Conference Article

From Metropolis to Microcosmos: The EU's New Standards of Civilisation

Kalypso Nicolaidis
University of Oxford, UK

Claire Vergerio
University of Oxford, UK

Nora Fisher Onar
University of Oxford, UK

Juri Viehoff
University of Oxford, UK

Abstract
While some denounce the legacies of colonialism they discern in the EU's practices and discourse, others believe these accusations to be unfounded, thus raising the question: how apt is the analogy between the 19th-century standard of civilisation and the EU's narratives and modes of actions today? In this essay, we address the question by developing 'new standards typology' articulated around two axes: agency denial and hierarchy. These refer respectively to the unilateral shaping of standards applicable to others, and to the salience of Eurocentricism in the way the standards are enforced and structure the international system. Ultimately, we argue that in transforming their 'continent' from a metropolis to a microcosmos – from a cluster of colonial capitals to an EU that contains many of the world's tensions within itself – Europeans have only partially succeeded in transcending their colonial impulses. We conclude by suggesting that the EU's relevance is grounded in its ability to become a post-colonial power, and that to achieve this, those acting in its name need to remember historical legacies and reflect upon the 'standards' that inspire their action.

Corresponding author:
Kalypso Nicolaidis, University of Oxford, University of Oxford, Oxford OX2 6JF, UK.
Email: kalypso.nicolaidis@politics.ox.ac.uk

Four hundred years before the signing of the Treaty of Rome, an iconoclastic theologian by the name of Francisco de Vitoria challenged the reigning medieval idea of the Pope's universal jurisdiction by virtue of divine prerogative to spread Christian 'law'.[1] Instead, de Vitoria argued, a new system of international law premised on the need to promote freedom to travel and trade – and in the process spread Christianity – should extend the world over, disciplining conquistador and Indian alike (though the latter must never be 'sovereign', that is, entitled by law to wage 'just war'). De Vitoria's construct, picked up by Grotius and 'Westphalianised', shaped for centuries a uniquely western idea of the rights and duties of colonising states and colonised peoples and the implied appropriate order in international relations.[2] Scholars across a number of disciplines – not least history, politics, IR – increasingly refer to these centuries-old imperialist impulses by Europeans and others with the catch-all phrase 'standard of civilisation' (SoC). While this special-issue asks to what extent the SoC referent help us understand world order today, we focus on the most direct successor of de Vitoria's conquistadors, namely the European Union (EU).

To be sure, the EU (then the European Community), cleverly nurtured a myth of its virgin birth, making it an international actor untainted by the past of its colonial founding states. This was to be a 'community of memory', yet it was committed to 'never again' embarking upon intra-European war while forgetting with staggering effectiveness the echoes of another past lingering at its foundation and epitomised in the so-called 'Eurafrica' project whereby, after the war, African colonies and their vast resources were to be integrated into a West European power sphere that would become strong enough to counterbalance the US and the USSR.[3] If despite the shifting *Zeitgeist* of the post-World War II era of decolonisation, the early days of European integration were characterised by the belief that the collective exploitation of African resources was both a pragmatic

---

1. Francisco de Vitoria et al., *De Indis et De Ivre Belli Relectiones (On the Indians and the Laws of War) (1557)* (Carnegie Institution, 1917).
2. Hugo Grotius, 'De Jure Belli Ac Pacis (The Law of War and Peace) (1625)', *Quotations (II III, IIX) from Edition Translated by AC Campbell, The Rights of War and Peace*, 1901, 18–21. On these longue durée patterns, see *inter alia* Rosemary Foot, John Lewis Gaddis and Andrew Hurrell, *Order and Justice in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Christian Reus Smit, *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Kalypso Nicolaidis, Berny Sèbe and Gabi Maas, eds, *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).
3. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, 'Building Eurafrica: Reviving Colonialism through European Integration, 1920–1960', in Nicolaidis et al., *Echoes of Empire*; see also Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, 'Imperial Origins of European Integration and the Case of Eurafrica: A Reply

necessity and an ethically justified endeavour, what is left of this mindset today? A number of intellectuals and policy-makers of both 'European' and 'non-European' provenance continue to denounce the legacies of colonialism they discern in the EU's narratives and policies, from dynamics of accession, and the development 'game', to continued adventures in military intervention.[4] But to what extent is it appropriate to view the EU's relations with others – those deemed non-European or non-yet European – under the long shadow of the infamous *Standards*? Is there an apt analogy between the 19th-century SoC and the EU's external image, self-image and policies today? If so, what are Europe's 'New Standards of Civilisation', and what are the normative and strategic implications of assessing the EU in this light?

In this article, we argue that the SoC analogy for the EU is indeed relevant and that in transforming their 'continent' from metropolis to microcosmos – from a cluster of colonial capitals to an EU that contains many of the world's tensions within itself – Europeans have only partially succeeded in transcending their colonial impulses. In spite of the transformative ambitions of the European project, the persistence of massive power differentials with many of their non-European interlocutors, and certain unquestioned habits of European exceptionalism have bolstered the tendency to re-enact aspects of the SoC. Europeans may have come to terms with the loss of metropolis status but often continue to see their microcosmos as a capital rather than a province of the world.[5]

Our aim is threefold. First, we hope to clarify the terms of the debate. The 'EU as SoC' allegation is a multi-layered and sensitive topic, all the ramifications of which we cannot explore. This is why critical examination of the contention that Europe has new standards of civilisation calls for the disaggregation of the allegation, distinguishing between different features of the historical standards and their present-day relevance as well as different areas of application of the analogy. This we do by offering a 'new standards typology' which allows us to assess degrees of relevance rather than black-and-white ascriptions.

Second, we hope to persuade our readers that an understanding of the EU through the lens of our analysis helps to problematise the notion of 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) and its implication that the EU wields a unique type of power in its ability to shape international conceptions of the normal – a 'power of an ideational nature characterized by common principles and a willingness to disregard Westphalian conventions'.[6] The idea

---

        to Gary Marks' "Europe and Its Empires"', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, no. 6 (2012): 1028–41.

4. See esp. Hartmut Behr, 'The European Union in the Legacies of Imperial Rule? EU Accession Politics Viewed from a Historical Comparative Perspective', *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 2 (2007): 239–62; Yannis Stivachtis, 'Civilization and International Society: The Case of European Union Expansion', *Contemporary Politics* 14, no. 1 (2008): 71–89. See also, Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European* Union (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

5. To echo Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

6. Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–58 (239).

has become pervasive in both scholarship and policy circles that the EU embodies a specific set of norms or normative ideals – justice, human rights, democracy, transnationalism – that other states seek to or at least *should* seek to emulate, and that it is therefore desirable to strive to promote them if this is done through non-coercive means. The NPE idea and its earlier incarnation under the label 'civilian power' was fundamental to the construction of the Union's international identity, as the EU sought to distinguish itself from rivals – initially the US and USSR – through the belief that it is a *sui generis* benevolent force on the world stage characterised by what we may call 'superpowerlessness'.[7] Especially during the 2000s, the frame captured both self-image and practice as the EU sought to co-opt states across the region, and offer itself as a model for new forms of governance at the global level. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Eurozone crisis has redirected rather than dented such discourse to the effect that Europeans can now share in the learning from their mistakes.

The 'new SoC' argument acknowledges that the NPE reading of EU influence is widely shared while offering a critical perspective by highlighting the lack of historical reflexivity of much of the scholarship as well as the dissonance between the positive connotation of 'normative' powerhood and its undertones of euro-unilateralism and euro-centricism. As we see it, much NPE-grounded analysis shares in the substance and structure of the historical SoC with its inclusive premise but ultimately hierarchical and diffusionist logic. Our ambition, therefore, is to provide a historically informed framework for what we can call 'the critical turn' in NPE scholarship.[8] The SoC frame bolsters the analysis of scholars like Diez for whom positing the benign nature of Europe's normative power should not blind us to the kind of quiet but pervasive sort of hegemony in the Gramscian sense that it entails, relying as it does on combined material and discursive means of domination albeit through relationships based on formal consent.[9] The new SoC argument alerts us not only to the impossibility of empirically differentiating between a foreign policy based on norms, and one based on interests – as the former often serves as a cloak to the latter – but to the fact that the norms or standards themselves are not necessarily neutral nor universal.[10]

---

7. Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'The Power of the Superpowerless', in *Beyond Paradise and Power: Europeans, Americans and the Future of a Troubled Partnership*, ed. Tod Lindberg (London: Routledge, 2004).

8. See, inter alia, Michael Merlingen, 'Everything Is Dangerous: A Critique of "Normative Power Europe"', *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 4 (2007): 435–53; For a recent critical appraisal of the state of the debate see *Normative Power Europe Revisited*, eds K. Nicolaidis and R. Whitman, *Special Issue of Conflict and Cooperation*, 48, no. 2 (2013).

9. Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 182–99.

10. At another level, the SoC frame calls attention to the ways so-called European standards are themselves the outcome of conflicts *within* the EU where they remain interpreted and re-interpreted over time, and thus the object of 'hegemonic struggles' not only among member states but also a much broader array of societal actors. As Diez argues, 'the experience of normative power is therefore best seen as a transversal struggle over societal norms in which different actors interact on different levels – as opposed to the unidirectional and uncontested imposition of norms, which would only replicate the problems of old top-down models of

Third and normatively, we make the case for an EU that could truly earn the status of post-colonial power, urging those acting in its name to better remember and reflect upon the *standards* that inspire their actions. In a post-Eurozone crisis era which corresponds to the emergence of new powers on the world stage, including many former colonies, the EU's credibility in the international arena increasingly relies on its post-colonial potential. In this context, it is crucial to note that whatever the analytical merits of trans-historical analogies, the accusations of neocolonialism levelled at the EU through the SoC analogy reveal the continuing salience of Europe's past in determining how its behaviour is perceived by others globally. The question of perception is essential as dissonance between a benign self-image and a much more critical perception among outsiders, often rooted in the memory of the 19th-century SoC, certainly dents the willingness of interlocutors to take up EU standards, putting into question the primacy of such an agenda in the EU's external relations in the first place. The onus is thus, we argue, upon the EU to confront the lingering Eurocentrism of its approach to world affairs and the persistent amnesia about the inconvenient colonial past.

Throughout this article, we speak of 'Europeans' or 'Europe', both in the past and in the present tense. But to whom do we refer? To be sure, we recognise that EU member states have very different historical legacies when it comes to colonial projects; some did not engage in such practices at all, and others were squarely on the receiving end of the civilising endeavour, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe.[11] As such, in using the terms 'Europe' or 'EU' we do not wish to engage in another form of hegemonic discourse that reduces the manifold differences that constitute 'Europe' to the policies and mindsets prevailing in the capitals of a few imperial powers, both then and now. We do not mean to ignore these differences and we would certainly be dismayed if our discussion were interpreted as reviving a 'Concert of Europe' type of mentality regarding intra-European politics and society. Nonetheless, we feel that speaking of 'Europe' and 'Europeans' is methodologically solid insofar as the referents are the distinctive elite of policy-makers and analysts who together form and reproduce a particular ideological view on international politics. In discussing the historical formation of SoCs the referent of 'Europeans' is to a distinctive epistemic group of politicians, diplomats, international lawyers and policy commentators who created and sustained a pan-European discourse of civilisation and legal standards in the 19th century While different states did indeed have different colonial experiences, it seems justified to refer to this discourse regarding civilisation and European distinctiveness as one that was genuinely pan-European: even among participants from smaller states who were not themselves engaged in colonial projects (though of course many of them were), voices rejecting the practice of colonialism and their moral justification were indeed rare, and the majority embraced a fundamental outlook in which European civilisation stood at the pinnacle of progress. Perhaps more controversially, we feel that a 'dominant belief system' can to some extent be discerned in the prevailing discourse today among an elite of policy-makers, analysts and

Europeanization'. Thomas Diez, 'Normative Power as Hegemony', *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2 (2013): 194–210.

11.   Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society*, 47.

EU supports who together form and reproduce a distinctive ideological view on international politics.[12]

The paper proceeds by first introducing two core understandings of the 'standard of civilisation' as defined in a burgeoning literature and conventional usage. These usages are generic on one hand, historical on the other and we posit the latter as the more fruitful site of analysis for our purposes. Next we make the case for apparent discontinuity between the historic standards and the values that prevailed in the creation of the EU. Third, however, we extract underlying similarities that may determine the varying strength of the SoC analogy across policy domains: from accession and neighbourhood policies, to other realms of external action. This framework allows us to conclude by assessing the 'echoes' of the SoC in the field of EU studies and their relevance for IR.

The Referent: Contested Meaning of 'Standard of Civilisation'

In assessing the pertinence of the 'EU as SoC' allegation, we begin by outlining the category 'standard of civilisation'. The term has been deployed in varying ways by students of European history, law and politics, many of whom are associated with the 'international society' approach to IR with its attentiveness to political philosophy, and (post-) colonialism.[13] It is also used intermittently by practitioners of law and diplomacy, though not to an extent that realises its potential for thinking through the baggage or indeed the promise of EU projects of peace and governance including the NPE frame. Most extant invocations reflect two modes of understanding, one generic and metaphoric, the other specific and historical.

General or *generic* definitions use the term to highlight a logic and practice witnessed across time and space. Bowden, for example, suggests that 'the means by which peoples or nations have historically been admitted into or barred from the international society of states is the legal mechanism know as the *standard of civilization*'.[14] Here, the term refers to any kind of rule-setting whereby one dominant (block of) state(s) determines which entity is to count as a legitimate political community entitled to self-rule, and based on what criteria. SoC as such typically entail a 'two-tiered'[15] or

---

12. This, of course, does not mean that we deny the many voices and historical sensitivities that different member states bring to EU foreign policy. See Gjovalin Macaj and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Beyond One Voice? Global Europe's Engagement with its Own Diversity', *Journal of European Public Policy* (2014): in press.

13. See, for example, Turan Kayoglu, *Legal Imperialism: Sovereignty and Extraterritoriality in Japan, the Ottoman Empire, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), William Bain, *Between Anarchy and Society: Trusteeship and the Obligations of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Brett Bowden, and Leonard Seabrooke, eds, *Global Standards of Market Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2006), and Ann Towns, 'The Status of Women as a Standard of "Civilization"', *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 681–706.

14. Brett Bowden, 'The Colonial Origins of International Law: European Expansion and the Classical Standard of Civilization', *Journal of the History of International Law* 7, no. 1 (2005): 1–23 (1).

15. Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society.*

'Janus-faced'[16] structure. They range from binary juxtaposition of, say, 'civilised' Greek, Chinese, or Europeans vis-a-vis 'barbarian' Persians, Mongols, or Africans, to the more subtle logic of liberal imperialism with its promise of inclusion but exclusionary practices.[17] Thus, different SoCs have dominated different historical periods in the relations between various metropolitan-periphery constellations.

A variant on this broad rendering of the SoC refers to any act where Europeans in particular acted upon a 'civilising instinct' for putatively progressive reasons, usually doing something unpalatable to non-Europeans in the process. We find that this latter use of the term raises problems as an analytical tool, not least the challenge of arbitrariness (were the Crusades an example of SoC? If not, where should we start?).

A second reading of the SoC is *historical*, best embodied in the work of Gerrit Gong,[18] who uses SoC only for the period of high imperialism (post-1870), when the term was coined and commonly used. At the time, the SoC referred to a specific set of rules introduced by lawyers, diplomats and their associates in the domain of international law to govern the entrance of new members into 'the society of states', understood as universal in principle but comprised, at least initially, only of Europeans. In the historical vein then, Standard of Civilisation served a *gatekeeping* function – a kind of systemic conditionality encompassing those specific norms and legal rules that determined formal and equal standing among sovereign states.[19] At the core of the new imperialism grounded in the SoC was a commitment to establishing a notion of global order premised on the view that international politics should be 'civilised' with sovereign European states doing the 'civilising': would-be states would have to adhere to standards of civility determined by Europeans if they were to enjoy exclusive sovereignty over their territory. But of course, the story was not that simple as we will discuss below.

There are merits and limitations to both the generic and the historical approaches to the SoC as benchmarks against which to assess today's EU. It can be argued, however, that the fact that the generic approach *already* makes use of analogical reasoning by essentialising features of the historic *Standard* makes it problematic for grounding our analysis, as it would entail evaluating the validity of an analogy based on another potentially debatable one. Instead we use the stricter historical SoC as a comparative benchmark which will make our claim to analogy all the more stronger.

At least in theory, the purpose of the SoC was to confer a form of universal 'basic standing' to make claims (or 'a right to have rights' in Hannah Arendt's terms). To the question of who could claim to be entitled to the kinds of protections, rights and obligations that followed from these standards, the answer now was: everyone. This

16. Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London: Routledge, 2009).
17. Ian Clark, 'Democracy in International Society: Promotion or Exclusion?', *Millennium* 37, no. 3 (2009): 563–81.
18. Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of Civilization in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
19. For a discussion on variants of these see Behr, 'The European Union' and Stivachtis, 'Civilization'.

convergence stood partly in contrast with the motives of most of European colonial enterprises that existed prior to the 19th century, which stemmed from the assumption that there were irreconcilable religious, cultural or racial differences between Europeans and non-Europeans that prevented the latter from even aspiring to the European model.[20] By the time of the SoC, it was the conviction shared by many in the perfectibility of humanity and the inevitability of social and moral progress – this along European lines of course – that made it appropriate for Europeans to take control of and steer non-European societies.[21] To ensure the progressive development of the international rule of law within the existing international society, it was necessary to educate non-Europeans and introduce 'civilised' governmental structures and European ways of life, if necessary through colonial rule. All in all, the standards-based process of the new imperialism was distinct from earlier forms of colonialism because, rather than being merely a mercantilist exploitation of local resources to be imported into the metropolitan state (though it certainly also was *that*), it became an attempt at exporting a way of life with all its institutions and mindsets to the colonies, in order to 'uplift' them. Unsurprisingly then, and interestingly for contemporary comparisons, the *civilising mission* underpinning the SoC was widely accepted among liberal internationalists, but also – in variegated formulations – among radicals, republicans and moderate socialists.

But despite this 'progressive' tendency to render every political community a *potential* candidate for sovereign statehood, the standards of course had many morally problematic and discriminatory elements. Most notably, 'basic standing' for non-European states was always potentially reversible through colonial rule. With an eye to longitudinal comparisons, the morally relevant implications of this practice can be broadly articulated along the following two dimensions, namely agency denial and hierarchy. Very generally, we use these two categories to distinguish between, on the one hand, the *absolute* lack of agential power that standards entailed for non-European newcomers (agency denial) and, on the other hand, the *relative* lack of equal standing and status that non-European states suffered vis-a-vis their putatively equal European counterparts (hierarchy).

Agency Denial

The *standards* were a rule-governed system that created and reproduced rights, for different kinds of members and would-be members, that is, political communities wanting to join the international society of European states. By *agency denial* we mean to capture a core aspect of this rule-governed system, namely its tendency to deny agency to new members in different domains not only in determining the rules applicable to them but also in determining who was to have agency in the first place. At one end of the spectrum, the fact that whether or not non-Europeans had agency was decided by Europeans,

---

20. John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
21. On the concept of perfectibility and its changing philosophical assumptions since antiquity, see John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, 2nd edn (London: Duckworth, 1972).

meant denying the prior – basic standing – altogether: non-Europeans did not need to exist as members of the international system. For analogy, think about domestic cases: in principle, people living in a state all have basic standing, even if some (e.g. children, temporary migrants, etc.) are not entitled to participate in shaping the norms that are enforced against all; but some may be denied basic standing altogether (illegal migrants).[22] But even assuming basic standing, the degrees and patterns of agency denial associated with the SoC can of course vary. As such, agency denial was about process, that is, *who* was entitled to shape norms about membership in the international system and the rights and duties that membership conferred, but also and relatedly about content, that is, who would receive *what* in terms of substantive economic benefits from the functioning of these procedures. In short, standard shaping and economic profiteering lay in the hands of European standard shapers. Five main categories of standards together more or less comprised the *standards* and were laid out in various written records:[23]

- Government structures that followed rational-bureaucratic principles, the creation of 'institutional memory', and the setting up of administrative hierarchies
- Basic rights to locals and especially or even sometimes exclusively foreigners (in commerce, life, religion, free movement and above all property rights) and European conceptions of the rule of law
- Social and cultural customs following European ideas of morality and prudence
- Norms associated with the functioning of the diplomatic system to ensure communication between sovereign states including diplomatic immunity
- Rights and obligations of international (i.e. pan-European) law – including the law of warfare

However 'standardised', the *standards* emanated from various metropolitan capitals – London, Paris, Lisbon – and were thus interpreted in a variety of ways infusing a wide range of colonial or semi-colonial relations. If we were to more broadly assess agency denial in the system, we would need to evaluate the extent to which local actors were allowed to (or prohibited from) interpreting and adapting these 'universal' standards to their environment. Moreover, we would need to distinguish between local actors to ask whether such and such standards empower certain actors while disempowering others. It

---

22. It seems to us fair to say that SoC only ever related to the question whether non-European states have the potential to advance to the level of children in domestic society: they have some rights, their interests need to be taken into account, but they are not entitled to weigh in when it comes to decisions about rules that everybody will have to accept. But whereas children have their basic standing respected unconditionally in society, non-European states had to conform to these standards to have even this minimal recognition conferred upon them. In the straightforward colonial relationships, the metropolis would demand the adoption of standards while arguing that in some key aspect 'candidate members' fell short of meriting basic sovereign status. See, for example, Stivachtis, 'Civilization'.

23. Jürgen Osterhammel *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: C.H. Beck, 2011).

is also important to point out that the standards themselves were not stable as the conditions under which they had been generated continued to evolve. Since the evolution of these standards was equally something that new members had no control over, they also lacked agency in this important respect.

Hierarchy

The second dimension along which we can characterise SoC is the institutional entrenchment of a hierarchical international system. We define *hierarchy* in the SoC context as a relational dimension, namely as the inequality that exists where some agents systematically have more power than others and are institutionally recognised to have higher worth.[24] Under this rubric, we intend to capture two interrelated phenomena that characterised the kind of social relations that the standards introduced between European and non-European political communities: First, the fact that the SoC conferred *unequal* rights and entitlements on different members, depending on whether they were European or not. Even where non-Europeans were acknowledged as states or entities whose interests mattered on some level (Persians, Ottomans, Chinese), they never received equal rights in the domain of rule-setting and rule enforcement. So while they sometimes had the right to claim certain things from others in line with existing international rules, the SoC system would never have allowed them to enforce these standards against the standards shapers. The second, closely related, element of hierarchy was the prevailing belief system according to which the highest status in international politics was always categorically reserved from Europeans. So hierarchy had both an 'objective dimension' (i.e. Europeans simply were granted more power in the system that the standards perpetuated) and a 'subjective dimension' (i.e. unequal power was seen to stem from unequal worth or status – in the sense of esteem).

Regarding this 'subjective' dimension, consider the ideas underpinning the contrast between notions of European *civilisation, progress, science, modernity* or *rationality* and others' *barbarity, backwardness, superstition, stagnation and fanaticism*. There was a deep, unanimous conviction in the superiority of European civilisation as *the only true civilisation*, which likewise implied that others had an *inferior* status. This belief transcended political antagonisms and ideological and confessional debates within Europe[25] and allowed leeway to those whose sovereignty was already affirmed regarding which aspects of the standards to incorporate (or not) at home.

The constant was that 'civilised' governmental structures and ways of life in Europe were determined *unilaterally* and seen as marks of progress within Europe, while it was

---

24. In other words, the badness of a lack or denial of agency and of hierarchy can be distinguished like this: Whereas an agent lacking agency suffers from the bad of <u>un</u>-*freedom* to do certain things, an agent positioned as inferior in a social system governed by hierarchy suffers from the bad of *inequality*. Of course it goes without saying that a lack of agency is often the prime marker of inequality, e.g. that agency denial can both assume and entrench hierarchy, but we still think that these two phenomena should be kept analytically distinct for comparative purposes.

25. Raoul Girardet, *L'idée Coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (La table ronde, 1972), 89.

deemed desirable that such progress be exported to and often enforced in the rest of the (uncivilised) world. While agency denial is about the lack of possibilities that non-European states faced, hierarchy is about the kind of unequal system of relationships that SoC created and reproduced. Again here we can distinguish between hierarchy that was created through the process by which the SoC was established and enforced – for example, who was entitled to enforce compliance with the standards, and who was immune from being targeted by the enforcement process; and hierarchy that can be read off the unequal gains that resulted from the system.[26]

Hierarchy resulted in a classification of states into three main categories: 'civilized humanity', 'barbaric humanity' and 'savage humanity',[27] forming an emergent, complex and hierarchical international system. Again, such hierarchy was both subjective-ideational – 'a geopolitical model of *projecting* a world order with European states at the centre and zones of less politically developed states at the peripheries',[28] and material – a basis for unilateral enforcement of such standards on the part of the metropole through more or less coercive means. In this latter sense, the SoC defined a relationship *between* the internal characteristics of non-European states and the terms that were to govern European interaction with them. As a legitimating strategy, the SoC authorised a (civilising) *mission* – colonial domination and transformation – sedimenting Europe's position at the top of the global pecking order.

The Narrative of Structural Discontinuity: From Metropolis to Microcosmos

It would be absurd to put on equal footing the era of so-called 'high imperialism' and today's EU given the appalling brutality and coercion that existed in the former. As Neta Crawford puts it, 'those who argue that there is no difference between colonialism and neo-colonialism have perhaps forgotten what colonialism entailed'.[29] There is simply less at stake for those on the receiving end today. States or populations that did not meet the criteria laid out by the original SoC often faced horrific violence which in theory was meant to encourage some 'civilising process', or they risked losing their claim to collective autonomy, becoming subject to foreign rule or even directly annexed (e.g. Algeria). Precisely what it was to be a European society of states – the mutual recognition of sovereignty – may have been the *abstract* reward to be offered at the end of the colonial road, but only after systematic denial of the ideal and practice of recognition.[30] Today, by

---

26. On such a system of stratification, see Edward Keene in this special issue.
27. James Lorimer, *The Institutes of the Law of Nations: A Treatise of the Jural Relations of Separate Political Communities*, vol. 1 (W. Blackwood and Sons, 1883). Cited in H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 36.
28. Behr, 'The European Union', 240.
29. Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 134.
30. See, inter alia, Tony Burns and Simon Thompson, *Global Justice and the Politics of Recognition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Trusting the Poles? Constructing Europe through Mutual Recognition', *Journal of European Public Policy* 14, no. 5 (2007): 682–98.

way of contrast, while racism is far from eradicated from European mindsets, it would be hard to imagine the EU implicitly or explicitly grounding any of its policies on the racial hierarchies embedded in the most egregious applications of SoC precepts.

More to the point for our purposes here, the post-war and decolonising era within which European integration was embedded and which it partially shaped could be characterised as one of 'universalised basic standing' whereby the right to bestow rights had been transferred to the UN family of nations. In this context, structural discontinuities associated with the new kind of power relations set into motion by the EU formed the basic planks of the Union's international politics. The standard story of the reinvention of Europe as a normative project from the earliest days of the European Community (EC) to its progressive assertion as a 'civilian' or 'normative' power rests on two basic shifts as depicted in Figure 1.

For one, at its creation, the EC's reach was local or regional and was about setting internal standards to civilise Europe itself upon the discovery that the 'barbarian' lay within. How could Europe claim to civilise the world when there simply was no agreement left about what constituted civilisation after World War I, the rise of conflicting mass ideologies and, most of all, World War II? How could there be ambition of global reach when the very creation of the EC coincided with a period of often violent decolonisation and subsequent European introversion? The idea that civilisation was a matter of conforming to certain standards was no longer a guiding mechanism in the relations with others but for the 'self'. Similarly, the brutality of the 'European civil war' (which some have interpreted as a turning inward of practices European states had tested in colonial warfare[31]) now made impossible to explain imperialism in terms of some benevolent universalism.

Second, the standards in question were not easily comparable to the pre-war SoC: if standards were shaped and refined anew in Europe after 1945, these were *standards of cooperation* pertaining to the ways in which states ought to engage with each other over mundane issues like trade liberalisation, competition rule, and the movement of workers. They followed a functional not socio-political logic, were shaped in common, and adopted on a voluntary basis by willing partners in a peace enterprise. As a result, while the SoC were conducted by and in the name of a specific colonial power, the EU's were standards in Europe's name.

In short, the EU microcosmos perfecting itself had replaced the European metropolis perfecting the world. And the SoC were all but forgotten. This does not mean, however, that the new standards were confined to the regional level and the weak analogy of voluntary EU membership. For one, and from its inception, the EC and its standards of cooperation were deemed relevant to other regions around the world. Whereas Europeans were in no position to set any kind of standards on political practices and institutions when they had torn apart their own continent in 1945, the experience of starting over on a new institutional basis and building intense regional cooperation 'from the ground up' was thought to have made them wiser – better endowed to teach others how to (re)configure their intra-regional models of cooperation. This pedagogical ambition was not yet

---

31. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1999).

		The Object of Standards	
		Standards of Civilisation (Metropolis)	*Standards of Cooperation (Microcosmos)*
Geographical Reach	*Global*	Old SoC	
	Regional		EU Membership

Figure 1. Europe's Virgin Birth: The Standards of Cooperation Narrative.

a project per se, that is, the setting of standards to be effected in one's relation to others, but if other parts of the world had also experienced intense conflict, they were free to take or leave the emergent method of technocratic reconciliation on offer in the EC. Gunboat diplomacy was a thing of the past.

Bringing Civilisation Back In: The EU's Colonial Impulses

The ex post facto manufacturing of a kind of EU virgin birth in the late 1950s, unconnected to the past of its member states, is in itself a fascinating story that will need to be told – who can find a map of the original EC containing Algeria in European children's schoolbooks? To be sure, accusations of 'neo-colonialism' have never really abated against 'Europe'. For many parts of the world after decolonisation 'Europe' long continued to mean its 19th-century Metropolis and the EU was all but invisible. After all, the original EC was not intended to supplant its member states in the foreign policy realm where the ex-Metropoles long continued to reign supreme. At the global level, these capitals, especially Paris and London, continued to police conditions of membership in international organisations, starting with the UN, and later, the norms and standards governing their operations. Bilaterally, the fact that the post-decolonisation practices of these ex-imperial powers exhibited strong continuities with the colonial era ought to be part of the background landscape for what preoccupies us here, that is, the EU as such. And as far as the nascent EC was concerned, it cannot be irrelevant that the same group of metropoles originally dreamed up a very different project, under the label of Eurafrica, a new form of partnership between Europeans and their continent-wide 'backyard', whereby they would pool their sovereignty *in order* to pool their colonies. To be sure, Eurafrica did not materialise although many traces of it found their way into the Treaty of Rome.[32] Yet we can still ask to what extent actors involved in dreaming up

---

32. Hansen and Jonsson, 'Building Eurafrica'.

that version of the new Europe could genuinely divest their latter EU-mediated practices of prior Metropolitan impulses.

How and why did the civilisational logic come to the fore as part of the EC/EU fabric itself in the decades following its creation? In a nutshell, we tend to agree with those like Behr who see strong echoes of SoC in the accession process (especially the last enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe). Our analysis differs in two ways. First, we take as point of departure the structural discontinuities outlined above within which SoC analogues are embedded. Thus, patterns discerned over a century after the era of high imperialism are familiar but not similar, in the same way a 21st-century analogue of a horse buggy may be a car, sharing certain core features and functions but not others. Our second point of departure is to examine the relevance of the SoC beyond the accession of new members, across EU practices, and as they evolve over time. We are interested in variance within a pattern of continuity. We proceed in three stages, from considering the underlying currency of power, to setting up our inter-temporal comparison along the two dimensions of agency denial and hierarchy set out above, to applying our proposed typology of analogues to a number of examples.

The Currency of Power Asymmetry

Standards of civilisation matter because they serve as justifications for exploiting asymmetries of power between different political communities. By the early 1970s and with growing European trade might, Gaullist third-way assertion, and the first signs of détente, European politicians and bureaucrats started to think of their creation as more than a forum for peace-through-commerce. Partly resulting from the fact that the EC had by that time developed into a bona fide institution with a new class of 'transnational civil servants', EU commentators began to envisage it as an actor in its own right, and a different kind of actor, namely one wielding, as Duchne famously argued, a new type of power 'in the era of its decline not as a colonised victim but an exemplar of a new stage in *political civilisation* … formed to exert essentially civilian forms of power'.[33]

Thus, the notion of 'civilian' – meaning the *voluntary* character of EU foreign engagement – was seamlessly juxtaposed to 'civilisation' and used to rationalise the worthiness of Europe's renewed international influence (even if non-coercive means and voluntarism were also deemed key). This narrative evolved and was increasingly associated not only with 'actorness' – the EU as an external player, but with 'powerhood' – the EU taking its place alongside the era's great powers. With awareness of powerhood, old tropes came back to the fore: standards of cooperation *between* states both require and create 'civilised' practices *within* states and the latter can legitimately be enforced in the name of the former (the completion of the internal market between states requires changes in domestic rules governing banks, but also in social rights; the adaption of a single money calls for new disciplines on national budgets, etc.).

---

33. François Duchêne, 'The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence', in *A Nation Writ Large? Foreign Policy Problems before the European Communities*, eds Max Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager (London: Macmillan, 1973).

As a result, standards of cooperation unique and internal to the EU – from market liberalisation and decision-making norms, to norms tolerance for minorities – have increasingly been packaged with other kinds of 'norm promotion' outside the EU, widely practised for better or worse by western powers and international organisations. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 explicitly made the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the rest of the world one of the primary goals of EU foreign policy, and the Copenhagen criteria hardened these into political conditions for enlargement.

The upshot has been that the need to 'manage interdependencies' has replaced the imperial rationales of early periods and that norms generated in the EU have been promoted rather coercively in the rest of the world through new forms of implicit or explicit conditionality. What justifies the *form* of engagement to which this rationale leads? Part of our argument is that similarity here is not strategic but 'atavistic', socio-cultural reflexes that are, if not unconscious, at least not articulated as a collectively recognised set of strategic motives. Often in fact, the justifications invoked for their actions by EU decision-makers may sound like *standards of civilisation* in reverse, presenting the EU as committed to promoting equality between the strong and the weak in the international system. At the very least, the EU does not use the former kind of 'coercive paternalism' as openly imperial states did in the 19th century. It would be far-fetched to argue that countering colonial legacies was foremost on the mind of EU founders who were in the business of countering another legacy – that of World War II – and initially at least, when designing the Eurafrica vision of European integration, had seen nothing wrong in grounding the rationale of the EC in its colonial ties.

If the SoC analogy has any merit, we need to analyse not only the rationale but also the underlying patterns of power in the context of which Europe's 'new standards' are advanced. The analogy we draw starts by noting a significant change regarding the source of power associated with gatekeeping and categorising the ways in which such power is institutionalised and thus legitimised. Power has been increasingly wielded by Europeans not from coercive intervention outside Europe, but instead from granting various degrees of access to the EU microcosmos itself.[34] The importance of Europe's new standards of civilisation rests first and foremost in the simple correlation laid out in Figure 2.

As illustrated in Figure 2, *full* convergence with EU standards (those required for accession) which translates into *full* EU membership can be considered as one end of the access spectrum. There are, however, incremental variants – kinds of graduated memberships, polity-building, partnerships and the like – which constitute more or less limited forms of involvement with the EU club, from access to aid, visas, migrant status and the EU's 500 million-strong consumer market. Incrementalism in convergence to standards can be *temporal*, that is, a prospective member will take steps to attain the nirvana of membership, or it can be *disaggregative* in that countries are granted (or demand) only one aspect of access in exchange for only bits of convergence. But in all cases, it is Europe's asymmetric control over such access and the value of such access for outsiders that underpins the relevance of today's new European standards.

---

34. On the EU's market power, see Chad Damro, 'Market Power Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 5 (2012): 682–99.
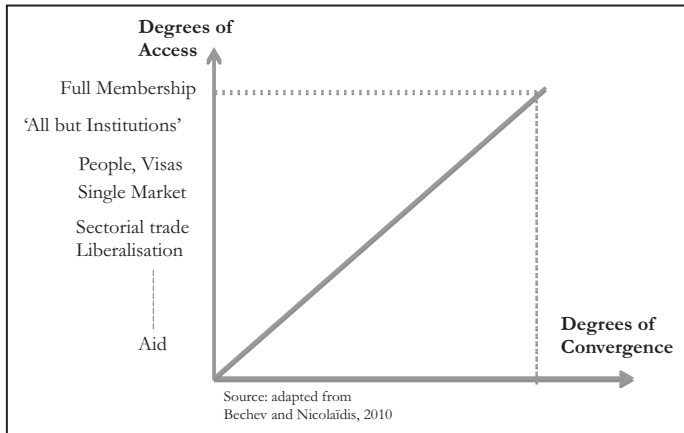
Figure 2. The EU's modus operandi: Graduated Gatekeeping.

One especially influential frame in this regard is that of external governance, that is, the EU's propensity to export part of its *legal acquis* without attaching to it political rights, through a mix of ideational policy diffusion, the expansion of elite and technocratic networks and various forms of conditionality.[35] While not referring explicitly to SoC, the external governance frame provides a useful basis for examining patterns of external interaction in a critical light, bringing in sharper focus background beliefs that may be shared between the EU today and the liberal advocates of the 19th-century SoC from attitudes towards 'progress' and 'liberal values', democracy and accountability to state-society relations, and the role of elites. These beliefs in-and-of themselves come to legitimise governance from the outside under the broad messianic conviction (in Weiler's formulation) that the worthiness of EU standards can justify 'exporting' them through various means. In this sense, one could argue that the new SoC were highly congruent with the functionalist spirit itself which sees peace as only attainable by restructuring transnational links along functional lines and deliberately excluding nationalistic publics organised within state boundaries. If this was true within, it would be all the more true without.

Underlying Patterns: Agency and Hierarchy Revisited

How then does such use of access as the EU's currency of power support the SoC analogy between a European world of *metropolis* to an EU *microcosmos*? The question can be addressed along the two dimensions of the SoC discussed in the first section.

---

35. It is important to acknowledge that the EU is not necessarily a forerunner in the use of conditionality *per se* and that its instruments of external influence are more wide ranging. See, for example, Sandra Lavenex, 'EU External Governance in "Wider Europe"', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 680–700; Frank Schimmelfennig and Wolfgang Wagner, 'Preface: External Governance in the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 657–60.

Agency Denial ('EUnilateralism'). Unquestionably, under the logic of access-for-convergence, Europeans remain comfortable with the appropriateness of limiting the agential freedom of others for their own good. But the question of whether the EU denies their agency altogether is more complicated nowadays, as it requires problematising the *voluntaristic* nature of taking on those standards, which is a key aspect of the discontinuity narrative discussed above. Assessing agency means asking what choices the EU's interlocutors have when confronted with its standards, and to what extent they have a say in the *fact* or *form* of engagement. In external governance terms, there is little congruence between unilateral expansion of the EU's legal boundaries and concurrent inclusion in its institutional boundaries where decision-making occurs. But are there proxies for such institutional inclusion – what people like to call 'local ownership'? What is the balance between persuasion and coercion in external standard projection? And isn't agency denial unavoidable as long as standards are not shaped in shared institutions?

Perhaps most importantly, we stressed originally the analytical connection between process and content in standard setting. Thus agency denial vis-a-vis external actors is itself a function of agency within. When it comes to socio-economic and regulatory standards, it matters therefore that the 'governance logic' entrenched within the EU itself has been at least in part about the denial of democratic agency through the apolitical nature of the post-war administrative settlement, which entrenched a profound distrust on the part of European elites in the capacity of mass politics to deliver peace and prosperity.[36] If the standards the EU was now to project therefore could hark back to a pre-democratic era, it is no surprise that the externalisation of this logic to the transnational realm would magnify this trait and de-emphasise bottom-up participation, local empowerment and ownership. Functional cooperation *within* Europe and the logic of external governance are but two sides of the same coin.

Hierarchy (EUcentrism). Similarly, Europeans have not given up ranking their interlocutors, reflecting their relative place along the access/convergence ladder. But the relationship between such ranking and degrees of appropriate interference and intrusive enforcement has clearly evolved. The EU's hierarchical view of the world can no longer translate into practices of direct domination, for the pecking order has dramatically changed in a world of US hegemony and rising regions. Notwithstanding these constraints, EU-centrism remains salient, defined by decreasing degrees of access from neighbours-as-members to be; neighbours short of membership; to various post-colonial and 'special' partners. Ultimately, hierarchy is about unidirectional enforcement. In a world where standards must be interpreted and enforced, standards may be set by Europe for others, even sometimes with these others' input. But are these others entitled to turn the standards back onto Europe? Is being on top also about being exempt?

---

36. For a discussion see Peter L. Lindseth, *Power and Legitimacy: Reconciling Europe and the Nation-State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
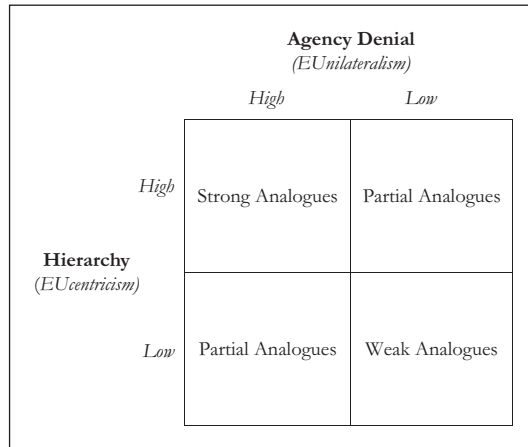
The figure shows a 2×2 matrix. The top axis is labeled **Agency Denial** *(EUnilateralism)* with columns *High* and *Low*. The left axis is labeled **Hierarchy** *(EUcentricism)* with rows *High* and *Low*. The cells read: High/High: Strong Analogues; High/Low: Partial Analogues; Low/High: Partial Analogues; Low/Low: Weak Analogues.

Figure 3a. Europe's New Standards of Civilisation: A Typology.

Strong, Partial and Weak Analogues

The distinct dimensions of agency denial and hierarchy enable consideration of Europe's 'new standards of civilisation' as analogous by degree. This suggests a typology of circumstances under which the SoC analogy may be more or less pertinent, from strong to partial to weak analogues (as illustrated in Figure 3a). This is clearly a highly simplified comparative scheme – a strong analogue clearly does not share all traits of the historical SoC, while a weak analogue may not escape the analogy altogether.

To ascertain which realms of EU international engagement should be ascribed to these categories is a matter of judgment over which reasonable scholars can disagree. The crucial concern is whether in each realm Europeans continue to monopolise agency and organise the world hierarchically. Thus, our typology of SoC analogues is meant to be dynamic, capturing persistent logics though scholars can debate which specific policies fit where, under what conditions and at which point in time, according to evolving patterns of power relations and dominant beliefs. This is also why we have categorised some realms in different boxes to reflect change over time and ambiguities (see Figure 3b).

Strong analogues: It is unsurprising that the EU accession process has been the main prompt in reviving the SoC analogy. It would be hard to find a more unilateral imposition of standards than the transposition of the *acquis communautaire* to candidate countries' domestic legal orders. Of course, and as discussed earlier, many would claim that the 'enlargement moment' is itself embedded within a logic that ought to trump the claim to analogy on two fronts. On the one hand and *ex-ante*, representatives of candidate countries often stress the voluntary nature of the process and the enlargement record itself – from a club of 6 to 28 over 55 years, suggesting that in this regional context, 'basic standing' (i.e. eligibility) is a credible promise contrary to the 19th-century reality. On the other hand and *ex-post*, the 'reward' in the form of EU membership is predicated on equality between states at least in theory. Hence a critical appraisal of EU accession
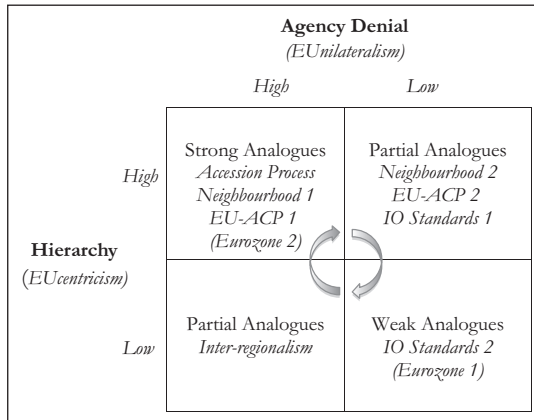
Figure 3b. Europe's New Standards of Civilisation: Illustrations.

needs to include both the accession process itself and these purportedly mitigating factors.

First, over the years, the accession process has become increasingly more analogous to the historic SoC. Structurally, the scope of enlargement alone has made the EU the only game in town for countries falling in its geographical sphere – the EEA has become an EU appendix, despite Swiss and Norwegian hold-outs.[37] The EU version of 'there is no alternative' renders doubtful protestation of voluntariness which has in turn entrenched the 'take it or leave it' nature of the deal on offer. Meanwhile, the scope of conditionality has increased both because the *acquis* itself is ever growing and because membership conditionality has been extended beyond the *acquis*, not least through the Copenhagen criteria on human rights, rule of law and democracy which have never been enforced on early members.[38] The unidirectionality of standards enforcement in the rule of law realm for instance underpins the claims to 'double standards' emanating from candidate countries. As such, the depth of socialisation to EU norms that accompanied the last enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe is unprecedented and the distinction between standard-setters (earlier members) and standard-takers (accession countries) became increasingly salient.[39] Similarly hierarchical, prospective members' chances are ranked

37. For a discussion on the various and contested visions of European frontiers see, inter alia, Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Europe's Ends', in *The Meanings of Europe: Changes and Exchanges of a Contested Concept*, eds C. Wiesner and M. Schmidt-Gleim (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 236.

38. Wojciech Sarduski, Adam Czarnota and M. Krygier, eds, *Spreading Democracy and the Rule of Law?* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Kalypso Nicolaidis and Rachel Kleinfeld, *Rethinking Europe's 'Rule of Law' and Enlargement Agenda: The Fundamental Dilemma* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2012).

39. Frank Schimmelfennig, Stefan Engert and Heiko Knobel, *International Socialization in Europe: European Organizations, Political Conditionality and Democratic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

according to a scale of the EU's own (subjective) making. Not all candidacies for membership are created equal.

But in our view, the claim to strong analogue status also needs to appraise the modern meaning of 'basic standing' both *ex-ante* and *ex-post*. In particular, the analogy can be mitigated not only by reasserting some credence to the *margin of choice* that remains for the candidate country but also with regards to the credibility of the offer of membership itself. In particular, the treatment of what one may call 'proximate outsiders' – states whose eligibility in the club is itself an object of unilateral judgment – such as Japan in the early 20th century and Turkey today, constitutes an interesting dimension of the accession analogue. The idea that such eligibility is determined by a criterion of 'Europeanness' that can be set objectively is itself a carefully constructed EU standard. The SoC only putatively introduced objective guidelines to which aspiring states could conform to realise equal status. Isn't the EU at least more honest when it does reach a judgment of eligibility? Many in Turkey believe that while the EU has sought to cloak the status of their 'candidate-country' in more specific and explicit terms, and while the government on occasion claims that accession criteria can be appropriated as 'Ankara criteria', accession standards for Turkey sometimes strangely echo the 'moving target' of the original SoC. Can there be 'objective' criteria for the objectivity of criteria?

Which brings us to the *ex-post* front, the vexed question of 'equal status' once a member state has passed the door. For, if post-enlargement equality is genuine, the SoC analogy is but a purgatory, a temporary paying of dues, which can be quickly and collectively forgotten. To be sure, while asymmetries of power have always been constitutive of the EU, the commitment in the initial project to mitigating such asymmetries seems to have waned away for good with the Eurozone crisis, both in the ways standards are made and in the way they are enforced. On the first front, and while equal status among member states has never implied equal power in the decision-making process (claims to member state equality and EU citizen equality), the EU has for the time being reverted to its internal hegemonic trope with some states setting rules for others. More importantly, on the enforcement front, rules have been arbitrarily applied to some member states but not others. The lingering sense in the EU periphery that the hierarchical logic of SoC has come to be reproduced within the EU cannot be wished away, witness EU league tables of deserving and undeserving members and the unilateral setting by the centre and big member states of standards that might not be enforced against them (who could imagine a Troika in Berlin if Germany were to harken back to its pre-2005 self?). Has then the unavoidable asymmetry involved in debtor/creditor relations come to imbue the transformation of this polity to such an extent that the old SoC trope has been internalised along with the commitment to banish war through 'civilised' inter-state politics? Or is this state of affair temporary, a crisis management mode that will soon be overcome? We leave these as open-ended questions.

Partial analogues are realms of action which may display affinities with the SoC minus one or another key ingredient (e.g. gatekeeping). This is clearly the broadest and more ambiguous category, allowing for degrees of variation including in terms of our dimensions of agency denial and hierarchy. The so-called neighbourhood policy, for example, constitutes a close variation on membership with access to 'all but institutions'

– or put in another way membership in a 'wider Europe'.[40] In keeping with the access-for-convergence logic, expected convergence is selective and incremental, but, at least in the economic and legal realms, this convergence is sought using the enlargement toolbox whereby in the language of 'external governance' the EU pursues the '(selective) extension of the EU's norms, rules and policies, i.e. legal boundary, while precluding the opening of its institutional boundary, i.e. membership'.[41] To the extent that the ultimate reward of equal member status remains out of reach (*pace* Ukraine), it could be argued that the neighbourhood realm is an even stronger analogue than accession to the hierarchical diffusionary logic of the SoC. Indeed, the very ascription to the status of 'neighbour' – precluding the idea that the EU itself could be considered as *their* neighbour – and the label of 'wider Europe' made of concentric circles together combine in mirroring the hierarchical diffusionary logic of historic SoC. It seems that whenever the EU has tried to escape such top-down ranking through regional multilateralism – as with the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean or the Eastern Partnership – an incontrovertible counter-logic unravels: bilateralism sets in within multilateralism (country-by-country action plans are negotiated), and since these entail highly asymmetric relations between single countries and the EU as a whole, unilateralism sets in within bilateralism. In short, the upshot is arguably a continental version of unilateral EUniversalism.[42]

Yet the analogy remains partial precisely because since the EU seems to have little to offer, it hardly can deny the reassertion of agency outside its borders, in all sorts of configurations involving states with or against their societies. In recent developments from Egypt to Ukraine, the ways in which societies seek emancipation from arbitrary rule translate into very different attitudes regarding foreign (including EU) influence, not least the EU's attitude and the soft power competition the EU faces in its 'near abroad'.

Moving further afield geographically, the SoC analogy takes on different connotations but remains strong. Most obviously, when relationships are justified not by geographical proximity but historical – indeed colonial – ties, one may expect both strong echoes of colonial mindsets and practices, and deeper patterns of resistance to neo-colonial conditions. EU relations with ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries over the past decade which culminated in flawed negotiations over EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements) can be seen in this light.[43] As with neighbourhood countries,

40. For a discussion see inter alia Elena Korosteleva, 'The EU and its Eastern Neighbours: Why "Othering" Matters', in Nicolaidis et al., *Echoes of Empire*, op. cit. Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'From Policy to Polity: Can the EU's Special Relations with its "Neighbourhood" be Decentred?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, no. 3 (2010): 475–500.
41. Lavenex, 'EU External Governance'. See also the new scholarship on narratives of governmentality. Inter alia, Hanna Mühlenhoff, 'Funding Democracy, Funding Social Services? The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights in the Context of Competing Narratives in Turkey', Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies 16, no. 1 (2014): 102–18.
42. K. Nicolaidis, 'Southern Barbarians? A Post-colonial Critic of EUniversalism', in *Echoes of Empire*, eds Nicolaidis et al., 249.
43. For an in-depth study see the work of Jones and of Weinhardt, including Emily Jones and Clara Weinhardt, 'Echoes of Colonialism in Trade Negotiations between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries', in *Echoes of Empire*, eds Nicolaidis et al., op. cit.

the relationship is grounded on asymmetric interdependence with the EU progressively extending standards upon which aid and trade may be made conditional to include norms pertaining to the broad categories of democracy, rule of law and human rights as under-pinnings of 'good governance'. In exchange, membership is offered to a 'partnership' whose terms are set by the EU including the pace and degree of *reciprocal* trade opening in a context where the EU's insistence on reciprocity is seen by counterparts as a new form of domination through penetration. That said, in the EU-ACP context, continuities and discontinuities afforded by (de)colonisation create a more variegated picture. The paternalistic undertones permeating bargaining dynamics and the oft-repeated rationale for exporting standards 'for their own good' along with the need to 'educate' is more unapologetic in the ACP context than in the neighbourhood.[44] Unidirectionality remains a constant from the Yaoundé convention to EPAs, from EU standards concerning devel-opment, industrialisation, and governance to the insistence on national treatment for company property rights. More subtle is the EU's propensity to unilaterally 'interpret' international legal constraints (e.g. the WTO limitations on preferential treatment for less developed countries) in its favour. Yet, as its failure to close on EPAs with most ACP countries testifies, it has become increasingly hard for the EU to assert dominance in its former empire, especially in light of the alternatives offered by China or Brazil's new-found engagement in Africa, and more generally the growth in South-South trade. Resistance to agency denial has become increasingly vocal but EU discourse and praxis has not changed concurrently.

Finally, realms where agency denial remains high while hierarchical ordering has had to be at least partially eschewed also constitutes *partial analogues*. A key example here is the relationship between the EU and other emerging or entrenched regions (e.g. Mercosur in Latin America, ASEAN, SADEC). The rise of such regional arrangements fed the EU narrative of discontinuity from its past in that European leaders saw their project as offering a welcome but un-coerced model to an international society of regions. But over the years, these regions have become major targets of EU standardisation where access to EU markets is often predicated on adoption of not only product standards but other more institutional codes. To this diffusionary end, the EU uses a range of (more or less coercive) mechanisms,[45] while often failing to view inter-regional relations as mutual, that is, to seek to learn from other regions' experiences. Unsurprisingly, most

---

44. See Jones and Weinhardt's conclusion on the EPA negotiations that 'instead of negotiating as equals, the European side clearly expected itself to be in a better position to judge what an economically sound EPA would look like' ('Echoes of Colonialism'). Numerous testimonies gathered in this and other studies attest to the fact that the EPA negotiations were constrained by 'Europe's seemingly unchallenged conviction … that Europe knows best what [the Caribbean region's] development priorities, needs, and capacities are' – a leading Caribbean academic cited in Clive Thomas, 'Reflections on the CARIFORUM-EC, Economic Partnership Agreement: Implications for CARICOM', in *CARICOM: Policy Options for International Engagement*, eds Kenneth O. Hall and Myrtle Chuck-a-Sang (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2010).
45. For a discussion see Tobias Lenz, 'EU Normative Power and Regionalism: Ideational Diffusion and its Limits', *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2 (2013): 211–28.

regional organisations, far from 'copying' the EU, pursue their own agendas paying at most lip service to the EU's regional civilising instincts.

Weak analogues. Finally, there is a range of EU practices in international politics that may qualify as analogues, albeit in a weaker and more indirect way then those we have discussed in the realm of the EU's bilateral external relations. In particular, the EU's involvement in international organisations (IOs) entails sharing agency in multilateral decision-making and, at least formally, abandoning a hierarchical outlook on global affairs including gatekeeping vis-a-vis membership.[46] Yet, from the development and enforcement of the principle of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) to the establishment and the promotion of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and while we readily acknowledge that it has not been the sole standard-setter here, the EU continues to play a pivotal role in determining the terms of membership in an 'international community' whose exact identity and boundaries remain debatable.

Of course, it could be argued that such impulses are a function of power games in international politics whereby various modes of persuasion, including market power, are used by all who can to promote their interests. But the SoC frame can help tease out deeper patterns that can be found in the gap between formal *multilateralism* and actual *mutuality.*[47] As Rahul Rao suggests, standards may be universal to the extent that they have been adopted in multilateral settings but may nonetheless be interpreted and enforced primarily by the EU or more broadly 'the West' in a way which furthermore may be unresponsive to the preferences of 'the subaltern other' – all features evocative of the SoC.[48] The growing controversy around the work of the ICC – ratified by 122 member states for which the EU is the main funder – is a case in point. While the goal of 'guarantee[ing] lasting respect for and the enforcement of international justice' is certainly of universal resonance, the ICC's near-exclusive focus on Africa, its failure to take into consideration local approaches to transitional justice and to collective responsibility has sparked much criticism ranging from mere accusations of bias to those who label it 'a tool to recolonise Africa'.[49] In this light, the polarisation between the ICC and the African Union can be seen as a tug-of-war around new standards of civilisation.

The typology we offer is admittedly extremely stylised and in need of refinement. It cannot possibly capture the vast array of external involvements of the EU as well as the many variations in terms of division of labour between the EU per se and the continued external actions of its member states. But we hope that it suggests two points. First, that many EU practices do entail a kind of paradigmatic new SoC mindset, defined above as

---

46. For a discussion in the context of WTO see, for instance, Alaisdair Young, 'Trade Politics Ain't What it Used to Be: The European Union in the Doha Round', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45, no. 11 (2007): 789–811.

47. For a discussion of mutuality see Rachel Kleinfeld and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Can a Post-Colonial Power Export the Rule of Law?', in *Relocating the Rule of Law*, ed. Palombella Gianluigi and Neil Walker (Oxford: Hart, 2009).

48. Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

49. See, inter alia, 'ICC, A Tool to Recolonise Africa', *New Africa Magazine*, 1 March 2012.

a specifically European belief in the appropriateness of setting standards for others and ordering the world hierarchically. Second, that there is significant variance across domains and across time in the ways the EU's global involvements may or may not qualify as analogues when considering patterns of cooperation with other states as well as mandates for enforcement. Whether or not this implies that the EU still carries the colonial gene is left to the reader.

Taking Stock and Moving Forward

We have argued that there are reasons to speak of a new European SoC albeit with a number of qualifiers. In this last section, we propose ways for the EU to take stock of the 'new SoC' argument to begin to close the gap between European and others' assessments of its behaviour on the world stage.

'Genuine' multilateralism represents the most obvious antidote to both the denial of agency on the part of the EU and its hierarchical ordering of the world, for the rising stars of the emergent multipolar order include many states on the receiving end of the historical SoC. Memories of that period thus run deeply in national imaginaries across the previously subdued world,[50] an enduring echo evident in tropes from China's 'hundred years of humiliation' to Turkey's Sevres and Capitulations 'syndromes'.[51] Today, it is clear that the EU is still far from achieving meaningful multilateralism. Surely, the EU may be held formally accountable in multilateral negotiations with regards to regulative standards in the fields from trade and finance to labour rights but even then, asymmetric market power gives very little leverage to most of its trading partners. Moreover, when it comes to multilaterally sanctioned rights of intervention to address civil strife or minority rights, there is little sense that the EU could ever be on the receiving end – the hierarchical unidirectionality of enforcement at the core of the SoC is assumed without second thought. More importantly still, echoes of the old patronising discourse are heard distinctly when EU officials explicitly equate desirable 'global' or 'universal' norms with European norms, not only in its dealing with former colonies but in multilateral settings. We are thus left with the following question: how can the EU counter such tropes to engage in a truly multilateral and symmetric approach to mutual recognition among states and peoples?

As we noted at the beginning of our article, problematising the 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) thesis constitutes an unavoidable starting point. Normatively, and from a 'new SoC' standpoint, it is not trifling that the EU would it find unproblematic to 'shape conceptions of the normal' for the rest of the world. And although the Euro-crisis may have dented the scholarly and political success of the NPE narrative and made the idea of new SoC plausible for both Europeans and non-Europeans, the idea of NPE is bound to be resilient. Projecting this particular identity rests heavily on the EU's grand narrative

50. Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
51. Nora Fisher Onar, 'Historical Legacies in Rising Powers: Towards a (Eur)Asian Approach', *Critical Asian Studies* 45, no. 3 (2013): 411–30.

with its simultaneous amnesia and atonement for the SoC, and its propensity to cherry pick aspects of the EU's past, using the horrors of the two World Wars as a cornerstone while obfuscating the central role played by colonialism in the formation of the EEC, not least through the 'Eurafrica' project discussed above. In light of this, it is all the more important for the EU to think critically about its habit of speaking from a moral high ground. While Europe's tainted past does not mean that all future European ambitions to change the world for the better are inherently problematic, it does call for a systematic engagement with how the EU's words and actions are interpreted outside 'bubble Europe'. The goal, in an era of eclipse, must be to provincialise the mental image of Europe and its place in the international pecking order, engage others on an equal footing, and reconstruct relations accordingly.[52]

Along these lines a growing chorus of voices at the nexus of IR and European Studies have called for a decentred approach which mainstreams 'non-western' perspectives. Studies in this vein point to the need to 'provincialize Europe'[53] and challenge Eurocentrism[54] across a wide range of fields, including European history and the disciplines lumped under the label of 'area studies'. The relevant literature points to a number of tools and avenues to explore, from the role of 'otherness' and the concept of 'co-constitution' to the idea of 'coevalness' and the existence of multiple 'modernities'.[55] These tools are particularly valuable for examining the realm of EU studies which has so far remained quite sheltered from postcolonial critiques. Despite this growing literature, the common features of key elements of EU praxis deeply informed by the substance, image and structure of the SoC remain unexamined. Part of our agenda therefore must be to link more systematically the macro-critique of Eurocentrism and the appraisal of EU external relations praxis.

This raises a further question that would justify much greater attention, namely the need to put into relief Europe's new *standards* in light of the hegemony of the major standard-bearer of the day, the United States. Much analogising can be made between US and EU exceptionalism to argue that the US is much closer to the unilateralist and hierarchical core of historical SoCs than the EU today, especially given the hard power which underpins US demands for external emulation.[56] Suffice to note here that the EU's claim to comparative advantage vis-a-vis the US and the (questionable) narrative that has been constructed around this claim could be read as an 'SoC distancing' discourse in

---

52. For a detailed discussion of these three dimensions, see N. Fisher Onar and K. Nicolaidis, 'The Decentering Agenda: Europe as a Post-Colonial Power', *Conflict and Cooperation* 48, no. 2 (*Special Issue on Normative Power revisited*, June 2013): 283–303.
53. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.
54. Sanjay Seth, 'Historical Sociology and Postcolonial Theory: Two Strategies for Challenging Eurocentrism', *International Political Sociology* 3, no. 3 (2009): 334–8.
55. See esp. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*. See also, inter alia, Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, *International Relations and the Problem of Difference* (London: Routledge, 2003).
56. For a comparative discussion see Nicolaidis, 'Southern Barbarians?' For a fascinating analogy between US hegemony with that of historic China, see Yuen Foong Khong, 'The American Tributary System', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6, no. 1 (2013): 1–47.

three ways. First, the EU can use its Kantian lack of coercive power reliant on civilian instruments of persuasion to bolster the assumption that its new standards can be adopted on their own merit, as it were, by the rest of the world. Second, it could be claimed that beyond the harmonised standards which are part of the *acquis*, the EU standards on offer could be construed as an '*a la carte* menu', that is, a set of national standards loosely connected through the Union rather than a monolithic blueprint (although it is notable that in the accession process, the EU Commission tends to create 'EU standards' out of disparate national ones, as in the area of the rule of law for instance). Finally and most importantly perhaps, the EU now sells itself for emulation as a region rather than a state itself, something the US simply cannot do. As such, it has a unique ability to offer standards for the taking to other regional groupings, such as ASEAN and Mercosur, a demarche that may be all the more legitimate as it is done in a passive mode. Such distancing could in turn be seen as offering grounds for making the EU a truly 'post-colonial' power, holding out the (questionable) promise that it could get it right 'this time around'.

This narrative, however, raises critical questions. For one, as long as the EU predicates access to its internal market on the adoption of standards beyond those necessary to ensure consumer protection, to what extent is adherence to its standards by other states or regions voluntary? Why is such access not governed by some form of managed mutual recognition that acknowledges the compatibility between European and non-European standards when such can be argued – rather than demanding unilateral harmonisation with EU standards? Don't we need to question the blanket belief in *techne* altogether, inherent in the SoC and embodied in the notion of 'governance' at the core of internal and external EU praxis, the conviction that is that rules and bureaucratic procedures can guarantee 'progress' by offering uniquely appropriate answers to redistributive conflicts, limiting the 'arbitrary' in politics and forging state machineries best suited to delivering universal services to citizens?

More generally, to what extent can former colonial powers ever be seen to export 'universal' values?[57] This is not the place to rehearse the ongoing debate about the genuine universality of 'universal values' like human rights. This line of questioning does provide, however, insights regarding the perceived 'baggage' of the EU and of the international legal order it vocally promotes,[58] the local embeddedness of struggles for recognition, including the recognition that underlies basic rights, and the idea that such embeddedness in turn calls for sophisticated strategies of empowerment on the part of outsiders grounded on local demands rather than external interests. All this is a tall order indeed.

These concerns ultimately point to one overarching question: what, exactly, does it entail for Europe to be a 'postcolonial' power? What would it take for it to transcend its imperial past?[59] And importantly, who may legitimately provide answers to this

---

57. Kleinfeld and Nicolaidis, 'Can a Post-Colonial Power'.
58. Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
59. Jorge Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism", "Postcolonialism", and "Mestizaje"', in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. G. Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 241–75.

question? Surely, it would seem insufficient for EU actors themselves to declare that the EU has squarely left its colonial past behind. How then do those outside Europe (and this brings us back to the question of perception and pragmatic imperative) – for whom the allegedly universal standards are projected, perceive the EU's behaviour against the backdrop of their post-colonial condition(s)?

Conclusion: Raising Questions, Seeking Change

We have discussed the relevance of the SoC analogy to assessing EU policies in realms from accession negotiations and neighbourhood policy to inter-regionalism and the EU's role in international institutions and global governance. Our discussion has highlighted both the promise and fallacy of examining the EU's narratives and modes of action through the lens of 'standards of civilization'. In order to disentangle these contradictory strands, our typology suggests a tentative classification of how pertinent the SoC analogy may be in different realms of action and policy domains. While the analysis was theoretical rather than empirical, we used examples to raise questions rather than to provide clear-cut answers

Our aim is transformative. Ultimately, we hope to contribute to better connecting 'decentring' in the scholarly field with 'decentring' by the EU on the ground and to translate our ideas into changing practices on the part of EU actors by questioning the overarching narrative relied on by practitioners.[60] Colonial echoes go largely unacknowledged in the central narrative of European history which feeds into the justificatory basis of presenting the European Union as a model to be replicated around the world. To be sure, members of the club differ in their colonial legacies and there are EU member states who were on the other side of the club, considering themselves as colonial victims rather than perpetrators. But even the latter have come to own Europe's colonial past through their belonging to the EU. If a historical-grounded argument about the legitimacy of presenting the EU as a model is to resonate with countries and groups outside of Europe, we think that Europeans (and the EU as their foremost common institution) must find a coherent narrative that includes recognition of the very ambiguous past they collectively share in attempting to act as a role model for others.

In doing so, we need to recognise that both the 'humanist progressive' and 'commercial' impulses which drove some liberals into accepting the 19th-century SoC and the darker instincts of civilisational superiority remain the core ideological foundation driving today's EU external policies, a nexus which can be dressed up in a multilateralised cloak while having undergone fundamental transformations alongside the transformation of the state itself in the century and a half that has elapsed. Our critical defence of the adequacy of the SoC analogy for present day EU practices is part of a broader debate on Eurocentricism and post-coloniality which has acquired heightened relevance with the EU's precipitous loss of geopolitical altitude in the recent Eurozone crisis, and with the

---

60. For a more general discussion see, inter alia, Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, eds, *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives on and beyond Asia* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

rise of alternative centres of gravity in the formerly colonised world. In this new environment, debating the standard of civilisation analogy may help to advance a broader agenda pertinent to both the analytical, functional, and normative imperative of 'decentring Europe'.

Author Biographies

Kalypso Nicolaïdis is Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford, Director of the Centre for International Studies and Director of the RENEW research programme (Rethinking Europe in a Non European World).

Claire Vergerio is a DPhil candidate in International Relations at the University of Oxford.

Nora Fisher Onar is a Research Associate of the Centre for International Studies of the University of Oxford.

Juri Viehoff is a DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford and a research fellow at the Centre for Ethics, University of Zurich.