What's Wrong with Neocolonialism: The Case of Unequal Trade in Cultural Goods

SHUK YING CHAN   *University College London, United Kingdom*
ALAN PATTEN   *Princeton University, United States*

Unequal patterns of cultural exchange between the Global South and Global North are sometimes labeled "neo-colonial." What, if anything, is wrong with these patterns? Debates surrounding cultural globalization have traditionally divided proponents of free trade and cultural preservation. The article develops an alternative account grounded in a global application of the ideal of social equality. Citizens of privileged societies ought to regard and relate to citizens of disadvantaged societies as social equals. Patterns of cultural exchange play an important role in promoting these relationships. Historically, colonized peoples were often regarded as inferior based on perceived failures to produce cultural achievements. To the extent that unequal global cultural production and exchange persist, the colonial pattern remains. The duty to relate to foreigners as equals implies that Global North countries should stop pressing for cultural trade concessions and instead favor the import of cultural goods from the Global South.

In 2017, American films accounted for 88% of Mexico's box office, while Mexican films made up 7% (UNESCO 2021). In the same year, foreign-language films represented only around 1% of the U.S. domestic box office (Follows 2018). On average, around 100 films a year have a "wide release" in the United States, meaning that they open in more than 1,000 theaters across the country. To date, only 12 foreign films have *ever* been released in more than 1,000 U.S. theaters (Epstein 2020). American films took the largest market share in 48 of the 58 countries surveyed in 2017 by UNESCO (2021).

These facts offer a snapshot of a broader pattern of unequal trade in cultural goods, including films and TV, books and magazines, video games, and music. As recently as 2004, according to UNESCO (2013) data, more than 70% of cultural exports originated in Europe or North America. Although this share fell to around 50% for the next decade, the change was primarily due to rising cultural exports from East Asia and India. The rest of the world, including Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, remained flat at less than 5% of all cultural exports (UNESCO 2013).[1] When digital goods (e.g., streaming) are included, the figures are even starker: in 2022, Global North

countries accounted for 95% of all such exports, with the United States alone accounting for 45% (UNESCO 2022, 172).

Since the era of formal decolonization, Global South countries have pushed for reforms to global cultural trade. Through forums such as UNESCO, they voiced concerns about deeply imbalanced cultural transmission due to trade liberalization and lobbied instead for cultural exemptions that would allow various forms of protectionism (MacBride et al. 1980). Even though the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions overcame U.S. opposition to pass in 2005, its subsumption under WTO trade rules made it a weaker instrument than its advocates sought, and significant inequalities in cultural exports have persisted (Voon 2007, 188–9).

One way to understand unequal cultural trade is as an instance of neocolonialism (Tomlinson 2001). Contemporary inequalities in cultural trade not only bear a structural similarity to cultural relations in the era of formal colonialism but are also traceable back to the historical experience of colonialism. The major exporters of cultural goods are (a) affluent, (b) majority white, and (c) have historically benefitted from relationships of domination, including enslavement, colonialism, and conquest. As shorthand, we refer to these countries collectively as the "Global North." The countries that export relatively few cultural goods, and heavily rely on imports, tend to have the opposite characteristics. They are (a) less affluent, (b) majority non-white, and (c) marked to some degree by a history of domination. This second set of countries is internally heterogeneous, but, again as shorthand, we label them the "Global South." To be sure, as the "last stage of imperialism," neocolonialism is more than unequal cultural trade (Nkrumah 1965). It is a form

Shuk Ying Chan [iD], Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University College London, United Kingdom, shuk.ying.chan@ucl.ac.uk.
Alan Patten [iD], Professor, Department of Politics, Princeton University, United States, apatten@princeton.edu.

[1] These data do not distinguish between South–South and South–North exports. For discussion, see UNESCO (2022, Ch 6).

of political domination in which dominant states exercise objectionable influence over disadvantaged states, usually for economic exploitation. Unequal trade in cultural goods represents one kind of objectionable influence (246).

Yet calling contemporary patterns of cultural trade "neo-colonial" is not merely to select an descriptively apt term. It also renders a normative judgment about those patterns. European colonialism was a significant injustice, notwithstanding continued debate about which features of colonialism account for its wrongness (Ypi 2013; Stilz 2015; Moore 2018). To describe today's patterns of unequal cultural trade as neo-colonial is to insinuate that, to some degree at least, those patterns are wrong; it is to suggest that they are wrong for the same kinds of reasons that account for the wrongness of colonialism.

At first glance, it is not obvious that observed patterns of unequal cultural trade do involve a serious wrong. The patterns are exactly what many economists would expect in a well-functioning system of international trade. Theories of international trade are founded on the idea of comparative advantage (Ricardo 1819, Ch. 7). Features of Country *A* allow it to produce some particular goods—for example, fine wines—in a cost-effective manner. Perhaps *A* is blessed with the right climate and soil conditions, or its history of producing fine wines attracts particularly talented producers. Meanwhile, Country *B* can produce textiles at a relatively low cost. Under these circumstances, both countries gain by specializing and trading with the other. Unequal cultural trade may simply be an application of this principle. The unequal pattern arises because one group of countries quite rationally specializes in producing cultural commodities, perhaps because there are benefits to productivity and creativity when artists work near one another in a relatively small number of global centers of cultural production. On this view, then, the mere fact of unequal flows of cultural goods is not a sign that something is wrong. It is just what one would expect in a system of international trade designed to produce benefits for all parties (Mas-Colell 1999, 88).

If comparative advantage provides one reason for disputing the wrongness of unequal cultural trade, the equally venerable notion of consumer sovereignty offers another. Netflix does not impose itself on societies in the Global South through gunboats but by catering to consumers' preferences. Protectionist policies that impede the imports of cultural goods risk undermining the autonomy of consumers in the Global South to make their own choices about what to watch, listen to, and read.

To be sure, these general arguments for free trade are quite controversial. The classical theory of comparative advantage has contemporary detractors. There may be forms of protectionism that add domestic options rather than curtail foreign ones and do not straightforwardly threaten consumer sovereignty. For this article, however, we set aside these questions and grant for argument's sake that the general case supporting free trade is quite strong. Our question is whether there is something specifically objectionable about the unequal trade of *cultural goods* that would warrant describing inequalities in that sector as "neo-colonial."

One familiar concern about unequal trade in cultural goods is based on the idea of cultural preservation (Mas-Colell 1999, 89–90). If people get their cultural goods from producers based in other countries, then they risk losing their own culture. To the extent that people in well-off societies have reasons to care about the preservation of cultures around the world, then, on this view, they have reasons to limit inequalities in cultural trade.

As an argument for the wrongness of unequal cultural exchange, this sort of view faces several problems. There are well-known conceptual questions about how distinct cultures are defined and when they are lost as opposed to merely changed (Patten 2011). There are equally familiar normative questions about why precisely cultural loss would be objectionable, especially where cultural loss results from choices by members of the disappearing culture (Barry 2001, 65, 71).

Aside from these general theoretical issues, a narrower question concerns the relationship between cultural commodities and cultural preservation. Trade in cultural commodities, such as films, books, and music, is a poor proxy for cultural influence between people. On the one hand, culture can be disrupted in many ways besides through trade in cultural goods. Immigration, new technologies, and new consumer goods are all catalysts of cultural change. On the other hand, even when people heavily consume imported cultural goods, that does not necessarily imply cultural loss. People often resist, reinterpret, or "glocalize" messages associated with the cultural products they consume. As Appiah (2006, 133) has pointed out, critics of cultural imperialism sometimes talk as if inhabitants of the Global South are "tabulae rasae on which global capitalism's moving finger writes its message, leaving behind another homogenized consumer as it moves on." We avoid this "deeply condescending" picture (Appiah 2006, 133) by focusing specifically on unequal international flows of cultural goods and not on further consequences for cultural preservation.

The account we develop represents an alternative to both the classical free-trader's embrace of unequal cultural flows and the cultural protectionist's appeal to cultural preservation to explain what is wrong with such inequality. The article elaborates on a novel argument that applies the ideal of social equality to the foreign policy of Global North countries. Social equality is often seen as a bedrock commitment upon which democratic institutions and liberal rights are justified. It is because people aspire toward recognition of one another as equals and seek to build a social world together reflecting that recognition that they endorse liberal and democratic institutions.

Our argument develops two claims about the social equality ideal. First, while the ideal is sometimes thought to be restricted in scope, there are good reasons for striving to realize it in an *inclusive* way. Ultimately, someone committed to liberal democracy should regard relationships of social equality as

valuable both within and across borders. Second, the ideal is *fragile* in that its inclusive realization is persistently threatened by all-too-human tendencies to construct hierarchies and barriers of exclusion (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Members of affluent liberal societies have a duty, grounded in their aspiration for social equality, to promote the conditions for realizing the ideal against tendencies that threaten it.

A key hypothesis is that patterns of cultural trade play an important role in creating and safeguarding the forms of recognition implied by social equality. Our arguments for this hypothesis are both historical and theoretical. Historically, we note that, under colonialism, colonized people were regarded as socially inferior on the grounds that they lacked key human capacities, or possessed inferior capacities (Pagden 1995, 79; McCarthy 2009). A standard pretext for the poor assessment of the capacities of these groups was their perceived failure to produce a valuable culture. Theoretically, we contend that unequal cultural trade diminishes opportunities for citizens in the Global North to be confronted with the cultural agency of individuals and groups in the Global South and to be informed by representations of Global South societies created by producers and artists from those societies. Ideally, these historical and theoretical arguments would be supplemented by contemporary empirical evidence. We cite some relevant empirical evidence below, but we are not aware of any direct empirical study of the relationship between trade in cultural goods and egalitarian or inegalitarian attitudes. Even in the absence of such research, our main claim can be formulated in conditional terms: just as colonialism was wrong because it established objectionable forms of social inequality, unequal cultural trade is wrong insofar as it contributes to an ongoing failure in the Global North to recognize people of the Global South as social equals.

Beyond its consequences for neo-colonial patterns of cultural trade, the analysis opens up new ways of thinking about the implications of social equality for political theory. While theorists have posited a relationship between democracy, recognition, and social equality (Kolodny 2014; Viehoff 2014; Wilson 2019, 48), they have not explored the full range of ways in which institutions and practices work to mediate the recognition that is partly constitutive of relationships of social equality. Nor have they, for the most part, extended discussions of social equality beyond domestic relations to global relations.[2] In addition, our analysis also contributes to recent efforts to re-center issues of race and colonial legacies in the study of international politics (Freeman, Kim, and Lake 2022). As Mills (2019) and others (Seth 2021; Shilliam 2020) argue, despite the continued global circulation of racial ideologies inherited from colonialism, political scientists and theorists have paid little attention to race and racism in understanding contemporary international relations and global injustice. There is now exciting work emerging on racism and international trade (Singh 2017), and our analysis seeks to open up new questions about this relationship. Finally, our article speaks to questions of cultural exports and "soft power" (Nye 1990) by positing a relationship between cultural exports and people's attitudes toward each other. If the former impacts the latter, then such exports become potential tools of soft power.[3]

SOCIAL EQUALITY WITHOUT BORDERS

In recent years, political philosophers have increasingly identified social equality as a foundational commitment of liberal democracy (Anderson 1999; Kolodny 2014; Viehoff 2014; Scheffler 2015; Wilson 2019). Major works of liberal political philosophy such as Rawls's *Theory of Justice* have been reinterpreted as animated by a notion of social equality, and more pragmatic, nonideal works of political theory (Anderson 2011) have started from it as well.

In abstract terms, the ideal of social equality is realized when a group of people live together *as* equals. The members of the group regard each other as equals and treat each other accordingly. Each member of the group is considered by the others to be a human agent with a full set of agential capacities and is therefore owed respect. In virtue of their "reciprocal commitment to treating one another with respect" (Scheffler 2015, 24), members seek to decide their collective affairs in an egalitarian way. At the level of fundamental justification, this means no one is regarded as having a higher status or greater authority than others. Moreover, when collective decisions are taken, the important claims and interests of each group member are given equal weight and consideration.

Understood this way, social equality has implications for the rights and material entitlements that individuals have against one another. In general, if a group is committed to living together on terms that take seriously the claims, interests, and agency of every individual, it should reject arrangements that violate individual rights and oppose unequal material distributions that enable objectionable hierarchies of domination, esteem, and standing (Anderson 2012). According to several prominent interpretations, social equality rules out economic systems that prioritize profit maximization or efficiency or that produce large wealth inequalities (Anderson 1999; Scheffler 2015). This said, social equality is not fundamentally a distributive theory specifying an ideal distribution of rights, opportunities, resources, or power (Scheffler 2015). Rather, at the most basic level, social equality denotes a moral relationship between and among a group of people. It is realized when attitudes of equal respect and consideration effectively guide their relationships.

Conversely, social inequality denotes the absence of these attitudes or their lack of efficacy. It describes objectionable social hierarchies of authority,

---

[2] Exceptions are Nath (2011), Ip (2016), and Wilson (2022).

[3] See Kim (2016) on the "Korean Wave" and South Korea's international standing.

consideration, and social status, where individuals believe and act as if others in the group are inferior and less worthy of concern and respect. These hierarchical attitudes and dispositions typically support objectionable distributions of rights, opportunities, resources, and powers. Those at the bottom are economically worse off, excluded from valuable opportunities, and are vulnerable to, and lack effective means to contest, decisions made by those at the top. Race and gender are leading examples of social hierarchies in societies such as the United States, and these hierarchies translate into familiar forms of substantive inequality.

Social equality is valuable, and social inequality is objectionable for diverse reasons. First, as just noted, social inequality underpins a range of distributive inequalities that are widely considered unjust. Second, individuals in relationships of social equality are able to experience freedom from domination (Schuppert 2015). When we are confident that others regulate their interactions with us based on respect and reciprocity, we can formulate plans with the reasonable expectation that others will not arbitrarily interfere. We need not subscribe, consciously or subconsciously, to deferential or servile principles of action. Third, social egalitarian relations are an important basis for individual self-respect. Confidence in our own worth is threatened by institutions and practices that persistently express the judgment that we are inferior (Taylor 1994). Fourth, and finally, quite apart from its *effects* (on distributive justice, freedom, and self-respect), many will share the belief that social inequality is intrinsically objectionable. When individuals and groups of individuals possess the traits and capacities that justify respecting them as equals, it is intrinsically wrong to regard them as inferiors or to fail to have or to act on a commitment to living together with them as equals.

Social equality refers to a *group* whose members regard and treat one another as equals. The scope of this group can be specified in two different dimensions. First, there can be variation in the *scale* of the community in which relationships of social equality are located. The community in question might be a marriage or friendship or small association, or it might be something much bigger such as a state or even the community of all human beings. Second, there can be variation in the degree to which everyone in a particular community is *included* in the relationship of social equality. For instance, social equality might be a relationship among only those at the top, or alternatively it might extend to everyone present in the community.

We start with the question of scale, leaving the problem of inclusion for the next section. Theorists of social equality often elaborate and illustrate their ideal by considering egalitarian personal relationships such as romantic partnerships and friendships (Scheffler 2015; Wilson 2019; Viehoff 2014; 2019). The ideal of social equality is also, of course, applied at the societal level. Indeed, there are difficult questions about whether social egalitarians extrapolate too quickly from small-scale personal relationships to large, anonymous communities structured by impersonal institutions (Viehoff 2019). Assuming the ideal does apply to larger communities, there is a further question about how these communities should be specified. One answer—perhaps the most common—is *statist*. The ideal should be realized among fellow citizens of a state. As understood, the ideal clearly has critical force. It can be invoked against structures of exclusion and marginalization that characterize every contemporary state to at least some degree: structures based on race or ethnicity, gender, religion, class, disability, and sexuality. Social egalitarians typically hold up as an ideal a vision in which citizens live together as equals even though they are diverse along various dimensions.

Social equality is not inherently connected to the state, however. Although the major early discussions of social equality took for granted a domestic political setting (Anderson 1999; Kolodny 2014; Scheffler 2015), political theorists are starting to recognize that egalitarian relationships might extend *across borders* (Nath 2011; Wilson 2022). There is no reason why people in one country might not commit to live as equals with people in others. Of course, the substantive implications of cross-border social equality are likely to look quite different than those associated with state-centered forms of social equality. Social equality is defined by a set of effective attitudes of respect and consideration. These attitudes translate into the recognition of particular rights, or the justification of particular distributions, only through the mediation of institutions. In the cross-border case, egalitarian attitudes will often imply respect for the efforts of foreigners to tackle their own challenges through their own institutions. Within a state, by contrast, the same attitudes might require domestic institutions to play the lead role. This is not to say that cross-border social equality is exhausted by a duty to respect the self-determination of people. At a minimum, a commitment to cross-border social equality demands efforts to reduce political domination between states, reform unfair or exploitative economic relations, discharge obligations of assistance, engage in reparation and reconciliation, and (as explored below) foster anti-racism.

There are several reasons for extending the social equality ideal across national borders. First, there is a relationship between social equality across and within borders. Due to centuries of migration, today's societies are highly diverse. Members of a diverse society may struggle to maintain egalitarian attitudes and dispositions internally if they simultaneously regard members of outsider groups as unworthy of concern and respect. If society is diverse enough, then the despised outsider group will also be an insider group. For example, if members of a group look down on Africans and regard their interests and claims as lacking equal weight, this may undermine egalitarian attitudes toward their own fellow citizens of African descent. Likewise, it would be surprising if non-Muslim Americans could hold derisive beliefs about foreign Muslims without having the same attitudes toward fellow Americans who are Muslim.

Admittedly, the argument here is vulnerable to appeals to countervailing factors and alternative specifications of the operative psychological mechanisms.

Perhaps the psychology of nationalism would induce some people to have conflicting attitudes toward outsiders and insiders whom they classify in a similar way. Our argument points to one particular mechanism that we expect will be operative for at least some people. To the extent that it is, establishing egalitarian relations across borders is good insurance against inegalitarian relations within one's borders.

Second, all of the previously sketched reasons for valuing social equality apply across borders and within borders. Whether or not egalitarian distributive principles apply globally, questions of global justice still arise in connection with human rights, global governance, trade rules, laws of war, humanitarian aid, and international assistance, as well as the enduring ramifications of past injustices, including colonialism and other forms of domination. Just as efforts to realize domestic justice are hindered by social inequality, cross-border social inequality is an obstacle to realizing global justice. If individuals regard foreigners as inferiors, undeserving of equal moral status, it becomes easier to rationalize global structures of oppression, marginalization, and exploitation (Hanania and Trager 2020). If relations of social equality secure freedom and self-respect in interactions with one's fellow citizens, then cross-border social equality helps to realize the same goods in relationships with all human beings in an interdependent world. Finally, social equality has the same non-instrumental value in the global context as it does in the domestic one. When someone has the traits and capacities that justify treating them as a social equal, it is wrong to treat them as inferior or to erect a hierarchy in which they are assigned a subordinate status.

THE DUTY TO PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SOCIAL EQUALITY

Just as social equality can be located in communities of varying scales, it can be realized more or less inclusively. Consider the outlook of colonizing populations, such as the British in India, the French in Algeria, and the Dutch in Indonesia. These groups rejected the inclusive ideal of statewide social equality. They did not seek to live with the native populations as equals, but this hierarchical and segregated outlook would not have prevented the dominant groups from valuing social equality *within* their own communities. In his novel, *A Passage to India*, for instance, Forster (1924, 52) portrays the British in India as caring sincerely about social equality among the British settler community, even while rejecting it categorically toward the native population. At the same time, it is obvious that a more inclusive conception of social equality is possible as well. Contemporary readers recoil at the hierarchical society depicted by Forster precisely because they presume that relations of social equality should be extended to everyone in a given society.

Normatively, it is not hard to adduce reasons to prefer the inclusive version of social equality over more restrictive variants. The reasons are the same as the ones advanced in the previous section for valuing social equality and seeking to realize it on a larger scale. The native population of Forster's India suffered in their relationship with the British from the injustices, domination, and humiliation warned against by social egalitarians. More fundamentally, restrictive social equality is wrong in itself: it denies the equal humanity of the individuals and groups who are excluded from the circle of egalitarian relations.

The difficult question is not about the normative desirability of inclusive social equality but about its practical realization. The possibility and historical reality of the restricted version of social equality highlight a permanent and ever-present danger to both domestic and cross-border applications of the ideal. Human beings have a poor track record of establishing and sustaining inclusive social equality within the boundaries of the state, let alone across boundaries. Because social equality is not inherently inclusive, and exclusion can be an effective mechanism for generating benefits for an in-group at the expense of an out-group (Anderson 2011, 1–22), racism and other forms of exclusion are standing threats to inclusive ideals of social equality. Anyone committed to an inclusive form of social equality must be concerned to articulate strategies for countering such tendencies. Our account of trade in cultural goods is proposed as one such strategy.

As this framing suggests, a commitment to social equality implies two different kinds of duties, which we call "duties of compliance" and "duties of promotion." The duties of compliance consist of the duties that participants in a relationship of social equality have toward other people in the relationship. Roughly speaking, these are reciprocal duties to take seriously one another's claims, interests, and agency. The duties of promotion, by contrast, are the duties to foster and sustain the relationship of social equality itself. These are duties to struggle against the various material, institutional, psychological, and linguistic conditions that tend to impede or undermine social equality and lend support to exclusion and subordination. At the individual level, a white male might respond to the duty of promotion, for instance, by (among other things) reading more books written by authors of color and/or women. These are not actions required of an individual in virtue of participating in a relationship of social equality. Rather, they are ways of fostering and safeguarding such relationships by leaning against conditions such as racial segregation and gendered socialization that tend to stand in their way. The duties of promotion are, if anything, even more important for governments. The governments of contemporary liberal democracies ought to acknowledge the histories of colonialism and racism within their own societies and in their society's interactions with the rest of the world. Acknowledging these histories should not merely be an occasion for moral condemnation. To the extent that governments in the Global North are committed to social equality, they should look for ways of combating the persistence and resurgence of socially inegalitarian relations with the Global South.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND RECOGNITION FAILURE

What, then, are the conditions that promote inclusive, cross-border relationships of social equality? Which conditions threaten to undermine such relationships? In a relationship of social equality, people *regard* one another as equals and they *treat* each other accordingly. A relationship of social equality might fail, then, either because people do not regard each other as equals, or because, despite having the right attitudes, the structures of action and interaction in which they participate are such that they do not end up treating one another as equals. Call these "recognition failure" and "practical failure."

Both mechanisms of failure help explain why inclusive, cross-border relations of social equality are difficult to achieve, and so both are relevant to affluent liberal democracies concerned to realize social equality. The decentralized decision-making characteristic of international relations and global capitalism exposes cross-border social relations to practical failure. Even where everyone regards one another as equals, imperatives of state security, profit maximization, local democracy, and so on would predictably leave some people in a subordinate, oppressed position.

While inclusive, cross-border social equality could be frustrated even in the absence of recognition failure, the actual history of European colonialism shows that recognition failure was a crucial part of the story. European colonialists justified the enslavement and oppression of non-European people with reference to emerging doctrines of scientific racism and cultural discourses that deemed non-white populations barbaric, backward, and inferior (McCarthy 2009; Said 1978).

These discourses remain important in international relations today. As critical legal theorists have pointed out, hierarchies of race and civilization have always differentiated societies' legal statuses under international law and continue to shape Western states' military engagements in peripheral states (Anghie 2005; Matua 2001). Consider the "War on Terror," for example. Postcolonial and feminist scholars have critiqued racist, Orientalist, and gendered media representations of Islam and the Middle East in the aftermath of 9/11, tying these discourses to broad support across the United States for the disastrous invasion of Iraq and subsequent counterterrorist efforts that disproportionately targeted Muslims (Dimaggio 2008).

Moreover, subtler forms of recognition failure have also shaped international relations. As Freeman, Kim, and Lake (2022) argue, ideas of racial inferiority continue to shape global politics from international criminal justice to discourses of good governance. Consider modernization theory, which influenced U.S. foreign policy responses to decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s. It defines a society's "level of development" by its success at importing a Western model of society, culture, and political economy. As Emerson (1963, 4–5) explained, "What makes 'modernization' modern is the ability to live, to think, to produce, to organize, in substantially the same fashion as the Western countries whose imperial hold has now been almost totally broken." Societies that lacked these features were "traditional," and explanations for low economic growth were traced back to traditional values, practices, and ways of life (Rostow 1960, 4–16).

Although the crudest forms of the theory fell from fashion by the mid-1970s, its core premises retain considerable influence and continue to shape policies emphasizing economic liberalization and privatization for economic growth (Escobar 1995). Embedded in modernization theory is a form of recognition failure —a failure to regard people of the postcolonial Global South as equal agents capable of developing useful practices informed by their values and beliefs. Instead, modernization theory relies on stereotypical images of stagnant and backward societies steeped in "tradition," waiting for Western planners and advisors to take charge. More broadly, as J.P. Singh and others have argued, race and racism continue to structure unfair terms of global trade and drive American and European public attitudes toward refugees and migrants (Singh 2020; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). If objectionable hierarchies of domination and exploitation describe much of contemporary global relations, recognition failure is at least one important part of the story.

The critique of unequal trade in cultural goods developed below arises from a concern about this persistent recognition failure. Since overcoming recognition failure does not suffice for realizing social equality—there is also the danger of practical failure—more balanced trade in cultural goods would not by itself guarantee social equality. For that matter, recognition failure is itself a complex phenomenon that results from multiple causes—including the vested interest of the powerful in regarding the dominated as undeserving of equality. So more balanced trade in cultural goods does not guarantee success here either. Nonetheless, insofar as unequal trade in cultural goods plays a contributing role in sustaining recognition failure, rebalancing trade in such goods forms part of a broader strategy for realizing social equality.

A key first step is understanding that recognition failures are underwritten by the judgment that members of a group tend to lack one or more of the capacities needed to be equals. Social equals recognize one another as having the same elevated status by virtue of sharing the same basic capacities to some threshold degree. When one group fails to recognize another, it is typically because members of the former persuade themselves that members of the latter lack the relevant capacities.

The conditions that foster inclusive social equality by addressing recognition failure, then, are the conditions that address and challenge the propensity within privileged groups to form demeaning views of the capacities of other groups. Political domination and economic exploitation are contexts in which such views often fester. An insidious effect of injustices is that they encourage the well-off to think of the victims with contempt and pity. However unfairly, victims are

thought to lack the capacities needed to defend themselves or provide for their own needs. Injustices have a stigmatizing effect: not only do they harm their victims directly, but they leave the impression, encouraged by their perpetrators, that the victims are the kind of people whom it is permissible to treat unjustly. An important implication is that combating political and economic injustice is one way to address recognition failure. Accepting this hypothesis, it would follow that anyone committed to social equality has multiple kinds of reasons for promoting justice. Justice is owed to people for its own sake, but justice is also a good means of fostering relationships of social equality and thus of discharging duties of promotion.

Other facts about a group—besides being a victim of injustice—are also relevant to whether the powerful tend to regard its members as equals. These are generally facts about a group's way of life, its practices, and its major achievements and triumphs. For instance, historically, as Europeans came to know non-European societies, they viewed the presence or absence of agriculture as a major determinant of whether these societies were "civilized" and hence fit for a relationship of equality. Other supposed indicators of civilization consisted of the presence of a system of law, monotheism, newspapers, and written materials. These indicators were treated as evidence of the presence or absence of certain key capacities and thus as evidence of fitness for equality.

An illustration of the idea that recognition is mediated by observable practices and achievements is found in Tocqueville's discussion of Native Americans ([1836/1840] 2003) in a famous chapter considering the "Three Races Which Live in the Territory of the United States." Acknowledging the "white supremacy" that shapes American life (375), he considered the causes of, and prospects for overcoming, the "inferior position" occupied by African and Native Americans (371).

According to Tocqueville, Native Americans faced a stark choice: "war or civilization…destroy the Europeans or become their equals" (382). To become equals, Native Americans had to start by becoming *civilized.* Tocqueville had no doubt that Native Americans felt equal, or even superior, to Europeans. The Native Americans had a "proud idea of his own worth" and regarded industry and farming as slavish and demeaning occupations (384), but Native Americans were considered by Europeans to be barbaric rather than civilized, and their nomadic way of life was cited as evidence. To be recognized as equals, Tocqueville thought it crucial for Native Americans to embrace European civilization by successfully taking up exactly those European modes of life that they disdained. Tocqueville pointed to the Creek and Cherokee nations as examples of Native Americans who sought to follow this path (385–6). They became farmers and, in the case of the Cherokees, manifested civilization in other respects by creating a written language, setting up a stable government, and founding a newspaper.

Although these examples complicate his view (McQueen and Hendrix 2017), Tocqueville remained skeptical about the prospects for Native Americans to fully achieve the "civilized living" required for equality (387): "the instant he wishes to enter the social hierarchy of the whites, he can only occupy the lowest rank for he arrives uneducated and poor into a society endowed with knowledge and wealth" (388). As soon as Native Americans seek to imitate their European neighbors by cultivating the land, "they expose themselves to disastrous competition" (389) from Europeans, who possess superior resources and are backed by the power of the state. The result is that, if they opt for "civilization," they end up in the most servile position in the social hierarchy. Tocqueville's key insight, then, is that given the fiercely competitive nature of the processes through which new groups seek to demonstrate that they are fit for equality and set against a European standard that has little connection with their own way of life, Native Americans lack a genuine opportunity to escape from a subordinate place in the social hierarchy.

Not considered by Tocqueville is why Native Americans should have to abandon their way of life to obtain recognition and live as social equals with Europeans. The problem for social equality is not only that recognition tends to be attached to observable practices and behaviors, but that Europeans—Tocqueville included—are working with a "Eurocentric" standard of what counts as a display of valued capacities. Even if Native Americans had a fair opportunity to engage in agricultural practices, the very demand that they satisfy Eurocentric standards of "civilization" already constitutes a failure to treat them as equals. Thus, addressing recognition failure is tricky: The social egalitarian cannot simply ask oppressed groups to abide by standards of recognition defined by the powerful. Doing so perpetuates the colonial relation by fostering what Glen Coulthard (2014, 25) calls an "asymmetrical and nonreciprocal" form of recognition.

In the next section, we consider a different picture of how recognition failure can be addressed: rather than asking the disadvantaged to conform to standards of civilization defined and valued by the privileged, the privileged (our specific focus is on Global North societies) should instead endorse institutional reforms that increase the visibility of self-driven exercises of agential capacities by the historically disadvantaged (we focus on the Global South). By self-driven, we mean activities that the disadvantaged have reason(s) to value independent of their effects on the privileged.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION, TRADE, AND RECOGNITION

In Tocqueville's account of the predicament of Native Americans, we find an illustration of the idea that recognition of a group as social equals can be mediated by facts about the group's way of life, including its modes of economic participation. A similar idea was elaborated by Tocqueville's near contemporary, Martin Delany, often considered a founder of the Black nationalist tradition. Delany had little doubt that it was

morally wrong to consign Black Americans to a position of social inferiority, but he thought that speculating and moralizing about inequality were insufficient. What was needed was to find some "practical application" of moral and theoretical principles ([1852] 2015, 37) that elaborated conditions for the "elevation" of Blacks in the United States to a position of social equality.

Delany argued that social inequality is sustained, in part, by unequal "attainments" by different social groups (16). Groups that are regarded as inferior tend to occupy servile and menial positions in society and, when they are not performing a subservient task, often find themselves in the role of passive "consumers." The privileged group, by contrast, is associated with society's "producers," who make high-status contributions as manufacturers, industrialists, and professionals. Addressing his fellow African Americans, Delany wrote,

> Cast our eyes about us, and what do we behold! Every thing that presents to view gives evidence of the skill of the white man. …Pass along the avenues of any city or town, in which you live—behold the trading shops—the manufacturies—see the operations of the various machinery—see the stagecoaches coming in…look at the railroads…see the vessels in every direction…the great and massive buildings…all standing as mighty living monuments, of the industry, enterprise, and intelligence of the white man. (38–9)

The abundance of visible and public evidence of white innovation, creativity, and skill contrasted with how African Americans were routinely seen in positions of servitude, as maids and "waiting-men" to whites. "The world is looking upon us," Delany wrote, "with feelings of commiseration, sorrow, and contempt" (38–9).

Delany did not believe African Americans were incapable of making important contributions to American society. On the contrary, much of his book is devoted to cataloging a rich and varied set of contributions that Blacks had made and were making. There was no basis, therefore, for excluding Blacks from full citizenship. However, it remained a problem that Black Americans had not been fully *credited* for their contributions (8, 84), because their history had been told by those "who are not their representatives" (9). A further problem was that Blacks had labored "under many disadvantages" (85) and thus had not enjoyed "an equal chance for emulation" of the attainments of whites (86).

The attainments emphasized by Delany were often economic—trading, manufacturing, building, and farming—and in some cases military and political. Significantly for our argument, Delany also singled out the production of cultural goods as a type of attainment where Blacks were lagging behind whites. "[B]y their literary attainments," Delany lamented, whites "are the contributors to, authors and teachers of, literature, science, religion, law, medicine…" (40–1). Delany approvingly cited Jefferson's answer to an Englishman who had pointed to American literature as "evidence of

[American] inferiority to the more highly favored and long-existing European nations." Jefferson insisted that it had taken time for Greece to produce Homer and Socrates, for Rome to produce Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, and for England to produce Pope, Dryden, and Bacon. Delany was confident that, given a fair opportunity, African Americans could close the gap in literary attainment with whites in a quarter century (86).

Writing in the context of European colonialism, other thinkers would follow Delany in emphasizing the importance of cultural production for recognition. For defenders of colonialism, cultural production played a key role as a pretext for withholding recognition. In the vein of Jefferson's English interlocutor, colonizers often justified their colonial project by pointing to a deficit of European culture as evidence of colonial subjects' inferiority. For example, the influential explorer Henry Morton Stanley, whose travel writing accelerated the Scramble for Africa, wrote that "all these black men were in a manner lawless…many of them were savage…some might be ferocious as wild dogs…Africa possessed no theatres, newspapers, or agreeable society…When I came face to face with the semi-naked blacks of Zanzibar, these horrors flashed upon me like a revelation." ([1886] 2009, 4). The alleged lack of what Stanley perceived as culture—from written media to theater to clothing—made Africans "savage" in his eyes.

Likewise, consider Thomas Macaulay's notorious 1835 "Minute on Indian Education," which formed the basis of education policy in British India for half a century. Macaulay wrote that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" and that it was "no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England" ([1835] 2015, 240). This attitude of cultural superiority underlies the political, economic, and racial hierarchies that defined colonial rule. Furthermore, even as British colonialism gradually shifted to indirect rule, as Mantena (2010) has argued, colonial academics and officials continued to cite supposed intractable backwardness within colonized people as a reason to deny egalitarian reforms. Culture thus served as what Mantena calls an "alibi of empire," a factor that supported "a new emphasis on the potentially insurmountable difference between peoples" (18).

Because a supposed absence of valuable culture was a pretext for denying equality, anticolonial thinkers also came to think of cultural production as an especially important site in resisting colonial racial hierarchy. Responding to the "hierarchy of creator and consumer," Aimé Césaire explained that Black cultural production had a crucial political edge because it "restores historic initiative to those whom it has been the mission of the colonial system to deprive" and thereby "disturbs…the colonial hierarchy" as it "converts the colonized *consumer* into a *creator*" (1959, 127). When members of the colonized population show that they can also produce culture, he thought that this

undermines the colonial lie that colonized subjects are inferior agents who ought to be left under European tutelage. In this way, cultural production challenges the racial hierarchy of the colony.

Although he recognized the subversive power of cultural production, Césaire's main concern was not whether colonizers would acknowledge the colonized as equals when confronted with the latter's cultural production. Instead, as a cofounder of the anticolonial cultural movement *Négritude*, Césaire's primary concern was to combat an "inferiority complex" among the colonized by demonstrating to *them* that their culture was worthy of respect and admiration (Césaire 1959, 127). As he told his fellow Black artists and writers, they were "engineers of the soul…[and] in the last resort, *inventors of the soul*" (127). In other words, anticolonial cultural production helps colonial subjects affirm their own equality and is valuable for that reason. For Césaire, there are *independent* reasons—apart from effects on the colonizers—for colonial subjects to engage in cultural production.

This makes cultural production a promising site for addressing recognition failure. Cultural production both mediates recognition—thereby combating recognition failures—*and* is valuable for its own sake. As we saw, without independent reasons for Native Americans to adopt agriculture, Tocqueville's musings about providing opportunities to farm to contest European ideologies of inferiority missed the point. Asking Native Americans to conform to the standards of the oppressor just to be treated as equals is itself demeaning. By contrast, there *are* reasons for oppressed groups to value cultural production of their own. Césaire put his finger on one: In contexts of racialized oppression, cultural production is a form of self-affirmation (Coulthard 2014, 131). There are also familiar reasons for members of a group to make art, music, and stories —such as intergenerational socialization, aesthetic value, and fostering common belonging.

Since the end of formal colonialism, the formerly colonized no longer produce culture under the direct gaze of colonial administrators and settlers. To some degree, the colonial powers disentangled themselves from former colonies and sought instead to create arm–length relationships of trade and investment, as well as indirect forms of political and military control. To the extent that visible cultural production can play an important (though not in itself sufficient) role in addressing recognition failure, this shift to a more mediated relationship between the Global North and Global South poses a challenge. New and dynamic forms of cultural production in formerly colonized societies risk escaping the notice of populations in the Global North altogether.

This is the reason we zero in on *cultural trade* as relevant to the problem of global recognition failure. Cultural goods exported as commodities form part of a group's cultural production, and thus, there are independent reasons for the group to value them, but, as traded commodities, they are also purchased, owned, and consumed by whoever buys them. This makes them instances of cultural production by postcolonial societies that are *experienced by* consumers in the Global North, even if the latter have little or no direct contact with the cultural producers and may live a great distance from them. To be sure, international trade is not the only vehicle through which people in the Global North can be exposed to cultural production from the Global South. Tourism and migration are other potential mechanisms, as are various forms of non-commodified exchange (e.g., art exhibitions or orchestra tours). We focus on cultural production for international trade, not because of any inherent superiority of cultural commodities for mediating recognition, but because consuming cultural commodities— watching films and TV, reading books and magazines, and listening to music—is such a ubiquitous part of everyday life.[4] For this reason, the cultural market is an important site for promoting or undermining particular attitudes. What is visible and easily available in this market should concern social egalitarians looking to address recognition failures.

Our hypothesis is that the experience of consuming cultural commodities produced by artists in the Global South challenges socially inegalitarian assumptions about capacities for cultural production and the nature of Global South societies.

Theoretically, three different mechanisms can be distinguished that connect the production of traded cultural commodities in the Global South with attitudes in the Global North.

First, cultural trade provides a *counterexample* challenging the stereotypes that capture the imagination of dominant groups. Cultural production is an expression of agency, involving intelligence, creativity, practice, and skill. The goods created serve as observable evidence that the producer possesses these intangible traits and qualities. Cultural goods are thus important data points that counter the generalizing nature of demeaning stereotypes, data points made more visible and salient to Global North consumers when these goods are traded internationally. As we have seen, recognition has often been withheld from a social group on the grounds that something about their character or circumstances makes them incapable of valuable cultural achievements. The fact that an individual member of the group produces such a good, despite sharing a common formation with other members of the group, is a counterexample. On their own, a few isolated experiences by Global North consumers of cultural goods produced in the Global South may not induce much updating of prior beliefs and attitudes, but an *accumulation* of evidence of this kind—through a persistent stream of exports of cultural goods—could eventually shake confidence in the stereotype and challenge the basis for social inequality.

A second mechanism highlights the *social character* of cultural production. The production of a cultural good is not typically the isolated act of an individual who happens to belong to a particular social group.

---

[4] A Bureau of Labor Statistics study (2018) concluded that "watching TV" is "America's favorite pastime."

Rather, the individual's creation often emerges out of a social group's broader collective efforts to interpret and give expression to their experience. Cultural goods are contributions to a dialogue that includes many other interlocutors and listeners about questions and struggles of mutual concern. They are oriented by the narratives and myths in the group's collective memory, the points of contention that divide the group, and the shared vocabularies with which the group articulates its experience. In this sense, a cultural good testifies not just to the agential capacities of the individual producer but to the capacities of members of the group more generally. In highlighting this interplay between the cultural producer's art and the broader social context, the point is not that artists tend to parrot whatever ideas happen to be in their culture. Rather, it is that without being situated in a vibrant formative context there is little material for the artist to engage with, whether their engagement is critical, positive, or ambivalent. When outsiders recognize an artist's achievements, it is reasonable to suppose that others who share her social group also receive some recognition by virtue of participating in the social context that enabled those achievements. Their participation is testimony to *their* agential capacities, even if they did not exercise those capacities in artistic ways.

A third mechanism again highlights the social context in which cultural goods are produced. Rather than emphasizing the participation of others in coproducing them, here the concern is with how cultural goods depict or *represent* the rich and complex character of the social group from whose milieu the material for creating the good is drawn. In this respect, cultural goods are distinctive compared with many other commodities. Producers of cultural goods draw directly on social material—shared experiences, ideas, values, and beliefs—in going about their craft and offer a representation of sorts of their social group to consumers. When a film writer makes a comedy about a wedding, she may draw on—perhaps to subvert—ideas of marriage that circulate within the dominant discourse of her culture. By representing their culture through the goods they produce, artists often bring to light features of a group—the depth, complexity and richness of their culture, and the humanity of its members—that challenge the crude preconceptions of consumers from dominant groups, who typically have little contact with or direct experience of the culture to rely on.

To be sure, cultural producers do not always represent their cultures in ways that enhance the possibility of social equality. It is conceivable that artists from the Global South could produce works that have nothing to do with their own cultural milieu. A Brazilian filmmaker, for example, could make a film that is indistinguishable from a Hollywood blockbuster set in the United States. More insidiously, a cultural producer in the Global South could seek to anticipate dominant consumer preferences and expectations by creating works that build on and reinforce demeaning stereotypes about the producer's own culture (Young 1990, 59–60). Clearly, such problematic cultural representations do not advance the cause of social equality.

However, problematic cultural representations of a subordinated group seem *less likely* when producers come from that group than when they come from historically privileged groups (Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock 2012). To be sure, there will be cases of home-grown problematic representations, and these are objectionable from a social equality perspective, but there would also be problematic representations in the alternative scenario where producers in the affluent world concoct images and narratives of social groups of the Global South (see Nguyen [2015, Chs. 9–11] lampooning the Hollywood production of a Vietnam War film). The claim here is broadly empirical, the hypothesis being that demeaning representations are less common when attempts by cultural producers of the Global South to represent their own societies are given greater visibility. Even if this is empirically false, the two previous mechanisms remain valid. Cultural representation may reinforce social inequality in one way (think, e.g., of music with sexist lyrics), but the previous mechanisms involving counterexample and coproduction remain intact.

A different worry about representation emphasizes the gap between how Global South producers depict their society and how consumers in affluent societies interpret and experience that depiction. As Said (1978) and others have insisted, cultural meanings are refracted through power relations that continuously work to stereotype and exoticize cultural objects and embed them in established interpretative frameworks. While social equality can certainly be stymied this way, the disruptive potential of cultural consumption should not be discounted. There is variation among consumers in Global North societies and also among cultural products in their amenability to domestication by pre-existing interpretive paradigms. Moreover, the same two responses offered to the previous concern are valid here too. Representations by Global North cultural producers are likely to be even more problematic, and the counterexample and coproduction mechanisms have independent relevance.

To summarize, we have pointed to two kinds of reasons for thinking that the production and trade of cultural goods by Global South societies could help to challenge the global social hierarchy. The first appeals to historical testimony by observers of racially inegalitarian and colonial societies. Despite opposing assessments of the value of the social hierarchies they encountered, these observers agreed that a stark divide between consumers and producers of cultural goods worked to rationalize and sustain social inequality. Moreover, at least one of these observers, Césaire, perceived that encouraging the colonized to engage in more cultural production was not simply surrendering to European ideas of "civilization," but was something the colonized had their own independent reasons to do. The second type of reason consisted of various theoretical mechanisms that connected cultural production and trade by the Global South with the experiences and attitudes of consumers in the Global North.

The next step would be to explore contemporary empirical evidence for the hypothesis that more

balanced trade in cultural goods would contribute to challenging global social inequality. The existing empirical literature does not shed very much light on this hypothesis. Within the domestic context, there is empirical literature considering the relationship between how groups are represented (e.g., in media portrayals) and out-group attitudes about them (surveyed by Tukachinsky, Mastro, and Yarchi [2015]). This is relevant to our third theoretical mechanism, but that mechanism is only part of our overall account. Our hypothesis also concerns the relationship between the group identity of the cultural producer and out-group attitudes about that group, but there is a dearth of empirical research on this question.

Since we do not address this research gap, our claim is best understood as having a conditional form: To the extent that more balanced cultural trade between the Global South and the Global North would help to challenge recognition failure and improve social equality, Global North citizens and governments have a duty to encourage such trade.

NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

We began by asking what if anything is objectionable about persistent patterns of unequal cultural trade. While some critics have associated these patterns with relations of the colonial era and described them as "neo-colonial," we asked whether there is an injustice that warrants the use of such a normatively laden description.

By now, our answer to this question is clear. There is a wrong associated with unequal cultural trade and that wrong is related to a central wrong-making feature of colonialism itself. Colonialism was wrong for many reasons, but central among them was that colonialism established and expressed objectionable social hierarchies—above all, the hierarchy between colonizer and colonized. Patterns of unequal cultural trade are problematic because they frustrate efforts to transcend these hierarchies and replace them with sustainable global relations of social equality. A supposed lack of valuable culture served as a key pretext for the denial of equality throughout the colonial era. The production of cultural goods by members of postcolonial groups is valuable not only for those groups, but also as a political vehicle for contesting ideas of inferiority and backwardness, especially when those goods are exported as commodities that reach consumers in the Global North. Efforts to increase the visibility of cultural production from historically oppressed groups thus contribute to exposing the falsity of pernicious myths that serve as justification for objectionable global relations. Given the persistence of racism among Global North societies and its role in shaping international relations, these societies' governments fail to discharge their duty to promote social equality if they continue to prioritize their own cultural exports while importing little from marginalized societies in return.

This argument rests on a normative premise—the duty to promote social equality by challenging recognition failure—and also, as noted previously, an empirical premise—that unequal cultural trade frustrates efforts to challenge recognition failure. While we offer some historical and theoretical reasons to accept the empirical premise, we do not attempt a full empirical analysis. Still, even without this analysis, there is reason for individuals and governments in the Global North to give the empirical premise some presumptive weight. The fact that they historically excused global hierarchy on the grounds of their supposed cultural superiority puts an onus on them to engage with cultural goods produced in the Global South. An analogy here is with sexist claims that women lack or possess inferior capacities because one seldom finds them in positions of public leadership. Undoubtedly, there is an empirical element to the claim that opening more leadership opportunities for women would change perceptions of their capacities, but, even without readily available empirical evidence, the fact that a gender hierarchy had been upheld based on women's absence from leadership positions would still be a good presumptive reason to improve their leadership opportunities. We saw a similar logic in Delany's argument: racists who deny Blacks full citizenship on the grounds that their "attainments" compare poorly with whites are hypocritical when they simultaneously refuse to allow Blacks an "equal chance" to compete.

Overall, the account supplies a distinctive reason to be suspicious of arguments for global free trade in cultural goods. In principle, global cultural flows could become more equal under a regime of free trade. For a reason identified by Tocqueville, it is doubtful that this would happen. In the context of what Tocqueville called "disastrous competition" ([1836/1840] 2003, 389), it is difficult for a group starting with fewer resources and less expertise to find success. The circumstances of contemporary cultural industries echo Tocqueville's insight. Much cultural production utilizes significant amounts of capital and technical expertise and relies on global distribution networks. Hollywood films have massive budgets and employ numerous technical specialists. They also rely on an extensive international distribution system for marketing. Under conditions of free trade, it would be very difficult for Global South cultural producers to compete with established producers in the affluent North (UNESCO 2022, Ch. 6). Although increasing digitalization diminishes the role of global distribution systems, the most esteemed cultural commodities are still those produced and distributed through major studios, publishing houses, music labels, and so on. In short, free trade in cultural goods results in the deeply asymmetric patterns of cultural trade seen today, rendering the creative productions of the Global South less visible than those of the Global North and reinforcing recognition failure.

A related implication is that Global North countries should remove obstacles that Global South countries face in the production of cultural commodities and work to increase the latter's visibility as global cultural producers. Many initiatives exist among Global South cultural producers to increase the international visibility of their work, such as the Pan-African Creative

Exchange (UNESCO 2022, Ch. 6). At a minimum, Global North countries should not hinder these and similar efforts by pressing for trade liberalization in the cultural sector. They should leave Global South governments the option to use public resources to invest in cultural industries and engage in other forms of protectionism. As mentioned earlier, the UNESCO 2005 Convention's "cultural exemptions" are a nonbinding instrument explicitly subsumed under WTO rules and criticized as ineffective at enabling underprivileged countries to pursue cultural protectionism (Voon 2007, 173–216). Our account would support strengthening this international legal instrument.

Going further, the argument could justify a range of other measures. For example, Global North countries could give preferential market access to Global South producers or incentivize increased domestic distribution of their goods. More ambitious steps include technology and knowledge transfers, developing international infrastructure, and regulating transnational media conglomerates. These measures are important for fundamentally transforming longstanding patterns of unequal trade, and the moral reasons to pursue them are grounded in a more general duty on the part of affluent countries to counteract racism and other forms of recognition failure that remain widespread among their own citizens. To be sure, whether a specific policy is appropriate all things considered depends on a host of contextual factors. The backlash against globalization and increased support for protectionism in countries such as the United States (Walter 2021), for example, caution against policies that leave consumers feeling as if foreign cultural goods are being imposed on them. Our aim is to highlight a neglected normative consideration rather than fashion a one-size-fits-all solution for every context.

A different kind of implication of our framework concerns the hotly contested idea of cultural appropriation. Critics offer formidable objections to the idea and draw attention to seemingly absurd examples (Appiah 2018, 207–9). One general concern points to the ubiquity and value of cultural borrowing. As cosmopolitans emphasize, people have always learned from other cultures and enriched their own societies by adapting foreign cultural forms. Indeed, the ubiquity of cultural borrowing threatens to undermine the claim that any group might be a victim of it. The cultural achievement or practice that the group says rightfully belongs to it turns out, on closer inspection of the historical record, to have been borrowed or adapted from another group. Moreover, complaints of cultural appropriation seem to extend the conceptual apparatus of private property into a domain where it does not belong. To complain of appropriation when a non-Korean chef serves Korean-style food, or when a white Canadian teaches yoga, is to treat national cuisines and physical or meditative practices as if they are somebody's property.

A full discussion of cultural appropriation is impossible here (Matthes 2019), but our framework points to a distinctive reason to object to some forms of it. Consider again Delany's argument that African

Americans have in fact contributed substantively to American society, but their attainments have often not been *credited* to them. Applied to our North–South context, this failure to give credit undermines the recognition that cultural trade can engender, diverting recognition to the appropriating artist. From our perspective, cultural appropriation is objectionable when cultural producers from the Global South are not properly recognized as creators of goods that others go on to popularize.

RESPONSE TO OBJECTIONS

In conclusion, we consider three objections to the argument that recognition failure can be addressed through cultural production and trade by members of Global South societies.

(a) Victim blaming? Some might think that focusing on what the formerly colonized do to counter perceptions of their inferiority amounts to a pernicious form of victim blaming. The argument seems to imply that the oppressed must take responsibility for freeing themselves. Surely, the problem is *not* that the colonized need to do anything in particular to make themselves plausible candidates for equality in the eyes of the colonizer, but rather that colonizers are *wrong* to deny them equality in the first place. Relatedly, when observing the relative lack of cultural exports from the Global South, reasonable observers should interpret these patterns as evidence of economic inequality rather than social inferiority. To infer the latter is not only an intellectual error but also a moral failure that the privileged should rectify themselves.

This objection misinterprets our aim. Undoubtedly, as emphasized earlier, the advantaged are morally obliged to recognize the fundamental equality of the disadvantaged regardless of the latter's (constrained) ability to produce and export cultural commodities. Their failure to do so is a serious injustice. There remains, however, a further question of how the advantaged can better secure compliance with their own moral obligations. We object to "neo-colonial" global structures because they frustrate a promising strategy for addressing recognition failure and cultivating social equality. The upshot is that Global North countries have a duty to pursue reforms to these global structures.

Far from blaming the victims, then, our argument places the onus on privileged groups to engage with the cultural agency of the disadvantaged. Indeed, against the odds and even in extreme situations such as formal colonialism, members of marginalized groups have continued to find ways to express their cultural agency. Our point is that existing structures ought to be reformed to make these expressions of agency more visible and therefore better equipped to challenge recognition failures.

(b) Eurocentric standards redux? Another objection worries that we have sidestepped the question of who sets the standards for recognition. Even if people in the Global South have independent reasons to engage in

cultural production, their products will be unable to find a market in affluent societies unless consumers there judge their value by *their* standards. In other words, those in positions of power get to define what counts as valuable forms of culture, which is part and parcel of the hierarchical relationship to begin with.

We saw a version of this objection already in discussing cultural representation. While we do not underestimate the power of affluent consumers to get the products they want, this does not mean cultural goods have to conform entirely to longstanding Eurocentric standards of value, nor does it prevent those goods from performing any disruptive or subversive function. Cultural goods are complex, multilayered creations that can unsettle beliefs and challenge preconceptions even while entertaining and providing intellectual stimulation. Consider René Maran, a prominent French Martinican writer who inspired Césaire and Senghor's *Négritude* movement. Maran's novel, *Batouala*, critiqued colonialism by sketching the daily life of an African chieftain. Far from being unintelligible or uninteresting to the French, the novel made him the first Black author to win the *Prix Goncourt*, the highest literary prize in France (Taoua 2015, 45). Subsequently, the French authorities banned its distribution in overseas colonies and fired Maran from the civil service. Therefore, as Césaire argued, even within colonialism, cultural production by the subordinate could function as a destabilizing force (1959, 127).

More generally, as global structures are reformed to better enable the Global South to export cultural goods, the increased visibility and consumption of these goods should contribute to shifting dominant conceptions of what counts as valuable forms of culture. In this sense, our argument is precisely designed to expose and overcome overly narrow conceptions of cultural value.

(c) A naïve theory? Finally, one might say that the paper's preoccupation with recognition is misguided. The colonists, and dominant groups in general, reject social equality because existing hierarchies serve their interests. At best, dominant groups are so invested in these hierarchies that it shapes what they can and cannot recognize as indicators of equal agency—if power corrupts, at least one kind of corruption is epistemic. Confronted with the cultural achievements of the disadvantaged, dominant groups can easily incorporate these "data points" into their problematic outlooks by further exoticizing the producers. At worst, the supposed lack of agential capacities on the part of the disadvantaged is merely a cynical pretext for justifying domination. In either case, trying to persuade the powerful otherwise seems like a fool's errand. Relatedly, we have not provided direct, contemporary empirical evidence that increasing cultural exports from the Global South would contribute to recognition and social equality, although we have drawn on a range of testimonial evidence from members of both dominant and subordinated groups that demonstrate the perceived importance of visible cultural production in justifying or overcoming social inequality.

No doubt there is much wisdom in this. Our argument is intended only as a modest, theoretical

contribution to the much broader project of securing social equality. That project has critical political and economic dimensions that go well beyond our concern with trade in cultural goods. Recognition mediated by cultural trade is important but far from sufficient for securing social equality in a deeply unequal world. Its effectiveness will likely vary between those whose vested interests commit them to support social inequality, and those who might be troubled by benefiting from hierarchies that an abundance of evidence suggests are unjustifiable. Our question is what conditions are needed for this evidence—testimonies against the lie of hierarchies—to become abundantly visible and accessible. Our response suggests a duty on the part of dominant groups to dismantle a division of labor in the production and exchange of cultural goods that serve as one important pretext for Global North societies to treat the people of the Global South as social unequals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues of conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

REFERENCES

Anderson, Elizabeth. 1999. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (2): 287–337.

Anderson, Elizabeth. 2011. *The Imperative of Integration*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Anderson, Elizabeth. 2012. "Equality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, ed. David Estlund, 42–57. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Anghie, Antony. 2005. *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2006. *Cosmopolitanism*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. 2018. *The Lies That Bind*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Barry, Brian. 2001. *Culture and Equality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2018. https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-7/television-capturing-americas-attention.htm.

Césaire, Aimé. 1959. "Man of Culture and His Responsibilities." *Présence Africaine* 24–25 (1–2): 125–32.

Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Delany, Martin. [1852] 2015. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Clifton, NJ: African Tree Press.

Dimaggio, Anthony. 2008. *Mass Media, Mass Propaganda*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Emerson, Rupert. 1963. *Political Modernization*. Denver, CO: University of Denver.

Epstein, Adam. 2020. "Thanks to 'Parasite,' We Know What It Takes for Americans to See an International Film in Theaters." *Quartz,* February 18. https://qz.com/1804271/the-us-box-office-success-of-parasite-provides-a-blueprint-for-foreign-language-films.

Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Follows, Stephen. 2018. "How Many Non-English Language Films Get a US Theatrical Release?" (April 9). https://stephenfollows.com/how-many-non-english-language-films-get-us-theatrical-release/.

Forster, E. M. 1924. *A Passage to India*. London: Harcourt Inc.

Freeman, Bianca, D. G. Kim, and David A. Lake. 2022. "Race in International Relations: Beyond the "Norm Against Noticing"." *Annual Review of Political Science* 25: 175–96.

Hainmueller, Jens, and Daniel J. Hopkins. 2014. "Public Attitudes Towards Immigration." *Annual Review of Political Science* 17: 225–49.

Hanania, Richard, and Robert Trager. 2020. "The Prejudice First Model and Foreign Policy Values: Racial and Religious Bias among Conservatives and Liberals." *European Journal of International Relations* 27(1): 204–31.

Ip, Kevin. 2016. *Egalitarianism and Global Justice*. New York: Springer.

Kim, Hun Shik. 2016. "The Korean Wave as Soft Power Public Diplomacy." In *Routledge Handbook of Soft Power*, eds. Naren Chitty, Lilian Ji, and Gary Rawnsley, 414–24. New York: Routledge.

Kolodny, Niko. 2014. "Rule Over None II." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (4): 287–336.

Lewis, David, Dennis Rodgers, and Michael Woolcock. 2012. "The Projection of Development: Cinematic Representation as A (nother) Source of Authoritative Knowledge?" *Journal of Development Studies* 49(3): 383–97.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington. [1835] 2015. "Minute, Dated the 2nd February 1835." *Islamic Studies* 54: 237–48.

MacBride, Sean, Elie Abel, Hubert Beuve-Mery, Elebe Ma Ekonzo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Sergei Losev, Mochtar Lubis, *et al.* 1980. "Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More Just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order." Report, UNESCO.

Mantena, Karuna. 2010. *Alibis of Empire*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mas-Colell, Andreu. 1999. "Should Cultural Goods Be Treated Differently?" *Journal of Cultural Economics* 23(1/2): 87–93.

Matthes, Erich Hatala. 2019. "Cultural Appropriation and Oppression." *Philosophical Studies* 176(4): 1003–13.

Matua, Makau W. 2001. "What is TWAIL?" *Proceedings of the ASIL Ann. Meeting* 31: 31–8.

McCarthy, Thomas. 2009. *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McQueen, Alison, and Burke Hendrix. 2017. "Tocqueville in Jacksonian Context." *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (15): 663–77.

Mills, Charles. 2019. "Race and Global Justice." In *Empire, Race and Global Justice*, ed. Duncan Bell, 94–119. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moore, Margaret. 2018. "The Taking of Territory and the Wrongs of Colonialism." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 27(1): 87–106.

Nath, Rekha. 2011. "Equal Standing in the Global Community." *Monist* 94 (4): 593–614.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2015. *The Sympathizers*. New York: Grove Press.

Nkrumah, Kwame. 1965. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. London: Panaf Books.

Nye, Joseph. 1990. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy* 80: 153–71.

Pagden, Anthony. 1995. *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c.1800*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Patten, Alan. 2011. "Rethinking Culture: The Social Lineage Account." *American Political Science Review.* 105 (4): 735–49.

Ricardo, David. 1819. *On the Principles of Political Economy, and Taxation*, 2nd edition. London: John Murray.

Rostow, W.W. 1960. *The Stages of Economic Growth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Classics.

Scheffler, Samuel. 2015. "The Practice of Equality." In *Social Equality: On What It Means to be Equals*, eds. Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert, and Ivo Wallimann-Helmer, 20–44. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schuppert, Fabian. 2015. "Non-domination, Non-alienation and Social Equality" *CRISPP* 18 (4): 440–55.

Seth, Sanjay. 2021. *Beyond Reason: Postcolonial Theory and the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shilliam, Robbie. 2020. "Race and Racism in International Relations." *International Politics Review* 8 (2): 152–95.

Sidanius, Jim, and Felicia Pratto. 1999. *Social Dominance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Singh, J. P. 2017. *Sweet Talk: Paternalism and Collective Action in North-South Trade Relations*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Singh, J. P. 2020. "Race, Culture, and Economics: An example from North-South trade relations." *International Political Economy* 28 (2): 323–35.

Stanley, Henry Morton. [1886] 2009. *My African Travels*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stilz, Anna. 2015. "Decolonization and Self-determination." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 32(1): 1–24.

Taoua, Phyllis. 2015. "The Effects of Censorship on the Emergence of Anti-colonial Protest in France." *South Central Review* 32(1): 43–55.

Taylor, Charles. 1994. "The Politics of Recognition." In *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann, 25–73. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tocqueville, Alexis. [1835/1840] 2003. *Democracy in America.* Gerald Bevan trans. London: Penguin Books.

Tomlinson, John. 2001. *Cultural Imperialism*. London: Continuum.

Tukachinsky, Riva, Dana Mastro, and Moran Yarchi. 2015. "Documenting Portrayals of Race/Ethnicity on Primetime Television over a 20-Year Span and Their Association with National-Level Racial/Ethnic Attitudes." *Journal of Social Issues* 71(1): 17–38.

UNESCO. 2013. "The Globalisation of Cultural Trade: A Shift in Consumption." Report. http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/the-globalisation-of-cultural-trade-a-shift-in-consumption-international-flows-of-cultural-goods-services-2004-2013-en_0.pdf.

UNESCO. 2021. "Origin of the Top 5 Countries of All Feature Films Exhibited Ranked by Admissions." http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3629.

UNESCO. 2022. "Re-Shaping Policies for Creativity: Addressing Culture as Global Public Good." Report. https://www.unesco.org/reports/reshaping-creativity/2022/en.

Viehoff, Daniel. 2014. "Democratic Equality and Political Authority." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42(4): 337–75.

Viehoff, Daniel. 2019. "Power and Equality." In *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, eds. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall, 3–37. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Voon, Tania. 2007. *Cultural Products and the World Trade Organization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Walter, Stefanie. 2021. "The Backlash Against Globalization." *Annual Review of Political Science* 24: 421–42.

Wilson, James. 2019. *Democratic Equality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Wilson, James. 2022. "Making the All-Affected Principle Safe for Democracy." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 50(2): 169–201.

Young, Iris M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ypi, Lea. 2013. "What's Wrong with Colonialism." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 41 (2): 158–91.