involved *ćevapi*, or “grilled skinless sausages, a kind of Bosnian fast food” (32). Hemon continues to give descriptions of food while serving the Yugoslav People's Army where food choices were far more limited than at home:

For breakfast, apart from dry bread, we would get a boiled egg, a packet of rancid margarine, occasionally a slice of sticky, thick unsmoked bacon" (ibid.)

Hemon never liked the army, he was missing his home and was craving his mother's food, similarly to how he craved Bosnian foods once he became an exile as he writes:

Perpetually hungry, I recalled my family dinners before sleep and constructed elaborate future menus featuring roast lamb or ham-and-cheese crepes or my mother's spinach pie (33).

Food, therefore, may act as a trigger that brings back memories and emotions in line with what John S. Allen states in *The Omnivorous Mind*: "Food has meaning, it evokes memories, and it shapes identities" (2). and similarly:

taste, smell, and texture of food can be extraordinarily evocative, bringing back memories not just of eating the food itself but also of the place and setting in which the food was consumed. Beyond memories of taste and place, food is effective as a trigger of even deeper memories of feelings and emotions, internal states of the mind and body" (150)

For Hemon, here clearly practicing reflective nostalgia, food is a trigger of the memory of family dinners, the year spent serving the military in Macedonia and then his mother coming for a visit, bringing food that she had prepared, making him feel a little closer to home:

Mother had dragged heavy bags of food on the many trains from Sarajevo and brought along a feast: veal schnitzels, fried chicken, spinach pie, even a custard cake. She spread a towel on the bed, as there was no table, and I ate from food containers, much of it with my fingers. The first bite into the spinach pie brought tears to my eyes and I silently swore that from thereon in I'd always respect the sanctity of our family meals." (Hemon *The Book of My Lives* 35)

Further on, Hemon writes about the recipe for the family *borscht* and dives into migrant attitudes to food by emphasizing that food is the one item that migrants are able to physically reproduce, which as a result may reduce their levels of displacement since food can function as an effective trigger of deep memories of feelings and emotions, connecting migrants to their intimate histories, childhood memories, people that they had left behind as well as home and a sense of belonging. However, by depicting transmigrant attitudes to food, Hemon emphasizes that, despite attempts to recreate dishes to perfection, it is quite unavoidable that the food in the end fails to taste as it did in the homeland since it can hardly ever be perfectly reproduced because some authenticity is always missing. For instance,

the *borscht* that Hemon attempted to cook according to the family recipe as an exile in America during the Balkan war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was not as *borscht* that he had memories of consuming in his homeland. This is on the account that it lacked a certain mystery ingredient, in addition to the family and friends who Hemon used to consume it with back in pre-war Sarajevo:

In the early, lonely days of my life in Chicago, I often struggled to reproduce the pleasures of my previous existence in Bosnia, I nostalgically sought good-I didn't expect perfect-borscht. But what I found at Ukrainian restaurants or in supermarkets with ethnic-food shelves was merely thin beet soup, and I was forced to try to reconstruct the family borscht from my addled memory. I'd make a pot for myself and live on it for a week or two. But what I made in this land of sad abundance was nowhere near what I remembered. I was almost 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. (38-9)

From this extract it is, therefore, clear that, when it is not authentically reproduced, food and foodways may also deepen migrants' feelings of loss, trauma and displacement, othering them even more, confirming Edward Said's view that there is no escaping exile since migrants often "make their food to taste of home, but it inescapably ends up having the taste of displacement" (Hemon *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* 103)

My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You

"Space" is the fifth chapter in this memoir in which Hemon describes the characteristics of his parents' displacement and in a manner that is quite similar to Said's view of exile being the defining moment in one's life as Hemon writes that for the displaced, migration inevitably becomes the center of their lives that divides an individual's life into the before and after exile:

When I write about my parents I'm compelled to claim that their displacement is the central event of their lives, what split everything into the before and the after. Everything after the rupture took place in a damaged incomplete time – some of it was forever lost, and forever it shall so remain. (68)

In the story, Hemon explains how his parents eventually adapted to the host land in a process that featured food as a central component. He gives an example of his

father's failed attempt to dry meat in his basement as he used to in his homeland, pointing to the fact that in exile the food and foodways generally end up tasting of displacement:

He even experimented with drying meat in the basement: he hung some pork, lightly smoked elsewhere, near a window with a ventilator. It was edible, but far from impressive, or even enjoyable, although he insisted it was as good as any dried meat. (70)

Hemon goes on to state that his parents as most immigrants "identified themselves by way of the food they ate" and that, therefore, "food was one of the few conduits of continuity between the before and after" (ibid.) thereby identifying food as "one of the crucial issues related to [his] family's displacement" (ibid.) in line with Weller's view that "food is a crucial source for maintaining and negotiating identity" (Weller et al. 1) where individual agency, otherwise often reduced due to exile, may be practiced in a dignified manner and with some sovereignty. Similarly, in an interview Hemon states that nothing had taught him more about his parents and himself than the "food they cherished after fleeing war-torn Bosnia." (Hemon "Bread Is Practically Sacred: How the Taste of Home Sustained My Refugee Parents"), so in Hemon's view, migrant food and foodways are not merely a product of nostalgia and a search for the lost roots, tradition and authenticity, but when they are put in a globalized and transnational context, they may contribute to the construction of a new hybridized identity.

Hemon gives food a double role as it might ease migrants' burden of non-belonging and displacement, but it may also be one of the main areas in which migrants feel most uprooted if they cannot re-create it. An example of this is Hemon's father's attempt to recreate the smoked meat that he used to enjoy in Bosnia above, but rather unsuccessfully. Therefore, Hemon's father attempted to recreate the staple of his country of origin, but failed, which deepened his sense of displacement. In addition, Hemon also states that the food and foodways often serve as an element of exclusion. He gives his parents and their Bosnian friends and family as an example as they view Canadian produce as being of a lower quality than Bosnian products. By doing this, they exclude or other themselves from the host culture by perceiving the dominant as the Other in line with what Hemon writes in *The Book of My Lives* which is that "[t]he moment you other someone, you other yourself" (12), so when they focus on the differences between their foods and the host country's foods they are othered:

Among my family in Canada and their friends, much time was spent debating dietary and other differences between "them" (Canadians) and "us" (people from Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia): "Their" bacon was soggy; "they" didn't

know how to make sausage; “their” sour cream was not thick enough; “they” didn’t eat things we ate; “they” were fat and incapable of truly enjoying life because “they” worried about getting fat all the time. (71)

Therefore, as immigration inevitably results in alterations in self-conceptualization and changes in cultural identity, food, in terms of its preparation and consumption along with the meanings and interaction with others associated with food, might be one of the crucial ways in which migrants deal with the alterations in their subjectivities in the sense of accepting new foodways on one hand, but also losing traditional ones, on the other. Which foodways will be preserved and which ones will be lost depends on each individual migrant or more broadly, on a particular diaspora and in the above example, sour cream and bacon are the foods that for Hemon’s parents and Bosnian diaspora in general are lost, as they cannot seem to be able to recreate them. Sour cream and bacon, similarly to *borscht* above, may therefore, be understood as reminders of the unsurmountable deficiencies and the incompleteness of exilic life due to a perpetual lack resulting in life that can never be complete again. There is always a missing ingredient that cannot be found, which reaffirms Said’s understanding of duality that makes exile unbearable. This duality refers to migrants’ position of in-betweenness, involving separation and displacement with regard to the place of origin, and the desire to belong and fit in the host country and its culture (Said 173).

On the other hand, migrants may also transform the space into which they settle to make it appropriate for them and therefore, encourage a sense of belonging also through food and foodways, so for Hemon’s parents, food represented the domain where continuity could be most pursued and which may serve as an anchor in the otherwise quite unstable, fluid and mobile exilic life, albeit not entirely.

The significant relevance that Hemon ascribes to the migrant preparation and consumption of food is clear from chapter 6 that is simply titled “Food”. Here, in a transnational and translingual manner, Hemon uses Bosnian words to name all the meals of the day: for breakfast (*doručak*), lunch (*ručak*), dinner (*večera*) (80, 82). In addition, also Bosnian staple foods are named in Bosnian. In this way, *ćevapčići* are then explained in notes as “*The Bosnian national kebab, made of a mixture of ground beef and lamb.” (81), “the *meza* (cold cuts, boiled eggs, cheese, pickles), [...] *sarma* (pickled cabbage rolls)” (84). Hemon also writes about his parents’ attitudes to food, stating that for them it is really a matter of their personal history and original culture, which is in line with Koc and Welsh’s view that identities are subject to the “social and historical conditions that create and define these identities and their social limits” (1) and also to Hemon’s view:

Food can never be enjoyed unto itself; it's never just a sensory experience, let alone a matter of sophisticated taste. Its meaning is always dependent on the outcomes of potentially catastrophic situations, its value always assigned in the context of particular lives and histories" (88).

For example, Hemon's parents, in contrast to the practices of the members of the host country, have an aversion to going to restaurants since "[t]here really was no restaurant culture in the Sarajevo of our previous life" (85). For the parents, restaurant food is "impersonal, uncommunal, consumed in the isolation of public space" (89) and because as a result of the poor living conditions in which they grew up, the war and finally emigration, the food intake was for the parents always considered to be "proportional to the uncertainty of the future" (87). Here, Hemon transculturally and translanguistically compares the English idiom of "being full" to the Bosnian equivalent of *sit*, which reveals a different concept and understanding of 'being full'. In Bosnian, the word *sit* does not mean "a sense of fullness, but an absence of hunger" (87). Furthermore, Hemon gives a well-known Bosnian proverb as an example as he writes: "There is also a proverb: *Sit gladnom ne vjeruje*. The full one doesn't trust the hungry one. The proverb doesn't work in English because "full" and "hungry" don't belong to the same semantic zone." (87), demonstrating that "food is more than a basic set of nutrients" and that it is "a key component of our culture" and "central to our sense of identity" (Koc et al. 1). In a similar manner, Hemon refers to the Bosnian idiom *Dobar k'o hljeb*, which he translates to "as good as bread" (91) and *zaraditi koricu hljeba* as "earning a crust of bread" (92) to show how in Bosnian culture bread is close to being sacred because it has a symbolic value of survival since anyone who is in possession of bread cannot starve and therefore, survives.

Hemon also explains that a different view on food and bread in particular, is a direct consequence of Bosnian history that is filled with occasions when people were concerned that they would starve and die. However, this distress is not a characteristic of the historical narrative of the American or Canadian locals on account of their puritan history that equals self-denial. To put it in other words, the attitude to food for Hemon's parents is based on food equaling survival, which is the exact opposition to the American and Canadian understanding of food as being connected to "the basic puritan operation of rejecting – indeed transcending – pleasure in order to become a better person". (99). This is, therefore, a further example of how foods and attitudes to food consumption may deepen the displacement of migrants when they differ from the dominant culture's attitudes. Furthermore, it also demonstrates how food and language are both expressions that are, as Allen states "necessarily shaped by both biology and culture: they are both biocultural phenomena" (4) and that human "diet and approach to food

and eating have [...] been remade by [...] enriched, language-mediated cultural and cognitive environment” (5) because it is in fact the brains that we eat with, meaning that food consumption is not merely intake and digestion, but “involves decision making and choice: we do not simply eat what is edible, and we do not always like foods that taste good”, so “food plays a role in our lives that goes beyond simple calories and nutrients” (ibid.), but is rather formed both by neurological pathways and by the cultural surroundings in which we were brought up and in which we live (ibid). Therefore, if as Allen states, the “human brain is the ultimate, evolving source of culture, but culture in turn shapes the function, and to a lesser extent the structure, of the brain” (5-6), then similarly to language “eating is a behavior that is integral to the human experience” (6) so food and food consumption of transmigrants and transdiaspora are inevitably shaped by the old and new cultural environment.

A further example of how reflective nostalgia of eating in the country of origin in “Food” is when Hemon writes that his parents did not care for expensive restaurants in Canada, but the foods consumed in their culture of origin when they were children:

My parents have never been in one of those Michelin-star-craving restaurants where thimblefuls of artistically arranged healthy ingredients are served on a satellite dish, but I know for a fact that the mere sight of something like that would appear insultingly ridiculous to them. Tata’s favourite dish is *steranka*, which his mother made for him when he was a kid. It’s dough boiled in milk. For my mother, eating the heel of a fresh loaf of good bread is a three-star experience. (88)

Therefore, his parents, similarly to most migrants came to Canada with a set of food choices, shaped by the individual, cultural, societal, historical and economical influences, and since food is central to the sense of identity (Koc et al., 9) and transmigrants’ identity is fluid rather than fixed, their attitudes to food and foodways also generally change as a result of displacement as he writes that “[t]he value and meaning of food is always necessarily altered, just like everything else, by displacement” (Hemon *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* 101). He gives his mother’s complaints that lasted “for years after their arrival” (ibid.) about the quality of Canadian and Bosnian sour cream as an example. In accordance with Hemon’s observation, Koc et al. refer to this phenomenon of ‘othering food’ as ‘food security’ which “includes not only availability of food at all times but also accessibility to all” and “access to sufficient, nutritious, and quality food at all time” (Koc et al., 9) that should also be “personally acceptable” (4). Moreover, the authors state that food security is part of “feeling at home” that is

not “limited to having access to nutritionally sufficient but also culturally appropriately diets” (ibid.). Consequently, when Hemon’s mother complained about the insufficient quality of Canadian sour cream, she did not belong and was feeling nowhere because the food had lost some of the authenticity that it had in her homeland because as Hemon writes “[o]ur food [...] stands for the authentic life we used to live, which is no longer available except as a model for this new, elsewhere life” (Hemon *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* 101).

Moreover, the extract below reaffirms Wilk’s view that foodways define the human experience and that they are physical and symbolic activities that are generally used to communicate individuality and membership within a larger group and may, therefore, contribute to maintaining diasporic group solidarity and, therefore, also personal identity.

There was always far more [food] than necessary, which would compel the hosts to insist that everyone put more in their plates (*Ma, uzmi!*), while rejecting the spurious claims that another bite would lead to an abdominal explosion. So the guests would take more, and the feast would go on for a while, everyone talking and shouting over one another, joking and teasing, often singing, all in a state of high agitation and plain joy. Nobody would ever call that whole endeavor dinner – the activity revolved around food, but could never be reduced to it. In Bosnian, the verb that describes such an activity is *sjediti*, which means to sit, as the whole operation consists of sitting around the table, eating, drinking and being together for the purposes of well-earned pleasure. If I want to invoke an image of my parents being unconditionally happy (not an easy task), I envision them with their friends at table, roaring with laughter between bites of the delicious fare and sips of slivovitz and grappa. (84)

CONCLUSION

As food is a biocultural phenomenon, its production and consumption are significantly shaped also by the cultural environment, so food preparation and consumption of transmigrants in displacement are subject to transformation. Migrant food that is often the result of experiencing reflective nostalgia can other and deepen feelings of displacement as in the case of Hemon’s parents who emphasize the dissimilarities between Bosnian and Canadian foods and foodways. However, food may also have a unifying function as it may bring family members and members of transdiaspora closer together in the Third Space where culinary practices, similarly to other parts of transmigrants’ cultural identity such as language, are therefore, also hybridized as they attempt to recreate and negotiate their culinary culture. Therefore, in the liminal Third Space, food acquires a significant role in

migrants' negotiation of belonging. In this way, food is then not only the food we eat at home, but connected to the histories, temporalities and subjectivities of the past life. In line with Said who states that the "achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind for ever" (137) Hemon also believes that it might be impossible for migrants to ever experience a state of non-displacement again also on account of hybridized food and foodways in the Third Space and while cultural hybridity is emphasized as migrants inevitably come into contact with the foodways of their host country, it is not romanticized or exoticized as Hemon demonstrates the difficulties that arise in the process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso. 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bostič Bishop, Nina. "Transnational American Literature: Aleksandar Hemon and Tea Obreht", Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, 2022, PhD thesis.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2002.
- Cook, Ian. "Geographies of Food: Mixing." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2008, pp. 821-833.
- Hemon Aleksandar. "Budučnost egzila." (translation: The Future of Exile) *Sarajevske sveske*, 2014, no. 45-46, pp. 11-14.
- . "Bread Is Practically Sacred: How the Taste of Home Sustained My Refugee Parents." *The Guardian*, 13 June 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2019/jun/13/bread-is-practically-sacred-how-the-taste-of-home-sustained-my-refugee-parents>.
- . *The Question of Bruno*. London: Picador, 2000.
- . *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You*. London: Picador, 2019.
- . *The Book of My Lives*. London: Picador, 2013
- Holtzman, J. D. "Food and Memory." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 35, 2006, pp. 361-378
- John S. Allen. *The Omnivorous Mind: Our Evolving Relationship to Food*. Harvard UP, 2012.
- Koc, M., and Welsch, J. "Food, Foodways and Immigrant Experience: Paper written for the Multiculturalism Program, Department of Canadian Heritage at

- the Canadian Ethnic Studies Association Conference." November 2001, Toronto: Ryerson University, 2002.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Imaginary Homelands: Essay and Criticism, 1981-1991*. London: Penguin, 1992.
- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile*. London: Granta, 2000.
- Spack, Ruth. "Aleksandar Hemon's Lost Eden: A novelist reckons with the disappearance of his country." *The New Republic*, 6 June 2019, newrepublic.com/article/153780/aleksandar-hemon-memoir-review-yugoslavia-socialist-utopia.
- Sutton, David. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory (Materializing Culture)*. Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001.
- Vallianatos, Helen and Raine, Kim. "Consuming Food and Constructing Identities among Arabic and South Asian Immigrant Women." *Food Culture and Society An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2008 pp.355-373, doi.org/10.2752/175174408X347900
- Weller, L. Daniel, and David Turkon. "Contextualizing the Immigrant Experience: The Role of Food and Foodways in Identity Maintenance and Formation for First- and Second- generation Latinos in Ithaca, New York." *Ecology of Food and Nutrition*, 2014, pp. 1-17.
- Wilk, Richard R. "Real Belizean Food': Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 101, no. 2, 1999, pp. 244-55. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/683199>.

Nina Bostič Bishop
University of Ljubljana
nina.bostic-bishop@fdv.uni-lj.si



Transkulinarične prakse transmigrantov v delih Aleksandra Hemona "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls", "Family Dining" in *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You*

V sedanjem transnacionalnem svetu, ki je poln transmigrantov ima hrana in vse povezano z njo novo, hibridno vlogo. V procesu transformacije kulturne identitete transmigrantov pri kateri je hrana ključen element, lahko priprava in poraba hrane, ki sta pogosto posledica reflektivne nostalgije po definiciji Svetlane Boym, delujeta kot most med domačo in gostujočo deželo. Vendar pa, če po eni strani transmigrantska hrana lahko vključuje, lahko tudi izključuje, ker pogloblja občutke razseljenosti in nepripadnosti, s katerimi se

eksilanti pogosto spopadajo in jih tako dela Druge. Aleksandar Hemon se v svojih delih pogosto ukvarja s subjektivitetami eksilantov in transmigrantov v transnacionalni sedanjosti. Članek analizira kako transmigranti v treh Hemonovih delih: "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls", "Family Dining" in *My Parents: An Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* doživljajo hrano in vse v povezavi z njo in kakšno vlogo imajo kulinarične prakse v procesu oblikovanja novih, fluidnih in hibridnih identitet v liminalnem Tretjem prostoru Homija Bhabhe.

Keywords: Aleksandar Hemon, transnacionalna književnost, hrana in prehranjevanje, transnacionalne kulinarične prakse, eksilne identitete