Unequal Togetherness or How Striving for Equality Can Produce Inequality; the Case of Esperanto

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I build on field theory to show how cultural and social logics, in addition to economic logic, can orient people's understandings of inequality and organize their preferences and their actions. I argue that, because inequality has multiple dimensions, not only an economic dimension but also a cultural and a social dimension, political cleavages occur along the cultural and the social axes, not only along the economic one. Political mobilization can thus harness interests and discontent along any of the axes of inequality. These cleavages and mobilizations can appear surprising. Field mechanisms, such as doxa *and* illusio*, create social blindness to the importance of unrecognized inequality and cleavages. To highlight the importance of the social dimension and of the cultural dimension of inequality, I examine the case of the Esperanto movement. I show how Esperantists focused on addressing the social dimension of global inequality but ignore its cultural dimension. While striving to establish an equal community, the Esperanto movement inadvertently creates a membership hierarchy based on cultural capital. The Esperanto case should be a cautionary tale for those aiming for equality but ignoring the fact that inequality has multiple dimensions, not only an economic dimension but also a social and a cultural dimension.*

KEYWORDS
Inequality, political cleavages, field theory, social capital, cultural capital

INTRODUCTION

For the left, rising inequalities exacerbated by the series of crises that have marked the early twenty-first century revive aspirations toward equality. For the right, still harboring Cold-War fear and hatred of communism, such utopian aspirations appear impractical and dangerous. The left has been surprised by the right's ability to rally constituencies whose economic interests should push them to the left, according to economic logic. In this work, I build on field theory to highlight two additional logics—cultural and social logics—that can orient people's understandings of inequality and organize their preferences and their actions. I define cultural inequality as the patterned differences between people based on their embodied cultural competences acquired through differential participation in various institutions, such as higher education. Social inequality, in turn, I define as the patterned differences between people's

access to resources and opportunities based on their group memberships (national, ethnic, racial, religious, etc.). I argue that, because inequality has multiple dimensions, not only an economic dimension but also a cultural and a social dimension, political cleavages occur along the cultural and the social axes, not only along the economic one. Political mobilization can thus harness interests and discontent along any of the axes of inequality.

To highlight the importance of the social dimension and of the cultural dimension of inequality, I examine the case of the Esperanto movement. The Esperanto movement has attracted participants for over a century and a half mobilizing around the constructed international language Esperanto. Early Esperantists sought to address global social inequality based on national membership by proposing the Esperanto language as a means of international communication. Because Esperanto was devised as a rational language, Esperantists believed it would be easy to learn and could thus serve as a neutral international language overcoming national distinctions. I show how Esperantists focused on addressing the social dimension of inequality but ignored its cultural dimension. While striving to establish an equal community, the Esperanto movement inadvertently produces a membership hierarchy based on cultural capital.

The Esperanto case should be a cautionary tale for those aiming for equality but ignoring the fact that inequality has multiple dimensions, not only an economic dimension but also a social and a cultural dimension. The Esperanto case indicates that for some people at some point in time, social or cultural distinctions rather than economic considerations may be of primary concern. The implication is to pay attention to cleavages considering all dimensions of inequality. For example, the distinct political preferences of Americans with and without higher education are not random but relate to cultural inequality.

The Esperanto case also suggests that interests based on cultural and on social inequalities—similarly to interests based on economic inequalities—while enmeshed with the nation-state system, can be global. The implication is to consider possible transnational forms cleavages can take. For example, the hostility of domestic workers against immigrant workers in many countries around the world relates to global social inequality.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Different kinds of capital in politics

One of the most important contributions of Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu 1984, 1993) is the recognition of different kinds of capital and of competition over these capitals. Field theory implies that there can be inequality based on any kind of capital. Bourdieu (1983) identifies three kinds of capital, economic, cultural, and social capitals. Because the importance of and competition over economic capital in modern societies is obvious, in most fields Bourdieu analyzes, competition revolves around cultural capital (e.g. 1993). It wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration to suggest that Bourdieusian field theory is most commonly associated with cultural capital. The increasing importance of science and of education associated with modernity (Drori et al. 2003) can explain the increasing importance of cultural capital. As this is the kind of capital scholars possess in excess of others, scholarly recognition of the importance of cultural capital means recognizing scholars are privileged. Scholars' reluctance to recognize their cultural privilege combined with their embattled position in relation to economic capital can explain the focus on cultural capital in debates related to field theory. Regardless, cultural capital matters; and there are inequality, political cleavages, and political mobilization based on cultural capital.

Focus on cultural capital has kept attention away from social capital. It doesn't help that Bourdieu's (1983) definition of social capital involves social networks, group membership, and access to resources, terms that relate to different and rich scholarly traditions outside field theory. Still, scholars sensitive to the concerns of field theory have recognized inequalities and conflict based on persons' association with categorical distinctions, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and citizenship, among others, which one can group under social capital (e.g. Wimmer 2013, Brubaker 2015, Velitchkova Forthcoming). There are fields in which competition revolves around social capital, for example in post-independence Indian politics, periodically, in Kabyle society, and in state-socialist East Germany (Singh 2016). Therefore, the inequality and conflict related to social capital can lead to political cleavages and to political mobilization based on social capital.

The politics of multiple capitals within fields

Fields are defined by the primary capital that drives field competition. This does not mean that other kinds of capital cease to matter in a field though. Capitals have the property of convertibility where one capital can be used to produce another (Bourdieu 1983). For example, in economic fields, in which economic capital matters the most, cultural capital (knowledge and skills) and social capital (connections, group memberships) can be used to gain economic capital. In cultural fields, in which cultural capital is the primary stake, economic capital and social capital can help one develop and/or hire/borrow cultural capital. In fields defined by group competition, economic and/or cultural capital can help one acquire advantageous group membership or help a group improve its standing.

As societies become differentiated, with multiple fields organized around competition over different kinds of capital, privileged persons may find it beneficial, maybe even necessary, to diversify their capital investment to facilitate capital conversion. Thus, wealthy persons may seek membership in prestigious social clubs to develop social capital and may strive to place their children in the most prestigious schools to acquire valued cultural capital. The acquired social and cultural capital can further the accumulation of economic capital. The resulting concentration of capitals can approximate caste-like social structures, as is the case for nation-states (Velitchkova Forthcoming), for example, where the top strata hoard the most capital of any kind.

While in some fields, it may be clear what kind of capital matters the most (e.g. cultural fields, economic fields), in other fields this may not be the case. In the former, competition revolves around subtypes of economic (e.g. financial vs. material), cultural (e.g. this or that kind of knowledge), or social (this or that grouping) capital. In other fields, there may be symbolic competition over which kind of capital matters in a field. Persons in possession of particular kinds of capital may push for the dominance of this kind of capital in detriment to persons in possession of other kinds of capital (economic vs. cultural vs. social capital), as is the case of the field of politics (Singh 2016). Various cleavages along the multiple dimensions of inequality can thus be mobilized for political purposes.

Political mobilization is a process of forming political coalitions by highlighting some cleavages along the multiple axes of inequality while deemphasizing or ignoring others. In class-based mobilization, parties coalesce around economic cleavages. In what is known as "identity politics," mobilization takes place around social cleavages. Harnessing popular anger against the so-called "liberal elite" suggests that political mobilization can take place along the cultural

capital axis as well. Coalitions can form combining different types of cleavages. Neither type of mobilization is self-evident but requires an effort of symbolically capturing and representing existing cleavages.

Politicization of different kinds of capital

The second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have been marked by identity politics, in which political actors have mobilized cleavages along the social inequality axis. Groups on the left have highlighted the oppression of women, of racial and ethnic minorities, and of LGBTQ+ people, among others. Conservative responses have highlighted perceived threats to national values and national standing and to the heritage of the so-called Western civilization mobilizing around global social cleavages but on the privileged end.

One consequence of the rise of identity politics is the de-emphasis of economic cleavages despite rising economic inequality. The political left has had a difficult time mobilizing around economic cleavages. This is also in part due to the symbolic association of rhetoric focused on economic inequality with the discredited economic systems of state socialism (i.e. communism).

While the political left struggles with mobilizing around economic cleavages, the political right has identified mobilization opportunities along a different axis, namely cultural inequality. One notable example is U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's use of the term "deplorables." Clinton used the term to refer to opponents of the advancement of groups of people along the social inequality axis, namely "racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic" persons (citation needed). However, Clinton's use of the term and her statement that it applied to half of Trump's supporters was understood differently and sparked outrage. It

allowed the right to mobilize along the cultural inequality axis and to present itself as a populist champion of ordinary people against the cultural or so-called "liberal elite," possibly costing Clinton the presidential election.

Politics emerges as a field in which any capital can be at stake. As there is inequality along three axes, an economic one, a social one, and a cultural one, cleavages along any of these axes can be and have been mobilized. Political competitions are not limited to struggles over social and economic capital but include struggles over cultural capital as well. Lack of attention to any of the axes can be costly, especially for the left, which purportedly values equality.

Single-focus fields, blindness to other kinds of capital, and field hierarchies

The importance of multiple capitals in fields notwithstanding, field theory tends to conceive of fields as single-focus domains. This is because fields have *illusio*, or a collective agreement as to what the stakes worth striving for are (i.e. a particular capital), and *doxa*, or the taken-for-granted definitions of reality in the field. Thus, while possession of different forms of capital in fields may be noted, it may be ignored or underappreciated in order to maintain the field's *illusio* and *doxa*. Consequently, fields' *illusio* and *doxa* create a kind of social blindness to the forms of capitals perceived as irrelevant to the particular field.

Fields' *illusio* defines the criteria of overt competition and, in a way, justifies the resulting field hierarchy. The presence of other forms of capital rigs the game by introducing unrecognized advantages because of the relative convertibility of capitals. Underneath the official field hierarchy, there lies a hidden hierarchy based on the ignored forms of capital. Persons' field positions may thus be influenced not only by their possession of the primary capital in a field but also by their possession of other kinds of capital.

The unrecognized importance of forms of capital not recognized in fields' *doxa* and *illusio* may keep people in the field but push them to the margins. Let us consider a field with *doxa* and *illusio* based on social capital. We refer to fields in which the primary stake is social capital as communities. Competition in such fields revolves around the social capital related to group membership. Social capital may allow people to belong to communities but if they lack (sufficient) economic and cultural capitals, they may remain on the margins of these communities. The case of the Esperanto movement, to which I turn next, illustrates the perils of focusing on one axis of inequality, in this case social capital, while ignoring another, in this case cultural capital. While striving for equality, Esperantists produce a membership hierarchy relegating some persons to the margins of the Esperanto community.

METHODS

Examining the case of the Esperanto movement is methodologically advantageous for understanding inequality and political mobilization for a number of reasons. The Esperanto movement is a difficult, or least likely, case for identifying inequalities and exclusion because of the movement's specific focus on challenging global inequalities and being inclusive (Lins 1988; Garvía 2015; Velitchkova 2021). If inequality and marginalization exist in the Esperanto community, they can happen anywhere. The Esperanto community is one of the longest lasting and well-institutionalized modern transnational communities (Velitchkova 2021). This implies that several generations of activists have participated in Esperanto politics and considered the implications of their decisions and actions. Basically, there is no reason to believe that Esperantists are less rational and less strategic than other people are. Therefore, processes occurring in the Esperanto community can plausibly occur elsewhere. At the same time, the

Esperanto project is a utopian project (Lins 1988; Garvía 2015) and, as such, it provides some distance from the passions of contemporary politics. The Esperanto case thus allows us to examine political dynamics more objectively, without the fear of jeopardizing the efforts of our preferred political actors if we uncover anything unsavory. In essence, the Esperanto case can be a parable.

To analyze the case of the Esperanto movement, I adopted a multi-method single-case-study approach. The goal was to produce an as complete picture of the movement as possible. Semi-structured interviews with key participants (Blee and Taylor 2002) tasked with leading the Esperanto movement informed me of the struggles and challenges the movement and its leaders have faced and of the approaches adopted in order to face the challenges. Thirty-two interviews with veteran members of the Esperanto movement in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania who had been active since at least the 1980s were conducted in 2009. The sampling procedure consisted of a combination of snowballing–relying on the leadership of national organizations to put me in contact with activists–and directly contacting country delegates, usually active volunteers listed in the Yearbook of the World Esperanto Association and in online sources. Participant observation alerted me to social mechanisms (Lichterman 2002) related to inequality not necessarily evident in the interview data. Participant observation data come from occasional participation in movement activities in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania in 2009, and in Denmark, Slovakia, and the United States in 2011. Archival documents, available organizational data, and a secondary literature review (Clemens and Hughes 2002; Minkoff 2002) allowed me to corroborate these narratives and experiences and trace the history of the Esperanto movement. Archival documents come from the collection of the Esperanto Museum of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, Austria, one of the largest

depositories of Esperanto materials in the world, from Esperanto book distributors, and from Esperanto sources archived online. Organizational data come from Smith and Wiest's (2012) dataset of transnational social movement organizations.

STRIVING FOR AN EQUAL GLOBAL COMMUNITY

The Esperanto project involves two important components, a language and a movement. Esperanto is a constructed language developed by one person, Ludwik Zamenhof, an ophthalmologist and amateur linguist, in the late nineteenth century (Garvía 2015; Kim 1999). As a Jewish subject of the Russian empire born in the Polish town of Białystok, Zamenhof was no stranger to conflict and marginalization. Zamenhof, who called himself "Doktoro Esperanto" (Dr. Hoping), hoped the Esperanto language would be the foundation of an equal global community. In a letter to the president of the Boulogne Esperanto group in 1905 included in the Encyclopedia of Esperanto and commonly referenced by Esperantists, Zamenhof wrote about his dream of all national hatreds disappearing, of the land belonging to everyone, of a language used by everyone, and of people loving and understanding one another (Kökény and Bleier 1933).

This one man's dream inspired a transnational movement still active today. Esperanto was one among many constructed languages with universal aspirations. Its comparative success can be explained in part by the movement's ideal of creating a future of peace, justice, equality, and mutual respect among people irrespective of their national origin (Garvía 2015). Esperanto was conceived as a solution to the so-called "international language problem," addressing the language of international communication (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). As a universal helping second language, Esperanto was touted as a "neutral" means of international communication bridging multiple and equal national languages and cultures (Garvía 2015; Lins 1988). Esperanto

attracted many followers of universalist ideologies promoting equality, notably pacifists, socialists, and anarchists who saw it as a means to pursue their political goals (Lins 1988).

Esperanto principles as the doxa *and* illusio *of the Esperanto field*

Known as the Boulogne Declaration, the principles of the Esperanto community, proposed by Zamenhof and adopted during the first World Congress of Esperanto in 1905, constitute a global community logic, distinct from other logics, such as the state and the economic logics (Velitchkova 2021). The Esperanto community logic consists of the taken for granted ideas (*doxa*), especially those defining what is worth pursuing (*illusio*), by members of the community. The Boulogne Declaration established an autonomous field striving to establish an equal global community around the Esperanto language. Its principles guaranteed the authenticity and autonomy of the community and proved indispensable for its growth, unity, and survival.

The first principle, that of "neutrality," claims universality for Esperanto and community autonomy for its advocates. The principle of neutrality disassociates Esperanto from—and thus puts it in opposition to—nation-states and other political and moral projects. Another principle claims a distinct and shared identity for members of the global Esperanto community, namely that of being *Esperantists* (Kim 1999; cf. Anderson 1983). As discussed below, most struggles in which Esperanto advocates have engaged revolve around the autonomy and recognition of the Esperanto community, and, relatedly, around the best organization that would guarantee them.

The Esperanto language is doxically at the center of the Esperanto community. Two principles in the Boulogne Declaration make this clear. One principle establishes a common core for the language (*i.e.* Zamenhof's *Foundation of Esperanto* [1905]). This unity principle would

prevent the splintering of the language and the community despite efforts to create purportedly "better" international languages similar to Esperanto, such as Ido and Interligua. Another principle would emphasize the practical use of the constructed international language. This principle would encourage language learning, language practice, and the spread of Esperanto to many domains (Table 1).

Without persons capable of using the language, Esperanto would only be a dream. The development of language competences is thus a top priority of the Esperanto movement and the movement spends significant efforts to promote the language. Language courses, the main mechanism for member recruitment, socialization, and retention, take place locally, nationally, and internationally and can be organized by any group. Language courses are regularly organized in conjunction with Esperanto meetings. Local clubs, schools, universities, and summer camps are among the most common venues where language instruction occurs. Esperantists have also taken advantage of the Internet to form an online learning community around the website Lernu.net.

Finally, the Boulogne Declaration establishes the Esperanto community as an equal community. This is ensured through the principle of communal intellectual ownership of the language, similar to the copyleft idea. Communal ownership of Esperanto would facilitate personal investment in the language and in the community and would also facilitate the spread of the language and the multiplicity of its uses.

Community at stake in the Esperanto field

All important Esperanto struggles of which I was made aware had the Esperanto community as a stake. While not all members of the Esperanto community consider themselves

Esperanto activists, the community owes its survival and its relative success largely to its activists. Esperanto activists have shown great ingenuity and commitment to the Esperanto cause ensuring the survival of the community despite the odds being stuck against them. Maintaining a new modern community defined in distinction to the all-powerful nation-state by fiat is not an easy task.

Community recognition struggles represent a central aspect of Esperanto activism. Such efforts help maintain the autonomy of the community, improve its international standing, and facilitate recruitment and retention. Following World War I, thanks to the efforts of the Esperanto movement, the League of Nations considered the adoption of Esperanto as a universal second language (Kökény and Bleier 1933). While this proposal failed, the League recommended the adoption of Esperanto as one of the "clear" languages of the International Telegraph Union (Kökény and Bleier 1933). The Esperanto movement suffered serious blows by Stalinism, Nazism, and World War II, with a large number of Esperantists being decimated (Lins 1988). Following the war, however, the movement reestablished its efforts. In 1954, Esperanto was recognized as a world cultural heritage by UNESCO (van Dijk 2008). In 1966, almost a million individuals and 3,843 organizations representing about seventy million members worldwide supported a petition addressed at the UN demanding recognition of the language (van Dijk 2008).

Arguably, the most important conflict in the history of the global Esperanto community is the struggle over the "neutrality" principle (Lins 1988). As noted above, the neutrality principle, a foundational principle promulgated in the Boulogne Declaration, guarantees the autonomy of the community. Accordingly, the core of the Esperanto community has vigorously defended this principle. For many Esperantists of left-wing persuasion attracted by the equalizing potential of

Esperanto, however, Esperanto could and ought to be used as a tool for political purposes. Between the two world wars and during the Cold War, the labor-Esperanto movement was a prominent counterforce to supporters of neutrality. Some would argue that Esperanto was most successful in coalition with the labor movement. For others, the association of Esperanto with communism discredits Esperanto. Following the fall of state socialism, proponents of the neutrality principle have had the upper hand.

Further differentiation within the Esperanto community has occurred because of struggles over how the universalist aspirations of the community can best be achieved. Claiming a stake in the very definition of the Esperanto community, different factions have struggled over what Esperanto is about. Each faction would propose a "better" vision for the community. The language standard, the organization of the community, and its principles have all been the subject of these struggles. These conflicts have led to schisms and to transformations in the Esperanto community. I briefly describe some of these struggles.

In the early years of the Esperanto community, when Esperanto was one among many possible international languages, enthusiasts of the international language idea debated the merits of Esperanto and of its alternatives (Garvia 2015). More recently, concerns have been raised over the gendered character of the Esperanto language (nouns end in "o," a sound associated with masculine forms in many European languages) and over its Eurocentrism (Esperanto was created on the basis of European languages). In each instance, proponents of a new language standard would attempt to convince the community to adopt this new standard. As such efforts would prove unsuccessful, some would try to form different communities based on the new language standard. Esperanto as a community has persisted maintaining the Esperanto language core.

Creating a community that spans the globe involves enormous organizational effort. The Esperanto community adopted a hybrid organizational structure that has allowed the Esperanto community to foster equal grassroots participation while also benefiting from coordination at the national and at the international level. The importance of the grassroots level for a community emphasizing language and communication equality is obvious. Local chapters allow persons to be involved in the community on a regular basis, to learn and practice the Esperanto language face-to-face, and to become socialized into the community overall. The form large-scale community coordination takes, however, has been more controversial.

One of the earliest divisions in the Esperanto community was the result of disagreements over the role of an international association as opposed to national associations (van Dijk 2008). On one side of the conflict, Esperanto activists would support the existence of an international association serving as an umbrella for other associations (national or specialized) and individuals. The World Esperanto Association (Universala Esperanto Asocio-UEA) would become such a federated international organization most readily associated with the Esperanto community at the global level. Critics of the international association form argue that such an association yields great power and could not be representative of the particular interests of national organizations. Consequently, a number of national Esperanto associations have opted for not being affiliated with the World Esperanto Association (UEA).

Another set of disagreements has to do with the nature of the global association organizing the Esperanto community. For some, Esperanto is best served if represented by a federated organization, such as the World Esperanto Association, in which national associations have a strong voice. Such a structure recognizes the nation-state division of the world and takes into consideration the particularities of national communities. Others argue that persons should

be represented directly at the global level. The important role local delegates play in the World Esperanto Association and the existence of groups such as the World Anational Association (Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda or SAT) having individual members reflect this position.

While for early Esperantists, the global orientation and universalist aspirations of Esperanto constituted its raison d'être, more recent cohorts appreciate its particularism and dismiss its universalist aspirations as too idealistic. One group of Esperantists, particularly active in the 1980s, has focused on linguistics and on scientific conferences and publications. They have promoted the subfield of interlinguistics, dealing with the international language problem. The most acrimonious conflict in the Polish Esperanto community I was made aware of was in fact between proponents of this narrow intellectual approach and traditional Esperantists in favor of mass participation. Eventually, the faction promoting mass participation prevailed in Poland. Interestingly, however, the academic field of interlinguistics continues to be an important mechanism conferring legitimacy to Esperanto globally.

The prominence of scholars and of other members of what can be described as the cultural elite in the Esperanto community cannot be denied. Despite the original Esperanto focus on equality, however, this curious fact has not been problematized and politicized in the community. As shown above, Esperantists do not shy away from engaging in political struggles despite considering themselves to be peace loving and equality seeking folks. This lack of politicization of cultural capital constitutes a peculiar social blindness, which, as I show in the next section, results in the production of an unintended and undesired membership hierarchy.

THE UNRECOGNIZED HIERARCHY IN THE ESPERANTO COMMUNITY

Importance of cultural capital in the Esperanto community

While the major struggles in the Esperanto community focus on the nature of the community—or the organization of social capital—cultural capital plays an important taken-for-granted role in the community. The primary advocates and constituencies of Esperanto have been persons endowed with cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984; Garvía 2015). Esperantists included professionals, persons with high-skill hobbies, persons with significant media and language skills, and persons with scientific or artistic proclivities, among others. The defining features of the population of international Esperanto organizations are indicative of the importance of cultural capital for participation in the Esperanto community. In the peak of the movement, in 1991, at least half of the fourteen types of Esperanto international organizations in existence, including the four most represented types, presupposed an ideal type of a member profile possessing significant cultural capital (Table 1). Despite its aspirations toward equality, the Esperanto community has largely been a community for the cultural elite.

Archival, interview, and participant observation data provide further evidence for the importance of cultural capital for achieving the highest status in the Esperanto community. The creator of Esperanto, Zamenhof, whose figure and biography are central for the community, exemplifies the ideal Esperantist profile. Despite his disadvantaged political and economic status, Zamenhof was able to create Esperanto and spearhead the Esperanto movement thanks to his cultural capital[1] (Kökény and Bleier 1933). Zamenhof was a well-educated professional with multiple language skills coming from a similar family (Kökény and Bleier 1933). The profiles of Esperanto leaders I had the opportunity to interview mirror this ideal participant type, endowed with significant cultural capital. All but one had university education, which for a cohort born in the middle of the twentieth century is an indicator of cultural elite status. In addition, all had

[1] Also thanks to economic resources brought as dowry by his wife (Kökény and Bleier 1933).

significant travel experience, spoke multiple languages, had a professional status, and engaged in some form of cultural production.

The main difference between Esperanto leaders and regular participants appears to be the ability and willingness of the former to engage in highly valued cultural production. The modal participant in the Esperanto gatherings I attended was also a highly educated professional. Most regular participants only engaged in direct communication and occasionally in indirect communication in Esperanto but mostly through private media. What distinguishes regular participants and leaders from low-status participants, in turn, is the possession of language competences, to which I turn next.

"The easiest international language"…

Many Esperantists believe that one of the best qualities of Esperanto is that it is easy to learn and there is evidence supporting this belief. Esperanto is a mixture of elements of various European languages, offering beginners who speak European languages some familiar ground, upon which they can build communication skills fairly quickly. Basic Esperanto grammar consists of only sixteen rules with no exceptions (Zamenhof 1905). The language uses the Latin alphabet and is phonetic, which makes it easy to write. Its twenty-eight sounds come from the Slavic languages but are common to other languages spoken in Europe too. As a foundation of the Esperanto vocabulary, Zamenhof chose the most "international" or shared roots among those of the languages he knew. In practice, a vast majority of the Esperanto vocabulary roots come from the Latin-derived Romance[2] languages, thus making learning vocabulary easy for speakers of these languages. Another large set of roots comes from the Germanic language family. In

[2] The Romance languages include French and Spanish among others.

terms of word formation, Esperanto follows the logic of German and the Slavic languages. Similarly to these languages, Esperanto includes a set of prefixes and suffixes with predefined meanings, which provide flexibility and allow language users to be creative with their wording yet be able to convey the precise meaning they want to convey. Almost any root can turn into any part of speech using appropriate suffixes (Zamenhof 1905). Word order and sentence structure are also mostly flexible, which can easily accommodate the usual practices of speakers of (at least) European languages. Reportedly, it takes ten times less time to reach a proficiency level in Esperanto than to reach the same level of proficiency in English or in another common national language (Maxwell 1988). My experience of learning the basics of the language in several weeks also demonstrates that Esperanto is indeed a much easier language in comparison to other languages.

… yet not everyone can acquire it; linguistic capital as a membership criterion

Despite its simplicity, flexibility, and similarity to other European languages, Esperanto is not accessible to everyone to the same degree. Persons with limited education and minority status could be disadvantaged in this regard. Language competences thus serve as an implicit criterion for inclusion and participation in the Esperanto community even in the case of a language specifically designed to be simple and easy to learn. An example from my field notes suggests that Esperantists themselves are likely aware that not everyone has equal chances of learning the language:

> I am waiting for an interview at the premises of the Esperanto club in the town of Z. A man rings the bell and is greeted by two Esperantists. He tells them he has heard about the Esperanto language and how easy it is, and he is here to get more information about

it. He is from a village close by. He asks about how useful the language is. They tell him there are Esperantists all around the world with whom he could communicate in the language. They give him some brochures. Before he leaves, they try to teach him a few words, like: "Saluton/Hello!", "Ĝis/Bye!" The man has a difficult time repeating the words. After he is gone, the two Esperantists briefly debate how likely it is that this man can learn the Esperanto language. One is skeptical about this ever happening. The other one is more hopeful and insists on giving the man the benefit of the doubt. What is left unsaid in this conversation is the visibly low social status of the man apparent through his timid appearance, clothing style, and possible ethnic origin.

As it will become evident from what follows, even one of the easiest languages is difficult to learn for some people–specifically those with less access to education and other practical learning opportunities–and serves as a basis for distinctions and inequalities. In this sense, processes in the Esperanto community exemplify language-based stratification processes likely in operation in other communities (cf. Bourdieu 1984; Polletta and Lee 2006). The Esperanto phenomenon thus draws attention to the stratifying role language plays, specifically when international communication and communication in standard languages is concerned. The taken-for-granted use of languages associated with former empires, such as English, French, and Spanish, for international communication accordingly appears less innocuous.

Normativity of language use

As the core of the *doxa* of the Esperanto field, the Esperanto language is taken for granted. While other forms of linguistic capital are politicized, Esperanto linguistic capital is not. Possession of Esperanto linguistic capital has a normative character and serves as a criterion for

inclusion or devaluation in the Esperanto community. Several incidents in which I was involve suggest that Esperantists are not only aware of persons' different Esperanto linguistic capital but also value negatively, in the context of the Esperanto community, those who do not possess and value it. Persons with limited Esperanto skills usually lack a voice in the community. While talking about an old-time activist I was considering interviewing who was uncharacteristically outspoken, two young Esperantists dismissed his contributions to the movement by suggesting he was not a real Esperantist because of his limited Esperanto language skills. In another instance, an elderly anti-communist Esperantist disparaged communist Esperantists by suggesting they did not speak the language well, among other failings. In a third incident, an aggrieved former leader dismissed the people who ousted his faction by insinuating they polluted the movement by opening organized Esperanto trips to persons only interested in shopping abroad rather than keeping these trips open to just people genuinely interested in the Esperanto language. Finally, one leader I approached for an interview refused to talk to me until I learned the Esperanto language. Esperanto language skills, for the community, are normative.

A hierarchical typology of membership categories

I have identified four membership categories associated with the Esperanto community related to the distinct importance of self-identification and of language skills as paths to full community membership (Table 2). As noted, per the Boulogne Declaration, the founding document of the community, members of the Esperanto community call themselves Esperantists. Everyone who speaks the Esperanto language is considered an Esperantist. Not every Esperanto speaker, however, self-identifies with the Esperanto community. Esperanto speakers who do not self-identify with the community are still welcome to fully participate but self-select out of full

membership and high status within the community. Thus, I would call them latent Esperantists. These individuals learn Esperanto for reasons other than a belief in the international language as a worthy endeavor in and of itself (e.g. the labor-Esperanto movement discussed above).

The category of “eternal beginners,” referring to people who never master the language beyond the beginner level but who nevertheless choose to remain in the community, further demonstrates the importance of Esperanto language skills (or linguistic capital) for achieving full membership in the Esperanto community. The reality of the continuous presence of “eternal beginners” in the Esperanto community further demonstrates that self-identification with the Esperanto community, even at the cost of enduring a low status, is an important element of membership in the community.

Full members in the Esperanto community thus appear to possess two characteristics. They have acquired a sufficient level of Esperanto language skills to qualify as Esperantists. In addition, they also self-identify as such. The broader point that can be derived from examining the membership categories of the Esperanto community echoes Bourdieu's (1993) claim that membership in an institutional field depends on a combination of an identification with the logic of the field and acquisition of the form of capital that defines the field in terms of practical operation. This is in contrast to the institutionalist argument about a loose coupling between institutional mandates and actual practices (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Loose coupling of institutional mandates and practices creates low-status membership categories, as the case of “eternal beginners” of Esperanto demonstrates. Possession of the capital defining the institutional field, on the other hand, confers high status in the field regardless of how closely one identifies with the field thus making access to the highest positions in the field much easier.

"Eternal beginners" as low-status participants in the Esperanto field

The term "eternal beginners", referring to participants in the Esperanto community who for one reason or another never reach some level of fluency in Esperanto, is derogatory. Unlike full members, they cannot participate in the most valued community activities such as translating into or from Esperanto, writing original texts in the language, teaching the language, or using Esperanto for other communicative purposes that demonstrate its value as a universal second language. The eternal beginners challenge the core claim of the movement that Esperanto is an easy language and that anyone can learn it. Since they represent such a contradiction, the eternal beginners are marginalized. Eternal beginners participate in their own marginalization through being silent observers and followers or through "crocodiling" (speaking in their native tongues). "Crocodiling" is looked down upon and discouraged. A brief interaction I participated in while taking a week-long Esperanto language course illustrates the point:

> "There are people who come every year to these courses but who still cannot speak the language. They are the 'eternal beginners,'" a man explains to me. "I'm one of them," a woman says at once. This is the first time I've heard her speak. Folks laugh uneasily.

Because of the effort to provide opportunities to anyone showing some interest in learning the language and because of the commonly held belief that the Esperanto language is one of the easiest if not the easiest language to learn, it is assumed that the only reason "eternal beginners" remain eternal beginners is because of a lack of sufficient effort. Esperantists, in my experience, are good-natured and polite people, so it is very unusual to hear anyone say anything overtly negative about anyone, including the "eternal beginners." Brief remarks establishing a boundary between the true Esperantists and the "eternal beginners," however, can be heard on occasion. Not speaking the commonly agreed upon language of communication practically

eliminates the possibility of having a conversation even if no intent to be exclusive is present. Another interaction makes this clear:

> I am attending a local Esperanto meeting in the town of X. I am invited to sit next to the president of the local club. Next to me, on the other side, an elderly woman is sitting who does not participate in the conversations around. "Mrs. Y is Mr. Y's wife. She's been coming to these meetings for years but she cannot say much besides 'Hello', 'How are you?', and 'Good bye,'" says the president before moving on to telling me about his experiences in the movement. I sense the disapproving tone in his voice.

When explicitly asked about why he is in the community, one eternal beginner of thirty years responded that he likes the "social aspect" of the community. To communicate with me, he relies on the goodwill and interpreting skills of another Esperantist, who is his friend. Yet, he continues to promote Esperanto despite the disapproval of other members who see his efforts as more hurtful than helpful for the movement [I do not know if expressed discouragements were ever spoken to his face]. The person is involved in public relations and in publishing efforts. "Eternal beginners" thus may find alternative reasons to stay in the community, in the form of "selective incentives" (Olson 1965), including ties to friends and significant others, in addition to the self-identification with the community. They, however, are not recognized as full community participants because they lack the Esperanto language skills necessary for communication within the community.

"No 'crocodiling' (speaking in one's native language) allowed here": Immersion as a skill-developing, disciplining, and status-defining practice

Individuals who identify with the idea of Esperanto but who are not quick enough to

learn the basics of the language and thus become potential members of the "eternal beginners" category may drift away from the community. The low status associated with the category is experienced as degrading and alienating. In the absence of continued strong identification with the community and/or of selective incentives, the logic of community is likely to lose its value and eventually lead to exiting the community. For example,

> A participant in a weeklong Esperanto course I took told me after the end of the course that he found the experience frustrating. As a beginner with no prior second language learning experience, he found the “No crocodiling” (no speaking in one's native language) rule particularly offensive. For a week, he had felt helpless and lost with little avenue for communicating his needs. The person felt discouraged and was moving on to doing other things. Yet, he remained interested in the language in general and approving of the idea of Esperanto as an international language of communication.

The term “crocodiling,” meaning speaking in one's own language or in a language other than Esperanto, is associated with Andreo (András) Cseh, who developed an Esperanto immersion teaching technique. In the reputable international weeklong or longer courses I took, an immersion-like experience is effected through imposing the “No crocodiling” rule for all participants. While the rule is intended as a fun way to assure the maximum amount of learning in the shortest possible time, it is psychologically taxing.

What distinguishes the fast learners of Esperanto I encountered from actual and potential “eternal beginners,” is their prior language learning experience or other strong educational background. For example, one fast learner in one of the language courses I took has a strong background in the main language families at the origin of Esperanto. Another fast learner has a strong background in multiple computer languages. For actual and potential “eternal beginners,”

on the other hand, Esperanto is their first significant exposure to a non-native language.

The same practice, which some novices experience as a challenging but efficient method of accumulating the communication skills central to the functioning of the community in which they are interested in participating, other novices experience as a disciplining technique that defines their low status and marginalization. What appears to distinguish the novices who experience the intense learning as challenging from the novices who experience it as degrading is their preparedness in terms of similar prior learning experiences, in this case language learning. The former are more likely to develop the skills/capital conferring high status in the community while the latter are less likely to acquire such skills/capital and thus become low-status members of the community if they have to or choose to remain in it.

Instrumental Esperantists as full participants

In contrast to "eternal beginners" and to novices who find the language not as easy as it is presented to be, I was immediately welcomed and felt at home in the community. The following is a personal reflection following a portion of my field experience:

> When I attend Esperanto meetings or meet Esperantists, I always say that I am a sociologist interested in studying the movement, through which I try to convey my intended position as an external observer. I present myself in Esperanto. People often ask me about how long ago I started learning the language and when I explain that I've been learning it for a few weeks, they get excited and encourage me to keep speaking. My efforts to speak are congratulated. When I say apologetically that my Esperanto is not very good, people are usually surprised and congratulate me for my skills.
>
> My ability to communicate in the language, albeit imperfectly, only after a few weeks of

learning it is a source of excitement because it confirms the generally held belief that the Esperanto language is easy. I am made to feel accepted because Esperantists can point to me and say: 'See, she can speak the language only after a few weeks!' I am considered an Esperantist despite the openly instrumental (scholarly/unrelated to the community's goals) nature of my involvement.

Another case of instrumental participation comes from Eastern Europe. Following the 1989 transitions to democracy, the Esperanto community in the region experienced a decline and lost members. A popular explanation for this decline among Esperantists is the availability of other means to travel and engage in consumerism, among other explanations. This argument is plausible but difficult to corroborate because instrumentally-oriented participants in the community would have left it long ago and would be difficult to locate. While attending the World Congress of Esperanto in 2011, however, I fortuitously met an Eastern European Esperantist who had been involved in the community for instrumental reasons during the 1980s–participation in the community provided a way to cross the Iron Curtain and travel abroad. After 1989, the person left the community and lived abroad. Twenty years later and back living in the native country, the person decided to rejoin the Esperanto community–the person spoke the language and thought participation in the community would be a great hobby. Having the necessary communication skill, the person felt welcome in the community and enjoyed the experience.

Another case of instrumental participation is evident in the following excerpt from my field notes while attending an Esperanto language course:

> A few folks are hanging out in the lobby of the school/dorm where the course is taking place. People are talking about what they do and why they are there. As usual, I say that I

am a sociologist and that I study the Esperanto movement. One young man insists on telling me that he is not involved in the movement because of its ideals. It's just a hobby for him. He works with computers, as a number of other folks do. Programmers often learn about Esperanto through Wikipedia when they do a search for artificial languages. He speaks the language well and as far as I can tell he is treated no differently from other participants.

The presence of persons who lack expressed commitment to the Esperanto community is plausibly welcome because they demonstrate that a community based on a constructed language is possible in practice. Even if one does not hold the community ideal, one's actions show its merit. Esperanto linguistic capital can convert into Esperanto social capital. Believers in or supporters of the Esperanto ideal who do not practice it, by contrast, are marginalized because they challenge the ideal, as if they say: it does not really work. Their lack of Esperanto linguistic capital undermines their Esperanto social capital. For instrumental participants, the possession of practical communication skills relevant to the community can draw them to participating, despite their lack of expressed commitment, because of the familiarity and ease of involvement and because of the attractiveness of enjoying a high status in the community (of which they may or may not be aware). Practical language skills relevant to a community, therefore, appear to be of primary importance in allocating full membership and high status within the community. Identification with the community, in turn, is only of secondary importance and, in the absence of practical language skills, leads to assignment to a low status and marginalization.

DISCUSSION

Contribution to the study of inequality

This work contributes to the study of inequality by highlighting the multiple dimensions of inequality. Inequality has not only an economic dimension but also a cultural and a social dimension. As the Esperanto case suggests, without paying attention to all dimensions of inequality, even movements whose sole purpose is to self-consciously strive for equality may inadvertently produce inequality and marginalization.

Contribution to our understanding of political cleavages

This work also contributes to the study of politics and specifically to our understanding of political cleavages and political mobilization. As inequality has multiple dimensions, political cleavages can form along any of the dimensions of inequality. Not only economic logic but also social and cultural logics can orient people's understandings of inequality and organize their preferences and their actions. Consequently, political mobilization can harness discontent based on any of these cleavages. Blindness or inattention to one aspect of inequality may cost parties constituencies potentially recruitable by other parties able to mobilize around this aspect of inequality.

Contribution to field theory

Finally, this work contributes to field theory by developing the political implications of two less prominent aspects of the theory, 1) the importance of social capital, and 2) the convertibility of capitals. Also, I argue that we need to pay attention to the role different kinds of capital play within fields, regardless of whether they are part of fields' *doxa* and *illusio* or not. I suggest that the so-called identity politics can be understood as mobilization along the social capital axis of inequality. I show how field mechanisms, namely *doxa* and *illusio*, can create

social blindness to inequality and cleavages related to other kinds of capital, notably cultural capital. Because capitals are convertible, however, all capitals can be consequential for the establishment of hierarchies within fields. As noted above, this can lead to undesired inequality and to unexpected mobilization based on unrecognized cleavages.

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Table 1. Transnational Esperanto organizations by type, 1991 (N=66) (Smith and Wiest 2012).

Type	Number of organizations	Percent of all	Sub-types
Professional	16	24	agricultural specialists, artists, commerce professionals, doctors, journalists, jurists, librarians, mathematicians, ornithologists, philologists, postal and telecommunication workers, railway workers, scientists, teachers, writers
Hobby	13	20	automobile enthusiasts, book clubs, chess enthusiasts, cyclists, Go enthusiasts, philatelists, photographers and cinematographers, radio amateurs, radio listeners, Scouts, tourism association
Media	10	15	correspondence service, Esperanto museum, journalists, librarians, musicians, philatelists, photographers and cinematographers, postal and telecommunication workers, radio amateurs, radio listeners
Language	8	12	Esperanto academy, international language associations, philologists
Solidarity	7	11	Committee for ethnic liberties, Europe-focused clubs, anational associations, Rotarians
Religion	6	9	atheists, Baha'i, Catholics, Christians, ecumenicals, Quakers
Art/creative	5	8	artists, musicians, photographers and cinematographers, writers
Environment	5	8	cyclists, nature conservationists, naturists, ornithologists, vegetarians
Literature	5	8	books clubs, librarians, writers
Science	5	8	Esperanto academy, Esperanto museum, ornithologists, science academy, scientists
Peace	4	6	friendship society, veterans, world peace movement, youth
Rights	4	6	blind, handicapped, homosexual, vegetarians
Politics	3	5	Committee for ethnic liberties, communists, European parliamentarians
Worker	3	5	anational associations, cooperative movement

Table 2. Membership categories for the Esperanto movement.

	Language skills allowing participation in core practices	*No or insufficient language skills for participation in core practices*
Expressed self-identification with the movement	“Esperantists”: full members	“Eternal beginners”: unable; silent/partial members
No expressed self-identification with the movement	“Latent Esperantists”: reluctant: potential full members; instrumental participants	Non-members