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Teaching the European Union in Brexit Britain: 'Peripheral Ideas' at a 'New Periphery'

Owen Parker

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Abstract

This contribution to the Special Issue focuses on how we might incorporate 'peripheral thinking' on the EU, with a particular focus on teaching the EU at a 'new periphery': Brexit Britain. First, it considers the limits of 'mainstream' approaches to teaching the EU in the context of what now feels like an almost permanent crisis, pointing to the importance of engaging with a 'cognitive periphery' that includes critical approaches to the EU and integration. Second, it argues in favour of a 'critical-pluralist' approach: that is, an approach that fully engages with that periphery as part of a broader commitment to scholarly pluralism. It suggests – with reference to my work on an EU politics textbook – that a 'question driven pedagogy' might be one pedagogically practical way of presenting such plurality to our students, particularly via independent reading and large-group teaching. Finally, the paper turns to consider how we might use the small-group classroom to deepen student learning in accordance with such an approach, drawing on my experience of developing a 'Brexit role play' in the context of teaching the EU in Brexit Britain.

Keywords

European Union; Periphery; Dissident voices; Teaching theory; Pedagogy; Brexit

INTRODUCTION

Teaching the EU is a challenge even in 'normal' times. Its institutions are complex, its history is widely debated and debatable and the academic and theoretical concepts deployed in its study are forever multiplying, as are the range of disciplines interested in it as object of study. Cutting through this complexity in order to render the EU intelligible and digestible is a challenge for teachers of EU politics (see Parker 2016; Bijsmans and Versluis 2020). What we are able to cover in our teaching is, of course, always audience and context specific. It is dependent on the prior knowledge of students, on the nature of the programmes we are teaching (undergraduate or postgraduate), and on whether the EU is taught in the EU or in non-EU contexts. For most of us teaching the EU, our own course or module will form just one small part of a broader programme of study. As such, tough choices need to be made in terms of breadth and content: trade-offs must be made between complexity and pedagogical appropriateness; differentiating between student abilities and interests will be important; a balance must be struck between coherence and facilitating processes of independent, problem-based and interest-led learning. These various difficulties are compounded in a context of what feels like a permanent crisis in/for the EU. Those crises render the EU an 'unsettled' object of study, but an interesting one for our students. At the same time, they bring to the fore a range of important critical and normative questions.

Against this backdrop, in a first step, this paper restates and updates an earlier argument, that 'peripheral', 'dissident' or 'critical' approaches (Manners and Whitman 2016) ought not – and cannot easily – be neglected in the classroom (Parker 2016). In particular, it is suggested that, in the current context, it makes little sense to narrate integration only in terms of a 'mainstream' history and theory, conceived as encompassing a range of approaches that adopt a broadly liberal and pro-market understanding of integration and the EU. Such approaches – manifest in both mainstream theories of European integration and in political science engagement with the EU as a polity – tend to adopt a progressive teleology (Gilbert 2008), implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) presenting the EU as a normative good; a 'post-Westphalian' model (Manners 2002) to aspire to and a champion of liberal norms in the world (see Alpan and Diez, this Issue). But such a liberal vision has, *inter alia*: neglected colonial legacies in European integration (Hansen 2002); overlooked the sovereign practices of the EU itself, captured in the label 'Fortress Europe' (Vaughan-Williams 2015); regarded a 'market Europe', rooted in 'orthodox' liberal economic thought, as an irrefutable normative good (Parker and Rosamond 2013); and, intimately related to the prior points, excluded many voices from beyond a geographical core EU (Alpan and Diez, this Issue).

That said, in a second step it is argued that it would be a mistake to merely replace the 'mainstream' with 'peripheral' thinking and thereby impose a new teaching mainstream. As argued with reference to recent work on an EU politics textbook (Bulmer et al, 2020), both the teacher and student of the EU should adopt a 'critical-pluralist' approach: that is, an approach that is aware of and ready to engage with a plurality of perspectives, including critical insights. Such an approach is instrumentalised in the textbook and in my own large-group teaching via the adoption of a 'question-driven' pedagogy, which involves presenting a range of legitimate questions that have been posed in relation to the EU as object of study. It is an approach which empowers students to explore, in more or less detail, a range of different theoretical approaches and normative positions depending on their interests, political commitments and background abilities. In particular, it gives them license to ask the critical questions that cannot be easily ignored in the context of multiple and multiplying challenges for the EU.

In a final step, the paper considers how such an approach might be embedded in the small group classroom via the use of 'active' or 'problem based' learning methods, focusing on my own personal reflections of teaching the EU at a 'new periphery': in Brexit Britain. While that context presented important challenges and dilemmas for teachers of EU

politics, Brexit as a case-study offers an important tool for pursuing the aforementioned critical-pluralist approach. The paper discusses, in particular, how a 'Brexit role play' was used not only to develop knowledge and understanding in relation to the UK case, but also to critically engage mainstream rationalist theories of European integration, explore 'new' theories of (dis)-integration, and, more generally, consider a range of political arguments and normative perspectives on the contemporary EU.

EMBRACING THE COGNITIVE PERIPHERY IN EU STUDIES

A 'mainstream' or 'orthodoxy' in EU political studies has 'disciplined' the subject area, with implications for the teaching of the EU (Manners and Whitman, 2016). However, that mainstream has itself shifted over time. This article concurs with Rosamond (2007; see also Manners and Rosamond 2018; Alpan and Diez, this Issue) that such a shift has happened as a consequence both of historical real-world events in EU politics and a disciplinary politics within the broader social sciences that has impacted on approaches to EU politics. Thus, for instance, the emergence of International Relations (IR) theories of integration were in one sense a response to the very fact of early integration in Europe, particularly following the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. But their form owed much to the backgrounds and academic socialisation of its key proponents, who sought to produce, in particular, generalisable theories of IR. A later turn to consider the EU as a political system (for instance, Hix 1994) can similarly be related to, on the one hand, the increasing 'thickness' of integration itself – the increasing resemblance of the EU to other (usually national) political systems – and, on the other hand, to the growing importance of political scientists and comparative politics scholars in the field of EU studies and a desire among some to 'professionalize' the field (Manners and Rosamond 2018).

Notwithstanding the differences between IR and political science approaches, running through this contemporary 'mainstream' in EU studies is a more profound background liberal, cosmopolitan or 'rationalist' bias (see, for instance, Ryner 2012). As per Rosamond's insights, that bias is also rooted in a combination of both a 'real world' logic – of US hegemony and Cold War and early post-Cold-War politics – and a 'disciplinary' and 'disciplining' socialisation of scholars in the (western) academy, which is influenced, of course, by those broader political dynamics. The normative biases in such theory have often been concealed with allusion to a 'scientific' aspiration, aimed at constructing theories which profess to capture some 'reality' of the social world: for instance, in our case, explaining the drivers of integration, or the functioning of institutions. But as Cox's (1981) famous dictum has it, "theory is always for somebody or some purpose."

Take, for instance, a neoliberal institutionalist perspective in IR, which, in response to a realist perspective, emphasised, *inter alia*, that states would focus on absolute gains in the course of repeated interactions: in short, their self-interest is conceived in terms which cohere with a liberal economic rationality (Keohane 1988). While ostensibly descriptive of the 'real world', such theory implicitly supported an ontology rooted in *a particular* utility maximising conception of self-interest. Similarly, Moravcsik's (1997) related attempt to produce a 'non-ideological liberal international relations theory' can be regarded as oxymoronic. Despite its delusions of objectivity, it is underpinned by a highly ideological conception of the history of liberal internationalism as an essentially pacifying unfolding. As Jahn (2009) states of his theory:

The substantive picture which emerges is ... one of linear historical development from the initial recognition of the rationality of market economy and government by consent through their progressive realization in domestic settings to their gradual change of the nature and principles of international politics. And in those areas in which the liberal

principles have been most fully realized, they have led to peace, prosperity, and cooperation in international affairs.

A broad narrative of this sort is present – albeit sometimes thinly concealed – in mainstream histories and theories of European integration. Both Haas's neofunctionalism and Moravcsik's (1998) liberal intergovernmentalism broadly suggest this kind of an unfolding towards ever greater market integration and cosmopolitan outcomes, even as they disagree on the importance of different actors (respectively, non-state actors and states) in driving that process.

While political scientists shifted the focus away from theorising integration towards a concern with European institutions, the underlying assumption is that those institutions would (and, indeed, should) pursue market integration to the end of utility maximisation (prosperity) and peace. To offer one clear example, contemporary regulatory governance theorists of the EU such as Majone (1996), highlighted its market-making function and the primary importance of its 'output legitimacy'. The explicit assertion in Majone's work that the EU's function *should be*, primarily, to maximise market efficiencies is one that was implicitly shared by many other political science scholars of the EU. Indeed, it has been commonplace to defer to the discipline of economics – particularly what is variously characterised as a neo-classical, neo-liberal or ordo-liberal orthodox economics – on questions of the organisation of a European market and money, while political studies has confined itself to questions of how integration has progressed, who has driven the process and how EU institutions function (Ryner and Cafruny 2017).

Similarly, mainstream historical narratives have often failed to question the aforementioned teleology. Early twentieth century wars and the Cold War are typically taken as the starting point – the origin story – from which processes of progressive and irenic market integration rationally emerged, giving integration an 'aura of success' (Gilbert 2008). Internal political power struggles involving economic winners and losers are frequently written out of that history. And a broader historical and geopolitical perspective pointing to *very particular* Atlanticist or US interests and – in more recent times, a neo-liberal rendering of such an agenda – have typically been written out of the mainstream (albeit peripheral voices have made such connections: Cafruny and Ryner 2007, Ryner 2012, Van der Pijl 1984, Lavery and Schmidt 2021). Moreover, Europe's colonial past (and, indeed, present) has, with a few notable exceptions (Hansen 2012; Bhambra 2021), been conspicuously absent in much of the study of the EU and integration. And yet the end of colonialism – signalled most dramatically by the 1956 Suez crisis – was an important 'functional' and geopolitical driver of integration; colonial wars (in Indochina and Algeria) were ongoing even as the first steps in the integrative European 'peace' project were taken; and colonial legacies shaped, and continue to shape, post-war EU interactions with African and many other countries, especially through development, trade and (increasingly) migration policies (Hansen and Jonsson 2014; Snyder 2019).

Teaching and textbooks on the EU have often reflected these omissions. They have, in short, unquestioningly mirrored, rather than challenged, the aforementioned 'market cosmopolitan' bias. As such, students of the EU have, in the past, often been led to regard integration as an unproblematic unfolding towards ever greater and rational international cooperation, in contradistinction to the security dilemmas that realists have long-claimed dominate the international realm. Such hagiographical analyses closely align with the EU institutions' own narrative histories and expert reports. Indeed, through various mechanisms, "EU studies interacts with and provides knowledge for the EU itself" (Rosamond 2016: 32). More critical accounts – including neo-Marxist and post-colonial – have, it should be noted, always existed, but they have too-often been consigned to a periphery in terms of, *inter alia*: research funding, publishing activities, policy engagement and, most significantly for current purposes, attempts to map the field of EU political studies in the context of teaching.

Such exclusions, when manifest in our teaching, risk de-politicising the EU and in so doing closing students' minds to the always-already contested nature of European integration. But the discipline cannot be – and, indeed, has not been (Manners and Whitman 2016) – impervious to broader political and societal shifts. In Rosamond's terms, an interconnected combination of 'real world' events (notably repeated 'crises' of/in the EU) and an opening of the scholarly mainstream to an intellectual 'periphery' have led to an increased politicisation, including of the theories and ideas that have been at the core of EU studies. The various recent crises in the EU – including eurozone, refugee, Brexit, pandemic and Ukraine/Russia – can each be connected to a broader crisis of the 'market cosmopolitan' bias. Indeed, the failure of the EU as (neoliberal) market to deliver the prosperity (both material and imagined) upon which political integration has depended has opened the way for a range of peripheral voices on the EU to make their mark on (and adapt) the mainstream. In the 'real world' of politics, populism and nationalism – in some cases taking a 'hard' eurosceptic form – has made a discomfiting return (Hopkin 2020), with Brexit the starkest manifestation for the EU. Correspondingly, in the world of scholarship, the teleological assumptions of the mainstream have been questioned, leading some (including some emanating from that mainstream) to openly contemplate in recent times the possibility of 'disintegration' and reflect on the circumstances in which it might occur (Webber 2019; Hoghe and Marks 2019). These broader shifts have made it increasingly possible and legitimate to integrate a long-neglected cognitive periphery (or set of explicitly critical approaches) into teaching-related contributions (among many others, Bulmer et al. 2020 (Chapter 4), Manners, 2007, Rosamond, 2013, Manners and Whitman 2016).

NURTURING A 'CRITICAL-PLURALIST' APPROACH TO EU POLITICS

But how might we seek to include a broad array of critical voices in our teaching? How might we overcome the tension between the desire to expose students to these critical voices and the practical and pedagogical constraints of teaching (some of which are described in Introduction)? If we do embrace these critical perspectives, is it possible or desirable to do so by eschewing the 'mainstream'? In this section I describe how these questions were tackled in the context of recent updates to a co-authored textbook, *Politics in the European Union* (Bache et al. 2015; Bulmer et al. 2020), which also informed my own approach to large-group teaching of EU politics.

The organisation of teaching material replicates in many respects a broader dilemma for the field of EU studies itself: in short, to what extent to define in precise terms a legitimate toolkit or approach to study or, conversely, to what extent to leave open this definition in the name of intellectual inclusivity, curiosity and pluralism. The latter approach was the one adopted in the textbook. The point, from this perspective, was not to try to impose upon students various 'critical' approaches that eschew the mainstream. Rather, the aim was to present a full range of approaches that was inclusive of the critical and thereby encourage a curiosity about the links, tensions and various relationships between them.

We emphasise in the book that, "to adopt a critical approach is not necessarily to reject a mainstream approach, or vice versa" (Bache, et al., 2014:80). What I have called in this chapter a 'critical-pluralist' perspective is one that might recognize the differences between the 'mainstream' and 'critical' in terms of Robert Cox's (1981) differentiation between 'problem-solving' and 'critical' theory. While the former views the broad structures of the social and political world as a given in order to focus on specific problems or issues within that pre-defined world, a 'critical theory' points to the mutability and alterability of that broader social and political world in an attempt to contemplate more fundamental or radical change. I have sometimes described this difference to students in relation to a game: problem solving is about strategizing within pre-defined rules of the game, while critical theory often seeks to fundamentally change those rules. If we accept the

importance of both of these functions then it can be made clear that scholars and students of the EU do not necessarily need to place themselves definitively within or in opposition to either of these camps.

The book articulates this divide between 'mainstream' (problem-solving) and 'periphery' (critical) in terms of their underlying positivist and post-positivist ontologies and epistemologies. Positivist and post-positivist positions are presented in the textbook as ideal types on the extremes of a continuum, with individual scholarly contributions lying somewhere along this continuum, as shown in Table 1 (reproduced from the textbook). It is noted that "it is a matter for significant debate as to where these are most appropriately placed" and that, "individual scholars identifying with any given approach may consider their own work to be positioned differently and have a far more nuanced understanding of their ontology and epistemology than the table suggests." (Bulmer et al. 2020: 68). Thus, while a selection of theories that are dealt with in the textbook are listed on this continuum, students are encouraged to view this as but *one provisional attempt* to map the theories in this way.

Table 1. Reproduced from Bulmer et al. (2020: 4). Those in bold are dealt with in Critical Perspectives, Chapter 4

	ONTOLOGY Nature of (social) reality	EPISTEMOLOGY What knowledge is/ how knowledge acquired	Continuum (from positivist to post-positivist)
Positivism	FIXED Rational actors Exogenous preferences	Objective Observation	Liberal Intergovernmentalism Rational Institutionalism Choice Neo-functionalism
Between Positivism and Post-Positivism	(MOSTLY) CONSTRUCTED Exogenous and endogenous preferences	Mixed methods encompassing a concern with discourse/ ideas Objective Observation	Historical Institutionalism Sociological Institutionalism Social Constructivism
Post-positivism	CONSTRUCTED Shifting preferences Socialisation/ Learning	Discourse, Language analysis Subjective/ Normative Observation	Critical Political Economy Critical Social Theory Critical Feminism Post-Structuralism

Students with an interest in the interconnected questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology may be encouraged to regard mainstream theory with greater circumspection; as part of the very knowledge-power nexus that has been constitutive of the EU. While a 'problem-solving' theory that takes certain structures as a given may do so innocently – in many instances it will be in large part the consequence of a particular intellectual socialization – some students may feel the need to explore the nature and effects of those very structures. Other students might regard the assumptions of the mainstream as permitting the development of a clearly discernible and parsimonious disciplinary framework (Moravcsik, 1997:515-6) which is particularly amenable to positivist tools of investigation. But they should be encouraged to at least recognise the normative underpinnings of such a position: to reflect upon the notion that 'theory is

always for someone'. It would certainly be legitimate for them to subsequently support a broadly liberal cosmopolitan normative position, which, following from functionalist thinking, might be regarded as securing cooperative and irenic possibilities (while maximising utility) in international relations (Keohane, 1988). But it would be more problematic (in my view) if they regarded such theory as 'non-ideological' (Moracsik, 1997).

The fostering of a reflective critical-pluralist engagement on the part of our students may be feasible on some standard political science degrees, especially where links can be developed with other modules. Those might include International Relations Theory and/or Methodology modules – where critical approaches might have already been discussed – or (International) Political Economy modules – where the attempt to emphasise the interconnected nature of economics and politics has long been present. But in some contexts (and for certain students), such detailed theoretical engagement may be overly ambitious given the aforementioned constrained syllabus, the modularisation of programmes (which can impede the development of links between modules) (Bell and Wade 2006), and variable student abilities/interests when it comes to questions of theory. In other words, a detailed discussion of problem solving versus critical theory – and of ontology and epistemology – may be beyond the constraints of many syllabi and beyond the abilities/interests of many students.

One solution to such pressures (discussed in greater detail elsewhere: Parker 2016) is to adopt a 'question-driven' approach to our teaching. In short, by presenting a range of legitimate and interesting questions in relation to the EU as object of study, we can present a more accessible overview of the disciplinary terrain. In the latest two editions of our textbook (Bache et al. 2015; Bulmer et al. 2020), we took inspiration from other teaching tools (particularly Wiener and Diez 2007, but also Edkins and Zehfuss 2013, Korosteleva 2010) to provide such an approach. More specifically, we present the broad theoretical terrain that has emerged in the sub-discipline of EU studies in terms of a series of questions that have been posed by thinkers in relation to the EU and its antecedents (see Table 2).

Table 2. Reproduced from Bulmer et al. (2020: 3). (Adapted from Diez and Wiener (2004: 7))

Phases in Theorising and Key Questions			
Phase	When	Main questions	Main Theories
Promoting peace through integration	1920s onwards	How can peace be achieved in Europe (and beyond)? How can nationalism be overcome?	Federalism Functionalism
Explaining integration	1950s onwards	How can integration processes be explained? What are the drivers of European (dis)integration?	Neo-functionalism (late 1950s) Intergovernmentalism (1960s) Liberal intergovernmentalism (1990s) Postfunctionalism (from late 2000s)
Analysing the EU as political system	1990s onwards	How does the EU and its governance work? How do its institutions work? What kind of political system is it? How can political processes be described?	New institutionalism Policy networks Multi-level governance

Phases in Theorising and Key Questions			
Analysing consequences of EU	1990s onwards	What is the impact of the EU on member states? What are the consequences of the EU for democracy and legitimacy?	Europeanisation Normative/ democratic theories Disintegration literature
Critiquing EU and/or 'mainstream,' approaches to its study	Late 1990s onwards	Which ideas /ideologies predominate in the EU? How and why? Where does power lie within the EU? In whose interest does the EU act and with what political and social consequences?	Social constructivism Critical political economy Critical social theory Gender approaches Post-structural approaches

As Table 2 shows, various theories can be linked to one or more questions. This is clearly a rather stylized presentation of EU politics scholarship and theorizing. It aims to strike a balance between the complex realities of EU political studies and the need to give students a preliminary sense of both the evolution and the plurality of questions posed within the field. The pedagogical advantage of presenting the discipline in this way is that it offers the possibility (for teachers and students) of a relatively straightforward rendering of the disciplinary history of EU political studies. In practical terms I have used adaptations of the table in large-group teaching (often an online recorded lecture that students can engage with 'asynchronously') as a 'scene-setting' slide or handout. It offers a general overview of the range of questions that scholars have posed about the EU and its antecedents (without necessarily even mentioning all of the theories). The list of questions is a resource to which I return throughout a module of study in order to consider in ever-greater depth how a particular question/theory might be applied to a particular empirical topic of study. It is hoped, in particular, that the list of questions may be useful in pointing to the range of ways in which it is possible to think about the EU, even if students ultimately engage with issues of theory indirectly or to a limited extent. In considering more recent events in the EU it will certainly be important to at least point out the growing salience of the normative and critical questions towards the bottom of Table 2; questions about democracy, legitimacy, power, knowledge and ideology.

In the latest edition of the aforementioned textbook, an attempt is made in many of the policy specific chapters to consider those critical questions and make connections with more critical theories. Students are still encouraged to deploy mainstream theories in order to tackle such questions as 'How can integration in a particular policy area be explained and which actors are driving these processes?' and 'How do the EU's different institutions and multi-level actors interact in a particular policy domain?'. But they are also encouraged to ask normative and critical questions such as, 'Whose interests does the particular course of integration serve in a particular policy area and whose are challenged or undermined?'. You could say that we take some steps towards 'mainstreaming' critical voices in the textbook beyond the standalone chapter on 'critical approaches' (much as Rowley and Shepherd (2012) argue for the mainstreaming of gender in teaching IR).

Thus, for instance, in chapters on the core economic policies of the EU dedicated to the single market, EMU and trade policy, while considerable attention is given to scholars that seek to explain integrative processes in these domains, space is also dedicated to considering broader normative and ideological contestation in economic policy. Links are made with the critical political economy literatures discussed in the 'critical approaches' theory chapter and important potential links between these policy areas are also indicated. Attention is given to critical and normative questions in other areas too. Thus, not only do we explore the evolution of policy areas such as Justice and Home Affairs (now the Area

of Freedom of Security and Justice (AFSJ)), the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Enlargement, we also point to the critical literatures that have engaged with these policy domains. For instance, we highlight that post-structural scholars have explored the ways in which the EU's policies on AFSJ paradoxically rely on security and bordering practices with various effects; questions about the fundamental nature of EU power in the world are considered in relation to the EU's CFSP; and it is highlighted that questions about the geographical, political and social limits of the EU arise in relation to enlargement. Relevant links are made between these sections and the Critical Perspectives chapter in the Theory section of the textbook. The underlying purpose is to draw attention to the ways in which the alternative questions raised by critical approaches in relation to the EU in general can be applied in particular empirical cases.

REALISING A 'CRITICAL-PLURALIST' APPROACH AT/ON A 'NEW' EU PERIPHERY

The foregoing makes the case for a 'critical-pluralist' approach to teaching the EU, which incorporates 'peripheral' voices, or 'critical' ideas and questions, while maintaining a commitment to intellectual pluralism. It suggests that a question driven pedagogy – deployed in an EU politics textbook and adaptable to large-group teaching or lectures – might offer a fruitful way of instrumentalizing pluralism in the context of various pedagogical and practical constraints. Emphasising the plurality of legitimate questions that have been posed in relation to the EU as object of study empowers students to think about particular empirical issues or cases from a range of perspectives, promoting a culture of student-led or independent learning. But the promotion of a 'critical-pluralist' approach of the sort advocated is best achieved by combining student reading (such as the textbook) and large-group lectures, with small-group active learning methods.

Indeed, if we structure student learning by presenting a plurality of approaches in a textbook/large-group context then we are effectively *giving license* to independent and flexible thought and learning. But it is through the development of small-group 'active' or 'problem based' learning methods (Kaunert 2009; Bijsmans and Versluis 2020; Sebastião and Dias-Trindade 2021) that we enable students to actually *become* independent learners. Such methods include debates, tasks of various kinds and simulations, the benefits of which have been widely documented in the education literature. Such activities and the learning independence that they foster, are effective in supporting processes of iterative and cumulative learning; they can promote an important shift from 'surface' to 'deep' understanding; they permit the development of a range of transferable research and employability skills; and, if well designed, they can be enjoyable for both students and teachers (on which, see Kaunert 2009, Baroncelli et al., 2014, Dingli et al., 2013, Giacomello, 2012, Jozwiak, 2013, Korosteleva, 2010, Lightfoot and Maurer, 2014, Usherwood, 2014).¹

Brexit was a deeply challenging moment for many teachers of the EU in the UK, particularly with respect to (often negative) public and government attention on EU scholars (Fazackerley 2017). But in terms of teaching our students it at once represented an opportunity (for one recent reflection, see Mahony 2020). Given its clear relevance for students of the EU based in the UK – indeed, when asked most of my students in recent years cited Brexit as the primary reason for choosing to study the EU – the UK's departure from the EU has proved to be a popular, and therefore motivating, focal point around which my own active learning strategies were developed (Kember et al. 2008).

In the context of my own teaching I developed a 'Brexit role play' aimed at bringing to life and deepening engagement with normative debates on the EU and encouraging critical engagement with theories of integration (that had already been covered to some extent in lectures and independent reading). The activity requires the students to take on the roles of a range of relevant UK civil society organisations and institutions in the context of

an imaginary government-initiated series of committee meetings aimed at establishing a UK negotiating position with the EU. In a spirit of co-creation, students are asked if they want to take on the role of a particular organisation, although I ensure that the organisations selected represent a plurality of positions on Britain's EU membership/ future relationship. Students work in pairs, researching the positions of their organisation and producing a policy brief outlining their organisation's position (a compulsory, but non-assessed piece of work). Thereafter, they participate in the committee, which is structured via a series of topics of more or less interest to the various organisations, arguing the particular case of their own organisation. I have chaired these sessions in recent years in the context of online delivery, but prior to that (pre-pandemic) they were chaired in-person by a local former MEP who attended the sessions (and also, following the role play, offered feedback to students on their policy briefs and presentation skills). Among a number of other organisations, students have represented: the Confederation of British Industry (CBI); the Trade Union Congress (TUC); National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT); Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA); and Migration Watch (MW).

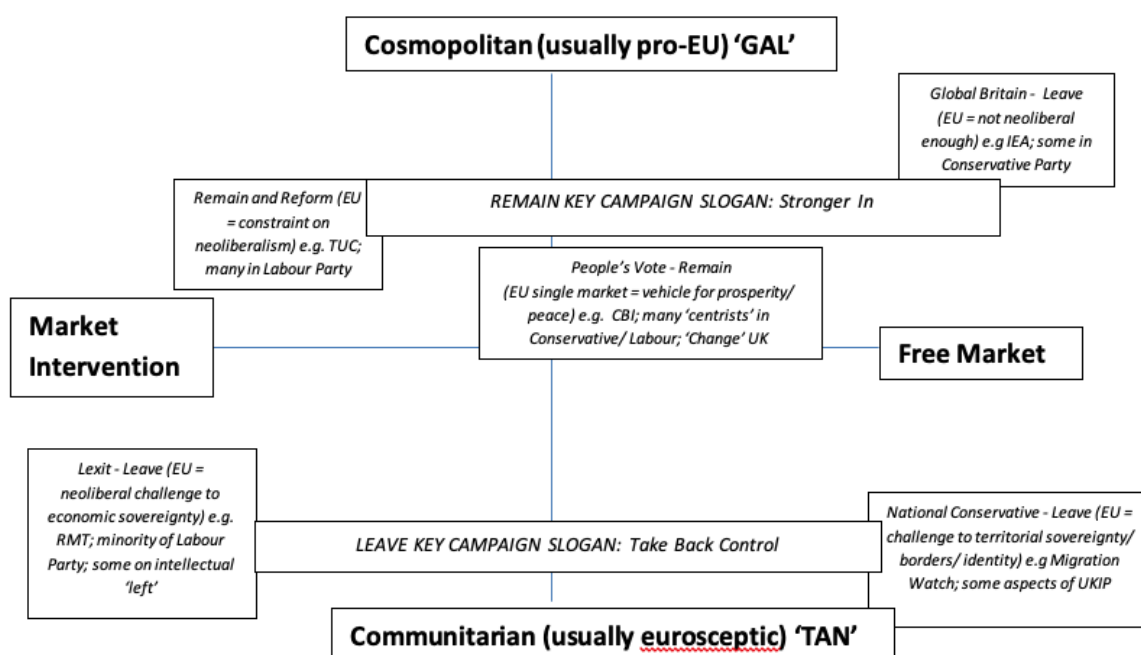
I use the role play as an entry point for various further discussions aimed at embedding the learning acquired from lectures and reading. In a debrief session we first consider what kind of negotiating position ought to emerge from our committee meeting. Invariably that process has led to a negotiating position in favour of a 'soft Brexit', aligned with the interests of the more powerful lobbying organizations (such as the CBI) which would mean ongoing UK single market membership (although, it should be noted, that this need not be the outcome). Whatever the outcome, this part of the debrief provides an opportunity to collectively consider 'actually-existing-Brexit' (a 'hard' Brexit) with a focus on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and to compare that with our own negotiated outcome.

Second, and relatedly, such reflections provide the opportunity for critical (re)-engagement with a mainstream integration theory covered earlier in the module. Students are asked, for instance, to consider what neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism would make of the Brexit vote and subsequent decision to leave the single market. This permits a critical discussion of the various (aforementioned) market rationalist and pluralist assumptions inherent in those mainstream theories of integration. More concretely, why would it be that the government did not adopt the position favoured by the major UK economic interests? In short then, Brexit serves as a case study for pointing to the potential explanatory limits of mainstream theories and as an entry point to consider alternative theoretical approaches. Those alternatives include, of course, the aforementioned recent or 'new' explanatory theories that take more seriously, inter alia, public opinion, domestic politics (variously labelled 'nationalist' or 'populist') and political economy; among others, post-functionalism (Hooghe and Marks 2019), variations of hegemonic stability theory (Webber 2019), 'critical integration theory' (Bulmer and Joseph 2016) and various critical political economy analyses (e.g. Hopkin 2020).

Finally, some of the core claims associated with these new theories – in particular the idea that "the European Union is no longer insulated from domestic politics; domestic politics is no longer insulated from Europe" (Marks and Hooghe 2009) – can of course be animated via further consideration of the particularities of the UK case and Brexit. In my own classroom, this has involved a collective mapping of key political actors in accordance with the emerging political cleavages identified in much of this 'new' theorising: for instance, an intersecting 'left-right' and 'GAL-TAN' cleavage (Marks and Hooghe 2009). These processes of mapping and visualisation can have important learning benefits creating 'aha' moments for many students (and, indeed, academics) (e.g. Donnelly and Hogan 2013). As shown in Figure 1, which serves as an illustrative example of such a mapping exercise, the organisations represented in the role play can be mapped along with various other relevant actors. For instance, the CBI might be identified as close to a mainstream *Remain/ Stronger In* position; the TUC close to a so-called *Remain and Reform* position; the RMT close to a *Leave/ Lexit* position; the IEA close to a *Leave/ Global Britain* position; and MW close to a *Leave/ 'nationalist-conservative'* position.

The background reading that the students are asked to do for this exercise takes in the broader politics and political economy of Brexit (using, among others: Gamble 2019). It also includes reflection on UK public opinion, in accordance with postfunctionalism and other 'new' theories. Reading on that has included a short but impressively clear and insightful blogpost on the Brexit referendum result by Finlayson (2016), which is used in conjunction with a Financial Times article that identifies 'Six Tribes of Brexit' (Burn Murdoch 2017). Among others, the excellent book 'Brexitland' (Sobolewska and Ford 2020) is recommended as further in-depth reading for those with a particular interest in the political sociology of Brexit. That said, students are also actively encouraged to explore their own sources – and to explore different disciplinary perspectives – with a view to their development as independent researchers.

Figure 1. Mapping the Brexit political terrain in the classroom



In summary, active learning methods such as the one outlined can help to foster a critical-pluralist approach of the sort advocated. Concretely, such methods help to reinforce and embed learning through empowering students, while at once nurturing transferable skills. In the current case, the Brexit role play led to various learning outcomes: knowledge on the specificities of Brexit; critical understanding of mainstream theories and deeper understanding of 'new' theories of (dis)integration; and provides a general sense – for the most part absent in the highly polarised *public* 'Leave-Remain' Brexit debate – of the complexity of normative debates and positions on the contemporary EU. It was particularly effective in allowing an iterative movement from theory to concrete practice and back again, and in so doing, fostering deeper learning. At the same time, it facilitated the development of research, negotiation, collaboration and presentational skills that are invaluable for our students.

In practice, I have adapted and tweaked the role play with different groups over the years since Brexit and allowed discussions to flow in very different ways (that do not always cover all of the learning outcomes discussed above). Indeed, there is always an element of risk in deploying such methods and a need for the teacher to be flexible and adaptable, both in the moment and from one group to the next. But, in my experience, any risks have been hugely outweighed by the rewards.

CONCLUSION

This paper sought to do three things. First, it made a case for a critical-pluralist approach to teaching the EU, which is inclusive of voices and perspectives that, until recently, could be legitimately regarded as 'peripheral' to the sub-discipline. It explained the importance of such an approach in relation to a need to *re-politicise* the EU as object of study that has been prone to *de-politicisation* (both in the real-world of EU politics and the academic study of it). Second, it discussed how such an approach might be realised in the context of the pedagogical and practical constraints of our teaching practice; constraints that all University teachers inevitably encounter in some form. Drawing on my experience of co-authoring a textbook on EU politics (Bulmer et al. 2020; Bache et al. 2015) and a previous intervention on teaching EU politics (Parker 2016), it pointed to the value of a critical-pluralist approach and a 'question driven pedagogy'. Such an approach allows students to appreciate the wide range of legitimate questions that have been (and can be) asked in relation to the EU as object of study. Depending on their interests, politico-normative commitments and abilities, students may or may not consider in greater detail some of the theoretical approaches – both 'mainstream' and 'peripheral' – that have posed such questions, as well as considering the various debates between them. A commitment to a critical-pluralism in teaching the EU gives students the *license* to think differently; to be independent thinkers and learners.

In a final step, the paper considered how we might take this commitment further, enabling students to actually *become* independent learners and researchers in the context of small-group teaching. The evidence in favour of active learning methods – which, *inter alia*, help to embed understanding, bring to life knowledge and nurture transferable skills – is extensive. Drawing on my experience of teaching the EU at the EU's 'new periphery' (the UK) in the context of Brexit, I showed how a 'Brexit role play' was deployed in order to critically engage with mainstream theories of integration; deepen an understanding of 'new' theories of (dis)integration; and develop a broader sense of the complexity of normative arguments for/against a contemporary EU than the polarised public Brexit debate allowed.

These reflections and experiences may be of direct interest and relevance to teachers of the EU in the UK. But they may also be of use to teachers in various other national contexts, whether member states, or – linking to the broader Special Issue – states in more established regions of a so-called 'EU periphery'. In all such cases a question driven pedagogy might be deployed, especially in large-group settings. Pointing to a plurality of approaches to the EU as object of study, inclusive of peripheral perspectives, students will be empowered and encouraged to engage critically with issues that align with their own interests. Thereafter, it may be possible to bring to life a critical-pluralist approach through the active learning methods advocated in small-group contexts, using 'Brexit' and/or other case studies of domestic political entanglement with the EU that are more pertinent to the local context.

To advocate the pluralisation of teaching on EU politics, inclusive of a so-called cognitive periphery, is not to advocate a form of learning that has no clear teacher-led structure or a sense of the disciplinary mainstream (as in extreme versions of 'problem based learning'). It does not involve, for instance, a maximalist embrace of student-led or problem-based learning, because students – particularly in a context of assessed learning that is here to stay in most national contexts – often want and even require some such structure (Bijsmans and Versluis 2020). A textbook, minimal assigned readings, and lectures can help to provide students with that structure. The point, nevertheless, is to ensure that students are increasingly empowered and encouraged to explore beyond and even critique those structures (and to ensure that they are rewarded for so doing). The central value of the aforementioned approach – in whatever context it is pursued – is that it has the capacity to foster a 'critical pedagogy' (Freire, 1998) which seeks, among other

things, to depose the all-knowing teacher and contest reified disciplinary – and associated political – boundaries.

AUTHOR DETAILS

Owen Parker, Department of Politics, University of Sheffield, Elmfield, Northumberland Road, Sheffield S10 2TU. United Kingdom. [o.parker@sheffield.ac.uk]

ENDNOTES

¹ For a useful list of articles on teaching the EU, see, <https://sites.google.com/site/psatlg/Home/resources/journal-articles/europol>

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