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**POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S NORMATIVE
POWER IN PEACEKEEPING POLICIES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Can Homer be born after us ... and myths open their doors to the throng?”

Mahmoud Darwish¹

1.1. Formulation of the research problem and research question

A kind of anthropological reflex leads people to “draw” mental maps by positioning themselves at the center and arranging everything else in relation to that center. When a community speaks about itself, it does so through the language of normality. In this sense, “we” functions simultaneously as both a descriptive category and a normative standard, while those who do not belong to this circle are portrayed as deviations from an established norm. In social and political relations, such a practice confers significant power upon those who control the definition of what is considered normal. Normativity is therefore always tied to specific group identified as “us”, whereas others are placed outside the framework of accepted values and constructed as an “otherness” in opposition to what is defined as proper and conventional.

The concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) was first formulated by Ian Manners in the early 2000s in his work “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”, aiming to describe the European Union’s efforts to establish and affirm its international identity.² According to Manners, the EU is neither exclusively a civilian power nor exclusively a military power, but rather a normative power that seeks to shape certain rules in international relations through the promotion of its norms, values and principles. The foundation of the concept of normative power lies in the EU’s institutional structure, which is based on agreements among member states that share common values. By establishing such a framework, the EU positions itself as a primary transmitter of values such as peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance, while simultaneously considering that it can serve as an example for other states and international actors. In his

¹Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), “Other Barbarians will come”, 20.

²Ian Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–258.

work, Manners emphasizes the ideological influence of the EU's international identity, capable of shaping "perceptions of normality" in international relations.³

The European Union has recognized maintaining peace and security without military intervention as a suitable arena for strengthening its normative power and constructing a holistic international identity. Since the late 1990s, the EU has initiated and participated in more than 40 peacekeeping missions and operations, both military and civilian, in Africa, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. These missions, conducted within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), represent concrete instruments through which the EU seeks to operationalize its foreign policy ambitions and consolidate its status as a global actor. Formal indicators of the EU's normative power in reinforcing its global position are evident in several documents, including the 2003 European Security Strategy, CFSP and CSDP policies and documents, and the 2016 Global Strategy.

This study assumes that peacekeeping represents both an instrument for validating the European Union as a normative power and the very materialization of its normative approach. Peacekeeping missions serve as a method for self-affirming the EU's international identity and as a way of projecting European concepts of civic and civil society into non-European territories.

The research problem addressed in this study concerns the nature and implications of the European Union's normative power and its manifestation through peacekeeping missions, as well as the epistemological assumptions on which these operations are based. While EU Studies have extensively examined the EU's normative role in promoting peace, democracy, security, human rights and good governance, on the other hand, the postcolonial perspective, which critically examines the historical, ideological and epistemological foundations of these policies, has rarely been integrated. Specifically, this study investigates how normative power is operationalized in contexts with different colonial legacies, focusing on Mali.

Through a reflection of the colonial genealogy of European modernity and norms, the concept of normative power functions as an epistemological regime that defines what it means to be "stable", "civilized" or "developed". A related issue in the discourse surrounding the EU and the process of strengthening normative power through peacekeeping missions is the susceptibility to colonial amnesia among member states, which erase their colonising past while presenting themselves as the collective entity of the European Union. This further

³Ibid.

motivates the postcolonial critique, aiming to expose the assumptions of knowledge underpinning the EU's self-perception as the moral center of the world, thereby opening space for pluriversal normativity.

A postcolonial perspective problematizes the European Union's self-representation as a normative power through its peacekeeping missions, arguing that such interventions may reproduce hierarchical relations between Europe and the societies in which it intervenes. Therefore, the first research question this study seeks to answer is how does postcolonial theory interpret the concept of the European Union's normative power and its manifestation through peacekeeping missions. The second fundamental question is how does postcolonial theory interpret the design and implementation of specific EU peacekeeping missions, such as those in Mali, and in what ways do these policies reproduce or challenge tensions between value-based rhetoric and practical realities on the ground.

1.2. Research objectives

The primary aim of this research is to reconstruct the European Unions' colonial subjectivity, analysing how the EU conceives of itself, its identity, and its role in the world; exploring how it represents itself as a carrier of peace, development and civilizational values, and how this self-perception has roots in colonial ideas of progress, modernization, and "civilizing" others within a framework of moral universalism. The second aim is to incorporate the postcolonial perspective more fully into EU Studies. From a scientific and academic standpoint, integrating the postcolonial perspective into EU Studies is significant for several reasons. First, it enables critical examination of the assumptions underlying the EU's normative power and challenges moral universalism. Although the past decade has seen a wave of critical research attempting to "decolonize" EU Studies, the field remains largely traditional, dominated by liberal-normative approaches, and often neglecting critical perspectives. Introducing a postcolonial framework contributes to revealing the EU's colonial genealogy, eliminating Eurocentric patterns of thought, and opening space for pluriversal normativity, thereby enriching the field both methodologically and theoretically and aligning it with the ongoing multipolarization of the world.

The aim of this thesis is primarily scientific in nature, though uneven and multifaceted, given that different sections of the work draw upon distinct levels of scientific cognition. The predominant level is that of scientific description, which is most extensively applied in the analysis of key concepts developed within several scholarly traditions of EU

Studies and postcolonial studies, as well as in the examination of the historical trajectory and the presentation of the EU's contemporary positioning within postcolonial spaces. Scientific classification, understood as a somewhat higher level of scientific cognition, is employed in those parts of the thesis where the conduct of the EU in peacekeeping missions is systematically categorised and ordered, alongside a number of related cases. Finally, scientific explanation, as a still higher level of scientific cognition, is applied in those segments in which its peacekeeping missions, are interpreted and critically assessed through the lens of postcolonial critique of the EU's normative power.

1.3. Hypothetical framework of the study

This work is grounded in a set of working hypotheses that guide the analytical trajectory of the thesis and frame its engagement with the postcolonial critique of the European Union's normative power in peacekeeping missions. Therefore, the central hypothesis posits that the EU, precisely through the exercise of its normative power, reproduces colonial patterns of governance, hierarchy and epistemic authority in the conduct of its peacekeeping engagement in Mali. Normative power, in this reading, does not stand in opposition to colonial legacies. Quite opposite, it functions as their contemporary modality, as a discursive and institutional vehicle through which asymmetries inherited from the colonial order are re-articulated in the language of norms, values and international responsibility.

This general assumption is further operationalized through several auxiliary hypotheses. First, the EU's normative discourse in peacekeeping missions operates as a legitimising mechanism that translates colonial hierarchies between the EU and the host societies into the ostensibly neutral vocabulary of universal norms. Second, the institutional design and operational practice of EU peacekeeping missions in Mali embed a Eurocentric conception of security, statehood and the rule of law, thereby marginalising local epistemologies, political agency, and alternative models of order. The intention of this paper is not to deny the intrinsic value of these principles, but to problematize the manner in which they are universalised and operationalized, namely, as self-evident and non-negotiable standards whose particular historical and cultural origins are rendered invisible in the process of their global projection. Third, the example of Mali reveals the selective and context-dependent character of the EU's normative power, whose reproduction of colonial patterns is shaped by distinct geopolitical, historical and postcolonial trajectories in each case.

1.4. Research methods and techniques

Starting from the empirical puzzle that the European Union presents itself as a normative actor promoting peace, the rule of law, freedom, human rights, while its peacekeeping policies can nevertheless be interpreted as reproducing hierarchical relationships between Europe and the “periphery”, this thesis requires a methodological framework capable of interrogating how EU actions are rendered legitimate, natural and self-evident. The EU’s peacekeeping engagement operates at the intersection of several dimensions, such as normative self-representation, strategic and security considerations, institutional practice, and historically embedded relations of power between Europe and non-European regions. These interventions unfold within geopolitical contexts shaped by asymmetries of power, the legacies of colonialism, and competing understandings of security governance. Capturing this complexity demands an approach attentive to the underlying assumptions, silences and hierarchies that structure it.

For this reason, this study adopts a postcolonial critique as its overarching theoretical and methodological orientation. This choice is deliberate and follows directly from the object of inquiry. A postcolonial approach does not seek to explain the EU’s behaviour through neutral causal mechanisms, but rather to interrogate the conditions of possibility of the EU’s normative self-representation, exposing the epistemic hierarchies and colonial continuities that mainstream accounts tend to leave unexamined. This does not entail an outright rejection of the NPE literature, neither of the insights of peacekeeping studies. On the contrary, the thesis engages with both critically. The concept of NPE is retained as an object of analysis, illuminating how the EU constructs itself as a promoter of universal norms, while peacekeeping studies furnish the empirical grounding for examining the operational practices of the missions in Mali. However, these bodies of literature are subsumed under the postcolonial critique, which occupies a distinctly diagnostic position and reveals what the normative and operational accounts render invisible.

In terms of research design and method of analysis, this study primarily employs critical discourse analysis, complemented by qualitative content analysis. Critical discourse analysis is particularly suited to the aims of this thesis because it treats language not as a transparent medium of description, but as a social practice implicated in the reproduction and contestation of relations of power. This approach enables a systematic examination of the linguistic and argumentative patterns through which the EU represents its own role. It is

particularly evident in its self-portrayal as a promoter of peace, freedom and democracy, and more importantly, of the discursive operations through which asymmetrical power relations are naturalised, depoliticised or rendered invisible. Viewed through postcolonial lens, critical discourse analysis allows the analysis to move beyond the manifest vocabulary of EU documents towards the colonial structures of thought and knowledge production embedded within them.

Furthermore, the study is structured around a single, in-depth case study, selected in order to test the reach and limits of the central hypothesis. At present, 21 EU missions and operations are active, of which twelve are civilian, eight military and one combined civilian-military. This thesis focuses on Mali as an illustrative site of the EU's projection of normative power, where colonial patterns of thought and authority may become visible. Mali, as a former French colony, represents a case in which the reproduction of colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power is expected to be particularly evident. Its colonial past furnishes a context in which European actors transfer governance models, norms and values that echo colonial asymmetries. Here, the EU's peacekeeping engagement comprises the civilian EUCAP Sahel Mali mission, focused on institution-building and security sector reform, and the military EU Training Mission (EUTM Mali), which provided training to the Malian Armed Forces from its launch in 2013 until its conclusion in 2024. By concentrating on a single, colonially embedded case, the analysis is able to trace in detail whether the transfer of norms and values remains entangled with colonial assumptions through the reproduction of what Edward Said termed Orientalism, and to establish whether the colonial logics identified in Mali operate as a broader feature of the EU's normative self-projection.

The primary source for analysis include official EU documents such as mission mandates and reports, statements by the European External Action Service, documents of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, and speeches by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Mission-specific materials relating to EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUTM Mali will be examined in detail. The study also draws on the EU's broader strategic frameworks, including the European Security Strategy, the EU Global Strategy and the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, which offer insight into the normative and ideological underpinnings of the EU's foreign and security policy. These sources provide a window onto the EU's institutional language and the official narratives through which it justifies its peace operations, externalises European norms to third countries, and constructs itself as a global actor invested with a "moral" mission.

In addition to EU sources, official documents produced by local authorities in Mali will be incorporated into the analysis, including security sector reform action plans, cooperation agreements with the EU, such as the Africa-EU Strategic Partnerships, and ministerial reports. The analysis of these documents offers insight into how local actors interpret, accept, adapt or reject European norms and values and into the extent to which these processes reflect alignment, negotiation or resistance. This attention to the discourse of the “norm-receiver”, rather than solely that of the “norm-sender”, is itself a methodological commitment consistent with the postcolonial imperative to restore the agency and epistemic standing of those to whom EU external action is directed.

Secondary sources, including academic monographs and journal articles drawn from EU studies literature, postcolonial theory and critical security studies, provide the theoretical grounding of the thesis and inform the interpretation of its central hypothesis. By reading the analysis of primary documents and strategic frameworks through postcolonial and decolonial theoretical insights, this study seeks to determine the extent to which EU peacekeeping missions function as mechanisms for the diffusion of norms and values, or conversely, as instruments that reproduce existing global asymmetries of power under the guise of normative universalism.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is structured around three interrelated conceptual axes: the idea of the European Union's normative power, the understanding of EU peacekeeping as an instrument through which this power is projected and postcolonial theory as a critical lens for examining how European foreign policy practices are historically grounded and legitimized.

The first part of the chapter addresses the development of the European normative identity and the genesis of the concept of civilian/normative power. The analysis begins with an examination of the historical sources of European Union's political, institutional and value-based self-understanding, as well as the ways in which the EU was constructed as an actor of "civilian", peace-oriented foreign policy. It then introduces and elaborates on the concept of normative power, as articulated by Ian Manners in the early 2000s in his work "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", focusing on its core premises, assumptions, modes of manifestation, and the declarative principles on which the concept rests. Subsequently, reflections and critical contributions from other scholars are discussed, with particular attention to conceptual limitations, debates over empirical verifiability, and the normative implications of the concept in the practice of EU foreign policy.

The second theoretical segment is dedicated to understanding European Union's peacekeeping missions and operations as one of the principal instruments through which normative power is being projected and operationalized. This section outlines the institutional and political development of European peacekeeping missions, their declared objectives and the discursive basis underpinning the claim that these missions materialize the EU's normative identity narrative. It also examines the relationship between peacekeeping operations and the projection of EU values in foreign policy, as well as the underlying epistemological assumption that peace and stability can be produced through the export of political models and institutional solutions deemed universally desirable.

The third axis of the theoretical framework is grounded in postcolonial theory. It begins by tracing the origins of postcolonial thought and key contributions from authors such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha etc. whose work enables an understanding of how colonial power relations persist in contemporary structures of knowledge and authority. This is followed by an examination of the more recent wave of postcolonial scholarship, which deepens the critique of contemporary global epistemologies.

Within this segment, special attention is given to the postcolonial critique of EU Studies and therefore the study also establishes a theoretical bridge between EU studies and postcolonial studies. The literature highlights phenomena described as “colonial amnesia”, “virgin birth” of the EU and “decolonized knowledge”, referring to the tendency to portray the European Union as a new entity independent of the colonial histories of its member states. This critique underscores the limited reflection on colonial legacies in EU foreign policy theory and the inability of dominant approaches in EU studies to connect European peacekeeping missions with deeper historical patterns of political domination and cultural selection. It reveals that most studies on EU peacekeeping tend to focus on institutional and normative dimensions while overlooking their complex historical foundations.

By integrating these three axes, the theoretical framework establishes an analytical foundation for examining the relationship between European Union’s projected normative power and the postcolonial continuities embedded in this conception, implementation and legitimization of its peacekeeping interventions. This framework serves as a crucial interpretative tool for the analysis of empirical material throughout the study.

2.1. Normative power of the European Union

2.1.1 The conceptual development of the European Union as a civilian normative power

From the very beginning of the European integration process - first as the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), then the European Economic Community (1957), and later the European Union (1993), academic literature has witnessed a vigorous debate on the nature of this political entity’s international role and the limits of its global power.

Considering that, at its inception, its primary function was internal economic rather than military, particularly following the failure of initiatives such as the European Defence Community, and aimed at the recovery of the European continent from the devastation of the Second World War, the logic of security was transformed from military rivalry into economic cooperation. In this context, the ideological framework guiding the European Community was grounded in the affirmation of liberal-democratic values, such as freedom, human rights, rule of law, and political pluralism, which were considered universally desirable norms for the international order. From the outset, the European Community rested on the principles of

mutual cooperation, institutionalized interdependence, and the guarantee of international peace and security.

By the early 1970s, against the backdrop of a bipolar international system that shaped the dynamics of power, the European Community faced a dual “constraint.” On one hand, it was not focused on its own military integration, as military cooperation among its member states occurred exclusively within NATO, meaning that the capacities for collective European military action were severely limited due to NATO dominance and strategic dependence on the United States. On the other hand, economic integration advanced significantly faster than political integration, prompting questions about the EC’s political indeterminacy. As European economic integration progressed along trajectories that corresponded neither to the model of a classical international organization nor to that of a federal state, some scholars argued that new conceptual categorizations were needed to understand it as a *sui generis* entity.

Under these circumstances, Francois Duchene, a close collaborator of Jean Monnet and inspired by the intellectual tradition of the European federalist project, introduced the concept of the civilian power to characterize the European Community’s unique position in international relations. Duchene regarded European integration as a historical experiment in the transformation of sources of power.⁴ He argued that the global order was shifting toward forms of influence operating through norms, values and identities rather than coercion. Civilian power primarily designates an actor that is “short on weapons, but long on economic power.”⁵ Moreover, Duchene contended that the European Community could serve as a “force for the international diffusion of civilian and democratic standards” and for “promotion of values that are constitutive of its internal character, such as equality, justice, tolerance, and concern for the poor abroad.”⁶ As Ozer notes, “Duchene envisaged the European Community as a model of reconciliation and peace not just for the territory of its own but also for other regions in the world.”⁷ Although Duchene did not offer a consistently developed or systematically precise theoretical framework, his formulation of civilian power provided an important intellectual impetus for subsequent debates on the EC/EU’s international identity and the multiple dimensions of its foreign policy practice.

⁴François Duchêne, „Europe in World Peace,” in Richard Mayne (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow*, London: Fontana/Collins, 1972, pp. 32–49; and François Duchêne, „The EC and the Uncertainties of Interdependence,” in Max Kohnstamm and Wolfgang Hager (eds), *A Nation Writ Large?*, London: Macmillan, 1973, pp. 1–21

⁵Ibid.

⁶François Duchêne, „The EC and the Uncertainties of Interdependence,” 1973, p. 20.

⁷Yonca Özer, „The European Union as a Civilian Power: The Case of the EU’s Trade Policy,” *Marmara Üniversitesi Avrupa Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Avrupa Araştırmaları Dergisi* 20, no. 2 (2012): 63–94.

In contrast to Duchene, Johan Galtung emphasizes that, in addition to its resource power, the European Community possesses structural power, understood as the ability to shape and create international norms and frameworks of action, which qualifies it as a “superpower in the making.”⁸

Galtung distinguishes between the channels of power (ideological power, remunerative power and punitive power) and sources of power (resource power and structural power). He argues that this distinction is “fundamental, because it is on the latter that the European Community is particularly strong, even more so than the United States”.⁹

A central question arising from this perspective is whether the Community seeks to project a structure of equality or a structure of dominance. Galtung further clarifies that, geographically and internally, relations with member states are characterized by equality, whereas externally, in its foreign relations, the EC exercises dominance. This understanding of structural power can be seen as complementing Duchene’s concept of civilian power, provided that the EC is able to alter the global architecture, an idea Galtung terms *Pax Bruxellian*, thereby influencing the definition of legitimate behaviour in the international system with its center in Western Europe.¹⁰

However, it was the first aspect of Duchene’s model, the absence of military power, that drew criticism, particularly from realist scholars. One of them, Hedley Bull famously labelled the concept of a civilian power as “a contradiction in terms.” Bull argued that any influence exerted by the European Community was “conditional upon a strategic environment provided by others,” primarily NATO and the United States.¹¹ He rejected the notion that civilian power could constitute a stable category without the material infrastructure to support it. Consequently, he stressed that the power of the “European concert of states” derives from external protection rather than its own autonomous capacity to act.

Building on this reflection, Stelios Stavridis emphasizes the persistent tension between civilian power and military means, noting that the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a de facto militarization of the EU, which many scholars argued rendered the concept of a civilian power Europe increasingly inapplicable.¹² Stavridis provocatively asks

⁸Johan Galtung, *The European Community: A Superpower in the Making*, Oslo/London: Norwegian University Press/Allen & Unwin, 1973, pp. 55–67.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Hedley Bull, „Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21, no. 2 (1982): 149–170, at p. 149.

¹²Stavridis, Stelios. 2001. “‘Militarising’ the EU: The Concept of Civilian Power Europe Revisited.” *The International Spectator* 36, no. 4: 43–50.

whether military means might sometimes be necessary to uphold civilian values, highlighting the conceptual ambiguity surrounding the relationship between non-military instruments and the preservation of European ideals.

Accordingly, in 1985, Jacques Delors, former President of the European Commission, implicitly addressed a similar challenge in a speech, warning that Europe would remain an “unidentified political object” unless it developed a clear political dimension. By positioning questions of identity at the center of European integration, Delors anticipated debates about the EC’s role and purpose on the global stage.¹³

In further conceptual development of civilian power, authors sought to refine the understanding of the EU’s specific role in international relations under the civilian power framework. Despite differences in interpretation, the common thread between them is the understanding of civilian power as the predominant use of non-military instruments in the achievement of foreign policy objectives. Hans Maull elaborated a systematic typology, identifying three key elements.¹⁴ First, cooperation as a necessary framework, requiring acceptance of the need to work with others in the pursuit of international objectives. Second, the primacy of non-military instruments in achieving these goals. Third, the development of supranational structures to manage collective challenges and assume responsibility for global welfare. Maull further introduces a normative dimension, arguing that civilian power transforms international relations by promoting the rule of law and civilizing processes, although he does not specify which objectives should be pursued or how civilian power influences the norms and behaviours of other actors.

Similarly, Mario Telo emphasizes the historically institutionalized patterns of cooperation emerging from European integration.¹⁵ He highlights the EU’s construction of a regional order based on peaceful coexistence, structured through rules, legal regimes, and institutional frameworks.¹⁶ While Telo acknowledges the historical roots of Europe’s post-war peace identity and its development during the Cold war, he does not fully explore how this historical process shapes the EU’s universalist ambitions.

¹³ Anna Molnár, Éva Jakusné Harnos, and Mónika Szente-Varga, *Security, Resilience and Sustainability of the European Union: Handbook* (2023), pg. 11.

¹⁴ Hanns W. Maull, “Europe and the New Balance of Global Order,” *International Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2005): 775–799.

¹⁵ Telò, Mario. 2006. *Europe, a Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Richard Whitman stresses that the identification of the EU as a civilian power does not inherently depend on the possession or development of military capabilities.¹⁷ Instead, he points to the environment in which the EU operates and the effectiveness of its civilian instruments as decisive factors. Whitman warns that the ongoing militarization of the EU could render the concept of civilian power politically and normatively questionable, emphasizing a foreign policy conception “bounded to particular aims, values, principles, as well as forms of influence and instruments of power in the name of a civilisation of international relations.”¹⁸

Karen Smith offers a clear definition of civilian power, describing it as an actor “which uses civilian means for persuasion, to pursue civilian ends, and whose foreign policy-making process is subject to democratic control or public scrutiny.”¹⁹ Smith articulates four essential components; civilian means, civilian ends, democratic transparency in foreign policy decision-making and persuasion as a method, constructing an ideal-typical model of civilian power in contrast to military power.

Across these definitions, a normative element consistently emerges, which later inspired Ian Manners, in the early 2000s, to introduce the concept of Normative Power Europe. Manners’ intervention represents a conceptual shift, highlighting the European Union’s capacity to shape international norms and values. It is precisely this framework that the analysis now turns to, in order to further explore how normative presence manifests in EU peacekeeping missions.

2.1.2 The concept of Normative Power Europe

When Richard Whitman asked in 1994 “what is the international identity of the European Union?”, his question reflected a profound moment of transformation.²⁰ The end of the Cold War, the adoption of the Treaty on European Union, and the ongoing wars in Kuwait and the former Yugoslavia all challenged scholars and policymakers to reconsider what kind of international actor the European Union could and should be. These events

¹⁷Whitman, Richard G. 1998. *From Civilian Power to Superpower? The International Identity of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Smith, Karen E. 2005. “Beyond the Civilian Power EU Debate.” *Politique européenne* 17, no. 3: 63–82. Smith, Karen E. 2005. “Beyond the Civilian Power EU Debate.” *Politique européenne* 17, no. 3: 63–82.

²⁰Whitman, Richard G. 1998. *From Civilian Power to Superpower? The International Identity of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

exposed both the limits of Europe's traditional instruments of influence and the need for a new conceptual language to describe its uniqueness in world politics.

Although the notion of normative power draws its theoretical roots from the earlier concept of civilian power, it departs from it in an essential respect. Civilian power refers to the ability to use civilian instruments, just as military power denotes the ability to use military ones. While these forms of power remain significant, the focus gradually shifted toward a subtler but equally potent dimension as the ability to shape conception of the normal.

Normative power first requires a clear semantic understanding of the very term of "normative". The word comes from the Latin *norma*, which refers to "rule" or "pattern", and entered French as *normative*, referring to processes of standardizing, directing or normalizing certain forms of behaviour. In its contemporary usage, as noted by the Cambridge Dictionary, the term relates to rules or to mechanisms that encourage adherence to them, particularly in the realm of social and ethical standards. The intellectual foundations of normativity reach deep into the history of philosophy, from Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of moral conduct, the good life, and the criteria of sound reasoning, through Hume's insistence on the distinction between *what is* and *what ought to be*, to Kant's sophisticated reflections on the normative domains of knowledge, morality and aesthetic judgement. It is within this long intellectual lineage that the modern debate on normative power is situated, transferring the question of rules and standards from philosophy into the field of international relations and illuminating how political actors shape the behaviour of others by defining what is considered legitimate and desirable within the global order.

Building on E.H. Carr's insight into "power over opinion", Johan Galtung's notion of "ideological power" and Duchene's vision of the European Community as an *idee force*, Ian Manners reoriented the analytical gaze away from the empirical study of EU institutions and policies toward the cognitive and symbolic processes through which the EU defines and projects its role.²¹

In his seminal article from early 2000s "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", Manners introduced the concept to capture the EU's efforts to establish and affirm an international identity grounded in the authority of norms.²² According to Manners, the EU is neither exclusively a civilian power nor exclusively a military power, but rather a

²¹Carr, Edward Hallett. 2016. *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: Reissued with a New Preface from Michael Cox*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.; Galtung, Johan. 1990. "Cultural Violence." *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3: 291–305.; Duchêne, François. 1972. "Europe's Role in World Peace." In *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, 32–47.

²²Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?“.

normative power that seeks to shape certain rules in international relations through the promotion of its norms, values and principles. He defined normative power as “the ability to use normative justification rather than an ability to use material incentives or physical force”.²³ Normative power thus represents a significant conceptual evolution in understanding the EU’s external action that situates influence not merely in what EU does, but in how shapes meanings, expectations and standards of appropriate behaviour. In this sense, as he further notes, it reflects a broader conception of social power in which “*power to*” precedes and often transcends “*power over*”.²⁴

The foundation of the concept of normative power lies in the EU’s institutional structure, which is based on agreements among member states that share common values. By establishing such a framework, the EU positions itself as a primary transmitter of values such as peace, freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance, while simultaneously considering that it can serve as an example for other states and international actors. Furthermore, Manners emphasizes the ideological influence of the EU’s international identity, capable of shaping “perceptions of normality” in international relations.²⁵

Focusing on the ideational impact of the European Union’s international identity as a representative of normative power, Manners argues that this form of power possesses an ontological quality which means that the EU can be conceptualized as a changer of norms in the international system; a positivist quantity meaning that the EU acts to change norms in that system; and a normative quality that the EU ought to extend its norms beyond its borders.²⁶ In other words, normative power represents what the EU is in its very essence, and normative power is something that the EU has by its nature, as its essential “innate” property. Therefore, it reaches deeper than the functional or instrumental logic of civilian power, positioning the EU’s external action within the realm of moral purpose.

According to Manners, central components of the normative power lies in the fact that the European Union exists as being qualitatively different from pre-existing political forms, and that this particularity and distinctiveness enables it to act in a normative way. The EU has an ability to reshape the concept of “normal” in international relations, defining what counts as legitimate behaviour within the global order.

²³Ian Manners, „The European Union's Normative Power: Critical Perspectives and Perspectives on the Critical,” in Richard Whitman (ed.), *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 226–247.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”.

²⁶Ibid, 252..

EU's normative difference derives from three sources of normative power; historical context, hybrid polity and political-legal constitution. The historical context refers to the legacy of two destructive world wars, which discredited aggressive nationalism and cultivated a collective determination to transcend power politics through cooperation and integration. The hybrid polity captures the EU's post-Westphalian character as an unique blend of supranational and intergovernmental elements that defies traditional state-based models. As Buzan and Little observe, the EU represents "a new type of entity with actor quality" which is "experimenting with a new form of both unit and subsystem structure."²⁷ Finally, the political-legal constitutionalism, elite-driven and treaty-based nature of the legal basis of the EU, embeds in its very foundations the liberal values of democracy, the rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Together, these three features of the EU bring the common principles of the Member States under a single framework, facilitating a shared commitment to principles and norms at the both the supranational and national levels. Consequently, EU policies and decisions are not guided exclusively by the regional interests of geopolitical nature, but by the normative commitments enshrined in its founding treaties. The EU thus grounds both its power and its legitimacy, internally and externally, in the promotion of its core principles, asserting its role in international politics through the language of norms rather than through material coercion. At last, Manners turns to the question of how the European Union's normative power is enacted in practice, through the process of norm diffusion. Three interrelated elements characterize this process; the ability to act in a normative way, the capacity to introduce new norms that reshape international relations, and the normative foundation grounded in shared values and principles.

This normative basis consists of five core norms; peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. These norms are enshrined in foundational treaties and symbolic acts such as the Schuman Declaration, the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, the Treaty of Rome, and the Treaty on European Union. Alongside, these stand four secondary norms; social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance, which reflect the European Union's evolving commitment to a broader conception of justice and equality.²⁸ In relation to this, in Article 2 of Lisbon Treaty is stated that the EU in its relations with the wider world "shall uphold and

²⁷Barry Buzan and Richard Little, „The Idea of 'International System': Theory Meets History," *International Political Science Review* 15, no. 3 (1994): 231–255.

²⁸Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?".

promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter.”²⁹

Similarly, in the European Security Strategy (2003), normative basis is treated as its constitutive orientation. This strategy explicitly frames the diffusion of these values as the guiding principle of the EU’s external relations, asserting that “spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order”.³⁰ In this reading, normative power cannot be understood as a foreign policy instrument mobilised in the service of narrowly defined national interests. As Manners and Diez emphasise, it is embedded within discursive practices that are at once constitutive of the EU’s international identity and continuously present in the articulation of its external action.³¹ Its capacity to define what counts as “normal”, legitimate and desirable in international politics is what will be interrogated in the subsequent sections through the lens of postcolonial critique.

2.1.3 Reflections and reconsiderations of the concept of normative power

Since Ian Manners’ article on the concept of Normative Power Europe, the notion that the European Union is a normative power has become central to debates in EU studies, attracting both conceptual and empirical reconsiderations and criticism. At the same time, it has invited both admiration and sharp criticism, fresh conceptual refinements and empirical testing in the scholarly community. It has also sparked a kind of scholarly thrill which Bickerton’s point about the proliferation of “adjectival prefixes” captures it perfectly, aiming to capture the complex identity and role of the EU.³² In the rush to attribute some form of

²⁹European Union. 2016. “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union: Article 2.” *Official Journal of the European Union* C 202: 17.

³⁰European Council (2003), A Secure Europe in a Better world: European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

³¹ Manners, I. & Diez, T. (2007). “Reflecting on Normative power Europe.” In F. Berenskoetter & M. J. Williams (Eds.), *Power in World Politics* (pp. 173-188), London: Routledge.

³² Bickerton, Christopher J. 2007. “The Perils of Performance: EU Foreign Policy and the Problem of Legitimization.” *Perspectives: Review of International Affairs* 28: 24–42.

“power” to the EU, the field slid into what can only be describes as the “powerisation of the EU”, an chaotic expansion of conceptual labels attempting to qualify what kind of power the EU actually exercises. The result is a fascinating theoretical kaleidoscope; Sjursen sees a *civilizational* power, Moravcsik calls it a *quiet* superpower, Aggestam opts for an *ethical* power, Diez emphasizes *discursive* power, McCormick ventures into *postmodern* superpower, Mayer and Vogt speak of *responsible* power, while Padoa-Schioppa and Merlini describe it as a *gentle* power... What this conceptual blossoming reveals is not indecision, but rather the difficulty of theoretical imagination and of trying to catch a protean actor whose influence is diffuse, institutional, legalistic, value-laden and deeply embedded in its architecture. The EU keeps shifting shape depending on the angle of observation and the theoretical vocabulary keeps evolving to keep pace. However, what all these theoretical conceptualizations of the EU share is the authors’ attempt to describe and explain EU’s ambition to assert itself as an international power, primarily through specific and often non-traditional modalities of power.

Thomas Diez, drawing on a poststructuralist perspective, argues that the concept of normative power is primarily a “discursive construction, rather than an objective fact”.³³ In his view, the EU constructs a narrative about itself as a “normative power” through a process of self-construction, in which EU actors position themselves as “model citizens” on the international stage. Rather than reflecting an objective fact, normative power Europe emerges as a discourse that shapes perceptions of legitimacy and moral authority.³⁴ Diez and Michelle Pace emphasize that the EU’s capacity to mediate conflicts or transform them through association agreements and partnership frameworks depends significantly on the acceptance of this self-image by external actors.³⁵ Yet Diez also warns that the concept remains problematic because it carries the risk of “Othering”, as a dynamic through which the EU, by portraying itself as the bearer of universal norms, simultaneously constructs and reinforces a divide between itself and those who are expected to adopt these norms.

This discursive dimension has been further elaborated by Aggestam, who advocates the concept of ethical power Europe.³⁶ In an effort to redefine the existing discourse on “normative power”, Aggestam argues that the term “ethical” more accurately captures the way in which, in the post-Cold War context of “normative globalization”, the EU has been

³³Diez, Thomas. 2005. “Reflecting on Normative Power Europe.” In *Power in Global Politics*, edited by Felix Berenskoetter and M. J. Williams, London Routledge, p. 2.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Diez, Thomas, and Michelle Pace. 2011. “Normative Power Europe and Conflict Transformation.” In *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, p. 2.

³⁶Aggestam, Lisbeth. "Introduction: ethical power Europe?." *International affairs* 84.1 (2008): 1-11.

able to assume a “more proactive international role by drawing on an international ethics largely, but not exclusively, institutionalized within the UN system”.³⁷ By framing the EU as an actor that proactively works toward a global common good, the concept of ethical power emphasizes the interdependence of norms and interests, avoiding the pitfalls of moral absolutism and altruistic idealism.³⁸

Attention is also drawn to the argument highlighting the situations in which the EU frequently encounters patterns of interdependence through the “external projection of internal solutions”, meaning that it models its approach to external actors on experiences and normative practices developed within its own system of governance.³⁹ While such projection may represent an idealized or selective version of the European model, Nicolaidis and Howse argue that it nevertheless constitutes “the operational one”, insofar as it actively contributes to the diffusion of the European understanding of principles of material justice.⁴⁰ In this spirit, Whitman offers a detailed analysis of the concept’s application across different cases and policy areas, while simultaneously updating it theoretically.⁴¹ Whitman places particular emphasis on the idea that principles, action and impact are equally important components in understanding the EU’s normative power.

A particularly insightful reflection is offered by Sijursen, who draws attention to a frequently overlooked aspect of normative power - what is it, precisely, that is distinctive about normative power itself? Sijursen cautions that claims regarding the EU’s normative or ethical nature can be overly broad and insufficiently specified.⁴² In other words, classifying the EU as a normative power does not, in itself, distinguish its foreign policy from that of other actors, since “all foreign policies may be said to have an ‘ethical’ or a ‘normative’ dimension.”⁴³ The specificity therefore lies not in the mere existence of norms, but in the ways in which the EU institutionalizes them, projects them externally and employs them to structure its foreign policy framework. Consequently, the concept of normative power is

³⁷Ibid, 4.

³⁸Ibid. 6.

³⁹Lavenex, Sandra. 2004. “EU External Governance in ‘Wider Europe.’” *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4: 695.

⁴⁰Nicolaidis, Kalypso, and Robert Howse. 2002. “‘This Is My EUtopia...’: Narrative as Power.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 4: 767–792.

⁴¹Whitman, Richard G. 1998. *From Civilian Power to Superpower? The International Identity of the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁴²Sijursen, Helene. 2006. “The EU as a ‘Normative’ Power: How Can This Be?” *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2: 235–251.

⁴³ Ibid.

meaningful only when linked to the concrete mechanisms, instruments and interests through which the EU operates.⁴⁴

From a structural-realist perspective, the European Union is not recognized as an actor independent of its Member States. Hyde-Price argues that rather than embodying a continuous commitment to universal values, “the EU has often been used by its most influential members as a tool to exercise hegemonic influence, shaping its ‘near abroad’ in ways that serve the long-term strategic, political and economic interests of those states.”⁴⁵ In addition, he advances a clear antithesis to Manners’ idealist approach by identifying three core problems inherent in liberal-idealist perspectives. First, he argues that this approach is fundamentally reductionist. Hyde-Price draws on Waltz’s well-known critique that idealists seek to explain international outcomes by focusing on the internal characteristics of states as actor-based ontologies, rather than by understanding the structure of the international system that constrains and shapes actors’s behaviour. Second, the “perennial weakness of liberalism” lies in its near neglect of power. He also recalls Hedley Bull’s argument that a civilian power is a contradiction in terms, since the EU can be civilian only because it enjoys security within a strategic environment created by militarily powerful states. Consequently, its normative power ultimately rests on the hard, military power of others.⁴⁶ Third, the concepts of civilian or normative power are explicitly normative in nature, as they implicitly assume such power to be an inherent “good thing”. Hyde-Price contends that this constitutes an epistemological problem, transforming analysis into a form of moral apologetics for the EU rather than an objective examination of its international behaviour. Importantly, he does not deny that the EU possesses normative aspirations. Rather, he insists that these aspirations should be analysed as instruments of power, not as expressions of moral superiority.

Other critiques emphasize conceptual limitations. Laidi argues that linking the European Union so closely with ideals risks abstraction from practical considerations of interest, potentially trapping the EU in an “idealistic” approach.⁴⁷ Similarly, Eriksen notes that acting on honourable motives alone cannot serve as a sufficient criterion for evaluating normative quality, as well-intentioned policies may neglect or override the interests and

⁴⁴Helene Sjursen, „Values or Rights? Alternative Conceptions of the EU's 'Normative' Role," in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 105–120.

⁴⁵Adrian Hyde-Price, „'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 217–234

⁴⁶Bull, Hedley. 1982. “Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms.” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21: 149–164.

⁴⁷Laidi, Zaki, ed. 2008. *EU Foreign Policy in a Globalized World: Normative Power and Social Preferences*. London: Routledge.

values of others.⁴⁸ Sjursen highlights the ongoing ambiguity in defining normative power, calling for clearer theoretical criteria and standards for evaluating both military and non-military foreign policy,⁴⁹ Likewise, Smith points to the persistent gap between the EU's policy instruments and the actors who steer them, emphasizing the need for reflection on how normative ambitions intersect with internal development and international structures.⁵⁰

However, normative power as conceptualized by Manners can be understood primarily as a relationship of meaning. Rather than negating or replacing the relevance of ethical, military, civilian power, this perspective highlights that, in the post-bipolar world, power can also be exercised and measured through the capacity to shape perceptions, interpretations and shared understanding. The European Union presents itself as a bearer of universal norms and values that promise stability, peace and progress. It is precisely through this self-perception, and the ways in which it is projected externally, that the concept of normative power acquires its analytical relevance.

In this study, Manners' framework is employed as a meta-analytical and discursive lens for understanding the EU's external behaviour. It enables an examination of the positionality from which the EU approaches specific relations, the interpretative frameworks it applies and the ultimate objectives that guide its external action. The concept provides a systematic tool for analysing how norms are articulated, transmitted and diffused, and it also allows for their concrete operationalization through empirical cases. In other words, the concept of normative power is analytically valuable because it offers insight into how the EU constructs its own role in the international system and how, through discourse centred on universal values, it legitimizes, directs and advances its foreign policy practices, while simultaneously pursuing its strategic interests.

What further strengthens the relevance of Manners' conceptual framework is its explicit engagement with the question of norm diffusion. As Manners himself emphasizes, "the normative basis of the EU does not make it a normative power", which necessitates a closer examination of how EU norms are diffused.⁵¹ His typology of diffusion mechanisms, that includes contagion, international diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, over diffusion and the cultural filter, offers analytical vocabulary for tracing the pathways through which EU norms travel beyond its borders. These mechanisms are particularly useful for

⁴⁸Eriksen, Erik Oddvar. 2006. "The EU—A Cosmopolitan Polity?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2: 252.

⁴⁹Sjursen, Helene. 2006. "The EU as a 'Normative' Power: How Can This Be?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2: 235–251.

⁵⁰Smith, Karen E. 2005. "Beyond the Civilian Power EU Debate." *Politique européenne* 17, no. 3: 63–82.

⁵¹Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?"

analysing the formulation and implementation of the EU's peacekeeping policy, as they illuminate how normative claims are translated into institutional practices and operational strategies.

Importantly, this framework also opens analytical space for identifying postcolonial patterns within the EU's external engagement. By examining how peacekeeping policy functions as a vehicle for norm diffusion, the study can critically assess the extent to which such practices reproduce hierarchical relations, asymmetries of power and paternalistic assumptions characteristic of colonial modes of governance. In that sense, Manners' framework provides the conceptual tools necessary to interrogate the normative claims of the EU.

Finally, Manners' concept of normative power serves as a widely recognized and theoretically productive point of reference within the literature, enabling meaningful dialogue, comparison and cumulative knowledge-building. Its analytical flexibility allows for the construction of a coherent research design while remaining open to critical engagement and theoretical refinement. As such, it offers a robust foundation for examining this paper's main question – the EU's peacekeeping practices at the intersection of norms, power and postcolonial critique.

2.2. Normative power and the European Union's peacekeeping policy

2.2.1. Conceptual foundations of peacekeeping and the European Union's approach

The European Union has recognized maintaining peace and security without military intervention as a suitable arena for both affirmation and strengthening its normative power and constructing a holistic international identity. Since 2003, when the European Union launched its first-ever mission abroad in the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, it has gone on to deploy several missions and operations dedicated to stabilising and keeping peace in third countries. Through these deployments, the EU established itself as an actor in international peacebuilding.⁵²

The EU has initiated and participated in more than 40 peacekeeping missions and operations, both military and civilian, in Africa, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. These missions, conducted within the framework of the Common Security

⁵²Merlingen, Michael, and Rasa Ostrauskaite. *European Union peacebuilding and policing: governance and the European security and defence policy*. Vol. 40. Routledge, 2006.

and Defence Policy (CSDP), represent concrete instruments through which the EU seeks to operationalize its foreign policy ambitions and consolidate its status as a global actor.

Peacekeeping missions play a central role for the EU External Action Service, especially in regions navigating political transitions and post-conflict reconstruction. Currently, 21 European Union's missions and operations are active, of which 12 are civilian, 8 military and 1 combined civilian-military, over 3500 military personnel and 1300 civilian personnel are deployed around the world in this moment.⁵³

The European Union peacekeeping missions and operations are formally framed as instruments for preventing conflict, strengthening international peace and security, supporting the rule of law and managing crises in fragile settings. According to the EU's diplomatic service, military missions and operations are meant to enhance security conditions in host countries through low-to medium- intensity engagement tailored to local needs, typically by providing military training, equipment, and advisory support to national forces. On the other hand, civilian missions involve operations carried out to support the security sector reform of a third state and often unfold on two levels: strategic advising and training.

The European Union's peacekeeping policy is formulated by a "hybrid collection of national and multilateral practices".⁵⁴ These missions fall under the EU's Second Pillar as established by the Treaty on European Union and they are shaped simultaneously by intergovernmental decision-making, member-states interests and the broader strategic ambitions of the European Union. This hybridity produces a system that is neither fully supranational nor purely state-driven, but something in between, as an evolving framework in which national priorities, collective norms and EU-level procedures constantly interact to define the character and direction of peacekeeping engagements. In summary, it is the result of hybrid practices and usages that were formed where different institutional contexts intersect. These ways of conducting peacekeeping are both external to the EU and specific to it.

As Biscop and Whitman noted, the emergence of the Common Security and Defence Policy, in particular its military component, was the key aspect in the gradual development of the EU "as an autonomous actor in the field of security, aiming to safeguard European security by improving global security".⁵⁵ Tardy similarly noted that CSDP missions and

⁵³European External Action Service, „Missions and Operations," https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations_en.

⁵⁴Antoine Rayroux, *L'Union européenne et le maintien de la paix en Afrique*, Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2017, p. 25

⁵⁵Biscop, Sven, and Richard G. Whitman, eds. 2012. *The Routledge Handbook of European Security*. London: Routledge, p. 1.

operations “are the most visible manifestations of EU activity in fragile states and the most tangible expression of the EU’s contribution to international peace”.⁵⁶ In this sense, CSDP engagements can be read as both normative and practical commitment to international peacebuilding, situated within a broader ecosystem of missions undertaken by NATO, the African Union and the United Nations.

At the same time, the CSDP remains an integral part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which means that the EU peacekeeping, fundamentally, represents an outcome and an expression of EU foreign policy. Given the EU’s distinctive and unique nature of foreign policy-making, where authority is shared between member states and supranational institutions, the character of EU peacekeeping inevitably carries the imprinting of both national preferences and EU-level norms. Understanding how peacekeeping is orchestrated within the CFSP framework is therefore essential for assessing the extent to which the EU’s approach is driven by strategic self-interest, normative commitments, or a combination of a two.

The European Union’s political declarations offer useful insight into these aspirations. The 2007 Berlin Declaration affirmed a commitment to “the peaceful resolution of conflicts” and to “ensuring that people do not become victims of war, terrorism and violence” neither “drive back to poverty, hunger and disease” and in that sense “it will continue to take a leading role in that fight.”⁵⁷ The EU Global Strategy from 2016 continued in the same steps, and reinforced this orientation by stating that the EU “will promote peace and guarantee the security of its citizens and territory...”, emphasising that internal and external security have become inseparable and that Europe’s own stability depends on peace in its surrounding regions.⁵⁸

Further, in order to better understand peacekeeping policy of European Union, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. These concepts are often treated as overlapping concepts, yet the literature consistently stresses the value of distinguishing between them. Peacekeeping refers to the separation of the parties to the conflict with their prior consent in order to prevent further violence or to limit it geographically, temporally and in terms of intensity or to observe a cease-fire, thus creating

⁵⁶Tardy, Thierry. 2015. “CSDP in Action: What Contribution to International Security?”, p. 7.

⁵⁷European Union. 2007. *Berlin Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Signature of the Treaties of Rome*. March 25, 2007.

⁵⁸European Union. 2016. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*. Brussels: European External Action Service, pg. 14.

the conditions for the final end of the conflict.⁵⁹ Peacebuilding, by contrast, encompasses a broader set of post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction efforts, including institutional development, reform of the judiciary and security sector, support for governance, the rebuilding of social fabric, and measures aimed at preventing a relapse into conflict. In that sense, peacebuilding is oriented toward the long-term consolidation of peace, while peacekeeping constitutes only one of its more limited components.

According to the United Nations definition, peacekeeping has a distinctive set of strengths, such as legitimacy, burden-sharing, and the ability to deploy and sustain personnel from across the world. UN missions integrate military, police and civilian capacities within multidimensional mandates. Peacekeepers provide security as well as political and peacebuilding support to help countries navigate the fragile early transition from conflict to peace.

Unsurprisingly, scholarly analysis is far more extensive on UN peacekeeping, largely due to the organisation's broader scope, longer institutional history, larger mission portfolio, budget and personnel. By contrast, academic attention to EU peacekeeping remains significantly more modest, even though the EU has identified peacebuilding and crisis management as core priorities of its foreign policy.⁶⁰

Kmec repeatedly emphasises that UN and EU approaches to peace missions, and to peacebuilding more broadly, are not identical. Yet, the EU's role in peacebuilding, and therefore in peacekeeping, is shaped to a considerable extent by UN frameworks. The EU deploys missions only in environments that are judged politically and security-wise acceptable. "The UN's approach is broader and more comprehensive, with UN missions mandated to perform a wide spectrum of tasks".⁶¹ On the other hand, the EU structures each of its missions around a more narrowly defined mandate focused on a single-issue area. Furthermore, EU missions concentrate on specific tasks as a result of political and operational considerations, and it is precisely this level of specificity that Kmec identifies as a key reason why EU engagements tend to be more effective and efficient than those of the UN.

2.2.2. Manifestations of normative power in the European Union's peacekeeping policy

⁵⁹Ramsbotham, Oliver, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse. *Contemporary conflict resolution*. Polity, 2011, 147 cited in Džuverović, Nemanja. *Studije mira: Sukob, mir i razvoj*. Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, 2021.

⁶⁰Council of the European Union. 2008. *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: Providing Security in a Changing World*. Brussels, December 11, 2008.

⁶¹Kmec, Vladimir. "The EU and Peacebuilding in CSDP Missions and Operations: Formulating Peacebuilding Policies1." (2015).

The manifestation of normative power in the European Union's peacekeeping policy is based on three core ideas; first, how norms are embedded in fundamental strategic documents, official statements and the mandates of the missions themselves; second, how normative power in EU missions becomes tangible through the emphasis on fundamental values; and third, how the EU transforms local institutions so that they can increasingly reflect European standards and practices. Encompassing these three core ideas, a useful analytical framework that will be used is provided by six diffusion mechanisms identified by Manners as ways in which these norms are diffused: contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference and cultural filter.⁶²

First of all, contagion refers to their unintentional spread to other actors. Local authorities, partners or national forces may spontaneously adopt EU standards simply by being exposed to its procedures and practices. A notable example is the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), launched in 2008 as the largest civilian mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy. The mission is focused on institution-building within Kosovo's judiciary and police, supporting the rule of law, human rights, and security sector reform. Its mandate explicitly incorporated human rights standards and European legal practices, thereby institutionalizing norms that the EU regards as universal or desirable. According to the 2008 Joint Action establishing EULEX (Mission Statement, Article 2), the mission "shall support selected Kosovo rule of law institutions... in full compliance with international human rights standards and best European practices".⁶³

Second, informational diffusion emerges through EU declarations and policy initiatives. This mechanism operates through the transmission of norms, values and expectations via public statements, policy documents and official narratives, creating a framework of behaviour that local actors can internalize or adapt. In the relation to EU peacekeeping missions, this "soft" form of influence has been central to promoting basic principles of justice, the rule of law, human rights... For instance, Javier Solana, the EU's former High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, famously stated in 2006 at The Sound of Europe Conference "I see Europe as a new form of power. A force for good around the world. A promoter of effective multilateralism, international law and justice."⁶⁴ This statement encapsulates a concise expression of the identity that the EU seeks

⁶²Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?".

⁶³Council Joint Action 2008/124/CFSP, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008E0124>. (22.11.2025).

⁶⁴Solana, Javier. 2006. "The Sound of Europe Conference." Speech by the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Salzburg, January 27, 2006..

to project through its peacekeeping policy. “Force for good” as a discursive construct, a way for the EU to self-define its identity, with peacekeeping policy representing one of several areas where this self-perception materializes. The emphasis on “effective multilateralism” reflects the EU’s reliance on UN mandates and cooperation with other international organizations to legitimize its interventions, while the focus on “international law and justice” translates directly into operational priorities such as security sector reform, strengthening the rule of law, and institutional capacity-building. As Martina Paone observes, the EU’s identity as expressed in Miliband’s statement “as a club that countries want to join... a role model that others follow” is exactly the expression of normative power of European Union.⁶⁵

Third, procedural diffusion operates through formalized relations with third parties, such as inter-regional cooperation or enlargement. Certain norms become formal embedded into institutional frameworks. A clear illustration of this mechanism can be seen in the EU-led mission EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which replaced NATO-led SFOR mission in 2004. EUFOR’s mandate combined robust military tasks, such as maintaining a safe and secure environment, supporting the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in implementing the peace process according to Dayton’s Agreement, conducting information operations and managing residual aspects of the General Framework Agreement for Peace with supporting civilian tasks, including policing organized crime and coordinating with national agencies. Through these formalized structures, the EU was able to introduce and institutionalize key governance and security norms, such as the 2004 state-wide Law on the Intelligence and Security Agency and the creation of the State Investigation and Protection Agency, tasked with handling serious crimes like terrorism and war crimes. Procedural diffusion is further reflected in efforts to unify the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina under inclusive, multi-ethnic principles and in the establishment of oversight institutions like the Ombudsman and the High-Level Prosecutorial Council.⁶⁶

Fourth, transference occurs via material exchanges like trade and aid. Access to a particular market is often linked to the adoption of specific standards and norms. The relationship between trade and norms is inherently reciprocal. The EU regulates certain norms while simultaneously controlling access to its market, creating an incentive for compliance. Conversely, the ability to access the market can reinforce and legitimize these

⁶⁵ Martina Paone, *From Civilising Mission to Civilian Power: Rethinking EU Peacebuilding from a Postcolonial Perspective*, PhD thesis, University of Warwick & Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2018.

⁶⁶ Mujkić, Asim, and Dino Abazović. 2018. “Security Sector Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Militaire Spectator*.

norms, making trade both a tool and a channel for the diffusion of EU values. Similarly, development and stabilization aid are frequently tied to the observance of certain norms by recipient countries. A specific example is the 2005 decision to redirect €300 million from the European Development Fund to the African Peace Facility, supporting African Union-led initiatives, including efforts to halt violence in Darfur.⁶⁷ This use of financial resources demonstrates how the EU employs material instruments to extend its normative agenda beyond its borders, embedding its values in the practices of partner states.

The final mechanism, the cultural filter, refers to what Manners describes as “the interplay between the construction of knowledge and the creation of social and political identity by the subjects of norm diffusion.”⁶⁸ It captures the process through which the norms projected by the EU are received, reinterpreted, and either internalised, adapted or resisted in accordance with the political culture, historical experience and identity of the recipient society. Drawing on the earlier work of Catarina Kinnvall, Manners situates the cultural filter as a decisive variable that mediates the impact of international norms and political learning in third states and organisations, producing outcomes that may range from learning and adaptation to outright rejection.⁶⁹ In this sense, the cultural filter reintroduces the agency of the “norm-receiver” into an analytical framework, that has otherwise tended to privilege the perspective of the EU as a “norm-sender”.

A paradigmatic illustration of the cultural filter operating in the direction of internalisation is the case of Turkey’s abolition of capital punishment in 2004, adopted as part of the alignment with the *acquis communautaire* in view of accession negotiations. The EU’s sustained normative pressure and resonated with domestic political actors seeking to consolidate Turkey’s European trajectory, thereby producing legislative and constitutional convergence with the EU’s normative order.

Conversely, the cultural filter can equally produce resistance and rejection, as evidenced by the trajectory of EU normative engagement in the Sahel region, particularly in Mali. Following the political transitions in 2020-2021, Malian authorities progressively distanced themselves from the normative vocabulary employed by EU civilian and military missions. They tend to reframe the EU’s emphasis on democratic governance as an external

⁶⁷ „EU to Agree on Using Aid Funds for Peacekeeping,” *Politico*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-to-agree-on-using-aid-funds-for-peacekeeping>.

⁶⁸ Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”.

⁶⁹ Kinnvall, Catarina. 1995. “Cultural Diffusion and Political Learning.” In *The Democratization of China*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 61-71.

imposition incompatible with local conceptions of sovereignty and postcolonial self-determination.

Taken together, these two cases demonstrate that the cultural filter represent a constitutive mechanism in which the recipient society's identity, memory and self-understanding actively co-produce the meaning and legitimacy of the norms in question.

2.3. Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory is by far the most varied and eclectic of the identity-based fields. It constitutes an autonomous scientific area and, to some extent, functions as a distinctive disciplinary prism through which various social and humanistic sciences. In this sense, it can be described as a highly distinctive framework. On the one hand, it operates as a disciplinary field, while on the other, it simultaneously represents a broader theoretical orientation.

It should be noted that the terms postcolonial theory, postcolonial critique and postcolonialism are often used interchangeably, as they all address the same underlying phenomenon - colonial power and its transformations over time, despite the fact that they do not carry identical meaning. Nevertheless, this chapter adopts the term postcolonial theory to denote the entire theoretical corpus discussed in this paper, given that it represents the broadest conceptual category. The subsequent chapters will place greater emphasis on postcolonial critique.

Postcolonial theory is not linear in any sense, despite the frequent assumption that it is. The linear view usually starts from the idea that there was a period of colonialism, followed by decolonization and that we are now merely analysing what remains afterward. Postcolonial though resists this straight-line logic precisely because the reality of colonialism itself was never linear, but rather a pervasive and ongoing condition. Colonialism, even when formally ended long ago, can resurface in the form of economic dependencies, cultural imitation or specific political arrangements.

At the epistemological level, identity, language, power and memory are deeply interconnected, meaning that perspectives intersect and overlap rather than aligning into a single, coherent chronology. Consequently, the condition interrogated by postcolonial theory is fragmented and nonlinear. Moreover, in spatial terms, colonial logic often reappears not only in former peripheral regions but also within erstwhile centers of power. Belgian colonial narratives, for instance, may re-emerge in African school textbooks, while Indian anti-imperialism may operate through British institutional language.

The term postcolonial is used in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it can be understood in a specific, narrow sense, referring to the historical period following the moment when a country or a particular population group is no longer formally governed by a colonial power. For this reason, both the emergence and subsequent development of postcolonial theory are commonly linked to the second half of the 20th century, beginning with the end of the Second World War, when the gradual process of decolonization of former colonial territories was set in motion. However, the very label *postcolonial* is itself problematic; it implies a temporal or historical condition “after” colonialism, raising the question of who can legitimately claim that we are out of colonialism today.

Following Bhabra’s thought, postcolonialism can be approached, within this temporal and spatial condition, less as an designation of a historical period than as an epistemic marker.⁷⁰ Critical vantage point from which the experience of colonisation, and its ongoing power to configure both past and present realities, becomes available for reflective interrogation

On the other hand, the term is also used in much broader sense to denote a vast and heterogeneous body of artistic, literary, political and academic work that engages with the enduring consequences of colonization, as articulated by authors and artists living within postcolonial societies themselves. In this latter sense, postcolonial theory functions as a critical approach to examining the socioeconomic and cultural relationships between former colonial powers and contemporary postcolonial states.

Postcolonial thought did not emerge, in its earliest form, as a theory of the international studies. Its intellectual origins lies in literary and cultural studies, where it took shape as a scholarly reaction against the systematic exclusion of non-Western literatures from the canon that had been progressively codified through modern literary education and reproduces across the curricula of Western universities. What animated this initial current was, in essence, a “poetry of resistance”. The aesthetic, metaphysical and somewhat political testimony of writers whose thought had been forged in exile, dispossession and survival at the outer edges of the imperial order. Before it became a language for critiquing states, institutions or international organisations, postcolonial reflection was first and foremost inquiry into the silences of the Western canon and into the epistemic violence embedded within its very criteria of literary.

⁷⁰Bhabra, Gurinder K. 2011. “Historical Sociology, Modernity, and Postcolonial Critique.” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3: 653–662.

Yet, as Vivek Chibber notes in the opening chapter of “*Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*”, what sets postcolonial studies apart from other analytical currents that have taken hold in the humanities and social sciences over recent decades are two more distinctive characteristics.⁷¹ The first refers to the striking rapidity with which the field breached the confines of its original disciplinary home in the wake of the so-called *cultural turn*, extending its reach into history, anthropology, sociology, political theory, and, more recently, international and European studies.⁷² The reasons of this expansion are, in a sense, historically self-evident. Centuries of colonial rule left deep sediments within the social, cultural and political fabric of the societies subjected to European domination. Therefore, explanatory primacy gradually migrated away from material and class-based categories and towards culture, discourse and ideology, which came to be treated as the principal registers through which social processes could be intelligibly reconstructed. The second feature identified by Chibber carries even greater weight for the argument developed in this thesis. Postcolonial studies decline to confine themselves to the historical reconstruction of colonial rule. They also lay explicit claim to the political practice. Chibber explain it as a demand to unsettle inherited Western epistemological premises that has generated a powerful impulse towards constituting postcolonial theory as an interventionist domain, taking knowledge as a practice implicated in the reproduction of relations of power.⁷³

2.3.1 Origins of postcolonial thought

This chapter presents the core theoretical corpus of postcolonial theory. It addresses the question of what postcolonial theory is at its most fundamental level; traces its intellectual development, introduces its key concepts and objectives and highlights the values of engaging with this theoretical approach when analysing issues related to the reconfiguration of the contemporary global order.

The principal founders of postcolonial theory, who laid down its core assumptions, are primarily associated with the second half of the 20th century and with the intersection of literary theory, history, anthropology, political theory and international relations.

Postcolonial theory, as part of the critical IR theory, is concerned with questioning entrenched assumptions that have come to constitute the mainstream within the field. By

⁷¹Chibber, Vivek. 2014. *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. London: Verso.

⁷²Ibid, 1-2.

⁷³Ibid.

challenging what is presented as necessary, unquestionable and culturally determined, it provides a particularly important analytical framework for understanding international relations. Jovanović notes that postcolonial theory has undergone a struggle for theoretical independence, resisting its classification within postmodernism, poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, feminism and similar approaches.⁷⁴ Accordingly, postcolonial theory rejects narrowly confined perspectives limited to a small number of dimensions, such as the political or economic alone, and instead engages with all spheres of life of populations in formerly colonized territories, including symbolic, cultural and ethical domains.⁷⁵

In this sense, the theorist Vladimir Biti defines postcolonial theory as “a heterogeneous theoretical corpus concerned with the history and culture of former colonial countries, or one that rereads the cultures of the colonizers from their perspective.”⁷⁶ The temporal dimension of postcolonial theory situates its object of analysis primarily in the past and the present, and only rarely engages in future-oriented prediction. Robert J. C. Young adds an important observation, noting that postcolonial theory does not privilege the colonial as such; rather it “addresses colonial history only insofar as that history shapes the configurations and structures of power in the present, to the extent that much of the world continues to live through the violent upheavals that accompany them and insofar as anti-colonial liberation movements remain a source and inspiration for contemporary politics.”⁷⁷

Among the most influential authors is Edward W. Said, an American-Palestinian theorist. The most paradigmatic work of postcolonial theory is his book *Orientalism* (1978), which challenged Western perceptions of the East by demonstrating how Western scholars and so-called “Orientalists” perpetuated stereotypes of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia as barbaric, inferior and irrational. Said grounded his arguments largely in poststructuralist thought, particularly in Michel Foucault’s idea of the close relationship between knowledge and power. He sought to highlight the presence of the Orient in the very process of constructing European material civilization and culture. Moreover, Said understood the Orient as an integral component of European institutions, art, language, customs, doctrines.

⁷⁴Ajzenhamer, Nataša Jovanović. 2017. “‘Rubikova kocka’ postkolonijalizma: Teorijski sinkretizam i novi izazovi u postkolonijalnim studijama.” *Međunarodni problemi* 69, nos. 2–3: 309–331.

⁷⁵Glavaš, Zvonimir. 2012. “Razgradnja Orijenta – razvoj i temeljni koncept postkolonijalne teorije.” *Essehist: Časopis studenata povijesti i drugih društveno-humanističkih znanosti* 4, no. 4: 75–82.

⁷⁶Vladimir Biti, *Pojmovnik suvremene književne i kulturne teorije*, 2. izmijenjeno i dopunjeno izd., Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 2000, p. 389

⁷⁷Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001.

Said notes that Orientalism does not function as a set of neutral descriptions but rather as a powerful cognitive framework that “explained the behaviour of Orientals” by assigning them a predefined “mentality, a genealogy and an atmosphere,” thereby transforming them into a predictable and manageable phenomenon endowed with “regular characteristics.”⁷⁸ These ideas do not operate only externally, as Europe’s view of the East, but have a bidirectional effect. They shape both those labelled as Orientals and those who see themselves as Westerners. This is why Said insists that Orientalism should be understood less as a positive doctrine than as “a set of constraints upon and limitations of thought.”⁷⁹ Its essence lies both in individual claims and in the enduring epistemological distinction between “Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” as an distinction that, through Orientalism’s historical development, is not softened but rather “deepened and even hardened”. Said further exposes the institutional dimension of this process by describing Orientalism as a field with vast geographical ambitions and an almost limitless capacity for subdivision. Everything deemed “Oriental” from Islamic law to Chinese dialects, falls under the same disciplinary label. This combination of “imperial vagueness and precise detail” points to the paradox of Orientalism as an academic discipline whose authority rests not on selectiveness, but on the constant expansion of its scope. The suffix –ism in the Orientalism, is therefore far from innocent, marking a closed, self-reproducing system of knowledge that distinguishes itself from other disciplines precisely through its ambition to encompass, categorize and stabilize the hierarchy between the West and the Orient, in which the West is placed in a position of superiority vis-à-vis others (Africa, the Middle East, etc.) and thereby never loses its relative dominance.

Building on Said’s Orientalism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha take it as a starting point for the development of their own theoretical projects and political visions. While Said exposes the structural logic of Western representations of the non-West, Spivak and Bhabha push the analysis further by interrogating voice, agency and the ambivalent spaces in which power is reproduced and contested. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, an Indian literary theorist, feminist critic and postcolonial scholar, is particularly known for her distinctive form of deconstructive criticism, which she describes as “interventionist”. In addition to drawing Said’ foundational insights, Spivak appropriates Antonio Gramsci’s concept of the “subaltern” to describe not only the subordinated peoples of the so-called Third World, but also marginalized groups within those societies themselves. Her central

⁷⁸Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁷⁹Ibid.

concern is the problem of representation. Whether the subaltern can represent themselves, or whether they are condemned to be endlessly represented, often in distorted and self-serving ways, by those who dominate and exploit them. In her seminal essay “Can the Subaltern speak?”, Spivak reaches a deliberately unsettling conclusion that there is no position from which these marginalized groups can fully articulate their interests and experiences on their own terms within existing structures of power and knowledge.⁸⁰ By shifting the postcolonial discussion from questions *how should the subaltern speak?* or *in which language should the subaltern speak?* to the far more radical question *can the subaltern speak at all*, Spivak exposes the depth of epistemic violence embedded in both colonial and postcolonial discourses, forcing it to confront its own limits and to reflect critically on whether acts of “giving voice” may themselves reproduce the very hierarchies they seek to dismantle.

Homi Bhabha introduces psychoanalysis into postcolonial studies, drawing heavily on the work of Frantz Fanon, whose influence on his thinking is both explicit and foundational. Fanon, an Algerian citizen, a Francophone psychiatrist born in Martinique, was among the first to bring psychoanalytic reflection into the analysis of the postcolonial condition. From the early *Black Skin, White Masks* (1959) to the more “mature” *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon exposes what he understands as the pathological splitting of Black identity produced by colonial domination and the pressure to internalize colonial culture. In this relationship between colonizer and colonized, Fanon insists, both sides are mutually dependent, each requires the other for the constitution of its own identity, even if only in order to define what is not. His famous line “Look mom, a black man, I’m afraid!” starkly captures the moment in which racialized difference is reduced to fear, projection and psychological violence.⁸¹

Bhabha moves a step beyond Fanon’s focus on subjectivity and the formation of individual identity by shifting attention to the processes that emerge in the articulation of cultural difference itself. Rather than grounding postcolonial analysis in fixed identities or in a simple opposition between cultures, he opens the way toward conceptualizing an *international culture*.⁸² This culture is not based on the exotic celebration of multiculturalism or the mere coexistence of diverse traditions, but on the notion of cultural hybridity. One of Bhabha’s most influential contributions is his concept of *mimicry*, which he understands simultaneously as a strategy of power and a potential site of resistance. Colonial authority demands imitation, but only up to a point where the colonized subject is expected to be

⁸⁰Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, 271–313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

⁸¹Fanon, Frantz. 1970. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Paladin.

⁸²Bhabha, Homi K. 1992. “The World and the Home.” *Social Text*, nos. 31–32: 141–153.

“almost the same, but not quite”, or more precisely “almost the same, but not white.”⁸³ This ambivalence destabilizes the universal values of Western culture upon which the imperial project of assimilation rests.

Closely aligned with postcolonial theory in its critical horizon, yet still an autonomous intellect current, is the decolonial scholarship. Although both traditions share a fundamental scepticism towards the universalist pretensions of Western modernity, decolonial thought possesses a different geographical, historical and intellectual genealogy. It emerged in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s as a political and epistemic project directed against the tendency to equate Western European modes of thought with universal reason.⁸⁴ Whereas postcolonial theory has drawn heavily on the Anglophone literary tradition and French poststructuralism following Foucault and Derrida, decolonial thought elaborates its conceptual apparatus from within the Ibero-American intellectual matrix and from the historical experience of the Americas and the Caribbean as the first laboratory of modern colonial rule.

Among its most influential proponents, alongside Anibal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, stands Walter Dignolo. What binds this circle of thinkers together is the shared conviction that the constitutive element of modernity cannot be grasped without the concept Dignolo places at the very centre of his analysis, naming it “*coloniality*”.⁸⁵

In Dignolo’s usage, coloniality must be sharply distinguished from colonialism. Colonialism denotes the historical form of direct territorial, political and economic rule exercised by one state over another. On the other side, coloniality is its continuation by other means such as durable logic of hierarchy and subordination that survived the formal dismantling of colonial empires and became silently embedded within the institutions, epistemologies and normative orders of the societies that succeeded them. In Dignolo’s own formulation, coloniality I “the underlying logic of foundation and development of Western civilisation of which colonialisms have been constitutive.”⁸⁶

2.4. Postcolonial critique of EU Studies

⁸³Bhabha, Homi K. 1984. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *October* 28: 125–133.

⁸⁴ Quijano, Anibal. 2000. *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

⁸⁵ Dignolo, Walter D. 2007. “Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking.” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3: 155–167.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

The transposition of postcolonial thought into the field of EU Studies cannot be assumed to be a neutral operation. Any theoretical framework that migrates from the intellectual and geographical context in which it was originally forged into a new disciplinary territory is inevitably reconfigured by the conditions of its arrival. The most compelling articulation of this insight remains that of Edward Said in his essay “Travelling Theory”, in which he formulates the guiding question of all theoretical displacement: “What happens to [the theory or idea] when, in different circumstances and for new reasons, it is used again and, in still more different circumstances, again?” Said’s own answer is that theory that travels is “to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place”.⁸⁷ What emerges at the destination is never identical to what departed at the origin, and this non-identity opens a series of methodological and interpretative questions concerning the relationship between the displaced, or more precisely the transplanted, theory and the intellectual soil from which it was first drawn.

This observation has direct consequences for the way postcolonial thought is mobilised within the present thesis. Postcolonial theory entered EU Studies through the institutional vocabulary, normative architecture and disciplinary conventions specific to the European intellectual field. It is precisely for this reason that the analytical instrument employed here is more accurately designated not as a postcolonial theory but as postcolonial critique. Considering that postcolonial theory mostly functions as a broader interpretative and conceptual horizon, postcolonial critique in sense of this thesis refers to its operational deployment and to the methodical application of postcolonial ideas to specific narratives, discursive formations and theoretical models. Critique, in this sense, is the working edge of the tradition and the analytical labour of dismantling discourses of “development”, “security”, and most centrally for this thesis “normative power”.

Understood in these terms, the contemporary corpus of EU Studies constitutes a particularly productive field for postcolonial engagement, precisely because it has generated a dense set of concepts such as normative power, civilian power, ethical foreign policy, external governance, etc. These concepts present themselves as descriptively neutral while carrying, on closer inspection, considerable normative and epistemic weight. The function of postcolonial critique within this thesis is therefore to make visible the epistemological hierarchies and relations of power that EU Studies have tended to neutralise or depoliticise, and to interrogate the conditions under which certain categories, actors, and forms of

⁸⁷ Said, Edward W. 2014. “Traveling Theory (1982).” In *World Literature in Theory*, 114–133.

knowledge have come to occupy the position of the self-evident, while others have been quietly displaced to the analytical margins.

Several distinct axes along which such a critique can be developed emerge from the existing literature. The first, and arguably the most consequential, may be termed colonial amnesia. The analytical horizon of EU Studies is characteristically confined to the temporal frame inaugurated by the European integration process itself, with the effect that the imperial histories of the EU's member states are treated as either irrelevant to, or safely external from, the contemporary operation of the EU as an international actor. The consequence of this framing is that the EU appears on the international stage as a *sui generis* normative agent, seemingly unencumbered by any historical continuity with the colonial trajectories of its constitutive states.

2.4.1 Colonial amnesia

Within mainstream EU Studies, the European Union is often implicitly portrayed as a economic-political project that emerged “from scratch” in the aftermath of the Second World War. In this narrative, European integration appears as a rupture with the past – a post-fascist democratic reinvention. However, what is largely overlooked is that many of the EU's founding and leading Member States were former colonial powers, shaped by deeply entrenched practices of governance, spatial hierarchy and normative domination. These imperial experiences did not simply vanish in 1945, but they formed part of the historical and institutional backdrop against which European integration unfolded.

Both EU Studies and much of the EU peacebuilding literature tend to marginalize Europe's colonial past as a constitutive factor in the formation of the European Union and its external action.⁸⁸ The EU is frequently depicted as a project born in “historically neutral space”, almost as if it were detached from Europe's imperial entanglements.⁸⁹ This narrative produces what Shilliam terms “colonial amnesia” referring to a condition that has allowed, and continues to allow, many European policymakers to conceive of the European project as

⁸⁸Paone, *From Civilising Mission to Civilian Power: Rethinking EU Peacebuilding from a Postcolonial Perspective*.

Kalypso Nicolaïdis and Robert Howse, „This Is My EUtopia ...': Narrative as Power," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 4 (2002): 767–792; Kalypso Nicolaïdis, „Southern Barbarians? A Post-Colonial Critique of EU Universalism," in Kalypso Nicolaïdis, Berny Sèbe and Gabrielle Maas (eds), *Echoes of Empire: Memory, Identity and Colonial Legacies*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2015,

⁸⁹Deloye, Yves. 2006. “Introduction: Éléments pour une approche socio-historique de la construction européenne. Un premier état des lieux.” *Politique européenne* 18, no. 1: 5–15.

a pristinely continental, post-fascist movement of democratic enlargement, segregated from the struggles and violences associated with Europe's colonial empires.

Colonial amnesia is not merely political, but rather epistemological. As scholars working within global historical sociology, such as Bhabra, argue that social and political formations must be understood through interconnected and spatially expansive relations. If European history is approached through this lens of interconnectedness, colonialism and empire necessarily come into view. For instance, European integration cannot be adequately understood as an internal continental process, but it was embedded in, and in many ways enabled by, imperial circuits of power, resources and governance.

Former spheres of influence have not disappeared. Rather, they have been rearticulated within a European framework. The interests of former colonial powers often persist under the institutional "umbrella" of the EU. In this sense, colonial legacies remain a structural element of EU identity. If several Member States were imperial powers, this fact does not remain external to the EU. The EU's external action, including peacekeeping missions in Africa and Middle East, cannot be fully detached from these historical continuities.

As Martina Paone observes, the EU, as the political representative body of Europe, is deeply rooted in European history. It is precisely through the way European history unfolded that the EU acquired its current political and economic weight.⁹⁰ Understanding the early roots of Europe is therefore essential to grasp both the process of European integration and its relationship with the wider world. As Paone illustrates, without acknowledging the origins of the Balkan Wars, for instance, one would struggle to fully comprehend the irregular trajectory of EU enlargement to the East. Similarly, without taking into account Britain's imperial legacy and its self-perception as a transatlantic power, key drivers of Brexit remain obscured.⁹¹

Within the framework of analytic eclecticism adopted in this study, concept of colonial amnesia provide a useful analytical lens for understanding how European actors often frame their external engagement in terms of universal norms and technical assistance, while downplaying or overlooking the historical legacies of colonial rule that continue to shape their relations between Europe and non-European regions.

⁹⁰Paone, *From Civilising Mission to Civilian Power: Rethinking EU Peacebuilding from a Postcolonial Perspective*.

⁹¹Ibid.

The problem of colonial amnesia becomes particularly visible in contemporary cases such as Mali. As a former colony of France, the persistence of French influence within the framework of EU external action illustrates how historical spheres of domination are rearticulated rather than dissolved. Although the intervention is framed as a collective European stabilization effort, the strategic agenda, operational leadership and security priorities have been deeply shaped by France's longstanding political, military and economic presence in the Sahel. The language has shifted from empire to partnership, from control to capacity-building, but the structural asymmetry of influence remains discernible.

2.4.2 Decolonizing knowledge about the European Union

According to the concept of coloniality of power and knowledge developed by Aníbal Quijano, at the end of the 19th century, Europe “suppressed the forms of knowledge production of the colonized peoples, systematically delegitimizing their models of thought, symbolic universes and modes of expression”.⁹² This process created a lasting hierarchy within the global epistemological structure; European models of rationality and modernity were presented as universal and superior, while all non-European forms of knowledge were marginalized or treated as “pre-modern”.⁹³ This pattern did not disappear with the end of formal colonialism, but on the contrary, its reproduction is still noticeable today under the great action of the EU for peace purposes. This dynamic is noticeable through the paternalistic pattern, that is, in the transfer of “knowledge from above”, or more precisely, from the European center to the periphery. It rests on the assumption that European forms of peace, development and democracy are the only legitimate ones, while local contexts, traditions and models of conflict resolution are often ignored or suppressed. Quijano terms these tendencies “epistemological colonialism”, describing how Europe continues to control the “production of meaning” in the global system, thereby maintaining hegemony over the concepts of modernity, rationality and peace.⁹⁴ He further notes that “if the concept of modernity refers only, or essentially, to ideas of the new, the advanced, the rational-scientific, then there is no doubt that it must be acknowledged that this phenomenon is possible in all

⁹²Quijano, Aníbal. 2000. *Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

cultures and historical epochs.”⁹⁵ Nonetheless, contemporary EU narratives still largely frame Europe as the epicenter of rationality.

Through its peacekeeping missions, EU presents itself as transferring technical expertise, institutional rationality and security doctrine to a fragile state. As not being epistemically neutral, military restructuring, governance reform and security sector reform are framed as universally valid solutions, rooted in European conceptions of statehood, territorial sovereignty and civil-military relations. Local historical trajectories, such as decentralized governance traditions in northern Mali or long-standing negotiations between territorial constraints that were externally imposed, central authority and nomadic communities, are often subordinated to imported institutional templates. In this sense, peacekeeping missions risks reproducing what Quijano calls “epistemological colonialism” referring to the assumption that European models of order and peace are inherently superior and transferable across contexts.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

3. POSTCOLONIAL DECONSTRUCTION OF NORMATIVE POWER IN EUROPEAN UNION PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

Since the end of the 1990s, the European Union has launched more than 40 peacekeeping missions and operations in the areas of Africa, the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. These missions, carried out within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), represent a concrete instrument through which the EU seeks to operationalize its foreign policy ambitions and confirm its status as a global peacebuilding actor. It is this normative framework that forms the basis for understanding the EU external relations.

In this way, the peacekeeping policy of the European Union becomes a significant mechanism of the process of establishing EU as a normative power, through which the EU tries to shape peace and security environment according to its own normative model.

Nevertheless, postcolonial critique provides a framework that problematizes the way in which this process takes place. As Manners himself warns, there is an obvious postcolonial concern that the concept of a "civilian power of Europe" as well as a "normative power of Europe" is nothing more than a neo-colonial attempt to "civilize" the world again, this time under the banner of European values.⁹⁶ This "civilizing mission" implicitly starts from the hierarchical relationship between the "civilized" European and the "unstable" or "underdeveloped" Other, most often African, Asian and Middle Eastern societies in which the EU conducts its peacekeeping operations. Gifawosen emphasizes the importance of postcolonial theory, and specifically the concept of Orientalism, in understanding the EU's external relations, arguing that the concept of Orientalism has the potential to make a significant contribution to the study of the notion of normative power and the power relations embedded within it in EU-Africa relations, but also to a broader analysis of the EU's global influence in the postcolonial era.⁹⁷

A postcolonial analysis of the normative power of EU in its peacekeeping policy, therefore, exposes the colonial patterns of power that persist within the institutional and discursive practices of the European Union. As it is said earlier, the central question raised by this paper is how postcolonial theory explains colonial patterns of normative power in the discourse of the European Union through its peacekeeping missions. The answer to this question requires a multi-layered analysis; from the normative dimension of how the EU

⁹⁶ Manners, „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?“.

⁹⁷ Gifawosen Markos, „Post-Colonial Perspective on the Discourse of 'Normative Power Europe' in the African-EU Relations," *Journal of Global Economics* 8, no. 6 (2020): article 355 (pp. 1–6).

constructs its own role as a "force of good", through the institutional dimension and the way missions are designed and implemented, to the epistemological dimension, that is, how the EU produces knowledge about "others" and legitimizes its own presence. Therefore, European peacekeeping operations, in addition to representing technical instruments of stabilization, can be seen as areas of reproduction of colonial power and knowledge, where European identity is reaffirmed through the "civilization" of non-European areas.

The EU's self-constructed identity of normative power is most often understood as the European Union's ability to influence the behaviour of other actors through the spread of its own norms and values. However, in the case of the EU, this power is not necessarily consciously applied, but acts structurally and discursively, even without conscious political intent. Precisely because of this, its effect can be analyzed on three levels; institutional, perceptual and discursive.

At the institutional level, the normative power of the European Union derives from its legal and political system, but also from its institutional presence in the international sphere. European Union. In this sense, normative power becomes part of the reputation that is considered an integral part of what constitutes the EU as a global actor. The legal *acquis communautaire* refers to the adoption of the fundamental values of the EU. These principles, in its own way, acts as a source of normative influence promoting it through EU's internal and external policies, rhetoric, actions and discourse, and becoming a model of ontological legitimacy. By universalizing the European concept of peace, state, security and defining what it means to be an "ordered society", a kind of moral hierarchy is established. Bazin and Tenenbaum in their book *L'Union européenne et la paix* state that the spread of democratic standards beyond the borders of Europe is carried out through the hybridization of practices and professional trajectories of EU actors.⁹⁸ Norms, values and ways of acting of the EU are intertwined with the fields of diplomacy, human rights, development and conflict resolution, thus creating a network of inter-institutional connections that legitimizes the presence of the EU as a "neutral mediator".⁹⁹ By founding institutions like the European Endowment for Democracy and the European Institute of Peace, the EU seeks to institutionally strengthen and professionalize its peace policy. Such institutional hybridity can also be seen as a legitimization strategy and a way for the EU to project its normative power through a depoliticized form of action. Sarah Dezalay interprets this process as a continuum between

⁹⁸Bazin, Anne, and Charles Tenenbaum. 2017. "Chapitre 2 – Des experts de la paix? Une sociologie des acteurs et des pratiques de la pacification européenne." In *L'Union européenne et la paix*, 39–62. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.

⁹⁹Ibid.

the humanitarian field and the development field, as well as between the development and security fields.¹⁰⁰ This erases the boundaries between peace aid and peace intervention as development becomes a security issue, humanitarianism turns into a form of foreign policy, and everything together contributes to the normalization of the European presence in post-colonial spaces.

Second, the normative power of Europe is based on the self-perception of the EU as a "force for good". The European Union often presents itself as a "civilian force" and a normative facilitator in the process of conflict transformation and peacekeeping. This self-perception of the EU as an ethical and civilizational model shapes the way it defines its foreign policy activities, including peace operations. Through the mechanisms of international socialization, it tries to influence the behaviour of other actors according to the logic of appropriateness - the idea that states, striving to be recognized as legitimate and modernized, will adopt the norms that the EU presents as universal.

The third, discursive level, refers to the way in which the European Union is spoken and written about in the public, academic literature, media, international institutions and the European Union documents themselves. "European discourse" builds an image of the EU as a moral role model and a rational model of modernity, which therefore produces a normative effect of perception by normalizing its norms through the symbolic power of representation. Another way of the discursive practice of representation is what Thomas Diez indicates that the discourse on Normative Power Europe includes the practice of "othering", constructing one's own identity through differentiation from "others", usually non-European actors. Diez further points out that this discourse in itself is "power acting upon power" (Foucault) as a form of epistemological dominance that affects how the world perceives the EU, but also how the EU perceives the world.¹⁰¹ The European Union constructs its international identity and frames its external actions by perceiving itself as a normative power, ideologically positioned as superior to the "Other", while discursively shaping image of itself as an actor that aligns more closely with universal norms than any other entity in global politics. This self-representation also carries an element of sensationalization, portraying the EU as uniquely capable of consistently applying its normative values both within its own borders

¹⁰⁰Dezalay, Sara. 2023. "The African Challenge and Its Aftermath: Colonial Legacies and the (Re)Making of the International Legal Order." In *[naziv knjige]*. Cham: Springer.

¹⁰¹Diez, Thomas. 2005. "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe.'" *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3.

and in its external engagements, thereby reinforcing its claim to exceptional moral and political authority on the international stage.¹⁰²

3.1. Reproduction of colonial narratives through European Union's peacekeeping policy

European Union's peacekeeping missions reflect its normative power through an insistence on Europeanizing conflict spaces via institutional reforms, democratic standards, the rule of law and a liberal framework for peacebuilding. Although this paper does not examine the practical implementation of peacekeeping missions, but rather focuses on the discursive dimension of EU peacekeeping policy, it is evident that a paternalistic tone is maintained in the language and conceptual frameworks of the policy. The principle of local ownership - which should ensure that local actors take the lead in peace processes - is frequently overlooked in these interventions. The European Union positions itself as the educator, while local communities are cast as students required to "adopt European values". This is exemplified by the Democratic Republic of Congo, described as "the largest laboratory for testing the EU's peace-building instruments".¹⁰³ (Paone, 2018).

This practice has deep roots in Europe's historical connection with colonial projects. Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson argue that the process of European integration itself contained colonial elements. They argue that European integration, among other things, arose from an attempt to preserve European global influence through connections with the African space, the so-called Eurafrica project. Today, in its modern form, this relationship manifests itself in the relationship of the European Union towards Africa, where the EU uses development, peace and migration policies as instruments of pressure and control. As Hansen and Jonsson note, today's "Marshall Plan for Africa," with which Angela Merkel has attempted to stem migration flows, clearly illustrates the continuity of colonial logic in European politics.¹⁰⁴

The European Union first formalized its relations with African states through the conclusion of the Lome Convention in 1975, within the broader institutional framework of

¹⁰²Gifawosen, „Post-Colonial Perspective on the Discourse of 'Normative Power Europe' in the African-EU Relations".

¹⁰³Paone, *From Civilising Mission to Civilian Power: Rethinking EU Peacebuilding from a Postcolonial Perspective*.

¹⁰⁴Hansen, Peo, and Stefan Jonsson. 2014. "Building Eurafrica: Reviving Colonialism through European Integration, 1920–1960." *Conference Proceedings*.

cooperation with the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. These relations were further specified and normatively consolidated with the signing of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement in 2000, which was presented as a “partnership” grounded in principles such as equality between partners, sovereignty in shaping domestic development policies and participation.¹⁰⁵ However, this formal equality was accompanied by clearly defined normative obligations imposed on ACP states, particularly those outlined in Article 9 of the Agreement, which explicitly establishes the European values and principles as universal standards. Beyond the development dimension, the Cotonou Agreement expanded cooperation to include peacebuilding policies, conflict prevention and resolution, as well as migration and security issues. This normatively dense framework highlights the tension between the discourse of partnership and the practice of conditionality. The Cotonou Agreement was replaced in 2023 by the Samoa Agreement, without a fundamental break from the hierarchical patterns established in the previous period.

A problematic aspect of these agreements lies in the high degree of normative and political conditionality that structures development cooperation between the EU and ACP states. Although the cooperation is formally presented as a partnership based on equality and mutual respect for sovereignty, in practice it is organized through a clearly hierarchical relationship, in which access to financial assistance, trade preferences and development programs is directly contingent upon compliance with pre-established normative principles. These principles, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, are not the result of joint normative negotiation but are imposed as the universal standards, whose interpretation and evaluation remain primarily under the control of the EU. As a result, development aid is transformed from an instrument of solidarity into a mechanism of discipline, where responsibility for failures in cooperation is shifted onto partner states, while structural inequalities and the asymmetry of power within the relationship remain largely unquestioned.

In the context of the EU peacekeeping policy, interventions in the domain of ensuring peace and security are shaped less by local political dynamics, historical conflict contexts or the specific needs of societies affected by violence and more by a normative framework reflecting the European understanding of sustainable peace. This implies that support for security sector reforms, stabilization missions or reconciliation programs depends on the EU’s assessment of partner states’ political suitability, transforming peacekeeping into an

¹⁰⁵Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, 2003, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/agree_internation/2003/159/oj/eng.

instrument of foreign policy and peripheral governance rather than a neutral mechanism for building peace.

This continuity between the colonial past and contemporary forms of peacekeeping can be further illuminated through the thought of Franz Fanon, who emphasized that colonial domination destroys not only social and economic structures but also the cultural identity of colonized peoples. Fanon warns that “national culture under colonial domination becomes a culture in the underground,” constrained and reduced to survival.¹⁰⁶ In the context of contemporary EU peacekeeping missions, a similar process can be observed. Local forms of knowledge, symbolism, and social organization are often suppressed under the pressure of “universal” norms promoted by the EU. In doing so, the EU, consciously or not, maintains what postcolonial theory recognizes as soft coloniality, a form of symbolic and epistemological control that substitutes for direct domination.

Therefore, a postcolonial understanding of European peace policies reveals that the European Union, although positioning itself as a bearer of peace, development and civilizational values, carries with it deeply rooted assumptions about the superiority of European knowledge and rationality. Given that it is nearly impossible to completely remove Eurocentric patterns from the institutional discourse of the European Union, it is very important to view certain external activities through the lenses of postcolonial theory. Otherwise, the lack of in-depth examination of the European colonial past and its legacy leads to the reproduction of colonial epistemology in contemporary EU peace practices which, although masked by the language of peace and development, continues to reflect the hierarchical relationship between the “European center” and the “non-European periphery”.

3.1.1 Case study analysis: EUCAP and EUTM Mali

The Sahara-Sahel region occupies a strategically significant position within contemporary global security governance due to its geopolitical location, migration routes and natural resources, making it an increasingly important site of external intervention by actors such as the EU, particularly France, the United States and China.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the 2012 crisis, which was triggered by a combination of political collapse, a military coup and an armed rebellion, Mali was considered a relatively stable democracy in

¹⁰⁶Fanon, Frantz. 2005. “On National Culture.” In *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, 198–219.

¹⁰⁷Filippov, V. R. 2015. “Uranium Factor in France’s Foreign Policy towards Africa.” *Sententia: European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no. 2, p. 2.

West Africa. According to Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) data, Mali was classified as a democracy from 1993 to 2011, and again from 2014 to 2019, although not fully in the strictest sense, while authoritarian regimes prevailed during 1989-1992 and during military coups period in the 2012-2013 and 2020-2022.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Regimes of the World (RoW) categorizes Mali as an electoral democracy during its democratic periods, highlighting that while democratic institutions existed, they were limited both institutionally and procedurally.¹⁰⁹ Freedom House reports, available from 2017, rated Mali as “partly free” with scores 45-44 out of 100 for the period 2017-2020.¹¹⁰ However, following the renewed military coup in 2020, the state of democracy in Mali began to deteriorate once again.

The triggers of the 2012 crisis were the military coup and the accompanying Tuareg armed rebellion in northern Mali, driven by accumulated grievances stemming from the prevailing constellation of power in the region. In January 2012, a non-international armed rebellion erupted in northern Mali. Rebel factions, including Tuareg separatists led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), initially allied with Islamist armed groups such as Ansar Dine, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), alongside Arab and Sonhay militias, rapidly seized control of key cities and military bases.

In parallel, on 22 March 2012, a month before a presidential election was to have taken place, mid-ranking officers of the Malian army calling themselves the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State led by Amadou Sanogo, staged a *coup d'état*, overthrowing President Amadou Toumani Toure and suspending the constitution of Mali, along with the civil and political rights. The coup resulted in the sudden collapse of democracy, undermining its key pillars such as the electoral system, freedom of speech and association and the stability and integrity of the rule of law. In addition, numerous serious human rights violations were documented, including arbitrary killings, detentions and abuse of both civilians and military personnel.

By April 2012, the Malian armed forces had effectively lost control over much of the northern territory, as government resistance progressively collapsed. This rapid deterioration enabled rebel groups to seize the three regional capitals, Timbuktu, Kidal and Gao, within the span of three days. The MNLA proclaimed independence from Mali, which received no

¹⁰⁸UNU-WIDER. 2017. *Mali: Desk Study on Aid and Democracy*. Helsinki: United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research. <https://www.wider.unu.edu/sites/default/files/Publications/Report/PDF/Mali-desk-study-aid-democracy.pdf>

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Freedom House. 2017. “Mali: Freedom in the World 2017 Country Report.” <https://freedomhouse.org/country/mali/freedom-world/2017>

international recognition and was promptly rejected by both the African Union and the EU as legally invalid. Infighting among the MNLA and Islamist rebel groups further destabilized the situation, as the groups failed to articulate a shared political vision for Azawad. Attempts at coordination quickly unraveled, giving way to open confrontation that culminated in a decisive defeat of the MNLA. Jihadist factions subsequently consolidated control over much of the territory, effectively sidelining Tuareg nationalist aspirations and transforming the conflict from a separatist struggle for independence into a matter framed primarily as the fight against transnational terrorism.

This shift in the balance of power prompted the Malian government to formally request foreign military assistance to reclaim the north. Therefore, in January 2013, France launched a military intervention against Islamist armed groups through “Operation Serval”. Six months later and with sustained international military backing, presidential elections were held under the supervision of the transitional authorities, while Malian government forces had regained control over most of the territory previously occupied by Islamist and Tuareg insurgents.

An initial ceasefire was achieved when the transitional government, the MNLA and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad signed a preliminary peace agreement that enabled the organization of unhindered, transparent and election-related violence-free presidential elections, paving the way for the establishment of a newly elected and internationally recognized government.¹¹¹ Importantly, this preliminary agreement also identified the key stakeholders in the political conflict and acknowledged the presence of additional armed and political movements. This broader recognition created the necessary foundation for more inclusive negotiations, ultimately culminating in the comprehensive Peace and Reconciliation Agreement concluded in March 2015, widely known as the Algiers Peace Agreement.¹¹²

Before turning to the role of the European Union in Mali and its peacekeeping strategy, it is necessary to clarify that the conflict in Mali cannot be reduced to an intra-state separatist attempt by the Tuaregs. First, the origins of the conflict cannot be understood solely as an internal rebellion, having in mind that they are closely linked to broader regional dynamics, including the onset of the Arab Spring and the downfall of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, which functioned as a security “shockwave” destabilizing the entire Sahel region. The

¹¹¹Nyirabikali, Gaudence. 2016. “The Mali Peace Process and the 2015 Peace Agreement.” In *SIPRI Yearbook 2016: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, 177–186. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

¹¹²European External Action Service. 2017. “Joint Declaration on the Implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali from the Algiers Process.” February 23, 2017.

return of heavily armed Tuareg fighters from Libya radically altered the balance of power in northern Mali. Consequently, the crisis was not merely autochthonous but fundamentally transnational in nature.

Second, the problem has significant historical depth. The roots of the crisis can be traced back to the colonial period, when borders were drawn without regard for ethnic and nomadic structures, creating a structural and enduring divide between the north and the south of the country.

Third, the conflict is deeply intertwined with ethnic and identity dynamics. Through migration to Libya and the Gulf states, Tuaregs developed a stronger sense of national consciousness and their political aspirations became more clearly articulated. However, as the conflict radicalized, northern Mali increasingly came to be framed as a space associated with terrorism and organized crime. This marked a crucial transformation of the narrative. Identity-based and autonomist claims were recast as security threats. Such a discursive shift is essential for understanding how the EU and other external actors legitimize their foreign policy presence in the region.

Fourth, Mali's geostrategic significance lies in its position at the crossroads of three regions: the Maghreb where Algeria and Morocco possess the capacity to influence political and security dynamics; the Sahel, characterized by fragile states; and the Gulf of Guinea region with which southern Mali maintains strong economic linkages. Consequently, Mali has long been a part of France's sphere of influence, which explains in large part why France launched Operation Serval to preserve its strategic leverage. In recent years, however, United States' interest in the region has grown, while emerging actors such as the BRICS have increasingly asserted their presence. As Filippov observes, "the Sahel region is considered a geopolitical and strategic intersection of the economic and political interests of the EU, France, the US and China, due to the presence of such valuable natural resources as hydrocarbons, uranium and gold".¹¹³

The European Union was active and important actor in Mali, and since the outbreak of the political and security crisis in 2012, the European Union has significantly intensified its engagement in Mali even more. In response to the collapse of democratic institutions and the armed rebellion in the north, the EU, together with its Member States, tried to be actively involved in the peace process in Mali, positioning itself as a guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement.

¹¹³Filippov, V. R. 2013. "Mali: The Battle for Uranium." *World Politics* 2: 1–47.

Through these missions, the EU projected itself not merely as a security actor, but as a normative actor seeking to export governance standards, liberal institutional models and particular understanding of security and statehood. The EU was actively involved in mediation and strengthening Mali's security sector through establishing the European Union Training Mission (EUTM), aimed at reforming and training the Malian army, and the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Sahel (EUCAP Sahel), designed to support internal security forces and enhance governance capacities. It was precisely the year of the outbreak of the war in Mali that the EU changed its strategy, which Bokeriya notes that "it is no coincidence."¹¹⁴ Instead of deploying combat troops with a limited mandate (as in DR Congo), it shifted to military training missions with the normative aim of strengthening the capacity of African states to manage crises independently, following the principle of "African problems-African solutions."

The EUTM Mali is a military training mission established in March 2013 as part of the EU's broader strategy to support the stabilization of Mali. The mission advises Malian authorities on the restructuring of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) "with a view to enabling them to conduct military operations aimed at restoring Malian territorial integrity and reducing the threat posed by terrorist groups."¹¹⁵ EUTM Mali has been engaged from the conflict period through the post-conflict phase of state reconstruction, forming an integral part of the implementation process of the Algiers Peace Agreement. The long-term objective of the mission is that by strengthening the Malian Armed Forces, it will contribute to the broader goals of peace and security in Mali.

EUTM Mali represents the EU's largest military training deployment, focusing on tailored training, capacity-building, providing guidance on military doctrine, human resources management, information management systems and intelligence. Specifically, the mission responds to the operational needs of the Malian Armed Forces by providing training and advice on command and control, logistical chains, international humanitarian law, civilian protection; targeted training programmes for personnel of Malian Armed Forces; support for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process to facilitate the reconstruction of inclusive Malian forces in line with the Peace Agreement; contribution to the G5 Sahel

¹¹⁴Bokeriya, Svetlana A. 2023. "The EU Peacekeeping Strategy in Mali: Challenges and Prospects." In *Africa and the Formation of the New System of International Relations—Vol. II: Beyond Summit Diplomacy: Cooperation with Africa in the Post-Pandemic World*, 317–328.

¹¹⁵Council Decision 2013/34/CFSP of 17 Jan. 2013 on a European Union military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian Armed Forces (EUTM Mali), Official Journal of the European Union, L14/19, 18 Jan. 2013

process, enhancing coordination and interoperability among the national armed forces of the region.

EUTM Mali advises the Ministry of Defence, Malian Armed Forces and military headquarters to implement structural reforms outlined in the Defence Programming Law. French-speaking, multidisciplinary military advisors provide expertise across logistics, intelligence, human resources, operational conduct, information systems, finance and planning. Only in first three years, OECD assessments indicated that EUTM Mali had successfully trained eight battlegroups, retrained five and conducted multiple leadership and specialized courses, cumulatively reaching over 8,000 soldiers, approximately two-thirds of the Malian Army.¹¹⁶

SIPRI's evaluation of EUTM Mali, using the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Newtork (EPON) framework, highlights the mission's capacity to prevent armed conflict and sexual violence, build confidence among local parties, stabilize areas, protect civilians, promote human rights, support institution-building and security sector reform, strengthen the rule of law and advance community policing and transitional justice. The assessment emphasizes factors such as political primacy, realistic mandates, a people-centered approach, legitimacy and credibility, coordination, coherence and promotion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

Having reconstructed the empirical terrain on which the missions were deployed, the analysis now turns from narrative to diagnosis. Read through the postcolonial optic, the operation of the EU's normative power in Mali becomes fully legible only when it is disaggregated across three interrelated levels, as mentioned before, on which it simultaneously unfolds. At the institutional level, the mission is legally designed and its authority structured through mandates and status agreements that encode a hierarchy between the actor who sets the norm and the territory on which it is applied. At the discursive-normative level, the EU constructs itself as a „force for good“, mobilising a technical and value-laden vocabulary that constitutes in Mali as a deficient object of reform. At the epistemological level, it determines what counts as legitimate knowledge, universalising European conceptions of security and statehood while consigning the region's colonial genealogy to silence. These levels are not autonomous but mutually reinforcing, and it is precisely their convergence, set finally against the voice of norm-receiver, that discloses how

¹¹⁶OECD. 2020. “Military Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali).” In *ODA and Non-ODA Eligible Activities*. Paris: OECD, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oda-and-non-oda-eligible-activities_5b102172-en/military-training-mission-in-mali-eutm-mali_f13bc0d5-en.html#section-d1e128

the ostensibly neutral language of peace, stability and the rule of law reproduces the colonial patterns of power the EU's self-representation is structurally predisposed to forget.

At the institutional level, the European Union's normative power is inscribed in the legal and organisational architecture of the missions themselves, before any single word of self-representation is uttered. The founding Council Decision 2014/219/CFSP defines the objective of EUCAP Sahel Mali as enabling „the Malian authorities to restore and maintain constitutional and democratic order... and to restore and maintain State authority and legitimacy throughout the territory of Mali by means of an effective redeployment of its administration.“¹¹⁷ The analytically decisive question is not what is to be restored, but who defines the standard against which restoration is measured. Although the mandate formally casts the Malian authorities as the acting subject, it is the EU that fixes the normative content of „constitutional and democratic order“, „rule of law“ and „legitimate“ State authority. Mali thus figures less as the author of these standards than as the territory of their application. This formulation inscribes the mission's very purpose within a distinctly Weberian and Eurocentric conception of statehood as the territorial monopoly of legitimate administration, and, at the level of the mandate's grammar, institutionalises the hierarchy between norm-sender and norm-receiver at the foundational moment of the mission's legal existence.¹¹⁸

This asymmetry is consolidated in legal form through the status-of-mission agreements concluded between the EU and the Republic of Mali. The 2013 EUTM Mali agreement and the 2019 EUCAP Sahel Mali status agreement establish a regime of privileges, immunities, jurisdictional exemption and freedom of movement for EU personnel within Malian territory.¹¹⁹ Whatever their technical necessity, these instruments constitute a concrete legal trace of what Paone identifies as the continuity of the „civilising mission“ as a juridical order in which the external actor is partially withdrawn from the sovereignty of the host State even as it operates within it.¹²⁰ The extraterritorial character of the mission is not incidental to its normative claim but is one of its enabling conditions, and it prefigures at the level of law the broader mode of engagement that Chandler terms „governance at a distance“,

¹¹⁷Council Decision 2014/219/CFSP of 15 April 2014 on the EU CSDP Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali), OJ L 113, 16.4.2014, p. 21, Art. 2.

¹¹⁸Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation* (1919): the state as the human community that "claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."

¹¹⁹Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Mali on the status of EUTM Mali, OJ L 106, 16.4.2013 (CELEX 22013A0416(01)); Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/1924 of 31 July 2019, OJ L 299, 20.11.2019, p. 1.

¹²⁰Paone, *From Civilising Mission to Civilian Power*.

through which external actors shape domestic institutional structures while formally preserving local sovereignty.¹²¹

The institutional narrative anchors its own legitimacy in the language of invitation and consent. The preambles of the founding decisions foreground the letters through which the Malian authorities requested EU assistance, most notably the invitation of the President of the Republic of Mali of 24 December 2012 that precedes EUTM Mali.¹²² Within the EU's self-account, this request functions as the juridical and moral guarantor of the mission's legitimacy. However, a postcolonial reading insists that consent extended under conditions of acute crisis and structural dependence does not dissolve asymmetry so much as it renders it invisible. The invocation of „request“ naturalises the intervention as a response to a freely articulated need, displacing from view the unequal field of power within which such a request is formulated. Consent, in other words, is mobilised discursively to convert a hierarchical relation into a partnership of equals.

This constitutive tension between advisory form and standard-setting substance runs through the entire institutional desing. While the European Union consistently casts its own role as merely advisory, cooperating with „legitimate“ Malian authorities, it is the EU that sets the normative and operational benchmarks against which those same authorities are measured. The consequence is legible in the way the missions' own texts handle political disruption the successive military coups and the broader instability of the transition are framed as an external „challenge“ to the mission claims to serve. At the level of nominalisation, this framing detaches instability from its historical and social drivers and marginalises Malian agency within the EU's own narrative of stabilisation, so that the burden of dysfunction is displaces onto the recipient while the intervening power retains the position of neutral standard-bearer. The institutional level thus established, in law and in mandate language, the asymmetry that the discursive level will subsequently clothe in the vocabulary of universal value.

If the institutional level furnished the architecture, the discursive-normative level supplies its legitimating language, and it is here that the analysis reaches its core. Subjected to critical discourse analysis, the EU's texts on Mali reveal a dense and repetitive technical vocabulary, such as „stabilisation“, „capacity building“, „training“, „mentoring“, „rule of

¹²¹David Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

¹²²Council Decision 2013/34/CFSP of 17 January 2013 (EUTM Mali), OJ L 14, 18.1.2013, p. 19, recitals (2) i (7).

law“, „good governance“, whose cumulative effect is to depoliticise the intervention and to constitute Mali as a fundamentally deficient object as a polity lacking capacity, order and stability, and therefore requiring external repair. This lexical field silently reactivates the binary opposition between the „civilised“ European and the „unstable“ „underdeveloped“ other against which Manners himself warned, and which Gifawosen reads through the prism of Saidian Orientalism.¹²³ Language, on this reading, does not neutrally describe the intervention but performs it, rendering the EU’s presence legible as assistance rather than as the exercise of power.

Nowhere is this performative operation more concrete than in the mission’s founding lexicon of restoration. The framing of EUTM Mali as dedicated to „restoring Malian territorial integrity“ and „supporting the restoration of state authority“ is far from a neutral description of operational objectives.¹²⁴ The lexical choice is not incidental. It presupposes a prior condition of integrity to be recovered, and in so doing naturalises the colonial-era border whose very artificiality lies at the root of the northern conflict. What the text presents as the recovery of a natural order is, on closer inspection, the reinstatement of a specifically colonial spatial settlement. This discursive move exemplifies colonial amnesia, the systematic elision, within EU institutional language, of the colonial genealogy of the very institutions and boundaries the mission purports to defend. In that manner, the silence is itself the analytical object. By foregrounding institutional weakness and terrorist threat while omitting the historical role of French colonial rule in the formation of the Malian state, the discourse renders of the EU’s normative authority self-evident and displaces the burden of dysfunction entirely onto the recipient. This substantiates the thesis’s first hypothesis, that the EU’s normative discourse functions as a legitimating mechanism that translates colonial hierarchies into the ostensibly neutral vocabulary of universal norms.

The same logic operates at the level of what the texts systematically omit. Mission documentation describes EUTM Mali’s work through the technical registers of command and control, logistics, international humanitarian law and civilian protection, while the conspicuous absence of any reference to the structural transformation of the security sector, or to its embeddedness in Malian society, functions as a form of depoliticisation. Technical training is foregrounded precisely so that the deeper political and historical realities, involving the legacy of French colonialism, the external pressures on Malian sovereignty, recede from

¹²³Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?"; Gifawosen, "Post-Colonial Perspective on the Discourse of 'Normative Power Europe' in the African-EU Relations".

¹²⁴Council Decision 2013/34/CFSP, Art. 1(2)

view. This is a process of neutralisation, whereby political and historical context is evacuated from the official narrative, leaving a facade of purely technical legitimacy. The depoliticised idiom is not a by-product of bureaucratic drafting but the very medium through which asymmetry is made to appear as expertise.

That this binary is not merely implicit but textually demonstrable becomes clear at the level of the EU's strategic frameworks. The EU's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel describes the region through a lexicon of „vulnerabilities, fragilities and insecurity“, while positioning the EU as the region's „privileged partner“. ¹²⁵ Read against the grain, the strategy distributes attributes along a stable axis - to the EU it assigns expertise, values, partnership and stability, but when it comes to the Sahel it assigns fragility, insecurity, disorder and threat. This asymmetric distribution of predicates is the textual signature of a Self-Other hierarchy in which the European identity is affirmed precisely through the constitution of the Sahel as its deficient counterpart. ¹²⁶ In Mignolo's terms, it reinscribes the colonial partition between the civilised and the governable within the depoliticised idiom of technical assistance, so that in framing insecurity as the consequence of weak governance, insufficient institutional capacity and terrorism, the discourse renders invisible the colonial production of state fragility itself, as the very historical process through which the boundaries, institutions and hierarchies now designated as „fragile“ were originally installed. ¹²⁷

This self-affirmation is enacted most explicitly through the vocabulary of values. The EEAS factsheet on EUCAP Sahel Mali frames the mission's three lines of action within a commitment to „(i) human rights, (ii) gender equality, iii) the rule of law“. ¹²⁸ Analytically, this enumeration is performative rather than merely descriptive. In naming the values it defends, the EU constitutes its own identity as a „force for good“, reaffirming its normative subjectivity through the reform and the „civilising“ of Malian institutions. The mission thus becomes a site at which European identity is produced, and not simply projected. This is the discursive dimension that Diez identifies as „othering“, the construction of the Self through

¹²⁵Council of the European Union, *The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel – Council Conclusions*, ST 7723/2021, Brussels, 16 April 2021,

¹²⁶Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 613–636.

¹²⁷Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 11, 20. (

¹²⁸European External Action Service. *Factsheet: EUCAP Sahel Mali*. Brussels: EEAS, July 2024.

differentiation from a non-European other, and it discloses the reciprocal structure of the process.¹²⁹ At this point, the reform of Mali is simultaneously the self-authorship of Europe.

Moreover, the construction of the Other, is doubled rather than singular. The civilian mission first extends this logic into the domain and internal security. Mandated to strengthen Mali's police, national guard and relevant ministries and to operationalise the Malian component of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, EUCAP Sahel Mali is embedded within a broader construction of the Sahel as a „zone“ of terrorism, irregular migration and transnational instability threatening European security. This securitising move is consequential, for it reframes what are, in the first instance, Malian and regional political questions as European security problems, thereby licensing the externalisation of EU security governance beyond the EU's own borders. In this way, stabilisation in Mali becomes inseparable from the management of threats to Europe itself.. This Othering is then redoubled along a second axis. Following the deterioration of relations with the transitional authorities and the growing presence of Russian and Wagner-linked forces, Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1966 mandated EUTM Mali to „support the strategic communication efforts...and expose violations and abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law by foreign forces in Mali.“¹³⁰ Here the EU positions itself as the bearer of truth and value against a rival external actor, generating a twofold othering. On one side Mali, the object still to be trained, and on the other side is the geopolitical competitor who „corrupts“ the space of intervention. In both movements the same discursive operation is at work, naming the interest of the intervening power are quietly recoded as the needs of the intervened-upon, and it is this operation that the epistemological level, to which the analysis now turns, raises from the register of language to that of knowledge itself.

Beneath the institutional and discursive levels lies a third, epistemological stratum, at which the EU determines what counts as legitimate knowledge and who is authorised to produce it. The most consequential analytical move here is the reading of that which is absent. Across the entire corpus, the founding decisions, the Sahel strategy, the mission factsheets, there is no acknowledgement of the French colonial past in Mali and the wider Sahel, nor of any historical responsibility flowing from it. The EU presents itself as an actor born, in Deloye's phrase, in „historically neutral space“, detached from any imperial

¹²⁹Thomas Diez, "Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 613–636.

¹³⁰Council of the European Union. *Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/1966 of 17 October 2022 Amending Decision 2013/34/CFSP on a European Union Military Mission to Contribute to the Training of the Malian Armed Forces (EUTM Mali)*. Official Journal of the European Union, L 270 (October 18, 2022): 82–83.

genealogy.¹³¹ This silence is not an incidental omission but the analytical datum itself. It is colonial amnesia in operation, the constitutive forgetting upon which the EU's „virgin birth“ narrative rests. By foregrounding institutional weakness and terrorist threat while eliding the colonial production of the very borders and institutions the mission purports to defend, the discourse renders the EU's normative authority self-evident and displaces the burden of dysfunction wholly onto the recipient.

The epistemological asymmetry is equally visible in the direction in which knowledge is authorised to flow. The missions are articulated through a one-directional transfer, in which expertise moves from the European centre to the Mali as a non-European periphery, while Malian experience, locally embedded conflict-resolution mechanisms and indigenous conceptions of security and order are never constituted as legitimate sources of knowledge. As Quijano's coloniality of knowledge, the systematic delegitimation of non-European epistemologies and their subordination to a European model presented as universal.¹³² As Pantilimon argues, the EU continues to position itself as a „universal source of knowledge“ and an exceptional norm-setter, sustaining its identity through the disregard of existing epistemological pluralities and a posture of selective self-reflection.¹³³ Epistemic coloniality, symbolic and knowledge-based control substituting for direct domination, is thus the deepest layer at which the missions operate.

This epistemic hierarchy is not confined to the level of language but is operationalised in the substantive priorities of the missions themselves, nowhere more visibly in the gap between the rhetoric and the practice of local ownership. It is widely accepted, in both policy and scholarship, that peacekeeping operations achieve durable results only when they are genuinely rooted in local communities. Yet, in the EU's Malian engagement local ownership functions less as a substantive redistribution of decision-making power than as a legitimating discourse through which externally designed frameworks espoused a „light footprint“ approach, programme design originated largely in Brussels and was driven by counterterrorism, migration and trafficking priorities rather than by locally articulated needs.¹³⁴ Successive mandate revisions tilted the mission's focus still further towards priorities of manifest interest to Europe. The 2023-2025 programming, adopted through Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/96, concentrated EUCAP Sahel Mali on „integrated border

¹³¹Deloye, 2006.

¹³²Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580

¹³³Ioana Pantilimon, "The EU-LAC Cooperation...", *Proceedings of the 55th International Academic Conference, Vienna* (Prague: IISES, 2020),

¹³⁴Peters et al. 2018, 82

management“, the „fight against trafficking in human beings“ and „the fight against terrorism and transnational organised crime“, culminating in an Integrated Border Security Centre at the Guinean frontier and a „refugee waiting room“ at Bamako airport.¹³⁵ This progressive reorientation towards border control and migration management, priorities that map far more closely onto the EU’s internal security anxieties than onto locally articulated needs, substantiates observers’ contention that many interventions were effectively “designed to fail” in local terms, missing key smuggling routes or underestimating local capacities.¹³⁶ In that sense, this validates the thesis’ second hypothesis that the operational practice of EU missions embeds a Eurocentric conception of security that marginalises local knowledge and agency.

In the whole, EU peacekeeping in Mali thus exemplifies broader processes of epistemic hierarchy and the colonisation of knowledge production within international peace practice. The missions implicitly universalise European understandings of security sector reform, military professionalism and state authority, while marginalising indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms and locally embedded security practices, so that European governance rationalities are normalised as technically superior, politically neutral and universally applicable despite being historically and culturally contingent. This dynamic resonates with Said’s account of Orientalism. The EU’s discourse constitutes Malian society as a politically deficient space requiring external guidance, a construction that both presupposes and reproduces the epistemic authority of the intervening power.¹³⁷ Richmond has advanced an analogous argument, contending that liberal interventions systematically depoliticise conflict by privileging technocratic governance over historically grounded political solutions, while Chandler names the underlying mechanism „governance at a distance“, the mode of intervention through which external actors shape domestic institutional structures via capacity-building, security assistance and administrative reform while formally preserving local sovereignty.¹³⁸ Although EUTM Mali is framed as a partnership grounded in Malian ownership, the EU retains the authority to define what counts as legitimate security

¹³⁵Statewatch, "EU Council: CSDP Missions and Migration," LIMITE 14103/24; i Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/96 of 10 January 2023 amending Decision 2014/219/CFSP (EUCAP Sahel Mali), OJ L 12, 13.1.2023.

¹³⁶Morten Bøås, *Rival Priorities in the Sahel: Finding the Balance between Security and Development*, Policy Note 3:2018, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2018(*potvrđi da je ovo Bøås 2018 koji citiraš*); Francesco Strazzari, 2015.

¹³⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

¹³⁸David Chandler, *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

governance, and this asymmetry discloses the persistence of hierarchical relations at the very heart of the EU's normative power projection.

The three levels analysed thus far reconstruct the intervention from the standpoint of the norm-sender. To honour the methodological commitment of this thesis, to restore the agency and epistemic standing of those to whom EU external action is directed, the analysis must finally place the EU's discourse in dialogue with the discourse of the norm-receiver. Read against the EU's account, the statements of Mali's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdoulaye Diop, function as a counter-archive that renders audible precisely what the European texts suppress.

The technique here is juxtaposition, a reading „against the grain“ that sets the two narratives side by side. Where the EU frames its presence as a value-driven response undertaken at Mali's request, Diop, addressing the Security Council on 16 June 2023, declared that „international prescriptions...have clearly shown their limits“ and asked pointedly why the security situation in Mali 2013 was so much better than it had become a decade later.¹³⁹ Before the General Assembly in September 2023, he denounced the policy of certain States seeking „to exercise neocolonial dominion and subject other peoples and nations.“¹⁴⁰ The point at which these two narratives collide, the EU's „partnership“ against Mali's „neocolonial dominion“, is exactly the point at which the asymmetry concealed by the European text is exposed.

Diop's intervention is not merely a geopolitical grievance but a discursive act of epistemic resistance. In reframing an externally designed intervention as a continuation of colonial subordination, the norm-receiver refuses the position of passive object assigned to it by the EU's discourse and rearticulates the relationship on its own terms. Whatever the strategic motivations of the transitional government, this act empirically substantiates the thesis's central hypothesis that EU peacekeeping functions not only as a mechanism for the diffusion of norms but also as an instrument that reproduces global asymmetries of power under the guise of normative universalism. It is precisely this epistemic contestation that the decolonial optic of this study is designed to render audible.

The endpoint of this misalignment is institutional. The termination of EUTM Mali in May 2024, the Member states deciding „by common agreement not to extend the mandate...taking into account developments in the political and security situation on the

¹³⁹Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, *Address by H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Diop ... 16 June 2023*

¹⁴⁰UN General Assembly, *Statement by H.E. Abdoulaye Diop, General Debate of the 78th Session*, 23 September 2023.

ground“, can be read as the rupture of the consent narrative on which the mission’s legitimacy had rested.¹⁴¹ When the host State withdraws its consent, the relationship is retrospectively disclosed as having been asymmetric rather than genuinely partnered all along. The collapse of the mission thus confirms, at the level of political practice, what the discourse-analytical reading establishes at the level of the text, that the vocabulary of EU’s normative power affirmation did not transcend the colonial genealogy of the Sahel so much as it depended upon its forgetting.

¹⁴¹ „End of Mandate EUTM Mali," EEAS; „Mali: Communiqué de presse sur le non-renouvellement du mandat d'EUTM Mali," Press Club Brussels Europe.

4. TOWARDS A DECOLONIZED VISION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The postcolonial critique developed throughout the preceding chapters does not culminate in a call for the abandonment of the European Union's normative engagement in international peacekeeping. To read the argument in such terms would be to misapprehend both its analytical stakes and its normative ambition. What the preceding analysis has sought to demonstrate is that the EU's peacekeeping practice in Mali cannot be responsibly assessed within a conceptual frame that treats normativity as a politically innocent category, nor within an analytical vocabulary that regards the transmission of European norms as a self-evident contribution to the international order. The task, therefore, is not one of rejection, but of reconceptualization. Its aim is to contribute to sustained rethinking of the assumptions, practices, and asymmetries of power that underpin the EU's external action, and a corresponding effort to imagine forms of international engagement that are more reflexive, more plural and more genuinely dialogical than those currently on offer.

Such an ambition finds its most articulate expression in what Fisher-Onar and Nicolaidis have described as the decentring agenda, a research programme that seeks to rethink Europe in a non-European world and to reconstitute European agency without reproducing the Eurocentric premises of the 20th century.¹⁴² Their argument, formulated within the mainstream of EU external action studies rather than its margins, is that “only by acknowledging the inflections of colonialism in the EU project itself, can the EU reinvent its normative power in the 21st century”.¹⁴³ This reinvention is undertaken from within the vocabulary of EU studies, yet it is informed by the analytical resources of postcolonial thought, that the present chapter seeks to outline. A decolonized vision of the EU, understood in this sense, would require the EU to move beyond hierarchical understandings of governance, peace, security and development, and towards forms of international engagement grounded in epistemic humility, mutual recognition and political pluralism.

4.1. Reflexive power, mutual learning and pluriversal Europe

The first constitutive element of decolonized vision of the EU concerns the capacity of the EU scholars to interrogate its own normative frameworks, rather than to project them outwards as if they possessed a self-evident universal validity. This shift is not without

¹⁴²Onar, Nora Fisher, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis. 2013. “The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a Post-Colonial Power.” *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2: 283–303.

¹⁴³Ibid.

antecedents within EU studies itself. In his influential reconsideration of the NPE thesis, Thomas Diez argued that the discourse through which the EU represents itself as a normative actor is inseparable from a discursive practice of European identity construction, one in which third parties are systematically constituted as “others” against whom the EU’s normative self is defined.¹⁴⁴ Diez’s argument concludes with an explicit call for “a greater degree of self-reflexivity in the representation of the EU as a normative power”, a call that Manners himself acknowledged and partially incorporated in his subsequent response.¹⁴⁵

What is here termed reflexive power, designates the analytical and political consequences of taking this call seriously. Reflexive power is not the negation of normative power, but its epistemological transformation. It refers to the capacity of the EU to promote norms externally and to interrogate the assumptions, hierarchies, and exclusions embedded within its own normative frameworks, including the historically Eurocentric criteria through which categories such as rule of law, good governance and legitimate statehood have been constructed and universalized. In this understanding, reflexive power places the burden of justification not solely upon the recipient of European norms, but also upon the sender.

The empirical relevance of such a reorientation is illustrated with particular clarity by the trajectory of EU engagement in Mali. As Wilen observes in her recent study for the European Parliament, the EU’s engagement with the Sahel has been marked, over more than a decade, by “shifting strategic logics, strong Member state influence and limited responsiveness to local political dynamics”, as a configuration that culminated in the rupture of relations with the transitional authorities in Bamako and the effective termination of the EU’s military and civilian missions. A comparable diagnosis is offered by Peccini, whose critical appraisal of the Malian case identifies an overemphasis on security and migration, coupled with a neglect of “Mali’s deep social and ethnic imbalances”, as a structural weakness rooted in “the systemic limits of the EU’s external actions and its colonial ties with Africa”. Read together, these findings suggest that the absence of reflexivity, the inability or unwillingness of EU institutions to subject their own normative premises to critical scrutiny, has functioned as an operational liability, contributing directly to the collapse of the EU’s peacekeeping architecture in the region.

¹⁴⁴Diez, Thomas. 2005. “Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering ‘Normative Power Europe.’” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3: 613–636.

Manners, Ian. "The European Union as a normative power: A response to Thomas Diez." *Millennium* 35.1 (2006): 167-180.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

The second constitutive element concerns the relational and epistemic configuration of peacekeeping practice. To decolonize the EU's peacekeeping engagement would require the substitution of unidirectional models of knowledge transfer with practices of mutual learning. Rather than treating local actors primarily as beneficiaries or implementers of externally designed reforms, peacekeeping processes would need to recognize locally embedded political practices, indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms and alternative conceptions of security as equally legitimate sources of knowledge.

The theoretical foundation for this reorientation is provided by the second and third steps of the Fisher-Onar and Nicolaidis decentring framework, respectively conceptualized as engagement with others' views and reconstruction of European external action along multilogical lines. Within this frame, the classical dyad of "norm-sender" and "norm-receiver", which has structured much of the NPE literature, is replaced by a relational field in which normative claims are negotiated across radically asymmetrical historical and political contexts.¹⁴⁶ As Keukeleire and Lecocq have argued in their operationalization of the decentring agenda, such a reorientation requires EU foreign policy analysis to move beyond the internal institutional logics of the EU and to take seriously the political, cultural and historical rationalities of the societies with which the EU seeks to engage.¹⁴⁷

The Malian case again offers a paradigmatic, if painful, illustration. The collapse of EUTM Mali and EUCAP Sahel Mali missions constructed around the assumption that the European template of security sector reform could be transmitted, more or less intact, to a post-conflict setting shaped by the sedimentations of French colonial rule, reveals with unusual clarity the analytical costs of unidirectional knowledge transfer. Mutual learning would demand that the EU treat the political knowledge of Malian actors, including their scepticism towards European normative claims, as constitutive of, rather than as an obstacle to, effective peacekeeping.

4.2. Postcolonial perspective within EU Studies

EU Studies has traditionally been focused on thematics of European integration primarily as an internal European process, concentrating on the development of European

¹⁴⁶Onar, Nora Fisher, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis. 2013. "The Decentring Agenda: Europe as a Post-Colonial Power." *Cooperation and Conflict* 48, no. 2: 283–303.

¹⁴⁷Keukeleire, Stephan, and Sharon Lecocq. 2018. "Operationalising the Decentring Agenda: Analysing European Foreign Policy in a Non-European and Post-Western World." *Cooperation and Conflict* 53, no. 2: 277–295.

institutions, political and economic integration, governance, enlargement, as well as on the EU's identity and a global role. Within these dominant and "mainstream" approaches, Europe has often been treated as a relatively autonomous political space, analytically separated from the colonial histories. However, European identity did not emerge in a historical vacuum. Colonialism, decolonisation and Europe's long-standing relations with the Global South formed an important part of the historical context within which the European "project" developed. Such an approach raises important questions for the study of the EU's contemporary external action and its global position.

A growing body of scholarship has begun to challenge the separation between European integration and Europe's colonial past. Nevertheless, this scholarship remains relatively fragmented and has not always been fully incorporated into the theoretical and analytical mainstream of EU studies. Colonialism is often acknowledged as an important historical background but is less frequently examined as a factor that continues to shape contemporary EU policies and external actions. Moreover, much of scholarship engaging with these questions has emerged from postcolonial studies, critical studies, anthropology, development studies and critical security studies, rather than from approaches that are used within EU Studies itself. Therefore, the gap is not just viewed as an empirical absence of scholarship on colonialism/postcolonialism and the EU. The gap exists as an analytical and disciplinary concerning the extent to which postcolonial insights have been integrated into dominant approaches to studying external actions of EU.

This difference becomes particularly visible in the questions asked by the respective approaches that has been used in this work. Whereas mainstream EU Studies often focuses on how the EU acts and how effective its external action is, a postcolonial critique asks from which historical and epistemological position the EU acts and whose understanding of effectiveness, security, peace, development is being applied. Similarly, while conventional approaches frequently examine how the EU promotes or diffuses norms beyond its borders, postcolonial critique attention to who defines these norms, whose knowledge is considered legitimate and under what relations of power such norms are being produced and transferred. In that way, the contribution of postcolonial dimension within EU Studies lies in adding colonial history as an additional contextual variable and in questioning the analytical and epistemological assumptions through which EU external action, including peacekeeping, itself is understood.

The intersection between these two bodies of literature remains insufficiently explored, particularly in relation to EU security and military engagement in Africa. Finally,

bringing postcolonial insights into dialogue with the literature on the EU as a normative power can provide a more critical understanding of how norms, security practices and forms of intervention are produced and implemented in contexts characterised by historically unequal relations between Europe and the Global South.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The significance of this thesis extends beyond the confines of a single case or a single body of theory. At the disciplinary level, it responds to a persistent silence within the study of the European Union, a field that has largely narrated the EU through the vocabulary of integration, institutional design, enlargement and normative actorness, while treating the colonial histories of its member states as external to, or safely superseded by, the contemporary European project. By bringing a postcolonial optic into the analysis of EU peacekeeping, this study seeks to add a further theoretical perspective, to reconstruct the very terms through which the EU is understood, and thereby to render visible the epistemic hierarchies that its self-representation has tended to naturalise.

The theoretical contribution of the thesis lies in its refusal to treat Normative Power Europe, understood as theoretical corpus, and postcolonial critique as mutually exclusive frameworks. Rather than discarding the concept of normative power, the study engages it critically, demonstrating that the postcolonial reading does not negate but deepens our understanding of the EU as an international actor. What appears, within the mainstream literature, as the benign diffusion of universal values is shown, when read against the grain, to rest upon a prior and unexamined foundation of colonial continuity. In this sense, the analysis reveals the coloniality that persists beneath the ostensibly neutral language of peace, security, good governance, rule of law, etc.

The political and ethical relevance of these findings is considerable. This thesis does not deny the value of peace, human rights or international cooperation as horizons of contemporary politics. It asks, instead, a more uncomfortable and necessary question, namely what it means when such ends are pursued through structures that reproduce the very hierarchies they claim to transcend. In a period in which the EU increasingly articulates its external action in the language of strategic autonomy and partnership with the Global South, an understanding of these mechanisms carries direct consequences for the way relations between Europe and the formerly colonised worlds are conceived and conducted.

Finally, the contemporary salience of the analysis is also difficult to overstate. The collapse of the EU missions in Mali in 2024, the reorientation of the Sahelian states towards alternative partners, and the explicit invocation of neocolonial domination by the Malian authorities themselves all indicate that the questions posed here are not matters of theoretical abstraction, but living political tensions unfolding in the present. By reading these developments through a postcolonial lens, the thesis offers an account of why such

relationships have fractured, locating the explanation in the deeper and historically sedimented asymmetries of knowledge and power that structure the encounter between Europe and its others.

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