

The Prophet of Countryside: An Intellectual Biography of Mile Budak

By
Tizian Raspor

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Supervisor: Professor Constantin Iordachi

Second Reader: Professor Mate Nikola Tokić

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will attempt to reconstruct the intellectual biography of Mile Budak. While stressing his role as one of the leading figures of the Ustasha Movement, a terrorist group of Croatian nationalists that established a fascist regime in 1941, the existing scholarship frequently notes the importance of Mile Budak in disseminating the ideology of the organization. In order to engage with Budak's ideological and political activities, this study will utilize a bipartite structure, dedicated to Budak's political writings and speeches and to his literary production respectively.

Doing so, this research will focus on the process of radicalization of politics in interwar Yugoslavia, as well as Europe, underlining Budak's role in the process. In addition, I will argue that the two overarching questions for intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe, including Mile Budak, were those of modernization and the role of the nation-states. Moreover, I suggest that not all of Budak's answers to those questions included extremism. While the process of radicalization can be traced in his political discourse, the same cannot be stated for his literary works. These findings suggest that the radicalization in political and cultural or artistic spheres are not necessarily correlated.

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I. Introduction

The period between the two World Wars is perhaps one of the most dynamical in European history. Revolutionary movements emerging from both, political left and right, projected their visions of a new socio-political arrangement throughout the Old Continent while seeking to come up with a viable alternative for the supposedly decaying liberal democracies. The emergence of Fascism¹ in Italy and communism in Russian Empire radicalized the political life in Europe, while simultaneously inciting the creation of their ideological siblings across the continent. This tide of political radicalization contributed to a new understanding of violence, which was now perceived as a social obligation, resulting in the overall militarization of politics followed by the establishment of paramilitary groups. An example of an organization that was born under such circumstances is the Ustasha Movement. Although the group started as a terrorist movement dedicated to the Croatian national cause, it later developed into a fascist organization that displayed ideological and political proximity to Mussolini's and Hitler's regime respectively.

The Ustasha Movement operated only in between the early 1930s and 1945, and for the majority of that period represented a marginal group, ideologically and electorally, unable to provoke a mass movement of followers. The greatest success of the Ustashas was the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, made possible by the outburst of World War II and the patronage of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler. Although short-lived and marginal for the majority of its existence, the Ustasha Movement and its members left a controversial legacy, still debated in the contemporary Croatian society. Mile Budak, the central figure of this thesis, represents one such phenomenon since it was only in October

¹ The term fascism refers to a broad group of ideologically similar movements, while Fascism will be used specifically for the Italian version of the movement.

of 2017 when the Croatian Constitutional Court declared that the streets named after Budak represent a violation of the Constitution. I believe that one of the reasons for the inability of the contemporary Croatian society to cope with its own past lies in the fact that some key issues surrounding the Ustasha Movement have not been properly investigated. In order to partially fill the gap, this research will focus on the political and ideological endeavors of Mile Budak.

As a member of the conservative, right-wing Croatian Party of Rights and from 1933 a member of the Ustasha Movement, Budak frequently disseminated the political ideology of those groups through political speeches and writings. Furthermore, as a passionate scriboman Budak published 16 novels in the period between 1930 and 1945, which amounts to nearly one novel per year. His constant presence in the public domain where he clearly expressed his individual ideals, as well as the ideals of the groups to which he belonged, while tackling the provocative questions of the time qualifies Budak as an intellectual. In that respect, this research is primarily devoted to the investigation of Mile Budak as an intellectual. Doing so, the research will utilize the term ideology as a cluster of ideas that pretend to reveal the essence of the world and the humans that live in it. Although it does not have to be empirically verified, ideology has the capacity to mobilize the audience it is addressing and consequently provoke verifiable political developments. Herein lies the importance of Mile Budak, since he is often mentioned as the chief Ustasha ideologue.

In order to engage with the thought of Mile Budak, this study will be divided into two chapters, dedicated to Mile Budak as a political ideologue and as a novelist, respectively. Although in the thesis I will argue that Budak's novels represent a pendant to his political ideology, and as such, the two spheres are complimentary, the separation of the two activities is based on several reasons. Firstly, Budak's factual and his fictional writings imply different body of primary sources. Secondly, the diversity of primary sources also implies the usage of

different methodological tools, since Budak's thought is much more straightforward when he acts like a politician, while when decoding the discourse in his novels a researcher has to sometimes read between the lines. In addition, the research will implement a chronological approach in order to explain the historical context behind the ideas of Mile Budak, while always making an effort to situate him in the transnational context of Central and Eastern European thinkers of the time.

Finally, this research will try to situate Mile Budak in the context of the radicalization of the European interwar political scene, mentioned at the very beginning of the introduction. In that respect, the case study of an intellectual engaging in both, political and cultural activities could be relevant for a wider European audience. Moreover, by engaging with the question of correlation between the cultural and political radicalization, the relevance of the study increases, since Europe is again witnessing a rising tide of right-wing movements that seek to alternate the existing political system.

I.I. Literature Review

The Ustasha Movement, which Budak was a member of, was one of many interwar political groups that were influenced by Nazi and Fascist ideology. In addition to ideological bonds, the Ustasha Movement found a patron in Mussolini during the 1930s, when the majority of Ustasha activities took place in camps that spread across Italy. Hence, writing Budak's intellectual biography necessary includes entering the labyrinth that is the scholarship on fascism. Roger Griffin, one of the most notable authors on the topic, (un)happily concluded that "academia and the real world are wrestling with the semantics of fascism as a political concept".² Despite these uncertainties, it is important to underline that the studies on fascism

² Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 8.

represent a long and fruitful research field, which experienced several successful conceptual breakthroughs that will be mentioned soon.

Ever since its emergence, fascism captured the interest of both, academia and public. In the beginning, during the mid-1930s, the Marxist perspective on fascist studies was influential in scholarly interpretations. In his historical overview on the scholarship of fascism, Constantin Iordachi rightfully emphasized the words of the Communist International leader Georgi Dimitrov, who stressed: “fascism is the power of finance capital itself”.³ According to that viewpoint, fascism had no genuine mass appeal, since it was only a last stage of a capitalist rule derived from any cognitive content. It was in the 1960s that this argument was contested by the proliferation of a new generation of scholars, such as Stanley Payne, George Mosse, and Ernst Nolte, that shed new light on fascist studies.⁴ This new approach observed fascism as an intelligible ideology, whose intellectual roots could be traced to the 18th-century reaction against the Enlightenment.⁵ What is also important, new scholarship on fascism during the 1960s and 1970s started to include examples from East and Central Europe, broadening the framework that was previously fixed on Western Europe.⁶ The above-mentioned generation of authors contributed to a more profound and complex understanding of fascism while managing to clarify the term itself by breaking the conceptual deadlock of the Marxist interpretation.

Furthermore, the debate around the phenomenon of fascism experienced several conceptual breakthroughs in the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps the most significant change of paradigm was the one from constructing a universally applicable definition of fascism to finding a “fascist

³ Constantin Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies: An Introduction” in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives (Rewriting Histories)*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (London: Routledge, 2010), 7.

⁴ Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies”, 8.

⁵ See in: Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2010)

⁶ Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies”, 11.

minimum” with Roger Griffin’s *The Nature of Fascism* provoking new debates in academia.⁷ In the book, Griffin defines fascism as “a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism.”⁸ While Griffin’s approach to fascism is debatable, he nevertheless provided the scientific community with a general inventory of distinctive fascist features that could serve as a measuring stick when comparing fascism to other movements. This is even more valuable when one takes into account that fascism is a European-wide experience, which makes it inevitably comparative. Hence, contemporary research of fascism emphasizes a comparative approach that transcends temporal and national boundaries, while at the same time taking into account different national contexts. That is why this research will subscribe to Griffin’s definition of fascism.

Besides literature on fascism, there is an extremely vast body of scholarly works on the Ustasha Movement itself. This abundance of work reflects the significance, controversy, and heritage of the Ustasha Movement, which intrigued both, academic historians and journalists, coming from both, Croatian and international context. The existing literature already includes overarching historical synthesis of the Ustashes, as well as highly specialized narratives that deal with more specific topics, such as Goran Miljan’s take on the importance of youth in the Independent State of Croatia.⁹ Additionally, there is a consensus among scholars of the Ustasha Movement to define the group as fascist, hence including it in the taxonomy of the interwar fascist movements.

Due to his significance and position among the highest-ranking members of the Ustasha Movement, Mile Budak’s name is unavoidable when it comes to reading through scholarly work that deals with the Ustashes. The earliest historical accounts on the topic date back to

⁷ Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies”, 21.

⁸ ⁸ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 33.

⁹ Goran Miljan, *Croatia and the Rise of Fascism: The Youth Movement and the Ustasha during WWII* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018)

the late 1960s and 1970s, in both Yugoslav and European historiography. While the European researchers in the decades immediately after the World War II focused exclusively on Italian Fascism, Nazism and Franco's regime in Spain, writing about the Ustashas was marginalized in communist Yugoslavia as well, with the earliest narratives emerging in the late 1960s.¹⁰ Well-known examples include Fikreta Jelić-Butić and Bogdan Krizman, who wrote the first comprehensive narratives of the Ustasha Movement, while also touching upon Budak's role in it.¹¹ Despite bearing a descriptive, rather than interpretive tone, Krizman's voluminous historical trilogy of the Ustasha Movement is especially valuable due to the numerous archival documents of German and Italian provenance that are highlighted in his work.¹² However, Croatian emigre historian Jere Jareb was first to write a comprehensive biographical study of Mile Budak in 1990.¹³ This suggests that the studies dedicated to life and work of Budak are fairly recent.

After the 1990s, when Croatia gained its independence, studying Ustashas became even more relevant since the issue was how to position the sovereign Croatian nation towards the legacy of the Independent State of Croatia (also known under the abbreviation as the NDH), endorsed by Hitler and Mussolini. Were Ustashas a part of the link in the Croatian national tradition or rather an aberration? While the Yugoslav communist regime that reigned for 45 years emphasized the later, the 1990s witnessed a shift in historical narrative and reappraised the Ustasha Movement during an explosion of nationalistic sentiments that occupied both, academic and public discourses. The figure of Mile Budak experienced a renaissance of his

¹⁰ An example of early anthology on fascism thematizing the ideology on a European-wide scale is Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism: Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1964)

¹¹ Fikreta Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i NDH* [The Ustashas and the NDH]. (Zagreb: SN Liber, Školska knjiga, 1977)

¹² Krizman's trilogy consists of the following: *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and the Ustashas] (Zagreb: Globus, 1978); *NDH između Hitlera i Mussolinija* [NDH between Hitler and Mussolini] (Zagreb: Globus, 1983); *Ustaše i Treći Reich I-II* [Ustashas and the Third Reich] (Zagreb: Globus, 1983)

¹³ Jere Jareb, „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of Mile Budak],” *Hrvatska revija* no.1, 40 (1990): 92-122, no.2 40 (1990): 311-355.

own, with several symposiums and books dedicated to his life and work, mostly due to the efforts of the Croatian Party of Rights, which Budak was a member of in the 1920s.¹⁴ The narratives written in that period re-evaluated Budak's political, literary and intellectual legacy while claiming that the demonization of his character during the communist regime was completely unjustified and unjust.¹⁵ Finally, these types of narratives often demonstrate a poor level of professional scholarship, while engaging in contemporary political debates through the figure of Mile Budak.

On the other hand, there were narratives that opposed Budak's re-appraisal, such as Ivo Petrinović's book *Mile Budak – portret jednog političara* [Mile Budak – Portrait of a Politician].¹⁶ However, Petrinović's account touches on Budak's political career in a superficial manner, while avoiding to engage with archival materials from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the period of NDH, both of which are crucial for Budak's political career. Furthermore, primary sources such as memoirs are often approached uncritically and are taken for granted, despite the fact that historical actors around Budak were not just witnesses, but also parties with their own interests. Finally, Petrinović's book follows the black and white pattern established after the 1990s, according to which Mile Budak is either celebrated and reappraised for his literary work or completely demonized due to his role in the Ustasha Movement. Accordingly, the narratives that are critical towards Budak as a politician also diminish his literary legacy, while historical accounts that cherish Budak's literature tend to pass over some of the controversies from his political career.

¹⁴ Ivan Gabelica, Ivan Pandžić ed., *Nad Velebitom sviće... Zbornik o Mili Budaku* [Sunrise over Velebit... The Anthology of Mile Budak] (Zagreb: Croatian Party of Rights, 1995)

¹⁵ An example of Budak's re-appraisal is evident in: Josip Pečarić, Dubravko Jelčić, *Književnik Mile Budak sada i ovdje* [Novelist Mile Budak- Here and Now], (Zagreb, 2005).

¹⁶ Ivo Petrinović, *Mile Budak – portret jednog političara* [Mile Budak – A Portrait of a Politician] (Split: Književni krug, 2003)

It was only recently that professional historical scholarship started to produce a much more nuanced view of Budak's legacy. For instance, in his book *Nikada više Jugoslavija. Intelektualci i hrvatsko nacionalno pitanje* [Never Again Yugoslavia. Intellectuals and the Croatian National Question] Stipe Kljaić evaluates Budak as a Croatian nationalistic ideologue who rejected fascism or Nazism as an ideology suitable for Croats, although he saw new geopolitical constellation in Europe, envisioned by Hitler and Mussolini, suitable for achieving Croatian independence.¹⁷ Similarly, Stjepan Matković and Tomislav Jonjić observe Budak as one of the most prolific Croatian nationalist intellectuals in the interwar period, but at the same time highlight Budak's lack of political skills.¹⁸ This research will ride the wave of this recent critical and nuanced scholarship, while filling the existing gap when it comes to Mile Budak, especially concerning his role as an intellectual. This gap refers to the fact that there is no substantive historical research on Mile Budak as an ideologue, intellectual or a novelist. Several studies touch upon Budak considering the above-mentioned perspectives, but only as a part of a wider Ustasha experience.¹⁹ On the other hand, the studies completely dedicated to Budak's persona, which are mentioned in this review, do not engage with his intellectual aspects. Finally, since the narratives written so far have completely isolated Budak from the wider European intellectual atmosphere of his time, this research will do the opposite and observe him as a part of the shared European interwar experience.

¹⁷ See in Stipe Kljaić, *Nikada više Jugoslavija. Intelektualci i hrvatsko nacionalno pitanje (1929-1945)* [Never Again Yugoslavia. Intellectuals and the Croatian National Issue (1929-1945)] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2017)

¹⁸ See in Tomislav Jonjić, Stjepan Matković, *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka (1907-1944)* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak] (Zagreb: Hrvatski državni arhiv, 2012)

¹⁹ In example Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism 1941-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013)

I.II. Methodological Approach

In order to successfully bridge the existing gap in the literature and construct Mile Budak's intellectual biography, this study will rely on three methodological pillars. It will utilize a comparative approach, as well as practices developed in the field of intellectual history, and finally discourse analysis as a tool for studying Budak's intellectual products. Firstly, while making an effort to analyze Mile Budak as an intellectual this study will be conducted through a comparative framework, which will contrast his ideas to the ideas of other intellectuals in European countries that were inspired by fascist ideology. Considering this, the research will be inductive, meaning that the starting point will be a specific case study of Mile Budak later observed in a general context of European fascist movements. As already emphasized, fascism is an inherently comparative phenomenon, since right-wing movements that highlighted some fascist features sprang across interwar Europe. Consequently, there is a certain similarity between the phenomena observed and a discrepancy between the situations in which they have arisen since different right-wing movements reflected different national particularities. These two conditions fulfill what Marc Bloch, French historian and one of the major proponents of the comparative method describes as necessary requirements for comparison.²⁰ Furthermore, there is a purpose for utilizing a comparative approach, as it enables to test the explanatory hypothesis about Budak's ideology while looking for presence (or absence) of certain characteristics among other intellectuals of the time.

The study itself belongs to the domain of intellectual history, a well-developed field in history writing that not only approaches the past reality but also translates past ideas into a language that is comprehensible to the contemporary audience. Thus, in order to successfully compose intellectual biography, a researcher has to locate an intellectual in his historical surroundings,

²⁰ Marc Bloch, "A Contribution towards a Comparative History of European Societies" in *Land and Work in Medieval Europe: Selected Papers* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 45.

which in this case means to observe the bond between Budak's texts and ideas with the social, economic and political environment that molded them. Furthermore, it is useful to emphasize the difference between intellectual history and the history of ideas, although the two are often used as synonyms. While the history of ideas is mostly concerned with large-scale concepts as they appear and develop over time, intellectual history focuses on ideas as historically conditioned, hence the need for contextualization is imminent. The tendency to historicize or put things into proper context does not imply that intellectual history is closed for interdisciplinary practice. Since Mile Budak was a novelist and a poet as well, reconstructing his intellectual biography will necessarily include practices developed by literary theorists and critiques. However, while literary criticism observes the internal meaning of the text and uses evaluative methods, the purpose of intellectual history is to understand, rather than to defend or refute an idea.

Since Budak expressed and reproduced his ideas through written texts and political speeches, a discourse analytical study of ideology is most relevant for this research. According to a definition provided by Michael Freeden, "the central idea behind discourse analysis is to conceive of language as a communicative set of interactions, through which social and cultural beliefs and understandings are shaped and circulated."²¹ For Freeden, discourse also implies communicative practice through which ideology is exercised.²² Another key term that needs to be addressed here is ideology. Teun A. Van Dijk uses the term to refer to "socially shared representation of group" and "the foundations of group attitudes and other beliefs".²³ This definition implies that ideologies consist of social representations that define the group identity, while their role is to provide coherence to the group belief system.²⁴ Meanwhile,

²¹ Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 103.

²² Michael Freeden, *Ideology*, 105.

²³ Teun A. Van Dijk, „Ideology and Discourse Analysis,“ *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no.2 (2006): 138.

²⁴ Teun A. Van Dijk, „Ideology and Discourse Analysis,“ 116.

ideologies are not a random set of beliefs, since they possess a structure.²⁵ Hence, it is necessary to observe Budak's ideology as an organized system of shared rituals, prejudices and stories upon which the Ustasha Movement operated. This implies that Budak, as a group member, tried to explain, motivate or legitimate group actions through his ideological discourse, written or spoken.

However, the discourse analysis method does presuppose some challenges that need to be faced. For instance, Freedden states that although ideologies direct the social and political world towards a certain direction, they also contain some levels of meaning that are hidden from their consumers.²⁶ This encompasses that studying Budak's ideology will also imply decoding some ideas that are not completely visible. When it comes to hidden aspects, another difficulty is that not all of the archival documents are preserved. For example, the fund of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of NDH in the Croatian State Archives is incomplete, which aggravates studying Budak's political thought. Another issue is the problem of censorship and self-censorship, especially in the period of monarchist Yugoslavia where Budak was considered *persona non grata*. Consequently, due to the intolerance of the Yugoslav regime towards the ideas proposed by Budak, a researcher trying to reconstruct his intellectual biography has to, sometimes, read between the lines.

Finally, this research will be based upon an ample and diverse body of primary sources. Since Mile Budak was a well-known public figure and a politician, a plethora of archival documents is related to his activities. However, this thesis will not address all of them. When it comes to archival fonds containing documents from the state apparatus, it is necessary to consult documents originating from both, the Yugoslav and the Ustasha ministries. Firstly, the Yugoslav Ministry of Interior Affairs and the state security apparatus produced a number of

²⁵ Freedden, *Ideology*, 13.

²⁶ Freedden, *Ideology*, 11.

documents on Mile Budak and the Ustashas in general. Secondly, since Mile Budak served as a Minister of Education and Religion and later as a Minister of Foreign Affairs in the NDH, hence, fonds of both agencies respectively need to be consulted. All of the above-mentioned fonds can be found in Croatian State Archives in Zagreb. Furthermore, Budak's personal correspondence reveals his connections to prominent Croatian interwar politicians and intellectuals. Hence, when it comes to recreating an intellectual biography of Budak, one has to analyze the existing epistolary network, as well as ideas transmitted through it. Ultimately, the core for studying Budak's ideas are his own narratives, both factual and fictional. The former includes a vast number of journal articles, spanning from the early 20th century to the period of World War II, while the latter consists of Budak's literary work. As a writer, Budak engaged with both, novels and poetry, ultimately publishing 16 novels in 25 volumes and numerous poems. The fund of *Matica Hrvatska* [Matrix Croatica], the oldest Croatian cultural institution, in the Croatian State Archives even contains Budak's unpublished literary work, his autobiographical notes, and writing schemes, which allows us to recreate his writing process. To conclude, all of the mentioned sources should be sufficient to reconstruct Mile Budak's intellectual biography. However, there is still a myriad of sources that could contribute to this thesis, among others the memoirs of Budak's closest associates and colleagues that could shed further light on the topic. Unfortunately, due to the spatial and temporal limitations, this thesis will avoid them deliberately, while acknowledging their value in the case of further research.

II. Mile Budak: Ideologue and Politician

This chapter will deal with Mile Budak as an ideologue while prioritizing his political ideology disseminated through journal articles and speeches. The analysis will also include those novels that have autobiographical connotations, while the next chapter will scrutinize the rest of Budak's literary production. In addition, the chapter will rely heavily on Budak's personal correspondence with prominent Croatian politicians of the time, published by Stjepan Matković and Tomislav Jonjić in *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak]. All of the primary sources mentioned above suggest that Budak was indeed an ideologue that advocated Croatian nationalism and a return to older, pastoral virtues, uncorrupted by the modernization of society. Further, the existing historical narratives recognize the role of Budak's ideology and its importance for the state building process in the Independent State of Croatia. Hence, this study will do the same, while arguing that the issues problematized by Budak and his answers to those, were coherent and stable from the very beginning of his political career to its ending. In order to accomplish the task, this thesis will chronologically depict the outline of Budak's life and work, since it is necessary to contextualize Budak's ideology within the highly dynamic and unstable socio-political circumstances of the first half of the 20th century.

II.I. Young Nationalist (1889-1919)

Mile Budak was born into a poor family in the region of Lika on August 30, 1889.²⁷ The place of his birth not only determined how his adult life will unfold but also left a stamp on his contemplative activities. Lika, once a part of the medieval Croatian Kingdom, by the late 19th

²⁷ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak], 14.

century represented one of the most underdeveloped parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Budak's family was not spared of material scarcity, as he himself admits in a short autobiographical text.²⁸ These circumstances directed young Budak towards following the footsteps of his two older brothers that became Austro-Hungarian officials in Bosnia. Becoming a part of the bureaucratic apparatus implied further education, thus Budak moved to Bosnia where he lived with the family of his older brother Joso.²⁹ Although he left Lika early in his life, Budak perpetuated his home region through his novels and political texts for a series of reasons that will be addressed in the chapter concerning his literary work.

First sparks of Budak's political and literary activities emerged simultaneously in Bosnia, where he was attending the gymnasium in Sarajevo. It is possible to reconstruct those beginnings based on Budak's preserved correspondence dating back to his high school years. From the very onset of his political activities, Budak was a proponent of Croatian nationalism and one of the leading figures of the Young Croatia movement. Although short-lived, the Young Croatia movement served as a platform for a generation of students that advocated Croatian independence.³⁰ Doing so, the members of the movement relied on the legacy of the Party of Rights, founded by Ante Starčević in 1861. Starčević, during his lifetime also known as the "Father of Homeland", proclaimed Croatian independence as his ultimate goal, while stressing historical argumentation in order to legitimate his demands.³¹ Besides Croatian nationalism, the Young Croatia movement inherited a benevolent approach towards Islam from the Party of Rights, which contributed to the initial success of the movement in Bosnia

²⁸ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In my Own Words],” in *Ognjište* vol. IV (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1941), 140-141.

²⁹ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In my Own Words],” 142.

³⁰ Vice Zaninović, „Mlada Hrvatska uoči I Svjetskog rata [Young Croatia ahead of World War I],” *Historijski zbornik* 11-13(1958/59): 83.

³¹ Extensive analysis of Party of Rights ideology is available in Mirjana Gross, *Izvorno pravaštvo. Ideologija, agitacija, pokret* [Authentic Pravaštvo. Ideology, Agitation, Movement] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2000)

where the majority of the population was Muslim. Compassion towards Islam was also an ideological construct of Ante Starčević, who was the first one to abandon the traditional position of hostility towards the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, Starčević declared the Muslim population of Bosnia as ethnically purest part of Croatian folk, since the Habsburg government did not corrupt their character, as it did for Croats in Croatia.³²

Budak correspondence with other members of the movement, primarily Josip Matasović, illustrates that Young Croatia was well organized, with Budak himself having contacts with influential people, such as Isidor Kršnjavi, former head of Department for Religion and Education in Croatia.³³ The movement also published a journal titled *Mlada Hrvatska* [Young Croatia] where Budak gathered his first editorial experience.³⁴ The journal itself is also important for analyzing Budak's early political stance, especially in the article concerning the constellation between Croatian and Serbian nationalism.³⁵ In it, Budak states that there is no need for extremism, since "in all societies, in all the nations, there are honest people besides troublemakers." However, he is skeptical towards the Serbian population in Croatia, since "Serbs in Croatia always side with our most distinguished enemies."³⁶ Hence, his earliest political papers indicate the difference between "us" and "them", a difference based on Budak's lived experience and political dynamics of the time. Namely, politicians in opposition to Croatian independence, such as Khuen-Hedervary or representatives of Italian parties in Dalmatia, used the animosity between Croats and Serbs for their own political goals

³² Mirjana Gross, *Izvorno pravaštvo. Ideologija, agitacija, pokret* [Authentic Pravaštvo. Ideology, Agitation, Movement], 62.

³³ Jonjić, Matković, „Budak kao novi urednik Mlade Hrvatske tumači svoje poteze predstavnicima pravaških srednjoškolaca [Budak as a New Editor of Young Croatia Explains his Decisions to the Representatives],” in *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 243-245.

³⁴ Budak served as the main editor from January 1911 to January 1912

³⁵ Mile Budak, „Mladohrvatstvo prema srpstvu i slavenstvu uopće [Young Croatia towards the Serbian National Ideology and Slavism],” *Mlada Hrvatska* no.7,8 (1911), 200.

³⁶ Mile Budak, „Mladohrvatstvo prema srpstvu i slavenstvu uopće [Young Croatia towards the Serbian National Ideology and Slavism],” *Mlada Hrvatska* no.7,8 (1911), 201.

by utilizing “divide and conquer” approach. This certainly influenced Budak who saw Serbs as the agents of enemy politicians.

However, Serbs in Croatia were not the primary target during Budak’s editorial service in *Mlada Hrvatska*, since he mostly polemicized with the members of Catholic youth.³⁷ Although both of the groups shared the emphasis on Croatian nationalism, Catholic youth saw in Young Croatia a group that depreciates God as the source of life, giving instead the central position to the man. The backbone of this ideological clash lies in the already mentioned interconfessional approach to the idea of Croatian independence shared by Budak and Young Croats, which saw Bosnian Muslims as an integral part of Croatian ethnic corpus. On the other hand, Catholic circles in Bosnia followed a different pattern and asserted the Catholic character of Croatian national idea. Furthermore, Young Croats followed the anticlerical tradition established by their ideological role model Ante Starčević, which again contributed to the animosity between the two groups. Conclusively, both of the groups had the same political goal but envisioned different means to achieve it, which led to further ideological debates.

It was also in the Young Croatia movement where Budak started to realize what kind of activity politics is. From the very beginning, Budak was aware of his lack of political instincts, while unwillingly participating in the political arena:

“I am not, my brother, a politician, but only for necessity, since I see that our “politicians” are worse than I could ever be as a man without any talent or will for this every day, inconsiderate politics.”³⁸

³⁷ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 19.

³⁸ Jonjić, Matković, „Budak izvješćuje Matasovića o prilikama u omladinskom pokretu u BIH i o reagiranju na tamošnju hrvatsku politiku [Budak Reports Matasović on the Situation among Bosnian Youth Movement and Reaction to Croatian Politics],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 212.

In addition, Budak's disappointment with politics also came from his experiences with the Young Croatia movement, where he often criticized other members for their passivity and frivolity. Overall, his youngish idealism and sensitivity would remain his characteristic, even in his later life, making him unsuitable for engaging in politics, a fact of which Budak was aware:

“For now I will be the victim of stupidity and immorality, I will work as much as I can, but I am telling you what I have already told many times: my brother, I would rather take care of hogs than do politics. It is mud, a brothel where body and soul decays.”³⁹

After graduating from Sarajevo gymnasium in 1910, Budak decided to study history and geography at the University of Zagreb. As Budak himself wrote, the motivation for studying those fields came from his disagreement with the history professor from Sarajevo gymnasium, “who taught the history of Bosnia in such manner, that Budak and all of his closest friends had doubts in its truthfulness.”⁴⁰ Additionally, Budak complained about the professor's political bias, which made his lectures “appropriate for political assembly, but in school, they were artificial constructs of a sick chauvinist.”⁴¹ However, existential motifs outgrew Budak's passion for untangling, what he saw as the anti-Croat version of history, and due to the lack of finances, he transferred to legal studies. In one of his letters, Budak writes how he was “forced to give up on his warm dreams and illusions about a happy and successful future, by leaving humanities.”⁴² Furthermore, Budak described this shift 20 years later in an autobiographical excerpt titled *Kod cara austrijskog* [At the Austrian Emperor], where he

³⁹ Jonjić, Matković, „Budak ponovno piše Matasoviću o skretanjima u mladohrvatskom pokretu [Budak Writes to Matasović Again on Movements in Young Croatia Movement],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 214-215.

⁴⁰ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In My Own Words],” 145.

⁴¹ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In My Own Words],” 145.

⁴² Jonjić, Matković, „Budak kao novi urednik Mlade Hrvatske tumači svoje poteze predstavnicima pravaških srednjoškolaca [Budak as a New Editor of Young Croatia Explains his Decisions to the Representatives],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 243-45.

reminisced about the hardships following him in Zagreb. It was at that moment that Budak first expressed what would stick with him throughout his career and that is the disillusionment with the urban way of life:

“I did not felt it yet – but I knew it – that the people are valued by their suits, their possession and everything else that is not human, which made me deeply insulted and unhappy.”⁴³

Starting from his academic days, another Budak’s distinctive intellectual feature emerges and that is the nostalgic regard towards a pastoral way of life, a complete opposite to the lifestyle of urban dwellers. In one of his articles dating from 1914, Budak pays homage to an old soldier from Lika whom he describes “as fresh, vital, proud, and fearless, just as our country should be.”⁴⁴ In his discourse, Budak presents the image of a virtuous and honorable soldier and then equates it with the image of Lika itself. The next step is to establish Lika as a role model for the entire country, due to its moral purity and vitality. Indeed, the elements of modernity sneaking into Budak’s idealized vision of Lika is what frightens him the most. Interestingly, in Budak’s discourse these elements are perpetuated in the image of American society:

“America is a greater evil than Croatian-Hungarian Settlement.⁴⁵ For women it is more dangerous than a pimp; it burns men more than all of the taverns, making them rusty, gun-loving, contentious card players. (...) We are losing our folklore costumes, leaving us as a mutilated tree without its heroic features, drowning in the universality of all nations. (...) The railroad is blowing the final impact on our characteristics.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Mile Budak, „Kod cara austrijskog [At the Austrian Emperor],” *15 dana – kronika naše kulture*, no. 24, December, 1932, 14.

⁴⁴ Mile Budak, „S ličke grude [From Lika],” *Savremenik – mjesečnik društva hrvatskih književnika* vol. 9 (Zagreb, 1914), 93.

⁴⁵ Croatian-Hungarian Settlement refers to a pact signed in 1868, which established political status and constitutional framework of Croatia

⁴⁶ Mile Budak, „S ličke grude [From Lika],” *Savremenik – mjesečnik društva hrvatskih književnika* vol. 9 (Zagreb, 1914), 95.

Although Budak's account is regionalized and is primarily concerned with the development in Lika, the narrative fits in a wider European intellectual atmosphere of the time. Equally, intellectuals in other European countries have expressed concerns about society transformed by the processes of modernization and industrialization. For example, German literature that preceded World War I was deeply involved in the quest for national identity and expressed a sharp reaction against modernity.⁴⁷ Perhaps the most eminent example is *The Decline of the West*, conceived by Oswald Spengler around 1911, in which the author suggests that due to modernity destroying rooted traditions, there is a risk of social collapse.⁴⁸ Questioning the linear and progressive view of history made Spengler popular across interwar Europe, while his catastrophism and anti-modernism resonated with a number of intellectuals coming from the East and Central Europe.⁴⁹ What is even more relevant for this research, Spengler's cultural pessimism also led to further political radicalization in Weimar Germany, although the available primary sources do not reveal the eventual influence the book had on Budak.

In Zagreb, Budak got the chance to study in the only Croatian university at the time and make new acquaintances, some of which will determine his life trajectory. Among others, Budak established contacts with the future members of the Ustasha movement, including its leading figure Ante Pavelić, as well as future prominent members of the Croatian Peasant Party, such as Juraj Šutej or Bariša Smoljan. His social milieu was also geographically determined, since he had intense contacts with students from the Lika region, including Vladimir Čopić, who will later become a distinguished member of the Yugoslav Communist Party.⁵⁰ It is interesting to notice how a group of pre-World War I nationalistic students later diverged

⁴⁷ George Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1987), 52.

⁴⁸ Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West* (New York: First Vintage Books, 2006), xiv-xv.

⁴⁹ Balász Trencsényi, *The Politics of „National Character“. A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 14.

⁵⁰ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 18.

across the political spectrum, from radical left to radical right, although this issue deserves a study of its own.

In Zagreb, Budak proceeded with the political engagement, achieving success in the University elections, which enabled Croatian nationalistic students to strengthen their presence among their peers.⁵¹ As a student, at the age of 24, Budak got married to Ivanka, with whom he will later have three children. The motivation behind this decision is very indicative for analyzing Budak's emotional sphere since he himself admits that he married "because of his employee, dr. Oswald, who mocked him even when he heard Budak fell in love."⁵² Yet, the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 disrupted Budak's life trajectory, since he was drafted in the Austro-Hungarian army and subsequently participated in the clashes on the Serbian front. The war certainly represented formative experience for 25-year old Budak, who contemplated extensively on his war experience, writing diary excerpts, journal reports, and even poems, which will be addressed later in the thesis.

His first note on the frontline experience dates from September 1914, when he published his personal reflection for a journal of the Party of Rights.⁵³ In his attempt to depict the life on the front to the readers, Budak is using a dark and realistic tone, while the feeling of existential threat intensifies when Fran Galović, member of the Young Croatia Movement and Budak's friend, dies on the battlefield.⁵⁴ Thus, Budak's early war notes differed from the general atmosphere that dominated among all of the belligerents in the first months of the conflict, when enthusiasm and the strong sense of sacrifice for the homeland were dominant. Interestingly, unlike the Italian case where fascists built their ideology upon the idea of

⁵¹ Tihana Luetić, „Hrvatsko akademsko potporno društvo (1894-1914) [Croatian Society for the Academic Support 1894-1914],” *Zbornik Odsjeka povijesnih znanosti Zavoda povijesnih društvenih znanosti HAZU* 29 (2011): 311-22.

⁵² Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In My Own Words],” 148.

⁵³ Mile Budak, „Iz mog ratnog dnevnika [From my War Diary],” *Hrvatska* no. 882 (September, 1914), 4.

⁵⁴ Mile Budak, „Fran Galović [Fran Galović],” *Hrvatska* no. 899 (October, 1914), 6.

trincerismo, meaning the spirit of warfare and camaraderie in the World War I trenches, neither Budak nor the Ustasha Movement, would engage in such constructions.⁵⁵ One possible explanation for that is because the Ustasha Movement was established in the early 1930s and as such fall into, what Spanish scholar Angel Alcalde defines as the second wave of fascism, which tended to be less influenced by the war veterans than the first wave during 1920s.⁵⁶ In addition, it would be hard for Budak, as a war veteran and a member of the Ustasha Movement, to reconcile Croatian nationalist discourse with his involvement in World War I, since he fought for Austro-Hungarian, and not Croatian cause.

In December 1914, Budak was captured by Serbian troops, while recovering in a military hospital.⁵⁷ After Austro-Hungarian victory on the Serbian front, Budak participated in the retreat of Serbian army as a war prisoner, crossing Macedonia and Albania on foot, and finally settling on an Italian island of Asinara. His recollections on this odyssey, which lasted for over a year, were published in an autobiographical novel *Ratno roblje* [Slaves of War]. The novel represents a valuable historical source in which Budak emphasizes on the same motifs that are present in his earlier texts related to the war. Although the author describes his encounters with Serbian officers propagating the idea of Serbian supremacy in a future Yugoslav state, all ethnic divisions are wiped out in the face of ultimate existential threat, hunger.⁵⁸ This threat was omnipresent, as Budak states that out of 60 000 members of retreating forces, only 15 000 of them managed to survive.⁵⁹ Moreover, most of Budak's writings dating from the war do not highlight animosity toward Serbs as an ethnic group. Of course, Budak is not indifferent to the fact that the Serbian nationalist organization

⁵⁵ More on *trincerismo* in Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), 63.

⁵⁶ Angel Alcalde, „War Veterans and Fascism during the Franco Dictatorship in Spain (1936–1939),“ *European History Quarterly* 47 (2017), 89.

⁵⁷ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In My Own Words],“ 147-48.

⁵⁸ Mile Budak, *Ratno roblje* [Slaves of War] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1941), 10.

⁵⁹ Mile Budak, *Ratno roblje* [Slaves of War], 282.

contributed to the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, and consequently to the outbreak of the conflict. In this case, Budak makes a distinction between the Serbian leadership, whom he is quite critical of, and the common Serbian man that is going through the same agony as he is.

The end of the war also brought the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and on its ruins the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes arose. Budak was able to return home in August 1919, more than five years since the war erupted, at the age of 30. By that time, his life experience already formed Budak's main intellectual subjects that he will continue to think, write and speak about. The relationship between modernity and patriarchy, urban surroundings and countryside, and the quest for Croatian independence remained Budak's most addressed topics during the interwar period. In addition, by this time Budak's thoughts were already firmly based on two ideological pillars: the legacy of Party of Rights and the glorification of the image of the countryside, similar to the ideologies of interwar peasant parties around Europe. However, the end of World War I brought political and social turmoil, with the ascendance of communism and fascism providing a revolutionary alternative to parliamentary democracies. The radicalization of social and political life influenced Budak's thought, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

II.II. Politician on the Rise (1919-1933)

After the foundation of the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes, Budak continued with his political engagement as a member of the Croatian Party of Rights (also known under the abbreviation as HSP). Budak and the HSP held on to the same political direction, advocating Croatian independence, just as they did before World War I. However, in the early 1920s, it was the Croatian Peasant Party (further in the text HSS) led by Stjepan Radić that now held the monopoly on the Croatian national idea, consequently marginalizing HSP in an electoral and ideological sense. The relationship between the HSS and HSP was ambivalent throughout

the interwar period, due to ideological disparities. While HSS advocated Croatian sovereignty inside decentralized Yugoslav federation, the HSP insisted on complete independence and breaking of all bonds with Yugoslavia. In Budak's case, further difficulties emerged when *Matica Hrvatska* [Matrix Croatica], the oldest Croatian cultural institution, refused to publish his novels thematizing World War I, such as already mentioned *Ratno roblje* [Slaves of War] and anti-war pamphlet *Živio rat* [Long Live War].⁶⁰ The publishing committee of *Matica Hrvatska* argued that Budak's novels were rejected because they condemned Serbian war crimes, but also because of his links with the HSP. Despite Budak's appeal that the novels are primarily pacifistic and do not reflect any political preference, the committee did not revoke the decision.⁶¹ Interestingly, Budak himself will join the *Matica Hrvatska* committee only 2 years after the dispute and will remain tied to the central Croatian cultural institution throughout the interwar period and publish most of his novels under its auspices.⁶²

These were the circumstances through which Budak was introduced to the new monarchist regime, which exhibited animosity towards the proponents of the Croatian national idea. The official state ideology now implied the construction of an overarching Yugoslav identity, which tried to erase national differences among Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The rejection of his writings did not discourage Budak, who criticized the new direction in state ideology. His personal fund in the Croatian State Archives contains several unpublished texts, among which *Govedoovcakoza* [CattleSheepGoat] stands out.⁶³ In this oddly titled short novel Budak mocks the idea of Yugoslav identity through metaphorical use of fictional creature

⁶⁰ Croatian State Archives (from now on HR-HDA), fond 1567, *Matica Hrvatska* 1838-1983 [Matrix Croatica 1838-1983], „Budakovo pismo odboru Matice Hrvatske [Budak's Letter to the Matrix Croatica Committee],” box no. 163

⁶¹ *Ratno Roblje* [Slaves of War] was published for the first time only in 1941 when the Independent State of Croatia was already established.

⁶² HR-HDA-1567 *Matica Hrvatska* 1838-1983 [Matrix Croatica 1838-1983], „Autobiografija [Autobiography],” box no. 163

⁶³ HR-HDA-1011, Osobni fond Mile Budak [Mile Budak's Personal Fond], „Govedoovcakoza [CattleSheepGoat],” box no.3

CattleSheepGoat, a hybrid containing cattle, sheep, and a goat that are no longer individual species but “one animal, of one origin, one blood and one seed.”⁶⁴ Additionally, not all of the three species are valued equally, since the goat is preferred among others. Beyond doubt, Budak’s discourse is targeting the Yugoslav project, which tried to merge three different national identities into one, while at the same time prioritizing the Serbian element as the most valuable one.⁶⁵

Besides ideology, his strong antagonism for the Yugoslav idea is also visible from Budak’s engagement in legal political organizations that nurtured the Croatian national spirit. One of them is certainly the Croatian Sokol Movement, a national pendant of a larger Slavic movement, in which Budak occupied important positions and acted as one of the *elders*.⁶⁶ The Croatian branch of the Sokol movement followed the main ideological features of the organization, such as the emphasis on physical exercise embodied in the proverb “a strong mind in a sound body”, and the spirit of camaraderie and collaboration among all Slavic people. Moreover, the leaders of the Croatian version also stressed their commitment to the national identity, embodied in one of Budak’s speeches in a rally held in 1926:

“(…) the Sokol Movement is, by its ideas, Slavic and Yugoslav, but ours is primarily Croatian, and brotherly with brothers; because Croat means everything and Yugoslav means nothing, it is an abstract term that someone uses only when they want to eradicate Croatia (…)”⁶⁷

Accordingly, the members of the Croatian Sokol saw the organization as a weapon against the ideological offensive of the Yugoslav regime and a safe haven for the Croatian national

⁶⁴ HR-HDA-1011, Osobni fond Mile Budak [Mile Budak’s Personal Fond], „Govedoovcakoza [CattleSheepGoat],” box no.3

⁶⁵ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 104-5.

⁶⁶ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 23.

⁶⁷ *Hrvatski sokol. Glasilo Hrvatskog sokolskog saveza* no. 10 (Zagreb, October 1926), 389.

idea. It is of no wonder then, that the organization gathered future prominent members of the Ustasha Movement, most importantly its leader Ante Pavelić. Throughout the 1920s, Budak was closely connected to Pavelić, on a political and existential basis, since both of them were lawyers.⁶⁸ Historians working on the topic debate on the relationship between Pavelić, the future Ustasha leader, and Budak, the second in command. The main dispute revolves around the question of Budak's involvement in the decision-making process led by Pavelić himself.⁶⁹ Although primary sources indicate that this question is not of crucial importance for reconstructing Budak's intellectual biography, it is, however, important to stress the existing debates concerning the inner dynamics among Croatian nationalists.

The second part of the 1920s brought drastic changes in the Yugoslav political arena. The assassination of the leading Croatian politician Stjepan Radić during the parliamentary session in 1928 and the introduction of King Alexander's personal dictatorship in January 1929 led to the radicalization of political life. The image of functioning Yugoslav parliamentary democracy died on the same day when shots were fired on Stjepan Radić, and Pavelić was there to witness it. It did not take long for him to emigrate and adopt a new *modus operandi*, which included illegal means, rather than voting ballots.⁷⁰ Countries such as Hungary and Italy provided shelter for Croatian nationalistic dissidents gathered around the terrorist Ustasha Movement, since those countries had territorial pretensions over certain parts of Yugoslavia. This uncompromising approach towards the solution of the Croatian

⁶⁸ HR-HDA-1567 Matica Hrvatska 1838-1983 [Matrix Croatica 1838-1983], „Autobiografija [Autobiography],” box no. 163

⁶⁹ On the one side, authors such as Tomislav Jonjić neglect the existence of a personal rivalry between Budak and Pavelić, while Ivo Petrinović in his biography of Mile Budak stresses the uneasy relationship between the two

⁷⁰ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement from Occurrence to April 1941] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006), 68-79.

national issue also reflected on Budak, who was now the main representative of the Croatian Party of Rights in the country.⁷¹

Immediately after the shooting in the parliament in Belgrade, oppositional Croatian parties stood in solidarity, which Budak himself expressed:

“Today, we are all an integral part of a unified coalition of all Croats, Serbs living in Croatia and Slovenes; hence, there is no reason for us to lead any separate action. We have to emphasize only one thing: before and during World War I, the Serbs in Croatia rightfully looked towards Serbia as a promised land. We never did that.”⁷²

The discourse itself does not highlight any animosity nor does it call for violence or radicalization, but still there is a clear distinction between *us* and *them*, despite the notion of unity. However, the solidarity among Croatian parliamentary parties was brief, since the differences between their political programs reappeared. This led to further distancing between the HSP, which insisted on Croatian independence, and the leading HSS that saw the federalization of Yugoslavia as the right choice.⁷³ However, the two parties will continue to have an ambivalent relationship throughout the 1930s and Budak himself was certainly aware that the solution of Croatian national question implied contacts with the leading Croatian party, the HSS.

After King Alexander’s proclamation of dictatorship, a wave of repression followed, with Croatian nationalists and communists being the primary target. Budak felt the repression as well since he was sentenced to one month of prison, due to his articles in a journal *Hrvatsko pravo* [Croatian Right]. According to the verdict, Budak’s mention of independent Croatia “provokes hatred against the country [Yugoslavia], while writing about free Croatia or

⁷¹ Petrinović, *Mile Budak*, 39. Also Jere Jareb „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of dr. Mile Budak],” 26.

⁷² Mile Budak, „Da se razumijemo [Let It be Clear],” *Hrvatsko pravo* 20 (Zagreb, 1928), no. 5175

⁷³ Ljubo Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke 1928-1941. Iz povijesti hrvatskog pitanja* vol. 1 [Maček and the Politics of Croatian Peasant Party 1928-1941] (Zagreb: Liber, 1974), 4-20.

confederacy is not prohibited.”⁷⁴ For every regime’s use of repressive action, there was an equally repressive and violent reaction of the opposition and the most overt example was the assassination of Toni Schlegel, director of a pro-regime publishing company and King Alexander’s confidant.⁷⁵ Since the murder was organized by the radicalized HSP’s youth, Budak was immediately linked to the crime by the state authorities, and despite having no evidence for Budak’s participation in the crime, the regime held him in prison for several months.⁷⁶ In a spiral of violence and repression, the whole country was sliding away from a parliamentary democracy towards authoritarianism, followed by the radicalization of politics. As far as Budak is concerned, this process reached its peak on June 7, 1932, when three men attempted to kill him.⁷⁷ Budak survived the attack and later claimed that there were two more attempts to kill him, both of them were thwarted.⁷⁸ Since staying in Yugoslavia became an existential threat, Budak decided to emigrate and establish contacts with Ante Pavelić, who has already founded the Ustasha Movement, a Croatian right-wing terrorist group that gradually radicalized and established a fascist dictatorship in April 1941.⁷⁹ Because of its utilization of terrorism as a legitimate medium in order to fulfill national aspirations, the Ustasha Movement belongs to the gallery of similar interwar European right-wing movements. However, the main reason for the radicalization of the Ustashes lies in the specific Yugoslav context, where the monarchy led by the Serbian Karađorđević dynasty

⁷⁴ *Hrvatsko pravo* 20, no. 5189 (Zagreb, 1928), 1.

⁷⁵ Mira Kolar-Dimitrijević, „Zagrebački novinar Antun Schlegel i njegov utjecaj na politiku u prvoj četvrtini dvadesetog stoljeća [Journalist Antun Schlegel and his Impact on Politics in the First Quarter of the 20th Century]” in *Skrivene biografije nekih Nijemaca i Austrijanaca u Hrvatskoj 19. i 20. stoljeća* [Hidden Biographies of some Germans and Austrians in Croatia of 19th and 20th Century] (Osijek, 2001), 253-255.

⁷⁶ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In My Own Words],” 148-49.

⁷⁷ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement], 220-21.

⁷⁸ HR HDA, MUP SRH, 013.0.52, Dosje dr. Mile Budaka, zapisnik sa saslušanja [Mile Budak, trial dossier], May, 1945

⁷⁹ One point of difference between fascist and radical right movement, according to Stanley Payne, is in their position according to liberal democracy. Payne argues that, while fascists tend to completely abolish democratic framework, radical right does not summon its complete abolition. More on the distinction in Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism. Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980)

attempted to construct a Yugoslav identity that overarched Croatian national aspirations, while simultaneously insisting on a strong, centralized state governed from Belgrade. This policy clashed with Croatian nationalist perspective, while the act that fully opened the door into political radicalization is the already mentioned shooting of the leading Croatian politician, Stjepan Radić.⁸⁰

It is interesting to observe Budak's political thought in the context of general social and political radicalization. Although some scholars, such as Ivo Petrinović in his biography of Mile Budak, stress the assassination attempts as the turning point when Budak himself adopts extremism, his private correspondence does not offer any evidence for that claim. For example, in an extensive letter addressed to August Košutić, one of the HSS leaders, Budak reveals his political ideology, which does not differ from the one he preached before the assassination attempts.⁸¹ His main emphasis is still independent Croatia, organized as a neutral, peasant republic.⁸² Meanwhile, he legitimizes those solutions because they represent people's will, which to some point resembles populist rhetoric. Moreover, since it is the will of the people, he insists on overcoming the party differences between the Ustashas and HSS, in order to achieve the ultimate goal, the Croatian independence. Consequently, according to Budak's discourse, political dynamics should be subordinated to the expression of popular will, which again resembles populist rhetoric.

⁸⁰ A recently found example of an individual radicalization in the described Yugoslav context can be found in: Goran Miljan, Ivica Šute, *Revolucionari i ubojice. Iz povijesti hrvatske nacionalističke emigracije u međuraću* [Revolutionaries and Killers. From the History of Croatian National Emigration During the Interwar Period], (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2018); also Constantin Iordachi, "Radikalizam, fašizam i (državni) terorizam: slučaj Mije Babića i ustaša [Radicalism, Fascism and (State) Terrorism: The Case of Mijo Babić and Ustashas]," *Revolucionari i ubojice*, p. 1-24.

⁸¹ Jonjić, Matković, „U pismu Košutiću Budak rekapitulira njihov razgovor [In his Letter to Košutić, Budak Recapitulates their Discussion],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 276-81.

⁸² Jonjić, Matković, „U pismu Košutiću Budak rekapitulira njihov razgovor [In his Letter to Košutić, Budak Recapitulates their Discussion],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 276-81.

Perhaps the strongest claim against Budak's radicalization comes from the same letter, where he describes himself:

“I am truly a born pacifist and tender to such point, that I can't even look at misery without the need to help (...) so you could imagine that I am truly not born for a terrorist nor a revolutionary; but my dear friend, whether I lament or not, the facts shows us that violence is the only language understood, not just by bloody Belgrade, but also by highly cultured and respected matron, Europe!”⁸³

As visible from the quote, for Budak violence represents a legitimate tool for achieving goals, but it is not understood as a social obligation as it is the case with fascist or Nazi ideology. Furthermore, even if one is suspicious about the sincerity of Budak's words, a valid measuring stick would also be to observe what others have said about Budak during the period. In this regard, Vlatko Maček, the successor of Stjepan Radić and the leader of the HSS, describes his impressions after he met with Budak during the trials for the murder of Toni Schlegel. While stating that they mostly talked about politics, religion, and philosophy, Maček reported:

“On the occasion, I got the sense that Budak's worldview is close not just to Stjepan Radić, but also Tolstoy. Hence, I was not only surprised but disappointed in Budak's conduct during the Independent State of Croatia.”⁸⁴

When speaking about radicalization, it is also interesting to see how Budak placed himself towards the most radical ideology of the time, fascism. Again, his personal correspondence allows us to recreate Budak's stance on the issue, in a letter dating from 1933:

⁸³ Jonjić, Matković, „U pismu Košutiću Budak rekapitulira njihov razgovor [In his Letter to Košutić, Budak Recapitulates their Discussion],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 276-81.

⁸⁴ Jere Jareb, „Iz korespondencije dr. Vladimira Mačeka [From the Correspondence of dr. Vladimir Maček],” *Hrvatska revija* 24, vol. 3 (1974), 338.

“However, it is not necessary for us to copy Fascists or Nazis, because it would not be a proper solution since we are particularly rustic folk and our state should reflect that; and none of the two mentioned types represent it.”⁸⁵

The argument of fascist ideology not being adequate for the “national spirit” was common among the majority of interwar European movements that exhibited some fascist features. British scholar Aristotle Kallis argued that in the case of fascism, there were no passive recipients in the flow of ideas from the center (Italy and Germany) to the periphery.⁸⁶ He further implies that each movement cherry-picked the features most suitable for its national and social context, thus transforming the original ideas into their own framework, which finally allowed to present the ideas as a national characteristic, rather than foreign influence.⁸⁷ The hypothesis is also valid in Budak’s case because, in the same letter in which he denounces fascism as a suitable model, he does embrace one fascist feature, which is the figure of authoritarian leader:

“Ante [Pavelić], through his work and success, has proved that he is led by the idea of liberation, no matter the price; hence, he deserved that every honest Croat greets him with utmost respect and follows him, not with confidence, but BLINDLY (...) the only correct way- the absolute authority, until we free ourselves and establish an order in the country.”⁸⁸

Certainly, the emphasis on authoritarianism is not sufficient to describe Budak as a fascist intellectual. When it comes to Italy, the proper intellectual pendant of Mile Budak would be the Strapaese Movement, a minor group that, just like Budak, celebrated rural life as healthy, rooted in tradition and morally decent. However, in Fascist Italy, the Strapaese Movement

⁸⁵ Jonjić, Matković, „Budakovo pismo iz emigracije Anti Trumbiću [Budak’s Letter to Trumbić from Emigration],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 284-87.

⁸⁶ Aristotle Kallis, „Transnational Fascism” in *Fascism without borders. Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 41.

⁸⁷ Kallis, „Transnational Fascism,” 41.

⁸⁸ Jonjić, Matković, „Budakovo pismo iz emigracije Anti Trumbiću [Budak’s Letter to Trumbić from Emigration],” 285.

was marginalized, but tolerated, since its ideology contributed to stopping peasant migration to the cities, consequently alleviating social pressure and the issue of unemployment.⁸⁹ Thus, although Budak's political ideology in the early 1930s displays features like populist rhetoric and authoritarianism, it cannot be identified as fascist, despite the radicalization of Yugoslav politics. Finally, in the next phase of his life, Mile Budak will become a sworn member of the Ustasha Movement, while living and working in both Italy and Germany, the cradles of Fascism and Nazism respectively. Will his worldview change now that he is in the epicenter of radicalization?

II.III. To Emigration and Back (1933-1941)

Researchers have repeatedly emphasized that the primary reason why the Ustashas found refuge in Mussolini's Italy is the one concerning foreign policy and diplomacy, rather than supposed ideological similarities. The Italian attempts to utilize Croatian dissatisfaction with how the politics were developing in Yugoslavia are even older than Fascist takeover in Italy, since they originate from the end of World War I.⁹⁰ Furthermore, the phenomenon of "mutilated victory" (ita. *Vittoria mutilata*), coined by Fascist precursor Gabriele D'Annunzio, fueled the Italian irredentism after the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, since Italy was not rewarded with Eastern Adriatic territories, as it was promised in the London Treaty signed four years earlier. These circumstances, in combination with the inability of Yugoslav leadership to solve the Croatian national issue, opened the space for Italian leaders to undermine its Yugoslav neighbor. The Italian leaders, including Mussolini, tried to use the opportunity by contacting Croatian politicians, who, on the other hand, had an interest in

⁸⁹ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1995), 62.

⁹⁰ James Sadkovich, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism 1927-1937* (New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987), 10.

raising the international awareness of the Croatian position in the monarchy.⁹¹ Finally, this constellation of foreign affairs provided a safe haven for the Ustashas and Ante Pavelić, who decided to continue with the movement's activities throughout the Apennine Peninsula.

This setting allowed Budak to emigrate in February 1933 and continue his political activities abroad, in Austria, Germany and for the most part in Italy. Also, it was in the emigration where Budak became a fully-fledged member of the Ustasha Movement, by taking the Ustasha oath.⁹² The oath itself reflects the militaristic and authoritarian character of the movement since it demands of an individual to be ready to sacrifice his life for the homeland and to swear to the leader, Ante Pavelić himself.⁹³ Immediately upon his arrival to Italy, Mile Budak proceeded with intense publishing and propaganda activities, while simultaneously contacting Oscar Randi, an officer from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs specialized in cultural issues.⁹⁴ Similarly, Budak spent several months in Germany in 1934, where he carried out publishing duties before returning to Italy.⁹⁵ Hence, Budak's activities in the emigration indicate that his task was to internationalize the idea of independent Croatia and raise awareness of the political situation in Yugoslavia. Moreover, he performed the task in two countries that aspired to revise the geopolitical order established at the Paris Peace Conference, an order that presupposed the Yugoslav state as its integral part.

Unlike the 1920s when Budak worked inside the Yugoslav framework and his targeted audience was domestic, in emigration Budak primarily appealed to the external audience. When it comes to analyzing Budak's political discourse this is an important distinction to

⁹¹ Sadkovich, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism*, 17.

⁹² The text of the oath taken from: HR-HDA-1354 Režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1919-1941 [Regime and Reactionary Organizations 1919-1941], box no. 4

⁹³ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement], 135.

⁹⁴ Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and Ustashas] (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 122.

⁹⁵ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and Ustashas], 150.

make, since the question of who is he engaging with is an important element when it comes to discourse analysis. Moreover, it was in the emigration where Budak published his most coherent political work titled *Hrvatski narod u borbi za samostalnu i nezavisnu hrvatsku državu* [Croatian Folk and the Struggle for the Independent Croatian State] in 1934. The book itself was published in Youngstown (United States of America), where the organization of American Croats financed the publishing process.⁹⁶ The narrative of the publication depicts the political history of Croats with the emphasis on the late 19th and early 20th century developments while utilizing a linear understanding of the past where the peak of evolution concerning Croatian history is achieving independence. Accordingly, Budak's discourse uses the idea of Croatian independence as the main reference point for judging historical actors. In that respect, the value of a certain individual depends on how much he contributed to the struggle for Croatian independence. Since the book was also translated in Italian, German and Spanish, it is evident that its purpose was to raise international awareness and to gain sympathy for the Ustasha Movement.⁹⁷ However, the publication did not gain any significant international attention, since it avoided problematizing the provocative question of the time, and that is the relation between the ideologies of fascism and communism, a question that by the time polarized European public. Moreover, the absence of Budak's viewpoint on fascism aggravates a researcher's task to place his ideology accordingly inside the taxonomy of fascist and radical right movements.

Simultaneously with the publishing enterprises, in 1934 Budak was given the title of *doglavnik*, officially second in command and liable only to the leader himself, Ante Pavelić.⁹⁸

Further, in January 1935 Budak was named the commander of all the Ustasha camps in Italy.

⁹⁶ Jere Jareb, „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of dr. Mile Budak],” 31.; also HR-HDA-1355 Emigracija 1920-1941 [The Emigration 1920-1941], box no. 4

⁹⁷ Jere Jareb, „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of dr. Mile Budak],” 32.

⁹⁸ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and Ustashas], 150.

Leading an organization such as Ustasha, characterized by militant spirit and ruthless attitude, would certainly be uncomfortable for a person describing himself as a “born pacifist, rather than terrorist”, as Budak does. In addition, the circumstances for the Ustashes in Italy were grim, since their assassination of the Yugoslav king Alexander did not result in the overall collapse of the country, as expected by the members of the movement. Therefore, testimonies of the members of the Ustasha Movement from the period, such as Ante Moškov’s account, mention the sense of helplessness and complete lack of communication with the world outside the Ustasha camp on the island of Lipari.⁹⁹ More important for this study, Budak also describes the atmosphere surrounding the Ustasha camps in Italy in an autobiographical novel titled *Na Vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes].¹⁰⁰

In this political allegory, Budak uses fictionalized characters in order to illustrate the dynamics inside the Ustasha Movement, although there is no explicit mention of the group’s name or purpose in the novel. The group is situated in a fictional town of Mortuus, surrounded by two volcanoes, Teribilis and Demens. The choice of the names is quite indicative, since they also contribute to a grim, not to say apocalyptic atmosphere. In the center of narration is Janko, the main protagonist of the book. Several clues suggest that the figure of Janko represents Budak himself, such as Janko’s visions of being assaulted in the street, just as Budak was, or the fact that the protagonist in the book is portrayed as a commander of the organization’s camp, which corresponds to Budak’s position.¹⁰¹ Both Budak’s fiction and historical sources emphasize the conflict between Budak/Janko and other members of the

⁹⁹ Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and the Ustashes], 187.

¹⁰⁰ The book was first published in 1941, although this study will rely on the second edition published in 1942.

¹⁰¹ Mile Budak, *Na vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes] vol. 1 (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1942), 6.

group, led by Branimir Jelić, or a character titled Stožina in Budak's fiction.¹⁰² At the center of the conflict is Janko's leadership, described by his opponents as too soft:

“This is your weakness! You treat the cowards and failures too good, thus, they do whatever they want and disgrace us in front of our fellow citizens. Whatever they suggest, you approve and even offer them more, so they could mock us, while we continue our harsh, but an exalted path.”¹⁰³

Although Budak's account is stylized to fit the narrational purpose, both primary sources and fictional account suggest that Mile Budak was not suitable for performing the duty of the main Ustasha commander. His solution for overcoming the harsh period in the Italian camps included turning to prayer and Christian spirituality, while engaging with the metaphysical ideas, such as the ephemeral character of everything that is earthly.¹⁰⁴ This type of discourse was certainly unpleasing for the members of the Ustasha Movement in the camps, with their concrete, earthly troubles that required specific, tangible solutions, rather than lectures on metaphysics. Lastly, since Budak uses the autobiographical narration in the novel, it implies a certain level of self-representation. In that context, the constructed juxtaposition between Janko, an idealist who is stoically suffering and believing in a greater cosmic purpose, and Stožina, a pragmatist who is ready to make compromises with his ideals if necessary, suggests how Budak perceived himself. Further, the contrast between idealism and pragmatism is a common trope for Budak, since he will later repeatedly problematize the topic, as in the novel titled *Direktor Križanić - rodoljub i dobrotvor* [Director Križanić - Patriot and Benefactor].

In February 1937, Ante Pavelić decided to dismiss Budak from the commanding position.¹⁰⁵ What occurred next could be described as one of the most fruitful intellectual periods for Mile

¹⁰² Budak, *Na vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes] vol. 1, 44.

¹⁰³ Budak, *Na vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes] vol. 1, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Mile Budak, *Na vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes] vol. 2 (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1942), 33.

¹⁰⁵ Sadkovich, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism*, 283.

Budak, since he wrote three novels in a period of a couple of months, among them *Na Vulkanima* [On the Volcanoes] and his most acclaimed novel *Ognjište: roman iz ličkog seljačkog života* [The Hearth: A Novel from the Peasants Life in Lika]. Budak's intellectual renaissance continued upon his return to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the Italian and the Yugoslav government proclaimed an amnesty for members of the Ustasha Movement in 1937.¹⁰⁶ The timing of Budak's intellectual revival is quite emblematic since it corresponds with his dismissal from the commanding position as if it was a burden, rather than a privilege for Budak. This suggests that Budak essentially perceived himself as a novelist, rather than a militant activist, thus his service in the Ustasha Movement should primarily be viewed through his intellectual contribution.

Although upon his return Budak promised to the Yugoslav authorities that he will denounce the main goal of the Ustashes, which was creating an independent Croatian state, it did not take long for him to engage in the debate on the Croatian national question.¹⁰⁷ Not only did he engage, but was also very influential in the public domain by launching a journal titled *Hrvatski narod* [Croatian Folk] in February 1939. As a sworn member of the Ustasha Movement, Budak was under government surveillance, while the journal was heavily censored and eventually forbidden by the state authorities in March 1940. Despite the pressure, *Hrvatski narod* developed a broad base of readers, selling 80 000 copies weekly. However, the number of readers was probably even greater, since the editors of the journal encouraged the subscribers to circulate the copy of the paper. The Yugoslav state surveillance even managed to trace the subscribers living abroad and listed their addresses, while the name of Nikola Tesla, in the document referred to as “the inventor from New York”, certainly stood

¹⁰⁶ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement], 442.

¹⁰⁷ Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* [Ante Pavelić and the Ustashes], 312.

out.¹⁰⁸ The journal itself was published weekly, while Budak served as the chief editor with the authority to decide which articles would ultimately be published.¹⁰⁹ Thus, although Budak was not the author of all of the articles, he had the final word when it came to the content of the journal. This makes *Hrvatski narod* indispensable, and perhaps the most important source for studying Budak's political ideology in the late 1930s.

In the very first issue of the journal, instead of referring to the Ustasha Movement, Budak uses the term Croatian national movement, which illustrates a certain level of self-censorship, as well as the intention to appeal to the broader public. After all, the Ustasha Movement still operated as a network of conspiracy terrorist cells consisting of several hundred members and never mobilized masses inside the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Hence, Budak's discourse attempted to enhance that situation by attracting more sympathizers. Furthermore, the analysis of the journal's discourse suggests that the targeted audience was mainly the agricultural class, both for pragmatic and ideological reasons. On the one hand, since the peasants constituted the majority of Croatian society of the time, by appealing to that social strata Budak could mobilize large segments of the population and at the same time challenge the political monopoly established by the Croatian Peasant Party. On the other hand, Mile Budak and the Ustasha Movement constantly emphasized the importance of peasants in their ideology. This worldview is exemplified in the *Ustaška načela* [The Ustasha Principles] published in 1933¹¹⁰, where it is stated that:

¹⁰⁸ HR-HDA-1361 Zabrana i cenzura tiska [The Press Censorship], "Zabrana tjednika Hrvatski narod [The Ban of the Croatian Folk journal]," January 5th 1940, no. 2938

¹⁰⁹ "Poruke prijateljima [Messages to Friends]," *Hrvatski narod* no. 25 (July 28th, 1939), 2.

¹¹⁰ The first version was published in 1933, while the second, expanded version originates in 1942. Unlike the first draft where 15 principles are stated, the second version brings two new principles and other materials concerning the movement and its leader Ante Pavelić. More on the issue in: Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret od nastanka do travnja 1941* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement from Occurrence to April 1941] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2006)

“The peasantry is not just the foundation and the source of everything living, but it constitutes the Croatian folk in itself and is, as such, the bearer and agent of all state authority in the Croatian state.”¹¹¹

The text further implies that “who in Croatia is not of peasant origin, in ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, is not of Croatian bloodline at all, but is rather a foreign immigrant.”¹¹² Budak follows and even expands on this line of reasoning, which is vivid from an article titled *Nekoliko misli o uređenju Hrvatske* [Few Thoughts on Arranging Croatia] published in *Hrvatski narod* around Christmas 1939.¹¹³ The article itself is a great compendium of Budak’s most significant political and social ideas and provides an exhaustive overview of his visions for the independent Croatian state. At the core of Budak’s conceived independent state are the peasant themselves, with traditional rustic and patriarchal institutions making the backbone of state framework. For instance, the nucleus of the society is contained in the peasant institution of *zadruga* (community), which is in Budak’s discourse presented as a societal ideal-type. The *zadruga* is praised for promoting healthy, patriarchal family values, where the figure of *pater familias* is marked as crucial since without “its head, the *zadruga* cannot prosper.”¹¹⁴ Hence, because of the authoritarian leader, the division of the responsibilities and the solidarity among its members, the *zadruga* is a model for developing the country. By highlighting authoritarianism and the tendency to promote collective interest over individual ones, Budak is sliding from a conservative intellectual towards a fascist one. However, there is still no extremism in his rhetoric, since there is no open call for violence and Budak suggests, “Croatia would be the most pacifist country in the world, as long as

¹¹¹ Danijel Crljen, *Načela hrvatskog Ustaškog pokreta* [The Principles of the Croatian Ustasha Movement] (Zagreb: Tiskara Matice hrvatskih akademičara, 1942), principle no. 13

¹¹² Crljen, *Načela hrvatskog Ustaškog pokreta*, principle no. 13

¹¹³ Mile Budak, „Nekoliko misli o uređenju Hrvatske [Few Thoughts on Arranging Croatia],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 46-47 (December 25th 1939), 8.

¹¹⁴ Mile Budak, „Prava, dužnosti i odgovornosti narodne zajednice i njenih članova [Rights, Duties and Responsibilities of the National Community and its Members],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 4 (March 3rd 1939), 1.

nobody touches us.”¹¹⁵ On the other hand, similar to the principles of the Ustasha Movement that highlight peasants as exclusively ethnic Croats, Budak does the same by claiming, “the improvement of the countryside implies the exclusion of foreigners.”¹¹⁶ Thus, Budak’s discourse is ambiguous, since it is difficult to reconcile his pacifist rhetoric with the proclaimed ethnic exclusivity.

After he established the peasants as the true representatives of the authentic Croatian national spirit, Budak engaged in historicizing the national spirit itself. Throughout the *Hrvatski narod* the focus is on the Croatian historical rights, preserved in the Roman-Catholic tradition and the existing national ideology, “the two impregnable fortresses that guarantee the survival of Croatia”.¹¹⁷ Other common tropes include the glorious military history of the Croats, regularly embodied in the concept of the *Antemurale Christianitatis* (the Bulwark of Christianity), which also implies a certain level of national territorialization.¹¹⁸ Underlining the historical argumentation could be explained by the influence of Ante Starčević and the Party of Rights, however, similar ideological reasoning can be found in several fascist movements. As Constantin Iordachi pointed out in his comparison of the Legion of the Archangel Michael and the Ustasha Movement, both organizations developed the cult of the ancestral land by claiming historical rights over a certain territory, while stressing its indivisibility.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, both movements recognized the peasants as the archetypes of the national spirit, since they were organically rooted in the national soil. Finally, when it

¹¹⁵ Mile Budak, „Nekoliko misli o uređenju Hrvatske [Few Thoughts on Arranging Croatia],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 46-47 (December 25th 1939), 8.

¹¹⁶ Mile Budak, „Nekoliko misli o uređenju Hrvatske [Few Thoughts on Arranging Croatia],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 46-47 (December 25th 1939), 9.

¹¹⁷ Mile Budak, „Gospodin Cvetković rješava hrvatsko pitanje [Mister Cvetković resolves the Croatian Question],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 6 (March 17th, 1939), 1.

¹¹⁸ Mile Budak, „Prava, dužnosti i odgovornosti narodne zajednice i njenih članova [Rights, Duties and Responsibilities of the National Community and its Members],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 4 (March 3rd 1939), 1.

¹¹⁹ Constantin Iordachi, „Fascism in Southeastern Europe: A Comparison between Romania’s Legion of the Archangel Michael and Croatia’s Ustaša” in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans. Transfers of Political Ideologies and Institutions* vol. 2, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 411.

comes to the individual members of the two movements, a valid comparison would be that between Mile Budak and Ion I. Moța, notable as the ideological “grey eminence” of the Legion of the Archangel Michael who displayed similar worldviews to Budak’s. In addition to the ideological similarity between Budak and Moța, there is a hierarchical one, since both of them occupied the second position in the organizational ranks, looking up only to their leaders, Pavelić and Codreanu respectively.¹²⁰

Due to its historical presence on the Croatian territory and the fact that it served as the line of demarcation towards Serbian Orthodoxy, Catholicism played an important role in Budak’s ideology. Furthermore, Budak frequently emphasized the importance of faith in the moments of hardship for the members of the Ustasha movement. However, Catholicism also influenced Budak’s discourse, especially when it comes to expressing the discontent with modern society and the need for its complete doom, followed by a new dawn. This myth of rebirth, or as Roger Griffin named it, the palingenetic myth, represents an integral part of all European fascist movements.¹²¹ In fact, because of the emphasis on the termination of the old socio-political order and the construction of a new one, most of the scholars agree that fascism is to be understood as a revolutionary nationalist ideology.¹²² In Budak’s case, the myth of rebirth is expressed through Catholic discourse, most notably in his phrase that “there is no Easter, without Good Friday.”¹²³ The phrase implies that without struggle and sacrifice there is no salvation, which justifies any sacrifice or victim in the fight for the Croatian national independence.

¹²⁰ Constantin Iordachi, „Fascism in Southeastern Europe,” 434.

¹²¹ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 34.

¹²² Marxist intellectuals represent an exception, since from their perspective fascism is to be understood as a counter-revolutionary movement.

¹²³ Mile Budak, „Uskrsnu kao što je kazao [He Resurrected, as he Told he Would],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 9 (April 7th, 1939), 1.

Although Budak repeatedly rejected the notion of implementing fascist ideology, arguing that it does not correspond with the Croatian national spirit, the general tone of the *Hrvatski narod* sympathizes with Mussolini's and Hitler's regime respectively. This is particularly palpable in Budak's article *Susret revolucija: boljševičke, fašističke i nacističke* [The Clash of Bolshevik, Fascist and Nazi Revolution], where he claims that Hitler and Mussolini are not dictators, "but the leaders of deep social revolutions that satisfied the people."¹²⁴ Interestingly, although a vocal opponent of communism, in the same article Budak justifies the Bolshevik revolution arguing that "despite the violence, humanity will enjoy its fruits."¹²⁵ The overarching concept behind all of the three examples Budak mentions is the revolution itself, perceived as an indispensable tool for the advancement of humankind. Having that in mind, it is useful to remind ourselves that Budak repeatedly described himself as a pacifist and not a revolutionary. At the same time, his narratives approve the radicalization of politics and justify the revolutionary movements, regardless of their ideological mark. Conclusively, Budak's writings imply that he had an indeterminate relation towards the radicalization of interwar European politics, at the same distancing himself from the process of which he approved of. What further complicates the issue is the fact that Budak certainly had personal motifs for radicalizing, since not only was he a victim of an attempted assassination in 1932, but also his wife died under suspicious circumstances in 1940.¹²⁶

It is also important to mention what Budak stood against, rather than approved of. His criticism in the late 1930s points out to the Croatian Peasant Party since in 1939 they arranged the federalization of country in an agreement with the Yugoslav prime minister Dragiša

¹²⁴ Mile Budak, „Susret revolucija: boljševičke, fašističke i nacističke [The Clash of Bolshevik, Fascist and Nazi Revolution],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 33 (September 22nd, 1939), 1.

¹²⁵ Mile Budak, „Susret revolucija: boljševičke, fašističke i nacističke [The Clash of Bolshevik, Fascist and Nazi Revolution],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 33 (September 22nd, 1939), 1.

¹²⁶ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 101.

Cvetković. Despite the agreement broadening the scope of Croatian self-government, the nationalists gathered around *Hrvatski narod* insisted on complete independence. In one of his columns, Budak compared this development with the “unhappy marriage between Slovaks and Czechs”, while crudely reminding the readers how the situation was resolved after the German intervention.¹²⁷ Furthermore, in his writings from the late 1930s, as well as the earlier periods, Budak established himself as an outspoken critic of Western democracies. In a textbook example of populism Budak writes:

“Democracy, per se, is an ideal concept, but democracy in the hands of a plutocracy, bourgeois, the international Jewish establishment, great bankers and industrialists - implies ruin for the poorer parts of the population. It is ideal only when people have the first and final word.”¹²⁸

The supposed antagonism between the elites and the people, and the emphasis on the *volonté générale*, the general will of the people, qualify Budak as a populist according to the majority scholarship on the subject.¹²⁹ Another common critique of the West targets the moral corruption of urban, modern surroundings, a trope often thematized in Budak’s novel, which will be scrutinized in the following chapter.

Finally, the rapidly changing geopolitical picture of Europe of World War II enabled the Ustasha Movement to take over the state power. On the ruins of monarchist Yugoslavia, the Ustashas accomplished their goal and established the Independent State of Croatia. Although the Yugoslav state security apparatus indicated that the Ustashas were in a downward

¹²⁷ Mile Budak, „Gospodin Cvetković rješava hrvatsko pitanje [Mister Cvetković resolves the Croatian Question],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 6 (March 17th, 1939), 1.

¹²⁸ “Poruke prijateljima [Messages to Friends],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 21 (June 30th 1939), 2.

¹²⁹ The debates around populism revolves around how to define it. Some scholars define it as a rhetorical style, while others argue that it is an ideology („thin,, or full-bodied). For a general overview on the phenomenon of populism see Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* ed. Michael Freeden, Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

trajectory in the late 1930s and were losing the momentum during the emigre period¹³⁰, Hitler's and Mussolini's geopolitical interest enabled them to turn the tables and proclaim the independence of Croatia, now a part of the Axis coalition. In the years immediately before World War II and the first phase of the war, Mile Budak made his presence felt in the Yugoslav public space, mainly as the chief editor of the *Hrvatski narod* journal. Despite the journal being constantly censored and ultimately completely banned, Budak managed to disseminate the ideas of the Ustasha Movement and attract more sympathizers for the organization's goals. For the effort, he was rewarded in a newly established NDH with several high-ranking ministerial positions.

II.IV. The Ustasha Minister (1941-1945)

On April 10, 1941, Slavko Kvaternik, military general and a member of the Ustasha Movement, proclaimed the Independent State of Croatia on the radio. At the time of the proclamation, Mile Budak was recovering from illness in a hospital, but it was only a couple of days later when he was appointed the Minister of Religion and Education in the first Ustasha government.¹³¹ From his initial meetings with the other Croatian novelists, as well as his public speeches, it is clear that the establishment of the NDH also brought a radical cultural and ideological shift in which only the Ustasha ideas will be tolerated. For example, during the meeting with the representatives of the Society of Croatian novelists, Budak asserted that "the ideological guidelines of the Ustashes will be appropriated in the field of

¹³⁰ Igor Despot, „Povjerljivi izvještaji obavještajnog odjela Generalštaba vojske Kraljevine Jugoslavije o ustaškoj emigraciji (Hrvatskom komitetu) 1937-1940: dokumenti [The Confidential Reports of the Intelligence Service of the Yugoslav Army on the Ustasha emigration 1937-1940: documents],” *Radovi zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 50, no. 2 (2018), 309-335.

¹³¹ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 114.

literature”, while each individual should keep his private ideals to himself.¹³² Unlike the interwar period, when he was censored in the monarchist Yugoslavia due to his ideological standpoints, Budak now became the minister with the authority of dictating the “rules of the game” for other novelists. As a writer himself, Budak was aware of the importance of literary production in raising the new “Ustasha man”, hence he proclaimed the novelists as “the new spiritual elite”.¹³³ The laudatory title reserved for the novelists implies a level of self-fashioning since it does not only refer to Mile Budak, but also to the leader, Ante Pavelić, who wrote a novel *Liepa plavka. Roman iz borbe hrvatskog naroda za slobodu i samostalnost* [Pretty Blonde Woman. A Novel from the Croatian Struggle for Independence] in 1936.¹³⁴

Apart from cultural production, as a minister, Budak also overlooked the arrangement of education in the NDH. Again, Budak stressed the primacy of the Ustasha ideas, a policy expressed in one of his public speeches at the ceremony of closing of the school year in 1941:

“Any sneaking of foreign ideas – and those are all that oppose the Ustasha principles – will be stopped and suffocated, in a proper Ustasha manner.”¹³⁵

The proclaimed ideological exclusivism again came from the statement that only the Ustasha principles reflected the authentic national spirit. Furthermore, in addition to ideological exclusivism, several legal measures were taken to secure racial exclusivity in the NDH, such as the *Zakonska odredba o zaštiti narodne i arijske kulture hrvatskog naroda* [Legal directive to protect the national and Aryan culture of the Croatian nation].¹³⁶ Mile Budak, among

¹³² Dubravko Jelčić, „Mile Budak u svjetlu arhivskih istraživanja [Mile Budak in the Light of Archival Research]” in *Nad Velebitom sviće... Zbornik o Mili Budaku* ed. Ivan Gabelica, Ivan Pandžić (Zagreb: Croatian Party of Rights, 1995), 11.

¹³³ “Budak u odgovoru hrvatskim književnicima [Budak in Response to Croatian Novelists],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 93 (May 16th 1941), 2.

¹³⁴ Mario Jareb, *Ustaško-domobranski pokret* [Ustasha and the Homeland Movement], 321.

¹³⁵ „Ustaški duh osvaja srednjoškolsku mladež [The Ustasha Spirit Conquers the High School Youth],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 120 (June 14th 1941), 3.

¹³⁶ “Zbornik zakona i naredaba 1941 [Corpus of Legal Directives],” *Narodne novine* no.43/1941, cited in Jonjić, Matković, *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak], 121.

several other Ustasha officials, signed the measure, which provided the legal basis for the purge of state officials based on their racial affiliation. Further legal directives specified that the people of Jewish origin and of Orthodox denomination should be dismissed from their positions. However, sources suggest that the massive purge of Jewish university professors occurred in 1943 after Budak already left the position of the Minister of Education.¹³⁷ Furthermore, the very anti-Semitic nature of the Ustasha regime is still debated in Croatian historiography. Some authors suggest that the Ustasha anti-Semitism was opportunistic and its only goal was to satisfy the German allies, hence it was only present after the establishment of the NDH. This claim is often backed with the documents of German provenances, such as the reports of the Gestapo officer Hans Helm.¹³⁸ Helm was especially critical towards Budak since he was convinced that the Ministry of Education propagated anti-racist policy and condemned anti-Semitic purges. He even tried to prove Budak's anti-Semitic position by citing a dialogue from his novel *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry].¹³⁹ On the other hand, authors like Ivo Goldstein finds clues for Budak's antisemitism in the very same novel.¹⁴⁰ Thus, to say that the issue of antisemitism and Mile Budak is unclear would be a euphemism. However, this thesis will tackle the issue later on, when the emphasis shifts to Budak's literary production.

Even if one can doubt Budak's anti-Semitic stance, what is certain is his radicalization after the establishment of the NDH. During his term as a Minister of Education, the radicalization was palpable from a discursive point of view, where Budak spoke of "suffocating" the ideas

¹³⁷ Jaroslav Šidak, „Sveučilište za vrijeme rata i okupacije od 1941-1945 [Zagreb University During the War and Occupation 1941-1945]“ in *Spomenica u povodu proslave 300. godišnjice Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija u Zagrebu, 1969), 177.

¹³⁸ HR HDA, MUP SRH, 013.0.52, Dosje dr. Mile Budaka [Mile Budak's Dossier], iz arhiva Hansa Helma [From the Archive of Hans Helm]; also, Ivo Petrinović, in his biography of Mile Budak, published the reports of Hans Helm.

¹³⁹ HR HDA, MUP SRH, 013.0.52, Dosje dr. Mile Budaka [Mile Budak's Dossier], iz arhiva Hansa Helma [From the Archive of Hans Helm]

¹⁴⁰ More in Ivo Goldstein, *Jasenovac* [Jasenovac] (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2018)

that oppose the Ustasha principles¹⁴¹ or “breaking the young and old spines”¹⁴² in order to introduce the Ustasha ideological monopoly in cultural and educational institutions. Moreover, the series of speeches given in the summer of 1941, by Budak and other prominent Ustasha ministers, witness that the radicalization was systematic. When it comes to Budak, the majority of examples of verbal extremism originates from that period. Perhaps the most notorious examples are the phrase *Srbe na vrbe* [which could be translated as “Hang the Serbs”] and the statement on the “three thirds”, by which a third of the Serbian population in the NDH will be converted to Catholicism, the second third deported, and the final third killed. Although these phrases are usually attributed to Mile Budak in the contemporary public and historiographic discourse, there are no primary sources that would confirm those claims. Many accusations concerning Budak’s verbal extremism appeared only after the end of World War II, and what is perhaps even more indicative is the fact that the Yugoslav communist authorities do not mention those two examples in their accusatory materials against Budak during his trial.¹⁴³

To say that the accusations against Budak’s extremism were blown out of proportion during the process of demonization of the Ustasha regime after 1945, does not imply that there were no Budak’s radical speeches in the first place. On the contrary, during the previously mentioned series of speeches in the summer of 1941, Budak constantly emphasized on the national and ideological exclusivity of the new Croat state. This agenda is embodied in the phrase *ili se pokloni ili se ukloni* [Either give in or get out], a message that targeted the Serbian population in the NDH. In a similar fashion, Budak repeatedly faced the Serbs with an

¹⁴¹ „Ustaški duh osvaja srednjoškolsku mladež [The Ustasha Spirit Conquers the High School Youth],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 120 (June 14th 1941), 2.

¹⁴² Mile Budak, “Prošlost i budućnost Hrvatskog sveučilišta [The Past and the Future of the Croatian University],” *Alma Mater Croatica. Glasnik hrvatskog sveučilišnog društva* 5 (1941-19442), no. 1; as cited in Jonjić, Matković, *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak], 116.

¹⁴³ *Vjesnik Jedinstvene narodno oslobodilačke fronte* 5 (1945), no. 39 (June 4th, 1945); as cited in Jonjić, Matković, *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak], 126.

ultimatum, which presupposed either complete obedience to the new Ustasha government or deportation.¹⁴⁴ Since he was a minister in the Ustasha government and one of the most popular state officials, Budak's violent rhetorics certainly contributed to the overall radicalization of the population. A confirmation for that claim can be found in several letters sent to Budak, by the members of the crowd in the cities where Budak held his speeches. For example, one of the listeners of his speech in Varaždin agrees that the Serbian population should be converted to Catholicism or deported, since "leaving the Serbian population in our country would imply digging our own grave".¹⁴⁵ Hence, Budak's literary talent enabled him to construct rhetorical quips, which served as an incentive for the radicalization of masses during the summer of 1941.

The timing of those speeches is not coincidental since it corresponds with two important events for the Ustasha regime. One is the signing of the Treaties of Rome in May 1941, according to which the NDH had to give in significant territorial concessions to Italy, mainly in the Dalmatian region.¹⁴⁶ The second one is the German attack on the USSR, known as Operation Barbarossa, which gathered a broad coalition of the Axis allies, including the NDH, in a crusade against communism. Thus, the incentives for radicalization were both internal and external, since the Ustasha government had to make a diversion for their diplomatic failure leading to territorial loss, and simultaneously create a violent atmosphere in order to convince the population that the crusade against the communist USSR is just. Consequently, the main targets of violent rhetoric were Serbs and communists.

¹⁴⁴ An example of such rhetoric is Budak's speech from the town of Gospić, published in the journal *Hrvatski narod* (no. 93, May 16th 1941)

¹⁴⁵ Jonjić, Matković, „Tomislav Lukić hvali Budakov govor u Varaždinu, potvrđujući ocjenu da Srbi trebaju prijeći na katoličanstvo ili napustiti Hrvatsku [Tomislav Lukić Praises Budak's Speech in Varaždin, Agreeing that Serbs should be either Converted or Deported],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 346.

¹⁴⁶ More on the Treaties of Rome in Tomislav Jonjić, *Hrvatska vanjska politika 1939-1942* [Croatian Foreign Policy 1939-1942], (Zagreb: Libar, 2000)

Besides Ante Pavelić, also known as the *Poglavnik* (the head man, leader), Budak was the most popular state official in the NDH, and the Ustasha regime tried to capitalize on his popularity by assigning him to perform quite unpleasant duties. None was more troublesome than the question of foreign policy since the NDH was created as a puppet state of the Mussolini's and Hitler's regime, therefore its initiative in the diplomatic area was severely limited. Accordingly, it was Budak who held the radio speech just before the signing the Treaties of Rome, while explaining to the population "the necessary sacrifices" in the struggle for independence.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Budak's involvement in foreign affairs increased after he was relegated from the position of Minister of Education and proclaimed the ambassador of the NDH in Berlin in November 1941.¹⁴⁸ He will occupy that position until April 1943, when he was declared the Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹⁴⁹ As previously mentioned in the thesis, Budak did not perceive himself as a politician, but rather a novelist or perhaps an ideologue. Moreover, Budak's stance towards politics was derogative ever since his first engagements in the Young Croatia movement. Besides the fact that Budak was not very fond of doing politics, his lack of political and diplomatic skills was another issue. Several episodes from his diplomatic career highlight that statement. For illustration, various state officials, including the Bulgarian Prime Minister Bogdan Filov, noticed Budak's zealous criticism of the Italian allies and their irredentist ambitions on the eastern Adriatic.¹⁵⁰ In addition, previously mentioned Gestapo officer Hans Helm claims that Budak held National-Socialism

¹⁴⁷ Budak's radio speech was published in *Hrvatski narod* no. 93, on May 16th 1941, under the title „Granice se zatvaraju [The Borders are Closing]”.

¹⁴⁸ Jere Jareb, „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of Mile Budak],” 59.

¹⁴⁹ Jonjić, Matković, „Dr. Mile Budak – književnik i političar [Dr. Mile Budak – Novelist and Politician],” 139.

¹⁵⁰ Nada Kisić Kolanović, *Zagreb-Sofija: prijateljstvo po mjeri ratnog vremena 1941-1945* [Zagreb-Sofia: A Friendship Suitable for the War Time 1941-1945], (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2003), 62.

“ludicrous and harmful movement”,¹⁵¹ although there are no other primary sources that would confirm the claim.

Budak's greatest political disappointment came after the capitulation of Italy in September 1943, when he expected territorial consolidation of the NDH and the return of the areas lost in the Treaties of Rome. However, German allies had other plans for those territories and planned to maintain the German and Italian dominance in the area. Budak's resentment with the way in which the things developed escalated when he faced the newly elected ambassador of the Italian Fascist government with an ultimatum to annul the Treaties of Rome and denounce Italian territorial claims.¹⁵² This diplomatic incident symbolically marked the end of Budak's political career, since the day after it, on November 5, 1943, he resigned from the ministerial position.¹⁵³ From that point until May 1945, when the partisan movement led by Josip Broz Tito defeated the Ustasha regime, Mile Budak represented a politically marginal figure and spent most of his time on writing novels.

In May 1945, Budak was retreating towards Austria, with the rest of the Ustasha officials, where they surrendered to the British army. However, the British forces handed over a group of prisoners, including Budak, to the partisan movement on May 18.¹⁵⁴ It did not take long for the communist-led partisan movement to set up a trial for the former Ustasha minister. The preserved primary sources allow us to recreate Budak's intellectual and emotional life during the case. Both, Budak's trial dossier and the notes taken by his defender in the court,

¹⁵¹ HR HDA, MUP SRH, 013.0.52, Dosje dr. Mile Budaka [Mile Budak's Dossier], iz arhiva Hansa Helma [From the Archive of Hans Helm]

¹⁵² Bogdan Krizman, *Ustaše i Treći Reich* [The Ustashas and the Third Reich], vol. 1 (Zagreb: Globus, 1983), 213.

¹⁵³ Krizman, *Ustaše i Treći Reich* [The Ustashas and the Third Reich], vol. 1, 225.

¹⁵⁴ Jere Jareb, „Prilog životopisu dr. Mile Budaka [A Contribution to the Biography of Mile Budak],” 87.

Ivo Politeo, suggest that Budak was calm during the process.¹⁵⁵ However, it seems that Budak tried to detach himself from the crimes that occurred in the NDH while emphasizing that the decision-making process depended completely on Ante Pavelić. Furthermore, according to Budak's testimony, Pavelić rarely consulted him while deciding on important political and social issues. During the trial, the prosecution accused Budak of his membership in the Ustasha movement, while stressing his role as an "intellectual agitator" of the crimes against the Serbs.¹⁵⁶ The court sentenced him to death and executed him on June 7, 1945. His grave was never found.

Similar to other political trials that followed the defeat of the Axis coalition, the prosecution of Mile Budak would not satisfy the contemporary judicial standards, since the defendant was not introduced to his charges, nor did he have the right to appeal to the verdict. This information is not crucial for a historian since he is not the judge with the authority of declaring someone guilty or repealing judicial decisions from the past, but it does describe the historical circumstances of the time. In that respect, a historian should observe the trials as a part of a longer sequence of historical events, rather than an isolated phenomenon. Moreover, the trial of Mile Budak bears a significance for contemporary Croatian society, since the deficiency of the process itself opens the door for his eventual rehabilitation. In that respect, the figure of Mile Budak represents an emblematic example and a test for contemporary Croatian society, when it comes to dealing with its own past.

¹⁵⁵ The text of the trial dossier can be found in Petrinović, *Mile Budak – portret jednog političara* [Mile Budak – a Portrait of a Politician]; also HR-HDA-416 Odvjetnička pisarnica Ivo Politeo [Lawyer Ivo Politeo's Office], Predmet: dr. Mile Budak [Case: dr. Mile Budak], 1945, box no. 3

¹⁵⁶ The full text of the prosecution can be found in Petrinović, *Mile Budak – portret jednog političara* [Mile Budak – a Portrait of a Politician]

II.V. Epilogue – Mile Budak in the Light of the Interwar European Intellectual Atmosphere

From an intellectual perspective, Mile Budak is a product of the interwar European climate. Just like his fellow intellectuals across Europe, Budak tried to provide an answer to two major challenges, debated ever since the mid-19th century. One of the intellectual concerns was the national question, especially among the thinkers coming from the East and Central Europe, where the ending of the World War I brought the dissolution of multi-ethnic empires, specifically the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and the Ottoman. This development left the window open for Hungarians, Croats, Romanians, Bulgarians, and others to finally territorialize their existing national aspirations. However, the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 postponed those ambitions for certain nations, among them the Croatian one. The establishment of monarchist Yugoslavia faced the Croatian nationalists with an unwanted reality. Budak, a vocal proponent for the Croatian independence, built his political ideology on the foundations laid by Ante Starčević and the Party of Rights, which emphasized on the historical arguments and the continuity of the Croatian statehood. Similarly to the intellectuals in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, Budak used what Balász Trencsényi refers to as the “historiosophic” constructions, in order to confer meaning on his calamitous national past and present.¹⁵⁷

World War I was also influential in a sense that it served as a trigger for political radicalization in the interwar period. By joining the Ustasha Movement, Budak became a member of the terrorist group that was ready to utilize any means in order to achieve independence. The group established contacts with other nations interested in the revision of the Treaty of Versailles, which established the political map of Europe after World War I that included

¹⁵⁷ Balász Trencsényi, *The Politics of „National Character“. A Study in Interwar East European Thought* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

Yugoslavia. At first Italy and later on the Third Reich provided key partners in achieving Croatian independence, although the partnership was costly and was paid in loss of territory and severe restrictions in the diplomatic arena. A similar case was Slovakia, where Germans provoked the breaking of an “unhappy marriage” between Czechs and Slovaks and established Slovakia as an independent country, again with a severely restricted autonomy.

The second overarching issue for the European intellectuals of the time, including Budak, was the project of social, economic and cultural modernization and Westernization.¹⁵⁸ The main debate revolved around the question of how much of Westernization should be imported and how much of the traditional should be kept. Although this thesis deals with an intellectual who was an example of anti-modern thinker *par excellence*, it is important not to overstate this position, since there were examples of modern thinkers influenced by positivism across East and Central Europe. Hungary during the 1930s represents an example, where the intellectual clash revolved around “populists” and “urbanites”.¹⁵⁹ The name of the two opposing intellectual traditions suggests that the principal juxtaposition was that between the countryside and the city. For agrarian populists, including Budak, the countryside represented the only legitimate basis for building the national identity, since the peasants were the exclusive representatives of the authentic national spirit. On the other hand, the urban environment was rejected due to cosmopolitanism, which corrupted the national spirit with foreign influences. Romanian example includes the Sămănătorism movement, which stressed the role of the peasants as the keepers of the national characteristics, or philosopher Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, who in the mid-1920s noted that the peasants embody the national interest because they are numerically in majority and represent the only productive

¹⁵⁸ Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova edited a multi-volume edition on the topic titled *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*.

¹⁵⁹ Trencsényi, *The Politics of „National Character“*, 107.

class.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, in Bulgaria Todor Panov wrote that the only true people are peasants and artisans, while their culture should be the basis of specific national culture. For him, the Western European countries were Pharisees using moral arguments just to secure their geopolitical aims.¹⁶¹ Although all of the above-mentioned discourses resembles Budak's, it is important to note that the ideology of empowering the peasants came from both, left and right poles of the political spectrum. Bringing art to the masses by reflecting their tastes and traditions was a discursive feature of both, the literary and artistic left and right. An emblematic example is the Hungarian group of writers, Népi Írók. Although the majority of the members of the group used populist discourse, there were clear political divides inside the movement, with Zsigmond Móricz, László Németh and Gyula Illyés leaning to the left.¹⁶² Finally, it is worth reflecting on a long and rich tradition that anti-modern intellectuals like Budak inherited from their predecessors. In his book *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, Zeev Sternhell argues that at the very moment rationalist thought reached its peak, a revolt against Enlightenment erupted, making the confrontation between the two traditions last for over two centuries.¹⁶³ Sternhell then specifically turns towards the 18th-century German philosopher Johan Gottfried Herder, whom he describes as the founder of the anti-modern thought.¹⁶⁴ To conclude, the intellectual tradition encompassing Mile Budak fermented for over 200 years before finally bursting in an array of violent and radical politics in the interwar period. However, the intellectuals following that tradition occupied political viewpoints that overarched the traditional left-right divide. To add, different intellectuals highlighted

¹⁶⁰ Trencsényi, *The Politics of „National Character“*, 35.

¹⁶¹ Trencsényi, *The Politics of „National Character“*, 129.

¹⁶² John Neubauer, "Introduction," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries*, vol. 3, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 54.

¹⁶³ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, 1.

¹⁶⁴ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, 187.

different levels of radicalization. Thus, although the issue of modernization was universal, the answers to it often reflected national particularities.

III. Mile Budak – The Novelist

Although this research already touched upon some novels containing autobiographical elements, Budak's literary production deserves a chapter of its own. There are several reasons that justify the claim. Firstly, reconstructing Budak's intellectual biography without including his literary production, which consisted of both, novels and poems, published and unpublished materials, would be superficial. Secondly, since Budak conceived himself primarily as a novelist, it is important to address the practice that he prioritized above politics. Thirdly, novels, in general, represent a valid historical source, which allows us to get a taste of an atmosphere of the time. In addition, this chapter will discuss the ideas present in Budak's novels, as well as his writing practice and habits. Further, the question of Budak's literary legacy in the NDH and his role as a literary role model will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will argue that Budak's novels represented an integral part of his thought and as such included political connotations, unlike some interpretations that emphasize the absence of political dimension in Budak's novels.¹⁶⁵

III.I. The Prophet of Countryside – Themes and Motives inside Budak's novels

The starting point for Mile Budak the novelist is simultaneous with his first engagements in politics, dating back to high school days in Sarajevo. In fact, the incentive for Budak's involvement in literature was to some point political, as he himself describes:

“His first motif for writing was that his school colleague Radulović was published, although he was no special talent, but was a member of other political organization. Hence, we had to show that we also had a horse for the race.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Tomislav Jonjić is one of the proponents of the apolitical interpretation of Budak's novels. Similarly, the anthology *Nad Velebitom sviće... Zbornik o Mili Budaku* [Sunrise over Velebit... The Anthology of Mile Budak] argues for the apolitical interpretation.

¹⁶⁶ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In my Own Words],” 149.

Budak started out as a young poet, publishing poems in several journals, such as *Pobratim* [Blood Brother], *Behar* [Behar] and *Mlada Hrvatska* [Young Croatia]. Upon hearing of her sons' new hobby, Budak's mother was disappointed since she considered poetry to be an excuse for idleness. However, instead of trying to explain the importance of poetry to his mother, Budak decided to dedicate her a poem, which eventually convinced her in the correctness of her sons' choice.¹⁶⁷

Budak's first poems, originating in the very beginning of the 20th century, reflect some of the issues already mentioned in the previous chapter, primarily his concern with the ingress of the modernization process in the countryside, thematized in the poem *Moje njive* [My Fields]¹⁶⁸, and the glorification of pastoral lifestyle in a poem called *Orač* [Plowman].¹⁶⁹ The import of the Western patterns of modernization was a concern for other Central European writers, such as Hungarian poet Endre Ady. In a song titled *Hazamegyek a falumba* [I shall return to my village], Ady, similarly to Budak, expresses his nostalgia for the pre-industrial values.¹⁷⁰ However, the beginning of World War I also brought a shift, when it comes to the motifs of Budak's literary production. As previously mentioned, Budak's war experience is illustrated in his autobiographical account *Ratno roblje* [Slaves of War], in which the emphasis is not on the political, but on the existential aspects. Budak's poems dating from the period of World War I confirm that he viewed the conflict primarily through the existential glasses, depicting it as a life-threatening experience. For example, in a poem titled *Noć* [The

¹⁶⁷ Mile Budak, „Sam o sebi [In my Own Words],” 150.

¹⁶⁸ Mile Budak, „Moje njive [My Fields],” *Savremenik-mjesečnik društva hrvatskih književnika* 8 (1913)

¹⁶⁹ Mile Budak, „Orač [Plowman],” *Savremenik-mjesečnik društva hrvatskih književnika* 9 (1914)

¹⁷⁰ John Neubauer and Mihály Szegedy-Maszák „Topographies of Literary Culture in Budapest“ in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th centuries*, vol. 2, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006), 173.

Night] Budak constructs an upsetting atmosphere in which the silence is only broken by the sound of shelling and the consequent moans of the victims.¹⁷¹

The end of the war and Budak's return to Zagreb, where he continued with his political career and lawyer practice, also marked the recovery of literary tropes that labeled him as a novelist. Throughout his books, Budak continuously underlined the dichotomy between rural and urban, attributing a certain set of values and morals to each. Hence, the most appropriate thematic taxonomy of Budak's novels includes three segments: the glorification of the peasant life and countryside, the demonization of the city and its dwellers, and the already mentioned autobiographical allegories. This tripartite division remained stable throughout Budak's literary career, from the first novels in the early 1920s, until his death in 1945, which made his choice of topics quite repetitive.

Although he left Lika early in his life, Budak perpetuated his home region through novels. The majority of Budak's literary accounts of Lika are situated in a transitional period between the 19th and the 20th century, in an ambient of decadence and disintegration of the traditional patterns of life dominated by Christianity and patriarchy. A most emblematic account of that sort is *Ognjište* [The Hearth], a four-volume novel over 800 pages long, first published in 1938.¹⁷² In it, Budak describes life in an isolated village in Lika, while psychologically profiling the main characters. One of the main archetypes in the novel is that of the hearth, which is the ultimate symbol of family bloodline, procreation, and a sense of belonging:

“He did not think or discuss contemporary events; he felt them with his soul, his flesh and the last drop of his blood, because he was an integral part of that old hearth, that elder flame (...) just like he is a part of that first ancestor, who came first to these lands and was the first to light a fire in the hearth.”¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Mile Budak, “Noć [The Night],” *Savremenik-mjesečnik društva hrvatskih književnika* 9 (1914)

¹⁷² This thesis is based on the third edition of the novel, published in 1941. *Matica Hrvatska* [Matrix Croatica] published all of the editions.

¹⁷³ Mile Budak, *Ognjište* [The Hearth], vol. 1 (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1941), 26.

In that respect, the hearth represents a metaphor for perpetuating family life. If the fire in the hearth dies out, that implies there are no heirs to preserve it and the survival of the family bloodline is endangered. The reason why this development is perceived as tragic lays in the fact that family is considered the main building block of society. The fear of diminished vitality and the declining birth rates, present in this novel, was one of the preoccupations of the interwar radical right and fascist movements across Europe.¹⁷⁴ Budak also stresses the issue in one of his columns titled *Zdravlja, zdravlja, Gospodine* [Health, Health, My Lord] where he states that the population increase is one of the conditions for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the nation.¹⁷⁵

Further, there is a great emphasis on the virtue of sacrifice and the idea of Christian spirituality, in the sense of obeying God as the creator of one's destiny. These virtues are embodied in the main protagonist of the novel, Anera, whose husband Markić officially disappeared on the Russian front during World War I. Consequently, Anera became a single mother of two but declined to marry again, despite the fact that it would alleviate her life. By creating this narrative, Budak is able to praise Anera for her loyalty and piety, while depicting her as a saint. The similar literary trope can be found in German novel by Agnes Günther „Die Heilige und Ihr Narr („The Saint and Her Fool“), which was sold in nearly million copies between 1913 and 1945.¹⁷⁶ In Günther's novel, the heroine is portrayed as a champion of overcoming, similarly to Anera. In both cases, the protagonists are depicted as role models, due to their obedience and loyalty to God, despite suffering from major setbacks in their lives.

¹⁷⁴ Robert O. Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 35.

¹⁷⁵ Mile Budak, „Zdravlja, zdravlja Gospodine [Health, Health, My Lord],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 2 (February 17th, 1939), 1.

¹⁷⁶ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 78.

On the other hand, through a male character named Blažić, Budak constructs a rigid dichotomy opposed to Anera. Blažić is portrayed as a morally bankrupt figure, disobedient to God and lustful, especially towards Anera. According to the narrative, Blažić was not born as such, but rather became a villain during the period he spent working in the United States:

“She immediately noticed that he (Blažić) has changed: as if the devil entered a baptized child, the second he put on that coat and trousers (...) As if he was not the same person that left, as if he was a foreigner to our countryside.”¹⁷⁷

It is no coincidence that the main antagonist of Budak’s account is also the one that lived in the United States, the archetype of the modern Western civilization. In the novel, the center of modernity is also the center of moral and spiritual decadence. That is why the characters in the *Ognjište* are resentful towards the railroads, one of the symbols of modernity:

“The devil himself invented this monster and grotesque to tempt the honest people. First, they crossed people’s farmlands wherever they looked, without even asking how do you feel or what is in your heart?! They paid, but what money can substitute your farmland, nourished by the ancestors from your hearth?! (...) This monster takes everything, and we are not allowed to come near since foreigners are working around it. Where we used to cultivate our land, now strangers bash the iron snake.”¹⁷⁸

The moral high ground of the countryside comes to the fore even to a greater extent in Budak’s novels where the narrative is situated in the cities, primarily Zagreb. In a novel titled *Direktor Križanić- rodoljub i dobrotvor* [Director Križanić – Patriot and Benefactor], published in 1938, Budak depicts the social and political milieu in the Croatian capital during the first decades of the 20th century.¹⁷⁹ In the focus of narration is Micek Križanić, a young commercial apprentice coming from the rural outskirts of Zagreb. The book follows his rise on the political and social hierarchy of the urban capital, simultaneously followed by his

¹⁷⁷ Mile Budak, *Ognjište* [The Hearth], vol. 1, 198-99.

¹⁷⁸ Mile Budak, *Ognjište* [The Hearth], vol. 4, 38.

¹⁷⁹ Mile Budak, *Direktor Križanić – rodoljub i dobrotvor* [Director Križanić – Patriot and Benefactor] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1938)

moral decay. In fact, Budak constructs the narrative in such a way that all of the characters can be divided into two groups, the idealists and materialists. The clash between the two is embodied in the dialogue between the two characters, Križanić representing materialists, and a young teacher Milica representing idealists:

“Križanić: Every reasonable man is a realist and materialist because that is the only way we can progress.

Milica: But Micek, where are not a political party seeking power. We are a nation striving for freedom. We are the movement, we are the wave that has to crush everything in its path to reach the goal. It was always the idealists who have undertaken this task (...)”¹⁸⁰

There is no doubt that Budak speaks through Milica and the rest of idealists, taken into account his political views and the rest of his literary production. Accordingly, in the novel, Križanić is punished for his deeds and eventually ends up in prison under the accusation of credit fraud and corruption. Such ending allows Budak to underline the moral of the novel, which is to warn his readers what happens when an individual migrates from the countryside to the city and is immersed in selfishness and greed, inherently characteristic for the urban metropolis.

Similar tropes can be found in another Budak’s novel *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry], his most comprehensive work, published in 1939 in four volumes.¹⁸¹ In it, the author illustrates the atmosphere of the interwar Zagreb, while concurrently depicting the influence of the Croatian capital on the main character, Dragan Bojanić, “a noble soul overrun by the unmerciful wheels of the city.”¹⁸² Like Križanić, Bojanić also came from a rural background

¹⁸⁰ Mile Budak, *Direktor Križanić – rodoljub i dobrotvor* [Director Križanić – Patriot and Benefactor], 11.

¹⁸¹ Mile Budak, *Rascvjetana trešnja* I-IV [Blossomed Cherry I-IV] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1939)

¹⁸² “Recenzija Rascvjetane trešnje [Blossomed Cherry – The Review],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 120 (June 14th, 1941), 11.

and then migrated to the city. His inability to adapt to the social dynamics of the metropolis leads to his tragic end, in the midst of pursuing property and high social status:

“I had lost my foundation, since we have destroyed it in the countryside, and we did not know how to build it in the city. In the city, we were floating like a cut tree in a fast stream (...)”¹⁸³

On the other hand, the character of Maks Wetter, whose only moral is the profit, embodies everything that is wrong with the urban environment and the Western tradition. Moreover, since Wetter is of Jewish origin this opens the question of Budak’s antisemitism. The existing primary sources, including Budak’s correspondence, his novels and the documents created during his trial in 1945, do not provide a direct answer, but rather offer an ambiguity. For example, in one of his letters to a subscriber of *Hrvatski narod* [Croatian Folk] journal, Budak states that “the journal is not, nor it will ever be, an anti-Semitic newsletter”. Budak continues by stressing “the journal will never conduct any other policy, not even the Jewish one, except the Croatian national policy.”¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, in his trial dossier, Budak claims, “all members of the government in the NDH had anti-Semitic stances”, although he does not explicitly include himself among them.¹⁸⁵ Finally, some characters in his novels, such as previously mentioned Maks Wetter, could help us to give an answer to the question of Budak’s antisemitism. Although Jewish characters are not at the center of narration in Budak’s novels, as an author he does mention them sporadically. In those cases, Jews are usually linked to the cities as the breeding grounds for corruption and moral decadence. Hence, in his books, Budak equates the Jews with all of the vices inherent to the urban environment. Consequently,

¹⁸³ Mile Budak, *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry], vol. 4, 110.

¹⁸⁴ Jonjić, Matković, „Kao urednik *Hrvatskog naroda* Budak piše dr. Mavru Grossu u povodu otkazivanja pretplate na taj tjednik, ujedno objašnjavajući svoje poglede na židovstvo [As the main editor of the Croatian Folk journal, Budak writes to dr. Mavro Gross concerning his cancellation of subscription, while explaining his thoughts on the Jewish question],” *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka*, 301.

¹⁸⁵ HR HDA, MUP SRH, 013.0.52, Dosje dr. Mile Budaka, zapisnik sa saslušanja [Mile Budak, trial dossier], May, 1945

as an intellectual resentful to the modernization process, Budak targets the Jews by expressing his anticapitalistic and anti-modern worldview, rather than expressing biological or racial antisemitism that dominated public discourse in the Third Reich.

However, when searching for clues in Budak's novels, one has to be careful. Although Budak's literary tropes may serve to reconstruct his political and social agenda, one has to bear in mind that these are only intertextual references. Stronger conclusions could be drawn from his work as the editor of political journals, where his statements are much more explicit and straightforward. Conclusively, in his novels, Budak problematized the issue of modernization and the import of Western values, a concern shared by many of his East and Central European fellows. For instance, German authors like Friedrich Ratzel and Heinrich von Sybel also advocated the idea of an individual able to find his roots only in a rural landscape, since modern industrial mass society breaks the traditional links between the men.¹⁸⁶

Finally, although Budak's literature does not explicitly engage in the construction of the Croatian national narrative, it does tend to empower peasants and celebrate the countryside. Since Budak expressed identical stances in his political writings and speeches, one should regard Budak's novels as an appendage to his political ideology. His novels certainly did not express radical political ideology, as some of his speeches did, nevertheless, they represent an integral part of his political views, especially when it comes to the issue of modernization. The dichotomies arising from that issue, such as that between rural and urban, traditional and modern, spiritual and materialist, provided a thematic basis for the majority of Budak's novels.

¹⁸⁶ George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 15.

III.II. Behind the Pen – Budak’s Style, Habits and Approaches to Writing

Although he primarily considered himself a novelist, Budak’s existential needs and the fact that he had to take care of his family limited his writing time. As he explains in an interview taken in 1932, “during the day I am a lawyer, while in the evening I am *pater familias* and a novelist. I write only after my office hours and during the evening.”¹⁸⁷ Due to these circumstances, Budak’s rhythm of publishing new material was quite sporadic. Although his first novels date back to the early 1920s, his first literary breakthrough occurred in 1930, when he published a book consisting of seven short novels titled *Pod gorom: ličke priče* [Under the Mountain: Stories from Lika].¹⁸⁸ Within the next two years, Budak established himself as one of the most popular Croatian writers with the novels *Raspeće: zapisci jednog malog intelektualca* [Crucifixion: Records of a Little Intellectual]¹⁸⁹ and *Na ponorima* [On the Abyss].¹⁹⁰ Since Budak emigrated from monarchist Yugoslavia in 1933, his next intensive publishing period will occur only in the late 1930s, when some of his most famous novels were publicized, among them *Ognjište* [The Hearth], *Direktor Križanić-rodoljub i dobrotvor* [Director Križanić – Patriot and Benefactor], and *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry]. After the establishment of the NDH, Budak took over ministerial duties, which again severely limited his writing time. His final parting with politics at the end of 1943 signified his last creative period, which resulted in a series of novels titled *Kresojića soj: roman grozd iz seljačkog života* [The Breed of Kresojić: Novels from the Peasants Life]. However, not all of

¹⁸⁷ “Jedan se čovjek nagnje nad ponore [A Man is Leaning Over the Abyss],” *15 dana - kronika naše kulture* 2, no. 11 (July 1932), 5.

¹⁸⁸ Mile Budak, *Pod gorom: ličke priče* [Under the Mountain: Stories from Lika] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1930)

¹⁸⁹ Mile Budak, *Raspeće: zapisci jednog malog intelektualca* [Crucifixion: Records of a Little Intellectual] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1931)

¹⁹⁰ Mile Budak, *Na ponorima* [On the Abyss] (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 1932)

the novels from the series were published, since 1945 marked a transition towards a regime where Mile Budak was considered *persona non grata*, as a politician and novelist.

Budak frequently repeated that the inspiration for the novels came from his living experience as if the plot played out in front of his eyes. For example, when being asked if his novel *Napoporima* [On the Abyss] depicts real events, Budak answered:

“Certainly. If necessary, I could tell you the exact trial document in which you would find the majority of the novel characters. Life of the Croatian people, especially nowadays, provides us with so much material, that any fictionalization would be redundant.”¹⁹¹

Although Budak claimed he never followed any literary movement, his novels are closest to naturalism, since he chooses the topics from his lived experiences, while portraying the characters according to their social environment. In addition, the reviewers of Budak’s novels described his books as “the mirrors of the Croatian society” in which all his fictional characters are at the same time embedded in reality.¹⁹² Hence, it is quite important to engage not only with Budak’s self-representation as a novelist but also with the way in which the public reacted to his literature. The next step from underlining the rootedness of Budak’s novels in reality was to use his books as a tool for social design of the Croatian society during the Ustasha regime, an issue that will be addressed later in the thesis.

As a writer, Budak relied heavily on his intuition, while omitting to develop a detailed outline of his narratives:

¹⁹¹ “Jedan se čovjek naginje nad ponore [A Man is Leaning Over the Abyss],” *15 dana - kronika naše kulture* 2, no. 11 (July 1932), 5.

¹⁹² HR-HDA-1567 Matica Hrvatska 1838-1983 [Matrix Croatica 1838-1983], „Antun Bonifačić – recenzija Budakovog Ognjišta [Antun Bonifačić – the Review of Budak’s novel “The Hearth”],” box no. 156; also Marko Čović, “Pripovjetke Mile Budaka [The Novels of Mile Budak – review],” *Hrvatska revija* 13, no. 4 (1940), 9.

“Before I start to work, I visualize all the characters and the main conflicts of the novel. I develop a very brief outline for every chapter (...) because the plot develops itself organically, according to the goal that is in front of my eyes.”¹⁹³

This type of approach when it came to writing resulted in an unstable rhythm inside the novels, as well as frequent changes of the tempo and inconsistent narration, especially in Budak's longer works, such as *Ognjište* [The Hearth] or *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry]. An example of such a spontaneous approach can be found in documents related to Budak's literary activity, kept in the Croatian State Archives. Among other documents, the fond contains Budak's handwritten sketch for *Ognjište* [The Hearth], consisting of only several pages of concepts, for a novel that is over 800 pages long.¹⁹⁴ All of the above-mentioned stylistic fallacies came from Budak's approach to writing, which was intuitive and primarily dependent on the current inspiration, followed by the absence of thoughtful conceptualization.

Furthermore, some of Budak's contemporary literary critics recognized these aesthetic and stylistic flaws.¹⁹⁵ First theoretical and comparative analyses of Budak's novels originated in the early 1930s, simultaneously with Budak's initial breakthrough on the literary scene.¹⁹⁶ The interest of critics, as well as the public, for his novels, increased with further publications reaching its peak in 1938 when *Ognjište* [The Hearth] was published:

¹⁹³ Jedan se čovjek naginje nad ponore [A Man is Leaning Over the Abyss],” *15 dana - kronika naše kulture* 2, no. 11 (July 1932), 5.

¹⁹⁴ HR-HDA-1567 Matica Hrvatska 1838-1983 [Matrix Croatica 1838-1983], „Mile Budak: Ognjište [Mile Budak: The Hearth],” box no. 163

¹⁹⁵ A comprehensive compendium of the interwar literary reviews of Budak's novels is available in *Zbornik radova o književniku Mili Budaku* [The Anthology of Mile Budak as a Novelist] vol. 1, ed. Zvonko Matić (Split: Brattia, 1998)

¹⁹⁶ Ljubomir Maraković, „Pripovjedački rad Mile Budaka [Narrative Work of Mile Budak],” *Hrvatska revija* 8 (August, 1932), 6.

“The upcoming literary years will look back in envy towards 1938, when *Ognjište* [The Hearth] sparked like a thunder over ours already decadent literary horizon.”¹⁹⁷

The popularity of Budak's novels grew further after the establishment of the NDH. However, some critical voices were still heard when it came to the literature of the Ustasha minister. In fact, those critical assessments were primarily related to the stylistic weaknesses of Budak's novels, such as the structure of his narration. His position as a literary role model was indisputable, as well as his guidelines for literary production in the Ustasha regime.¹⁹⁸ Majority of critics, in the interwar period and the period between 1941 and 1945, appraised Budak's novels, mostly because of their social engagement and the fact that they reflected the living experience of the Croatian society. Possibly, this could also explain the popularity of Budak's novels among readers, despite his aesthetic flaws, since he problematized some concerns that resonated with the audience. A predominantly agricultural Croatian society of the time, where the agrarian populism of the Croatian Peasant Party prevailed electorally and ideologically, seemed to provide a fertile ground for narratives that celebrated the countryside and expressed suspicion towards the destiny of an individual in modern society.

The example of *Matica Hrvatska* [Matrix Croatica], the oldest and leading Croatian cultural institution of the time, is quite indicative when it comes to underlining the popularity of Mile Budak. Although the institution struggled with financial difficulties during the 1920s, Budak's novels, all published by *Matica Hrvatska*, helped in the economic stabilization of the institution's budget.¹⁹⁹ Some of Budak's novels were even printed in several editions, with *Ognjište* [The Hearth] leading the way in terms of popularity and commercial success.

¹⁹⁷ Dušan Žanko, „Osvrt na književno stvaranje u godini 1938 [The Review of Literary Production in 1938],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 9 (April 7th, 1939), 9.

¹⁹⁸ Ivica Matičević, *Prostor slobode. Književna kritika u zagrebačkoj periodici 1941-1945*. [The Space of Freedom. Literary Critique in Zagreb Periodical Journals 1941-1945], (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2007), 454.

¹⁹⁹ Višeslav Aralica, *Matica Hrvatska u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj*, [Matrix Croatica in the Independent State of Croatia] (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009), 78.

The success and popularity of Budak's novels crossed the Croatian national boundaries, especially in the period after the establishment of the NDH, when the market for his books expanded across ideologically similar countries, primarily the members of the Axis coalition. Budak's correspondence, as well as the documents related to his service as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the NDH, back up this claim. For example, his most famous novel *Ognjište* [The Hearth], was translated to German, Italian, Slovak, Czech and Polish language.²⁰⁰ The number of copies for the translated editions of Budak's novels ranged from several thousand to 20 000 copies, ordered by Austrian publishing company Paul Zsolnay Verlag.²⁰¹ In addition, *Ognjište* [The Hearth] was even adapted for a theatrical performance in Sofia, Prague, and Helsinki, while some documents indicate that the German production companies Uffa and Tobis showed interest in adapting the novel as a movie.²⁰²

Again, in order to understand Budak's relevance as a novelist for both, domestic and international audience, it is necessary to point out to an overarching resentment against modernity, as opposed to the Western civilization. Budak's narratives were often compared to novels expressing similar tropes, such as Wladyslaw Reymont's *The Peasants* or Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*, both winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature. The thematic emphasis in Budak's novels that juxtaposed impoverished life led by peasants with narcissistic and morally corrupt life of the urban dwellers, probably resonated with some of the concerns of the contemporary European population. Such reasoning could help us understand why Budak, Reymont or Pearl Buck achieved both, great popularity and the

²⁰⁰ Budak's correspondence with foreign publishing companies is available in: Jonjić, Matković, *Iz korespondencije dr. Mile Budaka* [From the Correspondence of dr. Mile Budak]

²⁰¹ HR-HDA-1011, Osobni fond Mile Budak [Mile Budak's Personal Fond], „Ugovor s austrijskom izdavačkom kućom Paul Zsolnay Verlag [Contract with an Austrian publishing company Paul Zsolnay Verlag],” box no. 1

²⁰² HR-HDA-1011 Osobni fond Mile Budak [Mile Budak's Personal Fond], „Izvještaj Luke Fertilia, kulturnog atašea poslanstva NDH u Berlinu [The Report of Luka Fertilio, Cultural Attaché of the NDH in Berlin],” box no. 2

appraisal of the critics. Finally, constructing a narrative where the village is nobler than the city since it is closer to the individual and has much more to offer, proposed much-needed comfort to the readers during a turbulent period between the two World Wars. The image of peaceful pastoral history seemed more desirable than the appearance of an uncertain future.

III.III. Mile Budak – The Literary Role-Model

After the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, Mile Budak was rewarded for his contribution to the Ustasha Movement. As the second person in the Ustasha hierarchy, lower in ranks only to Ante Pavelić, Budak occupied several ministerial positions between April 1941 and November 1943. As already mentioned in this research, Budak served as the Minister of Education where he regulated educational and cultural policies, including the establishment of an institutional and ideological framework for the literary production in the Ustasha regime. Moreover, Budak himself was perceived as an archetype of the ideal novelist, since he remained a vocal proponent of the Croatian nationalism in the Yugoslav state when nationalist and separatist policies were not tolerated. Thus, in the NDH Budak was understood as one of the “torchbearers of the new future”²⁰³, due to his efforts in preserving the Croatian national culture, threatened by an overarching Yugoslav identity. Since the authentic Croatian national culture that Budak was writing about was that of peasants and countryside, it corresponded to the official state ideology in the NDH in which, according to Ante Pavelić, “the state authority is supposed to serve the Croatian peasants.”²⁰⁴ Accordingly, what was expected of the writers in the Ustasha regime was the prioritization of pastoral themes and the opposition towards the modern decadence.²⁰⁵ Since Budak’s novels fulfilled those

²⁰³ Marko Čović, „Hrvatska revija u suvremenoj hrvatskoj književnosti [Croatian Review and the Contemporary Croatian Literature],” *Hrvatska revija* 14, no. 5 (1941), 236.

²⁰⁴ Ante Pavelić, „Nezavisna država Hrvatska – seljačka država [The Independent State of Croatia – The Peasant State],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 93 (May 16th, 1941), 1.

²⁰⁵ Matičević, *Prostor slobode*, 146-47.

expectations, they offered a tool for social engineering and the creation of a new Croatian society, cleansed from foreign influences.

For example, in a journal titled *Nedjelja – tjednik za katolički rad, socijalni život i prosvjetu* [Sunday – Journal for Catholic Work, Social Life and Education] a series of columns were dedicated to the issue of the fictional characters from Budak's novel *Rascvjetana trešnja* [Blossomed Cherry] during 1941.²⁰⁶ Through already mentioned novel characters, such as Dragan Bojanić and Maks Wetter, the journal analyzed their development in the book and used their image for extracting moral lessons for the readers. One notable example includes the image of women in Budak's novels and its consequent repercussion in the public discourse. For instance, in the above-mentioned journal *Nedjelja* [Sunday], an article discussing the role of women in society reached for examples from Budak's novels. Criticizing the modern morals among women that turned them into “a generation of shallow female souls”, the journal calls for “a female youth (...) that will be completely dedicated to the family, just as Neda from Budak's novel *San o sreći* [The Dream of Happiness] was.”²⁰⁷ Hence, a female character from Budak's novel represented the basis for depicting, what was considered, a healthy relationship between a man and a woman, and the woman's place in the household. As a Minister of Education Budak made sure that he practiced what he preached, since he restricted the access to certain disciplines, such as medicine or law, for the female students, because “the woman was born to be a caretaker, a mother, and a teacher.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ “Likovi u Budakovoj *Rascvjetanoj trešnji* i problem moralnog izgrađivanja [The Characters in Budak's *Blossomed Cherry* and the Problem of Moral Edification],” *Nedjelja – tjednik za katolički rad, socijalni život i prosvjetu* no. 16 (April 27th, 1941), 3.

²⁰⁷ “Ženska omladina u NDH [Female Youth in the NDH],” *Nedjelja – tjednik za katolički rad, socijalni život i prosvjetu* no. 17 (May 4th, 1941), 5.

²⁰⁸ „Novi duh u školi [The New Spirit in the School],” *Hrvatski narod* no. 37 (September 21st, 1941), 4.

Having that in mind, it is evident that the emphasis on the novelists as the “new spiritual elite” that will “feed the souls of the people”²⁰⁹, was not just a fancy phrase, but also an actual policy of the state authorities. Consequently, this adds even greater significance to the figure of Mile Budak, who impersonated a role model for all the novelists:

“The greatest contemporary Croatian novelist is dr. Mile Budak. His literary work strives for the renewal of the Croatian state, a cause to which he is completely dedicated to.”²¹⁰

One of the reasons why novelists were of such importance for the new regime is because they represented an organic part of the authentic Croatian national culture, and as such were supposed to liberate the Croatian people from the eastern, Serbian culture dominant in the monarchist Yugoslavia.²¹¹ Since the idea of Yugoslavia started out as a project of cultural integration in the mid-19th century, the opposition to the interwar Yugoslav regime necessarily included not just political, terrorist or economic, but also cultural means. This is evident from the radicalization of the literary discourses after the establishment of the NDH in 1941, when a younger generation of writers opted for a heroic and militant approach to writing.²¹²

However, it is important to underline that Budak’s literary narratives were not radical, not prior to or after the foundation of the NDH, while his radicalization is most evident from his service as a politician. His novels operated between two poles, the urban where the emphasis is on Budak’s critique of the modern society, and the rural, which is constructed as a moral and social ideal-type. The antithetical pairing of the urban and the rural in Budak’s literary

²⁰⁹ Marko Čović, „Dužnost književnika u ustaškoj državi [The Role of a Novelist in the Ustasha State],” *Hrvatska revija* 15, no. 3 (1942), 114.

²¹⁰ Vilim Peroš, „Misao obnovljenja hrvatske države u hrvatskoj književnosti [The Idea of Renewal of the Croatian State in the Croatian Literature],” *Hrvatska revija* 15, no. 5 (1942), 317.

²¹¹ Rory Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation: The Ustasha Regime and the Cultural Politics of Fascism, 1941-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 2.

²¹² Yeomans, *Visions of Annihilation*, 246.

discourse is underpinned by establishing a simplistic moral asymmetry between the two poles, where the village is depicted as pure and the city as corrupt. Accordingly, the transition from villages to the cities in Budak's novels is described as moments of alienation and spiritual breakdown of an individual. These narratives reflected the Ustasha ideology but were not radical per se. The purpose of Budak's literature, as a part of the wider phenomenon of the peasant literature in the NDH, was to construct a grassroots movement in which the peasants themselves will preserve the traditions of the countryside, since they were the only true representative of the Croatian national spirit, according to the Ustasha ideology.

To some extent, Budak's novels got a life of their own after they were published. After all, at the moment of their publication, they were no longer exclusively Budak's intellectual property but rather belonged to the society as a whole. Although there is no primary source suggesting that Budak envisaged his novels to represent a role model for the construction of an ideal society, as a politician he advocated the idea of novels engaging with social issues and the creation of the new Ustasha man and woman. In that sense, Budak's example fits in a sequence of interwar writers, who "sensed" that the new world is coming, a world that will provide an alternative to the capitalist plutocracy and Marxism. Authors such as Robert Brasillach, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Gottfried Benn, Ernst Jünger, Giovanni Gentile, Curzio Malparte, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Knut Hamsun all sympathized with radical right-wing or fascist movements that promised to come up with an alternative to, what was perceived as a decadent society. However, none of them has climbed so high in the hierarchy of such movements as Budak did.

Finally, it is impossible to understand Mile Budak as a politician and ideologue without paying attention to his literary activities. He was the same person as a politician and as a novelist, especially when it comes to his idealization of the countryside, an ideological pillar in both spheres of Budak's activities. Presumably, Budak himself was aware of that since he

often stressed that he wrote novels as he saw them in his lived reality. Furthermore, there are several examples of Budak's political speeches where he uses the narrative and characters from *Ognjište* [The Hearth] in order to clarify his ideological standpoints to the audience.²¹³ Since he was a literary role model and one of the faces of the regime, the Ustashas often tried to capitalize on Budak's popularity by assigning him either uncomfortable duties, such as communicating the "bad news" (i.e. The Treaties of Rome) to the audience, or conveying radical messages like those in the summer of 1941, in order to mobilize the population. In that respect, it is impossible to separate Budak's literary and political spheres, just as it is impossible to separate his figure from the Ustasha regime.

²¹³ An example of such speech can be found in: „Budak Mile, predavanje u Slavonskom Brodu [Budak Mile, a Lecture from Slavonski Brod]” in HR-HDA-1354 Režimske i reakcionarne organizacije 1919-1941[Regime and Reactionary Organizations 1919-1941], box no. 8.

IV. Conclusion

In order to understand Mile Budak as an ideologue and a novelist, one has to situate him in the historical context of his time. Similarly to most of the Central and East European intellectuals of the interwar period, Budak was preoccupied with two questions, that of modernization and the establishment of the nation-state. The former issue implied the debate on how much of the Western modernization patterns should be imported, while the later problematized the question of establishing nation-states on the ruins of multi-ethnic empires that collapsed after the ending of World War I. In Budak's case, the answers to those two questions came from two intellectual traditions that constituted the foundation of his thought.

When it comes to the issue of modernization, Budak was a vocal proponent of agrarian populism, which emerged at the end of the 19th century, around the time of Budak's birth, in Russia (*narodnichestvo*) and US (The People's Party) respectively. Although *narodnichestvo* vanished by the beginning of the 20th century, it inspired agrarian parties across Eastern and Central Europe. At the core of this intellectual tradition was the idea that peasants represented the authentic people connected to the national soil, living a virtuous life. Moreover, instead of creating a modern, industrial society, agrarian populists advocated a system of agricultural economy based on cooperation between small farms, so-called *zadruga*.²¹⁴ These types of policies are perpetuated in Budak's political columns and speeches, as well as his novels where the countryside represents an ideal-type society. Taking everything into account, when it comes to the issue of modernization, Budak was rather mainstream than a radical ideologue, since a number of interwar intellectuals, coming from left and right-wing political organizations, advocated similar ideas.

²¹⁴ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Populism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* ed. Michael Freeden, Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 495.

On the other hand, when addressing the question of nationalism, the starting point of Mile Budak's thoughts was the ideology of Ante Starčević, a mid-19th-century politician, and a vocal proponent of the Croatian independence based on historical argumentation and the idea of the historical continuity of the Croatian statehood. From that standpoint, Budak gradually slid to a more radical version of Croatian nationalism, embodied in the principles of the Ustasha Movement. This sort of Croatian nationalism was exclusive and tended to ostracize the members of other nationalities from participating in political, economic or social life. The establishment of the fascist Independent State of Croatia in April 1941 represents the peak of radicalization, both for the Ustasha Movement and Mile Budak. In fact, the most radical period of Mile Budak's political career originates from a series of political speeches during summer of 1941. His radical ideas are embodied in the phrase *ili se pokloni ili se ukloni* [Either give in or get out], which targeted the Serbian population and faced it with an ultimatum that implied assimilation or violent deportation.

When discussing the question of Mile Budak and fascism, I think that the most convenient approach would be to tackle the issue like a moving target, rather than opt for an either/or solution. Such a method provides a much more flexible framework for studying Budak's ideology and its transformation over time. In that sense, several potential triggers for the radicalization of Mile Budak occurred over time. Firstly, the violent experience of World War I certainly pushed some of the political organizations towards extremism. Secondly, the unsuccessful attempts to establish a functioning parliamentary democracy in the Yugoslav state and the inability of Yugoslav leadership to solve the Croatian national issue by using legal instruments, directed a group of nationalist gathered around Ante Pavelić towards terrorist and violent means. Thirdly, Mile Budak himself experienced several potential triggers for radicalization on a personal level, including an attempt of assassination in 1932 or the death of his wife under unclear circumstances in 1940. However, an obvious

radicalization, which can be labeled as fascist, is tangible only in the period between April 1941 and November 1943 when Mile Budak withdrew from politics, spending the rest of his life writing novels.

This poses another concern, regarding the status of Mile Budak as a novelist. Although his novels do not propagate any radical ideology, as some of his political writings and speeches do, because of his involvement in the Ustasha regime Budak's novels were proscribed after 1945, when the Yugoslav communists took over. Even today, the issue of Budak's novels are a litmus test for a wider question of how to deal with the legacy of the Ustasha Movement. That is why claiming that Budak's novels were or were not political, can have practical implications, such as their inclusion in the school curricula. Furthermore, a more universal concern that exceeds the scope of contemporary Croatian society is the notion of parallel cultural and political radicalization. To put it simply, when does a cultural revolt transform into a political revolt with dire consequences? As Zeev Sternhell pointed out, the intellectual traditions that inspired fascism, which he labels as the Anti-Enlightenment tradition, existed even in the countries such as the United Kingdom, where fascism did not abolish liberal democracy.²¹⁵ Thus, Sternhell's conclusion implies that there is no direct connection between political and cultural radicalization. This study came to an identical conclusion while investigating the ideological cosmos of Mile Budak. In his case, political extremism was not followed by cultural radicalization, since his novels do not display radical narratives. Thus, correlation truly does not imply causation. These findings are relevant for studying the process of radicalization in contemporary politics as well, since there is a growing concern over the rise of right-wing movements, both electorally and ideologically. In this respect, the

²¹⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, 242.

lessons from the past could provide us with the guidelines for tackling the challenges of contemporary societies.

Appendix 1 –Mile Budak's Bibliography

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