The layering of liberal and postcolonial development practices: Analyzing EU-Africa development cooperation under the Ursula von der Leyen Commission amidst colonial legacy

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Abstract

This thesis looks at the complex dynamics of the political economy and postcolonial dimensions of EU-Africa development cooperation. Tracing the historical path of EU-Africa relations, from the colonial period and the Treaty of Rome 1957 to contemporary agreements such as the Joint EU-Africa Strategy of 2007 and the newest "Comprehensive Strategy for Africa" by the European Commission, published in March 2020, the thesis examines continuing critiques of asymmetrical power dynamics, showing that the EU pertains a mainly liberal approach towards its cooperation with Africa, but hides social and economic postcolonial practices behind this approach. Through studying layering of postcolonial and liberal development practices, focused on the current EU-Africa Strategy of the European Commission, the thesis shows how colonial legacies continue to maintain unequal power relations between the EU and Africa, despite the rhetoric of an "equal" partnership. The practical implications of these perspectives are shown through a country case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The thesis is an attempt to bring the very distinct areas of international political economy and postcolonial studies into conversation, as postcolonial scholarship has been reluctant to open up for economic analysis, while IPE literature frequently has been hesitant to take up postcolonial critique.

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Introduction

The history of EU-Africa relations goes back to the first interactions of European traders with Africans in coastal areas, through which trade in gold, ivory, and other items was established, in exchange for manufactured products and glasses from Europe (Kelly 1997). But the imperial conquest of Africa paved the way for the establishment of full colonial control over the government apparatus and the economy of several countries on the continent, until the formal decolonization of African countries under European control starting in the 1960s (Walker 2019). Since the formal decolonization process, the EU has established a partnership with the continent to promote development, with various reoccurring meetings and formal agreements, including the Lomé and Cotonou Agreement, as well as the Africa-EU Partnership, established in 2000, as formal political channel for the EU's relations with Africa. In 2007, the Joint EU-Africa Strategy followed. The EU's newest development, under the European Commission (EC) from 2019 to 2024, has been the introduction of a new "Comprehensive Strategy for Africa" in March 2020, which mainly focuses on EU policy toward sustainable development, climate change, and migration, emphasizing the role of the EU and Africa as "equal partners". The EC states in this document that the EU-African relationship is changing and evolving into new dimensions, which leads to the need to develop a new European strategy (European Commission 2020).

However, a common perception among postcolonial scholarship remains that the Euro-African relationship is not a partnership between equals, but one where the EU continues to mainly define the agenda and frequently neglects the colonial roots of the partnership (Strange and Martins 2019, Markos 2020). This thesis examines how the European Commission in its current strategy constructs partnership patterns in development cooperation between Europe and Africa, put against the European history of colonialism and its impacts on policies. On the one hand, the EU-Africa cooperation has followed extensive social and economic liberalization

patterns, that uphold the notions of free trade, close ties, and the EU's self-understanding as a norm exporter of human rights, good governance and democracy. Nevertheless, colonial legacy does not only shape several structures within African states, but also reproduces discourses on Africa in postcolonial times and impacts the nature of relations between Africa and Europe today (Sebhatu 2020, 42).

Given the fact that EU development cooperation policy is neither only liberal, nor only colonial, the research question is how the layers of liberal and postcolonial developmental practices interact within the current EU-Africa Strategy, and what the implications for power relations between the EU and Africa are. Layering, as conceptualized in this context, refers to a method of reform within institutions where certain elements are deemed unchangeable. Despite this, reform actors adapt by working around these fixed elements, introducing new layers of practices, processes, or structures to address existing issues or introduce change. In essence, layering acknowledges the constraints within an institution while finding ways to innovate and adapt within those constraints.

Through answering this question, the goal is to show how the implementation of the EU Africa strategy under the von der Leyen Commission has affected development policies in Africa, and to uncover its liberal and postcolonial aspects. Therefore, I employ postcolonial approaches that aim to reveal potential power imbalances and asymmetries. To limit the geographical scope and show how these implications are represented in practice, I will conduct a case study of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and analyze how the newest strategy has affected the EU's development policies towards the DRC.

The EU plays a significant role within international development cooperation specifically, as it spends nearly half of its development budget on Africa (European Parliament 2021, 4). At the same time, development cooperation lies at the heart of the EU-African partnership and therefore needs to be examined more deeply. Moreover, the EU development

strategy has significantly developed as a policy field during the last decades, creating a set of idealist criteria (Furness et al. 2020). However, postcolonial scholars have accused the EU of not always acting in line with its normative self-image to apply these criteria, and that it has not addressed the consequences of the colonial period properly. This postcolonial research on the history of EU-Africa cooperation highlights the power imbalance that exists in the EU-Africa relationship and how the EU's discourse reinforces it (Babić 2023). This thesis contributes to this endeavor, but aims at creating a conversation between political economy and postcolonial studies. I argue that more interconnectedness between these fields, overcoming the separation, is a significant addition towards current research. The research underscores the need for a more balanced and equitable partnership between Europe and Africa that recognizes the agency of African countries and participation in development processes. This type of research can help to challenge dominant discourses and promote more equitable EU-Africa relations, as well as can inform policy-making by highlighting the need to address power imbalances and promote mutual cooperation and respect, and face the colonial past, especially within the context of the upcoming EU elections, as a new Commission will be in the formation process from June 2024.

The thesis is structured as follows: firstly, in chapter 1, I will provide a literature review on the political economy of EU-Africa development cooperation and its postcolonial aspects. Then, in chapter 2, I will provide an overview of the methodological framework of layering used in this thesis. In chapter 3, I will focus on the Joint EU-Africa Strategy of the von der Leyen Commission to demonstrate how the current commission has conceptualized its approach towards EU-Africa cooperation. This chapter will serve as a basis for chapter 4, which provides a country case study of the DRC. There, I will analyze how the discourse of the strategy is represented in the development policies of the EU towards this country, reflected in its "Multiannual Indicative Program 2021-2027".

1 Literature review: EU-Africa development cooperation

The following section will explore the body of literature on the political economy of the EU's development cooperation with Africa as well as the postcolonial aspects of EU-Africa development cooperation. The focus lies on these two strands as this thesis aims at combining the EU's stance in development cooperation from a political economy perspective with its postcolonial aspects.

1.1 The political economy of EU-Africa development cooperation

The EU is the largest provider of development aid worldwide, counting the overall funds disbursed both by the EU and its Member States via their bilateral agreements (Council of the EU 2022). According to David, based on the high amount of funding and resources used to the periodic renewal of trade agreements and development assistance, EU-Africa relations constitute one of the EU's most significant development initiatives (David 2000, in Babarinde 2019, 111). This economic relationship between the EU and Africa dates back to the Treaty of Rome 1957 (Babarinde 2019, 111), as the core of Europe's integration within the Treaty of Rome and creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) circled around the common agreement of European countries that they needed Africa to reestablish Europe's own productive power after World War II (Sebhatu 2020, 42). The centrality of this agreement is represented in the third, often overlooked goal stated in the Schuman Declaration: "the development of the African continent" (Fondation Robert Schuman 2011, 1).

The agreement on the Treaty of Rome contained the establishment of the European Development Fund (EDF), which was created to guarantee a collective approach for financing aid towards Africa (Langan and Price 2020, 503). The founding members of the EEC, like Belgium and France, where at that time still colonial powers. The DRC became independent from Belgium only in 1960, Ruanda in 1962 (Kabemba 2001, 3). It took until the end of the 1960s until the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, and Gabon, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire,

Mauritania, Upper Volta (renamed Burkina Faso in 1984), Niger, and Mali; and Madagascar had proclaimed independence from France as well as for the decolonization of British colonies (Smith and Jeppesen 2017, 1). While the way forward was decolonization due to the surrounding political circumstances, France and Belgium attempted to maintain their relations with their former colonies to accommodate for the supply of raw materials and goods for their markets and the expansion of former colonies' markets to European firms (Carbone 2011, 326). The first agreement towards relations between the EEC and Sub-Saharan Africa was the Yaoundé Convention signed in 1963, with 18 newly independent states of West Africa (Kaya 2017, 185). In 1969, Yaoundé II was signed with the inclusion of other African states (185).

With the accession of the UK to the EEC in 1973, development policy became specifically focused on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, combining former Anglophone and Francophone colonies (Dimier and Stockwell 2023, 515). The aid and trade agreements with the ACP countries were first ratified with the Lomé Agreement in 1975, a sui generis contractual cooperation framework for North-South development (Babarinde 2019, 114). This Agreement was created in the framework of the provision of the UN for a "New International Economic Order" (NIEO) of 1974, which contained a set of proposals to end economic colonialism and dependency through a new interdependent economy (Laszlo et al. 1978). As an answer to these objectives suggested by the UN, with the Lomé Agreement, the EU emphasized trade and aid, with the centrality of non-reciprocal, duty- and quota-free access to the EU market for most ACP products. The goal of this was to use ACP exports to the EU in order to push the economic growth and development in the ACP countries, based on international trade theory that foresees that trade is an engine of economic growth and development (Babarinde 2019, 114). This development represents the increasing liberalization of development cooperation. However, the terms of trade still remained very uneven favoring EU states and not ACP states. While through the principle of non-reciprocity, a recognition of

pre-existing inequalities was brought into the Lomé Convention (Gruhn 1976, 255), the value of duty-free access to EU markets was not as beneficial as it had seemed (Asante 1996, 382). It has been argued that the gains for the EU were clear, but it was hard to see the gains for ACP countries (Oxfam 2006, 4).

In the following period in the 1980s and 1990s, development cooperation was characterized by structural adjustment programs (SAPs), representing further liberalization within the framework of growing neoliberalism in the international political economy. In this period, much of the developing world abandoned statist economic models in favor of neoliberal, market-oriented paradigms (Crisp and Kelly 1999, 533). The main characteristics of the SAPs were their neoliberal features, as they promoted anti-inflationary macroeconomic stabilization policies and pushed for private sector and free market development, controlling budget deficits, privatizing public sector companies and services, eliminating subsidies as well as cutting public support for social services (Heidhues and Obare 2011, 58). The main purpose of SAPs was to provide loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB) which were connected with conditionalities such as policy reforms which had to be implemented before getting the loan (Abugre 2000 cited in Oberdabernig 2012, 1).

According to Altin, 25 years later, after Lomé, a significant shift came with the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The Cotonou Agreement abolished the trade preferences system and included normative provisions and conditionality, therefore, the EU's Africa policy acquired a new dimension (Altin 2022, 125). While the agreement did introduce conditionality, which was also a significant part of the IMF and WB SAPs, it differed significantly from the IMF and WB conditionalities, as it included normative provisions and conditions aimed at promoting sustainable development and reducing poverty, rather than exclusively focusing on economic restructuring (Zimelis 2011, 395-396).

It has been argued that the EU has used its norms mostly to legitimize its geopolitical, economic and commercial interests in the continent. For instance, Altin argues that that while the principle of the "equality of arms" is stressed in the Cotonou Agreement, it cannot be implemented due to the asymmetrical relationship, where the continent has been made dependent on the EU with regards to trade, economic relations and aid (2022, 125). Moreover, economic relations and aid to be given to the continent have been subjected to conditions, and the EPAs have been shaped according to the interests of the EU (125). That is why Cotonou and EPAs are said to not having been effective in strengthening Africa and solving the problems related to development (125). Contrary to former conventions, the Cotonou Agreement had a shelf life of 20 years – from 2000 to 2020, with a review every five years (Babarinde 2019, 116). The EPAs were supposed to be regional free trade agreements containing policy commitments in a range of trade-related areas and service liberalization (Goodison 2007, 256). Nonetheless, scholars have been critical of the EPAs purported aims. Meyn argues that EPAs have not been a "historic step" to make EU-Africa relations more equal, but have rather been an outcome of asymmetrical power relations (2008, 515). She states that the Commission would have needed to give due consideration to ACP positions to reach an outcome that represents the interests of both sides (526). Another problem which occurred with EPAs was that it was questionable whether the EPAs could build regional economic integration, as the EU tried to "externalize" this model but did not consider more tailored approaches that reflect ACP needs (Draper 2007, 2).

Another significant agreement, which was created additionally to the Cotonou Agreement was the Joint Africa EU Strategy of 2007, which aimed at breaking with the traditional donor-recipient relationship between the EU and Africa (Del Biondo 2015, 5). At the turn of the millennium, the UN expressed an intensified global drive for long-term poverty reduction and implemented the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which became a

key part in further EU-Africa strategies (Kell and Vines 2021, 106). Among the eight thematic areas included in the Joint Africa EU Strategy, the MDGs compromised a separate thematic point, in addition to peace and security, democratic governance and human rights, trade, regional integration and infrastructure, energy, climate change, migration, mobility and employment and science, information society and space (Del Biondo 2015, 5). In 2015, a major shift occurred with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are a major departure from the MDGs. While the MDGs were a North-South aid agenda, the SDGs are a global agenda for sustainable development and not only applied to "developing" countries (Fukuda-Parr 2016, 44). This shift also represents the major change from the EU as normative power Europe during the MDGs, towards a geopolitical EU during the SDGs.

The history of the formal agreements in the EU-Africa partnership illustrates the fact that the EU's partnership with Africa is fragmented and bifurcated, mainly consisting of two frameworks, and two sets of legal instruments (Forysiński and Emmanuel 2020, 66). Firstly, the agreement between the EU and its member states and a group of African (and Caribbean and Pacific) states, included in the Cotonou Agreement, and secondly, between the EU and Africa, managed by the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy (66).

Furness et al claim that development cooperation is also recognized as the EU's "cornerstone" policy, being able to address the "root causes" of these phenomena, comprising socio-economic exclusion, reliance on fossil fuels, unsustainable agricultural practices, violent conflict, political repression and elite corruption (2020, 91). According to Orbie, EU-Africa cooperation has been characterized by a shift from trade to aid through the emergence of the Post-Wahington Consensus (Orbie 2007, 308). However, he argues that the shift to development aid is complementary to, and not a substitution for the pursuit of neo-liberal trade mechanisms. Consequently, it can be seen that neoliberal trade mechanisms and development aid can exist

in parallel. In line with the Post-Washington Consensus, it responds to the increasing contestation of neo-liberal globalization by civil society groups (308).

The political economy of EU-Africa development cooperation underscores the enduring complexities arising from shifting global paradigms, economic imperatives and colonial legacies. From the establishment of the Treaty of Rome to the contemporary frameworks of the Cotonou Agreement and Joint Africa EU Strategy, the partnership has navigated through various initiatives. The asymmetries revealed in the literature on the political economy of EU-Africa development cooperation necessitate to address the postcolonial aspects of this relationship.

1.2 EU-Africa development cooperation from a postcolonial perspective

Exploitation, colonialism, occupation and European dominance left negative consequences on the continent (Olivier 2011, 53). Rivas argues that colonial history and legacy around which discourse on international development as well as its practice is build maintains to create and reinforce asymmetrical power relations in new and complex ways (2018, 166). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, EU-Africa relations have relied on a coloniality of power, which

> articulates continuities of colonial mentalities, psychologies and worldviews into the so-called "postcolonial era" and highlights the social hierarchical relationships of exploitation and domination … has its roots in centuries of European colonial expansion but currently continuing through cultural, social and political power relations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, 8 in Haastrup, Duggan and Mah 2021, 542).

At the beginning of the post Second World War era, colonial powers started with extensive "development" programs throughout Africa and Asia, including colonial powers who later were founding members of the EU (Rivas 2018, 167). Consequently, the EU has long relations with Africa due to the historical colonial relations and domination (Holland and Doige

2012, 18). The Treaty of Rome was criticized by Kwame Nkrumah, leader of Ghana at that time as well as pan-Africanist, as a neo-colonial agreement comparable to the 1885 Treaty of Berlin (Zartman 2016; Gruhn 1976, 244 in Forysiński and Emmanuel 2020, 63). This notion has persisted until today, as critics describe the relationship of the EU with Africa frequently as asymmetrical, imbalanced and neocolonial. According to Akokpari, while the EU advocates for "recipient ownership" – which means soliciting recipients' input in aid policies that target them – the EU is following the old and familiar pattern of asymmetrical relations between donors and recipients (2017, 64). This gets for instance depicted in the allocation of aid: "aid darlings" – countries such as Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia – get favorized in EU fund allocation, whereas "aid orphans" – countries frequently overlooked, like Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, and Guinea Bissau – remain starved (Carbone 2015, 126 in Akokpari 2017, 65).

Despite the end of colonialism in the 1960s, the influence and exploitation of imperialists has continued in the post-colonial period (Fentahun 2023). However, the role of development cooperation from a postcolonial perspective, especially within the realm of EU Africa relations, remains understudied. This might primarily be caused by the differentiation between "postcolonial studies" and "development studies", which are very separate fields of studies. Moreover, the points of contact between postcolonial studies and international political economy (IPE) are marginal. This is caused by a reluctance of postcolonial scholarship to open up for economic analysis, while IPE literature frequently has been hesitant to take up postcolonial critique (Haag 2020, 4). This has also been addressed by Bhambra, who argues for the need to recognize the importance of historical colonial relations for the creation and continued reproduction of the global political economy (Bhambra 2021, 307). While postcolonial studies critically observe the power and cultural dynamics shaped by historical colonialism, focusing on representation, identity, and postcolonial experiences, development

studies focus on contemporary economic, political and social development. They utilize policy-oriented approaches to tackle issues such as inequality, poverty, and sustainable development (Currie-Alder 2016, 7-10). However, development cooperation as a policy issue can be analyzed from both sides, as the characteristics of contemporary development cooperation also have their roots in the colonial past. According to Ziai, due to the tension between development and postcolonial studies, it is worth taking up questions from development studies from the perspective of postcolonial studies (Ziai 2012, 11). Building on this argument, Sylvester argues that postcolonial theory can play a significant role in exposing development studies to subaltern voices, and can also highlight one core concern and contribution that development studies can bring to decolonization debates – an understanding of the material effects of poverty (Sylvester 1999, 703).

Jan Orbie makes the critical remark that while the colonial origins of EU development policy and its significance are generally known, the implications of this often come underexposed (2021, 597). He emphasizes that while the EU goes through multiple crises, development cooperation is an even more existentially contested EU policy domain. This results from a general contestation by policy-makers, activists, observers and researchers inside and outside the EU, that "development" should be improved through aid to "developing countries" (598). According to Orbie, development aid reinforces the persistence of colonial logics, e.g. through consolidating dependencies, the legitimization of interventions, and preventing systematic change. The intentional idea of development itself is rooted in the colonial discourse on the "civilizing mission and the associated role of trust to the colonial state" (Bernstein 2000 in Jalil 2022, 137).

In its initial period of the 1970s, the member states of the EU were divided over the creation of common policy on cooperation and development, challenging the "desire for continuity and collective management of a colonial world…slipping out of the grasp of its

member states individually" (Nicolaidis 2015, 285-286 in Sierp 2020, 690). While the former colonial powers aimed at direct inclusion of their colonial territories into the EEC at the beginning, it later turned into loose cooperation. Sierp argues that what has illustrated development policies since then is the invisibility of the colonial period in official documents and statements (Sierp 2020, 690). Saltnes and Steingass argue that the EU still draws a lot of its self-understanding from the postcolonial donor-recipient relationship, while it has been trying to transition from development towards "partnership", which risks being a rhetoric without triggering a fundamental change (2021, 523). This rhetoric has continued in the current EC since the elections in 2019 (525).

Building on these arguments, from a postcolonial perspective, EU-African relations are shaped by a history of colonialism, imperialism, and exploitation, which have shaped the power dynamics in EU-African relations, which, in turn, are characterized by a persistent inequality and an asymmetry of power (Olivier 2011, 56). According to Olivier, when the epoch of post-colonialism began, a new pattern of interstate relationships between newly independent African states and their former European colonizers formed, characterized by "apparent" benevolence on the part of the EU (54). However, more subtly it continued to hamper the attempts of African countries to create their own autonomous agendas and developmental paths (54). This was especially visible in the Lomé framework that did not achieve a lot of its long term goals, as ACP economies stayed underdeveloped, poverty levels had risen and due to the fact that the privileged access to European market prevented the endogenous establishment of a self-sustainable local economy, ACP countries became increasingly reliant on their former "colonial masters" (55). Olivier states that despite the loathness of the EU to admit the after effects of exploitation and colonialism, it left a residue of guilt and a sense of justification for restitution gestures (58).

While the European Union has made efforts to change its rhetoric and actions towards a "partnership" and a cooperation of "mutual benefit", the reality signifies that EU economic policies continue to prioritize the interests of European corporations and investors over the needs and priorities of African countries, leading to structural inequalities between the EU and Africa (Resty 2021, 8). Kohnert claims that these EU self-interested trade policies contribute to poverty and unsatisfactory development in Sub Saharan Africa (Kohnert 2008). Another important aspect of postcolonial EU-African relations is the way in which European countries continue to exercise influence over African political and cultural institutions. This influence is represented in the EU's role of promoting "good governance" and democracy in Africa, which often reflects a Eurocentric view of what these concepts mean and how they should be implemented (Börzel and Hackenesch 2013, 552). Chakrabarty further develops this notion of an Eurocentric view, as he refers to the term "provincializing Europe". With that expression, he notes the historicity and contingency of assumed universal European concepts and comes up with alternatives through an acknowledgment of the heterogeneous and often non-Western manifestations of modernity (Chakrabarty 2000). By addressing these two sides – the assumed universality on the one hand, and the non-Western manifestations on the other, he reveals the Eurocentric focus of dominant concepts and indicates the possibility of other forms of knowledge.

In conclusion, the literature review has highlighted the necessity of a deeper exploration of the intersection between political economy and postcolonial studies within EU-Africa development cooperation. The examination of EU-Africa relations through both lenses shows not only the economic dynamics at play, but also the historical and power asymmetries inherent in the partnership. Thus, the upcoming methodological chapter will seek to bridge the gap between these disciplines, employing the concept of layering to explore the interplay between liberal and postcolonial practices in the EU-Africa development cooperation context. Through

this interdisciplinary approach, the thesis aims to contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of EU-Africa development cooperation and to promote a conversation between the disciplines in further scholarship.

2 Research methodology

The literature review has examined the lack of conversation between international political economy and postcolonial studies. However, the literature review also showed that the EU development cooperation policy has followed increasing economic and social liberalization patterns. This liberalization dominates the cooperation, while continuing postcolonial practices in the cooperation have been hidden but gradually exposed through hierarchical and power relations, as a result of the financial and economic crisis which has forced analysts to problematize the notion of the EU as a normative power (Mikelis 2016, 2). Drawing on the framework of layering by scholars Streeck and Thelen, the study seeks to understand how within development cooperation between the EU and Africa, rules and policies have been added over time, leading to current strategies being mainly liberal, but containing postcolonial practices.

2.1 The concept of layering

Streeck and Thelen's approach to layering refers to the idea that institutional change occurs through the gradual accumulation of layers over time, rather than through sudden and complete transformation (2005, 24). Layering shows that an existing institution is not replaced, but that new institutional layers – these might for instance be rules, policy processes, or actors – are added to it (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010 in van der Heijden 2013, 3). However, over time, the new layers may significantly alter the overall trajectory of development as the old institutions or rules stagnate or lose their grip, and the new ones assume a more prominent role in governing behavior. An example of where this framework could be applied to the context of EU-Africa cooperation is the shift from the Millenium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals, as new goals were added to the old ones, but the goals were now also to be applied to all countries, not only developing ones, significantly altering the trajectory of development policies.

Another aspect of layering is that it can set in motion path-altering dynamics through a mechanism of differential growth, where the faster growth of the new layers can effect profound change by draining off political support for the existing systems (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 23). Layering can therefore lead to substantial change if amendments alter the logic of the institution or compromise the stable reproduction of the original "core" (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 17). Layering can also mean that new rules are introduced into an established policy when political actors endeavored to maintain the status quo by insulating it from changed external circumstances (Moschella 2016, 801). It can thus be thought of as an insulation strategy: actors that seek to preserve the status quo from outside pressures may achieve this goal through adapting existing rules and institutions to promote resistance (Farrell and Newman 2014, 349). This fits into the sequencing of development cooperation as directly after the end of the colonial period, the strategies became increasingly liberal and followed a postcolonial discourse, hiding it behind the notions of "partnership" and "natural partners". The agreements before the 2020 EU-Africa strategy have generally drawn much criticism on postcolonial structures and asymmetric economic policies used for development (Whiteman 2012). These criticisms have led to the argument that the historical Africa-EU partnership has not brought about the desirable development for the African continent (Langan 2017). Against this backdrop, the new 2020 strategy got a lot of criticism, aiming to bring both continents together in an "equal agreement", and simultaneously trying to leave a "donor-recipient" relationship behind.

The idea that institutions change over time, while they appear to show stability, has inspired a number of scholars to identify and describe mechanisms of incremental institutional change (van der Heijden 2013, 2). Layering therefore provides a bridge between the notions of incremental change and punctuated equilibrium (16). Particularly in the latest addition of Thelen's theorizing, there is a strong focus on the characteristics of an institution's political context, the characteristics of the institution itself, as well as the actors that aim to change or

preserve the institution (Mahoney and Thelen 2010, 15). These aspects in Thelen's most recent theorizing enrich the analysis, providing a comprehensive lens through which to explore the complexities of EU-Africa relations.

For this study, a discourse that exhibits liberal tendencies can elevate liberal values of equality, democracy and emphasize a globalized cooperation based on common values and comprehensive benefits for all involved. But liberals have often diverged from their core principles, such as sovereign equality and human equality, and violated liberal ideals (Paul 2021, 1608). Early liberals were even promoters of racism and colonial empires. The longstanding liberal entanglement with western imperialism and colonialism created deep-rooted systemic racism and excessive military interventions, and claimed justifications for both (1608). This discrepancy between values and the realities reveals how institutions might have been able to hide their postcolonial practices behind the liberal realm.

Postcolonial practices can instead be said to be characterized by a language that demonstrates a guardian (paternalist) mentality where a superior party considers itself to possess the knowledge and power and the other party is excluded. Thus, it is the responsibility of the superior party to guide, using its values and practices as tools, the other party towards a "civilized state" (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 37). Moreover, the postcolonial practices by the EU have continuously comprised neglect or ignorance of colonial history or the continuation of colonial patterns (Mikelis 2016).

The arguments here advanced are illustrated based on the official documents published by the European Commission as well speeches by EC Representatives who address EU-Africa development cooperation. By applying the concept of layering to the study of EU-Africa development cooperation during the European Commission from 2019-2024, the research shows how liberal and postcolonial practices interact and shape institutional dynamics. By assessing how new layers of policy initiatives and rules are added to existing frameworks, the

study seeks to reveal the pathways through which institutional change occurs within the context of EU-Africa relations. Through a dialectical process of theory building and theory testing, the study aims to contribute to theoretical advancements of the concept of layering while generating empirical insights that inform policy and practice in EU-Africa development cooperation.

2.2 Empirical sources

Firstly, the "Comprehensive EU-Africa Strategy" of the current European Commission from 2019 to 2024 will be examined. The priorities outlined in the EU-Africa Strategy are the result of collaborative negotiations at the 5th EU-Africa Summit and discussions between the European Commission and the African Union Commissions (European Commission 2020, 2). The strategy is an official document created in collaboration between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council. Since 18 January 2021, it has been approved by the EU institutions and is a communication towards other European stakeholders and to the African Union and its member states. Moreover, speeches by Representatives of the European Commission on the Strategy will be analyzed. The analysis will filter out keywords related to liberal discourse and practice, as well as to postcolonial practices and show how these interact.

Secondly, a case study of the EU development cooperation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will follow. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a suitable case study for investigating the liberal and postcolonial practices of EU-Africa development cooperation due to its specific historical and contemporary dynamics. The DRC's colonial past under Belgian rule has left long-lasting legacies of exploitation, uneven development and institutional fragility, and frequent upheavals by parts of the population show that the EU, specifically Belgium itself, has not adequately addressed its colonial past in the DRC (Castryck 2006, 76).

The country's huge mineral wealth has often been a reason for conflict and external intervention. The EU has tried to be a dominant peace and security advisor in the war in the DRC, and it is also the DRC where the EU conducted its first CSDP intervention outside of Europe, setting significant precedents for the development of future EU activities in Africa (Vlassenroot and Arnould 2016, 4). The relevance is also represented by the appointment of a Special Representative of the European Union (EUSR) for the African Great Lakes Region (Hoebeke et al. 2007, 7). Very recently, the DRC has accused the EU of being complicit in the plundering of its resources and fueling the conflict with Rwanda, as on January 19 2024, the European Commission and Kigali signed a memorandum of understanding for the exploitation of minerals (Châtelot 2024). This incident makes the EU-DRC relations specifically current.

The EU's development policies in the DRC focus on multifaceted approaches, containing state-building support, conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance and economic development (European Commission 2023). However, the complex postcolonial context of the country requires dealing with deep seated challenges, very often rooted in the colonial past, such as corruption, weak institutions and protracted armed conflicts (Staines and Villafuerte 2022, 154). By examining the EU's strategies and interventions outlined in the Multiannual Indicative Program from 2021-2027 for the DRC, the thesis aims to provide insights into the tensions between liberal development paradigms and postcolonial realities, outlined in the Strategy, and how they are applied and represented in a specific country context.

3 Case study 1: EU-Africa cooperation strategies

In the following, I will first give a short historical overview of the past strategies and conventions within EU-Africa cooperation. Secondly, I will present how members of the European Commission have recently framed the EU's relationship with Africa. After that, the analysis of the "Comprehensive Strategy for Africa" through the framework of layering will follow, which shows that the EU upholds a way of conveying its narratives focusing on "shared values" and "close ties" – while postcolonial social and economic practices that maintain unequal power relations and asymmetries are hidden behind these concepts.

3.1 Historical background

Historically specifically significant for today's EU Africa cooperation and relationship are the three trade and development partnerships – the Yaoundé Conventions I and II (1963–1975), the Lomé Conventions I, II and III (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000-present) (Odijie 2022, 7). For the Yaoundé Conventions, the European Development Fund (EDF) was created and European officials pushed for steady tariff liberalization on the part of the Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM) group, with reciprocal free trade, which means that both parties had the agreement to treat each other's goods and services alike in terms of market access and tariff rates, representing liberal trade patterns (Langan 2017, 122). At this early stage of association, critics doubted whether reciprocal free trade and the EDF monies would support development per se, or lock-in poorer states into colonial trade and production patterns (Nkrumah 1963; Touré 1962 in Langan 2017, 122).

The following first Lomé Convention aimed to create a more egalitarian partnership between the EEC and the newly constituted African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group, promising non-reciprocal trade, informed by criticisms of the dependency school of asymmetric trade and aid agreements (Langan 2017, 122). Following the Washington Consensus which emerged from the 1980s, the Conventions soon started to pave the way for free market impulses

in response to the 'debt crisis', with Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) as most significant development, leading to industrial privatization, deregulation and liberalization with regards to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and import tariffs (123). After Lomé, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement solidified the EU's free market footing with regards to development paradigms, demanding a return to explicitly reciprocal free trade ties (124). The main part that received criticism of liberalization and postcolonial structures were the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Orbie argues that the EPAs are a product of far-reaching trade liberalization (Orbie 2021, 601). Staeger underlines this and states that the EPA negotiations specifically showed a normative insistence on economic liberalization (2016, 988).

3.2 Speeches by EU Representatives

In the von der Leyen Commission's EU Africa strategy, the EU positions itself as a key actor in shaping the EU-Africa relationship, highlighting the need for a new European strategy to deal with evolving dynamics. Both EC President Ursula von der Leyen and European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen have addressed their view on Africa in a similar way before presenting the new strategy in 2020. While Urpilainen stated after her visit to Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, that "we experienced a continent of youth, brimming with confidence, full of potential, attractive for global players", von der Leyen pointed out that Africa is "a continent with immense ambition and aspirations but also with immense needs" (European Parliament 2020). The attractiveness of Africa to global players can partly be understood from a postcolonial perspective as a perpetuation of the narrative of Africa as a resource-rich entity which can be exploited for economic gain. This attitude is also represented in responses to shifting geopolitical and economic realities, as China is frequently seen as a competitional threat, leading to the EU attempting to uphold its economic interests in the face of growing competition (Ayers 2013, 228). This argument of maintaining economic interests is further underlined by the European Commission's shift from a normative power approach

towards a geopolitical Commission. The rhetoric of the EC representatives contradicts voices that have repeatedly criticized the imposed economic and political programs in past Conventions, combined with continuing aid dependence of most African countries (Abbas and Ndeda 2009, 79).

3.3 Analysis of the strategy

The "Comprehensive Strategy for Africa" was published in form of a communication of the European Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament (EP) in March 2020. In the strategy, the European Commission acknowledges that Africa is severely affected by the consequences of climate change, environmental degradation, and pollution (EC 2020, 1). Therefore, it states that the EU and Africa must work together for seizing the opportunities and to "address these challenges and develop actions that ensure stability, peace, security, human rights, democracy, gender equality, sustainable livelihoods, sustainable economic growth based on healthy ecosystems, social cohesion, and good governance" (1). The EC emphasizes that the partnership should build on a foundation of a clear understanding of mutual interests and responsibilities. According to the EC, the mutual interests include the development of a green growth model, strengthening the business environment and investment climate; supporting education, research, and innovation, the construction of decent jobs and value addition through sustainable investments; maximizing the benefits of regional economic integration and trade; creating food security and rural development; combatting climate change; endorsing peace and security as well as ensuring well-governed migration and mobility.

The five main pillars of the strategy are:

- A partnership for green transition and energy access;
- A partnership for digital transformation;
- A partnership for sustainable growth and jobs;

- A partnership for peace and governance; and
- A partnership on migration and mobility (2).

While these five points are significant for contemporary development initiatives, the strategy focuses primarily on economic growth, investment, and trade, but does not address fundamental structural issues, such as the colonial roots of EU-Africa cooperation. In what follows, I will analyze these pillars in more detail through the conceptual framework of layering. In light of the ambitions the Commission mentions in the communication, the question arises as to how the communication not only includes liberal discourse and practices but also postcolonial social and economic structures and practices.

The communication begins with a highly positive emphasis on the cooperation between Africa and the EU, reflecting liberal practices of shared values, cooperation, and mutual benefit. The EU mentions that the ties are broad because of the history, proximity and shared interests, and declares Africa as "our twin continent", with which it is necessary to maintain a strong partnership to tackle the challenges of the 21st century (EC 2020, 1). While the narrative of Africa being a "twin continent" adds a new layer to the partnership, the aspects of shared values, cooperation and mutual benefit are part of the already existing basic rules and norms governing the partnership – as the statements that Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture, geography, as well as a common future has been a constant since the EU-Africa partnership was formally established in 2000, where the EU stated in its Declaration at the Africa-Europe Summit in Cairo that

> Over the centuries, ties have existed between Africa and Europe, which have led to many areas of co-operation, covering political, economic, social, as well as cultural and linguistic domains. These have developed on the basis of shared values of strengthening representative and participatory democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law,

good governance, pluralism, international peace and security, political stability and confidence among nations (European Commission 2000).

These "shared values" and "close ties" are also represented in past cooperation agreements, such as the Joint EU Africa Strategy 2007 (EC 2007, 1). These mentions, in past strategies as well as in the current, especially neglect colonial history – as the EU does not explain where these "close ties" originate from. The narrative of Africa as "twin continent" shows the EU's attempt to convey a perception of equality between the two partners. This mention as "twin continent" evokes notions of paternalism, as this partnership discourse itself is characterized by a paternalism where the "donor", in this case the EU, identifies the problem, and declares the right treatment, following postcolonial patterns (Baaz 2007, 3). With regards to the continuing layer of "shared interests and values", Bossyut and Sherriff have argued that there might be shared issues, but not necessarily shared interests (2010, 8). Shared issues such as migration, security threats and climate change affect both the EU and Africa, however, their respective interests in addressing these issues can vary notably. These "shared issues" are thematized more clearly in the five proposed partnerships.

In the communication, the EC lists five focus areas, mentioned above, and states that positive developments in one of these areas are dependent on progress in other areas, which, in turn, can only be achieved through collaboration based on shared global commitments. These shared commitments are for instance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Agenda 2063 (EC 2020, 1-2).

3.3.1 Partners for green transition and energy access

The first partnership focuses on the fight against climate change and environmental degradation. A central term by the EU in this context is that the EU and Africa are "allies" in the development of circular and blue economies, transport solutions and sustainable energy (EC 2020, 2). The section mainly revolves around innovation and investments, especially in

scientific capacities, representing a liberal answer to climate change problems, as at the center is a focus on technological solutions to development challenges. On the one hand, it is clear that climate change mitigation and adaptation is necessary and cannot be avoided, but on the other hand, the EU perpetuates unequal mechanisms that lead to further environmental destruction, such as extraction of resources (Chen-Zion 2022, 593).

Moreover, the EU advocates for partnering with Africa to maximize green transition and minimize threats to the environment in full compliance with the Paris Agreement (EC 2020, 4). The Paris Agreement has crystallized the carbon metric (introducing carbon pricing and not considering the historicity of states) as a multilateral metric while developing countries criticized the suggestion of equal mitigation criteria for unequal historicities (Vieira and Bauer 2023, 7). Due to this metric, developing and developed nations have the same starting point which makes the trade of carbon credits unfair from the beginning. Today, the carbon footprint is a commodity that continues to benefit the most developed countries, as they have more technological capacities to reduce emissions and or buy credits (7). While the EU plans, according to the strategy, to support national financing frameworks as well as share experiences with Africa to manage a socially just transition away from fossil fuels, it does not address the colonial roots of the agreements climate policies are based on.

Firstly, post-colonial countries are marginalized in international climate negotiations and power matrices of control are exerted over climate change narratives, as concerns about carbon offsetting and the imposition of rules from powerful countries on historically marginalized countries has been named as “new carbon colonialism” (Sultana 2022, 1). These colonial roots include land grabs, extraction, dispossession and displacement, which is still a reoccurring practice (1). In the last decade, Africa has been subject to unprecedented amounts of land being concessioned, leased or sold to corporations, business, or foreign sovereign capital (Zambakari 2017, 195). These land dispossessions are justified via development terms, that

they will enhance productivity, mechanize farming to produce more food, create jobs, and attract foreign direct investment (196). According to Peša, patterns of colonialism and connected to it dynamics of capitalism, racialization and extractivism have led to environmental transformations and toxicity that have proven to be extremely durable, even in the present (2024, 34). Today, oil companies continue their colonial disregard through gas flaring and oil spills, which has for instance been documented in the Niger Delta (45).

Additionally, the strategy underlines the necessity of responsible resource management and sustainable value chains, reflecting liberal concerns about economic development and environmental sustainability (EC 2020, 4). This nuanced dynamic demonstrates the gradual accumulation of layers over time, as new priorities and perspectives are added to existing frameworks, as proposed by Streeck and Thelen. The significant emphasis on a climate-resilient future represents a recent layer to the EU-Africa Partnership, as compared to only one short paragraph on climate change and environmental degradation in the statement of 2000 – stating that

> particular emphasis must be given to the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and to the sustainable use of scarce water and soil, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, Agenda 21, the Kyoto Protocol and the African Common Position on Environment and Development (EC 2000)

the newest strategy has followed the agenda of mainstreaming the issues of climate change and environmental degradation, which is represented in all aspects of EU policies now.

3.3.2 Partners for digital transformation

From a liberal perspective, the emphasis on digital transformation as an important driver for economic growth and development aligns with the liberal ideals of innovation and progress. This partnership underlines the potential economic benefits of digitalization, such as increasing GDP and improving employment opportunities (Sabbagh et al. 2013, 36). A significant part of

the emphasis on digital transformation is its normative purpose as enhancing public trust in governments through accountability and transparency (EC 2020, 5). The partnership for digital transformation is mainly more generally focused on fostering Africa's digital transformation, which has been a consistent layer in the latest cooperation agreement. However, it is also essential to consider that African countries have been used as "dumping ground" for old tablets, computers, phones and other worn-out technologies that are being exported from countries in the Global North (Schelenz and Schopp 2018, 1415). representing hidden aspects of the positive emphasis on digital transformation. The enormously increasing global amounts of hazardous waste, including growing issue of electronic waste, exacerbate the disproportionate risks faced by developing countries in implementation and policy efforts of global hazardous waste management (Pratt 2011, 581). Some of the characteristics of colonialism, such as economic dependence, exploitation, as well as cultural inequality are closely associated within the new realm of toxic waste colonialism (587).

3.3.3 Partners for sustainable growth and jobs

This partnership starts again with the emphasis on the "close ties" and "geographic proximity" between the EU and Africa, which is supposed to make them natural allies (EC 2020, 6). The EU proposes joint actions on four priority fronts – boosting trade and sustainable developments, improvising the investment climate and business environment, increasing access to quality education, research, skills, health and social rights, as well as enhancing regional and continental integration. The variable investments the EU mentions, including public and private investments, partnership to increase environmentally, socially and financially sustainable investments, and partnering to attract investors represents again the keywords of cooperation and equal partnership, reflecting a mainly liberal approach. Moreover, it mentions "common values" with regards to shared goals and interests between the EU and Africa, especially in

terms of sustainable development, economic growth, and job creation, reflecting liberal practices of emphasizing cooperation based on common values and mutual benefits.

Additionally, this part of the strategy emphasizes the European Green Deal as EU's growth strategy and plan to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent worldwide by 2050. In the same context, the EU mentions that Africa is well placed to create and implement sustainable solutions as its economy grows, as it has huge renewable energy and biodiversity potential (EC 2020, 6). Vieira and Bauer argue that the proposed European Green Deal maintains an unfair carbon metric and does not consider the historical unfolding of colonies and metropolises (2023, 18), therefore it remains questionable if the European Green Deal is an example Africa should follow (Claar 2022, 263). While a Green transition as proposed in the EGD can boost an economic transition, it can also advance inequality through the imposition of a carbon board adjustment mechanism and emission taxation, and lead to what Hamouchene has called "green colonialism" as displacement of socio-environmental costs to the green era and to the renewable period (2022).

The emphasis of the EU remains on investments resilient to the impacts of climate change, to attract investors, and to enhance learning, knowledge and skills (EC 2020, 8-10). The emphasis on sustainable investments, regional economic integration, and education and skills development presents a liberal approach with the goal of fostering long-term economic stability and prosperity in both regions. However, the focus also strongly lies on aligning African policies and regulations with EU standards, which, from a postcolonial perspective, reinforces concerns of EU's paternalism and power asymmetries to be able to adhere to these standards. The promotion of regulatory reforms, investment climate improvement, and adherence to EU standards in fields such as governance and trade facilitation again neglects African contexts and colonial histories, as the unequal starting point makes it almost impossible to adhere to these standards.

3.3.4 Partners for peace, security, governance and resilience

In this partnership, the EU declares that it is responsible for guiding and assisting African countries. This is represented in the statements that it must "markedly step up its support to Africa" and "adapt and deepen the EU's support to African peace efforts." (EC 2020, 10-11).

The phrases "partner with Africa" and "integrate good governance, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and gender equality in action and cooperation" reveals again the EU's desire for equal participation and mutual benefits in the cooperation, representing a liberal practice (EC 2020, 12). This practice is again not new, as for instance in the European Africa Strategy of 2005, the EU mentioned that "it is now universally recognized that there can be no sustainable development without peace and security. Peace and security are therefore the first essential prerequisites for sustainable development" (EC 2005, 3). Aspects of peace and security have been gradually added to postcolonial European policy in Africa, representing a gradual accumulation of layers over time, but the institutionalization of EU-Africa security relations is a phenomenon that happened more recently (Pirozzi and Venturi 2021, 133).

What has been criticized more recently is the increasing "securitization" of development, including donor initiatives that aim to stem migration flows to Europe, which raise concerns about de factor violations of African state sovereignty (Langan 2017, 150). Staeger and Gwatiwa argue that this securitization and externalization of the migration agenda is based on a "logic of coloniality" with an intent of the EU to 'modernize African security', while the EU has failed to consider the context and local needs in the development of its African security agenda (2020, 175).

These increasing restrictions of migration policies are new layers to the EU-Africa partnership. Beauchemin et al. argue that European countries have become more and more restrictive towards migrants from sub-Saharan Africa (2020, 6). While the EU frequently

describes migration as a security issue, in the strategy, it does not address this issue in this partnership, but in the fifth one – the partnership on migration and mobility.

3.3.5 Partners on migration and mobility

In the partnership on migration and mobility, the EU acknowledges the challenges that African countries face due to crises, conflicts, climate change and environmental degradation, and suggests to create joint frameworks and partnerships for migration and mobility. The migration issue is particularly current, as the power hierarchies between the EU and Africa within migration management have become increasingly visible. Freemantle and Landau argue that as the EU has reframed migration from an intrinsic human trait to a privilege which must be earned through responsible behavior and appropriate forms of longing, Europe has positioned itself as authority of morality, which reinforces a hierarchical relation similar to a priest and parishioner or teacher and student (2022, 793-794). Furthermore, they claim that Europe thus advances its internal liberalism as the ever-receding end point of history and sets the criteria for accessing it (794). The EU emphasizes that "to address such challenges Africa and the EU need a balanced, coherent and comprehensive approach to migration and mobility, guided by the principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility and based on the respect for human rights and international law" (EC 2020, 14). However, the strategy does not address how the EU's border externalization policy has contributed to continued refugee encampment in Africa, and the EU has signed bilateral readmission agreements with some African countries whereby refugees and asylum seekers on their way to Europe are forcefully captured and refouled to Africa (Opi 2021, 1). Return and readmission is framed very positively in the strategy, as the EU states that the cooperation on return and readmission and effective return rates should be improved (EC 2020, 14). The majority of asylum seekers that have been refouled by the EU have to stay in detention camps African countries bordering the

Mediterranean seas as the AU refused to succumb to the EU's request to establish a readmission agreement (Opi 2021, 7).

In its concluding remarks, the EU again emphasizes that the EU and Africa must work together more closely (EC 2020, 15). The keyword "shared interest" is represented again, stating that "we therefore have a shared interest to cooperate on multilateralism and common agendas" (15). Throughout the strategy, it becomes visible that there is no frequent mention of poverty, no mainstreaming of addressing inequalities and while common interests are mentioned, there is no mentioning of "conflicting" interests. The analysis of the different partnerships the EU foresees with Africa has shown their liberal aspects, but also how continuing postcolonial practices are hidden behind these liberal practices. In the 1960s and 1970s, the European Community (EC) cast off its colonial legacy and reinvented a new identity grounded on universal values deeply rooted in European history (Pasture 2018, 546). That the EC is not remembered as a colonial enterprise is also because it has created a quite different narrative of peace, democracy, economic progress, development, human rights and the rule of law (554). When the colonial era was left behind, the EC/EU started to focus on the discourse of "universal" values that became the cornerstone of its foreign policy (555). Once more the past of colonial crimes it put to the side because it is classified as a potential obstacle for the further development of (economic) ties with the African continent (Sierp 2020, 651). These "universal values" are now part of the EU's liberal universalism, which contributes to be able to hide colonial roots (Leino 2005, Lucarelli 2018).The EU continues to advocate for a shift from a donor-recipient towards an equal relationship; however, the EU maintains a way of conveying its narratives focusing on "shared values", "close ties" – while postcolonial social and economic practices that maintain unequal power relations and asymmetries are hidden behind these keywords, and the colonial past is not recognized or even neglected. This is represented by continued layers of certain policy processes that have remained the same in the

last decades, such as a continuous emphasis on close ties and shared interests. At the same time, new layers have been added, such as the increasing emphasis on climate change as well as the framing of migration from Africa to Europe as a privilege. These layers have altered development trajectories, but have not altered already existing policy processes and rules. These transformations reflect Streeck and Thelen's approach to layering that institutional change occurs through the gradual accumulation of layers over time, as it has happened with the EC.

4 Case study 2: The Democratic Republic of the Congo

In the following, I will first give a historical background on the colonial and postcolonial history of the DRC, then I will provide a subchapter on the EU-DRC cooperation. After that, the analysis of the EU's current development program for the DRC – the "Multiannual Indicative Program 2021-2027" will follow. While the rhetoric of the program does depict the EU again as a norm exporter of democracy, human rights, sustainable development and equality, the concrete actions of the EU in the DRC show neglect of colonial history as well as a continuation of a hierarchical partnership.

4.1 Historical background

Since King Leopold of Belgium had taken the Congo region in his possession in 1885, several temporal fix points can be declared that draw attention to the DRC: firstly, the Belgian colony got a lot of attention in world politics at the beginning of the 20th century when the gruesome practices of the forced labor implemented under King Leopold II. became public (Bobineau 2016, 11). Leopold's cruel logic of revenue was the creation of an administrative system that aimed at extracting the maximum amount of natural resources as well as the maximum output of labor from people, for which his agents employed methods such as kidnapping the families of Congolese men for forced work. His system of force also contained the use of a private army – the Force Publique (Ebenga and N'Landu 2005, 64). Secondly, the country gained its independence in 1960, and Patrice Lumumba became the first president who had consistently defended the position of Congolese nationalism, advocated for self-determination and planned mass democratic movements for independence from Belgian colonial rule and western political and economic dominance (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002: 121). However, he was declared by the C.I.A. as an enemy due to having been involved in several inter-ethnic conflicts, coups and political splits within the Belgian Congo for the independence cause (Wong 2012, 74). In December 1960, an abrupt regime change followed through a coup

led by Mobutu which was backed by Belgium and the C.I.A., and Lumumba was arrested and later executed (75). Mobutu created a neocolonial regime backed by Belgium and the US. As a long-time totalitarian ruler, he lost his advantageous position after the Cold War, and was expelled from office in 1997 by rebel leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila (Bobineau 2016, 11).

In the 1990s, three decades after the independence, in the eastern parts of the DRC, unresolved local issues of citizenship and land access created additional layers to the crisis and led to a first round of armed mobilization (Vlassenroot and Arnould 2016, 5). During Mobutu's rule, the combination of his charismatic rhetoric of nationalism and a routinization of state violence imposed on the population to celebrate the nation, despite the fact that the population had almost no experience of what statehood or citizenship involved (Marriage 2021, 292). The mass exodus of Burundian and Rwandan Hutu refugees due to the Burundian civil war in 1993 and the Rwandan genocide intensified the instability. In 1996, the presence of the former Rwandan army (ex-FAR) and militias in the refugee camps and of Ugandan rebel movements in the DRC triggered an armed intervention of the neighboring countries Uganda and Rwanda and the creation of a regional coalition which ousted Mobutu from power in May 1997 (Vlassenroot and Arnould 2016, 5). The new Congolese president Kabila expelled his former Ugandan and Rwandan military allies in 1998, then a second war broke out which resulted in a high level of military fragmentation in the east (5). The multisided civil war embroiled much of the region until the hostilities ended in mid-2002 (Staines and Villafuerte 2022, 153). A formal peace agreement was reached in 2003, however, militia groups have continued to operate in parts of the country. Joseph Kabila became the DRC's next president after his father's assassination in 2001, and won the elections in 2006 and 2011. The election of Felix Tshisekedi as new president in 2018 was the DRC's first peaceful change of head of state since the country gained independence (154).

The DRC has received foreign aid from the IMF, the WB, the UN peacebuilding mission "United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo" (MONUSCO), as well as NGOs such as Oxfam and Doctors Without Borders (Smith 2018, 1). The donors have focused on the development of the DRC via economic means by providing loans for infrastructure building and to decrease poverty, as well as by social means with peacebuilding in war-torn areas (1). The DRC has grown over the past twenty years, but at a significantly slower rate than other nations in the Global South (1). According to scholars, the DRC has been subject to colonial exploitation by land grabbing, exploitation of natural resources as well as political interference (Peemans 2014, Burnley 2011, Demart and Bodeux 2013).

4.2 The EU-DRC relationship

Khakee argues that an important consequence of the silence surrounding colonialism combined with the EU taking "ownership" of democratic and human rights ideals is that colonial-time hegemonic discourses are left undisturbed (2022, 104). Nicolaïdis has conceptualized this under the concept of amnesia as a process of forgetting colonial pasts in today's EU policy making and the opposing concept of atonement as "inversing the exploitative tropes of the colonial era" (2015, 5-7). Similar patterns are visible in the case of the DRC. In 2018, when the DRC held its several times postponed presidential and parliamentary elections, the Head of the EU Delegation, Belgian diplomat Bart Ouvry, said on the occasion of Europe day that

> Today we commemorate Europe but we also celebrate the relations between the Union and the DRC. Even before the Congo obtained its independence, already in 1958, the European Commission had opened a representative office … Several generations have come and gone since that date and I remain convinced that the European Union can continue to support the Congo in the fight against poverty, in the promotion of inclusive and sustainable growth … But

> one of our main tasks is also to work with the Congolese to entrench democracy, the rule of law and human rights, to contribute to peace and stability … (Ouvry 2018).

Decolonization is mentioned at the beginning of the speech, but stays disconnected from the rest. Moreover, unmentioned is the total Belgian impunity for the grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in the Congo, and the up until very recently continued celebration of Leopold II. (Khakee 2022, 114).

Through its pillars of Community action and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the EU has significantly increased its involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The Cotonou Agreement as well as the European Security Strategy, and initiatives toward a strategic partnership with Africa, provide the framework for the EU's peace and security involvement in the DRC (Hoebeke, Carette and Vlassenroot 2007, 3). According to the EU, the EU-DRC partnership supports the sustainable and inclusive development of the DRC, in line with the National Strategic Development Plan (PNSD) and the Global Gateway Strategy, which is a recent European strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport sectors and to improve health, education and research systems worldwide (EC 2021a). The action builds on the strategic position the DRC has in Central Africa with the purported aim to foster regional stability and peace, biodiversity and sustainable natural resource management.

In the following, the Multiannual Indicative Program 2021-2027 for the DRC will be analyzed. The EU has defined its specific objectives and priority areas for the timeframe 2021-2027 with each partner country and region. According to the DG International Partnerships, the program creation process is made with dialogue with partner countries, EU Member States, civil society organizations, women and youth organizations, private sector, local authorities, the UN and other donors and key stakeholders (EC 2023).

In the Multiannual Indicative Program for 2021-2027 for the DRC, the EU states that the challenges the country faces are numerous, and since the signing of the Sun City peace agreement in 2003, the DRC has not yet arrived at stability and gotten out of poverty. It points out that the main challenges are the weak legitimacy and dysfunction of key institutions, as well as instability that complicates the phasing of interventions (EC 2021b, 3).

4.3 Analysis of the Multiannual Indicative Program

The EU names three priority areas for the cooperation with the DRC, namely governance, peace and security, human development and sustainable development (EC 2021b, 5-7).

4.3.1 Governance, peace and security

The EU notes that in the DRC, the population's support for the state institutions is weak, and the existence of violent armed groups, mainly located in the east of the country, continuously endangers stability and mentions with concern the continuing human rights violations. As mentioned before, the DRC's post-colonial history has been characterized by weak state institutions, but this fact has been exacerbated by the legacy of colonial rule and the following internal power struggles, which is a fact the EU does not mention. The EU maintains its liberal strategy by advocating for the principles of democracy, human rights and good governance, as well as supporting civil society, continuing in its self-proclaimed role as norm exporter, a continuous layer in the EU-Africa partnership.

As specific objectives, the EU emphasizes more inclusive and legitimate security sector governance, democracy consolidation and increased mobilization of internal state resources (EC 2021b, 13). With regards to the European Security and Defense Missions in the DRC, Schlag has argued that while the EU activities in the DRC are framed in terms of humanitarian help for the Congolese people and support for MONUSCO, they can also be understood as interest-driven national policies of former colonial powers (2012, 322). Merlingen and

Ostrauskaite argue that ESDP missions are inserted in a rationality of the pastorate that is established on a paternalistic order of difference and hierarchy (2006, 30). They point out that metaphorically speaking, its figures are, the shepherd, a distinct and superior kind of being, and the flock that must be cultivated and protected. The members of the flock are declared as lacking the habit of making responsible choices and are therefore in need of persistent surveillance and hierarchically administered benevolence (30). This leads to the constitution of subjects as inferior and dependent things (Hindess 1997, 267 in Merlingen and Ostrauskaite 2006, 30). This conception stands in contrast to that circulating in liberalism as "a rationality of power that imagines a form of governance that operates through the activation of the autonomy of citizens and the promotion of certain kinds of freedom from governmental interference" (Merlingen and Ostrauskaite 2006, 30). While the EU's liberal strategy emphasized norm exportation and civil society support, it does not challenge the inherent contradictions of paternalistic interventionism of former colonial powers.

4.3.2 Human development

In the human development section, the EU mentions that more than two thirds of the Congolese population lives below the poverty line of $1.9 per day, and the majority does not have adequate access to clean water, basic education, or health care (EC 2021b, 9). The resulting poverty trap reduces capacities for development and leads to the continuation of humanitarian crises. It states that the majority of women work in the informal sector, and are therefore often marginalized economically and politically. Here, the EU points to women's economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive rights, as well as their political participation (10).

Moreover, the EU points out that young people are very often left to their own, do not have guaranteed access to the education system and have a lack of training opportunities. In its areas and sectors of focus, the EU emphasizes to support access to education and training sectors, as well as the establishment of frameworks for dialogue, evaluation and negotiation

taking into account the aspirations of the youth population (EC 2021b, 17). It will thus ultimately aim for the emergence of an entrepreneurial middle class and the development of a dynamic private sector that is demanding in terms of economic and social rights and freedoms.

The proposed EU actions show the EU's attempts to advance its values of equality, opportunity and human dignity, as well as gender equality and democratic inclusion, therefore representing a continuing layer of liberal practices. The EU mentions as specific objectives the improvement of the health status of the population, the reduction of inequalities, and education as a driver of youth change and useful ground for future leadership. These proposed objectives are oriented towards the rhetoric of the EU-Africa strategy, which places equality as well as democratization at the core. The EU's discourse on human development in the DRC in the Program, which ignores the historical context of European colonialism, aligns with the critique that EU policy-makers reconcile the colonial past and the democracy-promoting present through a silencing of colonialism (Khakee 2022, 104). Moreover, the EU's failure to consider global economic structures that maintain inequality aligns with critiques of the selective focus of its democracy promotion agendas, as linkages between past imperial practices rejecting democratic and human rights to colonial subjects and present promotion of democracy remain unexplored (105).

4.3.3 Sustainable development

The EU points out that the DRC must address challenges to sharing resources from a regional point of view, with regards to cross-border conservation, the fight against trafficking, and sharing of economic potential. The EU also mentions the problem of deforestation and forest degradation which has been accelerating under the effect of intensive slash-and-burn agriculture, unreasonable logging and overexploitation of wood energy. The EU criticizes the limited renewable electricity production and welcomes the recent liberalization of the energy sector and the establishment of regulatory and planning authorities which has opened up private

investment opportunities (EC 2021b, 11). Specific objectives for this priority area include preservation of environmental capital and development of agriculture for the benefit of populations as well as improvement of renewable energy production, which is in line with the green growth goals of the EU-Africa strategy. The concerns about the environment contradict with frequent cases of neocolonial resource extraction, as the DRC is a target country for petroleum mining, coltan, cobalt, zinc, copper, silver, gold and diamonds (Wilczyński 2021, 65-66). All the companies invested in mining the precious metals present throughout the Congo were owned and operated by Belgian or European individuals, before and after independence . Today, all major mines are owned by non-Congolese cooperations (Clements 2018, 12).

Throughout the program document, similar patterns as in the EU-Africa strategy become clear, such as the recurrent emphasis of the SDGs as well as the addressing of climate change issues and peace and security. However, there is much less partnership discourse, but recurrent emphasis on the close relationship between the DRC and the EU due to its common history. This is phrased in a highly positive way, while the past colonial involvement of Belgium is not at all addressed

While the indicative program itself does not show postcolonial practices rhetorically, it is rather the non-addressing of colonial pasts and roots, and the practical actions of the EU that show a continuation of control via external means – such as mining corporations. Staeger has conceptualized this as a paternalist stance by the EU which applies its own success story of its overcome history to its spatial Other which lacks the "wider social ontology" of European liberalism (2016, 986). Khakee goes further and concludes that the EU is upholding colonial hierarchies through the parts of its own history that it has not overcome, and how this, too, relates to its spatial Other (2022, 116). Consequently, the dominant discourse on European unity is that of a break with a violent past of warfare and colonialism (Ejdus 2022, 46). As Nicolaïdis states, there seems to be only one relevant past which is the war that tore the continent apart 50

years ago, while Europe's other past of the colonial era "does not figure in this narrative" (2015, 285). The presented policies in the indicative program that continue to present the EU as an exporter of norms surrounding democracy, human rights, sustainable development and equality, partly contradict continuing economic exploitation patterns and the ignoring of colonial history, which shows in the Comprehensive Strategy for Africa as well as in the DRC as a country case. This norm exporter role has established itself as a consistent layer in the partnership. The added layers of the climate change significance and restrictive migration policies, as highlighted in the "Comprehensive Strategy for Africa" are also represented in this specific program, showing again the gradual accumulation of layers over time.

Conclusion

The EU-Africa relationship as it is today can be traced back to the colonial period, as well as the foundation of the EU through the Treaty of Rome of 1957, and has continued through agreements such as the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint EU-Africa Strategy. The examination of EU-Africa relations through a political economy as well as a postcolonial lens has shown the economic dynamics at play as well as the historical and power asymmetries inherent in the partnership. The thesis has revealed how colonial relations between the EU and Africa, where the EU has not addressed and frequently neglected its colonial past, influence present-day power relations, which often constitute the relationship as asymmetrical and that postcolonial practices have continued to shape the EU's development policy in Africa. To answer the research question how the layers of liberal and postcolonial developmental practices interact within the current EU-Africa Strategy, and what the implications for power relations between the EU and Africa are, the findings reveal that the EU views itself as an advocator for human rights, good governance, democracy and sustainable development, but hidden postcolonial practices remain behind these buzzwords.

The examination of the Comprehensive Strategy for Africa, published by the EU in March 2020, shows that social and economic liberalization processes of the EU in its development policies towards Africa are not new, but have continued since the creation of the European Development Fund through the Yaoundé Conventions, the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs during the Lomé Conventions or the introduction of Economic Partnership Agreements through the Cotonou Agreement. While the EU highlights cooperation and mutual benefit, especially through the recurrent partnership discourse – with emphasizing the close ties, shared history, shared interests and even declaring Africa as the EU's 'twin continent', this is accompanied by a neglect of the colonial past as well as a romanticization of the 'shared history'. The five pillars of the partnership represent a commitment of the EU

towards Africa in all important aspects of sustainable development today – green transition and energy, digitalization, sustainable growth, peace and governance, as well as migration and mobility, but there are significant gaps in the actions of the EU – such as unequal power relations in digitalization, suggesting hardly reachable standards for a green transition through European Green Deal principles and making migration a privilege that must be earned. The strategy does not address issues such as electronic waste in African countries, and that there is increasing securitization of development through restrictive migration policies. While the EU increasingly has tried to change its narrative under the buzzword of an 'equal partnership', the practices and norms established over time have majorly remained the same.

The country case study of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shows this continuation of the EU's practices and norms. The DRC has a history characterized by colonial exploitation, post-independence power struggles, and continuing neocolonial dynamics. Its postcolonial period has been marked by internal conflicts, exacerbated by unresolved issues of citizenship and land access. External interventions have aimed at addressing poverty and development promotion, but postcolonial critics argue that these efforts frequently maintain exploitation patterns through practices like land grabbing and resource extraction. In its development program for the DRC, the Multiannual Indicative Program 2021-2027, the EU focuses on governance, peace and security, human development and sustainable development. The EU frequently expresses concern over weak state institutions and ongoing human rights violations in the DRC, therefore advocating for principles of democracy and good governance together with supporting civil society. However, criticisms highlight that EU actions, such as the ESDP missions, reflect paternalistic interventionism, opposing the EU's liberal strategy of norm exportation and human rights advocacy. With regards to the EU's emphasis on human development and sustainable development, this part of the program is especially in line with

the Comprehensive EU Africa Strategy, but remains silent about roots of development problems.

Of course, such a study also comes with its limitations. Firstly, liberalism is a multifaceted framework and can be interpreted in different ways, making it difficult to uniformly apply it to EU-Africa relations. Moreover, Africa is not monolithic; as it contains 54 countries with different political, economic, and social contexts, so that generalizing findings across the continent can lead to oversimplification, which makes specific country case studies even more important.

The thesis has revealed that the EU continues to present its self-understanding as a norm-exporter and advocator for human rights, good governance and democracy, especially in its development policy, but that the practical actions often diverge from these commitments. It contributes to the existing literature of the application of postcolonial theory on the study of contemporary EU-Africa relations, but adds a more multidisciplinary lens by bringing political economic and postcolonial perspectives into a conversation. Additionally, the theoretical and analytical framework of this thesis can be applied to future EU-Africa strategies to examine how layers of the relationship remain the same or how new layers are added during policy reform processes.

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