Article

The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a post-colonial power

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Abstract

The aim in this contribution is to amplify the call, articulated across a range of disciplines relevant to international politics, for a paradigm shift that decentres the study and practice of Europe's international relations. Such a perspective is necessary both to make sense of our multipolar order and to reconstitute European agency in a non-European world. The analytical categories proposed in this article for a decentring agenda – provincialization, engagement and reconstruction(s) – can help to navigate the nexus of the empirical and the normative in such a decentring process. Applying the decentring logic to the EU's own foundational narrative, the authors suggest that, only by acknowledging the inflections of colonialism in the EU project itself, can the Union reinvent its normative power in the 21st century.

Keywords

colonialism, engaging, EU, Eurocentric, human rights, normative power, post-colonial, provincializing, reconstruction(s)

Introduction

Rethinking Europe in a non-European World (RENEW) is not a new imperative.[1] Even in the heyday of European global hegemony over a century ago, voices as disparate as Gibbons, Lenin and Tagore warned of Europe's imminent demise.[2] European powers proceeded to almost destroy each other and the centre of gravity shifted to the United States. Thinkers and agitators in both metropole and colony challenged European dominion, achieving formal independence, though myriad forms of material and cognitive subordination persisted. To be sure, the incomplete process of decolonization was mirrored by the 'Saidian turn' in the academy, challenging the privileged place of 'west' over 'rest' (usually the Orient). Although some social scientific disciplines were

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relatively more equipped to engage with other lifeworlds (e.g. anthropology), in most fields, the imperative of 'decentring' or 'provincializing' Europe spoke from the margins, largely ignored by western scholars, policy makers and publics alike. Meanwhile, Europeans have managed to create and fine-tune their Union over the past 50 years in a fascinating kind of 'virgin birth' – as if the new entity had nothing to do with the past of its most powerful Member States.[3] In short, Eurocentrism stubbornly survived European imperialism.

The omission of post-colonial perspectives in mainstream theory was a result, perhaps ironically, of a first kind of decentring, namely the migration of the metropolitan academy to the United States and the foundation of international relations as an 'American social science' (Hoffman, 1977; Smith, 2000). In response, European scholarship both contested an American-centrism echoing Eurocentrism and internalized analytical frameworks made in the USA. Eurocentrism was thus embedded in a broader western-centrism with two twists: not all western-centrism is Eurocentric; and some forms of Eurocentrism patently challenge American-centrism. The tangled relationship between Eurocentrism and western-centrism, even while in opposition, is evident, for one, in Kagan's (2003) popular rendering of the USA as Mars and Europe as Venus. This approach affirmed the centrality of European or western, classical and enlightenment referents for world order – Hobbes versus Kant – while corroborating what Hooper and Kramsch (2007: 527) have described as the 'unreflexive' view held by segments of 'European publics and many intellectuals and policymakers of the inherently benign motivations and processes underlying processes' of EU governance.

The idea that 'civilian' power can take the form of a 'civilizationalist' hierarchy vis-à-vis the rest of the world was implicit in the influential formulation of 'normative power Europe' (Manners, 2002) and was acknowledged by Manners in later work (2011). In his influential account, the EU's 'superpowerlessness' becomes the very source of the EU's power, for example, in its claim to define the new normal on the international scene (Nicolaïdis, 2004b). In this respect, one may interpret 'normative power Europe' as a sophisticated version of the 'EU-centric' narrative, in which Europe's unique transcendence of the state of nature, its atonement for intra-European warfare and the annihilation of the internal other, European Jewry, is achieved by shaping and exporting norms deemed to be truly universal 'this time around'.

However, this narrative marginalizes a central historical fact: the role of appropriation of non-European resources and labour in the empowerment of European states through to at least the mid-20th century, the violence this entailed and the echoes – direct or indirect – of *this* European past among those former 'subjects' among whom are to be found the rising powers of today's world. Of course, as reflected in this volume, the idea of 'normative power' concentrates on the nature and modalities of EU soft power in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the occlusion, by and large, of post-colonial perspectives in an account that is so seminal to scholarship and to aspects of practice in the recent period, attests to just how effective the denial of Europe's pre-world-war colonial past has been since the inception of the EU project.

As with other articles in this special issue, this article does not deny outright the import of the 'normative power' framework as a way to describe the aspirations held by many actors or citizens in the EU regarding the EU's current role in the world. Beyond

sociology, the present authors agree with Diez (2013) – that such a stance can take on hegemonic traits, albeit only at certain times (e.g. apogee of enlargement) and on certain issues (e.g. trade). Prescriptively, we do believe that neither a normative power narrative nor regional hegemonic aspirations are sustainable in the longer run, at least in their unadulterated form. As Europe's existential crisis, ushered in by the slow implosion of monetary union, collides with the need to confront the impending reality of global power shift, critical reflection on Eurocentrism has become, perhaps more than ever, a pragmatic, as well as normative, imperative and may be the best hope for reinvigorating European agency in a non-European world.

However, overcoming Eurocentrism is no simple task. The legacies of a Eurocentric international order remain palpable, even though Europe is no longer at its centre. As a result, and somewhat paradoxically, the EU and its Member States are asked by the rest of the world both to acknowledge their position at the periphery of the emerging multipolar system and to assume global responsibilities commensurate with historical weight and contemporary economic wherewithal. To date, the EU has not made a considered effort to rise to the challenge, with its propensity to pre-empt external negotiations with internal ones and its obsession with producing 'one voice' (Bickerton, 2010; Nicolaïdis, 2010). It suffers too from what is often perceived as 'neo-colonial' behaviour, whether in the context of Euro–African trade agreements, World Trade Organization negotiations or the International Criminal Court (see Nicolaïdis et al., 2014). Indeed, EU agents are often oblivious to the counterproductive outcomes generated in the 'non-European' world due to attitudes that echo the era of European imperialism, an indulgence which may not hamper EU efficacy in the case of diminutive partners such as Kosovo, but which has patently diminished EU influence vis-à-vis, say, Turkey or the Arab world. As a result, the EU seems to have lowered its ambition, as if external action necessarily had to correlate with expectations of dominance (e.g. MacDonald and Parent, 2011; cf. Kavalski, this volume; Mayer, 2008),

We believe that Europe still has much to offer. However, if it is to remain relevant there is a clear need – both analytical and political – to establish a 'Europe of vitality, open to connections, that has let go of its civilizational conceits' (Black and Rhys-Taylor, 2011). The decentring agenda can be found in many spaces, yet requires a revolution of a Copernican order. Challenges to Eurocentrism continue to come up against diffuse forms of resistance, even at a juncture when the decentring agenda has become a matter of pragmatism beyond being the 'right' thing to do.

The aim of this contribution is to amplify the call for this necessary paradigm shift in the study and practice of Europe's international relations, as inspired by the multiple and intertwined logics that infuse the growing body of multidisciplinary work regarding thinking outside of the Eurocentric box. We propose an overall theoretical framework to encompass insights usually kept apart, particularly at the nexus of International Relations and European studies. Our framework is based on three categories – provincialization, engagement and reconstruction(s) – which in our view best covers the decentring agenda. Each must be discussed with reference to the empirical challenges they entail and the normative questions they raise without compromising either side, a theme which structures the analysis[4] (see Table 1). First, *provincializing* is the most straightforward way to decentre conventional narratives that place Europe at the heart

Table 1. The three dimensions of decentring.

	Empirical	Normative
Provincializing	Question Eurocentric accounts of world history and politics	Question Eurocentric 'civilizational' assumptions
Engaging	Engage others' perspectives in which Europe may or may not figure	Engage others' assumptions with a view to mutual engagement
Reconstruction	Recognize historical patterns underpinning the EU's external relations	Explore more 'decentred' approaches to the EU's external relations on the basis of mutuality and empowerment

of global affairs, and to question the deep-rooted assumptions that underpin those narratives. Second, decentring calls for *engagement* with the ways the world is envisaged by others, including with regards to the colonial legacies of some of EU Member States. On this basis, the third strand of the decentring rubric – *reconstruction* – attends to the renewing of EU praxis in a non-European world, from the outside in, as it were. These three logics represent ideal-typical renditions of overlapping imperatives, and are co-constitutive of a decentred praxis.

Provincializing: questioning the myth of civilizational primacy

It seems almost tautological that moving away from 'Eurocentricism' ought to start with 'provincializing', to borrow Chakrabarty's (2007) felicitous turn of phrase. The notion has acquired salience with the rise of other regional centres of gravity in recent years. As with the decentring agenda in general, provincializing unfolds at the nexus of empirical and normative inquiry. For, at one level of analysis, provincializing entails uncovering evidence which countermands conventional, that is, Eurocentric, accounts of the world via objective evidence to the contrary. This kind of work is positivist, positing a subject–object distinction between the analyst and the object of analysis. Rival truth claims thus emerge and can be subjected to scrutiny and contestation. For example, scholars have challenged historicist accounts of the unilinear diffusion of European international society and modernity to the world through counter-evidence, which reveals the many ways in which Asian, African or south American inputs enabled the emergence of European actors as global players in the first place (e.g. Bernal, 1991; Blaut, 1993; Hobson, 2004).[5]

On the normative plane, to provincialize is to unpack the social scientific categories, assumptions and paradigms that underpin Eurocentric truth claims. Here, the analyst and the object of analysis are envisaged as mutually constituted. Normative approaches also render explicit the power relations by which mutual constitution is circumscribed, accounting for the ways in which the subjectivities of those deemed non-European have been erased in Eurocentric narratives. International Relations scholarship in this vein has interrogated – *inter alia* – the Eurocentric foundations of notions such as sovereignty

(Tickner, 2003), security (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006; Buzan, 1997), universality (Fisher Onar, 2009a, 2012; Fisher Onar and Muftuler-Bac, 2011; Nicolaïdis, 2008, 2014), democratization and the democratic peace (Usul, 2011), secularism (Hurd, 2004), the international (Darby, 2004; Qin, 2007), and the East–West, North–South and Europe–Islam binaries (Fisher Onar, 2009b, 2013, in press; Sparke, 2007).

Of course, empirical and normative approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather are situated along a continuum. Embarking upon the former often if not always leads to the latter, as the analyst digs deeper to problematize the ontological and epistemological assumptions which undergird Eurocentric knowledge. Conversely, an insight into the Eurocentric nature of constitutive categories can spur the pursuit of empirical evidence to substantiate the claim. For example, critical scholars working on the politics of the veil in Europe, or political Islamic mobilizations in the Middle East, tend to question conventional Eurocentric approaches by relying on 'facts' on the ground to challenge the dichotomy between secularism and Islamism and the ways in which these issues are 'securitized'.

It is evident that the decentring agenda calls for the navigation of the nexus between empirical claims and normative assumptions, even in a broad and cursory survey of themes accorded pride of place in mainstream scholarship. To begin with, the chronology and framing of International Relations' own foundational narrative – a transatlantic story which begins in the interwar era and which is traced through a succession of 'great debates' from idealism versus realism, through behaviouralism versus classicism, to the neo–neo moment and the constructivist challenge – reflects a preoccupation with the European and transatlantic origins and priorities of the discipline (Smith, 2000).

Similarly, the discipline of international relations has only recently started to reflect on its own longstanding omission of 'non-European' perspectives and the ways they are also constitutive of European or western affairs. Realists, for instance, remember Cold War superpower rivalry nostalgically as a time of stability – the most peaceful of polarities – when in fact millions perished in proxy wars that shattered the nascent nation-building projects of some dozen post-colonial states and societies.

Some argue that similar blind spots characterize the massive corpus on the democratic peace in the West, which tends to gloss over – and, critics claim, tacitly rationalize – the readiness of democracies to wage war on others (e.g. Barkawi and Laffey, 2006; Bilgin, 2008). The view that risk and uncertainty are more prevalent in today's post Cold War, post 9/11, globalizing world (e.g. Beck, 1999, 2006), arguably reflects a privileging of western 'before and after' experiences, when some half billion people have escaped extreme poverty since 2005 (Chandy and Gertz, 2011) and rising middle classes in the segments of the global South, empowered by economic globalization, are enjoying unprecedented prosperity.

Meanwhile, the 'three traditions' (Hobbesian, Grotian and Kantian), proposed in the classical international society strand of International Relations scholarship, self-evidently emanate from the European canon and reproduce the logic of unilinear diffusion of European practices from the European core to the periphery, a process Bull famously referred to as the *expansion of European society*. A critical-minded, new generation of international society scholars have revisited such frames, demonstrating that thinkers such as Locke and Grotius were complicit in, or appropriated by, the

imperial enterprise. Keene (2002), for instance, traces how Grotian ideas were deployed to rationalize a legal and normative apparatus, in which sovereign recognition was accorded to those deemed 'civilized/European', while capitulations were the fate of the 'semi-civilized' and colonization was the fate of the 'barbaric' or 'savage'. This formulation, he contends, gave rise to a two-tiered system of recognition (mutual recognition among Europeans, conditional or denial of recognition of the rest) or what Suzuki (2005) calls the 'Janus-faced' structure and normative character of the international system.

This is not to say that mainstream International Relations scholarship on both sides of the Atlantic has not developed tools to access non-European frames. The heuristic value of the concepts and the relationship between pluralism and solidarism in the international society approach is a good example (e.g. Hurrell, 2006; Rao, 2010; Shani, 2008). Another heuristic has been to engage with civilizational paradigms to question EU primacy in, for example, the Mediterranean (Adler et al., 2004; Nicolaïdis and Nicolaïdis, 2004). However, the notion that European-cum-western perspectives and interests represent particular, rather than universal, reading(s) of global order simply was not entertained in mainstream scholarship for much of the 20th century. If the de-naturalization of key frames within the discipline, under the banner of provincializing, is beginning to make headway today – propelled by factors like the rise of 'new' social movements and the concomitant pluralization of social science through approaches such as feminism, post-colonialism and post-modernism – this first, crucial step in decentring has yet to find significant uptake among policymakers and publics.

There are at least three reasons for enduring resistance to provincialization. One is linguistic convention – the stylized Manichean representations of complex phenomena often favoured by public intellectuals which reinforce binary readings of 'Europe' and the 'West' versus 'Islam' or 'Asia'. Even those who acknowledge the constructed nature of these categories are constrained by grammatical necessity – as in this article – to make anti-essentialist caveats and carry on in the hopes that commitment to decentring will eventually yield a more inclusive vocabulary. However, attempts to generate a less loaded language to date, such as the specialized turns-of-phrase of subaltern studies, mean that often only like-minded 'metropolitan diasporics' in Spivak's parlance (2004) engage in a conversation which remains opaque to the uninitiated.[6]

We believe the second cause of resistance has to do with Europe's identity crisis, accentuated by a general sense of decline, especially after 9/11 and the ensuing crisis of European multiculturalism. Here, a number of academics, public intellectuals and politicians have developed a sort of apologetics for Eurocentrism, in which European empire and the imposition of the institutions and norms of European civilization on subject peoples is deemed, on balance, to have been beneficial for all. The very act of decentring, though lambasted as nihilistic and masochistic, is read as evidence of Europeans' unique propensity for critical reflection and progress (e.g. Bruckner, 2010).[7] Thus, decentring itself becomes grind to the mill of Eurocentricism.

Last but not least, even facts and frameworks held by critical scholars can assume the 'silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world' (cited in Mowitt, 2001: 4). For example, the ground-breaking work of the 'Copenhagen School' at the interstices of

International Relations and European studies offers a platform to challenge naturalized notions of the 'state' and 'security', while continuing to envisage these in 'Westphilian' terms (Hobson, 2009). However, as Wilkinson (2007) demonstrates, the notion of 'securitization' may not capture dynamics in non-European settings where speech acts might not be as important as other forms of communication. Wilkinson's critique, for example, could be extended to constructivism more broadly given the emphasis on boundary-producing speech acts in constituting relationships between 'selves' and 'others' which, however multilayered, asymmetrical and dynamic, are ultimately conceived in binary terms, a characteristic feature of western thought (Dallmayr, 1996).[8] The crucial question is thus raised: are there 'critiques of Eurocentrism so different from our own that "we" would fail to recognise them' (Mowitt, 2001: 3)?

Engagement: learning from the other

The second logic under the RENEW rubric accordingly entails engaging non-European perspectives more directly. As with provincialization, engagement can unfold both empirically and normatively. In other words, one can seek out other accounts of the world, and one can unpack those accounts to better understand the worldviews and value systems by which they are underpinned. The same is true for interlocutors who analyse their counterparts in Europe with or without interrogating their own conceptual and normative priors. It is precisely by transcending this type of mutual reification at both the empirical and the normative levels that we can open the door to meaningful mutual recognition.

Honing in upon interlocutors' perceptions of the EU and Europe at the empirical level seems to be the first necessary step to engagement. It can offer horizon-widening insights, a foil for ever more rigorous decentring of European perspectives (e.g. Chaban et al., 2006; Lucarelli, 2007).[9] The substantive questions one could ask are wide ranging: how do the EU and Europe's counterparts view their internal and international policy aspirations; what role does the EU and Europe have in the mental maps, power political calculations and institutional responses of rising powers today; is it seen as a market, a model, a beacon, an historical nemesis, a rival or a partner; and how is the attempt to universalize European norms – with its undertones of a civilizing mission – received, and what does this mean for the EU bid to promote human rights, rule of law and democracy (Kleinfeld and Nicolaïdis, 2008; Magnette and Nicolaïdis, 2009; Youngs, 2002)?

However, there are limits to asking 'what do they think of us?'; instead the question should be 'what do they think'. Asking *how* Europe matters as opposed to probing *whether* it matters, the analyst selects for relevance rather than irrelevance and can come away with a slanted sense of priorities in settings where Europe may barely figure. In this regard, Europeans are not necessarily more prone to narcissism than their counterparts elsewhere – exceptionalism, paradoxically, is one of the most common features of actors across the international system. Unsurprisingly then, academic and policy communities around the globe selectively filter information about the broader world in terms of its relevance for parochial concerns.

If such filters reflect a sort of engagement on the ground, without provincializing vis-à-vis the empirical world, the same transpires at the normative level. Here, one may

grapple wholeheartedly with other perspectives, including ones where Europe is barely present, but assess them through prisms that persistently reflect European judgements. In other words, bona fide empirical engagement remains embedded in normative Eurocentrism or, as Diez (this volume) might put it, new information about interlocutors is assimilated to hegemonic frames of reference.

This habit may emanate from the fact that engagement of other viewpoints is often defensive – self-serving reconnaissance circumscribed by the prevailing balance of power. Thus, Europe's most proximate 'others' – Russia and Turkey – have played prominent roles in shaping European power as well as identity politics at various junctures when they have loomed more or less prominently (Morozov and Rumelili, 2012; Neumann, 1998; Nicolaïdis, 2001).

Early engagement by Europeans at the height of Ottoman expansionism, for instance, was informed by the millenarian tradition in European thought that equated the 'terrible Turk' with the 'scourge of God' (a trope still imprinted on the collective imagination of 'front line' Austria). As Ottoman power waned and European power waxed, engagement became exoticization, giving us non-threatening caricatures such as Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. By the late 19th century, in tempo with Europe's crescendo, this mode of engagement evolved into an Orientalist canon dismissive of Ottoman or Turkish agency (Fisher Onar, 2009b). Meanwhile, the Ottomans, like the Russians, Japanese, Chinese and Thais, to name but a few, embarked upon defensive modernization that ultimately shifted the pendulum again, away from Europe and the West more generally. This, in turn, has reinvigorated European engagement of 'rising powers' for precautionary purposes (Fisher Onar, 2013).

Defensive engagement can yield clues to the dynamics of mutual constitution. But the danger is that one of misses or misinterprets key aspects of the picture such that even as one engages rising powers' perspectives, one fails to see, for example, across the area studies compartments into which the western academy – and its counterparts in the post-colonial world – tends to box expertise on 'non-European' subjects, blunting for instance our understanding of south–south interactions and their broader geopolitical relevance. Thus, observers of China and Brazil as incipient super- or regional powers, or Turkey as a global 'swing state' (Klimane and Fontaine, 2012), tend to treat their subjects in isolation, overlooking, for example, their accelerating race for influence in, say, Africa. However, these incipient rivalries have considerable implications for voting patterns in multilateral institutions, which could impact outstanding political questions such as the status of Cyprus or Taiwan, or global governance more broadly.

A further danger is that distorted engagement engenders self-fulfilling prophecies, a case in point being the tendency of some American pundits to project onto China offensive realist aspirations without apprehending the logic of Beijing's own claim to normative powerhood (Kavalski, this volume). By thus framing the realm of possibilities, western pundits run the risk of awakening latent or novel aspirations and security dilemmas, notwithstanding the low salience of universalism in the Chinese political philosophical tradition (e.g. Chestnut and Johnston, 2009; Qin, 2007).[10]

It is therefore analytically as well as normatively preferable to recognize that actors across our transforming world interact in multifaceted ways, with many championing alternative pathways to modernity that diverge from prevalent

understandings in Europe and the West. To access these patterns requires engagement of others on their own terms, by taking seriously their 'facts' and 'values' about the world, while seeking to understand how Eurocentric legacies may condition such engagement.

Analysts are increasingly taking on this challenge, showcasing – *inter alia* – Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian, South East Asian, Indonesian and Islamic perspectives on international relations theory (see Acharya and Buzan, 2010), as well as Latin American, east, south and southeast Asian, Iranian, Turkish, Israeli and Arab along with central, eastern and western European perspectives (in Tickner and Waever, 2010). A variety of topics can be explored, including Iranian-Islamic approaches to non-alignment (Sadri, 1999); Chinese visions of war, peace and alterity (Bleiker, 2001); Muslim and Sikh approaches to universality and solidarism (Shani, 2008); Latin American perspectives on autonomy, hybridity and the 'everyday' (Tickner, 2003) and a growing literature on non-western understandings of dignity and their relevance for human rights (e.g. Fisher Onar, 2012; Krubein, 2012; Orakzai, 2012). A well-theorized branch of non-western international relations theory emanates from South Asia and has popularized notions such as the 'subaltern' and 'hybridity' which offer powerful tools for decentred engagement. In addition, Taiwanese and other East Asian scholars of cultural studies are producing seminal work on the need to 'decolonize' and 'deimperialize' knowledge production and political engagements in the wake of the Cold War in light of both echoes of European (and Japanese) imperialism and present-day globalization (e.g. Chen, 2010).

These viewpoints and categories, coupled with a commitment to decentring one's own, present a vast and largely untapped reservoir of ideas and connections with which to jointly grapple the challenges of our world. This may help us apprehend 'patterns of relations across borders, or between different peoples … in ways that will make the resolution of global problems easier or more difficult' (Mayall, 2011: 333).

The notion of hybridity,[11] for instance, offers a useful antidote to the temptation to essentialize even as one engages. The same is true for 'non-European' engagement of European perspectives which is often inflected by the Occidentalist habit of inversing Eurocentric or Orientalist binaries. This only perpetuates de-historicization of the relationship and mutual exclusion – for example the tendency to 'cherry-pick' from aspects of European modernity to extrapolate a monolithic, materialist and predatory West that is contrasted with an equally reified, spiritual and nurturing East (Cooper, 2005; Fisher Onar, 2013).[12] These reductionist invocations of 'authentic' difference are often deployed to authorize authoritarian practices, as was the case with Singaporean premier Lee Kwan Yew's pronouncements on 'Asian values' and subsequent Chinese variations, which assert that Asians' intrinsic preference for communitarianism, as opposed to Western individualism, means that social and economic empowerment trumps political freedoms.[13] Occidentalism (Buruma and Margalit, 2004) – a form of 'non-European' engagement of western counterparts that rarely reflects upon the normative underpinnings of such engagement – thus displays the same logic as Eurocentrism by overlooking the 'interactive, co-constitutive complexity of here and there, now and then' (Hooper and Kramsch, 2007: 529).

Given this, opening the door to recognizing mutual constitution through rigorous provincializing and engagement can belie the fear that underpins much resistance to dismantling Eurocentrism – namely, that a decentring agenda would write Europe out of the picture. Rather, decentring is about confronting the ways Europeans have and have not made an imprint, for better and for worse, on our interwoven world. Moreover, above all, it means asking how European imprints may themselves be a function of the influences of the rest of the world on Europe.

Re-construction: how should a post-colonial power act?

In short, transcending Eurocentricism calls for both provincializing strategies of engagement with other worldviews – even those in which Europe might not figure, or figure indirectly through local engagement with modernity. But if the purpose is to tease out threads of mutual constitution, what comes next? As specialists on the EU and Europe, we ask how Europe and its latest incarnation as the European Union has been constructed and discuss how it can and should be critiqued. We discuss this in ways which take into account the multifaceted *critique* of Eurocentrism emanating from within and outside its borders. We also ask how, on this basis, the current practice of Europe and the EU should be evaluated, and whether this should include assessment against the benchmark of normative powerhood.

We employ 're-construction' in two interconnected ways. On one hand, re-construction is used to ask whether the extant historical 'construction' of the EU as a normative actor can be questioned and whether the EU can be re-imagined on decentred grounds. On the other hand, we refer to the kind of *praxis* which follows from a decentring agenda. Specifically, there are clearly fields – such as human rights, environmental protection or multilateral governance – in which the EU's resources and experience, divested of imperialism, can contribute constructively to an emergent global order and the renewal of a humbled, reinvigorated Europe in a non-European world. In both these dimensions, our argument is that the idea and theory of *normative powerhood* should not be dismissed but rather the ways in which such normative powerhood can be co-constituted in the international system should be explored (Kavalski, this volume).

This part of the decentring agenda for Europe starts with taking stock of the ideal of a provincialized and engaged Europe in order to revisit the 'construction of European identity' through historical memory. For if, as in the mainstream iconography, the EU is a community of memory, then the memory in question is that of Europe's civil-war-turned-world-war. In this narrative, this traumatic past is meant to be transcended by the ever greater union between the peoples of Europe. But Europe's other past, that of its relations with the rest of the world from the beginning of the colonial era four centuries ago to the creation of the European Community and the EU through to the present, does not figure in the story. It is as if the EU, as an imagined community, has exorcized the demons of its Member States by forgetting their colonial past and successfully entrenching the myth of its own 'virgin birth' (Nicolaïdis, 2008; see also Hansen, 2002; Hansen and Jonsson, 2012).

However, this other past has never been far from the surface, acting as a backdrop for Europe's cautious reassertion on the global scene, first in the context of the Cold War and especially in the post Cold War era. Thus, the incremental and timid resurgence of the idea and practice of 'Europe as a model' can be seen as the product of a mixed strategy of amnesia, redirection and atonement on the part of public figures, intellectuals and broader publics. The European Community was not only born out of a desire for a radical break with the recognized past of (inter-)continental war and nationalism; but was also born out of desire for continuity: the yearning to manage collectively a colonial world that was escaping its Member States individually and above all the African continent – sharing sovereignty to share colonies. From the interwar period until the late 1950s, practically all of the visions, movements and concrete institutional arrangements working towards European integration made Africa's incorporation into the European enterprise a central objective. As witnessed by several scholarly, political and journalistic accounts of the time, including the minutes of the Hague Congress of Europe in 1948, European integration was inextricably bound up with the 'Eurafrika' project of collective exploitation of the continent's resources (Hansen and Jonsson, 2011, 2012).

There was no denying the presence of Europe's colonial past at the creation. If *Le General* de Gaulle presided over the launch of the new European project in 1958, it was only as a byproduct of his mission to deal with war and decolonization in Algeria. Indeed, it is now a forgotten fact that Algeria was a fully fledged part of the original EEC, not of course as a 'member' but as a (dependent) territory. As Shepard argues, the French response to the Algerian revolution, from war to negotiated independence, gave birth to the certainty that decolonization was simply a stage in the forward march of Hegelian linear history, thus making the messy episodes disappear in a familiar liberal narrative of progress (Shepard, 2006).

The bundling in of colonial legacies through the backdoor has meant that the gap between EU policies' stated intention and the worldview of others is both impressive and largely invisible, except for regular and vague accusations of 'neo-imperialism'. In particular, most of the traditional political economy of EU–Africa relations and trade or migration agreements fail to recognize the continued, even increasing, currency of colonial ideology in the EU's relations with Africa (Collier and Nicolaïdis, 2008; Jones and Weinhardt, in press; Hansen and Jonsson, 2011). Reconstruction, therefore, is about acknowledging and internalizing such legacies in the on-going relationship (Hansen, 2002; Merry, 1991; Wolfe and Pace, 2007).

If colonial legacies figured palpably in the constitution of the EU project, what normative inferences can be drawn from such diagnosis? In other words, how can the need for a 'post-colonial power' to provide the true substance of normative powerhood be reconsidered? To be sure, the very term 'post-colonial' is itself fiercely contested and riddled with contradictions. Since the age of formal colonialism is over and the descendants of ex-colonial people live everywhere on the globe, the whole world would seem post-colonial (Loomba, 1998). But in referring particularly to Europe, it is meant to convey an aftermath for the agent itself not only temporarily but also ideologically – the latter standing obviously as an aspiration if it is considered that the consequences of colonial rule are still very much visible today (Darby, 2004; Hooper and Kramsch, 2007; Nicolaïdis, 2004; Nicolaïdis, 2008). Post-coloniality clearly refers to transcending an

imperialist past not just coming after (De Alva, 1995), but the question is whether this can become an institutionalized exercise rather than simply an intersubjective life experience.

What does this imply? Practically, decentring can mean many things and be pursued at several levels. This includes emphasizing co-development including in the management of movement of people and circular migration, ownership including of so-called conditions for access to the EU, or the decentralization of decision making away from Brussels in delegation with local partners.

Partly, we need to better tease out the implications of the imperative of *mutuality* that any post-colonial approach entails (Kleinfeld and Nicolaïdis, 2008, 2012; Nicolaïdis, 2004, 2008). That is, the systematic mitigation of wealth and power asymmetries in international politics on one hand, and genuine mutual recognition of identities and polities across borders on the other – the logic that effectively underpins EU integration. Thus, for the EU, decentring calls for asking how and to what extent mutual recognition can be translated from a norm prevailing inside the Union to a basic norm governing relations with the rest of the world.

Related to this is the question of power or *empowerment*, since mutual recognition is rarely a matter of symmetrical tit-for-tat between equally empowered agents shaking hands but a complex negotiation (Fisher Onar and Paker, 2012). After all, power relationships at the global scale have been shaped for at least the past four centuries by the pervasive influence of Eurocentric ideational and institutional legacies, from the map of the modern world (Del Casino and Hanna, 2006), to notions of sovereignty, territoriality, nationalism and self-determination. Accordingly, the structural legacies of European hegemony continue to condition the journey towards reciprocal recognition steeped in mutuality and empowerment.[14]

This is apparent, for instance, in negotiations in the context of Europe's 'neighbourhood', where the EU persists in old centripetal habits, 'thinking' of its neighbours as the outer rim of a set of concentric circles emanating from Brussels and rippling outwards, offering degrees of access to the EU as a measure of countries' divergence with regards to EU standards and rules (Bechev and Nicolaïdis, 2010; Whitman and Wolff, 2010). In the wake of the Arab revolutions with all their adjacent uncertainties, a truly decentred approach that combines humility with proactivity in areas where EU resources can contribute would start with allowing complex societal dynamics underway in the settings in question to occur while helping create spaces for fair mutual engagement between local actors. Interestingly, at least in its official policy briefs, the EU has started to move in this direction, emphasizing empowerment and civil society initiatives, though such attempts are still grounded on notions of norm export and EU-anchored processes of change (Korosteleva, 2012). On the formal front, the EU will need to allow for more autonomous joint institutions and for equal rotation and 'decentred summits', as well as symbolically recognize concerns for status and polity building not with 'Europe's neighbour' as a hierarchical construct but as a political project for new overlapping regions in the Euro-Mediterranean for instance.

Meanwhile, it is crucial that the decentring agenda does not devolve into endorsement of other forms of centrism. The norms of mutuality and empowerment at a time of global recalibration suggest that, just as the time is ripe for the EU and Europeans more broadly

to let go of their centric shackles, so should authoritative agents and institutions around the world engage marginalized individuals and groups within their polities who are increasingly mobilizing on the basis of gender and sexuality, or ethnic, religious and socio-economic status, to confront the legacies of their 'double colonization' at the hands of Europe and the West on one hand, and traditional centres and elites on the other. The point of decentring is neither to throw the legacies of European humanism out with the bathwater, nor to uncritically endorse other 'centrisms'. As Spivak's cautions, empowerment should not be 'a duty of the fitter self' to the 'less fortunate other' (2004: 535) but rather should entail the laborious work of 'suturing' into being through patient and painstaking engagementof 'the imagined felicitous subject of universal human rights' (Spivak, 2004: 563).

Operationalizing mutual recognition is a vast agenda encompassing law, diplomacy, history, and economic, social and political practices. By mapping the modalities of co-constitution in these arenas, including the strategies and tactics agents use to negotiate their way through asymmetries, fresh insights can be drawn about wide-ranging phenomena, from the tensions at play in the debates over Islamic symbols in European public spaces, to the role of historical baggage – or instrumental invocations thereof – in World Trade Organization or climate negotiations. Even more basic are the games involved in diplomatic recognition as either simply declaratory or actually constitutive acts which become the source of a state's existence.

Above all, by acknowledging the role which European expropriation of southern resources and negation of southern agency played in the rise of the west and the historical subjugation of the rest, a European peace project which includes global responsibilities can be infused with renewed and global purchase. There is no reason why the kind of reconstruction called for here should not be possible, especially given the urgency and uncertainties of the present regional environment in light of the Arab uprisings and global rebalancing. After all, 'Europe' has been reconstituted in response to major geopolitical challenges at least twice in recent history: after the Second World War and after 1989. As Diez might have it (2013), if these entailed heated contests over long hegemonic narratives of exclusionary nationalism and east–west dichotomies, today social agents must confront exclusionary Eurocentrism in the wake of the 2009 economic crisis – a juncture when global capitalism, a European legacy, is empowering actors who are slowly but surely rethinking and revising the rules of the global game.

Embracing a post-colonial ethos in dialogical exchange with these actors regarding how to navigate the turbulent waters of our emergent multipolar order can, in turn, help reinvigorate other and precious legacies. Not least among these is the European-cum-universal human rights canon which has evolved over some two centuries of turbulent management of the inequalities engendered by capitalist modernity, empowering millions of men, women and children in and beyond Europe. It is crucial, in this context, to critically reflect on the origins of the human rights agenda and its availability for manipulation by western powers as grounds for *a certain kind* of intervention in the affairs of countries in the global South that may not conform to local approaches to justice. For instance, there has been a tendency in the International Criminal Court to trump national level process of reconciliation or local approaches to transitional justices, reconciliation and amnesties (Teitel, 2000). Bearing in mind this major caveat, namely that rights

discourse must be emplyed in an inclusive rather than hegemonic fashion, universal human rights can serve as a site for a global suturing conversation on how to institute a more pluralistic and inclusive international order.

Conclusion

Our call to 'Rethink Europe in a Non-European World' (RENEW) is driven by the conviction that the EU need not retreat to manage expectations and capacities in a multipolar world, where international capital and migration flows and transnational economic, environmental and security challenges are transforming the ways states interact (Beck, 2006). Instead, it needs to carefully decentre the vision of international order that continues to circumscribe scholarship and shape the perspectives of policymakers and publics in Europe. This means envisaging other countries and regions as centres of their own geostrategic and geopolitical concerns, while recognizing that legacies of a more Eurocentric era may inflect, for better or for worse, upon actors' perceptions and preferences to this day. Scholars, policymakers and citizens in Europe would need to think themselves out of the picture in order, paradoxically, to play a more meaningful role therein, all the while guarding against relapsing into Eurocentrism. Interlocutors too would have to resist the temptation to replace 'European' imperialism with 'non-European' authenticity, recognizing that, in addition to affirmation of difference, the decentring process is about acknowledging hybridity coupled with recognition of the power relations to which this has given rise.

Clearly, the kind of image which the EU seeks to project onto the rest of the world is nothing less than an 'EU-topia', itself manufactured as a narrative of projection, a construct of the kind of EU that many within would like it to be (Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2002). However, it is not because Europeans may still, even in the wake of the EU's greatest crisis yet, have some appetite for using such EU-topia as a model that others around the world are likely to buy it. Rather, the model European actors sought to construct and project has waned dramatically both within and beyond the Union. Today, many relevant blueprints, experiences and paradigms vie for influence in the global war of ideas. This makes the decentring agenda all the more necessary and urgent.

The challenges for such an agenda are formidable. The decentring exercise requires critically unpacking extant categories and assumptions at the level of ontology and epistemology without succumbing to relativism. Normatively this requires striking a balance between receptivity to multiple lifeworlds, social imaginaries, public philosophies and the practices to which they give rise, without attributing them with a monolithic or static character. At the same time, it necessitates attention to the oftentimes precarious position of vulnerable groups and individuals in emergent poles while eschewing the counterproductive logic of the rescue narrative, the civilizing mission. Decentring should not be a matter of *provincializing* Europe only to enable other powerful entities to subordinate and silence diversity within and beyond their societies and polities. The point is not to dislodge European hegemony and replace it with Sino-centric or Indo-centric perspectives, hybridized or otherwise. Rather, it is about digging deep to confront the mixed baggage of one's imprint upon the world.

If these considerable challenges can be met, the decentring agenda can help generate theoretical insights, analytical tools and empirical findings which will enable students of

global order – and Europe's place therein – to better grasp the challenges and opportunities of our increasingly non-European and post western order. In so doing, Europeans can also restore the credibility of the project of mutual recognition and salvage other, more laudable legacies. It is no small ambition to argue that normative power Europe must restrict itself to such an agenda. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has put it, 'At the end of European colonialism, European thought is a gift to us all'.

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2. Modern European colonialism was by far the most extensive of the different kinds of colonial contacts that have been a recurrent feature of human history, with colonies and ex-colonies covering 84% of the land surface of the globe by 1930 (Loomba, 1998).
3. See Nicolaïdis (2014).
4. See Seth (2009) on nomothetic and idiographic approaches in post-colonial studies.
5. Much cutting-edge work in this vein emanates from the fields of geography and history such as the 'global history' project for a decentred and inclusive world history associated with scholars such as Aydin (2007), Conrad and Sachsenmaier (2007) and Duara (2010). Historical and political sociology, with its concern with the origins and implications of European hegemony and modernity, also speaks powerfully to the decentring agenda for international relations (for a survey see Hobden and Hobson, 2002).
6. Volumes which could serve as core texts in a taught course on 'decentring international relations' include Tickner and Waever (2010) and Acharya and Buzan (2010), as well as Bleiker (2001). The accessible language of Nayak and Selbin's monograph *Decentring International Relations* (2010) offers a jargon-free introduction for undergraduates.
7. For more balanced or sophisticated renderings see Ferguson (2003) and Buruma and Margalit (2004), who rightly stress that systematically blaming Europe and the West is 'precisely a form of condescension as though only Westerners are to be morally responsible for what they do'.
8. In a sweeping survey of other critical approaches, Hobson (2007) traces the ways Gramscian, feminist and post-structuralist approaches to international relations may challenge capitalist or patriarchal 'centrisms' – or metanarratives altogether – but stop short of assessing how non-western perspectives are constitutive of the European.

9. Important contributions include Sonia Lucarelli's work (e.g. Lucarelli, 2007; Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010) and the Asia Pacific Public Perceptions Project managed by Martin Holland (e.g. Chaban et al., 2006; Holland and Chaban, 2009). Other individual contributions include studies of neighbourhood policy (Bechev and Nicolaïdis, 2010), trade relations (Elgström, 2007, 2008) and ad hoc country studies of views on Europe in contexts such as India and Turkey (e.g. Fisher Onar and Evin, 2010; Lisbonne-de Vergeron, 2006).
10. To be sure, there are tomes consistent with the 'realist' logic in the Chinese and Indian canons, exemplified by the works of Sun Tzu or Kautilya. However, it should not be taken for granted that they are fully congruent with western realism and that they are major influences on political thought and preferences in the two countries. The latter's works, for example, were lost by the sixth century and only recovered in 1915.
11. The notion of 'hybridity' has also been critiqued for a pedigree that was once implicit in the very racism or colonialism it is used today to unpack, as well as for having become a 'catch-all' phrase and hence an empty signifier.
12. Cooper criticizes leading post-colonial theorists for being as ahistorical as their Eurocentric counterparts, lambasting them for 'plucking' stories, 'leapfrogging' historical legacies and 'time flattening.'
13. Even well-meaning initiatives, such as the UN's Clash/Alliance of Civilisations, recognize but reify difference underwriting an us/them sort of civilizationalism.
14. In the academy too, non-western scholars face challenges inserting their voices into debates, especially on theory. Western academe sets research agendas, questions and assessment criteria such that western theories are often applied in non-western settings with nonsensical results. Non-western experiences tend to be delegated to area studies and considered relevant mostly for current events analysis and to 'test' aspects of western theory. Gatekeeping is perpetuated by the deep immersion in western academic conventions required to publish in leading journals, and the need for resources to attend the major trade fairs. Such factors limit fora where the global conversation – today perforce conducted in English – can transpire. For a catalogue of challenges faced see, among others, Tickner, 2003; In, 2006; and Aydinli and Matthews, 2009.

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