

Attention to quality also bears on the production of a national culture. Aside from whether it is feasible, it is a dangerous project. It implies that someone or group decides what it should be and how it is to be instilled. It provides a mechanism for manipulation -- a problem with all culture. Cultures emphasize stability and conformity rather than change and innovation. A naturally developing culture has the virtue of offering security and identity while being open to change and diversity. A manufactured culture shaped and imposed from above, no matter how well intentioned, is an entirely different matter. Atkinson (1994:744) has suggested that the elite politics required to maintain a mosaic that accommodates diversity probably would produce the sort of culture that is "...less likely to produce a challenge to the status quo."

In emphasizing culture, we may lose sight of the fact that it is a construct -- a concept created by scholars. Media and cultural policy address popular culture (e.g., folk art, commercial entertainment) and/or high culture (painting, drama, literature) and idealize the possibility of a national culture (i.e., culture constructed to tie to a political entity, a possibility that Handler has dismissed [1994:27], cf. Collins [1990b]); they do not address culture in the ethnographic sense. A culture in that sense is the tradition of patterned ways in which a group has accommodated to its circumstances. Cultures develop naturally; they are not purposely planned or manipulated. The people who exhibit these patterns do not consider their routines to be a culture. It is self-evident and obvious to them that their normal patterns of behavior, shared norms, values, and goals are appropriate and acceptable. Only outside observers objectify them as culture. Viewed in this light, the call to protect or develop a national culture may be a statement about someone's goals and interests rather than an assertion about a unique assemblage of material objects, behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values needed for the country to survive (cf. Bissoondath; Leong, 1989). If so, who is it that knows what the national culture should be and wants to implant it (cf. Yerxa and Moll, 1995, ¶4)? I would suggest that the call for a national culture is an appropriation of the scholarly concept of culture for the political arena by an elite whose interests would be furthered if there were such a thing.¹³ Elsewhere, I also have suggested (1991; 1995:288-289), as has Collins (1990a:32-37), that a national culture and efforts to build, preserve, or enhance one are concerns of interest to political leaders, intellectuals, and some segments of an upper class, not to the population at large (cf. Corse, 1995).

Why would an elite be concerned with culture? Put crassly, the interest is power (cf. Bodemann, 1984; Carroll, 1986). Control of an effective national culture (i.e., one to which everyone in the country subscribes) offers the potential for manipulating the population. The existence of a culture means that most of those who share it behave as it prescribes and are self-motivated to do so. People who behave predictably are subject to social control.¹⁴ In a society with an effective culture, authorities can rely on approved modes of leadership to mobilize support for their policies and actions. In modern societies, social order and voluntary compliance with demands that are costly but perceived as necessary by leaders (e.g., paying taxes, serving in the armed forces, not endangering the public health, repressing impulses to violent dissent) are increasingly problematic. a country's leaders are always concerned with avoiding social disorder and maintaining the potential for social mobilization. A widely shared national culture is a check against unpredictable behavior and incipient dissent. The promotion of a national culture then, may be, as much as anything, a response to these, by now, almost universal concerns of societal elites.

In a contemporary country, a national culture primarily contributes to the survival of and a good life for the group as a collectivity and for its leaders. It may or may not do so for ordinary people as individuals. Objectified cultures are conservative, they emphasize the established rather than change. By telling people how to think about reality, what is right and what is wrong, what to do and what not to do, what is worth achieving and what is not, they function as conformist ideologies that discourage individual initiative. A policy of building and protecting national culture implies that people's welfare is tied to that of the national entity, that their lot in life will not improve if they deviate from the prescribed norms. Accordingly, the tactics it provides leaders for mobilizing citizen support and conformity are likely to succeed. In sum, the