

Nikola Perišić*

Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade

CRITIQUE OF SLOBODAN MILOŠEVIĆ'S RULE IN SERBIAN CINEMATOGRAPHY: A CASE STUDY OF THE FILM “THE PROFESSIONAL”

Abstract

Artists most often find inspiration for their works in various social and political phenomena surrounding them. Hitler himself recognized the immense power that film could wield as a propaganda tool, a sentiment later perfected by other authoritarian leaders after the conclusion of World War II. Even the former Yugoslavia was not exempt from this influence. Simultaneously, movies often served as a cry, for dissidents who aimed to highlight social and political anomalies. In many Serbian movies of the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, the political situation in Serbia and the former Yugoslavia was addressed. Artists frequently criticized the low level of democracy and freedom in our country through allusive elements and indirect means. Nevertheless, one movie stands out from the others as it directly addressed all the political events that marked the 1990s, namely “Profesionalac” („The Professional“). The movie is enriched with authentic footage from all protest rallies organized against Slobodan Milošević since 1991. It's worth saying that one of the main roles in this film is played by Branislav Lečić, who portrays the character of Theodor Teya Kray,

* nikola.perisic@ips.ac.rs

a professor of the Faculty of Philosophy, fighting against Slobodan Milošević's regime. Branislav Lečić was also a real participant in all these protests, which facilitated the incorporation of documentary footage that complemented the movie itself. The aim of the work is to show which of the negative aspects of Slobodan Milošević's regime were presented directly and which were presented indirectly.

Keywords: *Slobodan Milošević, movie, film, authoritarian government, Branislav Lečić, the Professional.*

INTRODUCTION

The movie "Profesionalac" was produced in 2003 based on the play of the same name, written by Dušan Kovačević. It was a contender for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category. Through the encounter of two individuals after the October 5th changes, who were on opposing political sides during the 1990s, and their personal memories of that period, the movie effectively portrays all the significant social and political events that unfolded in the former Yugoslavia during that time. From the initial major demonstrations against Slobodan Milošević on March 9, 1991, through the onset of the war in Croatia and Kosovo, to protests over the "electoral fraud" in the Belgrade elections of 1996 and the bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, as well as the change of government following the elections on September 24, 2000. The additional authenticity of all these depicted events in the movie is heightened by original footage and the fact that one of the main roles is played by Branislav Lečić, who was actively involved in many events during the 1990s as one of the opposition leaders fighting against Slobodan Milošević's rule. In the film, Lečić portrays the character of Theodor Teya Kray, a Faculty of Philosophy professor who becomes the director of a state publishing house after the October 5th changes. The second main role in the movie is played by Bora Todorović, who portrays Luka Laban, a retired State Security inspector who, during Slobodan Milošević's rule, interrogated Teya for his oppositional, or "anti-state", activities. Through various allusive elements, but also in a direct way, often presented in a satirical manner, the movie depicts

the reality during the last decade of the 20th century and all the transitional elements that affected our country after the October 5th Changes in 2000. Additionally, the personal involvement in the film of then-significant political figures Milan St. Protić and Predrag Marković adds an extra layer to the entire story.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Film can be considered one of the youngest arts that developed primarily due to technological progress in the mid-20th century. Additionally, it should not be overlooked that film combines various already existing arts such as literature, music, photography, and more. However, throughout its short history, film has evolved from purely entertaining content to content that often contains propaganda elements.¹ This was first recognized by the government of Germany, where from 1933 until the end of World War II, the film industry was under the control of the Ministry of Propaganda.² The dedication of Germany to the development of film as a propaganda tool during that time is also evident in the number of cinemas opened before and during World War II. After the First World War, Germany had 2,000 cinemas, which increased to 5,466 by 1938 and 7,043 by 1942.³ It is believed that film conveys a message much more easily and persuasively than written media, especially during a period when television was not yet developed as a medium.⁴ More precisely, the attractiveness of film lies in the combination of audio and visual elements, evoking a wide range of emotions in the audience.⁵ The development and power of film have been influenced by the development of popular culture and mass media.⁶ In other words, film has become exactly what McLuhan observed as the basic task of a film author – to “[transport the viewer from one world (his own) to the world

¹ Devid Kuk (2005), *Istorija filma I*, Beograd: Clío.

² Dragutin Papović (2014), “Utjecaj politike na crnogorski igrani film u XX. Stoljeću”, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 46 (2), 224.

³ Милан Кољанин (2000), “Филмска пропаганда—увод у холокауст”, *Годишњак за друштвену историју*, 1, 37.

⁴ Nemanja Zvijer (2005), “Holivudska industrija: povezanost filmske produkcije i političkog diskursa”, *Sociologija*, 47(1), 47.

⁵ Daniel Franklin (2006), *Politics and film: The political culture of film in the United States*, London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 12.

⁶ Božo Skoko et al. (2012), “Uloga igranog filma u brendiranju država, regija i gradova”, *Međunarodne studije*, 12(3), 13.

created by the film creators”.⁷ Like any propaganda tool, it remains up to the consumer how they will encode the message and whether they will accept and understand it as the sender intended.⁸ There are also different opinions that state that the “movie’s ideological value is fixed – as it has become universal and natural”.⁹

The significance of film and the popularity it gained during World War II is reflected in the fact that some communication scholars consider film from that period to have had one of the most significant impacts on the culture of memory worldwide.¹⁰ After the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War era in geopolitical relations, there was additional development of various propaganda elements in movies created both in the West and the East. Western cinematography, personified through Hollywood during that period, was based on the promotion of anti-communist and democratic content. In various science fiction films, certain monsters metaphorically represented the USSR.¹¹ Thanks to these Hollywood movies, the so-called *American Dream* was created.¹² Additionally, Hollywood aimed to “create a different truth that suits different individuals and groups”.¹³ On the other hand, movies made in the East, particularly those related to the wartime period (World War II), aimed to develop the identity of newly formed states such as the USSR or Yugoslavia.¹⁴ This simplification of good and evil in social and political relations was done, so that ‘ordinary’ people wouldn’t have to think too much.¹⁵

For this reason, many communication theorists believe that film is “always ideologically colored and is difficult to imagine as a neutral expression”.¹⁶ The existence of censorship in Yugoslavia during that

⁷ Маршал Маклуан (1964), *Познавање општина – човекових продужетака*, Београд: Просвета, 348.

⁸ Zoran Slavujević (2009), *Političko komuniciranje, politička propaganda, politički marketing*, Београд: Grafokard, 31.

⁹ Стјуарт Хол (2008), “Кодирање, декодирање”, у: Ђорђевић, Јелена (прир.) *Студије културе – зборник*, Београд: Службени гласник, 281.

¹⁰ Inez Hedges (2015), *World Cinema and Cultural Memory*. Houndmill, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

¹¹ Andrea Gronemeyer (1999), *Film. A Concise History*, London: Laurence King, 78.

¹² Sead Vegara (2015), “Америчка филмска пропаганда”, *Novinar*.

¹³ Nemanja Zvijer (2014), “Cultural reflections of war crisis: the picture of war in the 1990 croatian cinema”, *Теме* 38 (1), 67.

¹⁴ Živko Andrijašević (2022), “Film u funkciji oblikovanja socijalističkog identiteta”, *Montenegrin Journal for Social Sciences* 6 (1), 105-116.

¹⁵ Zoran Slavujević (2005), *Politički marketing*, Београд: Факултет политичких наука и Ћигоја штампа, 72.

¹⁶ Тома Ђорђевић (1989), *Теорија масовних комуникација*, Београд: Савез инжењера и техничара Југославије, 171.

period is evident in the fact that out of about 800 movies produced from 1945 to 1990, more than 40 were censored in some way.¹⁷ Simultaneously, there was latent censorship, manifested in the sporadic screening of controversial movies, the absence of marketing campaigns, screenings during periods when audiences visited cinemas the least, and early removal from the repertoire.¹⁸ The large number of movies with war themes produced during Yugoslavia's existence, is indicated by the creation of a new genre called partisan ("red") westerns.¹⁹ Research shows that from 1960 to 1969 alone, a total of 81 movie with partisan themes were produced.²⁰ The goal of those movies was to "mobilize the people for major actions in building a socialist state and the inevitable victory of communist ideas".²¹ In other words, these movies served as the basis for creating a myth that would unite the community. For this myth to be created, a story about the common and equal struggle of all peoples against the occupiers needed to be fabricated.²² This was achieved by censoring certain themes and movies, as well as requesting scriptwriters and directors to falsify history. Large financial resources were allocated for war-related themes linked to World War II, and Yugoslav war films featured the biggest movie-stars of that time, such as Richard Burton or Orson Welles.²³

When the former Yugoslavia disintegrated into a long-lasting civil war, that theme became dominant in the domestic cinematography. Simultaneously, the war theme also dominated film productions in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian film "No Man's Land" from 2001 winning the prestigious *Oscar* award for Best Foreign Film. Some film theorists refer to this period in Balkan film development as post-partisan.²⁴ The fascination with the war theme in films can be attributed to the fact that it is a "particularly suitable

¹⁷ Милан Никодијевић (1995), *Забрањени без забране – Зона сумрака југословенског филма*, Београд: Југословенска кинотека, 53.

¹⁸ Aleksandar Vranješ (2013), "Partizanski film kao sredstvo političke propagande", *Pogledi*.

¹⁹ Nevena Daković (2004), "Plamen na ničijoj zemlji", *Vreme*.

²⁰ Radina Vučetić (2012), *Koka-kola socijalizam*, Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 137.

²¹ Dragutin Papović (2014), *op. cit.*, 224.

²² Predrag Marković (2021), "Bitka na Neretvi bila je jedan od najskupljih filmova na svetu izvan engleskog govornog područja, a partizanski film jedan od rekih evropskih autentičnih žanrova po čemu smo jedinstveni u svetu", *Nedeljnik*.

²³ Aleksandar Vranješ (2013), *op. cit.*

²⁴ Nemanja Zvijer (2017), "Partizanski versus postpartizanski film", *Zbornik radova Fakulteta dramskih umetnosti*, 32, 199.

form for cinema achievements”.²⁵ Nevertheless, it should be noted that in almost all films dealing with the theme of war in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was an expression of “telling the truth about that period”.²⁶ Along with the war themes, from the 1990s onwards, criticism of the socio-political context characteristic of our Serbia at that time also appeared as a theme in Serbian films. Therefore, we can conclude that the film industry plays a significant role in creating a positive or negative image of specific events, phenomena, groups, or individuals. What is a common characteristic for almost all war films in the former Yugoslavia is that, consciously or unconsciously, although more often consciously, is that they interpret traumas.²⁷ So, it can be concluded that one of the “very significant forms of nation and state branding has become the film industry”.²⁸

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The subject of the work is the critique of the rule of Slobodan Milošević in domestic cinematography, using the example of the film “The Professional”. The aim of the work is to demonstrate which of the negative aspects of Slobodan Milošević’s rule were presented in direct and which in indirect ways. The primary approach in the work will be qualitative, with a predominant method of discourse analysis. Bešić explains that discourse begins when we start to deal with the meaning of a statement.²⁹ Through discourse analysis, the system of signification can be deconstructed.³⁰ Discourse is an interdisciplinary method encompassing several elements: 1) the communicative intentions of the author; 2) the relationship between the author and the recipients; 3) the context; 4) the stylistic and rhetorical features of the message; 5) the prior experiences reflected in the message.³¹ The most important elements of discourse include the material carriers of discourse (written text or spoken language), the social meanings established through language use, and the

²⁵ Дејан Дашић (2022), “Савремени филм у функцији пропаганде и ревизије историје”, *Baština*.

²⁶ Jurica Pavičić (2023), “Državotvorni tres u srpskoj kinematografiji: pa ovo je kao Hrvatska devedesetih”, *Velike priče*.

²⁷ Sanja Lazarević Radak (2019), *Jugoslovenski film i kriza socijalizma*, Mali Nemo.

²⁸ Дејан Дашић (2022), *op. cit.*

²⁹ Miloš Bešić (2019), *Metodologija društvenih nauka*, Novi Sad: Akademsko knjiga, 258.

³⁰ Kevin Dunn & Iver Neumann (2016), *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 43.

³¹ Kuralay Kenzhekankyzy Kenzhekanova (2015), “Linguistic features of political discourse”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6 (6), 192.

social carriers that include specific social groups using language within a certain context.³² More precisely, “the primary role of discourse is to signify reality, to name and define it, to indicate and direct actors in how to perceive that reality”.³³ In addition to discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis will also be used as an auxiliary method.

ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE “THE PROFESSIONAL”

As previously mentioned, the film “The Professional” critiques the political situation in Serbia during the 1990s through various direct and indirect elements. The movie begins with original footage from the protests of October 5, 2000, which marked the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime and symbolized the symbolic end of Serbian society with socialism. Then, the film shows what Serbia looks like one year later. At the beginning of the film, we learn that one of the leaders of the October 5th Changes and opposition-minded Theodor Teya Kray has now become the director of a publishing house and has appointed his long-time lover, Marta, as his secretary. It is precisely in this publishing house that a workers' strike breaks out due to possible privatization. Here, a dual criticism of the government after the October 5th Changes becomes evident: first, there is clear nepotism, and second, the new government insisted on privatizing all state-owned factories and other companies. One of the strike leaders cannot pronounce “public procurement” and says several times: “We will not allow our house to be sold to whatever it's called...”, which illustrates how the citizens in Serbia have remained living in old times like socialism, regardless of the social and political changes that have occurred in Serbia. Even Inspector Luka Laban, who also belongs to some previous era, cannot pronounce “public procurement”.

Inspector Luka Laban, retired from State Security, comes to visit Theodor Teya Kray and brings him books that Teya has ‘written’. It turns out that Laban, as a member of State Security, had been monitoring Teya because he had oppositional inclinations, and by observing him, Laban was writing about his life. Laban explains that his daughter bound these ‘books’ that he brought because he doesn't trust bookbinders since they tend to report anything ‘interesting’ to the police. In

³² Paul Gee (2014), *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*, New York and London: Routledge, 58.

³³ Miloš Bešić (2019), *Metodologija društvenih nauka*, Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 248.

response, Theodor Teya Kray states that “instead of the police working for the people, the people work for the police”, which is a clear allusion to the authoritarian and unfree system they lived in. When the police do not work in the interest of all citizens but exclusively for the ruling elites, it is one of the characteristics of totalitarian systems, as noted by Hannah Arendt.³⁴ Additionally, Laban insists that Teya should not address him as “sir” but as “comrade”. We know that people used such forms of address during socialism, which is another indicator of how Laban has sentimental feelings towards the previous era. Despite being more inclined towards that system, Laban has also developed a patriotic sentiment towards Serbia. When his colleague informs him that Teya and his group are preparing a “Romanian scenario” (an allusion to the fate of Romanian autocrat Ceaușescu), Laban responds that he will “show them the Serbian scenario”.

At one point, the leader of the striking workers interrupts the conversation between Laban and Teya. Teya then talks to him and tells him that he can’t just barge into the director’s office whenever he wants, as he couldn’t do that even with the previous director, whom he only saw once a year, on May 1st. This date holds special symbolism as the International Workers’ Day and was significantly celebrated in the former Yugoslavia during socialism. It was often celebrated collectively in various companies. Socialist authorities insisted on their own holidays to establish a new tradition and create legitimacy for the newly established customs after the end of World War II.³⁵

Then, Laban starts talking about Russian literature and the literary ideas and symbols he notices in Chekhov and Dostoevsky, stating how Chekhov wrote the short story “Grief” based on ‘his life’. Teya responds by telling him that his knowledge of literature “doesn’t suit” a police officer. It is evident that there is a stereotypical representation of the police profession. Indeed, a 2004 study showed that survey participants perceived police officers negatively, highlighting negative traits such as being corrupt, foolish, and arrogant.³⁶ Later in the conversation, Laban confirms this stereotype when he says that Jean-Paul Sartre “was convinced he was a military attaché at the French Embassy”. He then attempts to justify it by saying that he only heard of foreign names like

³⁴ Hana Arendt (1998), *Izvori totalitarizma*, Beograd: Fond za otvoreno društvo, 254.

³⁵ Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin (1990), “Metamorfoza socijalističkih praznika”, *Narodna umjetnost: hrvatski časopis za etnologiju i folkloristiku* 27 (1), 21.

³⁶ Valentina Baić (2004), “Autostereotipi i heterostereotipi prema pripadnicima policije”, *Bezbednost* 4, 547.

Marx, Engels, and Lenin, but in the dossiers of members of various embassies, he came across names like Jean-Paul Sartre. This is another indicator of how Laban was a 'communist'. At the same time, we see that Laban being foolish is not his fault but a result of the socialist system in which he grew up. This system did not want to create educated people who could think critically, as they might pose a threat to the system.

Laban frankly admits that he wanted to kill Teya. He says, "While I was in service – officially, and when your people kicked me out of service, then privately." This portrayal illustrates how State Security functioned during that period and how they dealt with individuals who, in their assessment, were a threat to the system. It is enough to remember the tragic fates of journalists Dada Vujasinović and Slavko Ćuruvija, as well as politician Ivan Stambolić, to understand the consequences of such actions. In the continuation of the dialogue between Laban and Teya Kray, they engage in a conflict regarding the events on March 9, 1991, and who was responsible for that situation. Laban, in line with the narrative of that time, talks about a violent desire to seize power. Furthermore, in one of the dialogues, Laban admits that State Security and the police had the "entire city under surveillance, except for a few public toilets."

On the other hand, Teya, in his "Oration about the Monkey", stated that "it took a man thousands of years to become a human from a monkey, and communism only took 50 years to turn a human back into a monkey." This represents a clear allegorical story. At that moment, when Teya is giving the "Oration about the Monkey", he is in a tavern with a group of people, and Laban, disguised as a newspaper vendor, is sitting at their table because he has the task of Teya's surveillance. When the gathered group asks him how much the newspapers cost, Laban replies, "800,000", which is another allusive element pointing to the financial inflation caused by the poor governance of Slobodan Milošević. Later, the group at the table orders the song "Government Falling", and the waiter asks them not to sing that song because the tavern is full of police. This was meant to show how extensive the control was during Milošević's rule.

During the protest following the fall of Knin, in the Sports Hall, a picture of Nikola Tesla, who was born in Smiljan not far from Knin, was hung on the wall. While addressing the gathering, Teya stated, "Shame on us in front of Nikola Tesla, who asks *where is my home, brothers*." Such a performance had an additional intention of evoking emotions in individuals as the home of one of the most famous Serbs was attacked.

Furthermore, through this scene, we can observe how the State Security operated during that period. A large number of people did not gather at this protest, and Laban, in a conversation with his policemen, asked, "How many of ours are there?" to which he received the reply, "More than half." Additionally, the functioning of the State Security is depicted in a scene where the leader of the strikers in a publishing house, Jovan, pulled out a gun on Teya and his secretary Marta. However, upon seeing Luka Laban, he refrained from executing them. From a later conversation between Laban and Teya, we learn that Jovan is a master at inciting workers, and Laban moved him from one company to another for that reason. In the Service, they refer to him as "Trotsky". In a further discussion, Teya asks Laban if Jovan would be held responsible for murders if he committed them. Laban responds that it would be considered murder and suicide, to which Teya tells Luka that he had been through that as well. Laban responded with a smile, "The two of you, dead, would testify that I was present? Jovan would surely be a witness to your tragedy. You loved her, she cheated on you, and then you decided to kill her and pass judgment on yourself. Newspapers are full of tragic loves like that, every day." Teya responds to this with confusion and asks if Jovan still works for the Service, to which Laban says, "Probably". After this response, Teya becomes even more puzzled and wonders how this is possible when the Service has supposedly been changed, referring to the changes after the events of October 5th. Luka Laban responds, "Who says it's changed? Only your late father and I have changed, everything else remains the same." From Laban's statement, it is clear that he wants to convey that people within the system always stay the same; only their superiors or the ruling elites who lead the country change, and the individuals in the Service are accountable to them. Another important point we learn from this response is that Teya's father worked for the police, which is not uncommon, as family members often found themselves on opposing political sides – a long-standing characteristic of Serbian society dating back to modern independent Serbia foundation, the fact which is to be intensified by division between chetniks and partisans during the Second World War period. Later in the movie, we find out that Teya's father was a staunch communist, as evidenced by the fact that at his funeral, there was no priest, and a traditional-country band performed instead.

During the funeral, Teya's mother implores him not to involve himself in politics, stating that politics "killed his father." Teya responds

that he will stop engaging in politics once there is a change of power. His mother asks, "When will that be?" and Teja replies, "After these elections." This indicates that there was a belief during that time that a change of power could be achieved through the electoral process without resorting to any violent means for regime change. It also reflects the desire of the intellectuals involved in political life at the time not to engage in politics for personal gain but out of conviction that they could bring about change. However, many of them, like Teya, ended up in various high-level political positions after the changes. Nevertheless, the scene in the tavern after Teya's father's funeral shows that there was also consideration of a violent change of power. Teya sits with friends, and hunters led by the disguised Luka Laban arrive. Teya inquires about the range of the weapons carried by the hunters and then tells his friends that if "Milošević steals these elections, just as he has done before, we will organize a hunt for him." It's important to note here that during the 1990s, it was widely believed that Milošević manipulated elections that were organized. Additionally, during this encounter, Teya gives his father's ring to the musicians to play the song "Government Falling". This demonstrates how willing he is to offer important symbols from his own life to have musicians perform a song that carries a significant message that an authoritarian political leader's reign comes to an end. The song "Government Falling" was performed by one of the most renowned Serbian musicians, Momčilo Bajagić Bajaga, and it was recorded for the needs of this movie. Later, this song gained great popularity and became an indispensable part of all protest gatherings held in Serbia over the past 15 years or so. In late 2016, one of the opposition members of parliament, Saša Radulović, together with members of his parliamentary group, sang this song in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia.

When they were returning by train from Teya's father's funeral, Laban approached them disguised as a conductor. They were carrying election posters with them, and Laban suggested that they cover the entire train with those posters, as it would be good marketing for their political option since the train travels across the entire country. Teya's fellows referred to Laban as a "propagandist" and "PR", indicating that they are aware of the importance of investing in such means, even though in Serbia, voters primarily base their decisions on sociodemographic and/or rational elements rather than the electoral campaign process itself.³⁷

³⁷ Bojan Todosijević i Zoran Pavlović (2020), *Pred glasačkom kutijom: Politička psihologija izbornog ponašanja u Srbiji*, Institut društvenih nauka, 197.

The allusion that opposition forces at that time were connected to foreign agencies and governments is depicted in the scene when Teya found himself in the hospital. Laban, disguised as a doctor, visited him and asked who paid him to “hate our president”, but then rephrased his question and said, “Who are you in contact with from abroad?” Meanwhile, it should be noted that the police, once again, were portrayed as an institution working in favor of the ruling political structures. Namely, Teya asked the disguised doctor Laban, “Does anyone know who tried to run me over by car?” To this, Laban replied that he heard from the news that an investigation was underway and that it was necessary to “have trust in our police”. Teja responded that he feared that those conducting the investigation were the ones who tried to run him over.

In the movie, there is a noticeable critique of the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, presented from the perspective of children. During the bombings in shelters, children are told various stories and fairy tales to divert their attention from the grim reality they are experiencing. An animator tells the children the story of “The Three Little Pigs” and explains how the wolf destroyed their houses. At one point, one of the children present asks, “Is the wolf working for NATO?” With this question, there is a clear critique of NATO’s actions in destroying houses in Yugoslavia. Additionally, it’s worth noting another allusion. During the bombing, specifically during a period while the bombing was ongoing (up to April 28, 1999), Vuk (the Wolf) Drašković served as the Deputy Prime Minister of the country. So, the boy’s question can also be interpreted as asking whether Vuk Drašković was working for NATO. This connection is not accidental, as Vuk Drašković’s rhetoric after the year 2000 was that Serbia should become a member of that alliance.

The movie gains authenticity from the appearance of Jovan Mandić, who is beaten by the police in a police station because he had turned off the public lighting in the center of Belgrade on New Year’s Eve in 1997. This happened during the large protests due to irregularities in the local elections in Belgrade in 1996. Jovan Mandić is indeed a real person who worked at the Electric Power Industry of Serbia (EPS) as the head of the special measurements department. Mandić did indeed turn off the streetlights on Vidovdan (June 28) in 1992. At that time, the only light came from candles lit by citizens gathered at the protest (B92 2016). In the film, when the police ask him why he turned off the public lighting, Mandić replies, “So that the candles could be seen better”,

clearly establishing a connection between the events in the film and real-life occurrences.

At the end, it's important to note that when Teya falls from the train, Luka Laban jumps after him and saves him from more serious injuries, possibly even death. Laban justifies this action by explaining that his daughter Ana was in a romantic relationship with Teya, and she would accuse him of killing Teya. However, it's essential to keep in mind that during their conversation in the office, there was a certain level of friendship that developed between these two main characters, despite their diametrically opposed social and political positions and moments of mutual hatred. Their reconciliation should symbolize a symbolic reconciliation between the divisions that exist within the Serbian people, where these divisions have been growing and polarizing to the point where the culture of dialogue has been lost, and opposing sides are unwilling to listen to different arguments and perspectives.

The film ends by showing members of State Security, or whatever the security service was called at that moment, monitoring Theodor Teya Kray through the same screens as in the 1990s. This serves as a clear indication that the Security Service hasn't truly changed, as Luka Laban claims. The Service continues to operate as it did in the previous era, with only the political structures having changed. Everything else remains the same. This should be connected to the many disappointed expectations that citizens had after the events of October 5th (the overthrow of Slobodan Milošević). Hence, it's not surprising that there is a low level of political culture and interest in participating in various socio-political events. One of the last lines spoken by Luka Laban captures this sentiment well: "Back then, I was the boss, and you were a loser. Now you've become a director, and I'm a taxi driver, which is basically the same as being a loser. That's the change of power." Indeed, in Serbia, the change of power has largely boiled down to personnel changes without substantial changes to the system, which is what voters expected when they participated in the electoral process.

CONCLUSION

The movie "Profesionalac" has provided a strong and significant form of social engagement in depicting authoritarian rule in Serbia during the last decade of the 20th century. It represents a unique approach in Serbian cinema where, in addition to indirect and allusive critiques

of the authorities, it directly criticizes them by utilizing authentic figures from that period. Similar critiques of power in Serbia during those years can be observed in movies like “Kordon” or “Crni bombarder”, but “Profesionalac” stands out in this regard, primarily due to its use of various documentary footage appearing in the film and the inclusion of authentic individuals who genuinely participated in protests against Slobodan Milošević, such as Branislav Lečić. The particular value lies in the fact that, during all documentary footage, explanations are provided regarding the context and the exact events, which is essential primarily for the foreign market. In this way, thanks to the film industry, foreigners get acquainted with Serbian culture.

A detailed analysis of the movie “Profesionalac” reveals that the filmmakers used various direct and indirect methods to criticize the rule of Slobodan Milošević, as well as the new regime that took power after the conclusion of the election process on September 24, 2000, and the defense of election results, which ended on October 5th of the same year when Slobodan Milošević conceded defeat in the elections. The direct criticism is evident when the characters openly state in the film that Milošević is “stealing elections” and that some opposition-minded individuals are willing to use violence to bring about a change in power. It also portrays how the State Security (or security services) monitors individuals with opposing political views who want to change the government. The monitoring of citizens’ actions is depicted through Luka Laban’s admission that “the whole city is under surveillance, except for a few public restrooms”. Furthermore, it describes the lack of freedom of expression, where different musicians are always afraid to play and sing the song “Pada Vlada” (Government Falling) because it implies an imminent change in power. On the other hand, indirect criticism of the authorities is visible through various allegories and allusions. Notably, Teya’s “Oration about the Monkey” stands out as a critique of the communist society, whose heir was Slobodan Milošević. Similar criticism of the communist system is directed at the worker Jovan when he mentions that he saw the previous director “once a year, and that was on May 1st.”

As mentioned in the movie, indirect criticism is also directed towards the new government in Serbia, which used its power to place ‘its’ people in high positions, as exemplified by Theodor Teya Kray, who promised his mother during his father’s funeral that he would no longer engage in politics but continued to do so. This highlights not only the filling of official positions but also a certain inconsistency that was

characteristic of the new power structures in post-October 5th Serbia. Additionally, as indicated in this work, Teya's secretary is his long-time mistress, Marta, who clearly obtained her position through nepotism. Furthermore, when Laban announces the protest, he questions Teya about why there are demonstrations again when democracy has arrived.

Laban, despite being an inspector who comes from the previous system in which he was educated and worked, is not entirely portrayed stereotypically. He is depicted as someone who opposes the newly established system after October 5th, 2000, but also as an individual who is willing to work on himself and further educate himself. This is most evident in his knowledge of art, such as Sava Šumanović's painting, literature by Dostoevsky and Chekhov, and the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. At the same time, Laban has accepted that with the change of power, he lost his social status, and he is not ashamed to work as a taxi driver to earn enough money to buy medicine. What is most important about the character of Laban is that he is essentially a good person, but he did certain things because it was expected of him by the service, and it was part of his job. This is depicted in a dialogue between Teya and Laban when Teya tells him that he is a "monster of a person", and Laban responds that he was just a "professional".

The supporting characters, Teya's friends from the 1990s who were involved in opposition activities alongside him, do not appear in the movie after the events of October 5th. Therefore, it is unclear whether they obtained any positions or roles after the political changes. We also do not have information about their professional qualifications or levels of education. Based on their impressions, it's challenging to determine if they have received a university education. However, they are aware of the importance of political marketing and the emphasis on crafting the image of candidates. In preparation for the decisive elections, they have prepared several sets of posters to assist their preferred opposition candidate in achieving the best possible election results. Additionally, the film never explicitly mentions the names of any opposition politicians from the 1990s. Instead, in a brief sequence at a tavern, Milan St. Protić and Predrag Marković briefly appear. Of course, the movie is interwoven with original footage from various protests during the 1990s, featuring figures like Zoran Đinđić, Vuk Drašković, and Vojislav Koštunica.

An important message of the movie is the fact that there have been no substantial changes within the state structures. Despite Luka Laban's insinuation that some changes occurred when he tells Teya that

“his people threw him out of the State Security”, the film illustrates two examples that contradict this notion. First, when Laban says to Teya, “Who tells you that the Service has changed, only your late father and I have changed, everything else remains the same”. Second, the film concludes with the State Security continuing to monitor Teya through the same screens, despite the change in government. This is a clear symbolic message that there hasn’t been a change in the actual structural systems but rather cosmetic changes at the highest levels of state functions related to personnel appointments.

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