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1. Introduction

1 This article explores the role of memory and remembering in the nonfiction of Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon. Specifically, it applies Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic memory to Hemon's narration of his and his family's life stories in his two memoirs published in 2019 in one volume: *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You*. In my study, I wish to prove that the version of memory supported by nomadic thought, with its emphasis on creativity and intergenerational relationality, is a useful analytical tool for the study of texts dominated by a sense of the past and committed to the transmission of diasporic experiences which are not limited to restrictive visions of migration as trauma and loss.

2. Aleksandar Hemon

2 Aleksandar Hemon has been described as a writer "who transcends national identity" (Hemon, "Exile"), and his own life trajectory has played no small part in this. Born in Sarajevo in 1964 to a father from a Ukrainian family and a Bosnian-Serb mother, in early 1992 he arrived in Chicago for what was expected to be a short academic stay. By that time, he was a journalist who had already published some short fiction and poetry in Bosnian. A few weeks after his arrival, war broke out in his motherland, preventing his return home. Once established in Chicago as a political refugee, he landed on a series of dead-end jobs that helped him to improve his up-to-then rudimentary English. In the late 1990s he began to write stories in the English language, paving the way for the major works published in the next two decades, such as the novels *Nowhere Man* (2002, finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award) and *The Lazarus Project* (2008, shortlisted for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle

Award), the collection of nonfiction pieces *The Book of My Lives* (2013, shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award), and the double memoir *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You* (2019).

3 Hemon, who describes himself as "a diasporic person" (Hemon, "Teju Cole" 75), has devoted many pages to questions of identity, displacement, and exile. His current solid standing within the US literary system—as attested to by the distinctions mentioned in the paragraph above, to which the MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" and the Guggenheim Fellowship can be added, along with his conscious decision to use English, further problematize his position in the literary world (and the literary market). Thus, he has been labeled as an extraterritorial author—in line with George Steiner's multilingual and decentred writers (Pinto); studied as an "exophonic" writer—physically and linguistically displaced, representative of a "new internationalism" (Matthes and Williams 28), or inscribed in the framework of world literature (Ung). His ironic exploration of truth and fiction goes hand in hand with a strong moral and historical sense, making him a prime example of a trend in recent fiction "striving to marry the desire for the real with the legacy of postmodernism's fascination with the simulacral" (Lea 461). As James Wood claims, "more than any other American novelist I can think of, [Hemon] has made a kind of running autobiographical fiction of his actual circumstances." Of particular relevance for this article is the function of memory in the configuration of Hemon as an author and his portrayal of self, family, and nation.

3. Memory in Aleksandar Hemon

4 Due to the privileged position of the Bosnian War as the defining event in the experiences of many a Hemonian character, the most obvious way to approach Hemon's constant re-enactment of certain episodes in his writing is through trauma studies. Jacob Silverman locates in Hemon's stories the presence of "oblique angles of approach to near-overwhelming concerns." That is to say, the prototypical Hemonian narration is ostensibly about one thing, usually a banal anecdote, but gaps and conspicuous repetition make it about something else. The raw material that arguably conforms his narrative world is the trauma that has reshaped Bosnia, and more specifically, its capital, Sarajevo. This is the ghostly presence that returns time and again as discourse, mirroring the circle of violence, displacement, and self-loathing to which most characters are subjected. Even though occasionally Hemon does address these issues overtly, most notably in certain early stories such as "The Coin," they often appear as the background information that the inattentive reader may mistake for scenery. Hemon looks for ways of encircling trauma, going repeatedly over it instead of narrating it so as to avoid its commodification.

5 When studying nonfiction texts such as *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You*, it is necessary to take into account that the memoir, as a highly codified genre, points to the act of remembering in a different, and obvious, way. I find Vivian Gornick's understanding of the memoir particularly useful for the purposes of this article. Gornick, who defines the memoir as "a work of sustained narrative prose controlled by an idea of the self under obligation to lift from the raw material of life a tale that will shape experience, transform event, deliver wisdom" (91), identifies as central to the genre the dramatization of an experience of "becoming." It is there—and not in the recital of actual events—that the truth of the text is to be found.

6 In any case, the memoir is far from a monolithic genre. As if to prove it, Hemon places two distinct approaches side by side. *My Parents: An Introduction* deals with Tata's (Petar) and Mama's (Andja) experiences, often connected to larger historical narratives: from their participation in the construction of the socialist Yugoslavia of Tito to their exile in Canada as a consequence of the Bosnian War. Hemon's systematized approach to the figure of his parents follows a quasi-academic structure: the book is divided into ten sections, each one introduced by a header, usually a noun or a noun phrase, anticipating the area or facet to be explored, e.g., "2. HOMELAND," "5. SPACE," "6. FOOD," "7. MUSIC," and "9. MARRIAGE" (Hemon, *My Parents* 26, 68, 80, 104, 142). Despite this thematical organization, the account largely follows a chronological order that allows readers to make sense of what living in a socialist state looked and felt like, with the hopes and futures of the young couple inevitably intertwined with those of the nation. The disruption caused by the Yugoslav Wars force the middle-aged Hemons to flee to Hamilton, Ontario, in an attempt to start a new life without forgetting their old one.

7 On the other hand, *This Does Not Belong to You* is in certain respects closer to Hemon's fictional accounts (or, at least, those contained in books promoted as "fiction") of childhood in pre-war Yugoslavia (e.g., short stories such as "Everything" or "American Commando"). The recognizable obsessions of a first-person child and adolescent narrator find expression in the fragmented portrait, full of holes and repetitions, of the artist as a young man. Thus, we are granted access to Hemon's early experiences, concerns, and imaginings in all their vivid detail. The narrative voice presents both the usual occurrences of coming-of-age stories—committing petty acts of cruelty, falling in love with girls and music—and more idiosyncratic events and feelings, such as an obsession with the workings of memory, a fascination with violence and destruction, or the complex positioning of Sarajevo as the city where Hemon feels placed.

8 Reading these two memoirs vis-à-vis Hemon's previous oeuvre adds a new dimension to the text. This is so because Hemon, for the first time, de-emphasizes his own displacement, a decision all the more surprising given the genre to which these books belong. Therefore, one barely mentioned circumstance—that Hemon, like one of his characters, witnessed "the destruction of [his] hometown on TV" ("The Conductor" 68) —hovers over these texts, diluting the fact that the narrative voice is one extra step removed from the traditions and genealogies drawn in the memories. In contrast with the methodical—one could almost say, obsessive—exploration of his own displacement both in most of his fiction and in his previous memoir, *The Book of My Lives*, now Hemon refers to his traumatic relationship with Bosnia in an oblique way. I agree with Enrico Davanzo (349) that *My Parents: An Introduction* can be interpreted as an example of "allofiction," a term coined by Armine Kotin Mortimer to describe a variety of autofiction in which the narrative voice is configured by the stories of nearby others. Meanwhile, in *This Does Not Belong to You*, the life experiences of a pre- and pubescent Hemon stop short in the 1980s, with only some hints at the social and political upheaval that would eventually lead to the dissolution of Yugoslavia. His assertion that there are no new memories in adulthood hints at the gaps produced by events perceived as traumatic; surely, looping through a limited repertoire of childhood memories has the intended effect of blocking new ones.

9 Be that as it may, Hemon develops a narrative fixated on addressing the past: "So many of these pieces I start out by saying, or thinking, I don't remember, I can't recall, and

then I proceed to retrieve what happened long ago" (*Belong* 79). Futile as the attempt to recover the past may seem, the writer cannot but insist on trying. From the very beginning, the past determines the present, even in its most apparently absurd details: on the second page of *My Parents: An Introduction*, we read that because of the premature death of Andja's older brother when he was hit in the belly right after lunch—a story that, in Hemon's estimation, "doesn't quite add up"—Hemon and his sister would never be allowed to play until food digestion was completed (*My Parents* 4). In *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You*, two—not mutually exclusive—levels of remembrance are identifiable: that of the experience lived (e.g., Hemon's mother's participation in the physical and ideological building of the Yugoslavian state) and that of the experience that took place before somebody's birth (e.g., Hemon's father's connection with Ukraine, which is experienced mainly through storytelling and music). The memory of Ukraine as Petar's land[1] indeed exemplifies what Alison Landsberg calls a "prosthetic memory": a term that problematizes the distinction between memory and history by describing the "personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which [the person] did not live" (2). As I will show below, in this case, memories are not accessed via the technologies of mass culture—e.g., cinema, television—but through cultural practices such as singing. Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory" is just another instance of how creative reworkings can challenge traditional conceptions of memory and history, but the theoretical approach I propose to apply in a systematic way to my study of Hemon is that of nomadic memory.

4. Nomadic Memory

10 Critical posthumanist and feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti's conceptualization of nomadic memory needs to be contextualized as her contribution to the memory boom discernible in academia since the 1990s, the time when memory became "both a central and an organising concept within research in the humanities and in certain branches of the social sciences" (Radstone 1). Among the milestones of this memory boom, Marianne Hirsch's postmemory and Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory significantly contribute to dissolving the artificial distinction between factual memory and imaginative recollection. Nonetheless, the main influence for the development of Braidotti's nomadic theory is Gilles Deleuze. In particular, the French philosopher's notion of "writing from memory," the prominence he gives to creative reworking in the process of remembering, and the deterritorialization of stable identities as a result of non-linear temporalities lay the foundations for Braidotti's notion of remembering in the minoritarian mode.

11 An important element in critical posthumanist thought, nomadic memory is for Braidotti dynamic and creative, allowing to envisage "alternative world orders and more humane and sustainable social systems" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 32). In contrast to dominant politics of mourning and melancholia, Braidotti defends the affective force of remembrance and its capacity to produce generative interconnections and alternative approaches, in a nomadic vision of memory as becoming. Her nomad thought relies on a circular time of becoming which facilitates "the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous, as opposed to being mournfully consistent" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 167). This is what Braidotti calls remembering in the intensive or minority-mode—the label with which she emphasizes the consciousness of historically

marginalized identities—in which virtual possibilities frozen in the past become actualized (*Nomadic Theory* 32, 153). In the rest of this article, I propose a reading of Hemon's *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You* informed by nomadic memory. Needless to say, I do not mean to establish a one-to-one correspondence between Hemon's complex approach to the study of the/his/his parents'/his nation's past and Braidotti's conceptualizations of time and memory. Instead, I argue that Braidotti's body of theory can direct our attention to areas of Hemon's work not so readily available without an understanding of memory as creative, relational, and intergenerational.

5. Nomadic Memory in My Parents: An Introduction and This Does Not Belong to You

12 Analyzed with the tools provided by critical posthumanism, Hemon's nonfiction becomes an example of remembering in Braidotti's minority-mode. He presents the migrant as a subject-in-becoming, belonging to their community thanks to the workings of a transgenerational, nonlinear memory, operating in a time continuum where stable identities are deterritorialized and creative ways to access an unavailable past are generated. In Hemon's writing, identity is rooted in concentric homelands, and the truth of the memory resides in the affects it provokes and sustains. Opposing the static authority of the past and any fixed notion of the self, Hemon understands the past as a cultural practice deposited in bodies and rituals, as a home apparently beyond reach to which the migrant reconnects through the resources of the imagination. For the sake of clarity, my analysis of nomadic memory in Hemon's recent memoirs will be divided into three main sections: Hemon's version of "writing from memory," his exploration of memory as cultural practice, and storytelling in the realm of potentiality.

5.1. Writing from Memory

13 Arguably, at its most basic level, all writing is to a significant extent writing from memory. Nevertheless, what is emphasized with this label is that Hemon writes "from memory" à la Deleuze, a two-step process explained by Braidotti (*Transpositions* 171). Firstly, the person doing the writing is exempted from checking against an original. When telling us about his father's performance at Hemon's parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary at a Hamilton, Ontario church-basement hall, Hemon confesses that he is unable to locate the original script, which might be "in some file somewhere with all the other things I must never forget" (*My Parents* 121). In this case, the creative act of writing (about the anniversary celebrations) substitutes the non-productive ownership of a document, i.e., the script used by his father. Interestingly enough, Hemon's retelling includes some verbatim quotes from his father's speech, the irony of which does not become apparent until we realize the script is lost. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that any kind of conversation reproduced verbatim in a memoiristic or biographical work without the assistance of a transcript is the result of "writing from memory." In the anniversary episode, were it not for Hemon's uncalled for admission that he could not find the script, the truthfulness of the account would not be challenged. He points, therefore, to a lacuna in the text, a space that cannot be

accessed: as Hemon puts it, "even the greatest and sharpest memories contain a hole" (*My Parents* 106). However, the element of doubt introduced by Hemon is counteracted by the fact that "[t]he 'truth' of a text resides… in the kind of outward-bound interconnections or relations that it enables, provokes, engenders and sustains" (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 171), in other words, in the ensuing affects. The multiplying effect of writing (and publishing) about his parents' half century together—as part of a larger narrative of war and displacement—turns the personal memory of the father—shared by the limited number of attendants to the ceremony—into a communal celebration of survival. It is this celebration, made possible by Hemon's vivid rendering of the episode—quotes and all—that reveals the "truth" of the text/event, a truth that was "somehow never really 'written'" (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 171).

14 As a second feature of "working from memory," Braidotti refers to specific ways of relating to time and space. In a constant reconnection to the virtual totality of past and present moments, a non-linear temporality based on creative and generative interconnections—or "transpositions"—is privileged (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 171). These transpositions produce "points of contact between self and surroundings," marking embodied and embedded relations (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 172). Such notions are beautifully actualized in Hemon's memories of his paternal grandfather, Ivan. In the final years of his life, blind and afflicted by dementia, "Grandpa Ivan would get up from his sofa with great effort and walk in small Parkinsonian steps across the room, convinced that if he kept walking he would eventually reach Ukraine" (*My Parents* 21). A recurrent idea in the book is that objects and locations also provide a sense of continuity with the past: see, for example, Tata's obsession with purchasing a couple of vacationing cabins to be distributed among Hemon and his sister so that they can eventually bring their own future families and remember those who were there before. In the case of Ivan, the surrounding setting, and the interaction with it through the act of walking, provide access to a multiplicity of time lines. This way, the metaphors of the road to the past and memory lane become, for Ivan, a literal path to be covered on foot in order to return to the Galicia (now western Ukraine) he had left in 1912, aged 12. The fictionalized account of Grandpa Ivan's physical and mental deterioration toward the end of his life, as presented by Hemon in his novel *The Lazarus Project*, deserves quoting at length for the information it gives us to better understand this episode:

> After he lost his sight, he became entirely removed from the present: he could not remember our names, did not know us as his grandchildren.... It was very funny—nothing is as funny to kids as adult discombobulation—and then we would have to walk him around the kitchen, inch by inch, then return him to the sofa on which he was spending his final years. The circuit around the kitchen was his journey home. Once I took him for a kitchen walk, to the cupboard and back, a total of three yards that took us an eternity to cover. And suddenly we were in Lviv, he was nine, I was his father, we had gone to church, and now he wanted after-church rose candy as promised. When I said I couldn't give it to him, my grandfather cried like a child. I returned him to the sofa, he turned toward the wall, prayed, and wept, until he fell asleep. (Hemon, *Lazarus* 70)

15 What is relevant here is not so much Hemon's memory of his grandfather in his process of regression from old age to childhood. Rather, in *The Lazarus Project*, we are subtly invited to imagine this episode as if told from Ivan's perspective. Once the present can no longer be seen, the state of sightlessness seems to facilitate his access to the past. In the kitchen space, the largest city in Western Ukraine materializes after the required distance has been covered. Leaving aside the torments of dementia, the moment in

which Ivan turns into his grandson's son represents a surprisingly touching assemblage of intergenerational ties based on a memory able to generate new realities and a zigzagging philosophy of time (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 31). With the portrayal of the grandparent as a subject-in-becoming(-child-again), this episode depicts memory – quite literally – "as the ability to retrace one's steps, like reading the wolf's imprints on the snow, finding the traces, but obviously not in the semiotic-linguistic limited sense of the term" (Braidotti, *Transpositions* 173). Just like the sensorial event of urban walking allows the displaced character in Hemon's fiction (e.g., Jozef Pronek in "Blind Jozef Pronek and Dead Souls") and nonfiction (e.g., Hemon in "The Lives of a Flaneur") to construct and appropriate the city of Chicago from below—in the formulation of Michel de Certeau (93)—the domestic wandering of Ivan challenges "the dominant time line of Chronos" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 33) in a celebration of the non-linear temporality caused by migratory processes.

5.2. Memory as Cultural Practice

16 French art critic and scholar Nicolas Bourriaud argues that history is reproduced by the nomad in detachable, "portable practices" (33). This vision of culture as a mobile entity coincides with Hemon's understanding of the phenomena that bring together the Hemons of the past and the present. As a refugee in Canada, Petar is a devout practitioner of Ukrainianness. The memory of a land that strictly—or, rather, politically and geographically—speaking was his forebears' but not his own—as he was born in Bosnia—is retrieved most explicitly through the practice of singing, to which a whole chapter of *My Parents: An Introduction* ("7. MUSIC") is devoted. The core of the Hemons' repertoire consists of "the greatest hits of the Ukrainian diaspora" (*My Parents* 105). Therefore, the music played and sang by the Hemons is based on and informed by the experience of displacement. This music provides access to different homelands: the Sarajevo lost after the war, the Vučijak where Hemon's father was born, the Pronjavor where Hemon's paternal grandparents settled in their childhood. The resulting image is one of diasporic complexity: "The home of the Ukrainian homeland is Vučijak, which like the rest of Tata's life (apart from the four years in college) has always been in Bosnia. Which is to say that singing Ukrainian songs in Canada brings back the hill in Bosnia called Vucijack" (*My Parents* 42). This diasporic complexity contributes to the development of what Braidotti describes as "a nonunitary, multilayered, dynamic subject attached to multiple communities" (*Nomadic Theory* 35), a deterritorialized self in constant search of imaginative ways of expression.

17 In the "MUSIC" chapter, we are confronted with a collection of embedded and embodied experiences where some is lost and some is gained, giving rise to "an irreducible and incredibly rich identity rooted in concentric homelands" (Hemon, *My Parents* 42). Thus, Petar singing for hours on end about Cossacks, maidens, and horses during a family reunion in Toronto represents an affirmative vision of the migrant as a joyfully discontinuous subject, open to new realities as he longs for what is inaccessible. For all the pain involved in Petar's remembering from a position of exile, it is Andja's story that is regarded as truly tragic. After the destruction of her homeland (the Bosnia she helped to build and can no longer regain), unlike Tata, Hemon's mother lacks a "Ukraine" (real or imaginary) to which she could return: "What was destroyed was the framework within which her life—its very trajectory—had been self-legitimizing, where she never had to explain herself to anybody" (*My Parents* 35). This opposition between

Petar and Andja's ways of connecting to the past challenges the conception of migration as loss and of the grounded memories of the minorities as "just static splinters of negativity forever inscribed in the flesh of the victims of history" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 32). While for the family story of Andja, a reduced number of forced migrations imply less homelands available—via cultural practices such as singing—and, as a result, a more acute sense of dread, for Petar and his family the numerous departures and arrivals lead to wide-ranging types of remembrance.

18 Singing is not the only concrete, embodied practice analyzed by Hemon in his attempt to understand his parents. Beekeeping is also part of the "family lore," providing Tata with "a connection with and an extension of the family tradition," as well as a model of orderly society in a world characterized by rupture and displacement (*My Parents* 54). Interestingly, Hemon, who admits his lack of interest in his father's "apilife," identifies the points in common between keeping bees and literary creation: "What beekeeping is to him, literature is to me," that is, a domain where the fractured individual "can practice agency with dignity" (*My Parents* 63). But beyond this abstract interpretation, the physicality of beekeeping is worth emphasizing: in Hemon's recollections, it carries with it the taste of honey, the smell of wood and wax, the pain of the stings. As a crucial step in Petar's attempt to turn Hamilton into a place he can recognize as his own, he builds an apiary behind his workshop, and working in it "keeps him away from the void" (*My Parents* 61), holding traumatic memories and present worries at bay.

19 Along with singing and beekeeping, cooking (and eating) becomes the third main practice with which the Hemons try to establish a sense of continuity in exile. In one of the more explicitly comic chapters of the book ("6. FOOD"), Hemon describes the relationship of his parents with food: their partiality for "ontologically stable" traditional Bosnian dishes—particularly, Mama's *sarma*, i.e., pickled cabbage rolls—as opposed to fancy restaurant food (*My Parents* 89); their anxiety about an unstable future in which they would be hungry; their restoration of a sense of past authenticity when eating the dishes Bosnian women have always cooked. Crucially, the concerns revealed by this relationship with food are in themselves a form of connection with the past: as the narrative voice clarifies, Petar and Andja's food anxieties are not rooted in their *individual* experience (i.e., in any personal history of hunger), but in a *shared* history of survival (that of the previous generations, when having enough food on a daily basis could not be taken for granted). In other words, worrying about food becomes a cultural performance which brings its practitioners closer to their ancestors.

20 As Hemon acknowledges, displacement reinforces an imaginary sense of nationalism: people "might feel more connected to the mythological part of the nation precisely because direct contact is diminished" (Hemon, "What's Different"). The dangers of nationalism are all too clearly depicted in many of the most successful instances of Hemon's literature, where the evils of fascism are implacably examined. Nevertheless, the approach to his parents' celebration of their roots is significantly more benign. Different as they are, the practices of singing, beekeeping, as well as cooking and eating allow Hemon to prove that "even weak, incorrect, or incomplete memories persist" thanks to their being passed around and across generations through individual bodies (*My Parents* 108). Like myth, these practices provide stability in a changing world. The "complex singularities" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 164) expressed by these nomadic subjects in their concrete bodily practices represent a creative reworking akin to Hemon's own literary project.

5.3. Storytelling and "What If?"

21 In Hemon, the "what if" of the writerly practice signifies the "creative actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 167). Throughout *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You*, the narrative voice remains obsessively caught in between potentiality and actuality, giving rise to a tension where alternative paths provide imaginative ways of addressing the past. "Due to my compulsive writerly deformation, I have considered a different life trajectory," Hemon often admits, before ending up acknowledging that "[t]his is how history works: arbitrarily and irreversibly" (*My Parents* 11). This dualistic thinking borders on compulsion as Hemon approaches his awakening as an artist in *This Does Not Belong to You*. The fragmented narration is tainted by "all that could have been" (149), by "what could have been" (161), as he realizes that "I couldn't undo (no, it can't be done) what I did" (154). The task left to the writer is then to create a new reality, "inventing in the process an alternative self with a different life" (*Belong* 176). Thus understood, literary creation means a new way of "remembering in the nomadic mode," as it facilitates "the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 229). The two-year-old Hemon who records a tape imitating animal sounds has "no organic connection" with the listening self of the future, even though "the voice sounded familiar" (*Belong* 9), but the effect of this realization does not leave us perplexed and paralyzed, but amazed at the protean individual for whom remembering is about "differing from oneself" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 33).

22 As is the case with so many artists concerned with the act of remembering, Hemon's exploration of the operations of memory implies acknowledging the difficulty – if not outright impossibility – of apprehending a stable version of what was and is not any longer. When exploring the vanished world of his parents' youth, the narrative voice of *My Parents: An Introduction* constantly resorts to speculation, educated guesses, and extrapolation in order to bridge the gaps inherent to any process of remembrance. For example, on the momentous dead of Josip Broz Tito, Hemon catches a germ of ambivalence about the leader on his father's part, but "this could well be my projection" (*My Parents* 39). This sort of qualification undermines the discourse of truth expected in a work of nonfiction.

23 In the very first chapter of *My Parents: An Introduction*, the validity of the discourse about the past is eroded by Tata's and Mama's conflicting versions regarding their first sexual encounter (16-7). The realization that not even being an active participant in the event remembered gives you reliable access to a past truth supports Hemon's hypothetical (and creative) reworking of previous experiences. Although he has interviewed his parents as part of the preparation of the book, Hemon allows himself the freedom to imagine the details of their first date: "What they talked about, I do not know," "[t]he band must have played Paul Anka" (*My Parents* 14). As Hemon will explain in detail, this reimagining is inextricably linked to the acts of narrating and storytelling. As practiced by Petar, storytelling is described not as reporting but as "reimagining what happened in a different domain of experiential reality, including the past" (*My Parents* 128-9). Hemon is perfectly aware that the past of his father's stories bears little resemblance to any certifiable past. However, just like the "truth" of the past resists encapsulating or archiving efforts, the "truth" of a story does not

depend on any self-evident reality. As Hemon bluntly puts it, a story is "as true as can be" when it accumulates "relevant experiences and value while passing through other people" (*My Parents* 102). In other words, the veracity of a common memory depends on the affects it produces and on its validity for (transgenerational) community building, which reminds us again of Braidotti's nomadic memory.

24 Remembrance is constantly regarded as a creative enterprise: when Tata cannot remember what happens in his dreams, he makes it up in order to keep his listeners engaged and satisfied—the ultimate goal of the storyteller. Narration is perceived not only as a positive tool for transformation, but as the only option, given the unavailability of original experiences. Hemon asserts that the authentic memory—only a convenient fantasy—"is no longer available, in any language, it's always already transformed by the act of narration" (Hemon, "Narration"). Storytelling also provides the teller with an essential element: an interlocutor. "I, as I write this, am only a certainty that seeks out the words that are most apt to compel your attention. And who are you? Who might you be?" (*Belong* 25), writes Hemon to no one in particular—that is, to us, his readers. This vision of alterity is of particular relevance when one thinks of Hemon's work as diasporic literature: Hemon, as well as his parents, are constantly rendered as "others" in their American experience. As such, they are in a unique position to remember nomadically, which "amounts to reinventing a self as other" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory* 33). The alternative self, whose construction by Hemon-the-writer-to-be is painstakingly documented in *This Does Not Belong to You*, achieves a linguistic existence: "here we are, Hemon, you and I" (*Belong* 176) is the statement which closes a rather long section devoted to exploring the value of imagining and inventing oneself. It is thanks to Hemon's abandonment to literature—and, in particular, to storytelling—that the prosaic "all that could have been" gives way to the poetic "[t]he world is everything that is the case, and many birds, and more" (*Belong* 146): the new self is born, and it takes the form of the artist able, and willing, to reconnect experiences, memories, and affects.

6. Conclusion

25 As shown above, Rosi Braidotti's nomadic memory usefully illuminates certain aspects of Hemon's memoirs. In particular, it helps us understand the complex transmission of (individual and communal) memory in a context of forced migration, accentuating the crucial role played by creativity and imagination in the act of remembrance. The ever-present urge to remember in the face of the impossibility of total recollection determines the role of the writer in Hemon's narrative. Inventiveness and creativity are the most valuable assets in the fight against oblivion, premised on the belief that, if one could imagine something, it could happen (*Belong* 21).

26 Analyzed with the tools provided by critical posthumanism, Hemon's nonfiction becomes an example of remembering in Braidotti's minority-mode. He presents the migrant as a subject-in-becoming—a process in which "others" are an integral element, always different from the past self. The workings of a transgenerational, nonlinear memory produce powerful and unexpected connections, providing access to a genealogy as the subject operates in a time continuum where stable identities are deterritorialized and creative ways to access an unavailable past are generated. In short, Hemon's memoiristic writing represents a case study on the value of nomadic

memory for the apprehension of diasporic experiences and the transmission of the cultural and political memory of migrant communities.

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NOTES

1. Hemon's Twitter profile, @SashaHemon, is the ideal source of information for the reader interested in following live the author's own process of identification with the Ukrainian people in the current context of the Russian invasion.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon's two 2019 memoirs published in one volume, *My Parents: An Introduction* and *This Does Not Belong to You*. Specifically, it applies Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic memory to Hemon's telling of his and his family's life stories. Analyzed with the tools provided by critical posthumanism, Hemon's nonfiction becomes an example of remembering in what Braidotti calls a minority-mode. He presents the migrant as a subject-in-becoming, belonging to their community thanks to the workings of a transgenerational, nonlinear memory, operating in a time continuum where stable identities are deterritorialized and creative ways to access an unavailable past are generated. In Hemon's writing, identity is rooted in concentric homelands, and the truth of the memory resides in the affects it provokes and sustains. Opposing the static authority of the past and any fixed notion of the self, Hemon understands the past as a cultural practice deposited in bodies and rituals, as a home apparently beyond reach to which the migrant reconnects through the resources of the imagination.

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Keywords: Aleksandar Hemon, memoir, Memory Studies, nomadic memory, Rosi Braidotti

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