Fedja Wierød Borčak

A CHILDREN'S LITERATURE?
Subversive Infantilisation in Contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian Fiction
A Children’s Literature?

Subversive Infantilisation in Contemporary Bosnian-Herzegovinian Fiction
A CHILDREN’S LITERATURE?
Subversive Infantilisation in Contemporary
Bosnian-Herzegovinian Fiction

Fedja Wierød Borčak

Linnaeus University Press
Abstract


The past two decades of political and social disintegration in Bosnia and Herzegovina have given birth to literary counter-reactions against hegemonic ways of imagining social life in the country. This thesis deals with a particular practice in Bosnian-Herzegovinian war and post-war literature, which uses infantile perspectives to critically address issues related to the socialist history of Bosnia as part of Yugoslavia, the war in the 1990s, and the so-called transitional post-war period. Drawing on an old Western literary tradition of using the child character to estrange conventional experiences of the world, the texts (by authors such as Miljenko Jergović, Nenad Veličković, Alma Lazarevska, Aleksandar Hemon, and Saša Stanić) use the skewing and dislocating outlook associated with the infantile subject to expose and undermine perceivably problematic mechanisms in socialist, ethnonationalist, and Western liberal hegemonic discourses.

In contrast to previous research on the topic, which has primarily focussed upon the narratological conditions for the infantile perspective, the focus here is on the subversive infantilisation of hegemonic discourse— that is, the very discursive act of representing and contesting dominant concepts, narratives, and representations. The texts are seen as transitional areas through which input from the social world passes and, in this process, is restructured and ultimately transformed into a configuration slightly or radically different from the original input. Theoretically inspired by discourse theory and ideas from New Historicism, the study isolates and investigates a set of techniques through which this reconfiguration occurs. Apart from discussing the use of the basic infantile perspective as such a technique, the study also considers how the notion of the infantile influences techniques of dichotomisation (the production of positional counterpoints), appropriation (the critical subsuming of dominant discourse), and blending (the mixing of dominant and childish imagery).

The thesis also addresses the possible political implications of the strategy of subversive infantilisation. Here the approach is influenced by the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière, which enables an understanding of the aesthetic reconfiguration of how Bosnian social life is imagined as a way of constituting a new form of subjectivity that evades the excluding and oppressive framework of hegemonic discourse.

Key words: Bosnia, Bosnian literature, the infantile, child character, subversive infantilisation, nationalism, Balkanism, socialism, international administration, discourse theory, New Historicism, Jacques Rancière
Abstract


The past two decades of political and social disintegration in Bosnia and Herzegovina have given birth to literary counter-reactions against hegemonic ways of imagining social life in the country. This thesis deals with a particular practice in Bosnian-Herzegovinian war and post-war literature, which uses infantile perspectives to critically address issues related to the socialist history of Bosnia as part of Yugoslavia, the war in the 1990s, and the so-called transitional post-war period. Drawing on an old Western literary tradition of using the child character to estrange conventional experiences of the world, the texts (by authors such as Miljenko Jergović, Nenad Veličković, Alma Lazarevska, Aleksandar Hemon, and Saša Stanišić) use the skewing and dislocating outlook associated with the infantile subject to expose and undermine perceivably problematic mechanisms in socialist, ethnonationalist, and Western liberal hegemonic discourses.

In contrast to previous research on the topic, which has primarily focussed upon the narratological conditions for the infantile perspective, the focus here is on the subversive infantilisation of hegemonic discourse—that is, the very discursive act of representing and contesting dominant concepts, narratives, and representations. The texts are seen as transitional areas through which input from the social world passes and, in this process, is restructured and ultimately transformed into a configuration slightly or radically different from the original input. Theoretically inspired by discourse theory and ideas from New Historicism, the study isolates and investigates a set of techniques through which this reconfiguration occurs. Apart from discussing the use of the basic infantile perspective as such a technique, the study also considers how the notion of the infantile influences techniques of dichotomisation (the production of positional counterpoints), appropriation (the critical subsuming of dominant discourse), and blending (the mixing of dominant and childish imagery).

The thesis also addresses the possible political implications of the strategy of subversive infantilisation. Here the approach is influenced by the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière, which enables an understanding of the aesthetic reconfiguration of how Bosnian social life is imagined as a way of constituting a new form of subjectivity that evades the excluding and oppressive framework of hegemonic discourse.

Key words: Bosnia, Bosnian literature, the infantile, child character, subversive infantilisation, nationalism, Balkanism, socialism, international administration, discourse theory, New Historicism, Jacques Rancière
Mami, tati, bratu.
Mami, tati, bratu.
My interest in Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature began when I was in my early twenties. It was triggered by a personal curiosity about a cultural heritage from which I had been separated early in life. I was only three years old when, in 1992, the war broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and my parents decided to seek refuge in Northern Europe, ultimately ending up in Sweden. When I began reading the great Yugoslavian works that my parents had always talked about, and later the post-war works with which they were less familiar, it was with a sense of urgency — I felt I had missed out on something important.

Intellectually, and more significantly, I grew more and more curious about the significance of literature as an aesthetic means in a place characterised by continuous social and political disintegration. In one of the chapters of this thesis I refer to an essay by Željko Ivanković, where he talks about the significance reading and writing had during the war. Literature, he writes, provided a breathing space for shutting out the war, and it provided people with a tool for organising what seemed like chaos into something more comprehensible. I wondered, however, whether literature could offer something more than a therapeutic relief, whether, instead, it could provide a position from which one could take apart the conceptual cosmos provided by an ethnonationalist hegemony insisting upon self-victimisation, segregation, and antagonism. Could literature be a means of reimagining the concept of life in Bosnia? Could a study of the Bosnian literature help to understand potential resistance to the rise of xenophobia and nationalism across Europe today? I have focussed upon a textual strategy in Bosnian post-war literature that relies upon the 'dislocating' function associated with the figure of the child to intervene in the current hegemonic order and to rearrange stiffened models for thinking about a range of social and political issues in the country.

This thesis is the result of four years of research, and I am happy to finally be able to express my gratitude in print to those who have contributed to my work with the thesis and to my development as a scholar. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my head supervisor Jørgen Bruhn for his rousing curiosity, on-point critique, personal warmth, and relentless support.
Preface

My interest in Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature began when I was in my early twenties. It was triggered by a personal curiosity about a cultural heritage from which I had been separated early in life. I was only three years old when, in 1992, the war broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and my parents decided to seek refuge in Northern Europe, ultimately ending up in Sweden. When I began reading the great Yugoslavian works that my parents had always talked about, and later the post-war works with which they were less familiar, it was with a sense of urgency—I felt I had missed out on something important.

Intellectually, and more significantly, I grew more and more curious about the significance of literature as an aesthetic means in a place characterised by continuous social and political disintegration. In one of the chapters of this thesis I refer to an essay by Željko Ivanković, where he talks about the significance reading and writing had during the war. Literature, he writes, provided a breathing space for shutting out the war, and it provided people with a tool for organising what seemed like chaos into something more comprehensible. I wondered, however, whether literature could offer something more than a therapeutic relief, whether, instead, it could provide a position from which one could take apart the conceptual cosmos provided by an ethnonationalist hegemony insisting upon self-victimisation, segregation, and antagonism. Could literature be a means of reimagining the concept of life in Bosnia? Could a study of the Bosnian literature help to understand potential resistance to the rise of xenophobia and nationalism across Europe today? I have focussed upon a textual strategy in Bosnian post-war literature that relies upon the ‘dislocating’ function associated with the figure of the child to intervene in the current hegemonic order and to rearrange stiffened models for thinking about a range of social and political issues in the country.

This thesis is the result of four years of research, and I am happy to finally be able to express my gratitude in print to those who have contributed to my work with the thesis and to my development as a scholar. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my head supervisor Jørgen Bruhn for his rousing curiosity, on-point critique, personal warmth, and relentless support.
His guidance has had a huge impact on my work, and his general academic outlook has inspired me immeasurably. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor Andrea Lešić for her insightful comments, theoretical and contextual knowledge, and kindness. Besides my supervisors, I would like to thank my thesis committee: Zoran Milutinović, Tine Roesen, Adnan Mahmutović, and Karin Nykvist, for their willingness to read my work and share their knowledge and insights. Also, I would like to thank Stijn Vervaet for evaluating my work at the midway seminar, and Frederik Tygstrup for his critique at the final seminar in September this year.

It is difficult to find the words to describe my gratitude to all my colleagues at the Department of Film and Literature at Linnaeus University, who have always been kind-hearted and stimulating, and who have made work a joy. In particular, I want to thank Anna Salomonsson for her untiring support, stimulating thoughts, and healthy perspective, and Vasilis Papageorgiou for our endless talks about art, philosophy, and life. Special thanks also to Beate Schirrmacher, who always made time to read my drafts carefully. I sincerely thank administrators Ylva Forell-Gustavsson and Anette Lennartsson for always making things much, much easier.

I would also like to thank Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies at Linnaeus University, which was kind enough to host and support my research in numerous ways. Especially Margareta Petersson, Peter Forsgren, Johan Höglund, Maria Olaussen, Gunlög Fur, and Nicklas Hållén deserve many thanks.

In the spring of 2015 I was lucky enough to be able to spend a semester at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen, where I had the opportunity to closely study the Yugoslavian and post-Yugoslavian historical situation. My gratitude to Tea Sindbæk, Martin Madsen, and Ismar Dedović, who welcomed me with unmatched kindness and interest. Thanks also to the School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, where I had the chance to spend two months. Special thanks to Mads Rosendahl Thomsen for his guidance and Kasper Green Krejbjerg and Jakob Ladegaard for their contributions. I want to thank my friend Jasmin Agić, who helped me considerably in my work by showing me the ropes in Sarajevo. Thanks to Rasim Borčak and Irfan Horozović for their help in the initial phase of the project, and to Enver Kazaz for his thoughts on my work in its different stages.

My outmost gratitude to my dear parents, Edhem and Branka, who taught me discipline and humility, and my big brother Damir, who taught me hard work. I dedicate this work to them. Lastly, I want to thank my wife Lea, who supported me throughout the work and who—seemingly without effort—taught my heart to sing.

Copenhagen, October 2016
## Contents

1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 3
  1.1 Aim .................................................................................................................... 6
  1.2 Disposition ......................................................................................................... 6

2 Context, theory, method .......................................................................................... 8
  2.1 Situating Infantile Discourse ............................................................................ 11
    2.1.1 Infantile Perspectives in Literary History ............................................... 11
    2.1.2 Bosnian War Writing ............................................................................... 14
    2.1.3 Earlier Research ....................................................................................... 17
  2.2 Historical Context ............................................................................................. 20
    2.2.1 Yugoslavia .................................................................................................. 23
    2.2.2 War and Ethnic Cleansing ......................................................................... 28
    2.2.3 Western Passivity ..................................................................................... 30
    2.2.4 Continued Ethnicism ............................................................................... 33
    2.2.5 Western Paternalism ............................................................................... 37
    2.2.6 Remarks ................................................................................................... 40
  2.3 Subversive Infantilisation as Interrogation ....................................................... 41
    2.3.1 Text and World ......................................................................................... 43
    2.3.2 The Political Stake ................................................................................... 46
    2.3.3 The Political Child ................................................................................... 49
    2.3.4 Techniques of Reconfiguration .................................................................. 53

3 Perspective .............................................................................................................. 59
  3.1 The Immediate Surroundings ........................................................................... 60
    3.1.1 A Unique Status ....................................................................................... 60
    3.1.2 A Suspicious Weltanschauung ................................................................. 63
    3.1.3 Spatial Dislocation .................................................................................... 66
  3.2 Focus on History ................................................................................................ 69
    3.2.1 Two Sides of Socialism ........................................................................... 69
    3.2.2 Parallel Transitions ................................................................................... 73

4 Dichotomisation ...................................................................................................... 78
  4.1 Incomprehension .............................................................................................. 79
    4.1.1 Aporia ....................................................................................................... 84
    4.1.2 We and They ............................................................................................ 88
  4.2 In Dialogue .......................................................................................................... 92
    4.2.1 The Passive Child .................................................................................... 93
    4.2.2 The Active Child .................................................................................... 96

5 Appropriation ......................................................................................................... 99
  5.1 Writing, Yawning, and Mispronouncing ........................................................... 101
  5.2 Using Western Voices ....................................................................................... 106
    5.2.1 Maja’s Diary ............................................................................................. 106
    5.2.2 Balkanist Exploitation ............................................................................. 109
  5.3 Blurring Borders ................................................................................................. 113
Introduction

A considerable part of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature written in the past twenty years has revolved around issues related to the war in 1992–1995 and the depressed transitional social state that followed. While some writers have adhered to any of the three ethnonationalisms (Bosniak, Serb, Croat) which prevailed in the war and have since dominated the Bosnian political landscape, many of the most prominent writers have engaged in attacking the very same nationalist hegemony. The works of the latter tend to share the aim to relativise and show contingent the narrow conceptual framework and narratives promoted in dominant discourse and to search for alternative forms of imagining a range of issues that continue to stifle social development in Bosnia. In fact, a suspicious attitude towards ideology in general can be identified, considering also the critical treatment of Bosnia's socialist history during the time of Yugoslavia as well as the equally critical response to the attitudes and actions of the international community in connection with the war and the reconstruction process that followed.

This general tendency of resistance in the literature has manifested itself in a variety of ways. One particular strategy, which is the topic of this thesis, is the employment of what I have called subversive infantilisation. The concept signifies a literary practice characterised by the production of an infantile approach to the world that works to de-automatise sedimented experiences and expose and undermine dominant forms of representation through oversimplification and other types of ironic imagery (stylisation, parody).

5.3.1 Creating the Gap ................................................................. 114
5.3.2 Closing the Gap ................................................................. 117
6 Blending .................................................................................... 121
6.1 On the Threshold .................................................................. 125
   6.1.1 Guns and Babies .............................................................. 126
   6.1.2 A Bosnian Soldier ............................................................ 127
6.3 Projecting a Way Out ............................................................. 131
6.4 Versions of Reality ............................................................... 134
7 Conclusion .................................................................................. 138
   7.1 The Infantile Subject and Beyond ......................................... 139
   7.2 Techniques of Interrogation .................................................. 142
   7.3 The Possibility of Change ...................................................... 149
References .................................................................................... 155
1 Introduction

A considerable part of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature written in the past twenty-some years has revolved around issues related to the war in 1992–1995 and the depressed transitional social state that followed. While some writers have adhered to any of the three ethnonationalisms (Bosniak, Serb, Croat) which prevailed in the war and have since dominated the Bosnian political landscape, many of the most prominent writers have engaged in attacking the very same nationalist hegemony. The works of the latter tend to share the aim to relativise and show contingent the narrow conceptual framework and narratives promoted in dominant discourse and to search for alternative forms of imagining a range of issues that continue to stifle social development in Bosnia. In fact, a suspicious attitude towards ideology in general can be identified, considering also the critical treatment of Bosnia’s socialist history during the time of Yugoslavia as well as the equally critical response to the attitudes and actions of the international community in connection with the war and the reconstruction process that followed.

This general tendency of resistance in the literature has manifested itself in a variety of ways. One particular strategy, which is the topic of this thesis, is the employment of what I have called subversive infantilisation. The concept signifies a literary practice characterised by the production of an infantile approach to the world that works to de-automatise sedimented experiences and expose and undermine dominant forms of representation through oversimplification and other types of ironic imagery (stylisation, parody,
satire, hyperbole). In this strategy the narrator or main character is often—though not always—a child or adolescent guided by a high degree of naivety, curiosity, and instinct, who struggles, often in vain, to understand established ways of thinking about aspects related to the Bosnian context, such as ethnic and confessional identity, history, language, and war.\(^5\)

The practice of using the figure of the child to produce alternative, estranging perspectives is part of a rich tradition in Western literary history that goes back to St Augustine and continues over the Romantics and more socially oriented authors like Mark Twain, Tolstoy, and Henry James to the post-Second World War era of German literature and Jewish Shoah literature in which the war and the unfathomable extent of the Holocaust were considered from the skewing perspective of the child.\(^6\) Much like the literature published after the Second World War, Bosnian literature from the mid-1990s and onwards began using the child figure as a way of dealing with the war and, more specifically, with the way the war was represented. An early example of such a work is the novel *Lodgers (Konačari)* by Nenad Veličković, which was originally published underground in 1995 and smuggled out of Sarajevo in only a few Xeroxed copies, and which follows a teenage girl’s experiences in wartime Sarajevo.\(^7\) Written in the form of a fictionalised diary characterised by a great deal of humour and an estranging distance to the horrific circumstances of war, it has been read as a novel ‘unmasking the dominant ideological narratives and collective prejudices’\(^8\) and as a critique of Western media, which to a large extent produced ‘reductions of the war in Bosnia to an ethnic clash and simplistic stories about an ancient hatred lasting centuries’.\(^9\) Veličković is a writer who has continuously relied on the infantile perspective in the depiction of social issues, most notably in works concerned with the post-war period: *My Daughter’s Father (Otac moje kćeri)*, 2000), portraying the social hardships of a Sarajevan family shortly after the war, and *Sahib* (2002), a satire told from the viewpoint of a British administrator involved in non-governmental projects in the Bosnian capital.

Apart from Veličković, several other writers can be seen to use infantile discourse as an instrument for social critique. Some of the works included in

---

\(^5\) See for example Renate Hansen-Kokoruš and Elena Popovska, ‘Einleitung’, in Renate Hansen-Kokoruš and Elena Popovska, eds., *Kind und Jugendlicher in der Literatur und im Film Bosniens, Kroatiens und Serbiens* (Hamburg, 2013), 9. This general description of the child character will be nuanced in the course of this study. While it is applicable to most cases of subversive infantilisation, it does not necessarily cover cases where the child is a more passive element in the narrative, but nonetheless is able to carry with it connotations of the infantile, which can open up space for criticism.


\(^7\) Tatjana Jukić, ‘Souls and Apples, All in One: Bosnia as the Cultural Nexus in Nenad Veličković’s *Konačari*’, *Style*, 30/3 (1996), 488.

\(^8\) Enver Kazaz, ‘Krvavi lom društva i poetički predratni roman’, *Sarajevske sveske*, 13 (2006), 313.

the corpus of texts studied in the following chapters are short stories from Sarajevo Marlboro (1994) and the novel Mama Leone (1999) by Miljenko Jergović. I also discuss Semezdin Mehmedinović’s Sarajevo Blues (1992), which quickly attracted international attention; a few short stories by Alma Lazarevska; and Nura Bazdulj-Hubijar’s When in July (Kad je bio juli, 2005). The strategy is also found—and in fact quite often—in the works of some of the most prominent expat Bosnian authors, who do not necessarily write in BCSM. Aleksandar Hemon uses it in a couple of short stories in The Question of Bruno, and it plays a decisive role in How the Solder Repairs the Gramophone (Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert, 2006) by Saša Stanišić. It is also present in Bekim Sejranović’s Nigdje, niotkuda (Nowhere, Nowhere From, 2010) and to some extent in Alen Mešković’s Ukulele Jam (2011) and Ismet Prčić’s Shards (2011). In the last two examples subversive infantilisation is actualised in narratives told from the point of view of teenage narrators. In addition to these examples, there are writers who use infantile discourse in their works not necessarily as a tool for social critique, but rather as a way of representing the past and life in Yugoslavia. Notable examples include works by Sejla Šehabović, Cecilija Toskić, Nedžad Ibrahimović, Lejla Kalamujić, and Mirza Fehimović.

Overall, it seems that the infantile perspective has played an important role in the last twenty years of Bosnian literature. In this thesis I investigate its significance by closing in on a body of works that more or less explicitly direct the ‘child’s gaze’, as it is sometimes called, at problematic aspects of hegemonic discourse in Bosnia. These works do not merely use the child or other infantile characters to portray the nostalgic past, generational divisions, microsocial family relations, or other experiences close to the child; they also seek to intervene in oppressive hegemonic discourses and to create space for radical reconsideration of the ways in which personal, social, and political life is usually represented. With this in mind, I have chosen to see the employment of subversive infantilisation as a political move through which the texts work to reconfigure basic representations of life in Bosnia associated with hegemonic discourse, and to produce a new, deviant mode of thinking about issues related to Bosnian society, a mode that demands to be recognised as speech, that is, a politically valid form of discourse.

Being such an attempt, it is particularly interesting for its ironic attempt to produce speech through a medium (the child) that by definition cannot produce speech. The infant is per definition ‘the one who can’t speak’ and, therefore, someone who is excluded from the possibility of occupying the

---

10 BCSM is an acronym for the standards of Serbo-Croatian, which are sometimes wrongly treated as separate languages: Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin. For a critical discussion, see Snježana Kordić, Jezik i nacionalizam (Zagreb, 2010), especially 69–108.

realm of the political, which is reserved for those able to produce speech recognised as legitimate.

Also, the use of an infantile subject can be conceptualised as an attempt to ‘infantilise’ dominant discourses that have themselves contributed to the infantilisation (excluding, ignoring, quieting) of the population, be it the collectivistic oppression of the rights of the individual in socialist times, the more recent ethnonationalist hegemony, or the Western imperialist view of Eastern Europe as a place inhabited by the underdeveloped ‘children of post-communism’, who need liberalist ‘guidance’ in their mission for political autonomy. Against this background subversive infantilisation emerges as a kind of ‘writing back’ strategy, which does not only facilitate resistance and a dissident mode of thought, but is significant also in providing a method for subjectivation and a conceptual redefinition of who is allowed to speak and on what grounds.

1.1 Aim

The aim of the thesis is to investigate different ways in which subversive infantilisation is employed by Bosnian-Herzegovinian authors as a strategy for interrogating and disrupting dominant kinds of representation in socialist, ethnonationalist, and Western liberalist discourses. Focussing on the discursive interaction with these dominant discourses found in a body of significant works, I propose a set of general techniques by which this interplay occurs. In doing so, I attempt to differentiate and—at least to some extent—organise the multitude of nuances found in a strategy that has so far only been signalled, nuances that produce slightly different implications for our understanding of the political potential of subversive infantilisation to produce a mode of thought that can be fruitful in reconfiguring the way key aspects of social life in Bosnia are perceived and understood.

1.2 Disposition

A brief note on the disposition of the thesis, so the reader knows what to expect. The chapter following this introduction discusses the contextual, theoretical, and methodological conditions for my investigation. Section 2.1 presents the conceptual context of the notion of subversive infantilisation, putting it into historical relief and in the framework of what has been called Bosnian ‘war writing’. In this section I also relate my approach to the infantile perspective in Bosnian literature to other approaches in earlier research. Section 2.2 presents the historical context of Bosnia since the Second World War and onwards, focussing primarily on the emergence of the hegemonic

---

12 Boris Buden, Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).
discourses against which the texts react. Section 2.3 describes the theoretical conditions of literature in general for interacting with the world and its potential of changing the same. I also propose, more specifically, ways in which the interaction occurs in texts employing subversive infantilisation as well as the methodological approach I rely on in the following analytical chapters.

Chapters 3–6 are the analytical chapters. Each of these studies a particular technique of producing discursive interaction with hegemonic discourse. In chapter 3 I look at the function of the infantile perspective and its significance for producing skewing angles on key issues. Chapter 4 deals with the production of different types of dichotomies between the attacked discourse and the position of the infantile subject. Chapter 5 looks at another method which, contrary to producing clear-cut conflicts, tries to blur discursive boundaries by appropriating the target discourse and in this way exposes faults and inconsistencies in it. The last analytical chapter, chapter 6, focusses on the technique of blending conceptual inputs from various discourses and by doing so detects otherwise invisible contrasts between notions that are imagined to be given and solid. In chapter 7, finally, I reflect on the analytical results achieved in preceding chapters, focussing both on the textual circumstances characterising subversive infantilisation and on what political potential the strategy may have.
2 Context, theory, method

The child figure has been used in various ways and with different aims throughout Western literary history, depending on changes in philosophical, aesthetical, and social preferences. Consequently, as a device it is ‘rich in potential meanings and extends an open invitation to writers with very different agendas’. This means that no previous view of the child figure as a critical instrument can readily be transposed to the contemporary Bosnian context. Some delineation is required. This chapter is devoted to drawing some contours in my methodological approach to Bosnian literary texts, which, through what I call subversive infantilisation, construct estranging representations of social life from perspectives first and foremost associated with the child and notions of the infantile.

There are certainly traits in the Bosnian contemporary context that echo earlier use of similar strategies. Above all, this is the case in the highly contrastive, alternative perspective attributed to the child character, which functions as an outsider alienated from rigid social conventions, and which, because of its infantile behaviour, manages to see beyond the supposed delusions of the world. This figure is quite familiar and has some resonance in the experiences of children in everyday situations where they make idiosyncratic observations that may, apart from being cute or quirky, put things in a slightly different light. Apart from this loose connection between the two, however, child characters have very little to do with actual children. They are stylised, mobilised, and used by authors as critical textual tools in ways that are multifaceted, differentiated, and rarely unambiguous in terms of how well they manage to criticise mechanisms in the complex Bosnian social fabric. A significant aspect of the child character here—as opposed to the real-life child—is that the critical potential it seems to carry is consciously and consistently directed towards certain discourses, which for different reasons are perceived as problematic. I concentrate on works that use this strategy to react to hegemonic discourse in Bosnia with the aim of highlighting its

---

oppressive nature as well as questioning its epistemological and moral legitimacy. I have departed from the assumption that a study focussing on common characteristics of subversive infantilisation can tell us a great deal not only about this particular part of Bosnian literature, but also about how the political imagination in the country is—and can be—construed. I view the strategy of subversive infantilisation as a way of partaking in a political struggle with dominant discourse over the power to represent social reality. Later in this chapter I explain exactly what I mean by this by drawing upon a set of theoretical points from the New Historicism tradition, the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière, and an approach formulated by Frederik Tygstrup and Isak Winkel Holm that develops these perspectives.

Methodologically my focus on the relation between texts using subversive infantilisation and the dominant discourse places emphasis on the discursive processes involved in the interrogation within these works of, for instance, the nationalist fixation with ethnic affiliation or the weight on militarist narratives during the socialist era in Bosnia. What is meant by interrogation here will also be developed in the course of the chapter, but for the sake of overview it can be helpful to keep a basic distinction in mind: the distinction between infantile discourse and subversive infantilisation. Relying on Fairclough’s definition of discourse in *Discourse and Social Change*, I will define infantile discourse as a set of linguistic conventions that depend on connotations of the infantile, such as the way texts construct their subject matter (family affairs, play, generational questions), the narrative forms they use (estrangement, fragmented frog’s perspective, lack of chronology, marginal position, lack of insight), the way they relate to other discourses (the use of ironic devices and different kinds of discourse representation), and the type of message they aim to formulate.

Subversive infantilisation, then, signifies the particular manners in which infantile discourse critically relates to other discourses, that is, the very process in which this occurs. Assuming that one of the most important dimensions of Bosnian infantile discourse is its interplay with the surrounding social world (including other texts, modes of thought, beliefs and practices), subversive infantilisation is a strategy (among others) through which this occurs. Not all texts relying on infantile discourse trigger processes of criticism; a narrative told from the perspective of a child’s outsider position is not necessarily aimed at reconsidering the nature of conventional rituals or political positions. I should also stress that the occurrence of subversive infantilisation does not depend on a successful subversive effect, if we by that

---

15 Some examples of works in which children play an important role, but do not necessarily contain subversive infantilisation, include Melina Kamerić’s *Cipele za dodjelu Oskara*; Cecilija Toskić’s *Fojnički krumplir i tirolske šparglje*; Sejla Sehavović’s *Car Trojan ima kozije uši*; Mustafa Zvizdić’s *Muzika zidnih satova*; Lejla Kalamujić’s *Anatomija osmijeha*; Nedžad Ibrahimović’s *Inkapsulirana tijela*; and Mirza Fehimović’s *Zec i pantaruo*. 
mean a significant reconsideration of a given representation of reality (as I define it later in this chapter). Rather, the strategy is defined by the attempt to achieve that goal. In other words, it is defined by the author’s mobilisation of certain traits associated with infantile discourse towards a critical goal. This implies that not all cases of subversive infantilisation are actually subversive, and that they can in some cases reiterate the very same mechanisms that they have set out to criticise.

The selection of texts included in this thesis is limited to a body of works published since the war that utilises subversive infantilisation in the narrow sense described above. My intention is not to provide an exhaustive mapping of all possible varieties of subversive infantilisation in the Bosnian context. Rather, I have selected works (novels and short stories) that are representative and at the same time different enough to show the variety of the strategy. Apart from considering the most typical use of the child character in works such as Nenad Veličković’s Lodgers or Miljenko Jergović’s Mama Leone, where the child is represented as an instigator actively undermining conventions, I also consider works that challenge the conceptual boundaries of subversive infantilisation, such as Alma Lazarevska’s short story ‘The Feast of the Rosary’ (‘Blagdan krunice’). Moreover, I do not merely consider texts that use the child character as a representative of the infantile perspective, but also texts that put adolescents at centre stage. This is, for instance, the case in Goran Samardžić’s The Forest Spirit (Šumski duh) and Alen Mešković’s Ukulele Jam. I also touch upon works where the infantile subject happens to be an adult, such as Nenad Veličković’s Sahib or Miljenko Jergović’s story ‘Slobodan’. Because my analytical focus is on a limited set of discursive methods—which I call *techniques*—that function as ways of triggering an interrogation of dominant discourse, not all works will receive the same amount of attention. Texts that exhibit more complex use of a technique naturally demand more space, as do authors who have employed subversive infantilisation more extensively. I should also say that because the topic of the study is literary resistance to hegemonic discourse, and ethnonationalist discourse in particular, I have exclusively chosen works that include this element and that have no clear nationalist bias in other ways.

In order to get at the process of subversive infantilisation, one cannot avoid talking about the broader phenomenon of infantile discourse, as all processes of subversive infantilisation are dependent on the set of characteristics associated with infantile discourse. Exploring infantile discourse as a concept therefore seems to be a good starting point. I begin with a short exposition of the historical development of the single most important aspect of infantile discourse: the child character. This includes situating infantile discourse in the particular historical Bosnian context and the context of Bosnian ‘war writing’, a kind of poetics that took shape as a response to the war in 1992–1995. I then shift focus from the infantile discourse to subversive infantilisation by discussing the theoretical framework for the understanding of subversive
infantilisation as critical interrogation, relying on a set of insights from discourse theory and especially the New Historicism tradition. Subsequently, and from a philosophical position represented by Jacques Rancière, I will discuss the premises for thinking about subversive infantilisation in political terms. At the end of the chapter, relying on Tygstrup and Winkel Holm, I propose a handful of techniques that are used to interrogate dominant discourse.

2.1 Situating Infantile Discourse

2.1.1 Infantile Perspectives in Literary History

Infantile discourse, which is largely associated with the use of the child character, and which is aimed at exposing and criticising conventions and hegemonic structures, is not a particularly novel occurrence in Western literary history. Below I give a short overview of several well-known examples that can help to define the specificity of the occurrence in contemporary Bosnian literature.

Already in the 4th century St Augustine, in his Confessions, laid the groundwork for using the child critically. To St Augustine the child was a figure through which one could think about God and the world. Though the child, like the adult, was connected to sin and a result of the fallen man’s corrupted will, the child figure was thought to have the ability to reveal the scope of the ‘wickedness of this world’. Centuries later, in 1668, von Grimmelshausen wrote what is considered to be the first German picaresque, Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch, depicting experiences of the Thirty Years’ War through the eyes of a 12-year-old child protagonist. After having been brutally kidnapped from his farm by foreign soldiers and having escaped he travels through a land torn into pieces by the war and is able to morally question society from an ‘unsocialized outsider’s view’. Later yet, Voltaire similarly used infantile discourse in Candide (1759) to show the horrors of war, but also to ridicule organised religion and clerical hypocrisy (in particular Leibniz’ thesis that God, despite the evils of the world, had not underachieved in creating the world).

From the 18th century a significant historical development in the view of children occurred, strengthening children’s subjectivity, which in the earlier feudal world view had received no ‘separate privilege’ in relation to the adult world in terms of rights, labour, and so forth; children were seen simply as small adults. Rousseau played a vital part in developing and disseminating a new understanding, which clearly distinguished between childhood and

---

16 Robert Pattison, The Child Figure in English Literature (Athens, GA, 1978), 110.
17 Pinfold, Child’s View, 2.
adulthood and acknowledged the particularity of the former: The child has ‘its own way of seeing, thinking, and feeling’, he wrote in Émile.\textsuperscript{19} The child was now placed outside the adult world, in a separate and protected ‘social stratum’ from which it was to develop into a socialised and responsible citizen.\textsuperscript{20} In this special child’s status thinkers and poets saw above all the characteristics of spontaneity, freedom from conventions, and innocence, and it was celebrated as an entirely different mode of experiencing the world, which could bring man closer to nature and further away from convention.\textsuperscript{21} Above all, two of the aspects afforded by Rousseau to the child—original innocence and closeness to the natural state—were later adopted by the Romantics, who added to the concept an identification between the child and the poet,\textsuperscript{22} emphasising the idealised child figure as an incorrupt aesthetic channel through which one could free man from the delusions of experience. Literary child figures—like, for instance, the Chimney Sweeper or Little Girl Lost in The Songs of Innocence—are telling examples and essential in William Blake’s poetry, which emphasised the child’s innocence as ‘a form of resistance by its moral intelligence and its access to resources of the imagination that reproach the brutality and hypocrisy’ associated with the world.\textsuperscript{23}

The post-Romantic understanding of the child figure further accentuated the social and political potential of its innocence by moving the child figure from the sphere of ideas to the sphere of social life. It was now placed in literature as an active and independent agent that directly confronted society’s shortcomings by using a number of contrasting features such as ‘innocence, purity, emptiness’.\textsuperscript{24} Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist (1839), David Copperfield (1850), and Great Expectations (1861) are early examples of this new social function; so are Mark Twain’s books about the adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, which questioned, among other things, bigotry and racism in the US, and Henry James’ What Maisie Knew (1897), discussing through the eyes of a girl conventions of marriage, sex, and other current social topics at the time. In about the same period in Russia Tolstoy experimented with the

---

\textsuperscript{19} Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Émile or Treatise on Education, trans. William H. Payne (New York, 1918), 54.
\textsuperscript{20} Kline, ‘Making of Children’s Culture’, 99.
\textsuperscript{22} Pinfold, Child’s View, 11.
much literature thematising the Second World War has focussed on the Holocaust. The Hungarian author and Nobel Prize laureate Imre Kertész’ Sorstalanság (Fatelessness, 1975) is a well-known example that actualises issues of representing the Holocaust horrors by showing life in a concentration camp through the perspective of a teenage boy with a considerably unknowing child’s point of view in his autobiographical Childhood (1852) in order to create effective representations of the history of the nation.25

In the first decades of the 20th century avant-garde movements (such as Surrealism and Dadaism) turned to a fascination with childish de-automatising creativity, and by now different forms of infantilised rhetoric had reached the status of a central medium for social critique.26 The infantile perspective gained further momentum after the Second World War, when issues of how to represent the unfathomable events produced by the war, especially the Holocaust, came to the fore in German literature. The perhaps most famous book from this time employing an infantile strategy is Die Blechtrommel (1959) by Günter Grass, which fiercely attacked the political discourse in Nazi Germany. It tells the story of Oskar Matzerath, who ‘insists on his personal freedom, a freedom that he is able to enjoy under the guise of an ostensibly naïve but actually very clever three-year-old child, and rejects adherence to any and all ideologies’.27 The infantile point of view on the war is also significant in the American writer Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five: A Children’s Crusade (1969), which, by way of Bakhtinian carnivalisation mediated through the young soldier Billy, undermines typical historical narratives that accentuate black-and-white morality and contain the glorification of spectacular and heroic feats.28 Life under Nazism from the infantile perspective is also found in Siegfried Lenz’ Deutschlandtunde (1968), which tells the story of Siggi Jepsen, a detainee in a juvenile centre, while a different take on the ideology and discourse of the Nazi era is found in Gert Hofmann’s Unsere Eroberung (1984), which is told by a young boy narrator who appropriates and mirrors the discourse of his parents, who are dedicated to the regime. Here the boy functions as a projection space exposing the child’s receptiveness to ideology in a remarkable way. Focus on everyday life in the Third Reich is also thematised in Christa Wolf’s Kindheitsmuster (1976) in a way that contrasted with the narratives of the GDR regime, which usually put emphasis on victimhood and the resistance of the communists.29

Much literature thematising the Second World War has focussed on the Holocaust. The Hungarian author and Nobel Prize laureate Imre Kertész’ Sorstalanság (Fatelessness, 1975) is a well-known example that actualises issues of representing the Holocaust horrors by showing life in a concentration camp through the perspective of a teenage boy with a considerably unknowing

27 Siegfried Mews, Günter Grass and His Critics: From The Tin Drum to Crabwalk (Rochester, 2008), 25.
and limited point of view.\textsuperscript{30} Uri Orlev’s novel \textit{The Island on Bird Street} (1981) is another example that portrays the life of an 11-year-old boy in the Warsaw ghetto who has lost his family and must survive on his own. There is also the short story ‘Momik’ (1986) by David Grossman, in which an only child of Holocaust survivors unravels the mysterious stories of the Holocaust. The limited point of view and incomprehension of the child serves to highlight the struggle of the imagination to grasp the magnitude of the catastrophe.\textsuperscript{31} The limited perspective is often the point of departure for works like these and the foundation for a range of effects that break into pieces dominant representations taken for granted.

\subsection{2.1.2 Bosnian War Writing}

The literature in Yugoslavia following the Second World War also exhibited infantile discourse, which in a similar way to the German war literature directed its attention towards issues of representation and new ways of conceptualising society and particular historical events. An example from the war is Vjekoslav Majač’s \textit{Dnevnik malog Perice} (The Diary of little Perica, 1942), while the perhaps most famous examples are the works of Bora Ćosić, who frequently employed infantile discourse, including in the novel \textit{Uloga moje porodice u svetskoj revoluciji} (The Contribution of my Family to the World Revolution, 1969).\textsuperscript{32} Later, it became significant also in cinema, for instance in Emir Kusturica’s \textit{Sječas li se Dolly Bell} (Do You Remember Dolly Bell, 1981) and \textit{Otac na službenom putu} (My Father on a Business Trip, 1985) and in Goran Marković’s, \textit{Tito i ja} (Tito and I, 1991).

Infantile discourse became more prominent in connection with the 1990s war in Yugoslavia which created an acute demand not only for understanding the chain of events that led to the demise of Yugoslavia and the terrible fates of millions of people, but also for responding to the ideology that had enabled these events. Infantile discourse as an important tendency was first observed by Enver Kazaz in a 2004 survey of trends in Bosnian literature written during and after the war. He referred to it as ‘the infantilisation of narration’ (infantilizacija naracije) and saw it as an important part of what he called the poetics of ‘war writing’ (ratno pismo) made up of a set of characteristics that underpinned a general and deeply critical response to the war and the ideology

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} See Andrea Reiter, ‘Die Funktion der Kinderperspektive in der Darstellung des Holocausts’, in Barbara Bauer and Waltraud Strickhausen, eds., “Für ein Kind war das anders”: Traumatisch Erfahrungen jüdischer Kinder und Jugendlicher im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland (Berlin, 1999).
\item \textsuperscript{31} Naomi Sokoloff, ‘Childhood Lost: Children’s Voices in Holocaust Literature’, in Elizabeth Goodenough, Mark A. Heberle, and Naomi B. Sokoloff, eds., \textit{Infant Tongues: The Voice of the Child in Literature} (Detroit, 1994), 269.
\item \textsuperscript{32} For an extensive analysis of the infantile perspective in the works of Ćosić, see Brebranović, ‘Porodični metaroman’.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
behind it. Kazaz noted, for instance, literature’s function of documenting the horrors of the war, including experiences of concentration camps, mass murder, and the systematic raping of civilian women. Related to this aspect is a common intention to revise ‘cultural and historical memory’ in opposition to any of the grand narratives—be it the socialist, ethnonationalist, or Western liberalist. Kazaz also stressed as an underlying motivation for these aims the fundamental ethical engagement expressed by the authors, who, as he said, sided with the individual human being who had been exposed to various forms of oppression and violence without necessarily providing new ideological constructions or utopian promises for the future.

War writing, as understood by Kazaz, is defined especially by the break with grand narratives and the refusal to provide new hegemonic solutions. It defies the modernist historiographical notion of what Nietzsche had called ‘monumental history’: a type of historiography that formulates a chain of ‘great moments in the struggle of the human individual’ and continuously invokes the memory of them—maintaining them ‘in a perpetual presence’, as Foucault has it—in order to incite collective awareness of identity, meaning, and collective purpose. In this way communist narratives drew heavily upon what had happened during the Second World War by, on the one hand, stressing the victimisation of one’s own group, which was blamed on a handful of common fascist enemies, and on the other hand, commemorating the final partisan victory. This collective memory was continuously utilised as a collective glue in the new supranational Yugoslavian identity that was

---

33 Enver Kazaz, ‘Prizori uhodanog užasa’, Sarajevske sveske, 5 (2004), 163. Using the term ‘war writing’ to describe a literary corpus that is oppositional in every way to the war may seem somewhat misleading. This is seen in the different opinions expressed in the issue of the journal Sarajevske sveske on the topic. Nirman Moranjak-Bamburač reserves the term for the corpus of texts that have agitated for war by producing a kind of writing that is best ‘understood as a horrific and endless manufacturing of crippled bodies and ruins’. ‘Ima li rata u ratnom pismu?’ Sarajevske sveske, 5 (2004), 80. And Stevan Tontić, in order to emphasise the critical stance of the poetics of interest, calls it ‘anti-war writing’ (anti ratno pismo). ‘Ratno antiratno pismo’, Sarajevske sveske, 5 (2004). The designation is also used in Elena Messner’s overview work Postjugoslawische Antikriegsprosa: Eine Einführung (Vienna, 2014). Despite its ambiguity, I find the term ‘war writing’ adequate insofar as it designates a discourse preoccupied with the 1990s war or the effects of it by thematising social conditions caused by the war. In this study I am interested exclusively in infantile discourse found in the corpus of anti-hegemonic war writing, so whenever I use the term I am referring to this category.

34 Kazaz, ‘Prizori uhodanog užasa’, 137.

35 Ibid., 140.

36 Ibid., 137. Stijn Vervaet captures the double focus of war writing—documenting and aiming to change social conditions—when he says that it ‘not only tries to convey the experience of war but also tends to reflect on the ways in which war can be represented through literature and how the war experience often becomes a turning point in the life of people, influencing their understanding and framing of the past and its connections with the present’. ‘Writing War, Writing Memory: The Representation of the Recent Past and the Construction of Cultural Memory in Contemporary Bosnian Prose’, Neohelicon, 38/1 (2011), 7.

37 Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1997), 68.

taking form after the war. They served to create, in the words of de Certeau, ‘a theatre of references and common values, which guarantee a sense of unity and a “symbolic” communicability to the group’. This Yugoslav modernity discourse had affirmed a rather rigid ideological framework that lacked serious interest in the individual human being, but rather upheld the archetypical socialist hero as the representative of all of society, a hero who, backed by memories of historical losses and achievements, could homogenise and unite the different constituent Yugoslav nations (Serbs, Montenegrins, Bosnian Muslims, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenians, Kosovar Albanians) under one single identity.

As I will show in greater detail in section 2.2, this identity withered in the 1980s with the rise of ethnic nationalism in Yugoslavia and voices against the Yugoslav project. This did not mean, however, that the basic principles of imagining history changed in the new nationalist paradigm that was taking form. As intellectuals, among them writers, began revising official communist historiography in favour of nationalist versions, this was expressed in the first literary works that began to appear shortly after Tito’s death in 1980, and which celebrated ethno-confessional identity. The most famous and controversial example of this type of historical revisionism is probably the Serbian author (and later politician) Vuk Drašković’s 1982 novel Nož (The Knife), which in gruesome detail portrayed massacres committed by Muslims against Serbs during the Second World War. It sought to thematise what many Serb nationalists at the time perceived as the serial historical victimisation of the Serb nation by pointing to the Muslim crimes as ‘driven by pure Muslim hatred of Serbs, a hatred founded in Muslim feelings of inferiority’. The continuous victimisation of one’s ethnic group was a recurring theme in a number of other books, which often focussed upon historical aspects that had so far been more or less taboo, such as the communist prison camps, the Ustasha concentration camp at Jasenovac, or the Bleiburg massacre.

The event of war in Bosnia in the 1990s was instigated and fuelled by a nationalist ideology speaking in the same absolute historical terms as the socialist regime. While this, of course, inspired nationalist writing, it also inspired a counter-reaction—the poetics of (anti)war writing—which distanced itself from both socialist and nationalist narratives and the very logic by which these were created. As I mentioned earlier, many writers more or less explicitly made it their goal to deconstruct such narratives and suggest new ways of representing experiences of life in Bosnia. Authorial focus shifted from reaffirming historical grand narratives to representing experiences of everyday life, thus affirming perspectives ‘from below’

through ‘small stories, personal confessions, intimate autobiographical narratives and testimonies of ordinary people’ that work to preserve the ‘autonomy of the individual against the totalitarian ethno-nationalistic model of society’.42

Not only did monumental historical discourse contribute to the event of war, it was also ultimately unable to provide the tools for representing the full war reality as it was experienced by the individual subject in war. Ivana Maćek, who conducted anthropological research in Sarajevo during the war, points out, first, that ‘generalized accounts of the war’ (‘from above’, found, for instance, in history books), and not least those coming from the West, seeking to ‘provide clarity and structure to war itself’, could not encapsulate the affective response in people to what Maćek calls the ‘thickness of concrete experiences’ of war.43 Second, Maćek argues that a particular mode of understanding history on the individual level, which was rooted in the notion of monumental history and meant siding with either of the war parties, proved inadequate in many personal attempts to make sense of the war. This kind of ‘soldier mode’, as Maćek calls it, provided a lens through which the catastrophic proportions of war ‘seem necessary and even acceptable’; they were referred to as historical forces that could not be stopped.44 However, encounters with actual events during the war made this perspective obsolete, which is why individuals adopted a ‘deserter mode’ that entailed ‘a profound scepticism about the high ideals that justify vicious acts and an effort to recover some small measure of humanity in a world gone berserk’.45 For many, the individual experience of war had in the deepest sense contradicted the ideological explanations that rested upon—among other things—monumental history. War writing, I would argue, has worked to occupy a space cleared by this sort of deserter mode by disproving the explanatory power of the ideologies offered to the population. And subversive infantilisation is an important part of that tendency.

2.1.3 Earlier Research

Emerging from the same anti-hegemonic tendency that has characterised a wide Bosnian literary corpus from 1995 and onwards, the infantile discourse shares many traits with what I have described as Bosnian war writing. If one were to characterise Bosnian infantile discourse, many of the qualities attributed to the discourse of war writing would simply be repeated. For Kazaz, who talked about ‘the infantilisation of narration’ to describe the infantile perspective, this meant a particular strategy under the umbrella of

43 Ivana Maćek, Sarajevo under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime (Philadelphia, 2009), 198.
44 Maćek, Sarajevo under Siege, 5.
45 Ibid.
war writing that entailed an estranging perspective ‘from below’ in opposition to given ideological perspectives ‘from above’: a way of distancing oneself from grand narratives and getting closer to the immediate, personal experience of life.46

Although he saw it as one of the most significant strategies in contemporary writing, Kazaz did not expand on the unique qualities of narration relying upon a notion of the infantile. In much the same way a handful of other commentators have noted the significance and potential of infantile discourse as a critical instrument, without necessarily going into too much detail with the theoretical dimension of the concept. Alma Denić-Grabić, for instance, points out how a ‘de-centred’ infantile perspective manages to create an ironic distance to the war events in Veličković’s novel *Lodgers*. She also argues for its function as a near guarantee that the narrative will not develop into some typical ideologised representation (the child figure becomes a way of eluding ideological pitfalls), and makes maneuvers available to the author for pinpointing weak spots in dominant discourse.47 Similarly Anisa Avdagić argues that the consistent use of the ‘naïve narrator’ results in the production of political representations that are alternative to the dominant ones, but refuses to claim any stable political position in its ‘own system of representation’.48

Probably the most typical infantile work, *Lodgers* has been the object of several studies which to a lesser or greater extent relate to the infantile discourse characterising the book. Among these studies are Laura von Scheifinger’s comparative analysis of works by Veličković, Bora Ćosić (active during the Yugoslav period), and Saša Stanišić,49 and an article by Davor Beganović that sees *Lodgers*, and especially the teenage narrator Maja, as representing the tradition of *Kulturrkritik*.50 *Lodgers* has also demanded attention for its thematisation of memory processes, as in a study by Stijn Vervaet, which recognises the role of infantile discourse for issues of memory,

---

46 Kazaz, ‘Prizori uhodanog užasa’, 163.

One can also note that Nenad Veličković have addressed his own use of the infantile perspective in *Lodgers*; see ‘Der altkluge Erzähler’, in Renate Hansen-Kokoruš and Elena Popovska, eds., *Kind und Jugendlicher in der Literatur und im Film Bosniens, Kroatiens und Serbiens* (Hamburg, 2013).
history, and identity. Another study that focusses upon the importance of the infantile perspective for processes of memory is Andrea Lešić’s article on Miljenko Jergović and his novel *Mama Leone* in particular. The study is interesting because it puts considerable focus upon how the small boy narrator, with his specific conditions for perceiving his surroundings, engages with the world in a way that never ceases to be undecidable and fluid and is in opposition to the conventionalised, solid order of the adults. Lešić argues that this unique perspective, which is characterised by ‘the partial and incompletely processed acquisition of knowledge about the adult world’, enables the reader to approach traumatic experiences of the boy’s family in a way that is fundamentally different from usual representations of trauma, one that is able to open up for new ways of perceiving sensitive issues.

A few basic traits of infantile discourse are repeatedly brought up in the handful of studies that exist on the topic: First, the socially engaged dimension, which entails the appropriation of a position against hegemonic discourse. Second, the fundamentally differentiating perspective on the world that skews, as it were, aspects of social life and by doing this—and this is the third aspect often highlighted—catalyses processes of social criticism, demanding a revaluation of dominant representations of Bosnian social life. These aspects are emphasised in the most thorough effort so far to address the issue: the conference proceedings entitled *Kind und Jugendlicher in der Literatur und im Film Bosniens, Kroatiens und Serbiens*, which observes the continuous occurrence of the child narrator/character in the Yugoslav literary tradition and explores ways of understanding and analysing contemporary forms of the phenomenon. In one of the articles Renate Hansen-Kokoruš summarises the common denominators of the infantile perspective: The child or sometimes adolescent is most often a fictive (that is, not autobiographical) *first-person narrator* with a necessarily limited access (*beschränkt Wissenshorizont*) to the world, characterised not only by naivety, but also by curiosity and a spontaneity that drives the plot forwards. The narration, furthermore, aims to create the effect of immediacy and direct experience (in contrast to representing *memories of childhood*), thus stressing the documentary function, while also revealing the effects of ideological demagogy on individual lives. Hansen-Kokoruš also notes the potential of the child narrator to actualise representational issues and trigger estrangement: ‘Die Wahl eines solchen Erzählers entspringt einer Strategie der narrativen

51 Vervaet, ‘Writing War’.
Erneuerung, um automatisierte Lese- und Sehgewohnheiten aufzubrechen und Lesern und Zuschauern eine neue Sicht auf Vorgänge zu ermöglichen’.

Hansen-Kokoruš’ account—like many of the others I have mentioned—is characterised by a strong emphasis on the narratological conditions for infantile discourse, which are predominantly based upon the notion of the child or adolescent as a narrator/character who is in nearly every sense oppositional to convention. Though this approach certainly has yielded a great deal of understanding about Bosnian infantile discourse, I believe that it has so far only been signalled, and that there are possibilities in this concept that are yet to be explored.

My ambition with this study is to try to take infantile discourse beyond the isolated focus of the case study focussing on narratological aspects, which has so far dominated approaches to the texts. I believe the phenomenon has considerable potential for saying something about the social and political imagination in Bosnia, and that there is a need for putting more emphasis on the strategy as a discursive process and for considering what effects this might have on social life. From the discursive point of view that I have taken, this means investigating in detail what happens in the process of interaction between the infantile position and that of dominant discourse. What do we mean when we say that a child character is estranging dominant discourse, and in what different ways are estranging effects achieved? Too often, and without necessarily explicating what discursive mechanisms are at play, commentators have taken the subversive power of the infantile perspective for granted. This has sometimes meant overlooking instances of subversive infantilisation that are problematic in the sense that they reiterate aspects that are criticised in the first place. Only by carefully studying the mechanisms of interrogation is it possible to say something about the critical potential of the strategy.

2.2 Historical Context

In order to investigate the discursive mechanisms and the social significance of a strategy like subversive infantilisation, it is essential to have at least some conception of the historical and social context to which the texts studied here relate (and are a part of). First of all, some contextual knowledge is required to adequately interpret the texts analysed later, as they refer, implicitly and explicitly, to historical events and circumstances. Also, before looking more closely at the theoretical circumstances for subversive infantilisation as interrogation, it is crucial to discuss the nature of the discourses that are being interrogated. While the war in Bosnia received a great deal of international attention in the early 1990s, it cannot be presumed that readers of this thesis are familiar with the dimensions of the Yugoslavian conflict, or that they have followed Bosnian affairs since the war. And even at the time of the war—

56 Ibid., 28.
much like the cases of Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria today— naturally the full complexity of the situation was difficult to grasp, being limited by fragmented points of view, lack of knowledge, and special interests. For these reasons I devote quite a few pages below to a discussion of the context relevant to my study, for the moment leaving aside the literary texts. When returning to the discursive conditions for subversive infantilisation some points about history (what happened when and why) will hopefully be clearer, as will the understanding of the dominant discourses affecting the country (socialism, ethnonationalism, and Western liberalism) and how they developed. It is easier to discuss the interrogative aspect of the literary texts when one has a clear picture of what they are up against.

Traditionally, the constructed image of a specific set of social circumstances—the context—has been seen as a supporting factor in the understanding of a specific text in a two-fold way: producing and enriching the hermeneutical potential of the text, and supplying the circumstances of the ‘event’ of the text (its production or the reason for its being). These functions are methodologically valid only insofar as one avoids treating context as a somehow stable and transcendent entity standing-reserve ‘feeding’ or informing the text in a one-way type of relation. Context should not, Rita Felski argues, be seen as a predefined container conditioned by historical, economic, ideological, and cultural structures, which ‘the individual text, as a microunit encased within a larger whole, can only react or respond to’. An earlier version of this argument, put forward by Bryson and Bal, stressed that context ‘is subject to the same process of mobility that is at work in the semiosis of the text or artwork that “context” is supposed to delimit and control’. This does not mean that a heuristic representation of context cannot legitimately be formulated. The point is rather that context should be regarded as unstable, negotiable, and open-ended.

In order to recognise the fluidity of the Bosnian context, and to catch the point at which the literary texts tie into contextual aspects, I have, apart from relying on a purely historical perspective, chosen to discuss context in terms of the socio-emotional effects it has had on the population. I do this in terms of what Sara Ahmed has called the ‘affective economies’ of a society, that is, how certain affects are configured and reconfigured in official discourse, allowing for the production of particular identifications that ‘align individuals with communities’. This is not the place for a full-blown mapping of the affective economy of nationalist passions in the Bosnian context, but there is reason at least to consider the affective dimension as a pillar in the formation of nationalist passions, and to recognise the literary texts’ preoccupation with issues related to it. When nationalism is represented from the point of view of

---

57 Christopher Prendergast, The Triangle of Representation (New York, 2000), 49.
the infantile subject, focus is often upon certain affective mechanisms. One sees it, for instance, in Saša Stanišić’s novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*, which depicts what Max Bergholz has called ‘sudden nationhood’—the individual’s sudden, seemingly overnight shift in adherence to nationalist exclusionism, which replaces previously felt solidarity.\(^6^1\) One of the most obvious reasons for the continuously dominant presence of the war in Bosnian literature today, more than two decades later, is that its consequences are felt on an everyday basis. Not only does this apply on a socio-economic level, but also in terms of people’s attitudes, which continue to be determined by strong feelings of nationalist resentment and inter-ethnic suspicion. Now, in order to understand the social and political situation in Bosnia in the past two decades it is key to recognise the hegemony of two dominant discourses, that of domestic ethnonationalism and that of Western liberalism, which constitute what Kazaz has called double oppression of the individual Bosnian citizen.\(^6^2\) Above all, today’s Bosnia and Herzegovina suffer from deeply rooted, structural ethnic divisions between the three constituent nations (Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats), which consistently advocate for their own nation’s interests and primordial status in antagonism with the others, while insistently affirming strong seclusionist and discriminating attitudes. From the early 1990s to this day this circumstance has contributed to persistent social disintegration that has made the question of ethnicity in Bosnia ‘the question of all questions’.\(^6^3\) It is by no means confined to the official political sphere, where it is most apparent, but penetrates nearly every dimension of society—every issue, however small or big, seems to be ‘imbued with ethnic identity or ethnic politics’.\(^6^4\) Such an ethnicist paradigm has perverted a range of discourses by suppressing any flexibility or potential beyond the given conceptual boundaries of the ethnic metanarrative: Politics thus turns into ethnopolitics, democracy into ethnocracy, literature into ‘a web of ethno-cultural narratives’, and so forth.\(^6^5\) Vital institutions such as the educational system, academia, cultural production, and the media are thus ‘ethnicised’, leading to the systematic exclusion of individuals and the affirmation of collective claims only on the basis of ethnic or confessional affiliation. In the most explicit cases the perception of the other is characterised by near-total alienation. This is, for instance, the case with Mostar, one of the most segregated towns in Bosnia, where the Croat population on the west side and the Bosnian population on the east very...
reluctantly, or indeed never, cross the bridge to the other side: “The “other” side is for many perceived as if it were a city in another country and its strangeness and unfamiliarity is experienced through all of their senses”.66

The issue of ethnicity is dominant in the literary texts that I study, but this is not their only concern. Bosnia is also affected by an extensive international involvement in domestic state affairs. Soon after the war a vast international administration was implemented to make sure that the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) was being implemented as set out, but over time, and to an alarming extent, the mission turned into regular interference in political processes. Most notably, this has been the case with the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which soon after the war gained powers to dismiss ‘obstructionist’ politicians and unwanted decisions, and to implement own state-building initiatives according to Western interests, making the office wield ‘political power normally reserved for sovereign states’.67

The effects of these discourses—the ethnonationalist and the Western liberal—are largely consequences of the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia, which, not surprisingly, has been a defining point in Bosnian history, and which continues to have great influence today, both on concrete material circumstances and on the way the country is imagined culturally, socially, and politically. The war plays a central role in almost any discussion about Bosnian social life, and it is certainly present in the texts’ infantile representations of the past and present. To close in on the importance of war, in the next section I discuss the development of nationalism in Yugoslavia, which ultimately led to military conflict. At the same time, the presentation works as an overview of communist discourse on Yugoslav identity, which is also something the authors employing subversive infantilisation regularly consider (for example, Bekim Sejranović, Aleksandar Hemon, and Alma Lazarevska).

2.2.1 Yugoslavia
Left with a devastated region with great inter-ethnic suspicion, which had developed as a result of the brutal fighting between the ultranationalist Croatian Ustasha (ustaše), the ultranationalist Serbian Chetniks (četnici), and the (ultimately prevailing) communist partisans (partizani), the leader Tito’s prime mission after the Second World War was to glue together the different nations that would make up Yugoslavia by aligning them into a single symbolic community. A first step in that direction had already been taken with the mobilisation of the partisan movement during the war, which comprised communists of all national affiliations, and whose legacy of the struggle for

‘brotherhood and unity’ against a common enemy (the Nazis and their allies),
together with a set of narratives of heroic liberation, came to be foundational
for much of the official politics until Tito’s death in 1980.
A brutal consequence of the aim to stabilise the federation and consolidate
the political direction was the party’s sanctioning of mass killings and
imprisonments in 1945–46 of so-called party enemies. In propaganda these
domestic enemies were never ascribed a particular nationality, but denoted as
occupiers, collaborators, and traitors of the Yugoslav cause, and the
government consistently toned down inter-ethnic trauma and instead blamed
foreign invaders for what the Slavic peoples had done to each other.68 This
and other framings (historiographical and cultural) were aimed at the
socialisation and unification of Yugoslavia’s nations through constant
reminders of a common external enemy.69 The common struggle against the
Nazis and their allies during the war seemed to provide the idea of inter-ethnic
solidarity with a common narrative and a common destiny.70 Other measures
taken to form a Yugoslav identity included the introduction of common
holidays that celebrated the communist war victory, which was understood as
non-ethnic. So-called ‘work actions’ (radne akcije) were initiated, and they
consisted in the reconstruction of the infrastructure and economy, while at the
same time being ‘designed to encourage people of different nationalities who
were now living together after a civil war to work together toward common
objectives’.71
It seemed to work. Yugoslav identity was never meant to fully replace the
people’s various national affiliations, but functioned, as Bergholz points out,
as a way of connecting the different nations in a common project. Public
expressions of nationalist affiliation were tolerated, but their content had to be
socialist and to exist within the boundaries of the ‘brotherhood and unity’
parole.72 Yugoslav identity was a ‘supra-national, common cultural layer in
which all Yugoslavs took part’,73 and it was an identity that managed, though
not entirely erasing the lingering nationalist passions after the Second World
War, to neutralise social injustices motivated by ethnicity. David MacDonald
upholds that ethnic discrimination was a rare occurrence by the 1970s, and

68 Tea Sindbæk, Usable History? Representations of Yugoslavia’s Difficult Past from 1945 to 2002
(Aarhus, 2012), 75.
69 The enemy here functions as a ‘constitutive outside’, a notion that points to the necessity of the
creation of hierarchical difference (of the evil other) in the formation of one’s own identity. Chantal
70 Ugo Vlaisavljević, ‘Tri ratne nacije kao tri ratne naracije’, in Avetinska stvarnost narrativne politike
(Sarajevo, 2012), 23. This common destiny can also be thought of as a communist ‘transhistorical
68.
72 Ibid.
73 Zoran Milutinović, ‘What Common Yugoslav Culture Was and How Everybody Benefited From It’,

24
that national affiliation seems to have had no impact on social mobility in Yugoslavia. ‘Until the mid-1980s ethnic distance was stable, low, and even decreasing’, he writes.\textsuperscript{74} The strength of the Yugoslav bond is suggested, he argues further, by the fact that numerous peace demonstrations and other kinds of responses to an increasingly nationalist and aggressive public discourse were mobilised in the years preceding the war.\textsuperscript{75}

The fact that ethnicity and nation for a long time did not pose a big problem in everyday life is not, however, a sign of perfect harmony. Yugoslav society had seen nationalist tendencies throughout its existence, both in micro and macro social relations. Although each small republic seemingly had much to gain from the Yugoslav federation,\textsuperscript{76} and the regime made consistent efforts to maintain a common Yugoslav symbolic community and to keep power at the central level, Yugoslavia regularly suffered from inter-ethnic friction, which strained the legitimacy of the communist leadership. There were concrete expressions of nationalist resentment already in the mid-1960s, when antagonism developed mainly between the Croatian and Serbian republics, an antagonism that would also affect the issue of the legitimacy of the Yugoslav federation in the other republics, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. The growing sense of illegitimacy in the 1960s and onwards together with the republics’ increased sense of being mistreated in comparison with the others contributed to the fuelling of nationalism on all sides, leading to demands for stronger republic autonomy.\textsuperscript{77}

What followed from this in Bosnia was indeed a greater political confidence in the Bosnian party elite to make policies according to local interests (rather than to those of entire Yugoslavia). The local Bosnian communist party was in fact deliberately encouraged to do so by the central government in order to ease nationalist tensions and solidify its own political support by appropriating some of the nationalist demands that had surfaced.\textsuperscript{78} In time, this balancing act between central policy and local nationalist policy

\textsuperscript{74} David MacDonald, ‘Living Together or Hating Each Other?’, in Charles Ingrao and Thomas Allan Emmert, eds., \textit{Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies: A Scholars’ Initiative} (2nd edn., West Lafayette, 2009), 392.

\textsuperscript{75} MacDonald, ‘Living Together’, 399.

\textsuperscript{76} John Lampe suggests three political, economic, and security incentives for the republics to be a part of the Yugoslav federation. First, ‘the desire for representative government’, which the federation could provide, not in the liberal democratic sense, but in the form of a political balance between the provincial regions and the capital centre. Second, Yugoslavia provided a large internal market and a ‘comparative advantage in the international trade’, especially in relations with the Western bloc, through inter-republic cooperation. Third, it gave each republic more stable security relationships, much like, Lampe argues, NATO did for Western Europe in regard to the Soviet bloc. John R. Lampe, \textit{Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country} (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2000), 7–8. For additional cultural benefits, see Milatinović, ‘Common Yugoslav Culture’.


would cause problems, as it became more and more difficult to distinguish between the two in fact opposite lines. This would eventually develop into an acute problem.

However, the political changes during the 1970s had many positive effects on Bosnia. The increased autonomy contributed to many reforms, which meant a socio-economic upswing for the republic: Much needed roads were built, so were schools and libraries; the economy flourished; a new urban development was sparked; and water and electricity networks were extended into rural areas that had earlier lacked such infrastructure. Soon, in a time of fast economic development and international respectability, decisions were made on a federal level to give the republics even greater autonomy, and this process of decentralisation peaked with the 1974 Yugoslavian constitution, after which the focus of political interest clearly shifted from what was best for Yugoslavia to what was most beneficial for one’s own republic.

Going into the 1980s several factors made the already stretched Yugoslav political system susceptible to further erosion. Wachtel and Bennett highlight three main factors: the perceived illegitimacy of the central state, its inability to sustain a sufficient economic standard for its citizens, and its inability to uphold a ‘shared national identity’ that was broad and strong enough to withstand sectarian imperatives. The loss of trust in the communist government would make people seek identification outside of official politics, which meant that traditional, national, and confessional identification became more significant for constructing political alternatives. Ultimately, this made it very difficult to achieve and implement any significant mutual agreements on the federal level. It meant that by the early 1980s, after the death of Tito (who had been the single most important unifying factor), when the economic situation worsened dramatically and the federation was considered to be in a deep crisis, it became impossible to take the necessary measures to stifle the downward spiral.

Several significant events of popular protest over the course of the decade (for example, the violent riots in Kosovo in 1981, the mass mobilisation of Kosovo Serbs in 1988, and the number of industrial strikes that began to increase in 1985) contributed to political destabilisation. Politicians were quick to utilise these events in a hostile ethnonationalist rhetoric, which from the mid-1980s, and especially after Slobodan Milošević’s accession to power in Serbia in 1987, became increasingly hateful. The tapping into sleeping

---

nationalist passions in the population was primarily made possible by the creation of an affective economy based on what Ahmed refers to as ‘sideways’ and ‘backward’ symbolic movements.\textsuperscript{84} Emotions move sideways in discourse, between different spheres of signification in the present, enabling associative connections between circumstances that are otherwise unrelated. However, the backward-moving associations were the most striking in the late 1980s, as nationalist discourse began to connect the present political situation with unresolved trauma from the past, particularly from the Second World War, but also as far back as the Middle Ages.

As an example, Croatian leaders were regularly associated with the fascist Ustasha from the Second World War, while Croats began referring to the Yugoslav National Army as the ‘Serbian Chetnik Army’. Both designations, loaded with trauma, were utilised to create an associative synonymy between war crimes from the Second World War and the political visions of the different parties at the time.\textsuperscript{85} A now famous memorandum, written by members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, describes the disturbances in Kosovo as part of a series of historical injustices and framed ‘Serbian subjectivity as a string of victimizations’ that take somewhat biblical proportions, at times alluding to the struggles of the Jewish people.\textsuperscript{86} When the document was leaked in 1986 it was harshly denounced, especially by the government in Belgrade. However, when republished in 1989 the political climate had changed so drastically that many of the official policies were now in line with the views expressed in the memorandum.\textsuperscript{87} The actualisation of historical traumas—some remembered first-hand, others handed down—paved the way for ‘an emotional climate’ characterised by fear, resentment, and aggression.\textsuperscript{88}

In 1990 in Bosnia the three leading ethnic parties had prevailed in free elections: the SDA (Bosnian Muslim), the HDZ (Bosnian Croat), and the SDS (Bosnian Serb). Their success signalled the beginning of a disintegrated, exclusionist, and ultimately impotent political discourse in Bosnia, according to which political pluralism (in contrast to the former unitary communist party line) was not understood as a ‘conglomerate of different political programmes and ideas’, but as something in which ‘one party meant at the same time one faith, one nation and politico-territorial exclusivity and hegemony in at least one part of BiH’.\textsuperscript{89} This idea, together with the emotional climate, was enough to contribute to the rapid escalation of the inter-ethnic conflict in Bosnia, ultimately culminating in a war that would go on for years.

\textsuperscript{84} Ahmed, ‘Affective Economies’, 120. 
\textsuperscript{85} Sindbæk, \textit{Usable History?}, 191. 
\textsuperscript{87} Sindbæk, \textit{Usable History?}, 156. 
\textsuperscript{88} MacDonald, ‘Living Together’, 393. 
\textsuperscript{89} Zarije Setzović, ‘Političko-pravni uzroci’, 134.
2.2.2 War and Ethnic Cleansing

For the Bosnian population, regardless of national belonging, the war meant almost four years of consistent terror. It is estimated that about 100,000 people lost their lives, and that millions became internal or external refugees. During the time leading up to the war tensions had culminated in a conflict over what reforms should be implemented to solve a serious economic crisis and over the power distribution between the republics of the Yugoslavian federation. In 1990 Croatia and Slovenia suggested that Yugoslavia be turned into a confederation, meaning that primary authority in the republics would shift from the federal level to the government of each republic. Serbian leader Milošević, who preferred that power stayed in Belgrade, contested this. When he no longer had any hope of achieving his ambition of maintaining a united, centrally controlled Yugoslavia, he set out to carve out an ‘extended Serbian territory’, which meant annexing parts of Croatia and Bosnia. Soon the Serb minority in the Knin region of Croatia had organised a political party, the SDS, and began mobilising military, claiming to be defending themselves from the Croatian majority. This was repeated in Bosnia, where the Bosnian SDS proclaimed three so-called ‘Serb Autonomous Regions’. In the summer of 1991 Milošević was secretly sending arms shipments to Bosnian Serb paramilitary units that took orders from the SDS leader Radovan Karadžić.

By then war had already broken out in Slovenia and Croatia after the republics had declared their independence in early summer. Karadžić soon asked the Serb-controlled Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) to ‘intervene’ in Bosnia after a few minor violent inter-ethnic incidents. Federal forces were then deployed at strategic military positions, and in the winter heavy artillery was placed around Sarajevo and other major Bosnian towns. From November 1991 a Bosnian Serb Army (the VRS) began to mobilise with the help of the JNA, and in early April 1992 full-scale war in Bosnia was a fact.

Carving out an extended Serbian territory did not only entail controlling territory where Serb minorities lived, but also the systematic and forceful regulation of the demographic composition in those territories according to a pure, mono-ethnic ideal. The aim was to ‘establish a coincidence between borders and nations’, that is, to create mono-ethnic areas, which could later be claimed in negotiations and separated from the rest of Bosnia. This would be called ‘ethnic cleansing’ and was introduced by Serb forces early on, but was soon committed by Croats and Bosniaks too, and it affected a huge part of

---

92 Malcolm, Bosnia, 230.
Bosnia’s civilian population. It is estimated that more than half of the 4.4 million people living in Bosnia were displaced in the period 1992–1995.

In February 1993 a UN report documenting various methods used in ethnic cleansing was released, including torture, mass rape, mass murder, forced expropriation of homes, destruction of property (private, public, and cultural), looting, and attacks on medical personnel and hospitals. After Bosnian Serb forces had occupied a town or village, men and women would usually be separated into different groups and transferred to one of the many camps that were established for the purpose. The detention camps at Trnopolje, Manjača, Omarska, and Keraterm (a former factory near Prijedor) are the most well known, but there were many others. The worst single mass murder—which is also the only instance legally recognised as genocide—took place in July 1995 in the town of Srebrenica in eastern Bosnia, where the Bosnian Serb Army gathered and killed 8,000 men and boys and deported 35,000 women and children.

Already in April 1992 (the first month of the war), Malcolm argues, approximately 95 per cent of the Muslim population in the towns of Zvornik, Višegrad, and Foča had left their homes to become refugees. The strategy of ethnic cleansing was successful in entirely changing the ethnic structure in Bosnia: In 1997 the Bosniak and Croat population made up as little as 3.8 per cent of the population in Foča, in contrast to the 51 per cent prior to the war.

A decade later the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that the population was more or less fully segregated into...

---


95 Calic, ‘Ethnic Cleansing’, 115. Croat forces terrorised the large Serb minority in Slavonia and Krajina as well as Bosniaks in Herzegovina, when Croat and Bosnian forces started fighting each other. Bosniak forces, in turn, committed atrocities against Serbs, for instance in the region around Srebrenica in 1993, and against Croats on several occasions. In 1995 Serbs, who were fleeing after Croat and Bosniak forces had gained momentum, suffered large campaigns of ethnic cleansing. The Roma population in different regions suffered by such practice committed by all three sides. Ibid., 116.


98 Malcolm, Bosnia, 237.

three ethnically homogenous territories, despite efforts to reverse the tendency. In addition, although the importance of facilitating the return of refugees to their homes was underlined in the Dayton Peace Agreement, the same agreement institutionalised ‘monoethnic areas of control in the form of entities and cantons’, which merely confirmed segregation.

The consequences of the practice of ethnic cleansing during the war—as well as the institutionalised segregation that solidified these consequences—continue to have a tremendous impact on the social fabric in Bosnia. I return to this when describing the post-war situation. Before that, though, there is reason to look at how the world perceived and reacted to the war in Bosnia, as this too is an important topic in the literature studied in the chapters to come.

### 2.2.3 Western Passivity

The war in Bosnia was met with astonishment by the rest of the world. For many, a full-blown war in Europe in the 1990s was an anomaly and in direct contradiction to the ideal of an increasingly cooperative and stable European continent focussing on unity and human rights. The Yugoslav conflict shook these ideals and revealed the strong unwillingness of the international community to react to the crimes that were carried out against civilians on a daily basis and, it seemed, for everyone to see. It is true that there was something about the complex situation in Bosnia that made straightforward decisions very difficult to make, but there was also something in the Western perception of the Balkans that made the conflict seem more ‘impossible’ than it perhaps really was.

Malcolm suggests that the international community consistently failed to see the causality of the conflict, instead focussing fully on the symptoms of war—that is, the fighting. A significant reason for the superficiality of this approach was the simplified understanding of the historical, ideological, and political context of the war. It resulted in the interpretation that all warring parties from the outset were equally to blame for what was happening, thereby ignoring or downplaying the political genesis of the war and other significant events in the beginning of it. Peter Carrington, the head EEC negotiator, incarnated this perspective when he in the very beginning of the war concluded that ‘[e]verybody is to blame for what is happening in Bosnia and Hercegovina and, as soon as we get the ceasefire, there will be no need to blame anybody’. A few months later, when a number of instances of systematic ethnic cleansing by Serb forces were reported, this statement was followed by insistence on designating the warring leaders ‘fractional leaders’

---

and ‘warlords’, implying that the war was fought by unrelated tribe leaders, which made a handful of culprits the problem, again ignoring the bigger political picture in the region.\textsuperscript{104} What the international community saw was ‘a number of equally fierce-looking combatants fighting one another for equally incomprehensible reasons’.\textsuperscript{105} This framing of equal culpability can be attributed to a prejudiced balkanist discourse, which assumes the cultural ‘backwardness’ of the Balkans and a predisposition in the Balkan peoples for violence and tribal feuds based on ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’.\textsuperscript{106} In fact, ‘ancient ethnic hatreds’ became a widespread phrase in the vocabulary of a great deal of commentators, journalists as well as politicians, and gave the conflict in Bosnia an aura of near-metaphysical necessity.\textsuperscript{107}

Prior to the war the Balkans had received very little serious historical attention in the West.\textsuperscript{108} Suddenly many attempts were being made to understand the causality behind the conflict and, more specifically, the logic of the ethnic enmity that was highlighted as the prime component of the war. Now the problem was the way in which the issue of ethnicity was understood. It was usual to resort to little-changed ‘archetypal representations of the region’ first found in journalism and travel writing from the 19th century.\textsuperscript{109} The understanding was also influenced by memories of the Second World War, when Croat Ustasha, Serbian Chetniks, and communist partisans were involved in mass atrocities against one another. And even more recent sources added flame to fire, including Robert Kaplan’s book \textit{Balkan Ghosts}, which reiterated the myth of ancient hatreds and admittedly influenced both US president Bill Clinton, the British prime minister John Major, and the EEC negotiator David Owen.\textsuperscript{110} War was not understood according to the \textit{Realpolitik} of the time, but—implicitly or not—as an essential part of the Balkan mentality and the violence thus as something ‘inherent in the nature of

\begin{footnotes}
\item Simms, \textit{Unfinest Hour}.
\item Malcolm, \textit{Bosnia}, 239.
\item For the notion of balkanism, see Maria Todorova, \textit{Imagining the Balkans} (updated ed., Oxford, 2009).
\item Sabrina P. Ramet, \textit{Thinking about Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo} (Cambridge, 2005), 3.
\end{footnotes}
its people’.\textsuperscript{111} It was ‘the expected natural [outcome] of a warrior ethos, deeply ingrained in the psyche of Balkan populations’.\textsuperscript{112} Thus, violence and war were perceived as inevitable in this part of the world.

The prevalence of this understanding played a central role in motivating the international community not to involve itself in engaging campaigns such as military intervention. The perceivably irrational need in the Yugoslavs to go to war now and then was seen as something beyond Western logic, and it seemed that ‘the most practical course of action for a “civilized”, “rational”, and “enlightened” West was to let the Balkan countries remain entrapped in their own interminable conflicts’.\textsuperscript{113} The frame of equal culpability and the essentialist balkanist discourse also permeated the UN, the main actor in the peace negotiations. When the fighting in Bosnia started, the then Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said no to deploy UN forces in Bosnia, taking for granted Milošević’s false promise that Bosnian Serb forces were acting independently of Serbian influence.\textsuperscript{114} Boutros-Ghali also dismissed the seriousness of the war by calling it a ‘rich man’s war’, and on a later occasion, in December 1992, while giving a speech in a Sarajevo under siege, offered the people in the city ‘a list of ten places [in the world] where you have more problems than in Sarajevo’.\textsuperscript{115} The bizarreness of his statements may seem to be exceptions or anomalies, but they were not.\textsuperscript{116}

UN actions were problematic in other ways too. Its involvement in the Yugoslav conflict began in September 1991, when the Security Council imposed a weapons embargo on the whole of Yugoslavia. At that time Yugoslavia was still one country, but this changed when the independence of


\textsuperscript{113} Malcolm, \textit{Bosnia}, 242.

\textsuperscript{114} Marko Attila Hoare, \textit{The History of Bosnia: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day} (London, 2007), 378.

\textsuperscript{115} Three weeks before the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 Boutros-Ghali explained his perspective once again and claimed that ‘Bosnia has created a distortion in the work of the U.N. We are applying less attention to what is going on in Burundi, in Georgia’. David Rieff, ‘The Institution that Saw no Evil’, \textit{The New Republic}, 214/7 (1996). Disinterestedness, ignorance about the historical and political circumstances, and insensitivity were seen among a number of key officials. The UN’s chief negotiator from 1993, Thorvald Stoltenberg, seemed to have inherited a Serb nationalist world view when he expressed that Croats and Bosnian Muslims were actually Serbs. Tony Barber, ‘Outrage at Stoltenberg’s “Serb” gaffe’, \textit{The Independent} (27 June 1995). David Owen, the co-architect of the Vance-Owen Peace Plan, famously had warm relations with Milošević and his wife, and in 1999, when NATO began bombing Serbia over the issue of Kosovan independence, he suggested that Serbia could have parts of Bosnia as compensation for the loss of Kosovo. Hoare, \textit{History of Bosnia}, 379. Another often-mentioned example is the UN commander Lewis Mackenzie who blamed the ‘breadline massacre’ in Sarajevo in 1992 on the Bosnian army, despite forensic evidence against such a claim. Evelyn Farkas, \textit{Fractured States and U.S. Foreign Policy: Iraq, Ethiopia, and Bosnia in the 1990s} (New York, 2003), 100.
Croatia, Slovenia, and Bosnia was recognised. Despite the recognition of Bosnia as an independent state, the UN continued to uphold the embargo throughout the war based on the argument that arming the Bosnian army would only extend the fighting. This was a crucial decision, probably the most important single measure taken by the international community, because it made it nearly impossible for the Bosnian army to defend itself against aggressors, who were not concerned about the embargo, as they had stockpiled arms for some time and could fight for years, if necessary.\textsuperscript{117}

Voices were raised to lift the embargo, especially by the Americans, who suggested that the war could be shortened considerably if the Bosnian and Croat forces were allowed to arm themselves. This claim was supported by the Bosnian Serb military inefficiency in cases of serious resistance, for instance in 1991 when Croat forces, despite lacking military equipment, gained the upper hand against Serb forces, who were on the verge of defeat in parts of Croatia. What saved them was international diplomacy, which urged Tudjman to sign a cease-fire, in turn enabling Serb troops to withdraw from Croatia into Bosnia.\textsuperscript{118} As a result of the cease-fire UN peacekeeping forces (UNPROFOR) were deployed in the parts of Croatia that were occupied by the Serbs, disabling the Croats to recapture lost territory. Croat forces soon launched another attack against the Serbs, but were again halted by UN diplomacy and unable to retake lost territory due to the presence of UNPROFOR forces.\textsuperscript{119}

Something similar happened at the very end of the war, in September 1995, when Croatian and Bosnian troops were beginning to gain territory and were about to defeat the Bosnian Serbs as they advanced towards Banja Luka, but were stopped by the British and American governments.\textsuperscript{120} Two months later the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed, which finally stopped the war and kept the outer borders of the country intact, though at the same time legitimising the territorial grab of the Bosnian Serbs by recognising the occupied land (49 per cent of the entire country) as a Serbian entity, which would enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy. The rest of the country, the other entity, was to be shared by Croats and Bosniaks.

### 2.2.4 Continued Ethnicism

The damages inflicted upon the Bosnian-Herzegovinian society by the war were immense. Two thirds of the population now lived below the poverty line, and two thirds of all homes were either damaged or destroyed.\textsuperscript{121} The campaigns of ethnic cleansing had not only killed and driven large parts of the

---


\textsuperscript{118} Hoare, \textit{History of Bosnia}, 376.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 376–77.

\textsuperscript{120} Malcolm, \textit{Bosnia}, 267.

\textsuperscript{121} Ramet, \textit{Three Yugoslavias}, 466–67.
population from their hometowns and regions; in many cases it had also marked the victims with permanent psychological trauma. The population suffered not only from traumas from the war, but also from stress, insomnia, depression, and anxiety related to aspects of the post-war situation, such as poverty, staggering unemployment levels, lack of housing, widespread corruption, and high crime levels.\footnote{122}

The affective dimension of Bosnian disintegration is key to understanding the ideological dimension of continuing ethnonationalism, as much of it draws on feelings of resentment and victimisation as well as a sense of ‘unfinished business’. When the fighting was successfully stopped with the Dayton Peace Agreement, none of the warring sides were particularly satisfied with the outcome of the agreement.\footnote{123} The reason that the parties agreed to the peace deal was mainly external pressure from the international community, which threatened to stop all military assistance to the Bosniaks and the Croats, while Serbia had already for some time suffered from international sanctions.\footnote{124} The Dayton accords thus meant an imposed peace that produced only losers and no winners, and which only laid the ground for further antagonism. Symptomatically, the post-war period is often referred to as war by other means or ‘a form of war, marked by the absence of fighting’.\footnote{125}

I agree that the complex social situation in post-war Bosnia cannot fully be explained ‘through the lens of Dayton’,\footnote{126} and that the problems of that society cannot fully be blamed on the state structure specified by the accords.\footnote{127} However, it should also be clear that, although it obviously did not create ethnonationalism, the peace agreement imposed by the international community institutionalised discriminative and exclusionist ethnonationalist claims by affirming a political system which protects the rights of the three

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{123} The country’s borders were intact, which had been the primary Bosniak goal, but the acknowledgement of a Serb entity, Republika Srpska (making up 49 per cent of the land), gained through aggression and ethnic cleansing, was perceived as a terrible loss. Bosnian Serb leaders, on the other hand, felt that they had gotten too little territory in proportion to what they had held and were displeased with the fact that they had gained no international recognition for their entity as a sovereign state. Bosnian Croat leaders, in turn, were disappointed with having to share an entity, the Federation.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{125} I agree that the complex social situation in post-war Bosnia cannot fully be explained ‘through the lens of Dayton’, and that the problems of that society cannot fully be blamed on the state structure specified by the accords.}  
constituent nations rather than those of individual citizens.\textsuperscript{128} The constitution is thus ‘based on ethnicity, rather than on citizenship’.\textsuperscript{129} This central aspect of the DPA is explained by the then perceived risk of further violence in a strong central state which Bosniaks would dominate due to their numerical majority, but it has through a complex power-sharing system (at state, entity, and municipality levels) set the stage for nationalist obstructionist politics. Being first and foremost a compromise designed to minimally appease each warring side, the Dayton accords are an awkward middle course between a unitary central state and a highly decentralised federation.\textsuperscript{130} In this situation of a greatly complex state structure and with the ethnic divisions constitutionally solidified, the nationalist parties, which represented ethnic nations rather than citizens, and certainly did not answer to the entire population, now began using the existing institutional structure to promote further divisions between the nation in terms of politics, culture, religion, and language.

Nationalist parties have dominated politics and have, save for a few brief periods, been in power at the central level. They have been able to do so by exploiting existing inter-ethnic resentment among the population, which has functioned much like ‘a reservoir that nationalist and populist elites can tap into’.\textsuperscript{131} While the 1990s war certainly was an effect of a nationalist political climate, it has since the war functioned as a reason, or a nodal point, in the affective economy of post-war Bosnia. It has been a reminder of the perceived absolute reality of ethnic differences and a source of fuel for indignation, victimisation, blame, self-exemption, isolationism, and exclusionism. This is what Ugo Vlaisavljević means when he calls the war ‘the cause of all causes’, an overarching and far-reaching determinant that has redefined the fundamental patterns of Bosnian post-war society, giving birth to new ideologies, moral values, historiography, orthography, etc.\textsuperscript{132}

Vlaisavljević argues that the subsequent hypomanic safeguarding of the identity of one’s own nation is partly explained by the threat of physical extermination posed by the other nations during the war.\textsuperscript{133} Sačir Filandra has a similar argument, contending that one important way in which a community (he is talking about Bosniaks) demarcates its borders in relation to others is the fear, or at least the memory, of war atrocities, creating ‘a near-mythical image

\textsuperscript{129} Niels J. G. van Willigen, Peacebuilding and International Administration: The Cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (London, 2013), 111.
\textsuperscript{130} Gromes, ‘Dejonski sporazum’, 43.
\textsuperscript{133} Ugo Vlaisavljević, ‘Tri ratne nacije’, 22.
of “the enemy”.

This perception is completed by the discourse of self-victimisation, which characterises each Bosnian nation and entails claims of one’s own innocence, tolerance, and status of victim in a series of historical defeats. The attitude towards history, then, is in this process turned into fatalistic acceptance of one’s own suffering and disregard for active subjectivity and the possibility of change. Generally, history has been vital for the demarcation of identity, and the post-war period has been characterised by an insistent (and selective) invoking of symbols from the past in the form of folklore, language, statues, new banknotes, street names, or funding of the National Museum, to name a few examples. History has also been utilised to establish ethnic identity and the relation to the other nations as something a priori given, naturalised, and unchanging, further affirming conceptual and political passivity beyond the ethnonationalist framework.

The perceived threat to one’s own nation is attributed not only to the memory of war, but also to the implications of peace. Unlike war, which threatens the physical existence of a community, peace renders the threat of assimilation possible, that is, the erosion of a symbolic order solid enough to be equal to or to dominate the others. Bogdanić explains why one’s own ethnicity becomes the single most important aspect to defend:

The discursive connotations of political parties and political affiliation based on ethnicity are clear: one’s survival, one’s human rights, one’s way of life and one’s prosperity depend on the protection of one’s ethnic status, and only the respective political parties can provide such protection.

This two-fold fear of the other encourages competition for political control and dominance and in extension makes the foremost political message the ‘ethnic imperative’, the urging to prioritise one’s own ethnic community in any given situation, which means, among other things, to vote for the particular ethnic party regardless of its political programme. This closes the circle, as it were, reiterating the logic of ethnonationalist discourse and, thus, contributing to the strength of its privileged way of representing social life in Bosnia.

---

134 Sačir Filandra, Bošnjaci nakon socijalizma: O bošnjačkom identitetu u postjugoslovenskom dobu (Sarajevo, 2012), 318.
135 Filandra, Bošnjaci nakon socijalizma, 367.
137 Šarajlić, Kultura kulture, 11.
2.2.5 Western Paternalism

As I have argued, the ethnonationalist hegemonic order in Bosnia is accompanied, and to some extent underpinned, by the political discourse of the international community. In the reconstruction of war-torn Bosnia and its transition towards a stable and democratic society it was the international community that took the leading role. Over the years it has meant multi-billion investments in a range of economic development projects as well as coordinated efforts in state-building and peacekeeping, the last being the most successful part of the international involvement in Bosnia. On the other hand, the international community has been highly criticised in many other aspects of its intervention, for example for not being able to produce sustainable domestically embedded institutions independent of international oversight, creating ‘relations of dependency rather than a basis for stable democratic self-government’, and while seeing itself as ‘flagbearer[s] of a vision of liberal internationalism in a place destroyed by competing particularist nationalisms’, it has repeatedly worked in ways contrary to liberal democratic values and practices.

Opposite to ideals of democratic autonomy, it has established an international administration, which goes far beyond assisting in the rebuilding of domestic institutions. The most problematic, overarching aspect of the international presence has indeed been the extensive authoritative powers gained by the international institutions with the Dayton Peace Agreement, especially the Office of the High Representative, whose initial function was to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement and the state-building, but which in 1997 gained the so-called ‘Bonn-powers’, becoming a legislative and executive instance independent of the Bosnian parliament and with unlimited authority. The extension of the powers of the High Representative was motivated by the sense of emergency that had arisen in the first two years of the fragile peace, when the country still saw incidents threatening the peace, such as broadcasts inciting violence and paramilitary units committing arson. Although the state of emergency has long since passed, the High Representative continues to interfere in arguably smaller matters of ‘inefficient tax collection, the excessive regulation of private business, corruption in the public utilities, or technical drawbacks that make the court

---

139. ‘Secularizing the Ideology of Nationalism and Nationalizing the Ideology of Assimilation’ (Sarajevo, 2012), 318.
137. Ir Filandra, ‘Bosnia. Sreće nakon socijalizma: O bojama nacionalnih obitelja in Menih kom identitetu u postjugoslovenskom dobu’, in Šarajlić, Biljana, politika i društvo u Bosni i Hercegovini, Analiza postdejonskog političkog sistema (Sarajevo, 2011), 140.
135. Willigen, Peacebuilding and International Administration, 188.
system less efficient than it otherwise might be’. The Bonn powers have in other words become a convenient instrument in pushing through international policy in a way that would not meet democratic standards anywhere in Western Europe.146

An example of blunt interference happened when a non-nationalist coalition endorsed by the international community—the Alliance for Change—took power after the 2000 elections and it seemed that Bosnian politics had the chance to take a turn towards integration and self-government. The High Representative, however—the day after the elections—single-handedly ‘imposed ten pieces of legislation dealing with everything from the court system to weights and measures’.147 In another case several years later, in 2007, the High Representative changed legislation, without consultation or dialogue, so that consensus was no longer needed to make decisions on the central level, which de facto meant that the vote of the representative of the Serb entity did not have to be taken into account. The Bosnian Serb prime minister (in the tri-part rotating presidency) at the time, Nikola Špirić, reacted by stating, ‘If the international community always supports the High Representative and not the institutions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, then it doesn’t matter if I am the head of that state, or Bart Simpson’.148

The policy of the international community has been remarkably inconsistent with the democratic ideals that it has tried to implement in Bosnia. It regularly becomes clear that Bosnian representatives lack the political autonomy as well as any real responsibility for the consequences of the policies they promote, as these, however consensual among the domestic decision-makers, can always be overruled by the High R. The far-reaching interference in domestic affairs has made many commentators talk of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a modern-style protectorate, which, contrary to the aim, makes democratic progress all the more difficult.149

One of the cornerstones of international involvement in Bosnia has in fact been the democratisation of the state’s political institutions, civil society, and the general attitude of the population. Like many other Eastern European countries after the Cold War, Bosnia, despite its inner tensions, quite quickly

---

146 The powers of the High Representative, however, are practically unlimited and can even be used to ‘dismiss presidents, prime ministers, judges, and mayors without having to submit its decisions for review by any independent appeals body. It can veto candidates for ministerial positions without needing publicly to present any evidence for its stance. It can impose legislation and create new institutions without having to estimate the cost to Bosnian taxpayers’. Knaus and Martin, ‘Lessons from Bosnia and Herzegovina’, 61.
147 Ibid., 67.
149 Bieber, Post-War Bosnia; Chandler, Faking Democracy after Dayton; Omerović ‘Ured Visokog predstavnika’; Willigen, Peacebuilding and International Administration.
met formal requirements of democracy, but, as David Chandler points out, formal standards were overshadowed by ideological presuppositions about Bosnia as an Eastern European and Balkan country. As democracy is a qualitative concept that can be measured in a range of different ways, and can thus be applied arbitrarily, it seemed ‘increasingly difficult to obtain outside the developed and mature democracies of the West’. While the international community has downplayed minority conflicts in the Western world by excluding minorities in the US, Germany, France, Great Britain, and Spain from the responsibility of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, it has insistently stressed ethnic conflict as a particularly troublesome aspect of democratisation in Eastern European and Balkan countries, making ethnic conflict in Bosnia a proof of society’s inherent ‘cultural incapacity’.

Boris Buden has identified this transition narrative in Western discourse as a paternalistic understanding of the post-communist Eastern European populations as children—‘Kinder des Kommunismus’—incapable of governing themselves and in need of guidance to become full, democratic subjects. He notes how Western political discourse has made emancipation and maturity (Mündigkeit) synonymous, and because maturity is associated with liberal democracy the process of transition contains a teleological determination that leaves post-communist societies no other option than to strive for the—at times arbitrary—standards put up by the West. This is incarnated in the country’s transition towards the EU—its ‘Europeanisation’—which to a large extent has become synonymous with democratisation and prosperity. In 1999 Bosnia agreed to a largely asymmetric partnership—the Stabilisation and Association Process—and in exchange for financial support and a prospective EU membership handed over power to the EU to make decisions on important reforms. Chandler explains how ‘external advisers state why policy reforms need to be made and when they need to be achieved, leaving the specific content up to local authorities, albeit with external advice and support’. The concrete institutional steps and the ideology behind them have put Bosnia in an asymmetric power relation that is reminiscent of Western colonial discourse in other parts of the world, treating developing countries ‘as infant or deviant examples of the West’. In both cases this

---

146 Chandler, Faking Democracy after Dayton, 17.
147 Ibid., 20 and 26.
148 Boris Buden, Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 46.
149 Ibid., 31/1 (2010), 78.
150 Buden, Zone des Übergangs, 42.
152 Gurminder K. Bhambra, Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination (Basingstoke, 2009), 63. For this, and for an idea of the transition narrative similar to that of Buden in a broader postcolonial context, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton, 2000).
view of the other as undeveloped and even infantile has motivated a ‘helping hand’, resulting in the local subject’s loss of autonomous voice, as the one who is in the end always privileged is the truly ‘mature’.

As I have argued, the fact that any differing, alternative ways of thinking about politics are suffocated by the institutional arrangement and the ethnonationalist hegemony’s use of resentment and fear for one’s (physical and cultural) disappearance is accompanied by the international community’s solidification of the same institutional structure and its insistence on the deterministic incapability of the Bosnian subject to solve the intricate issues from which the country suffers.

2.2.6 Remarks

Providing a representation of the Bosnian context is difficult; the intricacies, nuances, and contradictions that characterise it are bound to make any such representation fall short, calling for more angles, demanding more investigation, and producing more frustration. Aware of these limits, I have neither intended to provide a final context nor an unbiased one—which would be impossible—but one that is motivated by central themes and motifs found in the literary texts analysed in the following chapters. Generally speaking, I have attempted to present a contextual framework that suggests the social situation which the literary texts are a part of and, at the same time, respond to. I have tried to do this by providing an overview of the historical events most relevant for the understanding of the topics actualised in the texts, and in order to present some of the most central mechanisms in the dominant discourses that are present in the texts as targets of criticism.

Most significant of all is the issue of ethnicity, which continues to determine much of the social and political imagination in Bosnia. As became clear above, it has to a large extent also provided a lens through which Yugoslavia is perceived today. Later on in the thesis, it will be clear that the texts, when depicting Yugoslavia, prioritise issues of Yugoslav identity and the processes by which it was replaced by ethnic identification. Apart from the inter-ethnic conflict I have addressed the international community’s perception of Bosnia and its effects. This question is repeatedly addressed in the texts. Although it is of secondary importance compared to the dominant discourse of ethnonationalism, what we could call ‘Western discourse’ is considered equally oppressive, and a discourse that severely limits the opportunity to imagine Bosnian social life in new, alternative ways.
2.3 Subversive Infantilisation as Interrogation

The remaining part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the theoretical conditions for subversive infantilisation as a literary strategy, which critically interrogates the dominant discourses discussed in the previous section. I also discuss how it is possible to talk about this interrogation as an attempt to redefine the hegemonic social and political imagination in Bosnia (or at least to lay the ground for such a redefinition). The discussion is structured according to three main aspects of these issues. First, and on a general level, I discuss the potential (and limits) of literary discourse to address and change circumstances in the world, and I do this mainly by relying on ideas from discourse theory and, more specifically, the New Historicist tradition. Second, by drawing upon insights developed by the philosopher Jacques Rancière in his political philosophy I deal with the political nature of literature’s ability to interrogate the world. Also in this connection I consider, more specifically, how the child figure can be considered a factor that instigates political processes in the texts. Third, and lastly, I propose a set of techniques with which the texts’ critical interrogation of dominant discourses can be understood as well as analysed.

As mentioned, in order to follow the critically interrogative function of subversive infantilisation theoretically, I depart from a discursive perspective, which above all enables a focus on the social dimension of the texts rather than on the somewhat closed off, text-inherent features that have been the prime focus of earlier research on the infantile point of view in Bosnian literature. A basic assumption in discourse theory is that the correlation of a discourse with the social world depends on two fundamental aspects. Recognising them as two central emphases in Michel Foucault’s genealogical work, Norman Fairclough identifies these as the primacy of intertextuality and the ‘constitutive nature of discourse’. The weight on intertextuality, first, recognises that ‘any discursive practice is defined by its relations with others’. A particular discourse is always implicitly related to other discourses as well as particular texts, genres, styles, and sentences, which means that any particular text a priori comments on other texts, be it to reiterate what has been stated or to transform it. This seems especially true in regard to literature, whose insistence on ‘[borrowing, manipulating or transforming] other kinds of discourse’ is often upheld as one of its most central characteristics. It is important here that, in contrast to Kristeva’s ‘purely textual concept’ of intertextuality, Fairclough adds the dimension of power relations, which recognises the constraint of textual play according to

---


social conditions. This makes a discourse, or a particular text, a place where struggles over power can be observed.

Second, discourse theory puts emphasis on the constitutive function of discourse, that is, its ability not only to challenge and restructure material from preceding texts, but also to produce ideas, attitudes, and, in turn, social change. For Fairclough, discourse is a ‘mode of action’: ‘a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constructing and changing. For Fairclough, discourse is a ‘mode of action’: ‘a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constructing and constructing the world in meaning’. The meaning produced in discourse concerning, for instance, identity has a direct or indirect effect not only on how people imagine their own and others’ identities, but also on how they behave and act on this conception. Discourse such as that of Bosnian ethnonationalism, which continuously stresses victimisation and the guilt of the other parties, then produces a situation where a citizen on either side of Mostar cannot cross the bridge in fear for his or her life, and an institutional segregation that is structurally discriminating.

Of course, the constitutive aspect of discourse is also relevant for the body of Bosnian literary texts studied in this thesis. However, the effect of these texts on society is less obvious, because of their admittedly limited concrete impact at the institutional level. Being a marginal discourse, it has yet to produce material change. Therefore, the issue of how Bosnian infantile discourse relates to the world, and whether it has any (potential) effect on it, needs to be further qualified. I do this below, where I begin by asking what potential literature in general has in this respect. Before that, however, a note on the use of the term discourse is required, as it is used in slightly different senses in the thesis.

In the broadest sense, ‘discourse’ is considered an articulatory process of fixing meaning or creating a system ‘in which each sign is fixed as a moment through its relations to other signs (as in a fishing-net)’ A specific discourse, then, is viewed as a particular logic of fixing meaning ruled by certain subject matter, style, implicit presuppositions, and so forth. I have already identified the Bosnian literary texts studied here as being determined by ‘infantile discourse’, which means that they exhibit a certain system of structuring their representation that relies on a number of circumstances associated with the infantile. First and foremost, it relies on the child figure as what Laclau and Mouffe would call a nodal point, ‘a privileged [signifier] that

---

159 Fairclough, Discourse and Social Change, 64.
161 This corresponds to Fairclough’s use of ‘a discourse’ (with an article) ‘in something like the social-conventional sense for a particular class of discourse types or conventions’, that is, a particular logic of meaning production that can occur in different genres and situations. Fairclough, Discourse and Social Change, 5.
fix the meaning of a signifying chain.

Furthermore, I use the term ‘dominant discourse’ to describe a hegemonic order of fixing meaning, such as the ‘ethnonationalist discourse’ or the ‘Western liberal discourse’. It is understood as ‘a discourse’ in the sense just described, but it is also characterised by its privileged status of permeating and controlling societal institutions.

Lastly, I refer to the ‘infantile discourse’ as a practice that is manifest in the form of the body of literary texts, which draw on a set of common features. Though the term ‘discourse’ is used to designate both of these meanings—both a ‘system of representation’ and ‘certain products of this system’—the distinction is important if we are to be able to distinguish between infantile discourse as a logic that can occur in an unlimited range of genres and situations (from Bill Cosby’s old TV show *Kids Say the Darndest Things* to the contemporary Bosnian context.

### 2.3.1 Text and World

One way of further developing the idea of the intertextuality and constitutive function of literary discourse is to tie it up with the New Historicist move in the 1980s to question the traditionally strict separation between text and context, while also attempting to move beyond the poststructuralist pessimism concerning the possibility of recovering or fixing historical meaning. The main methodological point in such an approach is the recognition of the literary work’s dialectical correlation with the surroundings, which stresses the embeddedness of the work in social life as well as its constitutive function, while also breaking down any notion of an objective, totalising, and unproblematic representation of a particular period in history, that is, a frozen, stable, monolithic context.

Louis Montrose has argued that literature should be considered ‘an unstable and agonistic field of verbal and social practices’, not in the sense that it simply produces reflective representations of heterogeneous strata of language use in society, but rather that texts participate actively in this very discursive play in which, he says, there are no definite boundaries between

---

162 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2nd edn., London, 2001), 99. Jørgensen and Phillips give the example of medical discourse where “the body” is a nodal point around which many other meanings are crystallised. Signs such as “symptoms”, “tissue” and “scalpel” acquire their meaning by being related to ‘the body’ in particular ways. *Discourse Analysis*, 26.


literary and other types of discourse.\textsuperscript{166} The important New Historicism conclusion was that the work is a liminal space, not an enclosed box, which means that the border between text and context is nearly dissolved. The border is understood as a membrane, which allows for different types of discourse to flow, as it were, in and out of the text. Like Frederik Tygstrup, one can nuance this double process by comparing it, on the one hand, with Edward Said’s notion of the text’s affiliation with the world, that is, the ‘impregnation of the text with particular historical, social, epistemological and rhetorical patterns’,\textsuperscript{167} and on the other hand, with what Robert Weimann has called the text’s appropriation of these patterns, a ‘making one’s own’ of conventional modes of representation and a modifying of these according to whatever goal is found in the text.\textsuperscript{168}

For my purposes, one methodological implication from this perspective is particularly significant. It helps me to direct my focus from the hermeneutical, intra-compositional particularities of a specific text (its depths) to the discursive contact zones which, I claim, subversive infantilisation opens up at a surface level. I am, in other words, interested in the space where different discourses intersect. If the borders of the texts are understood as membranes, allowing other discourses to ‘flow’ in and out, then this very flow can become a fruitful point of interest. It allows focus on the way other discourses are let into the text, and how they ‘come out’, that is, how they are transformed. In line with this, my approach puts great emphasis on how other discourses are represented in the texts and what happens to them in this representation. What happens, for instance, with the discourse of the Western diary genre when it is appropriated by a Bosnian teenage narrator, as is the case in Veličković’s novel Lodgers? Or what happens to ethnonationalist soldier narratives when blended with images of small boys enacting the role of the soldier hero, as is the case in one of Alma Lazarevska’s short stories? Later in this chapter (section 2.3.4) I come back to the different strategies by which texts represent other discourses with the aim of undermining them.

However, since the New Historicism wave in the 1980s closer attention has been given to the limits of literature’s interaction with other discourses. While Stephen Greenblatt argued that the work of art only needs to use the right ‘currency’ (‘the systematic adjustments, symbolisations and lines of credit necessary’) to participate in a serious exchange,\textsuperscript{169} it has been pointed out that

\textsuperscript{166} Montrose, ‘Professing the Renaissance’, 26.
\textsuperscript{167} Frederik Tygstrup, ‘Stilens taktik’, in På sporet af virkeligheden (Copenhagen, 2000), 212. Said himself refers to affiliation as ‘that implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements, and other aesthetic elaborations on the one hand, and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes, and amorphous social forces’. ‘Reflections on American “Left” Literary Criticism’, in The World, the Text, and the Critic (Cambridge, MA., 1983), 174.
\textsuperscript{169} Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Towards a Poetics of Culture’, Southern Review, 20/1 (1987), 13. The monetary transaction metaphor has been criticised, for instance by Prendergast: ‘In the Greenblattian
art, and literature more specifically, has certain institutionally defined qualities that make the literary text’s position somewhat ambiguous in relation to other discourses. The text is less free in its discursive play than Greenblatt might have imagined. On the one hand—as was indeed stressed by the New Historicists—literature is a mode of language use (discourse) like any other: born out of a discursive interplay, operating in manners conditioned by given hierarchies, following rules conditioned by the hegemonic representational forms, and employing the language common to many different communicative practices. On the other hand, literature is to a high degree determined by the ‘quality of fictionality’, which gives it certain unique possibilities, but also limitations, in the interaction with other discourses. This quality is not ontologically, but institutionally determined, grounded in expectations on fiction not to construct images of reality according to one-to-one referential correspondence, and not to have the same degree of referentiality in comparison with other discursive practices. We seldom take literature at face value and apply other cognitive strategies when reading a piece of fiction than when reading an interview with its author. Tygstrup and Winkel Holm call this feature suspension:

The institutionalization of fiction establishes a crucial distance to the surrounding cultural poetics by suspending any unambiguously pragmatic function: utterances that circulate within the literary institution have no clearly defined social significance and impact. This institutional distance enables literature to adopt a non-pragmatic and non-intentional relationship to the reality it depicts.171

This idea that literature is capable of distancing not so much the world as an object, but rather the way we usually understand and interact with the world is also formulated in Christopher Prendergast’s book The Triangle of Representation. He argues that works of literature

elicit, precisely by way of their fictional modes of representation, attitudes to the world that enable—or disable—forms of understanding […] They demand complex forms of attention and processes that are often obscure but bring a greater degree of clarity to our engagement

scheme things simply circulate, like money or currency, in a circulation without locatable origin. Origin is of course a problematic category, but if the problem is allowed entirely to obliterate the principle of hierarchy of determinations, then it is unclear what is left in any precisely specifiable sense of the idea of causality’. The Triangle of Representation, 58.


with the world than those normally on offer in the structures of everyday preunderstanding.  

From this perspective, literature is a mode of thought. It engages with the given ‘structures of everyday preunderstanding’, as Prendergast puts it above, by resituating and reconfiguring them, thereby making visible aspects in them that are not otherwise articulated or considered. Jacques Rancière formulates this lucidly when he writes that fictions ‘elaborate intelligible structures’, and that fictions are ‘material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen an what is said, between what is done and what can be done’.  

The quotes above by Tygstrup and Winkel Holm, Prendergast, and Rancière all share the same fundamental position, which stresses the ability of literature to partake in the world in an active and critical way that is able to produce new knowledge—and not only knowledge, but knowledge that makes a difference that changes the world (to whatever extent). By letting other discourses inside their soft borders, texts transform these discourses, making us perceive them in a different way, which ultimately allows us to think differently and act accordingly. I believe that this effect should be understood in political terms, and in the next section I discuss in what sense this is possible and fruitful.

### 2.3.2 The Political Stake

In order to understand the discursive conditions for the texts to interrogate dominant discourse in political terms, my point of departure is that the interaction produced in the process of subversive infantilisation should be conceived as an act of struggle over the power to represent social reality. To discuss this, I rely upon some of the principal arguments in Rancière’s philosophy on politics and aesthetics.

To begin with, Rancière argues that the dimension of the political in literature ‘is not the politics of its writers. It does not deal with their personal commitment to the social and political issues and struggles of their times. Nor does it deal with the modes of representation of political events or the social structure and the social struggles in their books’.  

What is important is not

---


173 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London, 2013), 35 (italics in original). Rancière explains this further when he writes that literary locutions ‘draft maps of the visible, trajectories between the visible and the sayable, relationships between modes of being, modes of saying, and modes of doing and making. They define variations of sensible intensities, perceptions, and the abilities of bodies. They thereby take hold of unspecified groups of people, they widen gaps, open up space for deviations, modify the speeds, the trajectories, and the ways in which groups of people adhere to a condition, react to situations, recognize their images’.

what messages or paroles a piece of literary work presents, or how it mimetically depicts the structures of society. Rather, what is at stake is the ‘very distance it takes with respect to these functions’. To create distance here means to highlight and make visible aspects of dominant discourse that are otherwise taken for granted, or are invisible, by elaborating and reconfiguring them in ways that produce new angles, insights, and modes of thought.

Politics for Rancière means the struggle not over the distribution of power and resources within a legally and institutionally defined space, which is the way politics is traditionally viewed, but rather over how this space is framed in the first place, in terms of what a community has ‘agreed upon’ are possible and impossible ways of perception, conceptualisation, speech, and action. With another political theorist, Chantal Mouffe, this can be understood as a hegemonic social order, which is constituted by ‘sedimented practices, that is, practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted, as if they were self-grounded’. Rancière has his own term for this; he calls it the ‘partition of the sensible’ and refers to the way we frame and structure the sensory data (our modes of perception) that are the foundation on which all knowledge is ultimately based, and which in turn define what is visible and sayable.

A particular hegemonic order (what Rancière calls the ‘police’) is understood as a particular distribution of the sensible, which constitutes the symbolic order of the social space: ‘society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places’. What is crucial in this self-sustaining symbolic order is that there is no room for any ‘void or supplement’, as Rancière puts it: no room for what it is not. An example of such an exclusion in the Bosnian context is manifested in the primacy of ethnic affiliation over citizenship in the institutional structure, for instance, in the power-sharing provisions in the Dayton Peace Agreement, which states that posts in the tripartite presidency of the country are reserved for ethnic Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats only, resulting in the discrimination of other minorities.

Generally speaking, the effect of this, Rancière argues, is the exclusion of social groups or interests from the public sphere and the possibility of making one’s own claims heard. It is from this exclusion that politics in Rancière’s sense is born: in the disagreement between a neglected social formation and

---

the dominant symbolic order over how the public, political space should be configured symbolically, and over the issue of who are allowed to participate in this space. In other words, politics happens when those who are ignored and excluded, as Chambers puts it, ‘lay claim to the fundamental equality that means they too—those who do not count—must be counted’. Literature can be a platform for such subjectivation, because it has, as I mentioned earlier, the ability to challenge and reconfigure the dominant symbolic order, creating space for what has previously been excluded. And this is exactly what makes it political: It is able to produce ‘new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals’. Here Rancière turns to Aristotle’s distinction between the political man, who possesses logos, and the hopelessly non-political animal, whose phone is ‘appropriate only for expressing the feelings of pleasure and displeasure’. He argues that politics consists in the struggle to territorialise the discursive space necessary to transform one’s senseless (that is, ignored) noise into legitimate speech (‘getting what was only audible as noise to be heard as speech’). Politics thus becomes an intervention not only into what can be conceptualised and said, but also into who is allowed to say it.

What significance does this understanding of politics have for subversive infantilisation? As I see it, Rancière’s view on the political potential of art, and literature more specifically, has two advantages that are central for my approach to the infantile discourse in the Bosnian context. It avoids two perspectives, which could perhaps be seen as two poles in the same spectrum. First, it avoids seeing the politics of literature as an emancipatory project—as would, for instance, a classical Marxist point of view—which looks to overturn the existing hegemony and replace it with another hegemonic order. Reading the texts in question, one quickly notices the absence of a clearly defined idea about a post-hegemonic state, that is, a situation after the ethnonationalist paradigm. Second, the Rancièrian understanding of politics avoids what perhaps risks becoming a consequence of the lack of clear direction, namely an undecidable or aporic attitude, which would circle (potentially indefinitely) around the dominant discourse it negates without necessarily producing any substantial form of subjectivation. It is true that the texts analysed in this thesis seem closer to the latter pole in the spectrum, as its non-programmatic attitude seems to produce little material effect in the social sphere.

182 Rancière, ‘Ten Theses on Politics’, 37. Bonnie Honig formulates the distinction lucidly: ‘Phone is the name for the sonorous emissions of the excluded, and logos is the name claimed by the included for their own sounds’. ‘Antigone’s Two Laws: Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Humanism’, New Literary History, 41/1 (2010), 20.
There is, then, potentially a problem here, considering Rancière’s fairly materialistic understanding of the process of politics, which demands the production of bodies that are somehow able to produce an effect on the institutional structure of a community. There must be some material trace of the subjectivation process. One could certainly argue that the anti-hegemonic literature in Bosnia, the infantile discourse included, has not yet produced any substantial traces of that sort, as the country continues to experience a political status quo in which literature and art in general play a very marginal role and are unable to produce any real social mobilisation. On the other hand, one could argue that what we see in this very literature is indeed the early stages of an attempt to produce material effects, which are yet to be seen. If that is the case, then the political dimension of the texts is best characterised as potential, which does not necessarily make it less interesting, perhaps even more so. Even if it limits it to the potential political effect of these texts, the Rancièrean point of view helps to make visible a potential that would otherwise be obscured by the seemingly undecidable and non-directional attitude found in the texts. This is perhaps first and foremost enabled by the weight on the appropriation of speech as the political act proper. Even though we have no definite conception of what the texts ultimately seek to articulate as an alternative to the hegemony, it is clear that an articulation is in progress, and that it is significant for understanding the social and political situation in Bosnia.

2.3.3 The Political Child

The image of the excluded, non-speaking subject in the process of appropriating the status of speaking is also interesting in a more concrete sense. In fact, the image is to a great extent mirrored in the child character, which is an essential factor in the strategy of subversive infantilisation. Like the animal in the argument above, the texts present the reader with child figures that should per definition be unable to produce speech in the political sense. The word ‘infant’, as it has been pointed out, ‘defines one who cannot speak and whose progressive attempts at articulation must be translated by adults into a world of discourse not yet fully inhabited by the child’.

It is merely able to produce noise that falls outside the order associated with the established social structures controlled by the adults. It might, then, seem strange to use the figure of the child as a tool in literature to appropriate speech and produce politics. It is ironic that an essentially subaltern character is appropriated to serve as a representative, or at least as a medium or tool, for adult writers that look to highlight problems in the social and political life in Bosnia. Gill Rye argues that ‘the (re-)creation of the child’s voice or

---

The notion of the ‘political child’ in terms of dissent largely gains its strength from its oxymoronic quality. What is accentuated by it is the very tension between the two poles in the distinction between non-speaking and speaking, as this type of child exists between the reader’s expectation on the child to be innocent and dependent and the author’s employment of it to trigger critical interaction with hegemonic discourse, to speak. Creating this tension is a way of focussing the attention to the process of articulating speech, as the discourse associated with the adults is imitated, played with, and challenged by a figure that ultimately represents the counterpoint to the order of the adults.

It is important to stress that subversive infantilisation is an aesthetic construct produced by adult authors, whose relationship to the child character is widely recognised as complex and ambiguous. Vice has shown that the voice or claims of the child are seldom represented (in the sense of standing-for) by the author. The same is true of the Bosnian context, where the figure of the child is not employed to voice children’s claims. What the writers usually do, then, is to appropriate what Vice would distinguish as the ‘child’s viewpoint’, a set of assumptions about what the world might look like through the eyes of a child. It is vital to keep in mind that the child is unavoidably ‘mediated, modified, appropriated by adults’ in texts employing the child, which, in turn, is ‘never free from adult concerns’. This means that the author actively utilises some expectations on the idea of the innocent, creative, and truth-saying child and exaggerates these in order to produce accounts aiming at effects of estrangement. Hence, the child perspective is necessarily a pseudo-child perspective, which transforms the conception of the real-life child’s, say, casual disregard of convention in general into a critique consciously directed at given conventions, more specifically certain dominant ways of representing certain issues. The child character’s target of attention, its stumbling over questions of ethnicism or Western prejudice, is never a coincidence, but the consequence of the author’s choice to load the figure of the child with political motives. It is moulded into a creature that has little in

---

184 Rye, ‘Writing Childhood’, 120.
185 Sue Vice, ‘Children’s Voices and Viewpoints in Holocaust Literature’, Holocaust Studies, 11/2 (2005). As the title of her article suggests, Vice discusses the issue in the context of Holocaust literature relying on the figure of the child.
186 Vice, ‘Children’s Voices’, 11.
common with a proper child, but is efficient as an alibi for questioning the most basic and naturalised social and political assumptions. First and foremost, the child character, in its relation to the world, is moulded into a radical Other, who is, as Konersmann has put it in a more historical context, made to work ‘counter-worldly’, and by doing so acts as a promise of a different state of things. The child character gains a great deal of critical potential from its detachedness from the logos associated with the adults, and thus from its irresponsibility in regard to conventional thought, speech, and behaviour. This is recognised by Goodenough et al., who note the fruitfulness of such an outsider position:

> To recognize the child’s exclusion from adult language and discourse does not mean that children’s voices are condemned to being disabled in literary representations. On the contrary, many texts written from a child’s viewpoint are brilliantly creative, subversive, or compensatory precisely because children speak from a realm as yet unappropriated, or only partially appropriated, by social or cultural intentionality.

The irrationality associated with the child figure that blocks it from accepted speech is also what makes it a threat to the stability of what Rancière would call the police order. Plato recognises this circumstance in *The Laws* when he points out the potential dangers of children’s presence in a rational society. ‘And, of all wild creatures’, he says, ‘the child is the most intractable; for in so far as it, above all others, possesses a fount of reason that is as yet uncurbed, it is a treacherous, sly and most insolent creature’. The child should not only be disciplined, taught right from wrong, but also policed: It must not be left alone by his mother, nurse, tutor, or mentor at any time, and it ‘must be treated as a slave’. Believed to lack a mature sense of rationality (possessing only the potentiality of it), the child must be kept from any recognition of proper agency; it must be kept silent, it must be an infant. Notions of rationality, political agency, and language are here intimately entwined. It is when the child is allowed to articulate speech (and not just produce noise) in equal merit to other given discourses that it risks polluting a rational order with irrational whims. In the context of my study the child character, which is excluded from

---

190 The rather assertive appropriation of the child character by authors lets us know that much expectation is invested into the child character from the part of the authors. In an essay Nenad Veličković speaks fondly of the varied repertoire that the child possesses by which to trigger critique, even mentioning its ability to encourage ‘the reader’s empathy’ for the ideas and viewpoint of the writer. Nenad Veličković, ‘Der altkluge Erzähler’, in Renate Hansen-Kokorüš and Elena Popovska, eds., *Kind und Jugendlicher in der Literatur und im Film Bosniens, Kroatiens und Serbiens* (Hamburg, 2013), 227–29.
191 Ralf Konersmann, *Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), 11.
the discourse of the adults, threatens this discourse by its constant disidentification with it as well as by revealing the lack of rationality in the adult world. By representing something entirely different, the child insistently negates the purported necessity of the given order, which is to say that it proposes the contingency of this order and reveals the arbitrariness in the rule of the adults.

Subversive infantilisation does not necessarily involve a child character that works as an instigator that triggers effects of centrifugal force. Sometimes the child character is given a passive role and works instead as a ‘figure of reflection’ (Reflektorfigur) for the projections of the adult.\(^{195}\) This means either that the child character is involved in dialogue with adults, who themselves produce critical comments about society in order to ‘explain’ to the child how everything ‘really’ fits together, or that the child is assigned roles to play, which it has no conscious partaking in.

However, typically the critical ability of the child figure is manifested in a child that is given an active, instigating role. This can be illustrated by likening the child character to a character type that Bakhtin identified in the picaresque tradition, namely the ‘fool’, which exists on the margins of society and which seized

the right not to understand, the right to confuse, to tease, to hyperbolize life; the right to parody others while talking, the right to not be taken literally, not “to be oneself”; the right to live a life in the chronotope of the entr’acte, the chronotope of theatrical space, the right to act life as comedy and to treat others as actors, the right to rip off masks, the right to rage at others with a primeval (almost cultic) rage—and finally, the right to betray to the public a personal life, down to its most private and prurient little secrets.\(^{196}\)

Here, the child is not merely a passive subject, a passive interpreter of certain aspects of social life that it ‘fails’ to understand. Instead, the child acts: It teases, questions, exaggerates, rips off masks, rages, betrays. The child—or the infantile subject in general—does not, from a transcendent position (with all the others’ explanations at hand), propose different ways of seeing things by explaining how it is or how it should be, but by acting, by immanently occupying the social space in which discourses uninterruptedly meet, conflict, and are negotiated.

Irony is central in this respect, as the ability of the child figure to focus upon contrasts, oppositions, and inconsistencies in established discourse, knowledge, or convention depends on it. The child’s ironic perspective creates

---


a distance to the imagined immediacy of language by more or less explicitly revealing the unreliable play of signification and the rivalry between opinions created by this play. It is in this sense that "[i]rony is a perspective that sees only perspectives, a look that regards what it sees as thoroughly within a world of appearances, and a way of speaking that regards speech acts as moves of interaction with other speech acts". The nonchalance and carefreeness in the play of the ironic child is crucial for its manoeuvrability among discourses.

The question is what kind of effect is produced from such a seemingly evasive and non-committing approach to others’ discourse. Kierkegaard recognised that irony is characterised by ‘a certain exclusiveness’, because of the fact that it ‘looks down, as it were, on plain and simple talk that everyone can promptly understand; it travels around, so to speak, in an exclusive incognito and looks down pitying from this high position on ordinary, prosaic talk’. Indeed, irony has usually been understood ‘through metaphors of height, elevation, and hierarchy’, producing a vantage point or ‘dominant overlooking position’, somehow above or outside language. It is at this point that infantile discourse risks getting into trouble in regard to the creation of new hierarchies, potentially as problematic as those that irony targeted in the first place. Linda Hutcheon attributes this double edge to irony’s ‘intimacy with the dominant discourses it contests’, which on the one hand, through irony’s appropriation of the other’s discourse, enables its subversive effects, while it, on the other hand, is vulnerable to the risk of reiterating the very logic it set out to disrupt.

After providing the theoretical circumstances of the interaction with the world, in what sense this interrogation is political as well as the significance of the child figure to trigger it, I now turn to some specific ways in which this interrogation can be understood analytically.

### 2.3.4 Techniques of Reconfiguration

I have argued that the infantile subject—typically the child character—is used by authors to trigger critical deviations from the hegemonic discourses in Bosnia. In the following pages I discuss the possible ways in which subversive infantilisation as a literary strategy engages in this struggle over the power to represent Bosnian social life on a textual level. Earlier I referred to the New Historicism point of view from which this engagement is understood as the literary texts’ ability to make other discourses ‘flow in and out of’ the boundaries of a particular text, and it is now necessary to concretise just how

198 Kierkegaard, *Concept of Irony*, 265.
the texts represent other discourses, how they relate to, problematise, and play with the hegemonic discourses. Therefore, the aim of the remaining part of this chapter is to propose a set of particular methods—I will call them techniques—through which this interaction is most typically achieved.

In order to approach this question, I draw principally upon the way of looking at the interrogative aspect of literary discourse proposed by Frederik Tygstrup and Isak Winkel Holm in their article ‘Cultural Poetics and the Politics of Literature’. Their approach is perhaps best described as an updated New Historicism approach in which the epicentre of the argument is the nature of the interaction between literature and the ‘cultural poetics’, which, drawing on Louis Montrose, they define as ‘a common set of models prescribing our ways of seeing, of thinking and of relating to ourselves, to each other and to the shared surroundings’.201 This is essentially in line with the model I have presented above: They too understand the interaction politically, as the text is involved in ‘a struggle between ways of forging images of what reality looks like and what it ought to look like’, and also, they make a direct link to the ideas of Rancière when they argue that literature ‘intervenes’ in social life by ‘reflecting, varying and contesting the dominant cultural poetics’ division of the sensible’.202 Now, Tygstrup and Winkel Holm propose three general principles by which literature is able to critically interrogate (or deviate from, as they say) the standard repertoire of dominant discourse. These are creation, exposition, and transposition. Of these three categories I limit my analysis to creation and exposition, as transposition falls outside the scope of my study, simply because it is not a significant feature in the studied texts.203 Because these functions are to be understood as attributes of literary discourse on a general level, it is, for the purposes of my method, important that they are further specified as analytical classifications which can be utilised to clarify the nuances of the texts’ interaction with dominant discourses. I do this by proposing a set of what I would like to call techniques, which serve as the backbone of my methodological approach, and while I only present an overview of their functions and significance in this chapter, they will be elaborated further in the analytical chapters to come. Every chapter deals with one of these techniques: perspective, dichotomisation, appropriation, and blending. While the techniques cannot be isolated from each other, as they overlap, depend on each other, and sometimes work together to achieve a critical effect, I have chosen to study them separately, mainly in order to be able to analyse them in as much detail as possible, but also for the sake of structure and clarity.

202 Ibid., 204 and 207.
203 Transposition is a function that problematises institutional borders between literature and other social practices. Any effect is produced by the change of context in which a text appears; this can mean to read a shopping list as a poem or publish a transcript of a televised charity fundraising as a piece of literature. Ibid., 210.
Now, Tygstrup and Winkel Holm highlight creation as one of the essential ways in which literature relates to the world. Faced with a dominant repertoire of representational forms, literature can interrogate these by seeking to frame the world in a deviant manner, and thus create novel representations of reality, or ‘capture pieces of reality that haven’t yet been named properly’.204 This does not primarily mean finding new ‘objects out there’ to describe, but rather to configure new ways of representing the existing world in a manner that challenges the conventional understanding of it within dominant discourse. Any ‘new’ image of reality should be understood as a revaluation of the manner in which phenomena in the world are identified, framed, and valued. From this perspective, subversive infantilisation is a strategy through which images of and attitudes to the social and political circumstances in Bosnia are reconfigured. This can, for instance, manifest itself in the emphasis on the fragmentary and individual narrative rather than on collective ones trying to encapsulate the whole of society. Expectedly, subversive infantilisation may be able to do this in a variety of ways, but I shall work with two specific techniques, which I have identified as crucial, namely perspective and dichotomisation.

I have already emphasised the importance of the infantile perspective on the world as it is portrayed in these works, and I regard the utilisation of perspective as a technique that plays the important role of establishing a fundamental framework for how the child character perceives, understands, and ultimately reacts to its surroundings. Perspective is sometimes manifested corporeally and visually, defined by the child character’s particular conditions for moving around in the world. This can entail the child’s limited access to spaces where adults converse or where traumatic events occur—in chapter 3 it will be made clear that the characters are usually removed from the chance to perceive such events directly, instead relying on second-hand information acquired through hearsay and sometimes thorough ‘investigation’. Perspective in this sense is also defined by such things as the character’s ‘optical perspective’ and even height, making them perceive phenomena from a frog’s perspective in a rather straightforward sense.205 In addition, perspective is understood in terms of the character’s mental capacity, such as its unfamiliarity with convention, limited access to knowledge, as well as its naivety, playfulness, and irrationality in relation to the adult world. These factors make up the child character’s fundamental outlook on the world and define how the world is framed and what aspects related to the Bosnian social situation are brought to the fore and which have been neglected, dismissed, or completely invisible in dominant discourse.

Also, in relation to the other techniques I consider, perspective functions as a basic set of conditions upon which other techniques rely. The child embodies

204 Ibid., 211.
205 Spielmann, Augen des Kindes, 223.
a unique way of perceiving and partitioning reality which determines every interaction with the world; therefore, the perspective technique is often at least an underlying factor in the use of the other techniques.

I also analyse another significant technique that falls under the creation category, which is more limited in scope than the perspective technique. I call it dichotomisation, and in terms of frequency it is among the most used techniques of subversive infantilisation. It is based on the creation of a rather straightforward conflict or dichotomy between a certain targeted representation (or representational form) and the infantile subject’s point of view. The critical effect relies on the stark contrast that is created between the positions, where the position associated with dominant discourse is usually depicted as both epistemically and morally problematic, as oppressive, and ultimately illegitimate, while the child’s position is presented as a sound refusal. Dichotomisation in this sense means creating, or at least emphasising, two sides that are mutually exclusive; it is characteristic that the two positions never meet, but rather are kept in static opposition. Usually, it is either the child character’s inability to understand (also in cases when it wants to understand) or its conscious refusal of the other’s arguments that produces critical effects. Ironic devices such as hyperbole and mockery are frequent, as are the ironic principles of contrasts, contrarieties, and conflict. Against this background, dichotomisation is probably the technique that runs the greatest risk of falling into the pitfalls of ironic treatment of dominant discourse. For instance, by establishing clear-cut contrasts and excluding the other, sometimes in a quite definite way, this type of subversive infantilisation risks repeating mechanisms similar to those targeted in dominant discourse.

Tygstrup and Winkel Holm also refer to exposition as a type of interrogation. Apart from creating a new filter through which to perceive and construe reality, literature can also be used to expose faults in already given attitudes towards reality or the consequences these attitudes have in the social sphere. While the function of creation relies on presenting ‘hitherto unseen aspects of social reality’, exposition lets the targeted discourse be repeated—lets it unfold—on what at least superficially appears to be its own terms. Tygstrup and Winkel Holm underline that this can be carried out in a variety of ways: ‘from direct citations of historical uses of language to reconstructions of “typical” images of reality’,207 common to which is that they seek to bring to light the faults, weaknesses, and inconsistencies of the targeted discourse. In the case of subversive infantilisation I argue that this happens primarily in two ways.

By relying on subversive infantilisation texts can appropriate particular representational conventions. They subsume the other’s discourse into their own, which means that they mimic the language, rhetorical logic, and

207 Ibid.
 ideological presuppositions associated with that discourse. Thus, the infantile treatment invites that discourse inside and opens up a space where the discourse is unfolded, challenged, and contrasted with an alternative position produced by the child. In this respect, the function of stylisation, understood according to Mikhail Bakhtin, plays a significant role. In ‘Discourse in the Novel’ Bakhtin sees stylisation as a way of producing discursive hybridisation, offering ‘an artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language’.208 In this sense, appropriation is a way of letting the targeted discourse unfold seemingly ‘as it is’, but with critical emphasis on problematic aspects that are usually downplayed or even invisible in a dominant discourse which we have been taught to believe is self-sufficient and objective on the basis of the authority of its subject. It is thus exposed in the sense put forward by Tygstrup and Winkel Holm. What subversive infantilisation tries to do here is to dethrone whatever ‘absolute dogma’ may exist in the targeted discourse and make it a ‘working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality’.209

Another way in which appropriation occurs is when motifs, images, or concepts associated with the targeted discourse are displaced from their original context. Whereas stylisation relies on the principle of appropriation of the other’s discourse, displacement relies on dislocating the stability of the original context tied to any particular statement. I have elsewhere referred to this as the ‘re-rigging’ of specific statements or representational forms, which in their original context are construed as solid, but in the new context emerge as contingent and conditional rather than self-apparent.210 It can also be construed in Hutcheon’s notion of ‘trans-contextualization’ in parody, with which she stresses the ability of parody mainly to imply a ‘repetition with critical distance’ undermining the object of parody.211

The final technique discussed in my investigation is blending. I have borrowed the term from Fauconnier and Turner’s theory on the cognitive strategy of ‘conceptual blending’ in order to describe how subversive infantilisation can work to mix conceptual inputs into new images, adding different layers or images, very much like double-exposed photography. In this type of infantile blending this often means mixing a notion of the infantile with particular notions found in the dominant discourse that is targeted. As an example, in chapter 6 I look at how some of the texts make use of this

principle by entwining the notion of ‘boy’ and the notion of ‘soldier’ in order to problematise militarist and masculinist narratives, which have played a central role in the discourses of Yugoslav socialism and the post-Yugoslav ethnonationalism. What develops from the process of laying these images on top of one another is a new ‘emergent structure’, as Fauconnier and Turner call it, which produces a reconfiguration of the relations between the inputs, which, in turn, creates new significance that is not found in any of the individual inputs. 212 The use of Fauconnier and Turner’s notion should not, however, suggest that I focus upon the cognitive aspects of reading a text; though it certainly functions as an interpretative strategy. Rather, I merely use it to unfold a particular textual practice of representing other discourses.

Above I have briefly discussed the set of techniques used in the following analytical chapter in order to unfold the different ways in which subversive infantilisation represents, relates to, and interrogates dominant discourses. In chapters 3–6 the techniques will, as I have mentioned, be elaborated further in the context in which they appear. However, I hope to have provided, together with the theoretical arguments presented earlier, the point of departure for my methodological approach to the texts and the strategy of subversive infantilisation. In the following chapters I analyse the different techniques of this strategy, in a sense, mapping it, so as to be able to investigate not only its functions, but also its effects and thus its political potential of reconfiguring the way Bosnian social life and all issues related to it are perceived and thought of.

3 Perspective

Departing from assumptions about the child figure’s unique way of existing in the world, authors who make use of subversive infantilisation rely on certain basic features associated with the child figure, which make up a fundamental perspective through which the world is depicted. By perspective I mean a set of preconditions for the way certain phenomena in the diegetic world are framed and treated in the texts. As a norm, an infantile subject—most typically the child character—is made the vehicle for such a perspective, which is a central aspect of subversive infantilisation, because it to a large extent defines the conditions for what can be expected from the strategy. The focus of this chapter is to identify central characteristics of the perspective of the child character, and to analyse what role it plays in the texts as a technique, that is, as a way of interrogating discourse.

My understanding of perspective here is twofold. First, it is a kind of Weltanschauung: an intellectual framework attributed to the infantile subject through which the subject perceives the world, affecting everything from how sensorial data is structured and how certain concepts are understood to what concepts are even available to the child in the first place. This can also be construed as what Boris Uspensky has called the ideological level of a point of view, which ‘represents a general system of viewing the world conceptually’. In addition to this mental definition, perspective is also thought of as the physical or material conditions for the child’s perception. For instance, Spielmann mentions the child’s differentiated ‘optical perspective’ from below,215 but it is also determined by audial, corporeal, and spatial factors. One aspect in relation to which both these definitions are actualised is discourse. The child’s access to discourse is determined both by its lack of knowledge about the world and its material limitations, as the child

214 Uspensky would call this the spatial plane of a point of view. See chapter 3 in Poetics of Composition.
is seldom allowed to take part in adults’ conversations about traumatic or in other ways sensitive issues, but is forced to eavesdrop, put together clues, and draw its own conclusions.

Together, these two manifestations—ideological and spatial—of the child’s essentially dislocating approach to the world reconfigure the representation of reality with which the reader is presented by disabling some aspects, usually associated with convention of different sorts, and enabling others synonymous with different types of idiosyncrasies. These idiosyncrasies are used to produce bizarre or grotesque descriptions that contrast to naturalised representations associated with the adults. In encounters with concepts or issues that are habitually accepted or portrayed as the most rational by adult characters, the child is usually affected by unfamiliarity and instinct, questioning arguments otherwise taken for granted. New, previously downplayed, or invisible parts of reality are created in the sense described by Tygstrup and Winkel Holm, thereby challenging the legitimacy of dominant representations.\(^{216}\)

An important dimension of the infantile perspective is its focus of attention. The focus of the child typically oscillates between the enclosed living sphere of the family and external societal and historical events, between small everyday problems that occur within the safety of the family and much bigger ideological problems and events that unfold in parallel and intrude upon the safety of the family. This tension is a central aspect of the strategy of subversive infantilisation, because it characterises the child’s unique situation on the threshold between two different spheres of life. The position can be thought of as in-betweenness, which enables the character or narrator to make critical contrasts between the two, thereby illuminating crucial issues. In the following I consider these two spheres and how they are connected by the infantile subject.

### 3.1 The Immediate Surroundings

#### 3.1.1 A Unique Status

Any experience of the child character or narrator begins inside the family walls. It is here that the child is introduced, step by step, to both the complexities and banalities of the world, and it is here that the infantile approach first comes into conflict with conventional understanding usually represented by the adults in the immediate family or other close relatives. While the relationship between these two subjects—the child and the adult—is in most cases characterised by mutual love, dialogue, and the sharing of

(traumatic) events, it is also marked by a fundamental dividing line in regard to how these subjects experience minor and major events as well as how they articulate their experiences.

It will be made clear that in most cases of subversive infantilisation the child character is given a special status already from the outset. An interesting example is found in Miljenko Jergović’s collection *Sarajevo Marlboro*, which consists of short stories all somehow dealing with the war in Bosnia. A handful of them use infantile discourse, and in one of them, ‘Declension’, the protagonist boy is given a unique status early on. In the very beginning of the story the boy, who is repeatedly declining the Latin word *terra*, is introduced as ‘gently swaying] in the middle of the room, happy and vacant, and just as handsome as a Buddhist monk’. His harmonic aura is contrasted to the portrayal of his stepfather ‘chain-smoking cigarettes and rewinding the videotape of a massacre he had filmed in central Bosnia’ (D, 149). Even though they experience the war in Bosnia together, as refugees somewhere in Croatia, the boy and his parents are engaged in this experience in diametrically different ways. The unconcerned boy is primarily preoccupied with watching cartoons and is trying to lure his stepfather outside in order to occupy the TV room. The distressed stepfather works as a journalist covering the ongoing war, and he is preparing footage to send off to American news media. Having trouble thinking out a good commentary, he considers for a moment recording the boy’s declension: ‘terra, terra, terram, terrae… and blood’ (D, 149). Surely, the Latin word for land, very close in pronunciation to the word ‘terror’, would describe the images better than any other. It also alludes to the Nazi principle of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil), an idea affirming the intimate correlation between ethnicity and territory, which was the ideological basis for the ethnic cleansing committed by the Nazis.

Though the declension does not end up on the video, the boy does ultimately provide the solution to his stepfather’s problem. After an unfortunate episode in a Catholic church, where the boy and his friend fail to pray with the right words—‘the boys can no longer follow the rhythm as they lip-sync’ (D, 153)—and where the priest learns that they are Bosnian refugees (neither of them Catholic), they are told that they do not necessarily have to come back to church; if they are ever frightened, all they have to do is to ask God for help directly. Walking home in silence, the boy and his friend are clearly marked by this sign of exclusion. When the boy tells his stepfather about the visit he also mentions another situation where he was excluded based on his ethnicity: ‘a girl, for whom he has a soft spot, often corrects his pronunciation’ (D, 152). After a short discussion with his stepfather the boy locks himself in his room, claiming that he needs to study Latin.

---

Later, curious to learn what the boy is up to, the parents search his room for evidence of any secret activity. They find a few torn-out pages that turn out to be a letter to his grandfather back in Zenica (town in central Bosnia). The content of the letter is not shared with the reader; all we learn is that it contains something of great value.

If it had been anybody else’s son, the sentences would have looked stupid and banal. As it was, they were perfect to cry over. The mother told the stepfather about the contents of the letter. He nodded and later told his friends about them. He translated the words for American editors, and they replied that they were wonderful and moving. (D, 153)

In the letter the true feelings of the boy, who seems to hide them underneath a precocious appearance, are disclosed: He turns out to be less oblivious to what is going on around him than first expected. More importantly, the letter seems to be more generally applicable, as it is readily forwarded to other people and even accepted by the American editors, who are moved by the boy’s words and accept his account as material for their broadcast. It turns out that the words are not as banal as is first remarked in the quote. Considering the initial description of the boy, where he is likened to a blissful and peaceful monk, and the inability of the clerical representative to recognise his perhaps very genuine spiritual potential only on the basis of his ethnicity and liturgical inexperience, it is tempting to see the words of the letter as hinting at some deeper truth. His words seem to produce such a striking and suggestive description of the war situation that they supplement the images of massacre his stepfather has intended to send abroad. The boy himself is unaware of his impact and continues to do what children usually do, and the story ends with him making a snowman.

I have chosen to begin with this example, because it is so vividly marked by an assumption, which is representative of infantile discourse in general, about the exceptional status of the child in terms of experiencing the world. This assumption takes for granted the ability of the child to produce representations alternate to conventional ways of imagining and talking about a range of different aspects, private as well as public. In Jergović’s story the boy manages both to produce what seems to be the most accurate representation of war massacres (terra/terror, Blut und Boden) and to reveal the significance of minor traces of ethnic difference in his encounters with a less than welcoming, though perhaps benevolent priest and a schoolgirl unfamiliar with his accent. There is possibly also an (ethnic) conflict between the boy and his stepfather, who tries to normalise the behaviour of both the priest (‘not everyone has the same beliefs’) and the girl (‘women are like that’). The reader also learns that ‘[o]f course, the stepfather is, like the priest, a Catholic. The boy, of course, isn’t’ (D, 152). While the subtleties of ethnic difference constitute an important theme in the text, I would argue that the
point of view of the child can equally be considered a theme, foregrounded as it is at the end where the content of the boy’s letter is overshadowed, even obliterated, by the assumed childish-prophetic style of it.

3.1.2 A Suspicious Weltanschauung

This point of view is elaborated in another major work by Jergović, namely his 1999 novel Mama Leone, whose first half is narrated by a boy called Miljenko growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. In the book the uniqueness of the child perspective is not instantly revealed to the reader, as in ‘Declension’, but is developed continuously in the interaction of the first-person narrator with his surroundings. Young Miljenko manages to produce and hold on to a clear memory of his own birth, at least according to himself: ‘When I was born a dog started barking in the hall of the maternity ward. Dr. Šrečko ripped the mask from his face, tore out of the delivery suite, and said to hell with the country where kids are born at the pound.’218 The boy is terrified, clinging to his mother, and wishing he would stop breathing.

When he recounts this episode to his family later in life, he is usually accused of being a liar, and this makes him draw the conclusion that the world basically rests on ‘the peculiar human tendency to think you are a total idiot whenever you told the truth and take you seriously the second you started lying’ (ML, 10). These words in the very beginning of the novel encapsulate, as Lešić has noted, much of what Mama Leone is about on the thematic level: life and death, lying and telling the truth, remembering and forgetting.219 These components are thematised either separately or in highly complex interplay, mainly through a carnivalesque style of narration that stresses subversion, critical laughter, bodily sensation, and becoming.220

What is most important in regard to the infantile perspective in the novel is the boy’s encounter with what he continuously perceives as the lies of the adults, the kind of lies that are somehow agreed upon, the subtle play act that makes up the fabric of social conventions and seems to distance objects and events in the world from how Miljenko himself experiences them. His striking awkwardness in regard to convention is illustrated when he learns that his grandfather has passed away, and he is unsure what the proper reaction to this news is:

218 Miljenko Jergović, Mama Leone, trans. David Williams (New York, 2012), 9 (italics in original, which is the case for all examples from Mama Leone, as rejoinders are consistently italicised in the novel; hereafter ML).
Was I supposed to stop eating cakes, burst into tears, ask how he died, shake my head, and say tsk-tsk-tsk like I saw Granny Matija from Punta doing the time I peeked out from the pantry, or was I supposed to do something else, something I didn't even know about. I'm only six years old and don't have any experience with the rituals of death. (ML, 20)

Whereas the family around him seems to adhere to certain predefined rituals and phrases associated with the loss of a close relative, Miljenko is to a large extent closed off from these conventions, both because of his family's wish to spare him the news for as long as possible and because of his unwillingness to express his grief through words: 'There was nothing to say about Grandpa's death, just as there's nothing to say about anyone's death', he concludes (ML, 21).

Several months after Grandpa's death, family and friends gather at a memorial service in honour of him, and, as Miljenko quickly notices, careful arrangements have been made to make the day special. Above all the boy's attention is drawn to the fancy plates, the ceremonial cutlery, and the polished glasses that his mother (who on that day, after six months, for some reason stopped wearing black) has placed on the dinner table. He reacts strongly to the formality and accuses—in silence—the adults of hypocrisy, and especially so after he hears the phrase 'Today we remember Grandpa' (ML, 23)—as though they did not in fact remember Grandpa every single day, and as though it was necessary to put on a shirt and a tie in order to remember him. Why would they not speak about him or even mention him the rest of the time? There were traces of his existence everywhere in the house; it was impossible not to think about him all the time: '[H]is umbrella is still there by the coatrack' (ML, 23). The boy's anxiety stems from his confrontation with the fundamental discrepancy between what is de facto the case in terms of affect (the continuous sense of loss) and what is said (or not said) about this affect. It seems to him that what the adults adhere to is a conveniently too stiffened version of reality that downgrades the complexity of it in order to avoid the great amount of pain associated with death and other kinds of trauma.

221 There is a strikingly similar scene in Saša Stanišić's novel How the Solder Repairs the Gramophone (originally written in German), where the boy narrator Aleksandar faces the same problem: 'Like all others I wear black, but wearing black can't be all you have to do at a funeral, so I imitate Uncle Bora and my father in turn. When Uncle Bora bows his head, I bow mine. When Father exchanges a few words with someone, I listen to what he says and repeat the words to someone else. I scratch my stomach because Uncle Bora is scratching his own big belly. It's hot; I unbutton my shirt because Father is unbuttoning his. That's the grandson, people whisper'. Saša Stanišić, How the Solder Repairs the Gramophone, trans. Anthea Bell (New York, 2008), 20. Both passages mark the implied distance in the boys' perspective, their unfamiliarity with convention, and their vain attempt to acclimatise to it. The important difference between the books is that the boy in Mama Leone is more sceptical and malicious in his approach to the behaviour of the adults than his counterpart in Stanišić's novel, who displays a greater amount of naivety and gullibility.
Perceiving this as a widespread proneness in adults to blatant dishonesty, he reacts to it with horror and distancing suspicion: ‘I was scared of their lies. The lie is alive, I thought. It swallows up and makes everything different from what it is’ (ML, 23).

By now the extent of the differentiated character of the infantile perspective should begin to be clear. The boy in *Mama Leone* exhibits not only disagreement with the adult characters over specific issues, but a deep conflict over the fundamental perception of reality. This is most obvious in the issue of language and can be observed when the boy’s fearful alienation towards the language of the adults is replaced by a considerably more joyous and creative approach to it:

> Words flowed in cascades, gushing over the edges of the world being born, making laughter, lots of laughter, echoing through all our rooms and the biggest of all, the room under the sky the one, where we’re all still ourselves, and so speak words out of joy, words superfluous and with no connection to the world or to the pictures in which we live and which cause us pain. Only words cause no pain, in them there is no sorrow, they take nothing from us, and never leave us on our own in the darkness. (ML, 26)

Language, as described above, is unmarked by any trace of what could, somewhat simplified, be called a wish to structure, demarcate, or categorise the world; it is free from a correspondence principle, which tells us that words are valid only if they match (are in accordance with) circumstances in the world. Instead words are out in the open without any claim to fix particular boundaries in the world; they are *becoming* (flowing, gushing, being born), and they have no delimited meaning, but rather produce a sensual stimulus that lures the self away from the pain that is assumed to be hidden away in the sphere of what is unrepresentable (or at least very difficult to face). Language here is something entirely different from the adults’ stiffened, ready-made phrases, which Miljenko overhears in connection with the death of his grandfather, and which seem emptied of meaning: ‘*The good Signore Fran suffered so, may God rest his soul*’; ‘*He’s at peace now, but who knows what awaits the rest of us*’; ‘*The little one might as well be an orphan now; parents today, God save us*’ (ML, 20). If the adults’ stiffened language amounts to no more than applying commonplaces, the boy challenges it by stressing its fluidity and semantic instability.\(^{223}\)

---

\(^{222}\) Note that in the original text the first sentence in this quote reads: ‘*Plašio sam se načina na koji laž*, which literally means ‘I was scared of the way they lied’, which more distinctly stresses the adults’ conventions of lying rather than the lie itself. Miljenko Jergović, *Mama Leone* (Zagreb, 1999), 18 (my italics).  

\(^{223}\) The same goes for pictures, which lack the changing nature of actual experiences: ‘*Photos are like grown-ups because they show everything in a way that can only make you get all worried; in photos...*’
It is possible to delve further into this tension of signification in representation, but the fact that young Miljenko triggers the revelation of it in the first place is enough to draw an important conclusion about the subversive infantilisation manifested in the novel. The perspective—here primarily on the ideological level—attributed to the infantile subject is from the outset a dislocating one, which does not merely alienate and distance particular issues, but is in its totality suspicious towards everything associated with the adult world. The boy finds the most joyous activities those that can shake the fixedness and stability of words, thoughts, and perspectives. It is this distanced, ironic enjoyment that enables him to move freely and irresponsibly between different events taking/taken place and between the discourses of the adult sphere with constant reference to his own stubbornly defiant understanding of what is happening around him and what is being said. By insistently challenging convention Miljenko enables the opening up of another space, which is much less clearly defined, but can potentially make possible other modes of experience.

3.1.3 Spatial Dislocation

The dislocating feature of the child perspective is also an important element in Aleksandar Hemon’s short story ‘Islands’ from his debut book The Question of Bruno (2000). He wrote the book in English after immigrating to the US in connection with the war and has since published several internationally acclaimed works, most notably Nowhere Man (2002) and The Lazarus Project (2008). Though writing for a broad, international audience, his works often draw on local experiences from Bosnia and the Balkan region. This is certainly the case with ‘Islands’, which consists of a young boy’s thirty-some short impressions from a family holiday on the isle of Mljet on the Adriatic coast, which was a popular holiday destination for many Yugoslavs before the war as well as for people from abroad.

Igor Duda points out that in advertisements for holidays by the seaside the Croatian coast was described as ‘a fragment from the Garden of Eden, where islands and ancient cities were linked together by a golden thread of history’. In Hemon’s story, and in connection with this paradise-like image, Mljet can be regarded as a symbol of the high standard of Yugoslavian everything looks like it’ll never change, like it’ll never turn into anything else’ (ML, 89). The fact that this is not merely due to the adults’ ill-intended ways of speaking, but an inherent condition of conventional representation is shown when Miljenko says, ‘Grandma isn’t lying, I know that for sure, but I don’t believe the meaning of some words, because any word can mean what I want it to mean, just like it could to her if only she weren’t so grown-up and worried someone might punish her if a word means something to her that it doesn’t to them’ (ML, 109–10).

middle-class life, which for many included a yearly holiday by the seaside. However, what Hemon does in ‘Islands’ is to question the legitimacy of this ‘almost topical idyll’, as Beganović describes it, associated with narratives of socialist Yugoslavia. Descriptions of the paradise-like environment are mixed with stories of the boy narrator’s uncle, Julius, which tell about the horrors of Stalinist Gulag camps, and there are several omens of the destruction of the idyll, which I will get back to shortly. For now I would like to focus on the dislocating aspect of the infantilising perspective that makes this possible. This dislocating quality is quickly established in the story—just consider the following passage on the first page:

We saw the thin stocking of smoke on the horizon-thread, then the ship itself, getting bigger, slightly slanted sideways, like a child’s drawing. I had a round straw hat with all the seven dwarfs painted on it. It threw a short, dappled shadow over my face. I had to raise my head to look at the grown-ups. Otherwise, I would look at their gnarled knees, the spreading sweat-stains on their shirts and sagging wrinkles of fat on their thighs. One of the Germans, an old, bony man, got down on his knees and then puked over the pier edge. The vomit hit the surface and then dispersed in different directions, like children running away to hide from the seeker. Under the wave-throbbing ochre and maroon island of vomit, a school of aluminium fish gathered and nibbled it peevishly.

Here perspective is a visual matter. Hemon uses the boy’s hat to visually dislocate his perception and direct his attention to other, more negative features of the milieu that would normally not be accentuated, especially the less flattering details of both the behaviour and physical appearance of the characters. It has been noted that while the landscape is left untouched in the story, maintaining the idyllic representation, the characters are described with images inclined towards the grotesque. For example, this is how Uncle Julius is portrayed: ‘[H]e grinned at me, showing his pink gums with cinnabar scars. He reeked of pine cologne, but a whiff redolent of rot and decay escaped his insides and penetrated the cologne cloud’ (I, 5). His wife Lyudmila, in turn, is described as having ‘a loaf of bread with a small tubby potato in the middle, arms akimbo, her calves full of bruises and blood vessels

on the verge of bursting, ankles swollen’ (I, 6). The infantile perspective in the story, which exhibits the same alienating distance to the surroundings as the one I suggested in Jergović’s *Mama Leone*, motivates the grotesque impressions, because it entails a fundamental inexperience with—and thus, it seems, a ‘fresh look’ at—predefined representations such as ‘the idyllic Mljet’. ‘Islands’ depicts how the inexperienced child forms experiences with little regard to any fixed images that the adults might provide, and it can also in this regard be compared to *Mama Leone*, where the perceptions of the boy narrator are determined by considerable irresponsibility in regard to conventions (rituals, situation-defined discourse, and so forth).228 Predefined ‘rules’ of how to experience are not followed in either work. If one, then, understands the grotesque as an artistic device, whose main effect is to distort fixed proportions of reality,229 the grotesque elements in ‘Islands’ can be said to be a part of this inexperience, in that the child’s experience of Mljet is not yet fixed, but flexible, malleable, and unpredictable.230

Above I have stressed what I have called the dislocating quality of the infantile perspective, which makes the infantile subject structure perceptions and conceptions in such a way that they continuously come into conflict with the established rules and principles represented by the adult characters. It is this perspective that makes the child character interact with the surroundings in such a way that the conventions are not only made discernible, but also skewed, resulting in effects of estrangement and thus the opportunity to question their legitimacy.

What is most often upheld as a subversive quality in this type of child character is its attention to and estrangement of representations associated with dominant discourse—some of which I address in the following section—but the dislocating infantile perspective is equally actualised in the most immediate surroundings. By looking at descriptions of the child’s most immediate sphere, as I have done above, it becomes clear just how deep-set the critique of the infantile subject is made out to be, and the extent of the expectations placed by the author on its critical power.

228 A visually dislocating perspective is also important in *Mama Leone*. An illustrative example is the boy Miljenko’s idea about the world as the most beautiful ‘when it’s turned upside down’ (ML, 107), and his favourite game is when Uncle Momčilo grabs him by the ankles and lifts him up and gives him ‘a little joggle so I can see what it’s like when sky and earth quake’ (ML, 108).


230 In the context of Russian-Jewish literature after the Second World War, in which the child character has an important place, Hetényi argues that this type of open, becoming experience of the child character ‘is not only due to a lack of necessary background knowledge or practical information, but also because his or her character is still unstable’; the child lacks the developed ‘hierarchy of values’ that the adults possess. Zsuzsa Hetényi, *In a Maelstrom: The History of Russian-Jewish Prose (1860–1940)* (Budapest, 2008), 233.
3.2 Focus on History

The perspective found in the child’s encounter with its immediate surroundings is not much different from the perspective actualised in encounters with events and other phenomena in the broader social context. In many respects, the former provides the rationale for the latter. The emphasis, for instance, on family members’ conventional and rigid use of language soon translates into criticism of the hegemonic uses of language in society. Although the focus on experiences most near to the child is a characteristic and essential part of infantile discourse, it is the child’s treatment of social narratives that are most interesting for my purposes, as it can reveal the social and political critique of subversive infantilisation.

My intention is not simply to look at how child characters respond to dominant narratives in society, though, but rather to see how they do so from a position that mixes the private and the social. I suggest that when child characters address social issues they do so from a perspective that is strongly tied to their position in the most immediate sphere of life. That is to say that, as a rule, they remain within the family walls and respond to the surrounding society only as it appears in everyday life. The child character does not leave the private sphere to occupy the public sphere, on the contrary: Society, and traumatic historical events in particular, are generally depicted as intruding upon the safety of everyday life. In order to analyse how this is manifested I maintain focus on the works of Jergović and Hemon already discussed, while also mentioning examples from other works, which are representative of the role played by the infantile perspective in the representation of society and history through subversive infantilisation.231

3.2.1 Two Sides of Socialism

In ‘Islands’ the grotesque, which, as shown above, allows for inconsistencies to emerge in the standard idyllic representation, is significant in the representation and challenging of Yugoslavia’s socialist history. Besides being signified by the trip to Mljet as a symbol of prosperity, socialism is alluded to on a number of occasions. Ironically, considering the paradise-like destination, the story starts with the boy singing morbid communist songs in the family car

---

231 Both Jergović and Hemon are well known for treating the correlation between the private and the social in their works, and both are influenced thematically and stylistically by the Yugoslav writer Danilo Kiš, who dealt extensively with issues of historiography and historical truth. Stephen M. Dickey, ‘Introduction’, in Miljenko Jergović, The Walnut Mansion (New Haven, 2015); Andrew Wachtel, ‘The Legacy of Danilo Kiš in Post-Yugoslav Literature’, The Slavic and East European Journal, 50/1 (2006). See also Zink, ‘Land in Bewegung’. Hemon’s stories have been said to ‘braid the fictitious with the historical, embedding history within fictions, fictions within history, to produce a metafiction that subverts the standard categories of both history and identity’. Michelle Levy, “‘Brotherly Wounds’: Representations of Balkan Conflict in Contemporary Balkan Literature’, World Literature Today, 75/1 (2001), 72. This is equally true of Jergović’s oeuvre.
all the way from Sarajevo to the coast: ‘songs about mournful mothers looking through graves for their dead sons; songs about the revolution, steaming and steely, like a locomotive; songs about striking miners burying their dead comrades’ (I, 3). Quickly the reader is introduced to two images of socialism, which make up a tension that exists throughout the story: one of prosperous modernity and one of the social hardships resulting from industrial progress and a narrow ideological framework.

Nature, which is continually described as heaven on earth, is interrupted by Uncle Julius’ anecdotes from his time at the Arkhangelsk camp in the Soviet Union in the 1940s. The boy learns that at one point his uncle’s ‘job was to dig big graves in the thawing ground, take the dead to the grave on a large cart and then stuff them into the grave. Fifty per grave was the prescribed amount. Sometimes he had to stamp on the top of the gravedload to get more space and meet the plan’ (I, 10). In the previous section I showed how the grotesque physical appearance and behaviour of the adult characters break with the idyllic descriptions of nature; here the grotesque recollections of Stalinism have the same function. Even though it is not Yugoslav socialism per se that is in question here, but Soviet Stalinism, the Yugoslav narratives appropriated by the boy in his singing in the beginning of the story (notice the parallel between the graves in the Yugoslav song and in Uncle Julius’ account) are necessarily implied in the criticism. One can also keep in mind the Yugoslav government’s initial affinity to Stalin and its implementation of Stalinist political and economic principles until Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948. In addition, the Gulag oppression in Hemon’s story certainly alludes to the ruthless ideological foundation—what Zink in this context calls the ‘problematischen Gründungsmythos’—on which Yugoslavia was built, and which, among other things, led to mass imprisonment of those who would not conform to the new ideological order.232 Also, it is difficult not to think of the Yugoslavian equivalent to the Gulag camps, for instance the prison camp on the island of Goli otok, which was one of the most gruesome aspects of the socialist regime in Yugoslavia.233

Hemon’s critique rests on the tension between the underlying hellish connotations to Goli otok and the paradisiac representations of Mljet. The juxtaposition of these two opposite images works to question the solidity of the idealised image of society, which, according to dominant discourse at the time, was purported to be solid and stable, prosperous for most of the population, and peaceful in most senses of the word. Alcalay has rightly called this ‘the illusion of stability created by Tito’.234 The erosion of the socialist idyll is constructed in a similar fashion in Jergović’s Mama Leone. For the

232 Zink, ‘‘Land in Bewegung’’, 96.
most part the author depicts the world of the boy narrator as a carefree and safe milieu, where he is allowed to explore without any greater risks than reprimands from his loving mother and grandmother. This is nostalgically remembered: ‘We lived from one special occasion to the next in a happy and ordered world, sometimes sick with feverish kids’ sickness and sometimes with serious grown-up ones, in a world in which everything had its place and moment in time’ (ML, 61). The recollection is tied not only to the safety of the family sphere, but to society at large, in which ‘every day had its place in the calendar and time in the seasons, that we would never think that we were alone and abandoned, forsaken like the faraway countries we heard about on the radio’ (ML, 62).

However, order, safety, and social stability are punctured by life stories that are usually repressed, but at times brought to the surface. Jergović, as Zink puts it, ‘sketches the neuralgic trigger points in the political unity’, addressing essential aspects of the history of Yugoslavia.236 One such sensitive point is actualised in the case of Auntie Doležal’s husband Jucika, who was killed at Jasenovac, an Ustasha camp, during the Second World War, and of whom no one dares to talk, except Auntie herself:

she always talked about him as if he were alive, as if he was going to appear on the doorstep in about half an hour, so I felt like I knew Jucika too, and wouldn’t have been in the least surprised if he had actually shown up and said I’m home and Auntie Doležal had again baked him five cakes for this habitation thing. (ML, 68; italics in original)

The memory of Jucika is as concrete as it can get: He is manifested all but in the flesh and works as a tangible reminder of the hidden, darker aspects of the ideology supporting everyday life in Yugoslavia, aspects that, if aired, disprove the imagined societal stability and unity. The fundamental carnivalesque suspicion in the boy noticed earlier in the chapter is suggested here too, and it allows him—in a sense—to disregard the distinction between life and death. It seems that young Miljenko’s childishly imaginative approach to the taboo, in some sense, manages to bring Jucika back from the dead (and back from the amnesia of history).

It is interesting how Miljenko relates to these types of hidden stories or discourses. Fundamentally, the infantile approach here is influenced by an outsider’s position, which basically means that Miljenko, being the child that he is, is consistently kept out of the discourse and knowledge of the adults. This seems to be so mainly because the adults around him believe that he understands too little about the world and want to spare him memories of

235 For more on Jergović’s treatment of nostalgia in Mama Leone, see Cynthia Simmons, ‘Miljenko Jergović and (Yugo)nostalgia’, Russian Literature, 66/4 (2009).

trauma that family members have experienced. The story in *Mama Leone* focusses on the boy’s hard-earned, but still very partial access to the discourse and knowledge of the adults and his struggle to assemble memories of the often traumatic past, which is what interests Miljenko the most, eager as he is to discover and preserve the life stories of his late relatives. Lešić has argued that one of the most important functions of this child narrator, who lacks any substantial familiarity with the adult world, but desperately tries to put the pieces together, is his ability to offer an alternate and revealing perspective on a number of processes of traumatic personal and cultural memory, and, I would add, a range of other issues. Focussing on the metonymic pieces of the discourse of the adults that he gathers (often from overhearing others talking or actively investigating), he is able to put them together in an unorthodox way. The outsider position is actualised in Hemon’s story as well, in that every piece of information he obtains about instances of socialist oppression he receives indirectly, through his uncle’s remarkable, and hyperbolic, anecdotes.

Destabilisation is achieved in other ways too, for instance by attacking the perhaps biggest symbol of socialist unity there was—Tito. In ‘Islands’ the picture of a smiling Tito is referred to several times, as omens, signalling hollowness or desertedness. The first thing the boy notices at the hotel is ‘the sonorous chill of a large stone-walled hall. There was a reception desk, but nobody behind it, and a smiling Tito picture over the numbered cubbyhole shelf’ (I, 17). This almost gothic mood is reiterated in another passage:

There was an aerial picture of a winding island (Mljet, it said in the lower right corner) and a picture of Comrade Tito, smiling, black-and-white, on the opposite wall. Below the window, the floor was dotted with mosquitoes—with a large green-glittering fly or a bee here and there—still stricken by the surprise. When I moved towards them, the wisp caused by my motion made them ripple away from me, as if retreating, wary of another surprise. (I, 7)

It is the discrepancy between the image of Tito smiling and the fateful atmosphere of a deserted room that signifies the inability of the communist narratives (with their claim of gluing society together) to respond to issues in society that became pressing during the 1980s. Considering this conflict with its somewhat violent undertones—the insects die suddenly, it is suggested, as if taken by surprise—the story is probably set in the late 1980s or early 1990s, when nationalisms in Yugoslavia became more and more aggressive, and the pluralist Yugoslav identity created by the communists lost its legitimacy. The final omen is found at the very end, when the family returns to their home in Sarajevo. The neighbour who had been responsible for watching over their cat

---

237 Lešić-Thomas, ‘Jergović’s Art of Memory’, 441.
had died suddenly, and the cat had gone ‘nearly mad’ without food for more than a week: ‘I would call her, but she wouldn’t come to me, she would just look at me with irreversible hatred’ (I, 20).

Though its environment is most often limited to the enclosed sphere of the family or the near neighbourhood, the child character repeatedly encounters, as shown above, aspects that come from beyond this circle, that is, from society as such. Even if the family to some extent shields the young one from the gravity of the world, society is sooner or later bound to penetrate these walls. A point in both *Mama Leone* and ‘Islands’ is that certain hidden aspects of history cannot in the end be suppressed. For obvious reasons, the influence of history becomes more acute when the violence foreboded in Hemon’s short story finally becomes a fact and war breaks out in Yugoslavia. Not only does history affect the child character and its family; the child also focusses much of its attention on describing, decoding, and ultimately challenging surrounding events and their underlying ideological mechanisms.

### 3.2.2 Parallel Transitions

The child’s sudden confrontation with war is a theme found in a number of works, and I devote the rest of this chapter to saying something about this aspect. When war penetrates the safe sphere of everyday life the separation between the private sphere and society becomes less clear. Goran Samardžić’s short story ‘The Haircut’ (‘Šišanje’) from the book *Sikamora*, for instance, begins with the rather cryptic words: ‘Then the war started, so suddenly that only children could understand it’. Through the eyes of a boy called Halid, the story portrays the experience of the outbreak of the war and the loss of a father, who is one day taken away by soldiers and killed. Standing by his father’s lifeless body, Halid is unable to match his mother’s violent crying and realises that he is about to lose his last opportunity to show his father how much he cares for him. He closes his eyes and remembers a joyful episode in which his mother cuts her husband’s hair, and he himself, in worship of his father, collects and saves the fallen hair. Suddenly his mother accidently cuts her husband’s ear, which makes him burst out, swearing. The father, however, quickly notices the terrified look on Halid’s face and picks him up, comforting him, assuring that Mother did not mean to hurt him, that she was only joking. ‘Then everybody started laughing. The sun then lighted up the room. It urged them to be as happy as they possibly could. Somewhere in the distance, sounding like someone taking a bite of an apple, he heard shooting. The first shooting in their lifetime’.

The remembrance is an escapist wish to save his father from any harm done to him, a wish that his death was one of those things you could laugh away. However, it includes also the distant, but unmistaken signal of the.

---

238 Goran Samardžić, ‘Šišanje’, in *Sikamora* (Sarajevo, 1997), 45 (my translation).
intrusion of war into the safety of the family. The circular narrative revolves around this intrusion and frames it as a defining point, which denies anything beyond itself: If the remembrance works as an escape, it only leads back to the day that Halid’s father was killed. One can recall a similar strategy in Alma Lazarevska’s famous short story ‘Death in the Museum of Modern Art’ (‘Smrt u muzeju moderne umjetnosti’), in which a woman in besieged Sarajevo, who is asked by an American artist how she would prefer to die, is triggered to remember an intricate series of episodes related to the concept of death, which are characterised by her own very intricate personal experience of the concept. While in the case of Lazarevska’s story this results in an emancipating act that refuses any imposed definition of the concept, the boy’s escape in ‘The Haircut’ only falls back on itself, repeating the moment of trauma in a devastating loop.

This can illustrate the great impact and central role of the intrusion of war in this text as well as in others that employ infantile discourse. War proves to be an end point for what has once been. In Samardžić’s story this means the end of a family and the love and safety associated with it, but also the loss of a historical and social continuum that Yugoslav society had provided, and which had enabled a decent and acceptable way of life. We know that the turn of events in history partly tells another story, because many people at the end of the era found the Yugoslavian project illegitimate and unable to provide these things, but many texts nonetheless (without ignoring its problems) emphasise this era as a positive one, especially in contrast to the time following it. This also goes for texts that are much more idyllic (or lack the anti-idyll) in their descriptions of socialist Yugoslavia than those by Hemon and Jergović mentioned earlier, texts such as Nedžad Ibrahimović’s Encapsulated Bodies (Inkapsulirana tijela), Bekim Sejranović’s Nowhere, Nowhere from (Nigdje, niotkuda), and Goran Samardžić’s The Forest Spirit (Šumski duh), which all stress a joyous and carefree childhood in contrast to adulthood during and after the war.

The war as a break is very vivid in Samardžić’s novel The Forest Spirit. In the first half of the novel Samardžić portrays the carefree socialist years of adolescence of the multi-ethnic narrator Kosta, whose life consists of hanging out with friends, chasing girls, and looking for kicks. The second half, however, starts with Kosta’s return to Belgrade after serving in the JNA shortly before the war and his realising that his predominantly Serbian friends (and the entire social climate) had changed while he was away. This transition between ‘paradigms’ is central in the story and takes place right at the time, in the late 1980s, when nationalism increasingly gained in strength in parts of Yugoslavia and became such a vital part of the mentality of a considerable

---

240 The war becomes a determinating factor for the perception of the 45 years of the socialist system. It seems impossible for a piece of literature published after the war to describe such a thing as growing up in Yugoslavia in the 1960s or 1970s without the signification being determined by the end of this era, however implicitly.
part of the population, resulting above all in ethnic seclusionism and inter-ethnic animosity. Kosta encounters what he perceives as a sudden ideological awakening in his friends, with which he is ultimately unfamiliar and has difficulties understanding. This difficulty of understanding the new tendencies springs not from his conviction of the superiority of the pluralist socialist ideology, but simply from the apolitical consciousness that characterised his childhood and adolescence. His support for Yugoslavia is, as he says, based on ‘sheer egoism, and not from the conviction that different peoples from different places have to agree’. Yugoslavia is good enough if it provides security and a decent life. Again, even though it is at times noted that it was far from idyllic, Yugoslavia is for the most part associated with peace, stability, and the carefreeness associated with childhood.

In *The Forest Spirit*, as in other works, there is an intimate parallel between the process of growing up and the history of Yugoslavia. Being closely tied to the socialist period, childhood here ends at the point in time when Yugoslavia collapses. Childhood is thus paralleled to the Yugoslav period. The war is a threshold between childhood and adulthood that breaks the continuity of life in socialism/childhood, causing deep disillusion and forcing the child character to both reevaluate the conditions of life (and survival) and mobilise a response accordingly. In the second half of the novel—after the outbreak of the war—Kosta flees to his home town Sarajevo, where he experiences the siege. The carefree memories of growing up are replaced by concerns about how to adapt and survive, leaving aside much of the infantile perspective that characterised the first part of the book. In a similar fashion, the second half of *Mama Leone* begins with the outbreak of the war, with the ‘day a childhood story ended’ (ML, 227), and cuts with the perspective of young Miljenko and instead tells disparate stories about the war from an adult perspective. Both novels distinguish in the most explicit way possible between the time before and after the war started. A similar distinction is made in Bekim Sejranić’s novel *Nowhere, Nowhere from*, which portrays a safe and happy childhood, which during the war is transformed into a deep sense of rootlessness and crisis of identity in life in the diaspora.

We also see the theme of war as a break in history in the 2011 novel *Ukulele Jam* written by Alen Mešković (originally in Danish), which tells the story of a boy in his early teenage years, Miki, and his experiences of life in a refugee camp in Croatia, where he and his parents end up shortly after the war breaks out. His beloved brother Neno, though, went missing after some turns of events in a Serbian detention camp. There is a dramatic chapter in the book that illustratively condenses the motif of the war as rupture:

---

It was summer, the summer of 1992, which Adi and I had looked forward to so much. We would finally finish elementary school, turn fifteen, and start to go out in the town’s nightlife. I would learn to drive, impress Nina with Neno as my passenger and the driving instructor at my side. Neno would finally come home. Dad would enjoy his retirement. But now, when summer had finally arrived, all of us together stood—Dad, Neno, Adi, his father, his brother and about twenty others—with our hands behind our backs and with our foreheads against a wall waiting to be shot.\footnote{Alen Mešković, \textit{Ukulele Jam} (Copenhagen, 2011), 165 (my translation).}

The men and boys are not shot, though, but moved by bus to another camp, but it is clear enough to Miki that he is at this point deprived of the continuity of his life as he knows it, and that he will never be able to return to it. It is precisely the teenager’s perspective that stresses the scope of loss. In this case and in those mentioned above the war is a rupture in the familiar and what has so far been considered normal. The infantile perspective enhances the impression of the suddenness as well as the magnitude of this event, producing skewed and ‘shocking’ representations of it that can present these aspects in a suggestive and new way, paving the way for the questioning of aspects that were once held to be true. I showed above how this includes above all issues of identity, where the Yugoslav project, once thought to be solid and legitimate, is eroded, allowing instead signification based on ethnic difference to flourish and determine almost every corner of personal and social life.

I suggested earlier in this chapter that the infantile perspective is basically a lens through which issues are revaluated, and which destabilises conventional, naturalised representations associated with dominant discourses. With respect to history, the use of this lens is probably most evident in the attempt to intertwine historical events and individual experiences and especially to reveal the full impact of the intrusion of war into the normalcy of life, suggesting also the war as a point of origin and a determinant for almost any kind of experience: Any experience can be traced back to the point at which nothing was any longer the same. It is certainly a way of shifting focus from the grand historical narratives to the small, intimate stories of individual lives, a strategy used to reconfigure the viewpoint and proportions of the images of reality usually provided by dominant discourse. As a frame for reconfiguration, it proves to be an essential technique, which serves as the point of departure for most, if not all, attempts to interrogate dominant discourse. It is, in other words, an integrated part of the other techniques, and the following chapters will surely prove that. However, it is also important to see it as a tool in its own right, which, even in cases when no other interrogating technique is involved, is able to change emphases in how experiences are perceived and formulated. The infantile perspective always
entails a shift in perspective and is as such not only a manifestation of dissent, but also a hint of the potentiality of alternative articulations of reality that are able to evade the problematic and even oppressive structures in the symbolic repertoire that has been and still is the standard in Bosnia.

It was summer, the summer of 1992, which Adi and I had looked forward to so much. We would finally finish elementary school, turn fifteen, and start to go out in the town's nightlife. I would learn to drive, impress Nina with Neno as my passenger and the driving instructor at my side. Neno would finally come home. Dad would enjoy his retirement. But now, when summer had finally arrived, all of us together stood—Dad, Neno, Adi, his father, his brother and about twenty others—with our hands behind our backs and with our foreheads against a wall waiting to be shot.

The men and boys are not shot, though, but moved by bus to another camp, but it is clear enough to Miki that he is at this point deprived of the continuity of his life as he knows it, and that he will never be able to return to it. It is precisely the teenager's perspective that stresses the scope of loss. In this case and in those mentioned above the war is a rupture in the familiar and what has so far been considered normal. The infantile perspective enhances the impression of the suddenness as well as the magnitude of this event, producing skewed and 'shocking' representations of it that can present these aspects in a suggestive and new way, paving the way for the questioning of aspects that were once held to be true.

I showed above how this includes above all issues of identity, where the Yugoslav project, once thought to be solid and legitimate, is eroded, allowing instead signification based on ethnic difference to flourish and determine almost every corner of personal and social life.

I suggested earlier in this chapter that the infantile perspective is basically a lens through which issues are revaluated, and which destabilises conventional, naturalised representations associated with dominant discourses. With respect to history, the use of this lens is probably most evident in the attempt to intertwine historical events and individual experiences and especially to reveal the full impact of the intrusion of war into the normalcy of life, suggesting also the war as a point of origin and a determinant for almost any kind of experience: Any experience can be traced back to the point at which nothing was any longer the same. It is certainly a way of shifting focus from the grand historical narratives to the small, intimate stories of individual lives, a strategy used to reconfigure the viewpoint and proportions of the images of reality usually provided by dominant discourse. As a frame for reconfiguration, it proves to be an essential technique, which serves as the point of departure for most, if not all, attempts to interrogate dominant discourse. It is, in other words, an integrated part of the other techniques, and the following chapters will surely prove that. However, it is also important to see it as a tool in its own right, which, even in cases when no other interrogating technique is involved, is able to change emphases in how experiences are perceived and formulated. The infantile perspective always...
4 Dichotomisation

After distinguishing the characteristics of the infantile perspective in the previous chapter, one aspect of subversive infantilisation comes across as essential and in demand of closer attention. I am referring to the conflict that exists between the child’s perspective and approach to the world and the grown characters’ entirely different or even opposite ways of understanding the world and acting in it. While conflict is common to all types of subversive infantilisation, it is conceptualised and used on different levels in the texts, depending on what particular technique is employed by the author. In the present chapter I deal with the technique of dichotomisation, which is the most explicit in regard to conflict. Dichotomisation here means the straightforward clash or collision between two autonomous and opposite positions: on the one hand the infantile subject, and on the other either of the ‘others’ usually targeted (the nationalist, the Westerner, or the Titoist). By comparison to the techniques I address in the following chapters, which are set on producing at least momentarily blurred hierarchies (social, moral, epistemic), the more overtly dichotomisation technique keeps positions apart and does not allow the breaking up of boundaries, as would be the case, for instance, for a device such as parodic stylisation.

The texts discussed in this chapter are all characterised by a degree of the ‘provoking ignorance’ usually associated with the child character, which has the ability to produce ‘a polemical failure to understand generally accepted and inveterately false languages with their lofty labels for things and events’. I believe this is a good description of the process through which the child’s incomprehension is utilised to initiate revaluations of conventional ways of understanding specific issues, leading to the creation of conceptual

---


distance to the discourse in the encountered representation. But it is usually not a matter of simply presenting the other’s discourse as incomprehensible and rejecting it on that basis. Instead, the attacked discourse is often unfolded in the child’s genuine attempt to get its head around it, and incomprehension becomes a seemingly accidental way of revealing its soft spots.

While recognising that there are potentially a number of ways in which one could approach the dichotomisation technique, I have chosen to discuss a few important ways that reoccur in the texts. The most used way is the one where the infantile subject either cannot understand the other’s discourse (because it is inconsistent) or simply refuses to acknowledge its legitimacy (because it is immoral). In this case effects of estrangement are created by contrasting the simple, clear, and to-the-point observations made by the child character with the often obscure and forced adult logic. In the following I discuss a few cases in Saša Stanišić’s debut novel, How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone (originally published in German in 2006), and more specifically the situation in which the young boy narrator experiences the culmination of the nationalist discourse in the early 1990s. I also discuss Veličković’s Lodgers, where the narrator Maja tries to get her head around the reasons for the war and for the passive response of the international community. Also in Lodgers I discuss another variation which, instead of creating an outright refusal, produces aporic situations, which, however, also end up negating the targeted discourse.

Yet another way in which the authors create dichotomic situations where the child challenges adult discourse is dialogue, in which the child’s simple logic, again seemingly without effort, undoes the laws by which the world of the adults is ordered. Here the child character can either be a passive character working as a projection screen for the adult counterpart, or it can be an active subject who triggers critical effects by its own hand. I limit my illustration of issues related to dialogue to examples from a work by Veličković, namely his 2000 novel My Daughter’s Father (Otac moje kćeri), which relies heavily on the dialogues between the adult narrator and his young daughter to produce social criticism.

4.1 Incomprehension

Stanišić’s novel How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone follows the first-person narrator Aleksandar Krsmcanović over a long period of time: from his childhood in Višegrad and the time shortly before the war over Aleksandar’s escape from the war and refuge in Germany (similar to that of the writer himself) to his homecoming and search for roots in eastern Bosnia. It has been pointed out that while we can presume that the story is a reconstruction assembled by a narrator in his twenties, stylistically it rests on seemingly spontaneous impressions associated with the diary form (despite not being written in the diary form), which enables the encapsulation of the
transformation in perception that the narrator undergoes in the course of the narrative. For our purposes, this style of writing means putting the narrator as close to the unfolding events as possible. In the beginning of the book—

which is characterised by what Previšić calls *Pseudokindlichkeit*—this means that the narrator is placed within the frame of the infantile perspective, with its accent on the strong corporeal anchoring in the spatiotemporally present situation, the physical limitations that go with it, and the unique infantile perspective determining the perception of the surrounding world. The novel is also characterised by a high degree of childish imagination, spontaneity, and a high-tempo criss-crossing between episodes, as Stanišić’s boy narrator functions as a ‘naïve and playful commuter between diverse personal, social, economic, and political histories’.

In this context Aleksandar is given the role of a witness of the war as a break in history. This motif was addressed in the previous chapter, but I would like to approach it from a slightly different angle here. While I focussed upon the child character’s perception of this kind of traumatic event in chapter 3, I will now direct my attention to the issue of how the child actually formulates a response to such an event. The idea is to show how Aleksandar’s infantile reasoning is able to produce an interrogation of this discourse by creating a dichotomic conflict based on his inability to fully understand it.

The episode of interest here is a key moment in the novel and it starts with a party held in honour of Aleksandar’s uncle, Miki, who is off to military service the next day. The party brings together the residents of the village of Veletovo, which is located on the very border of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, at the time two republics in a common Yugoslav federation (the plot is set in the early 1990s). Stanišić vibrantly portrays the meticulous preparations, the meals and decorations, and the colourful villagers, who, though not unaware of the recent political developments (the culmination of nationalist rhetoric and militarisation), manage to keep those affairs at a distance. Some time into the party, however, this changes, as a sudden roar interrupts the party. The reader is made aware of this from the frog’s point of view of Kamenko, a friend of Uncle Miki, holding a gun to the trumpeter, shouting, and asking for an explanation for the insistence on the Turkish cultural influence in the food (*baklava*, *kaymak*, *börek*) and the music (folk song genre called *sevdah*) sung by the guests. ‘Are we in Veletovo or are we in Istanbul?’

---


he goes on to ask. ‘Are we decent folk or are we gypsies? You ought to be singing the praises of our kings and heroes, our battles, the great Serbian state’.248

The name Kamenko jokingly alludes to the cartoon character Barney Rubble in *The Flintstones*, who was called Barni Kamenko in the Serbo-Croatian translation, implying an image of the non-budging nationalist hardliner as a caveman. Kamenko has grown a large full beard and sewn a badge of the double-headed eagle onto his cap (HSRG, 45), both well-known symbols of the nationalist Chetnik movement in the Second World War, which was once again being celebrated by some, when Serb nationalism peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In the blink of an eye Kamenko’s violent threat reveals the tension pulsating underneath the happy-go-lucky exterior and forces the guests to pick sides and position themselves. Interestingly, the scenario is familiar to Aleksandar, who draws a parallel to his school: ‘Sides are taken, you belong or you don’t belong, suddenly the veranda is like the school yard where Vukoje nicknamed Worm asked me: what are you really? The question sounded like trouble, and I didn’t know the right answer’ (HSRG, 50). Even though Aleksandar is vaguely familiar with the sides to choose from (he has read about them in history class), he is left perplexed by the demand of the school bully:

that question from Vukoje Worm in the school yard, I thought it was a threat and I thought my mother’s explanation was a joke. I’m a mixture. I’m half and half. There was everyone in the school yard wondering how I could be something so vague, there were discussions about whose blood is stronger in your body, male or female, and me wishing I could be something not so vague, or a made-up thing that Vukoje Worm didn’t know about, or maybe something he couldn’t laugh at, a German autobahn, a flying horse that drinks wine, a shot in the throat of a house. (HSRG, 51)

Matthes and Williams point out that Aleksandar has basically taken his supranational Yugoslav identity for granted up to this point, following especially the ideas of his communist grandfather (who passes away in the beginning of the book).249 It becomes clear that Aleksandar has not given his own ethnicity any thought whatsoever; he has had no reason to do so, as this was a downplayed factor in the collective Yugoslav identity. When confronted with ethnicity as a suddenly central determinant in regard to identity, Aleksandar has no idea of what to do. It is the ethnicist model of thought (either you are this or you are that) that complicates things for him, primarily

---


because he is a 'mixture', a child from a 'mixed marriage' (with a Serbian father and a Bosniak mother), which makes him indefinable and difficult to deal with for the other children at school.

Despite Aleksandar’s strong affiliation with Yugoslav identity, his response is not an immediate refusal of this ‘new’ nationalist way of thinking, quite the opposite. Aleksandar is anxious to meet the demands of Vukoje Worm and wishes he was something more concrete and tangible than what the category of ‘Yugoslav’ can offer. Thus, the most apparent conflict in the passage, that between ideologies, quickly loses any relevance for a critique of the nationalist insistence on a clear-cut, unambiguous ethnic identity. The more interesting conflict is found in Aleksandar’s genuine (but to the reader quite ironic) attempt to understand what is demanded of him and how he can meet these demands and his subsequent failure to do so. Even though Aleksandar tries to bridge the gap between himself and the other children’s strict, ethnicist way of determining identity, the overall impression of his encounter, viewed from the perspective of the reader, is oppositional conflict. By not letting Aleksandar understand the situation and adapt to it, Stanišić creates a dichotomy between the nationalist dogma and the complex composition of his own personal identity. In this opposition the ethnicist discourse appears to provide a formula that is unable to explain actual empirical circumstances in the world, a formula which, in Aleksandar’s mind, would be more accepting towards a piece of German Autobahn than a half-and-half Bosnian. This is very much the point of the dichotomy created by Aleksandar’s naïve approach to the issue: to underscore the rigidity of the dominant ethnonationalist discourse, which in its aggressive insistence on squeezing a complex world through a narrow template leads to the exclusion of the individual. The boy comes to represent a large number of individuals who in the time preceding the war found themselves in a situation of uncertainty and disorientation vis-à-vis a more and more widespread and aggressive nationalist discourse. The parallel the boy makes to the schoolyard, where the children have obviously been influenced by the nationalist discourse, is a signal of just how far-reaching the ethnonationalist ideas were.

The criticism produced from this situation is not something Aleksandar is aware of or is actively seeking. His sense of humour is striking, but he is obviously not a deliberate ironist, oblivious as he is to the mechanisms of the discourse into which he so desperately tries to fit. However, the critical edge is discernible for the reader, and the discrepancy between the non-understanding narrator and the reader, who is informed of the historical context of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the 1990s military conflict, loads the episode with sentiment and gives the description of it a twist that further adds to its rhetorical power. The child’s infantile, unconventional treatment of this issue makes the reader more attentive to the conceptual brutality of nationalist discourse than he or she would be if it had been told, as it usually is, in the language of history books or mass media. In this context Monika Spielmann’s
observation is telling: A child character’s acceptance of—and even adaption to—certain problematic conditions can have a ‘shock effect’ on the reader, whose preconfigured expectations are challenged. The curious and somewhat carefree description of Aleksandar’s situation, which downplays or normalises an exceptional historical scenario, manages through the very impression of normalisation to make it even more exceptional and affective.

The same sort of shock effect is created in a moving episode in Semedzin Mehmedinović’s Sarajevo Blues. The short text ‘Stocking Hat’ describes how on a Sunday afternoon, after football practice, the trolley that the (adult) narrator is riding is stopped by a gang of criminals wearing stockings on their heads and armed with Kalashnikovs. To his great surprise, the narrator recognises one of the perpetrators as his friend Šljuka, who had missed football that day and is now refusing to acknowledge his identity, when he is asked if it really is him. The story thematises the seemingly overnight metamorphosis in people’s—even friends’—personalities, transforming kind, ordinary people (often without much interest in politics) into violent aggressors ready to commit heinous crimes in the name of ideology. Indeed, this is reflected in Stanišić’s novel, too, where Kamenko’s political conviction and outburst at the party take the others by surprise—why would a man whose partisan grandfather fought the Chetniks in the Second World War feel inclined to support the Chetniks in a new conflict?

Mehmedinović goes on to ask much the same question about one of the leading Bosnian Serb nationalists, Radovan Karadžić, whom Mehmedinović, like many others in the cultural sphere, knew, and who, according to Mehmedinović, had in the years before the war seemingly undergone a fundamental change, even in physiognomy. Shortly before the war Karadžić proposed a model for an apartheid-like segregation of Sarajevo. He infamously argued that it was impossible for the nations to live together and expressed a wish to put up a wall to divide Sarajevo into ethnic sectors, of which the Serbian part would be the largest, while non-Serbs would be cramped into a small part in the east of the city. In this connection, his fellow party member Biljana Plavšić stated that Muslims ‘like to live on top of one another. It’s their culture. We Serbs need space’. Mehmedinović reacts to Karadžić’s change in character by saying that ‘Karadžić spouted such blatant lies that, in a rage, I found a book of his children’s poetry—There Are Miracles, There Are No Miracles, and began ripping it apart’ (SB, 14–15). It is at this point that his son is introduced:

---

250 Spielmann, Augen des Kindes, 224.
My son protested so much (he actually threw a fit before my eyes, even though he himself was scared watching the news), that I stopped, somewhat bewildered. I started taping together the ripped pages, to calm down a little boy whose world was being destroyed by grown-ups, a fact he refused to acknowledge. My son knew the author of this book, and he couldn’t let himself believe such a man would want to harm him. (SB, 15)

The infantile point of view, manifested in the son’s fierce refusal to believe that the author of the children’s book could turn out to be a ruthless and dangerous man, does not actually create the dichotomy that already exists between the metamorphosed nationalist and the unsuspecting author Mehmedinović. Rather, the child character only underscores the unbelievable character of the metamorphosis by ‘insisting’ on notrationally comprehending and, thus, not accepting the change in Karadžić. While the father reacts in anger to the situation, his son refuses to accept it as possible. Again, the child’s protective gesture towards the book may seem ‘shocking’, but is in the larger context of the text in line with Mehmedinović’s message and adds an affective layer to the issue.

By using infantile discourse to create dichotomic scenarios that intensify problematic aspects in the target discourse, neither Stanišić nor Mehmedinović reveal or introduce ‘new’ objects, issues, or other phenomena related to Bosnian ethnonationalism and the war. Themes such as ‘sudden nationhood’, people’s political preferences and general attitude to their fellow Yugoslavs, and the stark rigidity of the nationalist discourse have fascinated and recurred abundantly in all sorts of accounts. Instead, what the authors aim for is to challenge the habitual perception and understanding of these issues by creating an estranging experience that deepens both their conceptual and emotional dimensions.

4.1.1 Aporia
An author who has frequently relied on creating dichotomies is Nenad Veličković, and the technique is especially important in Lodgers. In the following I discuss what I argue is a variation of dichotomic infantilisation, which is slightly different from those addressed above, as it is based on aporic reasoning. Like in Stanišić’s novel, it implies an attempt by the child character to understand the other’s discourse. What distinguishes it from other instances, however, is the aporia that results from such an attempt, and which from the point of view of the child character leaves issues undecidable.

After a few pages introducing the setting and the main characters, Lodgers addresses the issue of precisely what sort of thinking led to the war, and in what terms the war can best be described. In the following quote Maja boils down the cause of the war.
The war is being waged between Serbs, Croats, and Muslims. Davor says that the war is being waged because the Croats have Croatia, the Serbs have Serbia, but the Muslims don’t have Muslimia. Everyone thinks it would be right for them to have it, but no one can agree where the borders should be. Dad says that Davor is a dunce and that the war is being waged because the Serbs and Croats want to divide Bosnia and kill and drive out the Muslims. I don’t know what to say. [...] 
No! I don’t think I’ll be able to explain objectively and impartially to an average foreign reader why war is being waged. Probably, like all wars, it’s about taking territory and plunder. But I can’t think of a probably for why a city of half a million inhabitants should be bombarded day after day from the surrounding hills. Why would anyone (in our case the Serbian artillery) destroy houses, burn libraries, and shatter minarets and the poplars planted around them?  

Asking her family members, who all have their own views of the issue, about the political situation, Maja is presented with different explanations for the causes of the war. Although the two accounts given by Dad and Davor differ on who is to blame for the war, they share a certain simplicity that prevents them from simply blaming the other side: Serb Davor blames it on the Bosniaks, because of their supposed aim to carve out a homogenous all-Muslim state, while Maja’s Bosniak father blames it on the Serbs and Croats, who want to cleanse the territory of Muslims. However, throughout the novel Maja is instinctively cautious about drawing conclusions, and in her diary (which is the format in which her thoughts unfold) she explicitly aims at merely reporting events rather than trying to explain them. The quoted passage is a perfect example of this, as she has no idea of ‘what to say’ and in the second part of the quote simply stipulates the impossibility of providing the reader with an easy, comprehensible answer that sums up the problem. Like Aleksandar in Stanišić’s novel, Maja makes an attempt to understand, but fails. However, Maja, more clearly than in the Stanišić example, ends up with an aporia: For her, there seems to be no adequate answer that is better than the other. She is left puzzled and in a state of uncertainty.

As a rhetorical device, the aporia has traditionally been associated with a doubtful and sceptical mind,  which Maja can very well be said to represent. In a more abstract sense it denotes an epistemic position that calls attention to the lack of resources (or sufficient premises) for addressing or solving a particular problem; it signifies ‘a dead-end to a line of thought which calls for the mediation of new ideas or perhaps the reformulation of the questions

asked.

In this light Maja is not only exhibiting the sceptical mind of an outsider who does not accept given simplistic explanatory models. Through her reasoning—which as a rule is not shared with the other characters—she is also drawing the reader’s attention to a notion that the evidence presented to her simply is not adequate information from which to draw conclusions. Seen from this point of view, Maja will not ‘choose’ from a pool of ready-made explanations, not because she is ambivalent or undecided about the choices available, but because she, with the infantile ‘prerogative’ of not having to understand invested in her by the author, does not accept the ideologically coloured presuppositions as premises.

By not understanding, Maja not only illuminates some problematic narratives in the discourse of the (nationalist) other, but, as is seen in the second part of the quotation above, also addresses her implied foreign readers, who are the primary target audience of her account. Not only does the aporia apply to the Bosnians affected by the war, but it stresses that it is crucial also for foreigners interested in the Bosnian War not to accept or reiterate too easy an explanation. Foreign readers are asked not to expect a clear-cut explanation of the situation or buy into simplistic narratives, as allusion is made to the problematic balkanist ways in which the international community perceived the ‘Bosnian suffering and West-Balkan animosities as the consequence and the boomerang effect of the old, unsettled accounts and resentments to be paid off, with delay, by the whole region and the continent’.

However, what is primarily attacked here is a mechanism in a nationalist discourse that is shared by all the three ethnic groups that were involved in the conflict, and which some would argue is one of the most central pillars in the discourse, namely the mechanism of creating an enemy other. This topos works as what Chantal Mouffe has described as a ‘constitutive outside’; a factor outside one’s own collective affiliation, which in the Bosnian context has functioned to create a scapegoat, someone to blame for the (not seldom imagined or highly inflated) hardships that one’s own ethnic group has endured historically. This is usually referred to as victimisation and has enabled nationalist followers to ignore the less flattering qualities of their own group (historical losses or unfulfilled civilizational potential, and more

---


concrete social circumstances such as poverty or inequality). In addition, the enemy other has worked to glue together one’s nation by posing a threat to the existence of one’s group. It has, as Vlaisavljević argues, worked both as a threat of physical annihilation in the 1990s war, and in peacetime as a threat of cultural assimilation. This has resulted in the accentuation of supposed unique characteristics of the nation, while at the same time accenting the otherness of the others.259

Maja, as an infantile subject, represents an alternative to this type of logic when she refuses an argument associated with the discourse of the nationalist other, not by countering with an argument or explanatory model of her own, but by failing to understand the fundamental premises for the other’s argumentative logic in the first place. A dichotomy is thus created between the ideological discourse of the adult characters and the stance of the child that seeks answers beyond the collective, ideological framework available and turns her attention to the private, most immediate sphere. The dichotomic positioning is not created in direct dialogue with the other characters, but is produced in her diary, where she, besides reporting events and the conversations of other characters, muses on how best to understand what she has experienced. It is in her own articulation that any dichotomic conceptualisation is constituted, away from the adult space populated by a flurry of sedimented and quite often simplistic opinions and narratives.

The movement from collective, ideological answers to the aporia in the private experience is evident when Maja at one point tries to find the one distinguishing point between Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats, who after all, she argues, share the same language, had shared the same state for a long period of time, and had married each other.

The only thing I could identify was faith. The Serbs are Orthodox, which means the others are Unorthodox. The Muslims are True Believers, which means the others are False Believers. The Croats are Catholics, which means that the others are Protestants. But if I try to go on being logical, that means that the war is being waged because of different faiths. That is, it is being waged by believers. Against whom. Against unbelievers. I’ve got muddled. I’d better write about what I can see. (L, 17)

The formal order in her reasoning is pretty much the same as in the previous example: Maja attempts to follow the logic of reasoning with which she is presented and indeed tries to make some distinctions (somewhat corrupted by her naivety), but ultimately fails to make any sense of it, ending in an aporia: ‘I’ve got muddled’, she says.

What is important in this particular case is the signal at the end of the quote, which more clearly than in the previous case suggests an alternative to trying to understand what is, it is suggested, perhaps impossible to understand from Maja’s viewpoint. She suggests that the preferable strategy is to ‘write about what I can see’ and to turn to the immediate experience of events, after which the focalisation immediately closes in on Maja’s physical position ‘in the half-dark behind the barred windows, between two mad dashes to the cellar’ (L, 18). This is the movement from the hegemonic narratives to the immediate, private experience. After engaging with the nationalist discourse she shies away from it, and her failure to accept this discourse and instead try to understand the war through the perspective most near to her is a subtle, but powerful refusal of basic mechanisms in nationalist discourse.

4.1.2 We and They

There is another variation of dichotomic infantilisation in Lodgers, which is interesting as a contrast to Veličković’s aporic approach illustrated above. Like the previous instances I have touched upon, it relies upon the notion of making opposite two separate stances, though, unlike the above, it does not end up in aporia, but rather affirms a strong, though implicit moral position in regard to the attacked discourse. This is especially the case with the instances of subversive infantilisation that address the involvement by the international community in the Bosnian conflict. Below I take a look at two passages from the novel that can illustrate this kind of more explicit adverse construction, touching also upon potentially problematic consequences of the dichotomisation technique.

One much-debated topic concerning international involvement in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been the humanitarian aid that was shipped by the UN and other organisations to Sarajevo during the siege. This is how Maja describes the operation:

This [the aid] consists of a certain quantity of food with which the civilised world wishes to feed the starving Srarajevans. Feed them is perhaps a bit of an exaggeration. This reminds me of the fairytale about Ivica and Marica [Hansel and Gretel]. I think that the aim of the world is to keep us alive, so that, when the war is over, we will be able once again to take out loans from it and buy whatever will be indispensably unnecessary. (L, 86)

Even if Maja throughout the book works hard to bridge the gap between what is construed as the Western (‘civilised’) world and (‘uncivilised’) Bosnia, the reader sometimes finds her outright refusing or scorning the words or actions of the imagined Westerner. In the quotation above a static, stark dichotomy is upheld between good and evil; it is implied in the analogy of the actions of the international community with the wicked witch in the fairy tale ‘Hansel and
Gretel’ by the Grimm brothers’. As is known, the witch in the story holds a brother and sister captive in her house in the woods in an attempt to fatten them in order to finally eat them. Maja jokingly remarks how the packets with food and other goods contain ‘more packaging than food. You are worn out unpacking it all’ (L, 86), and later a conversation about ‘the impudence of the western world’ (L, 87) is motivated by the fact that some of the packets contain pork and ham, which parts of the Muslim population for traditional reasons would not eat.

While the efforts of international humanitarian aid ‘undoubtedly saved lives’ in Bosnia, it had numerous problematic consequences. From the outset the international community limited its involvement in the war to stopping the spread of the military conflict to the rest of the region and to providing humanitarian aid, largely ignoring the political context of the war. Paralleled with the military passivity of the international community, the relief thus amounted to impotent symptom treatment, which only prolonged the war. The aid has even been regarded as ‘morphine with which the West provided aid to the victims of war’ without doing enough to halt the war. In addition, reports indicated that nearly 25 per cent of the aid was lost as it passed through Serbian checkpoints, and that up to 40 per cent of the areas in need of aid never received it. There were also several bizarre relief-related ironies echoing that mentioned in Lodgers. One of the most well-known instances took place during what was declared the Week of Tranquillity (1–8 November 1992) aiming to provide children in Bosnia with winter supplies. It turned out that the UN, in disregard of the economic embargo against Serbia it itself had imposed, had purchased parts of the supplies from Serbia, with the result that ‘Serbia’s victims would be forced to receive humanitarian aid from their enemies’. The Chicago Tribune reported that ‘Sarajevo officials decided to keep blankets, soy milk and food, but sent back Serbian-made shoes and clothes needed by 85,000 children trapped by the Serbian siege’.

Though Maja does not lose her morale and humorous attitude to what is going on around her, the tone of the passage quoted above is visibly much more morally invested and accusing than those discussed earlier. The aspect of not understanding in the infantile approach to the problem is replaced with a cynical attitude, which basically claims to know more than what appears on


the surface. Curiously, Maja is now suddenly able to spot implicit and subtle traces of ideological motives behind the discourse she addresses. Whether this gap in the level of naivety—between, on the one hand, seeing Protestants as the opposite of Catholics and, on the other hand, marking out geopolitical and macro-economic motives of the Western world—is a sign of Maja’s development as a character or the presence of authorial discourse in that of the narrator is perhaps less important than the consequences this may have for the representation of the other. Using hyperbolic imagery, Maja sheds light on the international community’s balkanist othering of the Bosnian subject during the war through her own othering of the Western subject. By ‘othering’ I mean the attribution of mostly negative qualities to a group that is perceivably not found in the self, thus demarcating the other as ‘not one of us’. Just as the Balkans were perceived as an uncivilised and barbaric part of the world in connection with the war, Western governments are here presented as scheming, imperialist ‘witches’ that impoverish certain parts of the world in order to further fuel the lifestyle of the detached, consumerist, high-maintenance Western citizen.

This image of the Western world is repeated, and its perhaps most vivid manifestation can be observed in the part of the book where Maja learns that soldiers defending Sarajevo have come up with a plan to injure or kill neighbourhood dogs in order to get the sympathy required to finally receive real help from the international community:

In Germany, we could ask Granny, there wasn’t a wealthy lady who didn’t belong to a society for the protection of animals. In capitalism people didn’t like each other. The less you liked your neighbour, the more you cared for your dog or cat. Just let ten ladies see Sniffy without legs and ears, and there’d be military intervention. (L, 105)

This is a depiction of the other’s indifference to one’s own suffering, and it is also found elsewhere in Bosnian literature, especially in works published during or shortly after the war. For instance, Đzevd Karahasan’s book-long essay Exodus of a City (Dnevnik selidbe) from 1993, which paints a picture of indifferent Westerners who ‘watch our misfortune like a badly directed film, but they watch our misfortune and our lives in such an intrigued way because they have nothing to see in their own lives’. 266 He goes on to say that ‘we are alive, while they’re dead’, repeating Baudrillard’s exact same statement about the suffering people in wartime Sarajevo.267 Another example is Mehmedinović’s Sarajevo Blues, when it addresses TV’s translation of the dead bodies in the Ferhadija Street Massacre on 27 May 1992 into a

266 Đzevd Karahasan, Dnevnik selidbe (Sarajevo, 2010), 29.
compassionless image lacking the ability to move the world audience emotionally (SB, 83). It is suggested that the Westerner, helplessly defeated by the perception of the world predominantly through simulacra and, as a result, influenced by a voyeuristic and imperialist possession of the other as depicted in the media, is no longer capable of recognising and prioritising the suffering of others.

The production of such an alienated other begs the question of whether Lodgers at times repeats the same discursive logic that it so strongly condemns. As I pointed out in the theoretical considerations in chapter 2, the employment of ironic devices (considering their play with values and hierarchies) necessarily comes with the potential risk of repeating the discursive logic inherent in the representations that are attacked. I would certainly say that something happens in Veličković’s critique of Western balkanist discourse that does not seem to occur in his critique of domestic ethnonationalism. Apart from exposing the dismal inefficacy and lack of will of the humanitarian action, Veličković creates an image of the Westerner that to a considerable extent falls beyond Maja’s limited infantile perspective. I referred to this as a gap in her naivety, but it equally amounts to an idiosyncrasy in her infantile perspective that makes her leave the privileged position of only observing what she can herself perceive (as she promises she will in the beginning of the novel) and start to draw conclusions that can be understood as equally problematic as those she attacks. It no longer seems to be a matter of shifting the focus from simple explanatory models to the complex fabric of individual life, but the other way around, as the complexity of the political circumstances is simplified into a stereotype of the detached and indifferent Westerner.

Veličković manages, on the one hand, to show the resentment of the essentially helpless Bosnian subject crying for help, and the depiction is effective in showing considerably problematic aspects of how the humanitarian aid was neither particularly well planned nor well executed. On the other hand, it is repeating a form of representation that it is trying to undermine. It creates a representation that fails to transcend the balkanist division between the ‘civilised’ and ‘uncivilised’ world, which may very well have been an underlying cause of the poor humanitarian aid and the lack of other serious actions. If the level of critical success of subversive infantilisation is measured not only according to the intensity of estrangement it produces, but also according to the principle of reconfiguring existing images and models of reality, the passages concerning the Western world seem to do a poorer job than other episodes in the novel.
4.2 In Dialogue

There is reason to stay a while longer in the oeuvre of Veličković, who has utilised subversive infantilisation—and the dichotomisation technique more specifically—consistently and in a variety of ways. In 2000 he published the novel My Daughter’s Father, which is in its subtitle presented as ‘the second part of Lodgers’, and which shares many of the themes found in Lodgers. However, it is differentiated from Lodgers above all in the basic narrative set-up, as it is set in the period shortly after the war, and the reader is presented with the thoughts of a grown (nameless) first-person narrator who struggles with the psychological and social aftermath of the war. The recent war is very much present in the narrative and functions as a constant point of reference; it is, as Kusturica points out, the background for almost every event in the novel. Nonetheless, the perspective is neither focussed on the war per se nor on the time preceding it, but is entirely devoted to describing the conditions of everyday life (and survival) in a milieu that can best be described as a dysfunctional pseudo-state glued together along ethnic divisions, plagued by social devastation, political corruption, and material and mental traumas of war. Veličković sets out from the inability of the narrator to uphold his personal life under these circumstances: His once dynamic relationship with his wife Eva is slowly falling apart, his professional career as a copywriter seems more and more empty and pointless as time goes by, and he is struggling to raise his young daughter in a tough environment.

My main analytical focus here is on the relationship between the narrator and his daughter, and especially their dialogues, which form the structural backbone of the narrative. I am interested in how dichotomisation is created through these dialogues, and I look at two slightly different ways in which this is done. In the novel Veličković mainly operates with a passive child character, which is made a sort of sparring partner for the adult character and helps him to formulate a critique of mainly nationalist discourse coloured by the infantile. In this case father and daughter are together in opposition to the discourse attacked. However, the daughter is at times made more active, driving the conversations further by demanding answers. Here, then, a dichotomy is created between the daughter, who due to her receptiveness becomes a representative of a society dominated by nationalist discourse, and

---

268 Beganović places it in the author’s trilogy of ‘war novels’, which all have the war as their epicentre and which follow the destruction of a society and life in a depressed state of ideological, economic, and cultural transition. The first part, Lodgers, is the description of life during the war, Otac moje kćeri the portrayal of a Bosnian society in a depressed state of transition; and the third and final part, Sahib, a parody of the involvement of international governments and NGOs in Bosnia in the early years following the war. ‘Polifonijska Kulturkritik: Ratno-tranzicijska “trilogija” Nenada Veličkovića’, in Poetika melankolije: Na tragovima suvremene bosansko-hercegovačke književnosti (Sarajevo, 2009), 218.


the father, who desperately tries to undermine this discourse and find alternative conceptual paths.

**4.2.1 The Passive Child**

As I mentioned, throughout the novel Veličković relies heavily on the subversive infantilisation catalysed by the daughter, but does so in a way that contrasts starkly to its function in *Lodgers*. While the protagonist Maja in *Lodgers* drives the narrative forwards on her own initiative, through her curiosity and willingness to put perceptions to paper, the girl in *My Daughter’s Father* has a much more uncritical and passive role. Her presence in the plot is almost entirely limited to her conversations with her father, and in these conversations she functions, as Beganović holds, merely as a ‘reflexive modus’ in the father’s narrative about himself and life in Bosnia in general. The young girl acts as a mirror that receives and reflects any idea her father may have about life.

However, it is perhaps more appropriate to liken the girl to a fractured mirror, which receives information, but reflects it back in a slightly altered way. In the role of an infantile subject with a limited *Wissenshorizont* she is obviously unsuitable for processing the kind of issues her father raises. However, the same role enables her to add a degree of dislocating, skewing naivety to the conversation, which results in a rhetorically effective disfiguration of the adult’s horizon. Beganović notes that her rejoinders in the conversations only have a slight effect on her father’s ramblings, but that she nevertheless steers his choice of words towards the childish, simple, and ironic. It is exclusively because of the young child that the father dresses his ideological critique in infantile words. There is no irony or critical awareness in the discourse of the daughter (as there is in the character Maja in *Lodgers*), and any social criticism is induced by her father, who insists upon presenting his daughter with a cynical and disillusioned image of reality. Nonetheless, the child has an important role in the narrative in inducing her father’s discourse with infantile qualities that can increase the rhetorical effect. This situation can be observed in one of several episodes that criticise the national educational system, which is portrayed as an institution whose foremost objective is to breed and solidify ethnic identity. When the father claims that school is a place where you go to get your brain washed, the child asks, ‘How do you wash a brain?’ Here is the exchange that follows:

---

271 Ibid., 231.
272 Ibid., 233.
273 At one point this is problematised by the father: ‘Why am I confusing her? Why am I playing with words that she can’t understand? Why am I teaching my young girl to sneer at the world, like a monkey or a hyena?’ Veličković, Nenad, *Otac moje kćeri* (Sarajevo, 2000), 126 (my translation; hereafter MDF).
—You cleanse it from dirty thoughts.
—What are dirty thoughts?
—That all people are equal.
—And they aren’t?
—No. Some are more equal than others.
—Who are more equal?
—Those who are greatest in numbers.
—Who are they?
—Those who have ideas that have been washed.
—Ah, she says and continues to glue beautifully colourful hair onto her Barbie doll. (MDF, 126; my translation)

The structure is very simple: The child asks, and the adult answers, and through a straightforward exchange they quickly formulate a critical representation of a vital social institution. The episode clearly illustrates the girl’s generally passive role; even if she had merely said ‘hmm’ between her father’s utterances the exchange is likely to have produced the same result. Her ‘Ah’ in the last line indeed signifies her disinterest. In fact, if one crosses out her words, his account would amount to a fully comprehensible and coherent one; she does not seem to have an autonomous position, but functions merely as a projection screen for her father’s thoughts. There is no real dialogue between the interlocutors, but I would argue that this should be seen as an instance of dichotomic infantilisation on a level where the representation that is the ‘end product’ (a statement about the educational system) of the exchange is understood as a single, composite image of reality that contends another, ethnonationalist image of reality, which is distanced and ultimately refused.

Veličković here adheres to a critical description of the Bosnian educational system as an indoctrinating ‘industry of national consciousness’. Largely divided into three parallel systems according to the divisions of the three constituent nations, with separate curricula and highly influenced by exclusionist ethnonationalist ideology, the educational system works to conform pupils to an ethnoconfessional worldview. Veličković, who has been engaged in criticising the Bosnian educational system in his academic work, points out how in the system it is ‘more important to think nationally than to think rationally’, and that learning is structured so as to direct the attention of the pupils towards ‘the interests of the collective rather than toward knowledge and verity’. Ramet has also pointed out how this kind of

---

‘cultural apartheid’ enables the three constituent nations—in the same state—to teach three different versions, depending on the interests of the respective nation, of the historical event of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in 1914, which had a decisive impact on the political map in the region.\textsuperscript{276}

The girl’s infantile position is at first glance reduced almost to a therapeutic function, enabling her father, who is in the process of isolating himself from others, to ventilate his thoughts. It is, then, he who paints the image of the other’s discourse in simplifying and naïve colours, an image that is firmly opposed to the image given by the Bosnian nationalists. A dichotomy is created between dominant discourse and a critical position, which mixes the cynicism of the adult and the naivety of the child. It is possible to see the dialogue as producing a single, composite image of reality that highlights another, ethnonationalist image of reality and ultimately refuses it. Unlike the typical child character that I have described—and on which I have based my theoretical considerations—the girl’s actively critical role is reduced considerably, but works, on the other hand, to catalyse a process in the adult, who before ending with a cynical punchline conforms to the girl’s limited conceptual frame of reference and attains some of the effect associated with it.

There is a potential danger in this kind of use of the child character. Apart from seeing the girl in the novel as inducing a critical infantile effect into the discourse of her father, one could also view it as a matter of exploitation of a rather objectified child character. In the latter case the girl seems to work as an alibi for her father to express whatever ideas he has when no one else is interested. It can also be viewed as an instrumentalisation of the child character, by which the father accents and uses certain infantile characteristics in order to articulate his critique in an estranging manner, while downplaying or entirely ignoring other circumstances in his daughter’s life. From the perspective of the author, I believe the exploitative aspect of using the child character for critical purposes is essentially unavoidable if what the author is trying to do is to construct a representation in which the child character is ‘rhetorically significant’ rather than ‘genuinely mimetic’.\textsuperscript{277} In other words, the child is primarily used as a tool for representing rather than being represented itself, and this is incidentally the case in all instances of subversive infantilisation analysed in this study. The impression of a higher degree of exploitation in this novel than in others should probably be attributed to the father character rather than to the author: The somewhat


parasitic approach of the father to his daughter mirrors the few relationships he has with other characters and fits well into the general existential dysfunction that he expresses.

4.2.2 The Active Child

Though the girl in *My Daughter’s Father* generally assumes a passive role, this is not always the case. On a few occasions she is the one driving the dialogue forwards, choosing the topics of discussion and setting the tone. In the beginning of the book the girl, returning home from playing with children from the neighbourhood, addresses the question of her identity.

In the street, below the window of our emergency accommodation, children, refugees from Priština and Belgrade, are playing. When she comes home, my daughter is disturbing me, in Ekavian.

— Dad, I don’t understand. Am I a Muslim?
— No, you aren’t. You’re my daughter.
— I know, but what am I besides that?
— A child.
— But, Dad! Don’t fool around, I’m kindly asking you.
— I’m kindly telling you.
— Are we Catholics?
— How persistent you are! No, we’re not.
— What are we?
— Sarajevans.
— Others are Sarajevans, too, and then they are something else as well.
— We are proletarians.
— Never heard of it. (MDF, 26; my translation)

In regard to motif, the similarity with the case in Stanišić’s *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* is striking, as the young children in both cases are presented with the same types of ethnicist narratives circulating in society. There is an important difference, though. In Stanišić’s novel the issue of the ‘ethnic imperative’ in the time preceding the military conflict leads to the very first encounter with the ethnicist logic, which demanded of individuals to pick sides among the nations, to determine their ethnicity, and, in the end, to affirm the consequences of such a choice. The encounter in Stanišić’s novel is therefore depicted as something exceptional, exotic, and fear-inducing that makes questions of identity and safety unclear and insecure. In the passage above, however, the ethnic imperative is portrayed as something quite normal, an omnipresent standard that also affects the everyday lives of children.  

---

278 This kind of thinking became the rule after the war, which Nerzuk Ćurak has pointed out by referring to a political campaign by Alija Izetbegović (leader of the Bosniak party SDA and former president of Bosnia), which in the early years after the war included posters saying: ‘Everybody has
The passage expresses the great hegemonic influence of ethnonationalist thinking on a highly susceptible young generation and the aggressive fixation with ethnic and confessional categories that is the consequence of such thinking. Seen from this perspective, Veličković addresses the strong presence of an ethnicist line of thought by showing how the children in front of the house mirror processes in the rest of society. The child here works as an ‘echo of the adults’, mirroring them and, in doing so, reflecting their actions in a new, de-familiarising and critical light. It is underlined that the other children are Serbian and Kosovar refugees, probably from the 1999 conflict, which suggests that they are quite aware of the importance given to ethnic categories and now simply reiterate them. The susceptibility of the children is also suggested when the girl suddenly, after playing with Serbian-speaking children, adapts the Ekavian dialect spoken in Serbia, which her parents do not use. In the dialogue two positions are juxtaposed: The first is represented by the daughter, who mirrors the ethnicist fixation with ethnic or confessional labels, and the second is that of her father, who tries to avoid such labels. When the girl asks if she is a Muslim or Catholic, he responds with the categories of ‘child’, ‘Sarajevan’, and finally ‘proletarian’. She, however, accepts neither of these labels, and it is telling that she is unfamiliar with the word proletarian, which, to the disappointment of her father, shows her unfamiliarity with the socialist tradition and Yugoslav history. The conversation continues about religion when the girl asks whether proletarians attend church or the mosque and her father answers that they do not go to either one: ‘Because we have come to our senses. We don’t listen to those that teach children to pray to God while they amass political and military power and money. They promise people heaven, and then take them to war’ (MDF, 27; my translation). As in many other episodes in the book, the conversation ends with a cynical observation that is removed from the infantile perspective. Before that, though, she has an active role, pushing her father for an answer and, by doing this, accentuates questions about several aspects of the dominance of nationalist discourse in Bosnian everyday life.

The dialogue form, together with the other mechanisms discussed in this chapter—the reliance on childish incomprehension in the infantile subject’s encounters with the world, the aporias that are created, and the straightforward refusal of dominant discursive logic—shows that the dichotomisation technique is a rather varied method of achieving the effect of dissent in the texts. Above all, these uses of dichotomisation seem to suggest the incompatibility of the dominant discourse—be it the ethnonationalist or balkanist—with the particularities of individual lives and the violence inflicted

picked [their people]. How about you?” This was a fearful reminder that the others, that is, rival nations, had already mobilised, implying that those unprepared could be left out of the political agenda, or worse, that they might become victims of aggression once more. Nerzuk Ćurak, ‘(G)eto, baš hoću!’ in Dejonski nacionalizam: Ogledi o političkom (Sarajevo, 2004), 39.

279 Spielmann, Augen des Kindes, 224.
upon these lives. This can also be construed as the exclusion of positions alternative to those in dominant discourse, a process in which the subjectivity of those not included in, for instance, an ethnically determined community is simply negated, not taken into account. Ultimately, the highlighting of this circumstance through dichotomisation not only amounts to presenting exclusion as a matter of fact, but also contributes to drawing the contours of an alternative, dissenting subjectivity. From the Rancièrean perspective on politics, which stresses a type of dissent against hegemonic discourse that formulates an otherwise ‘uncounted’ and invisible subject demanding attention, the particular uses of dichotomisation discussed above are certainly interesting. With that in mind, one can conclude that the technique not only criticises dominant discourse, but also contributes to the articulation of a subjectivity hitherto repressed by the exclusionist mechanism in that discourse. By juxtaposing positions in the clear-cut and straightforward ways described above, the technique of dichotomisation is probably the one that most resolutely makes demands about new ways of imagining life in Bosnia.
5 Appropriation

Chapters 3 and 4 have dealt with the way subversive infantilisation is used to interrogate dominant discourse in Bosnia and Herzegovina by creating contrasts and dichotomies between one’s own position and the position of the other. In the present chapter I deal with a technique, which is a familiar function in ironic discourse in general, such as satire or the pastiche. Here I call this function appropriation. Corresponding to Tygstrup and Winkel Holm’s idea of the exposing function of literary discourse (see chapter 2), appropriation is in essence a technique that makes the underlying structure of a particular discourse a structure of one’s own speech (or writing), but with the intent to subvert this discourse by letting it unfold in such a way that its problematic aspects are highlighted. In the infantile type of appropriation that is the subject here it is exactly the infantile dimension that allows for that type of criticism.

In contrast to the dichotomisation technique considered earlier, whose guiding principle is to construct more or less clear-cut oppositions between discursive positions, appropriative infantilisation to a greater extent rests on utilising the dialogic character of the written word in the sense represented by Bakhtin. While it is an a priori condition that enunciations are to a large extent always determined by somebody else’s discourse—‘[t]he word in language is half someone else’s’—appropriative infantilisation actively emphasises this circumstance in order to ‘occupy’ the other’s discourse, which means choosing the same words or adopting the same style or implicit ideological assumptions associated with this discourse. It is important to note that this does not entail mere imitation, but works critically to open up a space where two or more ‘intentions’ or ‘voices’ appear. It is through this stratification that

the unitary character of the targeted discourse is broken up, which allows for contrasts, conflicts, and inconsistencies to appear.\textsuperscript{281}

The appropriative kind of subversive infantilisation is thus based upon a set of features usually associated with notions such as parody and pastiche, which create a ‘double-voiced’ discourse that is not primarily directed towards objects in the world (though it is that too), but rather towards the other’s discourse,\textsuperscript{282} making this an object and target of its own, a ‘word on display’, as it were.\textsuperscript{283} Bakhtin would argue that voices discernible in the text signify social positions, each of them claiming a specific perception of the world. However, literature, and in this case subversive infantilisation, does not only represent this contest as an object, but is actively involved in challenging and rearticulating existing dominant images of reality by questioning boundaries between voices, positions, hierarchies, and conceptions. It makes sedimented forms of thinking a matter of negotiation, a negotiation to which the authors provide positions of their own by articulating preferred points of emphasis as alternatives to the dominant ones.

I have already pointed out that for the sake of argument and presentation I have separated the techniques from each other in my analysis, which has allowed me to follow through with as clear and detailed descriptions of each of them as possible. In reality, however, more than one technique can be actualised in a single piece of text, and this is in fact often the case. With this in mind, one may reconsider the passage from Stanišić’s \textit{How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone}, which was studied in the previous chapter, and in which the boy narrator encounters nationalist ideology and triggers a dichotomisation between his own multi-ethnic position and the ethnonationalist demands. In addition to this layer of dichotomisation, it would be useful to recognise the boy’s genuine and active efforts to meet these demands as an example of the appropriation technique. He subsumes a particular way of thinking and in doing so repeats it in an ironic infantile context that reveals it as problematic.

Ideally one would consider the interplay and synergetic effects of these two techniques in tandem in their interrogation of the target discourse. I do attempt such an approach in the later part of this chapter, where I consider how Jergović in \textit{Mama Leone} deals with the issue of the international community’s responsibility in regard to the suffering in other parts of the world than one’s own, as both the dichotomic and appropriative techniques are used in correlation in order to approach a complex issue from multiple angles.

Before this, however, I intend to suggest the diversity of the appropriative technique itself, relying in my analysis on a handful of texts by Nura Bazdulj-Hubijar, Bekim Sejranović, and Alma Lazarevska that address issues of

\textsuperscript{281} Mikhail Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, 1984), 189.
\textsuperscript{282} Bakhtin, \textit{Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics}, 185.
\textsuperscript{283} Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, 323.
ethnonationalism and—in Sejranović’s case—socialism. This will show that infantile appropriation, apart from a thematic variety, is manifested in forms ranging from whole works and motifs to single phonetic shifts. In section 5.2 I turn once again to works by Nenad Veličković that both address issues related to the perspective and presence of the international community in Bosnia. Aside from the stylisation of the literary genre of girls’ war diaries in Lodgers, I discuss his novel Sahib, a satire that criticises the balkanist attitude of foreigners working with non-governmental projects after the war.

5.1 Writing, Yawning, and Mispronouncing

I stated that the appropriative kind of subversive infantilisation varies in scope, from subsuming entire ideological frameworks to occupying single words. A broad appropriative approach, in two senses, is found in Nura Bazdulj-Hubijar’s novel When in July (Kad je bio juli, 2005). First, it is discerned in the skaz style manner with which the author stylizes the Eastern Bosnian dialect of a young man, Mirza, who writes letters to his late father (killed in the Srebrenica genocide in July 1995) characterised above all by a poor, non-standard, and jargon-filled language. The ironic edge of the skaz is not directed against him and his consistently naïve discourse, but against the ideology behind the turn of events in the 1990s, whose ultimate manifestation was war—a war that has robbed him of his childhood and many years of education. Cynthia Simmons notes that Mirza’s ‘colloquialisms, misspellings, and nonstandard grammar attest poignantly to an education curtailed by the war’.

Rather than being merely a description of Mirza’s hardships with occasional ironic accounts of violent manifestations of ethnonationalist logic, the book signals the young man’s total deprivation of the legitimate voice he needs in order for his representation of reality—including memories of the Srebrenica genocide and experiences of life after the war—to be taken seriously.

On another, related level appropriation is indeed found in the young man’s effort to finally occupy the standard written language of his mother tongue in order to produce recognised speech. With Rancière, this process can be phrased as an attempt by the young man to develop from a non-political, noise-producing infantile subject into a grown subject speaking with a legitimate voice. Though it has rightly been pointed out that Bazdulj-Hubijar’s novel suffers from major problems in terms of misrepresentation of facts and the production of stereotypes (especially concerning images of rural Eastern Bosnia and life in Srebrenica before July 1995), it illustrates well the tendency in infantile discourse to involve the appropriative technique in order

---

285 See Adisa Ćeço, ‘Savjest od 100.000 kuna’, Slobodna Bosna (17 November 2005), 64.
to occupy a space not yet available and from which it is possible to present truth claims that contradict those repeated in dominant discourse.

Another type of appropriation aims at behaviour and conventional rites instead of language. One such telling episode is found in Sejranovič’s *Nowhere, Nowhere from (Nigdje niotkuda)*, part of which is told from the perspective of a boy narrator. The episode has to do with the news of Tito’s death in 1980, which the boy narrator at first finds incredible and even has trouble believing is real. Tito’s death was an event of great national concern and was, reportedly, an enormously emotional experience for many people, who gathered spontaneously in the streets. ‘Thousands, and perhaps millions, of people throughout Yugoslavia were truly mourning Tito’s death’, the anthropologist Tone Bringa writes.286 This image is mirrored in the book: We learn that Tito’s funeral is followed on television by millions of Yugoslavs, who are seeing the greatest symbol of the Yugoslav project—a symbol that had been very present in the everyday consciousness of people—suddenly disappearing from their lives. It is the intensity of this collective mourning that the boy character in Sejranovič’s book has difficulties matching. While the cameras are following crying women and children, he struggles to generate the tears demanded by the situation, and the old trick of producing tears by yawning is not efficient enough:

I’m yawning as much I can, but I’m not happy with the amount of my tears in comparison to everybody else’s. Grandpa looks serious. Sad-faced Mum is probably thinking about what to cook for dinner tomorrow. The neighbour Sakib is smoking and tightening his jaw, which has an artificial tooth.287

While the boy is doing his best to appropriate—with the humour associated with the infantile perspective—the ‘right’ kind of reaction to the death of Tito, this very act seems initially to suggest the hollow, artificial character in the mass effect expressed by people around him. As Bringa notes, the ideology of the Yugoslav state was to a large extent based upon a cult of personality built up over a long period of time, and which iterated, above all, Tito’s heroism and status as the father of his people.288 In this light, Sejranovič seems to


287 Bekim Sejranović, *Nigdje, niotkuda* (Sarajevo, 2010), 32 (my translation; hereafter NN).

288 Bringa, ‘Peaceful Death of Tito’, 95. The great extent of Tito’s presence in everyday life in Yugoslavia is suggested by Mitja Velikonja in the following: ‘During [Tito’s] times, it was normal, and even required, that his portraits hung everywhere, that his image was reproduced on all kinds of objects ranging from stamps and badges to banknotes, that his historical statements were extensively quoted in the mass media, textbooks, historical and other studies, that his collected works in quality leather binding or books about him graced the bookshelves of those politically more conscious, that his name was painted on hills in huge letters seen from tens of miles away, that promises to him adorned many a classroom, office, waiting room, army barracks and other public place, that his name was
undermine the seemingly hyperbolical personal identification with Tito as a father that was so important for preserving political power—and that, by implication, in a sense transformed the people into children.

This is made somewhat more complicated, however, when the boy actually starts crying (together with the others) when cameras finally show Tito’s coffin being lowered into the grave. However, the boy is unsure whether this is a result of the yawning or a genuine emotion (NN, 32). Admittedly, it could be something in-between; if not empathy for Tito, then an effect triggered by the boy’s compassion for his grieving family. The general attitude expressed in the episode would suggest an ambivalent tension between a slightly cynical mimicking approach and an empathetic and genuine attempt to understand what Tito’s death really meant in the broader picture. What first and foremost characterised the situation in the country after Tito was a sense of uncertainty about the future. For instance, Bringa suggests that there was fear of a Soviet invasion. In addition, there was anxiety about the internal tensions that existed between ethnic groups, and whether or not these tensions would develop into a military conflict that would repeat the interethnic animosity exhibited during the Second World War. Tito’s death caused confusion politically, as the country lost both a symbol and a pragmatic political factor that could manage a palette of differing political interests. There was now no clear idea of how to structure an efficient leadership, and the 1980s were symptomatically characterised by the abandonment of several trademark ideas and policies (e.g., self-management, non-alignment, and the Communists as the sole legitimate regime). Soon, in 1983, state leaders openly announced that Yugoslavia was experiencing a deep economic crisis. In a Yugoslavia now on its knees—politically, ideologically, and economically—discontented voices, which would have been impossible during Tito’s rule, began surfacing, leading to nationalist radicalisation.

In Sejranović’s novel the general uncertainty, but also the disparity in reactions to Tito’s death is further underlined when it is mentioned that the only family member not crying is Alija. The boy guesses that it has something to do with the leg injury Alija suffered from working in a coalmine some years back. It symbolises the industrial development that Yugoslavia underwent after the Second World War, which, aside from remarkable progress, also produced victims, political as well as social. As in other texts dealing with the socialist period or Tito specifically, a double, ambivalent perspective is presented. The point in Sejranović’s text is not merely to reveal the bizarre cult of personality surrounding Tito, but also to say something about

proudly borne by one town in each republic and autonomous province, and that many streets, squares, public facilities and institutions were named after him. Titostalgia: A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz, trans. Olga Vuković (Ljubljana, 2008), 16.

289 Bringa, ‘Peaceful Death of Tito’, 171.

individual experiences of the uncertain situation in which the whole country suddenly found itself after Tito’s death.

The two instances of appropriative infantilisation discussed above are manifested on different levels—on the one hand, the appropriation of speech and, on the other hand, that of rituals. I wish to turn to an episode from a short story by Alma Lazarevska, ‘The Feast of the Rosary’, where the appropriation technique is even found on the level of single phonemes, and where a small girl, by mispronouncing a particular word, appropriates nationalist discourse and manages to highlight the arbitrary importance given to certain designations within that discourse. ‘The Feast of the Rosary’ is about a family that is driven from their home village somewhere in Bosnia by Serbian soldiers in the very beginning of the war, and it opens with a small group of Serbian soldiers on a reconnaissance mission. When one of them is asked to report back, he stutters: ‘I’m see... see... seeing two... two... three... three... I’m see... see... seeing ba... ba... lij... ke’. The last word is _balijke_, a derogative term for Muslim women. As the soldiers head back from their mission, the point of view shifts to the group of women just observed and the children who accompany them and who spot the soldiers from a distance:

—Serbs, the nephew whispered as he followed the index finger.
—Serbs, the triad of female voices answered like a muffled echo.
—Selbs, repeated the girl, after which she withdrew her hand to cover her mouth. (FR, 102)

The infantile response to the Serbian soldiers is expressed in the subtle phonetic shift made by the small girl, who mimics the others and by mistake produces ‘Selbs’ instead of ‘Serbs’. It is in the original sense that the label ‘Serb’ is infantilised, as it is made nonsensical and turned into a mere sound, emptied of semantic value. For a second or two, before the girl covers her mouth, realising her mistake, this sound is void of all the ideological connotations usually tied to the proper pronunciation. It is therefore tempting to interpret the mispronunciation beyond the comical effect or resultant empathy for the child—who is too young to understand the seriousness of the situation—and to see it as an effect that hints at the contingency of the purportedly solid quality of being Serbian. As the child character subsumes the word into its vocabulary, slightly skewing it, the word begs for the reader’s attention and urges the reader to consider its substance.

Designation is in fact a central theme in the story. It begins with the opposition between the labels ‘Serb’ and ‘balijke’, both of which designate the enemy, and which are stressed in the soldier’s stutter and the repetition of the Bosnian women and children, respectively. It is interesting that the soldier

291 Alma Lazarevska, ‘Blagdan krunice’, in _Biljke su nešto drugo_ (Sarajevo, 2003), 101 (my translation, as are all other quotations from the book; hereafter FR).
upon spotting a single woman in the field, dressed in white and ‘shining so intensely that, like the sun, she would disturb the eye’, refers to her as ‘a woman’ and not as a *balijka*, but then changes his designation when a few more women, who are ‘differently clothed’, enter his field of vision (FR, 101). It is with this shift in words that the civilians become enemies. The theme of the power of designation is underlined again a couple of pages later:

In Yugoslavia one could hear Serbs claiming that they were under threat and that they did no longer plan to tolerate that. When they appeared near the village, they were wearing uniforms and carrying arms from the stock of the Yugoslav National Army. Only now the *titovka* and the five-pointed red star were discarded. What had been Yugoslavian for centuries had become Serbian. Serbian tanks. Serbian grenades. Serbian howitzers. Serbian rifles. Serbian machine guns. Serbian grenade launchers. Serbian sowers of death… (FR, 103)

The quote gives the background for what is at stake in the girl’s skewing appropriation of the label ‘Serb’. It stresses the great weight suddenly put on this label, which in the course of the 1980s was transformed by nationalists from a designation of an ethnic group among others in the Yugoslav federation into one that violently insisted on its superiority over the other ethnicities. The label ‘Serb’, it is suggested in the story, is suddenly put on everything. ‘God is Serbian too’, it is even announced on a radio station proclaiming to be Serbian (FR, 103). However, while Lazarevska shows how the label occupies practically everything, she also shows that the opposite is the case: that the label itself is occupied, arbitrarily, by nationalist intentions to create difference where there perhaps is none. In the women and children’s repetition of the label ‘Serb’ when spotting the soldiers there is, I would argue, a hint of the magnitude that the word had gained as a result of a transformation in public discourse (from everything being Yugoslav to everything being Serbian), and it can be understood as a nervous way of realising what it means in this potentially violent situation.

The phonetic shift in the girl’s mispronunciation is not directed at (that is, does not attack) the content of the label ‘Serb’ as such, but should rather be seen as a parody of the fixation with and constant use of this ethnic label. Thus, appropriative infantilisation here is used to target the nationalists’ way of occupying and exploiting ethnic categories, rather than the categories themselves, which are of course perfectly valid. The repetition of the word in the story mimics the overuse of it in public discourse, and the slip of the tongue shows how little it takes for the word to be disarmed.
5.2 Using Western Voices

One can perhaps get the impression that subversive infantilisation is a strategy manifested autonomously in relation to the dominant discourse it addresses, that is, that it somehow operates from the outside, encircling a discourse with defined boundaries to which it can choose its distance. This is partly a consequence of the familiar distancing effect of irony, which elevates one’s own position above that of the adversary point of view. This effect is probably most tangible in dichotomous infantilisation, which stresses the clear line between positions, but it is also present in the appropriative type. And it can even seem to be equally present in my own way of speaking about the child subject appropriating certain discourses, as if the child was an autonomous actor free to stand outside of dominant discourses. This is, of course, not the case. It is essential to be aware that when the child character is said to appropriate discourse, this occurs from a position that is already embedded in the same discourse. When I arrest the boy in Sejranović or the girl in Lazarevska in their reactions to discourse in my analysis above, they are already occupied by that discourse and urged to follow the logic of, in the former case, the collective grief over a father figure (Tito) and, in the latter, the increasing importance of ethnic designations. This immanent position from which any reaction occurs is also evident in the case of Bazdulj-Hubijar’s When in July: The only language available to the young narrator is that which has been destroyed by the effects of nationalist thinking. Below I follow this idea in a work that thematises this to a considerable extent, namely Veličković’s Lodgers in which even the choice of genre indicates the strong, not to say claustrophobic presence of dominant discourse.

5.2.1 Maja’s Diary

The dominant discourse in question is what we could call the Western cultural discourse, which in Lodgers is suggested to force itself upon the representation of the Bosnian War. When the teenage narrator Maja begins to write down account of events in besieged Sarajevo, she is quickly confronted with a problem, namely the issue of format. In carefully choosing between several possible formats for her accounts of everyday life in wartime Sarajevo, she asks what perspectives and forms of representation are even at her disposal for describing the war, which at times, she insists, seems impossible to depict with words. Maja acknowledges the importance of choosing the right genre for her account, as each of the genres available is able to capture some particular aspects of the experience, while downplaying or wholly ignoring others.

The problem is, as Tatjana Jukić argues, that there are few genres available—only the novel, the diary, or a mix of these two—and that practically neither of them is free from potential problems and risks in terms of representing Maja’s experiences in a satisfactory manner: The structural
coherence of the novel plot, for instance, fits poorly with the chaotic quality of war. Jukić sums up Maja’s dilemma: ‘[S]he can succumb to overused discursive modes at her disposal (such as a novel or diary), which will necessarily fail to represent her experience, or else she can remain literally speechless, because no available discourse matches mute horror’. 292 However, the problem seems mainly to be an ideological one, because the available genres—and the genre eventually chosen, the war diary—are intimately tied to Western literary history, which has sedimented a certain cultural memory and developed its own set of presumptions about how to represent circumstances in the world. Therefore, Jukić holds, when Maja is in the process of deciding on a perspective, and she ultimately chooses one, her account inevitably enters ‘a dialogue with the cultural codes of Europe and the United States’. 293

I would even suggest that this dialogue should be conceived of as an interrogation, because what Veličković makes Maja do from this point on is to stretch, question, and ultimately refuse the applicability of the Western point of view on the war in Bosnia. Maja engages in the interaction with the forms available to her by constantly skewing the fictional war diary genre ‘from within’ and in practice, as it were, to create tensions and unexpected difference in an otherwise stable, unitary discursive format. She appropriates the style of the war diary genre and—with the ‘powers’ of the infantile perspective that entails the deviant, non-conforming reasoning invested in her—manages to turn the issue into a meta-issue, undermining the capacity of the Western war diary genre. Through Maja the author attempts to expose the incapability of the genre—saturated with ideology, expectations in terms of theme, affective mode, and so forth—to properly account for individual life in wartime Bosnia.

At first glance, the potential risks of a Western perspective inherent in the war diary genre may seem exaggerated in the Bosnian context, considering that Yugoslavian culture had generally—though sometimes ambivalently—shared a strong affinity with Western European cultural history. 294 The abundant references that Maja makes to writers in the Western canon and her familiarity with different literary styles can certainly be said to testify to this. However, Western expectations on representations of the war in Bosnia quickly came into conflict with the complexity of the situation. It is sometimes upheld that the accounts that had the most immediate success with Western readerships were teenage girls’ diaries, which gave autobiographical first-hand experiences of the war from a naïve point of view. 295 Most hyped was the 14-

292 Tatjana Jukić, ‘Souls and Apples, All in One: Bosnia as the Cultural Nexus in Nenad Veličković’s Konačari’, Style, 30/3 (1996), 483.
293 Jukić, ‘Souls and Apples’, 484.
294 See Zoran Milutinović, Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture (Amsterdam, 2011).
year-old girl Zlata Filipović’s *Zlata’s Diary,* which sold 80,000 copies and made Zlata the Bosnian equivalent of Anne Frank. In a review of the Viking edition of *Zlata’s Diary,* journalist David Rieff expressed his frustration over the fact that ‘it is the war as seen through a child’s eyes that is being presented as the deepest truth of the Bosnian situation’, and he questioned what he saw as a tendency to let simplified and sentimentalised accounts by—or about—children faced with war overshadow complex analyses of the situation.

Rieff is certainly right in pointing out the problem in readers being drawn to this type of story for their sensation and simplistic narratives.

Needless to say, Maja’s account in *Lodgers* should not be misunderstood as yet another of these sentimentalised accounts. It works rather as a critical appropriation of the Bosnian teenage war diary genre that became a popular medium through which the world observed the war. Veljčković’s infantile appropriation is an ironic and direct response to the West’s infatuation with a genre which put weight on simplified representations of the war in Bosnia. Even if one was to say that the inherent ideological content in the war diary as a genre did not necessarily need to clash with the Bosnian War experience, the genre was nonetheless quickly turned into a medium that steered the representation in a particular, quite problematic direction. Maja remarks on how eager people were to accommodate the expectations of the outer world when she says that she avoided writing a clear-cut diary ‘because now every salesperson in the market is writing one’.

Nevertheless, Maja herself seems at times rather eager to accommodate expectations on her representation, for instance when addressing her reader, whom she for the most part imagines to be a Westerner. At one point she ponders over the level of adjusting needed to meet the demands of writing a war account for a foreign audience, emphasising again the conflict between the representational form and the experience:

(([…] I am a divided being. One Maja writes, draws conclusions, makes judgements, chats with her future reader, while the other, her servant, slave, hired gun, does her dirty work for her: peers through keyholes, sets up mirrors like horizontal periscopes. She even rubs her cheek against slightly open doors, sunbathes in the shade under

---

297 Harriet Alexander, ‘Zlata Filipovic, whose journal was Sarajevo’s answer to Anne Frank’s diary, tells of her fears for Bosnia today’, *The Telegraph* (7 April 2012), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/bosnia/9192248/Zlata-Filipovic-whose-journal-was-Sarajevos-answer-to-Anne-Franks-diary-tells-of-her-fears-for-Bosnia-today.html.
300 Here are a few examples that illustrate the influence of an imagined reader on how the representation is constructed: ‘Needless to say, for my readers I shall extract the essence’ (L, 15); ‘For my European readers here are three fundamental facts about the building called the Vijećnica […]’ (119); ‘I have listed all this although in lessons I had not been a supporter of Balzac’s literary procedure’ (24).
broken doors, sets up mirrors like horizontal periscopes. She even sometimes reads other people’s papers, thumbs through other people’s books, sticks her nose into other people’s rooms and belongings). (L, 115)

The distinction between the comfortable overlooking position of the writer, who assembles the information provided into a narrative, and the ‘servant, slave, hired gun’ on the ground, who gathers data, reveals a discrepancy between actual experiences and what is allowed inside the framework of the format she uses. Her choice of the words ‘servant, slave, hired gun’ implies a colonial relationship in which the corporeally situated part of Maja is exploited for the benefit of a story that will be shared with Western readers according to their expectations. Being that Maja’s corporeal hands-on experience is deemed lacking, if not adjusted to the given form, she adopts this form, while at the same time constantly highlighting its limitations and inadequacy for fully rendering the war situation.

5.2.2 Balkanist Exploitation

I would like to continue the discussion of the infantile appropriation of Western discourse by turning my attention to one of Veličković’s books that I have so far not addressed, namely the novel Sahib. It has been referred to as the last part of Veličković’s trilogy of ‘war novels’ (Lodgers being the first part, and My Father’s Daughter the second) and is certainly a continuation of the author’s interest in the role of the international community in Bosnia.

*Sahib* is a satirical epistolary novel consisting of emails written by a British NGO official stationed in Bosnia shortly after the war to his boyfriend in London. Because the book is a satire all but prone to subtleties, the reader quickly learns that the narrator thinks and behaves largely like a (neo)colonialist, expressing both prejudice and an unashamed agenda to exploit the land as much as opportunity allows. Thus, he represents both a Western balkanist mind-set and the concrete practical consequences of this mind-set put into action, that is, economic and political manipulation through various civil projects. Unlike most of the characters I have addressed so far, the infantile subject in *Sahib* is neither a child nor an adolescent, but an adult who has come to Bosnia to initiate different reconstruction projects. Nor is the narrator voiceless (*in-fans*), as was the case in Bazdulj-Hubijar’s *When in July*, for instance; quite the opposite: In relation to the Bosnians in his proximity he speaks with authority and always has the last word—this is especially the case in his conversations with Sakib, his servant/driver, whom he can admittedly fire at will. In fact, the locals are only allowed to speak in the book insofar as

---

‘their thoughts and ideas are refracted in the prose of the letter writer’. Yet, the narrator proves to be a subject that functions much like the infantile subjects I have discussed so far. I will come back to this resemblance shortly, when addressing the critical potential in his largely infantile behaviour as a character.

**Sahib** relies heavily upon the very strong opposition that is created between the NGO worker and the local population. For instance, when the narrator’s local driver Sakib (with a ‘k’) — who is ‘a good driver, but hopeless at conversation’— makes his first subtle protest against the bigotry of the narrator, the narrator quickly, and in a few words, outlines the difference between himself and the Bosnian man: ‘He’s Sakib, I’m Sahib’. It has been pointed out that the distinction bears strong colonial connotations, in that the name Sakib with its Arabic roots (signalling the ‘East’) means something along the lines of ‘the illuminated’ or ‘the enlightened’ (in fact, he is a university professor who works as a driver to make ends meet), whereas sahib in Urdu equates to ‘master’ and was used to designate white European colonialists during the colonisation of India. This simple nominal difference is in a sense emblematic for the West–East dichotomy that exists as a backdrop to nearly all events in the plot.

Veličković’s portrayal of the Westerner is rather one-sided and negative, some would probably say demonising, which means that any positive aspects of the NGO work carried out in Bosnia is largely ignored in the book. This does not mean, however, that the Bosnian ‘side’ is spared heavy criticism. It is true that foreign administration is often met with distrust, counteracted, and even taken advantage of by local opportunists or organised crime. Veličković does not shun these circumstances, and he is equally brutal in his critique of domestic administrators and eagerly reveals the ‘patriarchal, nationalistic and homophobic traditional Bosnian life’.

For my purposes, the novel is interesting because of its unusual use of the infantile character, Sahib. However witty, smart, and imaginative the narrator proves to be in his letters to his boyfriend back in London, he shows great inexperience and naivety in actual encounters with the Bosnian locals as well as in ‘dangerous’ everyday situations:

---

306 Veličković has said in an interview that ‘[t]he novel’s greatest shortcoming is that it has not adequately emphasized all the fine examples and achievements of the international presence here [in Bosnia]. But, presumably, that’s not to be expected from satire’. ‘Life is what Cannot be Touched with the Hand’, in *Sahib: Impressions from Depression* (Sarajevo, 2011), 221.
I’ve cut myself on a piece of paper!
Stupid, but there was blood. I panicked!
It was MY blood after all!
I had come to the fucking Balkans to see my own blood for the first time in my life.
I called Sakib. He came in a few minutes.
He couldn’t believe that was why I’d called him. (S, 52)

Recurrently and blatantly the Westerner is portrayed as being protected and having little actual contact with the outside world except for relations with his NGO colleagues and driver Sakib. His fear is nursed by the balkanist conception of Bosnia as a savage land where primitivism, chaos, and aggression rule. He cannot, for instance, remember much of his first night in Sarajevo, because ‘I was so frightened of being attacked and robbed’ (S, 8). This fear, which is not only the narrator’s personal fear, but also a structural fear in the office where he works, explains the extensive security measures taken to protect the NGO workers. The office where he works is ‘an isolated building, with a high concrete wall round it and iron spikes on top of it’ (S, 7), and the vehicle he travels in—and is afraid to step out of—is a big Land Rover, which will ‘always come better off in a crash (physically, materially and financially)’ (S, 44). Sakib, who drives the Land Rover, is described as ‘a glove I wear when I come into contact with this potentially infectious part of the world’ (S, 87–88). In one email late in the book—which shows that no development is ever made in terms of leaving the protected state and blending with the locals—Sahib explicitly declares that his knowledge of what is going on in the city is limited to what he sees ‘through the windows of the office and the Land Rover’ (S, 192).

Sahib is set apart from other infantile characters in my study by being the only one who does not interrogate the discourse of others, but is instead himself the target of subversive infantilisation. Sahib’s protected, infantile status does not necessarily give him the alternative, deviant perspective that we have come to associate with infantile discourse. Instead, it works to underline and exaggerate the position of the protected Western NGO worker as well as the general mind-set that is manifested by his office. Rather than to appropriate other discourses, he in a sense appropriates his own discourse, as it is filtered through his infantile perspective on the world, exposing certain discursive mechanisms by exaggerating them.

The stress on the infantile nature of the NGO worker is also manifested against the backdrop of one of the book’s most central, overarching themes, namely that of rationalism and ignorance. It is particularly here that Sahib’s infantile attributes enhance and expose the mind-set of the balkanist Westerner and the consequences that result from such a mind-set. Not surprisingly, Sahib correlates rationality with Western modernity and capitalism, while the
transitional—in Sahib’s eyes still heavily socialist—Bosnian-Herzegovinian society is given the labels ignorant, barbaric, and primitive. Sahib is first and foremost a representative of the self-asserted benevolent ‘civilizing project’ that urges most of Eastern Europe—Bosnia included—to achieve a set of evasive standards (democracy, capitalism, plurality) upheld by the European Union and the US—to ‘become emancipated as “European”’. Post-communist Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall was met with a paternalistic attitude and essentially labelled unfit to structure society without aid from international actors. Eastern Europeans in large numbers and a range of countries that had overthrown their governments through massive popular protests were deemed politically immature. In the words of Buden, they became children overnight (‘Kinder des Kommunismus’, he called them), as the concept of emancipation after 1945 had slowly started shifting from signifying revolution to signifying ‘maturity’ (Mündigkeit). In order to gain the status of a proper political agent it was no longer enough to initiate revolutions and establish liberal institutions; democratic and institutional maturity was now the yardstick used to distinguish between master and child.

It is this conceptual opposition—master and child—that determines Sahib’s outlook on the Bosnian social world. It is by relying on these binary values that Sahib is able to explain almost every circumstance in his surroundings and to justify and dismiss others. Convinced as he is that ‘socialism was a dangerous form of mass hypnosis’ (S, 19), Sahib reads a type of all-embracing degenerate socialist logic into almost every aspect of the local culture, mentality, and behaviour, as when he is left puzzled after a joke told in Bosnian and desperately tries to fit it into a capitalist–socialist scheme:

I tried to read it like some political allegory […] Maybe they see socialism in Fata and capitalism in Mujo? And testicles stand for our western standard, which they envy us. But how could she have imagined that they should be equal? I haven’t a clue, but I don’t find it amusing. (S, 72)

This culture-deterministic approach in Sahib’s efforts to understand the mentality of the local people originates in his strong balkanist perspective, and in a broader sense his Eurocentric outlook, which again measures other cultures according to the template of the Western European cultural-

308 Boris Buden, Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 41.
309 The joke told by Sahib is as follows: ‘Mujo and his wife Fata (their stock characters) go to the doctor and say that they are non-identical twins. The doctor asks what the problem is. The fact that Muho has both the balls, explains Fata. When I looked blank, Sakib told me that “non-identical” twins are “two-egg” twins in their language and the word for “ball” is “egg”’ (S, 72).
geographical sphere. In ways that may be likened to modern epistemological tendencies (going as far back as the 18th and 19th centuries) in the mode of thought regarding the European subject’s relationship to other societies, Sahib tries to find ‘cosmos in chaos’ by departing from a systematic set of general (Western) rules and principles of human behaviour. The perceived absurdity of Bosnia must necessarily be rationalised, broken down into something that fits Sahib’s schematic world view. When others fail to fit into Sahib’s world view, or when this perspective is confused or challenged in any way, they are quickly dismissed, regarded as irrational, and thus legitimately stripped of any sense in their discourse—they are infantilised.

Aside from the abundant use of satire, Veličković relies much on the infantile character as a way of exaggerating (making explicit) traits in the narrator that can be ascribed to a set of underlying principles: traits such as a sense of superiority in relation to the locals, the belief in industrial and technological rationality, and empirical and transcultural unfamiliarity. These properties, Veličković seems to suggest, need to come to the surface, as they all help to sustain the patronalistic attitude needed to motivate what is in the book explicitly labelled a necolonialist project.

5.3 Blurring Borders

I would like to remain on the issue of the role of the international community and consider other ways in which Western discourse is appropriated. My focus is on the intricate and highly original approach taken by Miljenko Jergović in *Mama Leone*, which manages to produce multiple angles on the issue of what it means to see others suffer. The first half of the novel, which tells the story of a childhood in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s, contains only a few episodes that address perceptions of foreign countries and peoples, but they are all concerned with the issue of how an observer relates—empathetically and morally—to the suffering of others in other parts of the world and their desperate need of help from the international community. I will show how the novel by relying on appropriative infantilisation reveals aspects of this issue that are usually ignored.

I have mentioned that Western governments are often accused of indifference and passivity in connection with the war in Bosnia and of a balkanist attitude expressed in images also of post-war Bosnia. Sometimes the criticism expands to include the populations of Western Europe and their passivity. This was pointed out in Veličković’s *Lodgers* in chapter 4. This type of representation is more controversial than the one targeting governments, because it is prone to excessive expectations from citizens who are far removed from any significant political agency to defend the Bosnian victims.

---

This kind of unrealistic expectation can, then, lead to stereotypes and caricatures of the Westerner that are undeserved.

Jergović does not subscribe to such a narrative, but aims, I argue, to rethink the very frame of the issue of the international community and its responsibilities. This is done with such a subtlety that Jergović even fails to mention the war in Bosnia, but instead depicts international responses to Salvador Allende’s call for help in connection with Pinochet’s coup d’état in Chile in 1973 and the boy Miljenko’s emotional detachment in his perception of suffering civilians during the Vietnam War. However, I will show that in the context of the narrative the depictions nevertheless appear as mirror situations of the war in Bosnia, and that these scenarios complicate the issue of the international community’s response to the Bosnian War considerably. It is particularly interesting to see that the episodes contain less decidable, assertive, and ‘unforgiving’ claims than those I have looked at earlier, for instance in Veličković’s works.

A close look at these circumstances is also an opportunity to analyse how different techniques of subversive infantilisation—in this case the dichotomic and the appropriative—are related and work together to shed light on a complex issue from multiple angles. The former technique is privileged in the response to Allende’s death and establishes a conflict between the boy Miljenko and his grandmother, revealing weak spots in the socialist narrative of brotherhood. By way of infantile incomprehension, a gap emerges between the boy and this narrative, which creates sparks of contrast that seem to challenge the solidity of the narrative.

The latter technique dominates the episode that depicts the boy’s unexpected and rather disturbing response to Vietnamese war victims. In this case, as the boy appropriates a similar logic in his response to the dying Vietnamese to the one he had questioned a few pages earlier, the distance to the discourse of ‘the passive observer’ is now diminished and, in fact, appropriated by the boy. By using the two techniques in tandem, Jergović plays with several aspects related to the situation of acting—or not acting—as the ‘international community’, seeing and reacting to the suffering of others, but also the position of the one whose suffering is observed by others. The last aspect is highly implicit, discerned only in the contextual parallel that the reader is able to draw between the boy’s distanced observation of the Vietnamese and the world’s observation of the Bosnian subject during the war in Bosnia.

5.3.1 Creating the Gap

How, then, does Jergović go about challenging presumptions about the ‘international community’? Let us look at how the issue is initially presented in the novel. Together with his mother and grandmother, watching the news on the television in the living room, little Miljenko (the narrator) is following the latest developments in Chile. The year is 1973 and socialist leader
Salvador Allende’s presidential palace is under heavy attack from the military junta led by Augusto Pinochet, who would eventually succeed with his coup d’état and become infamous for his long-standing brutality against the Chilean people. It is mentioned in the news that Allende in one of his last speeches ‘has sent out a dramatic appeal to all Chileans and the international community.’ 311 The boy’s curiosity is drawn to the last two words: ‘Are we the international community too? I ask Grandma. On the one hand we are … On which hand aren’t we? … On the hand you’re waving in front of the screen so I can’t see anything’ (ML, 36; italics in original). The boy’s question initiates an enquiry not only into what level of responsibility one has as part of the ‘international community’, but also the nature of the supposed solidarity among the socialist states on a global level, as both Yugoslavia and Chile were socialist countries at the time. As the developments become more dramatic, the matters of responsibility and solidarity are brought to a head:

She’s [Grandma] already sitting in front of the television, it’s almost eight, she’s smoking anxiously, waiting for the news to start. Chilean President Salvador Allende has been killed in the presidential palace of La Moneda, says Mufid Memija, bless his poor mother, says Grandma. A man with a mustache and a helmet on his head enters the palace. Augusto Pinochet, says Memija, fascist pig, says Grandma, who’s that, I ask, he killed Allende, says Grandma, why didn’t we defend him? … How were we supposed to defend him from Sarajevo? … Well, didn’t he ask us to? … What, who did he ask? … Us, on the one hand we’re the international community … Well, on the hand that we’re the international community, on that hand we defend him, bless his poor mother … Who’s Salvador Allende’s mother? … I don’t know, poor thing, she’s probably not alive. (ML, 37; italics in original)

Grandma has no clear answer to Miljenko’s question (‘why didn’t we defend him?’), for if the Yugoslav people are the international community, and this admittedly entails moral responsibility and demands a genuine response to fellow socialist Allende’s call for help, in what sense, then, are they not the international community and, therefore, relieved of responsibility? This ambivalence is never explained, but is merely pointed out as an inconsistency in Grandma’s and the other adults’ way of talking about the issue. This is nonetheless an essential inconsistency; in fact, it is central to Jergović’s problematisation of the notion of socialist brotherhood.

There seem to be different ways of understanding the respective positions of the boy and his grandmother. Žink and Simeunović have argued that the boy, when taking solidarity for granted in the concept of the international community, is reproducing the cliché of brotherhood (bratstvo) taken from the

---

official socialist vocabulary to which he has been heavily exposed, while what they see as Grandma’s empathy with Allende’s mother is the only liberating thing in the episode that is able to transgress the brotherhood narrative. I do not agree with this particular dichotomy, though I do believe that the dichotomic interrogation triggered by the boy’s question is central to the episode. I would argue that Grandma’s discourse is the one representative of dominant discourse, and that the boy’s discourse is free from such an influence. The boy makes his enquiries not based on conviction, but because he spots inconsistencies between what the adults usually say about solidarity—especially among socialists—and what they seem to be saying when serious action is demanded from them. Therefore, what can be seen as an expression of empathy in Grandma’s ‘bless his poor mother’, can also be seen as an empty, meaningless phrase obscuring exactly in what sense they as part of a global community are relieved from responsibility. The hollowness of the phrase is further suggested by the fact that Grandma does not even believe Allende’s mother is still alive, which is first explicated after another of the boy’s questions.

I agree, however, with Zink and Simeunović’s conclusion that the ‘child’s gaze’ in the passage is what lays bare the hollowness of a supposedly strong, global socialist affinity. This is achieved by the boy’s questions that are driven by the incomprehension associated with the infantile, which I have highlighted as an important aspect of the technique of dichotomic infantilisation in chapter 4. The naively insisting boy is put in opposition to the realistic mind-set of the adults, whose narrative of a solidary global community is upheld with great difficulties against even the most banal questions posed by the boy. Grandma’s position is revealed as an at best ambivalent position and at worst a meagre and somewhat hypocritical commitment to Allende’s fate. Yet, criticism is not necessarily primarily directed at Grandma’s passivity—because what could they as civilians possibly achieve from Sarajevo? Rather, it concerns Grandma’s continued adherence to the given narrative, which is pretty much exposed as insubstantial by the boy, but defended by Grandma, who obscures the matter of moral responsibility tied to the notion of ‘international community’. From the boy’s perspective, this is just another example of the general insincerity in the conventional discourse of the adults.

By directing his attention towards the fundamental premises for how the adults (that is, people in general) subscribe to ideological narratives, Jergović goes beyond criticising the communist narrative of brotherhood—a critique


313 Zink and Simeunović, ‘Verlorene Brüder?’, 533.
that certainly recurs throughout the novel\textsuperscript{314}—to say something about the more general ideological implications of the issue of responding to others’ suffering in other parts of the world. One thing is learning about others’ suffering, another and completely different thing is perceiving and reacting to it. The episode with Allende’s plea for help is the first step in Jergović’s play with borders, discursive positions and perspectives, as well as perceptions and responses possible in the situation of seeing—or being seen by—the other.

It is noteworthy that in this case the boy takes on the role of the empathetic spectator, who takes the idea of brotherhood and moral responsibility very seriously—more seriously than his grandmother. Because in the next episode that I analyse this is basically inverted; here he is portrayed as a heartless spectator unable to take the suffering of the people in the war in Vietnam seriously, let alone react to it with moral indignation.

5.3.2 Closing the Gap

Again, the reader finds the boy in front of the family’s television set:

I laugh whenever I see little slant-eyed mothers next to their little dead husbands on the TV. Saigon and Hanoi are the names of the first comedies in my life. I spell them out loud, letter by letter, laughing my head off. Those people don’t look like us, and I don’t believe they’re in pain or that they’re really sad. Words of sadness have to sound sad, and tears have to be like raindrops, small and brilliant. Their words aren’t sad, and the tears on their faces are too big and look funny, like the fake tears of the clowns I saw at the circus. I’m just waiting for Mom and Grandma to leave the room so I can watch Saigon and Hanoi and have a laugh. (ML, 62)

The televised images of the suffering Vietnamese in the early 1970s do not—in terms of empathy—affect the boy in the slightest, and certainly not in the way they ‘should’, in the way his grandmother is affected by the same images. The boy’s hyperbolical insensitivity even makes him suspicious of his grandmother’s sincerity: ‘Grandma loved the little slant-eyed mothers and pretended she understood them’ (ML, 63). As in some of the other cases I have discussed, the child character here triggers a ‘shocking effect’ by breaking with the reader’s expectations about how an (innocent) child should think and behave, and what we believe is the ‘natural’ human response to such violent scenes as those watched by the boy. We usually assume that when confronted with the suffering of others, we react with compassion and indignation. We assume that one does not laugh at suffering individuals, regardless of the size of their tears and their way of speaking. We assume that laughter is misplaced in this situation, and further that a child least of all

should be able to express such gruesome cynicism. As readers, all our expectations are challenged by the grotesque depiction given by the boy, and, as a result, the ideological coherence of the passage is disturbed.

The disturbance does not merely concern the reader’s narrative and ideological expectations; the passage also seems to destabilise meaning on the thematic level. This is most acute when the Vietnamese individuals shown on television are basically stripped of all that makes them human: Their bodies, faces, emotions, language, and even their geography are all emptied of meaning, torn from their signified, as they are skewed into grotesque and isolated details (rather than signs making up a whole human being) by the boy’s senseless laughter. The boy is not perceiving suffering individual human beings, only joyous effects without correlation in a sensuous stream of perceptions. The Vietnamese are dehumanised and othered to the near absolute, which makes this case the diametrical opposite of the one discussed earlier, which depicts the boy’s empathy when exposed to Allende’s cry for help.

The question is whether there is something in the boy’s behaviour, underneath the apparent brutality, that could point in another direction. If the boy’s laughter is seen as carnival laughter in the Bakhtinian sense, it is possible to understand the effect of his behaviour ultimately as an attempt to include him in the ‘comic aspect’ of the world, that is, the bizarre events in life that seem to traverse logic, justice, and morality. According to Bakhtin, carnival laughter, with its aim of transgressing and confusing borders, is as much aimed at the one who laughs as those who serve as objects of ridicule. Those who laugh in this way ‘do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world’ by assuming an elevated position over the other, but recognise their own partaking in the world. From this view, the laughter functions as a way of drawing attention to the boy’s position as observer.

I believe that the two cases—the responses to Pinochet’s coup d’état and the suffering of the Vietnamese—should be regarded as two angles in Jergović’s play with the issue of engaging with the world as a passive television viewer and how this viewer reacts to the suffering of others: empathy and indignation in the former, total othering in the other. In the former the boy creates a gap between himself and the role of the passive viewer, and in the latter he fully (and hyperbolically) appropriates this role by enjoying the tragedy of others as a fantasy. Jergović lets the infantile subject appropriate these roles and subsume not so much a discourse or a style of thought, but a perspective (in essence visual), which, depending on the situation, triggers different ideological aspects and makes the boy articulate different positions. When the boy watches the suffering Vietnamese, laughingly enjoying the show, the alienated reaction seems partly to be caused

by the representational logic of television. Of course, it also has something to do with his unfamiliarity with the appearance of the Vietnamese, signalling a dimension of exoticism or racism.

The third position in this play is never actually unfolded in the book. It exists rather as a result of the most likely association by the contextually informed reader with a situation similar to those mentioned above, namely the Bosnian War during which the pain of Bosnian civilians for years could be observed on the news by people all over the world. This association forebodes the events of the second half of Mama Leone, when the tables are turned and the by now grown narrator ends up in the role of someone whose suffering is observed, but regarded as somehow not enough to result in action to stop it. The irony is also implied in the fact that the Vietnam War is referred to immediately after a memory of an idyllic Yugoslavia where you never felt ‘alone and abandoned, forsaken like the far-away countries we heard about on the radio’ (ML, 62). Thus, as the boy’s own forsakenness is foreboded, the position of the exposed, objectified suffering individual is also covered in Jergović’s multi-angle approach to the issue, an approach that does not seem to want to resist against, place judgement on, or uphold either position, but functions instead to problematise the issue from as many perspectives as possible. However, this side of Jergović’s attempt can be understood as a way of making the issue of being exposed to the cameras of the world (but ultimately not helped) an issue not of the West’s particularly bad (balkanist) treatment of Bosnia, but a more general issue of the power of representation to construct and skew reality. Miljenko’s grandmother sees Allende and the Chileans in the same way that Miljenko will be seen by Western Europeans twenty years later.

The function of drawing attention to different aspects of the gazing position is enabled by the childish, wholehearted manner with which he assumes his different roles. In addition, the strategy relies upon two techniques in interplay. While dichotomic infantilisation is observable in Miljenko’s way of distancing from his grandmother’s hypocritical or, at least, ambivalent view of the other, it is also seen in the distance between the boy and the Vietnamese other. In the first case Jergović makes use of the boy’s naïvety and incomprehension to create the effect, while in the other case it relies upon the supposed hyperbolical and carnivalesque quality of recklessness that often characterises the typical ‘instigating’ child character. Appropriative infantilisation, in turn, is perhaps best described by the near total devotion exhibited by the boy playing the roles he is assigned.

The case of Mama Leone clearly shows what is primarily at stake in the use of the appropriation technique in all the above examples: to expose the problematic aspects of the targeted discourse as well as its instability. In Lazarevska’s ‘The Feast of the Rosary’ the appropriation of Serbian nationalist discourse by a small girl can reveal both the passion invested in the word ‘Serb’ and the hollow way in which it is used in nationalist discourse. In
Veličković’s *Sahib* the reasoning of an infantile NGO worker exaggerates and thus makes visible certain mechanisms in Western discourse on Bosnia, while in *Lodgers* a Western cultural perspective is deemed lacking for describing the Bosnian War situation. The infantile quality inherent in the appropriation found in these—and the other texts I have mentioned—serves to skew the normal, conventional understanding of issues by playing with discourse and thus producing reconfigurations of discursive boundaries, positions, and claims.
6 Blending

Not long into the work on this thesis I was made aware of an approach in the photography of Milomir Kovačević that resembled what I saw as subversive infantilisation in literature. One of his series of photos, published in the book Sarajevo and entitled ‘Small Soldiers’ (‘Mali vojnici’), consists of portraits of small children, mostly boys, posing with weapons (sometimes real, sometimes toys) at different locations in wartime Sarajevo.\(^\text{316}\) In an interview in connection with a Sarajevo exhibition, Djeca u ratu (Children in the War), in the spring of 2016 Kovačević describes how he used to walk down the streets of the besieged city and meet children who would happily pose before the camera and imitate—‘in that naïve, innocent way’—the city’s defenders, with whom they quickly became accustomed.\(^\text{317}\) For me, the photos became emblematic of what the authors I was studying were trying to do in the literary medium. Like the literary child characters, the children in the photos impersonating soldiers are framed in such a way that they are able to trigger a commentary about a dominant narrative, more specifically that of the masculine, heroic soldier, which has had considerable historical importance in both the Yugoslav, war and post-Yugoslav contexts.

One quickly notices that the boys in Kovačević’s photos relate to the heroic, macho soldier narrative partly by mimicking it, and it is interesting how this very act of imitation is thematised in the images. As Lešić has observed in one of the photos, which depicts a group of small children with their backs against a wall: The boys ‘are playing up, acting, some of them not quite sure how it is done, and their faces seem to be asking for confirmation that they are doing it right’.\(^\text{318}\) By way of necessity, it seems, the boys leave in the images unmistaken traces of insecurity, naivety, and the impression of not

\(^{316}\)Milomir Kovačević, Sarajevo (Paris, 2012). Figures 1 and 2 below are from this book.


fully grasping the situation. Whether it is the apparent difficulty lifting a machine gun, the exaggeratedly raised ‘manly’ shoulders, or the Mickey Mouse shirt (see Figure 1), it is this, their infantile quality, that enables the photos to place the soldier narrative and the related issue of masculinity in a rather different light and make it susceptible to criticism. I would describe this as appropriation in the sense put forward in the previous chapter: Aspects of the targeted discourse are subsumed into one’s own discourse for the purpose of exposing the former as problematic.

However, there is another related technique which also uses the infantile to interrogate other discourses. Borrowing the term from Fauconnier and Turner, 319 I call this technique blending. It basically consists in mixing and contrasting conceptual inputs in a manner that exposes otherwise naturalised, ‘invisible’ aspects of the targeted discourse. Before turning to the literary texts I wish to make a note on how Kovačević’s photographs can help us define this technique.

From the perspective of blending, the picture of the boy in Figure 1 is understood as a composite of two figures—or a synchronic crossing of two inputs. It works as a conceptual double exposure, which superimposes the separate inputs of ‘soldier’ and ‘child’ onto one image. These two inputs provide the observer with unique connotations—or elements—which are basically contradictory: The ‘soldier’ offers elements such as ‘weapons’, ‘masculinity’, and ‘heroism’, while the ‘child’ bears connotations such as ‘innocence’, ‘play’, and ‘helplessness’. As these elements are placed within the same conceptual frame, the blend produces, according to Mark Turner, an ‘emerging structure’ with new relations between the elements and potential new meaning, which cannot be attributed to one of the original sets of elements alone. 320 A tension is created between these inputs, which challenges the interpreter and estranges the conventional meaning attributed to the two separate original inputs. The tension, as Lešić argues, helps to open up a space in the interpretation that ‘[slows] down the process of perception’. 321 Thus, the added infantile quality triggers the creation of new questions, new angles, and new ways of relating to familiar content. For instance, how is one to understand the induced correlation between the elements of ‘heroism’ and ‘helplessness’? Can the space for criticism created by this tension help us to gain an understanding of militarist narratives in the Bosnian context?

321 Lešić, ‘Kovačević’s War Photographs’, 146.
After briefly explaining the blending technique by reference to the photography of Kovačević, in the following I consider how this technique works in a handful of literary texts. As was the case with Kovačević, primary attention is given to the soldier/child motif—in which the blending technique is predominant—in the story ‘The Feast of the Rosary’ by Lazarevska as well as in Samardžić’s novel *The Forest Spirit* (*Šumski duh*) and in a story from Jergović’s *Sarajevo Marlboro*. Later in the chapter I consider a few examples—in the abovementioned story by Jergović as well as in works by Mehmedinović and Hemon—that broaden the blending technique to include entire diegetic worlds rather than delimited motifs (such as the soldier/child motif).

The soldier/child conceptualisation introduced above is an important one in the post-Yugoslav literary context. It occurs frequently in texts relying on subversive infantilisation, which address issues revolving around masculinity and nationalism, and I argue that the play with the notions of soldier and child can open up for an understanding of Bosnian nationalism in recent decades as well as the country’s socialist history. It is key to bear in mind that the tie between masculinity and nationalism is not limited to a strictly military discourse—and to the war in the 1990s—but is deeply rooted in a number of other discourses that determine how social life is conceptualised. Its presence
in the nationalist paradigm during the last decades is unmistakable, though it
goes as far back as the late 1940s when the ideological foundation for Titoist
Yugoslavia was taking form. Before I turn to the texts, a brief note is in order
about the circumstances surrounding the significance of the image of the
soldier and how it relates to other aspects of dominant discourse in Bosnia.

The heroic soldier is one of the ideal images of masculinity which have
dominated ethnonationalist discourse in Bosnia and much of the ex-Yugoslav
region as a whole. Rooted in the Tito era’s emphasis on the patriotic and self-
sacrificing male (partisan) hero, it has since the war in the 1990s—under the
influence of the transitional social conditions—developed into what Tatjana
Rosić has called the ‘Balkan model of masculinity’. This model of
masculinity, she argues, is characterised by a number of problematic aspects,
including a chauvinist culture of war and nationalist passions, the glorification
of criminals and war profiteers, and the masculinisation of official politics—
with the accompanying exclusion of women from politics.

Another commentator, Marko Živkovic, suggests that this particular configuration is
the result of a ‘crisis of masculinity’, which has provided ‘a fertile ground for
nationalist re-traditionalizers advocating a return to “real manhood” and
denouncing all the sissies, fags and other emasculated men’.

Rosić, then, further argues that although masculinity in the region has
suffered from the effects of the war (physical and mental harm, losing the war,
not being able to provide safety for one’s family, and so forth), much effort,
also officially sanctioned, has been put into the rehabilitation of this crisis of
masculinity. The prioritisation of this set of issues is visible not least in the
cultural production in the ex-Yugoslav states, where literary works that
portray the soldier at the front and frame the crisis of masculinity as an
‘aftermath of the historical trauma’ of war receive great critical attention.

Good examples of this tendency in Bosnia are, for instance, novels by Josip
Mlakić (Kad magle stanu) and Faruk Šehić (Pod pritiskom), which have been
widely acclaimed. However, it is important to recognise that this process of
rehabilitation is seldom unequivocal, which is evident from the fact that
authors like Mlakić and Šehić at other times—perhaps as a rule—are seen to
‘deconstruct the heroic ethos’ and to work in opposition to the nationalist
model of masculinity, especially the heroic soldier.

Regardless of individual works and their interpretation, the last two
decades of Bosnian literature undoubtedly show a preoccupation with

---

324 Rosić, ‘Panika u redovima’, 52.
325 Anisa Avdagić (2006), ‘Politike reprezentacije (O nekoliko bosanskohercegovačkih
masculine narratives, and particularly so when it comes to the understanding of the war—not just historically, but also in terms of how personal experiences and memories are constructed. This becomes particularly obvious when considering the marginalisation of women’s experiences of the war in the general corpus of ‘war literature’ as well as in the broader cultural field. However, apart from the resilience of images of the male hero found in texts receiving feminist attention, such as the works of Alma Lazarevska, Fadila Nura Haver, Cecilija Toskić, and Ljubica Žikić, I believe it can be said that the same critical attitude is generally manifested in the texts relying on subversive infantilisation—regardless of their level of awareness of other issues than gender issues.

This will be clear when looking at the following examples, which all use blending of ‘soldier’ and ‘child’ inputs to criticise the notion of masculinity, as described above. Their critique of the image of the soldier is not restricted to a general anti-militaristic type of critique, but always focusses upon the unique and fine-detail level contextual circumstances, which, when interrogated, reveal just how much the soldier as a figure is rooted in the fabric of society—in the past, today, and, of course, on the threshold that the war entailed.

6.1 On the Threshold

The war as a threshold—paralleled with the coming-of-age story—is perhaps the most revealing motif in criticism of the soldier image, as it often works as a kind of rite of passage, whose inherent notions of ambiguity and transformation are able to reveal the unstable and ambiguous character of sedimented identities, such as that of the soldier. In these cases, the child character is arrested on the threshold between identities in the Bakhtinian sense of the term threshold: first, as a defining point in the character’s life, as a ‘moment of crisis’, which necessarily triggers reassessment and revaluation, and, second, as a state of undecidability in which ideas, perceptions, and identities are yet to be finalised and thus can reveal the blurred liminal space between two notions. Below I look at two examples that seek to utilise this kind of threshold together with the blending technique to produce a liminal space between ‘soldier’ and ‘child’, which in turn is able to reveal problematic aspects of the notion of soldier.

---

6.1.1 Guns and Babies

The motif of the threshold is important in Samardžić’s novel Šumski duh (The Forest Spirit). The reader will recall that I addressed a central theme in the novel in chapter 3, namely the parallelisation of the transition between childhood/adolescence and adulthood and the societal transition from socialist Yugoslavia via war to succession states dominated by nationalist paradigms. The techniques used in the book to build up this theme include the blending of inputs in a fashion quite similar to that exhibited in Kovačević’s photos. Halfway into the novel, when the adolescent narrator Kosta has just returned to his hometown Belgrade from more than a year in military service—shortly before the war in Yugoslavia—he slowly notices that the simple times of childhood are gone and everything has become considerably more complicated:

My friends were no longer the same. They’d even gotten hold of a rifle with an adjustable scope and a pistol. We called them babies. I would ask them: “Where are your babies?” and they would reply in concordance: “In a safe place, you Turk”.

At this point Kosta finds himself on the threshold—between states, mentalities, and identities. The fact that Kosta is half Albanian has never been an issue before, but it now becomes something of a problem, as his friends become more and more excluding and aggressive in their attitude towards him (‘Turk’ in this context is a derogatory term for Muslim). More importantly, he notices among his friends a growing fixation with ethnicity, territory, and everything military. While the quote above reveals only a glimpse of the totality of the new mentality to which Kosta is suddenly exposed, it contains a few essential aspects that characterise this ‘sudden nationhood’, as Bergholz would call it. While the young men are not presented as proper soldiers—though later on some of them will happily enlist—their actions mirror the ‘Balkan model of masculinity’ with its strong tie to the soldier ideal, an ideal enhanced by the aggressive nationalist discourse dominating the political and medial discourses in Serbia and in the other republics. It is ironic that Kosta, who has served in the military for more than a year, has entirely missed the increasing militarisation of society; this can be explained partly by his apolitical mind-set and partly by his isolation in the army, though. Familiar as he is with the military, it is not the military stuff per se that shocks him; what takes him by surprise is instead the high level of significance that his friends, previously indifferent to all things political or ideological, suddenly assign to defending territory, ethnicity, and homeland.

---

331 Goran Samardžić, Šumski duh (Belgrade, 2006), 85 (my translation).
The quote suggests that Kosta’s adolescent friends have not entirely transgressed the state of childhood, but are trapped in an ambivalent, unfinished blend that allows the reader to catch them playing with guns and babies. The image of macho men is juxtaposed with an image of children, and it is essentially this choice of name (‘babies’) for their guns that gives the young men away and triggers in the reader’s mind a mix of inputs that would normally not be compatible. Whole clusters of connotations tied to ‘baby’ and ‘gun’ are now actualised and demand from the reader an ‘elaboration’ of the emerging structure of relations in the blend. The effect is that the macho behaviour of the young men comes across as much less authentic, as their preoccupation with the firearms, which signals grown men’s behaviour, is likened to taking care of babies, which would, traditionally speaking, imply a woman’s job and thus their emasculation, or it is likened to small girls’ play with ‘babies’, giving again a feminine as well as an infantile quality to a supposed manly setting. A masculine scenario is overtaken, in a sense, by women and children, as an impression is created of the boys wishing to be grown and soldier-like men rather than actually being so, which undermines the militarist, chauvinist type of masculinity longed for by the young men.

It is in this sense that the passage in Samardžić’s novel is similar to what I observed in Kovačević’s photos earlier, as it, by blending inputs, seeks to reveal infantile traces in what is expected to be a grown man’s discourse (with particular masculine ideals), and thus in the end makes ambivalent what is otherwise staged as unequivocal and definite. This turns an episode involving young men with a newly acquired war mentality which would normally be intimidating into an almost harmless representation of insecure teenage boys trying to live up to the expectations of a particular ideal of masculinity. Without neglecting its significance and power, the chauvinist soldier ideal is disarmed. Rather than using a typical, overt infantile discourse centred on a child character, whose perspective changes the proportions of the world and can thus make something new appear, it is enough for Samardžić to frame the situation in such a way that the small, but telling traces of the infantile quality come to fore. This is enough for the connotations that appear to disturb the solidity of the targeted representation.

6.1.2 A Bosnian Soldier

The sparse use of an obviously childish perspective also characterises one of Alma Lazarevska’s short stories, ‘The Feast of the Rosary’, which I discussed in connection with the technique of dichotomisation in chapter 4. Neither is there in this story emphasis on the perspective of the child; instead the child character is described from the perspective of a fairly neutral (but not disinterested) adult narrator. Apart from being a story about civilian women and children who fall victim of ethnic cleansing in a rural area in Bosnia in the

---

1990s, the text interrogates a number of social and political mechanisms on
the threshold between communist Yugoslavia and what would later become a
number of succession states.

One such central mechanism is dealt with in Lazarevska’s treatment of the
continuity into post-communist times of what has been called ‘one of the
ideologically strongest figures symbolizing Yugoslav socialism’—namely the
Yugoslav soldier.334 This is done with remarkable awareness of the potential
in the tension between the image of the child and the image of the soldier:

That’s how the nephew received a rifle in Travnik and became a
Bosnian soldier. He was still too young to be a soldier, although a lock
of his hair above the right temple had overnight become grey in
Sokoline. The Bosnian Army still didn’t have a uniform of its own, so
when the nephew put the rifle down, he looked again like a boy. That’s
the way he appears on the photograph published in Travnički ljiljan in
1992. He is turned towards the camera in half profile. The caption
below the photo reads: a break before battle. In Der Spiegel in October
the same year the caption to the same photo, in translation, reads: two
fighters of the Bosnian Army and a Bosnian boy. Der Spiegel does not
bring the photograph from the cover page of Travnički ljiljan, which
depicts a group of eighteen soldiers in total. Against the clear blue sky
are the tips of twenty-one pine trees. The caption reads: the Bosnian
Army, stronger by the day.335

What is striking about this passage is first the smooth, yet complex oscillating
movement between two conceptual inputs: the categories of being a boy and
being a soldier. Throughout the quote the young, nameless nephew goes in
and out of the soldier role. Like the boys in Samardžić mentioned above, he
stands on a threshold, a space enabling the unfinished negotiation over his
identity. Whether he is understood simply as a boy or as a soldier depends
only on a few symbols, whose meanings are relativised and changed
depending on the perspective from which the boy is seen.

The very first and most obvious shift between the two categories occurs
when a rifle is put into the boy’s hands, and he is, as it says, transformed into a
soldier. What is central here, I believe, is that he is said to be transformed into
a ‘Bosnian soldier’, which seems not to be the same as a typical soldier, but
has a particular significance. Initially this distinction is presented in the
assertion that the highly unprepared Bosnian army had no standard uniform
when the war in Bosnia began; therefore, when the boy puts the rifle away he

334 Tanja Petrović, ‘Contested Normality: Negotiating Masculinity in Narratives of Service in the
Yugoslav People’s Army’, in Daniel Koleva, ed., Negotiating Normality: Everyday Lives in Socialist
335 Alma Lazarevska, ‘Blagdan krunice’, in Bijek su nešto drugo (Sarajevo, 2003), 103 (my translation,
as are all other quotations from the story; hereafter FR).
is instantly transformed back into a boy. This suggests an unusually fine line between the categories, and the vagueness in the distinction—only a gun differentiates the soldier from the boy—signals uncertainty as to what it really means to be a soldier and, more specifically, what it means to be a soldier in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav context. As in Samardžić, the passage is not described from the perspective of an infantile subject, but the process of infantilising the soldier again relies on the emphasis on traces of the infantile quality, which is enough to destabilise the image of the heroic soldier as well as to question its ties to the developing masculinity of a young boy.

Apart from signifying the uncertain status of the image of the soldier, the absence of the uniform signifies a break with Yugoslav military tradition, with which maturity and the development of masculinity are associated in the story. The JNA (Yugoslav National Army) uniform is depicted as an important and honourable part of the family tradition, as the reader learns that many homes in the village had—in a central spot in the house—a photo of the oldest son wearing his uniform. ‘When someone visited one’s home’, it says, ‘it was usual for the guest first to take a look at the photo and declare how well the uniform suited the young man’ (FR, 102). In addition, the picture ‘revealed that the household had provided a soldier to the Yugoslav National Army’ (ibid.), and that was a reason for great pride.336

There is yet another layer in the meaning of the uniform. In chapter 4 I mentioned the boy’s familiarity with the uniforms, weapons, and other equipment of the JNA (based on this knowledge, he is the one who is able to spot the enemy soldiers at a distance). This acquaintance suggests his exposure to the military narratives sanctioned by the Yugoslav state, which greatly influenced the ideological and social aspects of the Yugoslav project. In this context, especially the Yugoslav Pioneer Organization comes to mind as a phenomenon that exposed children and young people to what was seen as beneficial aspects of army life. The organisation was established during the Second World War and mobilised children and teenagers to actively contribute to the communist cause by carrying out both civil and military tasks. The latter included ‘snatching weapons from German soldiers and giving them to Partisans, courier missions, guarding villages, enacting small diversions, and so on’.337 Although in peacetime the priority of the movement shifted to raising the young people to be good communist citizens and ‘to develop feelings of patriotism, Socialist spirit, and solidarity’,338 the

336 This is supported by research, which states that even now, in post-Yugoslav times, ‘[p]hotographs depicting a young man in the JNA uniform are found in family albums in virtually every former Yugoslav home, placed among photographs depicting other rites of passage of the boy/man’. Petrović, ‘Contested Normality’, 85.


movement, like most of the Partisan mythology at large, continued to be influenced by military discourse. One example of this was the uniform the pioneers wore on special occasions—such as the celebration on November 29, the Republic Day of the SFRY—which consisted of ‘a red scarf and a blue cap with a red star on the front [...], a white top and a blue skirt or trousers’. Other than inducing collective passions, the uniform was a privilege and regarded as a sign of coming of age and the development of social maturity; the child, who could become a member as early as in the first form, gradually became ready and dedicated to contribute to the Yugoslavian communist project.

Although in the story most of the pride inherent in the uniform—be it that of the JNA or that of the pioneers—has vanished when the war breaks out, mechanisms in the soldier narrative associated with these uniforms survive. This is one of the main points made by Lazarevska. We see it towards the end, when the setting has shifted from the rural landscape in the middle of war to post-war exile in Prague, and we are told that the boy ‘could stand across from a soldier on sentry’, competing on who could stand still in the same spot the longest (FR, 123). The need in the boy to continue to compare himself to and identify with a soldier is striking and suggests a deep-seated cultural code of masculinity inherited from the Tito era.

More immediately, however, the survival of the soldier narrative of the Tito era is traced in the insistence by the magazine Travnički ljiljan to include the boy—despite his young age—in the caption to the picture of Bosnian soldiers ‘taking a break’ from battle. Would it be too incisive to make a parallel between the willingness to let boys snatch weapons from Nazi soldiers during Second World War (as we are told the pioneers did) and the willingness to include them in the Bosnian army fifty years later—even if this is only in a propaganda picture? Lazarevska’s strategy is obviously more sophisticated than to suggest such a direct correlation, but what she is attempting to show is the vitality of a militarist discourse as a heritage from Yugoslav ideology, which relies on the socialisation of children into a military mind-set. That the implication of the boy in the category of soldier should be regarded as a circumstance possible exclusively in the Yugoslav/post-Yugoslav context is further affirmed by the contrasting outside perspective manifested in the way the German daily Der Spiegel chooses to capture the same image as the one published in the Bosnian magazine. From this outside perspective, the picture is described as depicting two Bosnian soldiers and a Bosnian boy—there is no ambiguity between the categories. German eyes, it is suggested, see no trace at all of a soldier in the boy. Der Spiegel also omits to republish the more clearly propagandist image with the message of how the Bosnian army is becoming stronger by the day.

As I suggested earlier, the infantilising element in this instance of blending is not found in the boy character’s active interrogation of the other’s discourse; instead he is moved in and out of roles by others, which perhaps suggests the eagerness of outside forces to mould him. These roles—‘the boy’ and ‘the soldier’—which are usually understood as incompatible and contradictory, are blended in a somewhat different way than in Samardžić’s novel. Whereas Samardžić creates a blend by suggesting two strictly speaking synchronic images—of manly soldiers and women taking care of babies—Lazarevska constructs her blend by letting the boy oscillate rapidly between the roles of the boy and that of the soldier, thereby revealing the ambiguity of the Yugoslav (and post-Yugoslav) attitude towards children and their development within the community. The diachronic perspective also reveals the problematic continuation of communist narratives.

However, both approaches share the effect of ambiguity resulting from the blend, which makes the targeted narratives less decidable and, therefore, more vulnerable to criticism. They also share the not entirely obvious infantile perspective, in both cases suggesting that an overtly childish style of narrative is not necessary to create a critical infantilising effect, but that it can be enough to frame events and situations in such a way that subtle traces of the infantile quality are emphasised.

6.3 Projecting a Way Out

In this section I look at another text dealing with the soldier narrative, which seeks to achieve the same effect of ambiguity as in the texts mentioned above while relying more clearly on the simplifying discourse associated with the child character. The story I am referring to is found in Miljenko Jergović’s Sarajevo Marlboro and is only a few pages long. Its title, ‘Chico the Seducer’, is borrowed from an issue of an Italian comic book, which was highly popular in Yugoslavia and which follows the adventures of the superhero Zagor and his Mexican sidekick Chico.341 The comic plays an important role in the narrative as it provides a common point of reference in the conversations between the two characters, twelve-year-old Harun and twenty-seven-year-old Armin, who is a soldier in the Bosnian army. Every now and then when Armin returns from the mountain Igman, where he is defending Sarajevo from Serb aggressors, he uses the comic reference to put his experience of the war into words. This is how the young—but not particularly naïve—Harun describes his friend’s stories from the frontline:

---

341 Chico’s catchphrase, ‘Karamba, karambita’ (‘goodness, gracious’), has inspired the title of a more famous work, namely the song by Rambo Amadeus that draws into question the political establishment both in socialist Yugoslavia and the post-war period. See Brana Mijatović, “‘Throwing Stones at the System’: Rock Music in Serbia during the 1990s”, Music and Politics, 2/2 (2008), doi: 10.3998/mp.9460447.0002.203.
He’s a bit eccentric, you see. Put it this way: he’s twenty-seven, right, and he’s fighting against the Serbs, but when he talks about the enemy he doesn’t call them Chetniks or anything like that. Instead he calls them damn raving Redcoats, or Comanches, or robbers from Rio Grande. He reckons that way it’s easier to make sense of the war. Mind you, I’m not convinced. I think he just describes the war in terms of a comic strip because he thinks it’ll help me to understand what’s going on.342

Drawing on typical discourse found in comic narratives, including the Zagor series (but also series such as Batman, Blake the Stone, and Commander Mark), Armin represents himself as a selfless hero, who much like Zagor maintains the peace in the wilderness and sees that justice is done in the end. In contrast to the previous examples, here blending is established through a projection of the comic book medium, which carries with it a set of common genre attributes and expectations that come on top of and colour the expected form, or ‘genre’, of the soldier’s experience. The comic template can be said to tweak this experience by emphasising certain traits that are in some sense already part of the soldier narrative, but are now exaggerated so as to achieve a defining function. For example, like all superheroes Armin has an arch-enemy, ‘the innkeeper from Vogošć’, known also as the Beast, with whom he has ‘been locked in combat for over fifteen months’, knowing every detail in his appearance, behaviour, and thinking (CS, 83). Allegedly, this is why Armin knows that the villain innkeeper has a picture of the Zagor character tattooed on his shoulder. This small detail greatly annoys Armin, probably because it signals that he is not the only one claiming the epithet of ‘the protector of the weak and the oppressed’, with which Zagor is often characterised. The implication—that he has not got the sole moral right to identify with Zagor—is also annoying because it is the one thing that disrupts the black-and-white comics perspective that he mixes into his representation of being a Bosnian soldier at the frontline. This small discrepancy in the mixed narrative, in which the narratives of the soldier and the superhero otherwise seem to match in all other respects, can tell us several things.

Harun, the young boy in the story, suspects that Armin is relating his war experiences in the language of comic books for Harun’s sake, as he is too young to understand, and this seems at first glance quite plausible. Why would anyone, especially a man in his late twenties, talk about his war experiences as if they were part of a plot in a comic book? This, however, is not the impression the reader gets when reading the story; it is rather that Armin does this—as it is also suggested in the quote above—because ‘that way it’s easier to make sense of the war’. Above all, the simplicity implied in the comics

narrative, especially regarding the clear-cut distinction between good and bad, is helpful in this respect. For the soldier Armin this sort of ‘comic book morality’ in the superhero genre, in which the good do good because they are good, and the bad are immoral because they are ‘greedy or insane or just plain evil’, can provide reassurance of the legitimacy of one’s acts of violence by affirming a clear-cut distinction between ‘us’, the good, and ‘them’, the bad. A few subtle traces in the text show that Armin’s experiences are actually a bit more nuanced than he admits to in his subsequent representations, like when he in a brief comment acknowledges a familiarity with his enemy the innkeeper. ‘You know’, he tells Harun, ‘the innkeeper would probably be my best friend if I didn’t have to kill him. The Redcoats are people like us, don’t forget. Their only mistake was choosing to be Redcoats’ (CS, 83). After all, before the war Armin and the innkeeper were both Yugoslavs growing up reading about the adventures of Zagor. A few moments later, though, the simplistic perspective of the comics narrative seems to ‘kick in’, re-establishing a solid dichotomy between them, as Armin expresses his anger about the fact ‘that a fucking Redcoat has a tattoo of Zagor’ (CS, 86).

Armin’s projection of the superhero comic book and its blending into the soldier narrative is a way of infantilising and simplifying things; framing his experiences in a much less complex way than would be expected of a representation from the frontline, removing it from any corporeal, dangerous and gruesome dimension, in a sense he flees from the situation.

Another (related) motivation for blending the comics perspective into his experiences may be the reassurance it carries: Not only does the comic form provide a template for who is good and who is bad; it also predetermines which side will prevail in the end. This can be observed in Armin’s promise when he is given a bullet that Harun has found on the ground: ‘the damn raving Redcoats will never capture Ontario or float down the Miljacka in a steamboat!’ (CS, 87).

However, while the infantilising blend aims to create a sense of meaning, escape, and assurance for Armin as a character, from the perspective of the reader it has a critical edge. It reveals the far-going similarities between the soldier narrative and the superhero narrative, where the latter merely exaggerates certain aspects of the former—such as the rhetoric of heroism or the good–bad dichotomy. In their exaggerated form, Armin’s stories show the incompatibility of a standard heroic soldier narrative and what actually went on in the mountains surrounding Sarajevo. Although Armin is hiding the true events from the reader—and perhaps because he is doing so—it is possible to assume that they are nothing like those presented in his infantilised narrative. What we are left with are not his supposed heroic deeds, but his wish that

---

everything was different, more simple, and clear-cut than the war situation allows it to be. An interesting detail is that it is the older of the two characters who is driving the infantilisation forwards, while the suspicion of the twelve-year-old Harun represents the more down-to-earth pacifist tendency, which reaches its culmination at the very end of the story when he declares that his favourite comic book issue was 'the one with Chico the Seducer, who only killed a Redcoat by accident' (CS, 88).

6.4 Versions of Reality

In the examples discussed above the technique of blending mainly concerns the blending of specific, enclosed images that can be isolated from the narrative as a whole. However, there are instances that take blending a step further by constructing diegetic worlds that rest entirely on the intertwining of different perspectives.

One of the most immediate instances of such an approach is found in Mehmedinović’s one-line snapshot ‘Kids’, which reads: ‘S: Harun, come on, get into the house, it’s grenading outside’. If we take at face value Aleksandar Hemon’s claim in an essay that this is a depiction of Mehmedinović’s wife and their son Harun (today an artist and filmmaker), then the blend is an exceptional image of shelling laid on top of a very familiar image: a mother calling her child from the window to come inside—as if the grenades were rain, and as if the worst possible outcome of staying outside was a three-day cold. It is the tension between normalcy and exceptionality contained in the conceptual pair raining–grenading that engages the reader to reflect upon the everyday state of war, and it relies to a great extent on the connotations of the infantile, which are activated.

In contrast to the other examples in this chapter, Mehmedinović’s one-liner is not—at least not overtly—directed at a particular ideology or discourse, but at an ontological consequence of a violent ideology. However, similar to the previous examples the process of infantilisation here is not triggered by the child character as an agent who actively undermines a conventional representation. Instead, the estrangement that occurs from the crossing of images of reality is supported and intensified by the trace of a child’s presence, which in this case signifies a lack of awareness of the exceptional and dangerous consequences of falling bombs. Because if the only thing that separates the two conceptual inputs is the circumstance of grenading instead of raining, then one can imagine that the boy is still playing when his mother

344 Semezdin Mehmedinović, Sarajevo Blues, trans. Ammiel Alcalay (San Francisco, 1998), 52. The idiosyncratic use of ‘grenading’ instead of ‘shelling’ in the translation is an effort to indicate the closeness between the images of falling grenades and falling rain, which is more obvious in the original text, as the word for falling (padati) is idiomatic in both cases. The original reads: ‘S: Hajde, Harune, ulazi u kuću, napolju padaju granate’, Mehmedinović, Semezdin, Sarajevo blues (Sarajevo, 2004), 35.
calls him, which may suggest that he has not necessarily understood or is not aware of the warning signal associated with bombardment. This, in turn, suggests that bombardment has become a normal, everyday event. Drawing on the unawareness associated with the child, as the link between two conditions, the short text manages to estrange the typical idea of war as a state of exception and instead produces a heightened, or at least alternative, experience of the infiltration of war into the deepest corners of personal life, eventually becoming as normal as any other state.

The blending of realities into an uncertain, ambiguous representation is also utilised and developed in Hemon’s story ‘The Sorge Spy Ring’ from The Question of Bruno. It tells two parallel stories. In the main text the reader follows the childhood memories of the narrator told from the perspective of him as a small boy back in the late 1970s. The remembrances focus upon the boy’s obsession with spies and his increasing suspicion that his father might be a spy working for the Soviet government. The parallel narrative unfolds in the 40 footnotes accompanying the main text and recounts episodes (factual mixed with fictitious) from the biography of the Soviet intelligence officer Richard Sorge, who was active in Germany and Japan during the Second World War, and who is most famous for discovering the intentions of Nazi Germany to break the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and attack the Soviet Union. The first footnote in Hemon’s story tells that Stalin, when first receiving this piece of information, disregarded it as ‘misleading’. The content in the following notes are loosely associated with what is mentioned in the main text.

Fascinated by Sorge’s life as it is portrayed in a book about the greatest spies of the war, the boy starts imagining his father’s career as an engineer, which involves frequent business trips to Leningrad and Moscow, as a cover for espionage activity. This makes the boy start investigating his father’s supposed secret life, which means going through his things in the house, looking for ‘typical’ spy gadgets and documents, and drawing conclusions about his ‘mysterious smiles when he watched the news, as if he knew more than the bland announcers’ (SSR, 57). The more the two narratives unfold, the more tightly they are intermingled, resulting in, as Nicolosi puts it, ‘an artful blending of its two parts, to an ever-stronger lack of distinction between reality and fiction, past and present’. Peripeteia is reached when agents of the State Security Service are in fact sent out to arrest his father in October 1977. He is sentenced to three years in prison for ‘disseminating foreign propaganda’ and is made an example of on national television (SSR, 80). Suddenly the stake of the tension between fact and fiction in the story becomes considerably higher. The grown narrator’s perspective now intrudes

---

upon the child’s perspective: ‘My entertaining idea that Father was a spy had
never been much more than a way to embellish my vacant childhood, but with
Father’s arrest it suddenly became palpable’ (SSR, 73). It is at this point that
the father stops being a figure of the boy’s imagination and becomes a spy, at
least by the government’s definition, with all the tragic consequences that
follow: the breakup of the family, the shunning by the circle of family friends,
the father’s illness and death, and the death of his younger sister. It is
noteworthy that the reader never learns whether or not the allegations against
his father are true; the word ‘palpable’ in the quote above should be
emphasised, as this is the closest we come to the fact that the father was
indeed a spy. I believe that this blurred conceptual zone, where fact is entirely
indistinguishable from phantasy, is what the author has tried to achieve by
blending the narratives of a child’s imaginings and the biography of a real-life
spy. Commentators sometimes describe this tension as a general tension
‘between a definite view of history as it stands and a more imaginative
retelling of events per individual or even familial interjections’, something that
is typical for Hemon’s oeuvre. However, I would like to stress the blending
as a more specific issue, which functions to critically target a discourse
associated with the Yugoslav government and its mass surveillance of its
citizens.

The type of structural suspicion and monitoring found in the text has been
described as a manifestation of ‘the Stalinist techniques in Yugoslav
culture’. It is illustrated in the obnoxious behaviour of the seemingly
untouchable State Security agent, Slobodan, but mainly in the propaganda
surrounding the sentencing of the father, who is exemplified as ‘the internal
enemy who never sleeps’, one of the ‘dissembling intellectuals, spreading
dissent like a lethal germ’ in opposition to ‘Tito and his vision’, and that it is
crucial to ‘[protect] what our fathers bled for’ (SSR, 80). What the blending
does in this text—and this occurs at the same time as it blurs the boundary
between fact and fiction in the climactic twist—is to create an anticipation of
the separability of fact and fiction in the first stages of the story. After the
initial exposition the reader starts perceiving the story as a comical description
heavily exaggerated by the infantile character, who is eager to make his dull
everyday life a bit more interesting. In this respect, the spy narrative, blended
into the main story, emphasises the quality of imagination and fiction in the
boy’s life in general—a fun addition to a monotone everyday life. And more
importantly, it adds this quality to the government discourse, making state-
controlled monitoring seem harmless and, thus, a fictitious, imaginative
addition to real life rather than an actual part of it, like when the boy believes

he is being ‘watched over constantly by Comrade Tito himself’, when having to spend periods of time alone at home (SSR, 55):

It was soothing to know, however, that I was being monitored when I was all by myself, that if someone came to abduct me (the police or the devil himself), it would be seen, and I would be, doubtless, retrieved from the sneaky villains. It also meant that I had to wash my hands after using the bathroom, couldn’t pick my nose and stick the snot to the underside of the chair, nor could I belch like a hog. (SSR, 56)

The parodic passage hyperbolises the positive effects of state control, especially its supposed pedagogical effects. The leader Tito is presented as a collective father figure—and perhaps even more so because of the absence of the boy’s father—mirroring the image of Tito as ‘an indisputable authority’ that stood as the guarantor of ‘security and communal spirit’ in the population, which internalised the disciplinary mechanisms demanded by the government.351 It is relevant to interpret the television set, which is where the boy thinks the secret camera is located, as an instance of panoptical disciplining, which makes the subject feel observed, even when this is really not the case, resulting in self-discipline.352 The boy’s fear of picking his nose, though exaggerated, at least hints at the extent to which the state could go in its surveillance of civilians.

I would argue that Hemon does something in addition to this by relying on the principle of blending, which governs the story in general. As part of the spy narrative in the story, which is laid on top of the boy’s life, the quoted passage contributes to creating (unexpectedly) a distance to government monitoring, making its structural scope seem less realistic and more ‘fictional’. The comical approach to the issue in the first part of the story makes the plot fairly easy to handle for the reader, who expects a clear separation between fact and fiction, while the peripeteia then subverts this sense of control and questions the established borders. This means that the infantilising blending of the main story and the spy narrative, ironically, first creates a separation between actual events and fiction, before collapsing these two inputs into one—when what we thought was an imaginative addition to actuality turns into reality, as the father is arrested and labelled a spy. With this story Hemon has created an unusual and intriguing blend with effects that are complex and probably not possible to track in detail, but which can reveal both troubling aspects of ideology and the possibilities of subversive infantilisation to expose the same.

351 Boris Buden, Kaptoljski kolodvor (Belgrade, 2002), 20–22.
7 Conclusion

After the detailed analytical approach in chapters 3–6 I believe there is reason to take a step back and reconsider some of the fundamental issues that have been addressed from a broader perspective. This can help to make sense of the literary, methodological, and political significance of subversive infantilisation. I believe that at this point it should be possible to formulate a qualified answer to the question of what potential and limits the employment of subversive infantilisation has had to produce criticism of the hegemonic order in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the past twenty years. In the following I not only say something about the use of infantile discourse in Bosnian literature during the past two decades, but also about my own methodological approach to the strategy. I return to three fundamental issues which are by now familiar to the reader, as they have been addressed explicitly and implicitly throughout the thesis. These are: (1) the use of the infantile subject (child characters as well as others) as a tool for critically interrogating dominant discourse, (2) the techniques by which the interrogation occurs, and lastly (3) the political implications of this interrogation.

In regard to the first issue I point out the heterogeneity in the way the infantile character is used to produce criticism, and I argue that the level of critical effect achieved depends less on the supposed abilities of the infantile perspective than on the sophistication with which this perspective is mobilised into discursive interrogation of dominant discourse. One of my points is that the infantile subject is only one, albeit central, ingredient in the process of interrogation. In order to reveal the critical potential of infantile discourse to reconfigure dominant discourse, it is necessary to focus on the process of interrogation itself, which means looking at how certain representations associated with dominant discourse are presented, challenged, and ultimately undermined. Turning the attention to the discursive interrogation of dominant discourse—rather than limiting the focus to the infantile perspective—means elaborating how we understand the play with discursive positions, conceptual boundaries, and images that occur in the texts. I will argue that analysing subversive infantilisation using the techniques I have identified is useful for
developing and nuancing the creative, vibrant, and plastic play with hegemonic representations. Only by seeing the ‘how’ of subversive infantilisation is one able to make conclusions about the level of critical success of the strategy, both in particular cases and as a broader tendency in the literature.

It is also by knowing the ‘how’ that one is able to understand the political dimension of the level of critical success. Certainly, the political side of subversive infantilisation is the least obvious issue, but an issue that one at least has to touch upon in order to make sense of a possible social effect. No matter how compelling, sophisticated, or critical an infantilising piece of text may be, one cannot help but ask what actual social difference it is able to produce. To what extent is subversive infantilisation actually subversive? I argue that subversive infantilisation is political insofar as it manages to transform the alternative claims about reality found in the texts—claims that are otherwise excluded from the hegemonic order—into a subjectivity demanding to be heard and taken into account. In other words, I consider the political potential through the process of subjectivation in the Rancièrian sense, that is, the making of a subject qualified as a political being able to make political demands. At the very end I also briefly say something about what subversive infantilisation can tell us about the potential of literature in general to make a social difference in the world and the applicability of the methodological focus to which I have adhered.

7.1 The Infantile Subject and Beyond

One of the most commonly identified characteristics of Bosnian infantile discourse is the fact that it is told from the perspective of a homodiegetic child or adolescent narrator. The reader is in a way given the opportunity (though in a highly stylised fashion) to view the world through the ‘child’s eyes’, which should be understood as an optics that filters experiences of the social world so as to make new or alternative aspects of it come to the fore. In this alteration lies, it is assumed, the foundation for any subversive effect that the text may have. This description fits the standard situation of a literary child character’s relation to the world, both in the particular corpus I have studied and elsewhere. I showed how this was the case in Veličković’s *Lodgers*, where the clever and curious teenage narrator actively and without hesitation investigates a range of issues related to the war in Sarajevo. It is even more obvious in Jergović’s *Mama Leone*, where the boy narrator subjects the adult world to the greatest suspicion and scepticism possible, questioning even the most basic characteristics of conventional language. These are cases where the active, relentless, and instigating child actively uses its outsider position to break free from various kinds of conventions.
I have argued that for the most part the texts portray situations in which child characters are less consciously ‘sceptical’ and even wholly unaware that there are aspects of the adult world that one should question. This is, for instance, the case in Saša Stanišić’s *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*. Stanišić’s boy character Aleksandar, compared with the boy in Jergović’s *Mama Leone*, who functions almost like a deliberate ironist ‘seeking’ situations in which he can expose the lies of the adults, is more of a victim of his surroundings, as he is suddenly exposed to a turn of events that he can neither fathom nor adapt to. Though the boy exhibits a sense of ironic humour, he does not seek or trigger the situation as such. He is only an ingredient in the totality of the ironic situation in which he finds himself. Here it is not in the child character’s own discourse that criticism is produced, but rather from a perspective only available to the reader, in the conflict between the child’s discourse and that of the adult. In other words, the child character does not produce criticism ‘single-handedly’, but is rather used as an element among others in the construction of the text. This suggests that it is not the child character that does the subversive infantilisation, but the text as a whole, in the situation it creates.

This becomes even more evident when considering cases where children are either passive, peripheral characters or represent reactionary, hegemonic stances. The former case is exemplified in Veličković’s *My Daughter’s Father*, where the girl simply works as a skewing mirror for the thoughts of the narrator. The latter is found in *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*, where the narrator’s playmates represent nationalist ideas, and they are the ones who put pressure on the multi-ethnic narrator. An especially powerful example of this type of pressure is found in Irfan Horozović’s short story ‘Play’ (‘Igra’), which depicts an episode in a schoolyard, and the father of one of the girls happens to be an officer in the Bosnian Serb Army able to influence what happens at the Manjača concentration camp outside Banja Luka: ‘But he will give the order to kill them and they will kill them all! At once! Do you understand! My dad wears a uniform. And he gives orders. Azra’s father is in hiding. You don’t think I know. And as far as your dad goes, Ana, nothing is certain. This won’t just go away. Just so you know’. The story gains its suggestive power from breaking with the expectation that the child is innocent and good-hearted. Though the girl adheres to violent nationalist discourse—thus not representing a deviant perspective herself—her role in the story is to trigger the appropriation of the violent rhetoric of nationalism in a childish context, with the effect that the violent tone seems even more shocking than it would be in any other context.

Another interesting alternative use of the child is found in Lazarevska’s ‘The Feast of the Rosary’, where the small boy in the story instead of being an infantile subject is framed as an infantile object, as his oscillation between the

---

categories of ‘boy’ and ‘soldier’ does not spring from his own thoughts or actions, but from the way the adult characters in the story see him. He is, in other words, used as a symbol according to different agendas. The effect of subversive infantilisation is produced by subtle associations or traces of the infantile rather than by the behaviour or mind-set of the infantile character. In this respect, Lazarevska’s story—which in general does not exhibit the typical traits of an infantile perspective—challenges the notional boundaries of subversive infantilisation, making the concept less about the childish outsider perspective and more about a certain, less decidable infantile quality which the reader associates with the child, and which in this context generates a ‘shocking’ effect in the encounter with the militarist narrative of the adults. Lazarevska shows that a story does not have to manifest a carnivalesque kind of ‘healthy egoism and hedonism’ in order to create a critical effect, which Veličković, for instance, has suggested is the basis for it.354

There is also reason to underline that the infantile subject does not have to be a child character. The narrator and main character in Veličković’s Sahib is certainly not a child, but a grown man who is made the representative of a Western balkanist point of view, the problematic aspects of which come to the fore primarily because of the infantile behaviour of the narrator. Veličković is not the only author who inserts an infantile quality into his adult characters. Jergović does so in Sarajevo Marlboro, in a story entitled ‘Slobodan’, which depicts the life of a peculiar child, Slobodan (meaning ‘free’), born during the Second World War. The boy turns out to have a mental handicap, which, on the one hand, makes it difficult for him to perform simple tasks such as tying his own shoes, but, on the other hand, enables him to remember practically everything, serving ‘as a kind of aide-mémoire to his parents’ and, in an allegorical sense, as an archive of Bosnian history.355 When the war breaks out in 1992, he appears on the streets of Sarajevo as an infantile madman:

One of the first CNN bulletins from Sarajevo contained footage of Slobodan wandering aimlessly through the city as dozens of shells exploded on all sides. The camera followed him for about seventy yards, no doubt because the journalists were expecting to capture the moment when the Serb onslaught destroyed an innocent life in Sarajevo. Slobodan very casually sauntered over to the cameraman and gave him a warm smile. You half-expected him to launch into a series of questions about family trees, but he didn’t stop. He just went on his way as the shells continued to fall. That night the reporter, with some

disappointment, informed views that there were insanely brave people living in Sarajevo.\textsuperscript{356}

Here, the infantile Slobodan defies any expectations—both common sensible and those of Western media—by simply refusing to adapt to the living conditions of war. By doing so he is hinting at the possibility of transcending the narrow confinements of war, physically and conceptually. Throughout the story he is explicitly signalled to be infantile at heart, and the reader understands that this quality eventually moves him to break free from the constraining ontological experience of everyday life in war.

I have briefly given these examples to suggest the variety of uses of infantile subjects—and ‘objects’—as an ingredient in subversive infantilisation. This variety not only suggests the richness in the ways in which critique of dominant discourse is produced, but also that the critical potential lies not entirely in the infantile character per se, but ultimately in what this character is made to do in the interrogation of dominant discourse. The infantile character is doubtlessly very important for triggering interrogative processes, because it provides a dislocating or skewing angle on which it is possible to found a complex and critical approach to naturalised conceptions of social life. My point, however, is that it is not enough to limit one’s analytical focus to what this subject does; rather it is necessary to consider just how it is used in the interrogation of a discourse.

### 7.2 Techniques of Interrogation

Both in studies that mention the critical effect of infantile discourse in passing and in those making it the primary focus there is a tendency not to go beyond the narratological circumstances of narratives constructed from a child’s point of view. While the infantile perspective associated with the infantile subject is undeniably of essential significance to criticism, an approach that stops at the infantile perspective as a narratological condition and does not consider the discursive implications of it runs the risk of producing an essentialist point of view that regards most, if not all, observations put forward through the child figure as critically productive, subversive, or even revelational. The child character is not a guarantee against banal observations, which, though critical of dominant discourse, do not produce any considerable reconfiguration of a dominant discourse. I also find it important to acknowledge that the use of the child can backfire to the extent that it fails to produce a reconfiguration of the logic it sets out to attack, but instead repeats it. In chapter 4, for instance, I argued that this is what happens in certain passages of Veličković’s *Lodgers* that target Western balkanist othering of the Bosnian subject, but in the end only produce a similar type of othering of the Western European subject,

\textsuperscript{356} Jergović, ‘Slobodan’, 69–70.
which is portrayed either as an evil witch starving the Bosnians in order to be able to issue loans to them at a later stage or as an old bourgeois lady who cares more about pet dogs than about human lives. While this is a humorous description with a satirical edge that probably reflects the emotional response to the world’s perceived abandonment of Bosnia more than anything else, it may not address the most relevant aspects of the situation, all things considered. One could question whether the old lady has any moral responsibility at all for what Western governments were doing in Bosnia. In any case, it does not propose any new angles on the problem; it does not create (in Tygstrup and Winkel Holm’s sense) a reconfiguration of the usual ways of understanding the problem.\footnote{357} This does not mean that the novel as a whole is not critically productive; the critical effect of other parts of the book can certainly be said to be more successful. In this respect, the creation of an aporia from the epistemically lacking ethnicist premises for legitimising the war—which is thematised in the beginning of the novel—has a clear advantage over the image of the Westerner as the evil witch in Hansel and Gretel.

In regard to the question of critical effect, there are also instances of subversive infantilisation that are in a grey zone, and which demand detailed discussion about what level of criticism they offer. Apart from noting cases that simply reiterate the logic they have set out to attack, it is important to consider in detail what level of critical reconfiguration is actually produced. As is usually the case in parodic texts, there is a fine line between exaggerating the discourse of the other and merely reproducing a stereotype. Let us consider Stanišić’s depiction of the hard-line nationalist in How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone in the form of Kamenko, a drunken Stone Age philistine, whose short-sightedness is only matched by his proneness to violence—is this an exaggeration or a stereotype? Or Jergović’s treatment of the issue of watching other people’s suffering in Mama Leone: empathy for or, at least, understanding of the passive, gazing Western position during the war—is this a useful transcending of the West–East dichotomy, or is it somehow a way of making universal what is essentially a Western problem?

It becomes clear that even the most intricate and complex uses of subversive infantilisation, as in the works of Jergović, are not unambiguous and clear-cut in what they produce in terms of a critical interrogation. I argue that in order to study the effects of infantile discourse as a critical tool it is necessary to consider the process of the discursive interrogation of dominant discourse, which is unique to every text, rather than

\footnote{357} Frederik Tygstrup and Isak Winkel Holm, ‘Cultural Poetics and the Politics of Literature’, in Aud Sissel Hoel and Ingvild Folkvord, eds., Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Reading (London, 2012). See also my discussion in chapter 2.
to limit the focus to the infantile perspective, which works as the basis for that interrogation.

In order to analyse this interaction I have adhered to a theoretical perspective which considers the text a ‘transitional area’, through which input from the social world passes and, in this process, is restructured and ultimately transformed into a configuration slightly or radically alternate to the original input. This is in fact a condition that is common to all discourse, but what is unique about the texts using subversive infantilisation is that they rely on a seemingly simple principle of treating and reconfiguring the original input from other discourses: Everything that comes within the borders of the text encounters a logic defined by the child and the infantile. While the literary devices employed for this purpose are familiar to readers of postmodern literature—play, fragmented perspectives in opposition to grand narratives, temporal distortion, etc—the reliance upon the perspective of the child and other infantile subjects to produce ‘skewed’, altering representations poses specific questions and entails specific conditions for how discursive critique is articulated. This makes subversive infantilisation, as a trend in literature from Bosnia during the past twenty years, an element that can certainly tell us something about literary discourse as a way of producing criticism and about how Bosnian society is imagined from both hegemonic and anti-hegemonic perspectives.

Now, the techniques I have proposed here—perspective, dichotomisation, appropriation, and blending—are different principles for the manner in which a text relates to the social input, that is, the way the text engages with the discourse it has set out to target. I have used the concept of techniques, on the one hand, as a way of mapping and systematising the variety of approaches that reoccur in the texts. On the other hand, I have primarily seen these categories as a methodological tool for revealing and opening up for the subtleties and complexity of the representation of other discourses. As analytical categories, the techniques are heuristic and should not be considered the only ones possible (one could certainly imagine other terminologies and other conceptual distinctions that describe the same processes). Neither are the borders between the categories particularly solid, as the techniques are sometimes difficult to distinguish precisely, sometimes flow into one another, and sometimes even work in synergy to achieve effects. I showed how in *Mama Leone* dichotomisation and appropriation fed off each other in Jergović’s multi-angled approach to the issue of observing the suffering of others (chapter 5). This was also evident in my discussion of Milomir Kovačević’s photos of children posing with guns in chapter 6, where both appropriation and blending were useful concepts for describing what is

---

358 I borrow the analogy of the text as a ‘transitional area’ from Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), 135. This is in line with the New Historicist perspective to which I have adhered, and which describes this kind of transition as a double process of ‘affiliation’ and ‘appropriation’ (see chapter 2).
happening in the photos. With this dynamic correlation in mind, it is not essential to uphold clear-cut distinctions between the techniques, but it is certainly useful to be aware that each technique has different conditions for producing criticism. None of the techniques proves by definition to be better than any of the other as far as critical ability goes, but they do different things. I find it relevant to summarise and compare them below.

The most basic technique, which is also the function that usually receives the most attention in readings of infantile discourse (but is not regarded as a discursive process), is the infantile perspective. It works to provide a foundational frame for how diegetic phenomena are perceived and understood from the point of view of the infantile subject as well as from the point of view of the reader. It is a technique that enables a great deal of alternative angles in the approach to dominant discourse, because of its weight on the differentiated, anti-conventional, and essentially ‘counter-worldly’ attitude towards established conceptions. Typically, every critical effect in the text is either sparked or enhanced by the specific framing of the world entailed by the infantile perspective. Indeed, it is essentially a matter of how the world is framed, what proportions of reality are enhanced and what are downplayed, and how certain events are experienced by the infantile subject, which is most often the medium for such a perspective. In my view, perspective in the texts is important mainly in the two senses proposed by Uspensky: perspective as it is manifested on the ideological and spatial planes.

The infantile perspective on the ideological plane entails the system of underlying beliefs guiding the infantile subject in its outsider perception and understanding of phenomena in the world. On the spatial plane perspective is for my purposes primarily a matter of corporeal delimitation—mostly visual, but also, for instance, the amount of access the child has to some adult spaces. In chapter 3 I demonstrated the significance of the combination of these dimensions of the infantile perspective in Mama Leone and Hemon’s ‘Islands’. In the first case the boy narrator’s perspective is one of great suspicion and revaluation of the ideological mechanisms in the adult world, concerning everything from its language to its rituals. The boy is a near absolute other, which in his dramatic encounters with the adult world comes to question almost everything that is otherwise taken for granted. His differentiated outsider perspective is symptomatically actualised in his visual point of view, for instance when he notes that the world is prettiest and makes most sense ‘when it’s turned upside down’.

The visual perspective is even more significant in Hemon’s ‘Islands’, where the boy narrator’s observation of the grotesque nature of the adult world begins with a hat that cuts away most of the world as we normally see it: ‘I had to raise my head to look at the

---


grown-ups. Otherwise, I would look at their gnarled knees, the spreading sweat-stains on their shirts and sagging wrinkles of fat on their thighs. Through these kinds of adjustments in proportions of the world, the infantile perspective is able to foreground aspects of the world that are by convention not reckoned with, that are in a sense invisible and have become naturalised premises for imagining and representing the world. By bringing these invisible premises to light the infantile perspective forces the reconsideration of how the world is viewed, which is, at the same time, a reconfiguration of discourse associated with the hegemonic order. New ways of thinking are potentially produced.

Like perspective, the other techniques are aimed at producing new angles on issues and revealing hidden circumstances that may be significant to how the world is represented. Infantile *dichotomisation*, which was discussed in chapter 4, denotes a range of situations where infantile discourse is utilised to formulate a critique of the other’s position by explicitly establishing an oppositional conflict with it. Here incomprehension and naivety are essential ingredients that produce effects either of aporia, which undermines the premises for and the sensibility of a given reasoning, or of outright refusal of the logic of the targeted discourse. Dichotomisation is the technique that most clearly rejects dominant discourse. It is almost always based on the description of the child character, with its particular perspective and supposedly sound way of reasoning, as basically misplaced in a world of ideological delusions and lies. It is in this technique that the infantile subject’s counter-worldly character is most prominent, and it is also here that the option of choosing alternative ways of thinking and acting is most clearly emphasised.

In contrast to the other techniques, the very act of refusing dominant discourse is exemplified here. It is here that the narrator in *Lodgers* in confrontation with nationalist explanations of the war simply says no to them by not buying into simplified narratives. It is through dichotomisation that the boy in *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* shows the necessary incapability of nationalism with the conditions of a multi-ethnic individual. I have stressed the risk of dichotomisation in repeating stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes, resulting in further solidification of the excluding opposition ‘we’–‘they’. But active refusal of dominant discourse is one aspect of dichotomisation that has an advantage over the other techniques. Dichotomisation not only stresses the need for an alternative way of reasoning, it also, as I said, provides an example of the act of refusal and the possibility of entirely dis-identifying with dominant discourse. There is a potential risk in the techniques of appropriation and blending, which follow the principle of blurring borders between discourses, making dominant discourse appear as an opponent that is impossible to shake off, somehow always interwoven in dissident articulation.

---

However, the fact that dichotomisation provides a clearer pedagogical imperative for negating dominant discourse does not mean that the other techniques have less critical value. Appropriation, to begin with, proves that dissident reactions are often formulated ‘from within’ the criticised discourse. In order to create reconfigurations, it is sometimes necessary to write oneself out of the dominant language that is after all determining what one can think and say about Bosnia today. The appropriation technique is used to blur the distinction between one’s own discourse and the discourse of the other: The latter is imagined and subsumed by an infantile character, which, via its ability to skew and exaggerate, is able to let the appropriated discourse unfold in a way that exposes otherwise hidden problematic attitudes, inconsistencies, and so forth. In chapter 5 I showed how in one of Lazarevska’s stories the seemingly simple appropriation of the word ‘Serb’ by a small girl, who mispronounces it as ‘Selb’, is able to draw attention to the insistent and violent overuse of ethnicist distinctions in the time leading up to the war. The very repetition of a word so intimately connected to dominant discourse, together with the slight skewing of pronunciation, thus highlights a problem of the very nature of this discourse. The word ‘Selb’ becomes a meta-word able (at least to some extent) to facilitate a distancing from the dominant discourse, or a ‘way out’. Something along these lines also happens in Mama Leone, in the episode where the boy appropriates the position of the passive observer of other people’s suffering (see chapter 5). By weaving a complex web of associations, Jergović is able to connect the historical events of Pinochet’s coup d’état, the Vietnam War, and the Bosnian War and produce an effect that goes against typical self-perception in Bosnia. By placing a Bosnian child in front of a TV showing suffering in Chile and Vietnam, the author is able to invert the situation in the Bosnian War, where the population suffered heavily, but was not helped by the international community. The passage plays with the idea that the suffering Bosnian individuals were not victims of the Western gaze any more than the Vietnamese were of the Yugoslav gaze in the 1970s. If read in this way, the text contradicts a self-victimising attitude in the self-perception of nationalist discourse (but not only nationalist discourse) today, which stresses the Western world’s abandonment of the Bosnian population. Of course, this can be read as a case of ignoring the relegation of the Bosnian subject to the status of second-class world citizen, but one can also choose to read it as a piece of text that actually empowers the Bosnian subject, or at least relieves it of the weighty burden of degradation and victimhood. Even if one chooses not to see it as empowering, but merely as the expression of the logic of televised mediation in which everybody is complicit, the passage nevertheless manages to wholly redefine the premise for the way we usually think about the issue.

Finally, the technique of blending similarly aims at redesigning the premises for the way social life in Bosnia is imagined. As I showed in chapter 6, this occurs according to the principle of conceptually mixing a
conventional, targeted representation with an element of the infantile. This creates a kind of double exposure, which in turn accents or exposes crucial problems in the targeted representation. I mainly concentrated on the use of the child/soldier blending in a handful of texts, which all criticise what Maček has called the ‘soldier mode’ of understanding both history and the war—a perspective from which war is a necessary historical force and perhaps even a normal continuation of a militarist mentality deeply integrated in the social fabric.  

I discussed the portrayal of young men’s determination in Samardžić’s *The Forest Spirit* to act as soldiers and to willingly participate in the Bosnian War, underlining their ambivalent threshold position between childhood/adolescence and adulthood (symbolised by becoming a soldier). Discussing Lazarevska’s ‘Blagdan krunice’—the perhaps most sophisticated example—I showed that blending does not necessarily rely on infantile discourse, or even an infantile perspective. The boy in the story functions more like an object than a subject and does not assume an active role in the process: He neither refuses the socialist and nationalist narrative of the heroic soldier nor appropriates it. Rather than providing an infantile point of view, the boy merely represents an infantile position—with associations of naivety and innocence—which in the process of blending functions as a stark contrast to the image of the adult soldier and can thus point out problematic aspects in the latter. Lazarevska’s main point is the continuity—from socialist times and onwards—of a soldier narrative that in critical light is understood as the normalisation of militarist attitudes in the broad population and ultimately their violent consequences. The small boy is expected to become a proud soldier and is eager to fulfil those expectations. In the blending process, however, Lazarevska momentarily puts the boy in the position of a soldier by lending him a rifle and then lets him oscillate between this position and that of an unknowing, innocent child. This forces the reader to make sense of two conflicting inputs within the same frame, and as a result the militarist expectations on the boy are not only revealed, but also appear as inappropriate, bizarre, and oppressive.

The techniques I have identified are principles of constructing an interrogation of hegemonic representational repertoires marked out as problematic, oppressive, and even detrimental for the social situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At this point it is clear what the main functions and greatest critical benefit of the techniques are: the ability to create new angles (points of departure, positions, formulations) and to expose existing symbolic structures in the discourses that are targeted. This was my point of departure theoretically, and it has certainly proven to be a fruitful ground on which to develop and nuance what is happening in subversive infantilisation in terms of interrogating dominant discourse. Methodologically, a focus on the techniques

---

362 Ivana Maček, *Sarajevo under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime* (Philadelphia, 2009), 5. See also chapter 2 in the present thesis.
has made possible a thorough view both on the common characteristics of the
texts and on the diversity of ways in which criticism is produced. Though one
can surely point to some typical traits in the strategy of subversive infantilisation,
what is striking after the analyses in chapters 3–6 is indeed the
highly varied set of approaches applied to roughly the same issues. This does
not only make the strategy rich in terms of reading experience, but also a
fertile ground for producing poignant reconfigurations in how these issues are
thought of and discussed.

Therefore, the strategy of subversive infantilisation seems to have great
potential, at least on paper, for providing an alternative imagination of social
life in Bosnian that could have an actual effect on the social sphere. But there
is reason to reconsider in what sense this is actually possible, in what sense
subversive infantilisation may have a political effect. How are we to think of
the reconfiguration of social issues found in the texts as a political act?

7.3 The Possibility of Change

Following Rancière—whose ideas were introduced in chapter 2—I understand
the political dimension of subversive infantilisation as the mobilisation of
dissent against the prevailing distribution of the sensible, that is, the dis-
identification with the modes of perception, thought, and discourse that have
been dominant in Bosnia in the past decades. With this premise in mind, I
would like to discuss the interrogation produced in subversive infantilisation
in terms of an intervention into these naturalised and institutionalised modes.
The slight difference in meaning between these two terms should signify a
slight shift in my analytical focus, where ‘intervention’ places more weight on
subversive infantilisation as a process of active articulation that goes beyond
critical questioning of the other. Focussing on the more decisive act of
intervening, it is essential to ask: What is the nature of the subject that
intervenes (and that is constituted in the very process of intervention)?

The possibility of seeing subversive infantilisation as political mobilisation
depends on the aesthetic lens through which one chooses to see the issue. I
have already argued (in chapter 2) for the benefits of using Rancière’s point of
view on the nature of art and literature to understand subversive infantilisation
as an active instrument in the reimagination of the social sphere in Bosnia. It is
a point of view that helps to make productive or ‘animate’ the strategy of
subversive infantilisation, which, as also argued in chapter 2, could be viewed
as a determined, but ultimately aporic and impotent reaction to the social and
political circumstances in Bosnia in the past decades.

One could simply point to the lack of institutional change in Bosnia since
the war to emphasise what has generally been perceived as the diminished role
of aesthetic attempts of transforming society. Joseph J. Tanke contrasts
Rancière’s aesthetics to such, more pessimistic, perspectives, which express a
position of ‘mourning’ over the incapability of art to achieve change, and which ‘simply lament the failures of aesthetic and political collaboration throughout the twentieth century’. Tanke takes Lyotard’s philosophy as an example: ‘For Lyotard, the role of postmodern art is to bear witness to the unpresentable—that is, to attest to the irreconcilable gulf separating an Idea of reason and its realization and to do this without generating nostalgia for their unification’. The purpose of art, in Lyotard’s own words, is ‘not to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be represented’. Another example of a mourning aesthetic attitude is Adorno’s suspicion of the aestheticisation of the Holocaust, which he feared would make the reader/observer unaware or forgetful of the unpresentable totality of this event. Tanke argues that Rancière offers a much more optimistic view, where literary texts are not forced to succumb to the unpresentable, but can instead ‘form points for resistance by opening up worlds where subjects are constituted as political subjects’.

This is the point from Rancière’s perspective: The political act implies the constitution of ‘a subject qualified to argue, over an identified object, to an addressee who is required to see the object and to hear the argument that he “normally” has no reason either to see or to hear’. A group of people whose voice and demands are normally either entirely excluded or included as subordinate in the hegemonic order now “[introduce] a supplementary speech that is irreducible to the constraints of social place”. This ‘speech’ is introduced by a drastic reconfiguration of the partition of the sensible, much as I have argued to be the case with subversive infantilisation in the Bosnian literary texts, which aims at producing alternative images of the world that contradict and negate the dominant ones. Rancière explicitly refers to the aim of the political act as ‘to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen’, which means to say to undo the social invisibility of certain groups within the Bosnian political context.

The next question, then, concerns the tangibility of a collective Bosnian subject born from the strategy of subversive infantilisation. To what extent does such a dissident subject exist? This is a difficult question, because we are not actually dealing with a clearly definable identity, but rather with the potentiality of such a thing. In chapter 2 I suggested that subversive infantilisation is not in any case a ‘completed’ political act that is able to show

infantilisation is not in any case a ‘completed’ political act that is able to show does such a dissident subject exist? This is a difficult question within the Bosnian political context.

I have argued to be the case with subversive infantilisation in the Bosnian literary texts, which aims at producing alternative images of the world that stretch the borders of given conceptions and images to destabilise them and, in the same breath, call for other ways of imagining the world. These reconfigurations are ultimately the basis on which a potential subjectivity that prefers and can demand other ways of partitioning the sensible can rest, and they thereby allow the possibility of alternative and more open-ended communities.

Any critical intervention produced in these texts aims at creating distance to dominant repertoires of representation, which can also be imagined as the creation of a space where alternative imaginations are able to flourish.

372 Ibid.
Dominant discourse is undermined and showed as contingent and illegitimate, while a subject is articulated, a subject that may not have the tangibility associated with collective subjects that are able to push through institutional change, but which still makes a difference and can at least symbolically make way for institutional changes yet to come. Rancière has a way of explaining the value of this discursive, halfway condition. He says that literary locations take hold of bodies and divert them from their end or purpose insofar as they are not bodies in the sense of organisms, but quasi-bodies, blocks of speech circulating without a legitimate father to accompany them toward their authorized addressee. Therefore, they do not produce collective bodies. Instead, they produce lines of fracture and disincorporation into imaginary collective bodies [...] It is true that the circulation of these quasi-bodies causes modifications in the sensory perception of what is common to the community, in the relationship between what is common to language and the sensible distribution of spaces and occupations. They form, in this way, uncertain communities that contribute to the formation of enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages.

The political potential is here described as literature’s ability to produce ‘quasi-bodies’, which in contrast to bodies proper make up ‘blocks of speech’ that circulate and interrupt the current distribution of the sensible and are able to produce subjects in the form of ‘enunciative collectives’. The entire passage draws on materialistic discourse to explain a process that is essentially discursive and not yet material. In a sense, it pleads for the reader’s acknowledgement that the function of a ‘quasi-body’ to block off nodes (such as ethnicity, victimisation, resentment) in the web of dominant discourse is similar to public demonstrations blocking off downtown avenues. Once again, Rancière’s optimistic understanding of political subjectivation is brought to light, as literary strategies such as subversive infantilisation, which emphasise the reconfiguration of dominant discourse, are recognised as fruitful ways of producing political subjects. It is also important to note the emphasis on the open-ended character of subjectivation, as it entails the constitution of ‘uncertain communities’ on the level of discourse, whose direction is not necessarily readily identified, but principally open for further articulation.

I agree with Rancière’s emphasis that the content articulated through an aesthetic act such as subversive infantilisation in narrative literature is in fact less important than the fact that the strategy is able to produce a platform for the creation of a subject that refuses (to whatever extent possible) to be a part of the logic of dominant discourses that have had a negative and even

---

Oppressive effect on people’s lives in Bosnia. The political value of subversive infantilisation lies indeed in the production of a platform for further articulation and as a manifestation of a dissent that is thorough and complex in its execution. The reliance on the infantile perspective and the use of techniques that gain their critical power from characteristics associated primarily with the figure of the child has proven to be an effective, vibrant, and creative angle that has opened up for nuanced problematisation of a range of social and political issues in today’s Bosnia. It has turned the child figure, something we usually associate with passivity and non-political agency, into a champion for an imagination that can elude the discourse of ethnonationalism, which to this day continues to stifle social change in the country, as well as the problematic international involvement and the heritage from the time of socialism.

With this study I hope to have suggested the complexity of subversive infantilisation found in Bosnian literature as an act of intervention into the social, its intricate modes of interrogation, and its potential political significance. One could also consider the Bosnian texts analysed here in a broader context: as examples of the ability of literature in general to serve as a productive platform for articulating social critique and resistance. Literature is productive in doing so not only by being able to depict the most acute societal aspects of the day in a particular context, but also by offering a medium for active involvement in the reconfiguration of what is sayable and who is allowed to say it, thereby providing an opportunity for those lacking the voice needed to make demands. If the text is seen as a transitional zone which allows different types of discourse to flow in and out, literature proves a valuable space for the study of social disagreement as well as any potential revaluation of sedimented discourse. I dare to say that this is reflected in my own analytical approach to the Bosnian texts, with which I have stressed a focus on the flows of dominant discourse in and out of the texts, that is, the ways in which this discourse is treated, processed, and transformed. One quality of literary discourse that is revealed in my results is the plasticity with which texts treat the world, and which allows both thorough examination and a reimagining of certain aspects of the world. Tygstrup and Winkel Holm put this neatly when they state that ‘literature takes the guise of a cultural laboratory where experiments can be conducted, testing, as it were, different roles and functions of a cultural repertoire of images and reality’.³⁷⁴ Awareness of this quality together with an understanding of its particular expression in the Bosnian case (where infantile discourse as an aesthetic means is challenging an aggressive and relentless form of nationalism) may provide a reason for optimism in a broader sense. Especially today, at a time when nationalism and xenophobia are spreading in many European countries, a strategy such as subversive infantilisation, which has targeted mechanisms in

nationalist discourse over the past two decades, may be informing both as a warning about the potential dangers of nationalism and as proof that literary responses to such dangers are not only available, but also creative and productive.
References

Alexander, Harriet, ‘Zlata Filipovic, Whose Journal was Sarajevo’s Answer to Anne Frank’s Diary, Tells of Her Fears for Bosnia Today’, The Telegraph, (7 April 2012),
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/bosnia/9192248/Zlata-Filipovic-whose-journal-was-Sarajevo-answer-to-Anne-Franks-diary-tells-of-her-fears-for-Bosnia-today.html.
‘Aporetic’, OED Online (December 2015),
Bazdulj-Hubijar, Nura, Kad je bio jul (Zagreb, 2005).
Bhamra, Gurminder K., Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination (Basingstoke, 2009).
Bieber, Florian, Post-War Bosnia: Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance (Basingstoke, 2006).
Bose, Sumanta, Bosnia after Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention (New York, 2002).
Buden, Boris, Kaptolski kolodvor (Belgrade, 2002).
Buden, Boris, Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus (Frankfurt am Main, 2009).
Čečo, Adisa, ‘Savjest od 100.000 kuna’, Slobodna Bosna (17 November 2005), 64.
Colebrook, Claire, Irony in the Work of Philosophy (Lincoln, NE., 2002).
Čurak, Nerzuk, ‘(G)eto, baš hoću!’ in Dejtonske nacionalizam: Ogledi o političkom (Sarajevo, 2004), 39–41.


Hansen-Kokoroš, Renate and Elena Popovska, eds., Kind und Jugendlicher in der Literatur und im Film Bosniens, Kroatiens und Serbiens (Hamburg, 2013).


Jukić, Tatjana, ‘Souls and Apples, All in One: Bosnia as the Cultural Nexus in Nenad Veličković’s Konačari’, *Style*, 30/3 (1996), 479–94.
Karahasan, Dževad, *Dnevnik selidbe* (Sarajevo, 2010).
Keil, Soeren, *Multinational Federalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Farnham, 2013).
Konersmann, Ralf, *Kulturkritik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008).
Kordić, Snježana, *Jezik i nacionalizam* (Zagreb, 2010).
Kusturica, Nazif, ‘Roman koji kritika ne smije mimoiti’, *Novi izraz*, 16 (2002), 182–86.

Lampe, John R., Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a Country (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2000).


Maček, Ivana, Sarajevo under Siege: Anthropology in Wartime (Philadelphia, 2009).


Mehmedinović, Semezdin, Sarajevo blues (Sarajevo, 2004).


Mešković, Alen, Ukulele Jam (Copenhagen, 2011).


Mews, Siegfried, Günter Grass and His Critics: From The Tin Drum to Crabwalk (Rochester, 2008).


Pattison, Robert, The Child Figure in English Literature (Athens, GA., 1978).


Samardžić, Goran, ‘Šišanje’, in *Sikamora* (Sarajevo, 1997), 45–47.

Samardžić, Goran, *Šumski duh* (Belgrade, 2006).


Sejranović, Bekim, *Nigdje, nietokuda* (Sarajevo, 2010).


Todorova, Maria, Imagining the Balkans (updated edn., Oxford, 2009).


Veličković, Nenad, ‘Life is what Cannot be Touched with the Hand’, in Sahib (Sarajevo, 2011), 211–21.


Veličković, Nenad, Otec moje kćeri (Sarajevo, 2000).

Veličković, Nenad, Sahib, trans. Celia Hawkesworth (Sarajevo, 2011).

Veličković, Nenad, Školokrečina: Nacionalizam u srpskim, hrvatskim i bošnjačkim čitankama (Belgrade, 2012).


Vice, Sue, Children Writing the Holocaust (Basingstoke, 2004).


Linnaeus University Dissertations

Nedan finns en förteckning över de senast publicerade avhandlingarna i serien. För en fullständig förteckning, se Lnu.se.


