JCMS Journal of Common Market Studies UACES
JCMS 2016 Volume 54. Number 4. pp. 981–998 DOI: 10.1111/jcms.12350

Africa–EU Relations and Normative Power Europe: A Decolonial Pan-African Critique*

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Abstract

The debate on NPE (Normative Power Europe) has flourished for more than a decade. NPE has shaped Africa–EU relations considerably, especially since the founding of the AU (African Union). Yet while the EU aspires to be a post-imperial, normative power, this postcolonial critique suggests NPE is a neo-Kantian, Eurocentric discourse that reinvigorates an outdated European moral paternalism. The article explores the role of NPE in Africa–EU relations through a Foucauldian conceptualization of knowledge in EU foreign policy, and insists particularly on how pan-African regionalization and NPE led to unwarranted optimism about deploying European norms in Africa. To the contrary, a decolonial perspective reveals that AU–EU inter-regional structural and organizational convergence enchains only frail normative convergence, which will diminish as the pan-African project unfolds further.

Keywords: normative power Europe; EU-Africa relations; postcolonialism; regionalism; Pan-Africanism

Introduction

This article critically roots NPE (Normative Power Europe) in contemporary Africa–EU relations (Manners, 2002). While NPE cannot speak for all of Europe, it takes an important role in the knowledge production about and within Africa–EU relations. The article's decolonial critique deems such political knowledge Eurocentric and inadequate to overcome the EU's postcolonial condition. As a seemingly postmodern, post-sovereign expression of imperial moral superiority, NPE cannot lay the foundations for a decolonized Africa–EU relationship. A postcolonial perspective on NPE explains why an EU foreign policy based on Eurocentric norms struggles to free itself of paternalistic discourse about Africa.

To redress a fraying academic and policy debate on NPE, this article reconsiders the three epistemological categories of NPE initially suggested by Manners (2002, p. 252): as ontological (a statement about the EU as a changer of norms), positivist (*how* the EU attempts to change norms of the international system and of other actors through certain 'types of diffusion') and normative (how *should* the EU act in extending its norms?). This 'epistemological multiplicity' is analytically crucial and at the heart of contentions in Africa–EU relations.

This article's key argument is that NPE is not the post-imperial, non-colonial normative discourse it pretends to be. Its intellectual origins and false claims of universality have detrimental effects for the African decolonial project. Within Africa–EU relations, NPE intervenes to capitalize on EU–AU institutional similarities to reinforce European

*The author wishes to thank Stephen Chan, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Rahul Rao for their advice. The author further thanks the two anonymous *JCMS* reviewers for their helpful comments.

normativity. EU regionalism promotion hence gives way to NPE imposition. While this article critiques NPE through Pan-Africanism, the latter hardly describes African political reality. Pan-African decolonization is an unfinished, normative project that will reshape Africa–EU relations toward a more equal, actual partnership of voluntary engagement.

Recovering African Agency

When engaging a European narrative of Self with its postcolonial Other, a major analytical challenge is the vast co-constitution of these discourses. Many postcolonial scholars write antithetically to a fetishized European Enlightenment modernity, whereas Europeans often disavow the constitutive contribution of non-European resources and inventions. When speaking about Africa, it is therefore crucial to appreciate the dialectics of 'tradition' and 'modernity' instead of essentializing an elusive, primitive Africa (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 189). A thorough critique of NPE in Africa–EU relations therefore needs to start by questioning the ontological positivism of NPE. Most NPE scholarship marginalizes the 'normative' dimension and conflates the 'ontological' and 'positivist' dimensions. Decolonialism views such European thought as Eurocentric systematized knowledge about and in politics. African agency can instead be recovered by understanding NPE as discourse. Foucault's work was crucial in conceptualizing discourse as power, and power as discourse. Hence, a Foucauldian analysis allows us to critique discourse and to think of alternatives. For a decolonial critique of NPE, the normative vantage point is Pan-Africanism – itself a discourse that does not describe African political reality.

An important distinction should be made between the 'postcolonial' and 'decolonial'. The two are not exactly congruent and draw from different geographical and historical foci in accounting for the same phenomenon of European epistemic hegemony in the aftermath of formal decolonization (Bhambra, 2014). Accepting the risk of oversimplification, this article uses 'postcolonial' as a *description* of incomplete European decolonization and the dominance of European knowledge, and uses 'decolonial' as the *prescription* by contemporary anti-colonial scholarship to overcome the postcolonial condition.

NPE as Discourse: European Agency and Eurocentrism

NPE is not actively out to subdue African agency; it is not a *purposive* neo-colonial undertaking. But postcolonial studies takes issue with precisely this puzzle: how Eurocentric political thought pretends its complete dissolution from European empire. As such, postcolonial studies has gradually shifted from pure resistance against European colonialism to a re-problematization of the postcolonial itself. This comprehensive state of the world came to be called 'postcoloniality' – that Eurocentrism continues to dominate Euro–African interaction. This Eurocentrism is construed as a systematic bundle of practices and institutions that operate on the idea that non-Western societies 'can only progress to the extent that they imitate the West', rendering progress itself the 'triumph of the humanist universalism invented by Europe' (Amin, 2010, p. 207). In the name of this humanist universalism, European modernity divides the world in binary terms that 'exclude … from its imaginary the hybridity, multiplicity, ambiguity, and contingency of different forms of life' (Castro-Gomez and Martin, 2002, p. 269). The 'good' side of this binary produces subjects that meet the demands of capitalism: 'white, male, married, heterosexual,

disciplined, hardworking, self-controlled' (ibid., 279). Despite these differences, Eurocentric knowledge discursively aspires *universality*. Consider the rhetoric on partnership with the AU put forward by the European Commission:

> But our partnership is also based on values and principles: democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, good governance and sustainable development are foremost among these. And most importantly, these are not models that are coming from the outside; these are the very principles and values that are at the core of this organization, the African Union. (Barroso, 2013a)

Discourse such as this informs this article's critique of NPE in Africa–EU relations. While not offering an extensive empirical discourse analysis, this article certainly understands NPE as a discursive construct in the Foucauldian sense. NPE should be thought of as an episteme, which Foucault defined as 'the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Foucault, 1970, p. 168). This definition fits well with the full breadth of Manners' NPE epistemological multiplicity: the EU as a normative actor, its way of acting normatively and the deliberation of said normativity all revolve around NPE as an episteme.

A *Foucauldian* decolonial critique of NPE is problematic. Studying the emancipation of *African* political agency within Africa–EU relations through a *European* paradigm is cynical. Indeed, Foucault's overall goal of a 'critique of our historical era' failed, as his engagement with the non-European was poor, and his thoughts on 'race' premature (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1999, p. 112). Foucault's thought is not universal and cannot satisfy the criteria of a decolonial account of African politics or postcoloniality. Nonetheless, Foucauldian thought allows unpacking European discourses toward the non-European.

The argument proceeds through five substantive sections. The article first establishes a postcolonial critique of NPE as a neo-colonial episteme. Then it locates NPE within Africa–EU relations. Subsequently, it focuses on the dialectics of regionalism and normativity. An overview of a full decolonial African project and its implications for Africa–EU relations precedes the conclusion.

I. A Normative Power for Europe

If the 1648 Westphalian Peace was Europe's first mythical 'big bang' of internationality, Manners' concept of NPE became a similar smash hit among EU scholars. NPE posits the EU as a global power championing fundamental liberal norms rather than seeking power through military might. Manners introduces a new narrative of Europe for and about itself, clad in a non-imperial *Gestalt*.

The False Dichotomy of 'Power' and 'Norms'

The role of norms and ideas has been constitutive in IR from the outset. The EU's specific historical experience combined a distinctly normative narrative of integration with a self-described 'post-Westphalian' polity. This blend invites NPE – a *sui generis* EU foreign policy doctrine. NPE differs from Duchêne's and Bull's 'civilian power', which sought to challenge the assumption that 'global power' in IR requires military capacity. The threefold epistemological classification of NPE rests on bold implications regarding

'power'. Manners points to several authors proposing normative concepts of power, for example Lukes' 'third face of power', as power to influence values of others so as 'to prevent [conflicting interests] from arising in the first place' (Lukes, 1974, p. 27).

Foucauldian IR suggests a genealogical sequence of different forms of power, in which knowledge plays a central role. Historically after 'sovereign' power until death, 'disciplinary' power represents a refined type of power, which was later complemented by liberal 'government'. 'Government' has not completely absolved prior forms of power, which now co-exist in a dynamic power triangle: 'sovereignty–discipline–government' (Foucault, 2000, p. 214). Different types of power thus co-exist, and states are simultaneous producers and subjects of power.

Even if NPE is a novel kind of power, its genealogical inheritance demystifies the concept. The constructivist binary interests/norms loses hence its pertinence; neither a purely normative account nor a reiteration of neorealism in critiquing NPE are helpful (e.g. Hyde-Price, 2006). Instead, norms and interests should be considered as neither fully discrete nor congruent. Their interplay and overlap matters: 'Norms based on material interests can assume normative authority; norms are woven into material interests' (Youngs, 2004, p. 420). NPE by implication inherited much of this IR debate: normativity in EU foreign policy genealogically builds on realist power paradigms, but NPE also aspires to post-sovereign foreign policy, yet cannot dissociate itself from its genealogy. Precisely because of this struggle over EU foreign policy knowledge among academics and practitioners, a critique starting at the 'ontological' level is necessary.

If the EU does not even have the ontological quality of being a norms-based actor, this hints at much broader ambiguities regarding NPE in Africa–EU relations. NPE also includes an ongoing definitional struggle among Europeans. A useful conceptualization of this struggle over NPE can be found in Diez's neo-Gramscian account of NPE as the 'experience' of a 'hegemonic struggle' *toward* social norms within the EU (Diez, 2014, p. 203). Merlingen's work underlines that 'even though [NPE] is aimed at the protection and strengthening of the basic exercise of human agency, [it] is never clearly distinguishable from the subjection and subordination of this very agency': something Foucault calls 'epistemic violence' (Merlingen, 2007, p. 443). Diez' and Merlingen's arguments enable a postcolonial critique of NPE – as a struggle concept among other foreign policy considerations that translates into epistemic violence which undermines African agency.

NPE's Kantian Heritage

Manners suggests as the 'ontological basis' of NPE certain norms: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights (2002, p. 242). These concepts resonate with an idealist depiction of Europe as the 'Kantian miracle' (Kagan, 2007, p. 135). There is merit to Kagan's charge: NPE's aspirations differ remarkably little from the thrust of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*. But a Kantian approach to normativity engrains NPE in Eurocentric intellectual traditions.

Kant perhaps defined the eponymous rationality of Enlightenment, but also believed that 'humanity exists in its greatest perfection in the white race' (*Physische Geographie*, in Eze, 1997, p. 188). The (white) free-thinking ideal sovereign citizen still resonates in the EU's insistence on liberty, as Perpetual Peace is attainable through Kantian cosmopolitanism, underwritten by global rule of law. For Kant, the global legitimacy of

cosmopolitanism follows from the assumption that adopting European success is not a matter of forceful imposition, but a voluntary, pre-given subaltern desire (Hobson, 2012, p. 28). Based on this supposed universalism of NPE *avant la lettre*, Kant confidently states: 'no nation shall forcibly interfere with the constitution and government of another' (Kant, 2003, p. 4).

NPE's claim to universality is 'underwritten by a Kantian philosophy that elevates [Enlightenment] morality to the ultimate goal of human activity' (Dillon, 2007). This philosophy continues to universalize the particular European experience for 'ostensibly universal legal cosmopolitan values' (Parker and Rosamond, 2013, p. 231). Ultimately, NPE normativity aspiring neo-Kantian status buries it in contentious cosmopolitan political philosophy. NPE hence limits its sources of normativity to a legalistic, racialized and utopian metaphysical cloud of providence.

Epistemic Violence through 'Past as Other'

NPE's normative basis is constructed on its European historical experience that 'predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics' (Manners, 2002, p. 252). Europe's past as an imperial power is absent in this narrative. Indeed, Catherine Ashton argued in 2011 the EU should offer 'post-imperial partnerships for a post-imperial age' (Ashton, 2011). Asserting that the EU is fully non-imperial is however incorrect rhetoric. It purports a 'virgin birth' of the EU and NPE – 'as if the new entity had nothing to do with the past of its most powerful Member States' (Fisher Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013, p. 284). A 'virgin birth' narrative of NPE assumes an ethical transcendence of NPE norms that completely disavows their Enlightenment liberal origin, which underwrote colonialism.

NPE is not anti-historical and makes clear references to Europe's past. This temporal construction utilizes transhistoricity to establish 'past as other' (Wæver, 1998). It enables a modernist linearity to know the 'different' and 'inferior' that violates 'universal' principles. Klinke makes this argument regarding EU–Russia relations, arguing that European superiority is grounded in a 'spatiotemporal relationship' based on difference and a historical master/apprentice relationship (Klinke, 2011, p. 712). The European view of its Others thus requires a *modern* temporality in which the binary 'postmodern-modern' effectively translates as 'modern-backward' (Klinke, 2012, p. 930). Prozorov shows empirically and theoretically that this 'temporal othering' cannot absolve itself of spatial markers: 'Spatial othering is not simply an unfortunate complement to temporal self-differentiation but rather the only way the latter can take place in empirical reality' (Prozorov, 2011, p. 1283). Concretely, NPE's Other thus arises *temporally* as Europe's own surmounted wretched past and *spatially* as that anachronistic evil actualized in today's Africa. A 2015 speech by High Representative/Vice President Mogherini exemplifies this well:

> There is no development without security, as much as there is no security without development. Peace in Africa is possible. […] Think of Europe. The peoples of my continent have fought against each other for centuries. After World War two we said: enough. This is why the European Union was born. Peace came with economic prosperity. And vice-versa. So we totally support African aspirations to silence the guns by 2020 and provide good governance for its people. (Mogherini 2015)

By implication, the legitimacy of NPE in crises in Africa becomes doubly Eurocentric, if the epistemic basis to discern said atrocity is not the present's unfolding tragedy, but an abstract representation of past European atrocities.

Why is NPE Neo-colonial?

NPE elides any appreciation of postcoloniality. Even the basic awareness that European hegemony hinges on colonial division of labour evades the NPE narrative. Manners wonders 'to which extent past European failures and crimes (such as colonialism, nationalism, world wars, the holocaust and inequality) […] are part of the normative power narrative' (2013, p. 319), but fails to connect this 'normative' consideration to the Eurocentric neo-Kantian 'ontological' essence of NPE. Instead of acknowledging postcoloniality, European leaders regularly deny the validity of decolonial critique, arguing Europe should 'bring a close to its colonial guilt', asking Africa not to play the 'colonial victim' card, or arguing that Europe should 'relax' about its long fulfilled 'retreat from empire' (Versi, 2008; *Evening Standard*, 2012).

NPE is neo-colonial as it purports a false universalism. Debate on NPE is distracted by a false interests/norms dichotomy, which is exacerbated by Kantian universalistic norm conceptions that Manners provides for in his 'ontological' and 'positivist' categories of NPE. Precisely because the reflective, third 'normative' epistemological category is not utilized to question the epistemological nature of NPE norms themselves, NPE struggles to accommodate non-European norms and African agency. NPE is neo-colonial because of its paternalist stance, like much of Enlightenment colonial reasoning, by applying the success story of its own overcome history to its spatial Other. This African Other lacks the 'wider social ontology' of European liberalism, which is why a universalistic imposition of European-defined norms in Africa is indeed neo-colonial (Joseph, 2010, p. 241). This wider social ontology is primarily founded on what has been called 'market cosmopolitanism', where NPE 'is always already possible' (Parker and Rosamond, 2013, p. 232).

NPE is neo-colonial because it lacks the legitimacy to impose normativity elsewhere. The reasoning is perfectly circular: because European norms are supposedly universal, they become a discursive *perpetuum mobile* of African deficiency in need of correction through norm imposition. An oft-quoted phrase by Tony Blair demonstrates Europe's clear role: 'the state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world' (*The Guardian*, 2001). As a neo-Kantian discourse, NPE needs an Other: it is found in the lacking, malleable Africa, which requires EU policies, development aid and regionalization. Such automatic superiority recalls the paternalism of colonization's *mission civilisatrice*, whereas 'perhaps the most fundamental measure of a non-colonial relationship is that of *voluntary* engagement, usually entailing at least some degree of equality or symmetry rather than a hierarchical relationship' (Kleinfeld and Nicolaïdis, 2009, p. 166). In short, NPE rests on Eurocentric Kantian ontological premises that predispose it to impose its norms universally. African knowledge has no place. NPE thus revivifies the Africa–EU postcolonial condition, and as an episteme of EU foreign policy, NPE does the EU's post-imperial aspirations a great disservice.

II. The Role of NPE within Africa–EU Relations

Revisiting Manners' threefold epistemological categorization provides an important first insight into NPE within Africa–EU relations. At the *positivist* level, regarding *how* the EU changes norms, NPE could be seen as coercive and requiring an explicitly post-imperial EU to be a normative power. At the *ontological* level, EU academia and practitioners struggle over the meaning, content and relevance of the EU as a normative power. At the *normative* level, this struggle has begun to question some of the hitherto unchallenged assumptions about Europe in the world.

The conundrum for practitioners aware of the EU's postcolonial condition certainly is whether a neo-Kantian theory of foreign policy should shape EU policy on Africa. Most importantly, however, locating NPE within Africa–EU relations should be preceded by a very significant caveat: the EU is far from the 'ontological' status of a normative power, and interacts with Africa in many other ways than mere norm diffusion. As such, NPE's epistemic violence does not completely subdue African agency. Therefore, while this article critiques NPE, it does not attempt to replicate a Manichean and neo-colonial account of Africa as a deficient actor in perpetual resistance against European neo-colonialism. To the contrary, the ambition of a decolonial approach is to demonstrate African agency in Africa–EU relations. This goal is pursued below by concretizing the role of NPE in Africa–EU relations as an episteme in EU foreign policy, by characterizing the African subjects NPE seeks to create and by insisting on regionalism as a key field where European normativity and African agency overlap.

Discourse and policy cannot be equated. For the sake of illustration, it is crucial to observe how NPE found articulation in Africa–EU *policy*. Sicurelli offers such analyses of NPE in EU conflict management, trade and environment policies toward Africa (Sicurelli, 2010). Nonetheless, discourse and policy should not be conflated. A 'thin' constructivist reading of NPE would see an 'idea' that matters within broader EU foreign policy. NPE as a Foucauldian discourse however argues that discourses, as specific enunciations within an episteme, 'inform [policy] articulations, and these articulations reproduce discourses' (Diez, 2014, p. 324). Diez also argues that discourse also delimits, not just constitutes, foreign policies. The implications of this argument for Africa–EU relations are considerable. NPE speaks about Africa and thereby reinforces the colonial difference upon which its normative 'positivist' norms are founded. NPE indeed delimits the 'conditions of possibility of all knowledge'. Most crucially, knowledge production about Africa within NPE remains a European affair.

NPE's Epistemic Violence: Marginal, Black, Impossible Africans?

The EU's language of 'partnership' with African countries purports a level playing field without postcoloniality. Such coloniality acknowledges the 'modicum of juridical freedom' that African countries enjoy, while nonetheless being subjected to a Eurocentric modern world order (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 50). But what African subjects does NPE attempt to create? Here, postcolonial studies focuses overly on resistance instead of providing an alternative project. A postcolonial critique of NPE thus cannot provide a full definition of the African subject. It much rather emphazises the ways in which epistemes such as NPE inhibit the development of African subjectivity. In the absence of NPE's

epistemic imposition, an African decolonial project could thereafter unfold: pan-African conceptions of justice, deliberation and participation in politics would instil normativity in African politics.

NPE shaping African subjectivity is best thought of as 'epistemic violence', a concept coined by the postmodern writer Lyotard and later taken up by Foucault. Lyotard argued that epistemic violence occurs between subjects with different epistemic viewpoints in the absence of 'universal rule of judgment between heterogeneous genres of discourse' (1988, p. xi). European postmodernists however assume a horizontality of epistemic violence that ignores the uneven character of Euro–African relations. Postcolonial epistemic violence is different: the African subject in NPE is both the *by-product* of European constitution of the Self and the *product* of European domination. Colonial administration, neoliberal governance and NPE's normativity are all forms of such government operating through subjectivity. While NPE is not a purposive attack against African subjecthood, its Eurocentrism implicitly unfolds in Africa–EU relations by denying the emancipation of African subjectivity.

Colonial and postcolonial European knowledge about Africa has significant continuities. In colonial times, European administration inscribed a 'colonial difference' in law and society (Mamdani, 2012). Colonial knowledge immured 'race' deeply within the African subject and created an inherently contradictory, belated black subject in the European image that is impossible due to the black subject's inferior position. NPE in itself does not speak about this colonial difference, but deploys it against Africans, thereby shaping subjectivity and agency. In deploying its European norms, NPE precludes the viability of African norms. This forces African agency into postcolonial, not decolonial, resistance in a Foucauldian sense: 'Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (2008, p. 95). By refusing EU norms, Africans supposedly refuse progress and modernization. The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations in particular showed a normative insistence on economic liberalization: 'What matters to ACP countries is real trade […] that provides secure jobs and lifts people out of poverty' (Mandelson, 2006). This is a deeply unsatisfactory condition for Africans regarding NPE within Africa–EU relations.

Locating NPE in Africa–EU Relations

But what is the status of NPE in Africa–EU relations? NPE cannot be equated to the EU, or EU policy itself, but is an episteme of EU foreign policy. As a systematic bundle of discourses, it intervenes as early as the level of knowledge production about EU foreign policy, and also translates into specific EU instruments and programmes. NPE certainly makes statements of positivist ontological nature, but it remains a discourse above all. NPE thus operates within EU foreign policy-making as a Kantian imperative that is both an ontological reality and political finality (in Manners' terms, a 'positivist' obligation). NPE contributes to knowledge production in Africa–EU relations in four ways.

First, NPE is visible in rhetoric, speeches, declarations and policy orientation documents, particularly the optimistic NPE-infused speeches given by top-level EU officials and heads of state. A famous and criticized speech by Nicolas Sarkozy

condemned European colonialism but saw 'European civilization' as a colonial gift to Africans, and argued that Africans should see themselves as 'heirs' of universal human civilization and 'appropriate' the 'common heritage' of 'human rights, democracy, liberty, equality and justice' (Sarkozy 2007). Such thought legitimizes Africa–EU postcolonial ties, whereas most rhetoric by EU leaders more cautiously argues for European norms as founded in the EU's 'unique' relation with Africa (Barroso, 2008). Hence, public speeches regularly vivify the post-imperial normative imperative of NPE for EU foreign policy.

Second, NPE matters in institutionalized Africa–EU political relations. Joint declarations, College-to-College meetings and the Joint Africa–EU Strategy from 2008 regularly seek to reaffirm the universality of European norms. Speeches from the European Commission show a preoccupation with 'partnership and shared norms' such as 'democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, good governance and sustainable development' (Barroso, 2013a). In recent years, the EU has also come to rethink the Africa–EU overall relationship. The phrase coined in a 2007 Communication and used repeatedly by High Representative/Vice President Mogherini is to 'go beyond the donor–recipient relationship of the past and reflect a political partnership of equals' (Commission, 2007). This shift shows how NPE's 'normative' dimension can indeed help to rethink the universality of the EU's 'ontology' and the 'positivist' ways in which it interacts with Africa. More generally, however, the aspiration of partnership remains a discursive promise only.

The closer to concrete policies or programmes one moves, the more Kantian NPE's influence on EU foreign policy toward Africa becomes. Besides the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) grouping that co-administers the European Development Fund, other EU instruments, such as the Development Cooperation Instrument or the Pan-African Programme, are much more unilateral. African voices take a merely consultative role. It is here where the EU could be seen as an 'ontological' norm-based actor.

Third, foreign policy knowledge production is crucial for NPE's role in Africa–EU relations, in the sense of Manners' 'positivist' aspect of NPE. In a recent article on NPE knowledge production, Manners distinguishes NPE in EU institutions in the sense of a fairly institutionalized episteme and high-level discourse, NPE in the media, and in the policy-making community (Manners 2015, pp. 303–13). In particular, the policy-making community takes a pivotal role in advocating and concretizing what NPE means in Africa–EU relations. Manners underlines the role of training future civil servants and diplomats, and the 'revolving doors' between academia and EU institutions. This 'free flow of ideas' is a quintessentially Foucauldian process of knowledge/power production and systematization though a dialectical relation between bureaucracy and academia (Manners 2015, pp. 306–7). African voices can only be mediated indirectly, and any assessment of contemporary Africa is not the *Darstellung* (representation) but the *Vertretung* (substitution) of actual African subjects (Spivak, 1993, p. 88). By giving precedence to Brussels-generated bureaucratic knowledge, the EU's foreign policy knowledge production on Africa geographically and literally marginalizes the African Other. NPE knowledge production is Eurocentric indeed.

Fourth, NPE shapes Africa–EU relations by promoting African regionalism and supporting the AU. The EU hence exploits a certain congruence of EU and African regionalism to its own end. This argument is fully developed in the next section.

III. NPE's Challenge to Pan-African Unity and African Regionalism

Regionalism culminates the analytical puzzle of NPE in Africa–EU relations. There is a crucial interplay between these two fields that explains much of the contemporary EU-perceived relevance and legitimacy of NPE in Africa–EU relations. The founding of the AU was perceived as a post-imperial moment for the EU, after which it could normatively engage an institution in its very own image. The EU uses institutional similarity between the AU and EU as a basis for renewed normative engagement, but misconstrues the African decolonial, pan-African agency behind this institution. The AU has only just begun to institutionalize its own set of norms and principles and is thus an institution that shares the EU's structural appearance, but not its normative substance.

The Distinctive Pan-African Roots of African Regionalization

European observers of non-European politics often make the error of using the analytical perspective previously described as 'past as other'. Concretely, Europeans often look at discussions of African regionalization and believe they recognize past episodes of European integration. NPE is deployable for superimposition onto other regionalization processes. This subdues the crucial impact of Pan-Africanism upon African regional integration.

Pan-Africanism is an inherently regional school of thought, in the sense that, unlike European political thought, it denaturalizes the nation-state as the basic political unit. Pan-Africanism first arose in the colonial African diaspora; several Pan-African Congresses took place from the 1920s onwards. The swift formal decolonization after the Second World War was the Pan-African movement's opportunity to realize their demands in the newly independent states. This was perceived as the 'securest safeguard of [Africans'] hard-won freedom' (Nkrumah, 1963, p. xi). Independence was widely agreed also to require pan-African political unity, which Kwame Nkrumah, first president of Ghana, grounded in the universal African experience of colonial subjection.

Pan-Africanism is a deeply normative school of thought. While Pan-Africanism had countless prolific thinkers, there is no canonical definition of pan-African philosophy. Colin Legum provides a useful summary of its norms (1962, p. 111 ff): Pan-Africanism pursues non-alignment with global politics and considers each issue on its merits. 'Neo-colonialism' by former colonisers through 'new forms of subjection' is to be avoided. As a regionalist philosophy, it deplores the postcolonial 'balkanization' of Africa into independent but weak states. Pan-Africanism supports an 'Africa democracy' but has historically underlined the need for a vanguard one-party state. Finally, Pan-Africanism aspires to rediscover a scarcely defined 'African personality'. Contemporary renditions of African decolonialism take up precisely this pan-African aspiration of 'African personality'.

The Incomplete Realization of Pan-Africanism

African politics is not automatically pan-African politics. Pan-Africanism should rather be seen as an episteme for the iterative institutionalization of African decolonial unity (Murithi, 2007); as such, its approach to decolonization is much more demanding than Europe granting formal independence to its colonies. Historically, African continental

integration occurred through two main organizations: the OAU (Organisation of African Unity) and the AU. The OAU, founded in 1963 during the heyday of formal decolonization, was the result of fierce diplomatic debate between 'big bang' and gradualist integration (Mazrui, 2005, p. 59). The gradualist group won and the OAU consequently only partially addressed Africa's 'balkanization'. Decades later, the AU was built out of scrambles by the defunct OAU. The same debate saw a revival in the late 1990s, when Libya's Qaddhafi faced Nigeria's Obasanjo and South Africa's Mbeki in their respective attempts to overcome the deadlock of the OAU. Qaddhafi's political savvy and Mbeki's and Obasanjo's coalition-building skills resulted in a compromise that created a continental African organization that *gradually* improves upon OAU deficiencies.

The AU reinforces the thrust of the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), which concretizes the pan-African credo that 'economic growth, though essential, will neither be sufficient nor indeed be possible without a fundamental transformation of the debilitating distortions in African economic and social structures' (OAU, 1980). Instead of the OAU's 'non-interference' with national sovereignty, a number of AU charter provisions and their implementation suggest that, for example, in security, the AU is a real, tangible step forward in overcoming the postcolonial condition of African states. If there is 'unconstitutional government change', AU membership may be suspended and the AU has in the past agreed to humanitarian interventions in the case of 'grave circumstances' (Williams, 2007, p. 255). Regarding economic governance, there was increasing understanding among African governments that 'economic development and integration could not simply be legislated into existence' (Whiteman, 2012, p.53). The implementation of this realization pre-dates the AU slightly through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) from 2001.

Why is Pan-Africanism not a political reality today? This is in part because African politics operates on postcolonial political structures. In light of Africa's 'balkanization', African leaders face structural constraints on state agency – the Western conception of state agency, for example in negotiating regional integration, is at odds with postcolonial African reality (Williams, 2013, p. 130). Historically, former colonies inherited territorial borders and administrative systems from colonial times, which precluded a 'starting from scratch'. Postcoloniality thus results in an amalgamated picture of African agency: on the one hand, postcolonial African leaders had agency and chose a *partial* institutionalization of Pan-Africanism; on the other, leaders were constrained by Western-style state structures that conditioned their approach to integration. In other words, both the African postcolonial state *structure* and African leaders' *agency* dialectically make for today's incomplete realization of Pan-Africanism.

Interpreting EU–AU Institutional Similarity: The Regionalism–NPE Nexus

European observers are usually struck by the quasi-identical institutional structures of the AU and the EU. Their structures are so congruent that they are best described as 'institutional isomorphism' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The AU has an Assembly of Heads of State, a Commission, a Pan-African Parliament and a Court. After 15 years and initial challenges, the AU's institutions are performing relatively well. The AU also has a Peace and Security Council, the functional equivalent of the EU's Political and Security Committee. Indeed, African leaders agreed that 'Africa should not reinvent the wheel'

regarding regionalization (AU, 2002). There are two possible avenues of interpretation of this institutional overlap: a Eurocentric interpretation would deem this highly successful norm diffusion from the EU; a pan-Africanist perspective appreciates the analytical relevance of this institutional isomorphism, but relativizes the overlap. Arguing that the EU's role in African regionalization is that of a 'mentor', Haastrup demonstrates that the AU is selectively adopting EU norms and practices selectively when it serves African interests (Haastrup, 2013). An optimistic account of EU norm diffusion within regionalism promotion would imply an 'implicit Eurocentrism', as it subdues the political contentions of this process and focuses only on the adoption of EU norms (ibid., p. 795). Given officially undocumented, extensive European diplomatic involvement surrounding the founding of the AU, reality certainly lies between these two perspectives, but a decolonial critique in defence of African agency tends toward the latter. If pan-African regionalization is indeed a pseudo-Foucauldian episteme far from its full realization, EU–AU institutional isomorphism should be expected to matter less and less in the future. Also a contemporaneous, eclectic analysis of African and European regionalism shows chiefly how significantly different the two regionalist projects are (Fioramonti and Mattheis, 2015). Pan-African norms and principles will eventually become increasingly institutionalized, leading to a rather different regional organization.

Why does regional institutional isomorphism matter for NPE? NPE bases its post-imperial claims of novelty also on the EU's post-Westphalian structure of polity (Manners, 2002, p. 240). Therefore, the institutional–structural confluence between the AU and EU was seen as enabling a stronger imposition of NPE. EU leaders hence perceived the structural change in African polity as enabling the EU and AU as 'natural partner[s]' (Barroso, 2013b). The 'ontological' scope conditions for NPE were thus sharply improved. As Parker and Rosamond (2013) argue, NPE is premised upon a European-modelled economico-political 'market cosmopolitanism'. As such, the regionalism–NPE nexus is at best a mutually reinforcing dialectic that is exploited by EU regionalism promotion and NPE. It then is also understandable why the EU insists regularly on economic liberalization in Africa, for example through ambitious national EPA liberalization schemes and considerable technical and financial support to African regional free trade agreements: seeing the structural conditions of possibility for European normativity revived, the EU can step up its normative engagement. In that sense, structural similarity enhanced normative imposition, which in turn also led to reinforced structural EU aspirations. Beyond a critique of NPE normativity, the contentions between African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the EPAs hint at a much broader economic debate on a global scale.

Surely, there is EU–AU normative congruence too – not least in the usage of a shared normative linguistic register of peace, development and growth, governance and human rights. Both institutions are also joined in a normative aspiration to gain more weight in international politics (Babarinde, 2007, p. 9). But a closer comparison of any of the AU's normative priorities and NPE norms rapidly exacerbates the different ideological provenance and a radically different historiography driving normativity and different political goals. This is not to suggest that the EU's long experience with regionalization and the gradual development of its norms is worthless in enhancing African agency. For example, regarding non-governmental participation in pan-regional governance, the EU undoubtedly has good practices the AU could draw from. More generally, however, if the AU were to replicate NPE norms, it would institutionalize epistemes from a

neo-Kantian, Eurocentric tradition that are in fundamental opposition to the Pan-African project. This project, if thought of as a process rather than a static institution, fervently refuses to accommodate a European episteme as a principle of government. Indeed, Pan-Africanism's thrust is to resist epistemic violence. Regionalism clouds NPE in Africa–EU relations through institutional isomorphism, but cannot hide it.

IV. Decolonial Resistance and Provincializing NPE

Optimism about normative congruence based on EU–AU institutional isomorphism is set to decrease as the AU gains relevance, power and financial independence. Surely, as long as the EU is financing the vast majority of AU programme budgets, their priority setting will always remain influenced by the NPE episteme. Murithi argues this postcolonial obstacle is 'mostly self-imposed, and egotistical state-centric attitudes of states' should be overcome (2007, p. 7). As argued above, the colonial balkanization of the African state also receives part of the blame. In response to European attempts to instil NPE norms in an isomorphic AU, the pan-African episteme suggests to reiterate Pan-Africanism as an *unfinished* process: it aims to complete the decolonial turn.

The decolonial turn is a holistic turn away from postcoloniality in all its aspects. It enacts decolonization by reinstating a silenced and marginalized historicity of the African subject. The holistic thrust of this project seeks to offer an 'alternative to modernity' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 25). Pan-Africanism therefore will have two interrelated objects: in a postcolonial sense, it resists NPE; simultaneously, in a decolonial sense, it unfolds an African polity and subjectivity independent of external influence. This subjectivity aims 'to discover the source of how it relates to itself and to the rest of the world' (Eze, 2010, p. xi). This undertaking thus incorporates an understanding of *global* coloniality of power and knowledge to advance *African* subjectivity. African subjectivity therefore unearths an African history that is ignored in NPE. Precolonial Africa is not ahistorical any more, as the decolonial project seeks the modernizing of indigeneities and indigenizing of modernities (Nyamnjoh and Zeleza, 2006, p. 393). In Foucauldian terms, a pan-African episteme is required.

Pan-Africanism is by definition a phenomenon of international relations, as its focus on 'race', imperialism and epistemic violence 'necessarily transcends territorial political boundaries' (Edmondson, 1986, p. 285). A decolonial African Self draws from and feeds into what should become a decolonized *global* political sphere. This serves the realization of African ambitions, but as one of the key problems of resisting NPE is its supposed universality, new notions of global legitimacy and universality are also needed. Here lies the full power of decolonial Pan-Africanism, in that it does not seek to eradicate other normative discourses such as NPE. Rather, a decolonial political philosophy aspires not to universality but to pluriversality – a 'universal project' that nonetheless refuses a single global order with monocentric and objective claims (Mignolo, 2011, p. 23). In European terms, this would mean that African and European knowledge are factually equivalent; for Africa–EU relations, this would mean actual partnership while accepting difference. This perspective thus goes beyond NPE universality, and simultaneously acknowledges the necessity for a critical dialogue between differends as diverse political projects. The project fulfils Chakrabarty's 'provincialization' of Eurocentrism (2000): it reduces NPE universality's epistemic scope within the pluriverse space of universality. One indeed

cannot 'displace or overturn Eurocentric reason by inversion' – the point is to demonstrate that 'there are no resources within the conceptual universe of modernity adequate to the task of unthinking Eurocentrism' (Lazarus, 2002, pp. 54, 61). Ironically, a pluriversal global sphere is the actual 'cosmopolitical' universality to which NPE aspires. Pluriversality finally meets the demands of pan-African decolonization by safeguarding nascent African polity and subjectivity against neo-imperialism, and, *a fortiori*, helps in resisting epistemic violence through the pseudo-universalism of NPE.

If regionalism and NPE have been linked by the EU in Africa–EU relations, what are the implications for a decolonial pan-African project? Most observers agree that the normative impetus of Pan-Africanism is well developed in principle. The challenge therefore is to put it to work for African citizens, thereby offering a true alternative to European normativity that shapes African subjectivity. A 'strong, democratic and pro-people' polity is required (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 96). A pan-African episteme guides this process. Pan-African regionalism is a welcome vessel for this undertaking, ideally overcoming colonial political national fragmentation. As such, the AU's policies and programmes should be strengthened to deliver tangible benefits to Africans. It is alarming that NEPAD's stimulation of trade between African countries is 'statistically meaningless', while exacerbating the integration of national economies into global capitalism (Tsheola, 2012). The EU should recognize the urgent need for African economic development and strengthened industries. Currently, its EPAs' very strict rules of origin preclude the diversification of African economies, but are benefiting European producers (Bartels, 2007, p. 748). NPE here should be used as a discourse not just to project norms elsewhere, but also in Manners' third, 'normative' sense to critically interrogate the impact of EU policy. Finally, what kind of political relation would Africans and Europeans aspire to in this new framework? It would seem that a fusion of the 'normative' and 'positivist' aspects of NPE is relatively compatible with a Pan-African episteme for African (international) politics. As such, both sides cannot insist on their relative 'ontological' or communitarian norms being applicable for others, but enter a pluriversal partnership of dialogue and deliberation on actual equal footing. Here, then, would we see a truly non-colonial Africa–EU relationship of voluntary engagement.

Conclusion

A decolonial critique of NPE should not diminish the concept's relevance for an EU that aspires to be a new kind of power in world politics. To the contrary, a better understanding of the role of NPE in Africa–EU relations sheds light on the contentiousness of European norms which liberal analysts miss. Understanding the deeply Eurocentric intellectual tradition on which NPE rests could ultimately improve the EU's Africa policies. Further scholarship on NPE should particularly scrutinize the interaction of economic liberalization, economic integration and NPE, and how this interrelation enables EU foreign policies that are both economically and normatively liberal.

European normativity rests on claims of universality that do not withhold the scrutiny of the decolonial paradigm. Pan-Africanism poses a serious threat to this fundamental aspect of NPE. A pluriversal global sphere can therefore only be universal if it is constituted also by experiences other than European knowledge. A serious challenge for proponents of NPE is whether one can imagine a truly post-imperial NPE – just as much whether a

post-imperial neo-Kantian philosophy is possible at all. Postcolonial studies argues that European self-decolonization is impossible, which is why pan-African resistance against NPE is necessary. At the same time, what was above termed NPE's 'epistemological multiplicity' might well be its saviour. NPE's 'normative' dimension has the capacity for reflexivity and to change its 'positivist' ways of engaging and speaking about Africa.

Africa–EU relations have seen renewed momentum in light of the foundation of the AU. Like all polity, the AU is an intricate blend of institutions and normativity, certainly imperfect and definitely far from fully institutionalizing the pan-African project. EU–AU institutional isomorphism suggests an ever closer Africa–EU partnership. Even if such a partnership was formally concluded in 2008, a strengthened AU signifies the very opposite of normative congruence between the EU and AU. Beyond appropriating EU best practices, unhindered African agency is on course to produce a continental polity with a different normative aspiration and political ends. The EU would do well to appreciate this shift not just in rhetoric but also in its programmes and policies, lest it became provincialized to the point of irrelevance.

Despite all caution about Africa–EU relations, more political focus and further research can yield tangible benefits for both sides. Political practitioners should not reproduce the futile discourse of the EU's 'virgin birth' that ultimately offends the pan-African project. Academics and practitioners in the EU should systematically question Eurocentric knowledge production in EU foreign policy and promote African voices. Overall, the EU should reconsider its strengths that are *voluntarily* accepted by its African counterparts, and respect normative differences in an effort to avoid reproducing the paternalist mistakes Europe has committed in the past. Decolonization is a grand normative project that requires action also from the EU. And, against all odds and if well delivered, exacerbating and mending NPE's postcoloniality can serve the EU in decolonizing its relations with Africa.

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