

‘The Light Cloak of the Saint:’ The Changing Rhetorical Situations of Esperanto’s “Internal Idea” and its Relevance to Contemporary Problems

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‘The Light Cloak of the Saint:’

The Changing Rhetorical Situations of Esperanto’s “Internal Idea” and its Relevance to Contemporary Problems



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Abstract: Esperanto was conceived as a model of commercial usefulness, but also to confront the higher aims of its “internal idea.” The *interna ideo* of Esperanto has historically taken various forms, but it has most often been concerned with protecting a multiethnic world in its diversities, building bridges that allow for a more equitable coexistence of minorities. This underlying ethical thrust makes the international language a potential lever for a more just society in the current global conditions. In order to support this claim, I reconstruct the rhetorical situation of Zamenhof’s pronouncements on the “internal idea,” including Hillelism and *Homaranismo*. I also argue that George Orwell’s dystopic *Newspeak* can be considered a political commentary about what would happen to Esperanto if the “internal idea” were to be hijacked in the name of economic progress or the supposed tranquility of commerce.

Keywords: Esperanto, Zamenhof, Hillelism, *Homaranismo*, Manuel Castells, Network Society, George Orwell, *Newspeak*

Introduction: Esperanto between Commerce and “Interna Ideo”

In *The Rise of the Network Society*, the first part of a trilogy that charts the social and economic dynamics of the information age, the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells quotes as prophetic some words of Max Weber from the *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5) (Castells, 2010, p. 215). The German sociologist states, “The care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the ‘saint like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.’ But fate decreed that it should become an iron cage” (Weber, 2001, p. 123). In other words, the spirit of religious asceticism, which was the favorable background and

mitigating force in the birth of capitalism, does not seem to be needed anymore in the mechanistic foundation of its victorious expansion. Capitalism has fled from the cage, leaving perhaps behind only mechanized petrification. Or, as Peter Baehr proposes in contrast to Talcott Parson's classical translation of Weber's *Stahlhartes Gehäuse* metaphor as "iron cage," the "shell as hard as steel" that modern capitalism has willingly accepted has created a new kind of being through a reconstitution of the human subject based on materialistic consumption (2001, p. 152). As Weber sarcastically concludes, "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart, this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (2001, p. 124). Baehr stresses that Weber's position has Nietzschean overtones that can be traced back to Zarathustra's indictment of the satiated humanity of the "last man," but Weber was far from desperate. Mechanized petrification is avoidable if new or old ideals are able to raise a new man from the mere pursuit of utilitarian values (Baehr, 2001, p. 160).

In the same way, Castells' book criticizes the new model of global production and management, which exacerbates inequalities, arguing that it is not an inevitable consequence of the informational paradigm (2010, p. 255). Rather, it is the result of economic and political choices by governments and companies that aim at productivity increases for short-term profitability, but disrupt the labor force and its traditions of grass-roots solidarity. The reference to Weber and the birth of capitalism in a highly spiritual, Calvinist environment shows that for Castells, too, contesting these choices and finding another way is still possible. In particular, the Spanish sociologist sees the global architecture of the space of flows and the defensive individualization of rooted identities as two faces of the same coin (Castells, 2010, p. 3). The instrumental logic of the network, which assigns worth to places and people, selectively switches on and off individuals, groups, or regions. In this context of "bipolar opposition between the Net and the self," elites can easily afford to feel global, but workers often react to the exclusion by embracing an equally exclusionary local identity. Even as immigration is making our societies more multiethnic, religious or ethnic fundamentalism tends to grow.

In this essay, I argue that Esperanto—an international auxiliary language created at the end of the 19th Century by the Jewish ophthalmologist Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof--can contribute towards reversing the most dangerous trends in the network society thanks to its inherent double purpose. It was conceived as a model of

commercial usefulness, but also to confront the higher aims of its “internal idea.” The *interna ideo* of Esperanto has historically taken various forms, but it has most often been concerned with protecting a multiethnic world in its diversities by building bridges that allow for a more equitable coexistence of minorities. More than the asceticism of the early Calvinists, which constrained profit by piety, its underlying ethical thrust makes the international language a potential lever for a more just society in the current global conditions, as well as a resource for a more empowering use of information technologies.

I illustrate the claim above by performing a rhetorical analysis of early Esperanto texts, showing how their motives are still relevant today. I first tackle the relationship between commerce and the still vague traces of the “*interna ideo*” in *International Language: Preface and Complete Grammar*, the first textbook of the language. Retrospectively known as the “First Book” (“*Unua Libro*”), it was published in 1887 by Zamenhof under the pseudonym Dr. Esperanto, “the Doctor Who Hopes.” On the one hand, it presents Esperanto as an extremely easy language that every literate person could learn in no time, stressing its potentially valuable contribution to commerce in order to stimulate its widespread adoption. On the other, it mentions its particular relevance for peoples living in regions torn by inter-ethnic strife.

The existential thrust of this statement is important. In fact, the author himself was born in the Pale of Settlement, the mandated area of Jewish residence in the Russian empire. His native place—nowadays Bialystok in Poland—was a relatively industrialized town in Belarus, in which Poles, Lithuanians, Germans, Russians, and Belarusians faced an often difficult coexistence with each other as well with the Jewish majority. As Rebecca Kobrin writes in her award-winning book *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora*, “Although demographically dominant, Jews represented a non-native population and so struggled with issues of identity and assimilation” (2010, p. 24). Accordingly, Zamenhof proposes literary translations in Esperanto not only in order to save time in language learning, but also as a way to reconcile ideas and convictions of different peoples. An interethnic public sphere as a neutral ground for rational argumentation, he implies, is an illusion without the international language. Even if people do not speak about politics, as soon as they open their mouths their languages betray them as foreign to each other. Zamenhof’s cosmopolitanism is, therefore, not a marketplace for ideas, but first and foremost a sensitivity to the rights of minorities.

The relationship between commerce and the “internal idea” was not always so harmonious in the life of Zamenhof. His first biography, written in Esperanto in 1920 by the young Swiss social democrat Edmond Privat, offers us a vivid portrait of the policy of “*Divide ut imperes*” in the Russian Empire as the fertile terrain in which Zamenhof’s messianic aspirations for humanity could blossom (Privat, 2001). However, Privat also bemoans the lack of understanding of Zamenhof’s thought in rationalistic France, where his closest collaborators asked him to be silent about the religious-political aspects of his “internal idea” and to stress only the commercial uses and scientific side of the language. This was a sacrifice he was no longer willing to make after the wave of pogroms in Russia due to the failed revolution of 1905. Privat reconstructs the more explicit developments of the “*interna ideo*,” from Zamenhof’s early project of reframing a modern Jewish identity through “Hillelism” (1901) to the more universalizing starting point of his later “*Homaranismo*,” which could perhaps be best translated as “Humanitism” (1906, 1913). Privat understates the extent of Zamenhof’s early engagement with the proto-Zionist movement, which has recently been brought to light by Kobrin, Roberto Garvía, and Esther Schor among others (Kobrin, 2010; Gavría, 2015; Schor, 2016). Kobrin, in particular, stresses that Zamenhof saw Zionism as a practical response to the plight of the masses of uprooted Jewish migrant workers (2010, p. 53).

Zamenhof’s reference to the thought of Hillel the Elder, a Jewish religious leader at the time of Second Temple who died around 10 C.E., is sometimes read as betraying a sort of elitism. However, Kobrin shows that even the Jewish socialist Bund Party, which was wildly successful in Bialystok, used the words of “the great wise Jewish scholar, Rabbi Hillel,” such as, “If I do not act now, then when?” in order to convince the workers of the rightfulness of their protest. In fact, Kobrin states that, “Such rhetoric allowed Jews to feel that they still operated within the parameters of Jewish law, even as they directly challenged the authority of the tsar” (2010, p. 45). Kobrin stresses, in fact, that while the ideologies that shaped the Bundist, proto-Zionist, and Esperantist movements originated in Jewish intellectual circles, their success “hinged on their ability to link their larger ideological platforms with the economic and psychological hardships facing internal Jewish migrants in the Russian Empire” (2010, p. 43). In particular, “Zamenhof’s Esperanto movement proposed a plan that facilitated Jewish assimilation by metaphorically forcing all residents of Eastern Europe to face the same struggle of learning a new language” (Kobrin, 2010, p. 52).

In his book on *Ancient Judaism* (1917-9), Weber writes that the teachers of the Torah in the time of Hillel were a stratum not of elitist, but of plebeian intellectuals. Due to rigid prohibitions against teaching the law for profit, most of them worked as artisans. In fact, “Also, the first two famous founders of schools and sharp controversialists, Hillel the elder and Shammai, were artisans. Thus they were men of the same social stratum that produced Paul and the personalities mentioned in his letters” (Weber, 1952, p. 393). Yitzhak Buxbaum describes Hillel as a “street corner missionary” who waited for manual workers at the gate of Jerusalem to teach them the Torah (2000, p. 17). In this sense, the historical persona of Hillel, the teacher from Babylon who wanted disciples not only from rich or learned Jewish families, but was open to proselytizing, brings us closer to Privat’s original insight into Zamenhof’s character and aims. In his picture, in fact, Zamenhof appears as the dedicated eye-doctor of the poor Jews, working nights on his ideal of a common language to great detriment of his health. Kobrin reminds us that, “By 1889 [...] Jewish men represented 13.4% of the empire’s practicing physicians, even though Jews accounted for less than 4% of Russia’s total population. This proportionally large number of Jewish doctors gave the medical profession in Russia a stigma of social inferiority among the Slavic majority” (2010, p. 39). There is no doubt that economic troubles marked the first decades of Esperanto, despite the high-status doctors enjoyed in the Jewish community of the Russian Empire and Zamenhof’s own high-level connections abroad, such as with his famous French Jewish colleague and early Esperanto-supporter Louis Émile Javal.

Thanks to Privat’s effort to eschew an elitist reading of Esperanto and to stress its egalitarian aspect, we can better reconceive how it can be understood as a tool to undermine the increasing social polarization between a global elite and locally-minded workers in the network society. The example of 1,200 students of pre-college age who have been studying a basic course of Esperanto during last year at Kunming College of the Arts in the People’s Republic of China shows that the language can be a valuable asset to broaden the horizon of youths of minority, working-class, and often migrant background who come from the Yunnan countryside. In fact, it provides them the model of the easiest Western language, helps them hone their pronunciation of Mandarin, and empowers them to ask for better conditions in their learning of English. These include, for example, the presence of foreign teachers alongside the Chinese colleagues, such as their peers would enjoy in expensive international colleges. Video correspondences and phone calls in Esperanto through WeChat with French and Italian students also

expose the Chinese students to other pronunciations and cultures. They stimulate a plurilingual curiosity in the most talented students and provide training in listening across differences that is important for their desired future careers as stewards on airplanes and bullet trains. In fact, even if Zamenhof talked highly of Italian as a musical language that could be a model for his “*belsona lingvo*” (sweet-sounding language), there is no standard pronunciation of Esperanto. We should notice that this stress on understanding and welcoming differences matches the most advanced research in Applied Linguistics for the teaching and assessing of English, which is increasingly a world language, written and spoken in different ways by people of the most varied backgrounds.¹

Zamenhof’s Hillelism stressed the human side of Judaism not as unavoidable ethical duties based on Israel’s covenant with God, but as a “concrete bodily form of religion created by common mortal human beings,” and therefore also changeable by them (Zamenhof, 1901, p. 40). This belief asked for the construction of practical bridges among the rituals and symbols of every religion in the public sphere. In private, everybody could still cherish the sense of belonging given by particular customs, but public places and occasions had also to provide chances to be together more intimately on neutral grounds than modern people who felt alienated by their traditions typically are. The adoption of Esperanto as an auxiliary language respectful of all would help them in this sharing. This side of the history of Esperanto resonates with the current campaign on the part of third-sector organizations dedicated to the adoption of neutrally furnished “rooms of silence” or “rooms of religions” in public places such as hospitals, railway stations, or universities in increasingly multiethnic Italy. In contrast to the growing souverainist positions and anti-immigrant fears in Europe and in the U.S., the ongoing engagement of Esperantists with these topical issues is proof that “even now in the Internet age, Esperanto is about connection, not connectivity; about social life, not social networks” (Schor, 2016, p. 9). Its

¹ See the contributions of Liz Hamp-Lyons, Rama Mathew, Gary Ockey, and Elvis Wagner during the conference *Assessing World Languages 2*, held at the University of Macau from October 29 to November 1, 2018. The assessment of written English increasingly welcomes models alternative to argumentation in the Anglo-tradition (Hamp-Lyons, October 30); tests of listening comprehension that include examples of foreign students (Ockey and Wagner, October 30); and new forms of assessment to evaluate the widespread phenomenon of “translingualism” among speakers of English and local Indian languages (Mathew, November 1).

inherited and inherently political thrust is also what distinguishes Esperanto from George Orwell's Newspeak, which could be read as an Esperanto emptied of its "internal idea."

In the next section, I address in more depth the relation between commerce and the ethically minded "internal idea" in the "First Book" of Esperanto in order to chart how the two are rhetorically intertwined and simultaneously contrasted in a successfully ambiguous message.

The "First Book:" Commerce and Emancipation

After several unsuccessful attempts, Zamenhof received money to print the "First Book" of Esperanto from his father-in-law, a successful Jewish soap merchant in a region in which trading was traditionally one of the few activities open to Jews. In this 40-page booklet, a long preface introduces a concise description of the grammar, a small vocabulary, samples of letter and translations, and examples of original poetry in Esperanto. These topics are followed by a blank form for readers to promise that they will study the language if ten million people would make the same pledge. The book first appeared in Russian, French, German, and Polish from a Jewish bookshop in Warsaw in 1887. English, Yiddish, and Hebrew translations followed the next year. Russian was the main language in which Zamenhof had been educated both by his Russophile father and in the public education system, and the most important to receive the censor's permission for publication. But Polish was his "personal" language (Privat, 2001, p. 64). As Jerzy Lukowski reminds us, French and German were the Enlightenment languages of modern instruction that the national education system of the late Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had inherited from the Jesuit Order after it was suppressed in 1773 (2010, p. 70, 96). These languages were taught in the prestigious gymnasium young Zamenhof was able to attend in Warsaw thanks to his father's official position as censor. My analysis focuses particularly on the text as it appears in these two languages.

Esperanto's main rival at the time was Volapük, which was invented in 1879 by the German Catholic priest Johann Martin Schleyer. It was the first artificial language to obtain wide international recognition and to gather a community of speakers. It presented itself mostly as a tool for educated men that could help standardize business communication, saving on translations and costly misinterpretations. But at the time of Esperanto's public

appearance, Volapük's popularity was being undermined by internal strife about linguistic reform. As Gavriá argues, Zamenhof "understood that, strategically, it was advisable to emphasize the benefits of an artificial language for international trade or scholarly exchange, but he never concealed his idea that a non-national language had to have a soul, a moral mission" (2010, p. 64). Accordingly, both the French and German versions of Zamenhof's booklet stress the time-saving aspect of learning a language that was so easy that its entire vocabulary could be sent in a letter cover, thanks to its use of words that were already international or common to more languages. No literate man or woman would have any problems in consulting the dictionary. Everything is made to facilitate immediate exchange between people. Therefore both versions state that it is needless to stress the self-evident importance that an international language could have for commerce and the sciences.

However, the real pivot between commerce and the "internal idea" lies in the issue of translation. In fact, while Volapük was mostly commended for its clarity in commercial translations, Zamenhof stresses the service Esperanto could perform regarding literary translations. As the French version states,

Le mur infranchissable, qui sépare les littératures, croulerait, et les œuvres des autres peuples nous seraient aussi accessibles, que celles de notre propre nation. La lecture deviendrait commune à tous, et avec elle l'éducation, l'idéal, les convictions, les tendances—tous les peuples se trouveraient réunis en une famille² (Dr. Esperanto, 1887a, p. 4).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his 1760's *Abstract of Monsieur the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's Plan for Perpetual Peace*, had already suggested that the continuous mingling of commercial interests with "the invention of the printing press and the general taste for letters" could eventually facilitate the creation of a federation of European states (2005, p. 31). Albert Hirschman has traced the genealogy of the idea of *doux commerce* in the age of Enlightenment, as polishing manners and ways of interacting and

² "The insurmountable wall among literatures would crumble, and the works of other peoples would become as accessible to us as those of our own nation. Reading would become common to all, and through it education, ideal, convictions, tendencies—the peoples would become united into a family."

as harnessing or even coopting destructive passions in the name of more innocuous interest (1977).

The texts Zamenhof himself translated in his lifetime do not present either a wholehearted embrace of modern economies or any lack of faith in the possible effect of “good” passions in checking politics. For example, *Marta* (1873), written by the Polish writer Eliza Orzeszkowa and translated into Chinese from Zamenhof’s Esperanto version, shows the discrimination a widow has to face in looking for jobs for which she had not been educated in a merciless capitalistic environment. The novel boldly asks for women’s education rights. Goethe’s *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1786), also translated by Zamenhof, finds its resolution in the courage with which Iphigenia speaks out against the tyrant in the name of hospitality for strangers and sisterly love. Zamenhof’s choice of works to translate into an ostensibly “commercial” language reminds us of two critiques of *doux commerce*: Montesquieu’s reservation that the monetization of human relations brings about a loss of hospitality and “human virtues” and the concern of Adam Ferguson, a contemporary of Adam Smith, and a bit later Alexis de Tocqueville, that people too absorbed with accumulating riches will cease to care for liberty or be wary of the danger of despotism (Hirschman, 1997, p. 80, 124). As we are going to see later, Zamenhof’s urge to speak up against the oppression of minorities was to become increasingly incompatible with a merely commercial view of the language. And his promotion of mutual help and hospitality aimed to further a mutual knowledge and appreciation among different people, which commercial competition might stifle.

Some early Esperanto translations aimed to hone the language itself through a confrontation with the masterpieces of Shakespeare, Molière, or other European giants. In the “First Book,” however, Zamenhof seems to be thinking especially about the minor languages of Eastern Europe that were just then striving to be recognized by developing a literary tradition: “Que de temps, de peines, d’argent on sacrifie, pour traduire les œuvres littéraires d’une nation, et pourtant ce n’est qu’une partie bien infime des littératures étrangères, dont nous sommes en état de jouir au moyen des traductions”³ (Dr. Esperanto, 1887a, p. 3). Esperanto would bring to the world treasures that could not be known

³ “How much time, effort, and money we sacrifice to translate a nation’s literary works, and yet we can only enjoy translations of an extremely infinitesimal part of foreign literatures.”

otherwise and which sometimes had to struggle to exist at all. Lins writes that literary works in Lithuanian, for example, did not receive permission to be published until 1904, due to the repressive language policy in the Russian Empire (2016, p. 13). Zamenhof's work on the reform of Yiddish before his absorption with Esperanto could also be read as an attempt to enhance its status as a literary language that could create a core Herderian identity for the Jewish people.

As the German sociologist of Jewish origin Georg Simmel wrote in his *Sociologie* (1908), the 18th century strove for a concept of individuality based on a “cosmopolitan” attitude in which even national solidarity recoiled before the idea of “Humanity.” By contrast, the 19th century thought that “the individual occupies and should occupy a place that this individual and no other can fill” (Simmel, 2009, p. 637). The expansion of the circle to which the first concept of individuality corresponded historically also favored the emergence of the second. However, “In the first sense lies the value emphasis on what is common to human beings; in the second, on what makes them distant” (Simmel, 2009, p. 637-8). We can see the coexistence of these two tendencies in Esperanto, whose focus on minority languages and a common human message was certainly responsible for introducing otherwise unknown literary traditions to geographically remote international audiences. As Lins writes in the second volume of *Dangerous Language*, in the early 1950s the Japanese Esperantist Kurisu Kei received an official answer to his inquiry about persecuted Esperantists from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture because “at the time he was the most active advocate of Czech literature and culture in Japan” (2017, p. 101).

Accordingly, even if the German version of the “First Book” suggests that works of “*kosmopolitischer Bedeutung*” (“cosmopolitan meaning”⁴) should be written directly in the international language, Zamenhof's form of cosmopolitanism can also be seen as intended to smuggle in minority rights (Dr. Esperanto, 1887b, p. 3). As Gavriá comments, “Paradoxically, then, Zamenhof was replicating the strategy he witnessed among Eastern European nationalist movements, although for quite the opposite intention” (2015, p. 64). These languages were trying to legitimize themselves by building an original literary corpus and by offering renditions of foreign literatures and the Bible. The “First Book”

⁴ The French version states, “*un caractère international*”—an international character (Dr. Esperanto, 1887a, P. 3).

presents the Lord's Prayer and the beginning of the *Genesis*. Translating the entire Bible from Hebrew into Esperanto took almost ten years for Zamenhof to complete, since it was also the basis for his politico-religious reflections on a reform of Judaism and eventually for a neutrally human religion that could facilitate inter-ethnic relations. After translating the Bible, Zamenhof, in his very last years, was keen to translate the Koran and the main texts of Buddhism.

The "First Book" also introduces "foreign words" that had already become international. They were the same in every language and therefore could be immediately understood without consulting the dictionary. This list of words in the French version manifests an interest in science (*atome, botanique, nerf...*), technology (*locomotive, télégraphe, wagon...*), and the public sphere (*comédie, public, redaction, théâtre...*) (Dr. Esperanto, 1887a, p. 11). Similar terms appear in the German version (Dr. Esperanto, 1887b, p. 12). The greatest difference concerns the German verb "*exploitiren*" (to exploit), which in French is replaced by "*émanciper*" (to emancipate). There is no doubt that the last was a key word for the Jewish population in the Russian Empire.

Schor repeatedly refers to Zamenhof, his father, and his grandfather as "emancipated" Jews. However, the American scholar just means that they were Jews close to assimilation in linguistic and professional terms, but who had not completely cut their relations with the Jewish tradition (Schor, 2016). In legal terms, Darius Staliunas calls attention to the fact that Jews were not equal citizens in Russia until 1917, while their coreligionists in the Habsburg Empire had already received their rights in 1848 (2015, p. 237). The fear that they might soon be emancipated and seize power was one of the causes of the pogroms of 1905-6 (Staliunas, 2015, p. 8). Also, the relation between French as a language and desire for emancipation already had a long history. In the 18th century, the dysfunctional Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had asked the French *philosophes* for advice on a republican reform that could hinder foreign aggression. Rousseau and the Abbé Gabriel Bonnon de Mably both argued in favor of emancipation of the serfs. Mably also wanted to allow Jews to be able to purchase landed property. Not all Polish Jews were in favor of emancipation, but they certainly looked with interest on how France granted full citizenship and legal equality to French Jews in 1791 (Lukowski, 2010, p. 219).

Until the wave of pogroms at the beginning of the 1880s, Zamenhof's father was an enthusiast about Russian because he thought that emancipation would soon be granted in the empire. Emancipation was certainly one of the reasons why Zamenhof was so glad that the Russian Revolution of February 1917 had started in a bloodless way. He hoped that the peoples would be able to continue on that way and free themselves fraternally (Privat, 2001, p. 107.) In his last published piece--an open letter to diplomats that appeared in Esperanto magazines in 1915--he strongly argued in favor of the use of neutral names for countries after WWI in order not to discriminate against any of their populations and to make clear that they all had the same moral and material rights (Privat, 2001, p. 104).

Schor describes Zamenhof's rhetorical stance in the "*Unua Libro*" as follows: "Making no reference to his high-minded ambition to break down barriers of ethnicity and nation, Zamenhof pitched the language as 'an official and commercial dialect' that would yield economies of time and money." According to her, "He was writing not for the heirs to an ancient community of believers, but for secular moderns" (Schor, 2016, p. 71). But seeing the much greater number of Jews from Russia and Poland who pledged to study Esperanto, we can wonder whether he did not adopt a Kierkegaardian stance of "indirect communication," talking to those who had ears to hear and were concerned about similar ethical and political problems. They were more taken by his quasi-messianic idealism and approved of his choice to seek an alliance with the Tolstoyans in 1894-5, since they "also craved universal justice and fraternity far above and beyond national or religious affinities" (Gavría, 2015, p. 76).

Tolstoy himself, who in his later age was living among simple peasants and hoped for a non-violent moral rebirth of mankind, had found the language easy to read and a worthy pursuit to bring about the Kingdom of God (Privat, 2010, p. 46). This alliance, however, raised the worries of the Russian authorities and thereby caused a serious setback to Esperantist activities in the Russian Empire. Also, the great number of women in the early Esperanto movement, particularly in Great Britain and the United States, in contrast to other international languages, is probably due to the feeling that it was not "just a language." Conversely, according to Lins the persecution of Esperanto under Fascism and Stalinism shows that the problem lays "in any effort to interpret the ideals linked to Esperanto in a fashion different from the prevailing ideology" (2017, p. 127).

In any case, the technique of asking the readers to send back promises to learn the language signaled Zamenhof's need for the potential users of Esperanto to become directly involved. A directory of Esperantists would soon come to facilitate international correspondence. Zamenhof did not present himself as the "supreme leader" of the language, like the inventor of Volapük. He renounced all rights to it on the back of the cover of the "First Book," where he stated that a living language is a public property (*une propriété publique*) and that only communal practice, rather than theory, will show the way for its growth (Dr. Esperanto, 1887a). Thanks to this stance, Esperanto survived the death of its father, who was heartbroken by the outbreak of WWI, as well as the coldly planned murder of his family, who were especially singled out for elimination in the Shoah. Zamenhof's grandson, who miraculously escaped, still brings the greetings of the family to the yearly World Congresses of Esperanto. In order to help him carry on this representative task, Zamenhof's great-grand-daughters and great-great-grand-son have recently learned Esperanto, in a sign of the times, from Internet courses.

As Schor argues, "It's no accident that fraternity flourishes in *Esperantujo*, since Zamenhof, by ceding his paternal authority over Esperanto to its users from the start, freed Esperanto from the 'dead hand' of its founding father" (2016, p. 109). In this multilingual and multiethnic fraternity of people who do not share a past, "moving fluidly from their nuclear families to Esperantic circles to the workplace, and on to a world indifferent to matters of fraternity and harmony," Schor feels almost among "meta-Jews" (2016, p. 110). It is important for us to understand, however, how Zamenhof's persona as a Jew ready to renounce nationalist personhood for his dream of universal harmony inhabited the unstable balance between the economy and the "internal idea" of Esperanto. I turn in the next section to one of the most conflictual moments in the coexistence of his project during the first World Esperanto Congress in 1905.

Boulogne-sur-Mer: Commerce and the Jewish Prophet

Zamenhof was not always allowed to speak freely about the "internal idea" of Esperanto. In fact, after the Russian censors forbade his journal from circulating in the Empire because of its alliance with the Tolstoyans, the most active members of the Esperanto movement became the French. In 1905, the first World

Esperanto Congress was held in Boulogne-sur-Mer, a town on the French side of the English Channel. As a symbol of Napoleon's projected invasion of Britain, the choice of location clearly showed the desire of former enemies to overcome their opposition in the new language of peace. For Zamenhof, it was the chance to have his project widely presented and circulated in the media of the main diplomatic language of the times. The occasion represented an invaluable springboard for the whole movement. However, the French organizers of the Congress were rationalistic believers in progress. The President of the Esperanto Club of the nearby Amiens was none other than Jules Verne, who in the original project for his last unfinished novel—*Voyage d'étude*—imagined that Esperanto would spread extremely fast throughout Africa for commercial and “civilizing” reasons. The French organizers worried that Zamenhof's Jewishness and his “Eastern European” mystical tones might lower the prospects of the language in the France of the Dreyfus Affair. For rich and well-connected French intellectuals, it was safer just to talk about its commercial and scientific usefulness, and to present its inventor as a man of science from Poland. Accordingly, they did not want Zamenhof to read during the inauguration his “Prayer under the Green Standard,” in which he referred to God as a high moral force that was the same in the hearth of every man.

Zamenhof finally “agreed to drop the final stanza of the prayer, which declared that ‘Christians, Jews or Mahometans/ are all children of God’” (Schor, 2016, p. 87). Still, his delivery of the prayer was shocking for the French organizers, who were expecting a poised doctor but were actually faced with the overflowing love of a Jewish prophet. The young Privat, having walked all the way from Switzerland, was in the audience. He was extremely moved by the unforgettable experience. As he writes, none in the audience could remember it without tears after the destructions of WWI (Privat, 2010, p. 56). Later, Privat showed the text of the prayer to the Mahatma Gandhi, whom he met while he was working at the League of Nations and to whom he taught Esperanto. As he wrote to André Caubel, neither Zamenhof nor Gandhi believed in any constituted religion any more than Emerson did: “Ambaŭ ne kredis je persona Dio, sed je krea Spirito kaj inspira Forto, kiu instigis ilin labori por harmonio inter homoj diversgentaj. Tio estas la senco de la ‘preĝo sub la verda stendardo’, kiu tre interesis Gandhi”⁵ (Caubel, 1986, p. 16).

⁵ “They both did not believe in a personified God, but in a creative Spirit and inspirational Force, who pushed them to work for the harmony

The Declaration of Boulogne defines the essence of Esperantism simply as the attempt to spread throughout the whole world the neutral language Esperanto, leaving aside any moral commitments as merely private or personal hopes. In doing so, it ignores the Jewish question, which was so important for Zamenhof and on which he continued to work in a parallel way, and the aspirations of all marginalized peoples. The following section explains why his writings on Hillelism are fundamental to understanding the relation between the economy and the “internal idea” in Esperanto.

Hillelism and the Practical Side of the “Internal Idea”

Already in 1901, Zamenhof had attempted to publish a Russian-language book entitled *Hillelism: A Project in Response to the Jewish Question* in St. Petersburg, under the pseudonym “Homo Sum” (“I Am a Man”). Its original title—*A Call to the Jewish Intellectuals of Russia*—was an address to modern assimilated or emancipated Jews, who were simultaneously the main target of his criticism and the main group on which he was pinning his hopes. Zamenhof wrote that he had been a Zionist before, but now claimed that Zionism did not understand the essence of the Jewish question. Homeland was not Palestine, but the place in which they were living. However, even the most assimilated Jews should never believe that they could talk about politics without addressing the Jewish question. The Jewish people was an illusion, because they did not have a communal language. Yiddish, which Zamenhof had spent years trying to reform, was just a messy jargon. Jewish people were linked only by religion—and only nominally so, since intellectuals often felt a lack of faith in traditional beliefs while common people sheepishly followed the rituals without questioning them. Therefore, the only possible solution to the Jewish problem was to initiate a change in religion that would start from the intellectuals and sever the direct relation between religion and nationality. A neutral language (Esperanto) could assist in this transition and eventually become a way for other peoples, too, to abandon their nationalistic positions in order to form a common humanity (Homo Sum, 1901).

As Schor explains, Zamenhof thought that the Abrahamic covenant could be considered the cause of Jewish nationalism. The words “God made with us a covenant” confounded monotheism

among people of different ethnicities. This is the meaning of the ‘prayer under the green standard,’ which greatly interested Gandhi.”

with nationality, “turning a philosophical, ethical world-concept into an ethnically homogeneous nation.” In other words, “What [Zamenhof] proposed was a ‘purified’ Judaism, unbound from Mosaic law and purged of nationalism” (Schor, 2016, p. 79). In Hillel the Pharisee—a teacher of the Torah after the Exile, and hence at the time of the highest importance of Mosaic law—he found a teaching that could capture the spirit of Judaism beyond the ritual: Faith in the existence of God as a Higher Power who places his rules in the heart of everybody in the form of conscience. From this ethical sublimation of ritualistic correctness stems the Golden Rule of loving your neighbor and acting with others in such a way that you would wish them to act with you.

Caubel glosses Zamenhof’s position in the following terms:

Lia granda ideo estis disigi la ordonojn de la religioj inter du grandaj kategorioj: la ordonoj de Dio mem, enskribitaj ‘en la koron de ĉiu homo sub la formo de konscienco,’ kiun oni povas redukti al la ‘ora regulo’ (...); kaj, dua kategorio, ĉio alia, nur ordonoj de homoj, kiuj do povas ŝanĝiĝi kaj kunfandiĝi⁶ (1986, p. 13-4).

Apart from what God directly wrote into the conscience, which is mostly the desire to esteem and help each other, everything else, such as customs and legends, is only human commentary. But a visible difference in customs is precisely what often generates the deepest conflicts. Privat explains that according to Zamenhof in their private life everybody can talk in their mother tongue or in the language of their choosing, but they should not impose this choice on people of other ethnicities on public occasions. Similarly, everybody could follow the religious customs they wished with their fellow believers or alternatively should be able freely to avow that they did not sincerely belong to any constituted religion. But they should also act with the sensitivity of the Golden Rule and put themselves in the shoes of people of other religions (Privat, 2001, p. 62).

According to Zamenhof’s Hillelism, the language that could connect this new purified people stemming from Jewish

⁶ “His great idea was to split the orders of religions: the orders that come from God himself, inscribed ‘into the hearts of every man in the form of conscience,’ which can be reduced to the ‘Golden Rule’ ... and, in a second category, everything else, which are only human orders and which can therefore change and intermix.”

intellectuals and in time would allow its expansion to include Jews of the lower classes as well as Gentiles was Esperanto as an appositely created language with an international spirit. In this way, Gavriá explains, “He elaborated the basic tenets of Reform Judaism, which, according to the prophets, claimed that the historical mission of the Jews was to bring forth the reunification of humanity” (2015, p. 84). As Weber reminds us, Paul learned the technique of propaganda and of establishing a community from the Pharisees (1952, p. 387). Paul’s victory over Peter at Antioch can be compared with Zamenhof’s attempt, as it opened the road for the conception of a universal brotherhood of man through emancipation from the ritual prescriptions of the Torah (Weber, 1952, p. 4). In this way, Paul’s mission represented a first step toward the “rationalization” that was later developed by Puritans, since it overcame the dualism that forbade certain behaviors toward the members of the Jewish in-group but not toward outsiders (Weber, 1952, p. 343). However, Pharisaic and older Judaisms were unfamiliar with the dualism of “spirit” and “matter,” or “spirit” and “body” that Hellenistic Neo-Platonism had elaborated and that Paul’s Christian teaching made into the fundamental conception of his ethical world image, in which the second, corporal term was devalued (Weber, 1952, p. 400).

In this sense, we can perhaps understand Privat’s claim: “Tial Zamenhof insistis pri neŭtrala fundamento *mora*, ne nur *idea*”⁷ (2001, p. 63). He wanted to realize his political-religious program of reform in practical life. In his first booklet on *Homaranismo*, which adapted Hillelism to a wider audience, Zamenhof even proposed to build a temple for those who wanted to bring about a warm and poetic religion that could regulate the practical life of every human being with communal festivals and calendars. There people would listen to the words of the great teachers of humanity, who would certainly have agreed between themselves, if they had had the chance to talk together. Every temple should educate youths to human fraternity, bring spiritual peace to the old, and consolation to the suffering. Eventually, Zamenhof began to understand that it would be difficult for believers to receive permission to attend both the church of their religion and the temple of *Homaranismo*. Therefore, he limited himself to the community of the “*liberkredantoj*”—free believers who did not belong to any conventional religion, but who still had specific

⁷ “In this way, Zamenhof insisted on a neutral foundation of *customs*, not only of *ideas*.”

needs, such as educating their children with the warmth that only a religious community could offer. From them would come the first impulse toward the slow and natural creation of a human community freed from ethnic chauvinism (Privat, 2001, p. 65-6).

Striving for the same sense of warmth, during the third World Esperanto Congress in Cambridge (UK) in 1907, Zamenhof compared attending Esperanto Congresses to the Temple pilgrimages of the Hebrew people: “Kiel antikvaj Hebreoj tri fojoj ĉiujare kunvenadis en Jerusalemo, por vigligadi en si la amon al la ideo monoteisma, tiel ni ĉiujare kunvenas en la ĉefurbo de Esperantujo, por vigligi en ni la amon al la ideo esperantisma. Kaj tio ĉi estas la ĉefa esenco kaj la ĉefa celo de niaj kongresoj”⁸ (Privat, 2001, p. 70-1). As Gavría comments, in fact, “Beyond their local organizations, their professional, national, or religious affiliations, the congress’s atmosphere helped forge a network of personal ties and shared emotions, a distinctive identity minted by a common language and a new community” (2015, p. 87).

Even if the French organizers of Boulogne were afraid that Zamenhof would act as a “Jewish prophet” with wildly mystical tones, Privat’s biography fondly depicts him as a dedicated man of deep passions who attempted to behave toward everybody with a kindness much closer to the traditional figure of the wise Hillel. He worked hard to make Esperanto immediately learnable and usable not just by intellectuals, but by the common people. During his whole life he preferred to live in working districts away from the high society. He was the kind doctor of the poor Jewish people, who otherwise could not have afforded treatment. More than anything, he was a “*granda kuracisto de la homaro*” (great doctor of humanity) who saw the concrete barriers among peoples, and proposed practical solutions that would encourage love (Privat, 2001, p. 111-2.)

Proverbs and parables enriched Zamenhof’s speeches, particularly Jesus’ parable of the sower. After Zamenhof’s death, Privat found on the manuscript of *Homaranismo* a pencil scribbling in which the author reminded himself: “Avoid anything

⁸ “As the ancient Hebrews would convene three times a year in Jerusalem, in order to reinvigorate in themselves the love for the monotheistic idea, so we every year convene in the capital city of the Esperanto world, in order to invigorate in ourselves the love for the idea of Esperantism. And this is the main essence and main aim of our congresses.”

too aggressive!” He was too modest to use arguments *ad personam* and he was always approachable: “Kiu, eĉ plej humila Esperantisto, ne parolis kun li ĉe kongreso? Kiu, parolinte kun li, ne lin amis kaj respektis en tutkoro?”⁹ (Privat, 2001, p. 87, 112). Certainly, for the prestige of Esperanto, it was important to talk about his decorations and connections with diplomats, intellectuals, and rich philanthropists. But Privat is capturing something that has remained as the ethos of Esperanto and that can be compared to Hannah Arendt’s “ambition to equality, the claim to be able to sign all addresses and petitions directed to delegates or to the Assembly as a whole with the proud words ‘our Equal’” (Arendt, 1990, p. 248).

We can see the paramount importance the practical side had for Zamenhof also in the choice of who was supposed to be, were it not for his early death, his successor. Hector Hodler, a Swiss 21-year-old and Privat’s former classmate, founded the first worldwide association of Esperantists, the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) in January 1908. It stressed the actual use of the language through immediate action that would insert it into practical life: “Sidestepping discussion of an international organization based on national Esperanto societies, Hodler established an association consisting only of individual members and offering them various services assisted by a worldwide network of so-called Delegates” (Lins, 2016, p. 32). Zamenhof immediately recognized the importance of the new association: “Kelkaj Esperantistoj, li diris, havis la bonan ideon fari per vojo privata ion, kion oficiale fari ni ne povis. Ili kunigis ne ĉiujn Esperantistojn, sed nur tiujn personojn, kiuj akceptis la internan ideon”¹⁰ (Privat, 2001, p. 90). Thanks to this focus, the UEA provided a neutral foundation for relations and services among people. According to Zamenhof, “el tiu ĉi reciproka sinhelpado rezultos pli da amikeco kaj estimo inter la gentoj, kaj foriĝos la baroj, kiuj malhelpas ilian pacan interkomunikiĝon”¹¹ (Privat, 2001, p. 91). A concrete example of this reciprocal help was a service to ensure letter delivery and relief packages during WWI.

⁹ “Who even among the humblest Esperantists did not talk with him during a congress? Who, having talked with him, did not love and respect him with his whole heart?”

¹⁰ “Some Esperantists, he said, had the good idea to do in a private way what we could not have done officially. They did not unite all Esperantists, but only those who accepted the internal idea.”

¹¹ “from this reciprocal help will result more friendship and esteem among peoples, and will disappear the barriers that hinder their peaceful communication.”

The same spirit appears in the “*Pasporta Servo*”—Passport Service—that was started by an Argentinian youth in 1966, which even in 2017 made it possible for traveling Esperantists to find free lodging in the homes of Esperanto-speaking hosts in 81 countries.

Weber wrote his book *Ancient Judaism* in order to examine why, in Southern and East European regions where they had been at home longer, Jews failed to develop the specific traits of modern capitalism even if elements of the Jewish religion are open to economic pursuits (1952, p. 345). Among the reasons cited is that, “There was lacking precisely any point of departure for an economic-ordered, methodic, or inner-worldly asceticism” through which the Puritans, notably, were able to prove themselves religiously (Weber, 1952, p. 402). In terms of wealth, wine, and women, the basic attitude of the old rabbis toward the world might well find expression in the Talmudic saying that paradise belongs to him “who makes his companion happy” (Weber, 1952, p. 403). An interesting note adds that, in contrast to Levitical exhortations, “The Babylonian ethic apparently did not place stress on ‘loving one’s neighbor,’ which presumably was due to the much stronger development of business life in metropolitan Babylon” (Weber, 1952, p. 454, note 6). Perhaps its foundations in a less ascetic and more hospitable view of the world has inclined Esperanto to create an alternative economy of equal exchanges that is more geared toward mutual enjoyment and education than toward accumulation. This still constitutes a great part of its charm.

In the next section, I discuss Zamenhof’s later writings on *Homaranismo*, in order to show how the articulation between language, race, and class issues became increasingly visible in his thought. I conclude with a reading of Orwell’s *Newspeak* not, as is sometimes implied, as a criticism of Esperanto, but rather as a deep reflection on the political meaning of the relationship between the economy and the “internal idea” in Esperantist history and with some remarks on Esperanto’s prospects in the network society.

Homaranismo* of Class and Orwell’s *Newspeak

The book on Hillelism could not be distributed, and as a result Zamenhof did not speak in public of the special importance of Esperanto for the Jews in order not to jeopardize its prospects in Western Europe. He only addressed the Jewish question in his personal letters to Esperantists, which were not publicly disclosed until the end of WWII (Lins, 2016, p. 25). However, as deeply

affected by the wave of pogroms in the Russian Empire around the failed revolution of 1905 as he was, he could not remain silent. In March 1906, he published a new booklet in Esperanto called *Homaranismo*, which translated Hillelism into a politico-religious program for a wider target-audience, asking all peoples and religions to come together in a purified monotheism on a fraternal and equal basis, as “neutrally human.” In June 1906 Zamenhof’s native town, Bialystok, was devastated by a three-day pogrom, during which—according to official sources—seventy-five Jews were killed (Staliunas, 2015, p. 218). This event moved him to deliver an intense speech during the following World Congress of Esperanto in Geneva. He boldly tipped the unstable balance of Esperanto toward the “internal idea,” stating that he did not want anything to do with an Esperanto devoted only to commerce and practical utility, as the French wanted. In fact, the “internal idea” was for him now increasingly coincident with his *Homaranismo*, even if he could not directly disclose the commonality between his linguistic and religious projects.

Homaranismo was a troubling heritage for Esperantists who simply wanted to enjoy the non-committal pleasure of the language and preferred an ethically neutral Esperanto movement that would not antagonize the main political powers. The expression “internal idea” conveyed a sense of value, but was also broad enough to be filled with different or conflicting meanings—from pacifism to feminism, from anarchism to socialism. This inherent ambiguity guaranteed the vitality and creativity of the Esperanto movement, but it also made it the target of attacks picturing it as a Zionist conspiracy or an empty dream of bourgeois cosmopolitans. As Lins has convincingly argued in his *Dangerous Language*, the difficulty of controlling the meaning of the “internal idea” on the part of authorities was the greatest reason for the persecution of Esperanto under fascist and communist regimes (2016; 2017). However, even politically committed Esperantists criticized Zamenhof’s *Homaranismo* for its apparently simplistic approach, which seemed to reduce complex issues of economic exploitation to mere problems of language and religion. Among them was Eugène Adam (1879-1947), who learned Esperanto during WWI, adopted the pseudonym “Lanti” for his often oppositional stances, and authored the most important Esperanto Dictionary (*Plena Ilustrita Vortaro* or PIV). In 1921 he founded the independent organization SAT (*Sennacieca Asocio Tutmonda*, Worldwide Anational Association) as a working class counterpart to bourgeois Esperantists.

Schor argues that even the younger Zamenhof was not blind to issues of class. In the Hillelism book he downplayed them purposely because he was embarrassed by how class struggles were tearing apart the early settlements in Palestine and undermining the Zionist dream (Schor, 2016, p. 321). In fact, economic conditions in Palestine were hard for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, who were skilled as urban laborers, but had little farming experience (Kobrin, 2010, p. 110). As a result, in the first booklet on *Homaranismo* he did not touch on the issue of class. However, in 1910 Zamenhof sent his greetings on the occasion of the founding of a workers' Esperanto journal in Germany, stressing the special importance of the language for proletarians: "Eble por neni en la mondo nia demokrata lingvo havas tian gravecon, kiel por la laboristoj, kaj mi esperas, ke pli aŭ malpli frue la laboristaro estos la plej forta apogo de nia afero. La laboristoj ne sole spertos la utilon de esperanto, sed ili ankaŭ pli ol aliaj sentos la esencon kaj ideon de la esperantismo"¹² (Caubel, 1986, p. 18). When he reissued his *Deklaracio pri Homaranismo (Declaration about Humanitism)* in Spain in 1913, for the first time under his own name, he presented the class question as articulated to ethnic, linguistic, and religious matters. The second point of the program states: "Mi vidas en ĉiu homo nur homon, kaj mi taksas ĉiun homon nur laŭ lia persona valoro kaj agoj. Ĉian ofendadon aŭ premadon de homo pro tio, ke li apartenas al alia gento, alia lingvo, alia religio aŭ alia socia klaso ol mi, mi rigardas kiel barbareco"¹³ (Zamenhof, 1913, p. 5-6). Real patriotism loves all the inhabitants of the country, and does not try to demoralize and oppress them for reasons of ethnicity, religion, and social class (Zamenhof, 1913, p. 9-10).

Perhaps the ethnic tensions in his native town Bialystok were a catalyst in furthering the development of Zamenhof's thought in this direction. As Staliunas argues, they worsened when Jewish-owned factories gave their workers the "privilege" of working with steam looms, which until then had been reserved for Christians

¹² "Perhaps there is nobody in the world for whom our democratic language is more important than for the workers, and I hope that sooner or later they will become our stronger support. Workers will not only experience the utility of Esperanto, but they will also feel more than others the essence and the idea of Esperantism."

¹³ "I see in every man only a man, and I judge every man only according to his personal value and actions. I regard as barbarism any offenses or impositions on a man, simply because he belongs to another people, another language, another religion, or another social class."

(2015, p. 226). A deeper reflection on the articulation between linguistic, racial, and economic factors can be found in his writing for the Congress of Races held in London in 1911, where Zamenhof asked the audience what creates hate among peoples. “Ĉu ĝin kreas konkurado ekonomia? Ne kreas, sed profitas. Rusaj kaj Japanaj malriĉuloj, estante soldatoj, servas interesojn de la majstroj. Se ekzistus inter ambaŭ gentoj kompreno reciproka, la milito estus malfacila”¹⁴ (Privat, 2001, p. 91). Even Lanti recognized that Zamenhof had been “the first anationalist without knowing it,” when he had to face his failed hopes in the Soviet Union toward the end of his life (Caubel, 1986, p. 20).

Lanti’s longtime partner was George Orwell’s aunt. The future novelist would develop a more critical understanding of the language problem thanks to him and his Parisian anarchic-Esperantic milieu (Gavriá, 2015, p. 1-2; Schor, 2016, p. 144, 151). Orwell never became an Esperantist, but the way in which he addressed the role of language in politics in his dystopic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) may help us to think about the relationship between the economy and Esperanto’s “internal idea.” In the novel, the ruling party of Oceania creates Newspeak as a language of limited grammar and vocabulary designed to hinder freethinking and to ensure the absolute ideological control by the Big Brother of English Socialism. Some of its traits recall Esperanto, such as the formation of antonyms by the prefix “un-,” which corresponds to “mal-” in Zamenhof’s language. However, Newspeak is supposed totally to supplant English in the future and is expressly designed to cloud truth in politics, to eliminate contents not in line with party dictates, and to prevent meaningful grass-roots sharing inside and outside the country.

These characteristics resonate with Lanti’s experience and disillusion with Stalinism. First attracted by anarchism for its radical opposition to nationalism, Lanti joined the sympathizers of Bolshevism after the successful October Revolution of 1917. However, he was always careful that SAT would not be dominated by the members of one political party. Esperanto enjoyed a positive moment under Lenin because of the importance that he gave to the support of minorities who were fighting against Tsarist russification. “He sharply opposed a compulsory state language,”

¹⁴ “Does economic competition create [hate among people]? It doesn’t create it, but profits from it. Poor Russians and Japanese, as soldiers, serve the interests of their masters. If there was reciprocal understanding among peoples, wars would be difficult.”

writes Lins, “and therefore the openly proclaimed priority of Russian” (2016, p. 244-5). In his thought, the various nationalities should enjoy equal treatment. They should meld into one after the victory of socialism, but freely and gradually thanks to the commercial advantages that knowing Russian afforded. Under these circumstances, Esperanto had two choices. On the one hand, it could present itself as revolutionary vanguard in the battle for the future universal language after the “withering away of the state.” On the other hand, Esperanto could more convincingly pitch itself as an indispensable auxiliary language for the present beside the “flowering” national languages. Esperantists could not sympathize with the first alternative because it depicted the marginalization of minority languages as a necessity in the Marxist theory of economic progress (Lins, 2016, p. 241). But neither was the second rhetorical positioning possible under Stalinism because its priority became all-Soviet patriotism dominated by Russian symbols and the Russian language (Lins, 2016, p. 275).

The practical aim left to Esperanto under Stalinism was to publicize the building of socialism in the Soviet Union through correspondence with workers from other countries. As Lins argues, “We can accordingly say that correspondence in fact constituted the very reason for the Soviet Esperanto Movement” (2017, p. 38). Lanti cooperated with the leaders of the Soviet Esperanto Movement in this initiative. The problem was, however, that the greater trust that correspondents in Esperanto felt with each other than in other languages, meant that their questions tended to be more precise and their answers more truthful and less in line with the official requirements. Esperanto workers from abroad began very early on to become aware that the Soviet Union was not a paradise and that their correspondents might suddenly “disappear.” By mid-1933 at the latest, Lanti had completely lost his belief in the Soviet Union, using the correspondence of Soviet Esperantists as proof that the country’s rule could only be characterized as “red fascism” (Lins, 2017, p. 45).

In contrast with Orwell’s *Newspeak*, the correspondence experience of Soviet esperantists shows that Esperanto created grassroots trust and solidarity among workers of different countries, outside and often in contrast to the empty official proclamations of the “international brotherhood of the proletariat.” Orwell’s dystopia presents an Esperanto that has lost its “internal idea.” It has been hijacked by the powers that be in the name of economic progress, or in the capitalist world by the desire for the peace and tranquility created by global commerce, or by the fear of

losing what one already has, which Adam Ferguson already saw as a potential source of despotism (Hirschman, 1997, p. 121). The “internal idea” impressed on Esperantists by their founder and his immediate followers refuses to entertain the idea that Esperanto should supplant other languages. It asks only for the courage to speak out when its values of acceptance of differences are in danger of being trampled on.

Orwell’s Newspeak is a language of progressive degradation in function to what cannot be safely said at that very moment under the control of a despotic political power. By contrast, Esperanto is a language that constantly grows through the confrontation with other languages and through the grassroots conversations of its speakers about value-laden communal themes of interest, as I have attempted to demonstrate by detailed discussion of the adventures of its guiding internal idea under different rhetorical conditions. As Schor argues, “Esperanto is *essentially* political ... It was created to enable diverse people to talk not only past their differences but also about them” (2016, p. 10). Zamenhof dreamed of multiethnic cities that would use Esperanto to bring about greater justice through the desire of people to be together, to know each other, and to overcome their conflicts.

As outlined in Castells’ network society, as also in the work of many other contemporary commentators, the present rhetorical situation of Esperanto is based on increased possibilities of connectivity that are being frustrated by the divide between the globally empowered classes and the lower classes paralyzed by the fear of the other and retrenching into local identities as a reaction. The example of the minority students of the Kunming College of the Arts shows how Esperanto can still be used to guarantee a meaningful connection to the world to young people who would not otherwise enjoy this chance. In this way, it encourages equality of opportunities of cultural and social exchange, even in conditions of growing economic inequality due to the fast development of the country.

Castells’ quotation from Max Weber about the “light coat of the Saint” shows his belief that the transformations of modern global capitalism are not a natural datum, but the result of political choices that should be discussed anew with attention to values rather than mere short-term economic profit. Baehr reminds us of the Nietzschean undertone of Weber’s quotation, bringing us back to the Last Man of Zarathustra and his saying that “One must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star” (Baehr, 2001, p. 160).

The inner awareness of chaos or productive contradictions is meant to shake people out of passive acceptance of the world as it seems that it is necessarily becoming. Zamenhof's "internal idea," which reminds believers in the commercial usefulness of Esperanto of the values that economic fears could make us lose, is perhaps still for us one of these dancing stars.¹⁵

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