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

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**Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

***The Problem of “Empire”***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*EU Development Policy*

This paper seeks to examine the EU’s attempt at “governing from the distance” and increasingly bureaucratized violence in the case of sub-Saharan Africa. The EUrope’s relationship with the continent of Africa clearly has a long history. Following the creation of the European Economic Community (ECC) in 1957 and formal decolonization, it became necessary for the ECC to (re)establish trade, developmental, and aid relationships with the African, Caribbean, and Pacific group (ACP) in a less overt (neo)imperial manner. Indeed, in order to avoid claims of neo-colonialism, the Yaoundé Conventions dealt exclusively with economic assistance in contrast to the more Contonou Agreements, which covers a wide range of aspects including social, political, cultural, economic, and environmental. Nonetheless, the Yaoundé Conventions (1963 and 1969) undergirded a new legal framework that would be utilized as a stepping off point for future relations between the EU and the ACP.

In the end, both Yaoundé and Yaoundé II were considered by both the original six member states of the ECC, as well as the African states that were involved, as too limited. The next expansion of the relationship between the ACP and the EU did not occur until 1973 at which point the UK’s entry, as well as the entry of Denmark and Ireland, marked a turning point for this relationship because the British Accession Treaty included provisions for the inclusion of those ACP states who were included in the Commonwealth (Adebajo and Whiteman 2012). The resulting Lomé Conventions provided a reformed and enhanced version of development and aid to specific African countries. One of the primary changes was the making aid contingent upon human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Barbiere 2016). An addition to the Lomé agreement affirmed that human rights are an “essential element of cooperation” and thus aid could be suspended if the above criteria were not met (Holland 2002 cited in Stivachtis 2015). The most recent approach to the EU-ACP relationship was the 2000 Contonou Agreement, which, while producing a new approach to their relationship, maintained the fundamental conditionality tools established by the Lomé Conventions, importantly, including aid hinging on human rights, democracy, and rule of law (Stivachtis 2015). It’s revision in 2005 reflected the EU’s renewed emphasis on security; specifically, the agreement established new provisions targeting terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and mercenary activities (Carbone 2013).

Although the EU’s development policies are by no means a unitary across the various member state, the Commission, and the multitude of development institutions within the European Union, there is enough significant overlap among them to consider them as, what Veit Bachmann has termed, “European spaces of development” (2011: 60). According to Bachmann, these “spaces” indicate a clear Europeanization of the EU’s “external policies” and thus represents an attempt at coordinating the multitude of actors and their respective external policies into unitary and coherent EUropean policies (Ibid). The question that remains is whether these policies and the future policies beyond the Contonou conventions in 2020 can overcome the Eurocentric, hierarchical, and unequal relationships that continues to haunt the EU’s relationship with the ACP group.

Although in comparison to the previous the Yaoundé agreements , both the Lomé and Contonou conventions empathize the importance of “agency” and “partnership,” thereby implying a more equal “partnership,” Rutazibwa notes that “if one considers coercion a situation in which there is no real choice, then the extreme power inequality expressed in one way financial dependency, and the merely declaratory ‘partnership’ that flows from this, account for a situation in which there is no real choice” (2006: 99; see Contonou Agreement 2005). Sepos (2013) argues that when it comes down to EU’s trade, energy, and security policies vis-à-vis the ACP states, the continuing coercion and manipulation clearly indicates an imperial core-periphery relationship. The unequal power relationship between the EU and specific sub-Saharan African states has become abundantly clear in the aftermath of the 2013 refugee crisis where development aid, security, neo-racisms, and migration have merged into questions of responsibility and, ultimately how the EU governs from a distance.

*“Conditionality is a thing of the past”*

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

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

*Conclusion*

Although this paper could only hint at the connection between the EU-as-empire and governing from a distance, the EU commission’s and the various member state’s response to the refugee crisis has highlighted the ambiguities that are at the center of the EU’s self-image. Despite the rhetoric espoused by the EU commission, the cooperation between the commission and dictorial regimes in sub-Saharan Africa, the EU’s attempts at governing from a distance, have highlighted the EU as a modern iteration of an empire. I do not mean to stake a normative claim by arguing that the EU should *just* open its borders and let everyone into the EU. That being said, the EU is coming to terms with its own narratives that under “normal” circumstances espouse the “universal,” “tolerant,” and “cosmopolitian” nature that undergirds the EU’s self-legitimation. I argue that these narratives, along with the teleological “origin” story, are now undermined. Whether the EU accepts this challenge, or just returns to “business as usual,” remains to be seen.

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