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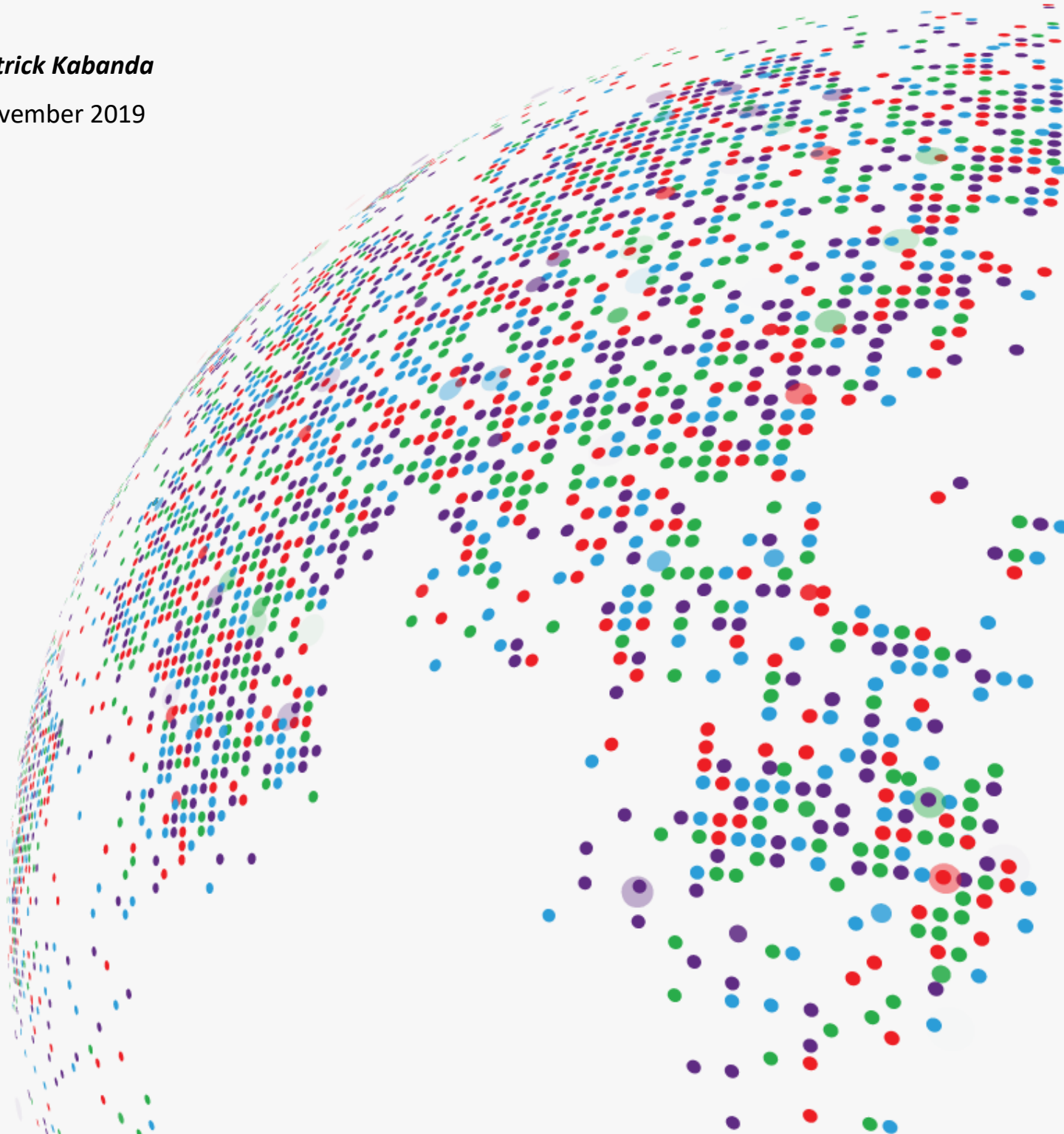
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Examining Inequality in the Arts

Patrick Kabanda

November 2019



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ABSTRACT

There is nothing new about the nature and scope of inequality engulfing the world today. Still, notwithstanding the ‘starving artist’ mantra—which has become an acceptable truism—inequality in the arts is rarely examined. This discussion aims to shed light on that issue by looking at the music industry, photography and cultural diversity as it makes the following points: Studying the music industry can effectively teach us about the winner-take-all economy, given the way the confluence of technology, globalization and superstar markets have fuelled greater income disparities for artists. Examining gender bias in photography, a medium that often shapes our world, similarly can help us view inequality from a holistic perspective. And scrutinizing Hollywood’s global dominance can bring our attention to the responsibility to uphold cultural diversity. In the battle to curb inequality in the arts and beyond, there is a need to continually collect and analyse data and, among other things, commission creative work to inspire an inclusive world. The United States of America, where inequality is increasingly becoming the trademark of a nation, presents a compelling site for inquiry.

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Introduction

Inequality is embedded in our social and economic structure, and a significant reduction requires us to examine all aspects of our society.

—Anthony B. Atkinson¹

In March 2019, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened a high-level open dialogue in New York to discuss one of the most pressing issues rocking the economic and social structure of our time: inequality. The United Nations is not short of frequent high-level meetings. Nonetheless, this time the tenor of the meeting, which had the aura of a packed concert at Carnegie Hall featuring a superstar pianist, was telling. Sometimes the moments of discussion felt like a confession session at Mass, with high priests of the god of economic justice ready to not only hear what had gone wrong and what was left undone, but also decide what should now be done.

The first moment came with the acknowledgement that inequality had been noticed years ago, but since there were no data, not much had been done about it.² The second came from the Nobel economist Paul Krugman. Krugman said that his first non-technical book, *The Age of Diminished Expectations*, written in 1989, contained a chapter on rising inequality. For complicated reasons, however, Krugman went on to say, the publisher put the book together under the auspices of *The Washington Post*, and they kept asking him to drop the chapter. “They said nobody cares about this,” he recalled. Inequality was apparently not the tune the top brass inside the Beltway wanted to hear,³ although they were somehow playing it. Fast forward, inequality is ballooning at an alarming rate, and we ignore it at our peril.⁴ As it happens, in creative work, which often escapes full-fledged policy attention, things have always been alarming. Consider the sector’s longstanding gender problem, and inequalities in arts access and income, for example.⁵ Given the arts’ influence on society, there is a pressing need to examine inequality in the arts in both the economic and social aspects of human development, and explore what to do about it.

¹ Atkinson 2015, p. 3. Emphasis added.

² UNDP 2019b.

³ Krugman 2019c.

⁴ Many people have discussed this; see Yunus 2017 (especially p. 5) and Wu 2018, for example.

⁵ As Atkinson argued, the types of inequality under consideration need to be clarified to avoid confusion, and this discussion will tackle that aspect in the coming paragraphs. This is also crucial because of the common counterargument that the arts are somehow elite “in terms of organizations curating and supplying artistic ‘excellence’ for a commensurately rarefied consumer base” (Sunil Iyengar, email message to the author, 13 March 2020). But that counterargument should not be used as a veil to sidestep tough questions like gender bias, income exploitation and cultural diversity that beset the arts.

This exploration, moreover, can push us to consider the problem of rising economic inequality as reflected in the arts. In 2013, for example, *The Wall Street Journal* ran an unlikely headline: “‘Winner Take All’ Economy Mirrors Music Industry.” The article that followed, by Sudeep Reddy, opened by paraphrasing the late Alan B. Krueger, who once served as chairman of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors under the Obama Administration: “The U.S. economy is looking increasingly like the music industry: a small sliver of people are capturing the largest gains.”⁶

As matters stand, the iconic US singer, songwriter and civil rights activist Nina Simone once said: “An artist’s duty, as far as I’m concerned, is to reflect the times. I think that is true of painters, sculptors, poets, musicians.”⁷ Ironically, it is as if the music industry itself is mirroring the inequality problem of our time. Krueger, who was a leading scholar of ‘rockonomics’, and noted the gross inequality that taints the music industry and the arts at large, was a rarity among economists. The economics profession, which informs much of public policy ex cathedra, has yet to appreciate culture, and hence consider its application vis-à-vis meaningful growth and development action. But why is it important to examine inequality through the lens of the arts?

First of all, consider the most abstract of art forms and the starting point of this discussion: music. Eons before imagining writing or agriculture, according to the US author and media theorist Steven Johnson, early humans were busy crafting tools to make music. Not everyone has to believe Nietzsche, who proclaimed, “Without music, life would be a mistake.” Yet music, which enjoys “a longer history of technological innovation than any other art form,”⁸ directly and indirectly occupies a great deal of people’s time. Indeed, in the current context, although it can be argued that “music represents a small percentage of economic activity”—that is, economic activity that is measured and perhaps even disregards trade in value added⁹—in our daily lives, music looms large.¹⁰ Therefore, studying creative sectors like the music industry, as Krueger observes, “helps shed light on one key factor: the role of superstar markets.”¹¹

Since the arts evince superstars who hold court as if they are gods, it bears considering how technology and globalization fuel income inequality by enabling superstars to net super incomes. Although digital technologies can benefit even lesser known artists, they also amplify superstar effects. These technologies therefore have not been as egalitarian as was previously thought. Moreover, as will be

⁶ Reddy 2013. See also Krueger 2019b.

⁷ Simone 2013. NB: Simone’s birth name was Eunice Kathleen Waymon.

⁸ Johnson 2016, pp. 67, 69, 71–72.

⁹ For more on trade in value added, see Kabanda 2018, pp. 85–87, 212 and 217–218.

¹⁰ Krueger 2019b, pp. 40–41.

¹¹ Krueger 2019a; 2019b, p. 1. The superstar effect is evidently present in other areas. Take sports, for one. See also Frank and Cook 1996.

argued later, some aspects of intellectual property that tightly connect with commerce in creative work tend to favour corporate interests, and raise questions about whether they have gone too far.¹²

Second, a great many people “confuse the underlying motivation of economic life with greed and the blind pursuit of money,” as Krueger said. “At its best”—and this is indeed at its best—“economics recognizes that people are motivated by much more than money. The great joys of life come from pursuing one’s passions, spending time with friends and family, and enjoying experiences.”¹³ Since the arts fulfil people’s lives beyond money, they invite us to take a broader perspective. In areas like the human capability approach,¹⁴ such a perspective diverges from the human capital approach, which tends to concentrate on human economic productivity—as if the sole purpose of human life is to get people to function as robots that serve the economy.¹⁵

Third, as the celebrated dancer Karole Armitage has argued, the arts often portray our lives.¹⁶ They have the power to not only shape the way we perceive our world, but also the kind of world we want to live in. Indeed, since “the desire to create art and engage with aesthetics is hardwired in our brains,” as neuroscience shows, in many ways we make sense of our world through creativity.¹⁷ That is why there is concern that when movie industries sexualize women in the name of making money, for example, what they do does not just stay on the screen; it can penetrate people’s minds and thus influence culture.¹⁸ What is more, as Krueger says, people’s tastes and preferences are not “immutable features of their personalities, as is commonly assumed in introductory economics courses” (he adds that economists are slowly becoming aware of this). “Instead, they are partly determined by social pressures, and subject to change based on experience. This is nowhere more evident than in music.”¹⁹

INEQUALITY, YES; BUT INEQUALITY OF WHAT?²⁰

In examining the scope of inequality under the current context, the 2019 *Human Development Report* has this to say: “Inequality in Human Development—deep imbalances in the opportunities and choices people have—goes beyond income, recognizing the dynamic and complex interactions between inequalities in education, health, voice, access to technology, and exposure to risk among many other dimensions that affect individual well-being.”²¹ Because human development is about “expanding the

¹² See Stiglitz 2013, p. 176, for example. Diane Coyle, email message to the author, 2 November 2019. For detailed discussions, see Timberg 2015 and Deresiewicz 2020.

¹³ Krueger 2019b, p. 9.

¹⁴ See Comim, Fennell, Anand et al. 2018; Zitcer et al. 2016; and Maguire et al. 2012.

¹⁵ On human capital versus human capability, see Sen 2000, especially pp. 292–298; Kabanda 2018, Chapter 2; and Robinson 2019, especially Chapter 2. For a related discussion, see also Markovits 2019.

¹⁶ Brooks 2015.

¹⁷ Fox 2018; Kate Fox, email message to the author, 3 March 2020. This is another reason why inclusion in the arts is so crucial. For a related discussion, see MacArthur Foundation 2018.

¹⁸ This issue is also addressed in Kabanda 2018, especially Chapter 7.

¹⁹ Krueger 2019b, p. 10. This is certainly evident in the field of behavioural economics.

²⁰ For a broader treatment of the “Equality of What,” see Sen 1995.

²¹ From the Human Development Report Office’s Terms of Reference; see also UNDP 2019a.

richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live,” an approach focused on people’s opportunities and choices,²² that statement suggests the following thought:

It is important to analyse inequality in both material and non-material ways, not just because it is the right thing to do in egalitarian terms²³—although that is important—but also because such a holistic approach can enlighten economics and public policy in making more informed decisions. This is particularly crucial because, even without considering that economics is not altogether immaculate,²⁴ the statistics usually consulted to make decisions that affect people’s lives are often littered with deficiencies, which run from poor numbers and competing interests to difficulties in access.²⁵ It is also important if one considers that the legislation that has weakened much of antitrust law in the United States of America, for instance, was solely based on ‘consumer welfare’, spelled out in economic terms. This has meant that such issues as corporate influence in politics have been largely ignored.²⁶

Yet as the US author and journalist Bob Herbert intimately portrays in his incisive book *Losing Our Way: An Intimate Portrait of a Troubled America*, in a nation where greed has “not only been tolerated but encouraged,” the result has “led to catastrophic imbalances in wealth, income, and political power.”²⁷ In fact, even economically speaking, as Suresh Naidu, Eric Posner and Glen Weyl point out, the issue of ‘worker welfare’, of workers who help pump the economy in the first place, receives little attention.²⁸ And while a diagnosis may not automatically translate into proper treatment, a poor diagnosis does not help either.

With respect to diagnosing inequality, “inequality” is no doubt much discussed nowadays. But since the term means different things to different people, there is also plenty of confusion. As Anthony B. Atkinson has noted, inequality arises in numerous spheres of human activity. “People have unequal

²² UNDP Human Development Report Office n.d.

²³ See Sen 1995, pp. 3–11, and Chapter 1 for more on egalitarianism, welfarism and utilitarianism.

²⁴ See Investopedia 2018 and Kamarck 2002, especially Chapter 2, among other sources.

²⁵ For example, see Jerven 2013; Borgman 2016; and Milanović 2016, pp. 12–18. Data, what is more, can also be a barrier to entry and competition. “A data-rich incumbent is able to cement its position by improving its service and making it more targeted for users,” for example, “as well as making more money by better targeting its advertising” (see Furman et al. 2019, especially pp. 33–35).

²⁶ For details on this, see Wu 2018; Katz 2020.

²⁷ Herbert 2014, p. 5.

²⁸ See Naidu, Posner and Weyl 2018, especially pp. 587–588. Indeed, as Herbert has argued, workers, over the years, “have come to be seen less and less as valuable, functioning human beings contributing to the success of an enterprise and more and more as impediments to profits.” They have been “tossed aside as easily as used tissues” (Herbert 2014, p. 51). And if we talk about ‘worker welfare’, we can also talk about ‘community welfare’. Take the environment. As many companies determine that as one way to maximize profits or to remain competitive they can just pollute the environment, they damage ecosystems that sustain our shared planet. Besides applying toxic chemicals and dumping hazardous waste both on land and in waters, sometimes this also means reckless forest destruction or execrable practices, which adversely affect local communities. Much has been written about these issues (for example, see Carson 2002 and Espinoza 2018), but apparently, this ‘green community welfare’ seems to be not as important as ‘consumer welfare’.

political power. People are unequal before the law.”²⁹ People have unequal cultural representation. Even Atkinson’s topic of focus, economic inequality, “is also open to many interpretations.” Those interpretations might be as endless as renditions of a Bach fugue or R&B, but nevertheless: “The nature of objectives, and their relation to social values, has to be clarified. Are we concerned with inequality of opportunity or inequality of income? With which outcomes should we be concerned? Should we just focus on poverty? When presented with data on inequality, the reader has always to ask, inequality of what among whom?”³⁰

In an attempt to answer part of the last question, this discussion focuses on inequality in the arts and cultural diversity, though not inequality in all the arts under the sun. The music industry, photography, Hollywood’s global domination, and other areas touched upon merely serve as exemplars of what is happening in the sector. Although the research more or less draws from the United States, where inequality is marching towards becoming a trademark of the nation,³¹ the lessons also apply to inequality debates elsewhere in the world. Under variables such as income, gender, cultural diversity and freedom of movement, moreover, the examples attempt to draw attention to the main inequalities in creative work. It must be noted, however, that these variables are not entirely mutually exclusive.

Conceptually speaking, given that inequality is embedded in all aspects of our society, as Atkinson observed, these inequalities tend in fact to be interdependent. For political inequality can cause economic inequality, and vice versa. Or cultural and social inequality can cause political and economic inequality and vice versa (see Figure 1). A society that may have less economic inequality but more cultural or social inequality may be far from cloud nine, moreover.

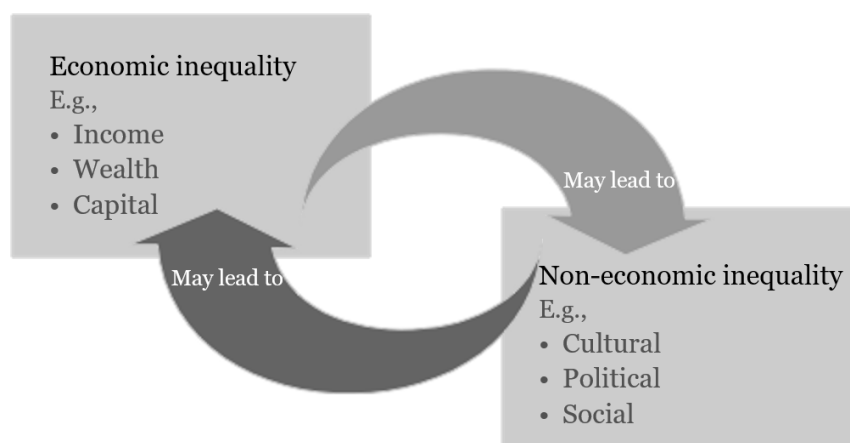
²⁹ In the context of the United States, consider what the public interest lawyer Bryan Stevenson has to say: In many parts of the world “the opposite of poverty is not wealth” but justice. “We have a system of justice in this country that treats you much better if you’re rich and guilty than if you’re poor and innocent. Wealth, not culpability, shapes outcomes” (Stevenson 2012).

³⁰ Atkinson 2015, p. 2.

³¹ Wu 2019.

FIGURE 1

The interaction of inequalities: A very basic example



Note: Although these inequalities may not always be interdependent, it is axiomatic that they are in most cases. For example, consider a situation where political inequality leads to economic inequality and vice versa. Or where gender, racial and religious discrimination (in the cultural and social space) lead to not only cultural and social inequality, but also to political and economic inequality.

At any rate, in what might be called ‘inequality within inequality’ or ‘inequality on top of inequality’, rendered by what might be called ‘prejudice within prejudice’ or ‘prejudice on top of prejudice’, consider the following points:³²

Dark-skinned actresses in Bollywood may face skin colour prejudice on top of gender discrimination, because they work in an industry that tends to put a premium on fair skin. This not only cuts into their chances to get hired and the kinds of opportunities they get, or the roles they play, but also how much they get paid.³³

The issue of skin colour prejudice no doubt deserves much attention. For it bears investigating why, even at a pedestrian level, we are more likely to see photographs of light-skinned women in glossy magazines in India and beyond.³⁴ Nevertheless, since that subject perhaps merits a paper of its own, we shall stick to the gender problem in photography, where the matter is not just about gender, but also voice, and where women play a major role, but are usually not famous themselves.³⁵ In fact, if the

³² This may also come under such areas as multidimensional inequality and intersectionality. On the latter, see Crenshaw 2016.

³³ This issue is of course beyond Bollywood. That is why the actress and producer Nandita Das’s effort to promote the Dark Is Beautiful campaign deserves much attention. See World Bank 2018, Abraham 2017 and Ganapathy 2013.

³⁴ See Russell-Cole et al. 2013, Nagar 2018 and Arie 2018.

³⁵ This undoubtedly touches on such observations as the importance of the painter to the appraisal of the painting. The Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby, in her Netflix stand-up special “Nanette,” takes a stunning swipe at this approach (Fox, email message to the author, 3 March 2020). See Halperin 2018.

music industry illustrates the broader winner-take-all problem in society, the photography profession arguably serves as a microcosm of the larger inequality problem in the arts.

Here is another example, concerning the unequal freedom of movement that is often neglected in inequality debates.³⁶ Imagine two groups of photographers,³⁷ say, Group X and Group Y, with the same equipment, same ability and same training, *ceteris paribus*, and the only difference is that Group X is connected to the ruling class, and Group Y is not. Then when it comes to opportunities like travel, Group X might be better able to take advantage of them than Group Y. Here, for instance, photographers from marginalized African tribes or communities may face far more hurdles to travel to the West to participate in photography exhibitions than their connected counterparts. In a situation where it is already easier for Westerners to travel to Africa than it is for Africans to travel to the West, those African photographers unconnected with their ruling class might find it even harder to travel to the West. This is evidently not because of their lack of talent, but because of their lack of opportunities that their connected counterparts might enjoy, such as easier visa application processes and other aspects that affect human freedom, like the freedom to travel.

Those examples notwithstanding, consider this contrarian view, which also deserves comment. One could argue that if there was less inequality in other sectors, then, in relative terms, there would be less to worry about inequality within the arts. For the field would attract only those who want to be there. After all, they get joy out of what they do. That mode of thought, however, may miss the fact that already many artists leave or do not take other jobs that may pay better because they prefer to eke out a living while doing something they love. And some may work two or more jobs besides trying to sustain their creative ventures. Further, that thought may also perpetuate the idea that artists do not deserve to be paid well or paid at all, because they enjoy what they do—and that is why many church musicians like organists tend to be told: “You do not need to be paid. You enjoy what you do and even serving God who gave you that talent!”

While this is also true in areas like research, consider this: It is one thing for a figure like the Nobel economist Paul Samuelson to say he enjoys his work so much that he is overpaid and underworked.³⁸ And it is another to consider that everybody in the field should feel the same way, because they enjoy or should be enjoying their research—graduate teaching assistants, for instance, some of whom may be drowning in student loans and other forms of debt.

³⁶ For insightful comments on this, consider Mehta 2019a and 2019b.

³⁷ This is just a hypothetical example, and instead of photographers, the groups could be farmers or footballers, teachers or dancers, and so forth. In any case, inequality in income and inequality in access, it must be remembered, are not always mutually exclusive.

³⁸ See Samuelson 1986.

What is more, the idea that inequality within the arts should not be so much of a worry is also probably more focused on the monetary angle, like pay rates, ignoring other factors like gender bias and sexual harassment, which in turn can affect income and general well-being. As we shall see later, many women photographers, besides receiving abysmal pay, also bear the brunt of perennial sexual harassment. Is it enough to say that that is the nature of the business and that not much should be done about it?

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS PAPER

This discussion is divided into five parts. Following the introduction, the rest of this paper proceeds as follows. After brief definitions of the arts and the creative sector, a literature review considers why using only economic metrics to examine inequality is insufficient. Nonetheless, as the review progresses, it tilts towards economic literature, looking at how the confluence of technology and globalization fuel inequality. The music industry here is an apposite laboratory.

The case study that follows zooms in on an issue rarely studied: gender bias in photography. The people speaking out against this problem are certainly not saying it is insoluble. Rather, they are seeking a corrective to a medium whose language so often shapes our world. Picking such a sensitive topic means leaving out many others that equally deserve attention, such as the sexual abuse scandal shaking the Catholic Church,³⁹ not to mention the pressing problem of inequality in arts education and access. But again, lessons here can be drawn to tackle broader issues of abuse.

An early United States-Canada magazine dispute at the World Trade Organization illustrates inequality in cultural diversity. The discussion of this notes that while the United States dominates the global cultural scene, this dominance did not come about by chance. The United States has for long used some elements of its soft power⁴⁰ to project itself as the Promised Land where poverty is history, opportunities are endless, and human freedom is greatest. For quite some time, it has been using the US State Department to promote Hollywood. This, among other things, abets inequality in cultural commerce and inhibits cultural diversity. If “human development is, fundamentally, about more choice,”⁴¹ then people should surely have the ability to choose from the world’s rich menu of cultural diversity, and not be led to believe that Hollywood is the only prime choice. The discussion terminates with policy options in the final section of the paper.

³⁹ In the arts, this problem also looms large even in less-covered areas such as architecture. And in frequently covered areas like the movie industry, this problem also affects assistants and others who might not be stars. On the former, see Arieff 2018; on the latter, see Chiu 2019.

⁴⁰ Although the term soft power enjoys wide usage, that “has sometimes meant misuse of the concept as a synonym for anything other than military force,” according to Joseph S. Nye Jr., who coined the term. “But soft power is a descriptive, rather than a normative, concept. Like any form of power, it can be wielded for good or bad purposes” (Nye Jr. 2011, p. 81).

⁴¹ UNDP Human Development Report Office n.d.

A WORD ON DEFINITIONS: THE ARTS AND THE CREATIVE SECTOR

According to Edward O. Wilson, “the arts in the primary and intuitively creative sense, *ars gratia artis*, remain the definition most widely and usefully employed.”⁴² *Ars gratia artis*, or art for art’s sake, is surely useful, especially when considering the immaterial benefits of the arts. That said, the contribution of the arts to wealth that can benefit human development in monetary terms merits recognition. “The arts, no one should doubt, are for the enjoyment and enrichment of life,” as John Kenneth Galbraith allows. “But there is another dimension insufficiently recognized. That is their contribution to economic life and well-being.”⁴³ The idea here is that the arts contribute to the economy in direct and indirect ways, even though that contribution is generally underappreciated and thus understudied, underfunded and underapplied.⁴⁴ They can enrich people’s lives in monetary ways by providing jobs people have reason to value, enhancing meaningful social capital, and unlocking people’s imagination, for example. That is the case even if we resist entertaining the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ as ‘art for life’s sake’.⁴⁵ Although there is no exact definition of art, “most definitions call it aesthetics,⁴⁶ a term concerned with beauty and ‘artistic taste’.”⁴⁷

And beauty and artistic taste can be subjective, but can be appreciated in both material and non-material dimensions. To consider the instrumental dimension, however, is to note that such terms as the cultural or creative industries, or the creative or cultural economy, are often employed to mean the arts, the creative or cultural sector. That nomenclature can be vice versa (and the word ‘sector’ can be replaced with ‘industry’). Among the litany of definitions, here is one by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): “The cultural and creative industries are those that combine the creation, production and commercialization of creative contents that are intangible and of a cultural nature. These contents are usually protected by Copyright and can take the form of a good or a service. Besides all artistic and cultural production, they include architecture and advertising.”⁴⁸ Needless to say, the terms ‘arts sector’, ‘creative’ and ‘culture sector’ are used interchangeably in the present context to mean the same thing.

⁴² Wilson 1998, p. 210.

⁴³ Galbraith 2017, p. 572. From a letter to Peter Walsh in 1993. At that time, Walsh was a staff member at Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts. For the complete letter, see citation.

⁴⁴ As Kaushik Basu has argued, there are purists who think that art and commerce should never be mixed (Basu 2019, p. 128). That line of thought is certainly not entirely baseless—and it will be misguided to value the arts by merely considering their economic contribution—but such thinking does not take away the arts’ contribution to economic life. Although this perception is changing to some degree, there is more to be done. See Throsby 2010 and Kabanda 2018, among other sources.

⁴⁵ For Yo-Yo Ma, it’s never art for art’s sake, but art for life’s sake. See Kranchalk 2019. See also Goins n.d.

⁴⁶ Morriss-Kay 2009.

⁴⁷ Kabanda 2015, pp. 5–6.

⁴⁸ Buitrago Restrepo and Duque 2013, p. 37; Kabanda 2018, pp. 225–228; United Nations 2010 and 2013. See the same sources for other definitions. For a definition of creative work see Kabanda 2015, p. 4.

In essence, to define the creative sector is to consider its promising role as many countries struggle with questions running from diversifying economies to youth unemployment. In that promise, as the author noted in *The Creative Wealth of Nations*, since each country has its own cultural wealth to draw upon, consider the following points: i) emancipating people's creativity or imagination, which is where promoting full-fledged arts education comes in; ii) promoting inclusive trade in creative goods and services, areas where many countries in Africa and elsewhere lag behind; and iii) building sustainable economic models.⁴⁹

On the last, since creative jobs are arguably greener, in the agenda to meet climate-friendly development, that by itself calls for more investment in the arts. Thus, these points go hand in hand, and the list could be longer. But more immediately, our unchecked overconsumption of material things has undoubtedly contributed to the environmental catastrophe we are facing. Although this is not to say that all things creative, including cultural tourism, are totally sustainable, a major question arises: How can we promote the emotional and spiritual satisfaction the arts bring and curb the constant buying of things we sometimes do not even need?⁵⁰ Given the 2020 *Human Development Report*, on transformations to expand human freedoms in balance with the planet, the need for inquiry into the arts' contribution to economic sustainability has never been greater, and could be a useful connection here.

Literature review: AKA an inquiry into the nature and causes of the unequal wealth of nations (in brief)

This inquiry considers inequality in various dimensions and not just economic justice. Part of this section, however, tilts towards literature that largely deals with the instrumental dimension—wealth, capital and income inequality. The findings here are not just about the creative sector, though. In fact, unlike work by Alan Krueger, they were not meant to focus on it. They are nonetheless useful in pointing out what has happened, and why other sectors increasingly look like the arts sector, where the inequality problem is no secret.

Focusing on the instrumental dimension, however, does not mean that non-instrumental or political or moral concerns are secondary. These, after all, can loop back to determine instrumental or economic outcomes directly or indirectly. Consider gender bias. It can be argued—and it has been argued—that gender bias running from photography to movie industries, for instance, promotes income inequality between male and female artists. The problem, as George Akerlof, Susan Athey, Kaushik Basu, Lisa D. Cook, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Jean Dréze, Shailaja Fennell, Rachel Kranton, Shelly Lundberg, Amartya

⁴⁹ Kabanda 2018, especially p. 3; United Nations General Assembly Second Committee 2019.

⁵⁰ For more on this, see Kabanda 2019. For a debate on the sustainability of recorded music, see Devine 2019.

Sen, Muhammad Yunus and others have noted, is that this does not just hurt the women affected; it also affects society.⁵¹

Let us reflect on a basic example: If the woman paid unfairly is her family's sole breadwinner, then it can be argued that her household also suffers from the inability to enjoy the income they badly need. Such discrimination, additionally, may discourage brilliant young women out there who might want to pursue arts vocations, in areas including film or photography, from following their dreams. In that sense, society itself loses by missing out on talent that could produce the next great photograph or film of all time. Also, if we consider inequality in just the instrumental metrics of economic utility, a lot can be missed. In situations that may stall change, and even dampen positive policy shifts that are good for society at large, think about the following, from Amartya Sen:

In situations of persistent adversity and deprivation, the victims do not go on grieving and grumbling all the time, and may even lack the motivation to desire a radical change of circumstances. Indeed, in terms of a strategy for living, it may make a lot of sense to come to terms with an ineradicable adversity, to try to appreciate small breaks, and to resist pining for the impossible or the improbable. Such a person, even though thoroughly deprived and confined to a very reduced life, may not appear to be quite so badly off in terms of the mental metric of desire and its fulfillment, and in terms of the pleasure-pain calculus. The extent of a person's deprivation may be substantially muffled in the utility metric, despite the fact that he or she may lack the opportunity even to be adequately nourished, decently clothed, minimally educated or properly sheltered.⁵²

It is unlikely that when he wrote that statement, Sen was talking about women of Hollywood⁵³ at the mercy of figures like Harvey Weinstein, or about artists worldwide who are subjected to exploitative arrangements. Or that he was examining how abusive arrangements are allowed to fester in ways all too familiar. But his take corroborates what we often see in the creative sector—and undoubtedly in other areas, notably now in the so-called gig economy. As many artists fear speaking out against 'Weinsteinian' episodes, as many embrace playing for exposure ad infinitum, as many continue to work multiple jobs even as gentrification forces them out of the neighbourhoods where their work is, they have to settle for this: coming to terms with “an ineradicable adversity, to try to appreciate small breaks.”⁵⁴

Of course, some artists make big breakthroughs and get big breaks. Notwithstanding this, which often leads others to think that if they just hang on, they, too, can make it, the inequality problem in the

⁵¹ See Kabanda 2018, Chapter 7.

⁵² Sen 1995, pp. 6–7.

⁵³ See Dowd 2015, and Kantor and Twohey 2019.

⁵⁴ Sen 1995, pp. 6–7.

sector continues to grow. This is because mogul artists and others controlling the industry normally have their deals cut in ways that are all about celebrating the crescendo of the winner-take-all drumbeat, a drumbeat now reverberating in many other sectors of the economy, hence such headlines as, “‘Winner Take All’ Economy Mirrors Music Industry,” and subheadlines like, “The music industry can tell us a lot about our winner-take-all economy.”⁵⁵ These increasingly reflect the unequal wealth of nations.

For Sen, who champions the human development approach, developed by the Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, with a focus on the ‘capabilities and functionings’ that look at human beings in a broader perspective, the nature of utility metrics may be misleading. Misleading, for example, because it neglects “the context of stable differentiation” that can run from class to gender or from caste to community.⁵⁶

THE CIRCULAR MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE: WINNER-TAKE-ALL ECONOMICS MEETS WINNER-TAKE-ALL POLITICS

Now, to speak about community is to invite comment on another central variable: politics. Without question, any government should be a *government of the people, by the people, for the people*, as Abraham Lincoln put it. In many countries, however, it is not a gross exaggeration to say that many wealthy people and corporations tend to have disproportionate political influence, which in turn favours their economic influence, which in turn exacerbates inequality.⁵⁷ As the picture starts to look more like the *government of some people, by some people, for some people*,⁵⁸ under the guise of democracy, we inevitably have to ask whether the people with the best chance of economic survival are those who are the fittest in political influence.

Ironically, the same voices that frequently suggest that the government should get out of people’s lives and the people’s economy are the same voices that often aggressively lobby the government to feed their insatiable acquisitive instincts.⁵⁹ Such claims are often made in the name of the ‘invisible hand’,

⁵⁵ See Krueger 2019a.

⁵⁶ Sen 1995, p. 7. The capability for people to achieve the functions they value for a variety of reasons provides a standard approach to evaluating social arrangements. This, as a result, generates a particular way of looking at how equality and inequality are assessed. But what are those ‘functionings’ we are talking about? The functionings in question “can vary from elementary ones such as being well-nourished, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality,” and so on, as Sen has argued, “to quite complex and sophisticated ones, such as having self-respect, being able to take part in the life of the community, and so on” (Sen 1995, pp. 4–5). See also Basu and López-Calva 2011.

⁵⁷ See Gosh 2019; Palma 2019 and also Atkinson 2015; Chua 2004; Milanović 2016 and Stiglitz 2013 (pp. xvii–xxviii, xxix–xxxv). In the context of the United States, see Hacker and Pierson 2010; Stiglitz 2019a (pp. xiii, xviii, xxvi–xxvii); Madrick 2020; Reich 2020 and Teachout 2020, for example.

⁵⁸ This could be called plutocracy, but it could also be a result of political structures such as ethnocracy.

⁵⁹ See also Wu 2018 on antitrust. “Contrary to one popular belief,” on one hand, “the richest people are not necessarily evil manipulators who have rigged the system through bribery or corruption,” as Muhammad Yunus points out. “In reality, the current capitalist system works on their behalf” (Yunus 2017, p. 7). On the other hand, there are cases where the richest wangle their way to beat the system in highly ruthless ways, ways that widen income divides, kill unions,

courtesy of Adam Smith. But while their actions might be deemed invisible on one hand, they are strikingly visible on the other. For this often enables economic benefits to rise up to the chests of the rich and powerful, instead of trickling down to the palms of the poor and powerless.

In all this, the creative sector has also not kept its hands clean. For instance, the Nobel economist Joseph Stiglitz, whose books include *The Price of Inequality*, said that he opposed the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Agreement,⁶⁰ the treaty that covers commerce running from pharmaceuticals to creative work, for this reason: “I had seen firsthand how TRIPS was shaped, not by the concerns of U.S. science, but by our pharmaceutical and entertainment industries.”⁶¹ Stiglitz made his observation not just as a distinguished professor of economics at a major university; he was the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under President Bill Clinton.

It is perhaps worthy noting that President Clinton was not only an excellent student; he was also a promising saxophone player, who even embraced his band director as a ‘surrogate father’, and once considered becoming a professional musician.⁶² What is more, under his administration “the U.S. enjoyed more peace and economic well being than at any time in its history.”⁶³ One would think that having a president who considered a profession in music, and who presided over peace and a humming economy, might improve the prospects for equitable arts policy. All the same, whether TRIPS was under Clinton’s radar or not, here is what Stiglitz said of the Agreement: “I had no illusions: it was special-interest legislation.”⁶⁴

The TRIPS Stiglitz worried about, moreover, was not just under the jurisdiction of the United States;⁶⁵ it was, and remains, an instrument of international scope, administered by the World Trade Organization (WTO). As the US entertainment industry got its way in order to reach far-flung markets, even as piracy and disruptive technologies may have cut into its bottom line, corporations, executives, and mogul artists are likely to have been the top beneficiaries—not those at the bottom ranks of the industry. While the Internet and social media can help little-known artists, with some exceptions it is

stall progress on climate action and use corporate influence to influence a politics that submits to their narrow interests (Leonard 2019).

⁶⁰ “The TRIPS Agreement is a minimum standards agreement, which allows Members to provide more extensive protection of intellectual property if they so wish. Members are left free to determine the appropriate method of implementing the provisions of the Agreement within their own legal system and practice.” The agreement is the most comprehensive multilateral agreement on intellectual property to date. It came into effect in January 1995 (WTO n.d.).

⁶¹ Stiglitz 2009, p. 141; see also Kabanda 2018, pp. 106–107.

⁶² Ivey 2010, p. xiii. For more on this, see the preface in Ivey 2010.

⁶³ WhiteHouse.gov n.d.

⁶⁴ Stiglitz 2009, p. 141; Lester et al. 2008, especially p. 42, 766–775. See also Kabanda 2018, 2016a and 2016c.

⁶⁵ At any rate, Justice Stephen Breyer of the United States Supreme Court makes the following point: The Internet “more and more permits ordinary citizens to do business internationally—for example, to reserve local transportation or to buy films or books from abroad. Those transactions will give rise to disputes, and we must have ways to resolve those disputes based on a rule of law. But there is no Supreme Court of the World with power to harmonize differences among the approaches of different nations. Thus such problems will require the judiciaries of different nations to address them separately but collaboratively. If they are to do so, they cannot automatically abdicate their authority at the water’s edge” (Breyer 2015, p. 6).

unlikely that the situation has changed much since TRIPS went into effect in 1995. “Designed by corporate interests to prevent the free flow of knowledge, the agreement strengthens monopoly power—helping create rents,” Stiglitz observes, “the source of so much of today’s inequality.”⁶⁶

On the inverse side, since some politicians use their office to gain economic influence, and hence enrich themselves and those in their direct and indirect circles, the mix of money and politics is inevitable. In the battle to influence public opinion, it is also not unusual for politicians to use the arts and influential artists to promote their political agenda and policy priorities.⁶⁷ Should the agenda win, artists (and others) in particular politicians’ circles are often rewarded disproportionately. This situation, which fuels inequality, is often called corruption or poor governance in the so-called developing countries. That observation notwithstanding, the rich world has not escaped this trap. Just look at what is happening in the United States. These points deserve more deliberation, but let us shift gears and comment on what has been said about inequality in the economic dimension.

TECHNOLOGY, GLOBALIZATION, AND SCALABLE AND NONSCALABLE JOBS

In *Global Inequality*, Milanović (2016) acknowledges the role of luck, the idea that being in the right place at the right time can help people make a leap forward. In the creative sector, this phenomenon is not unusual. While this is not to say that ‘discovered artists’ are not that talented or deserving, examples of people who have become known because someone stumbled upon them are common. Milanović nonetheless goes on to make the following statement. It recapitulates what has just been discussed:

In addition to blind chance, family endowments in wealth and, perhaps more importantly, connections, will matter more. One sees the effect of family money and networks in the United States very clearly in the occupations where lots of power and money accrue. Political dynasties are more common today than they were fifty years ago; people whose parents have been film actors or directors are almost ensured of a career in the same industry. The same is true in the financial sector. Are the children of politicians, actors, or stock traders the best qualified to do those jobs in the next generation? Assuredly not. It is just that previous success in these occupations breeds more success, including success of their offspring. Access to the people who make hiring decisions is crucial, and that access is helped by family background and connections.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Stiglitz 2013, p. 176. This observation includes areas such as research and development, access to knowledge and medicines. But it bears adding here, because global commerce in creative work is also included under TRIPS. For a related discussion, see Ivey 2010.

⁶⁷ There is also the issue of “reputational whitewashing that some wealthy people do when they join boards of prominent arts or culture organizations as a way to divert attention from other less flattering character traits or business dealings” (Fox, email message to the author, 3 March 2020). And sometimes this also involves donations. For example, see Goukassian 2018 concerning the Sackler Family, donations to cultural institutions and the opioid crisis.

⁶⁸ Milanović 2016, p. 215. Milanović added a note connected to Wieland and Wolters 2012. And again, although there are some genuine stories of ‘being discovered’, in a number of cases the ‘luck’ here is also connected with networks, access and money (Fox, email message to the author, 3 March 2020).

Mix that with the winner-take-all mindset, which extends to ‘winner-take-all politics’,⁶⁹ and what you get is a bitter cocktail of inequality, notably in sectors where service scalability is now even more pronounced by technology.

Citing Nassim Taleb, the author of *The Black Swan*, Milanović defines scalable jobs as those types of jobs where a unit of labour by the same person can be sold not just once, but many times over. “A typical example is that of a top pianist,” a celebrated virtuoso. In the past, such a pianist “could sell her ability only to those who would come listen to her” in a live setting, say, at Carnegie Hall. “Then, with the invention of the record player, she could sell it to all who would buy the recordings; today, via the Internet, YouTube, and webcasting, she can sell it to practically the entire globe.”⁷⁰

One could argue that it would not be so bad if the system was fair, operating in such a way that the ‘invisible hand’ of an ‘impartial market’ was allowed to do its job. But that is often not the case. For artists who may not have producers or managers with considerable budgets and sophisticated marketing techniques,⁷¹ or who play music or styles not preferred by the prevailing fashion of media tastes, or who refuse to get involved with the Harvey Weinsteins of the world, for example,⁷² the luck leading to scalability might be scanty. Moreover, to return to our previous example, “Those who are slightly less good pianists, or perhaps have not had as much luck, will hardly be listened to by anyone,” according to Milanović. “Scalable jobs, then, create very large income differences within the same occupation. What is more, these income differences are disproportionately large compared to any objective assessment of the differences in abilities.”⁷³ See Figure 2.

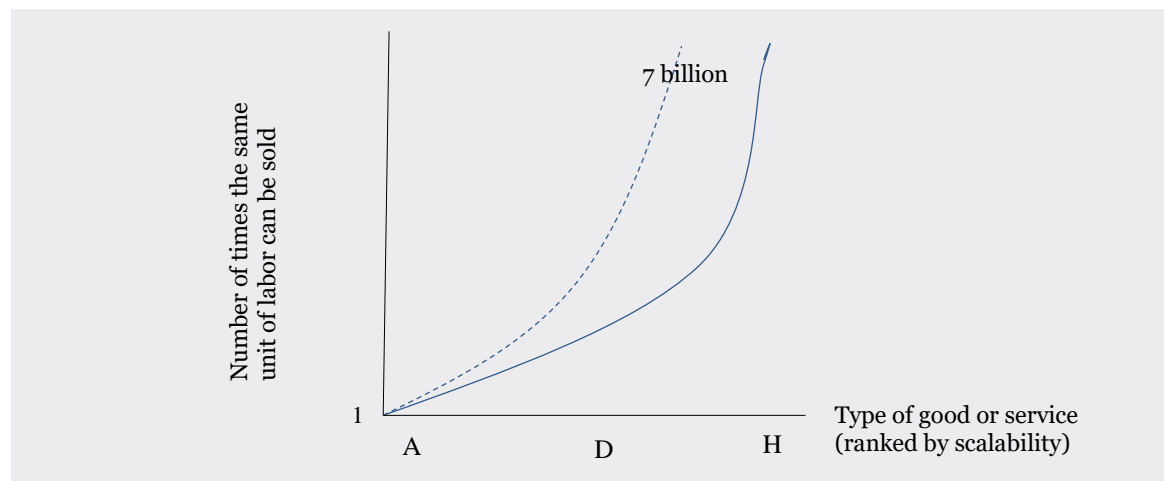
⁶⁹ Hacker and Pierson 2011 convincingly demonstrate that politics is the culprit for rising inequality in the United States. See also Atkinson 2015, p. 108. “The winner-take-all economy,” as they identify, “is primarily a result of winner-take-all politics” (Yale University n.d.). While their book *Winner-All-Politics* focuses on the United States, the authors reveal how runaway politics exacerbates inequality across the world. Since this problem was normally assigned to ‘developing countries’, it is not unusual these days to hear that the United States is increasingly starting to look like a ‘developing country’.

⁷⁰ Milanović 2016, p. 223. This advantage can also help such artists market their work, receive secondary opportunities and even get more followers to attend their live concerts. See Kabanda 2015 and 2018. This also brings in the issue of what the German philosopher and social critic Theodor W. Adorno, in his concept of the ‘cultural industry’, would have called ‘reification’. In this sense, reification implies “the process of turning an abstract performance into a physical commodity that can be bought and sold—thus transferring the profit motive onto cultural forms” (Paul Moody, email message to the author, 19 February 2020). See also Adorno 2001.

⁷¹ It would surely be useful to collect data on this issue. In any case, one way to consider this is perhaps through book writing. Some self-published authors get lucky in getting their work out there. Nevertheless, for the most part, writers with big publishers are likely to get more publicity, courtesy of their publishers.

⁷² Here, their moral stance against sexual exploitation may garner them respect and hence a following, but that is not the point.

⁷³ Milanović 2016, 223.

FIGURE 2**Scalability of goods and services**

This graph shows how many times one can sell the same unit of labor in different types of activities. In activity A, a unit of labor can be sold only once; in activity H it can be sold many times over. The dashed line shows the increase in scalable activities with technological change and globalization.

Source: Milanović 2016.

The large differences in income compared to tiny differences in abilities aside, there is also the issue of scalable and non-scalable goods and services. A taxi ride to a concert to hear a top pianist, for example, is a non-scalable service because the ride can only be sold one at a time. That is the case even if the taxi is carrying more than one passenger during the ride. Non-scalable products can therefore “be characterized as private, excludable, and rival goods and services.” On the other hand, although scalable goods and services are also private and excludable, as Milanović points out, they are non-rival because their greater consumption by person X, for example, does not reduce (or diminish) possible consumption by person Y (or even other people).⁷⁴

Although we have heard of Internet networks crashing because too many people are on the network and watching the same thing at the same time, such that those with weak networks may be disadvantaged, that is not the point. The point is that “the massive wage differences that exist within the same types of jobs are a combination of (1) technological change, which makes jobs in principle scalable (without the ability to record sound, a pianist’s performance would not be scalable), and (2) globalization, that is, the ability to reach every corner of the world.” Indeed, technology and globalization are playing a tight duet when it comes to what fuels massive income gaps.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 223–224.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 225. But again, technology and globalization are not entirely to blame. This issue will get more treatment later in the discussion.

Even more important, technology is making it more and more possible to make a number of activities scalable. As technologies expand the ability of sex workers, teachers, chefs, artists and others to sell their services directly and indirectly, “a rival good has become a nonrival.” And it does not hurt to have a huge following on social media. The so-called social media influencers, including famous artists, often enjoy compensation from companies for advertising products. As Milanović concludes, while we cannot imagine some services becoming scalable for now (like the taxi ride, perhaps even in a self-driving car situation), it should not be a surprise if many activities, especially in the domain of services, continue to become scalable.⁷⁶

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE YEAR THE ‘GRASS SHOT UP’

Historically speaking, scalability has been shaping compensation favouring superstars for quite some time. A century ago, the British economist Alfred Marshall noted how the size of the market enabled top performers to command high payments. Given that market size is contingent on technology, here is what Marshall saw: “the significance of ‘the development of new facilities for communication, by which men, who have once attained a commanding position, are enabled to apply their constructive or speculative genius to undertakings vaster, and extending over a wider area, than ever before’. In the case of the arts, [Marshall] observed that ‘there was never a time at which moderately good oil paintings sold more cheaply than now and at which first rate paintings sold so dearly.’” That picture has not changed much today: “The earnings gradient has become tilted in favour of superstars. It is not just communication; it is also globalisation that has extended the scale of the market.”⁷⁷

Although scalability is not new, there is something to be said about the year 1980. Before 1980, the period between World War II and the late 1970s, for instance, saw little change in inequality overall. The change was quasi flat to a point that prompted the US economist Henry J. Aaron, as Atkinson quotes, to come up with a famous joke. For anyone following the income distribution in the United States, the exercise “‘was like watching the grass grow’. Then, in the 1980s, the grass shot up.” In the United States, as we shall see shortly, this was the ‘inequality turn’. “Between 1977 and 1992, the Gini coefficient rose by some 4.5 percentage points; and since 1992 it has increased by a further 3 points. Overall inequality is not back to the levels reached in the Jazz Age, but it is more than halfway there.”⁷⁸

It is as if when the Swedish pop group Abba released the hit song “The Winner Takes It All” in 1980, the group was echoing Nina Simone’s call for artists to reflect the times. The album’s release came in a year that would become a turning point for economic inequality. “Since 1980,” as the rockonomics scholar Alan Krueger writes, “more than 100 percent of the total growth in income in the United States has gone to the top 10 percent of families. A whopping two-thirds of all income gains have gone to the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 225.

⁷⁷ Atkinson 2015, pp. 107–108; Marshall 1920.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

top 1 percent. The bottom 90 percent saw their combined income actually shrink.”⁷⁹ When Krueger asks why trenches of the winner-take-all economics are so deep in our society now, he turns not to sectors like finance, or manufacturing, but to the arts—notably the music industry. “Studying the music industry,” he says, “helps shed light on one key factor: the role of superstar markets.” Taking us back to the late 19th century, Krueger echoes what Atkinson, Milanović and others have said. Additionally, he suggests that it was Alfred Marshall who launched the serious study of superstar economics.⁸⁰

Now, one may ask, can we really do much about the superstar phenomenon without hurting the field? There are various answers to that question. First, as Milanović explained, this is not all always just about hard work. Connections, in many cases, also matter. So even the most talented may not be the winners if they lack the connections to be in the spotlight in the first place. But since society is largely caught up in winner-take-all mindset, some parents, for example, may do their best to get access to hiring deciders, coaches and so on to get their children in a position to win.

To touch on sports, we certainly cannot declare two teams as winners in soccer, for instance, if one team has scored more approved goals. At the World Cup, we know that the cup will not be split into two, at least the way the game has been administered. It will go to the winner. But in such a team sport, without even debating how much ‘A’ players should make versus ‘B’ players, or the pay difference between men’s and women’s soccer teams, it is clear that playing well does not always lead to scoring more goals.

So, while the winner may get the prestige, could it be argued that questions should be asked about how to stop this from automatically translating into extreme income and wealth inequalities? After all, as Milanović and others point out, income differences between the top competitors are often “disproportionally large compared to any objective assessment of the differences in abilities,” as previously noted.⁸¹ In terms of ethics, moreover, one could ask whether the winner-take-all culture also promotes behaviour like that of the US cyclist Lance Armstrong, who relied on drugs to win contests at all costs.

There will always be stars. But while this issue is more complicated than we need to get into here, we should never forget that even such artists as Bach were not superstar earners, yet that never damaged

⁷⁹ Krueger 2019a.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Milanović 2016, p. 223. “It is often said that winner-take-all is one of the characteristics of current globalization. For it is only thus that massive income differences between people with approximately the same abilities can be explained. As in tennis, a tiny difference in skill level is sufficient to make one person number one in the world, earning millions, and the other person number 150, covering the costs out of his own (or more likely his parents’) pocket in order to participate in tournaments. A useful way to visualize the winner-take-all rule is to think of the scalability of different jobs” (Milanović 2016, p. 223).

their creative genius as far as history can tell—although that should not also broadly mean that artists have to starve to be creative.⁸²

THE GREAT CRESCENDO OF SUPERSTAR INCOMES

The development of new communications technology, starting with the telegraph, as previously discussed, explains the great crescendo of income for superstar businesspeople compared to everyone else. Connecting the United Kingdom with the United States, India with Australia, the telegraph allowed the tentacles of savvy entrepreneurs to reach vast markets. As their tentacles stretched from continent to continent, the moguls were able to earn income that was nothing less than super in size.⁸³

Ironically, whereas Marshall used the pay scale between moderate and first-rate paintings to explain the superstar income phenomenon, when it came to music, he saw things differently. According to Krueger, “he used music as a counterexample, a profession where superstar effects were limited.” To explain his point, Marshall turned to the great British opera singer Elizabeth Billington. It was unlikely, he argued, for any singer to “make an advance on the £10,000 said to have been earned in a season by Mrs. Billington” at the dawn of the previous century as long as their audience reach was limited. With the inability to reach large audiences, their work was non-scalable, and hence limited in the race to superstardom.⁸⁴

Another point that must be noted concerns imperfect substitutes. Imperfect substitution in this case means that each superstar is unique in style and skills. And to create a superstar market, you need scale and uniqueness to perform in duo.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, while it is indisputable that technology can augment scale, who decides on uniqueness? The question of who decides is a complex one across the board. Indeed, as Sanjay Reddy has argued, citing Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, “Individual attitudes, preferences, and values are most often profoundly social in origin.”⁸⁶ “Anyone’s authority,” as Thomas Schultz and François Ost add, “rests on our collective and thus individual belief

⁸² As Toni Morrison said, “We love so much the idea of the struggling artists that we enfranchise not the artists, but the struggle. In fact, we insist on it.” Morrison was once perturbed when she “spoke to an extremely gifted and well-established artist who told [her] he vetoed a living for a fellow artist because he thought having so much money would undermine the recipient—hurt his work—and that the applicant was ‘too good to receive such a financial windfall.’ To me the shock of that revelation is that, in some quarters, it is not shocking at all” (Morrison 2019, pp. 58, 64–65).

⁸³ Krueger 2019a.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Reddy 1994, pp. 24, 29; see also Kymlicka 1991 and 1989. Here Reddy brings in what he calls ‘separable’ and ‘non-separable’ functionings (see Sen 1995, pp. 4–5 for a definition of functionings cited earlier). “The functioning of being able to speak freely,” Reddy explains, “is an example of a ‘separable’ functioning which may be valued for the particular social relationships it makes possible.” (For a formal definition of this, see Appendix 1 in Reddy 1994.) Meanwhile, in a situation where a person “may, for example, easily be imagined to value living in a society which has certain features (such as for example, a particular mode of governance, a particular method of meting out justice, a particular degree of diversity of political ideas, or a particular degree of mutual religious tolerance),” that would be called a ‘non-separable’ functioning (Reddy 1994, pp. 23–24). In our context, those particulars may involve valuing a certain mode of cultural expression (or even playing a piano duet, an act involving making music with another person, for example).

in it,” as we shall see later.⁸⁷ So are these solo decisions or ‘social individual’ decisions? Since artistic taste especially can be subjective, that question deserves more research. Whatever the case, as noted earlier, scale magnifies uniqueness, which in turn escalates incomes. Although they are just ‘slightly more talented’ than the next-best competitors, those at the top enjoy a much bigger piece of the pie—supposedly because their ‘genius’ can penetrate greater markets.⁸⁸

It has been argued that lower entry costs as well as streaming and computerized music production technology have made the music industry more egalitarian, as Krueger notes. “But as far as artists’ incomes are concerned it is becoming more and more unequal.”⁸⁹ And if more and more artists are relying on live performances, then the issues of travel and visa requirements can have huge implications for a variety of artists who may be marginalized for a number of reasons, including their countries of origin.⁹⁰ Should we be surprised if, besides income, this takes a toll on cultural exchanges and cultural diversity?

Let us now modulate to a different arts medium, which, like music, is one of the technologies of remembering in daily life: photography.⁹¹ Unlike the performing arts, empirical investigations in this medium are rare.

Case study: gender inequality in photography

WHY PHOTOGRAPHY?

We live and come to understand our world through language. The establishment of that thought, according to Gerald John Davey in his “Understanding Photographic Representation,” came via the “linguist turn” in the philosophy of the early 20th century. That, however, is not the end of the story. That same philosophy established another vital observation: We create our world, the world we inhabit, through language.⁹² If music is a universal language, and a picture is worth a thousand words, then that implies that language incorporates more than written and verbal signs. It also incorporates media and artefacts, areas in which human beings not only create but also share meaning.⁹³

⁸⁷ Schultz and Ost 2018, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Krueger 2019a.

⁸⁹ Ibid. See also Timberg 2015. Details are not repeated here, as besides elsewhere, they are treated in Kabanda 2016c and Erickson 2015 in response to Johnson 2015.

⁹⁰ For details on labour migration, see Trachtman 2009. See also Kabanda 2018, pp. 128–137, where the creation of an Artist Visa and Pearlman’s Cultural Exchange Free Trade Agreement are discussed.

⁹¹ Pickering and Keightley 2015.

⁹² Davey 1992, p. 1.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 1–2.

In our contemporary world, when it comes to communicating, creating and sharing meaning, there is no doubt that photographic images are increasingly playing a central role.⁹⁴ Though the advent of digital technologies may have killed the Kodak film camera, the omnipresence of digital phones with cameras means that today many more people are engaging in photography.⁹⁵

What is more, the consumption of these images is likely to be expanding. This is because the photograph, unlike verbal and written communication, can convey a message to people across different educational levels⁹⁶ and across different languages. Above all, “the photograph shows us what we want to see, what we would not otherwise see, and even what we don’t want to see,” as Davey said. “For most of us, photographic seeing is still believing.”⁹⁷

Given that, gender inequality in the photography industry deserves scrutiny. This certainly matters because of fairness. But it also matters because, if the arts are often a portrait of our lives, as Karole Armitage put it, and the art of photography is among the languages that shape our world, no language can effectively communicate societal ills if it is itself corrupted by questionable behaviour. As Muhammad Yunus and others have argued, moreover, it does not help to just have our world depicted in a male view; female views also matter.⁹⁸

To consider what has been happening, first of all, in modern communication, as described earlier, images are central and vital. Yet the photographers who make, process and disseminate professional pictures from day to day have seldom been studied. “Who are they, where and how do they work, what rewards do they receive, and what problems and risks do they receive?”⁹⁹

Those questions were the motivation behind a 2015 report based on a survey of more than 1,500 photographers, particularly photojournalists.¹⁰⁰ From Armenia to Viet Nam, the participants came from more than 100 countries and territories. Conducted by the University of Stirling, World Press Photo and Oxford University’s Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, the report was the first global study of its kind. The key findings do not just focus on gender, yet they invite us to zoom in with a gender lens. When we ask, who are the photographers, how do they work, where, how are they compensated, and what difficulties and risks do they face,¹⁰¹ here is what we find (Table 1):

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ See Mobile Photography Awards. n.d. and Gray 2012 for related discussions.

⁹⁶ Davey 1992, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁸ It should certainly not be taken as a given that the male view of world is the ‘default’ value. See Yunus 2007, pp. 54–55. This point is also discussed in Kabanda 2018, Chapter 7.

⁹⁹ Hadland et al. 2015, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ The survey was conducted online as the participants entered the 2015 World Press Photo Contest.

¹⁰¹ Hadland et al. 2015.

TABLE 1**Employment category by gender, for news photographers only**

	Male	Female	Total
Self-employed	46.6 percent	72 percent	49.6 percent
Employed on long-term contract	36.2 percent	17 percent	33.9 percent
Other employment arrangement	17.2 percent	11 percent	16.5 percent
Number	861	118	979

Cramer's V = 0.167, p = 0.000.

Source: Hadland et al. 2015, p. 22.

News photography is male-dominated; 85 percent of the respondents in the study were male.¹⁰² But it is striking to see that, as reported in Table 1, females make up 72 percent of news photographers who are self-employed. Should this not be surprising? When it comes to news photographers with long-term employment contracts, men, at over 36 percent, enjoy that security at a rate more than twice that of their female counterparts at 17 percent. This certainly indicates “greater long-term stability in the job for male, news-oriented photographers.”¹⁰³

In the industry as a whole, the picture does not change much. See Table 2.

TABLE 2**Employment by gender, photographic industry**

	Male	Female
Self-employed	55.9 percent	79.2 percent
Employed on long-term contract	27.5 percent	10.2 percent
Other employment arrangement	16.6 percent	10.6 percent
<u>Total number</u>	1,318	236

Cramer's V = 0.174, p=0.000.

Source: Hadland et al. 2015, p. 24.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 6. This obviously does not make these men ‘evil’, but it is a statistic worth noting.

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 21–22.

“The rate of self-employment is clearly much higher among the 236 women photographers included in the study, than it is for men, while long-term contracts are also far more scarce.”¹⁰⁴ The scarcity of that finding is substantiated by the fact that men were more likely to be employed by large media organizations compared to women, at 22 percent for men versus 7 percent for women.¹⁰⁵

For those women who worked for large organizations, furthermore, work assignments came by less often than for men. And the likelihood of having only one job but working only part-time was the picture of their day.¹⁰⁶

Usage of photographs without permission and payment is widespread. This matters in many ways, especially regarding the issue of copyright in today’s digital age. Nonetheless, if the rate at which this happens is over 72 percent for self-employed photographers, even if this is marginal compared to the 70.8 percent in the employee category,¹⁰⁷ then this means that women (who lead in this self-employed category), are more likely to bear the brunt of this behaviour.

Generally speaking, many photographers do not make big salaries. That said, women dominate the lower income bracket (less than \$29,999); in the higher income bracket (\$60,000+), there are fewer women than men.¹⁰⁸ We are not talking about millions of dollars common in executive pay and other superstar domains. The income gap here nevertheless is also glaring: “more women earned less than \$9,999 (42 percent) compared to men (3 percent), and many more men (5 percent) earn \$80,000 or more, compared to 1.5 percent of women.”¹⁰⁹

There is always a concern, especially in our age of sound bites, that such reports end up gathering dust in cabinets and are never read. This report, however, was picked up by publications like *Time Magazine*. In her article “New Study Shows Gender Inequality in Photojournalism Is Real,” Rachel Lowry reported that the situation is not due to a female effort deficit:

While the underlying causes remain illusory, the study suggested that their situation might not be due to a lack of effort. Of the 236 women photographers who participated in the study, 82 percent said they were university educated, compared to 69 percent of males. They were also more engaged in social media, with 76 percent of them thinking the activity was important, compared to 61 percent of males. The study also found that they are more versatile, in terms of technology use, such as video and multimedia.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Hadland et al. 2015, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ Lowry 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Hadland et al. 2015, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰⁹ Lowry 2015.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

But that versatility in technology also comes with a cost.¹¹¹ On matters relating to psychological effects, the study found that among women respondents the degree of stress induced by expenditure and ever-changing ‘image-oriented’ technology, for instance, was considerable. No wonder female photographers were slightly less sanguine about the future of photography than their male counterparts.¹¹² In any case, there are other issues at play.

According to the photojournalist Melissa Golden, we should not be surprised if female journalists are stressed out about their future: “We hear stories about our colleagues whose pregnancies rendered them radioactive.” One would think that such language has nothing to do with pregnancies, given their connection to the conception of human life. All the same, when clients discover that a woman is pregnant, “assignments dry up, it never gets much better,” as Golden goes on to say. “There are constant threats of sexual harassment and violence, often with no [human resources] department to appeal to. We’re surrounded by damaging and diminishing words and actions.”¹¹³ That is strong language. Nevertheless, since such unfortunate words and actions have not reached the point of diminishing returns, let us turn to another issue Golden brings up: sexual harassment.

UNWANTED ADVANCES ARE CERTAINLY UNWANTED

In July 2018, *The Columbia Review of Journalism* published a special report entitled “Photojournalism’s moment of reckoning.” The report, a culmination of a five-month investigation into sexual harassment in photojournalism, and based on interviews with more than 50 people, was shocking: It “described behavior from editors and colleagues that ranged from assault to unwanted advances to comments on their appearance or bodies when they were trying to work,” the report’s author, Kristen Chick, said. “And now, as the #MeToo moment has prompted change across a range of industries—from Hollywood to broadcasting—photojournalists are calling for their own moment of reckoning.”¹¹⁴

There is no doubt that there is always another side of the story. But while it is one thing to hear of a rare, isolated incident, it is another to hear multiple accusations, where Weinsteinian episodes are tolerated as if they are the modus operandi. Chick has this to add: “Women interviewed by *The Columbia Review of Journalism* say two well-known photographers—Antonin Kratochvil and Christian Rodriguez—engaged in serial harassment and that VII, a prestigious collective, and the Eddie Adams Workshop ignored complaints of harassment.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ As the online communities researcher Katherine Lo has argued, even such ‘invisible labour’ as interacting with fans may not only contribute to occupational stress, but also to post-traumatic stress disorder. See Parkin 2018 and Ward et al. 2017.

¹¹² Lowry 2015.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Chick 2018.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

The behaviour is so common that many women have long considered it a reality dancing side by side with other realities of working in the profession as a woman. This observation, in a way, asks us to zoom back to Sen’s observation: “Indeed, in terms of a strategy for living, it may make a lot of sense to come to terms with an ineradicable adversity, to try to appreciate small breaks, and to resist pining for the impossible or the improbable.”¹¹⁶ But why is this the case here? Chick observes that the problem is multidimensional, rooted in several factors:¹¹⁷

The field has historically been male-dominated with a culture that glorifies macho, hyper-masculine behavior; there is an increasing reliance on freelancers, which affects accountability; workshops and other events for young photographers are often exploited by older, established photojournalists.¹¹⁸

All the while “women photojournalists say publications, institutions, agencies, and industry leaders have turned a blind eye. What’s the point of reporting harassment, these women say, when no one is listening? From the perspective of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “urgency of intersectionality,” as Chick goes on to say, for women of colour the portrait is likely to even be bleaker:¹¹⁹

Women of colour are particularly vulnerable targets for harassment, both because they are less likely to be included in the so-called whisper networks used by women in the industry to warn each other about harassers, and because, as an already marginalized population, they have more to lose by speaking out. “I do think that when these stories do come out, there’s more of a willingness to believe these experiences when they’re coming from a white woman, there’s more of an inclination to protect them, than there are for women of color,” says Danielle Scruggs, senior photo editor at ESPN’s *The Undefeated*.¹²⁰

A number of women in the study mention things that are difficult to believe. The tales, some highly graphic, even though some of the behaviour was public, include the following: A man, “out of the blue,” asking a woman to lift her shirt to show her whatever; a man, “without warning,” sliding his hand behind a woman’s behind to touch her private parts; a man pressuring women to pose for nude or erotic photos. The main culprits again include superstar male photographers. But who are these women?

That question might trigger another one, a question of data—supposedly because the numbers will tell us the magnitude of the problem. But first, some women of course do not speak up or devise a strategy

¹¹⁶ Sen 1995, pp. 6–7.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

that suggests that everything is fine.¹²¹ In effect, when you hear stories like that of a New York photo editor who was forced to leave her job after nothing was done about her bullying and harassment complaints, why bother to speak up?¹²² The option not to speak up, however, does not of course render the problem nil. Furthermore, in a world that runs on knowledge, what society also misses is the valuable information, however nauseating, that might engender meaningful policy shifts, yet remains buried in what is left unsaid, and hence what is undone. In a way, this might be called another form of ‘information asymmetry’.

Second, some women choose to remain anonymous. Yet that, too, does not solve the problem, because it is most likely that anonymity concerns the economic calculus of job security, not the human guarantee of protection from abuse. Inversely, as one photojournalist from New York, who spoke to Chick (2018) but asked to remain anonymous, put it, by not naming the abusers, “anonymity equals protection” of the abusers. “Why are we protecting these guys?” she asked. “Why are their reputations and their careers more important than the safety of my colleagues and the advancement of my friends in this industry?”¹²³

We must recall that although economics and statistics have yet to immerse themselves in culture, areas like diplomacy, negotiation, conflict resolution, dispute settlement and even international trade remind us that many cultures deal with concerns differently. Clearly, in instances where it is extremely risky to challenge the status quo, women from different cultures might approach the problem in different ways difficult to capture objectively in numbers, particularly when it comes to such private affairs. So, while economic metrics might give us something to count, and even allow us to subitize numbers on income gaps, feelings like fear or shame, exhibited by the women who stay silent or anonymous, are another form of inequality that remains uncounted.

At any rate, some women who were interviewed in the study gave their names. They include Lina Botero, Violeta Capasso, Sara Hylton, Melissa Golden, Federica Gonzalez, Kirra, Sarah Leen, Amanda Mustard, Sarah Pabst, Carmela Perez, Isadora Romero, Andrea Sarcos, Stephanie Sinclair, Anastasia Taylor-Lind and Erin Trieb.¹²⁴ It remains to be seen whether these women will escape retaliation in all its forms.

THE WAY FORWARD

As noted earlier, photography is a major language in which we create our world. The people who have shed light on sexual harassment in photojournalism are not out there to prostitute this language.

¹²¹ Ibid., pp. 6–7.

¹²² Chick 2018.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Rather, they are there to make sure that this language, so dear, so universal, is not stuck in the abyss of gender bias. Here is what has happened since this problem “was catapulted into the open.”¹²⁵

- In 2014, for first time, the Eddie Adams Workshop, which has been in existence for more than three decades, “required all participants to sign a code of conduct that declares a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment.” Meanwhile, the storied photo agency VII, which was founded in 2001, has a new code of ethics concerning its mentorship and workshop programmes. And National Geographic, another organization that has not escaped this quagmire, released a statement saying that it “takes seriously and addresses all complaints of sexual harassment.”¹²⁶
- Such steps, at least for now, have meant some consequences for the accused: Patrick Witty, a major photographer at the centre of accusations, left National Geographic and was also not invited back to the Eddie Adams Workshop. Prime, a global collective of seven photographers that “once uplifted” Christian Rodriguez “quietly kicked him out,” and he is “no longer working with” National Geographic. Antonin Kratochvil’s membership at the VII agency, where he enjoyed the title of emeritus member, was suspended.¹²⁷

Whether such action will bear long-term fruits remains to be seen. But at a minimum, for the photojournalists who have decided to speak out online, for one, this might show that their efforts are not futile. For without the gatekeeper’s support, they also remain vulnerable. That view notwithstanding, Daniella Zalcman, founder of Women Photograph, is correct to assert that banning offenders is not enough. This “practice simply allows offenders to continue their abuse in other venues.” There is therefore a need to take a public stand against the offenders and the harassment, as Zalcman suggests.¹²⁸ This is particularly important regarding Chick’s conclusion, which echoes a point made earlier:

The effects of sexual harassment are wide-ranging, pushing some women out of the field and causing others to stop attending photo festivals, workshops, or networking events. Some women say they stopped seeking out mentors because they experienced so much harassment when they did, even as they described a dearth of female mentors in the field. Others say they’re disgusted by the hypocrisy of working in a field that claims to shine a light on abuses or wrongdoing in the world, while protecting predators in their own industry.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Finally, this also brings up the issue of trauma. The paradox here, of course, is that the arts can be both a source of trauma as well as a medium to address trauma.¹³⁰ That point aside, Melissa Golden notes that although everyone reacts to trauma differently, that does not render some traumas unpreventable. Preventing preventable traumas here would mean that photography does not lose incredibly talented women who are deemed unable to deal with sexual harassment. “We’ve got to stop blaming the women, and blame the harassers and demand better behavior and better treatment,” she said.¹³¹

More will be said in the policy options section. For now, let us consider cultural inequality, an issue that can pierce the soul of cultural diversity. Although the analysis here is brief, the subject merits attention that ought to be carried on beyond this appraisal.

On inequality in global cultural representation

Our cultures are being reduced little by little to nothing. These technologies have no passport and no visa, but they are affecting us and shaping us.

—Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Burkinabé historian, politician and writer¹³²

One little-known fact in the world of international commerce is this: Culture was at the heart of one of the earliest WTO disputes. The dispute, between Canada and the United States, involved Canada’s importation of magazines from the United States.¹³³ Canada has long been wary of its large neighbour’s influence on its soil. Perhaps nowhere is that sentiment better summed up than in a 1969 speech the former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau delivered at the Press Club in Washington: “Living next to you,” he said, “is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I may call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt. Even a friendly nuzzling can sometimes lead to frightening consequences.”¹³⁴

Those frightening consequences involve the fear that the relentless cultural dominance of the United States will crowd out Canadian culture. Consequently, this would affect not only Canadian artists, but also Canadian identity. Canada has therefore responded by enacting measures to curb this threat. In

¹³⁰ For example, on the former, see Parkin 2018; on the latter, see Dalley, ed. 1984; De Botton and Armstrong 2016; and Kabanda 2018, Chapter 8.

¹³¹ Chick 2018.

¹³² Mataire 2015.

¹³³ Lester et al. 2008, pp. 832–833.

¹³⁴ *The Hill Times* 2004.

the magazine case, the measures ran from restrictions on foreign magazines to “special taxes” on so-called split-run periodicals.¹³⁵

All told, the United States won the case at the WTO. For the absence of explicit exceptions for culture meant that the panel and the WTO Appellate Body would narrowly focus on the United States’ claims on the grounds of trade liberalization, not on Canada’s concerns over cultural identity. But things did not end there. In the eyes of some worried about the WTO’s lack of any specific exception on cultural matters, as Simon Lester and others note in *World Trade Law*, this prompted the need to propose an explicit provision for culture in trade rules. Among those concerned was Catherine Trautmann, the French Minister of Culture at that point. Here is an excerpt from her 1999 speech on the European Commission’s mandate to “preserve the cultural exception:”¹³⁶

The cultural exception is thus the rule and should remain so, the large majority of countries considering that we are not in the presence of an item of merchandise like any other. The notion of cultural diversity is not being substituted for that of exception.... “Cultural exception” is thus, in my eyes, the non-negotiable means of reaching the objective of cultural diversity.

The expression of “cultural diversity” is more recent. It is the fruit of reflection within the framework of UNESCO, ever since the conference in Stockholm in 1998. This new notion is positive, expressing the desire to preserve all cultures in the world, and not only our own culture, from the risks of uniformity.¹³⁷

Any objective assessment of Trautmann’s reasoning is likely to concur that without preserving the world’s cultures—and the arts are absolutely a major part of this territory—we risk uniformity that can squash global cultural diversity. At one level, because uniformity “means adjusting practice to create similarities at a large scale,” it is different from homogeneity, as interpreted by the distinguished British historian C. A. Bayly. Fashion and advertising are partly responsible for the trend towards uniformity.¹³⁸

“Uniformity registered an intellectual change in the aspirations of the self as much as it did the expansion of industry and empire.”¹³⁹ Can this be deducted from propelling a kind of cultural monopoly that induces inequity in cultural diversity? Whereas it would be unreasonable to say that people from country ‘A’ should not be allowed to consume culture from country ‘B’, it is also

¹³⁵ Lester et al. 2008, pp. 832–833. In this case, ‘split run’ magazines are foreign-owned periodicals that are printed as a second edition in Canada in order to qualify as ‘Canadian’ (ibid.). But perhaps the keyword here is ‘foreign-owned’. Whether Canada’s actions were disingenuous or not, that is a topic for another day.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 833.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 836. See also UNESCO n.d. For more on culture diversity, at least in the context of the United Kingdom’s film industry, see Malik 2013 and Moody 2017b.

¹³⁸ Bayly 2004, pp. 14–16.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

unreasonable to say that country ‘A’ should have a monopoly on a global cultural presence, because it has better values, for instance. That line of thought brings up the unsettling issue of inequality in global cultural dominion.

Yet that does not seem to bother some. Consider what David Rothkop had to say: “The United States dominates this global traffic in information and ideas. American music, American movies, American television, and American software are so dominant, so sought after, and so visible that they are now available literally everywhere on the Earth. They influence the tastes, lives, and aspirations of virtually every nation.” He goes on to say, “In some, they are viewed as corrupting. France and Canada have both passed laws to prohibit the satellite dissemination of foreign—meaning American—content across their borders and into the homes of their citizens.”¹⁴⁰

There is no question that in many countries, from music to movies, cultural content from the United States is sought like a hot cake. Nonetheless, if we care to examine the ingredients that make up this cake, is this interest truly organic? The United States, as noted earlier, has insistently projected itself as the Promised Land, with the celebrity culture and consumerism adding to this mix.¹⁴¹ Inadvertently, many people are likely to be attracted to the United States because they are led to believe that it is a true paradise.

This image in fact might be one reason to explain why so many immigrants are flooding to the United States.¹⁴² There is no doubt that it has much to offer. This, however, does not mean that it has figured out how to deal with problems like unacceptable levels of poverty in such a rich country, ballooning health-care costs, toxic politics oiled by big money, perpetual student debt, the alarming opioid crisis, widening income gaps, a justice system that appears tilted to serve the rich and punish the poor,¹⁴³ endless gun violence and even human isolation.¹⁴⁴ This is not to say that these problems are absent in other countries. But the image many people tend to have about the United States is akin to that of the Garden of Eden.

A great number of people in the United States have been led to believe this also. Often, those who call out its failings are accused of being unpatriotic. But even those who believe the Garden is perfectly manicured cannot ignore its crumbling infrastructure. This has reached the point that, in *Losing Our*

¹⁴⁰ Rothkop 1997.

¹⁴¹ On a related note, see Wu 2019.

¹⁴² This is also the case with many Africans risking their lives to cross the Sahara and the Mediterranean to go to Europe in search of greener pastures. In any case, obviously not everyone wants to go to Europe or to the United States.

¹⁴³ See Stevenson 2012 and 2014.

¹⁴⁴ See Holt-Lunstad et al. 2016. See also Nguyen 2020.

Way, Herbert tellingly suggests that the “increasingly dire state of the nation’s physical plant” is a “metaphor for the widespread deterioration of American society.”¹⁴⁵

Whatever the case, as noted earlier, some WTO agreements like the TRIPS treaty are partly a result of aggressive lobbying by companies in the United States—the entertainment industry was part of that orchestration. If such treaties help create rents that “are the source of so much of today’s inequality” as Stiglitz has argued,¹⁴⁶ then the issue of the cultural dominance of the United States (or any other country for that matter) is not just about culture for culture’s sake; it also translates into immense commercial power.

In that sense, if we allow that “where culture leads trade follows,”¹⁴⁷ then cultural exports from the United States are not just about exporting its values divorced from commerce.¹⁴⁸ They are also about its interests, notably seen in the corporate sector, in dominating global commerce, which increasingly seems non quid pro quo. For the more people are enticed by the United States, the more they are likely not only to want to attend schools there, but also to buy its products or buy into its consumerism, *inter alia*.¹⁴⁹ In the cultural domain, the superstars in the movie and music industries, for instance, are likely to gain immensely as their output penetrates markets in all corners of the globe. But we should not forget that the same superstars are used to advertise products that may have to do nothing with the arts, yet their perceived attachment to these items means a lot to consumers, and hence means a lot of money.

HOLLYWOOD: ‘THE LITTLE STATE DEPARTMENT’?¹⁵⁰

With mega-studios, including Disney, Fox, Paramount, Sony, Universal and Warner Brothers, Hollywood enjoys a prominent place in the global film industry. Its global market dominance can be attributed to several factors, ranging from its “inherent popular appeal” to the vast exhibition and distribution networks it controls. When it comes to absorbing financial losses, what is more, it has the

¹⁴⁵ Herbert 2014, pp. 12–13.

¹⁴⁶ Stiglitz 2013, p. 176.

¹⁴⁷ “Raising the profile of a country’s culture in foreign lands may also be an element in a wider trade agenda,” as David Throsby has argued. See Throsby 2010, p. 52; Kabanda 2018. A variant of this phrase, ‘trade follows the film’ (Lowry 1925, p. 12) was popularly but wrongly attributed to King Edward VIII (later Prince Edward, Duke of Windsor). Moreover, he used it in a 1923 speech before the British National Film League. But, according to Bill Grantham in his book *Some Big Bourgeois Brothel*, Frank Joseph Marion, who headed the New York-based Kalem Film Company, had, in the context of education and instructional films, used the phrase in 1918: “Trade follows the film. The projection of industrial pictures, backed by distribution of the product advertised, will create an immediate outlet for goods of American manufacture” (Grantham 2000, pp. 54, 69, as cited in Thompson 1985, p. 122). Thompson meanwhile cites “Business in War Time,” *Collier’s Weekly* 1918, p. 26 and Hill 1919, p. 54. She adds: “‘Trade follows the film’ became a sort of slogan after [World War I]; for example, see [Will H.] Hays’ use of it in a 1927 lecture given at Harvard, in ‘Supervision From Within’, in Kennedy [1927, 38]” (Thompson 1985, p. 187).

¹⁴⁸ Elteren 2003.

¹⁴⁹ For example, see *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Lee 2008; Moody 2017a.

ability¹⁵¹ (or rather the wiliness) to do so proficiently. Indeed, although the global box office is estimated to be worth around \$40 billion,¹⁵² that figure jumps more than threefold to \$130 billion for the global film industry's worth when box office and home entertainment revenues are combined.¹⁵³ It remains unclear how much Hollywood's share is.

This is because, whereas most corporations try to make a profit by minimizing costs, in the so-called Hollywood economics or Hollywood accounting, as Derek Thompson has concluded, things are more artful: "Movie corporations manage to record a loss by maximizing costs."¹⁵⁴ Is it doubtful that this has implications when the taxman cometh? In any case, of the \$11.9 billion North American movie studios garnered in 2018 globally, Disney alone took in \$7.33 billion.¹⁵⁵ The success of Disney and Hollywood at large might be attributed to the 'free market', a concept often associated with the United States, even in the cultural context. But again, this market does not work as if by an invisible hand. The United States, for one, led the fight for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) concerning not only media and communications, but also cultural activities.¹⁵⁶

Considering the powers it would have had, the MAI was "even more far-reaching in its implications for clipping the wings of governments," according to the distinguished political scientist and MIT professor Suzanne Berger. "This accord would have obliged its signatories to treat foreign investment like domestic investment and would have constrained the regulatory options of governments at all levels."¹⁵⁷ The MAI, which began in 1995 and was negotiated in secret, was defeated in 1998 by a coalition of local and transnational groups.¹⁵⁸ Whether another version of the MAI will take place or not remains to be seen.¹⁵⁹ But according Paul Moody, WikiLeaks has shed light on another area: the present nature of state support for Hollywood.

"As early as 1916, US embassies were reporting to the State Department on the opportunities for American movies in the world film market, with the advent of the First World War realizing Hollywood's global importance in terms of both its economic and political impact. This information would in turn be relayed to the Hollywood studios," as Moody cites from Kevin Lee's article "The Little

¹⁵¹ Moody 2017c.

¹⁵² As of 2018, it was estimated at \$41.7 billion. See McNary 2019.

¹⁵³ As of 2018. See IBISWorld 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson 2011. See also Kabanda 2018, p. 208.

¹⁵⁵ McNary 2019.

¹⁵⁶ Elteren 2003, p. 174. The treaty was negotiated between members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

¹⁵⁷ Berger 2000, p. 55.

¹⁵⁸ Elteren 2003, p. 174; Berger 2000, p. 55.

¹⁵⁹ Elteren 2003, p. 174.

State Department.”¹⁶⁰ This practice, which would become firmly entrenched by the 1920s, was part of a wider government agenda to establish Hollywood’s global dominance.¹⁶¹

In recent decades, Hollywood’s relationship with Washington has continued to grow from strength to strength. No wonder, to describe the industry, the epithet ‘Washwood’ nowadays enjoys frequent usage.¹⁶² Writing in the *SAIS Review*, Mel van Elteren provides his take: “The U.S. government has played an important role in promoting cultural exports, not only as a source of export income but also as a means of exporting beliefs, values, and practices that inherently favor U.S.-based corporate capitalism.”¹⁶³ As he adds, “All of this amounts to a marginalization of the cultural space for alternative versions of the good life and a better society.” Yet a capitalist culture, at least the way it is practised nowadays, “cannot really satisfy people’s needs for community involvement, personal development, and meaningful relationships.”¹⁶⁴

The current practice of capitalist culture brings up this paradox: Why is it that “at a time when we are better off than ever before in history, all too many of us are leading lives of quiet desperation?” Answers to that paradox are detailed in the Nobel economists George Akerlof and Robert Shiller’s book *Phishing for Phools*.¹⁶⁵ But if we have ‘superstars’, ‘superstar markets’ and ‘supereconomics’, we also have ‘supercapitalism’.

Supercapitalism, a kind of capitalism on steroids today, is a virulent strain of capitalism. As Robert B. Reich contends in his book *Supercapitalism*, it “produces better products and higher stock market returns but comes at the cost of inequality, uncertainty and a decline in democracy. This economic pressure cooker squeezes companies toward ruthless penny-pinching, decimates unions, degrades the environment and pushes government further into the pockets of lobbyists.”¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, people in the United States “devote far too little attention to these central issues of our day.” And while these debates are badly needed, as a whole, democracy in the United States, so often hailed as the global gold standard, seems incapable of having them. It is unlikely that the conclusion reached by Terry Burnham, who reviewed Reich’s book in the *Los Angeles Times* in 2007, around the time a mega-financial crisis was happening, has changed much today: “Most people know far more about Britney Spears’ belly than about Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke’s views on sub-prime loans.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Moody 2017a; Lee 2008.

¹⁶¹ Thompson 1985.

¹⁶² Moody 2017a.

¹⁶³ Elteren 2003, p. 174.

¹⁶⁴ Elteren 2003, pp. 181–182.

¹⁶⁵ Akerlof and Shiller 2015. See also Brueggemann 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Burnham 2007; Reich 2008. See also Greenhouse 2019; Madrick 2020 and Reich 2020.

¹⁶⁷ Burnham 2007. For a related discussion, see Andersen 2017.

Even under the current context, although Frances Stoner Saunders's *Who Paid the Piper?* exposed some aspects of state support for Hollywood that were clandestine for decades,¹⁶⁸ here is the thing: Most people are likely to know far more about the private matters of superstars like Britney Spears or Beyoncé than such public matters as the United States' global lobbying hand for Hollywood, and hence acknowledge and reflect upon the complexity and ramifications of such behaviour. This is because, as Moody says, little attention has been given to the support Hollywood receives from the US State Department, using its network of more than 270 embassies across the world. But scholars now have an opportunity to examine in detail how the Government supports Hollywood's global market power, thanks to the 2010 WikiLeaks dissemination of more than 250,000 US diplomatic cables.¹⁶⁹ Moody identified four ways in which US State Department embassies support Hollywood:

1. Embassies function as scouts, gathering data about the political, social, and economic conditions in countries that Hollywood has, or may have, a business stake in.
2. Embassies promote audiovisual free trade agreements that are heavily weighted in Hollywood's favor.
3. Embassies monitor Hollywood's intellectual property rights enforcement or violation in other countries.
4. Embassies attempt to influence the political and business leaders of other countries to embrace Hollywood's interests via training programs, equipment donations, and lobbying.¹⁷⁰

By intervening to tilt the market in favour of the United States, Moody alleges, the Government often circumvents its own 'free trade' chant. That is not difficult to see when one considers points from Moody's research: In India, where Bollywood is the world's largest movie producer today (in terms of volume), "cultural nationalism of the Indian screen industry" and "fiercely domestic" features were considered a barrier to Hollywood. So, as the cables reveal, Jawahar Sharma, the chief operating officer of India's largest film company, Reliance Entertainment, counselled thus: Instead of "aggressively marketing existing Hollywood productions in India, the studios should seek Indian filmmakers to remake productions in Hindi, claiming that if the United States was to succeed in India, the studios had to "re-orient their strategies, rescind control and empower local people."¹⁷¹

But even in places like Tajikistan where the movie industry is fledgling, embassy scouting has been active. One cable "describes a dichotomy in the Tajik filmmaking community between older

¹⁶⁸ Moody, email message to the author, 19 February 2020; Saunders 2000.

¹⁶⁹ Moody 2017c. A lot has been said in the name of 'empowering' local people across the board without really much thought about the questionable use the word 'empower.'

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

filmmakers, who approached film as a hobby, and the younger generation, who saw this as a potential career and had ambitions to have their films screened outside of Tajikistan,” as Moody cites. “These younger filmmakers were said to ‘indicate an affinity for Hollywood blockbusters’ while ‘eschewing Tajik cultural influences’ (WikiLeaks, July 16, 2009: 09DUSHANBE855). Despite this, they were critical of the amount of violence in American cinema, and [the ‘film industry worker’ from Los Angeles, Jon] Green believed there to be many obstacles to the production of any Hollywood films in the country.”¹⁷²

Back in Canada, the cables depict “a tense, fractious U.S. relationship with Canada, predicated on what was regarded as the increasingly vexatious problem of Canada’s record of intellectual property rights violations.”¹⁷³ The issue of intellectual property is one of the most fractious debates in economic and social policy. But if we take a leaf from the great Chinua Achebe, and reflect on things from an Igbo philosophy, then we can appreciate this thought: “Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it.” Acknowledging this pluralism allows that, “If there is one point of view, fine. There will be a second point of view.”¹⁷⁴

In the intellectual property debate that would patently mean that besides opposing views, something else stands: the middle ground. So, if Canada’s violations are legitimate, they surely merit fair action.¹⁷⁵ In other cases, however, “countries that had developed cultural policy tools to protect the erosion of their indigenous film industries from audiovisual free trade (and Hollywood’s dominance) were subject to extra scrutiny and, often, direct intervention.”¹⁷⁶ Concerned people may want to know: What kind of interventions were these? But if we take Achebe to heart, where Hollywood stands, indigenous films stand beside it. To wit, if there is Hollywood, fine. There will be indigenous films also.

In her paper “Cultural globalization and the dominance of the American film industry,” Diana Crane makes the following observation: In the 2000s, UNESCO¹⁷⁷ adopted a Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression. Affirming the right of nations to enact policies that not only protect but also provide their cultural expression, the Convention recognized the cultural exception,¹⁷⁸ which, as we saw earlier, leaders like the former French cultural minister Catherine Trautmann championed. The Convention had ardent support from Europe, France in particular. The

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Appiah. Foreword in Achebe 2017, pp. ix–x; Achebe 2017 and 1988.

¹⁷⁵ Even so, given that intellectual property protection has been key in tilting the market in Hollywood’s favour, and thus entrenching inequalities identified here, this claim warrants further scrutiny. For there is certainly a case to be made that intellectual property rights enforcement is “unnecessary and disproportionate,” as Moody put it, “considering the vast sums that are remitted to the US from foreign countries each year which consume US entertainment” (Moody, email message to the author, 19 February 2020).

¹⁷⁶ Moody 2017c.

¹⁷⁷ UNESCO 2000; UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2005.

¹⁷⁸ Crane 2014; Jin 2008.

reaction of the United States, meanwhile, was nothing but a move to curb Europe's enthusiasm. The United States not only "refused to sign" the Convention, but also "vigorously lobbied against it."¹⁷⁹ Instead, it expanded its usage of one-to-one free trade agreements (FTAs) with other countries—these are designed to eliminate film quotas and promote global exports of US films.¹⁸⁰

"The American government's reaction to the UNESCO convention and its use of FTAs reflect the enormous importance that the American government attaches to its film industry," Crane cites. Indeed, as negotiations for the UNESCO Convention were taking place, the United States was busy doing something else: initiating FTAs with over 20 countries.¹⁸¹ Although the outcomes of the pressure to cut film quotas vary from country to country, what happened in Mexico in the early 1990s, for example, paints a bleak picture: Home-produced films nosedived from 100 in 1992 to 14 in 2003, and in 2009, Mexico's film market share was less than 8 percent. This decline, Crane suggests, was a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement Mexico signed with the United States in the 1990s, which had Mexico cut its film quotas.¹⁸² Who knows whether Mexico will get a better outcome with the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, but all this is to say:

FTAs have been interpreted as diminishing the cultural sovereignty of other countries and the rights of their citizens to enjoy locally created culture and employment in the industries that produce them (Breen 2010, p. 673). Breen states that FTAs are "driven not by human rights but by a powerful commitment from the US political apparatus and the US entertainment industry to take care of their own interests" through unfettered access to other markets.¹⁸³

In connection with the role of scalability in fostering inequality, as discussed earlier, we see that technology is not the sole agent here. But as Crane asks: Why do foreigners have a huge appetite for films from the United States? One possible answer is this: Hollywood content is tailored to attract foreign audiences. And here, the levels of action and fantasy, sex and violence, which can be visual rather than verbal, have enjoyed a mighty crescendo in Hollywood movies.¹⁸⁴ If we consider the issue of trade in value added, moreover, US films borrow motifs from home and abroad. This, we are told, is forming 'a culture of appropriation' that is also a stamp on music, literature and other forms of popular culture.¹⁸⁵ And so, as Hollywood copies ideas and idioms and makes them its own, if the outcome is not actual remakes, then it somehow forges a kind of identity, which is national inasmuch as it is 'transnational'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ Crane 2014; Jin 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Crane 2014.

¹⁸³ Crane 2014; Breen 2010.

¹⁸⁴ Crane 2014, p. 11.

¹⁸⁵ McCram 2010; cited in Crane 2014, p. 11.

¹⁸⁶ Pang 2005, 150; cited in Crane 2014, p. 11.

In recent years, there is word that China is buying Hollywood at a breakneck speed, prompting some members of the United States Congress to look into this issue.¹⁸⁷ Whether that venture is a threat or not remains to be seen. But since we have been talking about super this and super that, Crane adds to that lexicon the term ‘superproducers’. She argues that unlike minor producers (12 countries), medium producers (11 countries) and major producers (7 countries), superproducers (4 countries) are the superstars of movie production. She describes them this way: Superproducers are the countries that “produced over 400 films in 2009. The average market share of their films in their national markets was 74.3 percent.”¹⁸⁸

It is unusual that Nigeria’s Nollywood is not on the list. In any case, India tops that list followed by the United States, China and Japan.¹⁸⁹ When it comes to the percentage of market share, the United States is ahead, however. See Table 3 comparing the market share of European and United States films in seven countries. We should not be surprised that, inter alia, the Government of the United States is behind the dominance of US over European films. As former president of the Motion Picture Association of America Jack Valenti said: “Hollywood and Washington are ‘sprung from the same DNA’ (Alford, 2009, pp. 153–154).”¹⁹⁰

TABLE 3**Market shares of European and US films by country, 2009**

Country	Market share (percentage)	
	European films	US films
Argentina	5.5	82
Brazil	3.0	86
Mexico	3.0	81
India	2.0	10–12
Japan	5–9	50
Republic of Korea	3.0	47
United States	6.8	91.8

Sources: Crane 2014, p. 7; Commission of the European Communities (2009) quoted in De Vinck and Lindmark 2011; European Audiovisual Observatory 2010, pp. 19, 43. (NB: It is unclear whether this analysis includes such areas as Netflix and streaming services.)

¹⁸⁷ See Brzeski 2016 and Kokas 2017 as cited in Kabanda 2018, p. 19.

¹⁸⁸ See Crane 2014, p. 6, Table 2 for the complete list of countries here.

¹⁸⁹ This ranking may have changed since this list was compiled, but that does not take away the notion of super producers.

¹⁹⁰ Moody 2017c.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS PICTURE?

Note the comparative absence of European films in the United States. It is normally understood that one of the reasons indigenous films do not do well globally is because their countries lack the infrastructure and resources to promote their films abroad. There is truth to that. But perhaps that reason alone does not explain why European movies, for instance, have an insignificant market share in the United States.

One ramification of the Government of the United States' lobbying efforts for Hollywood abroad is this: It is likely that this approach also promotes economic inequality besides compromising cultural diversity. Since superstars enjoy most of the fruits of scalability, when a government creates avenues for superstar markets, ultimately the money reaped from these markets is likely to trickle up to those at the top and not down to those at the bottom. In a place where the tax system is beset with loopholes, moreover, it is unlikely that fair taxes on this income are paid.

All the while, public funding for the arts in the United States is meagre, arts education faces threats in many schools, and even such agencies as the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, agencies tasked to exalt the arts and humanities in public life, have miniscule budgets.¹⁹¹ That is the case compared to the United States' trillion-dollar GDP. You would think the glory and the money Hollywood brings in would change that, but if you are not talking about superstars that appears not to be the case. Hence the gross income inequality between 'mogul artists' and 'starving artist' is not absent in the rich United States. That is the case even when it comes to education access and participation between the haves and have-nots.

But one critical issue relating to cultural diversity is this: Even perceived cultural threats can ignite real cultural battles. In their article "Fuelling Terror," Stephen D. Reicher and S. Alexander Haslam note that among the reasons why even ordinary people are susceptible to inflicting harm is this: "Having others misperceive or deny a valued identity—an experience we describe as misrecognition—systematically provokes anger and cynicism toward authorities."¹⁹² In that sense, the white supremacists who commit terror, for instance, may perceive that they are being denied their identity. To them, while authorities may promote cultural diversity, the 'd word' could mean a threat. In broader cultural marginalization, on the other hand, even though Hollywood may have nothing to do with fuelling sentiment against the United States, Islamic fundamentalists, for example, may use this to claim how the United States undermines Muslim values.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ See Zubrzycki 2006. As the teacher strikes across the United States have shown, this problem is surely not limited to arts funding. See Sedgwick 2018.

¹⁹² Reicher and Haslam 2016. On a related discussion, see Nussbaum 2018.

¹⁹³ On a related observation, see Raghavan 2012.

In 2006, “Intelligence Squared U.S.” held an Oxford-style debate on “Hollywood and the Spread of Anti-Americanism.” Consider the two divergent opinions from the debate, which brought together six panellists, three for the motion “Hollywood fuels anti-Americanism” and three against the motion:

James Hirszen, author, news analyst and law professor, [said] that Hollywood’s cultural exports provide the primary lens through which foreigners view American culture. He argues that in the era of the John Wayne-cowboy spirit, this lens was beneficial. But he says that since movies such as *Midnight Cowboy*,¹⁹⁴ Hollywood has delivered a degrading image of the American spirit.

Richard Walter, a writer [and educator said] that, as with all art forms, there are many bad films and few good ones, and that Hollywood is, after all, a business. He argues that American cinema is loved overseas, and that the Iraq war and U.S. foreign policy are the primary reasons for anti-American sentiment.¹⁹⁵

The results: Before the debate, 40 percent agreed that “Hollywood fuels anti-Americanism,” 35 percent did not agree, and 25 percent did not know. After the debate, however, the results were practically reversed: 59 percent voted against the motion, 35 percent voted for it, and 6 percent were undecided.¹⁹⁶ It would be interesting to see what would happen if this debate was held, say, in France or Iraq. In any case, note Walter’s comment about Hollywood being a business. Business is certainly vital even in culture, and many countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere could do more to develop their cultural businesses. Yet that remark asks us to recall that culture is not ipso facto just about business. To promote cultural diversity, the ‘cultural exception’ Canada and France advocated is not meaningless.

Wole Akande concludes the debate this way: “[C]ultural globalization, or worldwide McDonaldization, destroys diversity and displaces the opportunity to sustain decent human life through an assortment of many different cultures. It is more a consequence of power concentration in the global media and manufacturing companies than the people’s own wish to abandon their cultural identity and diversity.”¹⁹⁷ If you compare Rothkop’s previous statement with Akande’s present conclusion, what more should be said?

¹⁹⁴ This film was directed by John Richard Schlesinger, an Englishman, who made other films that presented culture in the United States in a satirical way (Moody, email message to the author, 19 February 2020).

¹⁹⁵ Wellemeyer 2006.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Akande 2002.

Policy options

1. ON PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

When asked about the marketing power of the United States, which some say enables it to engage in the so-called global cultural ‘dumping’, and the WTO liberal trading regime, which others say is responsible, James D. Wolfensohn reflected on what he saw during his presidency of The World Bank from 1995 to 2005. The remark was in response to what African countries should do to tackle global cultural inequity:

“One of the disappointments to me was that the leadership of many African countries do not themselves support their cultures. They do not project their cultures. They would have a gathering in Washington to raise money for the country. But it will never occur to them to have before that some African songs, or bring some kids from school, or to have a dance team. ... They just don’t do it. Because they think it’s too expensive to bring someone over. And maybe if a guy made a hit in Hollywood they will use him.”¹⁹⁸

Part of the problem, he added, is that the countries themselves do not value culture enough. “It is not just a crime of the rich countries ... It is very easy to blame the rich people for not taking their medicine. But if you don’t present [your culture] proudly ... no one knows that the culture is vital, no one knows about the vibrancy of the country. And that’s a shame. I don’t know whether all the countries have cultural ministers. But if they do, I don’t think they meet together very much to project an African image.”¹⁹⁹

Although Wolfensohn’s analysis focuses on Africa, it speaks to the need for many countries to promote their culture in meaningful ways. For the unmet need here is unlikely to render a *felix culpa*. This will mean providing more resources and deference for agencies and ministries of culture, working with other agencies in a crosscutting manner, and meeting in regional and global forums, not just for the sake of meeting, but to come up with concrete ways to advance cultural diversity. This also applies to indigenous languages, which are dying at an alarming rate.²⁰⁰

Offering full-fledged courses and ample access to indigenous arts in school curricula is also much needed. Besides funding, steps to combat cultural marginalization cannot be taken in one direction alone; they must be numerous and integrated. This is an issue that probably needs a *Human Development Report* of its own, moreover. But it can be done. And it promises to be more effective than dwelling on blame, as blaming the United States has possibly reached diminishing returns.

¹⁹⁸ Wolfensohn, interview with author, 2013. See also Kabanda 2018.

¹⁹⁹ Wolfensohn 2013; Kabanda 2018.

²⁰⁰ International Year of Indigenous Languages 2019.

2. ON THE ‘CULTURAL EXCEPTION’

On the other hand, if the United States is more interested in pushing economic and political gain in cultural exchange, at what cost does this come? In their article, “Shakespearean Legal Thought in International Dispute Settlement,” Thomas Schultz and François Ost turn to Shakespeare to highlight a middle path that echoes Achebe: “Following the idea of weights and measures,” Shakespeare’s play *Measure for Measure*, they argue, “is also about measure in the market or trade sense: is everything tradable, and if so at what price?”²⁰¹

“*Measure for Measure* asks us, then, to be creative in dealing with seemingly opposite values, opposite legal objectives, opposite interests.”²⁰² In the United States-Canada magazine case, which highlights the tension between the ‘cultural’ and the ‘economic’, one could interpret the plot this way: The play “certainly asks us to avoid the immeasure of single-mindedness.”²⁰³ In negotiating free trade agreements—including Edward Pearlman’s Cultural Exchange Free Trade Agreement²⁰⁴—and treaties on investment, arbitration and the like, the single-mindedness of centring on economics would then insist that “the world needs a strong hand to protect investors”²⁰⁵ or capital. Nothing else.

Though Schultz and Ost’s thoughts are not just about cultural trade, they remind us that the ‘cultural exception’ warrants consideration, as does the economic case. This is particularly paramount because, as Wolfensohn said, “it is tremendously important so that you don’t just have a Hollywood culture around the world, but you have indigenous cultures preserved and valued.”²⁰⁶ Embracing that proposition would mean that the ‘cultural exception’ has value beyond measure. And it is compatible with the human development approach, for it evidently supports the idea of people’s choices regarding access to culture diversity, which people, in a variety of ways, have reason to engage in. It could also mean discarding the term ‘emerging markets’, as it seems to imply that countries are nothing but markets.

3. COMMISSION CULTURE TO HIGHLIGHT GLOBAL INEQUALITY

At a presentation of his book *A World of Three Zeros* at the Inter-American Development Bank in October 2017, the Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus said that it would be useful to create a work of social fiction that inspires the kind of world we want to live in; for today, some of the things that were considered science fiction are a reality—self-driving cars, for example.²⁰⁷ Yunus’s remark transports

²⁰¹ Schultz and Ost 2018, p. 25.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 26.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Pearlman 2009.

²⁰⁵ Schultz and Ost 2018, p. 26. One major complaint about the MAI, for instance, was that it was more concerned about protecting investors at the expense of aspects like labour conditions, and, as previously noted, even government oversight. See Berger 2000, p. 55.

²⁰⁶ Wolfensohn, interview with the author, 2013. See also Kabanda 2018.

²⁰⁷ See also Moore 2013.

us back to the dancer Karole Armitage's point that arts portray our lives. It also echoes Gerald Davey's argument that since photography shapes our world, for most of us, seeing is believing. Yet it connects to Schultz and Ost's article as well.

Taking a leaf from Shakespeare, Schultz and Ost provide that for the Bard, "a defining element of humanity" is nothing but rituals: "We are human because we inhabit a symbolic world." Our symbolic world no doubt shapes our beliefs. "We believe because of a belief system. We believe because others believe. Anyone's authority rests on our collective and thus individual belief in it, constantly refuelled by rituals around it."²⁰⁸ Since the arts and rituals are intertwined, and this is not the first time the arts have been courted to tackle economic and social issues, taking Yunus's point seriously would mean acting along the following lines.

International organizations such as the United Nations could commission a work of social fiction that depicts the perils of inequality. Such a work could be a novel available in various languages and adopted into a photo essay and a movie, with all media accessible to the general public. Above all, the work could show the kind of world we want to live in, a world in which fairness is elevated above greed. Although a major theme of work might echo Francis Bacon's line that "Money is a great servant but a bad master," it would also include themes like climate, gender and racial justice. Such a work will certainly not be the panacea for all ills of inequality. But it could add to the debates that provoke action. At the end of the day, even if all the best policies to tackle inequality are passed, if cultural forces are doing the opposite, it is difficult to sustain any meaningful behavioural shifts. For much of human behaviour is encoded in rituals. And here, those who question Hollywood's materialistic overtures have a valid point.

"An artist's duty, as far as I'm concerned, is to reflect the times." When Nina Simone made that remark, she added: "As far as I'm concerned, it's their choice, but I CHOOSE to reflect the times and situations in which I find myself. That, to me, is my duty. And at this crucial time in our lives, when everything is so desperate, when every day is a matter of survival, I don't think you can help but be involved."²⁰⁹ Commissioning social fiction that inspires an inclusive world in all aspects could also challenge the arts industry largely entrapped in the wild glorification of fame to get involved in the battle against the unsustainable levels of inequality engulfing our age.

4. ON HUMAN RESOURCES, PART-TIME WORK, LUCK AND EDUCATION

Gender bias is littered all over the arts and sports, economics and politics—you name a field. Yet in recent memory, nothing has instigated a reaction to this problem like the sexual harassment cases that

²⁰⁸ Schultz and Ost 2018, pp. 19–20.

²⁰⁹ Simone 2013.

erupted from Hollywood and reverberated elsewhere. But where was human resources?²¹⁰ Although this is not to say that all HR departments do not care, many tend to work for the employer and not the employee. This means that victims are often bullied, ignored, threatened, silenced, or worse, fired. For HR seems to be more interested in protecting organizations, star employees and the like than in addressing human concerns. Sometimes the best advice victims get is not to report their cases to HR at all. In some cases, as in the photography case discussed earlier, there is not even an HR department to turn to for part-time workers.²¹¹

All this begs the question: Is it about time to separate HR departments from firms across the board? It may well be that “outsourcing HR to an independent third party is a cleaner model,” as Lisa Brown Alexander, CEO of the consulting firm Non-Profit HR, concedes. “In the same way, hiring an outside law firm to investigate complaints can boost employees’ trust in the process.”²¹² But this could absolve companies, particularly in anonymous cases. “In many cases,” as Fatima Goss Graves, president of the National Women’s Law Center, observed, “callers don’t leave enough information, and HR departments then say they couldn’t properly investigate because they didn’t even know whom to interview, and they couldn’t act on ‘rumors.’”²¹³ This is surely a problem resulting from the nature of ‘asymmetric information’ discussed earlier. So, what should be done?

A hybrid model

One proposal is to develop a hybrid model, as reported by Tovia Smith. This model “leaves HR in charge, but it puts an independent, outside counselor in the employee’s corner.” It is akin to “offering an on-call attorney, or union rep, to employees who don’t have one.” While this model may not be a cure-all, it is “gaining interest.”²¹⁴

If this model is gaining interest then this is an opportunity to guarantee that HR departments work for all employees—including part-time workers—to protect them from harassment and other ills.²¹⁵ HR can also help workers to negotiate health insurance and meaningful benefits, ease unionization, encourage fair pay, support vibrant mentorships, and so on. If the mandate is to truly fight inequality in the 21st century, this is not a difficult objective to reach. After all, this idea is not even limited to the creative sector.

²¹⁰ See Rafter 2018.

²¹¹ See Wickre 2017; Smith 2017; Efron 2014 and Rafter 2018.

²¹² Smith 2017.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ On a related discussion see Anderson 2017.

On legitimizing part-time and freelance work

We live in a world where the gig-economy is expanding, where more and more people are engaging in part-time work, and even where many more are freelancing.²¹⁶ Whereas this phenomenon may be just catching up in other sectors, it has been commonplace in the arts for ages. It is about time to legitimize this sector in substantial ways. And that legitimization can run from giving all consultants due credit on the research they produce at places like The World Bank to allowing part-time workers and freelancers to unionize.²¹⁷ It should also include paying fair wages; providing meaningful mentorships, vacation and sick leave, assistance with student loans, health care and benefits, maternity leave and childcare; and establishing functional HR systems and non-hostile work environments where freelancers and part-time workers—and of course all workers—do not just survive but thrive.²¹⁸

On luck and education

The concepts of luck and education continue to enjoy unquestioned intellectual heft. Yet unfortunately, they are not panaceas for inequality. If anything, although luck is always welcome, luck is luck; it is not a strategy. For instance, can we really tell the women photojournalists who bear the brunt of sexual harassment that, “Listen, go work on such and such a project, but just make sure you get lucky not to be assaulted?” Is that a viable policy intervention?²¹⁹

On education, as we noted earlier, despite dealing with creepy mentors, working part-time and making an impressive list of the lowest-paid workers, 82 percent of women photojournalists were university educated.²²⁰ Therefore, promoting people’s education to merely augment their economic productivity cannot by itself solve inequality.²²¹ This means that besides education—and education is absolutely important—issues including workplace safety, fairness, and ethics are too important to be left to employees. HR and employers should also be on board.

²¹⁶ Some people of course may engage in side jobs in addition to full-time jobs; some may be retirees or students who work part-time; others may want to have full-time jobs; and still others may want to maintain the independence that part-time work may give them. The examples are various.

²¹⁷ For one example of part-time workers’ unionization, see Oh 2012.

²¹⁸ The issue of thriving versus surviving has been discussed in many areas. For example, see Wu 2018, pp. 42–43. Of course, policies must be determined by the size of the organization and budgets, for instance, in case-by-case scenarios with a firm commitment to ethics and fairness. In any case, many employers might claim that they cannot afford all this, even though somehow many manage to pay their executives big salaries coupled with generous benefits. Needless to say, some of the abusers here are not cash-strapped organizations. The issue that deserves to be looked into is the widespread habit of equating power with pay. Since freelancers and part-time workers may have the ideas and work ethic but not the power, they are likely to be shortchanged as things stand. Whatever the case, it seems debates here are just getting started. See Conger and Scheiber 2019 and Coyle 2019b, for example.

²¹⁹ Although luck is luck, as Daniel Kahneman notes, it is shocking that there have been situations where a firm was “rewarding luck as if it were skill” (Kahneman 2011, p. 216).

²²⁰ Lowry 2015.

²²¹ On a related discussion, consider Hanauer 2019.

5. ON BIG TECH AND TRUST-BUSTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Trusts are the creatures of the State, and the State not only has the right to control them, but it is in duty bound to control them wherever need of such control is shown.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt²²²

If we have gods of economics and gods of the arts, we also have gods of technology. The advent of the digital age was greeted with such awe to the point that some saw ‘tech’ as some kind of god with the power to solve the world’s problems. Technology surely has many benefits, but as usual, there are thinkers who have seen holes in this lopsided thought. One of them is Atkinson: “So far, as in much of the economics literature, technological change has been discussed as if it were exogenous—determined by the gods. Some accounts even refer to it as ‘manna from heaven.’ Yet most technological advance reflects decisions that are made by, among others, scientists, research managers, businessmen, investors, governments, and consumers” here on earth. Whether the aggregate combination of these decisions makes technology divine is another story. All the same, much evidence suggests that “these decisions are influenced by economic considerations that make technical change endogenous; that is, determined from within the economic and social system.”²²³ They are not manna from heaven. Hence, as Atkinson’s book’s subtitle asks: *What can be done?*

Besides examining the nature and functions of superstars and superstar markets, superproducers, supereconomics and supercapitalism, that question invites a look at another area: ‘supermonopolies’. That term appears in Tim Wu’s book *The Curse of Bigness*, and there is perhaps no industry today that enjoys bigness as much as big tech. Certainly, many have come to fear behemoths like “Google, Amazon, and Facebook and their power over not just the commerce, but over the politics, the news, and our private information.”²²⁴ So the quick answer to Atkinson’s question is what Wu suggests: Break up these super monopolies.²²⁵

These monopolies should not be broken up (or busted) for the sake of breaking them up, however. As Stiglitz said, the idea should include making sure that the broken monopolies are still not owned by the same people,²²⁶ that the outcome serves the collective good. And this ought to mean that healthy competition renders it possible to have these companies elevate justice and genuine fairness when it comes to writing the terms of reference, a form of ‘digital social contract’ with artists and the public at large. This is profoundly crucial because of reasons such as the following.

²²² Cited in Wu 2018, p. 50.

²²³ Atkinson 2015, p. 87.

²²⁴ Wu 2018, p. 15. See also Madrick 2020 and Teachout 2020.

²²⁵ We will not get into the details here, but for informative proposals, see Wu 2018 and Teachout 2020.

²²⁶ Stiglitz 2019b.

It should not have to take superstars to refuse to put their music on platforms in order to force companies to write fair contracts, as was the case when Apple Music, in BBC Music’s words, “reversed its payment policy a day after the singer Taylor Swift said she was refusing to allow the company to stream her album ‘1989.’” The dispute came about because of a “three-month free trial” Apple had offered to subscribers. Although Apple swiftly reversed its policy after that ‘Swift stand’, and agreed to “pay artists for music streamed during trial periods,”²²⁷ when you consider books like Akerlof and Shiller’s *Phishing for Phools*, these ‘free trials’ are not free as such. So often, they are a form of phishing, as consumers get entrapped in a swamp of hidden costs.²²⁸

Beyond economic ideology

But how do these tech giants escape antitrust scrutiny in the first place? How did they balloon to the point that the US journalist Charlie Warzel has argued that a new government agency is needed to fight Facebook alone?²²⁹ The culprit seems to be what Amartya Sen and others have warned: The overreliance on narrow economic analysis to make decisions that affect people’s lives. In the days when antitrust was more functional in the United States, Tim Wu writes that Robert Bork, an anti-antitrust crusader, took Aaron Director’s²³⁰ “‘consumer welfare’ idea—that antitrust was intended only to lower prices for consumers—and argued that it was not merely what an economist like Director thought the law should do, but that it had been, all along, the *actual intent* of the laws.”²³¹

First of all, as discussed earlier, this reading clearly misses the concern that political trusts tend to dance with economic trusts. “The historical distribution of wealth has always been deeply political,” as Thomas Piketty observes in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, “and it cannot be reduced to purely economic mechanisms.”²³² This is still the case in today’s tango of winner-take-all politics and winner-take-all economics. “No one denies that economic considerations are what should govern any individual case,” Wu writes. “But the broad tenor of antitrust enforcement—the broader goals of enforcement—should be animated by a concern that too much concentrated economic power will translate into too much political power, and thereby threaten the Constitutional structure.”²³³ As Wu cites Robert Pitofsky, “we should always be concerned that ‘excessive concentration of economic power will breed antidemocratic political pressures’.”²³⁴ But why should we care? These pressures are not

²²⁷ See BBC Music 2015.

²²⁸ Akerlof and Shiller 2015.

²²⁹ See Warzel 2019.

²³⁰ Aaron Director was appointed professor at the University of Chicago Law School in the 1940s. He played a central role in the development of the Chicago School of Economics, and his “rigorous free-market analysis profoundly influenced approaches to antitrust law” (see Martin 2004).

²³¹ Wu 2018, pp. 87–88.

²³² Piketty 2014, p. 27.

²³³ Wu 2018, p. 55.

²³⁴ Ibid.

there for their own sake; they exacerbate economic and political marginalization, areas at the centre of today’s inequality crisis.

Second, although consumers are enticed to interact on social media largely for ‘free’ (a big ‘bonus’ for the ‘consumer welfare’ theorem), stories of tech industries monetizing people’s data are real. And when it comes to Net Neutrality and creative work, where streaming music and videos, posting photographs, selling crafts and the like are the order of the day, then questions including fair intellectual property, fair pay and fair access come up. Is it a gross exaggeration to say that the system seems to be tilted in favour of superstars and super monopolies? Although technology was lauded as a force that would level the playing field, broadly speaking, it has been exploited in ways that widen income gaps. The music industry, as Krueger noted, is a classic example.²³⁵ The big policy lesson here therefore is a reminder to move beyond simply focusing on economics to determine antitrust legislation. A holistic picture is needed.

Antitrust in the digital age

No long ago in the United States, Facebook was fined \$5 billion for its privacy missteps.²³⁶ And in what appears to be an echo of Europe’s lead in scrutinizing ‘big tech’,²³⁷ the US Justice Department, according to a report in *The New Yorker*, “announced that it was conducting a wide-ranging investigation into the ‘market-leading online platforms,’ which are widely believed to include Google, Facebook, and Amazon.”²³⁸ Even though Facebook’s fine was a drop in the bucket, there are benefits in pursuing big cases. As Wu suggests, the idea is that even if antitrust cases are dropped or lost in court, the process itself can engender gains that are worth the time and the money.²³⁹

And while not all antitrust cases are relevant,²⁴⁰ there is much to gain from what antitrust can unleash. The benefits include stimulating innovation, economic dynamism and reinforcing political fairness.²⁴¹ Moreover, if we allow that Adam Smith’s ‘fierce competition’ still has a place in today’s economy, then even in the creative sector we can appreciate the benefits antitrust can unleash:²⁴² “[T]he break-up of the original film-trust sparked the rise of the American film industry; and in more recent times the

²³⁵ See Krueger 2019a.

²³⁶ Tracy and McKinnon 2019.

²³⁷ Wu 2018, p. 131; see also Baca and Zakrzewski 2019.

²³⁸ Kolhatkar 2019. On the case of the United States against Google’s search dominance, see Kang et al. 2020.

²³⁹ Wu 2018, pp. 110–113.

²⁴⁰ For example, see Wu 2018, pp. 113–114.

²⁴¹ For example, see Wu 2018, pp. 73, 96–97, 132–133. On political fairness, according to T. M. Scanlon: “One reason for objecting to economic inequality is that it interferes with the fairness of the political system by giving the rich an unacceptable degree of influence over political outcomes. More needs to be said, however, about whether this influence is *improper* or whether it is *unequal*. One way in which the influence of the rich can be improper is by leading officials to adopt policies that fail to give proper weight to the interests of poorer citizens. ...The ideal of equal influence is best understood not in terms of likelihood of success but rather in terms of equal access to means of influence” (Scanlon 2018).

²⁴² Since we have focused on the United States, for a treatment of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, see Wu 2018.

campaigns against AT&T and IBM sparked a momentous boom in the telecommunications and computing industries,” as Wu points out. “The cries of doom, gloom and economic catastrophe are often overblown, for some industries can benefit from a breakup.”²⁴³ If such break-ups animate democracy and curb inequality, so be it.

6. ON DATA COLLECTION

Every measure is an answer to a question—a decision to focus on some things at the expense of others. Indicators define what is important, and what is not: they establish goals. Using income as a measure of personal success, for instance, privileges money over other possible options such as health or happiness. As such, all measures are both limited and subjective attempts to represent reality.

—Dirk Philipsen²⁴⁴

The morning of 4 January 1934 was a time to remember in the history of humankind. For this was the day the Nobel economist Simon Kuznets officially submitted his 261-page report to meet the United States Senate’s request for “basic and up-to-date information” on the whole US economy.²⁴⁵ The report would become the basis of GDP, a measure that has become a tool for measuring the economic health of countries around the world. As has been pointed out repeatedly, however, GDP, which has “ballooned from a narrow economic tool into a global article of faith,”²⁴⁶ even includes the economic effect of wars, hurricanes, accidents and the like. But it excludes such genuine articles as housework, volunteering and creative work that are non-paid or non-reported, or not officially counted or monetized.

Although this may be preaching to the choir, this point is nonetheless worth recalling: “Our most important measure says nothing about whether quality of life is improving.” It says nothing about the viability of our activities. And it says nothing about whether our economic growth is climate-friendly. “It only tells us about how much stuff was produced, and how much money has exchanged hands. As a result, cultures around the world promote, quite literally, blind and mindless growth—and increasingly dangerous growth. And they do so largely independent of what they subjectively want.” That conclusion in Dirk Philipsen’s book, *The Little Big Number: How GDP Came to Rule the World and What to Do About It*, is valid.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 26, 73.

²⁴⁴ Philipsen 2015, p. 271.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., front cover.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 4. See also Coyle 2017 and Yunus 2017. The debate on financializing the currently non-financialized services, including the ecosystem of the arts and culture as well as freedom and so forth, is certainly an important one to be had, as Philipsen has argued. This, however, “cannot possibly resolve the larger, underlying problem of finding better ways to prioritize what matters most to healthy societies that squarely focus their activities on wellbeing” of the planet and the people. If anything, as will be discussed later, “the problem correctly pointed out by Piketty (economics obsession

And its validity hints at the following point: Even though the arts fuel the ‘great joys of life’, as noted in the introduction to this paper, one of the main challenges of pursuing an arts career is this: Those with a predilection for pursuing arts careers are normally told that there is no money in the arts. Regardless of other benefits the arts render, the yardstick for assessing the goodness of the arts tends to focus on money. One would think that given the contribution of the arts to the quality of life, a better approach might be to make sure that arts careers are not only rewarding superstars with super incomes, but also paying a decent wage for all who choose to pursue arts vocations.

More generally, this thinking may also fuel inequalities in access to an arts education. For arts education broadly speaking has not escaped the notion that it is a luxury for those with means to pursue. Whatever the case, talking of superstars, Philipsen’s conclusion may also be why some take issue with the relentless elevation of supercapitalism in the United States, which is mimicked around the world, even as it promises benefits it does not always support.

This is certainly “not an indictment of all growth.” And it is not a call to replace all GDP with measures like the Gross National Happiness index. “Many kinds of growth are vital for overall improvement in quality of life,” as Philipsen notes. “But to GDP, which largely follows the logic of ‘converting nature into cash, and commons into commodities,’ quality is merely incidental.” Does this need to be so? No. “There is nothing about growth,” as Philipsen adds, “that makes it inherently blind and indiscriminate.”²⁴⁸

Part of fighting the blindness in GDP merits considering the following policy: Update the System of National Accounts to fully reflect the creative economy. In the same vein, update the Standard Industrial Classification and the Standard Occupational Classification codes to truly account for services and culture. As Diane Coyle has argued, this move alone would be a huge step forward. For while these codes provide details on manufacturing, that is scarcely the case when it comes to services—and we know most artistic output is rendered via services, services that can even be realized through the WTO’s Modes of Supply. Moreover, if cultural activities cross several sector headings, that should not come as a surprise. And this might explain why culture remains invisible even if it is bigger than finance in all likelihood.²⁴⁹ In any case, what does this have to do with fighting inequality?

Above all, many countries either do not invest or underinvest in their cultural sectors. This is also partly due to the blind assumption that there is no money in the creative sector. Therefore, as they do

with numbers/math) is merely the surface of a bigger problem: the crippling obsession with prices, with valuing only that which has a price negotiated in the marketplace” (Dirk Philipsen, email message to the author, 1 March 2020).

²⁴⁸ Philipsen 2015, p. 6; Shiva 2013. It is also possible to supplement GDP with more holistic measures. On that front, see The National Academies Press 2013.

²⁴⁹ Diane Coyle, email message to the author, 3 April 2017. See also Kabanda 2018, p. 214; on the WTO’s Modes of Supply, see p. 83. Broadly speaking, some countries like Nigeria and the United States recently saw GDP increase because they revised their metrics to start measuring some aspects of the creative sector (Kabanda 2018, p. 16). There is more to be done, however.

their benefit-cost analyses, culture often gets short-changed, if not sidestepped all together. But perhaps if countries get a sense of how the arts contribute to their economies, this could help change that mindset. While this economic metric is not perfect, it might allow things like the following.

It could unlock resources for cultural diplomacy initiatives and promote cultural diversity (to address concerns like those Wolfensohn detailed); it could help allocate funds for arts education programmes, and reduce the cultural access and participation gap between the haves and have-nots; it could help artists negotiate salaries and taxes;²⁵⁰ it could bridge Internet gaps;²⁵¹ and it could help countries negotiate fair FTAs and treaties on investments—and even come up with meaningful trade-related aspects for intellectual property that do not simply enable corporations to seek rents as Stiglitz warned, but work for local artists between and within nations. If knowledge is power—and “we become what we measure”²⁵²—then knowing how culture contributes to GDP²⁵³ could help to erase the ‘information asymmetry’ that makes it difficult to tackle the economic questions surrounding cultural inequalities.

On indices

It certainly does not mean that if culture can be adequately measured in GDP or elsewhere, then all the concerns here will be met. Yet if one considers that one of the most argued-over and sought-after indexes is the World Bank’s Doing Business report, then one can appreciate the power of measures. And as debates rage over methodologies, number fudging is also common. In our context, given that culture is not just about commerce, the Cultural Exchange Index (CEI) proposed in *The Creative Wealth of Nations* might allow us to start measuring cultural diplomacy or other cultural exchanges that might help inform policies for cultural diversity. The point is this: The number of culture exchanges between countries could help show what is going on and what countries need to do to promote their culture abroad.²⁵⁴

Concerning cultural commerce, another index suggested alongside the CEI is the Cultural Trade Index (CTI). But while the CTI could show the rank of cultural trade among nations, it could also go further and include information like the average wages of artists in a given country, cultural employment by age and gender, and so on. It could also indicate the contribution of culture to trade in value added.²⁵⁵

On creating a Cultural Inequality Index

²⁵⁰ On taxes, see Sohn 2015 and Kennedy 2014. Although these cases deal with the United States, they could provide lessons elsewhere.

²⁵¹ Internet gaps can be rural and urban, inter alia. In the gender dimension, see Intel Corporation 2013.

²⁵² Philipsen 2015, p. 1.

²⁵³ With respect to the United States, see National Endowment for the Arts 2019.

²⁵⁴ Kabanda 2018, p. 219.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 217–218. On trade in value added measurement, see pp. 212–213.

Even better, it might be worth considering creating a Cultural Inequality Index (CII). The CII could deal with issues of income inequality between artists and within the arts, gender bias, cultural representation, arts access and participation, and arts education, to name a few. The CII, like all measures, will not be perfect. All the same, it could have major implications for designing policies and allocating resources to deal with cultural inequalities. The CII could be national, regional and global, and it could be housed at universities, statistical offices, ministries of culture or even international organizations. One benefit of this, for example, might be allowing us to quickly discover that the income gap between superstars and non-superstar artists on streaming music is huge. With that information we can then start asking: Why is this the case? Was digital technology not supposed to make the system more egalitarian? *What can be done?*

Cultural measurement in the World Inequality Database

Given that sectors like the music industry are a microcosm of the winner-take-all economy, this begs the question of whether such leading databases as the World Inequality Database (WID) could include data highlighting inequality in the creative sector. With intellectual leadership from such figures as Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, the WID provides “open and convenient access to the most extensive available database on the historical evolution of the world distribution of income and wealth, both within countries and between countries.”²⁵⁶ If we are to believe Alan Krueger that the economy in the United States is increasingly mirroring the music industry, where “a small sliver of people are capturing the largest gains,”²⁵⁷ then having music industry data in the WID, for instance, might not only shed light on how this comes to be, but what can be done about it.

Collecting data in the creative sector is particularly difficult, because many creative activities tend to be informal. Besides, as we saw earlier, sometimes things run this way: In Hollywood, economic losses are exaggerated, states underhandedly support their creative sectors, and some mega-artists and firms use tax havens to hide their wealth. That acknowledged, an effort here might mean we do not have to wait for leaks by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, WikiLeaks or the so-called Guardians of Peace to empirically confirm the gender pay gap in Hollywood, for example.²⁵⁸

Beyond the ‘childish passion for mathematics’

“If the question of inequality is again to become central, we must begin by gathering as extensive as possible a set of historical data for the purpose of understanding past and present trends,” as Piketty observes. “For it is by patiently establishing facts and patterns and then comparing different countries

²⁵⁶ World Inequality Database n.d.

²⁵⁷ Reddy 2013; Krueger 2019b.

²⁵⁸ Lee 2015.

that we can hope to identify the mechanisms at work and gain a clearer idea of the future.”²⁵⁹ Well said. And that is why we have argued the need to collect data on the arts. Nonetheless, the following caveat merits attention:

The clarity Piketty notes might mean not putting all our trust in numbers, especially in fields like economics, which drive much of public policy. “To put it bluntly, the discipline of economics has yet to get over its childish passion for mathematics and for purely theoretical and often highly ideological speculation, at the expense of historical research and collaboration with other social sciences.” One could argue that the collaboration Piketty calls for is marginal partly because of the following reason—although not all economists are this way: “Economists are all too often preoccupied with petty mathematical problems of interest only to themselves. This obsession with mathematics is an easy way of acquiring the appearance of scientificity without having to answer the far more complex questions posed by the world we live in.”²⁶⁰

Picking up questions posed by the world we live in would mean embracing a holistic picture as repeatedly mentioned here. And sometimes it means paying attention to popular culture for clues that are non-mathematical. For example, one of the remarkable statements Krugman made at his UNDP talk in March 2019 was this: Even though Washington seemed not to care, for anyone who wanted to look during the 1980s, inequality was obvious. And it was not just “a few economists who noticed it ... popular culture was aware of it.” Krugman mentioned the movie *Wall Street*, released in 1987. That movie was not just about “inequality and the rise of the rich.” The director Oliver Stone “was perfectly well aware that inequality was not simply a matter of educated people pulling away from the less educated, but that there were extreme heights.”²⁶¹

While using the arts in media such as data visualization is important, sometimes immersion in the study of culture is not only an intellectual excursion, but also a policy microscope. On that point, Krueger gets the last word: “Economists have a great deal to learn from observing how musicians strive to develop an emotional bond with their audiences, often at the expense of short-term profits, and how emotions guide their work and shape their economic decisions. Because emotions play such an outsized and explicit role in the music business, the industry reveals behaviors that are often hidden, but just as prevalent and consequential, in other industries and walks of life.”²⁶²

7. OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

*Allow ‘confessions of ignorance’ and curb ‘acting on pretended knowledge’*²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Piketty 2014, p. 21.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 41.

²⁶¹ Krugman 2019c. On a related issue, of how popular stories can affect economic behaviour, see Shiller 2019.

²⁶² Krueger 2019b, pp. 9–10.

²⁶³ Kahneman 2011, pp. 261–263.

A large part of examining inequality in all walks of life surely means observing emotions besides statistical inferences. Here social psychology cannot but come into play, as the psychologist and Nobel economist Daniel Kahneman has argued in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. In the financial sector, for instance, a chief financial officer who tells colleagues that stock market returns might be between, say, “-10 percent and +30 percent’ can expect to be laughed out of the room.” This is mainly because for someone paid to be an ‘expert’ on financial matters, the expectation is to bring glad tidings, even though they may discern otherwise. The moment they sound unoptimistic, they are confessing ignorance, an act that is socially unacceptable.²⁶⁴

Because optimism is immensely valued, society tends to reward mis-leaders more than truth tellers—and again, this might also explain why many people across the world fall for culture in the United States, as the media and Hollywood continue to directly portray not the reality, but a rosy picture to satisfy what people want to see. So, though risk-taking is not always negative, as Kahneman cites Nassim Taleb, this tends to push “economic agents to take risks they should avoid.”²⁶⁵ By understanding the role of emotions and social factors, we can appreciate the following message.

“One of the lessons of the financial crisis that led to the Great Recession is that there are periods in which competition, among experts and among organizations, creates powerful forces that favor a collective blindness to risk and uncertainty.”²⁶⁶ In our context, one paper suggests that inequality exacerbated the gravity of the recession.²⁶⁷ Whatever the case, the recession hurt numerous people who had nothing to do with the kingpins’ ‘collective blindness’. But, as Kahneman said, “The social and economic pressures that favor overconfidence are not restricted to financial forecasting. Other professionals must deal with the fact that an expert worthy of the name is expected to display high confidence.”²⁶⁸ So, from data science to development policy, there is a need to allow room for the ‘confession of ignorance’ and to curb ‘acting on pretended knowledge’. Optimism is essential. Nonetheless, even in politics, which has contributed to much of today’s inequality, believing in optimistic politicians who talk the talk, but offer empty or uninformed promises, is unlikely to curb inequality effectively.

On media cultural responsibility and artistic exposure

Kaushik Basu has proposed creating media cultural responsibility where media allocate space in their outlets to promote culture.²⁶⁹ This is indeed much needed, given that buying ads in major news outlets can cost hundreds if not thousands of dollars. But even if this is realized, there is a need to make sure

²⁶⁴ Kahneman 2011, p. 262.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ See Pizzigati’s 2017.

²⁶⁸ Kahneman 2011, pp. 262–263.

²⁶⁹ Basu 2019, p. 132. See also Kabanda 2014, p. 63, and 2015, p. 21.

it works also for talented artists less known to the media, especially because it can be argued that the media itself contributes to inequality by relentlessly focusing on famous artists. From music and book reviews to interviews and profiles, this is usually the way it is—even in seemingly liberal media concerned about inequality. This is not to say that well-known artists do not deserve coverage. Balance here nevertheless could go a long way, because, besides income, inequality in voice also takes a toll on society. Moreover, well-known figures do not have a monopoly on wisdom.²⁷⁰

8. MORE QUESTIONS

Although some of the points mentioned above may be out of reach at least for now, there are some within immediate reach. They include tackling the following questions:

1. To what extent does net neutrality impact artists?²⁷¹
2. To what extent do poverty, education and social status impact arts participation, taste and access? Incidentally, there is a difference between participation and taste, and in examining cultural inequalities, this may have huge policy implications. For example, in the United Kingdom, while “government policy is currently concerned with encouraging arts participation,” according to Aaron Reeves, “policies are often based on research examining patterns of taste and not patterns of practice.”²⁷² This observation implies that there could be a risk of misallocating resources.
3. Funding platforms such as Kickstarter are providing funding opportunities, even for artists. But to what extent does this make a difference in fighting inequality? How do aspects of social capital, for example, come into play here?
4. According to *Women and the Web*, a report produced by Intel Corporation and others, the gender Internet gap is salient in low- and middle-income countries.²⁷³ This gap needs to be closed in all areas. Nevertheless, how does it affect women in these countries when it comes to presenting their creative work on the Internet?
5. Across the world, tourism has been identified as a promising engine for growth and job creation. Yet tourism also comes with problems. So, how do areas like cultural tourism contribute to exploitation, denigration and inequality?²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ For a related discussion, see “The Media and the Social Divide” in Sen 2015, pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

²⁷¹ For more on this, see Paddy 2018.

²⁷² Reeves and Bull 2016. See also the Department for Culture, Media & Sport 2016.

²⁷³ Intel Corporation 2013. It must be noted, however, that the Internet gap is also present in rich countries.

²⁷⁴ For more on this see, Becker 2013 and Kabanda 2018, Chapter 6.

6. In the United States, the Pentagon, as reported in 2016, fielded more than 130 bands worldwide with about 6,500 musicians. In money matters, the military bands received about \$437 million in 2015, “almost three times the budget of the National Endowment for the Arts,” according to Dave Philipps’s article aptly titled “Military Is Asked to March to a Less Expensive Tune.”²⁷⁵ If the National Endowment is supposed to cater to the arts in the United States, a nation of over 326 million people, even if many private individuals and organizations generously fund the arts, the math does not add up.

For this means that even if the musicians are not pocketing this money directly, and the bands are not receiving the monies equally, a basic estimate based on equal division suggests that one military band in 2015 alone cost taxpayers approximately \$3.36 million. How long has this been going on? This issue has no doubt been debated.²⁷⁶ And it needs to be all the more debated, because the Pentagon, which enjoys 2.7 trillion in assets and 2.6 trillion in liabilities, failed an audit in 2018.²⁷⁷ Although these numbers need careful scrutiny, does this not raise acute questions on how inequality in arts funding should be tackled?

A concluding remark: on taxes and the hidden wealth of nations

There is an ideological voice that tends to proclaim that the world runs on military might or ‘hard power’. Hence, the mindless military spending that, with the lead of the United States, many countries across the world vigorously engage in.²⁷⁸ But while culture may be described as ‘soft power’, from music to movies, the arts are not just a simulacrum of society. They *influence* society. Therefore, since inequality looms large in all aspects of our societies,²⁷⁹ the need to examine inequality in the arts, our true influencers, is pressing. Nonetheless, in the mandate to explore what to do, one great question that often comes up dances around affordability: How can we afford all this?²⁸⁰ For most of the policies listed here require resources. Although the wherewithal needed is not just money—in that what we

²⁷⁵ Philipps 2016. The National Endowment for the Arts was created by the United States Congress and President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. It “was established to nurture American creativity, to elevate the nation’s culture, and to sustain and preserve the country’s many artistic traditions” (Bauerlein and Grantham, eds. 2009, p. 1). For more about the agency see *ibid*.

²⁷⁶ Philipps 2016.

²⁷⁷ *The New York Times* Editorial Board 2018 and 2019.

²⁷⁸ And of course the costs, including opportunity costs, run beyond money. For example, see Stiglitz and Bilmes 2008; Tirman 2011; and Herbert 2014, especially Chapters 4–5, 9 and 12. See also Klein 2020.

²⁷⁹ Atkinson 2015, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ This question often comes up because of the pervasive thinking that such initiatives as those discussed here cost too much.

truly need is a shift in mindset coupled with intellectual and pragmatic leadership—there are ways to raise funds.

The first obvious way is taxes. Talking taxes, however, can be toxic to the point that evading taxes is equated with ‘smartness’, even for some leaders in high office. The explanation for why taxes are needed in the first place is often buried in the rubble of toxic taxes tales. But what should be done?

As Atkinson and others have said, inequality is of our own making. And if one recognizes what has been a fact all along, some major research that companies like Google and Apple benefit from was initially government funded. Take Apple, which, as Atkinson cites, has been investigated by the economist Mariana Mazzucato. In her book *The Entrepreneurial State*, Mazzucato details the role of public funding for research labs that led to the development of breakthroughs like the touch-screen. As we perform screen swipes, we may have no idea that public funds contributed to the development of this feature. Although technology gets all the blame, “It is not enough to say that rising inequality is due to technological forces outside out control. The government can influence the path taken.”²⁸¹ And that path can mean collecting taxes and using them in meaningful ways that include fighting inequality. But coordination between public and private sectors is also needed. That brings up another issue: tax evasion.

As Gabriel Zucman writes in *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, in recent years, “the amount of wealth in tax havens has increased over 25 percent—there has never been as much money held offshore as there is today. This hidden wealth accounts for at least \$7.6 trillion, equivalent to 8 percent of the global financial assets of households.”²⁸² Some of the culprits, as the Paradise and Panama papers reveal, include companies like Apple and Google, public figures and superstars.²⁸³

It must nonetheless be noted that it is not just some mega-rich people and mega-firms who tend to be tax averse. This is a common problem. Fighting inequality, however, is unlikely to succeed without fair taxation and using those taxes for investments that work for everyone—and not just a few. This is immensely crucial, because equitable tax collection does not matter anymore than equitable tax spending. This matters, for example, if we notice that the United States military accounts for more than half of the federal government’s discretionary spending, spending that reveals a mind-blowing

²⁸¹ Atkinson 2015, p. 119. Mazzucato 2018.

²⁸² Zucman 2015.

²⁸³ See also Kabanda 2018, pp. 112–113. For a list of top US companies holding profits in the trillions of dollars offshore, see Drucker and Bowers 2017. On the Luanda Leaks, see Forsythe et al. 2020, and the BBC Panorama Team 2020. Also, consider Kofi Annan’s take: “Africa loses twice as much in illicit financial outflows as it receives in international aid. It is unconscionable that some companies, often supported by dishonest officials, are using unethical tax avoidance, transfer pricing and anonymous company ownership to maximize their profits, while millions of Africans go without adequate nutrition, health and education” (Annan 2013a). See also Annan 2013b.

statistic: Since the September 11th attacks, the estimated cost of US counterterrorism wars has been a whopping \$5.9 trillion.²⁸⁴

Yet in the same country, inequality in areas like arts funding, access and participation is persistent—areas that are much needed to help bridge differences within and between nations in meaningful ways. Additionally, in regards to the basic income guarantee, a much-debated idea nowadays in the wake of automation and diminished manufacturing, as some have feared,²⁸⁵ the role of effective taxation that matches effective spending might be hard to sidestep. In any case, when it comes to such aspects as curbing the winner-take-all economy, fighting gender bias, and promoting cultural diversity, tax policy alone may not be the panacea. Yet when you listen to Eli Broad, a distinguished member of the 1 percent, you get the point:

Two decades ago I turned full-time to philanthropy and threw myself into supporting public education, scientific and medical research, and visual and performing arts, believing it was my responsibility to give back some of what had so generously been given to me. But I’ve come to realize that no amount of philanthropic commitment will compensate for the deep inequities preventing most Americans—the factory workers and farmers, entrepreneurs and electricians, teachers, nurses and small-business owners—from the basic prosperity we call the American dream.

Some of us have supported closing the gulf between rich and poor by raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, reforming our education system, expanding access to medical care, building more affordable housing.

But even in cities like my adopted hometown, Los Angeles, where many of these policies have been enacted, they have not adequately addressed the crisis. Our country must do something bigger and more radical, starting with the most unfair area of federal policy: our tax code.

It’s time to start talking seriously about a wealth tax.²⁸⁶

That opinion appeared not in a randomized study, but in a coveted space in *The New York Times*. But suppose Eli Broad had written this instead:

I’m in the one percent, and please don’t raise my taxes. Among other things, I have used my wealth to create jobs, support schools, and even promote the arts. All this has done wonders for my community, and all I’m asking is to emulate my approach to close the opportunity gap.

²⁸⁴ *The New York Times* Editorial Board 2019, 2018; Crawford 2018; and Watson Institute 2018.

²⁸⁵ For more on this, see Rogers et al. 2017. On the other hand, Krugman (2019a) has argued that the obsession with automation is “an escapist fantasy.” See also Muro et al. 2019.

²⁸⁶ Broad 2019.

A version of that theory has been tested and continues to be tested. But has it worked? Economics is a study of choice, yet when it comes to making choices, it does not tell us what to choose.²⁸⁷ It remains to be seen if Eli Broad's message will be heeded. After all, as artists like Nina Simone and economists like Anthony Atkinson and Joseph Stiglitz have argued, issues like the inequality plaguing our economic and social structure are all about choice.²⁸⁸ This means that if we are to pull out all the stops to overcome inequality in the 21st century, to build a more inclusive world, to build a more caring world, the prelude and postlude will be nothing but a canon in the declaration of better choices.

²⁸⁷ Buchholz 2007, 1. See also Kabanda 2018, 223.

²⁸⁸ Atkinson 2015; Simone 2013; Stiglitz 2019a

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