

## CHAPTER 2

# Visualizing Heritage, Ethnicity and Gender

## Bodily Representations of Finnishness in the Photographs of the National Inventory of Living Heritage

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### Abstract

The main goals of this chapter are to analyze: (1) how the claim of whiteness is reproduced in 21st-century Finland in the processes of producing intangible cultural heritage; and (2) how Finnishness is visualized and embodied in these practices. I scrutinize the newly established wiki-based open access publication *National Inventory of Living Heritage* (NILH, 2017–), which is a part of the Finnish implementation for the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In this chapter, I examine the photographs published in the NILH by using a methodological approach of visual discourse analysis. I conduct an analysis of 153 photographs that are divided into categories of (1) manhood, womanhood and family, (2) nature and naturalness and (3) visual othernesses of Finnishness. Building on interdisciplinary studies on

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heritage, banal nationalism and gender, I argue that the NILH photographs participate in reproducing the normative (e.g. heterosexual, white, family-centered and middle-class) images of Finnishness. Finnishness is embodied in the photographs in active, working, mature bodies that perform either heroic and masculine or collective and caring feminine tasks. Finns are also represented as having an intrinsic connection to “nature.” People are often portrayed in forested landscapes, and the pictures underline naturalized connections between the landscape, ethnicity and sexuality.

**Keywords:** Finland, intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO, visual discourse analysis, whiteness

## Introduction

“Externalizing culture in human bodies invites racist distinctions. In Iceland, it is difficult to get away from the whiteness of heritage,” states the Icelandic folklorist Valdimar Hafstein (2012: 513), who has scrutinized the use of Icelandic folk costumes in contemporary society. In Finland, whiteness seems to similarly be an intrinsic feature of the heritagization processes. However, heritage processes such as museum exhibitions are currently not places for “hot” (see Billig 2017; Paasi 2016) discussions on nationality, race or ethnicity, at least not in Finland, where the heritage sector has been fairly moderate and stated. Yet, as many scholars in the field of heritage and museum studies argue, heritage practices such as museum exhibitions or visits still participate in the processes of reinforcing and confirming the identities concerning gender, class, race or nation in banal, quotidian and unnoticeable ways (Embrick et al. 2019; Levin 2012; Smith 2015).

In this chapter, I analyze how the banal and often rather hidden claim of whiteness is reproduced in 21st-century Finland in the processes of participating in the transnational trajectories of identifying intangible cultural heritage. I scrutinize the newly established *National Inventory of Living Heritage* (NILH, 2017–), which is a part of the Finnish implementation for the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. The NILH stems from the *Wiki-Inventory for Living Heritage* (WLH, *Elävän perinnön wikiluettelo*, 2016–), which is a wiki-based platform into which different kinds of communities are able to submit entries that discuss phenomena that are considered as “cultural heritage” (these include, i.e., submissions such as “Glassmaking tradition,” “Beer culture” and “Picking mushrooms”). The NILH is curated by the Finnish Heritage Agency, but it could be described as an interface of institutional and vernacular heritage production as it is constructed in dialogue between the Finnish Heritage Agency, the Ministry of Education and Culture, and a varied group of larger and smaller Finnish communities.

In the chapter, I examine photographs (particularly those that include human beings) that are published in the NILH alongside the submission texts. The pictures are not by any means in the center of the inventory—on the contrary, they are “only” pictures that are chosen to represent and depict the phenomenon in question. Still, due to their minor role, the photographs are intriguing keyholes through which the performances of whiteness, nationality and gender may be discussed in detail. I am particularly interested in how “Finnishness” is embodied in these visual practices. I analyze the photographs published in the NILH and concentrate on the representations of human bodies: how do the bodies in the pictures represent “Finnish” cultural heritage? How are the heritagization practices gendered? How is the claim of whiteness present in the photographs?

The Finnish manifestations of heritage understood as nationally important are currently represented in a sublime, non-violent and festive manner, emphasizing the shared national past and the harmonious future ahead (Haapoja-Mäkelä 2019; 2020b). As shown in Figure 2.1, the bodies that represent sauna culture in the NILH emanate harmony, unity and even paradise-like conformity. The young female bodies are located in the rural, summery lake landscape, which—through its familiarity to the Finnish viewers—automatically evokes the canonical national landscape imagery in viewers’ minds, and thus refers to constructed spatial identities and imagined belongings of a nation (e.g. Häyrynen 2005). Qualities such as “purity,” “naturalness,” “traditionality”



**Figure 2.1:** The NILH: Sauna bathing in Finland. Photo: Hanna Söderström / Sauna from Finland. Published under CC BY 4.0.

and “authenticity” may be associated with the landscape, as well as with the modestly covered, but almost naked, white bodies that seem to merge into the landscape. Nakedness is not associated with sexual practices in the picture—rather, it implies the “naturalness” of the photographed bodies (e.g. Nash 2018) that represent the Finnish heritagized past. The Finnish past is understood as “natural” and “part of nature” in the heritagization processes, and this, as I will argue in this chapter, is a central perspective through which the visibility of Finnishness is produced.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, I consider the theoretical background of studying cultural heritage, Finnishness and whiteness. The second section introduces the materials and the method of visual discourse analysis in detail. The third, fourth and fifth sections concentrate on analyzing the pictures in relation to ideas of gender, “nature” and the boundaries of Finnishness. I conclude by summarizing briefly the relevant findings of the chapter.

### **The Heirs of the Finnish Maid: Intangible Cultural Heritage, Finnishness, Whiteness**

Heritage is a “verb” (Harvey 2001: 327): instead of being an inherent feature of a thing or a phenomenon, it is something that is actively (re)produced, negotiated, challenged and remade. It is a performance that becomes realized in the process of naming, disseminating and experiencing it. Furthermore, heritage is a network of meanings that is not produced only through language, but in a multimodal interaction with the material world (e.g. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Smith 2015). In the field of critical heritage studies, heritage performances are seen as something that always seek to negotiate the past’s presence in the present through strategic and political appropriations and the creation of connections and reconnections (e.g. Waterton, Watson and Silverman 2017). Hence, following this view, I suggest that the NILH does not represent “Finnish heritage” as such, but it actively participates in producing and remaking it.

The prefixes “cultural” and “intangible” are a part of the administrative language that has been adopted in global usage largely after the UNESCO’s *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (2003, ratified in Finland 2013). However, as Laurajane Smith and other scholars argue, the distinction between “intangible” and “tangible” is paradoxical and artificial: this division simplifies the complex relationships between human activity and the material world (Kuutma 2009; Smith and Campbell 2018; see also Lähdesmäki 2016). In this chapter, I see the concept of intangible cultural heritage as an “emic” conceptualization that refers to the institutional processes and taxonomic systems of producing and categorizing heritage. As a whole, I propose that the phenomenon of intangible cultural heritage is a

material-discursive process, in which intangible and tangible elements are understood as intertwined.

The institutional processes of producing and categorizing heritage have been acknowledged as systems that reinforce pre-existing structures and identities of gender, class, race and nation (e.g. Smith 2015). Despite the universalist aims of UNESCO or the pro-multiculturalist approach of the Finnish Heritage Agency,<sup>1</sup> the category of Finnishness seems to be understood in the materials in a rather stereotypical and normative way. Several scholars of critical heritage studies have shown that the UNESCO-related processes have ended up emphasizing the role of the national scale, even though the transnational and sub-national scales are interwoven into these processes (Aykan 2015; Buljubašić and Lähdesmäki 2019; Ichijo 2017; Smith and Campbell 2018).

I argue that cultural heritage and heritage production is a central category through which the national enters people's lives and through which it can be negotiated, manifested and reproduced. It is an essential part of *spatial socialization* that is defined as a process "through which individual actors and collectivities are socialized as members of specific, territorially bounded spatial entities, and through which they more or less actively internalize territorial identities and shared traditions" (Paasi 1999: 4; 2016: 24). A significant part of spatial socialization is the process of historialization that becomes manifested, for example, in school history teaching (Paasi 1999: 11), and similarly, heritage management powerfully participates in the creation of the nation's past, present and future.

Following Rogers Brubaker, I understand the notions of ethnicity, race, nationhood and gender as something that "are not things *in* the world, but perspectives *on* it. ... They include basic schemas and taken-for-granted background knowledge, embodied in persons and embedded in institutionalized routines and practices, through which people recognize and experience objects, places, persons, actions, or situations as ethnically marked or meaningful" (Brubaker 2009: 32, original emphasis). In the heritage practices, the idea of Finns as an ethnic ingroup is emphasized. I have argued elsewhere that the discursive construction of this ingroup-ness is circulated in the wiki-inventory through the usage of "we" pronouns that indicates an imagined national we-group (Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b). The idea of Finns as a "we-group" stems mostly from the politics of the 19th century. However, as the roots of the idea originate from the ideological and political foundations of Finnish nationalism and nation-making, traces of the discursive Finnish we-group can be followed further back in history, in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries and the politics of standardization of the Swedish state (Anttonen 2005: 131).

Currently, the Finnish normative and hegemonic we-ness is white, Finnish-speaking, heterosexual, family-oriented and middle-class (Lehtonen and Koivunen 2011; Rossi 2017). Yet, the idea of Finnishness as a "white" and "Western" construct is historically not trouble-free and a rather new one: in the beginning

of the 20th century, Finns were placed in the lower levels of racial hierarchies, especially when compared to Swedes (Keskinen 2019). Today, Finnish whiteness is rather color-blind or even “silent,” in a sense that it is not largely discussed in society.

“Whiteness” is considered here as a fluid construction that shapes the ways in which boundaries between “us” and “them” are drawn. Finnish whiteness has been traditionally described as blond and blue-eyed (e.g. Valenius 2004), but, as Richard Dyer (1997) has noted, whiteness can have various shades. This was manifested in the racialized discourses of the long 19th century, when the Finns were regarded to be of “Mongolian descent,” and thus, as a part of the non-white “yellow/Asian race.” Scandinavians, for example, were instead on the top of the hierarchy of whiteness (Keskinen 2019). Today, the rather hidden nuances between blond whiteness and other whitenesses can be scrutinized, for example, in the light of immigrant discussions—despite the shade of their hair and skin color, native Europeans (and to some extent, Russians) are part of the constructed “us” when compared to, for example, African or Asian asylum seekers.

The practices of normative white Finnishness are maintained, for example, in heritagization processes, such as museum exhibitions—or, as this chapter suggests, in cultural heritage inventories. The broad topic of racialized institutions has been studied widely, particularly in relation to space and place. This approach has been extended to the field of museum studies as well, and, following Embrick et al. (2019), I propose that like art museums, the practices of wiki-inventorying could be labeled as *white sanctuaries*. In the case of art museums, institutional racial mechanisms produce sanctuaries in which some groups are able to freely navigate the space and others are seen as outsiders, despite the universalist and post-racial discourses attached to the museums (Embrick et al. 2019). As for the wiki-inventory and the NILH, the practices produce a *virtual white sanctuary* in which the color-blind banality of whiteness is reinforced, for example, through the pictures published alongside the texts.

The ideas of Finnishness and whiteness are interwoven into the gendered practices of imagining and reconstructing a nation (e.g. Mayer 2000; Nagel 1998). As Johanna Valenius (2004) has shown, the state of Finland itself has been embodied into the bodily form of a female, the Finnish Maid (*Suomi-neito*), since the turn of the 20th century. The Maid was commonly portrayed as a blond, blue-eyed, virginal young woman, who was admired, desired, protected and loved, but also raped or annihilated in the visual and textual materials published at the turn of the 20th century (Valenius 2004). The Maid has been a common metaphor of Finnishness since, and even certain real living women have been described to be the embodiment of the Maid. In my childhood, in the beginning of the 1990s, I was taught at school to look at the Finnish map and see the Maid’s figure in the shape of the Finnish borders (her head

up in the north, her hand raised next to it and the hem of her skirt spread in the south)—which is a prominent example of the processes of spatial socialization and gendered practices of producing a nation. Thus, it is not surprising that the figure of the blond Maid also lurks behind the NILH's 2010 photographs; her figure is not necessarily explicit, but as I show in this chapter, she is implicitly present in the bodily manifestations of Finnishness.

## Materials and Methods

In my chapter, I examine the pictures published in the *National Inventory of Living Heritage*<sup>2</sup> (2017–). The NILH is an open access online publication that consists of entries that were earlier published in the WLH, but were chosen to be included in the national list as well (see Figure 2.2). In Finland, the UNESCO-related inventorying processes are based on the “bottom-up” ideology that is currently a large-scale trend in the new museology. However, the Finnish Heritage Agency controls, administrates and frames these processes by, for example, naming an expert group that participates in the selection of NILH submissions in cooperation with several societal communities (see Finnish Heritage Agency 2017). The Finnish submissions that are nominated for inscription on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity are chosen from the NILH, and thus, the NILH is an encompassing representation of things that are largely considered as nationally important heritage in Finland at an institutional and societal community level.

I concentrate in this chapter on the pictures published in 2017 in the NILH. This material consists of 52 submissions and 217 pictures, of which 153 represent humans (see Table 2.1). The number of submissions is based on the March 2020 situation; in April 2020, 12 new submissions were added to the NILH. Unfortunately, these submissions cannot be analyzed here since this chapter's analysis was already close to an end when these new entries were chosen to be included in the NILH.

The pictures in the NILH are uploaded partly by the submitters of the WLH, and partly by the experts and curators in the Finnish Heritage Agency from several open access image banks.<sup>3</sup> All of the images are photographs, and a majority of them are amateur shots of themes that somehow represent the entry. Just a few of the pictures are professional photographs that are clearly targeted, for example, for use in the tourism sector (e.g. “Santa Claus Tradition in Finland”). The analyzed pictures consist of 153 photographs that represent people portrayed in different kinds of positions and sets. The other pictures of the NILH depict material things such as artifacts, landscapes and animals. Most of the pictures are contemporary (175), but some of them could be labeled as “historical” (42), as the oldest among them was taken in the 1860s.





**Figure 2.2:** A screenshot of the NILH page “Sauna bathing.” Opened on May 25, 2020. Published under CC BY 4.0.

**Table 2.1:** Content of the photographs in the NILH.

Theme	Number
People	153
Landscapes	12
Animals	4
Artifacts, etc.	44
Miscellaneous	4
Total	217

All 153 photographs were analyzed using *visual discourse analysis* (Rose 2012). Close attention was paid to exploring how the images construct accounts of the social world: how they—in Foucauldian words—produce and participate in power/knowledge production and constitute regimes of truth. Visual discourse analysis is mostly concerned with the sites of the images (texts) themselves, particularly in relation to their social modalities. Thus, following Gillian Rose, I placed all the pictures side by side and focused on: (1) identifying key themes



in the pictures; (2) examining the assumptions they make about what is “true” about Finnishness, whiteness and gender; (3) being open to different kinds of complexities and contradictions; (4) looking for the visible (what is present in the photograph) as well as the invisible (e.g. discursive significance); (5) being attentive to details (Rose 2012: 219–220; cf. Nash 2018: 595). Consequently, I ended up dividing the photographs into themes that are (1) gender and Finnishness, (2) nature and naturalness and (3) othernesses, even though some of the photographs included overlapping themes and categories. These themes are introduced profoundly in the next sections of this chapter.

Visual discourse analysis commonly produces knowledge that is very effective at interpreting images carefully, and particularly stresses the effects of social differences, which quadrates with the target of this chapter that is to analyze the visual-discursive production of cultural heritage following the realm of the critical heritage studies. The method is less constructive if the aim is to analyze the practices or institutions through which different kinds of discourses are produced, disseminated and lived (Rose 2012: 224–25). I have analyzed the role of the institutional heritage administration in the production of nationalist discourses elsewhere (Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b).

As it was noted before, ethnicity, race, nationhood, gender and heritage are perspectives *on* the world, not intrinsic features of it (Brubaker 2009). Thus, it is problematic to analyze visual clues only and make claims, for example, about whiteness, or race in general, as a visual or conceptual fact (Nash 2018). Consequently, I have resorted to the literary texts of the NILH entries as a background material, even though I have not discussed them broadly in this chapter. I have read the texts and searched traces of racializations that are manifested, for example, in linguistic expressions such as divisions between “us” and “them” (e.g. Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b). Furthermore, I (as a white, Finnish female scholar) have used my own embodied understanding through which I recognize objects and situations as ethnically meaningful (Brubaker 2009: 32). Thus, I follow the views of the feminist scholars who argue that “race is a part of the fabric of everyday life ... if we think of the fabric of the racial order as woven in the dialogues between bodies and space, then white racialness is eminently photographable” (Knowles 2006: 517–18; see also Nash 2019: 594; Dyer 1997).

### **Men, Women and the Nation as a Family**

The analyzed NILH photographs consist of photographs that portray men (67), women (46), children (17) and crowds (41). A majority of the photographs include overlapping categories. Only two of the pictures represent bodies that are somehow interpreted as “minorities.” Of course, these kinds of categories are always vague and porous, and it is problematic to group people under these narrow notions. Nevertheless, the content of the photographs roughly follows

the normative categories of Finnishness: whiteness is overrepresented, and the photographs that somehow challenge this idea are rare. Moreover, the largest group of people portrayed in the NILH photos are men, which shows that the intangible cultural heritage inventorying is indeed a gendered practice which participates in the complex fabric of underlying power structures (see also Wilson 2018). In this section, I concentrate on bodily representations that interconnect the notions of gender, whiteness and Finnishness.

In the NILH, cultural heritage is commonly embodied in middle-aged or elderly bodies: the mature body represents traditional knowledge and Finnish heritage (see e.g. submissions “Kalakukko tradition”; “Winter seine fishing in Lake Puruvesi”; “Lace-making in Heinämaa village”). Additionally, both men and women are most often portrayed as representing activities such as working or exercising. The nature of work in the pictures is commonly understood as “traditional”: occupations regarded as “modern” and urban are absent, and historical rural and/or peasant working-class occupations such as fishing, tar burning or glassblowing are emphasized. A total of 34 of the pictures represent these kinds of activities, and a majority of these include handicraft making. Some of the people in the pictures are seen as representing their “real-life” source of livelihood, but a great deal of the submissions discuss activities that are considered to be hobbies or vanishing old occupations. These “vanishing” lifestyles are often revived and maintained in small-scale businesses and demonstrations held by local organizations and activists (e.g. “Log driver competitions”).

“Conscientiously done work” is a typical value that is mentioned in the discourses of national stereotypes and Finnishness (e.g. Helkama et al. 2012), and the NILH pictures do not challenge this view. Hard-working-ness is a virtue in the materials of this chapter, and the white male bodies seen in the pictures underline this feature almost overtly. In Figures 2.3 and 2.4, the masculine bodies perform toughness, muscularity, even recklessness as they carry out demanding tasks. The photograph in Figure 2.3 could be described as grotesque, as the man’s hands are dirty, his hair hangs loose over his face, and the flowing brown tar gushes from the pipe.

The pictures seek to materialize the “old times,” an imaginary but common temporal expression in Finnish, that refers, for example, to the rural pre- and postwar Finnish landscape imageries. In these visualizations, the theme of pastoral fields was popular, but it was also supplemented with hard-working, masculine men on the one hand and virtuous but beautiful women dressed in the Finnish folk costume on the other (Vallius 2014). The wooden log wall is a material trace of the Finnish past in the photograph in Figure 2.3, as a majority of the Finnish viewers recognize it as a material that was used in the rural Finnish tenant farms and outhouses. These kinds of material traces that indicate oldness, simplicity and “naturalness” are often used in the contemporary heritagization processes. Furthermore, Figure 2.3 reinforces the idea of Finnish heritage as something that is work-centered, simple, physically difficult and



**Figure 2.3:** The NILH: Tar burning in pits. Photo: Jussi Kalliokoski. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subject's face has been obscured.

far from the Central-European heritage ideal of castles, ruins and upper-class monuments (on elite origins of European heritage, see Sargent 2016).

In the heritagization practices, the romantic claim of “folk” that represents the idealized lower class (e.g. Anttonen 2005) is present in the photographs that depict rural working-class occupations. In Figure 2.4, a man participates in a lumberjack competition. Log driving played an important role historically in Finnish modernization and forestry, but lumberjacking was considered as dangerous and uncomfortable labor (Pöysä 1997). In the heritagization processes, the dangerousness of the performed activity brings a sense of heroism in the narrative of Finnishness and Finnish work: the male body on the log is a hero who is able to tame the “wild nature” and flowing rapids. This combines the ideal masculinities of Finnish narratives: first, the category of industrious working-class man in the forestry business (Pöysä 1997); and second, the category of a classic warrior who is powerful but ready to die and sacrifice himself for the nation's sake. These have both been idealizations of a decent man (e.g. Jokinen 2019; Tepora 2011).

In the pictures, the male bodies not only represent *modern masculinity*, which could be defined in terms of power, honor, courage and self-control (Mosse 1996), but they are shaped by the desire of reaching *beyond* “modernity”: to the imaginary time of traditions in which the main virtues of male body were strength and power. Similar observations have been made, for example, in relation to heavy metal culture in Finland: one of the ideal figures of



**Figure 2.4:** The NILH: Log-driver competitions. “King of log drivers.” Photo: Ninaras 2016. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subject’s face has been obscured.

masculinity among heavy metal music listeners and players is the category of *äijä* (“tough guy,” “dude” or, in older usage, “old man”), who is “hard like steel” and “traditional,” and who is neither sentimental nor fashionable in the way they dress. The ideal and imaginary picture of *äijä* is understood as stemming from the old times when values were not “soft” (Sarelin 2012: 162–64.)

The desired and ideal toughness of *äijä* is present in the NILH pictures, and it is emphasized, in addition to the above-mentioned pictures of working men, for example, in the photographs of athletes. Five of the submissions discuss themes such as Finnish baseball playing, skiing and running (e.g. “Everyman’s rights”; “Jukola Relay”). Sports have widely been acknowledged to be one of the central fields in which the constructs of “us” and “others” have been imagined, reinforced and negotiated at the national scale (e.g. Hobsbawm 1990). In Finland, athletes have been treated as national heroes for over a century, and one of the national myths is that Finland was “put on the world map” by the runners and other sportsmen in the first half of the 20th century. The sports victories were used in creating an image of Finns as a “strong, white nation that equaled the Germans and Anglo-Saxons in its racial qualities.” Members of this kind of “Western white race” were mainly understood as sporting males, and in the masculine imagery of sports journalism, the notions of “race” and “nation” have been commonly intertwined (Tervo 2002: 351).

The national athlete-hero imagery is salient in the NILH and, for example, Finnish baseball (*pesäpallo*), which is considered to be “the Finnish national sport”, is represented through the stereotypical images of masculinity: in Figure 2.5, the famous baseball player is pictured shouting aggressively when leading the



**Figure 2.5:** The NILH: Baseball in Finland. “Antti Piuhola from Nurmo Jymy in 2012.” Photo: Mädsen. Published under CC BY-SA 3.0.

game. The image fits well with the history of Finnish baseball, as it was used pre- and postwar times in military training and for preparing school children for battle and warfare. Even the vocabulary of the game was created to improve on militaristic aims (Hyvärinen 2017). Figure 2.5 follows up the image of *äijä*, and the man in the photograph is connected to the hero character in Figure 2.4 through the promise of toughness, even though the idea of danger and sacrifice is not explicitly present in Figure 2.5—the militaristic discourse is only implicit in the picture. Yet, the interminglings of nationality, whiteness and sporting masculinity are regarded as important in the processes of heritagization. In Figure 2.5, the male body has the ability to refer to the national past through the act of playing Finnish baseball and, thus, the sporting bodies themselves become important heritagized objects.

However, subtler tones are allowed for the masculine performances as well in the heritagization processes. Figure 2.6 represents professional fiddle players from the village of Kaustinen, which is one of the most well-known areas of historical folk music styles in Finland. In 2019, the Kaustinen fiddle-playing submission of NILH was nominated by the Ministry of Education and Culture for inscription to the UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The players in Figure 2.6 are professional musicians





**Figure 2.6:** The NILH: Kaustinen fiddle playing. “Kaustinen Folk Music Festival 2015. The band JPP performing in Areena.” Photo: Lauri Oino 2015. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subjects’ faces have been obscured.

who form the band JPP, which is the most well-known instrumental *pelimanni* ensemble of the Kaustinen area.<sup>4</sup>

The picture shows how the white, male bodies mirror one another in the rhythm of the music they are playing: all the fiddle players in the front are slightly bent down in the same direction and their feet stamp the ground. The musicologist Mats Johansson (2013), who has studied the gendered practices of Norwegian folk music, notes that the Norwegian folk music scene (especially fiddle playing) is historically and contemporarily dominated by men in social and musical meaning. The *pelimanni* field in the Kaustinen area is similar at least at the professional stage: despite some female performers, most of the players are men. Additionally, Johansson suggests that, in Norway, a fiddle player “should possess ‘masculine’ qualities in the sense of having technical proficiency and musical stamina required to convincingly project sound images of intensity and energy,” as well as expressive, emotional, tender and personal qualities in his playing (Johansson 2013: 369–70). In Figure 2.6, the energetic and heroic toughness of *äijä* is present in the players’ active and almost athletic playing positions, but the performers are also allowed—and anticipated—to express more emotional nuances, as their playing is also viewed through the demands and ideals of classical music’s violin virtuoso genius. Thus, heritagization practices allow male bodies to leave or distance themselves from the role of the traditional and almost “primitive” *äijä*, but as in Figure 2.6, the claim of





**Figure 2.7:** The NILH: Baking the traditional Eura twists. “People baking at Euran pirtti.” Photo: Jorma Pihlava / Photo archive of the Cultural Services at the Municipality of Eura. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subjects’ faces have been obscured.

pastness is then attached not only to their physical strength, but also to their bodies’ ability to refer to the genre of folk music and all its subtle nuances.

Women, instead, are portrayed in the pictures in a more serene way. The spatial environments of men are more often public, outdoors or in nature; in contrast, the women’s world seems to be “home” or home-like indoor environments, such as kitchens (see also Palmsköld and Rosenqvist 2018). In the NILH pictures, women knit, sew, make lace, bake or cook. The majority of the female bodies seen in the pictures are elderly, which underlines the temporal continuities between the present and the old times and, thus, fulfils one of the most important demands of heritagization. In Figure 2.7, the ladies baking the traditional pastries are portrayed wearing aprons in a cozy environment.

Their hard-working demeanor is more discreet, but their active hands produce large amounts of food which indicate mother-like care, collectivity and warm solidarity. Motherhood has been a central category in constructing the Finnish nation: even the modern image of a woman promoted by women’s organizations at the beginning of the 20th century was based on the unbreakable bond between a mother and a child. The virginal figure of the Finnish Maid has also been depicted paradoxically as a mother in some cases: Finland itself has been occasionally seen as a mother who protects her citizens (Valenius 2004: 110–18). When interpreted in the context of the NILH and compared to



**Figure 2.8:** The NILH: The gymnastic tradition in Finland. “The year-long rehearsals culminate in outdoor large group performances on fields. Come rain or sunshine. Women’s large group performance routine at Helsinki Festival Games in 1956.” Photo: The Finnish Gymnastics Federation’s archives.

the pictures of men, Figure 2.7 seems to reinforce the construct of a woman as the biological and ideological reproducer of the nation: the mother-like, baking older women indicate the Finnish “fore-mothers” whose task has been to repeatedly perform the duties of mothers and housewives in the private environment of home (e.g. Mayer 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Interestingly, one particular photograph of the NILH challenges the role of women as mother-like housewives. Figure 2.8, which shows one of the “historical” black-and-white photographs included in the data, depicts women doing gymnastics in a muddy field in the 1950s. In this photograph, female bodies are represented as heroines of the hard conditions of the past: they are represented as having enduring strength and as being capable of exercising in all weather conditions. The photograph renews the canonical narratives of Finnish past as tough but admired manifestations of “pain, poverty and suffering,” and the positions of the female bodies even underline this as they kneel down in mud and bow their heads in the heavy rain. Interestingly, pain and suffering have been the features of a man’s life especially in the militarist-nationalist war hero discourses (Jokinen 2019), but as the war history is almost entirely absent apart from some cursory mentions in the intangible cultural heritage inventory, female bodies are also given the role of showing the past’s burden.

Overall, the gender roles are represented in the NILH as “traditional.” The NILH photographs tend to place the body in the metaphoric heterosexual “national family,” that is, a male-headed household in which both sexes have a “natural” role to play (e.g. Nagel 1998: 254; Valenius 2004: 55–58). Children are quite rarely portrayed in the NILH photographs, but when they are, they

are often pictured with their parents (see e.g. “Santa Claus tradition in Finland”; “Making national costumes”; “Making a Korsnäs sweater”), which emphasizes the claim of “national family.” Furthermore, the ideal of a white and Finnish nuclear family is a metaphor that naturalizes the claim of whiteness: if the heritage practitioners are seen as “collective mothers” and “heroic fathers,” then the idea of whiteness is seen as a genetic fact that is inevitably inherited within the “national family.”

### Nature as Finnishness

The past is very commonly constructed in the NILH through connections to “nature,” that is, it is understood as something non-urban, but rarely outright wilderness. The metaphoric understanding of Finnishness as something that is close or intertwined with nature is not a new idea. As Ari Aukusti Lehtinen notes, the distinction between “culture” and “nature” has been a historical necessity in Finland: “nature has become a symbol of the past, that is, life at natural risk, to be used as a negation to those much-welcomed processes of modernization and civilization. Nature, as the primitive past, was to be left behind” (Lehtinen 2008: 475). This idea stems from the romantic period, but it was negotiated and contested by the critics of modern lifestyle, for example, in Finnish literature from the beginning of the 20th century as well. For instance, the “primitivist” authors such as Joel Lehtonen and Juhani Aho admired and described the sublime experiences of nature in which the controlled colonial gaze was substituted with descriptions of ecstatic bliss and the harsh, “vulgar” and frightening sides of nature that threatened and penetrated civilization (Rossi 2020: 148).

Both sides are essential in the NILH pictures: nature represents, at the same time, the primitive past and the tamed wilderness that is left behind, and thus brings forth the narrative template of national memory in which the toughness of the past is tamed and changed into the form of modern welfare Finland, but it is also something admired, uncanny, almost frightening and powerful. Nature is commonly recognized as a realm apart from the everyday, and the heritagization practices have been a part of the processes of separating nature from “culture” (Lowenthal 2006). This essential division between modernity and nature is present in the NILH pictures, but they are intertwined in a double-timed way: nature represents the past, and the past must be inherent in the contemporary heritagization practices. Thus, the past penetrates modernity through it. Consequently, the NILH photographs include very few urban environments (only 14 units can be recognized as urban), and most of them are located in rural-like, forested surroundings that are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in Finland: the forested landscape in the pictures is almost like a “non-place” or a stereotypical background that represents the Finnish national spatiality and its past, and, for example, regional features are subsidiary.



**Figure 2.9:** The NILH: Picking mushrooms. “A mushroom-picking trip in an old forest is a magnificent experience.” Photo: Lissu Rossi. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subject’s face has been obscured.

The landscapes seen in the pictures are semi-peripheries, picturesque rural environments reminiscent of the landscapes described by the famous Finnish author Zacharias Topelius in the mid-19th century or the forested imagery of National Romanticism (e.g. Figure 2.1; see Häyrynen 2008).

In the NILH, nature is a place into which people go and practice “heritagized activities” such as orienteering, foraging wild greens and mushroom picking (see Figures 2.9 and 2.10). The activities and the repeated movements bodies make in the practices connect people with the past: hence, as “nature” is understood as representing the Finnish pastness, activities in nature are regarded as even more traditional and, thus, worth heritagization. In the NILH photographs, bodies enter the “primitive” past as they go to nature. The forest landscape, which once was a symbol of backwardness and periphery, is now a landscape of national heritage in which modern Finns are able to be in contact with the past. In Figures 2.9 and 2.10, the forest landscapes, the act of picking mushrooms or wild greens, and the traditional, old-fashioned baskets made of splints create a backdrop of deep time spans that utilizes the stereotypical





**Figure 2.10:** The NILH: Horta hunting, foraging for wild greens and herbs. “Horta hunting, i.e. foraging for wild greens, is an ancient, empowering hobby practiced in nature, that can result in bringing home a basketful of superfoods, free of charge.” Photo: Jouko Kivimetsä. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subject’s face has been obscured.

symbols of Finnishness such as the naturalized connections between humans and forest landscape and artifacts made of wood. This is also brought forth in the imagery created for tourism: Figure 2.11 utilizes “natural” elements such as a campfire, the snowy ground, a cup carved from wood, woolen clothes and the wooden wall to create a sense of “authentic” pastness, even though the character of Santa Claus brings a twist of fantasy to these discourses.

However, “nature” is not represented only through explicit references to forested or rural landscapes in the NILH photographs, but it is also brought forth through “naturalness” in general. Ideas of “unspoiled” or “pre-modern” nature are significant in creating the connections between the present and the past—also in bodily representations. One of the examples of this is the “Sauna bathing” entry that introduces the idea of Finnish corporeality as naked but non-sexual, something that is regarded as “natural” (see Figure 2.1). Figure 2.12 is a prominent example of this: the photograph, published by Sauna from Finland, which is a commercial network that promotes sauna business companies, introduces a group of happily smiling people in a wooden sauna interior.



**Figure 2.11:** The NILH: Santa Claus tradition in Finland. “Santa Claus and an elf enjoying a cup of coffee by a lean-to in December 2015.” Photo: Kimmo Syväri / Visit Finland image archives. Published under CC BY 4.0.

The traditional sauna equipment (birch whisk, pail of water, scoop for throwing water on the sauna stove) function as semiotic symbols of Finnishness, but their “pre-modernity” and “primitivity” also mark deep time spans and connections to the forest landscape as they are made of wood and young branches of birch (see also Kalaoja 2016: 150).

The bodies in the middle represent the ideal of non-sexual nudity that is often associated with the Finnish sauna culture, but the non-sexuality is still brought forth in a rather modest (and, simultaneously, in a sexually loaded) way, as the bodies are covered with towels. Sauna pictures have been part of Finnish tourism imagery since the 1930s, but at the beginning of the 20th century, they were regarded as obscene. Today, the sauna pictures represent Finnish or Northern exoticism in the imageries of country branding. However, the tourism sector tries to avoid *overtly* “primitive” or sexually loaded impressions in sauna bathing pictures, which has led to an emphasis on amenity, enjoyment and collectivity (Kalaoja 2016: 150–51). Consequently, Figure 2.12 balances the fear of being “too primitive” and the ideal of non-sexual corporeality.

“Naturalness” is very easily associated with the naturalized category of whiteness. Figure 2.1 at the beginning of this chapter can be interpreted as an interface in which the ideals of Finnish naturalness, landscape and the gendered white body meet. The young women sitting on the small wooden dock refer to the image of the “pure” and “virginal” Finnish Maid who was quite often depicted naked or revealingly clad (Valenius 2004). The Finnish Maid’s hair





**Figure 2.12:** The NILH: Sauna bathing. Photo: Harri Tarvainen / Sauna from Finland. Published under CC BY 4.0. Owing to ethical considerations, the subjects' faces have been obscured.

is mostly described as blond, but the brown-haired women are “close enough” to represent Finnishness, and the color of the blue lake hints that their eyes might be blue as well. As the photograph is published in the “Sauna bathing” submission, the women are positioned as though they have just left the steamy sauna for cooling off on the small dock. This indicates that they are cleaned up, which connotes purity. The women seem to become one with the landscape, and the landscape becomes one with them, as the pure and virginal lake landscape (which, simultaneously, is the national rural-like “non-place”) surrounds them and even touches them as their feet soak in the water. The canonical Finnish lake-and-forest landscape has been identified with femininity and, thus, eroticized in the processes of viewing, recognizing and describing its beauty (Valenius 2004: 104).

### On the Borders of Finnishness

The NILH photographs show a very homogeneous image of Finnishness: people are beavering away on different kinds of tasks, the sun is shining and beautiful nature surrounds all. In the NILH, cultural heritage is often seen as something happy, joyous and worth celebrating—only the “Visiting cemeteries on Christmas Eve” entry might be interpreted as representing darker shades of life. The idea of so-called *dark heritage* (e.g. Thomas et al. 2019) is absent in the

NILH; for example, the mnemonic practices of remembering the Finnish Civil War (1918) or Second World War are not emphasized. This is rather surprising in the context of Finland, as the narratives of war are often considered as one of the most important ways of narrating Finnishness and the Finnish past (see e.g. Torsti 2012). In the NILH, the narratives of war are replaced with narratives and symbols of 'nature' and 'collectivity', and the 'everyday', which, of course, serve well, for example, the tourism sector, which is one of the benefiting areas of heritage inventorying. Are there, then, any cracks in the façade?

By reading closely the photographs, some underlying counter-narratives can be recognized. The aforementioned Figure 2.8 from the 1950s with muddy gymnastic fields opens slightly a small window to the idea that the past might also be difficult and problematic. The Finnishness of the picture stems from the postwar period during which the great narrative of the Finnish welfare state was only beginning to take shape; modern technologies and overflowing abundance are absent, and the slim figures of the women in the heavy rain indicate a simpler life. The old photograph in the context of the NILH functions, to quote Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2011: 245), "as supplement, both confirming and unsettling the stories that are explored and transmitted." In the case of Figure 2.8, the transmitted story is made clear when the photograph is compared to the other pictures published in "The gymnastic tradition in Finland" entry: large, green sports fields and glittery and colorful clothes of modern gymnasts underline the simplicity of Figure 2.8 and conditions that are close to indigent. Finnishness as a linear, developing narrative is made rather clear in this context, but, as noted before, the simplicity of the past lifestyle is simultaneously admired in the heritagization processes: the past's poverty and "naturalness" are happily celebrated and solemnized from the distance of the present.

Similar observations can be made, for example, in the case of Figure 2.13, taken from the submission "Finnish skittles." The photograph was taken by the journalist I. K. Inha, who was later named "national photographer of Finland." The photograph also belongs to the NILH category that depicts sports and leisure time activities. When compared to the contemporary photographs of sportsmen in the NILH, the men in Figure 2.13 are not presented in a traditional Western sports hero manner—on the contrary, their postures, clothes and facial hair could be described as peculiar when compared to later imagery. The photograph emphasizes—in a similar way to Figure 2.8—the desired but uncanny imagined otherness of the Finnish past: the simple clothes and equipment, the forest environment and the markedly high-spirited posture of the man raising his hand all tell a story of a humble and poor, but still resilient and capable, nation.

However, the photograph also broadens the geographical, linguistic and ethnic limits of normative Finnishness, as the picture is taken in the Karelian-speaking<sup>5</sup> area of Aunus Karelia (currently located in Russia) in the 19th century. The extension of Finnishness to the areas of "related people" (*fin suukansat*) in the East stems from Finnish national romanticism (e.g. Anttonen 2005), but



**Figure 2.13:** The NILH: Finnish skittles. “Kyykkämaalta.” Photo: I. K. Inha 1894, Luvajärvi, Kiimaisjärvi, Aunus. Photo: Finnish Heritage Agency, Finno-ugric picture collection. Published under CC BY 4.0.

it is still relatively commonly referred to in different kinds of institutional heritagization contexts, such as museum exhibitions or folk music performances (e.g. Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020a). The photograph in question underlines the temporal and spatial connections to the Karelian area and, thus, indicates an affirmation to old-ness, traditionality, Eastern-ness and Finno-Ugrian-ness. The 21st century’s normative Finnishness is thus widened in the picture toward the values and views of 19th-century politics, which is not surprising, as the heritagization processes tend to stretch the ideals of the national romantic period in Finland (Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b).

Figure 2.14, instead, comes closer to the contemporary society. The Roma singer Hilja Grönfors’s picture is one of the few photographs which represents “minorities” in the material. For example, the Indigenous Sámi people are not included in the NILH, even though the WLH contains Sámi-related submissions (see Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b). The largest minorities in Finland (Russians and Estonians) are mainly categorized in the linguistic/cultural vein and, thus, they are “invisible” in terms of visual markers. The Roma otherness, instead, is rather “hypervisual” despite their Finnish-speakingness and more than 500-year-long history in Finland: in the picture, Grönfors stands at the front dressed in her traditional Roma costume, which is a beautifully decorated but strongly stigmatized garment in Finnish society. Alongside other stereotypic



**Figure 2.14:** The NILH: Singing tradition of Finnish Roma people. “Hilja Grönfors Trio.” Photo: Sauli Heikkilä / Pieni Huone.

images, the dress is a symbol that indicates the othered role of the Roma people in Finland. The dress symbolizes the stereotyped features such as “free sexuality” and “criminality” that have been associated with Roma people historically—and in contemporary society. The Roma people have been erased from the idea of nationhood, as they have not fitted into the ideal of a Finnish folk (e.g. Stark 2018). Thus, Figure 2.14 provides a counter-narrative to other pictures analyzed in this chapter, as it challenges the stereotypical narrative of Finnish white heritage.

The Roma dress and the presence of the singer Grönfors in the photograph, as well as the whole “Singing tradition of Finnish Roma people” entry, are excellent examples of how the intangible cultural heritage administration practices openly and genuinely endeavor to be inclusive, multicultural and liberal *per se*. The NILH’s aim is to be as inclusive as possible, but, as the national-scale interpretation shapes the framework of inventorying in a rather banal way, the vernacular community level responses are produced, negotiated and shaped in relation to nationalist discourses. This results in stereotypical—that is, white, middle-class and normative—representations of “Finnish culture” (Haapoja-Mäkelä 2020b).

What kinds of stories does Figure 2.14 tell, then, against this background? Placed side by side with the other NILH pictures, it gives space for a non-normative embodiment of Finnish heritage. It is indeed a brave act to set Grönfors’s dress, black hair and singing in alignment with what is portrayed, for example, in Figure 2.1, particularly if the stigmatized role of the Roma people in the Finnish society is kept in mind. Additionally, she is depicted in a similar kind of



“non-place” described above; the landscape in the background spatializes her in the imaginary national space in which the forested environment plays a significant role, connecting the picture to the great narrative of Finnishness.

However, the picture might be interpreted only as a curiosity, or as a reproduction of the images of a romanticized and nostalgized “gypsy woman.” As Thomas Beardslee notes, the risks of the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage application are built into the very concept itself: gross power imbalances, problematic accreditation and access to authority necessary in order to shape the heritage discourse about a given practice, the “un-naming” or anonymization of heritage practitioners and their depiction only as “bearers” or “passers-on” of traditions, as well as the possible negative consequences for the “bearers” in terms of freedom and agency, are all risks that the heritagization processes may (re)produce (Beardslee 2016: 99). Interestingly, the above-mentioned un-naming happens in the NILH context mostly in relation to the entries that represent “canonical” Finnishness (see e.g. Figure 2.1), while Hilja Grönfors is introduced by name. However, she is depicted as a bearer of the Roma traditions, someone who has the knowledge and understanding of the past’s heritage. The question of whether her picture, name and singing are emphasized in the NILH because of the performance of inclusivity is not easily answered.

### Concluding Remarks

The NILH photographs offer interesting insights into the ways in which Finnishness is embodied in heritagization practices in 21st-century Finland. The pictures perform the Finnish “we-group” to others: they invite the outsider gaze to appraise Finnishness and Finnish heritage and compare it to the other cultures in the realm of modern heritage practices. This is by no means new in the context of visual heritage production: on the contrary, coffee table books, tourist brochures, museum exhibitions and so on have participated in similar processes for decades in Finland (see e.g. Jokela 2010). What is striking in the materials examined in this chapter is the similarity between the older imageries and the contemporary images of the NILH: since the 19th century, the national imageries have contained forested landscapes, blue-eyed girls, sportsmen and active workers (e.g. Häyrynen 2005; Koponen et al. 2018), similar to the images analyzed in this chapter. The longevity of these kinds of visual representations of nationality may, according to Maunu Häyrynen (2020: 54), stem from the experience of familiarity that affectively interlaces the everyday and the national ideology in certain places, spaces and environments. This idea fits in well with the observations of heritage scholars: performances of cultural heritage often reinforce the already acknowledged ways of producing identities that concern gender, class, race and/or nation (e.g. Smith 2015). Thus, following these thoughts, I argue that the bodies in the NILH pictures meet the expectations of what Finnish cultural heritage looks like and, hence, produce an affective experience of familiarity for the viewer of the photo-

graphs, especially for the one who views them from the insider perspective of “white sanctuary.”

The claim of whiteness is a significant part of this affective familiarity of Finnishness. It is present in the photographs in an all-encompassing manner: the NILH photographs belong to the virtual white sanctuary of the intangible cultural heritage inventorying, in which whiteness is taken for granted and regarded as a privileged norm. Whiteness is silent and banal in a way that no attention is paid to it, despite some obvious curiosities in which the alleged inclusivity of the inventorying practices is wished to be brought forth. Whiteness is also seen as “natural,” as the pictures underline the naturalized connections between the landscape, ethnicity and sexuality. Furthermore, as people are regarded as being a part of a “national family,” whiteness seems to be an inherited “genetic” feature of Finnishness.

The embodied heritage performances balance between the images of Finnishness “now” and “then” and strategically deploy and reconnect historical images and the contemporary. These performances seek to embody the romantic “Finnish folk” through strengthening, for instance, the stereotypical images of “Finnish man” and “Finnish woman.” Finnish heritage is embodied in the photographs in active, working, mature bodies that perform either heroic and masculine or collective and caring feminine tasks, which underlines the idea of national family, but also “traditionality.” The media researchers Mikko Lehtonen and Anu Koivunen (2010) suggest that in the Finnish public speech the category of “folk” (*kansa*) commonly represents today’s Finnish middle class. They state:

The new, ideal “we” consists of people who see themselves as broad-minded, law-abiding, and diligent citizens who, at the same time, are active and responsible consumers. Those who belong to the “we” are faithful to traditional Finnish virtues but they are simultaneously able to think about the future, be innovative, business-oriented, and international. (Lehtonen and Koivunen 2010: 234)

The NILH photographs visualize and reproduce this ideal group, but the context of heritagization requires emphasis on “traditional Finnish virtues,” which explains the emergence of, for example, rural peasant tasks or representations of having an intrinsic connection to “nature.” Overall, the ideal Finnish “we-group” in the NILH photographs is represented as maintaining and sharing a very homogeneous corporeality, physical space and mental state of mind.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Finnish Heritage Agency leans on the values promoted by the UNESCO 2003 Convention, such as mutual respect, transparent collaboration and cultural diversity (UNESCO 2020).



- <sup>2</sup> See the website of the National Inventory of Living Heritage at [https://wiki.aineetonkulttuuriperinto.fi/wiki/Elävän\\_perinnön\\_kansallinen\\_luettelo/valitut/en](https://wiki.aineetonkulttuuriperinto.fi/wiki/Elävän_perinnön_kansallinen_luettelo/valitut/en).
- <sup>3</sup> Email interview with a former university intern at the Finnish Heritage Agency (University Intern 2020).
- <sup>4</sup> Kaustinen fiddle-playing is based on the *pelimanni* tradition (Swedish *spelman*, literally “play-man”), instrumental dance music genre that has been prominent in the area since the 17th century. Nowadays, the field is heavily influenced by the folk music revival that emerged in the 1960s, and it is part of the so-called contemporary folk music scene that is largely institutionalized and professionalized (e.g. Hill 2014).
- <sup>5</sup> Karelian is a Finnic language spoken mainly in the Republic of Karelia in Russia.

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