

# Silenced Memories and Practices of Un-Silencing: Mobilities in a Dynamic Alpine Border Landscape

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## Abstract

*This article addresses a complex heritage configuration in the northern part of the alpine Adriatic region, taking a relational approach to landscape, memorials, and actors. Albeit shaped by wars, population exchanges, and multiple emigrations, this border area is primarily represented as static in Austrian, Italian and Slovenian national heritage discourses. An ethnographic exploration into silenced memories of mobility reveals a dynamic, outward-looking cross-border setting. An analysis of biographical memories and artistic initiatives leads to three modes of un-silencing, which affirm inhabitants' right to dwell and traverse dominant representations of ethnic belonging and exclusion, mobility and settledness, and mono- and multilingualism.*

**Keywords:** ethnography; alpine region; landscape; mobilities; memory; heritage; ethnicity; multilingualism; biography; art

Silenced memories may be unspeakable within the hegemonic narrative. They do, however, speak eloquently in a language of embodied practices, omissions, or biographical narratives. As newcomers to the Alpen-Adria-Universität Klagenfurt/Univerza v Celovcu, we noticed eloquent silences amongst students and staff. They made us aware of a complex heritage configuration in Carinthia, Austria's southernmost federal state. Historical incidents and conflicts appeared to be relevant for deep-running divides in the present. They are the continuation of a historical formation where repercussions of World War I were articulated with a settled Slovene minority and longstanding regional bilingualism. The resulting divisive narrative has been politically exploited for decades.

We set out to look for silenced (counter-)memories in the northern alpine Adriatic border region of which Carinthia is part, to trace the complexities and the reappraisal of local and supra-regional histories and heritages. Based on observations and interactions, interviews, and digital ethnography, we found that interpretations of the present are grounded in a regional heritage structured by multiple silences, perpetuated by different communities of memory, governmental measures, and activities aimed at economic development. Exploring the representation, silencing and un-silencing

of regional heritages in various national narratives, we shifted our focus to everyday experiences, stories, and informal practices of memory-making and un-silencing. Different forms of mobility stood out amongst the silenced and un-silenced memories that traverse, subvert or challenge hegemonic discourses on the area.

Our ethnographic research is located in the northern alpine Adriatic border region. It encompasses the southern part of Carinthia in Austria, the northwestern Slovene regions Gorenjska, Goriška, Obalno-kraška, and the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northeast of Italy, including the micro-region Valli del Natisone, the villages situated in the valleys of the river Natisone. First, we outline how contested pasts have shaped the region's contemporary heritage and social memory, including the silenced parts. Second, we visit the politicized alpine landscape through public memorial culture, including official memorials, commemorations, and heritage initiatives, as well as visible landmarks in the form of unintentional memorials and material relics of the past. Third, we argue that unofficial heritage practices and social memory carry counter-narratives. Turning to silenced memories of migration, mobility, and multilingualism, we present, fourth, three modes of un-silencing by examining contemporary individual and artistic cross-border practices as expressions of a social memory that challenges hegemonic discourses. We conclude with a look at alternative narratives.

The northern alpine Adriatic region was the site of major European conflicts in the twentieth century. Major battles of World War I and World War II were fought here, followed by territorial reconfigurations, population exchanges, and nationalization measures. The Cold War drew one of its frontlines through mountains and valleys, leaving military fortifications behind after its end. Depopulated mountain villages are evidence of various waves of emigration. All this shaped official heritage as well as collective social memories, silencing some dimensions and representing others. Positioned between Western and Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe, the borderland is marginalized due to weak socio-economic development. Today, the area is slowly developing into a tourist destination.

Marginality is not only a feature of peripheral geopolitical location and weak economic position. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing points out, margins are sites "from which we see the instability of social categories" and "where discrepant kinds of meaning-making converge" (1994, 279). While border areas are often politically and economically peripheral, they are also "linguistic, cultural and ethnic areas of transition in which various different influences cross paths and often also mix together" (Ther 2003, xi), and important "spaces of transfer between different memory cultures" (Ostermann 2012, 246). In borderlands, where old controversies persist, legacies and memories of unresolved conflicts over territorial demarcations, ethnicities, and identities assume a significance they do not have in the national center. Looking at the margins of Europe (Römhild 2009) sheds light on conflicts of the past and their contemporary repercussions, especially on crossings, interlinkages, creolization, and omissions. Latent ambivalences contained in hegemonic narratives of the past are tangible in everyday practices at the periphery and in the marginal landscape itself. This is why, with the rise of populist politics in recent years, we took a closer look at the alpine Adriatic

border region and its troubled past, where many of the divisions exploited for political gain by Austrian, Italian, and Slovene right-wing politicians have their painful origins. Political conflicts are also “conflicts over emotional practices” and “clashing emotional styles” (Scheer 2012, 218), reproduced, implemented, and valorized in political discourses, commemorations, and actions. We approach the complex and contentious heritage configuration (Hamm 2020) through relations between space, heritagization, and memory-making in artistic and everyday practices.

Oral historian Luisa Passerini recommends taking the word silence “literally to indicate what is pre- and post-sound, particularly the area around the word, the space where speech is located” (2009, 238). She proposes a relational perspective on silenced memories: “When trying to understand connections between silence and speech, oblivion and memory, we must look for relationships between traces, or between traces and their absences; and we must attempt interpretations which make possible the creation of new associations” (2009, 240). Taking a relational approach, our research confronts powerful discourses with everyday and artistic forms of social memory and informal heritage practices. To capture the power relations between silencing and un-silencing, we approach the region through the lens of contentious heritage.

Beneath imageries of idyllic alpine tourist landscapes—seemingly untouched by the flows of globalization—and despite worried debates on the depopulation of remote regions, our research uncovers a rich social memory of political, military, and ethnic conflicts, subsequent labor migrations, periodic returns, and multi-local settlement. Hegemonic national discourses dominate the memory landscape in all three parts of the border area. The alpine landscape as a whole is caught up in the discourse on progress and backwardness, where mobility symbolizes the urban and the present, while the settled symbolizes the rural and the past. To maintain the Alps as a counterfoil to urban progress, this discourse requires the erasure of mobility. A closer ethnographic look at seemingly depopulated villages counters the widespread assumption of a settled and stable rural area.

Ambivalences that are contained but silenced in hegemonic narratives and political centers become palpable when engaging with the marginal landscape itself. Tim Ingold (1993) conceptualizes landscape as a permanent store of past material and marks left by cultural developments of times past. He emphasizes the relational context evoked by engaging with a landscape, which is culturally shaped by the experiences of transient people and settled inhabitants, and draws attention to local practices of actors and the impact and effects these have on space. Our research reveals new relations established in everyday and artistic practices of connecting to the landscape. Profound knowledge on and personal experience of mobility and ethnic identifications, virtuosity in multiple language use, and linguistic displacement reveal a heritage configuration that is more complex than dominant narratives suggest. Such knowledge, contained in social memory, enables border dwellers to create new modes of un-silencing in the private space of home and family, in entire villages, or by taking artistically enhanced hiking tours in the alpine cultural landscape.

### Unsettling Pasts: Political Conflicts and Ethnic Belongings

Most parts of the provinces of the alpine Adriatic region once belonged to the Habsburg monarchy. Today they form a finely meshed border area. In the course of history, these borders were pushed back and forth, and with them, the populations, with many inhabitants going through several “ethnic metamorphoses” (Purini 2010). Nationalization policies initiated since the late nineteenth century turned ethnic and linguistic difference into a divisive political force. The alpine Adriatic region became one of the main European theatres of World War I, with its frontline running along the mountains, valleys, and rivers.

With the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy after World War I, heated and violent controversies over the distribution of its former territories set in, along with bitter conflicts over ethnic belonging along the lines of language use. Carinthia was now the southernmost federal state of the new Austrian state, with a border to the newly established Yugoslav Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Territorial claims by the Yugoslav side for the Slovene-speaking part of Carinthia were countered by a Carinthian militia. This militarized border conflict was locally propagated as *Abwehrkampf* or “defensive struggle.” As part of the post-war peace negotiations, the *Entente* powers stipulated a plebiscite in the disputed area to be held in October 1920. Following intense propaganda campaigns, a slight majority of the population voted to remain with Austria rather than joining the Yugoslav Kingdom. These events became the founding myth of a distinctively German-Carinthian identity, constructed through profound othering of the Slovene-speaking and bilingual population (Moritsch 1996; Entner 2010a; Holfelder 2020). Under Nazi rule, a strategy of ruthless Germanization and deportations intensified the Carinthian conflict over ethnic belonging (Brunner & Gombros 1990; Entner 2010b). Throughout the post-war decades, the German-speaking elites attempted to silence the Carinthian-Slovene minority and their painful social memory by fueling suspicion of Yugoslav irredentism, refusing implementation of contractually guaranteed minority rights, and withholding cultural recognition (Sima 2006). Tensions came to a head in the 1970s with a conflict over bilingual road signs which significant parts of the German-speaking population rejected vehemently (Gstettner 1988; Hamm & Schönberger 2020c; Entner 2005). Following the rise of the extreme right politician Jörg Haider since the 1990s (Brunner & Gombros 1990, 357), both groups’ representatives eventually established a fragile consensus on the issue in 2011 (Graf & Kramer 2007).

We observed similar strategies of silencing, marginalization, and othering in the Italian-Slovene border area. The administration started the assimilation and Italianization of the Slavs in Friuli-Venezia Giulia shortly after the Italian state’s foundation in 1866 (Banchig 2013, 205), profound anti-Slavic actions set in during the 1920s (Wörtsdörfer 2004; Purini 2010). The Italian fascist party intensified Italianization and started violent actions against Slovene-speaking people and institutions, especially in Trieste and in bilingual border areas like the Valli del Natisone. Hence, actions against and conflicts over linguistic minorities and ethnic belonging have both a political and a cross-border dimension in this area.

World War II generated an echo of conflicting memories that reverberates all over the region. While Nazi-Germany annexed the northern part of Slovenia, Italian fascists annexed Slovenia's south in 1941. Following Italy's armistice with the Allies in autumn 1943, Nazi-German troupes took control of Northern Italy, supported by Italian Fascists. Friuli-Venezia Giulia and parts of Slovenia were attached to the administrative unit of Carinthia as part of the German *Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral*, where partisans and occupiers were facing each other.

After 1945, European national governments strove to create clear-cut, unambiguous national states and identities with the creation of the Italian republic, the Austrian republic, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Different national readings around unresolved incidents during World War II put the blame for certain crimes on the respective other side. These readings continue to shape national narratives as well as silenced memories of former conflicts. Between Italy and Slovenia, there are continuous "silenced and divided memories" on the so-called "Istrian exodus," where Italian-speakers were forced to leave the now Yugoslav peninsula (Hrobat Virloget 2015, 159). Another highly controversial issue is the *Foibe*, referring to deep holes in the ground of the Karst area near Trieste into which the bodies of victims of war crimes were thrown (Cernigoi 2005; Manin 2006; Koroschitz 2013).

Accounts of crimes committed by occupying forces and the unresolved killings and deaths in the turmoil of the post-war period left many questions unresolved. These silences are about collaborations and allegiances that cannot be integrated into the national narratives of the respective countries on their roles during the war (Fransecky et al. 2010). They leave ample space for reduced and distorted versions of events, which continue to circulate for the purpose of revisionist politics (Focardi 2005; Mattioli 2010).

The Cold War, a crucial period especially in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, left a further legacy of silences. As part of one of the Cold War's front regions, the region became the most militarized area in Italy (Baccichet 2015). While Carinthia was not affected by the Cold War in the same way as Friuli-Venezia Giulia and saw considerable touristic development (Koroschitz 2018), this era shaped collective memories through the solidification of an image of the Balkans "as the 'other' of Europe" (Todorova 2009, 3), and created prevailing stereotypes.

Quite a few European border regions have "fragmented cultures of remembrance" (Wóycicki 2004), and some borderlands became "site[s] of transnational symbolic politics" (Becker 2005, 100). For instance, various programs were initiated and implemented between Germany and Poland to support regional development following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The very naming of the alpine Adriatic region highlights a cross-border initiative established in 1978 when the Alpine-Adriatic Working Group in Carinthia began to stimulate cultural, economic, and political cooperation, develop a vision of a peaceful common future, and thus overcome a troubled past. Under the umbrella of the Alpine-Adriatic Group, new "neighborhood politics" (Valentin 1988, 173, author's translation) brought some progress in the field of cultural and economic exchange. Eventually, the idea of a po-



litical working group stalled for several reasons. One was the fall of the iron curtain, as a former member of the group explains: “With the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Alpine-Adriatic lost the special charm of overcoming ideologically determined border lines and bringing together countries with different social systems” (Valentin 1988, 203). Regionally, various actors and institutions made cross-border efforts and realized various projects. Besides transnational natural parks, they established an extensive network of hiking routes known as the Alpe-Adria trail, and built cycle paths running along former train lines. However, on a discursive level, these borders have rarely been transcended, and the multi-layered heritage of the region never became a discursive political focus. A European memory remains a work in progress (Assmann 2007), and so does the institutional realization of a transnational everyday life. For instance, infrastructure between the three regions is poorly developed, as its capitals Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, and Trieste, are hardly connected by public transport. In recent years, infrastructures started to consolidate. The spatial separation along national boundaries is also mirrored in memorials and monuments in the alpine landscape.

### **The Politicised Alpine Landscape—Materialised National Narratives**

Monuments and memorials in Friuli-Venezia Giulia illustrate the relatively linear and homogeneous story of national states, ethnic identity, or language groups that is being told in the region. The example of World War I memorialization illustrates that in these material traces, memories of war, fighters, enemies, victims, and nation-building processes are omnipresent.

With the centenary of World War I commemorated on multiple occasions and with events between 2014 and 2018, the former war landscape was placed in the spotlight of political and cultural happenings. An online article on the development of peace tourism (Wohlmuther 2014) and cultural activities marking the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War I describes the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia as a “great open-air museum of warlike events” (Science Apa 2014, author’s translation). Citizens’ associations and other public and political initiatives engaged in preserving warpaths and turned them into peace walks, with itineraries leading through the last tangible remains of former main battlefields and trenches. Information boards along these routes explain military strategies, some of which were re-enacted during commemorative events. When driving along the alpine valleys’ small streets, one often passes border demarcations, indicating the drawing and re-drawing of national borders after 1918. Besides, hidden in the alpine landscape are several caves that served as a deposit for ammunition or water supply infrastructures for soldiers. Ironically, peace tourism consists mainly in remembering military actions and environments and rarely features people’s everyday perspectives.

Local politics tend to adopt this perspective on the war-scape and perpetuate established narrations. In a statement published on the region’s website, the regional council emphasizes the importance of remembering the past and maintaining its traces throughout the landscape. Besides the initiatives’ cultural work, these new tourist sites also have a significant economic dimension. Debora Serracchiani, the former

President of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, stated in the village of Castelmonte at the presentation of the initiative “Paths of the Great War along the former Border of the Natisone Valleys” that “[t]he rediscovery and enhancement of the ancient paths located on the sites of the Great War (...) serve to make known to the public often forgotten territories and represent an opportunity to revitalize and bring life to the Natisone Valleys while creating new jobs” (Regione Autonoma Friuli-Venezia Giulia 2017, author’s translation). The website then provides information on excursions that offer opportunities to discover “the value of peace among the people but also of celebrating the memory of the countless fallen Italians” (ibid.). The monuments themselves and the mode of remembering represent hegemonic narratives, framed by a national discourse that shapes the collective social memory in the present. By commemorating victims of the war as “Italians,” “Austrians” or “Slovenes,” the national commemoration discourse silences, once more, the specific position of people who have long been in-between national alignments.

While these monuments and infrastructures inform visitors on technical and strategic aspects of former battles, with panels explaining routes or military operations for conquering the territories, other memorials emphasize the Great War’s human tragedy. One of these is situated on mount Kolovrat in the Valli del Natisone, in Slovenia’s immediate vicinity. The *Monumento al primo caduto della Grande Guerra*, the monument of the Great War’s first fallen, was erected at around 50 meters distance to the border, still discernible through an empty border post. It is dedicated to Riccardo di Giusto, who stands as a symbol for the war’s many victims. However, the monument does not only commemorate the fallen. Its position on the edge of the Slovene border, on mount Kolovrat, at the heart of this ethnically heterogeneous area characterized by bilingual inhabitants since centuries, shows that monuments of this kind are “not only sites of memory and sites of mourning, but also sites that mark national territory” (Klabjan 2010, 403). The monuments stylize the countless dead to heroes who sacrificed their lives for the nation and thereby uphold the myth of the nation.

Rather than offering a transversal perspective, the commemorations continue to be framed by national narratives. In doing so, they suggest a clear and straightforward belonging and nationhood among border populations that never existed in this strict sense, as language and culture had traversed boundaries long before they were marked by national borders and continue to do so. The lives and actions of the people commemorated may bear completely different stories and meanings from those represented by the memorials. Their traces remain in cemeteries throughout the region. The information given on gravestones reveals stories of cross-border family relations and multilingualism, occupation and resistance, and inhabitants’ mobility, indicating their stories of emigration and their return to the country of origin.

Besides intentional monuments, implemented with a particular purpose and delivering a clear statement, the Friulian landscape speaks of silences also through “unintentional monuments” (Riegl 1996). Many military buildings remain from the Cold War era. An architects’ studio published one of the few accounts on this topic. As the military archives in this era are still closed, the authors collaborated, among others,

with the former military. While the exact number of empty military buildings and compounds in the region is unknown, an estimate amounts to 285 abandoned military sites (Corde architetti 2016, 88). Such architectural military heritage can be found in city centers, urban peripheries, and the countryside along the Austrian-Italian-Slovene borders. The enormous fenced complexes for thousands of soldiers from all over Italy added to structures that remained from the preceding World Wars, as the „reuse of the existing defensive system was almost never pursued and its constant implementation turned the Friulian territory into one of the densest defensive structures in Europe” (Corde architetti 2016, 19, author’s translation). Friuli-Venezia Giulia presents itself as a distinct political and “strategic” landscape (Corde architetti 2016, 34), where memorials and the architectural heritage underline ideas of power, authority, and nation.

These unintentional monuments at first sight merely provide evidence of yet another political conflict. However, they are closely linked to different individual experiences. Many people moved from Southern Italy to the northern part of the country to work for the military. Due to the limited development of agriculture and industry, the militarization triggered emigration within the region itself, for instance in border areas such as the Valli del Natisone. The Cold War era generated silenced memories of the experience of living on a border and the migration movements connected with militarization. The military strategy vis-a-vis the socialist neighbor reinforced the idea of a Slavic Other and led to further divisions among the population. In the Valli del Natisone, the Italian state, supported by the CIA, implemented the “Gladio,” a secret anti-communist paramilitary service, to observe the nation’s supposed traitors (Pacini 2014). Its existence was revealed in 1990, and it became known that the organization was closely connected to right-wing movements. Such operations intensified the remoteness and lack of development in this area. They influenced not only how it was perceived from the outside but also the social cohesion and relations amongst the population, profoundly shaped by mistrust. Political conditions continue to shape everyday practices, as the example of Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove below shows.

While some military compounds currently serve as refugee accommodation, most remain abandoned and are slowly decaying. Neglect of this heritage indicates the self-perception of a society and ambivalence in dealing with its past. Material representations of a divided history stand in contrast to a living heritage performed in the dynamic processes of people’s everyday experiences. Only a few memorials pay tribute to cross-border practices or the mobility of the border population. One hint to such activities during the Cold War era can be found in the Val Rosandra, a national park just outside Trieste. A small badge fixed on the former border post informs passing hikers that it was possible to cross the border here as early as 1982.

### **Concepts: Social Memory and Contentious Heritage**

The alpine landscape, and the ways people relate to it, can help understand the complex entanglement of the national discourse about the past and recollections of personal experience embedded in everyday practices. The World War I commemorations in Friuli-Venezia Giulia exemplify how heritagization forges a fluid and ambiguous



legacy into a territorially bounded, unified, stable, and monolingual identity, in tune with the national narrative. Silencing, oppressing or forgetting memories that run contrary to this imagined community was crucial in forming modern nationalism, as collective memory “has mainly been effective in virtue of all it has *left out*” (Ginzburg & Gundersen 2005). Codification and legal enforcement of cultural memory can take violent forms (Assmann 1995). In the process of “regulating and legitimizing” heritage (Smith 2006, 82), the silencing of memories in dominant narratives of the past often mirrors historical marginalization or oppression. This explains why the agility and transient dynamics of the border region are unspeakable within collective national memory. In places other than the national narrative, lived experiences and unintentional relics form a social memory that speaks of mobility and multilingualism, displacement, exclusion, and perseverance.

Since Maurice Halbwachs (1991) drew attention to the political and social dimension of memory and its collective cultural construction, scholars have grappled with the rift between collective memory that is publicly represented from a position of power and forms of popular memory produced and reproduced in more fluid and informal ways from a position of exclusion. For Stuart Hall, the impossible position of marginalized experiences is crucial for identity formation: “Identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (Hall 1987, 44). Jan and Aleida Assmann account for this by making an analytical distinction between communicative memory and the more normative, institutionally framed cultural memory (Assmann 1995, 61). However, in everyday practice, both forms of memory-making are “interdependent” (Welzer 2001, 15).

James Fentress and Chris Wickham introduced social memory to tackle the societal influence and various processes comprised in Halbwachs’ concept. Grounded in oral traditions, “social memory is a source of knowledge. This means that it does more than provide a set of categories through which, in an unselfconscious way, a group experiences its surroundings; it also provides this group with material for conscious reflection. This means we must situate groups concerning their traditions, asking how they interpret their own ‘ghosts’, and how they use them as a source of knowledge” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 26). Similarly, scholars of critical heritage studies distinguish between official and unofficial, formal and less formal forms of heritage (Harrison 2010). Memory as representation, understood as a network of discursively articulated ideas (Fentress and Wickham 1992, x), is aligned with what Laurajane Smith (2006) calls the “authorized heritage discourse.” In contrast, unofficial or personal ways of memory- and heritage-making can function as forms of social action (Harrison 2010; Fentress/Wickham 1992). Drawing on life-worlds and creating new significance for traces of the past, “people can transform and refigure the ways in which their societies operate” (Harrison 2010, 245f.).

Producing, affirming, transmitting, or performing alternative narratives of the past can challenge or subvert hegemonic discourses. The “heritage dissonance” (Kisić 2016) resulting from the interplay of official versions of the past and those that are excluded from public representation is increasingly recognized as a productive cul-

tural force that “can function as a form of resistance to hegemonic discourses” (Kisić 2016, 281). Tuuli Lädesmäki and her co-editors highlight “the productive and creative effect of frictions and connections” (Lädesmäki et al. 2019, 13) in the European heritage landscape. Research in a recent EU-project on transmitting contentious cultural heritages aimed at the “productive articulation of conflict and difference, rather than promoting unity and thereby exclusion” (Hamm & Schönberger 2020a, 7f.). Marion Hamm and Klaus Schönberger advocate applying Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonism (2007) to the process of heritage, to create open platforms where difficult pasts can be negotiated without the pressure to terminate irresolvable conflict, but also without perpetuating old antagonisms (Hamm & Schönberger 2020b). Outlining contentious heritage as an “emergent research perspective,” Marion Hamm argues that it “draws attention to the political dimension of history and collective memory” (Hamm 2020, 127). She holds that engaging with the contentious aspects of heritage is worthwhile, “[e]specially where no dispute over a certain manifestation of heritage is publicly articulated, where heritages are silenced, absent or ignored” (Hamm 2020, 110f.). Conflicts inscribed in the power-relations between silencing and un-silencing are not necessarily articulated in public discourse. Although the selective silencing of heritages is not always openly contested, conflicts are always present in strategies of silencing and un-silencing. Our exploration of the alpine Adriatic border landscape adds to the notion of contentious heritage.

As Harrison (2010) has pointed out, “heritage [...] can be something that people create and use actively to maintain the connections between themselves and other places and things” (ibid., 145). Border-dwellers’ ways of relating to the landscape in actions, objects, and performances, evoking corporeal experience, sensual feeling and understanding, demonstrate that a region is “a space created by interaction” (de Certeau 1988, 126). Their cultural productions are performative in that they “do not merely reflect social realities, but constitute them” (Hamm 2020, 130). The corporeal dimension (Butler 1993) of “embodied [heritage] practices” from below (Robertson 2012, 2) adds to their performative potential in transforming and transgressing established boundaries (Fischer-Lichte 2005).

While biographical experiences are rooted in the personal and mainly negotiated and performed in private space, artistic representations and re-formulations assume a more public character. Artistic approaches to memory, heritage, identity, and silence can uncover ambivalences, open up new perspectives, and enhance the visibility of silenced memories. Engaging with silenced memories, artistic and everyday practices of remembering and “past-presencing” (Macdonald 2013, 15ff.) offers alternative perspectives on contentious heritages, challenge imposed national accounts, create new cultural practices of social memory and have the potential to shake and tackle the authorized heritage discourse. The private and artistic cultural production of social memory is both political and “highly personal in its ‘assertion of a right to dwell’” (Muzaini and Minca 2018, 9).

### **Mobilities and Multilingualism: Three Modes of Un-Silencing**

The Valli del Natisone are situated in the Italian-Slovene part of the border area in the North-East of the alpine Adriatic region. The river Natisone rises in the Julian Alps in the borderland and gives its name to the valleys to its right, which comprise of seven municipalities. The further you go into the valleys, the narrower become the country roads that wind through the sparsely populated hilly landscape. Many villages in these valleys range amongst the abandoned alpine homesteads mentioned above (Pilgram et al. 2010). In these remote valleys, everyday practices are traversing the borderlands in ways that question, challenge and subvert a predefined territorial, linguistic and cultural unity of the Italian nation. People living in the villages were confronted with global conflicts like the twentieth century World Wars and nation-state ideologies. The Italian nation-building process turned a Slovene-speaking population who had lived in the valleys for centuries into an ethnic minority. In the nineteenth century, measures were taken to prevent the inhabitants from speaking the standard Slovene dialect. During the fascist dictatorship, these policies came to a head. Speaking Slovene was forbidden altogether, affecting politics and individual positioning ever since.

Donatella Cozzi studied the impact of border politics on and experiences of the Slovene-speaking minority in these border villages, a group that “appear[s] to have been ‘written off’ by Italian state history” (Cozzi 2009, 152). She analyses how people internalize the border by delineating its “inner dimension” (2009, 159) and emphasizes how inhabitants challenge the state’s clear categorizations.

Besides the ethnic aspect, the Cold War’s political handling influenced local living conditions, identities, and practices. The strategic policies of the era led to the depopulation of entire stretches of land. Political authorities literally emptied some of the villages to establish a military protection zone. Since no businesses were allowed to operate in the military zones, hardly any jobs were available. Consequently, more and more people emigrated. They were one of those “groups who are doing much physical moving, but who are not ‘in charge’ of the process” (Massey 1991). Consequently, the Cold War left behind a silenced memory of depopulation, displacement, and loss of home.

At the beginning of the 1950s, about 18,000 people lived in the villages. Today, their number has decreased to about 6,000. In this period, many emigrated to work in Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Argentina, Australia, and the US (Banchig 2013, 344f.). Soon after the war, more than 100,000 Italians found employment as miners in Belgium. As their number was high and the hard work claimed many victims, this is commemorated in one of the few existing monuments expressing people’s experience, located in front of the town hall of the municipality of San Pietro al Natisone. In many families, the experience of emigration is still present, having been passed on through the generations. The story goes that families received sacks of coal for every man who went to work in the mines.

The following parts introduce three modes of un-silencing. After showing how one woman performs her emigration through narrative and material performances, we introduce two cultural initiatives, dealing with the area’s heritage in different ways:

the festival Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove and UNIKUM with its artistically enhanced hiking tours. Their artistic work aims at the transgression of mental, symbolic, and topographic demarcations. By physically experiencing and exploring the alpine Adriatic region, both initiatives develop and support an intimate relationship to the landscape and the stories inscribed in it.

### **Everyday Performances—Glimpses of a Life Story**

By relaying her migration experience, Marica, a woman of around 70, demonstrates how a personal life story is narrated, embodied, performed, and thereby made political. Janine met Marica during an organized walk in the Valli del Natisone; Marica led the group around some villages. She spoke Italian to the (primarily Italian) participants but switched to Slovene when she talked to other locals coming our way. Marica is one of those who have returned. She went to Switzerland as a young girl and worked there in the hospitality sector. In an interview in 2017, she remembers her emigration:

I left in October 1957. And I loved going to Switzerland. Because in my village, they wanted me to marry someone. [...] For the young men who emigrated, there were celebrations in the village and people were singing good-bye. But they wouldn't do that for us girls.

Hers is a gendered perspective on migration and the roles and expectations attributed to young women, which eventually became a reason for her emigration.

Many valley-dwellers were forced to emigrate because of the dire economic situation. Along with the spatial displacement came a linguistic one, as many lost their language. As part of a Slovene minority, the emigrants had been stigmatized as outsiders by their dialect even before they left their villages of origin. Often, the social marginality continued in the host countries, now for being Italian. For Marica, the stigma she had experienced at home continued in Switzerland. She did not speak Italian or Slovenian in public in order to avoid discrimination, as she says, and quickly learned German. Later she moved on to work in Munich, where she met her husband, who originally came from East Germany and shares a similarly mobile background. They stayed in southern Germany for the next 35 years. Eventually, it was her husband who gave the impetus to return to Italy when he retired. Today, they run a small guesthouse for tourists who appreciate the Valli del Natisone, where there is hardly any tourist infrastructure. After the walk, she invited us for a drink and hosted us in her garden, where she introduced us to her two Bavarian lions, garden sculptures not only watching her doorstep but also symbolizing her migration experience and her multiple belongings. Besides narrating parts of her life story, she expressed her multiple identities in several small everyday performances. She demonstrated virtuosity in flexibly applying language for identification and positioning and proved that it is an important instrument, applicable in conscious and situational ways.

Although some emigrants return permanently, some homes in the valleys remain empty for most of the year. However, many of those who stayed abroad and their

descendants maintain relatively close connections to their villages of origin, families, friends, and their bond to the region itself. Even for those who took permanent residency in other countries and continents, the region remains a central emotional point of reference. Many visit their villages of origin during the summer months when various returnee meetings and village festivals occur. The international license plates of the cars that catch your eye during that period bear witness to this.

Policies against minority groups have been and remain a phenomenon in the border area. In Italy and in Austria, national discourses are superimposed on the Slovene-speaking border-landscape and its dwellers. Decades of discrimination and persecution during the years of Nazi-Fascism are shaping personal recollections and a social memory within the Carinthian-Slovene community of memory (Wutti 2013). Artistic expressions and practices can help translate individual experiences with silenced memory into a publicly perceived narrative. This clearly shows in the book “Na pamet. Aus dem Gedächtnis einer Slowenisch-Deutsch schweigenden Familie,” where artist Petra Kohlenprath (2015) enounces silences in her family’s memory as they are passed on in German and Slovene language. Kohlenprath describes several dimensions of silence and its manifestations. While the title hints at bilingual language knowledge and cross-border family history, it also expresses the anxiety and the restraint that comes from not speaking at all. In very sharp and personal vignettes, she evokes how the conflict over languages is transmitted to younger generations, who in severe and sometimes playful ways continue to feel a marginalization that started generations ago.

When talking or writing about life experiences, everyday actors rarely draw an idyllic picture of the alpine landscape. Their accounts show that past conflicts are reproduced in the everyday, but also that the area continues to hold multi-lingual and pluricultural heritages. Material arrangements and narrated experiences give evidence of their agency and the manifold social and cultural mobilities that are an essential but silenced part of this area’s living heritage. Contemporary realities are lived through overlapping and contradictory collective memories, amounting to a contentious heritage. Some may be silent and hardly represented; others are hostile and divisive and perpetuated in bitter antagonisms, for instance, over the rights of the Slovenian-speaking minority. Other memories form a repertoire of border-crossings and convivial relations in a variety of dimensions.

### **Stazione Topolo/Postaja Topolove—Re-Establishing an Imaginary Center**

The international cultural and art festival Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove bears the name of a small village situated in the Valli del Natisone, around two kilometers from the Slovenian border. It has been held since 1994 each summer in July and is curated mainly by Donatella and Moreno. The village’s border location and marginality is inscribed in its name, Topolò, which does not sound particularly Italian. Its entry on Wikipedia illustrates the place’s in-between-ness by listing two names and spellings in addition to Topolò: while the Slovenian name is Topolovo, it is Topoluove in the



local Slovenian dialect. On street signs, the variation Topolove is printed next to the Italian spelling.

In the artistic positions presented at the festival, the village's peripheral location, landscape, and history of depopulation are taking center stage (Schemmer 2018). The festival's program was strongly oriented towards re-appropriating the rural environment and new approaches to its eventful past from the outset. The curators invite artists as well as visitors to interact and build a relationship with the empty houses, stables, streets, squares, surrounding fields, and the people. One of the central places for playing and exhibiting during the festival is the old school building. The principal approach is to establish a new kind of presence and locality.

Donatella grew up in the area and is bilingual. She left the Valli del Natisone as a young woman to study architecture in Venice. In our interview in 2018, she emphasized that she could not imagine returning to the valleys back then. Nevertheless, connections to the area always remained, as she was already running a cultural association there as a young woman. She explained that many coincidences influenced her decision to resettle in the area. One of the reasons was Stazione Topolò, although it was not easy to establish in the area. She explains that when they first held the festival, the fall of the Berlin Wall had only just happened a few years before. Although the mood of the Cold War shaped the mentality of the inhabitants, the people in Topolò supported the project:

The community in Topolò was very tolerant and organic. At that time, it would not have been possible realizing a project like this with people from outside... There was still a climate of cold war, so frightening, full of distrust, of bad thoughts. Everyone had become accustomed over time to living with the need to control the territory. Because they had to protect it from a possible invasion of communists, all this paranoia that everyone who stayed here had was somehow in the pay of this organization called Gladio, which had...a pretty bad history over which the families were also pretty much divided into pieces. My father didn't talk to his brother, this one to the other etc. All a bit of an enemy and all controlling each other. There was a lot of social control. Everyone was an informer.

The Gladio operation divided the people living in the area and adds to a contentious heritage until today, having left silenced memories of distrust and cleavage among the local population. Despite the hostile atmosphere and the difficulties it brought along, Donatella and her partner at the time, who originally came from Topolò himself, decided to locate and initiate the festival in this "post-cold war place" (Kozorog 2014, 43). In the first years, the couple also lived there. The inhabitants were particularly open to the project through connections on different levels. Hence, the artistic festival's establishment and location were driven by personal motivations but took place within a specific political and public setting. Despite divided and contentious memories and values, the inhabitants still share the same environment and living heritage: the grass must still be cut and gardens planted.

The importance as well as the difficulty and complexity of establishing or renewing relations between curators and residents, but also amongst the inhabitants, points to the relational approach that runs through the project:

It's the relations that build places. It's the affections that make places. If a relation is non-affective, let's say a normal working relation, then what remains? Maybe a financial satisfaction. But if instead all relations turn into relations of love, then there will be different levels, right? And in that moment, that thing, that specific place takes on a different meaning. It becomes part of your life. And in the end, this is Topolò. It's really about this sharing in a very transparent way, very lightweight, and at the same time intense. It doesn't ask you to explain who you are, it just asks you to be there, be present, to spend time together. To share something. And this thing has built incredible relationships. So there are always parts of Topolò that are alive all around the world.

Donatella takes up the fear and the distrust that existed, but through the relational approach applied by artists from all over Italy and the world, the festival's activities are not restricted to local narratives. Instead, the conflicts function as a backdrop and stand paradigmatic for the significance of confronting silenced and contentious memories. This open, affective approach is mirrored in the organization of the festival. Everything is kept rather vague. Spectacles, walks, and events start "around noon" or "at sunset," not at a precise hour, which may be confusing for visitors from outside (STAZIONE TOPOLO/POSTAJA TOPOLOVE 2020). Conceptual vagueness and blurring of fixed rhythms and demarcations emphasize once again the importance of an open atmosphere, allowing for spaces of encounter. This approach includes the notion that there is nothing unambiguous in anything.

Movement and mobility are inscribed in the name of the festival: the Stazione refers to a train station, a place where routes and paths cross, a place of arrival and departure, a place of transit, which is missing in the valleys. The name thus refers to the difficult peripheral location of the village that so many people left. According to Donatella, the name explicitly stands for something that cannot be found in a materialized form:

Topolò was a place you couldn't even find on a map. So our credo was: let's make it a place of encounter. [...] One of the first artists of the festival, with origins in this area, created a timetable with arrival and departure times of the trains in the first year. And so there was this timetable, which was finally passed around in the bars of some of the surrounding villages. [...] A folding plan with false sponsors on it.

With the circulation of this fake timetable, the festival playfully approached the village's marginalized position. The artworks reflect upon mobility and consequences of migration movements from different perspectives. If you browse through the catalogs of the last decades, you will see that the themes that emerge repeatedly are identities and negotiations about home and belonging. Donatella says it is the perspective

that matters in the artistic involvements and discussions that take place: the focus is not on the border, which was once heavily armed and impenetrable, but on the idea of being in a center and developing new perspectives for the future.

The curators, artists, and visitors of Topolò are distorting the common understanding of center and periphery, and constantly reflect on and challenge the idea that the urban and rural are contradictory. In artistic works and organizational developments, curators and artists transfer attributions conventionally related to the city into this peripheral mountain area. Therefore, just as in other important centers, there are two embassies in the village, representing relations to the Netherlands and New Zealand. By creating urban references, curators and artists position the festival in an imaginary center and generate a continuous relation between people and spaces. In fact, the village steps out of its marginal position and instead centers the periphery and the narratives inscribed into this marginalized landscape.

Topolò is more than an art exhibition. Artists do not deal with landscape as a memorial but counteract hegemonic discourses through their appropriative actions, transcend the boundaries of established narratives, and find a new language and new perspectives (Kozorog 2014, 53). Even more important, the festival itself provides occasion and setting for a gathering of people. Approaching contentious heritage relationally is a delicate way of un-silencing by touching conflicts without perpetuating them.

The initiators want artists and visitors to experience the village and its area with all their senses. One understands the natural environment through the eyes, nose, ears, and legs. Walks through meadows, forests, and streams, and installations along these paths are an elementary part of the event. By entering the village, moving the body through its tiny roads, spending an afternoon or an evening there, communicating with the others, being present, the festival stimulates reflection, dialogue, and tight contact with the people and the landscape. Relational and spatial practices are designed to find new readings of this landscape. In this sense, the festival can be an example of un-silencing memories, as it focuses on the consequences of depopulation and contested memories from different perspectives and encourages a re-negotiating of the border area.

### **UNIKUM—Walking the Landscape**

Passing hikers may notice the abandoned military compounds, the plaque in Val Rosandra, the Bavarian lions at Marica's doorstep, or the closed shutters in villages like Topolò. Experiencing the landscape itself can make them palpable as signs of un-silencing in ways beyond a vague sense of nostalgia or a photographic motive. In the process of walking on partly overgrown agricultural tracks, old trade routes, or cracked tarmac roads, the landscape unfolds as a "pincushion of a million stories" (Massey 2013, 3). The University Cultural Center Klagenfurt / Kulturni center univerze v Celovcu or UNIKUM, founded in 1986 and affiliated with the Carinthian university, incorporates the physical and mental activity of walking the landscape in many of their activities. UNIKUM's directors Gerhard Pilgram, Emil Krištof, and Niki Meixner

describe the Center as a “place for applied cultural work that combines artistic practice and creative research” (UNIKUM 2020, author’s translation). As visual, media-, performance, and sound artists as well as curators, they address silenced memories with art-trails, performances, concerts, and exhibitions. UNIKUM positions itself as part of a bilingual Carinthia, for instance by relaying all information in Slovenian and German, and, at times of heightened tension and when the political situation requires it, by light-handed commentary that is at once humorous and biting behind a surface of creative gentleness. UNIKUM’s aesthetic activities are taking into account the ambivalent heritage politics of the place, affirm a claim to be part of it and yield to the desire of escaping the bitterness of ever-perpetuated conflict. Roaming the alpine landscape while “reading” the silenced memories contained in it allows for a departure from the entrenched situation in Carinthia while providing ways to connect the place, and maybe oneself, to the wider borderlands. In the process of walking, one literally moves away from ideological trenches. Maybe the most popular of their formats is the artistically enhanced hiking tour—a form of gentle tourism and, as we will show, a mode of un-silencing.

Early in our exploration, we participated in a philosophical hike in the Carnian Alps in Friuli titled “Landscape as a Text.” It was part of a cycle of different ways of approaching the landscape, the other two being “Landscape in Motion” and “Landscape in your Ear.” We vividly remember the physical experience of the day: the early start in Klagenfurt, together with two coach-loads of co-walkers, the steep ascent up a still-barren pre-spring mountain, the relief as we arrived at the first resting-point and the water bottles came out, settling down on the dry grass to enjoy the first philosophical intermezzo. Moving on in loose formation, silent or casually chatting to familiar and unfamiliar people, a dry-stone walled track took us past a village with all doors and windows shut. A sense of contemplation was punctuated by the strain of walking, resting, listening to readings on walking, thinking and landscape then moving on again. In the absence of any spectacular destination, the landscape itself became the destination. The day concluded with an excellent meal, and the coach journey back to Carinthia. Refreshing our memory of the philosophical readings by Wilhelm Berger and Gerhard Vitzthum on UNIKUM’s YouTube channel, we found an accurate reflection of our physical experience. The walk was enriched by gems from the cultural history of walking going back to the ancient Greeks and spiced with rebuttals of the eighteenth/nineteenth-century romantic approach to walking. For UNIKUM, the landscape is not merely a reflection of the self. Neither do they adopt the competitiveness of touristic summiteers or ambitious explorers. The politics of walking, as practiced by UNIKUM, is about setting things in motion and being part of this movement, suspended in and exposed to otherness (Berger 2004, 20), distant but not detached from nationalist or other exclusionary fixations. In this vein, UNIKUM situate their work in a “communicative space in-between (author’s translation)” (UNIKUM 2020): between various art-forms, between entrenched political positions, between inside and outside, settled and on the move. This liminal space resonates with Homi Bhabha’s analysis of the postcolonial condition as a third space, “which enables other

positions to emerge." It "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (Bhabha 1990, 211). The third space is a space of hybridity, "a place that simultaneously is and is not one's home" (Amherst College 2008). Considering their political agenda of openness, it is not surprising that UNIKUM became a focal point for resistance against right-wing politics in Carinthia in 2000 when the conservative people's party ÖVP formed a government with the far-right Freedom Party.

Besides countless site-specific and often temporary artworks, UNIKUM's artistic research process has led to a range of publications, where the knowledge is gathered systematically, making the region accessible for lovers of remote areas. Seven popular guide-books for hikers cover the cultural landscape of the northern alpine Adriatic region, with a sharp eye for social relations. They combine evocative photography with laid-back descriptions to create landscape portraits that are both poetic and pragmatic. Assessments of the architecture of towns and villages, descriptions of forgotten industries, and stories of resistances, for instance, of the partisan republic in Carnia (Koroschitz 2019) are given the same weight as random encounters en-route or recommendations for places to get a decent meal. In a chapter on the Valli del Natisone, a host is quoted as bidding farewell with the comment: "Qui il silenzio fa rumore" (Vitzthum 2010, 255). In a landscape "where the silence makes noise," walkers are well-advised to take note of the blank spots on the map because "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (de Certeau 1988, 129).

The "Atlas of special places," edited by the Stazione Topolò community and the Slovene cultural association Opoka, invites the reader to discover no fewer than 72 villages in the Austrian-Italian-Slovene borderlands. In the introduction, the authors explain how walking a marginalized landscape, far from the established traffic routes, opens up a new and critical horizon. The villages, places, and walks presented, they write, "stand for the forgotten landscapes on our doorstep, for those areas which have been completely marginalized as a result of emigration or structural change and which represent a kind of parallel world to the economic and tourist agglomerations" (UNIKUM 2011, author's translation). In this way, walking the landscape as open space becomes an act of remembrance. With books, tours, and artworks, UNIKUM produces and provides knowledge that allows the walker to read the landscape, hear the silence and find the stories, highlighting the beauty and the sadness of the passage of time.

### **Transcending Boundaries—The Power of Alternative Narratives**

Exploring practices of un-silencing with a focus on mobility, we found that inhabitants and artistic groups live and operate within a distinctively local dimension while embracing transversal and transnational cross-border perspectives in their narrations and actions. The actors discussed above take a dwelling perspective without reproducing the narrative of a permanent fixed home. At the same time they relate to different forms of mobility. Their attitude enables them to engage with the dynamic relation between mobility and staying put. The actors create connections and reanimate spaces, share an ability to change places, and match this with mental agility. Through



their relational approaches, they mobilize knowledge on constellations that were there before, and for different reasons, were destroyed or oppressed. They disengage from the national discourses covering the area while crisscrossing and marking the borderland in their very own ways. As local dwellers and passing wanderers perform mobility in everyday and artistic acts, long-silenced memories become tangible, presenting a challenge to the idea of rigid settledness while producing a global sense of place. The performative practices of installing biographical markers, temporary settling in a depopulated village, and walking the landscape stand for three modes of un-silencing, each comprising performative practices that claim the alpine Adriatic border region as a transcultural entity by creating it as a tangible, lived reality. Acts of narrating and performing mobility are ways of un-silencing memories from different perspectives. They operate with different means, focusing on multi-layered identities and plurilocality, home-making and dwelling, place, and settledness.

Marica returned to the village of her origin after many years abroad. She shares the story of the multiple de- and relocations she experienced in the course of her migration from a biographical perspective. Marica frames her mobility with the socio-economic conditions and gender aspects of migration. By displaying objects in her garden that clearly originate elsewhere, she turns prosaic garden sculptures into biographical markers that traverse the established narration of uni-local home-making.

While the village Topolò has suffered from population decline, the festival Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove re- and prefigures the village, carrying several kinds of mobility in its name. Mobility is performed as a phenomenon extending across different generations and containing the arrival and contemporary dwelling of artists and other guests. Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove re-establishes movement in everyday village life and re-invents a specific sense of community on top of a broken village structure. Adding and integrating voices and perspectives from outside former structures leads to new forms of temporary home-making/settling.

Without a venue of its own, UNIKUM regularly invites the public to depart and traverse the alpine landscape on foot. Mobility opens up new perspectives; it allows reading the landscape with an open mind, moving on, and finally going, with an open mind, back home to Carinthia. UNIKUM thwarts the hegemonic discourse by gently refusing and traversing what it means to be settled.

An important feature of social memory is dealing with memories in everyday life, integrating them, working them through, repeatedly confronting oneself with them, and reconfiguring them. It may be the easygoing, delicate and non-provocative, witty, and sociable way of everyday and artistic practices that produces their counter-hegemonic quality and annoys not only politicians on the extreme right. Artistic initiatives such as UNIKUM and Stazione Topolò/Postaja Topolove, full of perseverance, distort established narratives and create new discursive formations on what it means to live in this area with its multi-layered contentious heritages. Their ways of handling and reading the landscape give back agency to those who dwell in it. The artists' careful, gentle, and curious approaches to the landscape, its heritage, and inhabitants stand in sharp contrast to the strong emotions intended by memorials recalling death, un-

certainties and grief, unresolved conflicts and revenge, intentionally entrenched in divisive politics.

One example of UNIKUMs challenging interventions was installing a water depth board by Gerhard Pilgram at Klagenfurt's Lendkanal for the project "Stadt unter" in 2017. He graphically modified the markers to indicate a swastika as a commentary on an increase in xenophobic and anti-democratic tendencies in Austria. Turned upside down, the device could also indicate the decline of right-wing populism. After its first installation at the oldest bridge in Klagenfurt/Celovec, it temporarily moved to the university's outdoor area.

Positioning and assessment of right-wing tendencies are themselves part of the complex configurations of Carinthian memory. The region is the birth-place of Jörg Haider, a popular politician of the extreme-right Austrian Freedom Party. In 1999, when he was Carinthia's cultural secretary, he cut all grants for UNIKUM in response to their longstanding critical commentary. The group responded by setting up a shop specializing in "Terror of Virtue" in the center of Klagenfurt/Celovec. A wave of solidarity swept across the Alpine region, with numerous Austrian and international artists participating in the opening. Stazione Topoló/Postaja Topolove, having experienced threats by a right-wing government, supported the action and even offered asylum to UNIKUM. Lived reality had caught up with transversal cross-border practices of un-silencing.

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