Patricia Goff’s aptly titled book, *Limits to Liberalization*, is both an important case study on the political economy of cultural industries in Canada and Europe, as well as a timely contribution to Canadian scholarship on communication issues. Written from a political science perspective and set against the backdrop of neoliberal globalization and an expanding global trade regime, Goff undertakes an examination of the exclusion of cultural industries as a condition for trade negotiations within Canada, in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and similarly within the European Union (and France in particular), during talks surrounding the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Distinct from several other industries, Goff maintains that the cultural industries (i.e., radio and television broadcasting, film production, book and periodical publishing, and video and sound recording) carry “sociocultural value” (p. 4). As “vectors of culture and identity” (p. 169), she suggests that cultural products influence the sociocultural goals of community creation (following Benedict Anderson’s original thesis), and more recently, cultural diversity promotion. Importantly, Goff acknowledges early on in the book that culture is itself a moving target, dynamic and constantly evolving, rendering national cultural industries “a potent means of participating in the ongoing work of promoting collective identity formation” (p. 7; emphasis in original). The costs of economic liberalization, however, place these objectives at risk, threatening cultural sovereignty, national identity, and social cohesion. Accordingly, Goff argues that domestic policy measures intended to safeguard national cultural industries against indiscriminate market exposure spring from a concern to protect legitimate sociocultural objectives rather than arising from an interest in upholding conventional protectionism. To evaluate these policy measures against economic criteria alone, or against the “aggregate economic welfare” (p. 20), and to consider them as barriers to market entry, overlooks their non-commercial value in “offsetting the cultural costs of economic liberalization” (p. 169). In other words, “promoting economic gain takes a back seat to avoiding cultural loss as a key motivator of cultural industry trade policy” (p. 27).

To this end, Goff makes a fervent appeal to broaden and centre the now stagnant, often persistent, and hitherto polarized economic assumptions that underlie the free trade versus protectionism debate, which, she notes, “relies on a narrow vocabulary that fore-
closes the discussion of the sociocultural contribution of certain goods and services” (p. 4). Failure to do so, she cautions, constrains the range of normative policy options available to national governments to pursue socially-oriented goals. Additionally, it limits national policy autonomy and capacity for domestic intervention and marginalizes cultural policy to a dominant economic rationale.

The book’s most provocative feature is rooted in Goff’s treatment of cultural industries alongside the resurrection of John Ruggie’s notion of “embedded liberalism,” and the famous post-World War II regulatory arrangement known as the “compromise,” described as “no liberalization without safeguards” (Ruggie cited in Goff, p. 14). The “embedded liberalism compromise,” based initially on the work of Karl Polyani, makes compatible the balance between domestic social welfare responsibilities and those required to stabilize an open and liberal economy. Goff reasons that nation-states have the right to uphold sociocultural objectives in the face of an expanding global trade regime. This is especially true if one considers the sheer number of sectors, including but not limited to the cultural industries (in the book she also draws attention to the agriculture and healthcare sectors) that are now, or are under threat of being, classified as goods and services under the umbrella of trade policy.

Goff uses the Canadian and European examples surrounding the protection and promotion of cultural industries to empirically illustrate what she calls “a contemporary manifestation of embedded liberalism” (p. 14). She rightfully notes that in Canada, cultural policy was prioritized early on as a nation-building strategy, partly as a measure to counterbalance the strong and dominant presence felt by the proximity of the United States. She undertakes an overview of various Canadian cultural policy measures and their relationship to deliberations pertaining to NAFTA. Notable examples are the split-run magazine controversy between Canada and the U.S., and the development of broadcast content restrictions for radio and television. In the European example, Goff explains that the audiovisual industries were recognized as both a powerful cultural outlet influencing the development of a supranational European public sphere, as well as a measure to stimulate social cohesion within and across EU countries, making their exclusion from GATT a determining factor for the EU in trade negotiations.

Goff draws on Wolfe and Mendelsohn’s (2004) description of embedded liberalism as a “dynamic commitment to allowing countries to be different within a multilateral framework” (Wolfe & Mendelsohn cited in Goff, p. 154). In this regard, she introduces a brief discussion on the introduction of UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions as one step toward reinforcing the dynamic inherent in the “embedded liberalism compromise.” However, although Goff convincingly makes the case to resurrect a new trade policy discourse anchored in the “embedded liberalism compromise,” a more detailed conceptual discussion on the role of the state in the context of present-day globalization and the state’s capacity to intervene in cultural policy processes may have been a noteworthy contribution to the text. A deeper inquiry into the many policy processes—both at the national level and between the national and the international levels—surrounding the cultural policy measures discussed could have provided a further test to the feasibility of recovering the “embedded liberalism compromise” and its application to contemporary debates. Finally, a discussion about the policy process in the examples presented could have additionally uncovered some of the many complexities that underwrite policymaking, even when there exist clear (sociocultural) policy objectives driving the process.

Overall, Limits to Liberalization offers an accessible and useful overview of the cultural industries in Canada and Europe, as well as a broad-based explanation of the treat-
ment of these industries in the context of two of the most significant trade agreements driv-
ing the global trade regime. The book is a sobering reminder of the myriad ways in which historically sensitive social and cultural policy objectives can be—and increasingly are—at odds with the principles of neoliberal globalization and the institutionalization of a global marketplace. Importantly, Goff positively provokes the reader to consider whether the “embedded liberalism compromise” can sufficiently provide a useful vocabulary around which to address the trade-culture debate in its contemporary form and, more generally, whether it can recapture the imagination to become the new narrative that stimulates reforms to the global trade regime. Indeed, the recent collapse of the Doha trade talks, while not focused on the cultural industries, may suggest that it can.

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