

ANICA KOVAČIČ: THE SLOVENIAN FRIEND OF ANNE FRANK

Milena Mileva Blažić

Faculty of Education. University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia
ORCID: 0000-0002-6387-6646

Arburim Iseni

Faculty of Philology. Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tetovo
Tetovo, North Macedonia. ORCID: 0000-0002-8980-0682

Received: 2025-01-15

Accepted: 2025-03-05

Published online: 2025-03-14

Abstract

The article presents a qualitative analysis of an interview conducted by I. Jovanović and I. Šaponja with Anica Kovačič (née Mislej) as part of the "A Century of European Anti-Fascism" project. The Croatian newspaper *Vijesnik* reported as early as 1965 that Anica knew Anne Frank, met her daily in the Bergen-Belsen camp, and that the author of one of the most famous Holocaust testimonies died in the arms of her "Slovenian friend". This article sheds light on the details of Anica Mislej's life and her friendship with Anne Frank.

Keywords: Anne Frank, Anica Kovačič (née Mislej), Bergen-Belsen, Concentration Camp, World War II, "A Centenary of European Anti-Fascism".

1. Introduction

Even though it is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was removed from the curricula for Slovene in 2019 (2015, 2018). This is perhaps all the more surprising given the story in the Croatian newspaper *Vijesnik* from 1965 about the "Slovenian friend of Anne Frank", Anica Mislej (later Kovačič) (1923–2019). Similarly, when Dr Igor Jovanović interviewed Anica as part of the project "A Century of European Anti-Fascism", this also gained little attention in Slovenia. Igor Šaponja, from Pula,¹ also interviewed her, this time in 2013² (published in 2018),^{3, 4, 5} and she told him that she and Anne Frank knew each other, socialized and talked in different languages on a daily basis – probably in Czech or Polish, as well as German. Anica said

¹See the lecture by Igor Jovanović and Igor Šaponja: "Anica Kovačič in the camp with Anne Frank" in Buzet".

Online: <https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/predavanje-igora-jovanovnica-i-igora-saponje-anica-kovacic-u-logoru-s-anne-frank-u-buzetu/> [05/19/2023]

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yaS9x5GDfM&ab_channel=Bo%C5%BEidarFlaj%C5%A1man [05. 01. 2025]

²The interview was published in 2018.

³See the project website: <https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/>.

⁴"Imprisonment in the Bergen-Belsen camp and friendship with Anne Frank":

<https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/svjedocanstva/zatocenistvo-u-koncentracijskom-logoru-bergen-belsen-i-prijateljstvo-s-anne-frank/>.

⁵Interview transcript: https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Anica_Kova_i_-_transkript.pdf.

that tried to comfort and encourage Anne Frank. Anne wanted to live after death, but unfortunately, she died twice – the first time on 31 March 1945 in Bergen-Belsen in the arms of her Slovenian friend, and the second time in the Slovenian curriculum on 1 September 2019.

2. Anica Kovačič (née Mislej)

Anica Mislej was born on March 28 1923, in Veliko polje near Sežana. As a young girl, she participated in the resistance movement during World War II, and rescued her brother from a fascist prison. Her brother later joined the Partisans (01/25/1945), and she ended up in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp after being betrayed (01/26/1945). She spent her time in the camp surrounded by others who were tormented by hunger and disease while awaiting liberation or death. After liberation, Anica was treated in Osterwald (16/06/1945), and returned home to Prestranek on 17 August 1945.

Among the prisoners was Anne Frank, whom Anica befriended, and the two young women spent their days together in the camp. Anica remembers that Anne was very weak and had begun to lose hope. She thus comforted her and encouraged her to hold on a little longer, as the end of the war was near, but Anne died before tasting freedom (31/03/1945). At the time, Anica naturally had no idea that Anne's diary, which was published after the war as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, would become one of the most widely read books about the Holocaust, and that her friend would become a symbol of a generation of young people whose childhoods had been interrupted.

Anica Kovačič survived Bergen-Belsen, returned to her old life, married and had a job. She knew that *The Diary* had been published, but she was too modest to promote herself at the time. Today, she spends her days in a nursing home in Tolmin as one of the oldest of those in the camp who knew Anne Frank, and, unfortunately, her testimony was overlooked until she was found in 2013 by the historians Jovanovnić and Šaponja, at the initiative of other women who had been in Bergen-Belsen – Rina Smajla.⁶

⁶ Testimony of Rina Smajla about his imprisonment in Bergen-Belsen: <https://stoljeceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/svjedocanstva/svjedocanstvo-rine-smajla-o-zatocenistvu-u-bergen-belsenu/>.

2.1 Manuscripts by Anica Kovačič, 1980, 1996, 2011, 2018

According to the findings thus far, Anica Kovačič left three handwritten documents,⁷ which the author of the current article turned into typed documents.

2.1.1 List of survivors, 1945, 1980

Transcript

Signora Rosa⁸,

Ti mando la mia photography

Perche rido qua

Quando guarderai la mia photography

Say hello and say hello.

Dalla tua Rozi

Kovačič Anica

Photocopy of a handwritten manuscript

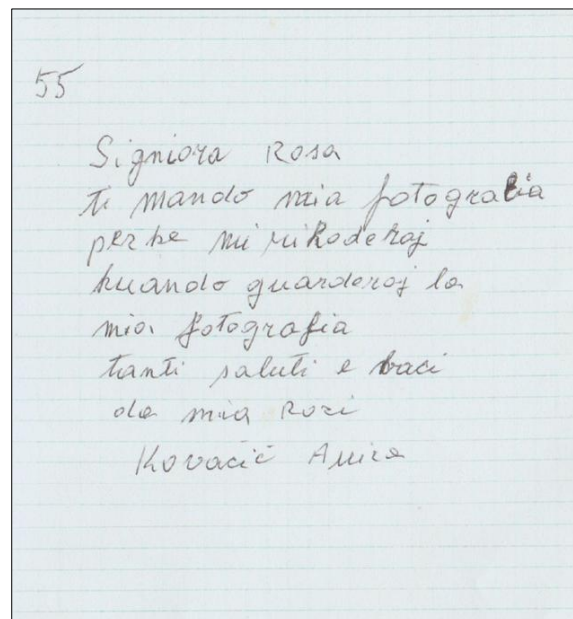


Figure 1: Handwritten manuscript.

⁷ The original documents were donated by Anica Kovačič's nephew, Danilo Mislej, to historians from Pula, who provided copies to the author of the article. The authors of the article typed the documents and sent them to colleagues in Pula for further research and to her nephew, Danilo Mislej (2023).

⁸ Mrs. Rosa, // I send you my photograph / Because I laugh here / When you look at my photograph / Many greetings and kisses // From your Rose

SIGNORIA ROSA
BERGEN – BELSEN
ACCORDING TO THE ORIGINAL, MAY
1945
LIST OF SURVIVING INTERNEES
RECORDED IN 1980
CURRENT RECORDS, 1980
MAIDEN NAMES
EXACT CURRENT ADDRESS
BORN IN BERGEN-BELSEN
DIED IN BERGEN-BELSEN
DIED AFTER THE WAR AT HOME
ARE THEY STILL ALIVE?



Figure 2: First page of the list of survivors.

2.1.2 We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp, 1996⁹

Transcript

We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp (Dr Marijana Baumgarten Briški)

So, we came to Bergen-Belsen, a real death camp (Roza Prijateljelj Šteje)

The English Commander Smoked (Lyudmila Yeshevnik)

On the second day after the wedding, they arrived in Bergen (Ana Videnšek)

Slovene Women in the National Liberation War, page 483, Winter 1944 [poem] (Vida Zavrl)

Photograph of a page from the notebook

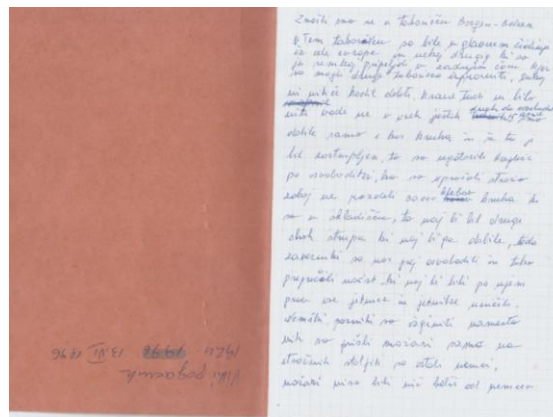


Figure 3: Manuscript – We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp, 1996.

⁹ The authors of this article named the chapters in the typed version of the notebook based on their first sentences. The notebook itself was probably created at a meeting of the camp survivors in 1996, but it is possible that the meeting where the information that the notebook contained was obtained earlier, perhaps in 1980, and was written into the notebook at a later date.

2.1.2.1 About the *Bergen-Belsen* camp

The following are some records or memories of the Bergen-Belsen camp:

Marjana Baumgarten Briški¹⁰ wrote:

In this camp there were mainly Jewish women from all over Europe and a few others who had been brought here later, when other camps were being emptied. No one went to work there. There was also no food, nor water, and like all the others until the liberation on April 15, we were given only one piece of bread, and even that was poisoned. This is what the English found out after the liberation when they asked the guards why they didn't distribute 30,000 loaves of bread when they were in storage. This was supposed to be the second ration of poison they were supposed to get. (Baumgarten Briski, 1996, 3)¹¹

Lyudmila Yeshevnik recalls: "The English commander smoked." After his experience in the Bergen-Belsen camp, the commander said, "It will never be possible to describe what is now seen in Bergen-Belsen and what happened in it" (Videnšek, 1996, 4).

Roza Prijatelj Steje wrote: "That's how we came to Bergen-Belsen, a veritable death camp. In front of each shack was a pile of dead men and women. All mixed, though. In the barracks, we were almost on top of each other. I was convinced that I would never come back alive from this hell" (Prijatelj Steje, 1996, 4),

Ana Videnšek: "This is a camp where we had to trample on the dead so as not to trample on the dying. A place where death has lost all price and man has ceased to be even a number" (Videnšek, 1996, 9).

"The Bergen-Belsen camp is burned and destroyed. Only the graves remained, which the fire could not erase from the earth and from our memory" (Videnšek, 1996, 9).

Vida Zavrl wrote a poem that included the following lines:

But I also have to lie down

In this German hospital.

Oh, yes, I could run away!

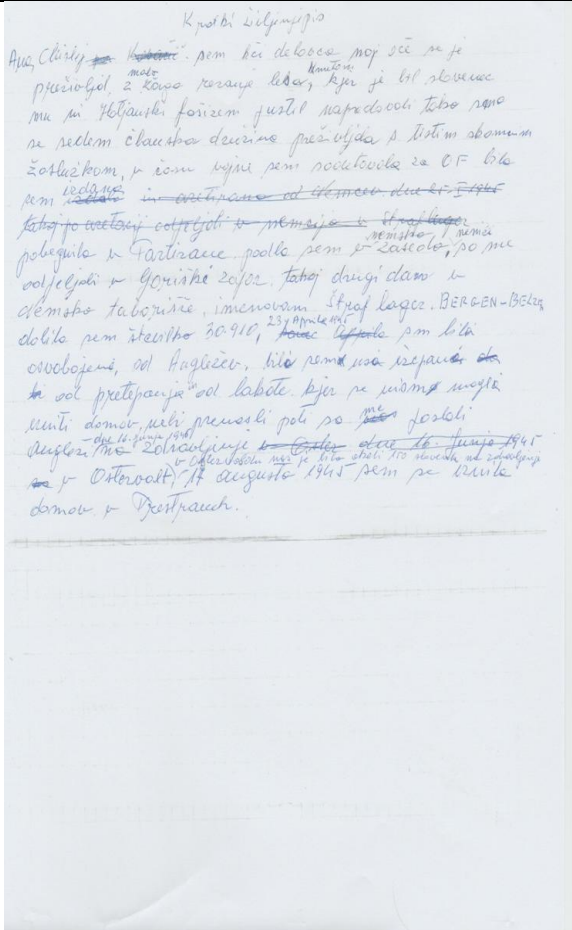
For me, there is no health here. (Zavrl, 1996, 11)

¹⁰ Marjana Baumgarten Briški (1914–1969), arrested on 12/09/1944, and sent to the Begunje, Ravensbruck, Salzgitter, and Bergen-Belsen camps. Born Marijana/Marjana Baumgarten, later Lt. Baumgarten-Briški, born in Maribor on 11 November 1914, died on 25 August 1969.

¹¹ Manuscript source.

2.1.3 Short biography, 2011

In a short manuscript biography, Anica Kovačič wrote some basic biographical information about her life.

<p>Kovačič, Anica: A Brief Biography [2011¹²]</p> <p>I am Ana Kovačič (<i>née</i> Mislej), the daughter of a worker. My dad used to make a living with a saw, cutting wood for farmers. Because he was Slovenian, Italian fascism did not let him advance. So, a family of seven made a living on that modest income. During the war, I worked with the Liberation Front. I was betrayed, and arrested by the Germans, on 25/01/1945. Immediately after my arrest I was taken to Germany, to a camp, and escaped to the Partisans. I fell into a German ambush. The Germans took me to the Gorizia prison. Immediately the next day I was taken to a German camp called Bergen-Belsen. I was given the number 30,910. On April 23, 1945, I was liberated by the English. I was all exhausted, from the beatings and from starvation, and because I could not return home, could not withstand the journey, I was sent by the English, on June 16, 1945, to be treated in Oster. On June 16, 1945, at Ostervolt. In Ostervold, there were about 150 Slovenian women undergoing treatment. On August 17, 1945, I returned home to Prestranek.</p>	 <p>Figure 4: Short biography by Anica Kovačič.</p>
--	--

¹²It is claimed that Anica Kovačič wrote her short biography in 2011.

2.1.4 List of survivors, 1945 [1980]

The separate sections of Anica Kovačič's notebook, allegedly written in 1980, are named on the basis of the first sentences or contents, and consists of the following:

- Bergen-Belsen
- Motto: Signoria rosa / Ti mando mia fotografia / Perke mia ri rode kaj / Kuando guarderaj la / Mia fotografia / Tanti saluti e baci / Da mia Rozi
- Bergen-Belsen
- According to the original, May 1945
- List of surviving female internees recorded in 1980
- Current records, 1980
- Maiden names
- Exact current address
- Born in Bergen-Belsen
- Bergen-Belsen deaths
- Died after the war at home
- Are they still alive?

Meeting Anne Frank, 26/01–31/03/1945

Historians¹³ from Pula recorded a video interview with Anica Kovačič and produced a transcript of it.

The key sections in the interviews with Anne Frank are as follows:

<p>MEETING ANNE FRANK SHE WAS SICK WE HEARD GUNFIRE WILL BE WHAT WILL BE WE WERE JUST WAITING HOMECOMING READING THE DIARY SATISFIED WITH THE DIARY</p>	 <p>Figure 5: Screenshot from the interview with Anica Kovačič.</p>
---	---

In the first part of the interview, Anica said that in the *Bergen-Belsen* camp, where she knew Anne Frank from January 26 to March 31, 1945, "this little girl [...] cried terribly, because her mother died, her sister died and she was left right alone."

In the second part of the interview, titled *She Was Sick*, Anica recalled trying to cheer Anna up and comfort her:

She [Anne Frank] said that she wouldn't last.

¹³ Dr. Igor Jovanović and dr. Igor Šaponja.

I said, "Be patient, hold on," I held her, I said, "Don't die. No, no, hold on. Just keep it that way!", right?

She said, "I won't make it," she said.

"I won't."

But then she died.

She died with me holding her in my arms.

Of *The Diary*, Anica said, "I was pleased that [Anne Frank] had written a true story [...] And of course, we just felt we were all like her." When asked by Igor Šaponja if anyone was interested in the fact that Anica knew Anna, she replied "Nobody asked."

Anica's story raises an ethical question with regard to the Slovenian public, because on 17 March 1965 an extensive article was published in the Croatian newspaper *Vijesnik* entitled "I Knew Anne Frank", with photographs of the two young women. However, this story did not arouse the interest of the public either in 1965, nor in 2024, even though in 2006 historians from Pula finally found Anica Kovačič, having been helped by Rina Smajla.

Vijesnik, 1965

On March 17 1965, the Croatian newspaper *Vijesnik* published a long interview with Anica Kovačič with the following subheadings in bold: *Chaos reigned in Bergen-Bels*, *The first meeting with Anne*, *The only witness in Yugoslavia*.

Anica Kovačič, from Idrija pri Bači, near Tolmin is probably the only Yugoslav woman who knew the unfortunate girl and was her friend until her death. [...] On an unknown day in late March 1945, Anne Frank died in the Bergen-Belsen Nazi camp. Twenty years have passed since then, and it seems to us that Anna is alive, that she is here among us – we meet her in libraries, films or theatres. (Vidic, 1965, 5)

The story was more or less ignored, while Anica Kovačič was too modest to draw attention to herself. In January 2023, a park in Pula was named after Anne Frank, and on May 19 2023 the historians Jovanović and Šaponja held a lecture on the friendship between Anica and Anne, which was attended by the author of this article, who became acquainted with this story for the first time at that event.

In the Bergen-Belsen camp and her friendship with Anne Frank



Figure 6: Vidic, J.: I Knew Anne Frank, 03/17/1965.



Figure 7: Image on the project website. <https://stoljeceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/>

Staff file of SS-Oberscharführer Karl Josef Silberbauer, 2011

In August 1944, after two years of hiding in the attic of an old house in Amsterdam, the Frank family was arrested along with their roommates, among whom were the young sisters Anne Frank and Margot Frank. In the spring of 1945, the two girls died in the Bergen-Belsen camp. They were arrested by a senior SS officer, Karl Josef Silberbauer, a man from Vienna who worked for the Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst in Amsterdam. His personal file has been held by the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia since 2011. How the dossier ended up in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia is the subject of further research (cf. Dr Tadej Cankar's "The cruel fate of the Anne Frank family is also connected with Slovenia", Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (21/10/2023)).¹⁴

Silberbauer arrested eight people hiding in the attic in 1944. In 1946 he was working as a police officer in Vienna, as he had been before World War II. He was tracked down by the famous "Nazi hunter" Simon Wiesenthal (1908–2005). In a written statement, Silberbauer said that he would probably have forgotten about the arrest of the people in the attic if Anne Frank and her diary had not become so famous. He remembered many details about the arrest, but nothing about who had betrayed the girl, her family and the others who were hiding.¹⁵ The Vienna police suspended

¹⁴ <https://365.rtvsl.si/arhiv/dnevnik/174995456>.

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/feb/02/the-betrayal-of-anne-frank-by-rosemary-sullivan-review-who-tipped-off-the-nazis>.

Silberbauer during the investigation, but he was able to return to work when he could not be prosecuted. It was concluded that in 1944 he was acting “on orders” and behaved “correctly” during his arrest. Investigating how the staff record ended up in the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia is a task that remains for others.¹⁶ The question of who betrayed Anne Frank’s family was also the subject of further research between 2017 and 2022, but it still remains an open question,¹⁷ and is beyond the scope of this article.¹⁸

In the Footsteps of Anne Frank (1958)

On March 29, 1944, Anne Frank heard a speech on the radio by the Dutch Minister of Culture, given from exile in London, who called on people to publish their diaries, poems, memoirs, and so on when the war eventually ended; thus, she began to correct her diary herself, with the prospect of possible publication in mind. Until then, she had been writing a diary for private use, as writing allowed her mental freedom while hiding in the attic. Anne not only wrote a diary, but also wrote fairy tales [34], poems, stories [5], a book about Egypt, verses in memory books [4], and a collection of quotes from authors such as Shakespeare. Her collected works have not yet been translated into Slovenian.

In the book *In the Footsteps of Anne Frank* (1958), Ernst Schnabel published interviews he conducted with 42 of the 76 people mentioned by Anne in *The Diary*. Interestingly, the book was also translated into Slovene and staged as a radio play in 1959. *The Diary of Anne Frank* itself has been staged several times in theatres, e.g. in an adaptation by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett (translated into Slovene by Jaro Dolar (1958, 1960)), as a monoopera (Grigorij Frid, 2007; at the Mini Theatre (2023)) and as a dance narrative at the Koper Theatre (2023).

Otto Frank, Anne’s father, came to Ljubljana in 1966, as he was visiting a Slovenian student, Ljubica Babič,¹⁹ with whom he corresponded in English. At that time, the first Slovene translation of *The Diary* was being prepared (the first translator was Albert Širok; 1969, 1972, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1984), followed later by a translation by Polonce Kovač (1994) and an expanded edition titled *The Collected Works* (2008)).

The Diary of Anne Frank is still the subject of numerous reviews, adaptations (including a graphic novel), and adaptations (films, animations, etc.).

¹⁶ <https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/go-in-depth/was-anne-frank-betrayed/>.

¹⁷ <https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/news-and-press/news/2022/1/17/statement-cold-case-investigation/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/jan/17/anne-frank-betrayed-jewish-notary-book#:~:text=The%20note%20claims%20van%20den,used%20by%20those%20in%20hiding.>

¹⁹ Zaplatil, Marjan (1966): Father of Anne Frank in Ljubljana. *Diary*, 08.04.1966. Č. J.: “In each of them I see a piece of my Anna and Margot...!” *Ljubljanski dnevnik*, 08.04.1966. “The Father of Anne Frank in Ljubljana”, *Dolenjski list*, no. 13, year XVII, Novo Mesto, p. 9, April 14, 1966.

The fact that Anica Kovačič knew Anne Frank is important for Slovenian literary history, so it is necessary to inform the Slovenian and international public that we can now add to the list of the "42" friends of Anne Frank, and add the girl in whose arms Anne died.

Jovanović and Šaponja recorded a valuable interview with Anica, transcribed it and wrote articles about the friendship of Anica and Anna at a tragic time. From a historical distance, they analysed the horrors of World War II, which we all hoped would not be repeated, but, unfortunately, are being repeated. The two historians analyse in depth the friendship between the two girls, as well as others who knew Anne in Bergen-Belsen, such as Marianne Brandes Brilleslijper, Hanna Goslar,²⁰ Irma Sonneberg Menkel, Nanette Blitz Konig²¹ and Gene Turgel.²²

It is likely that Anne Frank was known by others who suffered in the camp, but they did not survive or did not remember her.

Sources and Literature

Blažič, M. M., Kovačič, J. (2023): Orpheus from hell - a selection of songs from the concentration camps performed by Aleksander Kulisiewicz. *Angloamericanae journal*. 8, 1, 9–49.

<https://aaj.ielas.org/index.php/Angloamericanae/article/view/57>, <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=144161>.

Jovanović, I. (2003): Kako smo upoznali Anicu Kovačič. V: Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): Mednarodna konferenca Jeziki sožitja, jeziki konflikta. ["How we met Anica Kovačič. In: Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): International Conference Languages of Coexistence, Languages of Conflict."]

Jovanović, I. (2023): Poznavala sam Annu Frank. Predavanje: 20. 05. 2023, Štinjan, Pula. V: Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): Mednarodna konferenca Jeziki sožitja, jeziki konflikta. (URN:NBN:SI:doc-DRBFJH77 from <http://www.dlib.si>). ["I knew Anne Frank. Lecture: 20. 05. 2023, Štinjan, Pula.]

²⁰ For further research, it would be worthwhile to check Hanna Goslar's connection with Slovenian culture, as Goslar is a fairly common surname in Slovenia.

²¹ <https://research.annefrank.org/en/personen/f5df9355-f5f5-4c81-ae21-e25305f0046a/>.

²² <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2018/06/22316-memory-gena-turgel-bride-belsen-who-cared-anne-frank>.

- Jovanović, I., Šaponja, I. (2016): Bili smo samo brojevi: Istrani u koncentracijskim logorima u Drugome svjetskom ratu. Pula, Udruga antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Grada Pule, Povijesni i pomorski muzej Istre, Istarsko povijesno društvo. ["We Were Just Numbers: Istrians in the Concentration Camps of World War II" Published in Pula by the Association of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Anti-Fascists of Pula, the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria, and the Istrian Historical Society.]
- Jovanović, I., Šaponja, I. (2018): Transkripcija video intervjuja z Anico Kovačić. ["Transcription of a video interview with Anica Kovačić"]
- Kovačić, A. (1980): Seznam internirank evidentiranih v letu 1980. Rokopis. ["List of internees recorded in the year 1980. Manuscript."]
- Kovačić, A. (1980): Znašli smo se v taborišču Bergen Belsen. Rokopis. ["We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp."] Manuscript."
- Kulisiewicz, A., Kovačić, J. (2020): Orfej iz pekla: lagerske pesmi Aleksandra Kulisiewicza. 1. natis z dodanim CD-jem. Ljubljana: Radio Slovenije – Prvi program, ZKP RTV Slovenija, ZRC SAZU.
- Kulisiewicz, A., Kovačić, J. (2023): Orfej iz pekla: lagerske pesmi Aleksandra Kulisiewicza. 1. ponatis z dodanim CD-jem. Ljubljana, Radio Slovenije – Prvi program, ZKP RTV Slovenija, ZRC SAZU.
- Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): Mednarodna konferenca Jeziki sožitja, jeziki konflikta. [Conferenza internazionale Lingue di coesistenza, lingue di conflitto : 30° anniversario di ZRS Koper, 50° anniversario di SLORI Trieste e il prossimo 100° anniversario di INV : Koper, 6-8 giugno 2024 : programma e sintesi. International Conference Languages of Coexistence, Languages of Conflict: 30th anniversary of ZRS Koper, 50th anniversary of SLORI Trieste and the forthcoming 100th anniversary of INV: Koper, June 6-8, 2024: programme and abstracts] (URN:NBN:SI:doc-DRBFJH77 from <http://www.dlib.si>).
- Virk, T. (2017): Etična literarna veda med kakofonijo in pluralnostjo. Primerjalna književnost. 40, 2, 13–31.

Appendix 1 Anica Kovačič: List of female internees [1945] registered in 1980 22

Signoria rosa **Ошибка! Закладка не определена.**2

Bergen – Belsen -List of female internees registered in 1980 22

According to the original, May 1945 22

List of surviving female internees recorded in 1980 22

Current Records, 1980 23

Maiden names 23

Exact current address [1980] 23

Born in Bergen-Belsen 24

Bergen-Belsen deaths 24

Died after the war at home 25

Are they still alive? 25

Appendix 2 Anica Kovačič: We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp [1945] 26

We found ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen camp [1945] 26

In this camp there were mainly Jewish women from all over Europe and a few others who had been brought here lately, where other camps were able to be emptied 8

So we came to Bergen Belsen, a veritable death camp 27

The English commander smoked 27

On the second day after the liberation, Yugoslav prisoners of war arrived in Bergen from Fallingston 27
Slovene Women in the National Liberation War I, page 483, Winter 1944 30

ATTACHMENT 3 Anica Kovačič, transcription of video interviews, 2018 [Igor Jovanović, Igor Šaponja] 33

1. Meeting Anne Frank, 2018 33

2. She Was Sick 34

3. We heard gunfire 35

4. Will Be What Will Be 36

6. Homecoming

36

7. Meeting the Diary 37

8. Satisfied with the Diary 37

Annex 1

Anica Kovačič: List of female internees [1945] recorded in 1980

Signora Rosa²³,
 Ti mando la mia photography
 Perche rido qua
 Quando guarderai la mia photography
 Say hello and say hello.
 Dalla tua Rozi

Kovačič Anica

Bergen-Belsen - List of internees registered in 1980

	According to the original, May 1945	List of surviving female internees recorded in 1980
1.	Skuflič, Roška, Pula, Matič 31	
2.	Radan, Pink, Pula, Noodles 2	
3.	Drozetič, Ana, Pazin, Batluh 2	
4.	Ferlin, Marija, Pula, Vodnjan, Gajana 172	
5.	Starki, Angela, Pazin, Miločki breg 18	
6.	Nemarnik, Vera, Roč, Nugla 2	
7.	Gajtanič, Marija, Pazin, Katun 13	
8.	Gajtanič, Albina, Pazin, Jerolini 2	
9.	Ravazini, Mafalda, Goriza, Via Castelo 20	Ravašini, Mafalda, 1923, Gorizia, Italy, Via Regata, 16
10.	Horvat, Aleksandra, Belgrade	
11.	Budovski, Irena, Belgrade	
12.	Bolkovac, Ankica, Karlovac, Vukova gorica 26, Prelišče	
13.	Mervič, Marija, Gorizia, Ajševica 18	Maklic, Marija, Gorica, Ajševica 53
14.	Mervič, Alojzija, Šempas, Mihael 36	Pavšič, Alojzija, Šempas 178
15.	Jeronesi, Alvira, No. Andraž	Veronese Zanusso, Elvira, Goricia, Via Trieste
16.	Brezigar, Marta, Gorizia, Deksle 106	Šulica, Marta, Deskle, Anhovo, Sreberničeva 23
17.	Sirk, Danica, Gorica, Hlevnik. 7	Sibav, Danica, Dobrova, Neglo 45
18.	Margon, Stanislava, St. Peter, Na krasu 72	Vpenko, Slava, Gorica+, Vilharjeva vas 10
19.	Pupis, Mara, Tomaj 26	
20.	Lazar, Martha, Gorizia, Vrtovin 32	Lazar, Marta, Škofije, Škofije 54, pri Koper
21.	Žerjal, Dragica, Komen, Gabrovica	Humar, Dragica, Postojna, May 1, 8
22.	Košuta, Helena (1927), Volčja draga 324	Gregorčič, Helena, Volčja draga 69
23.	Archon, Stephanie, Renche	Arčon, Stefanija, Renče 65292, Arčoni 20
24.	Zajc, Angela, Gorica, Plužna pri Cerknem	Zajc, Angela, Idrija

²³ Mrs. Rosa,

I send you my photograph
 Because I laugh here
 When you look at my photograph
 Many greetings and kisses
 From your Rose

25.	Preifalk, Breda, Ljubljana, Staretova 23	Preifalk, Breda, Ljubljana, Gorkičeva 14
26.	Poljšak, Marija (1925), Duplje pri Vipavi	Lokar, Marija, Ajdovščina, Lokavec 28
27.	Polans, Milka, Otlica, Angelska gora	Zupan, milka, Nova Gorica, Kidričeva 33
28.	Močnik, Tereza, Idrija-Spodnja 8	
29.	Perčič, Ivanka, Ljubljana, Dobrunje, Zadvor	Perčič, Ivanka, Ljubljana, Scopolijeva 1
30.	Franzot, Elizabeta, Ljubljana, Kneza Koclja	Franzot, Betka, Ljubljana, Franfetova 4
31.	Vienna, Silva, Ljubljana	Snoj, Silva, Ljubljana Polje, Skojevska 26
32.	Boštjančič, Eva, Ljubljana	Boštjančič, Eva, Trzin Mengeš, Prešernova 1
33.	Bremec, Marija, Kočevje	Bremec, Marija, Kočevje, Turjaška 4
34.	Dombi, Anica, Kočevje	Dombi, Anica, Kočevje Šalka vas
35.	Frangeš, Štefka, Maribor	Frangeš, Štefka, Maribor, Krančičeva 5
36.	Katrašnik, Francka, Ljubljana	Birsa, Francka, Ljubljana, Dražgoška 12
37.	Klemenčič, Anica, Ljubljana	Klemenčič, Anica, Ljubljana Polje, Sostrska 38 c
38.	Kristan, Milica, Kočevje	Malenšek, Milana, Novo mesto, Prešerenov trg 11
39.	Lah, Fani, Ljubljana	Lah, Fani, Ljubljana, Pokopališčka 8
40.	Omejc, Nikica, Ljubljana	Omejc, Nikica, Ljubljana, Sp. Rudnik 10
41.	Ravnikar, Cilka, Ljubljana	Ravnikar, Cilka, Ljubljana, Celovška 124
42.	Žerovnik, Ivica, Ljubljana	Žerovnik, Ivica, Domžale, Župančičeva 9
43.	Kos, Lojzka, Trbovlje	Oražem, Lojzka, Ivančna gorica, Srednja vas 2
	Current Records, 1980 Maiden names Exact current address [1980]	
44.	Žbona, Clementine, Grbar	Bitežnik, Clementine, Grbar, Grbar 134
45.	Velikonja, Lojzka, Vogrsko	Bratina, Lojzka, Nova gorica, Cankarjeva 24
46.	Faganel, Jelka	Faganel, Jelka, Šempas, Ozeljan 74
47.		Gruden, Anica, Šempas, Šempas 24
48.	Cvetrežnik, Antonija, Kromperk	Kome, Antonija, Nova gorica, C. IX. Corpus 54
49.	Remec, Rozka, Užice	Kožuh, Zorka, Nova gorica, Tolminskih puntarjev 8
50.	Markič, Ljudmila (1927), Deskle	King, Lyudmila, Anhovo Deskle, Bevkova 38
51.	Lipizzaner, Danila	Lipičar, Danila, Kojsko, Šmartno 70
52.	Kolenc, Cvetka, Avče 63	Mrak, Cvetka, Nova gorica, C. 15 september 3
53.		Nemec Nanut, Olga, Vrtojba Špeter pri Gorici, Cesta na cuklis 9
54.	Ušaj, Anica, Kromberk	Novič, Anica (1926), Nova gorica, Grčna 4
55.		Povšič, Hilda, Grgar, Ravnica 42
56.	Pregel, Marija, Renča	Pregel, marija, Renče, Mahorini 12
57.	Fajt, Sonja, Renče	Pregel, Sonja, Renče, Renski podkraj 21
58.	Remec, Milenka, Užice	Remec, Milenka, Šempas, Vitovlje 8
59.	Archon, Ida, Renče	Žigorn, Ida, Renče, Renčki podkraj 6 p.
60.	Koren, Elvira (1894), Murska Sobota	Koren, Elvira, Nova gorica, IX. Korpus 73, Dom upokojenecv
61.	Arčon, Boženka, Renče [56]	Lukežič, Boženka, Izola, Predvor, 1. maj 6
62.	Archon, Mariana, Renče	Vučenovič, marija, Zagreb, Ul. Rade Končarja 248
63.	Vodopivec, Zora, Dornberk	Žagar, Zora, Koper, Pobegi Frankova 18
64.		Spacapan, Anica, Renče 57
65.	Srebernič, Alojzija, Goriška brda	Košir, Alojzija, Ljubljana, Postojška 11
66.	Cebokli, Klavdija, Kobarid, Creed	Čolanović, Klavdija, Beograd, 29. november 66
67.	Geogrič, Marija, Ajševica pri Gorici	Kavčič, Marija, Vrhika, Vrhnika 18
68.	Lazar, Maksa, Vrtovin	Černigoj, Maksa, Škofije pri Koprui 50

69.	Branik, Villa (1928), Stnadrež	Brajnik, Vilma, Gorizia, Via del Corso 8, S. Andrea
70.		Bujstato ragossi, Anese, Monfalcone, Via dela santa 18
71.	Žerjal, Lojzka, Trieste Križ	Bogatec Žerjal Lojzka, Trieste Križ
72.	Srebrnič, Danica, Goriška brda	Savrin, Danica, Gorica, Via capella 4
73.		Gulin Slatte, Milena, Goricia, Via Roma 14
74.		Bernardi, Irma, Gorizia, Piazza Tomased 22
75.	Žigon, Marija (1924), Ajdovščina	Erjavec+, Marija, Ajdovščina, Vilharjeva 13
76.	Furlan, Antonija, Vipava Loznice	Nabergoj, Antoiija, Ajdovščina, C. IX. Korpusa 1
77.	Rebek, Viktorija, Ajdovščina	Valič, Viktorija, Dobravlje, Stomar+ 9
78.	Škvarč, Roza++, Ravan col 61	Škvarč, Roza, Ajdovščina, Col 61
79.	Mrak, Gizela, Tolmin, Grudnica	Bratuž, Gizela, Tolmin, Žagarjeva 10
80.	Gregorčič, Jožefa (1909), Vrsno	Gregorčič, Jožefa, Kobarid, Vrsno 27
81.	Torkar, Angela (1920)	Kemperle, Angela, Bača pri podbrdu 24
82.	Kenda, Alojzija, Tolmin, Goljubin+	Kenda, Alojzija, Tolmin, Pokljukin+
83.	Miselj, Anica, Prestranek 54	Kovačič, Anica, Idrija pri Bači 10
84.	Zajc, Dora, Lasce pri Cerknem	[Zajc, Dora], Bovec
85.	Zlatoper, Marija, Cerčno	Obid, Marija, Cerčno 20 A
86.	Vončina, Marija	Obid, Marija, Cerčno 104
87.		Bratuž, Cvetka, Divača, Istrskog odreda 295
88.		Skapin, Zora, Kozina 13
89.		Butinar, Marija, Koper, Vatovčeva 2
90.		Vergolin, Cvetka+, Piran, Alme Vivode 21
91.	Brelih, Pavla	Brelih, Pavla, Rijeka, Cerčno
92.	Mrak, Milka, Grudnica near Tolminský Lom	Trampuž, Milka, Izola, Okrob. Revolucije. 83
93.	Štrekelj, Milka, Tolmin Quarry	Bratuž, Milka, Slap ob Idrijci 40
	Born in Bergen-Belsen	
94.	Skrabat, Mira, Bergen Belsen (b. BB)	Hladnik, Mira, Nova gorica, Šempas 87
	Bergen-Belsen deaths	
95.	Mozetič, Vilka, Rene+, 1925	
96.	Peternel, Natalija, Kostanjevica pri Igu+, 1924	
97.	Saksida, Virgilija, Gradišče, Prvačina, 1926	
98.	Komelj, Danica, Ajševica, 1918	
99.	Komelj, Vasilja, Ajševica, 1923	
100.	Štrukelj, Karolina, Smihel pri Šempasu, 1916	
101.	Štrukelj, Angela, Šmihel pri Šempasu, 1921	
102.	Markelj, Ivanka, Šempas	
103.	Zidarič, Marica, Dekla, 1928 (died on the way home)	
104.	Zidarič, Marica, Dekle, 1928 (died on the way home)	
105.	Srebrnič, Cvetka, Solkan	
106.	Bunc, Marija, Volčja draga, 1894	
107.	Rojc, Ivanka, Dornberk, 1920	
108.	Jerizia, Karla, Avče, 1897	
109.	Jermal, Anton++, Avče, 1873	

110.	Kerševan, Berta, Branik	
111.	Toplikar, Antonija, Osek/a, 1926	
112.	Remec, Karla, Vitovel pri Šempasu, 1897	
113.	Babič, Slavica, Trnovo pri Gorici, 1926	
114.	Hlede, Alma, Števerjan	
115.	Boža, Bilje	
116.	Gruden, Stanka, Šmihel pri Šempasu, 1923	
117.	Aurora, Trieste	
118.	Marušič, Jožefina, Štandreža+	
119.	Servant, Juliana, Žeja pri Prestranku, 1919	
120.	Manfreda, Rozina, Tolmin Poljubin, 1917	
121.	Blacksmiths, Justina, Tolmin Poljubin, 1905	
122.	Perdih, Marija, Tolmin Poljubin, 1891	
123.	Šfiligoj, Marija, Krmin	
124.	Žigon, Silba, Ajdovščina, 1925	
125.	Štrukelj, Elizabeta, Tolmin lom, 1921	
126.	Koren, Zlatka, Murska Sobota	
127.	Šfiligoj, Erika, Gorizia	
128.	Šfiligoj, Marta, Gorizia	
129.	Kafol, Evlalija, Tolmin Grudnica	
130.	Valentinčič, Marija, Bača podbrdo, 1905	
131.	Kovač, Angela, Bča pri Podbrdu, 1902	
132.	Gruntar, Palmyra, Staro selo	
133.	Pičulin, Frane+, Žaga pri Bovcu, 1882	
134.	Šulin, Jože, Žaga pri Bovcu, 1895 (09/05/1945)	
135.	Elda, Črni kal Loka	
	Deaths after the war at home	
136.	Rupena, Majda, Trieste, 1897	
137.	Janežič, Slavka, Trieste	
138.	Marija, Črni kal	
139.	Blikaraj Baldas+, Fani, Deskle, 1927, 1959*	
140.	Markič, Vera, Deskle	
141.	Rjavec, Marija, Gorica Trnovo, 1926	
142.	Skok Colja, marija, Brda Cerovo, 1969*	
	Are they still alive?	
143.	Nada, Črni kal Loka	
144.	Kristina, Črni kal	
145.	Jadranka, Trieste	
146.	Francka, Trieste (activist)	

Annex 2

Anica Kovačič: We Found Ourselves in the *Bergen-Belsen* Camp [1945]

We found ourselves in the *Bergen-Belsen* camp [1945]

In this camp there were mainly Jewish women from all over Europe and a few others who had been brought here later, when other camps were being emptied. No one went to work there. There was also no food, nor water, and like all the others until the liberation on April 15, we were given only one piece of bread, and even that was poisoned. This is what the English found out after the liberation when they asked the guards why they didn't distribute 30,000 loaves of bread when they were in storage. This was supposed to be the second ration of poison they were supposed to get. But the Allies had freed us before this, thwarting a plan which was to kill all the prisoners. The German guards disappeared, the Hungarians came in their place, and the only Germans who remained were in the watchtowers. The Hungarians were no better than the Germans.

The English army came and passed by the Belsen camp, which was lying in a grove on a path that held there with signs saying "no entry, area for exercises with weapons," or something like that. The camp itself was signposted anywhere, not even in the neighbouring village of Bergen. The Germans told the advancing English that there was a typhus epidemic in the unevacuated villages. They hung white flags everywhere, so there was no fighting in this area and the English rushed forward, but an English colonel got out and wanted to see the area and discovered the Belsen camp with 10,000 unburied corpses, with 60,000 living prisoners, of whom 13,000 died the following month. He arrived alone with his guard.

After this terrible discovery he left to come up with a solution as quickly as possible. In about two hours he returned with a lot of trucks and soldiers. Only at that time were finally liberated.

The SS men and women who they found were imprisoned and put to work – they buried the corpses, cleaned the latrines and the like. They immediately started sharing food with us, their own rations. They were not prepared for this discovery. The barracks that had previously housed the SS men were converted into hospitals or gathering places for the sick. Because everything had to be improvised, without doctors, without medicines, without proper hospital food. The rest were moved to other, slightly better barracks. Because+ they were all put in safer, healthier buildings, they burned down this horribly infected camp. On a large plaque, which was soon to taken and shown to others, was written in capital letters:

Here was the shameful Belsen concentration camp, liberated by the British, on April 15, 1945.

Here we found 10,000 unburied bodies. Since then, another 13,000 have died. All victims of the German New Order. In Europe and an example of Nazi culture.

Written by Dr Marijana Baumgarten Briški

So, we came to Bergen Belsen, a veritable death camp. In front of each shack was a pile of dead men and women. All mixed together. In the barracks, we were almost on top of each other. I was convinced that I would not come back from this hell alive unless the Allies arrived at the right time. We knew very well that they were not far away, for we heard the thunder of guns. But, when? Will be destroyed first?

A few days later, we were taken over by the Hungarians. The Germans were gone. Le++ had been eating bread on the last day, and it had been poisoned. Many poor souls had eaten it. Thankfully, I came too late, when it was gone. Then came the day of freedom. We were greeted cordially by the English soldiers. That happy day can never be forgotten. A few days later, a Lagerführer [camp commander] was brought in. Looking back, we watched as he had to drive already decomposing corpses into a cart under military guard+ and load them onto giant piles with his hands. After our release, we were taken to a convalescent home in Osterwald, near Hanover+ for a full three months. There were about 160 of us there. Under American command, the Germans had to serve us. With the best stuff.

Anything we wanted to eat, we got. But what we wanted most was to go home to Yugoslavia.

Written by Roza Prijatelj Stele

The English commander smoked. After his experience in the Bergen-Belsen camp, the commander said, "It will never be possible to describe what is now seen in Bergen-Belsen and what happened in it."

On August 10 we set out from this harsh country for our homeland. For 7 whole days we drove through the bombed and destroyed country towards our homeland. When we were looking forward to it so much, first to our families+ then to the receptions. We stayed there for two days on Friday and in the rain. On August 17, I returned home again. We wanted freedom.

Written by Lyudmila Yeshevnik

On the second day after being captured, Yugoslav prisoners of war arrived in Bergen from Fallingmouth. One of them wrote:

"This is a camp where we had to trample on the dead so as not to trample on the dying. A place where death has lost all price and man has ceased to be even a number."

That's how people saw the camp even after they were saved. But let's see how it was for the last month.

We were crammed into one block, eight hundred of us, where there was nothing to do. We sat on the floor, next to each other, and slept like that. We didn't have any luggage. You could put all your possessions in your pocket if you had them. I didn't have one. Of course, we were also without blankets.

At noon there was a soup with kohlrabi or cabbage. Maybe we can even eat some potatoes sometime. The scoop held half a litre and was never full at all+. There was no coffee, broth+ or bread for the last month. Dinner+ was gone. If it was there, it was shared with a spoon. Three teaspoons each. Water – we haven't seen it for almost a whole month. It rained a little, so we drank rainwater.

The crematorium no longer burned, could no longer devour the gigantic mass of the dead. That's why they made a bonfire. They took turns loading firewood and bodies and burning them all together. And we were able to watch all of that. It wasn't seen everywhere. From where I was, I could see it well. The deceased were moved with one car, and one cart with a horse, and one smaller cart was pulled by the prisoners. There were four prisoners. They pulled the cart from eight to ten o'clock. They worked like this for days.

The other day I saw one prisoner who was pulling a cart fall under the cart. And the SS kicked him and they were able to load him onto a cart and take him alive to the crematorium looking at that pile of firewood. And the corpses were burning. One day they ran out of firewood and they began to bury the dead. One day they appointed people: one to dig pits, others to carry the bodies, and two at a time they took the dead by their hands and dragged them along the ground to the pit. That has been the case for the last fortnight. Every day, all the dead were naked. The dead were stripped on their last day.

When the men started this procession, we thought we wouldn't be involved. But on the second day, it started here. In the middle of the blocks, one body was covered with tarpaulin. We dragged dead women there for more than a week.

Even the punishment here was not soft. For some offense, it was necessary to kneel on the sand or kneel on the wet ground with raised hands. A Russian woman named Tamara – a young woman – has a stone thrust into her mouth and with her hands raised she was kneeling for part of the day until she was knocked down on the ground. None of us were allowed to help her. We looked at her with tears in our eyes. There were all of us nationalities and gypsies in the blocks. One morning we looked at the guards

Soldiers with white armbands on their sleeves. The Germans were gone, and the guards were gone. We were guarded by Hungarian soldiers. They fired at anyone who crossed their space. There was no more cooking in the kitchen. It was Wednesday. It was the same on Thursday. When there were no Germans, we went ++ to a warehouse and

looked for clothes and they were also needed. On Friday morning, the Germans were back in position, and the guards had returned. Our hopes seemed to have crumbled into dust. The guards said that there would be cooking that day and that we would also get bread. We had to wash our clothes. That pile of clothes was just right there. A few days later, we picked them up again. There was a soup.

In the afternoon we were given bread divided into nine portions. It was mouldy, but it was bread we hadn't seen in a month.

The rest of us were powerless, without will, without heart. We were no longer human. When I got here, I saw the men falling to the ground during the roll call and no one helped them. We watched them over the wire and we were sick. And now, when good comrades were dying, we didn't cry. We accepted everything as inevitable. On Saturday, we still got soup. The atmosphere was like before the storm, shots were getting more frequent. And the Germans, were smoking, smoked the abyss+ up and down the camp.

We didn't have lights in the blocks either, but the last night was all lit up. In the morning, when we got up, there was still a guard. Or the guard was gone. To appeal, there was no more cooking in the kitchen. Everything was restless. We looked impatiently in all directions and listened to what was happening. What it was what it would be.

About twelve o'clock the disturbance increased. We saw a bunch of people in the men's camp, but we didn't know what it meant. The crowd of people moved, and a car drove up from the women's camp. It had a white star. And four officers were in it. Men came after it. Someone made a short speech in German. He said that the German army was defeated, that the war was over, that they would take care of everything: food, clothing and the return home. That was on April 15, 1945.

We must keep order and not leave the camp arbitrarily. This was very necessary, as we were all infected with typhus and various other diseases. And everyone. We became like children, crying, laughing, screaming. We didn't know what to do with the joy. Being free has given us new strength. On Monday, the English brought us water by car so that we could drink and boil the potatoes we got in the warehouse. They could give us more. On Tuesday, Yugoslav prisoners of war came to see if anyone was Yugoslav. They also brought us some packages. They helped us recover. In the afternoon there was also bread. On Wednesday, regular food arrived.

We were in the camp until April 23, 1945. That was kind of arranged. Patients were also given milk. The next day of the week, on the 23rd of April, 45, the sick began to be taken to the hospital. From April 15 to 23, they made themselves tents and slept outside in the open air. The men were also under the tents. We got them in one warehouse. When we got into the warehouse and we picked up, and so we set up our

tents. The men helped us. Only after a fortnight where we transferred to a military school. We were each given our own bed. We were also able to wash. Most of us had to put our clothes+ because+ they were rotten on us as we couldn't wash them. When we had no others to put on and no water to wash.

In spite of this+ death has not yet moved away from us. It just moved in with us. Many more women died. And so did Slovenians. We were taken to Ostervolt+ for convalescence. They provided us with everything. But the desire for the homeland did not give peace. We were rushed home in a hurry. When we were brought out of the camp, the English immediately burned the whole camp because it was infected.

The Bergen-Belsen camp is burned and destroyed. Only the graves remained, which the fire could not erase from the earth and from our memory.

Homeland, we paid for you dearly.

Written by Ana Videnšek

Slovene Women in the National Liberation War I, page 483, Winter 1944

I

It's about to begin,
The trumpet has already blossomed
But we poor Slavs
Were expelled from our homeland.

Soon the birds will sing,
The songs chirped beautifully.
Oh, flowers, birds, where are you now
Where is my birthplace.

And the meadows are already green
And the pastures are all beautiful
And there's a lovely garden in front of the house
But here and there everywhere only death.

II

The farmers drove us from our homes,
took what they had, picked up
What they couldn't take
They threw it in the trash.

They made a nasty joke
They beat us and cursed us
They shout out terribly in front of us
They poured ice water on us.
We prayed to God,
That he may help us,
Peace will be with us again
Once the German beast will be clean on the ground.

If we still get back
Into the love of our hometown
And if the ages were to pass
We will not forget the culprits.

III

My heart is saddened
And it hurts terribly
When I remember the beautiful
Days of my youth.

When I was a young girl
I was mowing the lawn
I was singing a song
I was picking daisies.

Daisy tell me, tell me
I tore the white petals
I'm going to get a groom,
Which I chose.

And my happiness came,
As I wished:
A farmer came and took me
And we loved each other.

We promised each other to death
We will love each in times of trouble
We looked forward to a better day
There was no separation for us

Now we had to part ways

At once leave each other
As a German beast from Satan
broke our bond.

IV

Where are the mountains, where are the hills
Where are all our brethren.
They live there in the forests
And they don't sleep through the night.

When I think of them too, the days
Happiness hurts me
Where they suffer there too
Just like us.

Heart-wrenching sadness haunts me
When I think of my husband
They chased him away from home
Weak and sick.

But I have to lie here
In this German hospital.
Oh, yes, I could run away!
For me, there is no health here.

Written by Vida Zavrl

ANNEX 3

Anica Kovačić, transcription of video interviews, 2018²⁴ [Igor Jovanović, Igor Šaponja]

1. Meeting Anne Frank [Meeting Anne Frank, 1945],²⁵ 2018

- Anica Kovačić	- That's what I saw [19]45 in January, I saw it, didn't I? - That time I went somewhere [there], she was in the [Bergen-Belsen] camp over there, right? - Well, and this little girl (...) cried terribly, but where her mother died, her sister died, and she was left right alone. - And I, because I was, because I went in January [1945], at the beginning, at the end of December [1944]. - And after that, she (..) and cried all along, right? - And after that, I comforted her, held her, comforted her, and she was left all alone. - Dad was in another camp and she didn't know anything about him, did she? - And at the same time, her sister and mother died inside, didn't they? - Well, after that, we were friends. - [Then] we were all together, weren't we? - Then I said, and I comforted her, don't cry, right? - And that, after that, she died at the end, at the end of March [1945].
- Anica Kovačić	- She said, because she's...
- Igor Jovanović	- How did you get along?
- Anica Kovačić	- A little bit after, a little bit like that, a little bit closely, and then so that I understood quite a bit, didn't I? - And she did, she understood me too, what is that no? - So she spoke, more after, more Czech, didn't she? - Because the Polish one... - No, Czech, yes? - I'm Polish. - But now I don't know. Polish it seems to me, she spoke more. - And so I understood her a little, a little bit, so I knew German quite well. - They spoke German there, didn't they?
- Igor Jovanović	- What did she look like?
- Anica Kovačić	- She?
- Igor Jovanović	- Yes.
- Anica Kovačić	- She was such a little girl and she was quite lively,

²⁴<https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/svjedocanstva/zatocenistvo-u-koncentracijskom-logoru-bergen-belsen-i-prijateljstvo-s-anne-frank/>

²⁵<https://stoljceeuropskogantifasizma.ipd-ssi.hr/svjedocanstva/zatocenistvo-u-koncentracijskom-logoru-bergen-belsen-i-prijateljstvo-s-anne-frank/> [12/30/2024]

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> but no, she was just a scarecrow [scared]. - But just like once her sister died, and when her mother died, and after that she didn't, she didn't, she wasn't (...) she was like that (...). - I held her to me, I comforted her, and I held her all together (...) no?. - Well, and so then [she said] "I won't, I won't, I won't, until the end." (...) - Indeed, in the end, she died.
- Igor Jovanović	- How often did you hang out?
- Anica Kovačić	- Every day.
- Igor Jovanović	- Every day?
- Anica Kovačić	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Every day. - We were together, that's the whole point (...) isn't it? - We weren't the only ones in the room, or anything like that, right? - We were all of us in that one room, wasn't it? - We've all been there . . .
- Igor Jovanović	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - And in the barracks, which barracks were you in? - In which barracks did you live?
- Anica Kovačić	- I don't know what the number was, I don't know if it was 25 of something like that.
- Igor Jovanović	- And she was in the other barracks?
- Anica Kovačić	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - She was in the other barracks. - Yes, but we got out there.

2. She Was Sick [She Was Sick]

- Anica Kovačić	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I knew, yes, she was sick, no? - Only then, we couldn't help anything, right? (...) It's not the others, it's all written in here. - This is the one from Anne Frank...
- Igor Jovanović	- A hut?
- Anica Kovačić	- Yes.
- Igor Jovanović	- Tell me, she told you she wouldn't make it?
- Anica Kovačić	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes. - That she would not last, she said. - I said, "Be patient, hold on," I held her, I said, "Don't die. No, no, hold on. Just keep it that way!", right? - She said, "I won't make it," she said. - "I won't." - But then she died. - She died with me holding her in my arms. - Yes. - So it was over there, in there in the [Bergen-Belsen] camp, - These are all pictures from the camp. - But here they are buried, that. - Look, these are graves.
- Igor Jovanović	- Is it a common grave?

- Anica Kovačič	- Yes, yes, yes, yes.
- Igor Jovanović	- Maybe your friend Juliana is there too?
- Anica Kovačič	- Yes, yes, . . . she's in there.
- Igor Jovanović	- When did she die?
- Anica Kovačič	- She died, and she was there before the end of the war. The end of the war.
- Igor Jovanović	- And you got sick there?
- Anica Kovačič	- Yes. - Because that's what it is. - It's just me somehow, she was moaning more, so she felt more inside. - But I didn't, somehow I was more energetic (...) - So yes, we have to remember that this was typhus.

3. *We heard gunfire [We heard gunfire]*

Anica Kovačič	- Well, and then they came (...) then there was the liberation, before, before the liberation, in January, I think January 15 [1945], we heard shooting, right? - And there, well, and after that, the Germans put the poison inside things, into the food, into the bread. - The bread was poisoned, not food, bread! Well, and after that, 15,000 of them died, they died just before the liberation, right? (...) We walked on the ground, and on it, on the floor, everyone was dead, they were ... That was right, right at the end. - And then 10,000 of them died and the English couldn't save them. - So many of them died because of the poison, and so they wouldn't be seen they were thrown right into the furnace, that's what they had in mind, right? So that the Americans who come would not see how many are dead. - How many are there, no? - They wouldn't say they threw them in the furnace, would they? - They just came in secretly, they came in secretly, and that's why they got all those things, these other ones that came to them in a hurry, and they left all those papers on the table and they're just (...) on the table. - There's that office, they ran away, and they picked it up so that the Americans could see everything that was inside, everything, everything was written down.
---------------	---

4. Will Be What Will Be [What Will Be, Will Be]

- Igor Jovanović	- And have you ever feared for your life?
- Anica Kovačić	- I haven't yet, I'm not yet, because it will be, it will be what it will be. - We've been there, but it's going to be whatever it is, right? - Well, and after that we're in there, so towards the end it wasn't like at the beginning, right? (...) What.
- Igor Jovanović	- Anne Frank was different? She was afraid?
- Anica Kovačić	- Yes. - You see, her mother died, her sister died, she was left alone and she was (...) carried away.
- Igor Jovanović	- Did she give up the fight?
- Anica Kovačić	- Yes, yes, right.
- Igor Jovanović	- And she was young?
- Anica Kovačić	- Yes, she was 17 years old.

5. We Just Waited [We Just Waited]

- Igor Šaponja	- What were your tasks in the camp?
- Anica Kovačić	- Nothing, nothing, nothing...
- Igor Jovanović	- Or were you just... ?
- Anica Kovačić	- Nothing... We walked, we sat inside the camp (...) - Nothing else.
-	- So...
- Anica Kovačić	- We talked (...) sat ...
- Igor Šaponja	- So you' were basically just waiting...
- Anica Kovačić	- We just waited, waited there while they were shooting, and we shuddered, and we said (...) now they have to be either close or they will [kill us]. - We were just waiting for them to destroy us.

6. Homecoming [Homecoming]

- Anica Kovačić	- I was sick at the time, I was in and out of hospital, I was really sick. - Before we got home, we got there. - When the liberation came [1945], the Americans put us in for treatment, until the rest of us healed enough to go on the road, they didn't let us go, right? - Well, and after that they took us, that was in August [1945], we came home in September.
-----------------	--

7. Meeting the Diary [Meeting the Diary]

- Anica Kovačič	- As for the diary, I don't know, it was in the newspaper, because what I saw (...) is a biography of Anne Frank, and I always took that.
-----------------	---

8. Satisfied with the Diary [Satisfaction with the Diary]

- Anica Kovačič	- I was pleased that [Anne Frank] wrote a true story, right? - And all together. - And of course, we just felt [that] we were all like her, and I was proud. - I was just happy that it was what it was, because I have that. - I have that. - History, the whole life of hers.
- Igor Šaponja	- Do you already know about her diary?
- Anica Kovačič	- I mean, I was so pleased
- Igor Šaponja	- When you saw that she became famous?
- Anica Kovačič	- Yes.
- Igor Šaponja	- Was anyone interested in the fact that you knew her? Have you had...
- Anica Kovačič	- I myself, you know, didn't tell anybody. - Because she was there (...) let's say she belonged to Germany or [Poland] (...) I don't know which country it was.
- Igor Šaponja	- Germany, the Netherlands?
- Anica Kovačič	- Well, she was there [Bergen-Belsen], no one knew anyone here, right? - And I couldn't (...) no one here knew the books, did they?

Sources and literature

- Jovanović, I. (2003): Kako smo upoznali Anicu Kovačič. [How we knew Anica Kovačič] V: Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): Mednarodna konferenca Jeziki sožitja, jeziki konflikta. [International Conference Languages of Coexistence, Languages of Conflict: 30th anniversary of ZRS Koper, 50th anniversary of SLORI Trieste and the forthcoming 100th anniversary of INV : Koper, June 6-8, 2024 : programme and abstracts] (URN:NBN:SI:doc-DRBFJH77 from <http://www.dlib.si>.)
- Jovanović, I., Šaponja, I. (2016): Bili smo samo brojevi: Istrani u koncentracijskim logorima u Drugome svjetskom ratu. Pula, Udruga antifašističkih boraca i antifašista Grada Pule, Povijesni i pomorski muzej Istre, Istarsko povijesno društvo. ["We Were Just Numbers: Istrians in the Concentration Camps of World War II" Published in Pula by the Association of Anti-Fascist Fighters and Anti-Fascists of Pula, the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria, and the Istrian Historical Society.]
- Jovanović, I., Šaponja, I. (2018): Transkripcija video intervjuja z Anico Kovačič. ["Transcription of a video interview with Anica Kovačič"]
- Kovačič, A. (1980): Seznam internirank evidentiranih v letu 1980. Rokopis. ["List of internees recorded in the year 1980. Manuscript."]
- Kovačič, A. (1980): Znašli smo se v taborišču Bergen Belsen. Rokopis. [Anica Kovačič: We Found Ourselves in the Bergen-Belsen Camp [194c] [Manuscript]

Mikolič, V., Rolih, M. (2024): Mednarodna konferenca Jeziki sožitja, jeziki konflikta. [Conferenza internazionale Lingue di coesistenza, lingue di conflitto: 30° anniversario di ZRS Koper, 50° anniversario di SLORI Trieste e il prossimo 100° anniversario di INV: Koper, 6-8 giugno 2024: programma e sintesi. International Conference Languages of Coexistence, Languages of Conflict: 30th anniversary of ZRS Koper, 50th anniversary of SLORI Trieste and the forthcoming 100th anniversary of INV: Koper, June 6-8, 2024: programme and abstracts] (URN: NBN:SI:doc-DRBFJH77 from <http://www.dlib.si>).

Summary

The 1965 *Vijesnik* report on the “Slovenian friend of Anne Frank”, or Anica Mislej (née Kovačič, 1923–2019) received little attention from the Slovenian public. Even when it was taken up again by the Croatian project “A Century of European Anti-Fascism” (led by Igor Jovanović and Igor Šaponja), it remained largely unnoticed.

In 2018, Anica Mislej became the focus of research by historians from Pula. A video interview with her, which was recorded in 2013 and published in 2018, also included statements from Reina Smajla, another survivor of Bergen-Belsen. Anica spoke about her friendship with Anne Frank during her time in the camp. She told how they spent time together every day and talked in several languages, probably Czech, Polish or German. Anica comforted and encouraged Anne in her final days. Tragically, Anne Frank died in Bergen-Belsen on 31 March 1945, with Anica by her side.

Anne Frank’s death symbolises both the tragedy of Bergen-Belsen and the fading of her story in Slovenian memory. Anica’s connection to Anne symbolises an overlooked chapter of Slovenian history.

In their 2023 article “How We Met Anica Kovačič”, Jovanović and Šaponja analysed her testimony, placing her encounter with Anne Frank in the context of the history of the Holocaust and emphasising Anne’s connections to other prisoners such as Hanne Goslar and Gena Turgel. While it is possible that Anne was known by others at the camp, there are few survivors who can recount such experiences.

The story of Anica and Anne’s friendship is important in understanding the enduring power of human relationships and togetherness, even in the midst of profound suffering.