

The Use of Cultural Heritage in Support of National Narratives

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ABSTRACT: This article is devoted to the problem of cultural heritage used in support of national narratives by governments and/or dominant groups. The article outlines seven case studies within three contextual categories. Special attention is brought to inclusive narratives within the context of national identity and collective memory. I argue that cultural heritage is used in the service of power both by dominant and minority groups and is vital for cultural survival.

KEYWORDS: Anthropology, cultural anthropology, cultural heritage, national narratives, invented traditions.

■ Introduction

Nations worldwide ascribe meaning and value to cultural heritage to support a national narrative. Cultural heritage can provide the foundation for national narratives and justification for governments and/or dominant groups to promote a certain agenda or policy. Cultural heritage refers to tangible heritage, including the built environment and artifacts, and intangible heritage, like oral traditions and rituals, passed through generations.¹ Thus, cultural heritage is a reflection of the way communities have developed and defined their lives. By helping establish a national narrative, cultural heritage can promote exclusionary policies that target groups outside of the dominant construction of "cultural heritage." Dominant groups fight to control the cultural heritage narrative as it allows them to exercise power over people's representation within it. National narratives can be reinforced in the process of sovereignty centralization, national and state building, bureaucratization, and rationalization of polity.²

National narratives are stories about one nation's past or present that help establish (or invent) a coherent national identity.³ National identity refers to a nation as a unified whole where people feel a strong sense of belonging.⁴ National narratives shape the nation's systems of values and beliefs and are strong vehicles of power/legitimacy for both dominant and minority groups.

On the one hand, governments and dominant groups can use national narratives as a tool to their advantage to shape public opinions or justify certain policies. As a result, national narratives can lead to exclusionary practices or policies that can marginalize certain groups because they do not "fit in" with the unified national identity. Cultural heritage justifies those exclusionary policies and gives authority to the dominant majority to execute them. The concept of "invented traditions," cultural practices that are perceived to be "historical" or "traditional" but intentionally "constructed" in recent times, is often present to support a national narrative.⁵ Dominant groups resort to educational institutions, entertainment, and literature to promote their narratives, targeting a wide audience.

On the other hand, cultures that fear cultural loss, referring to the disappearance of culture due to a changing environment, may use "invented traditions" and national narratives to distinguish and define their culture. Thus strengthening their national identity and making their culture more resilient in the face of cultural loss. It is not as critical to dig into whether these "invented traditions" are aboriginal. Instead, this essay focuses on understanding why these stories matter to the people creating them and what they aim for.

This paper examines the link between cultural heritage, collective memory, and national identity. It also explores how historical places, objects, figures, and their legacies can be manipulated. Given the social context and set agenda, they can be prescribed a symbolic value and meaning. What are the driving forces behind dominant national narratives? Who creates, supports, and benefits from them? In the quest to find an answer, this essay features three sections, discussing (1) cultural heritage used in the service of power, (2) cultural heritage as being vital to cultural survival, and (3) the means of promoting a set narrative.

This paper analyzes several case studies around these issues. In the first section, three case studies are presented, including one about African American heritage, where there is a persistent lack of representation of African American heritage in the national narrative. Another case study is about the Gauls, a branch of Celts who lived in modern-day France, and the Gallic king, Vercingetorix, who united the Gauls against the Romans. The final case concerns the Neolithic archeological site in Türkiye and how different interest groups, including Goddess feminism, try to interpret the meaning of "the Goddess" at the site. The second section reviews two case studies, including one about the Sardana, a Catalan music genre popular in Catalonia, an autonomous community of Spain, that is danced in a circle while holding hands and following a set of steps. The following case study is about the Hawaiian cultural heritage, such as the "slack-key" guitar, "Lomi-Lomi" salmon, and the Hawaiian traditional way of life. The third section includes two case studies, one about Scotland's distinct Highland culture and the kilt, their traditional costume, as a social

construct. The last case study is about the role of education, government, and popular culture in promoting a national narrative linked to cultural heritage in post-war Sri Lanka.

■ Literature Review

The set narrative with the legitimization derived from cultural heritage often excludes a group from the collective memory, referring to “shared representations of a group's past based on a common identity.”⁶ The unfair representation in the heritage narrative can alter how people perceive national history and both personal and collective identity.⁷

Societies enforce and maintain “invented traditions” to strengthen their national identity. These “invented traditions” serve as ethnic markers to distinguish their culture and define ethnic boundaries, ultimately becoming a form of resistance.⁸

In both exclusive narratives and those that are a form of resistance, intense nationalism, an idea that one's nation's interests are superior to other groups, can also be a part of the narratives groups enforce but with different intentions.⁹

Social structures support national narratives through rules and restrictions that different groups reinforce. This can occur in official power, like government, and unofficial power, which refers to different advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations. Our cultural beliefs, in the form of cosmologies and habitus, lead to social structures. Cosmologies refer to our belief systems because of the universe, our origin, and our understanding of how humans should behave.¹⁰ Habitus accounts for our beliefs formed through life experiences that become what we regard as “normal” or “traditional”.¹¹ Systems of beliefs are challenging for us to notice and change, and thus, they lead to social practices. Stories created around “invented traditions” are, in part, deep-seated in society's cosmologies and belief systems.

In order to reinforce social practices, social policing comes into play from both authorities and members of society. As a result, social structures and rules are expected to be followed, or otherwise, consequences are anticipated. However, the same model can function in any direction and start at any process stage. Social construction creates common sense, something we see as “normal” and fail to question.¹² National narratives can be easily formed around social constructs because they become part of our habitus, which can be challenging to see past through.¹³

National narratives inflict an agenda that can be a source of legitimization for social structures and rules. National narratives can reflect certain groups' power distribution and dominance of certain groups and legitimize their superiority in society. In return, groups in power can use cultural heritage to their advantage to either empower or exclude certain groups from collective memory, national identity, and narrative.

■ Case Studies

Cultural heritage used in the service of power:

Cultural heritage can provide the means to exclude or empower depending on a set agenda by the groups in power. Groups can be marginalized if they are not a part of the

dominant narrative, which is put forward and maintained by a powerful majority. Dominant groups use cultural heritage to their advantage to legitimize their actions.

First, such a narrative is seen in the first case study on African American cultural heritage by Erin Linn-Tylen, which explores the persistent lack of African American heritage on display and, as a result, an incomplete picture of American history and collective memory.

Demonstrably, out of 2500 National Landmarks of the United States, only 3% represent African American and other marginalized groups' cultural heritage. Simultaneously, any efforts to remove symbols of the Confederacy from public places invoke deep resistance from white supremacists.¹⁴ In this example, the lack of cultural heritage on display leads to African American identity being erased from the national memory, which serves to marginalize this group further.

The set narratives are also a reflection of people empowered to have control over them. White and male groups dominate the representation in historic preservation, which ultimately proves that cultural heritage can be used to ascribe authority and dominance. Consequently, African Americans or other marginalized groups are not represented equally because people controlling the narrative constitute a specific portion of the population.

The “dominant majority” holds power over the heritage narrative in the United States regarding what we acknowledge as heritage and what value we ascribe to it. For example, out of 86,000 sites in the National Register of Historic Places, less than 8% represent African American and other minority heritages.¹⁴ Manipulation of African American heritage or lack of it on display is used in the service of power to exclude the group from the national collective memory. This directly impacts the personal and collective identity of African Americans. It leads to an incomplete picture of African American history itself and that of the larger American history. Cultural heritage shapes our identity; simultaneously, what we consider our identity influences cultural heritage.

Often, tangible heritage does not hold significant value; it becomes valuable once we ascribe meaning and emotional linkage to it, which is determined by the present-day social context, persisting national narrative, and the identities of those in power. By controlling the heritage narrative, one can assert power over minority groups by choosing what to recognize as cultural heritage and manipulating its meanings. As a result, it culminates in twisted collective memory and national identity. The acknowledgment of the darker side of American history, in the case of African Americans, slavery, persistent violence, oppression, and racial discrimination, can be a vehicle of social justice to establish African American identity and fair representation in the heritage narrative, limiting the power to the “dominant majority.” Now, not enough has been done to honor African American history and increase its representation in the broader African American history.

Secondly, cultural heritage is also used to legitimize exclusive narratives, as in the case of Celtic people in modern Europe by Michael Dietler. In this example, Celtic people were excluded from the French national identity, where “unification” was

achieved by the set narrative, which gained legitimization from cultural heritage.

Although Celtic people did not have a unified “Celtic culture,” as different branches (for example, Britons, Gauls, and Gauls) had clear distinctions in political organization and social structures, they still spoke a set of related languages and shared some cultural elements. Therefore, Celtic people never had a cohesive collective identity or constituted a unified political community. Nevertheless, Celtic identity was manipulated to establish a unified French identity through appeals to common ethnic heritage, which often took a strong racial character. Celtic identity was sometimes even a means of classifying “others” and as a self-defining contrast, in part due to the generalizations of the “barbarians” vs. “civilized” like Greeks or Romans. The “invented” sense of unity and community out of ethnic heritage was furthered by the foundation of the *Academic Celtique* under Napoleon with potential political objectives of ideologically justifying the military expansion of the French Empire to reclaim the ancient territory of the Gauls.¹⁵ The link between Celtic identity and French history, especially seen in the heroic idealization of the Vercingetorix character, resulted in the Celts largely being portrayed as the primary ethnic foundation for the modern French nation. At the same time, Vercingetorix became a national hero, lighting the modern patriotic sentiment. The phrases “our ancestors the Gauls” and the “eldest daughter of *la Celtique*” became part of the unified French identity and went so far as to make Vietnamese and African children recite the same clichés.¹⁵ The manipulation of Celtic heritage quickly became part of French political life and a source of legitimization for exclusionary policies. For example, the characteristically xenophobic phrase “Gaul for the Gauls” was spotted at the annual festival of the Front National party.¹⁵ Children’s literature further reinforced the ideology of the unified French identity with the national Celtic heritage as the foundation. This demonstrates the power of the national narrative to define what groups are welcomed in a community and who will be excluded.

In order to strengthen national unity, the state began the process of bringing the French language to “backward rural provinces”.¹⁵ Ironically, the Breton language, part of the Celtic languages, became the victim of the process as the state’s goal was to eradicate local popular cultures. The model promoted by the Breton militants in Brittany in northwestern France denies connections with the continental Gauls, laying the foundation for the ethnic opposition to the French nation claiming Gallic ancestry. Furthermore, many activists share the common cause of returning Celtic languages to their homelands.

Places and objects can be turned into powerful symbols that uplift constructed traditions of identity and be used to justify exclusion, like in this case of groups who did not speak French. That is where our habitus comes into play: the overall understanding that we develop through life experiences, becomes part of what we regard as “common sense” or “traditional.” However, it might not necessarily be the “truth”.¹¹ As a result, it is hard to challenge these set narratives because once the symbolic meanings are ascribed to cultural heritage, they become part of what we consider the “correct way”.

Thirdly, the narrative of one group’s voice as being more powerful than another is followed in the case study by Kathryn Rountree at the Neolithic site at Çatalhöyük, Türkiye archaeologists and different interest groups like Goddess Feminism clash in the race to interpret the past, which comes with a power imbalance between archeologists and Goddess Feminists. The article explores the idea that one group’s voices can be silenced. In contrast, others are valued and respected in the case of archeological interpretations that have the power to set the national narrative.

James Mellard had excavated the archaeological site, which become known for discovering many clay “Mother Goddess” figurines.¹⁶ The discovery then became associated with the ancient worship of a female deity, drawing the attention of Goddess feminists to it as a sacred place that proves their ideology of Goddess-centred religion as being predominant in the Neolithic times.

The idea of all voices being respected and heard equally is solidified in multivocality, which was embraced by the excavation team as part of the research design.¹⁶ However, the archeologists at the site hold an officially recognized interpretative power, while Goddess feminists, who have a dissenting interpretation, do not. This pattern is seen in the example of scientific journals, where interpretations of the excavation team are published in academic journals. At the same time, the voice of Goddess feminists is restricted to a particular audience. Their voice is presented as “other” on display at the site as only two portable boards are designated to Goddess feminism, the main interest group. At the same time, the rest is covered in archeologists’ “scientific and up-to-date theories”.¹⁶ In the form of archeological findings, the cultural heritage is manipulated to suit one ideology over the other, ultimately empowering the dominant majority to exclude the group from collective discourse.

Archaeological interpretations are a construction of the present rather than an interpretation of the past. They are a product of a set agenda that can not be removed from the social context. For example, the Turkish government has the authority to set the framework for the research and may have the potential to influence the outcomes. This demonstrates the rigid hierarchy of power and dominance reflected in the narrative and the conflicting interests, with the winning one ultimately setting the agenda. It is also important to note that archeologists have little difference in opinion because they aim to reach a consensus so no one’s interests are suppressed. People of the Goddess movement have a range of motivations and political and religious beliefs and do not constitute a unified “team” that archeologists do, leading to an even greater power imbalance. In addition, a fruitful debate is not possible at the site because different people, even within one group, have different understandings of the meaning of “the Goddess” at the site. Although no archaeologist can prove that She was there, the findings can provide evidence, proving that people believed so. In this case, multivocality could have empowered all voices directly or indirectly involved in the excavation. This would have been reflected in interpreting cultural heritage and, thus, the potentially developed narrative.

The three case studies approach the idea of power/dominant groups using cultural heritage to exclude or empower depending on a set agenda from multiple perspectives. The first two case studies specifically address the manipulation of existing cultural heritage, whether its lack on display, like with African American heritage, or history viewed through cultural heritage, like with Celtic identity. In both cases, the ultimate consequence is a legitimized foundation for exclusion from national identity and collective memory. The example at the Çatalhöyük site differs in that it addresses the root of the policy. The ultimate narrative develops by silencing the voices of those whose opinions might dissent from the rest of the majority and thus not “fit in” with the proposed narrative. It is also interesting to note the multiple competing forces that try to shape and enforce the agenda. For instance, the Turkish government, Goddess Feminists, and archeologists all clash to interpret the past according to their beliefs and agendas. Consequently, it is a matter of who holds the “loudest,” most dominant voice and thus has the power to silence others.

Cultural heritage is vital to cultural survival:

Cultural heritage can lay the basis for cultural survival and shape the definition of being from that culture. It allows cultures to strengthen their national identities, ultimately becoming more resistant to the potential threat of culture loss. Cultural heritage might serve as an ethnic marker, allowing societies to distinguish and highlight certain aspects and values of their cultures. This subsection also examines the link between ethnic markers and “invented tradition” and what they mean for societies creating them.

This theme is central to the case study of Sardana by Stanley Brandes, a Catalan music genre that is danced in a circle while holding hands and following a set of steps. It is popular in Catalonia, an autonomous community in Spain. Sardana is an example of an ethnic marker that defines the Catalanian culture and makes it stronger in the face of cultural loss.

Although the Sardana poses some elements of folklore, popular, and high culture, it is not recognized as such. Unlike folklore, it is standardized and taught through formal agencies like dance schools instead of being communicated through unstructured communication networks. As opposed to popular culture, the roots of the Sardana are unknown. Compared to high culture’s exclusivity, the Sardana is open to everyone willing to learn and follow the rules. Therefore, it is an example of an “invented tradition.” The Sardana reflects core Catalan values: harmony, democracy, and brotherhood. Opening the “unbroken circle” to everyone who knows the rules, regardless of social class, age, or gender, for Catalans resembles democracy.¹⁷ At the same time, Sardana is exclusive in that a person will not be welcomed if they do not know the rules, and this exclusivity reflects Catalan’s fear of culture loss. “The Sardana circle strives for perfect unison,” this can be achieved only if the dancers have mutual trust and master counting the steps.¹⁷ Everyone can learn the Sardana, but they must put time and effort into doing so. Sardana reflects Catalanian distinct culture, combining its values, roots, and cultural expectations. Thus, taking away the Sardana is close to taking away part of Catalanian identity.

Despite the absence of an autonomous state, Catalans have tried to maintain a distinct national identity, especially from French and Spanish. The Sardana, as a national symbol, serves as an ethnic marker, making it vital for Catalonia’s cultural survival. Furthermore, it was used as a “peaceful demonstration” to protest oppressive laws forbidding the Catalan language, the primary source of Catalan identity. The Sardana’s father is considered to be Josep Maria Ventura i Casas. Although he came to Catalonia when he was little, many scholars refer to him as Catalan, mentioning “his bloodline, where he was conceived, where his parents were born, as well as the first language he spoke, and the composition of his soul”.¹⁷ The Sardana supports another Catalan value of identity and ethnicity as an achieved rather than ascribed status. As Catalans define their identity in cultural terms instead of referring to a birthplace, the Sardana and other “invented traditions” help their culture survive.

Secondly, similar patterns of cultural heritage being used by a community to distinguish their culture are central to how Hawaiians see their culture and identity within it, detailed in a case study by Jocelyn S. Linnekin.

Hawaiians refer to the “slack-key” guitar, which means playing in open tunings, ukulele playing, and preparation of “*Lomi-Lomi*” salmon as definitively Hawaiian, and it is a central practice for any Hawaiian celebration. However, “slack-key” is an adaptation of introduced musical styles, and the ukelele is attributed to late-19th-century Portuguese immigrants.¹⁸ At the same time, “*Lomi-Lomi*” salmon is made from imported salmon, foreign vegetables, and recently introduced ice. None of these practices are aboriginal, but they are key in forming present-day Hawaiian “traditional” culture.

Although traditions incorporate some elements of the past, what we recognize as tradition is made in the present according to modern narratives, values, and beliefs. For Hawaiians, the “traditional” lifestyle is represented by rural villages like Keanae. However, even there, people earn salaries, sell taro, receive public assistance, and substitute stable poi with rice. Still, such communities are often called “inside” compared to the “outside” urban world. Furthermore, when a person comes to an “inside” community, they return to a place dominated by close relationships, like family and friends. Although Keanae is a native Hawaiian village, due to its historically high outmarriage rate many of its residents are Chinese-Hawaiian or have other part-Hawaiian ancestry. Nonetheless, villagers still call them Hawaiian if they act “Hawaiian” and fulfill the expectations of “Hawaiianness.” In return, such traditions help their culture survive and use their cultural heritage to strengthen their national identity.

What it means to be “Hawaiian” is always changing, so “invented traditions” also transform in response to the changing social context. In the quest for cultural survival, isolated cultural elements become symbols of “Hawaiianness,” without any reference to aboriginal Hawaiian society.

Another example of this paradox is the reconstruction of the voyaging canoe, central to Hawaiian culture, *Hokule’a*, which was intended to sail to Tahiti. The necessary canoe-launching rituals were performed, including a meal of ritual foods and

Hawaiian prayers. The crewmen raised the concept of ‘*ohana*, being against ranked authority. “*Ohana*” often refers to extended family, characterized by “cooperation, internal harmony, and aloha”.¹⁸ However, aboriginal Hawaiian society was hierarchical regarding chiefs, commoners, and family. Senior and junior siblings of the same sex had different obligations, which sparked rivalry and shaped the Hawaiian model of relationships. Constantly changing “invented” traditions define the current model of “Hawaiianess” and serve to embrace what many Hawaiians believe is an “authentic” way of life, helping their culture survive.

The Sardana is a distinct element of Catalanian culture that serves as an ethnic marker, encapsulating Catalanian values and beliefs. In comparison, numerous “invented traditions” are exemplified in Hawaiian culture, which shapes the present-day Hawaiian identity rather than a specific element like Sardana. This makes the second case study more rigorous in giving the reader a complete picture of Hawaiian culture rather than just one concrete aspect.

It is also interesting to note that, on the one hand, both Catalanian and Hawaiian “invented traditions” are exclusive in that a person must adhere to the set rules and expectations to be welcomed into the Sardana circle or Hawaiian “inside” community. However, on the other hand, both cultures value identity and ethnicity as achieved rather than ascribed status, making their cultures more open and easier for foreigners to become part of.

In both cases, it is not significant whether these “invented traditions” are “historical” or not; all that matters is that they help these cultures survive and become stronger and more resilient in the face of potential cultural loss.

The Means of Promoting a Set Narrative:

National narratives can be uplifted through literature, institutions, and commercial entertainment with re-written history.

Firstly, the extensive use of literature to support and promote national narratives is exemplified in the development of a distinct culture of Celtic Highlanders of Scotland in the case study by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. The kilt, Scottish national dress as a social construct, allowed the instilling and spreading of the narrative of an independent Celtic Scotland.

Before the late 17th century, the Highlanders did not form a distinctive society; “racially and culturally, it was a colony of Ireland”.¹⁹ The concept of Celtic Scotland as a distinct society is purely invented. It was achieved through spreading the literature of re-written Scottish history and creating and adapting new Highland traditions. Though unrelated, James Macpherson and Sir John Macpherson, “created an indigenous literature for Celtic Scotland and, as a necessary support to it, a new history”.¹⁸ The history was taken from Ireland and assigned to Scotland. The minister of Sleat wrote a *Critical Dissertation*, laying the foundation of the “invented” Scottish history. James Macpherson wrote an *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, using the minister’s work and restating his points, including the narrative of native literature being stolen in the Dark Ages by the Irish from Scots. As a result of Macphersons’ fabricated literature, Scottish

Highlanders were now regarded as a distinct society with an independent ancient culture.

In the 18th century, the Gaelic language was often called Irish, and Highlanders’ original dress was also Irish.¹⁹ The kilt, which many assume is an ancient Scottish dress, is an English modern invention. It was introduced by an English Quaker, an industrialist, to modernize Highlanders’ traditional way of life by bringing them to factories.¹⁹ It is also important to note that clan distinction by tartans, referring to a specific pattern, which later became a symbol of a clan, traditionally did not exist; it was only a matter of preference. The formation of the Highland regiments by the British government gave rise to tartans differentiation by clans and probably the most recent invention of the Lancashire kilt. Literature continued to play a critical role: the *Waverly Novels*, in combination with the Highland regiments, persisted in promoting the idea of kilts and tartans throughout Europe.

The brothers Allen published a manuscript, *Vestiarium Scoticum*, on the tartans, but with limited copies. In the review of *Vestiarium Scoticum* published in *Quarterly Review*, an anonymous writer exposed the royal claims of the brothers. Two years later, the two brothers published a monumental volume entitled *The Costume of the Clans*. Although the brothers admit that the kilt is a modern invention, the volume cites many questionable sources. The brothers “sought to revive not merely the Highland costume but a whole imaginary Highland civilization, and they did so by a fiction as bold, and a historical revision as outrageous, as that of ‘Ossian’”.¹⁸ *History of the Highlands and the Highland Clans*, another work on tartans written by General James Browne, became a standard. Although *Vestiarium Scoticum* was discredited, all the mentioned works directly or indirectly depended on it. The story of Highland Scotland becoming a distinct society shows the power of literature to promote a set narrative.

Secondly, national narratives were uplifted in post-war Sri Lanka through educational institutions, children’s literature, and online entertainment. It is important to note that initially, the case study by Nira Wickramasinghe focused on many aspects of Sri Lanka’s post-war development; however, this essay focuses on the link between national narratives, education, institutions, and popular culture.

After the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, a separatist militant organization fighting for the independence of the Hindu Tamil’s homeland in Northeastern Sri Lanka, President Rajapaksa promised that there would be no minorities in Sri Lanka. This narrative came from a specific interpretation of the Sinhala people’s history, leading to a “return to heritage,” which meant history viewed through a particular interpretation of cultural heritage.²⁰ Education plays a key role in promoting a narrative of an idealized, often simplified account of the past and history viewed as heritage. These narratives are primarily conveyed through educational institutions like schools, universities, *Daham Pasala*, Buddhist Sunday schools, Buddhist and history textbooks, and children’s literature. It is worth noting that Sri Lanka’s primary, secondary, and tertiary education is free, and history is a mandatory subject at the first two levels. History textbooks, which the National Institute of

Education produces, emphasize “monumental histories associated with royal lineages”.²⁰ Texts taught in *Daham Pasala* are “full of omissions and chosen emphases”.²⁰ History is presented as heritage, where heritage interpretations are exemplified as evidence that cannot be further questioned. These narratives are also advanced by several government departments, ministries, and non-governmental organizations, which are also involved in generating public interest around heritage issues. These institutions earn credibility and power largely through media and other projects, targeting different audiences. On the other hand, in 2008, Sri Lanka’s government launched a “patriotic war” against the Tamil Tigers, which heavily influenced Sri Lanka’s film industry. This can be especially seen in the production of the historical film *Aba*. The film portrays the life of King Pandukabhaya, the first king of Anuradhapura, the Sinhalese kingdom. It was viewed by over two million people, accounting for around 10% of Sri Lanka’s population.²⁰ What is presented by *Aba* and other modern creative works is “not the past but Sri Lanka’s fame, which is related to its past ability”.²⁰ They provide a heritage that can consolidate national identity and legitimize the actions of political leaders, thus giving them even more power. Cultural heritage tries to accommodate violence by providing national consolidation when symbolic value is ascribed. The state’s national narratives are successfully promoted through education, institutions, and a commercialized environment, suppressing any dissent from the official discourse.

In both case studies, the history is manipulated to suit the present-day agenda and ultimately to advance the national narratives. Drawing from the previous case study on Goddess feminism at the Çatalhöyük Neolithic site, which exemplifies the significance of multivocality in the research design, the experience of post-war Sri Lanka demonstrates the long-lasting impact of archeological interpretations in the national consciousness as history is often viewed through the lens of cultural heritage. The example of Celtic Scotland deeply illustrates the implications of effective enforcement of the national narrative through literature. At the same time, the post-war Sri Lanka case is more rigorous in presenting various means to promote the set agenda. Similarly, like at the Çatalhöyük site, many forces are competing for the power to enforce a certain narrative and ultimately to control it. However, the present government is often the dominant group as it can control educational institutions, media, and other sources of information, especially if the country is far from being a democracy. It is interesting to note that children’s literature has been used in several case studies, including the example of Celtic people in the context of French identity and post-war Sri Lanka. Children’s literature and educational institutions target the youngest, with the set narrative influencing and ultimately shaping their worldview.

■ Conclusion

Cultural heritage can be used to support national narratives, which in return can be used in the service of power by minority and dominant groups. Cultural heritage can legitimize exclusive narratives while giving some cultures the basis for

resistance against cultural loss. Heritage itself is not valuable; however, it becomes valuable once the symbolic meaning is ascribed to it, linking it to national identity. Interpretations of heritage are not the product of the past but of a contemporary social context and set agenda, as seen in the conflicting interpretations of “the Goddess” by archeologists and Goddess Feminists at the Neolithic site in Türkiye. This example also illustrates the deep causes of exclusive narratives as the voices of Goddess Feminists are silenced at the site; they cannot influence the archeological interpretations and thus become part of the national narrative. Multivocality should be embraced in archeology and other disciplines so that a more fair representation is established, reducing the power of the “dominant majority” to control the heritage narrative. The lack of African American cultural heritage reinforces that by controlling the heritage narrative, one can exclude or empower certain groups and thus have power over the nation’s collective memory and identity. Heritage can be used to legitimize exclusionary practices, like in the case of the suppression of the Breton language in Brittany, where Celtic identity was manipulated to establish a unified French identity and French as the primary language. In this example and others, such as in the case of post-war Sri Lanka, children’s literature promotes the national narrative, suggesting that governments/dominant groups are targeting a wide audience and enforcing their agenda on multiple levels, including the youngest. Culture is part of the stories that nations tell, and it does not matter that they are not always true and are “invented” traditions. However, it is significant that they matter to the people telling them and help cultures survive. These stories, in part, come from nations’ cosmologies and belief systems, as seen in the example of the Sardana, which is also tied to their core values as an ethnic marker for Catalan culture. It is also interesting to see Sardana and similarly Hawaiian “invented traditions” as inclusive to foreigners because they both value identity and ethnicity as an achieved rather than ascribed status while still maintaining closeness and exclusiveness as seen in the rigorous rules one must follow in the Sardana dance. The examples of the establishment of the Scottish Highlands’ distinct culture through fabricated literature and the spread of post-war Sri Lanka’s narrative of an idealized past through school textbooks and the film industry demonstrate how education, government institutions, and popular culture further promote national narratives and help “invented” traditions thrive. Thus, instead of looking for positive or negative aspects of “invented” traditions, future research should focus on how they are used, why societies want them to be “traditions”, and what stories they create around them.

Although this paper examines seven case studies over three thematic categories, this amount is not enough to go into other aspects of cultural heritage used in support of national narratives. For instance, focusing on indigenous nations using cultural heritage to imagine a homeland against a colonial past can be an insightful question to ask in future research.

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