**Through an Inverted Telescope: Provincializing the EU**

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**Introduction**

The European Union (EU) seems to have reached a postcolonial moment (Bhambra 2009; Hooper and Kramsch 2007). The dual crises, one financial and the other the so-called “refugee or migration crisis”, and most recently “Brexit,” have framed a discourse of decline EUropean unity in a terminal or “toxic crisis” (Menon 2016). Concurrently, there is a resurgence of “Eurosceptic” regional identities and far-right, conservative, racist xenophobia against the “foreigner” whether that is in the guise of the refugee or migrant or minority communities within the EU (e.g., Muslim and Roma groups) (Verges 2011). Although the racist and xenophobic response to the refugee crisis by EU member states like Hungary have made news, the Brexit “leave campaign” is perhaps most recent illustrative of the rising resistance against the “other,” which is undergirded by a discourse based on a “racially stratified political formation” whose acolytes lament the loss of a white privilege that legitimated a racial hierarchy (Bhambra 2016). Yet Britain is not the only (potentially former) member state that has experienced a rise in xenophobic nationalism; France, Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands among others have witnessed a rise in both individual and governmental sanctioned xenophobia towards so called non-Europeans, both those ethnic groups that reside within EUrope (e.g., Roma and Muslims) as well as those who reside beyond the “border” of the EU (Parker 2013).

Although both groups are important to look at, this paper will primarily focus on the attempt by the EU control the movement of people beyond the borders of the Schengen zone. I argue that is it this attempt by EU to *govern* *from a distance* that demonstrates that the EU can indeed be considered a modern-day form of empire (Behr and Stivachtis 2015). To support this argument, this paper is divided into two sections: the first section will establish this paper’s theoretical foundations and thus illustrate how the EU can be considered an empire. To that end, I will utilize what Hartmut Behr’s seminal work terms “governing from a distance” (Behr 2015). The second section will focus on the EU and its policies concerning the control of refugees and migrants in African nation-states as a current empirical example.

Following the events of the so-called “refugee” crisis, the EU commission in line with several member state development agencies, specifically the German development institute which has put forth an African “Marshall Plan,” have committed to plans with various African nation-states, such as Sudan, in order to prevent further refugees and migrants from entering the EU and, more specifically, the Schengen area. This new method of securing the EU’s borders (Vaughan-Williams 2015) has, according to *EurActiv* reports, threatened the development conditionality policies enacted by the Lomé (1995) and the Contonou (2000) agreements. The EU’s “conditionality” policies are attempts to “define certain expectations and impose certain standards of behavior” through external pressure on both potential EU member states as well as on states asking for development aid (Stivachtis 2015: 82). Yet, the EU’s recent policies to stop the movement of people into the Schengen zone have illuminated not only the ambiguities of its Liberal development policies vis-à-vis the developing world but also the histories of domination that continue to structure practices and norms between the developed and the developing world.

In other words, rather than hinging development aid on the improvement of democracy, rule of law, or “good governance,” aid is increasingly dependent on whether or not the respective target countries will prevent the movement of people. The EU leaders have agreed to expand deals with Nigeria, Niger, Ethiopia, Senegal, and Mali to explicitly provide aid to those African states “in return of increased cooperation in stemming the flows of migrants to Europe” (Barbiere 2016). *Thus, the primary question this paper seeks to answer amounts to: if conditionality is a technique of empire, a technology to govern from a distance* (Stivachtis 2015) *and now “is a thing of the past,”* *how are we to categorize these new attempts at governing from a distance? How do these technologies of governing at a distance differ from 20th century efforts by European empires to govern from a distance?*

Although the increasing critical literature on the EU’s and its respective member states’ immigration and refugee policies are an important contribution to critical EU scholarship, this paper concerns itself with how the EU has attempted to overcome its imperial and colonial past. The answer to this question is complex. As will be detailed below, the EU has been quite successful in propagating a narrative about a “virgin birth” (Nicolaidis, Vergerio, Onar, and Viehoff 2014). This European (re)birth narrative effectively claimed to prevent another intra-European war while at the same time isolating itself from its colonial and imperial underpinnings, thereby obfuscating the importance of the colonies in general for the rebuilding post-war Europe as well as the geopolitical formation, *EurAfrica*. This envisioned geopolitical construct sought to harvest resources from colonies in Africa in an effort by (west) Europe to balance the two super powers during the Cold War (Hansen and Jonsson 2015). Yet despite the Fast forward to the current crises afflicting EUrope, observers and scholars still examine the EU and its policies rather solipsistically (cf. Stivachtis 2012; Behr and Stivachtis 2015). These Eurocentric self-centered perceptions, both historically and contemporaneous, obfuscate not only potential neo-imperial reasoning behind the EU’s humanitarian and development policies in former colonies, primarily in the African, Pacific and Caribbean (APC) group, but also the role of colonization and imperialism in the integration of EUrope (Halperin & Palan 2015; Girvani 2010; Hansen & Jonsson 2013).

***The Problem of “Empire”***

“Empire” as a concept remains contested and is utilized by scholars and popular culture alike in various different and often contradictory ways. As Behr and Stivachtis et. al (2015) note, part of the problem is the limited semantic nature of the concept of “empire” in the English language. The Latin concepts of “*imperium*” and “*patrocinium*” (the latter of which English has no translation), which corresponds loosely to “power,” “command,” “rule,” “authority,” and “patronage” has been narrowed down to the conceptually limited English translation of “empire” along with the adjective, “imperial.” The English translation thus severely limits the political imagination of what an “empire” is or can be. As Russell Foster (2015) points out, the normative baggage that is associated with the term as exemplified in popular culture (e.g., the evil empire in Star Wars) is also reflected in scholarly disciplines, such as International Relations, as well as Political Theory, that retain negative association. In these accounts, “empire” is often associated with the violent political, social, and cultural entities that have conquered, or attempted to, the European continent, the violent expansion of European imperialism and colonialism, and with the foreign policy of the United States (Stivachtis and Behr 2015). What is often left out, is that the Latin terms, “*imperium*” and “*patrocinium*,” also refers to an exercise of power in a more responsible or benevolent and legitimate manner (Ibid: 33). That is not to say that this exercise of power, whether paternal/benevolent or not, should not be critiqued, as I will do throughout this project, but it is to highlight the analytical possibility of the term “empire as well as its subtle transformative nature. In other words, although the European Union does not necessarily walk or talk like an empire, at least directly, nor does it have the more military swagger of the U.S, the Union nonetheless employs its own “imperial” governance.

This “imperial turn” in IR scholarship was propelled into both academic and public discourse during the of the U.S invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and the corresponding inherent colonial logics of the conflict (Gregory 2004). The debate that emerged, whether the U.S was an empire or not (Ikenberrry 2004; Cox 2004) and, if so, what type of empire the U.S had become (Ignatief 2003; Kagen 1998), along with some critical poststructural and Marxist based interventions, (Harvey 2003; Hardt and Negri 2000) highlighted the reemergence of a topic that had fallen out of favor following the end of the Cold War (Barkawi 2010). Yet, despite the U.S’ involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, Barkawi notes that theorization of empire in IR remains rare and, at least vis-à-vis the EU, considered to be provocative, especially by orthodox EU studies scholars (Behr and Stivachtis 2015). If empire is analyzed, the scholarship often remains embedded in Eurocentric and solipsistic comparisons of the U.S “empire” to Ancient Rome or the 19th century British empire (Barkawi 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; cf. Ferguson 2005; Muenckler 2007; Hardt and Negri 2000). As Hardt and Negri’s conceptualization of “empire” exemplifies, much of the scholarship on “empire” either envisions a “phantasmagoric empire” that is ethical and benign or, as Niall Ferguson’s work shows, empire as a necessary precursor to “Anglo-globalization” and thus although perhaps regrettable, part of the past to be forgotten or extoled.

The reality of the EU’s past and present engagement with their former empire stands in contrast to the main peace narrative the suggests that Europe turned inward following the Second World War. Currently, as Schulze-Engler points out, 4.5 million people, or about one percent of Europe’s population, lived in the “nine ‘outermost regions’ of the EU” (2013; 673). These outermost regions consist largely of European territories in the Azores, Guadeoupe, Martinique, Canary Islands, and French Guiana-the territory from where the European Space Agency launches its rockets. In addition, there are twenty-one “Overseas Countries and Territories” (OCT) that are constitutionally part of EU member states, but are not officially part of the European Union (Adler-Nissen & Gad 2013). Thus, “empire,” imperialism, and colonialism remain an integral part of the EU’s DNA. Yet while some of the European states will acknowledge their imperial and colonial past, the question whether imperial and colonial thinking continued to influence European integration has been asked less frequently (Schmale 2011). In order to begin to address this preliminary question, we must first address the status of the EU and its relationship to “empire” and imperialism in both political theory and critical EU studies.

Political theory as a whole has had difficulty identifying the EU as a “political object” (Manners 2013). Yet that is not to say that there have not been attempts by both theorists and politicians alike to identify this *sui generis* or “unidentified political object” (Jacques Delors 2000, quoted in Manners 2013; cf. Borg 2015). In an effort to conceptualize the EU, scholars have theorized the EU as a “normative power” (Manners 2002), “post-modern” (Diez 1997), “empire” (Zielonka 2006; Beck & Grande 2011), “civilian power” (Telo 2006), a “communion” (Manners 2013), or “post-modern (Ruggie 1993; Diez 1997). Yet, as Bottici and Challand (2013) have pointed out, these conceptualizations of the EU view “Europe” as a given entity and thus give little attention to the “*meaning* of Europe more generally, but also more fundamentally” (2, original emphasis). I argue that identifying the EU not only as an “empire,” but engaging with EUrope’s imperial and colonial past through what Benedict Anderson termed an “inverted telescope” in order to illuminate the role of this imperial past in the foundation of the European Union. (Anderson citation). In other words, this project seeks to critically engage with the general narrative of integration of Europe against the grain.

It was only recently that this turn to empire translated to “critical European Studies,” European Integration Studies, International Relations, or political theory of the EU. Important for this project is the increasing production of scholarship on the EU and empire, which has increased in the past ten years in spite of the negative normative connotations inherent within the term “empire” (Foster 2015).[[1]](#footnote-1) Yet, as I will show below, even within the literature that utilizes “EU-as-empire” as a critique, or at times a justification, the EU as a modern-day form of empire, largely do not examine the imperial, colonial past(s), and, more specifically, racial pasts and how these in turn continue to haunt the EU to this day. As a caution, I do not wish to imbue the present EU’s external policies with explicit neo-colonial intentions. Indeed, whether to glen if the EU sees itself as an empire or not, or whether it has the current ability to project its “empire” effectively is not the goal of this paper As Zielonka notes, “In other words, empire is about a system of rule and not prowess. Empires can be fairly ineffective and incompetent; they may be in crisis or even declining “(2015: 53). Nor do I wish to suggest the various actors within the EU and the member states as some kind of evil empire bent on domination or that indeed the EU is equivalent to past empires. Moreover, although the EU’ prowess is perhaps ineffective at the moment, that is not to say that if it had the ability that the EU would be reluctant to utilize it to maintain their past dominance. Indeed, as Russell Foster astutely points out, the banal everyday symbols the EU generates (the Euro, the EU flag, etc.) has fused Europe and the EU into one political, cultural, and economic entity that symbolically projects the EU as a unifier of a “European people,” thereby recalling former imperial attempts to unite the European continent (2015).

The EU-as-empire scholarship exemplified by the recent edited volume by Yannis Stivachtis and Hartmut Behr (2015), *Revisiting the European Union as Empire*. This volume illustrates the critical edge that this scholarship can have in both EU studies and International Relations. Indeed, the chapters in this volume contribute to a “critical” turn in EU studies, which seeks to overcome the teleological nature evinced in much of EU scholarship (Manners and Whitman 2016). Although deemed “polemical” or “controversial,” the EU-as-empire literature remains illuminating, despite recent events that have shown that if the EU ever was an empire, it perhaps has floundered. Brexit, the anti-austerity protests, and the Eurozone crisis have perhaps called into question the very unity of the Union. That being said, “empire” as an analytic remains a trenchant critique of the EU. As Stivachtis and Behr note, “Politics of conditionality, geopolitics of centre-periphery, and civilizational discourses resemble historically, whether one likes it or not, features that are otherwise evinced by what is noncontroversially termed empire” (2015: 2). Yet, that is not too say that I want to impute willful neocolonial intentions to the Commission or Council in contrast to North-South scholarship that analyzes the U. S’s interventions and invasions over the past decades. Rather, through the lack of critical engagement with its own imperial past, the EU’s technocratic and self-declared benign or ethical decisions and policies by a “rule of experts” both “domestically” and abroad invoke both historically and discursively Europe’s imperial past (Mitchell 2002). Nor do I wish to solely blame the “West” for the problems that haunt the Global South, or more specifically for this paper, the ACP nation-states.

Although the EU-as-empire literature has made significant headway by analyzing the more coercive aspects of the EU’s security and development policies, the Copenhagen criteria, the European Neighborhood Policies, conditionality requirements, etc., much of the literature does not incorporate postcolonial, anticolonial, and non-western theory into its critique of the EU. Although the solipsistic nature of the study of the EU is slowly giving way to a more critical engagement, there remains a reluctance in EU studies to include “dissident voices” into the disciplinary mainstream including critical theory writ large, post- and anti-colonialism, and imperial history. (Manners and Whitman 2016).

In line with postcolonial thought then, I do not use postcolonialism to signify the end of colonialism, but rather the remaining international and institutional framework that remains following the collapse of European empires and the subsequent independence movements (Kohn & Mcbride 2011). Important here is the intersection of the above scholarship and what Dipesh Chakrabarty has termed “provincializing Europe” (2000). By “provincializing Europe,” I follow Chakrabarty (2000) in his critique of the Euro-centric narratives of “progress,” modernity,” “development,” and their silent reference to a “hyperreal” or reified “Europe” (28). Or, as Chakrabarty puts it, “To ‘provincialize’ Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from a very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity” (Ibid, xiii). But that is not to say that Chakrabarty is calling for an anti-European project or, alternatively, an Indocentric reversal as some critics would claim, but rather seeks to examine the “limitations of certain European social and political categories” that continue to shape the modern world order. As a first step, this project will take Chakrabarty’s intervention seriously by not only illuminating the necessity of including post/anticolonial work and non-western in scholarship vis-a-vis the EU, but also arguing that the very integration of Europe was, at least in part, predicated on imperial rule and colonial domination of the non-west (Hansen and Jonsson 2015).

This papethus seeks to approach the study of the EU, its “actorness,” and its global policies in a more critical manner. Not only should we identify what Derek Gregory (2004) terms the “colonial present” through the examination of the EU as it was structured by imperial and colonial domination beyond the European continent, but I also argue that “race” and “racism” are integral to the integration of EUrope and thus need to examined in order to under the present conundrum the in which the EU finds itself. As Geoff Eley (2016; 2009), Annievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam (2015), McCarthy (2009), and Vucetic (2015), among others have noted, utilizing “race” and racism as an analytic concept comes with its own challenges. Although race as a category should be taken seriously, one runs the risk of just reifying “race” as scientific or objective. So the task then is to not only to identify how “race” and racism functions with political and society while at the same time challenging its very existence (Eley 2016). I do not wish to suggest that former European imperialism, colonialism, and racism are in anyway the *sole* factors in the integration of EUrope. As Chirar Bottici and Benoit Challand (2013) put forward, the cataclysm of the two world wars, among a myriad of other narratives, myths, and memories, established a founding discourse, often recalled during times of crisis or specific political moments, that ultimately led the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the EU, which, according to this narrative, has “for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe’ (Norwegian Nobel Committee quoted in Manners and Murry 2016: 185). Yet, as several scholars have shown, this peace narrative leaves out any colonial or imperial history that continued into the 1950’s and 1960’s (see Schamle 2011; Hansen and Jonsson 2015; 2013; Stivachtis 2015; Behr 2007). Indeed, Bo Strath notes that Georg Kreis and Guido Thiemeyer go as far to suggest that the “idea of foundational moment of the European Community was a transformation of national colonialism to a supranational colonialism, a kind of white-washing of the French responsibility through its translation into a European responsibility” (2016: 364).

Poststructural thought-especially Michel Foucault’s work on “governmentality” and biopolitics- suggests a lens through which the “integration” of EUrope and the current crisis can be critically assessed. Foucault approaches the history of government by investigating the conditions and problems under which what we now know as the state, political economy, “madness,” discipline, etc. came into being. In line with some of his former studies then, Foucault is interested in investigating the historical contingencies and political processes that have come to make up the “state.” As Lemke puts it:

“The state is not an object that is always already there, nor can to be reduced to an illusionary or ideological effect of hegemonic practices. Rather, the state is conceptualized as a ’transactional reality’, that is to say, a dynamic ensemble of relations and syntheses…” that produce both the knowledge and the structure of the state (2011, 27).

In other words, the state or government is not just a hegemonic institution or a series of norms. It is made up of various practices, modalities, mechanisms, and knowledges. This paper will take Foucault’s major insight into the “art of government” seriously and apply his methodological tool to the EU, the various institutions that make up the Union, and the policies enacted by it.

There has been an increase in the number of works specifically at the intersection of EU/ European studies and Foucault’s work, which have examined the integration of EUrope and have illuminated the power/knowledge nexus in the emergence and governance of the EU (Walter & Haahr, 2005; Parker, 2013; van Ham 2001; Diez 1999; Vaughan-Williams 2015). Foucault’s thought, especially in his 1979 lectures (Foucault 2004; 2004), and the subsequent “governmentality studies” (Walters 2012: Dean 2010), provokes a reading of EUropean integration that allows not only for a critical reassessment of the “origins” of EUrope but also for a critique of the EU’s deployment of “practices of government” beyond the “borders” of the Schengen zone. For example, in *Governing Europe* (2005), Walters and Haahr produce one of the more thorough investigations of the integration of EUrope by studying the emergence of specific technologies of governance within the EU, or its forbears, the ECSC and the European Economic Community (EEC). Their central question is one that asks “how is Europe being governed here-as a space of markets, a cultural domain, or perhaps a civilization?” (Walters and Haahr (2005) quoted in Borg and Diez 2016, 145). Walters and Haahr demonstrate that following the Second World War, European integration resulted in a “mutation of the logic of power” (2005, 10). Similar to the governmentalization of the state, “Europe,” or at least Western Europe, underwent a similar process.

Owen Parker’s (2013) nuanced and impressive work highlights a specific aspect found within the governmentalization of Europe: “the insight that liberal thought and government at the European level have been, to a large extent, co-constitutive in the modern European project” (Ibid, 18). Yet, although “*the market* has been the foremost contingent historical condition of possibility for cosmopolitan government in Europe,” Parker productively excavates the legal rationalities of EUropean government that could potentially provide resistance to the neoliberal market rationality within EU power/knowledge nexuses (Ibid, 20). More specifically, two dominant narratives can arguably be excavated from both of their insights: one of these narrative constructs a much criticized “market governmentality” that produces and *conducts* a neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivity (Parker 2013, 73; Borg and Diez 2016). The second narrative, as a response to the often perceived hegemonic notion of a neoliberal or “market EUrope,” is the construction of a “subject of right” through a legal rationality of government that is rooted in the imaginary of the nation-state. More specifically, Parker retrieves, in his genealogical account of liberal government in EUrope, a Foucaultian power-knowledge nexus of resistance to the overwhelming neoliberal narrative within EU integration discourse. This “social Europe” narrative is undergirded by an ontology based on a “legal cosmopolitanism” that promotes economic, civil, political, and social rights, (rights that were once originally only associated with the sovereign nation-state) which theoretically legitimize and authorize the EU’s supranational governance institutions (Parker 2013; Neyer and Wiener 2009, 74).[[2]](#footnote-2)

The problem with this “legal-statist” conception of EUorpe, as noted by Parker, is that these rationalities could, and very often do, reproduce the very exclusions and narratives that the nation-state once did (Borg and Diez 2016; Behr 2012; Parker 2013). Parker points out that “The invention of a political EU(orpean) constitution relies on a methodological nationalism which fails to respect an extant plurality in the contemporary EU and potentially reproduces the violence of exclusive nation-state, now as ‘fortress’ EU” (Parker 2012, 81). This reproduction of a territorial bounded nation-sate, evidenced by the EU’s initial reaction, consisted of suspending the Schengen agreement by several Member States, in response to the “migration” crisis. In the end, the recent crises within and without the EU have shown that, as Borg and Diez pithily put it, “The current ordering narratives of European integration thus seem to offer us little beyond a choice between consumer and ‘full citizen’” and, moreover, the violent exclusion of those deemed unnecessary to the EUropean “market” (2016, 146). Following the illuminating work of William Walter and Jens Henrik Haahr, as well the work of Owen Parker, I too will examine the intersection of EU studies and Foucault’s thought but through what Hartmut Behr has termed “governing from a distance” (Walter & Haahr, 2005; Parker, 2013; Behr 2015).

**The Civilizing Mission of EUropean empire**

The debate on the formation of the modern nation-state, origins of territorial sovereignty, and the international system generally remains within an intra-European context. Despite advances by World-Systems Theory (WST) that generally recognizes the geopolitical competition that was necessary for the “rise of the West,” the focus remains on intra-European dynamics (Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015; Wallerstein 2004; Abu-Lughod 1989). Indeed, the mutual “transformative nature of the colonial in producing (and reproducing) the modern state form” is completely occluded in the majority of international relations and EU studies literature. (Anievas and Nisancioglu 2015: 134; see also Branch 2010). The general narrative thus purports that the birth of the modern nation-state was an intra-European affair. Accordingly, classic sovereignty, defined by total power and control over their territory and agency, within limits, to do what is needed without fear of interference, which thus makes it the sine qua non of the modern nation-state, emerged from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Yet, non-European communities lacked this sovereignty and thus as the majority of the non-European nations were forcibly colonized by the Europeans, they entered into this burgeoning European international society. This began the process of expanding sovereignty to non-European communities, which apparently realized full completion after decolonization as sovereign nation-states emerged from the former European colonies (Anghie 2005: 743).

According to numerous critical and postcolonial scholars, what this narrative leaves out is the crucial connection between colonialism and the formation of (European) international law (Grovogui 2006). Anthony Anghie (2006) contends that Western international law’s claim to the universal and the failure of non-European communities to follow this “universal” international law therefore signified that they were not “civilized,” thereby legitimizing Western intervention and conquest (745). Robbie Shilliam (2013) adds that undergirding this (European) international law is a racial difference that relies on a temporal categorization that contrasts the “backwards,” “barbarian,” “savage,” to the “modern,” the “civilized,” and the “advanced.” He continues, “Substantively, racial difference is articulated through spatial arrangements-legal and otherwise-that demarcate certain territories and their non-European and/or non-white populations as lacking in appropriate cultural and political norms and values that make up a ‘standard of civilization’ (2013: 1134). In other words, this racial or colonial difference is at the very center of Westphalian sovereignty and the expansion of international law.

As numerous scholars have pointed out, the Westphalian idea of equal sovereignty has thus turned out to be something of a myth ([Teschke](https://www.versobooks.com/authors/441-benno-teschke) 2009; Brown 2010; Pabst 2014; Branch 2010). Pabst points out (2014), “Amid the shift in power from the west and the north to the east and the south, global geopolitics is marked by the crisis of the nation-state and the *resurgence of pre-modern empire*, besides and sometimes along with a new, premutation of the modern, colonizing empire” (118, my emphasis). This reemergence of a concern with “pre-modern empire” and imperial power in academic and popular scholarship was in part compelled by the “humanitarian interventions” in Kosovo in 1999 as well as the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 U.S invasion of Iraq, which the U.S administration justified through the so-called Global War on Terror. Moreover, Robert Knox (2014) notes that the current focus on *empire* and *imperialism* have brought the “racialized nature” of these interventions to the fore (176). In other words, the legal legitimization and justification of these invasions and interventions relied on a stark geopolitical and cultural differentiation between those nation-states or regions that are allowed to intervene and those who require intervention (Ibid). Although this is a generally well-known critique of the U.S’ recent in international relations, the critique of the EU’s “civilizing mission” is made less often. Accordingly, the next section will examine EU conditionality that structures the EU’s relationship with those beyond EUropean borders. Moreover, this section seeks to address how the “civilization” narrative has resurfaced in EU conditionality policies (if it ever truly disappeared in the first place remains an open question).

**EU Conditionality**

In order to pursue the objectives set forth in the Maastricht Treaty, the ESS, and the Lisbon Treaty, among others, the EU is able to project and enforce certain norms and values on outside nation-states. Stivachtis (2008; 2015), who has written extensively on EU conditionality, contends that through the imposition of specific standards of behavior, the Union can not only pressure those nation-states seeking to join the EU but also those nation-states that the EU, through conditionality, wants to change with respect to their attitudes or policies (2015). This is accomplished by specifying certain conditions that must be met in order for the target nation-state to receive material aid or other political and economic “benefits.” One of the primary conditionality requirements to join the EU as a full member is the “democratic condition” (Ibid). According to Stivachtis (2015), conditionality has been a crucial aspect of EEC enlargement since the 1960s. The first use of this “political conditionality” was in 1973 at which point new membership to the EEC was on the table. Stivachtis (2015) notes, citing a report from the European Parliament, that “only states which can guarantee on their territories truly democratic practices and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms can become members of the community” (83). The conditionality politics would develop as the EU concluded the 2004 and 2007 eastern enlargements. Following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the collapse of Yugoslavia, which produced several new nation-states, along with states that were once part of the USSR sought EU membership.

This “empire by invitation” relied on the politics of conditionality and the appeal of trade, investment, and security, instead of by military force or coercion, in order to enlarge to the East (Bechev 2015: 259). That is not to say that the EU does not have engage with colonial tropes when it comes to its eastern neighbors. Arguably, a similar “unreflexive” colonial impulse undergirds the EU’s relationship with both member and non-members in Eastern Europe (Korosteleva 2015). The politics of conditionality, once employed for EU eastern enlargement, would also be used in the EU’s interactions with its former colonies on the African continent.

**EurAfrica, EUrope, and Empire**

Western Europe and the African continent have a long and entangled history that is dominated by European imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and violence. In part because of this historical connection, the relationship between the European Union and the African Union and the individual African nation-state remains one dominated by the EU and its member states which allows the EU to impose specific standards of “civilization” (Schlag 2012; Sepos 2013; Stivachtis 2015). Undergirding the projection of these norms and values are also specific technologies, rationalities, and techniques of governance that make up the EU’s governing from the distance. First this section will review the coupling of conditionality and development. This will be then tied to the history of the EEC to the African continent.

Despite what the majority of historiography on the EU contends, the integration of EUrope was not solely based on the urge to avoid war and nationalism. Western Europe’s 400 year past experience with imperialism and colonialism up until the creation of the ECSC/EC is often left of the general story about the EU, but this history has had a lasting impact on EUrope’s geopolitical and geopolitical relationships with the developing world. Following the Second World War, there were two important trends that would challenge and question the remaining European empires. One, the trend towards decolonization continued as the politically, economic, and socially weakened European imperial nation-states could no longer maintain their hold on their former colonies. The emerging powers, the U.S and the Soviet Union, would further challenge the standing of the former empires and thus force them to seek alternative arrangements with their former colonies. The second trend was the creation of the ECSC/EC (White 2012). These two trends would converge in the Treaty of Rome (1955-1957) and continues to structure the relationship between the two continents.

As Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (2015) have argued, the geopolitical construct “EurAfrica” was an essential element in the creation of the ECSC and later, the EC. Indeed, starting in 1948, the role of the soon-to-be former colonies on the African continent were part of the debate on the creation of the ECSC.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the debate surrounding the Treaty of Rome (1955-1957), the Euro-African relationship emerged as one of the main issues of contention. According to Whiteman (2012), the French President Charles De Gaulle sought a new relationship with France’s colonies in order to map a “third way” between the two superpowers. It was at this juncture where the German and Dutch governments yielded to the French ambitions to include a provision in the treaty that allowed for the incorporation of “overseas territories” into the EC as “associations” (30). These territories, mainly French African territory, but also included territories on the African continent that were connected to Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy member states. Although these association clearly maintained a colonial relationship, territories like French *departmente*, the people in Algeria, which was legally part of Greater France and thus part of the EC, were considered French citizens. Also at this time, there several African leaders who supported a Euro-African project. For example, Senegal’s president (1960-1980) Leopold Senghor supported a “symbiotic relationship” between the two continents (Ibid: 31).

Yet, this Euro-African project and its “associations” would not last long. Despite the violent efforts by the imperial nation-states to maintain their influence in places like the Congo and Algeria, decolonization continued and in the 1960’s former colonies and territories gained independence. The relationship between the EC and their former colonies turned into the Yaounde Conventions (1963 and 1968), which was signed by eighteen African countries (Ibid: 31). Although the Yaounde Convention was somewhat limited, there was a breakthrough when the EEC enlarged to nine member states in 1973 (Britain, Denmark, and Ireland). Britain’s entry into the burgeoning Union included those states in the ACP group who remained part of the commonwealth and thus were able to take advantage of trade benefits between the ACP group and the EC. The next economic aid and trade treaties, Lome conventions (Lome I (1976), Lome II (1981), Lome III (1985), and Lome IV (1989), allowed most of the ACP countries duty-free access to the European market for mineral resources and agriculture products (Schlag 2012: 329). The Lome conventions also included a “human rights clause” (Stivachtis 2015: 90). This human rights clause would be expanded by the Cotonou agreement (2000).

While maintaining the basic framework of the Lome conventions, the Cotonou agreement included political conditionality based on human rights (Ibid). This inclusion signified a shift in how the EU interacted with African nation-states. First, this shift from Lome to the Contonou put an end to preferential trading agreements and focused on market liberalization through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which have been heavily criticized by political elites and civil society in the affected African nation-states (Bachmann 2011; Fioramonti 2009). Secondly, the EU’s role changed from a “sole aid provider to an international actor that would monitor on a regular basis the application of the political conditionality principles by its ACP partners” (Stivachtis 2015: 90). Conditionality can be found in both Articles 96 and 97 in the Cotonou Agreement. It stated that in the case of a failure by a Party to meet obligations related to “human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law,” the Agreement can be temporarily suspended (EC 2000: 119). In other words, economic development becomes a crucial deployment of conditionality politics that has the goal to reform the respective target’s “bad governance” and violation of human rights.

An important aspect of this shift, as Schlag points out, is the coupling of development and security (2012). As Fioramonti (2009) notes, the establishment of the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) in the 1990s, and the adoption of the ESS in 2003, paved the way for a significant increase in EU-led peacekeeping operations in Africa. There were both military and civilian operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2003 and 2006 as well as a mission in Sudan in 2005; in 2008, a military was launched along the border of the Central Africa Republic, Chad, and Sudan in order to limit “cross-border violence” (5). As Schlag (2012) argues in the context of the EU military mission in the DRC, the EU activities are framed by a narrative of “state failure.” Again, we find a dichotomy between a “stable EUrope” which is then contrasted to a dangerous, chaotic, Congo where people live in constant insecurity. Through the popular discourse of “state-building,” the Congo, and the African writ large, is discursively reproduced as a problem of postcolonial sovereignty that only the technical expertise of the EU can fix (Grovogui 2013). The goal according to the EU development treaties for the DRC, among other African nations-states, is to make these states and people more like “us,” or at least an imitation of the western European nation-state through what Homi Bhabha termed “colonial mimicry” (1997). In other words, this imitation is “almost the same but not white” (Ibid: 156; McCarthy 2009: 16).

At the same time as the signing of the Contonou agreement, an inter-governmental conference held in Cairo launched a new EU-African “plan of action” in which the “*partnership* was strengthened through the institutionalization of our dialogue,” which signaled a renewed EU interest in the entire continent of Africa apart from the prior ACP development agreements (EC 2007). Following Bachmann, I term these “spaces” “European spaces of development” (2011: 60). Bachmann adds that these spaces are” a combination of development aid, attempts to regulate spaces of interaction and the promotion of intra-and interregional cooperation” (Ibid). In combination with these spaces of development, this focus on the African continent emphasized peacebuilding, adherence to democratic and human right principles, and regional and economic integration of the African continent (Ibid).

This initial meeting prepared the way for the development by the EU of a new Africa strategy in 2005 and then, in 2007, the adoption of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic (JAES) partnership in Lisbon (EC 2007). An important difference between the JAES and the previous Lome conventions and the Cotonou Agreements is that, at least discursively, there was hope that the two continents could come together in the “spirt of cooperation” and turn a new page in their relationship (Rutazibwa 2010). According to these declarations, this renewal of interest in the relationship between EUrope and Africa is predicated on the “close historical relationship” between the two continents. The 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership stated:

Africa and Europe are bound together by *history, culture, geography,* a common future,

as well as by a community of values: the respect for human rights, freedom, equality,

solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy as enshrined in the relevant international agreements and in the constitutive texts of our respective Unions (1, emphasis added).

This statement reveals that the EU commission views Africa and Europe as separate but connected continents through their history, culture, and geography. This statement marks a notable change from the previous agreements between the two continents. First, whereas previous agreements addressed only specific nation-sates or regions of Africa (e.g., ENP in context of the MENA region), the JAES utilizes a pan-African approach (Rutazibwa 2010). Second, there is a commitment to a “renewed” long-term cooperative approach based on “new identities and renewed institutions” (Article 3: 1).

That being said, there is an inherent asymmetrical relationship between the two continents even in this declaration. The JAES seems to imply that both continents should move beyond past colonial atrocities. Indeed, Rutazibwa (2010) notes that the Erastus J.O. Mwencha, from the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), reportedly stated that “colonialism could not be blamed eternally and that it was time to take responsibility” (Rutazibwa 2010: 213). Yet, this being the case, I argue that the promise of the JAES has not come to fruition. The crises affecting the EU have only strengthened the EU commission and the member state’s resolve to prevent the movement of people from sub-Saharan people into the Schengen zone

As implied in the ESS, as well as in the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties, the EU sees itself as the originator of democracy, rule of law, justice, equality and freedom. The EU commission then attempts to project or impose these values and norm upon Africa, a continent that even today in the popular imagination had either no history prior to colonization and/or was made up of “barbarians” (Herbst 2000; Schlag 2012: 329). As Grovogui (2006) has shown,

…the ‘discovery’ of the New World, the slave trade, and subsequent European imperialism enabled the symbolic projection of ‘Africa’ as a counterpoint to Europe and civilization. From the sixteenth century onward, Africa firmly became the land of dysfunction: a land without laws, without kings, without faiths” (32).

Although the narratives of “civilization” have changed, similar legal and cultural reasoning continues in Western development schemes.

For example, Vernoque Diemer (2014) has shown the historical connections between the current EU development policies and the very creation of the EEC development polices in 1958. Following the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the Directorate General for Development and Cooperation (DG8) of the European Commission was in put in charge of the development aid programs within the framework of the Association with Overseas Countries and Territories, which would evolve into the Yaounde, Lome Conventions, and the Cotonou Agreements. The problem at the time was that the DG had trouble finding individuals who were experienced enough to handle the creation of the EEC/EU development policy. Consequently, the Commission tapped former French colonial officials who already had gained experience from working in former French colonies on the African continent and thus already had close ties to African political elites (2). Dimier than traces how this institution in the heart of Brussels slowly evolved from a development institution that relied on a “neo-patrimonial system,” largely based on mutual trust, obligations, and personal ties with the African political elite, to a development institution based on a “bureaucratic logic” in which the neo-patrimonial system was replaced by one founded on efficiency and objectivity (3). She notes, citing an interview, that:

EEC aid was simply a sedimentation, logical up to a point, of the colonial history of certain member states. It was the sedimentation of the *francophonie*, which was the first frame of reference, then *francophonie* converted in a Community policy, with the Lome Convention and the integration of the British. Then the sedimentation of the colonial history of Portugal and of Spain” (209).

Although the EU development policy no doubt evolved, Dimier’s contribution illustrates just how intertwined the EU development and conditionality policies are with western Europe’s colonial history. That is not to say that the often well-intentioned interventions by the EU are consciously repeating colonial or imperial tropes about the African continent.

Yet, as post-structural analyses of power have shown (Foucault 2004; Doty 1996; Rutazibwa 2010; Zanotti 2011; Behr 2015), governing from a distance is inherently violent because of its imposition of universalized knowledge claims over the claims and the context of the particular and the local (Behr 2015: 35). That being the case, as Behr points out, on one hand we should not unconditionally embrace local practices either. “precisely,” he continues, “we are aware of the advantages of rule of law over the rule of kinship; are not prepared to accept racist violence, gender discrimination and gender violence, homophobia…” (Ibid: 36). On the other hand, this refusal to accept this type of violence does not in turn legitimize the imposition of EUropean universalized knowledge practices and claims upon “others.”

Although the EU has refined a narrative in which the colonial and imperial aspects of its founding members are obfuscated, the EU Commission continues to utilize a colonial “standard of civilization” discursive justifications in order legitimize and normalize both economic and military interventions on the African continent (Schlag 2012: 326; Nicolaidis 2015). In other words, even in this ostensibly sanitized EU language that refers to “partnerships,” “cooperation,” “mutual and complementary interests,” it is clear that the EUorpe nonetheless sees itself as morally, economically, and politically superior to the African continent; this continues a civilizational, racial, and development genealogical *leitmotif* that had its origins in European colonialism and imperialism and was further developed in the Cold War narratives of modernization and state-building (Schmale 2011; Branwen 2013). As Branwen (2015) adds, the language of “state failure” and “bad governance” embodies a “racialized imagination.” This “racialized imagination” is not limited to the color of skin but rather, “refers to systems of thought about peoples-fundamentally the European and non-European-which are animated by difference and hierarchy, comparison and judgement, and which legitimize colonial practices and western intervention (76). For example, the EU is now attempting to craft new deals with Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Ethiopia in an attempt to stem the movement of refugees and migrants from Africa into the Schengen zone. This, I argue, is an example governing from a distance par excellence.

*EurActiv* reported back in October that EU leaders decided that there would be increased aid “in return for increased cooperation in stemming the flow of migrants to Europe” (*EurActiv* 2016). Thus, whereas conditionality was originally based whether the target nation-state followed democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law, this principle is now under threat as new deals are made with political elites who in the case of Eritrea’s current authoritarian government or Ethiopia’s government, who is criticized for their human rights abuses, can receive material aid in return stopping migrants and refugees (Ibid). A EU diplomat reportedly added that “’Conditionality is a thing of the past’…adding that *Europe’s priorities were ‘not necessarily the same as those partner countries*’” (Ibid). I argue that this example displays a renewed imperial attempt by the EU to govern from a distance. By rejecting its previous well-intentioned attempts at promoting EUropean knowledge practices, due, in part, to “different priorities” or *resistance* to EUropean attempts governing from a distance, this new approach represents a more imperial coercive attempt at imposing a EUropean governmentality.

*“Conditionality is a thing of the past”*

The EU alongside several of its member states (e.g., Germany) have made various deals with several sub-Saharan African in an attempt to stem the flow of refugees and migrants into Schengen. Prior to the collapse of several North African states (e.g., Libya) following the events of the Arab Spring, the EU commission’s “Global Approach to Migration and Mobility” (GAMM) had, under the auspices of the European Neighborhood Policy, given Libya ten million Euros for assistance in border control. According to Vaughan-Williams (2015), Libyan militias rounded up refugees from states like Sudan, Chad, and Nigeria and put them in the former municipal zoo in Tripoli for “processing” (70). This processing, mainly for diseases such as hepatitis and HIV, allowed for spaces that “enable the production of knowledge about ‘irregular’ migrants: this allows for their transformation from ‘unknowable’ and, therefore, ‘risky’ populations into ‘knowable’ and, therefore, governable subjects” (Vaughan-Williams 2015: 92). Yet, the collapse and instability of the states, and the resulting refugee crisis, have forced the EU to look beyond North Africa into sub-Saharan Africa in order to limit the movement of people into the EU.

In order to accomplish this task, the EU has committed itself to co-operating with dictatorial regimes, such as with Omar al-Bashir in Sudan who has ordered various militias round up refuges from states like Eritrea and then send them back to their respective “home” countries (e.g., Eritrea). The EU has gone as far to hinge development aid on the ability of these states to prevent their refugees from moving into EUrope (Plaut and Vincent 2017). For example the EU has recently signed a 200 million Euro aid package for “projects” but offers very little in way of monitoring how this money is spent (EU Commission ACP development). Indeed, it is the EU’s attempt at “governing from a distance” that this paper finds problematic. Although the EU commission continues to espouse normative justifications-the spread of security, democracy, “good governance”- the refugee crisis has called not only these norms into question, but also the normative legitimization of the EU itself, which portrays itself such as a “civilian power,” a “normative power,” a “non-imperial empire.”

*Conclusion*

Although the above examples display both the potential power, limits, and resistance to the EU’s governing from a distance, I argue that the European Union nonetheless acts in an imperial manner, especially vis-à-vis western Europe’s former colonies on the African continent. Through a new “Standard of Civilization,” asymmetrical political, social, and economic power, paternalism, and the imposition of universalized EUropean norms and values, the EU maintains, whether consciously or not, an empire by governing from a distance. I also argued that the new migration deals signed with specific sub-Saharan African-nation-states are examples par excellence of governing from a distance. Despite the lack of material military force, at least for now, the EU Commission nonetheless attempts to impose its will, especially in development and economic spheres of influence, despite increasing resistance by both political elite and civil society both within and outside EUrope.

What will happen to the EU now after Brexit? Will the EU survive the rise of nationalist, Eurosceptic, and xenophobic parties in a number of member states? If the EU is an empire, will these recent events mark a potential turning point for the EU as empire? If the EU can survive its current predicament, the EU very well may become more integrated militarily, economically, and socially. There are already trends that may point to a more assertive EU both militarily and politically. It also may fall dissolve like the many EUropean empires before it. Either way, in order to understand both the origin and the current predicament, the colonial and imperial origins of the EU must be understood and critically assessed.

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1. Although there appears to be wide-spread agreement within EU and IR literature that the EU is not a state, recent literature has questioned this assumption due to the similarities between EU’s construction of a “European identity” and a EU citizenship and those of the modern nation-state (Borg 2015; Foster 2015; Walker 2000; Shore 2004). Rather than questioning the *sui generis* nature of the EU vis-à-vis the nation-state, I argue that we need to question the distinction made between the EU and 19th century European empires, or in Gary Wilder’s terms, the “imperial nation-state” (2005; see also Behr 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although my point is not to fully look into this debate, there is a massive amount of literature debating whether the EU has a “democratic deficiency” or not and how to resolve it. I bring this point up to illustrate that despite the narratives that would suggest that the EU’s “market governmentality” is hegemonic in nature, there are some narratives that resist this conception. Yet, if these narratives can truly counter the neoliberal conceptualization of the EU, especially after the sovereign debt and migration crises, remains to be seen. See specifically Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of the Europe Union: A Response* (Polity: Cambridge, 2012); Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (Verso: New York, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Clearly, as Hansen and Jonsson (2015) point out, this term has a longer history than just 1948. As stated elsewhere in this project, EurAfrica and other conceptions of the continent of Africa are entangled with various imperialized and unified conceptions of Europe. This section of the paper will solely focus on the post-war period to the present. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)