

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023): Disrupting European Studies

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ISSN 1815-347X

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Introduction

Disrupting and Re-imagining European Studies: towards a More Diverse and Inclusive Discipline

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Citation

David M., Garcia M., Haastrup T. and Mattheis F. (2023). 'Disrupting and Re-imagining European Studies: towards a More Diverse and Inclusive Discipline' in *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 19 (2): 151-162. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1294>.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This Special Issue is the culmination of the Diversity, Inclusivity, Multi-Disciplinarity in European Studies (DIMES) project, undertaken under the aegis of the University Association of European Studies (UACES). DIMES was initiated in recognition of the under-representation (broadly conceived) of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) academics and to address the over-representation of Western European and North American scholars and knowledge production within UACES and European Studies more generally. This introduction to the issue establishes the context for the contributions that follow. It outlines the ways in which DIMES sought to address the lack of inclusivity in European Studies, and speaks also to the further aim of DIMES, the extension of the disciplinary focus of European Studies. Here, then we introduce the contributions to this special issue, which are representative of some of the many conversations held over four years with a wide range of scholars, all committed to disrupting European Studies, albeit through different means. We argue that debates about decentring, about decolonising, on the need to acknowledge the privilege and Eurocentricity that continues to dominate knowledge production traditions, are pertinent to European Studies.

Keywords

European Studies, Diversity, Inclusivity, (Multi-)Disciplinarity, Disruption, Decolonisation, Decentring.

In 2019, UACES and the European Studies Association of Sub-Saharan Africa (ESA-SSA) launched a project funded by the European Commission's Erasmus Plus Jean Monnet Projects. The aim of the programme was to encourage and promote diversity within European Studies - broadly defined. The project, 'Diversity, Inclusion and Multidisciplinarity in European Studies' (DIMES) sought to explore ways to increase diversity within the field of European Studies, in particular with regards to the ethnicity, disciplinary focus, geographical location of its participants and eventually knowledge production within European Studies itself. The outlined aims of the project were threefold: 1) to improve the representation of BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of colour) academics within UACES and European studies more generally; 2) to move away from the emphasis on Western European and North American academics towards greater inclusion for scholars from under-represented, even marginalised geographies; 3) to broaden the disciplinary focus of contemporary European Studies to include adjacent/related disciplines such as anthropology, human geography, cultural studies and sociology.

The early vision of the DIMES team was to organise three workshops to debate the issues at hand. These were ultimately held: at [Leiden University in early March 2020](#); online (as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns) in February 2022; and at [University of Pretoria in February 2023](#). The hope was for collaborative and provocative discussions in which all participants were willing to be challenged, even discomfited. Our initiative dovetails with growing calls for greater reflexivity in the Humanities and Social Sciences and acknowledgement of privileged positions and views in the respective disciplinary canons. This particularly concerns how the partial and partialised narratives that dominate in academia can reproduce and perpetuate injustices in societies. Social Sciences and Humanities departments of universities have started projects to decolonise curricula and to acknowledge their own histories and contribution to colonial pasts and the lasting legacies of these histories in today's world. Still, as we found throughout the project, there remains a good deal of resistance to such projects. We also encountered a good deal of debate about the extent to which a break with past practices is required, about the relative virtues of bridge-breaking versus bridge-building.

The first event in Leiden was key to much that followed in the lifetime of the project. 'Disruption' was discussed extensively during the second day of this workshop and is the concept that went on to underpin our many and long conversations about the articles now published in this special issue. The Leiden event was held shortly before lockdowns took hold in Europe but some participants from further afield were already unable to travel. Their contributions were facilitated via the video links that we would all become very familiar with but at this very early stage of the pandemic, we could already see the inequalities when it came to travel, to the capacity to be "in the room". At the same time, other than the DIMES team and invited speakers, few travelled from Europe to Africa for the closing conference in Pretoria. The reasons for this are many and include those border and visa issues that constrain freedom to travel, as well as other deeply inequitable structures, such as access to financial resources. But they reflect structural obstacles that are more universally experienced, for instance, jammed schedules that limit what we can do in terms of stepping away from our immediate responsibilities, especially to acquire new knowledge and listen to the voices of those outside our carefully constructed networks. The changes that disruptive practices seek to achieve are contingent on the availability of both time and space, or the capacity to make them available, which too few manage.

Cognisant of the structural barriers to participation and in line with the broader aims of the project, the DIMES team and the UACES secretariat worked consistently to ensure access for those who were unable to attend. Moreover, to ensure that the perspectives presented at workshops and conferences were captured, we made consistent use of available technology that allowed participants to produce and/or contribute to blog posts, videos and podcasts from the workshops. These have been curated by the UACES

secretariat and archived on the [UACES's website](#) to serve as an enduring repository for all European Studies scholars.

Given that we aimed for a broader impact of the project beyond its immediate participants, the discussions that have occurred under the aegis of the DIMES were visible and accessible to a wider cohort of European Studies through three DIMES-sponsored panels at the UACES annual conference 2022 in Lille. Beyond the UACES community, there were also two DIMES convened panels at the 2023 biennial European Union in International Affairs (EUIA) Conference in Brussels. EUIA was an important venue for highlighting the ongoing research and approach cultivated by DIMES since it also included policymakers and practitioners as participants and attendees. Through presentations and critical debates on the teaching of European Studies, materials produced as part of DIMES have also been used at annual UACES Graduate Forum Doctoral Training Academies for early career researchers.

In this essay, we reflect on the culmination of some of those discussions as articulated in the contributions to this special issue. The discussions, reflections and collaborations facilitated by DIMES over the last few years are largely preserved as essential knowledge for the field and a wider public. Additionally, we hope that the themes featured in this special issue, which provide provocations to the mainstream, inform research and teaching on European Studies. Disrupting the canon will also begin to rectify the omissions and silences that have beset European Studies as both an academic discipline and a field of study.

Somewhat conflicting, European Studies is simultaneously a field and a discipline. As a field of study (in European studies), Europe is just one among many world regions to be explored and can be done so through a wide range of disciplines: political science, international relations, law, sociology, economics, history, anthropology, sociology, business studies, cultural studies. Such study might be mono-, multi- or interdisciplinary. In the field, the phenomenon of European integration may be a component of study but it is not the essence of it.¹ In this regard, it is similar to other area studies.

European Studies is perhaps most discernible as a discipline when examined through the lens of degree programmes and the related canon of literature. Such lenses demonstrate that when European Studies is articulated as a discipline, this is often in reference to studies on the European Union (EU),² which uncritically asserts Brussels and/or its member states as the voice and voices of Europe.³ This discipline is itself multi- or interdisciplinary in form, reflecting the complexity of the system (Newell 2001) that is the EU. Yet, as evidenced by the discussions undertaken during the DIMES project, there are debates to be had about what insights from the various bodies of literature *could* be applied to the study of Europe and/or the EU but are not. Over the life of the project, we saw this most clearly in the discussions about decentring versus decolonisation. In these discussions, the former is seen as facilitating dialogue, the latter forming an obstacle to it, particularly in policymaking circles (see also Orbie et al. 2023). Readers of this special issue may find it useful to juxtapose the arguments of Antonio Salvador M. Alcazar III, Camile Nessel and Jan Orbie with those of Sharon Lecocq and Stephan Keukeleire to gain a broader picture of the debate.

Both the field and discipline will continue to have a European focus in terms of the subject matter. Yet, we should not assume that Europe or the EU are only studied in Europe. Stepping out of European geography to see how others study both the region and the integration project might be the most impactful way of understanding what Europe and the EU look like from afar. Indeed, this was one logic of holding one of the three workshops in Pretoria. Equally, one can remain in Europe to study Europe and still, as the contributions to this issue maintain, step away from Eurocentrism. This might be through more inclusive working practices, for example, centring the voices of BIPOC scholars. Or

it might require only an active acknowledgement that whilst European integration in its modern incarnation began after 1945, it did not start with a blank slate. This geographic area has a long and bloody history of impacting other peoples around the world, it is not inaccurate to argue that the EU (through its member states) was built on foundations of extraction, enslavement and appropriation. And, for many in other parts of the world, the EU and Europe are synonymous, their foreign policy practices still informed by the imperialist's instincts. Recognising such perspectives, moving beyond those Eurocentric philosophies, theories and epistemologies that pervade the canon has therefore been a key part of the DIMES efforts.

Gurminder K. Bhambra (2022) has pointed the way towards a 'decolonial project for Europe' building on postcolonial scholarship understanding Europe not as a story of successful modernity, nation-state building, and then post-war integration, but as an 'unfinished project of colonialism' (Maldonado-Torres 2007). Bhambra (2022: 240) argues that:

The decolonization of Europe will only happen once the colonial histories of Europe are explicitly reckoned with and Europe itself is understood to have been constituted by those histories – in all their variety. The injustices consequent to these histories can, further, only be adequately addressed through acknowledging the histories that have produced them as well as the historiographies that have obscured them.

Actively focusing our attention on how legacies of colonialism continue to shape European and other societies allows us to understand how they affect relations between Europe and other parts of the world is therefore a prerequisite for the decolonisation of European Studies. A distinction, we would argue, should be made between "decolonising" and "decentering", despite shared commonalities such as disrupting Eurocentrism. Few working in this area would disagree that a consideration of these impacts and relations from the perspectives of others is essential to decentre the study of Europe, in a colloquial sense, and contextualise it. But as our conversations through the lifetime of the DIMES project clarified, for some, decentering is insufficiently ambitious in view of what needs to be rectified (see also Orbie et al, 2023). Within the study of African-EU relations, some scholars have concentrated on showing how the legacies of colonialism have material negative economic and social impacts (Hansen and Jonsson 2014a, 2014b; Haastrup 2020), and how the European integration project assumed economic contributions from African colonies almost as 'dowries' being brought into the European project (Hansen and Jonsson 2011). Beyond this, paying attention to the legacies of colonialism also highlights the omissions in knowledge production about Europe, the EU itself and its engagement with the world (Haastrup 2020). In some cases, studies on the EU can occupy outsized roles in their explanatory insights, creating blindspots and knowledge gaps with implications for policy, as demonstrated by Dina Sebastião and Bruno Luciano's contribution to this issue. In their analysis of polycrisis, Sebastião and Luciano make a compelling case for the utility of comparative regionalism for EU Studies in a way that potentially challenges prevailing explanations of global phenomena. Drawing on two examples of the 2008 financial crisis and the trends in migration since 2015, they show that perspectives from other regions, which often sit on the margins of regionalism studies, can enrich and enhance our understanding of Europe. A wider scope for European Studies will afford us more nuanced critiques of Europe and policies, pointing the way to more just domestic policies and external relations. The normative agenda underpinning contributions to this issue parallels the increase in discourses around decolonising, supported by a range of initiatives being undertaken across higher education globally.

Among others, various well-known European Studies centres of excellence are actively reconsidering their practices and curricula. For example, after George Floyd's killing in the United States at the hands of police officers, and the demonstrations across numerous

countries against structural racism that followed, the Amsterdam Centre for European Studies at the University of Amsterdam responded by launching a radical programme that included decolonising curricula, diversifying the student and staff bodies and enhancing linguistic diversity. The goal was to provide a space for reflection and action on how racism and various forms of discrimination inhabit institutional spaces and structure relations to detrimental effects. Colleagues have proposed problematising the self-definition and self-presentation of European Studies. They have advocated for the need to foreground 'Europe' as a highly contested project, paying substantive attention to racialised, ethnic, sexual, religious diversities and corresponding structural exclusions within European societies, and they launched a series of discussions on these matters (ACES 2023). To a limited extent, the European Institute at the London School of Economics has also set itself the objective to cultivate its research and teaching in a way that would go 'beyond Eurocentrism'. They use this expression 'to play a twin role in our thinking about what we do and who we are: it serves to highlight that we both look beyond Europe in a regional sense and look beyond Eurocentrism in a philosophical-political sense' (Glendinning 2023). Similarly, the Decolonising Initiative at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence aims to decolonise knowledge and practice by creating a forum for dialogue and change which challenges colonial privilege, narratives and assumptions. It invites its community to reflect on what they consider knowledge and its biases and to seek to examine and address the colonial legacies that shape the material structures of the institution and knowledge creation. The EUI's initiative poses questions about how definitions of the curriculum and existing practices unknowingly reproduce patterns of hierarchy that have implications for knowledge production and how they perpetuate the underrepresentation of people from certain European or non-European places (EUI 2022).

In line with these agendas, in this special issue, the co-authored article by Christopher Changwe Nshimbi, Patrick Develtere and Bacha Kebede Debela reflects on what European Studies means outside of Eurocentrism, both geographically and epistemologically. Situated within new practices of science diplomacy, they provide an account of how a new African-European higher education collaboration platform sought to engender co-creation and co-production as a challenge to prevailing patterns of knowledge production. It recognises that scholarly frames of understanding are often defined from positions of academic privilege anchored in colonial relations that continue to inform knowledge production. Engagement between and among bodies of knowledge originating from the Global Souths and from Europe could change the very terms of debate, as Sebastião and Luciano's, and Nshimbi, Develtere and Debela's contributions to this issue demonstrate.

The perspectives presented in this special issue are ontologically and epistemologically diverse but they share the same underlying assumption that inspired DIMES: when we ignore hierarchies of knowledge and silence historically marginalised voices and spaces, our knowledge and understanding of Europe, and of Europe in a changing world, is invariably limited and limiting, with negative consequences for the discipline. In the contributions from Lecocq and Keukeleire, and Alcazar III et al. both sets of authors interrogate what it means to 'decentre' Europe. Nora Fisher Onar and Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2013) called for an agenda to 'decentre' European studies, and more specifically to 'decentre' EU external action studies (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2021). For them, the practice of 'decentring' encompasses three dimensions: 'provincialising' Europe (acknowledging Europe as just one of many regions whose realities matter), engaging with other regions (understanding others' perspective on the world and interests), and reconstructing European identities through historical memories (including incorporating understanding of how the past influences how others perceive Europe and are impacted by it).

Lecocq and Keukeleire take this logic further in their contribution to this issue. They expound on the value of decentring the study of EU external action. For them, 'the argument (in favour of) decentring pertains to a sense of unfairness regarding core-

periphery relations that have characterised world politics, and the production of knowledge about the world and within Europe', as Eurocentric approaches have led to the perpetuation of unequal power relations and 'research practices that oppress critical and dissident thinking'. From a practical perspective, they argue that decentring can lead to more nuanced situational knowledge of the world in which EU external action is exercised, reducing policy failures. Lecocq and Keukeleire propose understanding decentring as a debate that is disrupting mainstream studies of EU external action and problematising Eurocentric assumptions. Crucially, they point to the value of both critical and problem-solving theorising within the decentring debate in driving this agenda of disruption forward. Critical work aims to fundamentally disrupt the mainstream canon and rebuild the discipline, and represents a 'deeper' form of disruption, whereas problem-solving theorising is disruptive in different ways through 'adapting and improving existing frameworks (i.e. recalibrating existing scholarship and policy to make them less Eurocentric)'. In conversations with Lecocq and Keukeleire, a contentious aspect was the paradox they highlighted, that critical approaches may be confined to more critical circles, alienating particularly those with the power to make policy and so bring about change. By contrast, they argued (both then and here) that the more limited ambitions seen in problem-solving approaches might be a faster avenue to counter Eurocentrism and to decentre EU external action studies and policies, constituting a step towards broader acceptance in the mainstream of more critical approaches. In our workshop discussions, others argued that the decentering agenda is not sufficiently disruptive in view of the nature of the problem, since invariably the problem to be solved is about improving the European approach: in this reading, the decentering agenda ultimately ends up centring that which is supposed to be decentred.

Alcazar III, Nessel and Orbie also argue for provincialising Europe, removing it from a privileged standpoint, to focus on how partners experience interactions with the EU, and to imbue partners with agency. They set about disrupting the study of EU trade policy, which has been dominated by research focusing on the institutional and intra-EU social dynamics related to trade, despite the fact that the effects of trade are by their very nature global. They argue that mainstream EU trade studies have centred around the idea of power, focusing on what kind of power the EU has and how it wields it to attain its aims. They propose a decolonial approach to studying trade policy, particularly specific areas of EU trade policy that directly apply to trade relations with the Global Souths: the Generalised System of Preferences; the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) organising economic relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific states, and the trade and sustainable development chapters in new bilateral trade agreements. The approach they suggest entails first deconstructing Europe as a knowledge-subject as this 'alerts us to the ways in which dominant knowledge regimes and political discourses objectify peoples and places that the EU deems less modern, less developed, less capable' and justify particular paternalistic policies. Secondly, they propose rehistoricising silences, and paying attention to historical (colonial and post-colonial) relations between Europe and other regions. The third strategy in their approach requires eschewing assumptions that trade policy is technocratic and neutral, through engagement with those targeted by external interventions and how they experience and interpret the material impact of those interventions. Finally, they advocate centring subaltern subjectivities and alternative political subject-hoods to escape the limitations of Eurocentric approaches. Understanding EU trade policy in a decolonial way would therefore entail problematising existing assumptions regarding the benevolent, or at least neutral, character of EU trade interactions with the global souths, and abandoning the underpinning focus in the scholarship on EU power. It would additionally entail engaging with researchers and scholarship generated in the Global Souths to focus on Global Souths' interactions with EU trade policy, their impacts, as well as their agency in how they shape trade, and how interests, values and understandings of trade policies and their effects emerge from historical legacies of colonial pasts. Ultimately, this perspective hopes to reform EU external relations via trade policies.

Tiffany Williams's article likewise demonstrates the importance of paying attention to historical legacies. She reveals how the assumption that EU values are universal has led to observing and defining the EU's Eastern Partnership relations from a Western perspective aiming at greater Europeanisation. She argues that the EU has branded Europeanisation and rapprochement to the EU as a solution to the problem of instability in the region. Through a process of first 'othering' and then 'sameing', the EU has made the deepening and expansion of relations with Eastern neighbours conditional on these states accepting and approaching EU standards and the EU's definition of 'European'. This EU-centric approach has not only ignored the domestic situation of these others, of their preferences and historical, cultural and social specificities, but it has blinded the EU to an understanding of how these multiple domestic realities of any partner state affect relations with the EU. A corollary is the blinding of the EU to the limits on its power to generate transformative change in each state, let alone to transform others in precisely the same way, seen so visibly in its relations with Armenia and Belarus, as Williams sets out. Achievement of the EU's objectives in the Eastern Neighbourhood, Williams argues, would require both a willingness and a capacity to de- and reterritorialise the region but this is impossible given that the EU is neither fish nor fowl when it comes to colonialism in its Eastern Neighbourhood:

In order for the EU's brand of Europeanisation to achieve and sustain the intended transformation and integration, the ties to national and regional identity that impede its Europeanisation efforts would (will) need to become undone and reconstructed through de- and reterritorialisation. However, as discussed in theoretical debate and shown historically, e.g. colonialism and imperialism, hegemonic power is required to achieve this profound degree of transformation and integration.

This over-estimation of its capacity (or misunderstanding of what is really required) to reproduce its peace project on its borders to the east holds dangers for the Eastern Neighbourhood - and for the EU itself. The blinkering effects of EU-centricity account for the different outcomes we see in the EU's relations with those to its east and, in the cases where association has turned to accession, explains the backsliding from EU values we have seen in some member states. All told, Williams's article articulates the perils of Eurocentrism in the EU's external relations. She demonstrates how the conditionality inherent to its dealings with others puts unnecessary pressure on the ties between a culture, people, place and identity, and is counter-productive to the goal of uniting Europe.

The three articles collectively demonstrate the practical value of decentring European studies and consciously incorporating perspectives and experiences of 'others' in research. Defending the value and opportunities that can arise from more systematic comparative perspectives and studies in regionalism, eschewing the primordial position granted to the EU and theories developed to explain the EU, Sebastião and Luciano implicitly advocate for the provincialisation of the EU in regionalism studies. They call for a more rigorous and consistent agenda of comparative regionalism, with greater attention paid to regional dynamics in the Global Souths. This is necessary if we are to overcome the limitations of the study of regionalism(s) which has tended to apply theories and understandings developed in the case of the EU to other regions, thus imbuing regionalism with a Eurocentric bias. Focusing on the polycrises of the last fifteen years, they review scholarly literature on how regional organisations have responded to these polycrises, and show how that Eurocentric bias limits our understanding of regional integration and how regional projects can operate in times of crises. They find a predominance of studies investigating the response of the EU to these crises, more so than other regional projects, despite, as they point out, the Global Souths responding to far greater refugee and migratory movements, for instance in Jordan, or South American migration out of Venezuela. In contrast to the Western securitised approaches to migration regulation, South American countries have emphasised human rights and regularisation over incarceration and

deportation (Brumat 2020), and as Sebastião and Luciano discuss, by focusing more (solely) on the EU, we are missing out on lessons from approaches in the Global Souths that lead to more just outcomes. Furthermore, their findings reveal how research based in other regions pays greater attention to citizens and societies affected by regional initiatives, in contrast to EU Studies, where the Eurocentrism and disciplinary predominance of Political Science, has led to research focused on institutions, structures and elites. Indeed, even comparative regionalism research that sought to break away from Eurocentrism and 'integration snobbery' (Murray 2010) privileging the particular European model, has concentrated on institutional developments, political and elite dynamics resulting in different types of regionalism (De Lombaerde et al. 2010; Warleigh-Lack and Van Langenhove 2010; Telò 2014; Börzel and Risse 2019). Yet, the crises have affected mainly under-represented objects of research: economically and socially excluded citizens and minorities. In their contribution, Sebastião and Luciano show the limitations of mainstream approaches to EU Studies and propose a research agenda that takes account of the extra-institutional dimension of regionalism (Mattheis et al. 2018), that focuses on people and the subjects of regionalism and takes advantage of a cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches via comparisons with regionalism in the Global Souths.

The final articles by Ainre Maame-Fosua Evans and Danai Petropoulou Ionescu, and by Christopher Changwe Nshimbi, Patrick Develtere and Bacha Kebede Debela focus on teaching (and researching) practices and experiences of decolonising curricula and trans-continental partnerships respectively, as ways to overcome the silences, biases and reproduction of certain knowledge and standpoints that are widespread in academia and European Studies. They engage with the debates and concerns that academic institutions are increasingly attempting to tackle and provide practical examples to further inspire and advance these programmes. In this way, the final section of this special issue thus gives way to more practical examples of initiatives being implemented to contextualise and decolonise what is taught in European Studies, and to co-produce knowledge on Africa and Europe and their relations (Kotsopoulos and Mattheis 2018) in a more democratic and unbiased manner.

Maame-Fosua Evans and Petropoulou Ionescu introduce the basis and debates surrounding efforts to decolonise curricula. They highlight an agenda that moves beyond initial, sometimes tokenistic, steps of incorporation into reading lists of minority and under-represented authors and scholars. They suggest a series of purposeful actions to address the problematic canon of EU Studies in its focus on formal institutions and narrow definition of Europe and attempts to distance it from legacies of war, colonialism and violence to emphasise a positive narrative of idealised European ideas, values and progress. These actions include: contextualising the canon, discussing in the classroom the historical contexts of ideas and authors, and debating the problems that perpetuating and reproducing these ideas uncritically can and has caused; presenting alternative narratives and the experiences of groups affected by Europe. They also point to examples of approaches in their own institution in Amsterdam, of the incorporation of students' diverse lived experiences in the classroom, through active attempts to de-hierarchise knowledge and knowledge production and validating diverse points of views and experiences.

At a more macro-level, the PAES (Platform for African-European Studies) Initiative that Nshimbi, Develtere and Debela present in their article an ambitious coordinated endeavour challenging the historical Eurocentric nature of education cooperation and scholarship exported from Europe to Africa. PAES structures collaboration between eight universities in Europe and fourteen in Africa. A key aim of the Platform is to recognise and incorporate into curricula and teaching on both continents the pluriversality of knowledge, ontologies and epistemologies in order to decolonise African Studies in Europe and European Studies in Africa. It fosters greater visibility of the study of Europe from outside Europe and non-European perspectives, a valuable way of breaking from the strictures and biases of Eurocentric studies of Europe, opening avenues for more critical engagement with

European Studies. Simultaneously, more ambitious study and representations of Africa in Europe would be developed through new programmes on African Studies, co-created with African partners, eschewing the prevalent European scholarship on Africa centred on studying Africa as a locus of corruption, underdevelopment and problems. This innovative collaboration seeks to transcend the barriers of European Studies, to 'provincialise' Europe, and create a more democratic African-European Studies field to foster a new, more balanced, collaborative and egalitarian understanding of these regions and their interactions past, present and future.

Contributions to this special issue serve as the culmination of four years of principled, sometimes difficult, always thought-provoking conversation that has been the DIMES project. They reiterate the need for more inclusive scholarship and curricula and teaching materials, taking account of perspectives from the Global Souths, and marginalised groups within and outside Europe. As editors of the issue, we regard it as challenging us all to engage with those voices and ideas that for too long have heedlessly been ignored, even, perhaps especially, when to do so makes us feel profoundly uncomfortable. While debates on decolonising curricula, acknowledging privileged and Eurocentric positions in knowledge production traditions, and more broadly on the need for genuine postcolonial research practices and disciplinary shifts, are not unique to European Studies, they are especially pertinent due to the problematic history of the subject, particularly when narrowed to EU Studies. This special issue contributes to the growing literature and practical undertakings that are intent on disrupting that mainstream and shining a light on unacknowledged approaches, understandings of Europe and voices. The DIMES Project and contributions to this issue remind European Studies scholars of their responsibility to reflect, actively, on their research and teaching practices, to consider the silences and omissions in the canon and how they impact societies and individuals. A collective endeavour is required to reach a future where the themes and approaches highlighted in this issue need not be showcased in a special issue, but are part of everyday research and teaching practices in European Studies.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The DIMES Project and this special issue were made possible with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union (Grant No: 612072-EPP-1-2019-1-UK-EPPJMO-PROJECT). As academic coordinators we are most grateful to the University Association of European Studies (UACES) for the DIMES initiative, without UACES, and especially the leadership of its Executive Director, Emily Linnemann, DIMES and this

special issue would not exist. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Institute for History, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University, Netherlands for hosting the DIMES opening conference. Additionally, we are grateful to the Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria, South Africa and the European Studies Association of Sub-Saharan Africa for hosting the DIMES closing conference, and in particular Victoria Graham. Finally, we thank all the participants of DIMES, especially the contributors to this special issue.

ENDNOTES

¹ This argument, along with the field and discipline distinction, was persuasively made by Dr Meng Hsuan-Chou at the DIMES closing conference in Pretoria, February 2023.

² For the sake of fluency, we refer to European Studies throughout this introduction, as a proxy for both European Studies (the discipline) and European studies (the field).

³ We are grateful to Professor Ummu Salma Bava for this point, made at the DIMES conference in Pretoria.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Critical and Problem-Solving Perspectives on Decentring EU External Action Studies

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Citation

Lecocq, S. and Keukeleire, S. (2023). 'Critical and Problem-Solving Perspectives on Decentring EU External Action Studies', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 19 (2), 163-180.
<https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1293>.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This article proposes a decentring approach for EU External Action Studies as a debate that is 'disrupting' the mainstream in European Studies. It theoretically contributes to the decentring debate in three ways. First, by identifying decentring as a meta-theoretical current of thinking, the article helps define the decentring debate as an area of theorising which can accommodate scholars from various backgrounds and bring them together around a common commitment to overcome Euro- and Western centrism in scholarship (and practice). Second, the article states the wider relevance of taking a decentring approach, which entails normative and instrumental benefits for scholarship, teaching and practice. By doing so, the article underscores the ethical imperative of disrupting a field of study on the one hand, but also the usefulness and even the necessity of disruption as a problem-solving approach to the benefit of a field's mainstream centre on the other. Third, the article shows how the decentring debate accommodates both critical and problem-solving theorising, and proposes potential theoretical anchors in existing bodies of work. Finally, it discusses the inherent paradox that follows from critical and problem-solving approaches to decentring specifically and disruptive theorising more broadly.

Keywords

Critical theory; Decentring; EU external action; European foreign policy; Pragmatism; Problem-solving theory

The past decade has seen an increasing call to bring more diversity, and 'dissident voices' into European and EU Studies, warning against introversion and pointing to the need to go beyond 'the mainstream' – i.e. the conventional worldview and assumptions, theories and methods in the field that constitute 'the centre' (Manners and Whitman 2016; Rittberger and Blauburger 2018). The argument is that questioning and disrupting these central assumptions is necessary in order to become more representative and innovate through including different perspectives and insights from outside the dominant centre. The study of the external relations of Europe with the rest of the world has been particularly subject to the criticism of 'navel-gazing' (Keuleers et al. 2016).

Perhaps because of its very focus on Europe's role in a world that is otherwise non-European, scholars particularly question the Eurocentric civilisational and analytical assumptions underlying analyses, urging a decentring of these foundations by lending voice to different geographical (Global South), social (subaltern), but also disciplinary and methodological (e.g. Area Studies, ethnography) perspectives. As such, decentring can take various forms with different implications for scholarship. Imported from its counterpart in International Relations (IR), which calls for diversifying and decentring the study of global affairs (Tickner and Waever 2009; Nayak and Selbin 2010; Acharya 2014; Hurrell 2017; Tickner and Smith 2020), this debate also emerged in European scholarship, criticising Eurocentrism in its various forms (Hobson 2012; Sabaratnam 2013) and arguing for a 'Decentring Agenda' for EU External Action Studies, geared towards finding tools to overcome the identified Euro-, EU- and broader Western centrism in scholarship and practice (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013, 2021; Huber and Kamel 2018; Keukeleire and Lecocq 2018, 2021; Huber and Paciello 2020; Wolff et al. 2022; Zardo and Wolff 2022).

Inevitably, attempts to disrupt the conventions and foundational assumptions of a field's centre encounter scepticism from that very centre, which in the end constitutes the core of what defines a field in the first place, an overhaul of which would endanger its *raison d'être*. For the study of the EU and its external action, these criticisms include the arguments that in the end, European (External Action) Studies as well as EU external action itself primarily derive from an interest in the EU/Europe and EU/European interests – so why spend so much effort on non-European perspectives? Moreover, a better understanding of the external context of the EU and Europe may be useful, but what is a decentring approach, and how to make a theoretical case for its relevance? This article aims to further the decentring agenda by addressing concerns from mainstream EU External Action Studies about the theoretical footing of decentring and the broader relevance of including disruptive perspectives into the study of EU external action.

In this article, we focus on EU External Action Studies as a distinct field of study that is embedded in, yet distinct from, the discipline of International Relations and its subfield Foreign Policy Analysis on the one hand, and European Studies as an area study and its subfield EU studies on the other hand (Jørgensen 2015; Gstöhl and Schunz 2021). Being more all-encompassing than 'European foreign policy' (Keukeleire and Delreux 2022), EU external action refers to 'any form of interaction ... between the European Union, that is, EU institutions and bodies or EU member states acting on behalf of [or with] the EU, and the outside world' (Gstöhl and Schunz 2021: 3). By focusing on EU External Action Studies, this article does not touch upon all manifestations of the decentring agenda in current scholarship, nor does it pretend to discuss comprehensively all areas and fields in which the approach can or should be applied.

Decentring can indeed equally be geared towards recognising differences and centre-periphery relations within the EU and Europe at large. Moreover, as domestic and EU level contestation shape EU external action, the study of the latter equally requires a decentred understanding of Europe itself. Decentring EU external action also requires an acknowledgement that the EU itself is not the product of 'a fascinating kind of 'virgin birth'' (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013: 284) as if it has nothing to do with the colonial and

imperialist past of its member states (Hansen and Jonsson 2014; Nicolaïdis et al. 2015; Pasture 2018; Bhambra 2022). Thus, while the specific focus of this piece is geared towards EU external action specifically, we also acknowledge the importance of the aforementioned dimensions of decentring and argue that some of the arguments made below can be relevant to these related debates.

The article aims to contribute to the decentring debate as follows. First, it identifies decentring as a meta-theoretical current of thinking and area of theorising, which can accommodate scholars from various backgrounds and unite them around a common commitment to overcome Euro- and Western centrism in scholarship (and practice). Second, the article aims to lay out schematically the relevance of a decentring approach, which entails normative and practical benefits for scholarship and practice. Third, by taking this step back and distinguishing the various *purposes* – i.e. critical and problem-solving – of theorising in the first place, the article shows how the decentring debate also reflects these two types of theorising which can find theoretical anchors in existing bodies of work. Finally, the article discusses a paradox that arises from a debate between critical and problem-solving approaches to decentring, which may defy each of the other's initial purpose.

By doing so, the article contributes to this special section by DIMES (Jean Monnet project on Diversity, Inclusion and Multi-Disciplinarity in European Studies) on *Disrupting European Studies*. The article presents the decentring approach to the study of EU external action as a current of thinking that is 'disrupting' the mainstream within this specific field. It underscores both the ethical imperative of such disruption, and the usefulness and even the necessity of disruption as a problem-solving approach to the benefit of a field's mainstream centre. Therefore, the inherent paradox in the decentring debate that is discussed in the article is also more broadly relevant, as it calls for a reflection on the purpose and outcome of disrupting in general and in European Studies specifically.

DECENTRING: A META-THEORETICAL CURRENT OF THINKING

As already set out, by calling into question mainstream assumptions, decentring is geared towards disrupting usually unquestioned conventions. Tickner and Smith argue that the 'act of decentering challenges the alleged existence of a centre from which legitimate knowledge is deemed to originate' (2020: 8). The imperative of decentring has increasingly found uptake in European Studies, especially in the study of EU external action. Significant developments have been made to offer convinced researchers tools for *how* to go about decentring. In particular, Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013, 2021), Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018, 2021), Huber and Paciello (2020) and Wolff et al. (2022) have contributed to providing concrete steps, analytical frameworks and methodological tools to approach research on Europe and its role in the world in a more non-Eurocentric way. However, within the context of mainstream European (External Action) Studies, questions arise about the theoretical case for decentring (Dijkstra and Vanhoonacker 2017) and about the concrete contribution decentring can make to a scholarship that is mainly interested in Europe, the EU itself and its inner workings. Rather than offering additional tools, this article therefore engages in a more fundamental discussion on the definition of the decentring debate and its wider relevance for gaining a better understanding of Europe in the world, and in the end, of Europe itself.

It is useful first to establish what a decentring approach can actually be considered as. Decentring does not constitute a theory in itself, with fixed ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. We propose to consider the decentring approach as a 'current of thinking' (Jørgensen 2017b: 169). Currents of thinking, also referred to as 'turns', constitute debates among communities of researchers that share a commitment or sensitivity to a specific aspect of social and political reality, which in their view should receive more attention than is the case in mainstream theorising. Currents of thought are areas of theorising in the form of pluralist debates orientated towards developing new

insights and conceptual tools to think about global affairs. Scholars interested in decentring agree on and convene around the need for more attention to the non-European in European (External Action) Studies.

A commitment to decentring can stem from normative concerns, displaying a heightened sensitivity to the importance of self-reflexivity and emancipating the subaltern, and to criticising socio-political narratives and practices that perpetuate uneven power relations. However, not only normative concerns drive researchers to decentring, but also concrete theoretical and empirical academic and policy concerns. 'Centrism' is also increasingly equated to 'myopia', leading to a range of biases, misunderstandings and a limited view of reality – for example, by assuming the predominance and universal validity and applicability of European and Western conceptions of modernity and progress, within and beyond Europe. From a 'functional' point of view, a decentred perspective is thus not only about disrupting, but about strengthening one's own knowledge through broadening one's perspective. Moreover, an increasing interest in learning about 'the other' has also coincided with real-world power shifts that put the non-European more front and centre than ever (Zarakol 2019).


As such, decentring can be seen as both a normative and pragmatic imperative in the study and practice of international relations (Acharya and Buzan 2019: 299) and European external action (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013: 285). Within a current of thinking, the content of the discussion and the form research takes may be similar. Thus, scholars can enter the debate from very different points of departure, including different philosophical points of view. Decentring as a meta-theoretical current of thinking transcends specific theoretical inclinations, meaning that decentring can be grafted onto various new and existing theoretical lenses. The two different approaches to decentring briefly outlined above, i.e. driven by normative or practical concerns, will be discussed throughout the following sections and will form the basis for offering existing theoretical anchors and for discussing the compatibility of approaches and potential paradox inherent to the debate.

THE RELEVANCE OF A DECENTRING APPROACH FOR EU EXTERNAL ACTION STUDIES (AND PRACTICE)

If Eurocentrism only entails a focus on Europe and endowing Europe with some exceptional qualities, then Eurocentrism in the study of Europe and EU external action is essentially not surprising, nor necessarily problematic. On the one hand, it is 'not particularly exceptional to think in terms of exceptionalism' (Jørgensen 2017a: 286) and it is therefore natural to accord a measure of evidence to one's own worldview as a researcher or practitioner raised and trained within 'the Eurocentric box' (Friedman 2015). On the other hand, the field of European/EU Studies is geared towards a focus on Europe and the EU itself, the intricacies of which warrant entire fields of study. The Eurocentrism in the study of EU external action also stems from the field's roots in the IR discipline (and its subfield foreign policy analysis) and European Studies (and its subfield EU Studies) as an area study (Jørgensen 2015; Gstöhl and Schunz 2021).

Eurocentrism becomes problematic, however, when European universalist and civilisational pretensions are used as a basis for studying Europe's place in the world (Hobson 2012; Sabaratnam 2013). In this sense, the same normative and practical concerns that are raised in the IR discipline apply: Eurocentrism 'undermine[s] the intellectual claim and moral purchase of a discipline that aspires to understand international politics' (Grovgui 2002: 52 in Bilgin 2016: 136). This section attempts to lay out the usefulness of decentring as an approach that disrupts the Eurocentric foundations of EU External Action Studies, identifying concrete empirical and normative benefits and relevance for both the scholarship and practice of EU external action – schematically presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Wider relevance of the decentring approach

	Scholarship Strengthening analytical capacities in EU External Action Studies	Practice Improving EU external action
Normative / ethical  Functional / instrumental	Inclusiveness and plurality Mutuality and genuine dialogue / multilogue Description Understanding Explaining Theory-building	Overcoming colonial burden through mutuality and genuine dialogue / multilogue Relevance Efficiency Effectiveness Pre-emptive action

Relevance for Scholarship

In line with calls for decentring and globalising the IR discipline, the idea of decentring was introduced in EU External Action Studies mainly in view of *normative, moral or ethical reasons* – aiming for a more inclusive scholarship and for pluralising and decolonising the study of Europe in global affairs. The argument for decentring pertains to a sense of injustice regarding core-periphery relations that have not only characterised world politics, but also the production of knowledge about the world and within Europe in particular. Eurocentrism leads to making conscious and unconscious research choices that perpetuate uneven power relations and research practices that oppress critical and dissident thinking. For example, Sabaratnam (2013: 263-264) explains how Western interventions are generally studied from the perspective of the intervener, which not only reflects the ‘habits of intellectual Eurocentrism’ and ‘underlying ontological premises ... emphasizing ‘Western’ agency as the terrain of the political’ but also ‘helps to reproduce, however unintentionally, the background assumption that that which is exterior to this does not matter for an appreciation of the politics of intervention’.

Aside from the actual content of the research, inclusiveness and plurality are also called for within communities of researchers, as a broader normative concern equally considers the expression of uneven power relations in academia and in teaching at universities (de Sousa Santos et al. 2016; Bhabra et al. 2018; Cupples and Grosfogue 2019; de Sousa Santos 2019). This growing concern has also coincided with worldwide calls for decolonising universities and public spaces through protests and in the form of, for instance, the symbolic removal of imperialists’ statues – examples of which are the South African student protest movement ‘Rhodes must fall’ (Kwoba et al. 2018), the broader ‘Black Lives Matter’ movement and a ‘woke’ call for heightened awareness of social injustice in all areas of society, including academia and education. Decentring is thus also relevant for *teaching* in the field of European External Action Studies, providing inspiration for innovative teaching on European (foreign) affairs (Maurer et al. 2020). It can contribute to what Oloruntoba et al. (2021: 179) advocate as ‘a relevant and balanced curriculum of European Studies’ that non-European as well as European teachers and learners can embrace.

Other than normative or ethical concerns, decentring can address *functional/instrumental concerns* in EU External Action Studies. Innovative descriptive and explorative analyses into the external context of European foreign policy are necessary for understanding the new realities with which Europe is confronted and the local contexts towards which EU external action is projected. A lack of such understanding, to a major extent attributed to Eurocentrism and an unwillingness for real engagement with local external contexts by scholars, has led to questions about whether EU External Action Studies – with its

conventional assumptions and theories – is actually up to the challenge of fully grasping the EU's role and the (in)effectiveness and (ir)relevance of its policies in an increasingly complex and volatile 'non-European world' (Keuleers et al. 2016; Keukeleire and Lecocq 2021).

Rich empirical material is not only required for better description and understanding, it is necessary to move to the next analytical stages, that is improving and updating conceptual and explanatory models. Decentring helps to shed light on previously neglected or unknown factors and processes that can help explain the external (in)effectiveness, (ir)relevance, and (lack of) legitimacy of Europe and the EU in the world. In this sense, new data do not only provide a fertile base for testing existing hypotheses and theories, but also for asking new research questions, detecting new relationships and causal mechanisms that can contribute to further theory-building. For example, concepts such as Normative Power Europe, when applied in EU-Africa or EU-MENA relations in a decentred way (Staeger 2016; Huber et al. 2017; Keukeleire et al. 2021) can assume a very different meaning and evaluation, and studies into local contexts can expose factors explaining successes and failures in those relations. On EU-Africa relations, Bourgeois et al. (2020: 8-9) point to 'the legitimacy of a plurality of perspectives, which challenges existing Eurocentric biases' proposing that 'research is not driven anymore by the search for an absolute truth but by the unveiling of the different aspects of a situation seen from these different perspectives.'

Decentring thereby not only relates to the rich empirical realities that are present outside the conventional Eurocentric centre. Decentring requires including and starting from different worldviews, theories and approaches to understand and explain the world, which can also provide insights and explanations for Europe's position in the world. Examples include African (Ngcoya 2015; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) Asian (Qin 2018; Shih et al. 2019; deSouza 2020) and various other Global South (Tickner and Blaney 2013; Acharya 2014; Aydinli and Biltekin 2018) as well as other non-Western perspectives and schools of thought (Ling 2014; Sheikh 2016; Shahi 2020). In this context, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 6) emphasises the importance of 'a decolonial epistemological move of decentring the Global North as the centre of knowledge and recentring the Global South'. The author argues for 'an intellectual and academic process of centring of Africa as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and epistemic site from which to interpret the world while at the same time globalizing knowledge from Africa' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018: 4). Turning to EU External Action Studies, epistemic sites and knowledge from the Global South thus constitute a basis for interpreting and analysing EU external action and Europe's position in the world.

Relevance for Practice

While our focus here is mainly on EU External Action *Studies*, it is worth pointing to the policy relevance of decentring and to the intertwinement of scholarship and practice. Decentring may equally inform the *practice* of European external relations and politics, again from both an instrumental and normative point of view. On an *instrumental* level, a decentred approach holds the potential of strengthening EU external action through developing a stronger knowledge base and deeper understanding and situational awareness of the external context in which the EU operates (cf. European External Action Service 2015; 2016). Policies generated through decentred analyses can diminish the chance that the EU is caught by surprise or misjudges its own involvement due to a lack of such knowledge and awareness. Concrete examples entail the failure of the European Neighbourhood Policy and of the EU's policies towards Africa, which have been explicitly related to a Eurocentric approach and to the disregard of Mediterranean and African agency and contexts (Schumacher and Bouris 2017; Kotsopoulos and Mattheis 2018; Del Sarto and Tholens 2020; Haastrup et al. 2020; Teti et al. 2020). In turn, decentring can contribute to a more relevant and effective foreign policy when it is tailored to benefit local contexts – as interpreted by local agents – as well as the EU's interests (Keukeleire and

Lecocq 2021). This reframing of the EU's interests into 'other-regarding interests' (George and Keohane 1980: 221) may mean that a more effective EU foreign policy does not necessarily entail more Eurocentrism.

Ethical drivers for decentring the practice of EU external action can be a willingness on the part of foreign policy makers and diplomats to engage in genuine dialogue/multilogue and seriously listen to and learn from their interlocutors as a matter of mutual respect and equality. On an ethical level, 'ignoring the point of view of the EU's counterparts is problematic, as they are major stakeholders of the EU policies' (Keuleers et al. 2016: 360). This imperative is particularly pressing in view of coping with the burden of EU member states' colonial and imperialist pasts, and in view of allegations against the EU about taking a civilisational tone and conveniently 'forgetting' its exploitative history (Hansen & Jonsson 2014; Nicolaïdis et al. 2015; Pasture 2018; Sebhatu 2020). Moral considerations can be a motivation to decentre in order to signal recognition, humility and mutuality. As such, decentring can help dealing with what Nshimbi (2020) sees in EU-Africa relations as the overarching challenge in the partnership, that is 'finding common ground and levelling the playing field'. This way, decentring could counter the EU's inclination towards 'continuously devising ways to maintain its dominance in the 'partnership''. Decentring can also contribute to overcoming the underlying Eurocentric, modernist and colonial paradigm of specific domains of EU external action, such as EU development policy, and contribute to 'a better acknowledgement of the diversity or 'pluriverse' of alternatives to 'development'' (Delputte & Orbie 2020: 249).

Important to note here is that the analysis and practice of EU external action are more interrelated and mutually constitutive than is often acknowledged. In other words, decentred analyses can lead to policy recommendations to improve and strengthen EU external action, while a decentred policy practice may broaden the scope for decentred analyses within mainstream EU External Action Studies. Likewise, the difference between ethical and instrumental imperatives to decentre may not be as clear-cut, given that moral incentives can lead to practical benefits when scholarship or policies end up more efficient and effective by gaining more legitimacy. However, just as disrupting a field of study can help in strengthening that scholarship, decentring can (intentionally or unintentionally) serve to preserve, and ultimately even reinforce, the power positions both of European/Western academic and political actors. A paradox then arises, when decentring based on ethical incentives perpetuates the dominance of the EU and the Western centres through strengthening their scholarly or real-world position. This paradox is also discussed in the next section and derives from the approach's compatibility with both critical and problem-solving theorising.

DECENTRING AND DISRUPTING: CRITICAL VERSUS PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACHES

As a meta-theoretical current of thinking aimed at disrupting the field of EU External Action Studies, we argue that a decentring approach can be both critical and problem-solving. In the famous words of Cox (1981: 128-129): 'Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose' and theorising can be pursued for two purposes which broadly align with the above normative and instrumental objectives that may give impetus for decentring. As a point of departure for theoretically discussing the decentring approach, we rely on the distinction made by Cox (1981) between critical and problem-solving theorising. It is argued that, depending on a critical or problem-solving stance, researchers may find theoretical anchors in different existing bodies of work outside of European Studies.

Critical and Problem-solving Theorising

According to Cox (1981), theory can serve two purposes and take two kinds of shapes: critical theorising and problem-solving theorising. Critical theorising 'begins with the avowed intent of criticizing particular social arrangements and/or outcomes [...] it explicitly

sets out to identify and criticize a particular set of social circumstances and demonstrate how they came to exist' (Kurki & Wight 2007: 28). A critical theorist claims to step outside of the prevailing world order, pick apart existing frameworks focusing on broader socio-political institutions and power-relations they represent, and aims to overhaul and re-construct them based on a certain *problematique*. Critical theorising is also an ongoing effort, as it 'does not take institutions and social power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing' and therefore 'must continually adjust its concepts to the changing object it seeks to understand and explain' (Cox 1981: 129).

Problem-solving theorising takes existing institutions and power relations as parameters for investigation and tries to change things within the existing order. While this second type of theorising can equally take on a reflexive, critical and normative angle, its aim is more 'practical'. Rather than reconstructing from zero, problem-solving aims to change and adapt (perhaps also fundamentally) existing institutions and power relations and make them 'work [more] smoothly by dealing effectively with particular sources of trouble' in scholarship and international politics (Cox 1981: 128-129). Problem-solving perspectives equally depart from a reality that is acknowledged to be complex, yet conveniently presuppose an artificial measure of 'fixedness' to the world.

Critical and problem-solving theorising exhibit distinct strengths and weaknesses as specific types of theorising that aspire to a disruption of existing structures, both in the scholarship and in the practice of international politics. The critical perspective is the most fundamental, self-reflective in terms of historical awareness, and aims for a true overhaul of existing structures based on an aspect of reality that is the source of criticism – such as the eradication of Eurocentric foundations of scholarship and practice. The issue with radical critical perspectives, however, is that through its concern with 'what ought to be', there can be an unwillingness or inability to work with or construct on 'what is', aside from criticising it (cf. 'boundary of negativity', Wæver 1996). Rather than providing concrete options or solutions for change that can readily be applied by mainstream thinkers, there is a danger of lingering in a circle of criticism related to what can be considered utopian or 'unrealistic expectations' (Kurki & Wight 2007: 28).

In comparison to critical theorising, a problem-solving approach can be considered less radical in terms of disrupting an existing field of study, but therefore perhaps also more appealing to mainstream thinkers, as problem-solving theory explicitly aims to provide applicable solutions. In the end, subtle disruptions can be more effective in the short term, and become larger in the long term through a slower process of 'conviction'. However, this approach can also be considered as not radical enough and even damaging to the cause of disrupting. According to Cox (1981: 129-130), the willingness to work within existing power structures and conventional theories is a weakness, as presuming a measure of 'fixedness' is a false premise and ideologically problematic:

problem-solving theory, however, rests upon a false premise, since the social and political order is not fixed but (at least in a long-range perspective) is changing. Problem-solving theories can be represented, in the broader perspective of critical theory, as serving particular national, sectional, or class interests, which are comfortable within the given order.

In sum, critical and problem-solving theorising can be considered distinct approaches to research with distinct advantages and disadvantages in terms of transformative potential to a field.

Critical and Problem-solving Approaches to Decentring EU External Action Studies

These approaches are reflected in the formulation of a 'Decentring Agenda' for the analysis of EU external action. This agenda, initially proposed by Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013),

presents three steps for overcoming Eurocentrism, including *provincialising* (implying self-reflection and unpacking the particularistic nature of (different) European experiences, accounts and assumptions, often presented as universal), *engagement* with others' worldviews (in relation to Europe or not), leading to a *reconstruction* or re-imagining of European agency based on mutuality and humility. Elsewhere (Keukeleire & Lecocq 2018), we have developed these dimensions and aimed for operationalisation with a number of categories along which differences in worldviews can be detected (including various temporal, spatial, polity, normative, linguistic and disciplinary perspectives). In addition, we proposed to rethink these steps – provincialising, engagement and reconstruction – in view of their practical application in research and practice. We explicitly pointed to the importance of distinguishing between 'the Decentring Agenda as an analytical or heuristic tool on the one hand, and as a normative judgement on the other' (ibid: 280). This does not mean research is neutral (cf. Cox), but rather that individual scholars should try not to make a priori normative judgements and to be open to perspectives which may appear alien or unacceptable from the researcher's point of view. The aim is 'to assist scholars in detecting, labelling and understanding concepts, ideas and practices that do not fit within their usual frames of reference' (ibid: 280).

Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis start their argument for decentring EU external action from a normative point of view and from a critical and post-colonial background – denouncing the Eurocentrism in European Studies with reference to 'echoes of empire' and an incomplete process of decolonisation that privileges Europe and the 'west' over the 'rest' in reality and in academia (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis 2013, 2021; Nicolaïdis et al. 2015) – although they also point to the analytical challenges of and empirical need for taking a decentring perspective more broadly. We entered the decentring debate from a different point of departure that stems from within 'the mainstream' and from the realisation that the conventional Eurocentric tools with which most scholars work appear insufficient to empirically and analytically grasp Europe's place in the world (Keukeleire and Lecocq 2018). Although this difference is subtle and would not matter for engaging in constructive dialogue, ultimately, these two points of departure may result in differing research objectives and outcomes that may seem contradictory.

Building upon the 'decentring agenda' (Lecocq & Keukeleire 2018; Keukeleire et al. 2021; Keukeleire & Lecocq 2021), we also pointed to potential misunderstandings, concerns or resistance to decentring by mainstream scholars and practitioners. For example, the formulation of engagement in both academic and policy circles may be obfuscated with endorsement or legitimisation of other perspectives (which may be considered as unethical or unacceptable), whereas 'learning' about and from counterparts' different perspectives is more permissible. Similarly, a full 're-construction' of European Studies 'from the outside in' raises questions about the feasibility and tractability to start rebuilding scholarship and policy from zero and on the basis of radically different foundations – even if this would ultimately be the most desirable outcome. Referring to 'recalibration' rather than reconstruction reflects an acknowledgement that scholars and practitioners are rarely open to completely starting anew. It emphasises larger potential for actual change and adaptation, including by mainstream scholars and practitioners.

These nuances mirror a distinction between a critical and problem-solving perspective. Both put forward the importance of reflexivity and including worldviews from different geographical and social perspectives, yet enter the decentring debate from different angles and in different ways – i.e. from outside and from within – but also to different extents. In this sense, it is the critical and post-colonial perspective that prescribes a true overhaul of scholarship and policy based on non-Eurocentric foundations, while the problem-solving perspective holds that decentring can be compatible even with existing frameworks to various degrees.

Pragmatism as a Theoretical Anchor for Problem-solving Decentring in EU External Action Studies

For sure, the two approaches are complementary and mutually constitutive in the decentring current of thinking. Yet, their start from distinct 'purposes' implies that they can be couched in different theoretical perspectives. Evidently, scholars preoccupied with the normative imperative of decentring can find a useful anchor in critical and postcolonial bodies of work, which have a long legacy of exposing the Euro- and Western centrism in scholarship and politics with the aim to fundamentally reimagine academia and the world on a different basis. Dominant Euro- and Western centric approaches such as positivism, and theories like realism and liberal institutionalism, are shown to fall short of capturing reality, and alternatives and new approaches are presented from outside mainstream IR (e.g. Fisher-Onar 2020). However, problem-solving orientated scholars, concerned about the analytical capacity of existing frameworks to adequately grasp the empirical reality of Europe in the world, may not seek to do away with their theories, but find ways to work with them, improve them and make them more applicable to real-world problems at hand. Where a critical approach for decentring European foreign policy analysis finds an established theoretical lens in Critical Studies, including post-colonialism, feminism, and Marxism, it is less clear where problem-solving theorising may find a foothold.

This article argues that a problem-solving perspective on decentring could look towards Pragmatism for developing its theoretical foundations, for concrete guidance in terms of research design and for adapting/improving existing real-world structures and scholarship. Pragmatic research is inherently problem-solving. It starts from real-world observations and puzzles and aims to 'understand complex social phenomena and/or to explain observed social regularities' – phenomena 'that previously escaped our cognitive or operational parameters' (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009: 706, 716). Starting from the complexity of social reality, it assumes that no single theoretical paradigm is able to capture this reality in all its facets. Rather than overhauling existing paradigms, however, it combines useful elements of different paradigms in new ways (cf. 'analytical eclecticism', Sil and Katzenstein 2010; or 'comparative area studies', Ahram et al. 2018). For example, Darwich (2018: 6) notes how eclectic and middle-range analytical frameworks that combine insights from several traditional paradigms may 'account for the complexity of international life in the [MENA] region that no single research tradition can', for instance by including insights from Area Studies on region-specific issues. Hence, Pragmatism developed its own peculiar meta-theoretical stance, which is characterised by ontological agnosticism, epistemological instrumentalism, abduction as a preferred methodology, and a distinct emphasis on practice as a level of analysis (Hellmann 2009; Franke and Weber 2012; Delputte and Orbie 2018).

Pragmatism points to the perils of 'paradigm mentalities' (Walker 2010) which limit scholars' analytical abilities by predetermining which (aspects of) realities are even worth scrutinising (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). This prevents scholars from observing and investigating beyond the 'straitjacket' of theoretical lenses and widens the gap between academia and policy relevant research. This does not imply that Pragmatism rejects existing theoretical work and the useful insights it generates. Much to the contrary, a pluralist disposition encourages pragmatists to start research from a broad knowledge base of existing fields of inquiry, including Eurocentric ones, as these are also available tools for seeing the complexity of research problems and suggesting useful explanations. The preferred methodology of pragmatists is an *abductive* research strategy which travels between empirical observations and different existing frameworks containing various elements (theories, concepts, analytical tools) which can be employed and combined in order to make sense of puzzling observations (Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2015).

Pragmatism is highly self-reflexive, as it departs from the acknowledgement that researchers never embark upon a project from a blank page, but bring their own

background and assumptions into the research from the start even when one *tries* to move beyond them, be it related to theoretical or ethnocentric predispositions. Conventional Pragmatism, however, in the form of theoretical pluralism or analytic eclecticism, has been criticised for its tendency to overlook ethical concerns regarding inclusivity. If inter-paradigmatic dialogue remains confined to interaction among the dominant paradigms, it would generate only a partial pluralism that forgoes its claim to inclusivity and emancipatory potential by reifying existing power dynamics (Blanchard 2020; Peet 2020). Similarly, and in line with decentring, Eun (2018: 9-11) explains that more inclusivity is needed not only across theoretical boundaries but also among social and spatial divides, as a focus only on the former would continue to rest upon existing Euro/Western-centric paradigms. A pragmatic or problem-solving approach to decentring would therefore include non-Eurocentric knowledge, without necessarily discarding existing Eurocentric knowledge.

THE DECENTRING/DISRUPTING PARADOX

The following section discusses the inherent paradox that follows from accommodating both critical and problem-solving approaches in a debate on decentring EU External Action Studies. This paradox has been hinted at in the previous sections, and results from the different purposes with which scholars can enter the debate. Some scholars start from criticising the Eurocentric foundations of the study of Europe's international relations, take a critical approach to further theorising in the field and require inclusivity through decentring mainly from a normative perspective. Other scholars start from criticising the diminished problem-solving capacities of existing frameworks and assumptions in the study of EU external action and find Eurocentrism to be problematic on that account. The latter take a problem-solving approach to further theorising in the field and require inclusivity through decentring mainly from an instrumental perspective.

The critical perspective on decentring is the most fundamental, self-reflective and historically aware, aiming for a thorough overhaul of existing structures in the field of EU external action (studies) and based on non-Eurocentric foundations of scholarship and practice. A true disruption of a field – in terms of shaking its Eurocentric foundations – may therefore at first view require critical theorising. The large body of existing work in the post-positivist and post-colonial tradition of IR can serve as a foothold for scholars wishing to study Europe's role in the world from a non-Eurocentric perspective. However, critical perspectives are also criticised for their 'enduringly Eurocentric gaze' resulting in 'avatars of Eurocentrism' in critical and postcolonial approaches (Sabaratnam 2013; Hobson and Sajed 2020; Murray 2020; Toley 2021; Pison Hindawi 2022). As critical theorists call for a fundamental rethinking of the frameworks and assumptions that mainstream scholars have been using, the latter may be more deterred from than enticed to consider a decentring approach. This may perpetuate the talking past each other of the critical and the mainstream, leading to less disruption than would be expected. In short, critical perspectives can paradoxically lead to a perpetuation of what they want to disturb and disrupt.

That being the case, a problem-solving approach can also be conducive in terms of making real changes and convincing also mainstream thinkers to try and adopt a decentring approach or join the debate and current of thinking. A problem-solving approach such as pragmatism leaves room for incorporating and adapting existing frames of reference based on inclusion. It can thus ultimately and paradoxically have a larger impact, as it may (also for simply functional reasons) reach an extensive academic audience from scholars representing a wide range of theoretical thought. A problem-solving perspective can also constitute a more humble and 'realistic' stance for some researchers, in the sense of *trying* to move beyond their own background and assumptions, which may never fully be possible. We speak from such a humble position, as we are *trying* to move past the Eurocentric bubble in which we were socially and academically reared.

Nevertheless, there is a need to acknowledge that a problem-solving approach may ultimately defy the initial emancipatory objective of decentring and disrupting. Rather than doing away with existing frameworks, it aims to strengthen the effectiveness and legitimacy of EU External Action Studies and practice by addressing the lack of knowledge of the EU's external context and the negative consequences of Europe's actions beyond its borders. A problem-solving approach does not start from an intention to be disruptive, but in a sense can be seen as rescuing the 'centre' – the opposite intention of critical theorising. This more 'light', 'thin' or less fundamental form of decentring thereby runs the risk of not only perpetuating, but even legitimising centre-periphery relations – even if this is not the aim.

As with the distinction between the normative and instrumental relevance of decentring, the distinction between critical and problem-solving theorising is not always clear. Researchers can be driven as much by ethical concerns for being more inclusive as by making existing scholarship and frameworks more effective. There may be a wide spectrum as to where a researcher is situated in terms of the intentions with which one enters the debate, the extent to which one engages in it and the preferred process and outcome of doing so. There might also be an argument for various degrees of decentring, in which modest attempts at disrupting may be seen as a step into the direction of more fundamental change, rather than merely reifying existing power structures. For instance, entering new empirical insights from external contexts into (the analysis of) EU external action may not have the objective to disrupt, but can do so by exposing new theoretical and policy questions that may trigger rethinking foundational assumptions about the presumed universalism of European accounts.

CONCLUSIONS

This article introduced the decentring approach for EU External Action Studies as a debate that is 'disrupting' the mainstream in European Studies. While it does not touch upon all manifestations of the decentring agenda in current scholarship, nor comprehensively discusses all potential applications of the approach, the article theoretically contributes to the wider decentring debate in three ways. First, by identifying decentring as a meta-theoretical current of thinking, it helps define the decentring debate as an area of theorising which can bring together scholars around a common commitment to overcome Euro- and Western centrism in scholarship (and practice). Second, the article underscores the wider relevance of taking a decentring approach, schematically presented as having normative and practical benefits for scholarship and practice. Third, the article shows how the decentring debate accommodates both critical and problem-solving perspectives on theorising and proposes potential theoretical anchors in existing bodies of work.

In addition, the article discusses the inherent paradox that arises in the decentring debate through accommodating both critical and problem-solving approaches to theorising. It argues that critical and problem-solving approaches to theorising have distinct advantages in the function of disrupting and innovating a field of study. While critical theorising has a clear normative agenda and stronger disruptive intention in terms of altering a field (i.e. uprooting and changing the Eurocentric foundations of scholarship and practice), problem-solving approaches can be disruptive in view of adapting and improving existing frameworks (i.e. recalibrating existing scholarship and policy to make them less Eurocentric). The paradox entails that, while critical theorising holds the most disruptive potential in terms of depth, its academic reach may be more limited by remaining confined to the critical. Problem-solving approaches are more readily tailored to also accommodate mainstream Eurocentric thinkers, and despite being less disruptive in purpose, their reach may provoke broader change.

It is important to note that this article, for the sake of clarity, includes several binary distinctions that may not be as clear or exist in reality. Researchers can be driven both by ethical concerns about inclusivity and the desire to strive for building more effective and

efficient scholarship and frameworks; and theorising can contain both critical and problem-solving elements. The article underscores the ethical imperative of disruption on the one hand, and the usefulness and even the necessity of disruption as a problem-solving approach to the benefit of a field's mainstream centre on the other hand. Even more, the argument lies in the fact that, rather than being at opposite ends of a debate, different perspectives are complementary within a current of thinking and they need each other, both in view of innovating a field of study and in view of policy relevance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to colleagues who gave feedback on earlier versions of this paper during the DIMES-UACES Workshop on 'Disrupting European Studies' (online, February 2022) and the panel discussions at EUSA (Miami, May 2022), ECPR/SGEU (Rome, June 2022), and UACES (Lille, September 2022), including in particular Maxine David and Frank Mattheis. The study benefited from funding by the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) Special Research Fund: C1 Project CONNECTIVITY.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Decolonising EU Trade Relations with the Global Souths?

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Citation

Alcazar III, A.S.M., Nessel, C. and Orbie, J. (2023). 'Decolonising EU Trade Relations with the Global Souths?' in, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 19 (2): 181-206. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1295>.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

That the European Union's common commercial relations with ex-colonies and more broadly the 'tiers monde' now rest variously on benevolence, depoliticised practices, equal partnerships and values fuels reigning foundational myths about the EU in global politics. Efforts to disrupt these received presuppositions have come from interpretivist, postcolonial, post-development, post-structuralist and other heterodox research traditions. Yet the academy has been largely impervious to knowledges that genuinely question and subvert, in both theory and praxis, Eurocentric ways of seeing the world and understanding the EU as a 'benevolent' trade actor on the world stage. In dialogue with existing heterodox approaches, this article asks how we might puncture the coloniality of dominant knowledge regimes about EU trade relations vis-à-vis the global souths, i.e., peoples and places that the EU deems peripheral and, as such, in need of trade-related interventions in the name of development. To this end, we propose different 'subject-positions' with which to unthink and rethink our ways of knowing EU trade policy and the Eurocentrism lurking behind it by turning to decolonial thought. We borrow heavily from the work of Meera Sabaratnam whose 'decolonising strategies' in studying world politics we attempt to exemplify through a critical interrogation of the canonical scholarship around three distinct 'policy worlds' of EU external trade relations: Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters in free trade agreements. Finally, we think reflexively about the decolonial option and the ruptures it triggers as to what EU trade policy *is* and the colonial logics sustaining 'normative' and 'geopolitical' narratives on/by the EU as a trade power.

Keywords

Decoloniality; Economic partnership agreements; European Union; Generalised scheme of preferences; Global souths; Trade and sustainable development

On 24 January 2017, the then trade commissioner of the European Union (EU) Cecilia Malmström addressed Bruegel and, in defence of a besieged EU common commercial policy establishment post-2015, had the following to say about trade:

Trade is a force for good in the world. A way to engage with other nations to foster change. A way to support our values and standards, and spread them across the globe. A way to help the poorest on the planet develop, grow, and improve their lives. Millions of people have been lifted out of poverty because of trade. (Malmström 2017)

Although the updated Trade Policy Review of February 2021 puts more emphasis on Europe's strategic autonomy and geopolitical goals, it equally stresses that EU trade policies 'increase trading opportunities for developing countries to reduce poverty and to create jobs based on international values and principles, such as labour and human rights' and pledges that sustainable development commitments in EU trade agreements will be further enforced (European Commission 2021: 13).

The continuity of such normative assertions reflects the self-image of EU policymakers, but also animates political and scholarly understandings of the EU in global trade relations, especially with so-called 'developing' and 'least developed' countries. Those writing within heterodox traditions have sought to puncture the centrality of these claims through different scholarly slants. Several strands stand out. Firstly, an interpretivist perspective contends that 'the construction of a "thicker" picture of European trade policy will require that we look at the commitments and world views of the people involved in producing it' (Bollen 2018: 202). This approach stresses the need for shifting agencies, pitched against the growing 'normativisation' of EU trade policy without necessarily engaging the interpretations of those subjected to it extra-EU. Interpreting the narrative construction of 'ethical' trade between the EU and Vietnam, for instance, aligns with this approach (Nessel & Verhaeghe 2022). Secondly, a post-structuralist critique questions well-established constructions between structure and agency reflected in hegemonic discourses on EU trade policy, for example, by denaturalising notions such as 'free trade' and 'protection' (Jacobs & Orbie 2020). Thirdly, highly resonant with the post-structuralist premise, a post-development view criticises the conditionality behind the EU's unilateral trade preferences and searches for alternatives to the developmentalist scripts that continue to organise the 'developing' world's market relations with the EU (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022). Last but not least, EU trade policy has been interrogated from a structure-focused postcolonial lens. In the context of Africa-EU relations, there is a tendency in Economic Partnership Agreements towards sustaining the continued market dominance of EU member states over African economies (Langan 201: ch. 5). From this angle, neocolonial patterns dictate the EU's relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of former colonies whose trade ties with the EU persist on the basis of dependency (Langan & Price 2020a). By no means, therefore, do we claim there exists a critical lag in the field.

Yet EU trade policy studies have, to the best of our knowledge, been largely impervious to the 'decolonial turn' (Maldonado-Torres 2011) in critical social and political studies (for some notable exceptions on Africa-EU (economic) relations, see Staeger 2016; Haastrup 2020; Langan & Price 2020b; Sebhatu 2020; Polonska-Kimunguyi 2023). Our article explicitly links the critical scholarship on EU trade policy to this intellectual movement. In response to this special issue's judicious invocation of 'disrupting' the study of Europe, we propose to deviate from Eurocentric ways of seeing world politics and ask how we might reconfigure our understanding of EU trade policy *decolonially*.

From a decolonial perspective, interrogating epistemic orthodoxies is understood as a 'call for action, for change ... [that] necessitates the problematisation of Eurocentrism as a mode of organising knowledge' and the attendant spatial and geopolitical hierarchies of

(re)producing knowledge about the socio-political world (Capan 2017: 9). In this sense, decolonial thinking is 'an unsettling approach' (ibid), one that aims not only at pluralising voices but at disrupting our ways of knowing.

To be sure, thinking in decolonial terms should not be misread as a necessary and sufficient condition for being critical of and within European Studies (ES). In other words, it does not mean that claims to criticality are now to be judged as legitimate if and only if a decolonial approach is pursued. Different forms of critique exist to defy different things one may find problematic in the academy. That said, taking decoloniality seriously 'requires from those of us at the hegemonic centre a willingness to a dislocation of power; an openness to (have others) redefine expertise and rigour, and to discomfort in the face of new knowledges' (Rutazibwa 2020: 240).

To this end, our article reconsiders specific writings within the field of ES with 'state-of-the-art' claims on EU trade policy, especially in the form of handbooks and special issues.¹ Our goal is not comprehensiveness, but to critique those texts positioned to enjoy the most scholarly outreach, to be deemed authoritative, or to claim academic expertise on the subject. In other words, these texts are what students often encounter the first time they study EU trade policy. We have delimited a common set of key writings on EU trade policy by searching on Google Scholar. Here, we have mainly considered political studies texts and excluded those steeped in legal and economic approaches as well as those already taking a critical stance (e.g., contributions unmasking the neocolonialism of EU trade policy). Horizontally, we have approached this corpus of knowledge by reading across the texts and critically discerning what 'avatars' of Eurocentrism they sustain regarding EU trade policy. We have also incorporated additional writings to supplement our analysis, except on the ACP-EU trade regime whose coverage in the key texts is deemed sufficient (see the annex for an overview of our selected texts).

The rest of the article unfolds in three parts. Firstly, we offer a general grounding of decoloniality. More specifically, we propose different 'subject-positions' with which to unthink and rethink our ways of studying EU trade policy and the Eurocentrism lurking behind it by turning to decolonial thought. Secondly, we exemplify the merits of Meera Sabaratnam's 'decolonising strategies' through a critical interrogation of the scholarship around three distinct 'policy worlds'² of EU external trade relations: Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA), Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) and Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters in free trade agreements. We bring to the fore these policy worlds because they are the principal means through which the (geo)politics of trade between the global souths and the EU is entrenched. In doing so, we respond directly to calls urging us to move critique beyond questioning the more symbolic, abstract and homogenous manifestations of coloniality towards unsettling the more material, concrete and heterogenous manifestations of the colonial/modern and Eurocentric capitalist world order (Gandarilla Salgado, García-Bravo & Benzi 2021: 212). Finally, we think reflexively about the decolonial option and the ruptures it triggers as to what EU trade policy *is* and the coloniality of 'normative' and 'geopolitical' narratives on the EU as a trade power.

THINKING DECOLONIALY

In considering how the Eurocentric study of trade policy might be disrupted within European Studies, we engage with decolonial thought in two ways. Firstly, we ask what it means to think about decoloniality as an option. What can we learn from the 'decolonial turn' in critical social and political studies? Why does it matter now, and for whom? Secondly, we think through what a decolonial project in ES might look like. Can we imagine doing ES differently and, if so, in what ways? Beyond Eurocentrism, how might decolonial thought reorientate our ways of seeing the EU as a trade power in world politics 'otherwise' (Escobar 2007)?

For Samir Amin, Eurocentrism has propelled a global political project at the service of imperialism and a world capitalist order whose 'centre' exploits the 'periphery' (Amin 2009 [1988]). In International Relations (IR), Eurocentrism is often read as a mode of organising knowledge that (re)enacts 'the colonial matrix of power' (Capan 2017: 3), as a 'pathology' (Rutazibwa 2020: 233), or as a 'monoculture of scientism' (Zondi 2018: 19). In this article, we understand Eurocentrism as 'the sensibility that *Europe is historically, economically, culturally and politically distinctive in ways which significantly determine the overall character of world politics*' (Sabaratnam 2013: 262, emphasis in original). Eurocentrism assumes different 'avatars' or manifestations (Wallerstein 1997; Sabaratnam 2013). Culturalist avatars obsess over the civilisational, cultural or racial differences between an enlightened Europe and the 'unruly' rest. Here, the rest becomes objectified in discourse and practice as needing external (read: EU) aid, control, direction, involvement, management or salvation. Epistemic avatars insist on the universalism of social scientific knowledge conventions emerging out of Europe since the nineteenth century. Here, the colonial logics and rationalities in making 'scientific' and 'legitimate' claims about the social and political world are often reproduced, thereby stifling the possibility of knowing 'otherwise' (Escobar 2007). Historical avatars frame Europe as the principal subject of world history. This framing cloaks the past, present and future entanglements of different parts of the world in Europe's (hi)story.

Decoloniality as an Option

Before considering what a decolonial approach to EU trade policy might look like, it is imperative that we situate decoloniality in the scholarly literature. Here, we make no systematic attempt to articulate the richness of this body of knowledge cultivated by Latin American intellectuals including Aníbal Quijano, Arturo Escobar, María Lugones, Walter Dignolo, and Rosalba Icaza, among many others. Nor do we juxtapose decoloniality vis-à-vis postcolonialism, which has been ably written about elsewhere (see Bhambra 2014: ch. 4). Nor do we bring any conceptual or theoretical innovation to 'anticolonial', 'decolonial' or 'decolonising' critiques and praxes across social and political studies (e.g., Sabaratnam 2011; 2013; Bhambra 2014; Pham & Shilliam 2016; Staeger 2016; Blaney & Tickner 2017; Capan 2017; Motta 2017; Sabaratnam 2017; Woons & Weier 2017; Bhambra et al. 2018; Zondi 2018; Haastrup 2020; Kamola 2020; Patel 2020; Shilliam 2021; Bhambra 2022; Fúnez-Flores 2022; Evans & Petropoulou Ionescu, this issue). Instead, we engage briefly with the notion of decoloniality in an effort to recast our understanding of EU trade policy by centring knowledges from and for the global souths (Muñoz García, Lira & Loncón 2022). By invoking knowledges in the plural, we stress that different ways of knowing outside Eurocentrism have long existed and continue to exist within anti-colonial sites of struggles, past and present, across the global souths.

As an intellectual movement, decoloniality is premised on the notion of coloniality/modernity or the 'no modernity without coloniality' thesis: that European modernity and coloniality have inextricably co-constituted one another (Icaza 2017). It problematises this co-constitution and how it is inscribed into a Eurocentric world order seen as 'universal, good, and a suitable aspiration [*imposition?*] for others' (Patel 2020: 1467). As a way of seeing the world, coloniality forces us to think through the persistence of civilisational, economic, epistemic, gendered and racialised hierarchies today despite the formal closure of colonialism (see Quijano 2000; Lugones 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Central to decolonial thought is shifting the *locus of enunciation*, which is 'unavoidable if we aim at changing the terms and not only the content of the conversation' (Dignolo 2009: 162). The locus of enunciation is the site where one speaks about the world Eurocentrically. It brings to the fore the geopolitics of knowledge that privileges Eurocentric epistemologies by virtue of their supposed objectivity, neutrality, rationality and scientism. To change the site of enunciation means to disrupt the European self as

'knower' and the non-European other as 'known' in ways that go beyond what has emerged as the 'decentring agenda' in EU foreign policy studies (Orbie et al. 2023). To enunciate differently means 'to affirm the exteriority and alterity of others as well as the discourses and practices born in sites of struggle' (Fúnez-Flores 2022: 14). Two intertwined ideas build on this understanding. Decoloniality demands a shift in the locus of enunciation beyond the confines of Eurocentric categories, thoughts and experiences. This implies *epistemic delinking* from knowledge regimes that have produced and reproduced 'places of non-thought' (Mignolo 2009) from a locus of enunciation that privileges Europe as knower. In turn, this delinking means *border thinking* 'as an epistemological position that contributes to a shift in the forms of knowing in which the world is thought from the concrete incarnated experiences of colonial difference and the wounds left' (Icaza 2017: 29).

Decoloniality is interpreted 'not as a new universal that presents itself as the right one that supersedes all the previous and existing ones, but as an option' (Mignolo 2011a: 273). To embrace the *decolonial option* means to make legible, epistemically and politically, the 'trajectories in knowledges and cosmovisions that have been actively produced as backward or "sub-altern" by hegemonic forms of understanding "the international" and "global politics"' (Santos et al. 2007, as cited in Icaza 2017: 29). Decolonial thinking as an 'option' or 'among a plurality of options' differs from a paradigm or grand theory as it wishes to avoid becoming a dominant epistemic project (Icaza 2017: 27).

Decoloniality, therefore, aligns itself with pluriversality, not universality. Imagining our world in pluriversal terms means a disavowal of a single global order based on monocentric, objectivist and universalistic claims (Mignolo 2011b: 23; Kothari et al. 2019). In a pluriverse, the decolonial option would 'consider worldly multiplicity as reals' (Blaney & Tickner 2017: 303). In a pluriverse, one may dream of 'a world in which many worlds fit', following one of the oft-cited political convictions of the Zapatistas (2001). In a pluriverse, doing international relations differently would mean fostering partnerships on a similar footing, while at the same time accepting difference and recognising the plurality of emancipatory and humanistic ways of being (Kothari et al. 2019). In a pluriverse, the hierarchies between previously asphyxiated knowledges and Eurocentrism would collapse. In this sense, decoloniality remains a long-standing, unfinished, ongoing project working to dismantle the coloniality of being, of power and of knowing (Maldonado-Torres 2011; 2020).

Decolonial Thinking as Intellectual Strategies

In advocating a decolonial option for the study of trade within ES, we consider four different but interrelated approaches with which to rethink how we come to know about EU trade policy from alternative 'subject-positions' (Sabaratnam 2011) or from a non-Eurocentric (not anti-European!) 'locus of enunciation' (Mignolo 2009). We read these decolonising approaches as 'intellectual strategies' (Sabaratnam 2011: 784) intended to unsettle the primacy and persistence of certain knowledge regimes that naturalise historically entrenched power imbalances between the EU and its presumed objects/others in global relations. Such knowledge regimes hinge on the underlying presumption of a European/EU subject through whose lens world politics is enunciated, seen, experienced, narrated, written and known. Decolonising strategies militate against this premise, but do so in the spirit of building dialogue between those working within and outside this site of enunciation in the hopes of generating:

alternative accounts of subjecthood as the basis for inquiry. The recognition of possible alternative subjects of inquiry is the essential precondition for a *dialogic* mode of inquiry in IR – that is, speaking across divides from different positions. (Sabaratnam 2011: 785)

We foreground Sabaratnam because her writings are central to current avant-garde debates in decolonising the study of world politics. Theoretically, her work provides a pragmatic approach, which speaks to all four aforementioned strands of critical scholarship on EU trade policy without getting lost in meta-theoretical conflicts between and among the perspectives. Empirically, her 'intellectual strategies' lend themselves well to (re)searching the EU's entanglements in world politics, not least in trade. While we have EU trade policy in mind in our interpretation of Sabaratnam's writings, the strategies we advance here may also be fruitfully translated to 'disrupting' other facets of the EU's external relations (e.g., cyberspace, climate, environment, security, migration) and ES more generally. Where possible, we point to extant writings that cohere, either implicitly or explicitly, with each of the strategies to delimit a patchy, hitherto fragmented but emerging epistemic space that articulates a decolonial ethos within ES.

1. Deconstructing Europe and the EU as a Knowing-subject that Represents the (Developing) World as its Object

The first strategy unmasks how 'the conceptual framings of IR and international politics express and reinforce hierarchical subject-object relationships between formerly colonising and colonised peoples, despite the political-legal act of decolonisation' (Sabaratnam 2011: 786). The emphasis is placed on discerning the discursive and normative structures undergirding the EU's external relations. In particular, it alerts us to the ways in which dominant knowledge regimes and political discourses objectify peoples and places that the EU deems less modern, less developed, less capable. This framing constructs a view that those peoples and places inhabit 'a space of tradition and opportunity to be governed and explored, or alternatively feared, by the rational and enlightened West' (Sabaratnam 2013: 262). Here, it is important to shift our analytic gaze beyond the assertion of 'cultural/colonial difference' (that is, Europe's Self sees the Other as 'alien') to an understanding that concentrates on the 'alienating' character of this assumed difference. In other words, the first strategy pays less attention to the constructed differences between the European self and its presumed other as such, and is more interested in scrutinising what acts of alienation it ultimately gives rise to within the realm of political possibility, in terms of displacing, violating, silencing, humiliating, or dispossessing the EU's supposed other (Sabaratnam 2013: 272–273).

Several writings in ES gesture to deconstructing the EU as a knowing-subject that objectifies the 'developing' world. A Foucauldian critique of 'normative power Europe' exposes how the EU's diffusion of 'good' policing norms in the Balkans has simultaneously produced epistemic hierarchies between EU and host authorities and displaced domestic policing knowledge (Merlingen 2007). A discursive analysis of texts produced by the presumably status-neutral EU rule of law mission in Kosovo (EULEX) exposes how the EU has both affirmed and silenced Kosovo's independence. At times, not only does EULEX discursively engage in silencing the independence of Kosovo, but silences also 'an entire set of conflicts, relations of power, and disputes [that] are made technical and generic' (Musliu 2014: 484). On trade, the conditionality regime behind the EU's unilateral tariff preferences enables the objectification of 'vulnerable' countries to EU monitoring and technocratic surveillance around 'severe and systematic' violations of international conventions (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022).

2. Rehistoricising Silences and Erasures in the Entanglements of Europe and the EU in Modern History and Global Affairs

The second strategy devolves into two historiographical intents. Firstly, a decolonial understanding necessitates 'the direct contradiction of foundational historical myths in social theory and discourse about Europe itself' (Sabaratnam 2011: 787). These myths are premised on taken-for-granted narratives that Europe gave birth to technological advancement, development and modernity in world history; that Europe attended to the predicaments of international difference by establishing a Westphalian world order based on sovereign nation-states (and later by instituting a *sui generis* supranational order qua

EU); that Europe has been the provenance of ethical and political thought deemed enlightened and, therefore, worldly and universalistic. A decolonising approach, then, would inscribe what has been absent into the ways in which European history has been told and retold, written and rewritten. In this sense, Hansen and Jonsson (2014a) have rehistoricised the complicity of colonialism in furthering European integration and sought to address the near-absence of this complicity in EU studies and historiographies of European colonialism. A closely related effort has recovered the geopolitical vision of 'Eurafrica' and the initial thinking behind the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC), which was premised on the idea of integrating the Common Market and certain parts of Africa into one imperial market order (Balogh 1962; Hansen & Jonsson 2012). Eurafrica regurgitated colonial logics as early European integration efforts sought to cement Western Europe's power over Africa and in particular to rehabilitate the colonial projects of imperial France and Belgium (Hansen & Jonsson 2012: 1038).

Furthermore, a second intent when it comes to historiographical erasures recovers the 'significance of the pluralities of pasts, presents and futures that were and are happening elsewhere' (Sabaratnam 2011: 788) to the trajectory of European progress or, in other words, the co-constitution of European coloniality/modernity. This is so because other histories are systematically erased from historiographical accounts of 'development' and social transformation, which are often enunciated by virtue of the categories and paths contingent upon Europe's march to modernity. Here, Walter Rodney's (1972) magnum opus immediately comes to mind as a compelling case for how colonialism, extraction and slavery in Africa have contributed to Europe's capitalist development. In this context, a decolonial agenda for Europe enjoins us to come to terms with how the 'varieties of colonialism' have enriched and enabled European societies, including the EU project itself, in hopes of opening the door to discussions around post-colonial reparations (Bhambra 2022). It is crucial to ethically prioritise situated and embodied knowledges from the global souths whose historical presence is often elided. Doing so would analytically foreground the social and political changes that have materialised in post-colonial contexts as a consequence of European colonial emigration/settlement, dispossession, appropriation, extraction and enslavement. It would also make more legible what European colonisation had altered in those subjugated societies and how Europe had gained materially in the process, especially since global trade has been intimately enmeshed in fuelling expansionist European colonial and imperial enterprises. These submerged histories are often forgotten when thinking about contemporary systemic problems of unequal exchange between the EU and so-called 'developing' countries.

3. Politicising the Distinct Forms of EU Interventions in the Global Souths

The third strategy demands genuine engagement with how those targeted by external interventions experience and interpret the material impact of those interventions. It unmask the different modes of entitlement, dispossession and accumulation that underpin the rationales for intervention and its distributive effects (Sabaratnam 2013: 273–274). Politicising trade-related interventions by the EU such as aid-for-trade schemes, capacity building programmes, market-making initiatives, monitoring and sanctions demands a recognition that these technologies are implicated in a politics of distribution that reconfigures domestic political economy constellations. This stance, therefore, proposes a direct provocation against viewing EU trade policy as developmentalist, technocratic, or neutral. As an intellectual strategy, politicising EU interventions acknowledges the 'targets' of those interventions as a site of knowledge and political agency. It pays attention to how the 'other' understands and experiences the political (in)significance of EU trade policy. For instance, the technocratic refocusing of EU unilateral market access under the Everything but Arms (EBA) regime in favour of 'least developed countries' (LDCs) has unleashed 'new regional fault lines' leading to the material disadvantage of non-LDCs compared to LDCs in the ACP group (Lincoln 2008: 224). Lincoln reads EBA as a de-historicisation of Europe-ACP ties founded on imperialism, as the EU repositioned its development efforts from aiding ex-colonies to advancing a more global

pursuit of growth and poverty alleviation in the 'developing' world on the basis of empirical indicators (ibid. 225–226). Moreover, while the EU claims that its 'ethical' trade and development policies on fisheries benefit African economies, Gegout (2016) contradicts this celebrated claim by demonstrating how EU interventions have exhausted fish stocks, altered economic regulatory frameworks and harmed fishing communities in Africa.

The analytic openings from this strategy stand in contradistinction to the 'politicisation' literature, which is typically preoccupied with the contestation of EU trade policy within the EU itself and by EU actors (e.g., Leblond & Viju-Miljusevic 2018). What tends to be excluded from this scholarship are the experiences, struggles and voices of the 'non-EU' in challenging what EU trade policy is or should be in the twenty-first century. However, political economy analyses should be wary of dwelling at the level of political elites in the global souths, which are oftentimes co-opted by EU trade thinking (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022). Depending on the research framing, this strategy enjoins us to take seriously the perspectives of activists, environmentalists, indigenous peoples, labour groups, local communities, nongovernmental organisations, scholars, trade unions, workers and other affected groups whose political interpretations are often methodologically marginalised when we talk about EU trade policy being 'politicised'.

4. Taking Subaltern Subjectivities and Alternative Political Subjecthoods Seriously

Last but not least, the fourth strategy intentionally subverts the notion of Europe and the EU as the principal subject of modern history and 'being' in the world. This decolonial critique spells out at least two intellectual stances. The first involves 'pluralising the various potential subjects of social inquiry and analysing world politics from alternative subaltern perspectives' (Sabaratnam 2011: 789). It demands tilting the focus away from the centrality of EU subjectivities on global trade politics and cultivating political inquiry 'from below'. Rather than privileging what EU-centric subjects think about the substance of EU trade policy in the world, a decolonial project repositions the site of interpretation to generate situated knowledge with or, more importantly, by subjects themselves in the global souths that the EU claims to transform, inter alia, through trade. Consider how the Permanent People's Tribunals against European Multinationals and Neoliberalism as a bottom-up forum have resisted and contested the neoliberal governance model promoted by the EU in Latin America and the Caribbean (Icaza 2010). Another work that centres the other's subjectivities asks how market liberal and social norms have been received/resisted in India in the context of bilateral trade negotiations with the EU (Orbie & Khorana 2015). From a decolonial perspective, reclaiming African subjectivities challenges the enduring coloniality that shapes Africa–EU relations (Haastrup 2020).

The second intellectual stance prioritises 'the recovery of alternative *political* subjecthoods in both historical and contemporary settings' (Sabaratnam 2011: 791). It foregrounds other political imaginaries of living and being in the world from the alterities of EU trade policy. It is, therefore, a subversion of the 'cosmovision' made intelligible through EU trade thinking as a 'model', as a shining exemplar for others to emulate or mimic. For instance, some point to post-development and degrowth as political subjecthoods that could substitute 'the prevailing developmentalist imaginaries' imbued in the EU's unilateral preferential trade regime (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022).

As such, thinking beyond EU subjectivities and subjecthoods aligns with critical qualitative and interpretivist methods and methodologies in social and political studies. It eschews the parsimony of large-N positivist approaches, which often methodologically bypass the lived experiences of individuals. Without any contextual understanding of the 'lifeworlds' of the 'non-EU', the idea of speaking across divides around contentious political issues on trade seems difficult, if not impossible. Generating 'thicker analyses' of the worldviews by those subjected to EU trade policy attends to this problem, such as through political ethnography (Schatz 2009) or critical policy ethnography (Dubois 2017). However, it is crucial to underline the importance of committing to the politics of refusal in pain-based

research (Tuck & Yang 2014), or to epistemic co-generation in terms of 'researching with' people in the field and of learning from our interlocutors, so as not to replicate the colonialist foundations or extractivist nature in the chequered history of Anthropology as a discipline (Richmond, Kappler & Bjorkdal 2015; Pachirat 2018).³

KNOWING EU TRADE POLICY, OTHERWISE?

How might we reimagine EU trade policy from alternative subject-positions? In this section, we delve into three distinct 'policy worlds' through which the EU governs its commercial relations with those considered to be on the peripheries of the global economic order. Specifically, we articulate how the decolonising strategies we have proposed could reframe our understanding of the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements, Generalised Scheme of Preferences and Trade and Sustainable Development chapters in free trade agreements. In what follows, we point to how the study of EU external trade relations might be reread from a decolonial lens. Through this reorientation, we hope to demonstrate how we, as scholars of EU trade policy vis-à-vis the global souths, could 'move away from assuming the non-West as a space of insuperable difference and move towards a more articulate, inclusive and concrete dialogue about the nature of international power' (Sabaratnam 2011: 795).

Economic Partnership Agreements

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) were foreseen in the Cotonou Agreement that was concluded between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states in 2000. The EPAs would replace the Lomé-style trade regime that was based on non-reciprocal market access, by introducing reciprocal liberalisation between the EU on the one hand and several ACP sub-regions on the other hand. The Cotonou Agreement (Art. 37) stipulates that all ACP countries 'in a position to do so' will engage in EPAs. Negotiations started in 2002 and were expected to be finalised in 2007. The EU strongly insisted on the conclusion of ambitious EPAs that cover not only free trade but also so-called 'new' trade issues such as investment and services. However, the process turned out to be complicated and contested and several countries have only signed interim EPAs and/or have not ratified EPAs.

Generally, academic studies on EPAs have been more receptive to decolonial thinking compared to research on GSP and TSD chapters. Nonetheless, Eurocentric avatars also appear in key textbooks and other publications. In terms of historical avatars, it is worth stressing that the dominant story of EPAs stresses the shift from Lomé to Cotonou. Much ink has been spilled on this change (Young & Peterson 2014: 188-190; Perdakis and Perdakis 2018: 30) or even 'radical innovation' (Faber and Orbie 2009 in Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 145). Often mentioned explanations concern the (perceived) failure of the Lomé system and the growing importance of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Young & Peterson 2014: 189; Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 145). The increased popularity of neoliberal beliefs within the EU is also recognised (Young & Peterson 2014: 189; Garcia 2018: 66). Despite the relevance of such research, the emphasis on policy *change* has the unintended effect of also obfuscating colonial *continuities*.

This neglect of colonial continuities is reinforced through the ways in which the EU's motives, the ACP-EU relationship and the ACP group are represented. Firstly, EU motives are typically analysed as oscillating between good values versus bad interests. Young and Peterson stress twice that 'the primary motivation [...] has been to promote development' (2014: 188) and 'helping developing countries' (2014: 193) while Garcia highlights the ideational dimension of EPAs (2018: 66; see also Heron & Siles-Brügge 2012 on commercial interests). Such motivational framings highlight the intentionality of the EU and, therefore, overshadow more structural logics that go beyond motivations and concern more fundamentally the Eurocentric, modernist and colonial paradigm underpinning EU relations with the ACP (Hurt 2012; Delputte & Orbie 2020). By focusing on the false

dichotomy between EU values and interests, it is easily overlooked how these are interwoven in a colonial structure to the extent that they are indiscernible (and that the distinction becomes irrelevant) (Rutazibwa 2013: 84; Staeger 2016: 983–984). Secondly, the *nature* of the ACP–EU relationship is often described as being ‘political’ (Young and Peterson 2014: 63) or ‘historical’ (Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 151), thereby avoiding the more controversial C-word. Thirdly, the common shortcut description of ACP as ‘former colonies’ suggests that the main characteristic of these countries is that they were *formerly* colonised, thereby underlining that the main demarcation line in this story are the dates before and after formal independence.

This characterisation of the ACP group relates to culturalist avatars in EPA scholarship. Unsurprisingly, studies are primarily interested in questions around the EU’s power vis-à-vis other countries. Key textbooks and chapters on EU trade politics consistently write about ACP countries without going into detail about the divergences and complexities among and within these countries. The only exception when different preferences within the ACP group are mentioned, is when it serves to illustrate the EU’s failed attempts to stimulate regionalism, for instance, towards Southern Africa (e.g., Young & Peterson 2014: 190). Indeed, what counts as failure or success is assessed from an EU perspective. For example, Young and Peterson (2014: 190) define the ‘central problem’ with EPAs as the EU giving away its negotiation leverage through ‘Everything but Arms’. Similarly, Gstöhl and De Bièvre (2017: 148) stress how EBA has undermined the EU’s impact. When evaluating 15 years of negotiations as ‘rather disappointing’ (Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 149), they refer to the limited signatories of full EPAs, *not* the EU’s apparent failure to consider the demands and preferences of people, groups and countries within the ACP. Admittedly, the latter is hard to prove in the absence of many detailed studies on the (disruptive?) impact of EPAs. Meanwhile, key textbooks depict the ACP group as a rather monolithic actor that resides in the background and appears mostly defensive in opposing the shift towards reciprocity and regionalism. Epistemically, we have much more research insights on EU motives and institutions in relation to EPAs than on what these trade arrangements mean for people and communities in Africa and how decolonial alternatives might be concretised.

Furthermore, academic writings tend to reflect EU policy discourses that present the EU as a benevolent actor that aims to help (or should help) poor African countries (Faber & Orbie 2009). Studies on trade policies, including the EPAs, almost consistently write about how ACP countries ‘enjoy’ preferences (or ‘privileges’) that are ‘given’ or ‘granted’ by the EU (Young & Peterson 2014: 188, 190; Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 151). Such language conceals the fact that European businesses and consumers are in fact major beneficiaries of cheaper imports thanks to EPAs, while their impact on the people and environment of the exporting countries may be detrimental. This developmentalist approach to studying the EU’s trade-development nexus reinforces colonialist donor-recipient images (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022).

Several scholars have at least partly engaged in alternative strategies to studying EPAs. In terms of rehistoricising silences (strategy 2), the history of EPAs could be rewritten by reference to the intrinsic coloniality of the European integration project since its very origins in the Treaty of Rome (e.g., Schreurs 1993; Hansen and Jonsson 2014a; Jones and Weinhardt 2015; Kotsopolous and Mattheis 2018: 445; Sebhatu 2020: 43; Polonska-Kimunguyi 2023). Perdakis and Perdakis elaborate on the origins of the EEC, including an extensive part on the 1956 Spaak Report (2018: 22), but they fail to mention the key impact of what Spaak called ‘the dream of Eurafrica’ (see Hansen and Jonsson 2014b: 448) on the creation of the EEC. Gstöhl and De Bièvre mention ‘the perpetuation of unilateral dependence of ACP countries on the benevolence of the Community’ and the system of ‘collective clientelism’ between EU and ACP (2017: 141; referring to the seminal work of Ravenhill 1985). However, they do not extend this analysis to EPAs, despite clear continuities between the reciprocal market access required under Yaoundé (1963–1975)

and the EPAs. Furthermore, the former Lomé system may not be so different from the current EPAs as is often suggested, taking into account that the non-reciprocal tariff preference and schemes like STABEX also turned out to continue the dependencies of the ACP on commodity trade with Europe. Rewriting the histories of EPAs could be inspired by Nkrumah's work on neocolonialism (Nkrumah 1965; see also Langan 2018 who revisits the vision of Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Touré) as well as Galtung's (1973) analysis of EEC structural power vis-à-vis the global souths through exploitation, fragmentation and penetration. More research into EU and member state archives may also contribute to problematising the colonial thinking involved in ACP-EU histories (strategies 1 & 2). For instance, Dimier's (2021) recovery of a theatrical play on the 'métro-circulaire' illustrates the colonial spirit of European Commission officials in the 1960s.

Rehistoricising could also involve the centring of subaltern subjectivities. This could be done by highlighting the agency of African leaders and movements during events such as the eight Pan-African Congresses that have taken place since 1900 and the All African Peoples Conference that took place in Accra in 1958 (strategy 4), all of which illustrate the inextricable links between colonialism, European cooperation and Pan-Africanism. This may show that there has *always* — not just since the EPAs — been strong resistance within the ACP to how its trade relations with Europe should be organised. When analysing recent EPA episodes, more attention should be paid to African agency and subjectivities (strategies 3 & 4). Murray-Evans (2018) stresses the agency of strong and weak actors within the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in negotiating the EPA. Haastrup highlights that there is a distinctive impetus for regionalism in Africa and that studying this (instead of 'the EU's own commitment to promoting a version of itself') is 'essential to realising African agency' (Haastrup 2020: 516). Sebhatu criticises the 'epistemic violence' in the dominant discourse and research on EPAs which discursively constructs the ACP as weak (Sebhatu 2020: 45). Studies of transnational activism against EPAs (e.g., Del Felice 2014) could link with local resistance strategies and 'patterns of politicization' (Plank et al. 2021: 166–170) within ACP countries. Langan and Price (2021) analyse the EPA with Western African countries from the perspective of people in Ghana's poultry sector. However, interpretivist studies that profoundly engage with political subjectivities within the so-called ACP partner countries are, to our knowledge, non-existent within the archive of predominantly Anglophone scholarship that we know about Africa-EU relations.

Generalised Scheme of Preferences

Since 1971, the EU has established a Generalised Scheme of Preferences, which today is run as a three-headed unilateral market access regime for countries categorised as 'developing' and 'least developed' by the United Nations. GSP targets are typically trumpeted as 'beneficiaries' in both mainstream academic and policy discourse, as if already presuming, by default, a necessarily positive connotation of GSP. The standard GSP allows exporters from eligible 'developing' countries to send their wares to the EU, with partially or fully reduced customs duties on two-thirds of product lines. The GSP+ variety cuts tariffs down to zero under the same product lines for exports by so-called 'vulnerable' developing countries. The 'plus' in GSP+ signifies that target countries voluntarily apply to adhere to 27 international conventions on, inter alia, good governance, sustainability, as well as fundamental human and labour rights in exchange for more market access to the EU. Finally, the EBA initiative opens the EU market to all exports, except ammunitions and weaponry, from 'least developed' countries.

Historical and epistemic avatars of Eurocentrism permeate the scholarship on the policy world of the EU's GSP. Although colonial and racial differences between the EU and GSP countries are not explicitly emphasised, culturalist avatars manifest themselves through epistemic ones as the 'rest' becomes objectified in the scholarly canon as needing EU intervention. On the one hand, the institutional forerunners of the EU are often framed as

the principal subject to contextualise the origin of EU GSP. It was the EEC that first granted generalised trade preferences to, and in favour of, the Third World. It was Europe that unilaterally opened its markets in aid of less developed, less industrialised countries that were/are not 'there' yet. It was Europe that responded to the recommendation of the United Nations Committee on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to afford special and differential treatment to developing economies. Despite tracing EU GSP back to UNCTAD, the scholarly literature tends to centre the fact that Europe acted and delivered on UNCTAD demands, thereby effectively ignoring or downplaying the historical milieu of decolonisation within which newly independent states and dependent territories struggled for a 'new' way of organising global economic relations, including the GSP (Gsthöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 154; Perdakis & Perdakis 2018: 30–31). In Young & Peterson (2014: ch. 3), this reference to UNCTAD is not mentioned at all. What is camouflaged is that the notion of instituting generalised preferences by the rich world was only one within a broader set of reformist demands championed by the global souths to contest economic imperialism and dependency in the sixties and amidst calls for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the seventies. The NIEO envisioned radical systemic reforms that contradicted and moved beyond trade liberalisation (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022: 7). Also shrouded is the political significance of Bandung as an Afro-Asian enunciation of 'an-other' way of reimagining global relations that opposes colonialism and neocolonialism (Pham & Shilliam 2016). Furthermore, when narrating the history of the Common Market in relation to external tariffs, no explicit links are forged between the history of preferential trade access for European colonies and ex-colonies within the EEC and that of the GSP (Perdakis & Perdakis 2018). Therefore, the coloniality of 'granting' trade preferences is absent from the standard narrative of how the EU GSP came into being.

On the other hand, received scholarly interpretations of EU GSP as foreign policy sustain epistemic avatars of Eurocentrism. Reading GSP as foreign policy pertains to the idea that the EU exploits trade in international relations to organise its engagement with the (developing) world and to 'extract behavioural changes elsewhere in the world' (García 2018: 62). Two rational, positivist approaches emerge from our reading of the EU trade policy scholarship related to these phenomena. The first is through a two-level game analytical framework where a constellation of EU ideas, interests and institutions determines the contours of EU trade policy 'sub-systems' (Young & Peterson 2014). For example, the sub-system dynamics around EBA allegedly

reflected the pattern of interest mobilization typical of a unilateral policy pursued with much weaker economic partners. Mobilization was unidirectional against liberalization and concentrated in a few sectors. Support for liberalization was due primarily to the normative desire to assist developing countries. (ibid: 193)

The fact that the EU leverages GSP within 'highly asymmetrical' trading relations and according to parochial group interests is unsurprisingly not problematised (ibid.: 185). Because this approach is invested in the internal determinants of EU trade politics, the 'targets' of GSP and how they think about EU trade are methodologically neglected altogether. The second approach relates to the global governance through trade thesis (Marx et al. 2015). It claims to explore why and how the EU externalises non-market governance objectives via trade. Citing general impasse at the multilateral level, the authors argue that the EU pursues global public goods through trade because of its 'strong normative international agenda' (ibid.: 3). Analytically, the entire compendium revolves around the concept of 'market power Europe' (Damro 2012). By adopting this framework, the emphasis is on tracing the 'export' of EU market rules and civilian norms through trade policies, including GSP. Beke and Hachez (2015) suggest that the withdrawal of EU trade preferences from Burma/Myanmar between 1997 and 2013 failed to induce the desired political changes. Meanwhile, Yap (2015) argues that the threatened withdrawal of EU market access perks nudged Bangladesh to adopt stricter labour protection standards

following the Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013. Apropos of the global souths, the contribution develops a clear worldview that reimagines a dual ordering–othering role by the EU on the global periphery: by displacing ‘bad’ local norms as a global public good. A Eurocentric ‘export’ lens does not capture how differently sited actors contest, resist, reject, accommodate, push for, or translate institutional change (indeed it does not even concern itself with these political possibilities). In both approaches, it is clear that the agency of actors in third markets is de-emphasised in their analytical frameworks. Indeed, mainstream political science approaches to EU trade policy remain EU-centric, so that ‘a greater understanding of the “other” in EU trade policy becomes an urgent necessity’ (García 2018: 72).

In order to decolonise these Eurocentric knowledges, a retelling of the history of EU GSP is needed to locate it within the politics of (de)coloniality and how the development of the EU’s common commercial policy is implicated in it (strategies 1 & 2). This would mean recovering an understanding of trade preferences through the varied and connected experiences of European economic subjugation by formerly colonised countries, such as in the contexts of Bandung and the NIEO. In part, it would also require that we change the terms of conversation by seeing the targets of EU GSP not as ‘beneficiaries’ but as recipients of ‘post-colonial reparative action’ as articulated by Bhabra’s (2022) decolonial project for Europe, and as ‘contributors’ to the EU economy by supplying cheap global labour and raw materials, which further aggravates extractive, rapacious, environmentally destructive practices in the global souths. Furthermore, understanding EU GSP as foreign policy through a decolonial lens requires the centring of subaltern subjectivities (strategy 4): that is, how the targets of EU GSP experience and think about the technologies and normative scripts to which they are subjected under the kind of pro-growth, industrialised, regulatory orders required to do business with the EU. Relatedly, politicising the export of EU market rules and norms would shed light on their distributional effects in a given GSP context and, therefore, lay bare the contested nature of EU entanglements in global governance by virtue of trade (strategy 3).

Trade and Sustainable Development Chapters in Free Trade Agreements

If a non-ACP country reaches World Bank status as a middle-income country, it will become eligible to ‘graduate’ from GSP, which often constitutes a stepping-stone for negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU for countries from the global souths. Since the mid-2000s, EU FTAs have entailed TSD chapters (Harrison et al. 2019). These chapters continue the logic of the GSP regarding the commitment of FTA signatories to international conventions including eight labour conventions and seven to nine multilateral environmental agreements (Nessel & Orbie 2022). However, unlike the GSP, TSD chapters constitute a ‘soft instrument’ as they embrace dialogue instead of suspension in case of violation of these commitments. These chapters have been seen as a prime example of the EU’s ‘contribution to the well-being of the world’ (Nitoui 2013) through its trade policy and accordingly attracted a remarkable amount of scholarly attention. Despite being one chapter out of 20 to 30, TSD chapters have garnered an impressive amount of interest among political science researchers, notably compared to other chapters, such as competition or intellectual property law. In this scholarly debate, one sees a dominance of positivist research and problematic historical, epistemic and culturalist avatars of Eurocentrism. The extensive literature on TSD chapters generally starts by pointing out the special character of the EU as a normative power in international trade (Poletti & Sicurelli 2018; Nessel & Orbie 2022). From this starting point, the works quickly move to a discussion on the effectiveness of these clauses in third countries (Hradilova & Svoboda 2018; Roozendaal 2019), with a traditionally mandatory opposition of EU–US approaches (Van den Putte 2015; Portella 2021). Less prominent has been the question as to how far research on TSD chapters has reinforced coloniality. Following the example of five canonical publications on this subject, we engage with three interlinked problematic tendencies in this research field, namely historical, epistemic and cultural avatars.

Research on TSD chapters generally uses the contextual framework of the events at the World Trade Organization from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s or occasionally linking to the creation of the EU in the 1950s as a starting point for investigating ethical challenges in EU bilateral trade agreements. In the former, 'failed attempts to bring a social clause into multilateral trade agreements' (Harrison et al. 2019: 260) form the historical background for their investigation (Postnikov & Bastiaens 2014; Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017). In an example of the latter, the ethical trade discussion is linked to the 1950s and the 'trade and aid relations with EU member states' former colonies' (Martens & Orbie 2018: 287). From that point onwards, the developments and main challenges of the fair-trade doctrine are sketched.

No further attention is given to the dynamics of (de)colonisation when discussing the ethical trade doctrine, nor to the question of how far the EU has presented an ambiguous and soft position (see Orbie & Babardine 2008). However, several problems that are now associated with unsustainability in EU trade relations should in fact be associated with European colonialism and structures established during those times (McElwee 2016; Ziai 2016). Through the authors' silence on colonial aspects and on EU ambiguities in external actions, they give the impression that issues related to unsustainability are not to a large degree the result of European colonialism, but of underdevelopment. The silences foster the image of a new European trade policy, detached from colonialism (Nicolaidis & Onar-Fisher 2013; Sebhatu 2020). However, ethical concerns in European trade are not new (e.g., Bertrand 2007).

The historical starting point is also problematic as it contributes to the centring of EU trade agency to a positively connotated ethical singularity on the international level (see Bhambra 2022). The narrative is established that ethical trade concerns emerged as an ethical counterpart to the creation of the WTO in the 1990s. In fact, it implies that, prior to this date, free trade was problematic because no ethical value system channelled the market. The logic is directly visibly applied in the works of Postnikov and Bastiaens (2014) and Bastiaens and Postnikov (2017) when comparing EU-US ethical trade policy without, however, contextualising that the norms promoted in the context of TSD chapters are a product of the Western world order. Also, elsewhere, the singularity image is not challenged when asking 'whether the EU's approach to external governance of labour can be characterized as a form of (potentially significant) *normative power* focusing "on persuasion, argumentation, and the conferral of shame and prestige" rather than "coercion or solely material motivations"' (Manners 2009: 793). Testing the special character of the EU, while not pointing to the special character of others, latently suggests that other actors on the international scene are driven by ordinary interests and need the EU to govern the international system in an ethical manner.

The EU's partner in its mission to act 'as a force for good' is civil society on both sides. Research implicitly metamorphoses civil society into a highly institutionalised-technocratic tripartite between employers, employees and governments in the context of TSD chapters. The appropriateness of the tripartite to channel the costs of trading with the EU as an empire is not problematised in the five selected publications. The EU is needed to fight the injustices produced by the neoliberal West in third countries through binding rules in TSD chapters (Martens & Orbie 2018). Civil society agency remains restricted to articulate points of view within the above sketched epistemic boundaries. Whether other forms of organised contestation exist is ignored, reducing the debate on ethical trade to core labour conventions and selected multilateral environmental agreements, while ignoring the question of who is actually protected by EU trade deals. Linked to this is a common assumption that 'developing' countries are against TSD chapters. In the few cases where the positions of formerly colonised countries on TSD chapters have been studied, no larger questioning has been raised on what the 'other' understands by sustainable development and what priorities have been given to tackle unsustainable development.

Ontologically, TSD chapters are a mutual agreement attempting to make economic growth and sustainability compatible. The challenges encountered through trade agreements are in fact not specific to third countries; rather, the EU equally struggles with harmonising economic progress and sustainability. Yet the research on TSD is set on governing 'others' (Gstöhl & De Bièvre 2017: 187–189). Such culturalist boundaries fertilise discussions, where the economic-institutional effectiveness of bringing about change in third countries is the main concern. The questions look at ex-post or ex-ante changes and ways of how 'transnational communication leads civil society actors in EU PTA partner countries to learn successful strategies from their EU counterparts and pressure their state authorities to improve them' (Postnikov & Bastiaens, 2017: 927–928). Here, and also in other contributions (Martens & Orbie 2018; Harrison et al. 2019), the question is mainly whether the EU needs sanctions and pre-ratification requirements to 'develop the other' (Martens & Orbie 2018; Harrison et al. 2019). This is then opposed to the hard approach of the US, the EU's Western ally in overcoming anarchy in the international system. However, unlike the EU's imperialist other, the EU is presented as having opted for a softer non-sanctioning approach, favouring dialogue. The image solidifies that the EU does not use (military) force to pursue its goal and is hence detached from the colonial aspirations of the past. Instead, the EU's singularity is its normative trade power, which not only protects the feminised 'developing world' through TSD chapters, but also offers a way out of the poverty trap. If EU scholarship were to complexify this debate by raising questions about the special character of the EU and the supposed victimhood of civil society, the discussion on TSD chapters would be shifted. This includes an active engagement with the earlier described decolonising strategies through rehistoricising silences (strategy 2), giving 'others' more agency in expressing their positions on sustainable development (strategy 1 & 3) and changing the subjects of inquiry (strategy 4).

DISRUPTION AS DIALOGUE

To overcome Eurocentric epistemic regimes implies a disruption or a dislocation of those epistemic regimes in view of generating alternative knowledges. For us, to disrupt the modes in which we study EU trade policy in a decolonial sense means to efface Eurocentric ways of seeing world politics. However, we have pitched this disruption in a dialogic manner. While it may seem indefensible at first glance to disrupt dialogically or, put differently, to dialogue disruptively, we read 'dialogue' in a polysemic sense. Firstly, decolonial thinking engages new subject-positions from which dialoguing or 'speaking across divides from different positions' can be generated (Sabaratnam 2011: 785). It chafes against the enterprise of 'knowledge production' and instead commits to 'knowledge cultivation ... [as] a certain open-ended, non-zero-sum, non-competitive logic of oxygenation from which other insights can grow or resurface' (Rutazibwa 2020: 225). From this vantage point, our aim is certainly not to usurp existing research traditions with important claims of criticality to the study of EU trade policy. Indeed, some decolonial scholars have worked to couple decolonial thought with other traditions of social critique 'as a way to move beyond universalism into forms of argumentation that are built on the possibility of a dialogue across a plurality of epistemic locations' (Icaza and Vazquez 2013: 687).

Secondly, another understanding of dialogue speaks to our shared commitment of contributing to, not displacing, extant critical approaches to EU trade policy. More broadly within heterodox approaches to the study of Europe and the EU, we hope our contribution will complicate ongoing conversations around EU trade policy in the context of the 'decolonial project for Europe' (Bhambra 2022), the 'decentring agenda' for the EU as a post-colonial power (Onar & Nicolaïdis 2013; Keukeleire & Lecocq 2018; Lecocq & Keukeleire 2023), the 'Critical European Studies' project (Bigo et al. 2020), the 'Decolonising Europe in International Politics' initiative⁴ and the Decolonial Europe Day project.⁵ Beyond the decolonising strategies we have advocated here, there exist more institutional/curricular impediments to address when it comes to the (geo)politics of

knowledge (see Bhabra et al. 2018; Fúnez-Flores 2022; Evans & Petropoulou Ionescu 2023). As a field, we ought to take a hard look in the mirror and ask what the problem *really* is in terms of how we teach Europe, who gets to be in our classrooms, why some research projects are considered more desirable than others, how our scholarship is judged, who gets to make this judgement, how the EU is taught and learned Eurocentrically in the global souths, and so on. More dialoguing also needs to take place around the dangers of subsuming the decolonial option under the banners of 'diversifying' and 'decentring', which are distinct intellectual undertakings. While diversifying and decentring agendas imply pluralising scholarly perspectives, they may not necessarily cohere with the political commitments of questioning and squashing colonial/modern hierarchies (for a discussion on the differences between the 'decentring' and 'decolonising' agendas in European Studies, see Orbie et al. 2023). Last but not least, we view our decolonial proposal as dialogical for it stems from a generative research partnership among differently situated scholars with different positionalities and originating from countries that are steeped in varied histories and legacies of European colonialism.

Across our reading of the GSP regime, TSD chapters and EPAs, the historical avatar of Eurocentrism permeates EU trade scholarship, flattening the histories of Europe's presumed 'others'. However, even if one would like to overcome this, the most immediate reaction would be to say: 'Yes, of course, we are not doing that because we are not historians. We are doing EU studies. We are doing political science'. So, there is a question of strictly defined scholarly boundaries. This disciplinary gatekeeping raises the question of what counts as EU trade policy scholarship. We cannot decolonise EU trade scholarship without opening the field more to other historical knowledges, which get suffocated to some extent, because they are not seen as part of the discipline despite their importance to understanding contemporary EU external relations. Indeed, how can we genuinely engage with decoloniality without recovering alternative historiographies and leaving the traditional field of European Studies? Another layer to this gatekeeping is how EU trade policy scholarship is currently defined as those studies that deal with Article 207 of the Lisbon Treaty, or as what the Trade Commissioner says and does. How academics define EU common commercial policy is a consequence of how policymakers have defined it, which is hugely problematic because academic boundaries should not be led by policy choices.

When engaging with key texts on EU trade policy, there is something striking and related to the culturalist avatar of Eurocentrism that stands out for us: an obsession with power. It reads as a Eurocentric obsession that denies the EU's imbrication in the colonial matrix of power through trade. Writings often go to great lengths to emphasise how much power, how much competence, how much leverage, how much influence and how much economic weight the EU possesses as a 'force for good' in world politics, only to conclude that the EU does not use it or that it is not entirely working out. This becomes especially evident in relation to the EU's 'performance of power' in the conditionality discourse surrounding GSP (Orbie, Alcazar III & Sioen 2022). If the EU possessed more power, they would be better off. If the EU was weaker, they would be worse off. There is a civilisational connotation to this performance of power. It is also an unwritten assumption that the EU should use its power to advance its goals. If it fails to do so, it is a problem. If it manages to do so, all is well. Then, it is backed up with the narrative of international anarchy or of the 'jungle' out there where the EU's presence is needed to weed out and solve problems.

Problematically, the epistemic avatar of Eurocentrism manifests itself within seemingly unshakeable ways of seeing the EU as a global trade actor in terms of the normative power Europe (NPE) thesis (Manners 2002). Of course, the EU still fashions itself as a distinctly normative trade actor in world politics. But it has also increasingly presented itself as a realist, interest-driven, pragmatic actor of late, especially in the context of the geopoliticisation of EU trade policy (e.g., Meunier and Nicolaïdis 2019; Borrell 2021; Olsen 2022). This literature, however, tends to accentuate so-called 'great power' politics. It

neglects to consider how the EU continues to exploit trade policy as a way to (re)organise its relations with the global souths. These hierarchical relations of power must also be read *geopolitically*, that is, from the perspectives of the very 'targets' of EU trade policy, especially those deemed to be 'the most in need' (Alcazar III (forthcoming) 2024).

Since the Global Strategy of 2016 and the Trade Policy Review of 2021, the EU has more overtly stressed the language of enforcement, the language of enforceability, the language of coercion and the language of assertiveness when it comes to the GSP regime but also TSD chapters. Yet the EU has long been seen as coercive, aggressive and assertive especially in its pursuit of EPAs. Coercion operates through the EU's staging of EPAs as a means to enforce norms, stricter monitoring exercises and political conditionalities (Hurt 2003: 163). The EU also threatens that it will demote African 'partner' countries to the less preferential GSP regime if they do not ratify and implement EPAs with the EU (Langan 2018, 141). In 2013, in the context of the EU forcing an end to the EPA negotiations, Namibia's trade minister voiced 'dissatisfaction with a negotiating partner taking precipitous unilateral economic action against a more vulnerable side whilst we are in the process of negotiations. This is simply not in the spirit of partnership, fair play or equity' (Schlettwein 2013).

One discerns a more pronounced realist language that is being articulated slowly by the EU trade policy establishment and maybe even more slowly in EU trade relations with so-called 'developing' countries. To be clear, this 'new' geopolitical discourse, just like the NPE thesis, is tinged with strong pretensions of Europeans being more civilised and being in an exemplary position for other societies to emulate. Geopolitical Europe is legitimised by virtue of the 'special' character of the EU in the world.

We could think of these seemingly contending discourses as a triangle. On the one hand: normative power Europe. On the other: geopolitical Europe. Some — the present authors included — often think about the geopoliticisation of EU trade policy as if it is a shift from the normativisation of EU trade policy. Before, we had an 'ethical' trade policy under Cecilia Malmström, a more interest-driven one under Karel De Gucht, a more ethical one again in terms of harnessing globalisation under Pascal Lamy, and a more interest-driven, neoliberal one under Sir Leon Brittan. We might speak of a kind of pendulum oscillating between values and interests, values and interests. This pendulum is superficial because it distracts attention from something more fundamental, relatively constant, relatively unchangeable: coloniality. We could consider the decolonial option as transcending the 'values versus interests' divide because it directs our anticolonial gaze to both the normative and realist dimensions. Thinking decolonially challenges both dimensions because they co-constitute one another in perpetuating the coloniality of the EU in world politics. For proponents of the geopoliticisation narrative, EU trade policy seems now implicitly absolved from the sins of colonialism and *mission civilisatrice*. Therefore, dwelling on these sins might be tantamount to flogging a dead horse. Geopolitics is geopolitics is geopolitics. Yet this thinking is flawed, as we have attempted, from a decolonial perspective, to unmask.

In thinking through the coloniality of the EU as a global trade power, disrupting the Eurocentrism within EU trade policy studies demands a deep-seated shift in perspective, an unflinching disavowal of this pendulum thinking by genuinely engaging with other ways of knowing and being. If we were genuinely committed to changing the site of enunciation, would it not follow that the EU's trade relations with the global souths could and should be known differently?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to one anonymous reviewer and all participants of the 'Disrupting European Studies' online workshop, and in particular to the editors of this special issue, for helpful feedback on an earlier draft. We are indebted to Beatrix Futák-Campbell, Daniela Sicurelli, Mark Langan, and Nadia Jones-Galiani for engaging with our working paper as panel discussants in different academic conferences. We also wish to thank the UACES team and the DIMES project for hosting us in Lille and for making our participation possible at the 52nd European Studies Conference there. All lapses and misinterpretations remain ours and ours alone.

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ENDNOTE

¹ Tellingly, the special issues on the contemporary politics of EU trade policy that we have shortlisted are silent on GSP, TSD and EPAs.

² We use the notion of 'policy worlds' to stress that policies are embedded in and through particular socio-political realms. As Shore and Wright (2011: 1) put it: 'Policies are not simply external, generalised or constraining forces, nor are they confined to texts. Rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested. A policy finds expression through sequences of events; it creates new social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects, and new webs of meaning'.

³ The (Silent) Voices from the Field collective at the Governance in Conflict Network rethinks transnational field research practices in development and (post)conflict studies by advancing a research ethos based on open dialogue and partnership: <https://www.gicnetwork.be/silent-voices-about/>.

⁴ This initiative is convened by Beste İşleyen and Tasniem Anwar at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam: <https://aces.uva.nl/content/news/2020/06/decolonising-europe.html?cb>.

⁵ <https://decolonial.eu/>

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ANNEX

		GSP	TSD	EPAs
Handbooks	Young & Peterson (2014)	✓	X	✓
	Gstöhl & De Bièvre (2017)	✓	✓	✓
	Khorana & García (2018)	✓	✓	✓
Special issues	EU Trade Policy in the 21 st Century, <i>Journal of European Public Policy</i> (2019)	X	X	X
	Politicization of EU Trade Policy Across Time and Space, <i>Politics and Governance</i> (2020)	X	X	X
Supplementary texts	Wouters et al. (2015)	+		
	Postnikov et al. (2017)		+	
	Harrison et al. (2019)		+	

Remarks:

✓ indicates that the corresponding text figures in the analysis because it includes a discussion on GSP, TSD, or EPAs.

X indicates that the corresponding text does not figure in the analysis because it does not include a discussion on GSP, TSD, or EPAs.

+ indicates that the corresponding text is incorporated in the analysis as a supplementary text on GSP, TSD, or EPAs.

Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Regional Transformation as Reterritorialisation: Examining the distorted image of EU- ropeanisation

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Citation

Williams T.G. (2023). 'Regional Transformation as Reterritorialisation: Examining the distorted image of EU-ropeanisation' in *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 19 (2): 207-225.
[https://doi.org/ 10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1296](https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1296).

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

The European Union's (EU) mission to promote its idea of European-ness across the continent led to its eastern enlargements and later the Eastern Partnership of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Along the way, this mission encountered competing norms and regional integration efforts shaped by sociocultural and historical ties connecting state, society and territory. These ties inform the barriers to Europeanisation and the backsliding from EU-managed policy reforms. They can illuminate where the EU's self-image and constructed European identity do not reflect perspectives abroad or those of EU member countries. Such inconsistencies in the EU-constructed identity that shaped related policy mechanisms prevented sustainable regional transformation and integration. Further policy integration and future EU enlargement remain strong possibilities, as does the risk of basing the next generation of policy mechanisms on a distorted image of the EU and its capacity to transform. In this article, I apply a novel critical theory perspective on the entwined processes of de- and reterritorialisation to this context, and argue that this perspective clarifies and informs the EU's aim to transform and unite Europe.

Keywords

Europeanisation; Reterritorialisation; European Union; Eastern partnership; Regionalism; Post-colonial

Notions of the EU as a 'force for good' that is 'predisposed' to behave in a normative way internally and externally (Manners 2002: 242) had a firm hold on EU scholarship for well over a decade, despite early alarm bells questioning whether predisposed normative behaviour was actually a good thing (Sjursen 2006: 236). Since then, the unanticipated consequences to EU external action show that instead of a one-way process of the EU exporting its norms and values, it also is shaped by those of its neighbours, particularly the countries that become new members (Delcour 2011, 2018b; de Franco, Meyer and Smith 2015; Burlyuk 2017, Williams 2022).

Building on scholarship that applies de- and post-colonial and post-imperial perspectives to European integration, this article explains that while EU external action follows colonial and imperial patterns (Kølvraa 2017; Ifversen 2019, 2022; Luciani 2020), its distinctions from past actions invite further examination through an even more nuanced lens. The theoretical perspective discussed herein is that when implemented externally, the EU's brand of Europeanisation would need to reterritorialise a targeted region in order to achieve its core expansionist objectives of deep, comprehensive regional transformation followed by integration. The brand of Europeanisation refers to the EU's discursively constructed and promoted policy mechanisms used to diffuse EU norms and values into domestic contexts and discursively justified as offering the solution to regional problems.

EU norm diffusion is commonly represented as a mechanised process implemented in the domestic sociopolitical contexts of its member, candidate and partner countries, as well as throughout the broader international community (Manners 2002; Sedelmeier 2011; Börzel and Risse 2012; Seybert 2012; Kølvraa 2017): in other words, exporting EU norms and values across borders. Is this exportation enforced, threatening other countries to adopt EU norms and values or else? A prevalent argument concludes it is not, but rather that countries that wish to participate in partnerships or other policy-based agreements with the EU and its countries either accept conditions, or simply do not participate in partnerships. As such, these partnership policy mechanisms utilise incentivised conditionality and are therefore voluntary and dependent in nature (Manners 2002; Diez 2005; Lavenex 2008; Haukkala 2011; Seybert 2012). However, this approach does not merely prescribe a voluntary set of limitations and conditions. The partnership policy mechanisms also aim to exert a normative yet palpable power in that they target 'reterritorialisation of power away from the central state along vertical lines via the principles of regionalization and subsidiarity, and horizontal lines via the principle of partnership' (Stanivukovic 2018: 61; see also Havlík 2020). Whether or not this aim is feasible and functional is a question this article addresses.

Policy norm diffusion via conditional partnership agreement conceivably corroborates a post-Cold War departure from using violent means to enforce one's beliefs and values. It exemplifies a soft power approach. However, this article aims to show that this softer approach nevertheless promises more than it could ever deliver, and argues that treating norms and values as goods for cross-border export still follows past colonial and imperial perspectives that are perhaps not entirely consigned to history.

The EU neither has nor intends to wield the type of power necessary to achieve such ambitious regional transformation goals given the fact that, even if not fully appreciated when first launched, such goals necessitate de- and reterritorialisation. Prior understandings of the EU theorise that it behaves as a normative power given the norms-based, incentivised conditionality in EU external action mechanisms. However, these conceptualisations do not adequately address what these mechanisms are meant to achieve and presume voluntary compliance without viable evidence. Along with demonstrating these points, this article argues that the dual processes of de- and reterritorialisation offer a new, necessary lens through which to gauge the planning,

development and implementation of EU foreign policy and external action frameworks in order to avoid further overambitious or underdeveloped objectives.

But, why, after all the discussion already on normative power EU-rope, would such a lens matter? Discussing what was called the 'European question,' Jan Ifversen implores, 'If we are to have any hope in the transnational and intercultural potential contained in the idea of Europe, it is time to listen to those who have been marginalized and silenced' (2022: 293). So, it matters only if those who believe in the European project truly want to reflect good in the world. If the aim is to see the EU's version of Europe and the EU self-identity reflected in its neighbours as if holding up a mirror, where is the EU-ropean self in Brexit? Or, in the mixed messaging from EU countries during the invasions of Ukraine (Maurer, Whitman and Wright 2023)? Where is the EU-ropean self when asylum-seekers drown who could have easily been rescued by EU country authorities (UN 2020; Stevis-Gridneff and Shoumali 2023; Vasques 2023)? Who is the EU-ropean self that identifies as the exemplar of 'force for good' to the world, yet also shows the jungle-like, invasive overgrowth (European External Action Service Press Team 2022) of sociopolitical and economic issues that it perceives as an external problem. Furthermore, where is the exemplary good in making new candidate members (European Commission 2022; European Parliament 2022a) and pushing forward the last (European Parliament 2022b) when the cracks left in the foundation after prior enlargements are not yet mended? The image reflected back to the EU from its neighbours indeed shows its inconsistencies and weaknesses, and reveals where the EU self-image is distorted. A lens through which to examine and understand these issues matters for those who want to correct that distortion.

To demonstrate this, the article focuses on the campaign to instil the EU's idea of European-ness across the continent. This led to its eastern enlargements and the Eastern Partnership arm of its European Neighbourhood Policy, all of which were constructed from the EU's policy integration platform. Within the Eastern Partnership countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the EU's policy implementation and normative positions encountered competing norms and regional integration efforts constructed from existing national and regional identity perspectives. Such perspectives are shaped by the sociocultural and historical ties between states, societies and territories. The de- and reterritorialisation processes inform how these ties can push back against or compete with the EU's version of what it means to be European, thereby informing the barriers to its Europeanisation, and can also explain regression from implemented political or social reforms.

In order for the EU's brand of Europeanisation to achieve and sustain the intended transformation and integration, the ties to national and regional identity that impede its Europeanisation efforts would (will) need to become undone and reconstructed through de- and reterritorialisation. However, as discussed in theoretical debate and shown historically, e.g. colonialism and imperialism, hegemonic power is required to achieve this profound degree of transformation and integration (Hevia 2003; Diez 2013; Duran 2015; Stanivukovic 2018; Luciani 2020). The outcomes of the Eastern Partnership do not demonstrate that the EU possessed such power (Burlyuk 2017; Williams 2022). Examining how the partnership processes discursively unfolded also reveal which sociocultural, political and historical ties within the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood represent resilient obstacles to the EU's aim to deeply and comprehensively transform the region with its soft power, norm diffusion approach.

Critical examination of this approach illuminates and challenges the driving beliefs about its characteristic power structure that dictates which actors should set limitations and control standards, and which should be controlled. An intended function of this approach is to reaffirm a self-image that, compared to its neighbours, the EU is an attractive, better actor that 'appears desirable and worthy of identification, even if one has to leave "Europe"

to find it' (Kølvraa 2017: 22). Interrogating EU external action from a reterritorialisation perspective can clarify the inaccurate views driving identity affirmation through expansion. When examined through the lens of reterritorialisation, Europeanisation and region-building are revealed for what they are, thus elucidating the inconsistencies in what the EU expected yet did not have the power or capacity to achieve.

To illustrate these assertions, this article discusses four key, interconnecting concepts that shape the EU's regionalism from the perspective of de- and reterritorialisation: power; self-reproduction; problem-solution narrative promotion; and identity-affirming behaviour. De- and reterritorialisation as entwined processes are reviewed and explained within the context of the EU's brand of Europeanisation that blends identity-driven region-building with the exportation of norms and values. Particular attention is given to the problem-solution narrative in which the EU offers itself as a solution to regional problems, aiming to justify its power-seeking behaviour. The discussion will also further unpack the role of identity and the related discourse underlying the EU's Europeanisation approach, informing and clarifying the inconsistencies between its objectives and its potential. Ultimately, while more precise representations of policy problems and practical solutions are important, they are insufficient for the EU's brand of Europeanisation: regional transformation and integration cannot rely on both normative conditionality and the rapid dissolution of longstanding social, cultural or historical ties.

THE EU'S BRAND OF EUROPEANISATION: 'SOFT POWER,' NORMATIVE RETERRITORIALISATION?

If reterritorialisation can explain the inconsistencies in and unanticipated consequences of EU external action, then we can expect to see evidence in the related policy mechanisms of intended reterritorialisation of power away from the state. These mechanisms, in contrast to the physical violence of past colonialism and imperialism, aim to hold power by setting standards, incentives and conditions, yet place the onus for change on candidate and partner countries, and furthermore lack enforcement measures.

The type and degree of transformation and integration that these policy mechanisms are meant to achieve are also relevant for understanding the intended direction of power. This is revealed in the EU's profound, comprehensive platform for social, political and economic norm transformation in targeted regional territories, including integration for its members via the *acquis communautaire* (acquis). Additionally, the EU's aim to 'unite the European continent' (European Union 2007: Preamble) suggests more than a plea for peace when taken alongside the widespread mechanised campaign to export EU core norms (Thomas 2006, 2016; European Union 2007) throughout most, if not all, layers of European countries' domestic contexts.

Evaluating compliance to EU policy mechanisms also follows a top-down direction that reterritorialises power away from the state towards another actor, the EU (Stanivukovic 2018). As mentioned, the Eastern Partnership agreements place the responsibility to implement the diagnosed institutional changes on the partner country's government (European Commission 2011, 2015; EEAS 2016). This corroborates research findings showing that the credit for reforms in Eastern Partnership countries cannot exclusively or unequivocally be given to external actors (Delcour 2011, 2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Kakachia, Lebanidze and Legucka 2021; Williams 2022). However, the top-down nature of the Eastern Partnership stipulates that if the partner country is to reap the conditional benefits, it must demonstrate change to a degree that the EU deems sufficient. In such a structure, the country responsible for change is not meant (or permitted) to decide if it has transformed to the point that it deserves conditional benefits or deserves to be an EU member. Additionally, the EU's discursive positions regarding who belongs to its united, 'better' Europe and who is sufficient to be a member have been inconsistent (Delcour

2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; Crudu and Eremenko 2012; de Franco et al. 2015; Williams 2022).

Furthermore, the divergent outcomes of the Eastern Partnership processes implemented in the six Eastern Partners demonstrate that belonging to Europe and/or confirming a common European identity may not hold the same value across domestic contexts (Kølvraa 2017; Delcour 2018a, 2018b; Williams 2022). The external recognition of continental or regional identity may become trivialised while national identities (of which many may persist within one country) are still forming, connecting and evolving according to the social, cultural and historical ties that remain. In such instances, controlling the narrative on a common European identity and who belongs to Europe holds little to no power. On the contrary, being approached as 'the other' may be an expectation or even a preference if it means avoiding labels constructed by external actors (Williams 2022).

Given these issues at the heart of EU external action in terms of both a lack of power and capacity, questioning why Brussels decided to move forward with such frameworks is fair. The fact of a distorted self-image helps to explain how this occurred; however, it is also necessary to account for the fact that the EU's identity-driven expansionist ambitions demanded (de- and re-)territorialisation, and why this was not just under-appreciated, but overlooked.

REFLECTED ABROAD: SELF-REPRODUCTION AND CONTEMPORARY DETERRITORIALISATION AND RETERRITORIALISATION

The theory of reterritorialisation was initially developed in the fields of philosophy, anthropology and sociology. Reterritorialisation is the reconstruction of a place that has experienced social, political and/or cultural deterioration (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 1987; Hevia 2003; Duran 2015; Stanivukovic 2018; Havlík 2020). As a process, reterritorialisation needs *detrterritorialisation*, which beyond mere deterioration entails separation (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 1987). Deterritorialisation as a process entails weakening and undoing the links between culture and place, and supersedes the confines of physical territory in that places of origin and territorial homes are interwoven in cultural and personal identities. The deterritorialisation process is 'not a promised and pre-existing land, but a world created in the process of its tendency, its coming undone' (Deleuze and Guattari 1977), and this undoing can occur distinctly or alongside the redoing process of reterritorialisation.

De- and reterritorialisation relate to the former Soviet republics given that they are in a period of sociopolitical, economic and cultural transition and rebuilding after separation from the collapsed Soviet Union. Afterwards, some of the formerly communist countries aimed to democratise and build economic and diplomatic ties across the globe (Delcour 2011, 2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Moreover, historically, the region experienced the grip of competing imperial and colonial territorialisation even prior to the Soviet Union, which can further complicate the way forward as the newly (re)independent countries decide which cultural features to keep for their national identity (Delcour 2011, 2015, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Simão 2013; Bolkvadze et al. 2014; Luciani 2020; see also Crudu and Eremenko 2012).

Understanding the relationship between who or what instigates the processes of de- and reterritorialisation and the given justification for it can inform the outcomes, intended and unintended. Externally instigated territorialisation can aim to reproduce the external actor and its norms, values and beliefs to the benefit of its preferences and interests. Historically, colonial and imperial territorialisations occurred by violent force: both the breaking of ties between peoples and places through deterritorialisation, and the reterritorialisation of power away from the existing leaders in order to enforce the adoption

and standardisation of new norms and behaviours. Along with the normalisation of intergovernmental organisations, territorialisation via external actors was reconfigured to be a process managed diplomatically and economically through policy and political tools (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Duran 2015; Kølvråa 2017; Luciani 2020). This still carried an expectation, however, that reterritorialisation would occur as evidenced by government and societal behaviours following, reproducing or 'imitating' (Kølvråa 2017) values-driven norms set by the dominant actors in the international community. The justification is that such efforts are considered humanitarian in nature, and aim to deter conflict and war, rather than benefit from these acts. This directly corroborates the EU's justification for its Europeanisation through comprehensive policy norm integration that relies on voluntary compliance with norms and incentivised conditions. Furthermore, this framework places the EU at the top, setting and promoting its own norms, and evaluating compliance and the ability to 'imitate' its preferred behaviours. As such, this brand of Europeanisation functions as a system of EU reproduction.

With regard to the Eastern Neighbourhood, partner and candidate countries can conditionally receive financial and programmatic support to adapt to EU standards, which is represented as a transformative type of European integration for the non-EU European Eastern Partners (European Commission 2011; EEAS 2016). Such incentivised conditionality reveals a fundamental belief that Europeanisation entails an underlying power structure where the EU community determines and manages the standards for the broader European constellation, thus promoting its own constructed version of a European identity. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that a key interest for the EU in implementing its Eastern Partnership is to (re)construct the European continent according to its own specific set of standards, and with the aim for the result to reflect its specific understanding of Europe.

Reterritorialisation informs this system of transformative reconstruction that assigns identity and exports sociopolitical norms and values, yet is bound to regional territories (Havlík 2020). The EU's brand of Europeanisation reflects a reterritorialisation effort in that it targets specific regions for profound, comprehensive social, political and economic norm transformation, setting its own norms and values as the baseline (Stanivukovic 2018; Havlík 2020). This is demonstrated across the EU's integrationist platform, including the *acquis* as a legalised mechanism for profound integration among EU countries. As mentioned, this reterritorialises power away from the state, rather than the state and society concerned reterritorialising their country and deciding without external pressure which ties between them and their country form the national identity.

Additionally, the core emphasis on *territorial* identity demonstrates that institutional change was not the sole purpose or intention of the EU's approach to external norm diffusion through partnership mechanisms. The reterritorialisation perspective illuminates how accomplishing regional transformation and integration is a more profound ambition, which must be not just reproduced but also normalised in order to be sustainable (Stanivukovic 2018; Luciani 2020; see also Duran 2015). Moreover, it demands a high degree of power that, despite the emphasis on rules and normativity, is not represented in the intrinsic conditionality of the EU's mechanisms.

The historical examples of profound, comprehensive and longstanding transformation attempted by an external actor inform how hegemonic power is necessary (but perhaps still not fully sufficient) to achieve reterritorialisation (Hevia 2003; Diez 2013; Duran 2015; Stanivukovic 2018; Luciani 2020). However, the outcomes of the Eastern Partnership and broader European Neighbourhood Policy mechanisms neither show that the EU can reach such power, nor that it is prepared to resort to the type of behaviour prevalent in prior examples, e.g., imperialism, colonialism. Yet, the old roots still seem to have produced fruit in the form of a driving belief that if the EU is to unite the European continent, then

it must aim for EU-specified profound, comprehensive transformation externally, and profound, comprehensive integration internally.

These inconsistencies between intended and actual power are shown in the problem-solution narrative underlying EU discourse on its brand of Europeanisation. They seem to be the result of providing a benefit-seeking solution before the problem was fully understood (Delcour 2015, 2018a, 2018b; European Commission 2011, 2015; Burlyuk 2017). Moreover, representing the discursive construction of the EU as a transnational brand or identity in the problem-solution narrative may have shifted focus and weakened the policy-driven approach (Diez 1999, 2005; Reinke de Buitrago 2012; Seybert 2012; Bolkvadze, Bachmann and Müller 2014; Delcour 2018a, 2018b). The next section further addresses the role of the problem-solution narrative, followed by an in-depth examination of the broader identity-affirming discourses that shape the EU's brand of Europeanisation.

RETERRITORIALISATION AND THE LIMITATIONS OF NORMS-BASED CONDITIONALITY: RIGHT PROBLEM, WRONG SOLUTION

Political and policy-related decisions can be grounded in problem-solution narratives in order to sell them to targeted audiences. Such solutions are presented as a 'fact of life', obvious response to a social problem that is not open for interpretation, debate or alternative recommendations (Fairclough 2003: 91-92, 210). When examining problem-solution narratives, it is necessary to consider whether the related 'social order... "needs" the problem' (ibid.) in that those with authority and power promote their agenda as a solution to a problem that may not exist, may not exist as stated, or that may purposefully never be resolved. Solutions can 'need' a problem when those driving the problem-solution narrative seek some benefit that can only be legitimised if it is believed to resolve a serious problem, otherwise the justification for securing the intended benefit is not convincing: for example, securing a voluntary following in order to legitimise power-seeking, expansionist behaviour. However, it is possible for such solutions to produce negative effects, require unwanted changes or otherwise entail unattractive features, thus preventing their voluntary acceptance. I contend that such outcomes corroborate the unanticipated consequences of the Eastern Partnership that contradict initial beliefs about EU power, and highlight state and societal ambivalence towards external actors. The EU's condition-based partnership mechanisms demonstrate a 'fact of life' belief that the EU belongs in charge of norms-setting and should expect its behaviours and values to be reproduced and reflected, particularly by external countries that want to be members. However, this overlooks the lack of power and enforcement in these mechanisms' inherent conditionality, which also does not account for the fact that new members in turn import their norms, values, interests and behaviours, likewise impacting the EU community.

The EU and its member countries deemed the problem of instability in the neighbouring, formerly Soviet region impactful enough to devise a plan for how they can change it. With the Eastern Partnership, the EU initially proposed its brand of Europeanisation as a solution to this regional problem in its Eastern Neighbourhood (Delcour 2011, 2015; European Commission 2011, 2015; Simão 2013; EEAS 2016). Functionally, the 'EU as a solution' perspective aims to discursively justify the attempt to realise Europeanisation abroad and achieve the previously discussed external self-reproduction. The EU's core membership norms that shape policy mechanisms like the Eastern Partnership are not necessarily problematic themselves (see European Union 2007). However, the manner in which the EU externally promotes its norms, its justification for this as a solution, and the results of these decisions draw attention to instances where old, entrenched beliefs about power start to show through, necessitating critical examination. The EU was forced to adapt its approach and objectives when the Eastern Partnership was met with unexpected reactions and responses, and did not achieve regional transformation via policy norm and behaviour reproduction as intended (Burlyuk 2017). This suggests that the EU did not possess the

hegemonic power necessary to achieve its specific regional transformation objectives throughout its Eastern Neighbourhood – yet it acted on the belief that the EU-ropeanisation solution it offered was both sufficient and the most attractive.

This problem-solution narrative additionally posits that the conditional benefits and incentives the EU offers are deemed otherwise unattainable for the targeted partner country. However, for the Eastern Partnership countries, there are other regional and global partnership opportunities through which to promote their own interests that are not based on normative conditionality. Therefore, the EU's partnership by conditionality was not a 'fact of life,' obvious-best solution even with the substantial incentivisation aimed at attracting voluntary participation and compliance (Fairclough 2003: 91-92, 210; European Commission 2015). Additionally, normative frameworks and conditionality do not work in every context, and whether they work at all to produce genuine, sustainable change is disputable since countries can play along and imitate what is expected to reap benefits, then backslide soon after (Sedelmeier 2014, 2017; Kølvråa 2017). Furthermore, although the EU claims to jointly develop with candidate and partner countries the incentivised conditions through which they are meant to acclimate to EU norms and standards, there is a lack of enforcement and an end-point is unclear (European Commission 2011, 2015; Lebanidze 2020; Kakachia et al. 2021).

Additionally, the aim to unite Europe shows evidence that it is still rooted in the soil of old beliefs that designate a wealthier group experiencing a (temporary) period of camaraderie as worthy of dominating and setting the standards for the entire continent (Diez 2005, 2013; Crudu and Eremenko 2012; Kølvråa 2017; Luciani 2020; Williams 2022). This exposes beliefs about not just belonging, but also about who is deserving of power. Examining the discursive construction and implementation of the Eastern Partnership can reveal how sociocultural, political and historical ties within the Eastern Neighbourhood effectively pushed back against these beliefs about an external actor reterritorialising the region, even via normative, soft power.

These ties inform how prevalent identities, including the EU's version of European-ness, are discursively constructed and promoted. Two common discourse frames, othering and 'same-ing', are widely and strategically used to construct, promote, justify, legitimise, transform and deconstruct identities, actions or political positions (Diez 2005; see also de Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak 1999). Examining this critically through the lens of de- and reterritorialisation shows that discursively constructing, promoting and justifying its normative identity as connected to national and regional identities was not enough for the EU to achieve reterritorialisation. The identity discourses ultimately positioned the EU against regional and national ties, beliefs and perspectives, thus preventing reterritorialisation of the Eastern Neighbourhood region (Bolkvadze et al. 2014; Romanova 2016; Delcour 2018a, 2018b; Williams 2022).

The following section addresses how the EU promoted its EU-ropeanisation problem-solution narrative through othering and same-ing identity discourses. More specifically, the tracing of the EU/European identity discourse, and the subsequent responses and outcomes, shows how it promoted a transformation mission comprised of incompatible objectives. While reterritorialisation would be the degree of transformation necessary to achieve the Eastern Partnership's initial deep, comprehensive ambitions, the EU always lacked both the perspective and the power to do this. The regional transformation mission was nevertheless based on longstanding beliefs about West/East and Global North/Global South identities rooted in colonial and imperial practices. In other words, it aimed to achieve regional transformation based on timeworn identities without wielding the same power and physically violent means used during past colonial and imperial periods in Europe. Nevertheless, the past violence attributed to those identities is held in regional

memory, which can be triggered by discursive othering and same-ing, thus inspiring the desire to establish national identities without external pressures.

IDENTITY AND RETERRITORIALISATION: THE ROLE OF OTHERING AND 'SAME-ING' DISCOURSES

Unlike the lighter Europeanisation of similar, relatively stable countries that the EU achieved in the 1990s through integrating already common policies (Schimmelfennig 2001), its eastern enlargements were taxing (Crudu and Eremenko 2012; Sedelmeier 2014, 2017; Stanivukovic 2018). It was therefore a risk to attempt additional replication in even further dissimilar countries, even if at a slower pace. The EU's regional approach has been well documented as the EU's Europeanisation efforts have moved further to the south and the east across Europe. However, this regional focus overlooks intervening identity perspectives and beliefs. As this section explains, a critical miscalculation in the EU's Europeanisation was to construct policy mechanisms from the assumption that perspectives on the EU throughout the region directly reflected its self-identity as a powerful, attractive force for good (European Commission 2015).

While the EU claims its membership requirements are based on geography and core norms, sociocultural values and historical connections are still found in the discourse on who the EU is, what it stands for and how it behaves. The EU's claim to a strong 'western' identity was a central focus when considering eastern enlargement (Thomas 2006, 2016; Crudu and Eremenko 2012; Seybert 2012). As such, the potential Central and Eastern European candidates presented the case that they in fact had always been 'western' and 'a part of Europe', citing historical references like the Austro-Hungarian empire, and emphasising that they were executing a sociopolitical transition towards western-style, liberal democracy (Ramet 2007; Crudu and Eremenko 2012; Seybert 2012; Thomas 2016; Stanivukovic 2018).

Perhaps these countries made their case, or perhaps nothing could be a stronger signal that the EU is 'the most important normative power in the world' (Peterson and Barroso 2008: 69) than to have so many countries attempt to become members. Or, at least this was the story coming from Brussels about the EU and its external action (Peterson and Barroso 2008; EEAS 2016). This narrative advocated for the Eastern Neighbourhood to strive to be good enough for the EU, and thereby resolve domestic issues by 'imitating' (Kølvraa 2017) the EU-ropean identity to reach some EU-determined standard. As such, a perceived benefit of the eastern enlargement for the EU was the opportunity to establish the 'good-Other' identity and declare itself the better and more responsible 'force for good' alternative to competing global powers (Thomas 2016: 3; see also Peterson and Barroso 2008; Stewart 2011). As discussed, the problem-solution narrative proposing the EU as the solution to regional problems was used to justify pursuing this benefit, aiming to represent it as a benefit for the continent, not just the EU.

In order to sell its problem-solution narrative, the EU strategically framed it both internally and externally with identity features claiming 'friendly' sameness, or 'same-ing', and 'othering', or discursively positioning actors as for or against others (de Cillia et al. 1999; Diez 2005; Reinke de Buitrago 2012; Horký-Hlucháň and Kratochvíl 2014; see also van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 92 'we group/they group'). While constructing membership standards is itself a norm in international organisations, the EU opted for a particularly comprehensive norm integration platform that, as is now observed, requires substantial power and authority to be realised and sustained (Kølvraa 2017; Luciani 2020; Williams 2022). Its same-ing discourse strategy to convince others that it can be trusted with such power, and that it also trusts its members to voluntarily comply in return, relies on shared 'EU-ropean' values and normative positions. Furthermore, as mentioned, this discourse strategy is framed with the 'EU-ropean identity' device to sell the Eastern Partner countries

on the idea that EU norm compliance would bring them into the EU's Europe and solve their instability problem (Delcour 2011, 2015; European Commission 2011, 2015; Simão 2013; EEAS 2016; Kølvråa 2017).

Guided by the norms and conditions detailed in EU partnership agreements, the targeted partner countries were expected to voluntarily commit to actively setting and implementing a comprehensive domestic reforms agenda. This is critical to the core identity discourse on ethical normative conditionality that asserts that countries willingly and voluntarily comply with EU norms and conditions, therefore justifying and legitimising the EU's authority as the norm-setter and values-exporter.

However, reaching the EU's stated standards can be a grand ambition for countries experiencing sociopolitical and economic transitions in complex, tense regions – both abroad and internally. 'Below EU standards' is a framing device in an othering discourse strategy that has been constructed and promoted as a particular problem for which the EU and its agenda is the solution (Delcour 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b; European Commission 2011, 2015; EEAS 2016). Yet, the recent social and political norm divergence of eastern enlargement members, such as Hungary and Poland, reveal that the imbalanced internal mechanisms that constrain the EU without similarly controlling member states were not resolved prior to enlargement and remain a problem (Meijers and van der Veer 2019; Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton 2019). Additionally, enduring post-crisis economic decline in certain EU countries, like Italy and Spain, contradict the EU's economic progress norm (Picot and Tassinari 2017; Badell et al. 2019), and shocking reactions to migration in Mediterranean countries (UN 2020; Stevis-Gridneff and Shoumali 2023; Vasques 2023) violate its human rights and rule of law norms.

This divergence among EU countries and internal lack of EU norm compliance contradict the integration platform that requires members to be facsimiles in terms of domestic policy norm implementation in order to function as a collective. These internal inconsistencies controvert EU norm diffusion and integration mechanisms, as well as the surrounding narratives. Furthermore, if EU countries clash regarding EU norms and how to implement them, it challenges the notion that a functional internal EU normative mechanism even exists to be exported or promoted abroad in the first place. Further still, if the limitations of the EU's internal integration platform persist and continue to produce unfavourable outcomes, mobilising it externally is likely to yield similarly unwanted outcomes. In brief, the aim to export and reproduce itself abroad will reproduce existing internal inconsistencies as well.

It is also particularly relevant that the EU claimed to base its core membership norms and integrationist platform on the United Nations Charter (European Union 2007), despite the 'distinctly European' regionalism and Europeanisation (de Franco et al. 2015; see also Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). Making a fundamental United Nations connection strategically situates the EU in a now normalised global system of institutionalised intergovernmental organisations, aiming to implicate sameness with an established organisational identity. As mentioned, the normalisation of intergovernmental organisations reconfigured an 'acceptable' form of territorialisation. The Cold War period following the Second World War, roughly 1945-1989, was a time when many countries hoped to rebuild and form new alliances, which ultimately led to the normalisation of institutionalised multilateral governance administered via organisations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization among many others (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; see also Delcour 2015, 2018b). These global intergovernmental initiatives later produced regional intergovernmental organisations around the globe that were continental, transcontinental or subregional. While global and regional multilateral governance blossomed, breakdowns and wars still nevertheless occurred, at times spurred by territorial conflict. In the late 1980s, the intergovernmental organisations began to

intervene in emerging conflicts as relative outsiders aiming to negotiate peace and act as catalysts for rebuilding countries and regions with the consent and participation of their governments (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; see also Delcour 2011, 2015; Seybert 2012; Simão 2013; Stanivokovic 2018). As discussed earlier, such interventions were largely justified as humanitarian and peace-seeking within the international community.

Nevertheless, even if humanitarianism is the intention and discursively woven into organisational identities, because the intergovernmental organisations are established and managed by powerful, economically dominant countries, the lines are blurred between their interests and the organisations' interests (Bickerton 2011; de Franco et al. 2015; Delcour 2018b; Stanivokovic 2018; Havlík 2020; Luciani 2020). This is even more pronounced within the EU with its club-membership basis and distinctive regional targeting externally and internally (e.g., *European Union, Neighbourhood Policy*). For a regional actor to establish its own core norms as a regionalised version of state norms, it needs similarity across state contexts and likewise requires the elimination of dissimilar state attributes, which signals a demand for de- and reterritorialisation. However, the EU attempts to use a normative, condition-based soft power that heavily relies on attractiveness internally and externally. This creates a sticking point in that a preference for normative and incentivised conditionality is necessary to affirm the EU's good-Other identity perspective.

Existing research addresses how EU external action mechanisms can function as neocolonial and neocapitalist mechanisms in many external contexts, and even evoke a 'neo-medieval' form in the EU's mission to unite the European continent (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Birchfield 2011; Manners 2011; Crudu and Eremenko 2012; Luciani 2020). Yet, their normative, condition-based approach is not sufficient to secure comprehensive, enduring reterritorialisation because building a new system on top of a divergent old system is not sustainable. The evidence of this was already very apparent before signalling a fourth and fifth eastern enlargement (European Commission 2022; European Parliament 2022a, 2022b). Brexit, the unacceptable treatment of migrants, the backsliding of Central and Eastern European EU countries and the revival of far-right nationalism did not sprout overnight, but were the fruit of deeply rooted identity perspectives, beliefs and practices (Seybert 2012; Sedelmeier 2014; Stanivukovic 2018; Ifversen 2019, 2022). This indicates that the EU's promotion of its self-image and its incentivised policy mechanisms were insufficient to de- and reterritorialise national and European identities, even those held within EU countries. The EU's integrationist and expansionist foundations were constructed from this distorted self-image that does not necessarily reflect others' European identities, or how it is perceived by others throughout the European region it aims to transform and unite. Additionally, this integrationist and expansionist mission is still promoted with the approval of new candidates.

Therefore, clearly, given the evidence that the EU imports as much as it exports in enlargements, an open reflection on how these candidates see the EU and themselves in it – not just a conflation of their views with the EU's self-image – should occur before future accessions.

Furthermore, the candidate and partner countries are aware of the inconsistent messages of belonging, and in their own ways take control of deciding what is enough for their own country that already belongs to Europe geographically, historically and culturally (Williams 2022; see also Bolkvadze et al. 2014; Kakachia et al. 2021). This confirms that, despite the region-building approach, the different domestic contexts of the Eastern Partners interact differently with the EU, thus explaining the different partnership outcomes (European Commission 2015; Burlyuk 2017; Williams 2022). Consequently, Eastern Partnership countries whose domestic contexts are resistant or not amenable to the domestic changes entailed in EU policy diffusion may seek beneficial partnerships

elsewhere. Armenia and Belarus have demonstrated this with their membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, which strongly restricts the ability to form a deep, comprehensive trade agreement with the EU or other similar strategic partners (Popescu 2014). As such, it can be said that the EU would then need to attain and employ hegemonic power to reterritorialise or shape the reterritorialisation of these countries.

Nevertheless, the various manifestations of reterritorialisation in formerly Soviet countries are evident. While the EU was developing its transformation and integration mission, the countries in the targeted Eastern Neighbourhood were (re)building their own sociocultural and political ties, as well as re-evaluating their historical ties beyond the Soviet era. The partner countries' own domestic contexts, national identities and ties between and among culture, people and territory limited the EU's normative, 'soft power' approach to Europeanisation as reterritorialisation. While this demonstrates that comprehensive and sustainable deterritorialisation must occur before an external (nonviolent) actor can embed its own norms and values, it also emphasises the power in a country rebuilding and reconstructing its own identity at the national level, even for small states like the Eastern Partnership countries.

In brief, the EU attempted to define and justify its expansionism and power-seeking behaviour as a regional 'force for good' solution to a post-communist problem by relying on its beliefs about western, Global North, and intergovernmental organisational identities. The proposed solution packaged the 'reterritorialisation of power away from the central state' (Stanivukovic 2018: 61) towards the EU/Brussels as a partnership for region-building led by an experienced actor that has already achieved desired objectives (Peterson and Barroso 2008; Delcour 2011, 2015; Simão 2013; Stanivukovic 2018). Given the mission to unite and integrate across the European continent, the region-building aspect is an important component of the EU's Europeanisation formula. It contributes a palatable reason for territorialisation that also supports the 'force for good' narrative about uniting Europe. In other words, it aims to portray the EU and its members as parts of a greater whole – i.e., the European continent including the 'weaker', transitional Eastern Neighbourhood – who must take control of building, shaping and sustaining that whole. Nevertheless, as the next section will discuss, when the region-building framework was initially operationalised, the stipulations on who leads, as well as why and how, were not convincing, and the surrounding justification for this approach unravelled when contested.

REGION-BUILDING AS RETERRITORIALISATION

As mentioned, since the Eastern Partnership was enacted, the outcomes corroborate that the countries the EU aims to transform also influence the EU to adapt (Burlyuk 2017; Lebanidze 2020; Kakachia et al. 2021; Williams 2022; see also Crudu and Eremenko 2012; de Franco et al. 2015). This calls into question whether the EU 'is shaping or shaped by' (Delcour 2011) its targeted partner countries, and interrogates the EU's external norm diffusion. Additionally, it emphasises that the EU conceived of this as a one-way process where only its norms and values are exported, without appreciating that expansion and integration would also import the values, views and beliefs of new member countries and their citizens.

The EU planned its partnership by conditionality to function as a top-down process intended to manage the partner countries' transitions via norm-based, or norm-justified, power (Bickerton 2011). Extant research addresses how the EU explained its region-building behaviour as a mission to unite the European continent and transform neighbouring regions in order to 'create' the neighbours it wants (Stewart 2011: 65) by 'establishing good neighbourly relations' (Simão 2008: 56). It wanted to see what it believed to be its own achievements and attractive features and values reflected in its neighbours as a shared regional experience that supersedes borders (European

Commission 2011). However, as discussed, external views of the EU and its identity were not fully appreciated or accounted for when constructing the mechanisms used to pursue this regional goal (European Commission 2015).

Furthermore, while the EU may identify itself as leading norm selection and managing related policy implementation, there is no true enforcement mechanism regarding political positions or general government behaviour for partner countries. Where administrative enforcement of EU-level policy is concerned, the implementation is in the hands of the state, and relies on national systems to develop mechanisms and operations in order to adopt and comply, or not. Even early descriptions of internal EU community-shaming do not corroborate actual enforcement (Schimmelfennig 2001). On the contrary, the EU's internal structure involves, perhaps unintentionally, mechanisms through which member state interests can constrain EU action. Similarly, the EU's external norm diffusion campaign is dependent on voluntarily compliant followers. These issues press upon the EU's ability to execute partnership by conditionality. As a result, the Eastern Partnership instrument and the EU's 'force for good' justification for its region-building approach has unravelled under the weight of the inconsistencies between norm diffusion and conditionality.

As discussed, the EU's reliance on normative, incentivised conditionality was necessary to construct and affirm the 'good-Other' identity that was furthermore necessary to justify its power-seeking, expansionist behaviour. This formula of incompatible components represents a structural trap where, despite its self-image as a powerful leader, the EU must trust that its members will continue to imitate and reproduce the norms they agreed to when they joined. However, as prior examples explained, state interests and identities, both internally and abroad, pushed back against the EU's imbalanced position, requiring Brussels to seek core adjustments to restabilise.

To be fair, perhaps the intentions of the architects and managers of the European Neighbourhood Policy and its Eastern Partnership were not to be domineering or judgemental. Perhaps, however miscalculated or subjective, the intention of these individuals was indeed to do their job of protecting EU progress and EU citizens, which to them meant defining EU relations with surrounding regions. Nevertheless, scientific enquiry should not begin and end with those subjective statements of intent. It may be good and better that EU behaviour as a political actor differs from past or current hegemonic powers. Yet, the policy mechanisms and political processes it designs and implements do not necessarily corroborate that all lessons learned from history are enforced, and this is deserving of critical examination. Therefore, a firm appreciation of the de- and reterritorialisation processes can aid in curtailing the enticement towards the old, familiar and deeply-rooted beliefs and practices. The processes themselves are not necessarily bad or negative, but rather demand exceptional power to achieve. As such, external actors should be vigilant in their understanding of this if the power to shape a country, its identity and its future should be left to the *demos*, the people.

CONCLUSION

This article argued that the perspective of de- and reterritorialisation is a much-needed missing link to understand what did not work in the Eastern Partnership. Future research can apply this perspective to policy mechanisms implemented in other candidate and partner countries, as well as where regionalism is found in EU development policy. As it stands, the EU's brand of Europeanisation underappreciates the realities of sustainable regional transformation, and as such the realities of de- and reterritorialisation. The core issue in this specific brand lies with power, or lack thereof, and the assumption that its self-image as a powerful force for good is reflected and shared abroad. Additionally, the one-way partnership by conditionality feature confronted established competing identities,

and the challenges of national and regional transitions as prior states re-emerged concurrently with the generation of alternative institutions. As such, an external actor requires hegemonic power to de- and/or reterritorialise these states, including a willingness to sever and prevent the reforming of ties to identity, values, history and culture. The EU possesses neither the capacity nor the will for this, and therefore its external action was left with only its normative positions and generic conditions from which to negotiate for its norms-based regional transformation objectives. Given the constraints of the EU's internal functions and the limitations of its integration platform, reproduction of the EU model abroad was not set up for sustainable success.

Contrary to the EU's regional approach, the unique domestic context of each Eastern Partner interacts differently with partnership by conditionality and its entailed normativity, and has thus produced different partnership outcomes. Eastern Partner governments have at times accepted more attractive alternative partnerships over those the EU proposed in order to attain similar incentives without similar norm compliance. The EU's brand of Europeanisation is then not only insufficient without the necessary degree of power to support it, but is also counterproductive to the achievement of stable, sustainable partnership. Instead, it places unnecessary pressure on the ties between and among a culture, a people, a place and identity, which *opposes* the goal to unite Europe. Overall, these ties persist and have represented domestic and regional obstacles to the EU's normative policy integration platform.

When examined from a critical perspective, the story that the Eastern Partnership tells cautions against the ambition of profound, comprehensive regional transformation, particularly under the pretext of partnership. Regional partnerships and initiatives could be catalysts for stability and peace in tense regions, however, in such contexts it may be best to avoid the designation of a norms-promoter, or identifying as the 'most important normative power' (Peterson and Barroso 2008: 69). Given the shared history and culture combined with persistent conflicting positions, a united, peaceful, stable Europe may require the eradication of the Europeanisation goal. The related beliefs and the mentality they shape breed competition and stir old offenses. Building a top-down mechanism for regional transformation on such a foundation, even if 'hard power' or violence are not an option, is likely to continue producing unintended and unfavourable outcomes.

The EU has struggled to find a balance between its staunch normative positions and a sustainable, attractive partnership mechanism that can also influence countries abroad. Rather than fixate on its own community norms, an amended problem-solution perspective that takes a more honest look at the EU identity and self-image could improve the EU's status in the broader Eastern Neighbourhood and beyond. Specifically, one that can account for the fact that, even if changes to be more EU-ropean have occurred, new members will nevertheless import their unique features along with their accession to the Union. Although this was not fully appreciated or accounted for in the beginning, looking through the lens of reterritorialisation moving forward will show a clear image of region-building as it is, rather than the distorted image of what the EU assumed it could achieve.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Moving from EU-centrisms: Lessons from the Polycrisis for EU studies and Global South Regionalism

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Citation

Sebastião D. and Luciano B.T. (2023). 'Moving from EU-centrisms: Lessons from the polycrisis for EU studies and Global South regionalism' in *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 19 (2): 226-245. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1297>.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

This article reflects on the responses to global crises in Global South regionalisms and the EU, emphasising the need for disrupting research agendas, strengthening disciplinary and theoretical diversity accounts in the EU and comparative regionalism studies in general. The article collects trends and challenges highlighted by the literature on EU and regionalism in Global South from 2008 onwards, aiming to address as main research question: how EU studies and Global South scholarship developed after multiple global crises to contribute to the theorisation renewal and the disruption of research agendas? Stemming from the concept of global polycrisis, two relevant and multidimensional crises are analysed: the 2008 global financial crisis and the migration influxes derived from humanitarian crises. By studying both the EU and Global South experiences, we aim to contribute to move beyond the Eurocentric foundations of the regionalism studies, emphasising that knowledge production needs to be more empirically sensitive to context and social reality.

Keywords

Comparative regionalism; EU studies; Global South; Polycrisis; Eurocentrism; Global financial crisis; Migration crisis

Crises open windows of opportunity for policy and institutional change in regional integration, and they may also trigger the rethinking of the epistemology of EU Studies (EUS) and Global South (GS) Regionalisms. This article aims to assess to what extent the regional responses to global polycrisis faced by the European Union (EU) and other regional organisations in the Global South have impacted the development of diversified theoretical and disciplinary approaches to the study of EU and comparative regionalism and allowed to move for a more disrupting research agenda, addressing the multi and interdisciplinarity growing trends in the social sciences. Definitions in literature are broad and sometimes overlap or contrast, but consensual definitions consider multi and interdisciplinary methods the most adequate to approach complex problems/issues (Newell 2001). By multidisciplinary, we mean the study of an issue from the perspective of two or more disciplines, of which insights are separately conceived, without any integration of knowledge. On the other hand, in interdisciplinary studies disciplinary insights are integrated, research is conducted between disciplines, and knowledge transcends the boundaries of each one, forming a new integrated insight (Menken and Kestra 2016: 31-49; Repko, Szostak and Buchberger 2017: 93-115). We contend the EU and regionalisms in general as complex phenomena that can only be scientifically addressed by multi and interdisciplinarity.

To answer the question of how scholarship developed after global polycrisis contributed to the theorisation and the disruption of regionalism studies, we analyse the reflections brought about by literature on two major crises in European and Global South regions - the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration/humanitarian crisis. With this, we intend to reflect upon the improvement of EU studies and Comparative Regionalism research agendas.

The article is organised as follows: in the first two sections, we go over the mainstream literature of EUS and stress its main limitations and the *centrisms* embedded in the knowledge production practices. In addition, we highlight some of their main theoretical and conceptual contributions of comparative regionalism to disrupt this research agenda. In the third section, we provide an analytical panorama of the scientific literature trends in result of those crises. In the fourth section, we reflect on whether the regionalist studies from both Global North and South regionalisms have surpassed diagnosed constraints and some *centrisms* inherent to mainstream EUS towards the study of global regionalism.

Our empirical study relies on a qualitative analysis of selected articles published in scientific journals and books in the area. In the case of EUS, top ranking journals of the area, according to Jensen and Kristensen (2013) criteria, are analysed, in the period from 2008 to 2021, approaching the two identified crises, and representing the scholarship production in the mainstream EUS. Other journals and books will be used as complementary analysis, to contextualize events and the EU's responses to crises. Given the lack of specialised journals specifically focused on GS regionalisms - despite the existence of journals such as Third World Quarterly, and area studies outlets which focused on specific (sub)regions, for instance, Latin America, Southern Africa, and Southeast Asia - the empirical assessment of regional crises in the GS will go over literature (high ranked articles and book chapters) within the same time frame on the two crises.

ACADEMIC TRENDS IN EUROPEAN UNION STUDIES

EUS have been the result of the (re)construction of discourses and narratives, bordering subjects, theoretical views and disciplines that configure the mainstream studies (Rosamond 2016: 32; Manners and Whitman 2016: 4). Although neofunctionalism has been a predominant theoretical account at the beginning, studies explaining European regionalist phenomenon have reached diversity, with

several disciplines gaining theoretical property and approaching different objects of study, with a (re)construction of a series of social and institutional representations of past discourses. Within this process, we argue that EUS have been suffering from three kinds of centrism, that somehow limit the scientific development of the area and the usefulness to address European empirical challenges. The three *centrisms* are: (1) Eurocentrism, which is more commonly pointed out, (2) disciplinary and theoretical centrism and (3) elite-centrism as object of study.

EUS are commonly accused of Eurocentrism, meaning that studies are biased by the almost exclusive European or Western origins of the research, thus reproducing historical and structural relations of political and economic power and hegemony. In this regard, academic analysis on European integration comes almost always from the inside, and the "EU should be looked from the outside too" (Manners 2016: 10). In fact, "mainstreaming has done more than anything to deal with EU studies' 'n = 1 problem' and has helped to ensure that the study of the EU has not become ghettoized as a self-contained and insular sub-field" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 30). In addition, US and UK based scholarship dominates the academic debates in the field (Rosamond 2007: 8). On the editorial level, the *status quo* remains the same, with main journals in the field with North American or European origins, as well as the respective editors, with English being the *lingua franca* (Jensen and Kristensen 2013: 13, 14). The result is an exclusionary construction of scientific knowledge (Rosamond 2016). Even when political science started to offer alternative analysis to the founding International Relations theories, it did it using the theoretical frameworks from American political science. The American positivist-oriented approach is also present in neofunctionalism, which is proficient in explaining and predicting regional integration concentrated in the analysis of actors and events, but neglects accounts from "systemic context", dispersed in the amalgamation of historical, cultural, and social national political backgrounds of Europe (Kaiser, 1971). With such an exclusionary paradigm, important insights for knowledge may have been lost, which also culminates in a narrowing of the disciplinary and theoretical pillars of the EUS, which supports the second centrism.

Disciplinary and theoretical centrism correlates discipline with theory to argue that EUS has been developed around a few theories which consequently derive from limited disciplinary fields. As the foundational theories of European integration, grounded in the IR field (Rosamond 2006: 450), neofunctionalism alongside intergovernmentalism have been considered the most sounded explanations of regional integration in Europe. But from the 1960s until the 1990s, academic literature diversified objects of study and theoretical frameworks, either approaching the European Community (EC)/EU as a political system, the transnational political dynamics, or the domestic influences of integration, and the international and global role of the EU. Constructivism emerged as an alternative to the realism of IR, tempering rationalist studies (Checkel 1999; Parsons 2002; Christiansen, Jorgensen and Wiener 1999). Under the hat of political science, systems theory started to be applied to study the EC/EU (Lindberg 1967; Scharpf 1999; Schmidt 2013), and in the 90s, comparative politics theorised the EU as a political system (Hix and Bjorn 2011). Along with it, governance studies emerged, to explain the EU as a multilevel governance polity (Hooghe and Marks 2001). Institutions have gained renewed interest in different scientific fields, and new institutionalism developed as a cross-cutting stream subdivided into historical and rational variants (Armstrong and Bulmer 1998). Already in the 1970s (Scheingold 1970), the study of consequences of European integration in domestic politics developed into the Europeanisation literature in the 1990s, evolving as an important subarea within EUS (Ladrech 1994; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Green Cowles, Caporaso and Risse 2001). Moreover, the rising importance of national politics to the EU opened the end of the permissive consensus era, boosting post-functionalist approaches (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

Nevertheless, the theoretical evolution of EUS has been circumscribed mainly to the field of political science, constituting what we label as “mainstream studies”. These are mainly composed of theoretical debates around dichotomic and “rival” perspectives: intergovernmentalism / neofunctionalism; international relations / comparative politics; constructivism / rationalism – that have been dominant in the top scientific journals of the field (Manners and Whitman 2016; Rosamond 2016).

Of course, science is made of the same structural axioms where core theories are grounded, making, therefore, the epistemology of each scientific area, and the (re)construction of discourses is part of it. But the question here is that if EUS are supposed to be disciplinary diverse, with the top scientific journals assuming it, must be open to contributions of several social science fields (Rosamond 2007:11). Yet, journals focused on EU studies, such as *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *European Union Politics* and *West European Politics*, are very much circumscribed to the IR, Comparative Politics and Public Administration (Jensen and Kristensen 2013). However, the old rationalist debates around the neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist rivalry can be too simplistic (Rosamond 2006: 449). In fact, they reduce the European integration and the EU (after 1993) dynamics of power and politics to an *eliticised* conception of regionalism. Furthermore, explanations provided by those theoretical frameworks always correspond to a partial selection of the EU reality. The 1990s revitalised this debate, with a reconstruction of events, excluding alternative approaches, limiting the development of EUS (Manners and Whitman 2016: 6). Even when comparative politics challenged IR in theorising integration, it did it facing the EU as a familiar phenomenon, with a resource to already known theoretical tools, disregarding the EU as a theoretical novelty (Rosamond 2006: 451), with comparative exercises always around the same objects, unitary states or federal systems (Manners and Whitman 2016: 5).

Even the governance approach was developed mainly around the political science field, with the multi-level governance, europeanisation, and legitimacy/ democratic deficit studies. Although assessments of the economy and the law are found in the work of Jensen and Kristensen (2013) as sub-disciplines of EUS, they are placed in an isolated segment of journals, with little connections with the core network of the top journals, from which disciplines such as history and sociology have been excluded. This leads to the exclusion of some works that are deemed less important or pertinent yet go beyond the conventional methods. Rosamond (2016: 31) gives the example of Etzioni (1965), who combines a sociological approach to IR and treats integration as part of a historical political context. Some studies have called attention to the rise of dissident voices in EUS, highlighting the potential contributions coming from feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to disrupt the ways scholars theorise Europe and the EU (Manners and Whitman 2016; Kronsell 2016; Borg and Diez 2016; Kinnvall 2016), but much work is still needed to break the glass ceiling of what constitutes mainstream EUS.

Being constructed around theoretical dichotomies and subject to narrow disciplinary research agendas, scientific discourse in the case of EUS incurs other dangers: creating pseudo-theoretical novelty and overlapping analytical perspectives. Regarding the first concern, the foundational EUS theories may already provide explanations and frameworks of understanding for current integration issues, excluding the need of new conceptualisations or theories. Those explanations may not be so obvious in the core rationale of the theory, but they are explored or embedded in the causal and consequential inferences inherent to it. For example, while neofunctionalism predicts that pressing effects for integration are made by economic corporations and institutional elites, in a first stage, it also envisages that a cyclical effect reaches domestic politics and interest groups (Haas 1958: 113-239),

opening prospects for the politicisation of European integration and thus the end of an elite issue (Schmitter 1969). This lays down premises for the multi-level governance and Europeanisation studies, that despite having built their own field of disciplinary coherence, are not provided with absolute originality regarding the object of study. That's why a deeper and broader reading of classical theories is advised (Rosamond 2006: 455), to avoid simplistic and stereotyped understandings, that may pose no need for new theoretical frameworks. For example, liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and neofunctionalism theories, in essence, describe the same dynamics but looking at the picture from different perspectives. LI claims that the result of intergovernmental bargaining is the conciliation of national interests, resulting from the aggregation of domestic preferences, plus the possible response of the integrated institutional system that is conditioned by the liberal international interdependence. Hence, it's worth asking, isn't the conditioning of liberal international interdependence the same as the pressure of transnational economic corporations for integration postulated by neofunctionalism? And aren't the aggregated domestic interests the result of the spillover of institutional elites to national politics, that neofunctionalism also postulates?

The third centrism is a consequence of the two previous ones. It is worth asking, which interests do mainstream studies represent? In the last years, the gap between theory and reality in the EUS has increased (Manners and Whitman 2016: 4), something that seems to be related to the disciplinary and theoretical centrism. As said, scientific discourse is institutionally and socially constructed, and this is halfway to disconnect the objects of study from the multiple interests of the real world. If one looks at the main theories or concepts of study resulting from the development of EUS (Table 1), the conclusion is that the majority focuses on the elite structure of the EU ecosystem, being the general interest of the citizens and minorities misrepresented. This is to say that the targets of EU integration are the least represented in EUS, and the theories that arise from the scholarship have no connection with the lived experiences of the regional communities (Munford 2020: 4). "There needs to be acknowledged that the empirical agenda of EU studies has hidden in plain sight the neoliberal preferences for market economics over the everyday socio-economic concerns of ordinary EU and non-EU citizens" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 35).

Table 1

Theory/concept of study	Object of study
Neofunctionalism	EU institutions, corporate interests; political elites
Intergovernmentalism	EU institutions; governments
The EU as a political system	Institution's competences and power; "constitutional" aspects; politics-political parties
Multilevel Governance	EU institutions; EU agencies; national governmental institutions; regional governmental institutions; national and transnational corporate interests; national and transnational citizens interests
Europeanisation studies	National politics (parties, elections, decision-making); national policies; national public institutions; private corporations; citizens' mobilisation; public opinion.
Politicisation studies	Political parties, public opinion; communication;

Source: the authors, derived from main theories/concepts developed in EU studies

Nevertheless, the multiple crises happening since 2008 have affected mainly the under-represented objects of study: citizens, mostly the economically and socially excluded ones, and minorities. On the other hand, by questioning the success of European integration, these crises have posed new challenges to scholars, while boosting a considerable amount of new research in EUS. Assuming EUS as a form of

regionalism studies, this article aims to analyse scholarship responses to the crises and provide insights about continuation of elite-centred perspectives or if the theoretical *acquis* resulting from the study of crises have altered the previous paradigm of EUS.

SCHOLARLY TRENDS OF REGIONALISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Considering that theories of regional integration are mostly translations of European experiences, scholars have put more emphasis on more contextualised parameters to understand other regions of the world, especially in the Global South. Since the 2000s, a growing criticism of Eurocentrism has been observed in regionalism studies (Acharya 2012; Söderbaum 2013; Briceño-Ruiz 2018). The successive crises faced by the EU since 2008 and the Brexit process have raised questions about the EU as a “successful” project, and a model for other regional organisations around the world.

Comparative regionalism as a research agenda has been important to this questioning. It features three main dimensions: “(a) an empirical focus on regional identity formation as a way of distinguishing between autonomous regions, (b) decentring Europe as the main reference point of comparative regionalism, and (c) defining what is truly “comparative” about comparative regionalism” (Balogun 2021: 2). The Comparative Regionalism research agenda has aimed to both avoid over-contextualising regional cases and overgeneralizing theoretical assumptions, favouring a mid-way approach to assess regionalist initiatives across the globe. Furthermore, there is a need to insert European integration theories in a comparative perspective, considering that the EU integration is not necessarily a *sui generis* case or a referential model, but simply a comparable case of regionalism.

In fact, there is already much literature on regionalism in other parts of the world, published in non-EU-centred journals that have developed territorial and non-territorial conceptions of regions, region-building and regionness (Riggirozzi 2012; Weixing 2013; Levine and Nagar 2016; Chakma 2018; Deciancio and Quiliconi 2020). They have contributed to providing new understandings of the emergence of regions in these areas through an analysis of state-society complexes and the search for autonomy, development and sovereignty. Studies in these contexts not only provide diverse conceptualisations of regionalism, but they can also facilitate dialogues between studies in regionalism, while acknowledging the importance of knowledge production in and from the Global South.

The empirical insights from the Global South have provided new theorisations that can be helpful for comparative regionalism and especially EUS beyond mainstream theories. Progress has been made in constructing parameters for comparing formal regional arrangements (Acharya and Johnston 2006; Jetschke et al. 2021) and the influence of extra-regional actors (Haastrup 2013; Fioramonti and Mattheis 2015; Gardini 2021), but more can be done to set out parameters for defining the performance, as success or failure of regionalism tends to be comparative, materially, and normatively speaking. Besides, it must be recognised that regions are not isolated in the world and regional organisations do not emerge from the vacuum. Therefore, comparative regionalism studies have accounted for the role of interregionalism (North-South and South-South) and the dissemination of institutional standards and designs (Hoffmann 2016).

In empirical terms - and in contrast to the works on EU regional integration path, studies in Global South regionalism have for example demonstrated that supranational integration is not the most used and desirable model in the world. Moreover, they also show that, even though several regionalist projects have aimed to achieve regional economic integration, economic interdependence has not been a constitutive feature of regionalism across the world (exceptions are the EU and

ASEAN) (Ramanzini and Luciano 2020). Also, regionalism goes beyond solving/reacting to functional problems, which leads to the importance of socialisation factors and construction of regional identity (regioness) (Riggirozzi 2012). Finally, in order to better understand the functioning of regionalism in the Global South, one must go beyond the textual content of Treaties/Protocols and official declarations, which are mostly an expression of Declaratory (Jenne et al. 2017) and Rhetorical regionalisms (Söderbaum and Brolin 2016).

Nonetheless, our assessment of scholarly works on regional responses to crisis will highlight that overcoming the Eurocentrism of studies on regionalism in comparative regionalism is still more a demand than a reality, despite the emergence of relevant works focusing on decentring regionalist studies. When possible and relevant, incorporating the EU trajectory as a comparable case may also be a productive step (Vleuten and Hoffmann 2010). This is crucial for cross-regional comparisons (also called Comparative Area Studies) aim to build bridges between area studies specialists and generalist theorists (Köllner et al. 2018). However, broadening the scope of the field of both the EU and comparative regionalism studies is much more than not taking the EU as a reference model, but it is also about increasing our understanding of regionalism in the Global South.

SCHOLARSHIP RESPONSES TO THE POLYCRISIS IN THE GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH REGIONALISMS

Drawing on the concept of global polycrisis as crises entangled occurring in multiple global systems, that interact and produce harms greater than the sum of isolated crises (Lawrence, Janzwood and Homer-Dixon 2022), this section will evaluate scholarship responses to two crises: the 2008 financial crisis and the migration crisis, to demonstrate their responses as covered by EUS and Comparative Regionalism literature. On the one hand, we understand these two crises as global polycrisis, given the scale of their impact, yet their impact is differentiated. Critically speaking, these events have also been framed by political and economic elites - especially in the West - as 'crises' and not simply as 'issues'. "Crises are constituted discursively by both policy actors and academics" (Manners and Rosamond 2018: 28).

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis

Triggered in 2007 by a huge contraction in liquidity in global markets, global financial crisis emerged in the USA in 2008 as a credit crunch and subprime crisis, which due to the deep global economic inter-dependency spread out to other regions of the globe, spilling over into a banking crisis, a sovereign debt crisis and finally affecting real economy with high rates of unemployment, particularly among youth workers, contraction of public expenditure and subsequent social exclusion. Economies in several regions experienced long periods of near-stagnation, with global financial crisis being considered the worst economic downturn since the 1929-30 great recession, having also political implications.

The effects of the 2008 global financial crisis led to distinct regional responses. Most studies on the impact of the financial crisis on regionalism in non-Western regions have focused on the case of Asia, especially in East Asia. In this sense, scholars have emphasised that the crisis hit East Asia in a context of increasing regional financial cooperation in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 (Katada 2011; Grimes 2012), and that Asian countries have pushed for responses at both the global and regional levels:

Although the first order response of Asian countries was to join the broader global effort to contain financial freefall at the world level, there emerged a second order response at the level of regional institutional building,

specifically to “multilateralize” the Chiang Mai Initiative, and to develop a regional trust fund to help strengthen Asian bond markets (Chin 2014: 39).

Regional responses from other parts of the Asian continent have been less visible, since financial cooperation mechanisms in regions such as South Asia are more fragmented and episodic (Tripathi 2010).

In Latin America, analyses seen in the period have presented a distinct outlook. ‘Although financial conditions have deteriorated, particularly since September 2008, the financial shock has been less severe than during the two previous crises’ (Ocampo 2009: 703). Nonetheless, studies have stressed that trade restrictions - particularly border measures - adopted by Latin American countries have affected intraregional trade, especially in South America, bringing about tensions within the subregion’s two traditional economic blocs, Mercosur, and the Andean Community (ECLAC 2009). Studies at that point have often focused on a policy-recommendation approach, urging for stronger and pragmatic intra-regional cooperation among LAC countries as an alternative to reduce the economic effects of the global financial crisis (ECLAC 2009; Ocampo 2009). However, the literature has pointed out that cleavages regarding the economic models adopted by Latin American countries - ranging from neoliberal policies, neo-developmental, to Socialist/Bolivarian ones - have prevented the region from constructing effective economic forums to protect the region from the crisis (Guillén 2011).

On the other side, fewer assessments were seen in the case of African regionalism, highlighting not only its marginal position in the global economy, but also its position in knowledge making. Some attention was given to the recurrent financial constraints of African Regional Economic Communities, which significantly restrained their capacity to implement regional policies aiming to reduce the economic effects of the financial crisis on the continent (African Development Bank Group 2009). Besides, mention is made of the varying impact of the crisis on African subregions. For instance, due to its stronger participation in global trade flows, the SADC region was expected to become more vulnerable to the global financial crisis (Zampini 2008).

In the EU, economic and social consequences of the global financial crisis were particular and severe, specifically in the Eurozone, with soaring unemployment rates and social exclusion. Due to the specificities of financial and economic governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), the reflections of the global financial crisis in the EU have transformed into the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis. Unemployment reached 12% in 2013 in the Eurozone, while in Portugal and Greece it went up to 17 and 27%, respectively. In young people, it reached 56% in Spain and 62% in Greece (Eurostat 2013). This was the result not only of the financial impacts of the north American originated crisis, but also to all Eurozone members that recorded GDP growth (Hodson 2017: 121-122).

Regarding EUS, the literature released following the Eurozone debt crisis continues strong in the traditional theoretical frameworks, especially in journals stemming from the political science and IR areas, investigating the influence of intergovernmental power in bargaining and decision-making (Hennessy 2014; Finke and Bailer 2019) and the observance of the neofunctionalist rational (Braun 2015: 422) in the institutional deepening of the EMU. This, in a certain aspect, not only shows the nature of empirical institutional regionalist responses to the crisis, as is also the reflex of an historical theoretical liability, that is part of a constellation of power monopoly of European elite actors governing the Eurozone.

In the field of economic studies, scholars identified the inefficient initial structural design of EMU as causes of the Eurozone debt crisis, linking the economic dichotomies

that it generated to the political cleavages formed in the attempt to find policy responses (Copelovitch, Friedman and Walter 2016; Stockhammer 2016, Krugman 2012). Some economy scholars followed a critical approach to the EMU economic policy, particularly due to the austerity measures responses in a one size fits all manner, creating huge and long-term economic and social consequences (Vlachos and Bitzenis 2019: 1-3), that originated significant political impact, also studied by literature.

In this sense, a great increment of theoretical production based on the politicisation and europeanisation studies is observed, contributing to provide these theoretical frameworks a more prominent role in the EUS. Europeanisation and politicisation studies had a significant increase in EUS scholarship following the Treaty of Maastricht, which unlocked the potential of the electoral basis and political parties as relevant actors in the European integration. Until then, such assumption has been implicitly secondary in the theorisation of EUS.

It was the tremendous economic and social impact of the Eurozone crisis that had definitely awakened citizenship awareness for the domestic consequences of the EU policies, shortening distance between electorate and institutional EU elites. Literature elaborating on that is a significant contribution to consolidating post-functional studies. Works pointing out that EU integration can restructure the way parties and voters position themselves in economic issues (Katsanadiou and Otjes 2015) on pro and anti-EU attitudes and according to territorial preferences regarding EU policies (Kriesi 2016; Hutter and Kriesi 2019) are an example. Some studies in the scope of politicisation of the Eurozone crisis attempted to find out the formation of counter-narratives to EU economic policies in the elite discourses, that challenged the predominant ordoliberal economic political rational, notwithstanding concluding the mismatch between the existence of those counter-narratives and the EU policy outputs. This incongruity between delivered policies and electoral demands are explained by the constellation of power actors (Kutter 2020), in the framework of the intergovernmentalist theoretical ground (Graziano and Hartlapp 2019), reflecting the asymmetry of intergovernmental power in the EU. One sees here the rebuilding of traditional theoretical *acquis* to provide explanations for the dealignment of the EU with democratic grounds.

Democracy approaches are directly or indirectly inspired in systemic theories applied to the study of the EU, conceiving it inherently as a political system, and providing ground for normative orientations. Normative and accountability studies elaborating on the democratic implications of the Eurozone crisis come in this line, reinvigorating the critical approach of the democratic deficit in the EU. Studies in this sense find out that while the gain of power by the non-legitimized supranational or intergovernmental EU institutions tends to aggravate the democratic deficit, the politicization of EU issues seems to attenuate its technocratic nature, although politicization was also brought about by Euroscepticism growth, which is an indicator of legitimacy concerns (Kratochvíl and Sychra 2019). As said before, the perception and impact of the Eurozone crisis in population gained special focus on research after the crisis, demonstrating the negative effects of bailouts on satisfaction of citizens and turnout, proving that economic policy outcomes have a stronger influence on satisfaction with democracy and electoral turnout than quality of the democratic process (Schraff and Schimmelfennig 2019).

Some studies call for an historical comparative exercise that argues the potentiality of economic crisis to threaten democratic regimes, providing the pertinence for recalling other disciplines as history, to fully understand the EU contemporary dynamics. The work of Arnemann, Konrad and Potrafke (2021) is such an example.

Relying in economic psychology, it tries to understand if memories of the crisis evidence systematic differences between borrower and lender countries.

In sum, a significant part of the literature produced after the crisis reflect the historical liability of hegemonic theoretical models in the EUS, focusing on the study of institutional and political elites, and thus conceiving it as a top-down process mainly. Nevertheless, the social and political impacts of the crisis turned it difficult to ignore bottom-up dynamics, which were addressed by scholars with an expressive presence of europeanisation and politicization studies. What is evident in this trend of EUS is that theoretical production has been more reactive than predictive in the EU, and the question is whether knowledge construction can side the logic of institutional building or the other way around. Whether it a reflection or not of this scholarship trends after the crisis, the fact is that EU political and institutional actors have been putting more frequently and emphatically in the political agenda the debate on democratic deficit and the need to democratically legitimize the EU.

Regional Migration

While regionalism studies have recently put strong emphasis on assessing immigration in the Mediterranean, and their effects on the EU and Member States' policies and politics, less attention has been paid - especially in English-language publications - to migration influxes in the Global South, especially the humanitarian crisis of Venezuela and its migratory implications to South America (Brumat 2020). This is particularly striking as most of the international migration flows occur and directly impact countries of the Global South, which led to the increasing engagement of regional organisations of the Global South in the construction of regional migration policies (Schneiderheinze et al. 2018). Despite much attention being given to the EU's comprehensive model of regional mobility (Zaun 2018; Servent 2018; Menéndez 2016), other regional bodies such as ECOWAS and Mercosur have also established broad regional policies aiming to foster free movement (Brumat, 2020; Arhin-Sam et al., 2022). In fact, ECOWAS was the very first regional project to set up a regional policy on that matter, with the signature of the Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment in 1979. When it comes to South America, significant human mobility policies were set out in the 2000s, particularly the Mercosur's Residence Agreement, which was implemented by most South American nations.

Interestingly, studies such as Brumat's (2020), contrast the EU and US more securitised approaches towards irregular migration with South American experience of putting more emphasis on its human rights dimension and the 'right to migrate', favouring migrant regularisation instead of incarceration/deportation. Nonetheless, migration governance in some cases such as Asia has received less attention, given the low participation of Asian countries in international migration conventions and the prevalence of bilateral and informal consultation mechanisms employed by Asian nations to address this topic, such as the Bali Process, the Colombo Process and the Abu Dhabi Process, which have been criticised due to their non-transparent and selective approaches (Shivakoti 2020).

Regarding EU-focused studies on the migration crisis, not only do we notice elite-centred responses by the EU, but also elite-centred approaches as objects of study in scholarly works. Some studies adopt a critical perspective, with the securitisation/humanitarianisation dialectic in migration and borders management (Moreno-Lax 2018), others focus on the politicisation, electoral impact and political preferences following the refugee crisis (Van der Brug, Harteveld 2021; Conti, di Mauro and Memoli 2019), on the assessment of responses to the crisis and policy analysis (Grech 2017; Angeloni 2019; Trauner 2016; Morsut and Kruke 2018). Contribution of the crisis for integration is another perspective found (Scipioni 2018),

with the use of the theoretical framework of traditional integration theories (Niemann and Speyer 2018; Zaun 2018). Discourse analysis and political conflict (Maricut-Akbik 2021; Wolf and Ossewaarde 2018) are other perspectives identified in the mainstream literature on EU studies.

In the Africa context, the literature has tended to focus on the characterisation of a continent of large-scale forced migration, identifying the root causes of involuntary displacement (Bayar and Aral 2019; Schmidt et al. 2019; Nyaoro 2019; Mpedi 2019; Mudawi 2019), and the precarity of protection of displaced people according to the international protection standards (Mpedi 2019: 80-84; Schmidt et al. 2019: 5-7). Towards this context, some literature argues that the EU externalisation approaches of asylum management raises concerns regarding human rights compliance (Scherrer 2019; Fotaky 2019), denouncing the resurgence of the "fortress Europe" idea, that falls at risk of breaching international conventions, as some third countries fall short of the criteria to be considered a safe country for an asylum seeker.

Although there's a close interdependency of migration in Africa with asylum policy in the EU, and the perspective of the externalisation of asylum management is studied, EU-Africa relations in migration policies have been usually approached separately and dichotomously, considering the EU as the active actor *versus* the passive role of Africa, as the target continent of EU policies. Although this is an important and empirical reasoned perspective, it urges studies that face Africa as a potential region with agency on international migration and refugee protection policies, in order that Europe and Africa are regarded by principle as equal to equal actors in the research.

DISRUPTING EU STUDIES AND GLOBAL SOUTH REGIONALISMS AGENDA

By examining how scholarly works have assessed regional developments in European and GS regionalisms in times of polycrisis, we aimed to respond to whether the multiple crises faced by the EU and regions in the Global South led to theoretical renewal and more diverse disciplinary dimensions of knowledge production about regionalisms and the overcoming of some centrism's previously identified.

Our analysis on how the 'crises' have been covered in the GS aimed to contribute to the attempt to move regionalism studies beyond EU/Eurocentrism (1). By equally observing regional crises in both the EU and the GS, we aim to move the comparative regionalism research agenda towards a more de-centred and non-Western approach, favouring the understanding of regionalism as a comprehensive and global phenomenon. Despite the predominance of studies on EU reactions to the polycrisis, Europe was not the only region that passed through turbulent times and achieved regional responses. In fact, some regions - such as Latin America - have learned through crises that their path is not/should not necessarily be the same as Europe:

Apparently, the time has come to recognize that the region's integration model is far removed from the European one, and will remain so for a long time. This in no way signifies that the region should renounce goals as ambitious as those attained in Europe. What it does mean is that proposals for integration in the region should be consistent with the real strengths and weaknesses of the existing integration schemes. The European route is not necessarily the only way to move forward on regional integration, and the sooner the realities of Latin American and Caribbean integration are made explicit, the easier it will be to agree on the road towards deepening it. (ECLAC 2009: 83)

While for EUS' scholars the focus of the 2008 financial crisis is more on understanding the balance of the market's interests and political institutions' dynamics of power, for GS studies the question is about understanding the relation with a hegemonic global

economy in a continuous struggle process for development (Deciancio 2020). This difference requires a primacy for considering contextual differences that should be structuring different empirical objects and theoretical frameworks. Although, it's important that scholars go beyond the structural historical insight of their region and essay a look from the outside.

This requires certain disruption in terms of a redefinition of research agendas, by, for example, considering longitudinal changes that regions themselves have overcome, and diversifying objects of study. In response to the Eurozone debt crisis, EUS somehow have strengthened its focus on bottom-up dynamics of power influence, but not significantly changed the focus of study in the mainstream literature. An example of this is that the gap between the EU institutional responses and the demanding reality of the most affected by the crises was not filled by scholarship. If one observes that in the financial and refugee crises the responses of the EU were mainly elite-centred, scholarly outputs were also predominantly focused on institutional and political elites as objects of study, despite some exceptions and the growing trend of europeanisation and politicisation studies. Hence, if comparative regionalism can advance through lessons from European regionalism, it has as much to learn with the EU leftovers and mistakes, and not only with its achievements.

Thus, there is a need for topical comparisons to fully understand the performance of regionalism both in the Global North and South in dealing with crises and delivering regional public policies, in order to fill the gap between theory and reality. In contrast to the theoretical and disciplinary centrism (2) of EUS - which remains majorly based on the traditional disciplinary trends (political science and IR) - analyses on the regional responses in the GS regionalism seemed much less theoretical and more focused on contextual and policy analysis from the reactions of GS agents in the crises evaluated. This is aligned with some of the assumptions of Comparative Regionalism and Cross-regional analyses - which tend to favour more context-sensitive observations - but it falls short of their expectations on the development of mid-range conceptual frameworks, considered as central aspects of theory-building. A middle-ground approach is desirable, and one may find room for mutual learning between EU and Global South studies.

Whilst EUS have been too much centred on theoretical development and legitimising a predictive theory of integration, it has neglected contextual analysis and prescription-driven policy analysis, in line with what Manners and Rosamond (2018) already diagnosed, something that is predominant in non-EU regionalism studies. Moreover, the incorporation of dissent scholarship, such as historical materialism, critical theory and post-structural perspectives (Manners and Whitman 2016), would contribute to a more multi and interdisciplinary authenticity of EUS. In turn, the complement of contextual analysis with a theoretical stance by GS regionalism studies could contribute to the development of more solid and scientifically grounded interpretations.

However, the empirical assessment of major developments derived from the crises beyond Europe also highlights the same trend of elite-centrism (3), given their main attention to elite-driven framing of contemporary dynamics as 'crises', which ultimately shape the subsequent responses to the crises. As shown in the previous section, most of the assessments of crises faced by the EU are centred on the policies and the polity itself, with the prevalence of policy-making and institutional implications. Nevertheless, one must recognise that there was a significant increase in europeanisation and politicisation studies, focused on public opinion and electoral preferences, as well as some works on critical economic and social impacts in the EU following the crises in mainstream journals. Meanwhile, studies on regional reactions to the two crises in the GS have also concentrated their attention on the responses

coming from national - and sometimes regional - political agents, particularly on the dynamics and interactions between national governments, also marginalising the agency of economic and social actors within the crises, merely treating them as implicit victims of the negative effects of the crises analysed. This means that the way knowledge is produced continues to be hegemonic in both EU and GS studies, and that EUS remains to some extent paradigmatic for comparative regionalism.

While we have acknowledged that EUS have paid particular attention to institutional-building analysis, we also contend that an excessive institutionalist focus has been exclusionist of other approaches, reinforcing elite-centrism as an object of study. The EU as an object of study must be considered as something beyond the institutional and power relationships to decentre within itself. Likewise, GS regionalism studies must decentre from EUS as a paradigmatic standpoint. If the definition of research agendas and theoretical development is dependent on the degree of institutionalisation of regional cooperation, the decentralisation of comparative regionalism studies becomes unlikely (Chakma 2018) and biased by the beginning. Scholarly works need to be more empirically sensitive and go beyond the scope of institutional responses to both the EU and GS regional practices to fully understand global and multidimensional challenges.

A more proactive and prospective research agenda that considers the extra-institutional dimensions of regionalism must be built. This leads us to the rich scholarly debate of what to consider a region. If one considers the constitution of regions based on the degree of institutional cooperation, this will automatically bias research, either leading to euro-centred GS or elite-centred EUS. On the other hand, understanding regions as something beyond a trade-inspired model of integration and as patterns of relations and interactions at various levels, including inter-state cooperation (Riggirozzi 2012, Chakma 2018), has the potential to turn the literature more disciplinary and theoretically inclusive. Disciplinary diversity can have a role in comparative regionalism studies towards a more empirical and less theory-driven research, leading scholars to ask research questions that concern the communities of the region (Munford 2020:3). Another interesting suggestion is made by Favell and Guiraudon (2009) towards the development of a sociological empirical driven agenda of EU research. Moreover, and specifically concerning the EUS, a more normative-oriented research agenda would also have the potential to approach non-elite objects of studies (Manners 2009; Manners and Rosamond 2018).

CONCLUSIONS

This article aimed to contribute to the literature of EUS, regionalism and especially comparative regionalism by comprehensively identifying the disciplinary developments within the analyses of two topical crises faced by European and the GS regionalisms, namely the 2008-9 financial crisis and the humanitarian crisis derived from recent migration flows. By assessing how scholarship has understood these crises and the responses of regional actors in Europe and the GS, we aimed to broaden the awareness of regionalism as a global and less EU-centric phenomenon. While topical studies on the impact of the crises on the EU have presented more theoretically driven implications - demonstrating the theoretical centrism of EUS - assessments of responses from the GS seem to be more empirically and contextually focused. Moreover, even though the crises substantially affected ordinary citizens, with huge social consequences, mainstream EUS scholarship - as well as studies examining developments in the GS - continues to focus on elite-based processes and responses from institutional and political elites.

We have argued that these crises need to be seen as multidimensional to be fully understood by scholarship. In fact, they cannot be seen as geographically separate, as they are interconnected, leading to the global scope of the concept of polycrisis,

which can be a powerful concept for disrupting research agendas. Furthermore, polycrisis cannot be fully assessed through single-disciplinary approaches, which necessitates the inclusion of diverse disciplinary perspectives in future regionalist studies. This stems from asking unfamiliar questions at the outset of a research project, e.g. is economic interdependence or trade-led integration essential to the study of regionalism? What about other areas of interstate cooperation? In addition, more inductive rather than deductive research projects would contribute to a theoretical and disciplinary decentering of European experiences within regionalism studies, which could be seen as a step forward in moving comparative regionalism away from the hegemonic standpoint of the EU.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project receives funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Grant Agreement No 101034324.

CEIS20 is funded by national funds through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., in the scope of the project UIDB/00460/2020.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Unlearning and Relearning Europe: Theoretical and Practical Approaches to Decolonising European Studies Curricula

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Citation

Evans, A M-F. and Petropoulou Ionescu, D. (2023). 'Unlearning and Relearning Europe: Theoretical and Practical Approaches to Decolonizing European Studies Curricula', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*. 19 (2): 246-261. [https://doi.org/ 10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1298](https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1298).

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

Discussion on decolonising European Studies (ES) curriculum has gained traction in academic and activist circles, partly responding to calls to decolonise curricula that have brought attention to the 'whitewashing' of history and the critical lack of BIPOC scholarship taught in higher education syllabi. Current efforts to decolonise ES as a field of study have largely relied on these aspects. While this is undoubtedly an important step, many ES scholars have expressed a lack of clarity as to how this rhetoric can be practically adopted in their courses without compromising the central subject matter – Europe. This paper responds to calls to decolonise ES, by introducing different theoretical and practical approaches that educational practitioners within the field can draw from in the building of curricula.

Keywords

European Studies; Curriculum; Education; Decolonisation

'While knowledge can never be total, the selections we make have consequences for its ordering' (Bhabra 2017: 28).

The decolonial discourse around higher education first emerged as a part of the broader 20th Century decolonial movements active in South America, Asia, and the African continent (Mamdani 1995). Decolonial efforts challenged colonialism and imperialism through political protest and mobilization, organized military revolt, and finally, intellectual and ideological resistance. These efforts rose against the romantic rhetoric of the empire's civilizing mission. They fought hard to resist particular modes of knowledge production that placed Europe and America at the epicentre of world history, thought, and development. Recognizing this, decolonial movements and discourses of the 21st century build on the rich and diverse body of early colonial resistance and decolonial thought to provoke epistemological questions on the production of knowledge and its reproduction (Gatsheni 2019). At their core, these movements aim to interrupt and interrogate a Eurocentric canon often presented both implicitly or explicitly as universal, truthful, and innocent. In this vein, a key background assumption in this paper is that the histories of Western global domination have affected and structured what we in the academy acknowledge as legitimate and authoritative knowledge. This includes, but is not limited to, the voices we choose to integrate and methods we use in teaching this knowledge (SOAS 2018).

The specific decolonial context this article centers on, is the call for decolonisation within the university, given its importance as a place for knowledge production. Universities have played a historic role as key infrastructure of empires and shying away from this history only deters and prevents us from having important conversations about the implications of such a role on knowledge production in the past, present, and future (Bhabra, 2018). This history of the university as an institution is inseparable from power relations that still affect what and how we learn. Consequently, the call for decolonisation in the context of the university discusses this legacy and its perpetuation in today's higher education curriculum.

While these decolonial movements have been intrinsic to the proliferation of decolonial discourse in the university, we lack consensus on how to approach and redress these issues. As a result, mainstream decolonisation movements focus their efforts on justifications for decolonial action with most attention being placed on the inclusion of BIPOC scholars or literature for the Global South. While this is a first step in this effort, diversifying reading lists is not the end-all and be-all of decolonising the curriculum. In fact, the impact of empire is much deeper and complex than that – it affects how we understand knowledge acquisition and production and has shaped some of the most basic concepts that help us understand societies. This lacking attention on the methodological approaches and theoretical discourses, which are central to decolonial transformations, is part and parcel of the widening interstice within the contemporary decolonial movements in European higher education.

Despite more active discussion about European imperial legacy in our curricula, European universities have seen little change at a program level. Certainly, decolonial efforts are no easy task; they require effort, time, and adequate funding – all of which are, arguably, scarce resources in higher education. Even more, if we can acknowledge the imperial legacy ingrained in our curricula, where should our decolonisation efforts begin? Though it is true that such a legacy is present in most disciplines, this article argues that a sound starting point for this discussion can be found in the field that puts Europe at its very core: European Studies. While some work has been done in this regard, for instance by the public open access lecture series of the Amsterdam Centre of European Studies (ACES) on *Decolonising Europe*, literature on decolonisation and the field of European studies is still limited.

Our article offers a first step in this direction by presenting a reflection on these discussions and aims to contribute to the growing literature of decolonisation in education. We focus on the theoretical and practical implications of efforts at decolonising the curriculum. Our overall objective is to equip those who hold institutional power with approaches to enable them to implement decolonial change as an indelible part of curriculum development and teaching practices. Recognizing this, this paper proposes a series of recommendations that educators, practitioners, and leaders in the field can reflect onto their curricula and teaching material.

With this in mind, the article proceeds as follows. First, we provide a general overview of the current discussions on decolonisation, as well as the potential pitfalls of decolonial action. We then take stock of current European Studies curricula across Europe to gain as comprehensive of a picture as possible. The article then addresses how we can approach the decolonisation of ES curricula without compromising Europe as a subject-matter. Further, we provide practical recommendations that educational practitioners in the field can draw from. Finally, we put forth some concluding thoughts on the future of ES as an evolving field.

DECOLONISING & PUSHBACK – WHERE DOES THE PUSH FOR DECOLONISATION COME FROM AND WHY IS METHODOLOGY IMPORTANT?

Decolonisation is a process that involves a multitude of different strategies, aims, and definitions. A key part of understanding decolonial work is to recognize that decolonisation is not a fixed definition but rather encompasses a range of contesting ideas and interpretations and has done so throughout the history of Decolonial Studies. This makes it even more pertinent, in approaching the subject of decolonisation, to situate our own understanding of the term. Looking at the canon of decolonial literature, we can broadly say that decolonisation “is a way of thinking about the world which takes colonialism, empire and racism as its empirical and discursive objects of study; it re-situates these phenomena as key shaping forces of the contemporary world, in a context where their role has been systematically effaced from view”. (Bhambra, Gebriel & Niscancioglu 2018: 2). This speaks to a growing body of decolonial literature that focuses on coloniality and the marginalization of knowledge that originates outside of the Western world. Coloniality in this context can be defined as “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that transcend colonialism to be constituted in culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production” (Ndlovu Gatsheni 2013: 30). These understandings rely on the fact that, despite colonization and empire being central to the organizing frameworks and categories in European social thought and broader society, there is relatively little attention given to exploring the history and ramifications of this reality.

Given that the demographics and social landscapes in Europe itself are increasingly expanding and blurring, including third and fourth generation migrants, persons with dual-nationality and heritage, and nations of former colonies, conversations about identity, coloniality, and inclusivity are increasingly being pushed forward from within Europe itself. As such, working against coloniality and its reproduction, decolonial calls have targeted university curricula, calling attention to the different ways curriculum transformation often overlooks marginalized histories or knowledge systems (Ramrathan 2016). Contemporary discussions around decoloniality provoke questions of how colonialism configures our contemporary world (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021). Equally characteristic of this growing body of thought is an emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge, and the refutation of the idea that knowledge is objective, truthful, and uninfluenced by identity and geo-political configurations.

The reaction to this strand of decolonial thought has been mixed. Although there has been space made for conversation around imperial legacy in curriculum, whiteness, Eurocentrism and power in the politics of knowledge production, there has been little

systemic change in and across curricula in European universities. This has led some scholars to refer to the “buzzwordification” of the decolonial movement in the academy and the efforts made to address it – labelling the movement as one that pays lip service to decolonial rhetoric and thought but rarely sees or perhaps more importantly, funds, concrete change. These accusations of ‘buzzwordification’ have also been pushed forward by critics of the movement itself, who view many of the changes advocated by the movement as incompatible with the ‘integrity’ of a higher education institution (Ndlovu Gatsheni 2013).

Considering the backlash, the subject of approach, method, and effect is often called into question. Many have pointed to the ‘extreme’ and often nonsubversive approaches taken by the calls to decolonise the university and curriculum, particularly those that have focused on inserting and removing perspectives and authors from existing fields of study in a bid to make them more inclusive, with particular emphasis on those voices that have been historically excluded from and marginalized in the academy. Campaigns such as the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ movement in South Africa and Oxford University, alongside the ‘Decolonise my Curriculum’ campaign in UK universities, have often come under scrutiny for this reason. For some, these movements are taken as pressuring university staff to adapt, and in rare cases scrap, their reading material. While there is a conversation to be had on the diversification and selection of reading material, there is also a need for such change and reform to be productive, thoughtful, and critically substantiated. Decolonial movements in the academy today will not receive the support needed for meaningful change if there is ubiquitous disagreement and lack of consensus as to how to implement subversive and fruitful reform.

Interestingly, an emergent group of contemporary decolonial thinkers have approached the challenge of decolonisation in the academy from a different angle. Thinkers such as Gurinder Bhambra (2021;2017;2007), Sabelo Ndlovu Gathesheni (2013), and John Holmwood (2011) approach decolonisation not by advocating for the inclusion or addition of Othered knowledge into curricula and theory, but rather aim to situate and rethink the construction of these fields on the basis that the grand social theories of the 19th and 20th century largely excluded coloniality and imperialism in their frameworks (Holmwood 2011). Social theorists such as Locke and Hobbes, despite rising to prominence at a time where imperial conquest was rampant amongst European Powers, failed to integrate or consider colonialism effectively in their social theorization (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2021). Recognizing this, thinkers such as Gurinder Bhambra have been pivotal in highlighting that the cornerstones of modern social theory have overlooked and not effectively grappled with concepts such as empire, conquest, and colonization, which were central to 19th and 20th century social thought.

The absence of systematic treatment of European colonialism and empire in the development of social theory impacts how we view and frame social issues in contemporary societies, and how we teach these issues. Anti-colonial movements, revolutions, and struggles are not theorized within broader theory around democracy, modernization, and citizenship. They are rather seen as the political entanglements of nation states rather than defining their societies and social processes (Bhambra 2021). As such, this call to decolonise sociology and modern social theory requires a decolonisation of categories and concepts rather than a wholistic critique or dismissal of the canon itself – ‘the issue now is not simply to add colonialism to sociology’s repertoire of topics, but to show how that repertoire has been formed with the absence of its consideration and must be subsequently reformed’ (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). This approach to decolonisation does not entail relativistic claims but situated social thought in its historical roots. In this construction, European thought, modernity, and enlightenment was shaped and influenced by European Colonialism and empire in profound and explicit ways that cannot remain overlooked.

This is neither novel nor alien to European Studies. For years, ES curricula treated Europe as an imagined construct – an imagined community (Anderson 2006) – that is observer-relative, changes over time, and means different things to different people (Delanty 2019). It is, as a subject matter, historically formed and situated. It follows that when the basis of this imagined community neglects or undermines the immense impact of European colonialism, our understanding and our interpretation is, arguably, lacking. This does not mean that all we know about Europe is wrong nor that the current body of knowledge in European Studies ought to be discarded. It means that we – as practitioners, researchers, students – need to open our horizons to different interpretations of Europe, and acknowledge how the imperial legacy has left its mark on the thoughts, theories, cultures, societies, and ideas that are at the centre of our field (see also wa Thiong’o 1986; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012; de Sousa Santos 2017). Decolonising European Studies necessitates a general reflection on what we know, why we know it, and what we are missing. In short, in order to learn about Europe, we first must engage in a process of unlearning.

STATUS QUO: WHAT DO EUROPEAN STUDIES CURRICULA LOOK LIKE?

The objective of this article is to provide theoretical and practical guidance for the decolonisation of European Studies curricula. Let us start from the basics. What do ES curricula look like? Which modules or themes can we identify across European Studies programmes in Europe? To answer these questions, we conducted a brief and non-exhaustive stock-taking exercise of modules offered in European Studies programmes in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.¹ The focus was undergraduate programmes (BA and BSc) offered by research-oriented institutions. Table 1 below provides a non-exhaustive overview of the general modules taught, as well as an overview of the core themes that are addressed in the courses. These were deduced through a review of the websites dedicated to the courses or curriculum of each programme, and a review of available reading lists.² As is shown in the overview, ES curricula are structured around general modules focused on several aspects of the interdisciplinary field of European Studies, but mainly on European History, International Relations, European Union Studies, Politics, and Law.

Table 1: Overview of European Studies modules

General Modules	Addressed Themes
Cultural Studies	<i>Foreign languages</i> <i>Area Studies</i> <i>Cultures of Europe</i>
Economics	<i>Micro/Macro-economics</i> <i>European markets</i> <i>Fundamental principles of economics</i>
EU Studies	<i>EU politics and institutions</i> <i>EU policy domains</i> <i>EU governance and administration</i>
European History	<i>History and European identity</i> <i>History of European integration</i> <i>History of European political thought</i>
International Relations	<i>Globalization and development</i> <i>International Relations theory</i>
Legal Studies	<i>EU Law (substantive and procedural)</i> <i>Legal philosophy</i>
Politics	<i>European Political philosophy</i> <i>European Political theory</i> <i>Fundamentals of political science</i>

These modules address complex and interdisciplinary questions about Europe as an imagined community and European Studies as a field. On average, ES curricula begin with

an overarching question about what Europe is and what it means to be European, then gradually building on the idea of the European community as it is shaped by its diversity, by wars, and by integration. As educators in this field, we often ask questions about how the long history of Europe has shaped it as a community, how political movements have defined the way we understand European societies, and how the Europe of now, either as a Union or a community of states, exists and acts in a global context.

ES curricula put particular emphasis (to varying degrees) on teaching the 'basics' of responsible research practices and research methods in European Studies. Given the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of the field, methods education in ES curricula borrows from the 'toolboxes' of several disciplines – ranging from historical methods to political science quantitative methods – that equip students with the necessary techniques to gather and analyze data (Jackson 2011). Still, at the core of research skills training, we can find some common methodological assumptions about the making of solid scientific research – i.e., assumptions that have to do with "the logics, structure and procedure of scientific enquiry" (Sartori 1970: 1033). These typically have to do with what 'reliable sources' are and how the student-researcher can identify them, with how to formulate strong and feasible research questions that reflect analytical problems and steer away from normative ones, and how to collect data in an objective and systematic manner.

This overview shows us that, with the exception of a few modules dedicated to Europe's colonial legacy (usually integrated within modules on Globalisation and Development), the history and effect of colonialism and decolonisation is primarily addressed in the margins as the odd assignment in courses about European history or to provide context in discussions about International Relations. This is likely due to the hidden assumptions, forgotten voices, and socio-political practices that, whether we like it or not, have shaped how we understand Europe, and ultimately how we teach it.

UNLEARNING EUROPE: DECOLONISING EUROPEAN STUDIES CURRICULA

As argued previously, the process of decolonising the curriculum requires two interconnected steps: unlearning and relearning, so, how can we refocus the field of European Studies, and especially European studies curricula, so that we acknowledge Europe's colonial past and its impacts on current practices within the field? We find that the current configurations of European Studies curricula – broadly speaking – pose two separate challenges for decolonisation efforts. One challenge pertains to the content of the curricula, in terms of the subjects that are addressed or whose voices are represented in the syllabi. The other challenge pertains to methodological conventions in European Studies research training practices. Let us examine these in turn.

As we presented in the previous section, the content of most ES curricula is structured on the basis of modules of European history, European political theory and philosophy, international relations, and European Union studies – like, European law, EU politics, or EU policy domains. We recognize that, whilst curricula are not set in stone and the content of such does change over time often to accommodate new approaches to studying Europe – e.g. from a decolonial perspective. Still, our review revealed an absence of non-Western scholarship and particularly scholarship by scholars of colour in curricula and highlighted the ingrained Eurocentric character of ES.

Knowledge, and knowledge production, are not unbiased and "while knowledge can never be total, the selections we make have consequences for its ordering" (Bhambra 2017: 28). For ES curricula, this means that the decisions we make when designing curricula have a real impact on how we and our student-audiences understand and absorb. There are two components to this. The first relates to the diversity of the voices that we choose to include (or exclude) from our reading lists and our curricula. The overall monocultural canon of ES curricula, and European education, has been put under scrutiny through activist

campaigns such as 'Rhodes Must Fall' or 'Decolonize my Curriculum' that advocate for the inclusion of voices of colour and perspectives of marginalized communities in the curricula. However, adding new materials without addressing why these voices are necessary without framing the discussion in a larger context will not do much.

This brings us to the second component: the critical and intentional contextualization of marginalized and dominant voices. In short, teaching our students to recognize and acknowledge the impact of the European imperial legacy – i.e., by learning to contextualize their readings materials and their respective authors in social and geo-political contexts – only makes for a deeper understanding of the respective materials and the subject-matter. In this way, we learn to identify whose voices are represented, understand where those voices are coming from, and notice who is left out of the discussion. This is an exercise that is currently practised in ES curricula to a certain degree; however, this practice is, primarily, reserved for topics such as East and West European histories or other matters of political controversy that occur on 'European ground' – e.g., in discussions regarding East-West European relations. What about controversies that take place outside the continent? Or, what about topics that we do not consider as political controversies? We take topics such as modernity or the Enlightenment at face value, and while we may consider different analyses of the concepts at hand, we rarely position them in the imperial context in which they emerged. Still, it is sometimes the case that ES curricula, for instance modules relating to European history may undermine ideas of European exceptionalism and may not offer a critical approach to the history of European thought or European integration from a perspective of power and oppression.

The second challenge we face relates to methodological conventions about what it means to conduct solid research in European Studies. Be it as researchers or educators, we engage with the scientific method when conducting research. We make educated observations, carefully formulate research questions and hypotheses, consult the literature, systematically gather data and critically analyze it. We teach our students to do the same. In this way, by presenting research as a 'clean-cut' scientific process, we create the common understanding that knowledge acquisition is objective and somehow exempt from biases and assumptions. We claim the universal validity and universal applicability of the scientific method as the only (or at least the superior) manner of acquiring and producing knowledge. Is that the case? We argue for the contrary. Knowledge acquisition, like knowledge itself, is not devoid of politics. Presenting research practices as implicitly or explicitly universal, truthful, and innocent, we make normative decisions about what information and sources can be considered reliable and valid, and which voices can be justifiably excluded from the discussion in the name of the scientific method.

Still, critically evaluating one's sources of information and identifying the underlying assumptions at play is a major component of the first steps of research training that undergraduate ES students receive. They learn how to position themselves as researchers, how to identify their prior knowledge and assumptions, and how to consult different perspectives in order to gain a clear and comprehensive insight into their respective research problems. However, we only seldom extend this exercise to the identification and acknowledgement of the student-researcher's biases stemming from their own social and political environments. By recognizing that knowledge production is shaped by the researcher's own social and political positions and social and political experiences – for instance in the context of their relationship to positions of power and oppression (Naples 2003: 197-198), we move away from the assumption that knowledge production can adhere to European ideals of rationality and objectivity, and most importantly that we as researchers can detach ourselves from the process of knowledge production.

INTERMEZZO: BUT, IT'S STILL EUROPEAN STUDIES!

In both academic and activist spaces, discussions regarding decolonisation in the context of European Studies as a field, or Europe as a subject-matter, often trigger a pressing and persistent question that challenges the need for decolonisation: *'But, it's still European Studies!'*. While efforts at the decolonisation of European Studies – be it regarding our curricula, our research practices, or our field of study – do not entail the compromise of Europe as a subject-matter, these questions are valid and ought to be addressed.

European Studies do, indeed, have Europe as their central focus. Engaging with decolonisation and taking a critical stance against the legacy of the European empire on our perception of Europe does not mean that we erase Europe as a focus. Quite the contrary, it means that we focus on Europe in a deeper, more meaningful, and more comprehensive way. It simply means that we acknowledge that Europe is not a neutral object of study; it is imagined, it is constructed, and it is defined by a myriad of things – and the European imperial legacy is part of that. The point here is that one cannot simply detach Europe from its colonial past nor the impact that this past has on our current ideas about Europe.

While indeed we do run the risk of “compromising” our current understanding of what Europe is and how European Studies operates as a field, we argue that this is a risk worth taking for the development of ES as a whole. As mentioned above, reckoning with difficult histories and violent pasts is an intrinsic part of European Studies, because it is an intrinsic part of Europe. Engaging with decolonisation in the field of ES – and especially in curricula – only enriches our understanding; not doing so would be a disservice to the discipline and our students.

Having said that, we also recognize that decolonising ES curricula, just like any ‘paradigm shift’, can be messy and difficult. It makes us take a deep look into our work and our practices, and while enriching, it can also be uncomfortable and challenging. Like any other field stemming from the humanities and social sciences, context matters. European Studies are taught under different names, under different disciplines, different programmes, and are perceived differently in different countries. This is something to certainly take into account in these discussions, but it should not, however, deter us from engaging with a critical reflection of our curricula.

RELEARNING EUROPE: PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Having covered some main reasons why decolonial approaches in European Studies are important, this section highlights practical approaches to implementing decolonial methodologies in European Studies curricula and considers approaches that educational practitioners can explore. The aim here is to critically reflect on how the living legacy of coloniality has structured knowledge production within our curricula and how, in turn, this has contributed to structural disadvantages in both students and staff experience (SOAS, 2018).

These methodological reflections do not offer case-in-point solutions to complex problems. Educational practitioners should pay close attention to what may be relevant and useful for them in their context. Additionally, it may be helpful to ask why something is not useful for your context or why exactly you feel it would not work. As mentioned earlier contemporary approaches towards decolonising the academy have assisted in understanding the different ways decolonial strategies can help build a more honest picture of European thought. Against this background, we identify three broad points of attention relating to positionality, responsiveness, and storytelling. We explore these in turn.

Positionality

Teaching positionality in education encourages one to critically locate the geo-political context of who and what they teach. Positionality is essential in overcoming an ‘objective’

and monocultural approach to knowledge. In her article on Confronting the Colonial Library, Sally Matthews (2018) identifies a key question in her navigation of decolonial approaches in the classroom, asking herself 'what is the extent to which a scholar's race or geographic origin matters when thinking about how to challenge the colonial library?'. To answer this, Matthews quotes Sarah Harding, saying that 'we must surely be able to decide the validity of a knowledge claim apart from who speaks it, even while recognizing that "it does make a difference who says what and when' (Matthews 2018: 52). The relationship between knowledge and identity and whether knowledge can have an identity, are concerns that reflect the key questions many Western societies are grappling with today.

Eurocentrism, a monocultural approach to knowledge, assumes a universal validity and reproduces an 'abstract vantage point of the knowing subject' (Izcaza and Vazques 2018: 114). Putting positionality into practice enables us, even while teaching the canon, to uncover the geo-epistemology of the subject, knowledge, and thinker we are teaching instead of assuming a position of universality. In their chapter of 'Decolonizing the University' Rosalba Icaza and Rolando Vázquez discuss a study they conducted at the university of Amsterdam in 2018, where they found that undergraduate students felt more included in their learning when exposed to knowledge practices in class that revealed their 'geo-historical position'. Engagement with positionality reveals 'the intersectional conditions of knowledge production and that shows unequivocally how the axes of differentiation along race, class and gender have been essential for establishing the canon and, concurrently, how the canon has been essential to reproduce these axes of discrimination' (Izcaza and Vazques 2018: 119).

What could this look like in practice? Some Universities such as SOAS, University of London have, in their efforts to decolonise their curriculum, integrated *disciplinary framing* in their courses to address issues of positionality (SOAS 2018). Part of this disciplinary framing at the start of courses has involved posing a series of questions that, 'contextualize the emergence of the discipline in the histories of colonialism and empire' and examine how their course has been 'saturated' by this context (SOAS 2018: 11). Questions involved in the 'disciplinary framing' of a course could include:

1. How have the methodological approaches used within this discipline affected who this subject has taken to be both objects and subjects of research and knowledge?
2. What voices are present in the course I am teaching, and how do these voices contribute to presenting or framing different entry-points into the disciplinary framing of the course?
3. 'How and why have the colonial context and authors discussing the colonial context been erased and/or ignored by the canon? And what effects has this erase had on the subsequent development of the discipline?' (SOAS 2018: 11).

Disciplinary framing in this way can assist educational practitioners in putting positionality into practice. As mentioned above, this exercise could involve integrating reading material that highlights aspects of an author's life and presents critical critiques that open up an arena for students to think about and discuss why decolonial pathways may be relevant to their own subject study.

For instance, John Holmwood (2020) explains that in the study of Political Philosophy and Political Science thinkers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes developed their work at a time where European Imperialism and Colonial conquest was at its height and failed to critically reflect on empire and colonization in relation to European society in their work. The intentional highlighting of the authors' background can equip students with a better understanding of where respective arguments stem from, how they are created, and what

is or is not considered. This shifts away from a 'colour-blind' perception of academic texts to recognize and account for their normative nature. Exposing students to this context and its implications in their education does not 'divert' from the core tenets of a discipline but rather introduces students to the different ways these subjects are still being discussed contemporarily. In highlighting an author's positionality, we are thus more able to expose how a thinker's biases may have developed and may be reflected in their work. For educational practitioners looking to expose students to a more diverse readership, these footnotes of information also encourage students to place readers and thinkers in conversation with one another, not only on the basis of commonality and disagreement but also based on what has been neglected and silenced.

Responsiveness

Practices of teaching and learning grounded in relational approaches, or democratic forms of teaching, can contribute to more decolonised forms of learning. This approach comes from acknowledging the makeup of your classroom interacts with the knowledge you are teaching and relaying in that space. For many practitioners, this essentially boils down to recognizing that teaching is also the practice of meaning-making and that the content of the canon will undeniably create and relay multiple meanings for different people. A relational approach is not simply a participatory approach but rather one in which the diverse backgrounds and lived experiences in the classroom can be rendered valuable in the learning process. This is all the more relevant as our classrooms become increasingly international and as boundaries around access to education are, albeit slowly, reduced.

Engaging with students' experiences, opinions, and lived realities assists us in teaching students how to critically relate to material in constructive ways. For example, in the course 'The Idea of Africa', taught at Maastricht University in 2019, students were tasked with studying Congolese philosopher Valentin Yves Mudimbe's concept of the 'Colonial Library'. Students were asked to first discuss for ten minutes their engagement with the 'idea' of the continent and how their understanding of Africa is framed and constructed in their relative countries and/or general experiences. After students had finished this reflective exercise, we found that engaging these relevant experiences opened up pathways for students to relate more to the theoretical concepts placed in front of them in the tutorial and also provoked a critical dialogue on the relevance of these ideas to contemporary society and the different people who operate in it. Integrating individual experience and background into class in a non-assuming and respectful way can show students and teachers how diverse experiences shape knowledge claims, and how disseminated knowledge will, in turn, have different meanings for people in the classroom. In this way, using relational teaching practices means that students' positionality is not suppressed, but, on the contrary, becomes a tool for enriching learning experiences whilst engaging in and preparing students for the contemporary conversations beyond academia.

Often, using and engaging lived experience in university settings is thought to take away from the subject material itself and give too much room for subjectivity. People have commented that in the calls to decolonise curriculum there is too much of an emphasis on the student's feelings in relation to the text or, indeed, the figure taught. One of the most common examples is for students to cite the prolific racism of sociological, literary or philosophical figures and use this as a basis for not studying the mandatory reading material. Using relational approaches, one could address and be open about the existing critiques of these sociological thinkers and offer space for students to address these elements constructively. Relational approaches to teaching encourage practitioners to develop an understanding and sympathy of where students may be speaking from and the experiences that have led them to express caution and skepticism of certain approaches, thinkers, or discussions in a classroom. Dismissing this skepticism does little to encourage students to learn the course material and in effect explore this skepticism and caution critically. Similarly, simply providing materials that engage with 'tough topics' without

training necessary critical thinking and analytical skills defeats the purpose of such exercises.

In 2019, a decolonial workshop for teaching and support staff at Maastricht University in The Netherlands focused on responsive teaching, generated many fruitful inter-faculty discussions on possible 'decolonial pathways'. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and practices in the international classroom. One experience repeatedly raised in the workshop by participants was how to handle uncomfortable situations in class that might arise from student discussions about decoloniality, race, and colonial legacy. This discomfort is not unfounded and is widely experienced by those attempting to integrate these discussions into their class environments. However, it is important to remember that teachers are also tasked with guiding and intervening in difficult conversations on colonial legacy, race, and decoloniality – all issues that might be either new or somewhat unfamiliar or uncomfortable to them too. In the workshop, participant experiences of discomfort and uncertainty were highlighted as a point of mutual learning between course coordinators, instructors, and students. Giving examples from their own classroom environments, student exchange and interaction were encouraged whilst also setting certain ground rules before said conversations. These included:

1. Relaying to students in both the course manual and again in person that this course may cover difficult topics that are the subject of much debate today but that in discussing these subjects, our classroom will function as a space where racism, homophobia, and sexism are not tolerated, in line with broader university policies on classroom interactions and acceptable conduct.
2. Offer replacement words at the beginning of each task that students can use to comfortably address and discuss historical texts that include racial and homophobic slurs without reproducing them.
3. Explain that while debate and exchange of opinion are encouraged, we will avoid debating the validity of individual experiences of oppression, and in doing so, also try to keep a close eye on whether particular students are being used as ambassadors of their racial, religious, class, gendered, and sexual identities in conversation.

The workshop provided space for participants to practise working through examples of student scenarios that had occurred at the university and provided room for the exchange of suggestions rooted in staff-student experiences. As such, while responsiveness within the classroom can be a great tool in decolonising ES curriculum and putting that in practice within the classroom, guiding a responsive environment will also take time and practise. There is no fixed image of a 'decolonised classroom'. Instead, staff need to explore, reflect on, and test out different practices that suit your classroom environment and material. In a class on history of European empires, challenging topics are more likely to arise than in classes on the history of European integration, which key texts tend to consider 'free' of colonialism. However, by intentionally bringing attention to the complex issues relating to the legacy of the empire on the EU, one can start chipping away at the assumption that European empires no longer influence contemporary Europe and contemporary European Studies.

'Other Others', Epistemologies of Thought, and Exploration

Being open to exploring and researching alternative methodologies and systems of thought is integral to establishing decolonial pathways. Given the multiplicity of decolonial approaches and aims that exist, researchers and educational practitioners are encouraged to dedicate time to situating their own standpoints within decolonial literature, and especially decolonial literature relevant to their field. Oftentimes, people make a point to say they disagree with decolonial rhetoric and action, whilst not having explored the

multitude of standpoints that exist with decolonial literature. Openness is also the willingness from educational practitioners to research and discover alternative methodologies and voices located in knowledge systems that are typically underrepresented in the Western academy.

Recognizing this, it is imperative to avoid tokenistic forms of integrating voices into reading material. Representation is important, but voices must still be included in meaningful, critical, and intentional ways. There is no singular 'indigenous', 'Black', or 'gendered' voice, and exploring the multiplicity of voices is integral to creating a curriculum where reading material generates critical and thoughtful dialogue. Postcolonial thinker Gaurav Desai uses the concept of 'other others' to highlight those voices that are often overlooked in the attempt to redress the colonial archive. According to Desai, there are 'Others' in the canon but also 'Other Others'. The most obvious, Desai explains, is the intersectional marginalization of African women in the colonial library by European and African writers (Desai 2001). For educational practitioners hoping to amplify the voices of 'other others' in European society and history within their curriculum, storytelling offers an interesting and accessible approach. Students can relate these stories to other core readers in interesting and pluralistic ways. In doing so they are encouraged to notice how such narratives may be omitted from broader accounts of history, sociology, or global politics.

By storytelling, we mean the "the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through stories or narratives that evoke powerful emotions and insights" (Serrat 2008: 14). Building narratives and placing stories in conversation can create both depth and relatability to a subject that many students and practitioners often miss in their experience of higher education and research. Therefore, through storytelling, we may draw from peoples' lived realities and sometimes even works of fiction, which can then challenge and provoke a different strain of thought within a broader subject. Integrating storytelling as a decolonial strategy can be met with reserve as it is seen as going against the grain of 'objectivity' and 'concrete learning'. Within higher education, peer-reviewed journals, articles, and concrete textbooks are considered key sources of knowledge. However, as educational practitioners, there is also a wide variety of work outside this that can contribute a lot of value to the subject and discourse you present within your course, class or research.

For example, teaching what some consider more delicate topics, storytelling can contribute important and often overlooked dimensions to grander narratives. Consider for example Saidiya Hartman's work on the histories of the enslaved and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Hartman's work uses fiction alongside historical documentation and archival research to re-create narratives that give us insights into lived realities often excluded from historical accounts. This is a process she terms 'critical fabulation'. Hartman explains that 'as a writer committed to telling stories, I have endeavored to represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to respect the limits of what cannot be known' (Hartman 2008:3). While Hartman's stories are not presented as the central texts on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the experiences of enslaved Africans, her work opens a new, intimate, and more 'humane' dimension to her readership. These are important as much literature about the enslaved, colonialism, and the trans-Atlantic slave trade can often focus too heavily on figures and statistical accounts. Students exposed to these stories, are offered new angles to critically discuss the topic of the transatlantic slave trade in West Africa. Integrating storytelling, fiction, and narrative can thus assist teachers in uncovering different 'actors' in history and aids with recuperating the narratives of what Postcolonial thinker Gurav Desai (2001) calls 'other others'.

CONCLUSIONS

In the very last paragraph of her book, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks states:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility, we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (hooks 1994: 207)

In this reflective article, we base our argument on the premise that the university, in its traditional role as an institution for the pursuit of knowledge and truth – whatever those might mean, is an institution of freedom. By critically assessing and rethinking our ways of knowing, deconstructing and reconstructing our ways of acquiring knowledge, and examining how we teach and what we teach, we engage in what bell hooks refers to as a 'necessary revolution' (hooks 1994: 29-30).

European imperial legacy, as any other act of oppression, is created, re-created, and taught at both a cultural and individual level through education (Noël Smith 2014: 80). When faced with the legacy, history, and the damage of colonialism, one may get the feeling that dismantling colonial systems of power feels like throwing a pebble at a brick wall in the hopes to dismantle it. People may even think such a task is futile. It is important to re-emphasize here that decolonisation is a process rather than a fixed location or a tangible end-objective such as a dismantled barrier. This is to say that there is no clear step-by-step guide to achieving a curriculum or program that is fully 'decolonised', especially as the term decolonisation itself is not a fixed concept and will continue to change. Rather, this article has demonstrated why decolonial approaches are incumbent to educational reform, particularly in fields that center on European thought and European social history. In presenting this article we have endeavored to point others in directions that might help them in their own decolonial process - exposing them to literature, research, and resources that can assist to unlearn and relearn Europe.

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ENDNOTES

¹ This exercise was carried out on the basis of publicly available information provided on the websites of each undergraduate ES undergraduate programme offered in Europe. The programmes were found through the website www.bachelorsportal.com.

² The list is based on the BA European Studies curricula offered by the following universities on February 2022: University of Amsterdam, Maastricht University, University of Groningen, Europa-Universität Flensburg, Sciences Po, University College London, University of Southern Denmark, University of Piraeus and University of Essex.

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Journal of Contemporary European Research

Volume 19, Issue 2 (2023)

Research Article

Rethinking African-European Scientific Cooperation: The Case of the Platform for African-European Studies

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Citation

Nshimbi C.C., Develtere P. and Debela B.K. (2023). 'Rethinking African-European Scientific Cooperation: The case of the platform for African-European studies' in *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 19 (2): 262-279. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v19i2.1299>.

First published at: www.jcer.net

Abstract

African universities rely on teaching traditions and scientific theories based on Western epistemologies and ontologies. Interactions between European and African scholars too tend to focus on the deficits in African experiences, knowledge, research and teaching methodologies and the poor economic environments in which they operate that are characterized by inadequate infrastructure and budgets. This essay discusses an emerging opportunity in science diplomacy within African-European Union (EU) interactions in higher education and argues that a fundamental revision of the imbalances in African-European scholarly relationships is possible. The essay uses the case of the emerging Platform for African-European Studies, which involves 22 universities (including 14 in Africa and eight in Europe) and underscores the importance of science diplomacy, knowledge co-creation and co-production to correct hegemonic knowledge about Africa. It explores the origins of the programme, its attempt to follow a critical global and decolonized approach in addressing the revision of curricula both in Europe and in Africa and the co-design of research. It concludes by highlighting some of the obstacles to disrupting the status-quo.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, Knowledge co-creation, Knowledge co-production, African-European scholarly relations, Programme for African-European Studies

Africa and Europe share a long history of socio-economic and political interaction. The relationship between them has a troubled past though. It has historically tended to be vertical, unidirectional and asymmetric too, in the favour of Europe. This is not to say Europe has not attempted to rebuild the relationship, especially since African countries started attaining political independence in the 1960s. A quick trace of this troubled relationship helps highlight some of Europe's efforts to remodel it. More appropriately, it helps locate the discussion in this essay within efforts to reboot relations between Africa and Europe, in the domain of research and science cooperation.

The legacy of colonialism has had a profound effect on the relationship between Africa and Europe. However, individual European countries and Europe as a group have sought to redefine the relationship into one that is less hierarchical. Through the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic Community (EEC), which preceded the European Union (EU), for example, provided preferential market access for goods from Africa and established a framework for development aid to Africa. Overtime, the relationship was defined by through a series of region-to-region trade and development agreements including the Yaoundé Conventions, the Lomé Conventions and the Cotonou Partnership Agreement¹.

Three arguments can be made from the historical relationship between Africa and Europe. First, some scholars and policy makers argue that Europe has long dominated the relationship with Africa and continues to do so (Farrell, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; 2019; Oloruntoba, 2016; Nshimbi, 2020). Second, other scholars go further and argue that the relationship is neo-colonial in nature (Taylor, 2019; Fish et al., 2020). Third, and importantly, scholars focus attention on the realm of knowledge production and highlight the hierarchies inherent in the production of scholarship. These scholars emphasize that the process and practice of knowledge production is Eurocentric and sees Europeans export European educational practices to Africa while they study Africa and Africans from Eurocentric ontological and epistemological perspectives (Nyamnjoh, 2019; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; 2020). Further, they argue that African scholarship is deliberately marginalised in "the so-called global economy of knowledge" and African scholars are reduced to "hunter-gatherers" and "native informants" for theorists in the global north (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:86). They assume that knowledge created in Europe is universal (Mignolo, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

These arguments support increasing calls especially within Africa to decolonize Eurocentric curricula and research practices and processes in universities (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi, 2016; Oloruntoba et al., 2021). The curricular and pedagogical methods reinforce and overemphasise Westernized knowledge and knowledge production (Nyamnjoh, 2016; Shahjahan et al., 2021). Despite some efforts to redress this imbalance in scholarly relations, empirical research on how to balance African and European perspectives in education and research in both Africa and Europe are scarce. This is especially the case when it comes to research and innovation cooperation in Africa-Europe relations. Most studies and media reports on African-European relationships and specifically Africa-EU relations disproportionately focus on policy dimensions of cooperation including the economy and most recently, migration.

This essay showcases an attempt to decolonize higher education and research in both Europe and Africa in an effort to disrupt scholarly engagements between Africa and Europe. It does this through an explorative case study of the nascent Platform for African-European Studies (PAES), which started as the Initiative for European Studies in Africa (IESA), and drawing on the concepts of knowledge co-creation and co-production, and science diplomacy. The essay addresses the question: how can African scholars and European scholars co-design and co-create balanced education and research projects on level scholarly relations and build a sustainable professional network?

This essay articulates practical efforts to decolonize education and research in both Europe and Africa, while contributing to literature on knowledge co-creation/co-production and science diplomacy as a disruptive endeavour. The essay reflects on an attempt to reorient attitudes and approaches to transform African-European scholarly relations. It demonstrates how a balanced understanding can be co-developed in education and research that promotes mutual respect and interest. It expands the concept of co-creation and co-production which is prominent in public service, where citizens co-create and co-produce public services (Brandsen et al., 2018; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018; Jukić et al., 2019), to knowledge and research, which are also global public services. It also extends the concept of science diplomacy which tends to focus on inter-state relation, to inter-regional scholarly relations in education and research, which is also becoming important in knowledge production in the increasingly crisis ridden and multipolar world (Copeland, 2016; Arnaldi, 2023).

Following this introduction, the next section presents the methodological note deployed to explore the genesis of PAES and activities towards co-creating a decentred approach in teaching (European Studies and African Studies) and research in Africa and Europe. The third section discusses African-European relations as presented in the literature review and the case of PAES. The fourth section reflects on some challenges the initiative faced/faces in its evolution. The last section concludes and sets the agenda for future research.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This essay relies on a qualitative analysis that engages with numerous sources including academic articles, books and relevant strategy and policy and legislative documents such as the European Parliament Resolution 2017/2083, *Communication on Africa – Europe Alliance* (2018), *European Commission -European Parliament and the Council, Joint Communication* (2020), and the *Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* (EU 2020). It also relies on a range of discussions and critical reflections undertaken by the informal working group of the PAES, a science diplomacy initiative. Furthermore, it draws on the deliberations of the first virtual workshop of the PAES initiative, which comprised over 60 participants from 18 universities in Africa and in Europe; officials from the European Commission, some EU delegations in Africa; embassies in Brussels, and representatives from the European Studies Association of Sub-Saharan Africa (ESA-SSA) and Una-Europe². PAES itself includes 22 universities, of which 14 are in Africa and 8 in Europe (Table 1).

Table 1 lists some of the universities that participated in the virtual workshop.

Table 1: European and African universities participating in PAES

Europe	Country	Why (involvement)?
Freie Universität Berlin	Berlin	Member of Una-Europe
KU Leuven	Belgium	Member of Una-Europe
Universidade Católica Portuguesa	Portugal	Lusophony
Universidade de Lisboa	Portugal	Lusophony
Università di Bologna	Italy	Member of Una-Europe
Université Paris1 Panthéon-Sorbonne	France	Member of Una-Europe
University of Edinburgh	UK	Member of Una-Europe
Uniwersytet Jagiellonski w Krakowie	Poland	Member of Una-Europe
Africa	Country	Why (involvement)?
Cairo University	Egypt	Hosts European Studies Centre
l'université de Carthage	Tunisia	Hosts European Studies Centre
University of Ghana	Ghana	Hosts European Studies Centre

Europe	Country	Why (involvement)?
University of Pretoria	South Africa	Teaches European Studies / Hosts European Studies Association / Hosts Research Unit on African-European Studies
Addis Ababa University	Ethiopia	Proximity to African Union (AU)
American University of Cairo	Egypt	Networks with some participating universities
The university of Libreville	Gabon	Proximity to Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)
Universidade Catolica de Angola,	Angola	Lusophone African university
Universidade Católica de Moçambique	Mozambique	Lusophone African university
Université d', Benin	Benin	Francophone African university
Université nationale de Kinshasa	DRC	Francophone African university
University of Abuja	Nigeria	Proximity to Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
University of Dar es Salaam	Tanzania	Proximity to East African Community (EAC)
University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa	Network with some participating universities

AFRICAN-EUROPEAN SCHOLARLY RELATIONS IN THE LITERATURE

The Eurocentric nature of the education and scholarship exported from Europe to Africa, including European research on Africa from European epistemological perspectives often leads to misunderstanding, misinformation, and disinformation concerning the two continents (de Sousa Santos, 2018; Shahjahan et al., 2021; Oloruntoba et al., 2021; Clarke & Yellow, 2021; Knudsen et al., 2022). It also goes contrary to the efforts to remodel African-European relations in the aftermath of colonialism. Apart from the deliberate misrepresentation of African realities and marginalization of African scholarship (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Herzfield, 2002; Hall, 2000; Foucault, 1972; 1977), Eurocentric scholarship often lacks a comprehensive view of Africa and overlooks cultural, politico-administrative, and economic differences between individual African countries and societies in most accounts. Studies thus tend to be selective in their focus and interpretation of what Africa is and what issues matter. Unsurprisingly, these threads within scholarship often depict African countries as homogenous and reinforce the stereotyped narrative that Africa is a “hopeless Continent” (Deegan, 2008).

Besides representing Africa and Africans in this way, Western educational institutions and curricula also systematically dismiss African scholarship in Africa and the African diaspora (Emenyonu 2020; Cooper, 2019; Oloruntoba et al., 2021; Agozino, 2021; Clarke and Yellow; 2021). Despite the rich customs, traditions, identity, socio-cultural environment and world view, African society and epistemologies are considered inappropriate from the Western perspective (Cooper, 2019). They often ignore African indigenous knowledge production practices such as oral narratives and storytelling (Emenyonu, 2020).

However, recent decolonial discourses represent some efforts to counter these erasures; decolonize curricula and, in the process, argue for pluriversal knowledge (Mignolo, 2003; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). The collective struggle for decolonization and human-centred narratives helps to restore dignity, respect and human dignity, and build an inclusive, just and sustainable society (Clarke and Yellow, 2021; Eze, 2021)). From an African policy perspective, Agenda 2063 of the African Union (AU) provides a strong and appropriate avenue for decolonizing education and research in Africa as part of the blueprint for Africa’s development (AU, 2014). There is also concern to go beyond Africa. For example, Oloruntoba et al. (2021:197) advocates the necessity to review “European Studies in Europe and Africa”.

The evolving and new Africa-Europe relationship that allows for cooperation between African and Europe on education and science, as established in the Joint Africa-Europe

Strategy (JAES), provides a practical pathway to challenge hegemonic practices of knowledge production in the context of Africa-EU relations.

Knowledge Co-creation and Co-production in African-European Science Diplomacy

Research on the co-creation and co-production of knowledge is increasingly multi-disciplinary and championed as a mode of reorienting hegemonic knowledge practices (see Brandsen & Honingh, 2018; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). Like Brandsen and Honingh, (2018), we see co-creation and co-production as distinct but related concepts. While co-creation primarily focuses on initiation and/or strategic planning, co-production concerns design and implementation. We argue that the focus in this context, on knowledge co-creation and co-production between African and European scholars is crucial to decolonising education and research practices while boosting collaboration between African and European scholars.

We further argue that African and European scholars should give increasing attention to science diplomacy. Science diplomacy does not primarily focus on advancing science but sets a broader framework for international scientific cooperation through foreign policy (Arnaldi, 2023). A growing number of countries and international institutions such as the EU and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognize the diplomatic potential of science in international cooperation (Copeland, 2016; Ruffini, 2023, Young, 2023). Science diplomacy promotes cooperation between scientific communities (the diplomacy for science dimension), fosters diplomacy, even when tensions exist between nations (the science for diplomacy dimension) and sheds scientific insights for foreign policy and diplomacy (the science in diplomacy) (Copeland, 2016; Ruffini, 2023).

Science diplomacy is increasingly important for the EU. For example through science and innovation programmes like Horizon Europe, the EU has invested significantly in science diplomacy to foster foreign policy and pursue solution to global challenges (Young, 2023). In its engagement with the AU, the EU fosters international scientific cooperation and provides joint funds for EU and African researchers to enhance scholarly relationships. Additionally, through science for diplomacy, the EU seeks to implement AU-EU objectives set out in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. Finally, from the perspective of science in diplomacy, the EU provides scientific knowledge to address global challenges such as climate change, migration and inequality (Young, 2023). We contend that science diplomacy has the potential to address the problem of Eurocentric scholarship and enhance African-European scholarly relations; to boost diplomatic relations between the AU and EU; and ensure the societal relevance of education and research to tackle global challenges (Copeland, 2016; Arnaldi, 2023).

BACKGROUND OF THE PLATFORM

Recent changes in relations between Africa and Europe have had an impact on research and education collaboration. Following the launch of Horizon 2020 in 2014, the EU has taken substantial action to increase the mobility of African students and researchers through Erasmus+ scholarships. To further strengthen academic mobility between AU and EU, in 2017, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that leverages the EU-Africa Strategy (European Parliament, 2017). The Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Development and Jobs reinforces the strategy (European Commission, 2018).

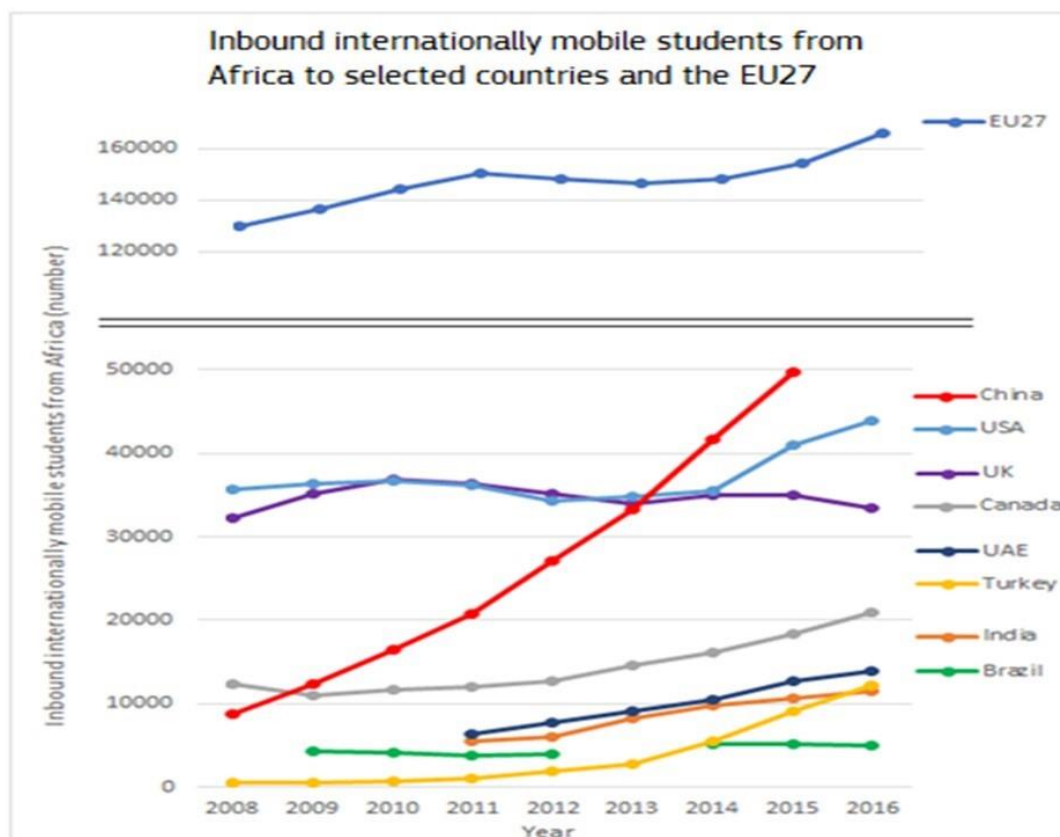
The European Commission (EC) has sought to further strengthen partnerships as articulated in March 2020 with a *Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*. The strategy emphasises that the EU needs “to partner with Africa, our twin continent, to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century and to further our common interests and future” (European Commission, 2020). The strategy further stressed the fact that the “partnership

(with Africa) should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities, reflecting the comprehensiveness and maturity of (the) relationship” (European Commission, 2020:1). Among other things, it was proposed “that the EU scales up EU-Africa academic and scientific cooperation and facilitate the mobility of students, teachers, trainers, and researchers”, reflecting science diplomacy. It is worth noting that the Horizon 2020 programme and science diplomacy are the main vehicles for implementing the 2007 Joint Africa EU Strategy (Young, 2023).

The turn in the way that Europe considered its relationship with Africa is consistent with the shifts in the international development cooperation landscape (Develtere, 2020; Develtere et al., 2021). This shift seeks change in a longstanding unidirectional, vertical and asymmetric relationship built on donor-recipient and North-South perspectives and focused on gaps, deficits and problems.

Recent decolonial discourses have helped to encourage the “review of European Studies in Europe and Africa” (Oloruntoba et al., 2021:197). Practically, the role and influence of non-European countries also appears to be significant. Various non-European countries, such as China, South Korea, India, Turkey, the UAE are investing in African universities and strengthening ties with them, and disrupt the traditional European dominance. Moreover, those countries are increasingly becoming popular destinations for Africans to pursue studies (see Figure 1). Despite the interests from and in other spaces, the ties between European and African institutions on joint research and exchanges remain strong and African students continue to view Europe as a desirable place for study (Develtere, 2021; see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Inbound students from Africa to EU27 and other selected countries



Source: UIS Stat, Chinese Ministry of Education, EPSC

The countries which are increasingly attractive to Africans for pursuing academic studies use soft power and the tool of public diplomacy to woo the Africans. They use multiple

actors along with traditional diplomats to engage the international community on their behalf (Cull, 2009; Nye, 2008). China, for instance, increasingly uses culture and language study centres and investment as tools just like France and the UK.. As of January 2022, it had about 50 Confucius Institutes in 40 Africa countries, which is more than France's Alliance Française, which is present in 37 Africa countries. China has study centres in almost all countries in Africa too. These share institutional links with prestigious Chinese universities in China, which also host students from Africa. The centres also engage in collaborative research on contemporary issues on Africa and China. Like the EU, beyond education and cultural exchange (Liang 2012; King, 2013), China couples this sort of collaboration to boost its soft power by investing in aid programmes in Africa (Shambaugh, 2013) and through unconditional investment into infrastructure and trade with Africa (Fijałkowski, 2011).

South Korea seems to use study centers. Since 2016, it has established study centers at African universities in South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Ivory Coast (Develtere, 2021). The Russian government uses culture and science as soft power. Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russian foreign cultural exchange agency, implements Russia's foreign policy, facilitates scholarships for African students, engages in humanitarian work and builds trust with the international community through Russian values, culture, social and political programmes (Mäkinen, 2015). For the EU, on the other hand, only has four countries in Africa host European Study Centres (Ouma-Mugabe and Chaminuka, 2021; Cherry and Toit, 2018). As shown in Table 1, these are located in Egypt (University of Cairo), Ghana (University of Ghana), South Africa (University of Pretoria), and Tunisia (L'université de Carthage). In contrast there are least 56 African Studies centres in Europe. The majority of these centres are associated with the Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS). Some scholars have questioned knowledge making in Europe-based African Studies centres/institutions and the content of the knowledge contained in the programmes offered in those institutions. Oloruntoba et al. (2021:188), for example, show that the content of African Studies offered in European universities depicts a longstanding stereotype of Africa as a conflict-ridden continent and is devoid of an Africa focus. According to Oloruntoba et al. (2021), European perspectives on Africa constitute the core of African Studies courses in Europe. This reflects a deliberate marginalization of African scholarship and Africa as a producer of knowledge. It suggests, European Studies in Africa and African Studies in Europe and research on Africa should be carefully designed and incorporate African perspectives (ibid). The curricula and research should seek to stimulate a critical reflection on positive and negative past and present outcomes of African-European relations so as to promote balanced, inclusive, sustainable and new forms of relations. The PAES initiative seeks to contribute to this.

PRACTISING SCIENCE DIPLOMACY IN AFRICAN-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

Initiative for European Studies in Africa

In 2020, some scholars at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) in Belgium reached out to European Studies centres in Africa with a proposal to co-design a programme or project for promoting European Studies in Africa. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, through a series of email exchanges and virtual meetings the message that Belgian academics wished to do something about the near absence of European Studies in Africa was spread among African scholars. They argued that the limited availability of European Studies in Africa compared to African Studies in Europe has negative implications on current and future relations between Africa and Europe.

An informal working group made of scholars from both continents was convened in 2020. It comprised three members of African and European origin, who were also Africa- and Europe-based academicians. A factor that brought them together in the initiative was their common work and interest in European Studies as well as experience in teaching the subject in Africa. Among the first concrete steps the informal working group took alongside

the discussions was the creation of a website for the initiative where it was clearly indicated that the initiators were committed to, among other things, the exchange of views between African and European participants in the initiative concerning the changing relationship between Africa and Europe and the potential role knowledge co-creation strategies to enrich African Studies programmes in Europe, and co-design European Studies programmes in Africa; and exposing policy makers and non-academic stakeholders to the idea of mutually enriching African and European Studies programmes, in order to determine their views and potential contributions. The informal working group reached out to African and European universities and other stakeholders whose activities involved European Studies and African Studies and based on geographic location and linguistic coverage. Thus, other universities from each of the major regions in Africa, in addition to the four universities that hosted European Study Centres or taught European Studies, came on board as shown in Table 1. The informal working group also reached out to institutions from Lusophone speaking countries to ensure pan-African and lingual representativeness. From Europe, the informal working group approached Una-Europe to ask its members to participate in PAES. Table 1 lists the eight research universities in this alliance which confirmed participation. In addition, to bolster the momentum, the informal working group also set up bilateral meetings with various African government embassies in Brussels, the European Commission, EU Delegations in Africa, industry and the business community, the European Studies Association of Sub-Saharan Africa (ESA-SSA) and Una-Europe.

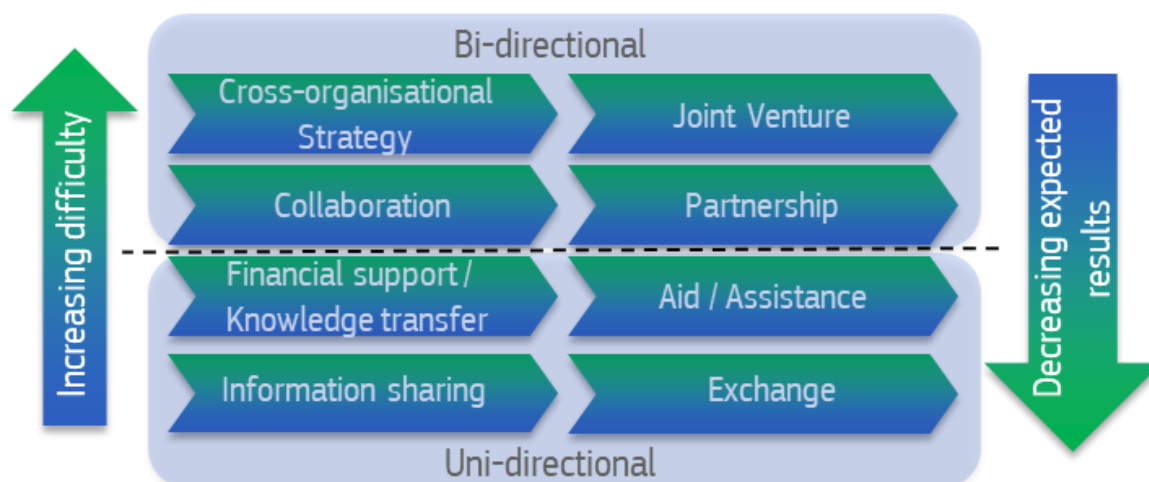
KU Leuven also approved an internal project during this period to bring participating universities to Leuven (Belgium) to launch the programme at a workshop in the autumn of 2021. Due to restrictions caused by Covid-19, however, this had to be delayed *sine die*. In the meantime, the working group used videoconferencing, WhatsApp calls and correspondence through email as functional alternatives to the face-to-face meeting that would have taken place during the Autumn 2021 workshop. It means that, the digital technologies, which are increasingly becoming the norm, partly due to crisis driven innovation, directly and indirectly has helped the co-creation/co-production process.

Participants from the universities that expressed interest in the programme were then asked to write two-page briefs about their universities and to participate in a virtual workshop planned for November 2021. To ensure full participation, the informal working group sent three reminders to the participants. Consequently, over 60 participants from 18 African and European universities, ESA-SSA, the European Commission and two goodwill ambassadors attended the virtual workshop. Most invited universities participated in the workshop, which marked the first collective meeting of all participants, albeit virtually.

In the first part, the participants introduced their respective institutions. Thereafter, the informal working group of three individuals based in Europe and Africa made presentations on European Studies in Africa and African Studies in Europe. The presentations focused on the number of European Studies programmes in Africa and African Studies programmes in Europe, their contents and ongoing Africa- Europe relationships.

The project for African-European scholarly relations, initially called the "Initiative for European Studies in Africa or IESA", would be a real joint venture. As visualised in the PowerPoint presentation developed to explain the *raison d'être* of the project and the proposed strategy to third parties (Figure 2), the initiators preferred taking the path in international cooperation with an explicit choice for a joint venture that would reflect a cross-organizational strategy of the universities involved.

Figure 2: Shifts between a unidirectional and bidirectional relationship



IESA to the Programme for African European Studies (PAES)

Shifts in depth and span

During the bilateral meetings a number of recurrent issues were debated that increased the span and depth of the original initiative. Three major changes out of these debates are noteworthy.

First, a shared conviction that this initiative should not be about establishing European Studies Centres in Africa in an effort to fill a gap or to compete with China Study Centres or Korean Study Centres. The initiative had to go beyond this and set the stage for a multilateral collaboration involving African and European scholars and institutions to stimulate and integrate African perspectives in European studies. Participants also argued that the IESA should not be limited to education, but focus on both education and research. They agreed that research and teaching activities in the frame of the initiative had to include a decolonized and decentred perspective both in Africa and Europe and contribute to the further decolonization and decentring of African – European relations.

Therefore, participants proposed that the network change the name—Initiative for European studies in Africa—since it implied that the ultimate objective of the initiative was to remedy the absence of European Studies in Africa by introducing European Studies in curricula in Africa. A program for African-European studies was proposed, but dropped for linguistic reasons and its implications. Consequently, the new working title of the network was “Programme for African European Studies” aka “PAES”, which tabled the need for an African perspective on European Studies.

Second, there was an institutional shift that implicitly reflected the theory of change. Participants stressed that PAES had to be co-designed and co-created by all participants, and constructed from the bottom-up. The idea of a programme offered by European colleagues, as donors and tutors, to African counterparts, as recipients and students, was resolutely rejected. Rather, the proposal was for the programme to be constructed by all participants on an equal footing and to that effect, mechanisms for co-decision-making had to be established. The point of departure of this decision-making had to be the individual scholars and their respective research units or departments. This bottom-up process was confirmed by participants at the August 2022 in-person meeting in Leuven in which they also underscored the importance of mutual trust and ownership, which they agreed to constitute the core principles of cooperation.

The third important dimension that stems from the discussion was networking and pluriversity of knowledge. The focus on dimension was partly reinforced by the workshop welcome speech, Professor Meulaerts who emphasized: 'the need to build a strong international network and to co-design and co-create an African-European program, and decolonize African-European scholarly relations'. She added 'history matters and thus the network should seek to decentre knowledge production and see knowledge as pluriversal'.

The participants in the workshop similarly underlined the necessity of pluriversity of knowledge within PAES as a collaborative endeavour (co-creation and co-design). The participants highlighted the need to integrate African perspectives into existing European Studies in Africa and African Studies in Europe. In addition, they also wanted to explore research collaboration on topics of common interest on African-European relations and Europe and Africa in the world. This is in line with Knudsen et al. (2022) who argue that pluriversity of knowledge is crucial to opening up new horizons for all participants and imagining humanistic and co-created future societies.

Equally, the participants emphasized the importance of building networks, which ultimately resulted in renaming PAES. To truly reflect, its mission and nature, the participants decided that PAES should stand for *Platform* for African-European Studies. That is, a platform as a programme of programmes in research and teaching; a meeting point for African and European scholars; a workplace to construct new initiatives; an incubator of new experiments and innovative projects; a particle accelerator; an intersection where academia, policy makers, private sector and civil society interact; and all of this combined. To this end, they also highlighted the need to foster student and staff mobility, establish bottom-up and university driven interdisciplinary PAES chapters in all the participating institutions, networking with multiple actors, interdisciplinary research cooperation and joint publications and conferences, and the search for funding and sharing of resources to operationalize PAES. PAES was consolidated in an in-person meeting held on 24-26 August 2022 in Leuven.

Joint Mission and Goals

The initial PAES mission and goals built on the many online informal working group discussions and reflections since 2020. The workshop confirmed the need for dialogue and critical reflection between stakeholders including, African and European scholars, the EU and the AU to address the historic, asymmetric and Eurocentric approach and to reimagine a balanced socio-economic and political relationship between the continents (see also Develtere, 2020). The participants underscored the need to decolonize European Studies in African and African Studies in Europe and to decolonize the mind, institutions and educational practice in both continents (see also Knudsen et al., 2022). The participants were convinced that both Africa and Europe would benefit from a systematic and respectful relationships and more democratic access to knowledge. They articulated and agreed on the mission of the PAES as follows.

We are committed to co-create (sic) and decolonize education and research both in Africa and Europe to address the limitation of Eurocentric approach and improve political, economic and social life in both continent through strengthening balanced and evidence based and context fit teaching and research that rooted in multidirectional and reciprocal partnership of equals and networks of mutual interests and responsibilities. (Platform for African European Studies, 2023)

Related to the mission, the participants distinguished two major goals/objectives:

The first was to promote European Studies in Africa and to exchange views between African and European partners on the desirability, relevance and feasibility of co-creating

European Studies programmes in Africa. The participants were convinced that potential existed for further research on European politics, institutions and culture from an African perspective. Moreover, they underscored that a better understanding of the workings of the European Union could enable African students, scholars and future leaders to engage Europe and the world better as well as to be better equipped to deal with European stakeholders.

The second was to enrich and strengthen existing European Studies programmes within Europe that are already developing critical global and decentred approaches, with specific African perspectives. The participants emphasized the need to break the mould and curb the rather one-sided flow of information and knowledge by learning with and from African partners, in mutual respect and appreciation and through genuine decolonial and collaborative cooperation. They unanimously revealed their interest to achieve truly decentred learning and genuinely decolonized university on both continents.

GOVERNING PAES AND CHALLENGES TO DISRUPTIVE SCIENCE COLLABORATION

Participants critically discussed the framework and how PAES would be governed as well as the way forward to realize its mission and goals. Concerning the working framework, the critical topic that occupied the agenda was the need to make the programme interdisciplinary both in Africa and Europe. To disrupt Eurocentric scholarship, there was consensus that, the programme should be open in terms of disciplinary scope based the diversity and intersectoral nature of the relationship between Africa and Europe.

Interestingly, the interdisciplinary teams of most universities in the initiative were created in the framework of PAES. This also came about in a bottom-up manner. There was no imposition of a common template. The teams comprised scholars from social and political sciences, international law, economics, geography, arts, and languages, as well as other disciplines. There was also no recommendation on where the program should be hosted in the participating universities. However, participants agreed that an interdisciplinary approach not only improves the quality and inclusiveness of the program but that it would also contribute to decolonizing education and research in African and Europe. It would also contribute to the co-design and co-creation of relevant education and joint research programmes.

The governance of PAES turned out to be a critical topic of discussion in the virtual workshop. After critically reflecting on this, the participants agreed on two issues: to work towards signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and to establish an interim working group of five individuals to steer the programme. Participants agreed that the MoU would facilitate smooth horizontal and vertical interaction between partners and within the universities that were participating in the initiative. This was informed by the fact that formal governance and leadership depend on formal contractual agreements that would detail the duties and responsibilities of the actors. The participants agreed that the interim informal working group would comprise the authors and participants from Benin, Egypt, and France. They agreed for the informal working to operationalize the programme and move the initiative forward. The working group's mandate was, therefore, organise, coordinate and facilitate the next (in person) meeting, develop an MoU, a proposal for a definite governance model as well as project proposals within the platform for funding. Participants were aware of institutional (historical, structural, and cultural), and financial challenges (see Shahjahan et al., 2021; Belluigi & Joseph, 2021; Clarke & Yellow, 2021; Knudsen et al., 2022) in implementing the aspirations of PAES. However, they foresaw the development of a multi-stakeholder project, with the possibility of receiving funding from multiple actors including international organizations, the private sector and co-financed by governments.

Three prominent challenges that PAES has faced in its evolution and implementation are worth briefly reflecting on. We broadly characterise them as: time, expectations and institutional challenges.

Turning the page in the relationship and stepping into a common future on the same leaf promises to truly establish the partnership (to which both parties aspire) as a genuine partnership of equals. It will help them squarely address sticky challenges that mock the touted political shift towards a partnership in Africa-EU relations and the suggested abandoning of a donor-dependent relationship in spheres like development cooperation (Carbon, 2015; Sherriff and Kotsopoulos, 2013; Haastrup, 2013; Develtere et al., 2021). It also promises inclusive mechanisms of interaction marked by transparency, communication and dialogue, to govern the partnership. Transparency, communication and dialogue are essential conditions for an even or levelled and interactive platform on which to co-create and co-produce knowledge.

Despite that, establishing new relationships among actors from diverse cultures, socioeconomic, political and historical backgrounds and building a team out of them that works towards common objectives and goals is daunting and time consuming. It takes time and effort to share ideas, exchange information, iron out differences, align interests and reach consensus and common aspirations. For PAES, which started in early 2020, this was compounded by the outbreak of Covid-19 and accompanying national lockdowns and restrictions on human mobility. Scheduled in-person activities to establish and concretize the relationships and build PAES from potential partners got cancelled or postponed. A couple of the postponed meetings ended up being virtual meetings. And though not attended by all targeted potential partners, and despite challenges in coordinating intercontinental virtual events across different time zones as well as technical glitches, the meetings were successful for events of their type.

The informal working group constituted in 2020 had a challenge in managing expectations of potential partners. Some of the partners had difficulties coming to terms with the fact that besides the common work, interest and experience in teaching European Studies in Africa within the informal working group, no funds actually drove the IESA/PAES initiative. Instead, it was an idea purely driven by the vision to reboot African-European scholarly relations and to co-create and co-produce knowledge on a level playing field; in the hope that fundraising to finance the initiative would come later, after the idea was firmly rooted. Others saw the initiative as a potential commercial venture they could exploit as a source of *n*th stream income for their institutions. They were, therefore, reluctant and questioned the benefit of participating in an initiative that had no commercial aspirations. Despite this, a fruitful in-person meeting of stakeholders from Africa and Europe based institutions materialised and successfully launched PAES.

Some of the institutional challenges PAES experienced relate to the apparent perpetuation of what the scholarship argues are historical asymmetry and patriarchy in Africa-Europe relations—skewed in Europe's favour as the dominant partner (Brown, 2000; Hansen and Jonsson, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2019; Oloruntoba, 2016; Pasture, 2015). Partners from Africa faced various visa-related challenges that affected travel to Europe and attendance of the in-person platform meeting. The challenges ranged from high visa fees, to delays in issuing visas, to inability to obtain visas. The visa challenges have precedence. Citizens of African countries need a visa to enter the EU but citizens of the EU and its member states enjoy visa-free entry in most African countries. Obtaining a visa to Europe is increasingly difficult for many people from Africa because of tighter visa and stringent immigration regimes informed by the securitization of migration and narratives of Africans attempting to escape poverty, pestilence, crime, war and conflict for a better life in Europe (Nshimbi and Moyo, 2016; Flahaux and De Haas, 2016; Laine et al., 2021). Unfortunately, African scholars are caught up in this narrative too and their ability to collaborate with colleagues in Europe is affected.

Constraints on the international mobility of African scholars due to increasing restrictive visa policies for Africans (Mau et al., 2015) affects science diplomacy (Ruffini, 2023) and African-scholarly relations. It also constrains the implementation of the ongoing African-European partnership on research and innovation.

CONCLUSIONS

Historical shifts in African-European relations have the potential to change the existing unbalanced positions between Africa and Europe. This change can be facilitated by science diplomacy with attention to knowledge co-creation, and knowledge co-production. The case of PAES presented in this essay shows that dialogue and critical reflection between African and European scholars could help balance African-European perspectives and reimagine scholarly relations. The dialogues and critical reflections experienced in the PAES initiative demonstrate that opportunities exist to develop, co-design and co-create multi-stakeholder projects and networks in scholarship. PAES adopted an approach that promises to promote justice and humane African-European scholarly relationships. The promise of the initiative is evident in its activities, which started in 2020. Despite the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, the nascent and evolving initiative has realized some notable accomplishments in the two short years of its existence.

Firstly, PAES has managed to establish a community of interest that spans Africa and Europe. This community is unique in the sense that it constitutes scholars who are committed to transforming the curriculum from the traditional universal to pluriversal and decentred outcomes and processes. This will include the creation and production of knowledge on European Studies in Africa and vice versa. Secondly, the initiative comprises a transcontinental team that is interdisciplinary. This is commendable in view of the tendency for scholars to work in disciplinary silos, when societal, global and indeed problems that face Africa and Europe traverse the continents and require comprehensive and integrated approaches to addressing them. The viability of the community established by PAES is evident in the fact that, thirdly, the participants can communicate and exchange ideas with each other and across disciplines. This is happening within each participating institution, where local interdisciplinary PAES chapters have been formed. It is also happening between participating institutions within Africa and Europe, respectively, and across the two continents. Some of the ideas and information exchanged in these networks concern the mobility of professionals, postgraduate study and research at the Master's and PhD levels. With this, the initiative, fourthly, now boasts of a completed Master's thesis on "European Studies in Africa" at KU Leuven.

Agenda 2063 of the African Union emphasises the quality and relevance of education and research, and that this generates knowledge that fosters development (AU, 2014). Agenda 2063 further promotes the direct involvement of non-conventional stakeholders in such spheres as education, to address societal problems and promote development. PAES as an initiative, and joint scholarly programmes drawn in the context of African-European relations like those envisioned by PAES to co-create and co-produce knowledge for improving intercontinental relations and addressing various problems speak directly to the recommendations of Agenda 2063.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The Yaoundé Conventions (1963-1968) elaborated the preferential market access for African goods to European markets in the Africa-EU relationship. The Lomé Conventions (1975-2000) dropped the policy of association in the Treaty of Rome and replaced it with a policy of 'partnership'. The 2000 Cotonou Partnership Agreement implicitly retained pan-Europeanism and the exploitation of African resources (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2005; Farrell, 2005; Hansen and Johnsson, 2011; Langan and Price, 2020).

² Una-Europe is an alliance of 9 European research universities: Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna, Freie Universität Berlin, University of Edinburgh, Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, KU Leuven, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, and Leiden University.

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