The contemporary Serbian crime novel as a catalyst for social change: The case of Novaković's "Tito je umro" and Kecmanović's "Sibir"

MILENA KALIČANIN

The following research investigates the possible reasons for a conspicuous boost of crime fiction in postmillennial Serbia.* Our general hypothesis is that the socio-political circumstances of the last decade of the 20th century largely contributed to the overall interest in this literary genre since it offers both a vivid depiction and direct criticism of diverse social phenomena initiated in this period. Thus, the main objective of the paper is to explore, describe and judge the long-lasting impact of these social occurrences through a detailed comparative analysis of *Tito je umro* (2011; Tito is dead) by Mirjana Novaković and *Sibir* (2011; Siberia) by Vladimir Kecmanović and to present them as potent catalysts for a necessary social change. The research method is eclectic: apart from close reading and comparative analysis of the aforementioned novels, the paper relies on the contextual depiction of Serbian political climate in the 1990s and 2000s, as well as brief theoretical insights into Serbian postmillennial crime fiction.

POLITICAL CLIMATE IN SERBIA DURING THE 1990s AND 2000s

The last decade of the 20th century in Serbia was marked by a conspicuous need for political and social change that would eventually bring about much-needed economic progress. The necessary political transition of the country, from the radical post-communist (socialist) ideology to a cutting-edge democratic social system, implied a definite break with the pervasive communist legacy of authoritarianism, absolutism and monocracy. However, the long-awaited split with the communist heritage was not easily obtained. In the early 1990s, immediately after the belligerent dissolution of Yugoslavia, a conspicuous number of the Serbian population (predominantly the people from rural parts and the elderly) was still craving the authoritarian, Messiah-like political figure exemplified in the firm rule of Slobodan Milošević and his Socialist Party. Milošević's political system was characterized by "the limited political pluralism, aggressive populist rhetoric, concentration of power by the

party leader and clique around him and their ability to manipulate the electorate" (Sotirovic 2009, 427).

Together with his wife, Mirjana Marković, a leader of the Yugoslav United Left Party, Milošević supervised the state politics, army, police, economy and mass media that basically pointed to a thorough control and manipulation of "information channels and civil initiatives which lost a great degree of independence and critical voice to the regime" (427). Consequently, the important move towards democratic transition (from extreme totalitarianism to autonomous pluralism) was still doomed to failure.

Another reason for the unsuccessful democratic transition in Serbia in the early 1990s was a heavy nationalist rhetoric that was propagated not only by the aforementioned leading political parties but also by some of the influential oppositional fractions (the Serbian Radical Party and Serbian Revival Movement, just to name a few). As Sotirovic validly demonstrates, Milošević succeeded in maintaining political power for almost two decades (from 1986 to 2000) by developing the discourse of "national mobilization" (428) and patriotism to fight for national interests.[1] In these circumstances, oppositional democratic parties had the utmost difficulty to compete with the iconic image of the Serbian leader and could not obtain support for social and political reforms and civic society values in Serbia. Perhaps the best illustration of the political system in Serbia in the 1990s is given by the American sociologist Eric D. Gordy who referred to it as "nationalist authoritarianism" (1999, 8–9), particularly taking into account a powerful, iron-fisted presidential position that essentially thrived due to extreme nationalist rhetoric.

Thus, in the last decade of the 20th century, as Todosijević (2006, 123) succinctly points out, the political climate in Serbia was characterized by the steady but rather slow dissolution of the communist political system, drastic economic decline, constant disputes over the borders of the national community, more or less open armed conflicts with neighboring republics and ethnic groups, and finally a war with the most powerful military alliance the world has ever witnessed. However, it is also important to point to a rather paradoxical issue related to the overall political climate in the 1990s: whereas the Serbian society expressed the elements of conspicuous economic instability, the political system exhibited certain stable characteristics. Todosijević convincingly states that "the facts that ten years were needed for the first crucial political change to take place, and that very few political parties have been electorally relevant, are distinctive signs of this political 'stability'" (122).

In the same vein, Bieber insightfully alludes to Milošević's regime, along with the previous communist heritage, as the main factors in creating "a profoundly negative impact on the political and public sphere of Serbia" (2003, 87). He perceptively claims that the only way out of this political turmoil could be sought in a long-term process of democratization relying particularly on the joint forces of oppositional parties and civil society's organizations: "With the elections in the fall and winter of 2000, this process merely began […] not only the legacy of the regime shapes post-authoritarian politics, but the legacy of opposition and civil society in such a system also have a far-reaching impact on the nature of the democratization process" (87).

Though various sociological and political discussions of social and economic transitions in Eastern Europe have mostly given privilege to the general outlines and global macro-processes, it is particularly relevant for the purpose of this research to indicate diverse trends in the changing political culture in Serbia from the point of view of ordinary citizens. Thus, instead of concentrating on the ensuing plans of oppositional fractions and subsequent civil society's actions, Spasić shares the belief that "in a democracy, the real, living people, with all their virtues and vices, must be taken into account since they are the true basis of any political processes and the source of their legitimacy" (2008, 1). In order to offer a glimpse into ordinary people's desires and expectations, she conducted three successive waves of semi-structured interviews between 2002 and 2007, which focused on the impact of political transition and social transformation in Serbia. People of different social background and from diverse geographical locations were interviewed in order to make a parallel between their everyday life and evaluations of the political development and economic progress of the Serbian society.

The 2002 interviews showed that "attitudes of Serbian citizens toward politics in general, political change of 2000, new post-Milošević government and the problems Serbia was facing were marked by a positive change as compared with the kind of political behavior (most) Serbs had engaged in during late 1980s and early 1990s" (2). Not surprisingly, the event of October 5, 2000, when a massive civil protest against Milošević's regime was successfully realized, represented the crux of these interviews and consequently provided a firm background for the expression of new, democratic civic values. The immediate success of October 5 is definitely linked to the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 (from March 24 to June 10), during which the Serbian population in general felt betrayed and abandoned by Milošević's government. Though most Serbs' prevalent feeling regarding the NATO's Angel of Mercy bombing mission has definitely included skepticism towards the militant Western implementation of democracy in Serbia, ordinary people felt that October 5 marked a turning point in recent Serbian history that would hopefully imply a radical change in all aspects of life (particularly referring to the much needed economic recovery, legal security, elimination of corruption and organized crime, depoliticization of life chances, etc.).

However, Spasić astutely notices that unlike the optimistic, sometimes even euphoric mood that dominated the first interviews, the gloomy tone of disappointment and disillusionment prevailed in 2005 and particularly in 2007:

> When talking about how they felt, and how people around them felt, interviewees said that hopes were dashed, that there was nothing to be expected any more. In 2002 people were saying they knew that change could not happen overnight and that they were ready to wait for life to get better in Serbia. Three years later, they were still in principle patient, though stating that they no longer knew how much longer this improvement would take. And in 2007, they stopped waiting altogether: there was nothing to wait for, they said (9).

The greatest blow to the democratic transition in Serbia was definitely the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, the first Serbian democratic Prime Minister, in March 2003. His unfortunate death was symbolically connected with the initial failure of new-

ly-created democratic institutions to offer a valid alternative to the previous socialist regime. Other relevant reasons that point to the inevitability of democratic disenchantment in Serbia definitely include people's unfulfilled expectations related to the unsuccessful economic recovery of the country, unrealized depoliticization of life chances, enormous corruption boost, strengthening of organized crime, etc. "Instead of breaking once and for all with the former practice of choosing people for political offices at all levels of government and in government-controlled enterprises on the basis of political obedience and personal loyalty rather than expertise and capability, democratic parties have continued doing just the same" (9).

As a result of the lack of genuine democratic actions, a trend of immigration to economically developed Western European countries, especially Germany, has lately been established. It is not surprising that among the new wave of Serbian immigrants there has been a striking majority of university-educated individuals. Apart from the conspicuous brain-drain process, a visible consequence of failed transitional measures has been "the extremely low esteem that political parties, political figures and the whole political system enjoy in the eyes of citizens" (11), that is most vividly present in declining rates of voter turnout, from one election to another. It is especially the democratically oriented citizens of Serbia that feel to have been let down by "their political representatives, the parties of the democratic bloc" (11).

The discussion so far points to a paradoxical situation concerning political participation in Serbia at this moment. Spasić refers to it as the "paradox of (non)involvement" (11), which should be regarded as an individual right and a legitimate personal choice and, as such, an important element of a liberal democracy. However, it is also rather indicative that the proper level of liberal or constitutional democracy has still not been reached in Serbia: "It is neither fully consolidated nor in shambles, but instead 'underconsolidated': it is functioning and the danger of a possible return to the past ways is not imminent, but not fully ruled out either. Democratic changes are visible and on the whole institutionalized, but are not absolutely irreversible" (14).

THEORY OF CRIME FICTION: GENERAL INSIGHTS

Bearing in mind a tremendous democratic transitional upheaval in Serbia, it is no wonder that the beginning of the new millennium has witnessed a rapid proliferation of crime fiction that has faithfully depicted new social phenomena. Peter Messent and Peter Clandfield are just two of the theoreticians of crime fiction who emphasize its capacity to address diverse social concerns that are inserted into the narrative in various artistic forms and styles. In *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (2013), Messent claims:

> Crime fiction confronts the problems of the everyday world in which we live as directly as any form of writing can. It allows its readers – though sometimes indirectly and obliquely – to engage with their deepest social concerns, their most fundamental anxieties about themselves and their surrounding world. This engagement, though, can vary in intensity and vary too in explicit recognition by the reader of its presence (7).

Though the explicit recognition of current social concerns in crime fiction on the part of contemporary readers is intentionally brought into question by Messent, the

emphasis is given to a strong link between the genre itself and everyday problems. In a similar fashion, Clandfield states that the "connection between dysfunctional social systems and menacing urban environments is a foundational convention of crime fiction" (2008, 80). Thus, it goes without saying that global (or local) political and social contexts represent a crucial standpoint in the creative process of writing contemporary crime fiction.

If we apply Messent's and Clandfield's insights to the political and social climate in postmillennial Serbia, two subgenres of crime fiction seem to be prevalent: noir fiction and diverse variants of crime thriller. The common denominator for these subgenres of crime fiction is the dysfunctional social background of systemic and institutional corruption.

The protagonists of noir fiction are mostly self-destructive individuals that are in conflict with a corrupt legal or political system.[2] As Penzler and Ellroy suggest, these characters are often victims, suspects or perpetrators who are seriously flawed and morally questionable. Works of noir fiction basically focus on existential pessimistic tales about people: "Their tone is generally bleak and nihilistic, with characters whose greed, lust, jealousy, and alienation lead them into a downward spiral as their plans and schemes inevitably go awry" (Penzler 2010, x). "The machinations of their relentless lust will cause them to lie, steal, cheat, and even kill as they become more and more entangled in a web from which they cannot possibly extricate themselves" (Ellroy 2010, xiii).

Thus, violent crime does not represent the main element in defining noir fiction. Noir is predominantly characterized by the prevailing mood of "pessimism, personal and societal failure, urban paranoia, the individual's disconnection from society, and cynicism" (Simpson 2010, 189). Philip Simpson validly states that noir fiction addresses social issues, such as class inequities and the motivations behind adultery, in an explicitly uncompromising fashion typically not found in mainstream fiction, and concludes: "Noir's universe is bleak, divested of meaning. Flawed human beings in these stories must somehow make moral decisions with no transcendent foundation of morality on which to base them. The consequences of those decisions are frequently fatal and always tragic to someone" (189).

The overall bleak and nihilistic tone of noir fiction can also be recognized in crime thrillers whose common themes are mostly ransoms, captivities, kidnapping, revenge, etc. The protagonists in crime thrillers mainly include innocent victims often on the run, menaced women, psychotic individuals, etc. These are usually ordinary citizens, not accustomed to danger, who are during the course of the novel related to criminals (from merely harmless stalkers to severely dangerous assassins) or police detectives and are exposed to their hazardous lifestyle. Depending on the thriller category, the themes mostly revolt around perilous social or political circumstances (terrorism, political conspiracy, murder, organized crime, etc.). As David Glover suggests, the thriller has mainly been marked by the way in which "it heightens or exaggerates the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock" (2003, 137). According to him, the world of the thriller is radically uncertain in at least two major senses:

On the one hand, the scale of the threat may appear to be vast, its ramifications immeasurable and boundless. Thus, the thriller trades in international conspiracies, invasions, wholesale corruption, serial killers who threaten entire cities or even nations. […] On the other, the thriller unsettles the reader less by the magnitude of the terrors it imagines than by the intensity of the experience it delivers: assaults upon the fictional body, a constant awareness of the physicality of danger, sado-masochistic scenarios of torture or persecution, a descent into pathological extremes of consciousness, the inner world of the psychopath or monster (137).

In line with Glover's insights, Simpson claims that the plot of a thriller is structured on the basic principle of suspense with the constant presence and awareness of physical danger, as well as the threat of exaggerated violence. The conflict usually addresses a contemporary anxiety of the thriller's audience (the fear of a foreign enemy, organized crime, etc.):

The criminals are often larger than life, imbued with a Gothic brand of pseudo-supernatural cunning and malice. The protagonist must prove his/her worth by overcoming a series of obstacles, each one more daunting than the last, thus demonstrating the thriller's indebtedness to tales of heroic romance. The moral plane of the thriller is usually quite defined, with the individual hero embodying admirable qualities, such as loyalty, and the criminal despicable ones, such as betrayal. But because the threat is represented as so dire, the hero usually dispenses with the social niceties of due process, much to the audience's approval, and exacts a kind of frontier justice to resolve the threat (Simpson 2010, 188).

The main features of noir fiction and crime thriller represent dominant traits in two Serbian crime novels, *Tito je umro* (2011, Tito is Dead) by Mirjana Novaković and *Sibir* (2011, Siberia) by Vladimir Kecmanović.

POTENTIAL CATALYSTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: *TITO JE UMRO* AND *SIBIR*

Novaković's heroine is an unnamed journalist of the leading political newspaper *Politika* who unexpectedly finds herself on the quest of solving a puzzle related to the late Yugoslav President, but is also engaged in modern politics as a reporter from the National Assembly where new Serbian leaders are chosen and various political crimes are committed. She lives a lonely, secluded life, but the possible reasons of her isolation, just like her name, are intentionally concealed from the readers. The clue that Novaković gives about the heroine is that her professional career has mysteriously been ruined and consequently, from the very start of the novel, the reader is gradually introduced to the main character's severe alcohol addiction. Though not directly stated, it becomes obvious that her writing was not deemed suitable according to the standards of the leading political party in the transitional Serbia. As a result, she has to write about trivial issues (such as Serbian quasi-celebrities and their lifestyle) in order to earn her living. However, the author emphasizes that the heroine's bosses have a high opinion of her journalist skills and deep respect for her work despite the fact that they are forced to obey the leading party's political decisions.

Described in such a manner, Novaković's heroine represents a proper embodiment of a flawed noir character: she is utterly pessimistic and experiences herself

as both personal and social failure. She intentionally chooses to be disconnected from the society with dubious moral values and cherishes a cynical attitude towards everyone in her surroundings. Postmillennial Serbia is definitely "divested of meaning" (Simpson 2010, 189); in such a society, the heroine willfully chooses the path of self-destruction as the only act of meaningful resistance to collective moral depravity.

The events in the novel take place in December 2010. The heroine finds herself at a friend's *slava* (the celebration of the patron saint of the household), where she meets the former communist official Nikola Babić. He disrupts her alcoholic lethargy by revealing that the day and exact hour of Tito's death had been announced in *Politika*, twelve years prior to the actual date of his death (May 4th, 1980). In a text from the culture section announcing a theatre performance based on Meša Selimović's well-known novel *Death and the dervish*, scheduled for May 4th, 1980 at 3.05 p.m., the beginning letters of every paragraph reveal the sentence: Tito is dead. However, this is only the first mystery that the journalist is supposed to solve.

A few days later, she surprisingly gets the job of reporting from the annual elective assembly of the Democratic Party, and finds out that a party official who insisted on his anonymity requested her professional report from this event. A young and prospective candidate for the leading party position, Saša Vrtača, dies in the night between the first and second day of the assembly, under mysterious circumstances. The journalist starts investigating this unfortunate event and it turns out that Vrtača's death is a murder, carefully planned by his nearest associates. Their material interests are utterly exposed during the course of the murder investigation in which the heroine cooperates with characters that represent the final product of the materialist-oriented, consumer ideology of transitional Serbia: corrupt journalists and police inspectors, a young Slovak painter who works as a housemaid and becomes a victim of police torture, Vrtača's greedy lover who dreams about a financially profitable marriage, etc.

Though the described plot takes place in 2010, the novel is based on a myriad of political conflicts in the period of Tito's rule that are cleverly connected to diverse contemporary issues like the pharmaceutical mafia, elite prostitution, secret service, and inner party conflicts. As it turns out, the author of the mysterious newspaper article foretelling Tito's death was imprisoned and then committed suicide in prison under suspicious circumstances, so the heroine searches for the possible culprits of this vicious act among the newly-elected democratic political leaders two decades after the unfortunate event.

Entangled in a web of political schemes and moral corruption, Novaković's journalist is capable of lying and cheating in the name of truth and honesty as Ellroy suggests (2010, xiii). Living on the margins of the society, with no lovers or friends, the heroine focuses on the triangle of professional rivalries and fragile alliances with greedy politicians. Gordić Petković (2017, 81–82) validly claims that this journalist represents a protagonist of contemporary morality in which white and black figures play their game of chess to the moment of final extermination, that is, until the moment truth and power confront each other.

This novel focuses on the gloomy, satirical narrator's perception of Serbia: existing social depravities are drastically enlarged. Political parties, the media, police and

criminals, secret service and church are guided by the greedy impulses towards material enrichment. The heroine is obsessed with failures: her personal failures become a potent reflection of social deficiencies. In her account, Serbia represents a grim picture of moral apocalypse, nightmare of corruption, with no hope that a better world can be created on the basis of the devastated one (82). Gordić Petković alludes to the fact that the root of the heroine's sufferings remains unrevealed to the readers. One of the possible explanations of this peculiar phenomenon is that the unresolved issues in the novel contribute to it being a powerful allegory of basic illegibility and inexplicability of political power, which, when it comes to the matter of punishment, does not require solid reasons so they do not have to be named straightforwardly (82).

Finally, Novaković intentionally opts for the phony appearance of the Yugoslav Golden Age of Tito's communist rule than the democratic illusion of social rebirth and renewal. A symbolic message of the novel is that Tito's death represents a turning point in collective awareness and identity formation whose consequences are still deeply felt and questioned (257). Even the heroine herself becomes an immediate culprit for the destruction of the few positive characters (Zuzana the artist/maid dies in an unresolved hit and run car accident after the journalist's text related to unnecessary expression of police violence). Her "relentless lust" (Ellroy 2010, xiii) to reveal the mystery of Tito's death and Vrtača's murder causes her to assume false identities, cheat and ultimately, be indirectly responsible for the death of an innocent human being. Though initially intended as a social critic, Novaković's heroine demonstrates identical personal flaws as the politicians she criticizes. In order to make a difference, she uses the same institutional methods and thus, unconsciously, becomes a proper tool of the corrupt system. However, the mere fact that Novaković tells the story of a depraved individual who symbolically represents society's mirror image testifies to the serious potential of *Tito je umro* as a potent catalyst for social change.

The heroine of Kecmanović's *Sibir* is a daughter of a criminal for whom a state warrant has been issued. Being mysteriously kidnapped, she unwillingly gains personal access to the Serbian criminal underground. The plot serves the function of revealing a striking social criminalization as a consequence of the Western Balkans' transition. The life of a tycoon's daughter seems to be entirely determined by the figure of her authoritarian father. Thus, the novel is based on the main elements of the crime thriller: the theme of kidnapping, an innocent female victim, organized crime, and the "larger than life" criminal (Simpson 2010, 188).

The focus of the novel represents a rather intriguing love story between the heroine and policemen in charge of her safety according to her criminal father's instructions. A strange sort of connection appears between the kidnapped girl and her kidnapper and it turns out that the kidnapper offers more understanding and support to the narrator than her closest relatives. A common trait in thrillers is skillfully portrayed here: carefully calculated plans mostly end in failure, so the heroine becomes a reluctant witness of criminal clashes, as well as business arrangements of Serbian and Croatian organized crime representatives. It turns out that the national conflict between Serbs and Croats serves only as a pretext for criminal enrichment in which policemen are revealed as the worst criminals from both parties. Greed governs the

life of Kecmanović's characters (both Serbs and Croats) and extreme nationalist rhetoric is presented as a cover for bare material impulses.

A possible love affair between the kidnapped girl and her guardian takes a special segment of the novel that unexpectedly introduces the theme of love in this crime thriller. Kecmanović insightfully shows that even love loses its transformative, healing power in the community void of justice, mercy and morality. It turns out that the kidnapper is the narrator's potential father which evokes strong incestuous images and inspires a painful ironical twist by the end of the novel. Thus, the exaggerated, rising curve of danger, violence and shock that Glover describes in his rendering of the thriller's main features (2003, 137) is successfully depicted here.

A significant question that the novel raises is the dubious identity of the real criminal, the heroine's biological father or her surrogate father, the kidnapper. It turns out that though both of them break the law in various ways, the kidnapper respects a certain chivalric code of honor and is ready to overcome diverse obstacles in order to fulfill his task and protect the narrator. The element of heroic romance is thus intentionally inserted; however, the moral plane of the thriller is, quite opposed to Simpson's claim (2010, 188), not properly defined in Kecmanović's novel. The kidnapper, who is by default a criminal, possesses admirable personal qualities such as loyalty, integrity and pride. Thus, he becomes the proper hero of the novel and in order to resolve the threat imposed by Serbian organized crime channels exacts severe "frontier justice" (188). In order to fight criminals, Kecmanović suggests, one has to use criminal methods which ultimately leads to inevitable personal corruption and failure.

The form of the novel represents one of its key aspects; Dragana Veljković (2012, 338) claims that its form is subordinated to its themes. From the visual perspective, it seems as if it was written in verse since its utterances are minimized and reduced, sentences are short and elliptical, the form is mostly based on dialogues and punctuation is utterly basic. These are all main features of so-called "enter" literature (particularly its immediate graphic recognition and brief utterances markedly separated by spacing) that mainly carries a derogative connotation. However, Veljković validly concludes that the aforementioned features of Kecmanović's style contribute to the vivid dynamics of the novel's action as well as to the depiction of the narrator's emotional aspect. A well-founded interpretation that Veljković offers is that chopped sentences and presenting reality through a myriad of constantly diverse events represent a metaphor for the life of young people from the criminal milieu: everything happens quickly and is short-lived – events, emotions, even life itself (2012, 338).

Kecmanović's innovative narrative technique and deliberate political incorrectness in the period of alleged freedom and pluralist thinking thus represent a remarkable description of transitional, postmillennial Serbia. The title of the novel reveals a potent allusion to Dostoevsky's exile, a metaphor for the necessity of eloping into a better future, since the present is too bleak and gloomy to bear. It is precisely what the heroine of Kecmanović's novel finally does. Though she runs away from the problematic country and her burdened past, the novel itself represents a potent indicator of the bare necessity for social change. In other words, Kecmanović straightforwardly suggests that social reform has no alternative.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the politically turbulent last decade of the 20th century that had its climax in the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, the country has undergone a severe process of economic transition. The expected side effects of such a tremendous social upheaval, as Sotirovic, Todosijević and Spasić inform us, have been the creation of new political parties, altered governmental policies, increased rate of immigration, strengthening of organized crime, corruption boost, etc. It is no wonder then that the beginning of the new millennium has witnessed a rapid proliferation of crime fiction in Serbia that has faithfully depicted new social phenomena. Since a "foundational convention of crime fiction" (Clandfield 2008, 80) is to mirror the political and social climate of a country, the elements of noir fiction and diverse variants of crime thriller, here defined by Simpson and Glover, seem to be prevalent in crime fiction of postmillennial Serbia. Both novels depict the dysfunctional social background of systemic and institutional corruption and offer a vividly sincere cross-section and criticism of modern Serbian society. It is our belief that both Novaković and Kecmanović, in their rather stylistically diverse crime novels, used the noir genre as a potent catalyst for necessary social change, since their heroines ultimately become fervent critics of contemporary Serbian social problems.

NOTES

[1] Sotirovic adds that the extreme rhetoric propagated in the Serbian media in the 1990s was that "ethnographic borders should be expanded to the national-state borders, or other way around that the state should enlarge its borders in order to include both the territories settled by dispersed Serbs and lands that historically belonged to the 'national' state. [...] In this way both political blocks in position and opposition gained popularity among Serbian citizens, but lost political and financial support from the western democracies" (2009, 428).

[2] Simpson defines the origin and etymology of noir fiction: "The term is popularly believed to originate in the French crime-novel publishing imprint Serie Noire, which in turn inspired critic Nino Frank in 1946 to dub a certain mood and tone of postwar cinema as 'film noir'. These films, in turn, evolved from the fiction published first in pulp magazines and then novels in previous decades" (2010, 189).

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The contemporary Serbian crime covel as a catalyst for social change: The case of Novaković's "Tito je umro" and Kecmanović's "Sibir"

Contemporary Serbian crime novel. Catalyst. Noir. Crime thriller. Social change.

The paper focuses on the comparative analysis of two crime novels: *Tito je umro* (2011; Tito is Dead) by Mirjana Novaković and *Sibir* (2011; Siberia) by Vladimir Kecmanović. Both novels offer a vivid cross-section and criticism of modern Serbian society. The aim of the paper is to present these stylistically diverse crime novels as potent catalysts for necessary social change. The theoretical framework of the paper relies on the political insights of Gordić Petković, Veljković, Sotirović, and Spasić, as well as critical approaches by Messent, Clandfield, Simpson, and Glover.

Milena Kaličanin, PhD.
Associate Professor
English Department
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Niš
Ćirila i Metodija 2
18000 Niš
Serbia
milena.kalicanin@filfak.ni.ac.rs