

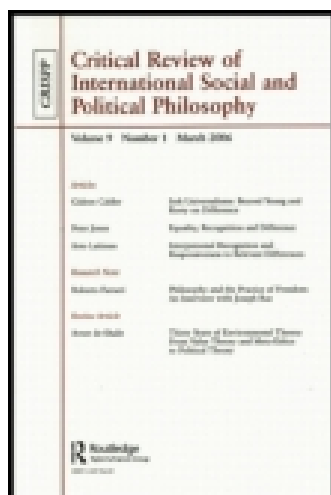
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Language, dignity, and territory

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This article raises two critical concerns about Philippe Van Parijs's recent book. First, I argue that Van Parijs lacks a convincing account of why global English poses a threat to parity of esteem for other linguistic communities. I argue that English threatens the dignity of speakers of other languages only because background power inequalities are driving its adoption. Second, I question whether linguistic territoriality is the right way to restore parity of esteem. I show that official multilingualism provides a superior approach to managing linguistic heterogeneity.

Keywords: language; dignity; territory; multilingualism; Van Parijs

Philippe Van Parijs believes that justice requires an egalitarian distribution of options and life-prospects across the globe. Specifically, he favors a world in which a universal basic income is distributed to each human being, and the value of that income is set at a level that sustainably maximizes the opportunities of the globally least well off. Any departures from this distribution can be justified only as a result of preferences and choices for which people can properly be held responsible (Van Parijs 1995, p. 228, Van Parijs 2011, p. 88 – hereafter cited parenthetically by page number).

This is a demanding conception of global justice, and revolutionary changes will be needed before its implementation becomes a realistic possibility. Domestic economic policy must be constrained by global institutions that can tax, regulate international finance and trade, and enforce socioeconomic justice transnationally. We must do away with border controls that fetter free movement, allowing those born in Nigeria to access all the options and opportunities available in Norway. We will need to build structures of deliberation and electoral accountability that can facilitate representative government at the world level, possibly re-imagining our conception of democracy in the process. We can expect our current configuration of states, territories, and collective identities to be radically transformed by this undertaking.

Of course, many people do not wish to transform their existing political institutions in this way. But for Van Parijs, this provides no good argument against making these changes. Instead, 'feelings ought to be shaped by just

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institutions. They ought not to dictate which institutions should be regarded as just' (Van Parijs 2007, p. 644). Our current political institutions and patterns of social solidarity are not of intrinsic value in themselves: they are instruments for the pursuit of justice, and we should not hesitate to refashion these tools if justice so demands. 'Nations, politically organized peoples, are not part of the ethical framework of global egalitarian justice. They are sheer instruments to be created and dismantled, structured and absorbed, empowered and constrained, in the service of justice ...' (p. 139). As a prudent political thinker, however, Van Parijs recognizes that this reform project ought not to be attempted all at once, in top-down fashion. Instead, it should be undertaken through a series of incremental steps. A good start, he claims, is the establishment of regional organizations such as the EU, which might eventually serve us as a model for building a future transnational demos and its associated global institutions (p. 27).

Unlike Van Parijs, I am not a global egalitarian. But I will not question that account of distributive justice here. Global egalitarianism is a widely supported position, and so its implications are worth exploring. Moreover, what is particularly fascinating in Van Parijs's project is his treatment of how we might justly transition to a future global egalitarian arrangement. He distinguishes himself from other cosmopolitans by offering us a much more systematic attempt to theorize the moral challenges that are raised by his theory's implementation. Must everyone in the world assimilate to the same language, in order to access equivalent economic opportunities? Will all people need to undergo a standard Western education, abandoning their traditional occupations and cultural pursuits? If the emerging global culture is inflected by American or European culture, do those from other backgrounds have a morally serious complaint about having to forgo collective identities they would prefer to sustain? Finally, if building a global political community will foreseeably lead to the extinction of many people's cultural identities, does that provide us any reason to refrain from creating it, or to go about its establishment more cautiously and circumspectly than we otherwise might have?

In *Linguistic Justice for Europe and for the World*, Van Parijs investigates these issues through the lens of global language policy. He offers us a somewhat ambiguous, even Janus-faced, account of just global egalitarian reform. In discussing these issues, Van Parijs allows that justice may have more than one dimension: the familiar dimension of egalitarian distribution, on the one hand, and another 'dimension of justice that is irreducible to the equalization of opportunities', which he calls *parity of esteem*: 'in a just society, people must not be stigmatized, despised, disparaged, or humiliated because of their collective identity' (p. 119). We ought not to transition to a globally just distribution of opportunities, then, in a way that violates parity of esteem, by insulting or humiliating people's existing collective identities.

I think Van Parijs is right to highlight this additional 'parity of esteem' dimension of justice. But this sets up a dilemma for his overall view. If justice

has two distinct components – the equal distribution of opportunities, on the one hand, and parity of esteem, on the other – is not it possible that these two components might systematically diverge from one another, pulling us in different directions? Which element of justice ought we to prioritize in such a case? Could it even be – in the extreme – that the strict observance of justice in one form (parity of esteem) could prohibit us from realizing justice in the other form (distributive equality)? Van Parijs himself recognizes this worry and briefly considers it (pp. 204–206), though he does not believe the tradeoff will be as sharp as I have posed it here.

This potential tension between the two dimensions of justice is reflected in Van Parijs's prescriptions for global language policy. On the one hand, he is an enthusiastic proponent of expanding the use of English as a lingua franca in Europe and around the world. Global English, for him, is a vehicle for forging the ties of communication and solidarity upon which a European and – eventually – a world *demos* might come into existence. In that sense, it is demanded by distributive justice. Indeed, 'people committed to egalitarian global justice should not only welcome the spread of English as a lingua franca but see it as their duty to contribute to this spread in Europe and throughout the world (p. 31)'.

At the same time, Van Parijs gives a sympathetic hearing to complaints that this dominance of English represents an injustice to speakers of other languages. While skeptical of claims that there are fundamental rights to the survival of one's own language or that linguistic diversity is itself of intrinsic value (p. 146), he considers three other ways in which a complaint of linguistic injustice could be compellingly formulated: (1) in terms of *unfair cooperation*, (2) in terms of *inequality of opportunity*, and (3) in terms of *unequal esteem*.

I want to focus here on the third formulation, since it is the one that implicates the distinct dimension of justice as parity of esteem. (The other two complaints, I believe, can be fully characterized in terms of egalitarian distributive justice; indeed, addressing them requires accelerating the spread and diffusion of global English). In treating this third complaint, Van Parijs ultimately concludes that it is just to promote English as a global lingua franca only if, alongside it, we at the same time introduce a territorially differentiated linguistic regime that allows non-English speakers to coercively protect their languages, by making them the official languages of a political territory. Such a regime is required in order to counteract the threat of unequal respect that the increasing dominance of English poses to speakers of these other tongues.

But why exactly does the global use of English pose a threat of unequal respect? To illustrate the idea, Van Parijs tells the story of a Flemish waiter in Bruges who indignantly refuses to serve a customer ordering his beer in French. The waiter objects to the customer's arrogant assumption that it is French, not Dutch, that should structure their interaction. And Van Parijs claims that 'when this happens systematically ... it can easily lend itself to an interpretation analogous to a situation in which it is always the members of the

same caste or gender that need to bow when meeting members of the other' (p. 119). Speakers of other languages might interpret the global use of English similarly, as a slight to their native tongue and, by extension, to themselves.

But would these speakers be *correct* to see English's global precedence as an insult to them? I don't deny the pull of the intuition that the Flemish waiter is rightly indignant. But do officials of the EU Parliament, or the attendees at an international conference, have a similar complaint when proceedings are conducted in English? The question is particularly pressing because if Van Parijs's explanation of the factors driving the global spread of English is true, then *no insult is intended*. I can imagine perceiving others' refusal to interact in my native language as insulting if I have reason to think it arises from a belief in the inferiority of my language, or of the people who speak it. But for Van Parijs, these 'colonial' attitudes are not driving the global rise of English. Instead, English's spread is explained by a set of rational microdynamics that make it advantageous for individuals to communicate in English when they need to interact with a linguistically diverse group of people. According to Van Parijs, English systematically tends to be the *maxi-min language*, the language that is known best by those who are least skilled at communication outside their native tongue. For this reason, it is the most efficient vehicle of communication in diverse multilingual settings. People opt for English not because they think it is intrinsically superior, but because it is to everyone's advantage to speak it in transnational interactions.

If this is right, though, then why does the choice of English in transnational settings insult or humiliate the speakers of other languages? We might compare it with an analogous situation of rational convergence on a common standard (p. 16): as more people begin to use Word rather than Word Perfect, it becomes rational for me to adopt Word as well, even if I otherwise prefer Word Perfect (because I am more familiar with it, or like its user-friendly features). Surely it would seem ridiculous for me, however, to claim a threat to my equal dignity in this! So why is convergence on a lingua franca different?

Of course, a language can be distinguished from a word processing program along several dimensions, and these differences may be relevant to the dignity complaint. First, it is much harder to switch languages than it is to switch computer programs. Second, the choice of a language – unlike a word processor – is often imposed by the state, which educates its citizens and conducts its official business in a particular tongue. And third, people typically identify much more closely with their native language than they do with their word processing program. These differences may explain why people are more humiliated by global English.

While the first two differences – the difficulty of switching languages, and the state's imposition of an official idiom – are important, I doubt that they explain the insult in global English. The parity of esteem complaint is meant to arise even in a situation where non-Anglophones have already learned English and been fairly compensated for their investment in accordance with

appropriate principles of cooperative justice. The idea is that there is an *additional* injustice – beyond any unfair distribution of burdens or costs – in using English, because this use insults the speakers of other languages. But the explanation of this additional injustice cannot refer back to an unfair distribution of burdens, since *ex hypothesi*, that unfairness has already been taken care of. The second difference – that languages are often imposed by the state – cannot explain the insult in global English either. It is the microchoices of private individuals, not official public policies, that are driving the use of English in transnational contexts. Since states are not currently in the business of mandating global languages, there is no complaint about the ‘non-neutrality’ of state policies here.¹

What about the third difference? Perhaps it is the fact that people care greatly about their native language, and feel very strongly identified with it, that explains the humiliation they perceive in global English? Certainly, this seems closer to the mark. Still, I doubt that people’s subjective identification – by itself – can explain the threat to their equal dignity. For people also care very strongly about many things besides language. Yet only sometimes is it reasonable to feel humiliated when social institutions make it more difficult for me to pursue projects with which I strongly identify. Consider another area in which we have strong incentives to converge on a common social standard: the public workday. Shared social norms about working hours, like shared social norms about language, can make it difficult to pursue my projects and values. It is harder for me to indulge my passion for, say, organic farming, when I have to do all my teaching between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm. It would be better for me if Princeton University accommodated my preferences for scheduling work and leisure time, allowing me to farm all day and teach my students only at night. But surely the fact that my projects are disadvantaged by the public workday, in comparison with some conceivable alternative, is not sufficient to say my dignity – or the dignity of my community of organic farmers! – has been insulted here. To hold otherwise would allow that my dignity is insulted whenever I do not get what I strongly want. And surely that opens the door to all kinds of unreasonable ‘dignity-based’ demands. So why isn’t the convergence on English as a global lingua franca the same? Why invoke the more morally serious complaint of a failure of equal respect?

No doubt many readers will find this analogy between our linguistic and our occupational preferences somewhat fanciful. It might be argued that, unlike our occupation, our native language structures our very memories and thoughts, giving it an especially close connection to personal identity. Still, I doubt that identification, on its own, allows us to successfully distinguish reasonable from unreasonable ‘parity of esteem’ complaints. For it is undeniable that people are strongly identified with a very wide range of things. Some people *do* identify with their occupational or recreational pursuits more strongly than with their language. Yet if the fact of subjective identification is sufficient to show that a social standard insults one’s dignity, then we are committed to

accommodating a kaleidoscopic multiplicity of identity-based claims. If we wish to avoid that conclusion, then some further criterion, by which we might distinguish reasonable from unreasonable feelings of insult, seems required. I'm not sure that Van Parijs has offered us such a criterion. But I do share his intuition that there is a greater problem with global English than with the choice of Word over Word Perfect, or daytime over nighttime working hours.

My main aim here was to highlight the need for some criterion by which to distinguish reasonable from unreasonable dignity-based complaints. But, as a tentative proposal, let me explore one idea that seems to me promising in this area. We might explain the threat to dignity by reference to the background power inequalities against which individual language learning-decisions take place. These background facts include the global military, economic, and political hegemony of Anglophone countries, and especially the United States. These countries are among the wealthiest in the world, making them dominant in international trade and foreign investment; their universities enjoy ascendancy in global higher education, which makes learning English a necessary means to acquisition of advanced knowledge; Anglophone countries exercise predominant control in international institutions, giving English a privileged status in the operations of these institutions; and English-language movies, TV shows, books, and other programming are diffused everywhere, a fact which imprints Anglophone tastes and values on the entire modern world. All these factors make it especially rational for people to choose English as a second language, because only *English* will grant them access to the global centers of political, economic, military, and cultural power. It is not as if a random cascade had suddenly shifted people's language-learning habits in favor of, say, Zulu, in the aftermath of which it became rational for others to adopt Zulu as well. Rather, English *is* the salient choice as a global lingua franca only because of the prior paramouncy of English-speaking states, and by extension, of their citizens.

When people use English in transnational contexts, then, they are indeed 'bowing' to the dominance of Anglophone countries in a real sense. Had it not been for those countries' hegemony, we would never have converged on English as our global lingua franca in the first place. To me, that is why it seems reasonable for non-Anglophones to feel insulted by the dominance of English. Had *some other* country attained international preeminence, it might have been *their* native language we would all be using. Global English, on this view, is just one more privilege that accrues to the inhabitants of Anglophone states, along with their wealth, their business and political connections, their power to unilaterally sanction other countries from whose policies they dissent, and their unequal access to visas that allow them to travel anywhere in the world they might wish to go.

If this is right, it suggests a more general criterion by which we might evaluate the reasonableness of 'dignity-based' complaints. It is reasonable to feel insulted by the choice of a social standard that diverges from one's preferences

where background power inequalities between groups have caused that social standard to be structured in the way it is. This might occur because a more powerful group has used the lever of the state to impose its sectarian preferences on others, or, more subtly, because prior facts about its dominance systematically structured individuals' private choices in ways that reinforce that dominance. In such cases, one's dignity is indeed insulted by the requirement of conformity with these social norms. But in cases where background power relations between socially salient groups played no role in structuring prevailing standards – as in the choice of Word over Word Perfect, or the 9 am–5 pm workday – then it is not reasonable to invoke the 'parity of esteem' objection.²

Even where a legitimate parity of esteem complaint exists, that reason will not always be dispositive. Parity of esteem reasons need to be weighed against countervailing considerations, like coordination, administrative costs, other people's legitimate expectations, and so on. So there will be some cases in which – though a group's dignity is indeed insulted by a prevailing social standard – we should not reconfigure that standard, since the cost would be too great. But parity of esteem does give us an important *pro tanto* reason to reconfigure our institutions, and one that can justify the imposition of at least moderate costs. Even where a parity of esteem complaint cannot be fully accommodated, moreover, it still generates duties: for example, we ought to offer a justification that shows why important public purposes cannot reasonably be achieved without this particular disadvantage. This justification requirement is important, since it demonstrates our shared commitment to the equal dignity of socially salient groups. Unlike subjective identification, then, I believe that the background power inequality criterion may allow us to more successfully distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable complaints. And whether or not my particular proposal for making this distinction succeeds, I believe some such criterion is certainly needed.

Setting aside my proposal about how best to interpret the 'parity of esteem' complaint, I now want to ask whether Van Parijs's solution – the linguistic territoriality principle – is a successful response to it. The linguistic territoriality principle holds that each language community should be granted the right to impose its own language as the medium of public administration, political participation and education within a territory. The community must be willing to bear the costs associated with protecting its language, by extending access to an adequate level of proficiency to all permanent residents, and by accepting whatever reduction in economic competitiveness its policy might entail. According to Van Parijs, this territoriality principle helps to prevent the development of a 'colonial' attitude on the part of speakers of more widespread languages, such as English. Outsiders settling on the territory will be required to learn and educate their children in the official language of this particular place, thereby 'bowing' to a weaker tongue's ascendancy. The territorial regime also prevents the maxi-min dynamics from permanently eroding weaker languages to the point of extinction. Finally, it allows each language to become

the ‘queen’ of a political unit (though not necessarily a fully sovereign one) somewhere on the globe.

Perhaps surprisingly, then, Van Parijs’s cosmopolitan egalitarianism ends up partly endorsing the nationalist principle that political units should be congruent with cultural ones, and specifically with linguistic groups (Gellner 1983, p. 1, see also Miller 1995, pp. 81–118). Of course, Van Parijs makes space for nationalism only up to a point, since he also supports the parallel development of supranational political institutions. But, for him, linguistic communities have the right to claim political autonomy within a territory in order to protect and preserve their languages.

Does this linguistic territoriality principle achieve its intended goal, of securing the equal dignity of individuals who speak different languages? Here I am skeptical. As Van Parijs himself notes, a difficult challenge for the view is the fact of linguistic heterogeneity. To claim that the territoriality principle adequately secures parity of esteem, we need to picture the world as neatly divided into distinct linguistic communities, each of which maps readily onto a separate geographical area. But this is false: territories everywhere are inhabited by a linguistically diverse mix of people, including immigrants, refugees, and national or indigenous minorities (De Schutter 2008, pp. 110–111). Once this linguistic heterogeneity is factored in, doesn’t a territorial solution simply replicate the worrisome colonialist dynamic it was designed to prevent? When some residents of the territory do not belong to the preferred linguistic community, aren’t these people slighted by being made to ‘bow’ to the official language, forced to adopt it in their transactions with the state, to school their children in it, and to use it when they enter the public sphere?

Van Parijs considers several possible responses to the heterogeneity problem. One possibility – quite plausible, it seems to me – would be to require that linguistically heterogeneous territories be officially multilingual, on grounds that this is more consistent with parity of esteem. But Van Parijs largely dismisses the multilingual approach. He considers two variants of it. On a *disjunctive multilingual approach*, the regime offers citizens the choice of educating their children and communicating with the state in whichever of the many languages within the territory they prefer. Van Parijs finds this approach inadequate because it does nothing to prevent the stronger language from driving out the weaker language(s) over time, as maxi-min dynamics between diverse speakers begin to take hold. Even if the state provides services in a weaker language, the stronger one may still dominate when it comes to people’s everyday interactions. So a *disjunctive approach* does not provide sufficient guarantees for linguistic survival. If, on the other hand, the political regime pursues a *conjunctive approach*, requiring all its citizens to learn all the officially recognized languages, then this quickly imposes an upper bound on the number of languages that can be recognized and is very demanding in terms of expenditure and effort. Van Parijs believes it will hardly ever work in practice.

So for the most part, Van Parijs reacts to the problem of linguistic heterogeneity not by recommending official multilingualism, but rather by counseling further territorial subdivision. He favors chopping territories into unilingual zones that can maximize the inclusion of native speakers of the recognized language and minimize the inclusion of non-native speakers. Political units should, as much as possible, be gerrymandered around language groups (p. 166).

Yet this 'territorial subdivision' solution simply re-confronts the original problem. Unless people can easily move or be moved, any continuous geographical space will always include some people who do not belong to the prevailing linguistic community, no matter how small we draw the units. What are we to do about those linguistic minorities who remain 'trapped?' Van Parijs offers us only a very limited response. He claims that it is appropriate to introduce transitional accommodations for 'trapped' allophones at the moment new borders are introduced. Non-native speakers alive when boundaries are redrawn who find their ability to live in their own language jeopardized, can demand some temporary continuation of the services they previously enjoyed. They can keep using their minority language in communications with the state, and (for a time) schooling their children in it. But eventually these transitional measures will end: any people born after the cutoff date will be educated in the official territorial language. Thus, future generations of allophones will be required – eventually – to accept the elimination of their language's public use on that territory.

Is this outcome acceptable, if what we care about is parity of esteem? What can we say to the linguistic minority member, to convince her that she enjoys equal respect here? One thing we might say is that the system produces a kind of 'reciprocity' at the global level: the minority member's language may well be protected in some other place. If she lived there, then she would be entitled to expect immigrants and minorities on the territory to 'bow' to her native tongue's dominance (p. 149). So perhaps she should accept that turn-about is fair play, and be willing to 'bow' to the dominant language in the territory where she now resides.

Yet how is it supposed to bolster the dignity of this particular person to know that her language might be a 'queen' on some other territory? As I understand the parity of esteem complaint, it is not a complaint that *languages* are treated unequally across the globe. It is rather a complaint that *people* are treated unequally, by being continually required to accommodate to a more powerful group in their everyday interactions, in a way that reinforces their subordinate status. *This* indignity is not at all expunged by the knowledge that if one lived somewhere else, one would be one of the favored inhabitants in that other place. For one is still subordinate in *this* place, here and now.

Perhaps we can say to the trapped minority member that if she really wishes to speak her language in public – and to see her children grow up in it – she can always move. Would that be an adequate response? If resettlement is

sufficiently easy, maybe it would. If she merely has to relocate ten miles down the road, then that is probably an acceptable price to pay. Moving ten miles is unlikely to disrupt her personal and family ties, and she can probably keep working at her current job and participating in most of the social practices that matter to her. But since a person's family, friends, workplace, cultural, and associative bonds – the whole structure of her life – are usually located in her territory of permanent residence, it is not a reasonable response to require her to uproot herself and relocate to some very distant area. For that means that she has to give up almost everything else that matters to her in order to secure parity of esteem.

Thinking about what we might say to the trapped minority member, then, highlights a serious problem with the strategy of pursuing parity of esteem by means of a linguistic territoriality principle. This principle simply replicates the very 'colonialist' dynamics of domination and subordination it was designed to mitigate, by conferring special privileges on one linguistic group at the expense of others within a territory. Allowing the preferred group's language to 'own' the public space devalues citizens from other linguistic backgrounds, consigning them to second-class status within the area. But we cannot actually secure parity of esteem in this way. Conferring special preferences only reinforces the dynamics of power and subordination that drives the 'parity of esteem' complaint in the first place.

So is there a better way? I believe that official multilingualism provides a superior approach to managing linguistic heterogeneity. While I cannot elaborate a full institutional proposal here, let me simply describe three multilingual regimes that have been outlined elsewhere in the literature. Any one of these regimes, I think, would provide a better way of securing parity of esteem than the linguistic territoriality principle. The first variant, *official multilingualism*, holds that all the different languages spoken in a territory can claim equivalent public support. Equal public services should be provided in each language spoken, no matter how many speakers that language has. The main objection to this model is that it would be costly and cumbersome, and provokes potentially wasteful state expenditure. On the second variant, *prorated official multilingualism*, some account is taken of the number of speakers demanding services in a recognized language, so that the state must provide the same *per capita* level of assistance to each group. This may mean that languages with smaller numbers of speakers receive fewer services, or have to travel farther to access these services (Patten 2003). This responds to the concern about wasteful expenditure, by limiting language assistance to the fair claims of that community of speakers on public resources. The third variant, the *least cost model*, accepts that states have reason to impose some rationalization in a common language, where that rationalization serves compelling public purposes – for example, in access to economic opportunity or democratic participation. Still, these reasons for imposing a language must be balanced against an equally important reason to acknowledge the equal standing of linguistic minorities.

On balance, then, states should *narrowly tailor* their rationalization policies, by granting these linguistic minorities the right to publicly promote their languages (e.g. through bilingual schooling) alongside the common language (Stilz 2009).

I believe that any of these multilingual regimes would allow the polity to more credibly claim to secure parity of esteem than the linguistic territoriality principle. Under that principle, the polity sends the message that the majority linguistic group ‘owns’ the territory and its political institutions and that minorities have only second-class status. Yet surely this is problematic: the polity’s commitment to parity of esteem ought to be publicly reflected in its political institutions, in the justifications that are offered for various language policies, in the way citizens treat one another, and the attitudes and expectations they have of those who are not members of the majority linguistic group. Only a multilingual regime can secure this important public goal of acknowledging equal standing under conditions of linguistic heterogeneity.

Let me conclude, then, by considering three objections that one might make to such a multilingual regime. First, one might object that it is simply impossible for the state to be ‘neutral’ with respect to language (Kymlicka 1995, pp. 110–111). So why should we try to achieve the impossible? I think this objection misfires. It is true that the state cannot ensure *equal success* for all the languages on its territory. Yet the state can establish a language policy that treats speakers of different languages fairly, by not specially privileging one linguistic group over others. It can do this by recognizing multiple languages, providing some public support to all these languages, and offering a justification for any imposed rationalization in a common language that references a genuinely compelling public purpose that cannot be pursued in any less restrictive way.

Second, it might be objected that a multilingual regime cannot adequately ensure language survival. Van Parijs argues that once a linguistically diverse group of people interact with one another, the maxi-min dynamics will take hold, and more powerful languages will tend to drive out the weaker ones (pp. 143–145). I would respond, however, by questioning whether parity of esteem actually requires language survival. If, against a set of rules that publicly express the state’s commitment to the equal standing of different linguistic groups, some people decide to assimilate to a different language, I do not see any injustice in the loss. The commitment to parity of esteem, again, is a commitment to the equal dignity of *individuals*, not the equal dignity of *languages*. It might be objected here that an individual can only freely decide to abandon his or her language under fair background conditions. But once the maxi-min dynamics are in play, some individuals may lack the genuine option of continuing to speak their native tongue. In response, I make two points. First, it seems prematurely pessimistic to believe that minority languages will always be driven out in a multilingual context. Under a multilingual regime, the state

does a great deal to support individuals' ability to continue speaking their native languages, by providing them significant education and public services in those languages. Second, even if some languages struggle under these conditions, it is not always unfair to face background conditions that preclude one's projects flourishing to the degree that one desires. Citizens do not have a right against the state that all their projects succeed, but only that the state treats them fairly and even-handedly, balancing their claims against the equivalent claims of others with different projects. If the state does institute fair background rules, and still some languages do not succeed, this may be regrettable, but it is not an injustice (see Patten 2014 for a similar argument).

Finally, we might object, as Van Parijs does, that a multilingual regime risks walling off citizens into distinct and mutually unintelligible enclaves, thereby posing a threat to social cohesion (p. 148, 196). But this depends significantly on which model of multilingualism we adopt. Both *pro-rated multilingualism* and *the least cost model* can accept that in certain cases, there are compelling reasons for promoting a common public language. But they deny that these reasons suffice to justify aiming at linguistic homogeneity, and these views point out that there are important countervailing reasons for the state to publicly demonstrate its commitment to the equality of linguistic minorities. We might plausibly think that the balance of these two reasons requires us to leave significant space for the public support of minority languages.

To sum up, then, while Van Parijs has convincingly argued for an additional dimension of justice he calls 'parity of esteem', he has not fully explained why the global dominance of English poses a threat to equal esteem, nor why the linguistic territoriality principle is the right response. I believe English threatens the dignity of speakers of other languages only because background power inequalities are in large part driving its adoption. And I have argued that Van Parijs's linguistic territoriality principle does not provide the right response to our parity of esteem concerns. Under conditions of linguistic heterogeneity, only a multilingual regime can succeed at addressing these important issues. Allowing majority groups to claim hegemony within a territory, on the other hand, only incentivizes conflict and subordination. And that is not the kind of respectful transnational cooperation that we want as a basis for a future global *demos*.

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Notes

1. One might object that though there is no state-imposed global language, international institutions such as the EU, IMF, World Bank, or the aviation sector privilege English, and this structures individuals' learning choices. I agree that this fact is significant, and discuss it further below.
2. One might hold that even without background power inequalities, the fact that a particular group's language is chosen as a *lingua franca* is sufficient to single out that group for higher status. But I doubt this. In the nineteenth century, for example, French was the language of international diplomacy, though the French were not economically or politically superior to the other Great Powers. Did the mere use of the French language at international conferences give the French a publicly superior status *vis à vis* the British, Germans, or Americans?

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