The European Union in the world

Critical theories

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Introduction

There has been an increase in interest in recent years in (broadly defined) critical theories of, or approaches to, the process of European integration (Bieler and Morton 2001; van Apeldoorn, Overbeek and Ryner 2003; Manners 2006a; Bailey 2006; Hoskyns 2004; Cafruny and Ryner 2009). While this is to be welcomed, critical theories are less prevalent in the literature focusing specifically on the European Union’s (EU) role in global governance. The present chapter aims, therefore, to present an initial overview of the way that critical theories have been applied to the EU’s external relations, and in so doing to suggest further areas of research and analysis that might provide interesting insights into the question of the EU’s position within the world. As such, the present chapter might be viewed as part of a more general endeavour ‘to ensure that the study of the EU maintains its innovative and challenging character’ (Warleigh-Lack, Chapter 1 of this volume). The chapter begins with a discussion of what we mean by critical theories. It then proceeds to provide an overview of how different critical theories have provided useful insights into the EU’s external relations, particularly focusing on recent discussions of Eastern European enlargement and the EU’s development policy. The chapter concludes with an overview of the merits of critical theories, as applied to EU external relations.

What are critical theories?

As is routinely noted, we can divide critical theories into those with a specific connection with the so-called ‘Frankfurt School’ that was originally based at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt (this branch of critical theory is usually referred to as ‘Critical Theory’), and those that aim to present a more broadly defined critical analysis of their topic of investigation (usually referred to as ‘critical theory’). While there are clear differences (most notably regarding breadth of subject area), there are nevertheless also a number of similarities between the theoretical claims to which these two terms refer. Perhaps most notably, both types of critical theory are concerned with the experience of those individuals and/or groups they view as being dominated by other individuals/groups, and the possibility that that domination might be overcome. Given these similarities, the present essay will refer to ‘critical theory’
(lower-case) throughout, while nevertheless recognizing that the term has its historical roots in the work of the Frankfurt School. As such, in seeking here to identify a definition of critical theory, an obvious starting point is the essay by the one-time director of the Institute for Social Research, Max Horkheimer, published in 1937, titled *Traditional and Critical Theory*. Here Horkheimer attempted to define the meaning of the term critical theory (Horkheimer 1937), claiming much of ‘traditional theory’ erroneously viewed empirical observation as unproblematic, whereas in fact such observation is unavoidably wrapped up in the observing individual’s conceptual apparatus, which itself cannot be removed from the social relations (and particularly social relations of production) within which those individuals are located. In contrast to ‘traditional theory’, therefore, Horkheimer advocated critical theory, by which he meant theorizing that is self-consciously aware of its own roots in social relations characterized by inequality, exploitation and the contradictions of capitalist society. Most importantly, perhaps, critical theory represented for Horkheimer an attempt to transcend those unequal relations: ‘The issue … is not simply the theory of emancipation; it is the practice of it as well’ (Horkheimer 1937: 233).

While Horkheimer’s seminal essay has become a reference point for many working within the critical theory framework, for those within the discipline of international relations (IR) a more recent essay by Robert Cox (1981) is more commonly noted as the seminal work (see, for instance, the discussion in Rupert 2007: 158–59). Thus, in his essay, ‘Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory’, Cox (1981) famously argued that ‘theory is always for someone and for some purpose’ (italics in original, ibid.: 128). He went on to state that theories will always be located within the specific relations of power, dominance and subordination that characterize the context within which a theory is explicated. Thus, similarly to Horkheimer’s recognition that theory is located within capitalist relations, Cox also recognizes that power relationships will pervade theoretical statements. Cox claims ‘critical theory’ is concerned not only with the problems that afflict a particular social order, but also with ‘how that order came about’ (ibid.: 129). In doing so, critical theory permits a positing of change to the present order as one of the means by which those problems studied might be resolved. The aim, therefore, of critical theory is not so much to identify solutions to problems within the present context, but rather to identify possible solutions to contemporary problems that might be realized through a change in the present context itself. There are clear parallels here, therefore, with the work of Marx, for whom it was famously insufficient merely to interpret the world, ‘the point is to change it’ (Marx 1888). Moreover, just as for Marx ‘men make their own history … but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past’ (Marx 1869: 10), so equally for Cox:

Critical theory thus contains an element of utopianism … , but its utopianism is constrained by its comprehension of historical processes. It must reject improbable alternatives just as it rejects the permanency of the existing order.

(Cox 1981: 130)

Critical theory, therefore, seeks to provide ‘a guide to strategic action’ (ibid.: 130) for those actors seeking to transcend the existing (unequal) social order.

Marx’s analysis of capitalism has, therefore, clearly influenced critical theory. As Wiggershaus (1994: 5) notes in discussing the Frankfurt School, ‘Critical Theory’ was ‘a camouflage label for “Marxist theory”’. However, we have witnessed over the past two or three decades a pluralization of the range of patterns and types of power, domination and subordination that are focused on by critical theories. An initial focus on class and capitalism has now been extended
to include gender relations (Young 1990; Butler 1990), colonial, quasi-imperial and post-colonial relations (Spivak 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000), and more plural and diffuse (micro?) power relations (Foucault 1980; Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 1988). Thus, while sharing a concern for context, inequality and emancipation with Horkheimer and Cox, Eschle and Maiguashca (2005) nevertheless identify a far greater range of inequalities. Critical theories, they claim, ‘acknowledge the importance of exploring social struggles and resistances, whether conceptualized as social movements or not, as crucial sites of world politics. This is true of neo-Marxist, Gramscian, Habermasian, poststructuralist and feminist theories, among others’ (ibid.: 1).

In sum, we can identify three core features that contemporary critical theories share in common:

- a recognition that all theoretical statements are located within, and have a relationship with, a particular historical context characterized by a particular constellation of unequal power relations.
- An alignment with those groups and/or individuals identified as subaltern, or subordinate, within that particular constellation of inequality.
- An attempt to identify, advocate and put into effect potential means by which that subaltern group could achieve emancipation from, and the transcendence of, the unequal power relations identified.

Critical theories are those that seek to identify unequal power relations, to speak to those who suffer as a result of those unequal relationships, and to advocate means by which emancipation can be attained. Moreover, critical theories can be disaggregated according to the particular type of inequality they focus upon, with four strands of critical theory (and respective targets for emancipation) standing out as particularly noteworthy. Thus, Marxism focuses on capitalism and the emancipation of the proletariat; feminism focuses on patriarchy and women; postcolonialism on relations between a ‘Northern’ core and ‘Southern’ periphery; and poststructuralism seeks to highlight the existence of the excluded ‘other’. What follows is a discussion of each of these critical theories and how they have influenced critical approaches to European integration.

**Marxism (and neo-Gramscianism)**

Marxist critical theories are focused on the central, but yet problematic, relationship that Marx claimed constituted capitalist society: the antagonistic relationship between capital/capitalists and labour/workers. While existing in an antagonistic relationship, however, Marx claimed that capitalists and workers are nevertheless mutually constitutive:

> Without a class dependent on wages [i.e. the working class], the moment individuals confront each other as free persons, there can be no production of surplus-value; without the production of surplus-value there can be no capitalist production, and hence no capital and no capitalist! Capital and wage-labour … only express two aspects of the self-same relationship.

(Marx 1867: 1005–6)

From a Marxist perspective, the contradiction that capital-labour relations are at the same time both mutually constitutive of, and mutually antagonistic within, capitalism results in the recurrent experience of social tension, destabilization and crisis. Marxist critical theories seek to highlight the causes for these crises, and to identify means by which capitalism might be overturned. In the field of European integration and EU studies, therefore, we witness a number of such

Within the Marxist tradition, the question posed by Gramsci (1971) was that of how to explain the perpetuation of capitalism despite its apparently crisis-prone nature. Perhaps more pertinently still, Gramsci was particularly interested in what he perceived to be the widespread consent of sections of the working class to the subordination of their interests to those of capital. In order to understand and explain these phenomena, Gramsci developed the concept of ‘hegemony’, by which he meant the construction, by the contemporary ruling elite, of both the coercion over, and consent of, the working class, through the formation of a unity of interests across classes (termed a ‘historical bloc’). More recent ‘neo-Gramscians’ have therefore sought to investigate the extent to which the contemporary ruling elite has produced a new form of hegemony across today’s ‘neoliberal’ historical bloc (see, for instance, Gill 2008; Plehwe, Walpen and Neunhöffer 2006). In seeking to apply such analyses to the EU, therefore, we have witnessed a particular focus upon (1) the way in which European integration has acted to facilitate the production of a ‘neoliberal’ hegemony across transnational class relations that span the EU (see, for instance, Gill 2003; Bieler 2005; van Apeldoorn 2002, 2006), and (2) the potential for a European-wide labour movement to construct a ‘counter-hegemonic’ movement that might challenge this (Bieler 2006).

Feminism

What unites feminist approaches to the concrete study of social and political relations is their focus on gender, and particularly the notion that gender itself is a hierarchy of values in which ‘masculine’ values such as ‘strength, rationality, independence, protector, and public’, are prioritized over ‘feminine’ values such as ‘weakness, emotionality, relational, protected, and private’ (Tickner and Sjoberg 2007: 186). This, in turn, is seen as a result of the power relations that characterize contemporary patriarchal society. These values therefore perpetuate the domination of men/masculinity over women/femininity (ibid.: 187–88). Yet, in seeking to characterize feminism as a critical theory we immediately run into the problem that feminism itself is characterized by a number of quite diverse approaches to political analysis. For instance, Steans (2006) identifies six different core tasks for feminist scholarship in international relations: to critique mainstream approaches, to focus upon women, to analyse gender inequalities, to empower women, to show how masculinities and femininities are (re)produced, and to show how gender is also manifested in postcolonial relations (ibid.: 27). Reflecting this pluralism of feminisms, in EU studies we have witnessed literature focusing on the promotion of women’s issues, rights and interests in the EU (Ellina 2003), on the gradual exclusion of gender equality issues by the EU (Jenson 2008), on the role of women’s movements’ activities (and, therefore, the extent to which women are subjects) within EU politics (Bleijenbergh and Roggeband 2007; Roth 2007), on the impact that EU policies might have on gender equality (Meier and Lombardo 2008), and at the way in which identities are constructed along the lines of gender, class, race and age through official discourse articulated by EU institutions (Brine 2006).

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism seeks to highlight the power relations that comprise the legacy of colonial relationships. This includes a focus upon the effects of these relations, particularly upon notions of knowledge, culture and morality, and the process through which these are reproduced. Thus, authors such as Fanon (1968), Said (1979) and Spivak (1999) have each sought to show the way
in which colonial power relations have resulted in the production of a civilized ‘Western’ or ‘European’ identity, that contrasts with a ‘native’, ‘Oriental’, or ‘subaltern’ Other. In doing so, postcolonialists argue, contemporary notions of rationality, morality and knowledge are imbued with both those colonial exclusions that in part constituted them when they were initially constructed and, moreover, the contemporary postcolonialist exclusions which continue to constitute them. As such, postcolonialism seeks to uncover and expose the inequalities, patterns of domination and practice of self-legitimation/other-denigration that characterized the colonial era and continues to characterize the postcolonial era (Grovogui 2007).

Moreover, given that Europe was the site of most of the metropoles of the colonial order, it should come as no surprise that the structure of European society has particularly come in for critique (see, for instance, McClintock 1995). As such, given that the EU has a number of ex-colonial member states, it should come as no surprise that the EU has also been the target of postcolonial critique. For instance, in discussing the way in which non-European subjects have been (and still are) excluded from both the notion of Europe and the process of European integration, and in also noting the prior colonialism in which this exclusion is rooted, O’Brien and Penna (2008) argue that:

A policy for European integration is always a dualism—including and excluding, integrating and disintegrating, incorporating and alienating at the same time. In short, the process of inclusion in modern socio-political frameworks is fundamentally dependent upon the process of exclusion from those frameworks: the formation of ‘system boundaries’ comprises a two-fold action whereby the construction of the rights, identifications and symbols of some constituencies serves to de-construct the rights, identifications and symbols of less powerful others.

(ibid.: 87–88)

This process, they argue, can be most clearly witnessed in the contemporary preoccupation of EU-level policy-makers with the notion of ‘social exclusion’, which they claim serves to conceal and consolidate wider patterns of exclusion associated with colonial legacies (ibid.). Similarly, for Kramsch (2007), European integration itself was born out of an attempt by postcolonial states to consolidate their position of superiority vis-à-vis those ex-colonies over which their formal domination had ended. In this way, they claim, we can witness an attempt at ‘naturalizing the imaginative separation of “Europe” from its former overseas colonial possessions’ (ibid.: 1590). Finally, in considering the ongoing discussion over the formation of a European identity, Hansen (2002) adopts a postcolonialist perspective in suggesting that many of the ‘core ingredients’ of a (purported) European identity are themselves constituted by ‘the exclusion of a whole range of events and structures tied to colonialism and decolonization’ (ibid.: 485). Postcolonialism is therefore an important branch of critical theory applied to the process of European integration.

**Poststructuralism**

While the preceding types of critical theory have each focused upon a particular type of domination, poststructuralism is different in that it seeks to bring into question dominant modes of thought, knowledge and power on a more general level (Campbell 2007: 206). This is based on a central claim of poststructuralist thought, that representation is inherently problematic. Thus, the attempt to represent a particular element of reality is always-already faced by the inherent problem that the representative symbol (or ‘signifier’) is intrinsically different to the represented object (the ‘signified’). For Gilles Deleuze, one of the founding poststructuralist philosophers,
therefore, ‘representation fails to capture the affirmed world of difference’—and, particularly, the difference between the represented and the representative (Deleuze 1994: 68–69). It is this inability to represent reality, especially given the unavoidable representativeness of thought, ideas and identities, which has so exercised poststructuralist theorists. Thus, for Foucault, in any attempt to identify a ‘unity’ between thought and various other elements of reality we will always be faced with the problem that ‘such a unity, far from being given immediately, is the result of an operation; that this operation is interpretative’, and, as such, ‘can be regarded neither as an immediate unity, nor as a certain unity, nor as a homogeneous unity’ (Foucault 1969: 27).

With any given attempt to represent reality, therefore, we experience a plurality of alternative truths, statements and depictions. This thereby necessitates the study of the process whereby one of these alternative viewpoints becomes dominant in any one period in time. Poststructuralist research therefore seeks to study and illuminate the way in which dominant representations are constructed and alternatives are excluded. Indeed, for poststructuralists, any consensus sustaining these constructions ‘must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justifications of which must be scrutinized: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate’ (ibid.: 28). Similarly, for Laclau, in seeking to understand the formation of identities we must pay attention to both the necessity of highlighting equivalent attributes that sustain those identities, and the impossibility of doing so due to the inherent difference between those attributes. It is this impossible representation, therefore, that comes to constitute the subject’s identity: ‘the object, in spite of its necessity, is also impossible. If its necessity requires access to the level of representation, its impossibility means that it is always going to be a distorted representation—that the means of representation are going to be constitutively inadequate’ (Laclau 2000: 56). This therefore opens up for Laclau the possibility of investigating the way in which this constitutive tension between necessity and impossibility perpetually destabilizes identity, ideas, and interests (ibid.: 75). Indeed, it is this perpetual destabilization at the centre of identity-formation that forms the basis for much of poststructuralist discourse analysis. In the words of Howarth (2005), ‘all systems of meaningful practice—or discourses—rely upon discursive exteriors that partially constitute such orders, while potentially subverting them’ (ibid.: 317, emphasis added). The aim, therefore, is both to identify the historical practices through which objects of research have been constructed, and also ‘to show the contingency of identities and practices and foreground possibilities foreclosed by the dominant logics’ (ibid.: 318–19).

Poststructuralism therefore seeks to problematize the notions of knowledge, ideas and identities, based on a more fundamental problematization of representation. Moreover, in doing so, poststructuralism undertakes a critique of those forms of knowledge, ideas and identities that have become dominant. Thomas Diez (1999, 2001) has done much to advance these arguments with a specific focus on the EU.

**Current critical theories applied to EU external relations**

The above has sought to provide an overview of the central claims considered to constitute some of the key critical theories of relevance to the present chapter. The aim of this section is to consider how each of these different critical theories has been used specifically to develop a critique of the EU’s place within the wider context of global governance. Thus, while critical approaches towards the EU’s external relations remain relatively sparse, we can nevertheless engage in a survey of some of the main claims already made in order to build up a picture of how critical theories might inform further studies of the EU’s position within the world. In
particular, as we shall see, critical theories have tended to focus on the dominating role that the EU has played through two specific policies: the enlargement eastwards that resulted in the 2004–07 accessions, and the development policy towards the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.

**Marxism (and neo-Gramscianism)**

As already noted, Marxist critical theories tend to focus on class relations and the domination and exploitation they produce. In the area of EU external relations we can observe a number of scholars who have developed analyses along such lines. For instance, Otto Holman has conducted a number of studies that analyse the process of European enlargement—both the southern European enlargements of the 1980s (Holman 1996) and the eastern enlargement of 2004–07 (Holman 2001, 2004)—in a way which draws upon the Marxist class analysis of Poulantzas (see, for instance, Poulantzas 1980). Thus, Holman shows how the interaction between domestic and/or transnational classes and class fractions, located within a particular position within the international capitalist economic structure, can explain the variation between the different effects, and degrees of success, of EU enlargement in the cases of southern and eastern Europe. Importantly, in the case of the eastern enlargement, the absence of domestic capital (which resulted in the transferral of key domestic resources to transnational (foreign) capital during the transition to capitalism), the context of an international neoliberal consensus, and the stringent insistence (by external actors) of a move away from state provisions towards the marketization of Eastern European society (in the form of the Copenhagen criteria) have each resulted in the domination of Eastern Europe by a coalition of transnational capital and international institutions (Holman 2004). Also adopting a Marxist class analysis, Carchedi assesses the extent to which eastern enlargement can be expected to negate the economic dependence of Eastern Europe upon Western Europe. He concludes somewhat pessimistically that the Central and Eastern European countries ‘operate in technologically less advanced sectors and with technologically less advanced production methods. This is a sure recipe for unequal exchange and thus for the reproduction of the economic dependence’ (Carchedi 2001: 186).

Alongside the Marxist class analyses of Holman and Carchedi there has also developed a more ideas-focused neo-Gramscian analysis of EU external relations. For instance, Hurt (2003) provides an illuminating study of the history of EU development policy vis-à-vis those ACP countries that comprise its former colonies. In particular, Hurt notes how the EU has acted to project neoliberal norms internationally through the growing introduction of market liberalization into trade agreements. In contrast, Cafruny and Ryner (2007), who also adopt a neo-Gramscian perspective, view the EU as a subordinate actor in a global historical bloc that is dominated by the USA on the basis of the dominance of its financial system within contemporary (2007) global capitalism. Cafruny and Ryner also view this historical bloc as being oriented around a neoliberal ideology, but for them it is in a way that benefits the USA at the expense of Europe. Rather than viewing this as the successful construction of a US-led historical bloc, however, Cafruny and Ryner instead speak of ‘minimal hegemony’. This is a condition whereby the ‘hegemon is no longer strong enough to systematically devise policies capable of serving general interests’, but nevertheless there is no obvious challenger to the hegemon’s dominance (ibid.: 20). Further, Cafruny and Ryner argue, this subordinate position of the EU within a neoliberal transatlantic alliance has resulted in the (unstable) military dominance of the USA within much of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, achieved with either the explicit or (sometimes) tacit support of subordinate EU elites (ibid.: Chapter 5).
Feminism

Secondly, a number of attempts have been made to examine the international role of the EU from a feminist perspective. For instance, in an article that featured in the *Journal of European Public Policy* special issue on gender in 2000, Watson examines the impact of the EU on gender relations in the 2004–07 accession states. Here she shows how gender equality has risen from being a non-issue in the Soviet bloc during the pre-1989 era, to being of growing concern in the light of the inequalities that have occurred during the course of the transition from state socialism to liberal democracy. In particular, ‘the privatization of state property—a key condition for the accession of the post-socialist countries to the EU—has meant that, in place of the state as an employer, the new employers in the region are mostly men’ (Watson 2000: 376). Nevertheless, Watson also notes that gender inequality has been experienced differently in Eastern and Western Europe, resulting in some difficulties in translating existing EU policies on gender equality to the newer member states. Indeed, if we accept that the transition from state socialism to liberal democratic capitalism in the Eastern European states has in part been about creating capitalist class relations, Watson notes, then it might well be that gender discrimination is not the factor producing hardship. As such, to act as if gender discrimination might be the key factor producing inequality potentially ‘essentializes sexual difference’ in a context where ‘sex discrimination is only one reason for not having a job—and that a still more important one, affecting both men and women, is economic reform’ (ibid.: 381). In this way, therefore, Watson highlights the multiple forms of domination that a feminist critical theory can attempt to highlight.

In another study focusing on the gender aspects of eastern enlargement, Charlotte Bretherton (2001) also notes an exacerbation of gender inequality that resulted from the transformation of socialist states to liberal democratic capitalist societies. Thus, she notes, unemployment has particularly affected women in the Central and Eastern European countries, and the participation of women within democratic institutions has worsened since 1989. In assessing the impact of EU policies on these processes, moreover, Bretherton observes how gender equality was deprioritized in favour of economic integration during the accession negotiations, thereby reflecting dominant values within the EU. Indeed, this reflects a more general hierarchy of values within the foreign policy-making institutions of the EU, whereby gender equality is considered a ‘low politics’ issue and therefore of little importance to those institutions dealing with foreign and security policy (ibid.: 74). Finally, Vassiliadou (2002) seeks to problematize the notion of exporting gender equality that has characterized much of the process of European enlargement. She does this through a consideration of the case of the accession of Cyprus. Thus, she notes that while the EU seeks to export notions of gender equality to accession countries, the fact that this is produced through elite-level negotiations (in this case in a country, Cyprus, where women are consistently unrepresented at the level of the political elite) ironically creates a situation whereby equality is imposed—they are ‘ultimately “given” equal legislation’—in such a way that the extent to which this actually empowers women is questionable.

More generally, Jo Shaw (2000) has raised a number of important points from a feminist perspective regarding the impact that the development of EU law has had on general patterns of global governance. Most importantly, perhaps, we can view the EU as one instance of a more general pattern of ‘post-national’ or ‘supranational’ governance that can be witnessed globally. In this sense, the EU prompts the question, ‘can we invest a post-national concept of sovereignty with a self-conscious gender dimension?’ (ibid.: 420). Thus, just as the state has been a key institutional and discursive factor in the construction of patriarchal values and gendered identities, so we should expect post-national political and institutional constellations, such as the
EU, to have similar effects. As such, she argues, we need to find new means by which to conceptualize the relationship between such ‘post-national’ institutions and ‘shifting and contingent notions of gender and identity’ (ibid.: 422).

**Postcolonialism**

Attempts to develop postcolonialist critical theories of the EU’s external relations have tended to focus on the way in which the EU seeks to postulate its supremacy vis-à-vis external actors and states. Thus, in keeping with the overview of postcolonialism provided above, such authors have sought to highlight the way in which the inequalities that result from Europe’s history of colonial relations are reproduced (but oftentimes ignored) in the present. Thus, Engel-Di Mauro introduces an important edited collection of postcolonialist essays, *The European’s Burden: Global Imperialism in EU Expansion*, by arguing that:

> The neocolonial linkage between the major EU members and most of the rest of the world is pitifully lost on most scholars, if they do not participate themselves in reinforcing it outright in their writings. The colonialist past is treated mostly in a subtle manner, as if it were either irrelevant to the current expansion or superseded by more recent events.

*(Engel-Di Mauro 2006: 15)*

Similarly, Attila Melegh (2006) uses the concept of an ‘East-West slope’ to discuss the way in which the process of EU enlargement has been accompanied by the promotion of values that prioritize and privilege ‘Western’ European values over ‘Eastern’ ones, thereby perpetuating the colonial notion of the civilizing empire and barbarian ‘other’, and at the same time constructing a hierarchy of values in which the ‘West’ is superior to the ‘East’. In particular, Melegh points out, the Copenhagen criteria acted to depict ‘Western’ Europe as the bastion of values such as the rule of law, stable democratic institutions and human rights. Yet, while all countries (both EU and non-EU) can be found to be wanting in terms of these values, the implication of the Copenhagen criteria is that there is a ‘slope’ or hierarchy according to which certain countries (Western) are more virtuous than others (Eastern). In adhering to these criteria, therefore, ‘Eastern European countries or non-Western social groups acknowledge their “belatedness” with regard to the “West”, while at the same time they also look down on the slope in order to find groups and countries further to the “East”’ (ibid.: 169). From a similar perspective, Behr (2007) sees clear parallels between the notion of ‘standards of civilization’ employed by 19th-century imperial European nations and the centrality of the Copenhagen criteria to the 2004–07 enlargement negotiations. Such an analysis has been extended further to the case of the Balkans by David Chandler (2007). He argues that EU intervention, particularly following the Kosovo war, ‘has enabled the European Union to project its power in the therapeutic framework of the liberal peace and of the capacity-building and empowerment of its eastern neighbours, rather than posing the questions of political responsibility which are raised with empire’ (ibid.: 594).

Postcolonialist critical theories have therefore sought to show how the dominant narrative of European integration acts to exclude and conceal the colonial and postcolonial relations within which EU member states are embedded. Thus, Hansen (2002) finds irony in the much-touted view that the absence of conflict is one of the key achievements of European integration, despite the actual presence of conflict throughout the period of European integration. For Hansen, therefore, ‘the Algerian War [is] so exceptionally illuminating, showing as it does that not even a sizeable war fought inside the Community has been able to impinge on the notion of European integration as a symbol of peace’ (ibid.: 488). Postcolonialist critical theories of the
EU’s place within the world have acted therefore to illuminate questions of power and exclusion that have often been ignored by other scholarly perspectives.

Poststructuralism

Finally, as noted above, poststructuralist approaches seek to identify dominant discourses and narratives, uncover those alternative conceptions that have been excluded in the attempt to construct those dominant narratives, and (thereby) denaturalize and (potentially) destabilize those dominant discourses. Such an approach has been employed by a number of scholars seeking to study the way in which the EU engages with non-EU actors in an attempt to construct a European identity. This has included, in particular, the way in which the EU polices its own borders with external actors (see, for instance, Bigo and Guild 2005; Diez 1999; Diez and Cooley in Chapter 18 of this volume; Huysmans 2006; Walters 2006), geopolitical interactions with external actors (Diez 2004), and attitudes towards Turkish accession (Yegenoglu 2006). Many of these analyses have sought to show how the EU’s interaction with third countries have sought, and/or acted, to construct both a European identity and a non-European ‘other’. For instance, in discussing the European Neighbourhood Policy, both Jeandesboz (2007) and Malmvig (2006) have noted the way in which the notion of ‘Europe’ has been constructed as a ‘space of security’, in contradistinction with the EU’s neighbours, particularly in the Mediterranean, who are depicted as insecure and, therefore, posing a threat. Indeed, for Jeandesboz (2007), it is this attempt to avoid such threats to European security that have come to constitute the central (discursively constructed) purpose of the EU, thereby marginalizing alternative political projects at the EU-level (ibid.: 409). Poststructuralist critical theories of the EU in the world, therefore, provide an opportunity through which to consider the marginalization of alternative viewpoints on the EU’s external relations, for actors located both within and outside of the EU’s territory.

Conclusion

In sum, this chapter has sought to identify some of the central claims of the key critical theories that have thus far been applied to the process of European integration and the place of the EU within global governance. Critical theories of European integration have particularly focused on two controversial areas, which arguably most clearly highlight the coercive and/or oppressive role of the EU in international relations. These are the (Eastern) European enlargement and the EU’s development policy. In both cases, critical theories have provided important insights into the exploitative, patriarchal, ostensibly civilizing (but more accurately, orientalizing), and/or excluding effects that the EU has had in its engagement with subaltern and subordinate regions outside of Western Europe. Less critical approaches—either those which seek to adopt a more ‘scientific’ approach to their empirical subject matter, or which aspire to produce a value-free interpretation of European cultures and values—might for some be considered to be closer to properly scientific enquiry. It is to the merit of the kind of critical theories discussed here, however, that they expose such attempts as implicitly acting to conceal the power inequalities (and hegemonic ideas that endorse and/or conceal them), which always-already invalidate such attempts to be ‘neutral’.

In conducting the present review, the chapter has sought to highlight the theoretical, analytical and normative ‘value-added’ that critical theories can provide. In particular, by accepting that political analysis is always unavoidably located within a context of unequal power relations, critical theories permit an analysis of the EU that highlights the potentially oppressive effect that this supranational institutional complex might have and, therefore, focus their attention on those
patterns of inequality that arise from that inequality and oppression. Moreover, in doing so, critical theories act to denaturalize and/or propose means by which the particular subaltern group/individuals that are identified might overcome their experience of subjugation. Thus, we have witnessed the focus by Marxist and neo-Gramscian scholars upon the role of the EU in upholding class domination, particularly through the adoption of the Copenhagen criteria and the promotion of conditionality in EU development policy. Feminist perspectives have sought to highlight the way in which European enlargement negotiations reflect dominant ‘masculine’ values prevalent within the EU. Postcolonialist perspectives have highlighted the role of enlargement policy and external interventions in upholding values that privilege the EU over Eastern European ‘others’. Finally, poststructuralist perspectives have sought to problematize the way in which the EU seeks to construct a European identity through engagement with third parties. Each of the critical theories discussed in the present chapter, therefore, have been applied in such a way that they enable an illumination of patterns of inequality, oppression and domination emerging from the EU’s role in contemporary global governance, which might otherwise go unnoticed by more mainstream perspectives. As such, we might hope, critical theories of EU external relations have also begun a process that might facilitate the overturning and transcendence of, and emancipation from, the oppression they have helped to identify. At the very least, critical theories of the EU’s place within the world provide a basis upon which to further refine and revise our analysis and knowledge of patterns of oppression and domination within and without the EU, which hopefully brings us one step closer to the realization of another European and/or global system of governance, both of which we can at least aspire to show are possible.