

# **Dynamic Diversity: Variety and Variation Within Countries**

*Abstract:* Deterministic models of globalisation disregard national local differences or regarded them as outdated and inevitably doomed. They over-privilege change. On the other hand, national models whether (cultural or institutional) over-privilege social continuity. They discount social change which they lack the capacity to explain (other than through occasional exogenous shocks) and variation within countries. This paper outlines an alternative perspective – dynamic diversity - which renders intelligible within-country change (endogenously and/or exogenously generated) and within-country diversity. It is developed through a critique of problematic moves in the national cultural literature: its illogical arguments and commitment to presuppositions which are theoretically and empirically untenable. Albeit through an engagement with a largely different literature and a focus on culture rather than institutions, the findings and conclusions in this paper are broadly in line with those of a new wave of neo-institutionalism which is not analytically a ‘prisoner of the nation-state’.

Are workplace practices shaped by national context? What constitutes such contexts? Are those practices embedded, inflexible, path dependant? Is there a national path? Is there a one-best ‘fit’ between practices and specific national contexts? The view that practices in individual countries are nationally distinct in key respects, and robust enough to block, neutralise, incorporate, or continue independently even of formal attempts to replace them practices from elsewhere – including, those brought in by via foreign direct investment or indirectly through changes in ownership/capital market relationships – derives support either from theories of uniform national institutional environments or national culture.<sup>1</sup> Within neo-institutional arenas, the notion of enduring and deterministic national cultural is not widely engaged with. But we should be less hasty in ignoring or dismissing national cultural depictions and explanations of varieties of capitalism. National culture is immensely popular<sup>2</sup> as the supposed cause of, and portrayer of, national

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst national *culture* is the most widely used term in the management literature, the terms national: ‘mentality’; or ‘character’, or ‘psyche’, or ‘mind-set’, or ‘personality’ are sometimes used in a equivalent sense. Elsewhere the labels ‘national genius’, ‘national spirit’ and ‘national *Geist*’ are employed in a similar way.

<sup>2</sup> During 2000 – 2004 (inclusive) 23% of articles in the four most frequently cited scholarly journals in international business (DuBois & Reeb, 2000): *Journal of International Business Studies*; *Management International Review*; *Journal of World Business*; and *International Business Review* – included “culture” in their title and/or abstract. Within that literature the

distinctiveness. Furthermore, although there is little intellectual cross-over in the literature between determinate notions of national institutions or national culture both have much in common. The division may perhaps be traced to the 1958 manifesto written by Kroeber and Parsons distinguishing between cultural and social systems, and in which the study of the former was deemed to be the domain of anthropologists, the later for sociologists. This differentiation was however ultimately supposed to result in collaborative work. Little has occurred.

*Dynamic Diversity versus National Uniformity:* The varieties of capitalism/national business systems literatures (institutional and cultural) depict countries as characterized by patterns of persistently reproduced actions and practices. A national variety is defined as an integrated whole. The two explanatory models differ in what is deemed to be the enduring source of those stable patterns – unchanging national institutions or culture. In so far as the institutional literature engages with cultures or values these are usually also said to be institutions. Whenever the national cultural literature refers to institutions these are treated as dependent variables, as consequences of national culture. However, whilst much of the neo-institutionalist literature is as deterministic as the national culturalist literature it is not all as totalising. The former's focus is usually more narrowly on markets and corporations and it claims ongoing uniqueness in major aspects but not every aspect.

The arguments for dynamic diversity, for the variety and variation in countries, also have implications for models of global homogenization. In its most uniform sense, 'globalization' is presented as a monolithic and always standardizing process. More segmented versions acknowledge national varieties: 'globalization' comes in national varieties – that of the home country of foreign direct investment; or U.S. hegemony. But this supposes the national uniformity of the originating country. Companies, or whatever other

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research of Geert Hofstede was most prominent - on average he was cited 78% of the time. The highest percentage was in *Journal of International Business Studies* (90%); the lowest in *International Business Review* (67%)(Cray, 2007). The top downloaded paper in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2004, 2005 and 2006 from *Human Relations* was about national culture.

‘globalizing’ force, from a specific country, may indeed in part be the product of nationally uniform influences of that country, but they may also be shaped by variety within that country. What comes into a country, even from the same originating country, will not necessarily be identical and thus there is the potential for dissimilar outcomes (Smith, McSweeney, Fitzgerald, forthcoming). Furthermore what is ‘met’ within a ‘host’ country will also have some variety. The combination of both types of differences multiplies the possibility of variations in practices. An unstoppable uniformity does not therefore meet an effete national uniformity. Variety meets variety. That is not to discount what might be nationally uniform either from home or in host country but to reject a reductionism that ignores all else and specifically the reality and influence of variety within home and host countries.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that deterministic notions of national culture are unable to render intelligible within-country diversity and change and to sketch-out an alternative view – dynamic diversity - which is capable of doing so. The monistic determinism of enduring national culturalism, it is argued, requires commitment to illogical arguments and to presuppositions that are theoretically and empirically untenable. In failing to acknowledge the necessary implications of its position on culture and action those employing it try to have their ‘cake’ and ‘eat’ it.

*Within-Country Diversity:* History is not the record of a merely fortuitous sequence of events – we may recognise some inner continuity – but history also involves the novel formations and new events which are unaccountable on the basis of unchanging cultural forces. Whilst it is possible to identify practice uniformities within countries – for example most people drive on the left-hand side of roads in the United Kingdom (and dozens of other countries), it is also possible to identify diversity (Crouch, 2005; Thompson and Phua, 2005; Lenartowicz, *et al.* 2003; O’Sullivan, 2000; Goold and Cambell, 1987). Take the example of homicide. Rates vary not only between countries (and over time), but also within them. They differ immensely across different locations, socio-economic, gender, and ethnic groups (Gaines *et al.* 1997). Within the U.S. for example, in 2003 the annual homicide rate per 100,000 of

the population in the states of Louisiana and Maryland was 13.0 and 9.5 but at the other end the rates were 1.2 and 1.3 in Maine and South Dakota respectively. In the period 1999-2001 the average homicides per 100,000 population was more than five times greater in Washington D. C. than in San Francisco. Nisbett & Cohen (1996) found that among white men, homicide in response to insults occurs at rates several times higher in the southern U. S. states than in the northern states. Sub-state analysis of homicide (and multiple other practices) reveals further spatial heterogeneity at sub-county or sub-city and so forth (Law *et al.* 2004).

Sub-national analysis based on *social* rather than *geographical* heterogeneity also demonstrates the information poverty of national averages. For example, in the United States in 2002 blacks were 7 times more likely to commit homicide and were 6 times more likely to be victims of homicide than whites. In the same year and in the same country, it was men, and not women who committed 91% of gun homicides; 80% of arson homicides; and 63% of poison homicides.

Localised practices and piecemeal changes within countries are incompatible with a theory whose bedrock supposition is that of an enduring, coherent, determinate national culture. At the very least, diversity of practices over time and space in a country indicates that if national culture is a causal force it is not the only one. The notion of national uniformity is contrasted in this paper with a notion of 'dynamic diversity' within countries.

In the face of extensive empirical data of variations within countries across social and geographical contexts and also across time how does the national culturalist literature continue to rely on monistic reductionism? It does so by making a number of the following problematic moves. By denying agency. This is achieved by (a) assuming that a national culture is stable and coherent; (b) excluding any independent role of other cultural influences; and (c) excluding any independent role of non-cultural influences. By inappropriate depictions. This is done by: (a) conflating nation and state; (b) making unwarranted generalisations from singular instances and/or treating

unrepresentative averages as nationally representative; and (c) confusing statistical averages with causal forces. By ignoring prior and pertinent intellectual developments elsewhere. It fails to engage with the peripheralisation in anthropology, cultural geography (and elsewhere) of the assumptions of national and other spatial cultural uniformity. These moves are now addressed. Unpacking them points to within country change and variation – not enduring uniformity.

### **Denial of Agency**

The general notion of culture is not necessarily static and can be employed to explain both change and stability (Schmid, 1992; Chabal and Daloz, 2006). But national culturalists' absolute notion supposes continuity over lengthy periods of time: "National values", Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: p. 13) state: are "as hard as a country's geographic position" (p. 13) and "while change sweeps the surface, the deeper layers remain stable, and the [national] culture rises from its ashes like the phoenix" (p.36). Kets de Vries states that there is a: "stability to the essential nature" of the national character that retains its "significance regardless of place, time or regime" (2001: 597)(see also Newman and Nollen, 1996; Hofstede, 2005, 1976; Inkeles, 1981, 1977).<sup>3</sup> National culture (and its consequences) gives a nation its distinctiveness.

In explaining action individuals are effectively conceived of either as irrelevant or mere *carriers* of national culture. It is value equivalent of a deterministic notion of the genetic code. National culture supposedly orchestrates behaviour within countries. It shapes individuals and sweeps them along its routes. Individuals are not merely regulated but constituted by culture. And as 'national culture' is conceived of as coherent, as integrated, as contradiction free – and the consequences of other cultures denied or ignored – national culture is only imaginable of as action/order maintaining. There is thus no possibility of choice and inventiveness by social actors. For them, there is patterned order of behaviour determined by national culture. Constant culture

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of similar views from an earlier period are: Commager's claimed that there is an "American character" and an "American philosophy" (1950: 3). Melvin C. Wren writing of Russia asserted that: "The geographical factors which set the Russian land apart from the rest of Eurasia have helped to produce a national character as distinctive as the land in which it grew" (1958: 3).

creates constant outcomes. The power of human agency is denigrated, indeed denied. Cultural pluralism or oscillation is denied, as are ideational or value ambiguities and contradictions within, or between, sets of ideas/values. The individual is not conceived of as a potential innovator but as a cultural carrier who has passively and indelibly received and internalised national values. National culture is a theory of stasis based methodologically on a bracketing of history and suppression of the agency of people in creating history. To treat the individual as irrelevant or as a cultural 'dope' requires the suppositions that: we are dominated by a single coherent culture and there are no significant independent non-cultural influences.

*The Supposed Coherence of Cultures and Cultural Combinations:*

Even if national culture is supposed to be *the* causal force - uniform and enduring "consequences" (Hofstede, 2001) will only occur if culture (and national culture in particular) is conceived as coherent, that is, impermeable and having no internal contradictions, inconsistencies, ambivalences, variations, or gaps. Defining national culture as containing some patterns but overall as a loose assemblage points to quite different consequences. The assumption of coherence of causal national culture and the exclusion of any other cultural influence (sub-national and/or from outside the nation) necessarily excludes the possibility of any divergent cultural interpretations and thus of the variety of social actions within the same state space.

There is a long-standing debate about whether cultures are coherent or incoherent. At one end of the spectrum would, for instance, be the views of Engles who (adopting Morgan's views) asserted that each state of human progress (savagery, barbarism, feudalism, capitalism, and so on) had a coherent cultural 'package'. An example of a strong incoherent view is Tylor's who called culture(s): a "thing of shreds and patches" (1920). Similarly, Mereman described culture in the USA as a "loosely bounded fabric". Ruth Benedict's studies argued for national incoherence but coherence within sub-national groupings. In her study of different native American cultures, for example, she described the Dobuans as paranoid and the Kwakiutl as megalomaniac. Her contemporary Edward Sapir rejected the notion of coherence and criticizing Benedict's account of the Dobu he stated that: "A

culture cannot be paronoid ... I suspect that individual Dobu and Kwakiutl are very like ourselves; they just are manipulating a different set of patterns" (in Kuper, 1999: 67). As early as the 1930s she acknowledged that she had found extreme incoherence in some cultures, in particular, she described "our society" (that is the USA) as "an extreme example of lack of integration" (in Smelser, 1992: 6). Her two symbols of the chrysanthemum and the sword in her 1946 book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* embody what she defined as the *contradictions within* Japan. In Edmund Leach's classic study of Burmese highlanders he records them as alternating between two quite incompatible versions of society (1954).

The national culturalist literature in management lies at the extreme coherence end of the coherence-incoherence spectrum. But commitment to that intensity of coherence is challengeable on three grounds.

First, actors do not encounter/are not constituted just by national culture (even if we suppose such exists) but by a host of cultures. Even if it also supposed that each of the cultures is internally coherent, why should as similar assumption hold for combinations of cultures? Why should there be no contradictions, gaps, or ambivalences between the cultures?

Secondly, it seems to me that any systematic effort to depict a society's culture unless it is driven by confirmatory bias (Sloman, 2005; Klayman & Ha, 1987) – as unfortunately is much of the national cultural literature – will find significant incoherence (incompleteness, illogicality, gaps, contradictions, ambiguity, incompatibilities).<sup>4</sup> As Smelser states: "any culture will present a number of contradictory adages or sayings ("look before you leap" and "he who hesitates is lost") as part of its repertoire"; (1992: 25). The tensions between the active church engaged with the world and the monastic ideal in Christianity illustrates non-identical orientations within a single tradition (Eisenstadt, 1992). It is such incoherence which makes space for agency – for bounded free will.

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<sup>4</sup> That is not to dispute the views that culture may also contain patterns, that it may be a simplifying device containing typification and reification.

Thirdly, outside of management, even weaker notions of cultural coherence than that of national culturalism have long fallen out of favour. In the 1960s Clifford Geertz, in harmony with what had become, and overwhelmingly still is, the accepted view in anthropology, dismissed the coherence view when he ridiculed the “favorite image of romantic ethnographers: a seamless superorganic unit within whose collective embrace the individual simply disappears into a cloud of mystic harmony” (1965:145)(see also Geertz, 1983). Slater sharply describes the notion of cultural coherence, of “monolithic totality” to be “delusional and ridiculous” (1970: 27).

The notion of cultural coherence within a monistic deterministic theory implies wholly uniform and stable consequences. A mix of uniform/varied, stable/unstable, and predictable/unpredictable outcomes is not compatible with such a notion of culture. Extensive evidence (and the consensus view in anthropology) challenges the view of culture as coherent and demonstrates the significance of varying practices. To be logical, national culturalism must either deny incoherence/social diversity or abandon its commitment to coherence - but to do the latter would require its own self-destruction.



*Excluding the Independent Influence of Other Cultures:* The object of analysis here is not the claim that national culture exists and is influential (the paper is agnostic on that view) but the monistic determinism which dominates the national cultural literature in management: uniform culture creates uniform outcomes. It's an extreme and monopolistic version of that Archer critically calls "downward conflation" – the view that "causal relations of influence" are "engulfed" by culture (1989). It is possible to suppose the existence of national cultures without attributing deterministic powers to them. If national cultures exist they might be non-causal, or be causal outcomes not causal forces, or have limited causality, or be just one component in a fixed or varying cocktail<sup>5</sup> of influences (Caudill, 1973). As Gerhart and Faney (2005: 974) observe 'national culture cannot', for instance, explain merger and acquisition differences that arise between two domestic companies'. Other influences may be seen as cultural and/or noncultural and to have originated from within or from outside a country (Pries, 2001).

Even if the notion of culture is limited to that of 'values' (and ones which can be empirically apprehended, recorded, and described) – as is the focus of most national culturalists – and existence of cultures additional to, or other than, national culture are acknowledged, then the treatment of national culture as the independent variable is possible only by illogically attributing causal power to one category of culture (the national) but denying it to others whether they are also called cultures or "values" (Hofstede, 2001, 15). We can take meaning or values very seriously without accepting the determinate singularity of the national cultural literature (Leung, *et al.*, 2005; Collins, 1998). Furthermore, if culture is defined more widely than 'values' - as everything that is symbolically available to actors – then the action influencing 'cocktail' of cultures will be even more extensive and varied.

Thus, even *within* a wholly culturalist explanation of social action attributing causality to just one type of culture, 'national' or whatever, is far too simple. Many cultures are by definition not national and so they are *not* represented even by national culturalists as being uniformly present at sites of action

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<sup>5</sup> 'Multicollinearity' is the more formal description in variance analysis.

across a nation. Thus, if causal influence is attributed to culture, then logically it must be concluded that the acknowledged cultural diversity must create national heterogeneity not homogeneity of practices. Even if a common national culture is supposed to be somehow present at every site of practice, in action there will also be a varying brew of other cultures with differential embeddedness and characteristics, and thus uniform national practices cannot logically be deduced (Scheuch, 1967). But by unreasonably supposing that a coherent 'national culture' is effectively the only independent variable, that conclusion is drawn.

*Excluding the Independent Role of Non-Cultural Influences:* The view that national culture creates uniform (and predictable) consequences not only denies the possible effects of cultures other than the 'national' but it also excludes the possible independent effects of non-cultural features. But as Kuper (1999: 199) observes: "[c]ulture does not provide scripts for everything". Social action has many ingredients. A move beyond the exclusiveness of culturalist explanations, problematises further the characterisation of national practices as "[national] culture's consequences" (Hofstede, 2001). Even if momentarily we accept the notion of culture (national and others) as internally and relatedly coherent, we cannot conclude that common social action will be the outcome. Uniformity may result from common values but it may not. Common action does not require such unity nor does such action necessarily result from common values (Archer, 1989; Schudson, 1994; Campbell, 1998; Merelman, 1984). An extensive post-Parsonian literature argues on both theoretical and empirical grounds against both the conflation of values and social action and also alternatively against the treatment of one or other as merely a dependent variable (Schmid, 1992). To draw a distinction between national culture, or culture much more widely, and social action is not necessarily to deny the effects of culture on action, but it does exclude a restricted focus on culture as the determining force. Once culture is defined not as the only cause of action – whether seen as having no influence, some influence, or considerable influence, but not complete influence – non-cultural influences must be acknowledged. As these are not all nationally uniform the resulting action will also not be uniform. The

champions of national culture obfuscate the notion of uniform culture and uniform action. But these are theoretically and empirically distinct; hence they can vary independently of one another (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Archer, 1989). Where there is uniform social practices, culture is not necessarily the cause.

Laws, institutions, monarchs, the invisible hand, social contracts are amongst the explanations for uniform social practices. One of a number of non-cultural explanations is *coercion*. National culturalism is unable to imagine a society or organization that is integrated not on the basis of a common set of values. It is empirically incontestable that under certain conditions it is possible to detect common social action without reference to a unified and commonly accepted cultural system. A glaring case is that of fascism in Germany where considerable behavioural uniformity co-existed with both substantial doctrinal inconsistencies within Hitler's entourage and significant reservations amongst the population of Germany.<sup>6</sup> Hitler's *New Order* was a coercive order (Gellner, 1987). As Maurice Farber argues:

Would it be meaningful, for example, to talk of the religiosity of the Spaniards without description of the officially monopolistic position of the church in Spain, or of the irreligiosity of the Russians without considering the attitude of the Soviet government towards religion?  
(1950: 313)

The radical decline in church attendance in post-Franco Spain [figures] and the considerable increase in post-Soviet Russia [figures] demonstrates the influence of historical specificities of which the demise of coercive regimes is but one illustration. As subjects, or citizens, or partners, or immigrants, employees or whatever, we take our positions within relations of power and

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<sup>6</sup> Although German detainees (Jewish and non-Jewish) constituted a comparatively small minority of the concentration camp prison population, in absolute terms their number was significant. In addition repression against non-Jewish German citizens in Germany became increasingly severe during World War II. About 50,000 non-Jewish German citizens were condemned to death by German courts. Approximately 15,000 Wehrmacht soldiers were executed after court-martials, whereas in the course of World War I only 48 German soldiers were condemned to death and executed (Burrin, 2005).

within our understanding of those relations (Kondo, 1990: 301; McSweeney, 2002). Why should national cultural – or cultural in general - causality be privileged over administrative, coercive, or other means of social integration/control? Their exclusion is reckless and unwarranted.

D'Andrade created and administered many attitudinal questions designed to identify cultural reasons for the Nisbett & Cohen (1996) finding (above) that among white men, homicide in response to insults occurs at rates several times higher in the southern U. S. states. None of the questions successfully uncovered the behavioural differences observed by Nisbett and Cohen (Kitayama, 2002). The study of culture, its intertwining (conceivable in multiple ways) with the non-cultural, and its possible consequences has considerable potential for understanding continuity and change in organizational and wider social practices but only if culture is treated not as wholly autonomous and coherent but as containing diverse and conflicting elements and as a result is contestable, elastic, and situated. As anthropologist Adam Kuper states: “unless we separate out the various processes that are lumped together under the heading of culture, and then look beyond the field of culture to other processes, we will not get very far in understanding any of it” (1999: 247). Similarly, Neil Smelser (1992: 24) states that culture should not be treated as a “global entity”.

Practices rarely have a single cause (culture, institutions, whatever); causes rarely work in isolation; multiple causes act in varying combinations not merely additively – thus a change in one will not necessarily produce a different outcome or a predictable outcome; and causes may have contradictory effects depending on context (Ragin, 1987; McSweeney, 1995).

The national culturalist supposition is not merely that individuals are cultural dopes but that they are doped by a coherent culture and thus there is no heterogeneity to facilitate, or require, innovation or choice. But as Wittgenstein emphasizes – the possibility of creative interpretation exists:

A rule stands like a sign-post ... Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it shew me which direction I am to take when I have passed it ...? And if there were, not a single sign-post,

but a chain of adjacent ones or of chalk marks on the ground ... is there only *one* way of interpreting them? (1953: sec. 85)(emphasis in original).

Whilst individuals may sustain a prevailing order they may also attempt to change it. As Mikhail Bakhtin points out: “A single consciousness is *contradictio in adjecto*. Consciousness is in essence multiple” (1984[1929]: 228). Intra-national conflicts and contradictions, and not simply adaptations to external shocks, are crucial in generating and shaping social and cultural change (Keesing, 1974; Deeg, 2005).

### **Measurement Moves**

In the popular media and elsewhere the idea of unique and causal national culture (or ‘character’, or personality, or ‘psyche’, or spirit, or soul, or *Geist*) is often taken as self-evident – as common sense. Through what Ching calls the “social construction of primordiality” (in Yelvington, 1991: 165) the notion of the enduring distinctiveness of countries – is continuously perpetuated in multiple explicit and symbolic ways including country specific: passports, stamps, flags, capital cities, anthems, civil services, police forces, taxes, maps, elections, state funerals, nationally regulated examinations, aggregate statistics, and in routines of international comparisons, in international sporting events, and in notions such as ‘national competitiveness’ (Tooze, 1998; Firth, 1973). These features of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995) contribute to the construction and maintenance of belief in national uniqueness. Within the academy, the statistical analysis of often large data bases has legitimated and strengthened the belief in: the ontological status of national culture as real and empirically identifiable; as having causative power; and as having consequences predictable on the basis of the statistical representations (Kirkman, *et al.*, 2006; Oyserman *et al.*, 2002; Kitayama, 2002; McSweeney, 2002a,b; Smith 2002; Redding, 1994, for overviews). Here four problematic measurement moves employed in seeking to empirically depict national cultures are considered. Unpacking these moves points again to national diversity not uniformity.

*Conflating Nation and State:* One would reasonably suppose that a ‘national culture’ is represented as the culture of a ‘nation’. Yet, a striking feature of the national culture literature is the conflation of the word ‘nation’ with that of ‘country’ or ‘state’ (in the sense of a territorial juridical unit) (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Lewin & Kim, 2004, Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993, for instance). The territories said to be each characterised by a uniform, enduring, causal culture are overwhelmingly not single nations but clusters of nations and yet each is supposed to have one, not multiple, national cultures.

Were all states nation-states - in the sense of each nation having a state - the distinction between ‘nation’ and ‘state’ (or country) would not be important, but many states include multiple nations – they are therefore not nation-states. Gellner (1983), for instance, estimated that there were about 8,000 nations, yet only 159 states. And there are nations without states. A state is easily conceptualized at a particular point in time in quantitative terms. “Peru, for illustration, can be defined ... as the territorial-political unity consisting of sixteen million inhabitants of 514,060 square miles located on the west coast of South America between 69° and 80° West, and 2° and 18°, 21° South” (Connor, 1994: 36). Defining a nation is much more difficult and is, as a result, the object of extensive and long-standing scholarly debates between the primordialists, perennialists, symbolists, modernists, and others (Gorski, 2000; Pandey, 1999; Smith, 1998; Singer, 1996; Hutchinson & Smith, 1994; Eller & Coughlan, 1993; Stokes, 1986; Robinson, 1979, for instance).

Even if national culture is theorized as determinate, or just as influential, then within most states/countries multiple national cultures, and not a single national culture, would operate. What its devotees call ‘national’ culture is, in effect, an assertion that there is uniform *state-level* culture. Despite the use of the term ‘*national* culture’ its champions’ descriptions, measurements, and comparisons are of states or countries, not nations (Ryan et al., 1999; Schaffer and Riordan, 2003).

If the existence of unique national cultures is supposed, the state data analysed will almost invariably be from territories with multiple nationalities and therefore logically each state must have multi-national cultures not a common national culture. A state is a political unit. It is inappropriate to use citizenship as a proxy for sampling an unwarrantedly supposed cultural unity (Fiske, 2002). A *data unit* – that is the category used in the data collection and analysis - should not be confused with an *explanatory unit* – that is the unit which can account for patterns of result (observed practices or whatever)(Ragin, 1987; Stannard, 1971).

*Making Unwarranted Generalisations from the Singular:* National culture is represented as nationally common in two ways in the devotee literature (sometimes in the same work). First, as individually carried by everyone in a nation. Secondly, as a national average, as an “average tendency” (Hofstede, 1991: 253). The former is first discussed in this section of the paper. The latter is considered in the section which follows.

Theorizing national culture as common to all national individuals makes ‘identification’ easy. On the grounds that what is true of one is true of all, depictions of national cultures or of the supposed consequential national organizational practices have all been based on studies of miniscule numbers of individuals or firms. Claims about entire national populations are based on very small-scale studies (for example, the attendees at single undergraduate, post-graduate, or management development courses categorized on the basis of their nationality) or practices *in* a single organization become the window through which an entire national culture is identified (for an overview of such studies see Oyserman, *et al.*, 2002).

What evidence supports the assumption that ‘national’ culture is common to individuals within a nation? Beneath its scientific veneer, research which relies on this notion of national culture, necessarily employs stereotyping, a notion which has a long, but dishonourable, history (Lippmann, 1997/1922). In effect, this sense of ‘national culture’ is a politically correct euphemism for race (Said, 1978; Abu-Lughod, 1991; Kuper, 1999).

Any national stereotype can always be countered by actual counter examples from the same country. Although Myra Hindley was English and a child-killer, not all English people are child killers. There is counter-evidence even within the national culture literature itself. For example, “ [U.S.A.] IBM respondents tended to score much more individualist than Japanese [IBM] respondents. However, some Japanese respondents gave quite individualist answers. Some Americans scored quite collectivist, more collectivist than the average for Japanese IBMers” (Hofstede, 1991: 253)(see also Takano & Osaka, 1999). As Oyserman *et al.* observe based on a metanalysis of studies of individualism and collectivism: “[o]ur ability to make generalizations on the basis of the current body of empirical research is limited by significant within-group heterogeneity in regional, country, and ethnic group comparisons” (2002: 30) (see also Fiske, 2002; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2003).

As the monistic determinism of national culturalism assumes that just about everything is “[national] culture’s consequences” (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). then, in principle, a national culture can be identified through everything and anything. Culture is not defined as “a whole way of life” (Elliot, XX) but a whole way of live is deemed to be the consequence of national culture. And indeed, a wide variety of artifacts - “explicit products” (Trompenaars, 1993: 22) - have been used to ‘demonstrate’ or confirm the existence of specific features of national cultures and identify some of the consequences. Artifacts analysed have included newspapers, popular magazines, institutional structures, regulations, novels, children’s stories, folklore, plays, films, television programmes, websites, art, *and* organizational practices. The core assumptions are: (i) that the chosen artifact(s) are national cultural products (Kroeber and Parsons, 1958); and (ii) that the characteristics and consequences of that causal culture can be discerned from an analysis of the artifact(s). Erikson (1950) bases his claims about "German authoritarianism" solely on the analysis of one book: *Mein Kampf*.<sup>7</sup> Kets de Vries (2001) claims to be able to discern national character from just one character in one novel. Hofstede & Hofstede (2005: 2) give the example of the juror who remains

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<sup>7</sup> Written by an Austrian.



polite despite being confronted by other angry jurors in the play/film *Twelve Angry Men*. The juror retains his composure because he is an Austrian who “still behaves the way he was raised. He carries within himself an indelible pattern of behaviour”.<sup>8</sup> Hofstede sometimes argues that country-level analysis does not explain individual behaviour and yet at other times he proclaims its ability to do so (Roberts & Boyacgiller, 1984).

An obvious concern is the representativeness of the examined artifacts. Treating Leni Riefenstahl movies, for example, as products of a German national culture is to ignore the extensive suppression and destruction by the Nazis of movies with different messages, the death in concentration camps of many film industry personnel, and the large number of distinguished German movie directors who fled to the USA and elsewhere (Rentschler, 1996; Jackson, 2001).

In generalising about the character of all Russians, Kets de Vries largely draws on Ivan Goncharov’s novel, *Oblomov* (2005/1859). His logic is that as Goncharov was Russian his novel is the product of ‘the’ Russian character or culture and that this can be discerned from the novel. But that novel is a satirical portrait of what Goncharov regarded as an idle and decaying 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian aristocracy, *not* of all Russians. The aristocrat Oblomov avoids work and postpones change. But that attitude is not true even of all characters in that novel. So why chose one alone as representative?

The hugely reductionist idea that Russian (or any other) national character/psyche/culture (terms used interchangeably by de Vries) can be discerned by selecting any one character (or aspect of one character) from just one novel from the immensely varied creations of Bunin, Chekov, Dostoevsky, Goncharov, Gorky, Lermontov, Nabokov, Pasternak, Puskin, Sholokhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, as well as a multitude of hack socialist realists apologists for Stalin’s regime, for instance, or from the poetry of Akhmatova, Baratynsky, Blok, Dementyev, Fet, Gippius, Ivnev, Kapnist, Lermontov, Mandelstam,

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<sup>8</sup> The very impolite Austrian Adolph Hitler seems somehow to have not been programmed by Austrian ‘national culture’.

Myakovsky, Tsventaeve, for example, is an absurdly shallow view, but it is consistent with, indeed a logical consequence of, defining national culture as coherent and determinate. Which character in which novel of Balzac, Camus, de Laclos, Flaubert, Sartre, Stendhal, the Marquis de Sade, Proust, Voltaire, Zola, and so forth, represents French national culture? Which in the novels of Alcott, Carelton, Collins, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Ford, Hawthorne, Hurston, James, Keillor, Lee, Smiley, Spillane, Stowe, Wharton, for example, represents the culture of the United States of America? A national culturalist can take his/her pick and select any character they wish from the novel/play/movie or whatever they have picked. Unaware or indifferent to enormous diversity and complexity in literature the confirmatory bias of national culturalism allows unwarranted generalisation.

Regardless of diversity within national populations (of age, region, gender, class, education, and so forth) and individuals' reflexivity, each individual is treated as a "perfect [national] sample" (Mead, 1953: 648). It is: "as if all members of a nation were envisaged as having been immersed in the homogeneous fluid of national culture" (Farber, 1950:307). Thus, for example, at an executive course in a business school in France, the answers given by an affluent, agnostic, forty year-old, female, multi-lingual, Pakistani senior manager of a large multinational corporation who completed her postgraduate studies in the UK, whose office is located in New York, and who holidays in the West Indies and Italy with her Columbian husband are – based on the assumption of representativeness – treated as typical of all Pakistanis such as a nineteen year old, ill-educated, impoverished, Hindko-speaking, religiously devout, man who works fifteen hours a day for a pittance sewing clothes.

That is not to deny that the analysis of certain artifacts can be valuable in understanding the internal dynamics of particular nations. For instance Siegfried Kracauer's (1947) analysis of filmic images in his book *From Caligari to Hitler* provides a rich depiction of the events and conditions that made possible the rise of Nazism. But it did not claim to have unearthed a nationally shared and socially determining national culture. Which of Hogarth's etchings – the repulsive violence and poverty depicted in *Gin Lane*

or the prosperous contentment of *Beer Street* – is a window to British national culture? Were the Free Officers led by Gamal Nassar who vowed to give equal rights to women a manifestation of Egyptian ‘national culture’ or was it the assassination attempts by the Muslim Brothers fiercely opposed to such equality? Which movie character, if any, represents *the* US ‘national culture’: *Dirty Harry* in which the cop is tougher than the villains or *Colombo* in which the cop is smarter than the villains? In so far as the notion of national culture makes any sense, should we not consider each in their differences to be part of complex and heterogeneous culture(s) within countries? The diversity of films being produced even from quite centrally controlled countries such as Iran is indicative of heterogeneity within countries. Timothy Mitchell’s studies in Spain, including, bullfighting (1991), flamenco song and dance (1994), and sexual abuse of women and children by Spanish clergy (1998) do not propose a uniform Spanish national culture but richly explore intra-national diversity. David Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) is often cited as a description of ‘the’ American national character or culture (see Hofstede, 2001; Potter, 1954, for instance) but as Riesman himself states: his book does not “attempt to deal with national character as such, but to suggest a hypothesis about changes in upper middle-class social character in the twentieth century” (1967).

A problem additional to the questionable representativeness of the selected artifacts is the assumption of national purity. Even a moderate familiarity with management textbooks, novels or films would show how much multi/inter/trans-national influence and borrowing routinely occurs (Abu-Lughod, 1998). To take an Irish example, the classic memoirs of Tomás Ó Crohán (*An tOileannach/The Islander*) and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin (*Fiche Blian ag Fás/Twenty Years a’Growing*) have often been taken as narratives embodying the pure experience of life in a western Irish island and for national culturalists it reflects (as does every artefact), and is a means of access to, what is quintessentially national (Kiberd, 1995). But it turns out that Ó Crohán’s and Ó Súilleabháin’s books were both *directly* shaped by reading Maxim Gorky’s *My Childhood* lent by a visiting intellectual (Foster: 1998: 39). Ó Crohán was aware how atypical his, and his fellow islanders’, life was even of that of the rest of Ireland - and that it would not endure. As he

said, he sought “to set down the character of the people about me so that some record of us might live after us, for the like of us will never be seen again” (my translation from the original Munster Gaelic). Coleridge was steeped in German philosophy, Carlyle wrote extensively on Goethe and the German Romantics, Elliot drew on French writers (Kuper, 1999: 45/6), and so on.

*Treating Unrepresentative Averages As Indicative of National Uniformity:*

In response to such critique, some national culturalists argue that they are not identifying or comparing the national cultures of the individuals in a nation but comparing the culture of one nation with another (Søndergaard, 2002). ‘National culture’ is instead, or additionally, defined as a ‘national norm’ (Hofstede, 1980b: 45), or national ‘average’ (Trompenaars, 1993: 25). It is not conceived as what Durkheim called the “collective consciousness” but an average of the consciousness (or values) of the collective – the nation.

This statistical definition of national character or culture has its origins in the 1950s. Cross-cultural studies had indicated a very low level of characterological similarities amongst the inhabitants of even the most isolated communities. By the mid-fifties even the most ardent advocates of the notion of national character, such as Linton and Gorer, had rejected it as “inapplicable to any but the most exceptional circumstances” (Stannard, 1971: 203). In response, social psychologist Alex Inkeles and Daniel J. Levinson, suggested a statistical concept, national character was the “relatively enduring personality characteristics and patterns that are *modal* amongst the adult members of the society” (1954: 983)(emphasis added).

If all individuals in a national population were culturally identical it would be superfluous to calculate an average – because a single measure would represent all. Each individual would be, as Margaret Mead claimed they were: “a perfect sample” (1953: 648). Attempting to calculate a national norm is an acknowledgement of diversity. An average is not a representation of what is supposed to be nationally shared but an average of what is accepted as diverse. Many national culturalists inappropriately try to explain or predict actions at levels lower than the national (individual, organizational, and so

forth) on the basis of their (or other's) depictions of national properties. This is what Robinson called the "ecological fallacy" (1950) and Galting, also called "the fallacy of the wrong level" (1967) (see also Hofstede, 2001: 16). It consists of making direct translations of properties or relations at one level to another. The fallacy can be working downwards, by projecting from a higher level to a lower, or upwards, by projecting from lower levels (such as individuals) to higher levels (Bond, 2002; Lieberman, 1985).

But in any event, how valid is the identification of culture as a 'national' norm? Relying on questionable assumptions and using contestable processes an average national culture is said to have been isolated (McSweeney, 2002). The norm is calculated by statistically averaging diverse views on a range of issues of a group, or groups, composed of individuals of the same nationality, collected usually by attitude surveys, and defining the results as nationally representative.

Generalisation to the national level by statistically averaging highly varied responses might seem more sophisticated than treating one respondent as representative of all. But there is little difference. The numbers studied are always miniscule proportions of their national populations. Instead of each individual being defined as carrying a national culture, the national culture is held to be present and identifiable within the group which is studied – it could be any group sharing the same nationality. The chosen group is treated as, and often described as a 'sample' but this is an inappropriate use of the term 'sample'. Those in the chosen group are merely a miniscule selection, a conveniently available or accessible assembly of individuals who can only be held to be a representative sample of the national population by presupposing their representativeness. The logic is circular.

Benedict Anderson famously described a nation as "an imagined community" the individual members of which "will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion" (1983: 15). National culturalists who suppose that on the basis of a few answers from a band of citizens they have identified a nation's

culture similarly make the assumption of communion. Trompenaars, for example, relies on samples which were as low as “100 people [white-collar employees]” for each country (1993:1). These were drawn from one or at most a few organizations in each country. Bollinger (1994), for instance, ‘identified’ the “mentality” of Russia (population in excess of 143 million) from a study of 55 managers on a management course in Moscow (see also Kets de Vries, 2001). Hofstede’s depictions of national cultures are statistically averages of answers provided by quantitatively and qualitatively nationally unrepresentative groups of sales and service staff to an IBM survey (not Hofstede’s) which was primarily designed to obtain data to boost staff morale. The unrepresentativeness of his ‘samples’ is indicated, for instance, by the way in which the surveys he relied on had only 37 respondents in Pakistan in the first and 70 in the second (1980a: 73). All of the respondents were urban dwellers. At the time of the surveys, the population of Pakistan was about 65 million of whom over three-quarters lived in rural areas. In the Philippines, the answers of 158 respondents in the first survey and 161 in the second are deemed to be sufficient to identify the ‘national culture’ of a country with at least 30 million people on 6,000 islands with 100 different dialects. The only surveys in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore were of 88, 71 and 58 respondents respectively (1980a: 411). In South Africa all respondents were white (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005: 121).

Even if somehow these tiny numbers of respondents whose answers are relied on by national culturalists were nationally representative there is a further problem. The answers provided to questionnaires or in interviews always show diversity. The national culturalist move to escape from this heterogeneity is to average the diverse individual responses and depict the result as ‘national culture’. But labelling that arithmetic mean as ‘national culture’ or ‘national cultural difference’ is a conclusion too far.

A mean can always be produced from any data set – but what is that data representative of? Does an average even report the ‘culture’ of the organization or class of students from which it was extracted? Even if it heroically assumed to do so, there are no reasonable grounds for supposing

that the norm would be the same in every other organization in the same country. Is it reasonable to suppose that the norms of the editorial staff of the Klu Klux Klan's 'White Pride Internet TV' would be the same as amongst the attendees at the 'Friends of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns' gathering at the US Quakers annual general conference? Yet, it is supposed by national culturalists that such different and opposed groups have a common, identifiable, and hugely causal national culture. Is it reasonable to suppose that whilst French 'national culture' as norm would *not* be shared by an enclosed order of nuns in France with those in a similar convent in Spain but that the French nuns would share it with all French nationals in a French brothel and with every other grouping of persons in France?

It is possible that there is not even cultural homogeneity *within* each of those groups (Allport, 1924; Sen, 2006). Only by *presupposing* national representativeness of the chosen organization can the averaging of the views of a miniscule proportion of the population (those in the studied organization or class-room) be described as a *national* culture. Geertz rejects the notion of modal character or culture stating that: "it leads to a drowning of living detail in dead stereotypes and ultimately obscures more than it reveals" (1970: 62-3). More mundanely, we may also simply ask how useful are extremely broad generalizations – even if we heroically suppose that the generalizations are correct. The characteristics, said to have been identified at the national level are not those of lower levels and yet it is at those levels we operate, that we engage.

A measure of an average value or central tendency (mean, median, mode, or whatever) can always be extracted from any data but it can only be representative of the entire population if all the data is available, or the sample, can confidently be deemed to be representative. Neither condition is satisfied in the calculations of national culture as a national average.

*Treating Statistical Averages (or Other Reifications) as Having Substance (i.e. Independent Existence) and Causal Efficacy:*

The notion of a national average culture is distinguishable from that of dominant culture; of majoritarian culture; of the culture of political elites; of cultural consensus; of culture as ideal type; of culture as a heuristic device; of merely a means to make prediction.

Significant diversity and asymmetries of power are ignored - the 'rich man is in his castle and the poor man at his gate' but somehow each contributes to and is shaped by the same national norm. But as Starbuck observes: "[s]ince social phenomena often give overlapping frequency distributions, comparisons between averages may say nothing about specific instances" (2004: 1245)(see also Lenartowicz & Roth, 2001; Lenartowicz *et al.*, 2003). Predominantly, 'national culture' is not differentiated along class or other principles of social division. There is a very limited mention of dominant (rather than average) culture in the national culturalist literature (see Sagiv & Schwartz, 2000; Hofstede, 200; Licht, *et al.*, 2005). But in any event, the acknowledgement of dominant culture, or that of the majority, or of majority groups also implies cultural diversity and potential conflict and thus that there is the possibility of different practices and of endogenous change.

Treating *statistical* averages as a social force is an early nineteenth century notion, a phenomenon Ian Hacking called "statistical fatalism" (1990). What came to be called *Quetelismus*, after the Belgian astronomer Adolphe Quetelet who on the basis of statistical averages sought to identify social forces or "penchants" which he believed acted like physical forces such as gravity was widely satirized - as early as 1859 by the novelist Charles Dickens (Kerns, 2004).

An average is not a fact *sui generis*. To attribute constitutive power to an abstraction is to commit the metaphysical fallacy of 'misplaced concreteness' that is attributing efficient causality to conceptual forms (Bidley, 1947; Duncan 1980). Averages are abstract concepts which have no existence independently of being - although they might have predictive power



(Friedman, 1953). Social action is not caused by averages. We do not meet or negotiate or form friendships with averages.

When Yugoslavia (first created in December, 1918) existed as a single country, Hofstede ‘measured’ its consequences creating ‘national culture’ – as did Trompenaars (with different results). After its break-up into seven separate states, Hofstede ‘measured the ‘national cultures’ of three of these new states (namely, Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia). If ‘national cultures’ exist and if the national culture of the initial state (Yugoslavia) had been accurately identified, then the national cultures of the seven states into which it fragmented would be very similar: (a) to each other; and (b) to that of the initial state. Hofstede’s measurements of the ‘national’ cultures of three of those states show the opposite – dissimilarity (Hofstede, 1980:104, 165, 222, 279; Hofstede, 2001: 87; 151; 215; 286; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 43; 78/79; 120/121; 168/169). Of course it is possible to argue that Yugoslavian national culture measured was an average - but how could that be measured? And in any event what use was it or any of the other averages represented as national cultures?

### **Ignoring the Virtual Abandonment of its Bedrock Suppositions in its Parent Disciplines**

In the critiques above, each of the problematic moves by national culturalism reference was made not only to contemporary literature but also to an earlier non-management literature. Within the academy, management was not the first discipline to develop or employ the notion of uniform, causal, and enduring national culture. It has a long genealogy – as has rejection of it. For periods it dominated a number of academic disciplines. Historiography and anthropology were its pioneering employers within the academy. But within these disciplines, and others such as cultural geography, this idea of national culture once dominant has long been peripheralised (Bock, 1999, 2000; Kuper, 1999; Stannard, 1971).<sup>9</sup> As Wolfgang Welsch states, the idea that “an

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<sup>9</sup> The idea of coherent culture, albeit not of nations but of groups within a nation, retains a following. The term ‘multi-culturalism’ is often employed in the sense - that internally each such sub-national group (‘ethnic’, ‘class’, ‘gender’, ‘class-gender’, and so forth) has a homogeneous or coherent culture. The alternative view is that there is

individual's cultural formation must be determined by his or her nationality or national status ... belongs among the mustiest assumptions" (1999: 199). It is within parts of management alone that the view now retains a significant following.

This section provides a broad overview of the eviction of the transcendental notion of national culture from historiography and anthropology. It demonstrates that the present-day criticisms within management of national culturalism – specifically rejection of the attribution of determinate causal power to and measurability of national culture – had triumphed in historiography and anthropology well before the notion of national culture had developed a significant following in management in the 1980s. In the contemporary national cultural management literature the earlier and powerful critiques of the notion are ignored. At most there are some references to a few past advocates – their intellectual demise is ignored (see Hofstede, ; Trompemaars for instance).

### *Historiography*

With the rise of nationalism across nineteenth-century Europe there was an increasing essentialising of alleged national characteristics, or culture (Berger, *et al.* 1999; Singer, 1996). Numerous historians in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century employed race as a synonym for nation, references to a 'German race' or to an 'English race' for instance being quite common. As Stargardt (1998: 22) points out: "the establishment of modern history as a full academic discipline in the nineteenth century was intimately connected with writing political and even social history within a national framework ... Assumptions about the inherently national character of modern history ... remained safely ensconced in their dominance well into the post-1945 era."

The idea of a nation in its distinctive modern sense fused the idea of 'people' - previously used in the sense of "rabble" or "plebs" with that of "elite" elevating

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cultural diversity also within those groupings (Higham, 1993; Fiske, 2002; Sen, 2006).

the populace of a defined territory to the position of an elite. The 'dead generations' were assumed to be our cultural contemporaries. The nation as our cultural 'motherland' (Brandt *et al.* 1952:245). Historography was “central to the elaboration and affirmation of the nation’s “cultural” distinctiveness (Singer, 1996: 314).

However by the 1980s, conceptions of nation as an imagined, invented, or hybrid category had become the standard orthodoxy in historiography. The ‘evidence’ in historical studies of long-standing cultural distinctiveness had come to be seen as largely fictive and indeed often invented or counterfeited (Detutch , 1969; Andersen, 1983; Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983; Schudson, 1994; Cubitt, 1998a; Oergel, 1998). The past preoccupation with the degree of coherence of national culture has now virtually disappeared in historiography. The fictive bases of the narratives of the purveyors of the notion of a unitary nation were increasingly exposed as based in acts of faith not evidence. The field remains riven by disagreements and is divided by rival approaches but compared with previously dominant national essentialist models they demonstrate a much greater level of sophistication and understanding of the complexity of nations. Overwhelmingly, nations are not conceived of as revealed realities, but as always ontologically unstable: “nations remain elusive and indeterminate, perpetually open to contest, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction” (Cubitt, 1998b: 3).

### *Anthropology*

By the late nineteenth century anthropology had developed into an organized academic discipline. There were followers both of the notions of coherent and incoherent culture. The Berlin school of anthropology, for instance, held the view that, like races, cultures are hybrids. Karl Renner accused the coherentists of making an academic discipline out of ancient cultural hatred [source?]. In his Presidential Address to the Royal Anthropological Society in 1940 Radcliffe-Brown stated that “We do not observe a ‘culture’ since the word is not a concrete reality, but an abstraction, and as it is commonly used a vague abstraction’ (in Kuper, 1999: xiv).

But the notion of a coherent national culture – a transcendental<sup>10</sup> or superorganic<sup>11</sup> view which regarded culture as undifferentiated along class or other principles of social division became dominant – an achievement aided by both World War II and reinforced during the early Cold War period. After the USA entered World War II, a number of prominent anthropologists moved to Washington to take part in research and planning (Bock, 1999; Shannon, 1995). Cultural anthropology promised practical pay-offs. During that war, profiling the supposed national character of Germans and Japanese was the main focus of the co-opted anthropologists' analysis – even writers such as Eric Fromm and Theodor Adorno travelled on the national stereotyping 'band-wagon'. In the early Cold War period the Russian national character and those countries seen to be vulnerable to communism became the focus of research. Politicians impatiently sought solutions to the 'cultural' roadblocks to 'modernization' of these countries. Those were heady days when the leading anthropologists of the day, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn could in 1952 pronounce that culture: "in explanatory importance and in generality of application ... is comparable to such categories as gravity in physics, disease in medicine, evolution in biology" (in Kuper, 1999: x). Like contemporary national culturalists, Hofstede, Trompenaars, et al. they defined culture primarily as "values" which were said to "provide the only basis for the fully intelligible comprehension of culture" (XX). They anticipated a quick victory for the positivist notion of culture - precise and supposedly measurable.

However, increasingly, the cultural characterisations – of common coherent values were challenged. Alvin Gouldner accused Parsonians of ignoring dissent and promoting an illusion of social consensus (ref. From Kuper p. 81) Ernst Gellner described the coherence 'findings' in early anthropology as

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<sup>10</sup> Transcendental is used here in the sense of an autonomous process which is conceived of as being greater than, and determinant of, individual parts (such as actions) which are held to be mere manifestations of it. It is a thesis which unites such diverse social thinkers such as Hegel, Comte, Spengler and Sorokin (Bidney, 1947; Duncan, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber probably first used the term "superorganic" in anthropology (1952). He borrowed it from the nineteenth century social determinist Herbert Spencer (Kroeber, 1948; Duncan, 1980).

"unwittingly quite *a priori* ... the principle employed has ensured in advance that of any inquiry that nothing may count as ... inconsistent or categorically absurd though it may be" (1979:36). Referring to Evans-Pritchard's pioneering and highly influential study of 'Zande culture' he states that it was "... ironical that this culture [that of Zande - described by Evans-Pritchard (1937) in a seminal anthropological study] of shreds and patches, incorporating at least 20 culturally alien groups and speaking at least 8 diverse languages in what is but part of its total territory, should have come to have been systematically invoked by philosophers making facile and superficial use of anthropology as an illustration of the quite erroneous view that cultures are islands unto themselves" (1974: 143-4).

By the 1960s the national cultural (or national character) assumption was "pretty well discredited" in anthropology (Bock, 1999: 104). Culture was seen as part of a context for, rather than the context within which choices are made.

As anthropologist Adam Kuper states "[t]hings look very different today" (1999: x)(see also Inkeles, 1961: 173; Yengoyan, 1986: 368). In a paper published in the same year as the first edition of Hofstede's *Culture's Consequences*, James Duncan stated that to accept a superorganic theory concept of culture – as national culturalists do – is to inadvertently chose a theory "which has come under devastating attack and which has long been rejected by the vast majority of anthropologists" (1980: 182).

The national culturalist literature has however ignored these debates and developments. Indeed, compared even with the earlier models, its singular primordialism seems crude and simplistic. Anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn's analysis is sometimes cited by leading management national culturalists - but the subtleties, nuances, and qualifications in his work are ignored (see Kets de Vries, 2001: 597, for instance). Kluckhohn distinguishes between situational and absolute culture: the former is incompatible with the notion of national culture. He gave the example of Japanese prisoners of war who "in situation A [prior to capture] publicly observed the rules of the game with a fervor that impressed Americans as "fanaticism". Yet the minute [they were] in situation B, the rules for situation A no longer applied" (1957: 137). But the idea that the

rules we follow, the way we behave, the practices we accept or reject, are situationally influenced, other than by the national, is irreconcilable with the notion of determinate national culture. As Sorge states: '[a] large power distance in the enterprise, for instance, does not necessarily imply a correspondingly large power distance in the family, such as between father and children' (1983: 628) (See also Lane, 1989; Kondo, 1990; Triandis, 1994; McSweeney, 1995, for instance). But reducing context(s) to enduring and coherent national culture debars the possibility of conceiving of such variability.

Hofstede's argument that the rejection of national culture/national character in anthropology was mainly the result of a technical deficit - the discipline supposedly lacked adequate statistical "tools" (2001: 13)(which he asserts he later employed) and that prior to his work "no one else had done any serious empirical research in the field" (2002: 76) – ignores the depth of the conceptual critiques in anthropology of national culturalism; the extensive but ultimately abandoned efforts by some leading anthropologists to empirically identify national cultural patterns; and the *continuing* dismissal of the notion (despite the availability of the "tools") within contemporary anthropology. As Philip Bock, formerly President of the Society for Psychological Anthropology emphatically states: "the uniformity assumption is false" (1999: 111). Even Alfred Kroeber, a key populariser of, the superorganic notion of culture had admitted that he had failed to substantiate his theory:

In reviewing the ground covered, I wish to say at the outset that I see no evidence of any true law in the phenomena dealt with: nothing cyclical, regularly repetitive or necessary (in Bohannan and Glazer, 1973: 106).

Classical anthropology studied (apparently) simple societies – so there is some explanation for the formerly dominant supposition that each society has a common, coherent culture. But the national culturalists in management have taken that idea and applied it to widely differentiated and diversified modern societies and organizations. It is desirable that the disciplines of management draw from and contribute to other disciplines. It behoves

scholars of management to keep up to date with developments and debates in relevant non-management disciplines. Over the past few decades whilst the field of organization theory has engaged with a wider cultural literature and revealed complex cultural processes and characteristics in organizational contexts, the national cultural literature has theoretically atrophied. It remains fixated with a once dominant but now at best a peripheralised view of culture.

The idea of a national culture or character as a product of a common national history relies on *volkisch* fantasies not on scholarly historiography.

Belief in national cultural uniqueness and of individuals as passive recipients has long ceased to have a following in disciplines in which it once was the dominant view. And yet, the devotees of national culture in management unquestioningly suppose it. That dogged commitment is not based on engagement with and rejection of the pertinent debates and conclusions in the disciplines which have jettisoned national culture. Thirty years and more of developments are ignored. They are not even acknowledged. Instead of standing on the shoulders of giants, the devotees of uniform, ensuring, and determinate national culture are standing on graves.

## **Conclusions**

Albeit through an engagement with a largely different literature, with greater emphasis on micro-level sites of action, and a focus on culture rather than institutions, the findings and conclusions in this paper are broadly in line with those of a new wave of neo-institutionalism which is not analytically a ‘prisoner of the nation-state’ as it does not treat the nation as *the* unit of analysis nor as a discrete unit of analysis (see Djelic, & Quack, 2005; Crouch, 2005; Streeck & Thelen, 2005, for instance). That is not a rejection of ‘societal effects’ but of reducing and restricting ‘society’ merely to that of a nationally uniform, unchanging, and determinate context.

National culturalism’s assumption of the internal coherence of subjective culture debars engagement with diversity and with contemporary

developments in anthropology, historiography, geography, and elsewhere which predominantly conceives of cultures as multiple, fragmented, internally contested, and porous. Its determinism – the supposition and claim that autonomous national culture shapes just about everything - unrealistically, indeed foolishly, excludes the influence of other cultural and non-cultural factors. Its conflation of the unit of data (the ‘nation’) with the unit of explanation (the sources of action *within* a ‘nation’); its erasure of intra-national differences; and its commitment to an unchanging and nationally uniform culture debars it from engaging with endogenous change.

National culturalists’ supposition of continuity allows them to assert prolonged influence - but it disables them from engaging with change other than that which is externally induced through rare exogenous shock and whose effect is not localised but nationally uniform (Burke, 1962). Locked into its theoretical lacuna, national culture has no leverage to engage with the meetings of, the inter-relationships between, an immigrant culture, or culturally created practices, and those in the host country. Even if we accept that the new arrival ‘meets’ national culture there is nothing in the national cultural literature which provides insights into the outcomes – other than generalised and largely content-free notions such as ‘resistance’, ‘repulsion’, or ‘disregard’. But even such blandness exceeds what most national culturalists can legitimately claim. They cannot even go so far as to say that every attempted change - for example, attempts via a foreign direct investment to impose different management practices – will even encounter national culture. Why? Because the sites of such new cultural ‘immigration’ is not the nation as a whole, the level at which national culture as the ‘central tendency’ or ‘norm’ or ‘average’ is supposed to exist, but at micro-sites, for example: a factory plant; the readers of a particular book; the viewers of a specific film; and so forth. If ‘national culture’ is theorized as a national average or central tendency - and not something that is present everywhere - then it cannot logically be said that the immigrant culture or cultural practice will meet anything national as ‘national’ culture is not necessarily present where the immigrant culture ‘arrives’.



When the possibility of change is acknowledged (and it rarely is), it is conceived of as uniformly and simultaneously happening, that is, across a country and not just in some organizations within a country. Intra-state differentiation as a consequence is inconceivable for national culturalists as that would mean acknowledgement of the end of *national* culture. What is deemed to be true of one location in a country, must it is supposed, be true of all in that country – as the cause of action is national any change must also be nationally pervasive. Bizarrely, Hofstede even goes further in claiming that on the rare occasions when there is a change in a national culture, the change occurs not only across that country but that it also occurs within all countries throughout the world so that the “relative positions of national cultures are almost as solid as the countries’ geographical positions” (2005: 40). National cultures very rarely change, he states, but when they do, “they change in formation” across the globe (Hofstede, 2002: 36).

So, what can the notion of national culture tell us about the meeting of the exogenous with the endogenous, the alien and the national? Frankly nothing because only two implausible answers are possible without undermining the notion of national culture itself. First, it can be supposed that no change occurs – national cultures are robust enough to withstand any attempt to change them. But this characterisation of enduring isolation, of the unfailing capacity of the local to repel anything new, is inconsistent with many local studies (see Gamble, 2000, for instance). Secondly, and alternatively, it could be supposed that if a change occurs at a site of action it must also somehow happen simultaneously at every other national location. Such rapid national transformation is contradicted by just about every historical study of national change. An acknowledgement of the possibility of change that would not also occur everywhere else in the same country would be inconsistent with the master assumption of *nationally uniform* culture.

As Norbert Elias observes: “[s]ocial norms are often discussed in a manner which suggests that the norms of one and the same society are all of a piece [but] [i]n societies above a specific level of differentiation, inherently contradictory codes of norms can co-exist in varying degrees of amalgamation

and separation. Each may be activated in different situations and at different times” (1996: 158).

The tragic flaw of deterministic theory of national culture is its reliance on a simple-minded mechanical psychology. The unintended consequence of the deterministic theory of national culture has been to discourage inquiry into the richness of social interactions by reducing the explanations of everything to national culture. Ultimately, we may ask what value, if any, does the notion of national culture have for understanding and changing the world. National culture defined as a superorganic entity impedes explanation of many important questions and masks many problematic social, economic, and political relationships. This paper does not deny that there is value in the careful use of the term culture but it does reject the attribution of determinate power to it or any variation such as ‘national culture’. Politics is not an empty space dominated by national culture. Treating national culture as the primary or sole causative force mystifies important social processes. Conflicts and contradictions, and not simply adaptations to external shocks, are crucial in generating and shaping social and cultural change (Keesing, 1974).

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