

# Resonances of Swissness in Switzerland's *Streichmusik*

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the current resurgence of folk music in Switzerland using the localized practice of *Streichmusik* (string music originating in the adjoining Appenzell and Toggenburg regions in northeast Switzerland) as an example. I examine the relationship between *Streichmusik* and Swissness, a concept used in marketing Swiss products and culture. Swissness highlights contemporary Swiss national anxiety around shifting global, political, and economic dynamics as a rise in nationalism encourages identity politics. I argue that *Streichmusik* is a sonic resonance of Swissness and has been valorized both locally and nationally through the notion of *Heimat* (homeland) and the trope of nostalgia.

**Keywords:** Switzerland; traditional music; folk music; Swiss national identity; nostalgia; *Heimat* (homeland); music and politics

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The video of Swiss rapper Bligg's (a.k.a. Marco Bliggensdorfer's)<sup>1</sup> hit single from 2007, "Volksmusigg," was produced in collaboration with the folkloric ensemble, Streichmusik Alder. The chorus states, in Swiss-German: 'Das isch Musig, Volksmusigg, mir sind Stolzmusig' ('This is music, folk music, we are proud music'). Then Streichmusik Alder plays 'Birre, Birre Wegge, Chäs ond Brot' ('Pear, pear pastry, cheese and bread'), arguably the most famous and often played *Streichmusik* piece, sometimes described as a national anthem of the Appenzell, the region in northeast Switzerland where *Streichmusik* (literally translated as "string music") originates. A prominent feature of the television performance is bassist Ueli Alder (1922–2014), in his late eighties at the time and a distinguished figure in *Streichmusik*.<sup>2</sup> In the televised performance, Bligg seems pleased to be sharing the stage with Streichmusik Alder, the most iconic *Streichmusik* group in Switzerland.

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**Figure 1: Swiss rapper Bligg with Ueli Alder in the televised premiere performance of ‘Volksmusigg’**

Although a chance happening at the suggestion of a television producer, the performance of *Streichmusik Alder* and Bligg was extremely successful on a national level.<sup>3</sup> ‘Volksmusigg’ stayed on the ‘Hitparade-Schweizer Charts’ (Swiss pop radio charts) for twenty weeks, Bligg’s greatest success to date. Subsequently, Bligg began to incorporate folk music and attained incredible popularity; his album, titled *0816*, was in the Swiss charts almost continuously from December 2007 until January 2009. Bligg became labelled as a ‘*Heimat-Rapper*’ (‘homeland-rapper’) because of the frequent inclusion of Swiss folk elements in his music (Hürlemann, 2009). He went on tour with *Streichmusik Alder* and then with *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer) virtuoso Nicolas Senn, and received much acclaim from young audiences (interview, Nicolas Senn, 20 June 2013). Bligg became equated with the concept of Swissness: according to Swiss journalist Patrick Sigrist, ‘Bligg, the name stands symbolically for the modern Swissness. With his popular fusion of typical Swiss folklore and urban rap the rapper has struck the nerve of the time’ (2010, my translation). The collaboration between Bligg and *Streichmusik Alder* had somehow tapped into the zeitgeist. The incidental success of ‘Volksmusigg,’ I contend, comes from an ideological shift of consciousness that has occurred in Switzerland in the last few decades, often described by the term “Swissness.” Bligg’s inclusion of *Streichmusik* highlights contemporary Swiss national anxiety around the nation’s position relative to shifting global, political, and economic dynamics, as evidenced by the notion of Swissness. In this paper, I will explore *Streichmusik* in relation to the history and etymology of the notion of Swissness and how *Streichmusik* has been valorized both locally and nationally through the trope of nostalgia.



Figure 2: Painting of Emil Zimmerman playing *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer) located at the *Zentrum für Appenzeller und Toggenburger Volksmusik* (ZAV—Centre for Appenzeller and Toggenburger Folk Music) (Photograph by Andrea Douglass)

### **Defining *Streichmusik* and the ‘*Neue Volksmusik*’ (new folk music)**

*Streichmusik*, or in Swiss-German dialect *striichmusig*, developed in the Appenzell during the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> To date, *Streichmusik* is primarily practiced in the two half cantons (or districts) of the Appenzell region—Innerrhoden and Ausserrhoden—and the neighbouring Toggenburg valley in northeast Switzerland.<sup>5</sup> The instrumentation of the a typical ensemble consists of one or two violins, a *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer), a ‘cello, a double bass, and an accordion or piano. In 1892, Quintett Appenzell performed for the first time in what they called the ‘original *Streichmusik*’ formation of two violins, ‘cello, bass, and *Hackbrett*. The folkloric ensemble that performed with the Swiss rapper Bligg, *Streichmusik Alder*, sometimes referred to as the Alder Dynasty, is regarded as the most famous example of *Streichmusik* performers. The Alder family has played this music since 1884, the oldest continually performing *Streichmusik* ensemble and many of the local inhabitants view the Alder family as the primary keeper of the *Streichmusik* tradition.

In the last two decades, there has been a rise in popularity of folk music on a national level, giving rise to what some have termed the *Neue Volksmusik* (new folk music: Ringli and Rühl, 2015). The recent addition of a Bachelor’s degree in folk music at the University of Lucerne is both a product and an agent of this resurgence. While there is no one representative national folk music in linguistically and culturally diverse Switzerland, many regional styles have had a revival, especially through innovative performers such as Marcus Flückiger, Nadia Räss, Erika Stucky, and Christian Zehnder, among others.<sup>6</sup> An outcome of this seemingly nationwide interest in folk music was the

founding of the *Zentrum für Appenzellische Volksmusik* (ZAV—The Centre for Appenzeller Folk Music) in Gonten, Appenzell Innerrhoden in 2003 by Joe Manser.<sup>7</sup> Manser had amassed a personal collection of material about the folk music from Appenzell. His father, Johann Manser, was a postal worker by trade but an amateur musician and collector of information about Appenzeller folk music. Johann Manser's book, *Heematklang us Innerrhode* (Homeland Sounds of Innerrhoden) (1979) included the first published transcriptions of *Streichmusik*. Joe Manser and the ZAV continued this process of publishing transcriptions as well as a book on the history and current state of the folk music of the region: *Appenzellische Volksmusik* (2010).

## Research Methodology

The research in this paper is based upon an ethnographic methodology comprising participant-observation and personal interviews. Living and participating in the *Streichmusik* community provided numerous insights into its complex socio-cultural dynamics. My longest fieldwork trip was from January-August of 2012; I resided in Urnäsch, Appenzell Ausserrhoden with my young family.<sup>8</sup> There were also several shorter fieldwork trips in the summers of 2008, 2010, 2013 and 2015. I spent several days a week at the *Zentrum für Appenzeller und Toggenburger Volksmusik* (ZAV—Centre for Appenzeller and Toggenburger Folk Music) using a participant-observation approach. Part of each day included playing *Streichmusik* during a coffee break at the ZAV. Often the ensemble consisted of Matthias Weidmann on *Hackbrett*, Joe Manser on bass, and me on violin. At times, other musicians came to play music or to take lessons with Weidmann, and at the end we would all play together. The pieces ranged from hand-written manuscripts from the archive to parts of the newest edition of pieces that Weidmann was in the process of collecting, called *Schlääzig ond Löpfig*. Every other week I attended the group lesson of two of Weidmann's students, a violinist and a *Hackbrett* player at the 'Musikschule Matthias Weidmann' *Volksmusikwerkstatt* (folk music workshop) in Herisau, located in the same building as Werner Alder's *Hackbrettwerkstatt* (hammered dulcimer workshop). Through rehearsing in ensembles and performing at several *Stobete* (informal musical performances that often occur in restaurants) I was able to learn more of the intricacies of phrasing, dynamics, and bow technique. This participation also seemed to legitimize my efforts to conduct research and probably improved my response rate.

I interviewed performers or audience members who participate in this genre of music, as well as cultural historians, researchers, and other individuals who have a response to this practice. Using the snowball sampling method (Goodman 1961), by the end of my stay in 2012, I had recorded thirty-one in-depth personal interviews as well as conducted many shorter, less formal interviews. In 2013, I returned and interviewed seven more individuals for a total of thirty-eight in-depth personal interviews. The majority of these interviews were with *Streichmusik* performers. The snowball sampling method led me to talk with a wide range of performers, ages 18-90, men (27) and women (11). The majority of the interviewees were from the Appenzell and less than a third were from the Toggenburg (due to the fact that there are many more performers in the Appenzell). The total sample size of thirty-eight interviewees included two non-performers (Roland Inauen and Roger Meier) and one conductor/composer/visual artist (Dölf Mettler).

The manuscripts in the archive at the ZAV provide a view into how *Streichmusik* differed in Appenzell Innerrhoden and Auser Rhoden, and how the music differed from one performing group to the next. The documents at the archives provide insight into the history of *Streichmusik* that until now has remained unexamined. There are interviews with notable figures in *Streichmusik* history such as Jakob Alder (1915-2004) and Hans Rechsteiner (1893-1986) on reel-to-reel tapes that the late ethnomusicologist Margaret Engeler (1933-2010) conducted in the 1970s. Other data in my research process were anthologies, live and recorded performances, and discussions of performance aesthetics. Many of the materials of the Toggenburg were kept in private collections or at the *Ackerhaus* in Ebnat-Kappel during the years of my fieldwork trips.

On a personal level, the subject of *Streichmusik* has interest to me because I can trace my genealogy for nine generations in the Toggenburg. My *Heimatort* (place of origin), Nesslau, which is traced patrilineally, is in the upper Toggenburg. My maiden name, Lieberherr, is one of the most common last names in the Toggenburg, and most people in the Appenzell and the Toggenburg immediately identified me as a ‘Toggenburger.’ Being labeled as a Toggenburger helped me gain access to the community by being perceived as a ‘partial insider’ (Narayan, 1993, p. 676).

### “Swissness” and “soft power”

As the Swiss nation is currently undergoing a phase of redefining its cultural identity and exerting its international presence, Swissness indicates a rebranding of the nation. After experiencing economic setbacks in the 1970s (Blankart, 1990, p. 12), Switzerland’s government created policies and laws to strengthen its international economic presence. The Swiss private sector began an initiative to re-establish the nation’s economy in the international market. As Switzerland lacks many natural resources, it has exerted influence on other nations in different ways. For instance, the nation has used ‘soft power,’ attracting favour through economic and cultural influence rather than coercion in international politics (Nye, 2004). According to the 2014/2015 Monocle Soft Power Survey, Switzerland is ranked seventh in the top ten nations that are successful in exerting soft power (Monocle, 2015). These processes of redefining the national identity—as a means to soft power—have precipitated the adoption of the pseudo-English word “Swissness” into the Swiss-German language in the late 1990s. An editorial in *The Economist* states that Swissness ‘stands for democracy, fairness, stability, quality, meticulousness, punctuality, thrift, efficiency, openness and all sorts of other desirable things’ (Beck, 2004). Swissness means ‘a healthy, well-ordered, efficient world’ and has connotations of ‘precision, meticulousness, reliability and thoroughness’ (Vogel-Misicka, 2010). This old image of Switzerland has been reformulated in the last few decades to reestablish Switzerland’s presence on the international market.

One of the first physical manifestations of Swissness was the ‘Swiss Law on the Protection of Trademarks and Indications of Source,’ which went into effect in 1992.<sup>9</sup> This law states the legal aspects of Swissness and indicates what percentage of a product needs to be produced in Switzerland. A study conducted by the Institut für Marketing an der Universität St. Gallen (Institute for Marketing at the University of St. Gall) in 2013 points to the success of Swissness in marketing. Using an online survey with over 13,000 participants and more than four thousand interviews in fourteen countries, the institute

investigated the marketability of Swissness. Switzerland and its products were very competitive on a global level (Institut für Marketing an der Universität St. Gallen, 2013).

It is interesting to note that the term *Swissness* indexes the English language in a country with national languages of German, French, Italian and Romansh (a romance language spoken in the canton of Graubünden). I assert that the choice to address the national essence in English stems from Switzerland's desire to reposition itself as a cosmopolitan nation in the global market. Swissness was first used for economic repositioning but has also come to signify a cultural presence and unification in a country with customs that vary greatly by region and language.

Swissness inherently carries contradictory forces: while Swissness is a strategic move to assert national economic power on the global market, there are also some closed tendencies in contemporary Switzerland. Just as in many other European countries,<sup>10</sup> Switzerland has recently experienced an unprecedented shift to the right, exemplified here by the upswing in power of the right-wing populist *Schweizer Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party, abbreviated as SVP). The SVP now controls 29% of the seats in the *Nationalrat* (National Council, the lower house of the Federal Assembly of Switzerland). In all of Switzerland's history no party has had this much control influencing national policy; there are many political parties all of which typically receive small percentages of the vote. Along with this domination on a parliamentary level, SVP member Christopher Blocher was on the Federal Council from 2004 to 2007. During that time he encouraged increasing xenophobic tendencies through his advertising campaigns. For instance, an increasing sense of exclusivity and xenophobia is evident in a ban of minarets in 2009 initiated by Blocher and the SVP and passed through a public referendum that by 57% (Cumming, 2009). The SVP advertisements in support of the minaret ban (see Figure 3) draw on Nazi and neo-Nazi colours (red, white, and black) and aesthetics, indexing Nazi Germany. More recently, in July 2016, the Ticino, the Italian-speaking canton of Switzerland, began to enforce its ban on burqas and niqabs with fines up to CHF10,000 (approximately equal to £7,700 at the time of writing) (Dearden, 2016; Agerholm 2016). Swiss author Hugo Loetscher notes there is a part of Swissness connected with a "reactionary conservatism" against increased immigration (2009).

On the one hand there is the Switzerland that wants to position itself as a global player that sells Swiss products locally and internationally, and on the other hand there are the increasing xenophobic tendencies within the country, associated with the revitalization and preservation of traditions. In other words, Swissness represents both a cosmopolitan outward projection of the nation and an inward, xenophobic and traditional Switzerland.



Figure 3: Swiss People's Party (SVP) advertisement to ban Minarets

### ***Streichmusik* and Swissness**

One of my interviewees was Jakob “Köbi” Freund (b. 1946), *Hackbrett* player for *Streichmusik* Alder. As a member of the *Nationalrat* (Switzerland’s National Council) from 1995 through 2003, he initiated programs to support folk music. He was also president of the *Verband Schweizer Volksmusik* (Swiss folk music society) from 2001 to 2011. Freund is perhaps more tuned in to the reception of *Volkskultur* (folk culture) than many other musicians because of his leadership roles in national politics and music organizations. Freund indicated that he associates Swissness with an increase in the popularity of *Volkskultur*: ‘The whole *Volkskultur* scene is experiencing a huge upturn. First of all, there is the so-called “Swissness.” One stands by Switzerland again, wanting to be Swiss, and somehow one expresses this again’ (interview, Jakob Freund, 1 July 2013). Freund emphasizes a return to the embrace of folk culture, revealing a recent shift in the advocacy of tradition.

Even though Swissness was initially an economic concept used to promote the marketing of Swiss products, it has been partnered with Swiss folk culture more recently. Nicolas Senn, the *Hackbrett* player that toured with Swiss rapper Bligg, commented on the increase in corporate gigs he has experienced in the last few years:

‘I would say for about ten years and especially in the last few years, is the extreme focus on Swissness. I notice at the moment that at company events and corporate shows they say: “This year we have the motto Switzerland or Swissness and that is why we need to hire a traditional musician.” It is nice that people are looking back on their own values, on their traditional values, but we do need to watch out that it is not “too much”’ (Interview, Nicolas Senn, 20 June 2013).

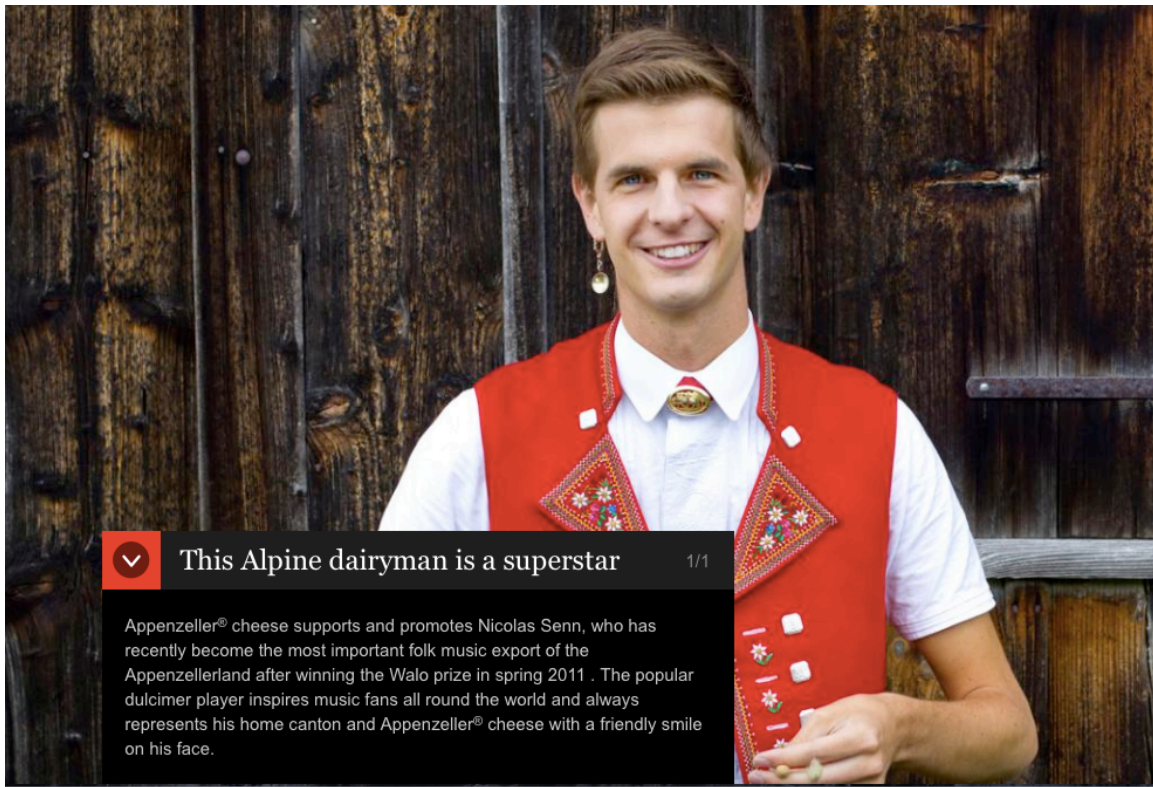


Figure 4: Nicolas Senn on the *Appenzeller Käse* website (Appenzeller Käse GmbH 2011)  
 [Link: <https://www.appenzeller.ch/en/brand-identity/sponsoring/nicolas-senn/this-alpine-dairyman-is-a-superstar/>]

Senn is in a unique position as a folk musician in Switzerland since he has corporate sponsorship from Appenzeller Käse (Appenzeller Cheese). The marketing power of Swissness products such as water bottles and watches has been transferred to Swiss culture, which has positive and negative outcomes for traditional music. However, Senn is comfortable with his sponsorship from Appenzeller Käse (Appenzeller Cheese), since they are a local company connected with the regional customs, even though he acknowledges that it is a ‘delicate matter’:

‘I advertise and play for [Appenzeller Käse] at certain events. Sponsoring and advertising is a very delicate matter. It is actually rare that someone advertises in folk music [in Switzerland]. Endorsements are practically standard in pop and rock music, with a huge sponsoring platform in the background. This is much less so in the folk music’ (Interview, Nicolas Senn, 20 June 2013).

Senn argues that cheese making is integral to the culture of the Appenzell, and so it makes sense to accept the Appenzeller Käse sponsorship:

‘I find that it fits with the cheese because it is a product that is very close to the culture ... And that is why I do not have a problem being sponsored by the cheese



company. But if I had advertisements for Apple or BMW or another company on my *Hackbrett*, that would not fit' (Ibid.).

Senn's argument is that the company Appenzeller Käse works within the purview of the regional culture. In a sense, being endorsed by Appenzeller Käse indicates a music's—and musician's—cultural alignment with Swissness.

### **Older iterations of Swissness**

Swissness is based on older sentiments in Switzerland's history including *Heimat*, a German term that is used similarly in German-speaking countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Germany. Lacking an English equivalent, *Heimat* can be referred to as home, homestead, birthplace, hometown, home region, homeland, fatherland, motherland, or native country. The idea of *Heimat* is historically associated with regionalism, devotion to nation, and nationhood, and is a concept that is 'emotional, irrational, subjective, social, political, and communal' (Blickle, 2002, p. 8); it is a conception aligned with the rural, the traditional, and an idealized past (Applegate, 1990; Umbach and Hüppauf, 2005). In politics, *Heimat* has served 'to further sharp exclusions of certain groups—usually ethnic minorities, less-propertied classes, or both' (ibid., p. x). For instance, *Heimat* films emphasizing clichés of an imagined homeland began in the 1940s in Nazi Germany pre-World War II and lasted until the early 1970s. While it was temporarily co-opted as German Nazi propaganda, *Heimat* as a concept has for the most part become disentangled from such connotations but continues to exert notions of national identity in a modernizing context.

There are many iterations of the term *Heimat*. Other terminology using the root *Heimat* includes *Heimatort* (place of origin), *Heimatideologie* (ideology of the homeland), *Heimatverbundenheit* (rootedness in the homeland), and *Heimatschutz* (homeland protection). The longevity of interest in Swiss identity and looking "back to the roots" can be exemplified by the prominence of these elements at the Swiss National Exhibition (*Schweizer Landesausstellung*, or "Landi") in 1939 and Expo .02 in 2002 (Stadt Zürich Präsidialdepartement, n. d.). *Heimatideologie* (ideology of the homeland) and *Heimatverbundenheit* (rootedness in the homeland) are terms that came out of the "Landi" of 1939.<sup>11</sup> The Exhibition of 1939 incidentally coincided with the beginning of World War II, making it necessary for the Swiss to distinguish themselves from their German neighbours and thereby resulting in growing use, by the Swiss, of the terms *Heimatverbundenheit* and *Heimatideologie*. The Swiss ethnomusicologist Max Peter Baumann refers to the term *Heimatideologie* in his book *Musikfolklore und Musikfolklorismus* as 'emphasizing the specialness of Switzerland, the love of the homeland, cultivation of undistorted musical customs and the faithful preservation of old practices, stoking emotional defense against foreign influences' (Baumann, 1976, p. 228–229, my translation). *Heimatideologie* is associated with rurality and a traditional way of life, promoting the preservation of culture that is in danger of disappearing.

The word *Heimat* is found in the context of *Heimatschutz*, literally translated as "homeland protection," which applies most accurately to Germany and Austria. *Heimatschutz* comes from a fear of *Überfremdung* (too many foreigners), that foreigners and foreign culture will overtake and obliterate so-called native culture and heritage. After the end of the First World War, the *Heimatschutz* or *Heimatwehr* was created to aid

the territory disputes along the Austrian border (Blickle, 2002, p. 133). In Switzerland, however, the term *Heimatschutz* is mainly associated with the Swiss Heritage Society [[heimatschutz.ch](http://heimatschutz.ch)], which is concerned with preserving traditional architecture, as well as the *Heimatwerk* (homeland work), which promotes traditional arts and crafts. *Heimat*, *Heimatideologie*, *Heimatverbundenheit*, and *Heimatschutz* are associated with preserving regional culture and national heritage, with sometimes troubling political histories. I assert that Swissness is the newest version of this type of nationalist impulse to preserve and protect.

Expo .02, the latest National Exhibition in 2002, attempted to distance itself from cultural clichés such as cows, chocolate and cheese, and marketed a new, modern, young Switzerland. As the exhibition's general director, Nelly Wenger stated: “Expo wants to show that Switzerland is diverse and forever changing” (Swissinfo.ch, 2002). Expo .02 focused on rebranding Switzerland with the term *Swissness* rather than make reference to the older notion of *Heimat*. The purpose of rebranding was not only to renew Switzerland’s image internationally; it was also directed toward the youth of Switzerland, to discourage emigrating. There is a correlation between the Expo .02 rebranding with Swissness and an increase in patriotism as well as conservatism among some of Switzerland’s youth. Both inward-looking and outward Swissness projections are evident in the Expo .02.

Reactions to outside influences indicated by the coining of terms such as *Heimatideologie*, *Heimatverbundenheit*, *Heimatschutz*, and Swissness mark cycles in which concerns of preservation and the creation of barriers, a demarcation against outside influences, become more important. It is imperative to scrutinize why Swissness, the newest iteration of *Heimat*, has become a paradigm in the present moment that operates under the auspices of exerting an international presence. However, it is also inherently an inward looking politicized and aestheticized cultural trope with troubling implications of conservatism and exclusivity. The Swissness phenomenon centres on a desire to connect to the past, in other words, longing for an earlier time. Some of this nostalgia is for a rural lifestyle, which many Swiss citizens abandoned through migration to urban centres; it is a longing for an imaginary, idealized and to some extent, invented Switzerland.

### **Nostalgia and the ‘salvage paradigm’**

‘Until 1800 we were not influenced much from the outside, the valleys were isolated. Then the tourism came, and we were affected. Innerrhoden in their way, Ausserrhoden a bit less, it was still a quiet valley. But the towns of Appenzell and Gais had quite a bit of tourism. The tourists came for the spas, you probably heard about the “Molkekuren” (whey cures)’ (Interview, Arnold (Noldi) Alder, 29 February 2012).

As is evidenced in old postcards, the Appenzell and the Toggenburg, located at higher altitudes in the mountains bordering Austria, were known for their *Luftkurorte* (health spas). Doctors prescribed that their patients in urban areas spend time in these therapeutic towns to restore health through the clean air and landscape up in the mountains, especially during the winter when many lower-lying cities were covered in fog and higher elevations had more sunshine. A hotel was built in the town of Weissbad, next to thermal springs, in the early nineteenth century.



Figure 5: Postcard advertising the *Luftkurort* (health spa) in Walzenhausen, AR

Other towns such as Gais, Gontenbad, and Walzenhausen, as well as the towns in the upper Toggenburg valley, also attracted visitors from outside the region. Roger Meier, director of *Toggenburg Tourismus*, described it to me:

‘In the beginning of the twentieth century we were a destination to cure lung disease. We specialized in health tourism, specifically healing those with tuberculosis. That means that many destinations or hotels were originally sanatoriums, with big balconies and flat roofs, at a time when there was no other medication but fresh air and sun’ (Interview, Roger Meier, 10 July 2013).

The Appenzell and the Toggenburg were and still are known for their natural healers (*Naturheiler*), who used plants and herbs from the mountainsides to cure ill. Thermal baths were built in Jakobsbad, Gontenbad, Weissbad, and Unterrechstein, among other places. The presence of urban inhabitants in the Appenzell and the Toggenburg initiated the beginnings of cultural tourism to the region and the development of *Streichmusik* which was, for example, played at the hotel in Weissbad on a weekly basis.

As this region has historically been known among the Swiss for its restorative and healing powers, it is represented as a restorative nostalgic trope. Nostalgia, a longing for homeland (*Heimat*) and a perfect past was a pseudo-Greek term coined by Johannes Hofer (1669-1752), a Swiss medical student, in his dissertation to describe Swiss mercenaries living in France and Prussia in the seventeenth century (Boym, 2001, p. 3). Describing the homesickness (*Heimweh*) of the Swiss mercenaries, nostalgia was called the ‘Swiss disease’ (Ibid., p. 15), or *maladie suisse*, in French. One recurring viewpoint on nostalgia is the concept of a ‘salvage paradigm’ (Desmond, 1999, p. 254), where cultures in danger of vanishing need to be saved. Desmond finds that ‘[w]hile seeming to celebrate cultural difference or the natural world, this paradigm dehistoricizes certain people, practices, geographic regions, and their animal inhabitants, setting them up as avatars of unchanging innocence and authenticity, as original and ideal’ (ibid.). This kind of labeling can create a ‘museumization’ of certain cultures. The Appenzell and the

Toggenburg are regions of Switzerland that still practice many old agriculturally based customs, making these areas candidates to be avatars.<sup>12</sup>

Scholars besides Desmond have also addressed the trope of the salvage paradigm. Sociologist John Frow, for instance, refers to ‘nostalgia for a lost authenticity’ (1991, p. 135) in his semiotic approach. Anthropologist Esra Özyürek focuses on the temporal aspects of nostalgia in *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (2006), arguing that utopia is found in the past and not the future. Özyürek finds that looking back to the past propels revivals, with nostalgia as the agent. Anthropologist Marilyn Ivy uses the term ‘nostalgia for origins’ (1995, p. 42) and invokes the idea of longing for the cultures living on the edge of vanishing in her book *Discourses of the Vanishing*. Ivy argues that cultures that are in seeming danger of vanishing are seen as worth preserving and therefore marketable, on the grounds that scarcity creates value. I argue that the Appenzell and the Toggenburg are ‘marginal cultural sites’ (Ben-Ari, 1996, p. 273) that have been decontextualized on both a local and a national level as the cultural products of this region are marketed and sold as imagined heritage.

Svetlana Boym (2001) divides nostalgia into a binary: restorative and reflective. Reflective nostalgia refers to a personal longing that is fragmented and private, whereas restorative nostalgia is more public, referring to the collective lost home, and engaging impulses to return to an imagined past. Thus conceived, restorative nostalgia has the capability to create cultural change such as revivals. Restorative nostalgia on a national level, I contend, contributes to the idea that the Appenzell is a miniature version of the Switzerland that once was. Swiss journalist Lisa Tralci writes in the September issue of the *Appenzeller Magazin*:

‘Country or the rural is “in.” That is what the publishers of all the new magazines believe. They are over-flooding the market in the name of this trend. The magazines are reacting to a vague longing for the indigenous life, connected with nature. And even further, they are reacting to a seemingly lost security, perhaps a lack of confidence that society’s development is moving in a positive direction. These articles are mostly targeting an urban public and summon an unusual nostalgia’ (2011, p. 7, [author’s translation]).

This inward projection of Swissness espouses nostalgia invoked by acclaiming a rural utopia and a negative outlook toward urbanity and modernity. The Appenzellerland, as the Appenzell is often called, is symbolic of a simpler, pastoral past. As Tralci states above, there is a trend in Switzerland to embrace the rural way of life and as an extension, the customs surrounding it.

The sense of restorative nostalgia may be related to the practice of direct democracy in Appenzell Innerrhoden, one of two places in Switzerland that still cultivates this voting procedure. The direct democracy practiced in Appenzell Innerrhoden, called the *Landsgemeinde* (public assembly) whereby all the citizens meet in the town square and vote by raising hands is symbolically appealing as Switzerland strives to keep its distinctiveness from the surrounding European Union. In other words, the Appenzell and *Streichmusik* symbolize an earlier time of geopolitical sovereignty. For many Swiss, whose cantons (states) no longer engage in this type of direct democracy, the life represented by the Appenzell invokes an earlier time. Restorative nostalgia

creates a regressive ideology through the idea that older traditions are better, and while forming a national identity, it also creates an exclusionary attitude towards outsiders. The cultural and religious landscape of Switzerland has begun to change as demographics shift recently, and this is perhaps why the boundaries are being more clearly delineated.

Swissness, the new image of Switzerland, represents the layers of complexity in this small nation, and *Streichmusik* is one of the visual and sonic representations of Swissness, or, what ethnomusicologist Daniel Sharp calls a ‘sonic postcard’ (Sharp, 2014, p. x). Restorative nostalgia, part of Boym’s binary, is at the root of the Appenzell and the Toggenburg’s geographic and cultural embodiment of Swissness. Characterized by the popular slogan ‘back to the roots,’ restorative nostalgia in part propels a revival of *Streichmusik*, sonically recalling this region as well as the Swissness of the nation.

‘Back to the roots’ and the ‘*Hackbrett* boom’

In March 2011, *Quartett Laseyer*, an Appenzeller group that embraces both the traditional and the unconventional, presented a concert in the Engadin, Switzerland, entitled ‘Back to the Roots.’ This was not the first concert of its kind but is part of a larger movement. In fact, the phrase “back to the roots” is one that surfaced repeatedly in my interviews. Within the revivalist movement of *Streichmusik*, this discourse seems to be connected with a nostalgic desire to recreate or reinvent the past.



Figure 6: *Quartett Laseyer* performing in a concert entitled “Back to the Roots”

Among other interviewees, Barbara Giger (b. 1969), bass player for *Quartett Laseyer*, often referred to the espousal of folk music as a ‘*Volksmusik* boom’: ‘Folk music is experiencing a “boom”—the instruments used in folk music are also experiencing a “boom”—that makes it easier and creates an understanding and awakens an interest in the population ... not everywhere, but ... yes, I do believe it is changing’ (Interview, Barbara Giger, 23 June 2012). A component of the ‘back to the roots’ movement is what locals

refer to as a ‘*Hackbrett* boom.’ The *Hackbrett* is the instrument that typifies *Streichmusik* and sets it apart from other Swiss folk music. Currently the *Hackbrett* is by far the most popular *Streichmusik* instrument studied by children of the region. Many interviewees associated the “*Hackbrett* boom” with the media and specifically with increased *Hackbrett* performances on television. This mediatized visibility began with *Hackbrett* performers such as Tobi Töbler, Walter Alder, Ruedi Bischoff in the 1970s and Roman Brülisauer in the 1980s (who was known for his theatrical performances that involved dancers and light shows). Peter Roth (b. 1944), the individual responsible for reviving *Streichmusik* in the Toggenburg valley in the 1960s, associates this phenomenon with certain musicians:

‘Assuredly it always has to do with individuals. When it started here [in the Toggenburg] it had to do with me and that children saw and heard me play *Hackbrett* and thought that they wanted to try it too. Now I think it is [*Hackbrett* player] Nicolas Senn. There are recurring “booms” that are like waves. The traditional way of playing with your grandfather or with friends that one grew up with is like the basis. In addition there are fashionably regulated waves’ (Interview, Peter Roth, 18 June 2012).

Roth references a basis for *Hackbrett* performance, and traditional music in general, that exists separately from what is popular at the moment. Historically this music has been passed down through generations as an oral tradition whereas now this music is taught at folk music schools. In addition to the media exposure of the *Hackbrett*, there are more identity-driven, deep-rooted reasons for the “*Hackbrett* boom,” fuelled by restorative nostalgia. It is nostalgia for a time characterized by a traditional foundation of learning from relatives and friends.

Several interviewees referred to a “back to the roots” movement as the motivation for a revival of the *Streichmusik* tradition. Barbara Giger finds that ‘*Streichmusik* is really experiencing a “boom” in many categories—in classical areas, but also with the children and the youth who really want to play and think it is cool’ (Interview, Barbara Giger, 23 June 2012). Historically folk musicians tended to be politically conservative, which is less the case currently (Ibid.). Folk music is becoming mainstream and there is a distancing from political affiliations. Still, the “back to the roots” movement is driven by a desire to find “roots” and a sense of belonging to an ethnicity, indicating an inward and exclusive projection of Swissness:

‘It is hard to say why there is a boom...perhaps it is because of globalization and that people have the desire to search for their roots and a sense of belonging...I have the feeling that people have become rootless because of our ultra-connected world in which you can be anywhere in the world in a short amount of time and everything is global, people are speaking English and are interconnected. And so people need roots, to be at home. Coming home is an ancient necessity of humankind as well as belonging to an ethnic group’ (Ibid.).

Violinist Albert Kölbener (b. 1955) echoed Giger’s thoughts about the motivation behind the “back to the roots” movement. He explained to me that going “back to the roots” was

a reaction to the increased immigration of outsiders to the Appenzell and to globalization: ‘I think many people are afraid of the outcome of globalization ... so you look back, what do we have, what is typical for us?’ (Interview, Albert Kölbener, 24 May 2012).

Looking at the history of the *Hackbrett* in the last forty years offers some insight into the events that led to the “*Hackbrett* boom.” When Appenzeller historian Hans Hürlemann and photographer Amelia Margo’s book *Brummbaß, Geige, Hackbrett* was published in 1984, the Appenzeller youth were distancing themselves from the practice of *Streichmusik*. According to Hürlemann, the students he interviewed were only interested in the popular music of the “Hitparade,” the Swiss pop music charts. This has changed greatly over the last several decades. In 2011, *Hackbrett* virtuoso Nicolas Senn was writing about the “*Hackbrett* boom” in the ‘Gastkommentar’ column of the Swiss folk music journal *Alpenrosen*.

Senn is arguably the most famous *Hackbrett* player in Switzerland as well as the moderator of the national folk music TV show *Potzmusig*. He mentions that he often gets asked about the “boom” and the visibility of the *Hackbrett*. The *Hackbrett* gained popularity among many young people in Switzerland recently, first with the collaboration of *Streichmusik* Alder, and then when Senn toured with the rapper Bligg from 2007 to 2009. There was, however, an older generation of players (e.g. Tobi Töbler, Walter Alder, and Ruedi Bischoff) who in the 1970s were laying the foundation for the instrument’s current surge in visibility and popularity. Their performances—particularly those on television—brought increased visibility to the *Hackbrett*. Tobi Töbler incorporated the *Hackbrett* in jazz, and Walter Alder played the traditional repertoire as well as music from other parts of the world with his brothers in the ensemble, *Alderbuebe*. Senn states that these few pioneers began to increase the visibility of the *Hackbrett* in the 1970s and 1980s, when *Volksmusik* was off the radar of the general Swiss population. Albert Graf (b. 1966), *Hackbrett* player for *Quartett Laseyer*, was one of the individuals who saw a *Hackbrett* performance on television and so was inspired to learn to play (Interview, Albert Graf, 28 March 2012). Graf is now one of the main *Hackbrett* teachers, with over forty students, and is also director of the *Volksmusik Schule* (folk music school) for the half canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden.

Nonetheless, *Streichmusik* had experienced a decline in popularity in the mid-twentieth century with the introduction of jazz and pop music. By 1980 there were only two *Streichmusik* performers remaining in Appenzell Innerrhoden. Through community efforts, and especially through the initiative of the entrepreneurial owner of restaurant *Loosmühle* in Weissbad, free instrument lessons on violin and *Hackbrett* were offered through an organization called *Pro Innerrhoden*. Among the teachers were members of the Alder dynasty: Jakob (1915-2004), Noldi (b. 1953) and Walter Alder (b. 1952)—all performers from Appenzell Ausserrhoden. There was a great interest in these free lessons. Noldi Alder told me how he immediately had thirty-five students from Innerrhoden in 1981 (Interview, 29 February 2012). Many of the *Streichmusik* performers active today learned from these free lessons, including Albert Graf, Martin Dobler, and Joseph Rempfler.

In the 1980s, the free lessons prompted the founding of music schools specializing in folk music in the Appenzell through the initiative of *Volksmusik* (folk music) teachers and students. There are now several folk music schools in Herisau (Ausserrhoden), Altstätten (Rheintal, Rhine Valley), and the town of Appenzell. These

schools are thriving today, and the principal *Hackbrett* teachers of the area (e.g. Walter Alder, Albert Graf, Roland Küng, and Matthias Weidmann) teach at least one hundred and fifty *Hackbrett* students in total. Currently there are about fifty performing ensembles of Appenzeller *Volksmusik*, many of them comprised of young musicians, because there is such a high demand for this music at restaurants and cultural events.

The preservationist efforts happen on a national level as well. Bassist Barbara Giger spoke about the Bachelor's program in folk music at the University of Lucerne (Hochschule Luzern) and how the creation of this program shows a change in attitude toward folk music in Switzerland: 'Things are changing so that, for example, the newest thing is that you can now study folk music at the University in Lucerne. I find it great that these steps are happening that have been possible for a long time in other countries. Folk music has been stereotyped and pushed to the side in Switzerland in the past' (Interview, Barbara Giger, 23 June 2012). Currently, there is more widespread acceptance by the general population of folk music as a valued art form and University of Lucerne's creation of a Bachelor's degree in folk music in 2006 is indicative of this change.

There has been a move to promote traditional music projects through the newly amended *Kulturförderungsgesetz* (Culture Law), a national law designed to preserve the national heritage. This law supports cultural projects and a strengthening of regional customs through government funding. Köbi Freund, *Hackbrett* player for Streichmusik Alder and former National Council member as well as former president of the Verband Schweizer Volksmusik (Organization of Swiss Folk Music), was instrumental in creating an amendment to the *Kulturförderungsgesetz* that requires organizations like Pro Helvetia to fund traditional music projects (Interview, Jakob Freund, 1 July 2013). Until four years ago, Pro Helvetia, a federally funded organization that provides grant money for cultural events, supported contemporary and experimental projects but not the traditional ventures. Freund also lobbied for representation from the folk music scene on the grant committee for Pro Helvetia. Now Pro Helvetia is required to have a representative from the folk music field on its panel that chooses how the organization spends its money every year. Pro Helvetia's new stance on folk music is another manifestation of restorative nostalgia and Swissness.

Emphasis on locality, as identified earlier by violinist Albert Kölbener and bassist Barbara Giger, has political ramifications. For instance, many young people, especially in rural areas, are now voting for the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the most right-wing of the political parties in Switzerland's multi-party system. Kölbener's thoughts about globalization are echoed in ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman's ideas: 'The removal of national borders in the New Europe, musical no less than political, has by no means erased nationalism. The absence of borders may instead heighten anxiety—about allowing those outside the nation unencumbered entrance into it, about sounding like the rest of Europe' (2011, p. xviii). Thus, the revival and "back to the roots" movement can be seen as a reactionary political move to preserve the culture and way of life as it has been historically. Social anthropologist Sharon MacDonald articulates a similar viewpoint in *Inside European Identities* (1997): 'While [...] it might seem that as borders become weaker—as people and goods traverse them more easily—there will be a consequent relaxing of the sense of allegiance to place and people, very often the reverse is actually the case. Notions of 'us' and 'them' become stronger still' (p. 1). MacDonald indicates that the more the world around them changes, the more people attempt to preserve their



identities. Baumann asserts that looking to the past for a national heritage can be a 'vehicle for forming national identities by drawing the borderlines against the foreign' (1976, p. 77). Other authors have tied the concept of revivals with that of being 'ethnic symbols' (John Edwards, quoted in MacDonald, 1997, p. 8). In other words, a revival of *Streichmusik* happened because a conception of ethnicity is being showcased. In this case *Streichmusik* is used as an ethnic symbol and as a way of demarcating a notion of 'us' in juxtaposition to 'them' as well as a projection of Swissness.

## Conclusion

Bligg's collaboration with *Streichmusik* Alder ended up on the Swiss charts and met with enthusiastic reception among young Swiss audience members. As I have shown in this article, this success is related to a broader cultural shift of embracing Swiss heritage that has been labelled as Swissness. The fact that borders are increasingly more open across Europe is putting pressure on Switzerland to confront its historical tendency towards isolationism. The term "Swissness" emerged in the 1990s as a reiteration of older sentiments such as *Heimatideologie* (ideology of the homeland) and *Heimatverbundenheit* (rootedness in the homeland), which were formed at the start of World War II. Swissness marks a new cycle of exerting nationhood in juxtaposition to the outside, in this case the global economy and politics.

The "*Hackbrett* boom" and the *Streichmusik* revival are a celebration of regional culture in a time when locality is a valued commodity. As Baumann suggests, 'celebrating regionalism must be understood as compensation for the complexity of the modern world' (1976, p. 79). Celebration of heritage has always been cultivated in the small northeast region of the Appenzell and the Toggenburg, but recently culture has been celebrated on a grander scale, with more sponsorship and a wider audience. In the midst of increasing immigration, changing religious and cultural demographics, and pressure to join the European Union, local practices such as *Streichmusik* are employed to highlight Switzerland's "specialness." *Streichmusik* has come to represent Swissness in the national cultural imagination and the "*Hackbrett* boom" speaks to trends that are happening on a national level. The restorative nostalgia at play in the *Streichmusik* revival marks a desire to return to the past, and to renew ideas of Swiss nationhood in opposition to the outside.

In a national press article titled *Die Schweiz als Sonderfall* (Switzerland as a special case), ambassador Paul Widmer (2007) analyzed surveys on the idea of Switzerland as a 'special case' that were conducted among Swiss citizens. One of Widmer's findings was that there were two trends: one a trend toward globalization and modernity, and the other a negative reaction to globalization by preserving traditional values (ibid., p. 36). Widmer also found that these trends augment each other and there is a symbiosis of the modern and the traditional (ibid., p. 32). The collaboration between rapper Bligg and *Streichmusik* Alder exemplifies this new coupling of seemingly contradictory tendencies of embracing the old and the new simultaneously. Folk music such as *Streichmusik* resonates in this search for a redefinition of Swiss nationhood.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Marco Bliggensdorfer (born September 30, 1976) is a rapper from Zurich, Switzerland. Since he raps mostly in Swiss-German dialect, his following is mostly in the Swiss-German region of Switzerland as well as in southern Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Ueli Alder (1922 –2014) was the last remaining member of the third generation of Streichmusik Alder who was still alive while I was conducting my fieldwork. I was fortunate to interview Ueli Alder in 2012 at the family farmhouse called *Strüssler* above the town of Urnäsch, Appenzell Ausserrhoden. At present the fourth and fifth generations of this family perform together locally and internationally.

<sup>3</sup> As was related to me in an interview with *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer) player Nicolas Senn, Streichmusik Alder and Bligg were coincidentally scheduled on the same television show, called *Die Grössten Schweizer Hits (The Biggest Swiss Hits)*. The producer of the show suggested the two groups perform together. The piece they played, ‘Volksmusigg,’ was composed by Bligg. The text originally referred to rap as the new folk music of Switzerland. Inserting the *Streichmusik* group in the piece created ambiguity in the meaning of the piece—it is not clear if Bligg is referring to *Streichmusik* or rap as folk music, perhaps it is both.

<sup>4</sup> Contrary to popular belief, *Streichmusik*, just as other Swiss folk music(s), is not an age-old practice, but something more akin to an ‘invented tradition’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). See Ringli (2006) and Janett and Zimmermann (2014) for more on the subject of the development of Swiss folk music(s) in the last two centuries. Early works on Swiss folk music that include the music of the Appenzell and the Toggenburg are by Alfred Tobler (1845-1923) and include *Kuhreihen* (1890), *Das Volkslied* (1903), and *Sang und Klang in Appenzell* (1892).

<sup>5</sup> *Streichmusik* is often referred to as *Appenzeller Streichmusik*. I purposefully omit the word “Appenzeller” in the identification of the genre because I believe using “Appenzeller” excludes the Toggenburg in the history of *Streichmusik*.

<sup>6</sup> Ringli and Rühl (2015) include interviews with many of these innovative artists in *Neue Schweizer Volksmusik*.

<sup>7</sup> As of 2015 the ZAV is known as the Roothuus Gonten, *Zentrum für Appenzeller und Toggenburger Volksmusik* (Centre for Appenzeller and Toggenburger Folk Music). The inclusion of the Toggenburg marks a shift in the level of collaboration between the Appenzell and Toggenburg.

<sup>8</sup> The inhabitants of Urnäsch include several members of the Alder *Streichmusik* dynasty. During my fieldwork, Ueli Alder lived with two of his sons, Walter and Hansueli, on the family farm, and another one of Ueli's sons, Arnold "Noldi" Alder had his home/studio closer to the centre of town. Werner Alder, one of the two *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer) builders currently active, as well as Hans Hürlemann, a *Streichmusik* performer, historian, and author of the *Streichmusik* history, *Brummbass, Geige, Hackbrett* (1984), were also inhabitants of Urnäsch. Moreover, the annual *Striichmusigtag* (day of *Streichmusik*) takes place in the restaurants in Urnäsch every spring.

<sup>9</sup> See 'Use of the "Swiss Made" Indication of Source (Origin): General Information,' published by the Swiss Federal Institute of Intellectual Property (Eidgenössische Institut für Geistiges Eigentum, 2006), for detailed information regarding this law that details the conditions under which the denotations "Switzerland," "Swiss," "Swiss quality," "Swiss Made," and "Made in Switzerland" can be used. For instance, at least 50% of a product must be of Swiss origin and the most important parts must be manufactured in Switzerland.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Hutter and Grande (2014) and Langenbacher and Schellenberg (2011).

<sup>11</sup> The National Exhibitions began in the nineteenth century as marketplaces that sold both artisanal and industrial products. The first official National Exhibition was in 1883, followed by 1896, 1914, 1939, 1964, and 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Swissness involves embracing the customs of the area. There is subsidy and promotion of the local customs surrounding dairy farming by the government, even though the number of people employed in the agricultural sector is declining. However, the ideology of the rural, farming community is clearly marketable, as evidenced in the case of the Appenzell.

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