

***THE DIARY OF DIANA BUDISAVLJEVIĆ*,
directed by: Dana Budisavljević, screenwriters:
Dana Budisavljević and Jelena Paljan
(Zagreb; Ljubljana; Belgrade: Hulahop; December;
This and That Productions, 2019), 88 minutes.**

Nikica BARIĆ*

The news that the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education has approved the ‘live-action documentary’ film, *The Diary of Diana Budisavljević* (Croatian: *Dnevnik Diane Budisavljević*; 2019), directed by Dana Budisavljević, as part of the Croatian school curriculum, prompted a response by Prof. Mario Kevo of the Croatian Catholic University. Kevo is one of Croatia’s top historians of the World War II topics relevant to Diana Budisavljević, and has warned that Diana Budisavljević’s *Diary* (further: *Diary*) cannot be considered a fully reliable historical source as well as that the film uses some information from the *Diary* in a selective manner:

‘Even though the film has received numerous Croatian and foreign awards, it still leaves a somewhat bitter taste because it is, in the end, a one-sided view of the war, which has drawn much sympathy due to the topic. This is understandable and expected, but one should note that the movie lacks the dividing line between the subjective and the objective, and is obviously the result of the personal impressions of the film’s director, who did not go much further than the *Diary* itself when preparing it. It is also apparent that these diary texts were approached in a very selective manner. The film does not offer a full, quality picture of the work of Diana Budisavljević during World War II.’¹

I agree with Prof. Kevo’s view, and in this review, I shall show that Dana Budisavljević’s film is in many ways not an ‘objective’ and ‘true’ depiction of the work of Diana Budisavljević during World War II.

First of all, the basic facts need to be presented. Diana Budisavljević (1891–1978) was born in Innsbruck, where she married the surgeon Dr Julije Budisavljević during World War I. Soon after the end of the war, she and her husband moved to Zagreb, and they were living there when World War II

* Nikica BARIĆ, PhD, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb, Croatia

¹ <http://www.unicath.hr/diana-budisavljevic-u-skole-struka-na-margine>, accessed 28 September 2020. Kevo’s review is published in the translation into English in the same volume of the *Review of Croatian History* under the title “Diana Budisavljević Into Schools: History to the Margins”.

broke out and the Independent State of Croatia (ISC) was established. During this war, she put much effort into helping Serb prisoners of ISC concentration camps, especially Serb children, but also helped other war victims. Her diary was published in the Croatian State Archives' journal *Fontes – izvori za hrvatsku povijest* in 2002, and again as a book by the Croatian State Archives and Jasenovac Memorial Site in 2003. This is the mentioned *Diary*, in which Diana Budisavljević described her humanitarian work during the war and the events in its immediate aftermath. The first entries in the *Diary* are from October 1941, and the last from February 1947. The *Diary* follows events in a chronological order, but there is no doubt that Diana Budisavljević added some comments later.

Director Dana Budisavljević's film uses various documentary footage from World War II and contemporary accounts of four people who were imprisoned in ISC concentration camps as children (Milorad Jandrić, Zorka Janjanin, Nada Vlasisavljević, Živko Zelenbrz). However, the emphasis of the movie is on its live-action part, which depicts the activities of Diana Budisavljević, played by Alma Prica. At the end of the film, it is claimed that it is based on 'the book *The Diary of Diana Budisavljević 1941–1945* and documentary research'. The film won the 'Golden Arena' award at the Pula Film Festival in 2019, and Dana Budisavljević was awarded the Croatian state Vladimir Nazor Award for culture.

The Views of Diana Budisavljević on Jewish Suffering

When the film shows how the humanitarian work of Diana Budisavljević began, she (Alma Prica) is speaking with her tailor, 'Mrs Reich' (Urša Raukar). They have the following dialogue:

'Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): Mrs Reich? I must tell you... I was in Innsbruck just before it began here too... I heard horrible things about the camps in Germany... About camps for members of your faith...

Mrs Reich (Urša Raukar): There are camps here already... Several of them, I hear... The Jewish Community is gathering help for these poor people (...).'

This is followed by documentary footage, showing the ISC authorities demolishing the synagogue in Zagreb. Thus, the viewer gets the impression that Jewish suffering and the knowledge about this that Diana Budisavljević possessed had an important role in her decision to engage in humanitarian work. However, the *Diary* does not support this. Its introduction states that Diana

Budisavljević had a Jewish tailor, who told her on several occasions about the 'great campaign' that the Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb was conducting for its members who were imprisoned in concentration camps. But nowhere does the *Diary* mention that Diana Budisavljević told her tailor that she had been in Innsbruck and learned 'horrible things' about the German concentration camps for Jews. This may look like a trivial detail or expression of 'artistic license', but it does not reflect well on a film that claims to be 'documentary'.

In addition, although Diana Budisavljević acted with the help of the Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb, she did not leave any prominent notes on why Jews were being deported into camps, or why Jews were being persecuted, why they were suffering. However, in an entry dated 9 November 1941, she wrote that the (female) Serbian prisoners in the Lobar-Grad camp felt 'completely isolated from the Jewish women' and, on 1 May 1942, noted that she had the impression that the 'Jewish clerks' of the Jewish Religious Community in Zagreb were 'providing only for the Jewish women' in the Lobar-Grad camp. Besides, in a note dated 6 February 1942, Diana Budisavljević wrote regarding the position of women in the camps:

'One could always find someone who would help the Jewish and Communist women, but nobody cared about the Orthodox.'

It could, however, be added that nobody could have helped the Jewish women by that point because deportation to the camps meant almost certain death for them.

In late May 1942, Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac received Diana Budisavljević, about which more will be said later. She was not happy with Stepinac's attitude when she told him about the need to protect Serbs, writing about this meeting in her *Diary*:

'[Stepinac] told me that he visited some [ISC] minister about a Jewish woman's apartment. That man had promised him the woman would be allowed to stay in the apartment, but now intended to throw her out despite this. I say I've come to ask him to save a people, and he is telling me about some apartment.'

While there is no doubt that, in the ISC, 'a people', i.e., the Serb people, needed saving, and Diana Budisavljević did much to achieve this, the fact remains that another people, the Jews, were in an even worse position, subjected to complete physical extermination. However, as can be seen from this example, it appears that Diana Budisavljević did not have this knowledge.

There is another interesting detail regarding this. Namely, Diana Budisavljević noted in her *Diary* on 25 November 1941:

‘We then went to the Jewish Department of the Ustasha Police Directorate, whose chief, [Vilko] Kühnel, had to issue me and my sister a permit to visit the camp. I must stress that the chief continued to accommodate and help me whenever I needed it. (After the liberation, this man, who had also done as much to help the Jews as he could, committed suicide.)

It is strange that Diana Budisavljević, who devoted herself to protecting the threatened Serbs, continued to laud Vilko Kühnel, the chief of the Jewish Department of the Ustasha Police Directorate, who was responsible for the destruction of another threatened community in the ISC, the Jews. Namely, Kühnel played an important role in the deportation of Jews to ISC concentration camps as well as to the German-run Auschwitz.² It is possible that he, as Diana Budisavljević writes, helped some Jews for certain reasons, but there is no doubt he sent an incomparably larger number of Jews to the camps. Besides, if he ‘helped’ Jews, why did he take his own life after the fall of the ISC?

Thus, in contrast to the depiction in Dana Budisavljević’s film, the *Diary* contains no notes by Diana Budisavljević that point towards a special concern for Jewish suffering, and the ‘accommodating’ Vilko Kühnel does not appear in the film at all. This surely serves a practical purpose. Namely, Dana Budisavljević’s film was shown to students this year on International Holocaust Victims Remembrance Day, so presumably showing Diana Budisavljević’s links with the ‘accommodating’ Kühnel, a man who was one of the conductors of the Holocaust, would have been problematic.

The Forgotten Dr Savo Besarović

An important role in the *Diary* is played by Dr Savo Besarović (1899–1945), a Serb lawyer from Sarajevo. Besarović was a university colleague of Ante Pavelić, the man who later became the *poglavnik* [headman/fuehrer] of the ISC. According to some sources, Pavelić invited Besarović to Zagreb in the summer of 1941, seeking his help in pacifying the Serb rebellion against the ISC. Besarović later became the notary of the Croatian State Parliament, and in October 1943 also a state minister, i.e. minister without portfolio, in the ISC Government. Immediately after the war, the new Communist authorities in Sarajevo sentenced Besarović to death.

The *Diary* shows us that Diana Budisavljević had numerous contacts with Besarović in late 1941 and early 1942. It also shows that Besarović was in direct contact with Ante Pavelić. Indeed, in an entry dated 29 December 1941,

² Carl Bethke, (*K)eine gemeinsame Sprache?: Aspekte deutsch-jüdischer Beziehungsgeschichte in Slawonien, 1900–1945* (Berlin: Lit Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2013), pp. 245–246, 299, 371, 377.

Diana Budisavljević noted that she had learned of new persecutions of Serbs and therefore decided to send a telegram to Besarović, who was then in Sarajevo, to ‘make use of his strong connections with the *poglavnik* and stand up for the persecuted’.

Still, Diana Budisavljević was not happy with Besarović and noted in the *Diary* that she could not count on him as well as that she was taking concrete steps to help the Serbs in the camp, which Besarović then presented as his own. Besarović was not happy with Diana Budisavljević, either, and they eventually stopped cooperating.

Besarović, however, helped Diana Budisavljević at least once, which she noted in her *Diary*. Namely, the ISC police conducted a search of her home on 25 February 1942. This event greatly disturbed Diana Budisavljević. However, it was precisely after she contacted Besarović, who then interceded with Eugen Dido Kvaternik, the director of public order and security, that the police left her home.

Savo Besarović was therefore one of the important persons with whom Diana Budisavljević was in contact as part of her activities. However, he does not appear at all in Dana Budisavljević’s film.

On Diana Budisavljević’s Contacts with the ISC Authorities

One of the first scenes in the film shows how Diana Budisavljević and her husband, Dr Julije Budisavljević (Igor Samobor), are talking with Julije’s sister Mira Kušević (Mirjana Karanović). During this conversation, Kušević describes in no uncertain terms that the Ustashe, who have just taken power in the ISC, are ‘common criminals’, and that the Germans ‘have put these scum in power’.

I have no doubt that Mira Kušević and the Budisavljevićs did not have a positive opinion of the Ustashe, and neither could they have. However, the *Diary* does not mention that Mira Kušević offered any opinion on the Ustashe or that she called them ‘criminals’ or ‘scum’. I assume that director Dana Budisavljević wanted to explain clearly who and what the Ustashe were at the very beginning of the movie. Thus, applying artistic license at the expense of documentary accuracy, it would have been ‘inappropriate’ or ‘rude’ to then mention Diana Budisavljević’s contacts with representatives of that regime, such as Vilko Kühnel and Savo Besarović. And it is therefore even less surprising that the film does not show when Diana Budisavljević was personally received by Andrija Artuković, the ISC minister of the interior, on 16 December 1941. He did not offer her much help, but did give her his spoken permission, dubious as it may have been, to continue her humanitarian work.

None of this appears in Dana Budisavljević's film because, I suppose, it would have 'hurt' the idealised character and work of Diana Budisavljević had it been shown that she had contacts with some very high-ranking representatives of the Ustasha regime, even though these contacts are clearly noted and described in the *Diary*. In doing so, the film's director avoided every fact that would point towards Diana Budisavljević's humanitarian work being impossible without her contacting members of the Ustasha regime.

There is only one scene in Dana Budisavljević's film where a direct meeting between Diana Budisavljević and ISC government representatives is shown (if we ignore, for the moment, that Kamilo Brössler and Dragica Habazin, about whom more will be said later, were also representatives of the ISC government). It is the mentioned search of her home that was conducted by ISC police on 25 February 1942, which greatly disturbed her.

The film shows two Ustasha policemen entering her home at the exact moment when Diana Budisavljević is packing the gathered food and clothing with her colleagues in preparation for sending it as aid for camp inmates. One policeman picks through the food and other items on the table in an intimidating manner, or throws them about. He then asks the other policeman, who is checking their personal documents: 'Whose are they?' The other answers: 'All Serbs.' After this, the first policeman forcibly throws two large boxes of clothes off the table. After the policemen have returned home, Dr Julije Budisavljević returns and his wife tells him: 'They only wanted to frighten us.'

This sentence 'They only wanted to frighten us' is ahistorical. A regime such as the ISC's did not need to 'intimidate' anyone in the described manner. It did not need to intimidate when it could arrest, interrogate, torture at the police station, deport to concentration camps, or bring before a summary court, which could sentence the accused to death in short order... Why, then, lose time with 'intimidation'?

When one reads the *Diary* and the described police search, which had truly and understandably disturbed Diana Budisavljević, one can see that she believed the search had been conducted because someone had reported that she was sending aid to the Partisans, i.e. that a secret radio station was located in her apartment. The *Diary* does not mention that the police called those present Serbs, and it appears that no force was used during the search. Namely, as described by Diana Budisavljević, a wardrobe that contained the possessions of her daughter, Ilse, had to be opened during the search. The wardrobe was locked, but the police did not break it open. Instead, an Ustasha took Ilse to her apartment in his car, so that she could bring the wardrobe key. When Ilse returned to her apartment, she told her husband that her mother's home was being searched, after which he phoned Savo Besarović, who then

intervened with the director of public order and security, Eugen Dido Kvaternik, to stop the search without consequences.

One can conclude that many whose residences were being searched by the ISC police did not have the option of phoning Savo Besarović or anyone else who could have protected them. However, the film shows the complete opposite of what is described in the *Diary*, with the goal of using ‘artistic license’ to protect the idealised character of Diana Budisavljević, despite such idealisation being completely unnecessary and going against the very point of a documentary film.

Dr Julije Budisavljević

An important role in the film is played by Diana Budisavljević’s husband, the physician Dr Julije Budisavljević (1882–1981). As I have mentioned, he is played by Igor Samobor.

In the film, he is depicted as a person who is having difficulty ‘coming to terms’ with the reality of the Ustasha regime. Here the film again diverges from what is written in the *Diary*. In the film, when his sister mentions that there is a concentration camp in Lobar-Grad, Dr Budisavljević refuses to ‘believe’ this and claims it is only a ‘nursing home’. However, the *Diary* does not support this interpretation, so once again artistic license is given priority at the expense of documentary accuracy.

The film contains a scene in which the Budisavljević couple, Marko Vidaković (Tihomir Stanić), and Đuro Vukosavljević (Krunoslav Šarić) are discussing that an initiative to help the Serbs deported to concentration camps needs to be launched. During this conversation, Vidaković mentions Julije Budisavljević that he has heard that Budisavljević had allegedly ‘saved the life of Minister [Mile] Budak’ before the war. The *Diary* itself nowhere mentions that Vidaković said this to Budisavljević. However, certain sources, reports sent from Croatia to the representatives of the royal government in exile in late 1941 claim that, allegedly, according to the wishes of Ustasha *doglavnik* [*poglavnik*’s deputy] Mile Budak, Julije Budisavljević was ‘the only Serb who was left (...) at his position’, i.e.:

‘Surgeon Dr Budisavljević is allegedly still chief physician at the clinic at the direct intervention of Dr M. Budak, because he had saved the latter’s life with an operation years ago.’³

³ Ljubo Boban, *Hrvatska u arhivima izbjegličke vlade 1941-1943.: Izvještaji informatora o prilikama u Hrvatskoj* [Croatia in the Archives of the Government in Exile 1941–1943: Informant Reports on Conditions in Croatia] (Zagreb: Globus, 1985), pp. 37, 252.

Thus, the film suggests that there is a possibility that Mile Budak, one of the more prominent Ustasha regime personalities, in a certain way protected Dr Budisavljević. However, the film's scenario did not want to go down this road, probably because it would have hurt the idealised image of the Budisavljević couple and showed certain acts of Ustasha dignitaries that cannot be linked to crimes. This is why the next scene has Dr Budisavljević explain to his wife that he had to report to the police, where a personal identity card was issued to him, registering him as 'Serb [number] 498'.

Only later did those who worked on the film publish what the card mentioned in the film looked like. One can see that Dr Julije Budisavljević reported to the ISC Ustasha Police Directorate in Zagreb and that the Serb Department of this directorate issued him 'Serb Card no. 298a'. However, they also published an ISC Ustasha Police Directorate order dated 10 July 1941, according to which all subordinate authorities were not to apply any measures to Orthodox Serbs when the issue involves Dr Julije Budisavljević's freedom of movement, until further notice; the mentioned order acted as an identity card.⁴

Besides this, judging by certain sources from April and May 1941, it appears that Dr Budisavljević continued to work as the head of the Surgery Clinic of the School of Medicine in Zagreb without (major) problems.⁵ Also interesting is an informant report forwarded to the ISC police authorities in late April 1944:

'Dr Julije Budisavljević, full professor at the school of medicine of the Croatian University in Zagreb, born 1882 in Požega, now of Roman Catholic confession, formerly Orthodox, in service for 37 years, served at the school of medicine and Innsbruck, and at the surgery clinic in Zagreb since 1919. Appointed at the time of former Yugoslavia, he was ideologically aligned to the Independent Democratic Party, but was not politically prominent in any party. His politicising consisted of occasional talks with his brother [Srđan], a renegade leader of the Serbian Democratic Party. He did not vote in 1935 or 1938. (...) It appears that the named has been completely loyal from the founding of the ISC until today, and that he is not politically prominent in any way. It is certain that he is not a sympathiser of the Ustasha Movement, but he does not express his beliefs. As a physician and

⁴ <http://historiografija.hr/?p=22057>, accessed 28 August 2020.

⁵ Croatia, Croatian State Archives, Zagreb (further: HR-HDA), fund 226, Ministarstvo zdravstva i udružbe NDH, Glavno ravnateljstvo za zdravstvo [ISC Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, General Directorate of Health], Broj: 5845/1941., Broj: 6710/1941., Broj: 9077/1941.

head of the surgery clinic, he is very conscientious and diligent, and also very sociable, serving as an example to many physicians.⁶

It is interesting that the report does not mention Dr Budisavljević's wife, Diana, i.e. her humanitarian work, as something that could be aimed against the ISC.

Not long after this report was written, Dr Budisavljević was retired in summer 1944. The *Liečnički vjestnik* [*Medical Journal*] reported:

‘Dr Julije Budisavljević, full professor at the Medical Faculty of the Croatian University in Zagreb, official IV-3rd class, has been retired.’⁷

Prof. Danko Riessner then held a lecture in honour of Dr Budisavljević in the lecture hall of the Surgery Clinic in Zagreb, on 6 November 1944. The lecture was attended by Ante Šerčer, the dean of the School of Medicine, as well as the professors, assistant professors and teaching assistants of that school. Also present were representatives of the Medical Association and Medical Chamber and the Croatian Society of Surgery, and School of Medicine students. In his lecture, Riessner lauded Budisavljević's work:

‘The greatest pledge for the health of every patient, in addition to their physician's professional qualifications, is without a doubt the moral fibre of that physician as a man. In this regard, Prof. Budisavljević is certainly an uncommonly strong presence in our modern society, and a sterling example to other physicians. Conscience, the strongest foundation of a physician's work, permeated his whole being, and this affected his entire clinic. With these characteristics of his, to the benefit of our medicine and our people, as an experienced pedagogue, he uplifted all the generations of our physicians through the last 23 years; so to us, his closest associates, his name became almost synonymous with conscience.’⁸

⁶ HR-HDA-1549, Zbirka zapisa upravnih i vojnih vlasti NDH i Narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta [Collection of Records of the Administrative and Military Authorities of the ISC and the People's Liberation Movement] (further: Zbirka zapisa NDH/NOP), I-51/1181-1182, Dr. Julije Budisavljević, redoviti sveučilišni profesor, podatci. Broj 100 dne 25. travnja 1944. dostavlja sljedeće [Dr Julije Budisavljević, full university professor, data. No. 100, date 25 April 1944, sends the following].

⁷ *Liečnički vjestnik* (Zagreb) LXVI (August 1944), No. 8: 202.

⁸ Danko RIESSNER, ‘U čast i u znak zahvalnosti prof. dr-u Juliju Budisavljeviću’ [In Honour and Gratitude to Prof. Dr Julije Budisavljević], *Liečnički vjestnik* LXVI (November 1944), No. 11: 249–253.

After the war and the collapse of the ISC, Dr Julije Budisavljević described his position during the time of the ISC in a statement given before the District Court in Zagreb in late June 1951:

‘At the moment of the German occupation of our country [Yugoslavia] by the Germans in 1941, I was a professor at the medical school and head of the surgery clinic in Zagreb. I was at that time wearing the uniform of a medical lieutenant colonel. I remained a professor in active service until 1944, when I was retired, and I remained in retirement until the liberation in 1945.’⁹

In stating these facts, I want to highlight that there is no doubt that Dr Budisavljević’s position during the ISC was uncomfortable, difficult. In the first months of the ISC, he, as a Serb, was given a special card, and he later converted from Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism. It is highly likely that he did this so as to better ‘integrate’ himself into the ‘new order’ and the reality of the ISC. One could also ask whether he was retired before it was truly necessary. But, on the other hand, it appears that Julije Budisavljević was in a far better position compared to thousands upon thousands of other Serbs, and this was certainly due to his medical capabilities, but possibly also to the interventions of certain high-ranking Ustasha officials. He was also respected by all his fellow physicians, who expressed this in public. Based on this, one could assume that his position also (in)directly helped his wife’s humanitarian work.

Dr Marko Vidaković

The architect Dr Marko Vidaković (1890–1976), a Serb who lived in Zagreb, is also mentioned at many points in the *Diary*. The *Diary* makes it clear that he had a substantial role in helping and saving Serbs from the ISC authorities’ oppression and that he cooperated with Diana Budisavljević in doing so. Vidaković described these efforts in a series of documents after the war. He

⁹ HR-HDA, fund 421, Javno tužilaštvo Narodne/Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske, Odjeljenje bezbjednosti, kut. 123, Zapisnik od 26. VI. 1951. o saslušanju svjedoka prof. dr. Budisavljević Julija u kriv. predmetu proti Pavelić Ante zbog krivičnog djela iz čl. 124, 125 i 128 Krivičnog zakonika. Sastavljen u Okružnom sudu u Zagrebu [Public Prosecutor’s Office of the People’s/Socialist Republic of Croatia, Security Division, box 123, Minutes of 26 June 1951 on the hearing of witness Prof. Dr Julije Budisavljević in the criminal case against Pavelić Ante for criminal offence from art. 124, 125, and 128 of the Criminal Law. Done at the District Court in Zagreb].

also described in positive terms that Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac and Dr Savo Besarović helped these efforts.¹⁰

During the ISC, Vidaković drew the attention of an ISC police informant and was regarded as a suspicious person. One informant report from late January 1944 mentioned Vidaković and his brother among certain persons, ‘Freemasons’, who gather in the Esplanade hotel in Zagreb, and also their political activities during the time of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia:

‘Dr Marko Vidaković, urban planner, is also one of the “malcontents” from the Esplanade café. Dr Marko Vidaković was appointed at the last moment as a city councillor of Zagreb, as a friend of Dragiša Cvetković, friend of Dr Vladko Maček. Dr Marko Vidaković is known as a pronounced “Yugoslav”. His brother used to own a blinds factory. In the time of Dr Milan Stojadinović, the Belgrade prime minister, factory owner Vidaković became a “national representative”, and remained so during Dragiša Cvetković’s time. He ran the office of the Yugoslav Radical Union political organisation in Zagreb. The Vidaković brothers are Zagreb Serbs!’¹¹

Unfortunately, I did not manage to find a similar informant report that would speak about any suspicious, possibly anti-state activities of Diana Budisavljević...

In Dana Budisavljević’s film, however, there was little room for Marko Vidaković (who, as has been said, is played by Tihomir Stanić). In the mentioned scene when the Budisavljević couple are discussing how to help the Serbs in the camps with Vidaković and Đuro Vukosavljević, he and Dr Budisavljević are depicted as indecisive (frightened) persons who do not wish to take charge of such an undertaking. This does not match the statements in the *Diary*, such as Diana Budisavljević’s entry of 26 October 1941:

‘My husband then remembered an acquaintance, and the architect Dr Marko Vidaković came to us in the afternoon. After I described the situation to him, he immediately and wholeheartedly agreed to start working on this. (...) Dr Vidaković devoted himself to our effort with tireless diligence and persistence.’

¹⁰ See for example: Juraj Batelja, *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac – svjedok Evanđelja ljubavi: Životopis, dokumenti i svjedočanstva – prije, za vrijeme i nakon Drugog svjetskog rata*, knj. 3: *Dokumenti II, br. 400.-691. (1944. – 1998.)* [*The Blessed Aloysius Stepinac – Witness of the Gospel of Love: Biography, Documents, and Testimonies – Before, During, and After World War II, Book 3: Documents II, no. 400–691 (1944–1998)*] (Zagreb: Postulatura blaženoga Alojzija Stepinca, 2010), pp. 125–129, 316–320, 394–395.

¹¹ HR-HDA-1549, Zbirka zapisa NDH/NOP, I-25/286-291, Masoni na poslu: Izviešće [Freemasons at Work: Report], Zagreb, 29 January 1944.

Later in the film, about which I will write more, there is also a scene showing Diana Budisavljević's conversation with German officer Gustav von Koczian. The *Diary* makes it clear that Marko Vidaković was also present during this conversation but, in the film, Vidaković has been 'deleted' from that conversation and replaced by Diana Budisavljević's husband, despite the fact that the *Diary* claims he was not present during the conversation.

Thus, Dana Budisavljević's film has, I would say, largely 'omitted' Marko Vidaković. But this is understandable: why should another 'good guy' be allowed to 'steal' the spotlight from Diana Budisavljević?

Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac

An important place in the film is given to Diana Budisavljević's 'conversation' with Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac (played by Livio Badurina). The film presents it as follows:

'Aloysius Stepinac (Livio Badurina): The sacrifice you make for the people and your husband's faith deserves every respect.

Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): Father Archbishop, people are being stuffed into railway wagons and taken away like cattle. It is not possible that you do not know about this.

Aloysius Stepinac (Livio Badurina): No, no, no... I do not condone this savagery.

Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): These people I'm talking about, the Orthodox, are converting to the Catholic faith in the hope that their lives will be spared. They have been told this.

Aloysius Stepinac (Livio Badurina): I strongly opposed Pavelić regarding these conversions at gunpoint, and I now have some problems because of this...

Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): It is our Christian duty to help the innocent, especially children. I humbly appeal, could you speak to someone? Let the mothers and children be released from the camps.

Aloysius Stepinac (Livio Badurina): And who should release them?

Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): These camps are under Ustasha authority ... and you are their confessor...

Aloysius Stepinac (Livio Badurina): My advice to you is to try among your own ...'

Thus, Archbishop Stepinac is shown as indecisive, unwilling to help, effectively a hypocrite, because the Ustasas are destroying Serbs and he is an Ustasha 'confessor', and in the end coldly 'advises' Diana Budisavljević to ask 'her own', meaning the Germans, for help.

Later in the film, in a text narrated by Alma Prica, it is said that the Catholic Church has 'finally' joined the efforts to help Serb children from ISC concentration camps, i.e. that rural families are providing for around 5,000 children, 'thanks to the efforts of local priests'. Therefore, when the Catholic Church 'finally' joined the efforts, it was done by 'local priests', while the higher hierarchy of the Church and Stepinac are not mentioned.¹²

In the *Diary*, Diana Budisavljević did indeed note that she was not happy with Stepinac's readiness to help her. She was first received by Stepinac on 3 December 1941 and noted in her diary that the result of this conversation was 'completely negative' because Stepinac declared that he had no influence on the ISC authorities, i.e. that he was willing to help, but knew in advance that he could achieve nothing. Diana Budisavljević was received a second time on 26 May 1942, about which she noted in her *Diary*:

'The archbishop is very reserved. He does not wish to show real interest. He says he does not have any influence on the government. He told me that he had visited some minister regarding the apartment of a Jewish woman. That man had promised him the woman would be allowed to stay in the apartment, but now intends to throw her out regardless. I say that I have come asking him to save a people, but he is telling me about some apartment. He then started to criticise the Germans, Nazism, Hitler, saying they're responsible for everything. I tell him that German bishops are very active in helping their believers and standing up to Hitler. Many of those persecuted here have converted to the Catholic faith, and it is his duty to stand up for them. It is very important for the Church that the people know that it cares for them at the time of their greatest need. He eventually promises that he would do something for them.'

The *Diary* shows that Diana Budisavljević was not happy with Stepinac's stance, but when the cited film dialogue is compared to what is written in the *Diary*, it is clear that those who worked on the film let their imaginations run free. In the film, Stepinac 'advises' Diana Budisavljević to address

¹² On this, see: Mario Kevo, 'Uloga nadbiskupa Stepinca u zbrinjavanju i spašavanju srpske i židovske djece', u: *Nadbiskup Stepinac i Srbi u Hrvatskoj u kontekstu Drugoga svjetskog rata i poraća/Archbishop Stepinac and the Serbs in Croatia within the context of World War II and the post-war period*, Ivan Majnarić, Mario Kevo and Tomislav Anić, eds. (Zagreb: Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište; Zagrebačka nadbiskupija; Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2016), pp. 331–394.

the Germans, but the *Diary* states that Stepinac criticised the Germans and Hitler. Nowhere in the *Diary* is it stated that Diana Budisavljević told Stepinac that he is an Ustasha ‘confessor’ etc.¹³

I did not expect, and neither would I ask, that Stepinac be presented as ‘blessed’ in Dana Budisavljević’s film, but his depiction is certainly not a ‘documentary’ one, and it is true neither to what is written in the *Diary* nor to any other verifiable sources.

It should be noted that it was none other than Dr Julije Budisavljević and Dr Marko Vidaković who wished to speak as defence witnesses at the post-war trial of Archbishop Stepinac, but they were not allowed to do this.¹⁴ If the two of them—both being closely connected to Diana Budisavljević and having, as Serbs, personally felt the reality of the ISC—nonetheless wanted to say something in favour of Archbishop Stepinac, Dana Budisavljević did not have such sentiments in her film.

Prof. Kamilo Brössler

In the *Diary*, Diana Budisavljević particularly highlights the merits and help offered by Kamilo Brössler (1901–1967), an official of the ISC Ministry of Social Welfare and the Croatian Red Cross. Brössler is played by Ermin Bravo in the film. Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica) approaches him and pleads that he secure a work permit for her ‘humanitarian organisation’ (*sic!*), i.e. to allow her to help the prisoners of the Lobar-Grad camp. Brössler replies that he cannot issue such a permit. Diana responds that she was at the police, who directed her to the Ministry of Social Welfare, i.e. Brössler. After this, he replies that the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Croatian Red Cross do not have access to the camps, and then asks Diana Budisavljević how is she sending aid to the camps:

¹³ Unfortunately, the recently published version of Archbishop Stepinac’s diary does not contain his entries for the period from early August 1941 to early January 1943. See: Željko KARAUŁA (ed.), *Dnevnički zapisi Alojzija Stepinca 1934. – 1945. Iz arhiva UDBA-e [Diary Entries of Aloysius Stepinac 1934–1945. From the UDBA Archives]* (Zagreb: Despot infinitus, 2020), pp. 426–429.

¹⁴ Juraj BATELJA, *Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac – svjedok Evanđelja ljubavi. Životopis, dokumenti i svjedočanstva – prije, za vrijeme i nakon Drugog svjetskog rata*, Book 1: *Životopis [The Blessed Aloysius Stepinac – Witness of the Gospel of Love. Biography, Documents, and Testimonies – Before, During, and After World War II, Book 1: Biography]* (Zagreb: Postulatura blaženoga Alojzija Stepinca, 2010), pp. 265–266.

‘Diana Budisavljević (Alma Prica): In some way, for now, illegally, unfortunately. I would not like my associates to have problems because of this. This is why I need an official work permit.

Kamilo Brössler (Ermin Bravo): I fear that nobody will be able to issue you a permit that would guarantee your safety. For, even if you receive it in one office, another will tell you it is not valid. That’s how it is now...’

However, the *Diary* claims the opposite. The ‘accommodating’ Vilko Kühnel, head of the Jewish Department of the Ustasha Police Directorate, issued Diana Budisavljević a written permit to send aid to the Lobar-Grad camp prisoners in late February 1942. It was none other than Kühnel who warned her that every Ustasha institution follows its own rules and that is why, in certain cases, they will not respect the permissions granted by another Ustasha office. Since Dana Budisavljević’s film, as I have mentioned, avoids mentioning Vilko Kühnel, his words are partially ascribed to Kamilo Brössler in the film, and it is also shown that the film’s Brössler cannot issue Diana Budisavljević a permit despite the fact that the *Diary* reveals that Kühnel did issue such a permit after all. All this has been done with the goal of avoiding mentioning the contacts of Diana Budisavljević with Vilko Kühnel, which is unnecessary from a documentary standpoint.

Red Cross Nurse Dragica Habazin

Along with Brössler, Diana Budisavljević wrote high praise about Red Cross nurse Dragica Habazin (1902–1977) in her *Diary*. She wrote that Habazin had always selflessly helped her, i.e. that she had devoted her wartime years to those who were ‘the most persecuted’ during the war, and Diana Budisavljević expressed her ‘deepest respect and gratitude’ to her, concluding that she cannot adequately express ‘everything good she had done for the people’. In the film, Nurse Habazin is played by Areta Ćurković. Even though the role is not of great importance in the film of Dana Budisavljević, those who worked on it, such as Silvestar Mileta, later highlighted the positive role of Brössler and Habazin as Diana Budisavljević’s associates, as opposed to the higher ISC authorities, who had no good intent towards the Serb children in the concentration camps. Mileta concluded:

‘Thus, if somebody from the ISC apparatus saved children (and they did), these were individual officials (Brössler was the most important due to his far-reaching influence and the organisation of shelters) who did not support Ustasha ideology and the Croatian Red Cross nurses (led by Dragica

Habazin), rather than the ministers, Pavelić, or the leadership of the state Croatian Red Cross.¹⁵

Along with the stated interpretation, it should be mentioned that the *Diary* of Diana Budisavljević, in an entry dated 3 February 1944, notes that Habazin tried to help a group of Dalmatians who had been mobilised by the Partisans after the capitulation of Italy, after which they had surrendered to the Germans, who brought them to Zagreb. This entry suggests that Habazin believed that these people should be set free in accordance with the amnesty for Partisans who surrendered voluntarily that Ante Pavelić had declared on 26 January 1944.

However, certain other sources put into question Mileta's interpretation of Habazin, and place her readiness to help the captured Partisans within the frame of that which was, from the perspective of the ISC authorities, allowed, even desirable.¹⁶ Namely, a note of the Zagreb State Security Administration (Udba) from March 1958 about Dragica Habazin, who was then the director of the Red Cross Shelter at the Main Railway Station in Zagreb, comments on her activities during and after the war:

'During the occupation, she was the chef at an Ustasha camp for captured Partisans at the Kanal in Zagreb. She is completely loyal to the Ustashas. She did not in any way wish to help the captured Partisans. Around 60 Partisans came to the camp in 1943, and these were in various ways, through activists, freed from the camps as their relatives. Only two female Partisans remained in the camp. Even though she could have helped free them from the camp, Habazin did not wish to do so. When she was asked why she had agreed to have the female Partisans taken to Germany, she answered: 'Ah, what? They must suffer'. She received a German decoration, which was handed to her by Kasche [Siegfried, the German envoy to the ISC] himself, and was then received by [Ante] Pavelić, who congratulated her on her decoration. It is claimed that this was filmed by the occupiers. (...) Her husband was an active Ustasha, and was eliminated by our army units after the liberation. (...) Dragica today presents herself to our people as a great patriot and lover of the current social order. The commander of the 1st People's Militia [Police] station in Zagreb knows her well, and he is her fellow member of the Shelter Committee. The prevalent opinion about her among our people can be seen in the fact that they call her 'Momma Dragica'. With her flattery, Habazin has also made a favourable impres-

¹⁵ <http://historiografija.hr/?p=22057>, accessed 28 August 2020.

¹⁶ See for example: HR-HDA, fund 216, Ministarstvo narodne prosvjete NDH [ISC Ministry of Public Education], U. M. Taj. Broj: 368/1944.

sion on the Central Committee of the Red Cross of Croatia, and has thus made it to director of the Shelter.¹⁷

The Zagreb Udba also had other data, received from informants and interrogations of a series of people who knew Habazin during World War II, which confirmed that Habazin had been completely loyal to the Ustashas and Germans during the war, and that she had spoken and acted against the new Communist authorities after the war in certain situations. One Udba associate reported in early 1955 that Habazin had told him President Tito was a 'gypsy' and 'whore', that he is not 'a Croat, but a Pole', and that she had spit on a picture of Tito in front of him, and then showed him a photo she was keeping hidden:

'After this, she took out a packed photo showing her and two other female Red Cross members. All three had a German cross decoration on their breast, which they had received during the occupation, and she went on to say that she must keep this photo hidden so that the communist whores don't see it, as there could be consequences. She then re-wrapped the photo and took it to another room.'¹⁸

Taking into account this data, if it is even partially correct, an image appears that contradicts the black-and-white divide advocated by Mileta. Perhaps Nurse Habazin was completely loyal to the ISC, but despite this participated in and did much good for providing for Serb children taken from the ISC concentration camps? Or, as another possibility, was she much closer to the 'ministers, Pavelić, and leadership of the state Croatian Red Cross' than to Diana Budisavljević after all?

The Accommodating Hitlerites

As I have explained, Dana Budisavljević's film 'skips over' all contacts between Diana Budisavljević and ISC government representatives such as Artuković and Kühnel as well as her contacts with Savo Besarović. Next, it invents that Archbishop Stepinac 'advised' Diana Budisavljević to contact the Germans. Apparently following this 'advice', in the film Diana Budisavljević contacts 'Sergeant Hecker' (Vili Matula), who arranges for her to meet with German captain Gustav von Koczian (Boris Ostan). In the film, Koczian is

¹⁷ HR-HDA, fund 1561, Služba državne sigurnosti Republičkog sekretarijata za unutrašnje poslove Socijalističke Republike Hrvatske [State Security Service of the Republican Secretariat of the Interior of the Socialist Republic of Croatia], Dossier 301.002, Habazin, Dragica.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

presented as a *deus ex machina*. He sits in a comfortable armchair in the Esplanade hotel, in a tailcoat, with a drink in hand, his invented wife (Barbara Prpić-Đurović) at his side. He has the power to resolve all Diana Budisavljević's problems and procure permission for her to save Serb ('Kozara') children from ISC camps. In this scene, director Dana Budisavljević had no issue wandering very far from how the meeting with Koczian is described in the *Diary*.¹⁹

Incredibly, the described scene gives Koczian the invented line that this 'situation with the children' could 'reflect negatively' on German interests because 'the public is always sensitive to children', so Koczian will talk to 'the general' (Edmund Glaise von Horstenau) about this. It is ahistorical that an officer of Hitler's army would speak about the 'special sensitivity of the public to children'. When did the Nazis and the German Reich ever give special consideration about what 'the public' thought about the suffering of children? Perhaps when the Germans deported Jewish children from the whole of Europe to camps? Perhaps when the ISC authorities deported Jewish and Roma children to their camps? Perhaps when German units killed children in the field, such as the numerous Croatian children in the villages of the Cetinska Krajina in March 1944? Yes, there is truly much proof that Nazi Germany took care not to disturb the public because of children's suffering.

Generally, speaking about the German officers who helped Diana Budisavljević, even though the topic deserves more attention, it is known in historiography that many German officers in the ISC, starting with General Edmund Glaise von Horstenau, had a very unfavourable opinion of the Ustasha regime. They believed that the regime did not have the support of the Croatian people, that it is inefficient, incompetent, and, most importantly, they believed that Ustasha terror against the Serbian population had created a resistance movement that had to be put down by the German army. This is why there were German outrage, protests, and interventions against some of the violence committed by the ISC against the Serbian population. However, the Germans understandably had no complaints against Ustasha persecution and destruction of Jews.

Thus, while individual German officers could have helped Diana Budisavljević, possibly even for humane reasons (and possibly due to their personal dislike of the Ustashes), I believe that one should not ignore the fact that they were also prompted to do so by practical reasons, namely the need to wage a war that was supposed to end in the victory of Hitler's Germany. However, the film depiction of Gustav von Koczian leaves the impression that an officer of Hitler's army, only because he helped Diana Budisavljević, is shown almost like an American or British officer in a German uniform. It is almost as if it

¹⁹ <https://www.isp.hr/odgovor-dr-sc-nikice-barica-na-navode-silvestra-milete/>, accessed 24 September 2020.

was forgotten that, while many German officers may have been highly critical of the Ustasha regime, this was not because of ‘anti-fascism’ or ‘humanism’, but because they believed that some Ustasha actions were yet another barrier to their desired goal: the final victory of Hitler’s Germany.

This also applies to Koczian. According to the sources at my disposal, his mission in the ISC was to find workers for the German war economy. During 1943, the ‘campaign of Rittmeister von Koczian’—I presume this refers to Gustav von Koczian—was in effect, according to which some ISC draft-eligible persons, especially ‘the Orthodox’, were to be sent to work in aircraft factories in Germany.²⁰ In some other circumstances, this would be viewed as yet another example of the soullessness of Germany and the ISC, who were sending Serbs to work in German factories. But if ‘Rittmeister von Koczian’ was helping Diana Budisavljević, this is viewed in a completely different light, as a *deus ex machina* who sits in the Esplanade, waiting to put himself at Diana Budisavljević’s disposal.

Saving Serb (‘Kozara’) Children from ISC Camps

Once Koczian has solved all of Diana Budisavljević’s problems in the film, she is shown going to take charge of the Serb children imprisoned in the Stara Gradiška camp. This actually refers to Serb children who found themselves in the camps after a German and ISC army operation in the Kozara region. This part of the film shows ISC propaganda recordings depicting, among other things, the real Diana Budisavljević recording children. For the sake of ‘documentary value’, it should be noted—because this, of course, is not shown in Dana Budisavljević’s film—that ISC propaganda used the recordings showing Diana Budisavljević for a propaganda piece about the activities of the Croatian Red Cross.²¹ The documentary recordings are accompanied by words said by Alma Prica. But what she says often has little to do with what was recorded in the *Diary*.²²

Understandably, the film completely ignores the fact that the ISC authorities at one point took part in the evacuation of Serb children, with the knowledge of the highest ISC representatives. The film also neglects to mention that Diana

²⁰ HR-HDA, fund 492, Domobransko popunidbeno zapovjedništvo Bjelovar [Home Guard Recruitment Command], Taj. Broj: 878/1943.

²¹ See: *Slikopisni pregled „Hrvatska u riječi i slici”* [Film Review ‘Croatia in Word and Image’] (Zagreb), No. 40, 1942.

²² <https://www.isp.hr/odgovor-dr-sc-nikice-barica-na-navode-silvestra-milete/>, accessed 24 September 2020.

Budisavljević participated in this and that many of the children were taken to Jastrebarsko and Sisak. There, particularly in Sisak, many of these children died. Of course, Diana Budisavljević is not responsible for this, but the question remains: why are Jastrebarsko and Sisak not mentioned at all in the film?

Based on everything mentioned above, I believe that Dana Budisavljević's film can hardly be considered a 'documentary'. It omits all contacts of Diana Budisavljević with certain important ISC government representatives; her conversation with Archbishop Stepinac is presented in a—mildly put—'non-documentary' manner. It is not shown that Diana Budisavljević took Serb children to Jastrebarsko and Sisak. All this has some, albeit twisted, 'logic' of unnecessarily preserving the 'purity' of the person and work of Diana Budisavljević. But it goes further than this, so that Julije Budisavljević and Marko Vidaković are in some way belittled, shown as weaklings, cowards... In the end, a German officer, Koczian, almost becomes one of the most important and indispensable 'positive' characters in the film.

Particularly striking is that those who worked on the film stress that they spent years conducting extensive archival and other research in order to find sources important for the film, but the end product does not show this. The film is mostly based on a selective, sometimes untruthful, retelling of the *Diary*. Dana Budisavljević's film is not a scholarly work with the appropriate scholarly apparatus, and should not normally be put under critical scrutiny to this extent. However, when it is claimed that it is a 'documentary' that has 'taken great effort' to show 'the truth', then it should be approached with caution.

As has been stated in the text by Prof. Mario Kevo quoted at the very beginning of this review, by publishing a critical review of Dana Budisavljević's film, one exposes oneself to the 'already normalised labelling as a revisionist' since this is an important and shocking story. Recently, Dr Vladimir Geiger from the Croatian Institute of History has rightly noted in an article on researching the number of Jasenovac concentration camp victims published in this journal that one writes 'uneasily' about topics of this sort if one does not want to submit to certain 'authorities', because one will be declared a 'revisionist' who panders to the 'Ustashoids'.²³ Understandably, those who brand others as 'revisionists' also think nothing of presenting their own black-and-white view of the past, or their ignorance, as 'the truth' for 'the common good', i.e. they claim that we should stick to a bright, black-and-white view of the past in order to build a bright, black-and-white future.

²³ Vladimir Geiger, 'Pitanje broja žrtava logora Jasenovac u hrvatskoj i srpskoj historiografiji, publicistici i javnosti nakon raspada SFR Jugoslavije' [The Issue of the Number of Jasenovac Concentration Camp Victims in Croatian and Serbian Historiography, Opinion Journalism, and Public Discourse after the Disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia], *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 52 (2020), No. 2: 532–533.