



Building resilient states and societies as goal in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy

What's the problem represented to be?

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Abstract

This study concerns the problem representation behind the goal of building more resilient states and societies in EU-Africa policies. As resilience is a recent feature of the European Union's policy discourse, the study aims at uncovering the problematisation behind its use towards Africa and, consequently, what interests lie behind this change of language. The study is conducted on documents pertaining the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and through the employment of the "What's the problem represented to be?" (WPR) approach. Moreover, the research engages with a postcolonial standpoint through which the findings are discussed, highlighting concepts such as 'othering' and 'eurocentrism'. The findings of this study indicate that the problematisation behind the goal of enhancing resilience in the African context is represented as a lack of African capacities to deal with different issues, and that the EU's 'need' of a more resilient Africa relates to the increase of ownership in the African territory. The problem representation is argued to contribute to the colonial narrative that characterizes EU-Africa relations and therefore clashes with the emancipatory features that concrete ownership should entail.

Keywords European Union, Africa, resilience, policy, WPR, postcolonialism

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1. Introduction

In considering the EU as a major global actor, it is crucial to take into account the various partnerships it initiated with different countries and regions worldwide, as well as its remarkable role in development policies and aid. While promoting values such as democracy, human rights and peace, the EU became a prominent player in the international relations realm. However, its conduct has raised questions concerning what its true identity is and what its real intentions are. As a matter of fact, the EU's commitment to multilateralism can be seen as a strategy to extend its influence beyond its borders and counterbalance other potential competing powers (Sicurelli, 2010: 2-3).

In general, the EU's cooperation with various world's regions is often perceived as guided by its self-interests in asserting its position as a major global actor, and its relations with developing regions as mechanisms that perpetuate the European colonial behaviour (Hurt, 2010: 162, 165). This view might be relevant to the EU's relationship with Africa, as it can be conceived as built on the desire to expand EU's influence on the African continent.

The end of colonialism signed the beginning of a new chapter for EU-Africa relations, characterized by decades of policies aimed at strengthening economic ties, cooperation as well as providing aid and assistance in terms of development, peace and security. In these, the EU places a great emphasis on the principle of partnership, making the partnership discourse a common feature of the various agreements it initiated with the African continent (Del Biondo, 2020: 310). Furthermore, the EU implemented strategies that could facilitate the promotion and export of its own version of regional integration, promoting it as a suitable option for African regions as well (Sicurelli, 2010).

The most remarkable policy concerning the relations between the two continents is certainly the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). Launched in 2007 and renewed in 2017, it is considered as "the capstone doctrine of African-European Union relations" (European Parliament, 2017: 7) and "the overarching long-term framework of cooperation between the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU)" (European Parliament, 2017: 7). It is mostly aimed at reinforcing the economic and political relations between the two, and at enhancing cooperation on areas of common interest, such as peace and security, migration, democracy, good governance, human rights and human development.

In the 2017 renewed Strategy, a new goal has been introduced: the building of more resilient states and societies. This goal covers areas such as preventing conflicts, building peace, addressing crises and strengthening governance systems. These common objectives have been mentioned and addressed since the first Joint Communication, however, the policy released in 2017 is the first in which the EU addresses these issues under the goal of building more resilient states and societies. What interests lie behind this EU change of language? My research intends to focus on this specific

aspect of the EU-Africa relations and, by employing Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" approach, aims at uncovering the problematization behind the EU's resilience discourse in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, revealing the actual Union's interests.

Given this, the research question of my thesis is: *what is the problem representation that lies behind the goal of building more resilient states and societies in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy?*

The analysis of this thesis will be focused in addressing this question through the methodology offered by Bacchi (2009), and the findings originating from it will be later discussed in relation to a postcolonial framework.

1.1 Disposition

In order to provide a comprehensive research, the following chapter of this thesis will present an overview of the EU-Africa relations' background. This will outline the events that led to the adoption of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and will provide a better understanding of the dynamics that characterize the two actors' relationship. The third chapter will introduce the literature review of the existing research concerning the thesis' topic. Given the variety of it, the chapter will present three different sub-groups focusing on EU's policy strategy and discourse, EU-Africa relations, and the resilience discourse. The fourth chapter will present a theoretical and conceptual framework. In this, the postcolonial standpoint of the thesis will be described, as well as the concept of resilience and the one of problem representation that, being key concepts for conducting this research, deserve to be further addressed. The subsequent chapter will outline the 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach, which represents the methodology chosen for this study, and the policy material that will be subjected to analysis. Delimitations and limitations will be presented in the same chapter. The sixth chapter will present the analysis and its results, and the findings will be later discussed in relation to the theoretical framework in the seventh chapter. Finally, the thesis will end with the eighth chapter, in which concluding remarks and suggestions for further research will be provided.

2. Background

By having the uncovering of the problem representation behind the EU's resilience discourse towards Africa as the main purpose of this research, I consider an overview of the EU-Africa relations' background as necessary to gain an understanding of what are the factors and events that led to the outcome I will analyse.

As commonly known, relations between Europe and Africa are rooted in history. After 70 years of colonization, in which a great amount of European capital was generated, the relations progressed in

a series of agreements, specifically the Yaoundé and consequent Lomé partnerships between the EU and the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group of countries. In the 1990s, the relations were progressively securitized and politicized, until the signing of the Cotonou Agreement in 2000. In the same year, the first Africa-Europe Summit took place. This, organised by the EU and the predecessor of the African Union, led to the Cairo Declaration and represents the first ‘continental level’ meeting between the leaders of both parties (Kammel, 2017).

The Cairo Declaration committed the two continents in fostering an equal and respectful cooperation in order to add a strategic dimension to their partnership. In particular, the cooperation was aimed at increasing regional economic integration and the Africa position in the world economy, and integrating democratic principles, good governance, human rights and peace-building. Despite the differences between the EU and Africa’s main objectives, with Europe focusing more on peace and security issues and Africa on economic growth, the Cairo Action plan laid the foundation to the development of the EU-Africa partnership. However, some issues in the agenda, such as the debt issue, are believed to not have been addressed in the way they deserved, and this caused a sort of frustration on the African side that was perpetuated to this day (Kammel, 2017).

In 2005, the first comprehensive “EU Strategy for Africa” was adopted by the EU, outlining the guidelines for a new partnership and, two years later, the 2nd Africa-EU Summit led to the adoption of the first Joint Africa-EU Strategy and a 2008-2010 Action Plan. The year this happened, 2007, was the year that marked 50 years of African independence as well as of European integration, leading the JAES to be referred to as a ‘partnership of equals’, aiming at disrupting the donor-recipient relationship that characterized the two continents (Kammel, 2017).

Three years later, in 2010, a 3rd Africa-EU Summit took place in Tripoli. Here, the JAES was confirmed as the main strategy for future cooperation and the 2011-2013 Action Plan was introduced. The intention was to progress in the earlier identified areas of cooperation and to seek for initiatives that could be mutually beneficial. However, the ongoing financial crisis in Europe got the major attention during the Summit, therefore the interest towards a concrete EU-Africa implementation plan resulted to be limited (Kammel, 2017, 321-322).

A further step, in 2014, brought the creation of the Roadmap for 2014-2017, which presented objectives in conformity with the JAES. The main principles, such as moving away from a donor-recipient relationship and increasing an equal economic integration, were reiterated, implying their unsuccessful implementation until then, and again, concrete proposals regarding how to deepen the cooperation failed to be addressed (Kammel, 2017, 323).

The JAES was re-confirmed in 2017 and slightly renovated in order to meet the contemporary needs and issues. Here, the goal of ‘building more resilient states and societies’ was introduced. Today, the two continents still rely on the JAES as the framework for their cooperation and, meanwhile, follow a process for the creation and adoption of a latest version. Despite this, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy remains subjected to criticisms regarding its implementation and compliance with the claimed objectives (Pirozzi, 2010).

3. Literature Review

In this chapter, the existing literature concerning my thesis’ topic will be outlined and, given the variety of it, I identified three main sub-groups: EU’s foreign policy strategy and discourse, EU-Africa relations, and resilience in the EU discourse.

3.1 EU’s policy strategy and discourse

In order to assess the EU’s real interests and motives behind its relations with Africa, it might be useful to acquire an understanding of its general foreign policy strategy and discourse. When it comes to foreign policies of the European Union, a great deal of literature focuses on the aspects of development cooperation and development policies.

As Tallarita (2023) claims, development cooperation is one of the most influential and enduring aspects of EU foreign policy. Its significance stems from its capacity to foster positive international relations as well as its potential to spread EU values beyond its borders. As she emphasizes, the study of the European behaviour is expressed in two opposing ways: the liberal and the realist narratives. These are represented by the division between values and interests, thus the basis for EU development policies can be either the promotion of certain values or the pursuit of certain strategic goals (Tallarita, 2023).

Hurt (2010) came to similar findings in his review study. More precisely, he conceives this approach to development as an effort to secure liberal capitalism to local initiatives in many developing regions. Whether or not this is in the best interest of the majority of the poor people in developing countries, this could be interpreted as an effort by the EU to increase its structural influence over the global political economy. According to him, European self-interest is becoming more pronounced, also enhanced by the failure to obtain much more than a rhetorical commitment to policy consistency for development (Hurt, 2010).

In relation to EU’s discourse, many studies take into account the role of normative power and its practices.

Aydin-Düzgit (2014), in analysing the use of discursive approaches to the EU foreign policy, claims that normative power is an important feature of the EU's discourse, through which the Union spreads democratic norms and promotes democratic changes in countries. However, the democratic principles that characterize the EU are promoted as universal, discursively reinforcing Europe's superiority over the rest of the world and strengthening the boundaries separating the two (Aydin-Düzgit, 2014: 362).

Huber et al. (2017), in their research concerning the EU's discourse, reiterate both the importance of human rights and democracy in the Union's foreign policy and how this discourse enhances a gap between Europe and the outside world. In fact, this Europe's rhetoric that sees itself as the only continent where human values and democracy are respected reminds of the European colonial empires' rhetoric and portrays the EU as right and modern and the rest of the world as wrong and backward (Huber et al., 2017: 3-4).

Diez (2014), with his comprehensive analysis of the EU's discourse and foreign policy and the role that normative power plays in them, provides a different point of view. In particular, he claims that the consideration of normative power Europe as a constitutive part of the EU's identity, on which its discourse and foreign policy are based, can be problematic. This is due to the fact that such an approach overestimates the level of stability of the discourse and, at the same time, underestimates the debates about normative power as a concept in itself. It implies the possibility to set limits to what is legitimate in EU foreign policy, when in reality, the setting of boundaries in foreign policy is a source of struggle. In this, he also highlights how EU norms and interests often cannot be distinguished, as they go hand in hand in the empirical world (Diez, 2014).

In an earlier study, Diez (2005) treats the topic of normative power Europe in a different way. He considers normative power as a constitutive practice of the European identity, and highlights the 'Othering' processes that belong to it. In this, he also pinpoints the fact that normative power and its self/other practices are not a unique feature of the EU's conduct, but can be noticed in other actors as well, such as the United States. However, he argues that the projection of European standards and ideals needs to be continuously deconstructed through the exposition of inconsistencies both inside and between this discourse and other processes. This would not undermine normative authority, but rather prevent it from developing into a project that asserts to know what Europe is and what other actors should be like (Diez, 2005).

3.2 EU-Africa relations

In the International Relations' field, the relationship between EU and Africa presents a wide range of studies. Many focus on the historical development of the relationship, others on the efficiency and

possible improvements of the various agreements issued over the years. Pirozzi (2010) and Kammel (2017), for instance, provide inquiries concerning the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. They analyse the strengths and the flaws of the partnership and suggest new approaches to better regulate and implement it.

Another perspective of the existing literature concerning EU-Africa relations concerns the normative power of the EU and its moral facade. An example of this is provided by Langan (2012) who, in analysing EU-Africa relations, employs the concept of moral economy. According to him, an analysis of moral economy can allow an understanding of the relationship between EU's moral norms and its acts abroad. As a matter of fact, the EU is associated with the notion of normative power, through which the EU acts to shape international norms according to its own values, such as democracy, good governance and human rights. A study focusing on moral economy facilitates the examination of inconsistencies between moral standards, that serve as justifications, and the material results of EU's economic ties for their purported beneficiaries. His analysis concludes that in the EU-Africa cooperation, the projection of European moral standards serves more to publicly legitimize and self-justify the pursuit of unfair policies that impair the well-being of "the poor" than to change external partners' mindsets or positively transform their policy objectives (Langan, 2012: 244, 265).

Rutazibwa (2010), with her research concerning the role of the EU as an ethical intervener in its relations with Africa, provides similar conclusions. In fact, her analysis of the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy through a post-colonial/development studies lens suggests that the methods the EU employs to achieve interventions abroad contradict with the content it uses to describe its purposes, and she concludes by claiming that "[i]f the EU were to be consistent and serious about its normative ambitions, it would mean that it would be successful in empowering the other to build its own good life" (Rutazibwa, 2010: 222).

A more recent study is provided by Del Biondo (2020), who analyses the Joint Africa-EU Strategy according to the principle of equality. She argues that donor-recipient relationships are often characterized by discording principles and interests, and, because of this, she aims at analysing whether the JAES is not an exception or it implements an equal partnership. Her research recognizes the presence of equality when the more powerful part of the partnership, the EU, does not impose its will on the less powerful one and, by taking the power asymmetry as a given, she concludes that the so assessed principle of equality was overall respected (Del Biondo, 2020).

3.3 Resilience in the EU's discourse

The concept of resilience appeared dominant in the EU's discourse in the past few years, and this certainly raised the interest of different scholars who provided different inquiries about it.

One of the first studies is provided by Joseph (2014) who focuses on the EU's project SHARE (Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience) and, through the concept of governmentality, suggests that the project of building resilience can be seen as a strategy to govern from distance. According to him, the EU showed a lack of a clear strategy in regards to both humanitarian aid and development cooperation, despite it being considered as one of the world's largest aid donors, and its approach to resilience in the Horn of Africa can be seen as part of a new strategy for crisis reduction in developing areas. More specifically, the EU seeks to establish a longer-term strategy to improve impacted people's resilience and coping skills and, through this approach, it is able to transfer accountability for governance failures from the international community to local actors who are now held responsible. In his view, this can be considered as a form of soft power, as the agenda is still defined by international organizations, but governance is pursued remotely through the concepts of ownership and accountability (Joseph, 2014: 286-290).

Tocci (2020) provides an overview of the role of resilience in the European foreign policy, including its origins, challenges, and future prospects. Going back to 2015-2016, she emphasizes how, at that time, the concept of resilience appeared in numerous policy communities and its adoption by the EU could be seen as a way to embrace a shared language and bring all these policy worlds together. Moreover, she highlights the fact that, until those years, the EU's relationship with its neighbouring regions was characterized by concepts such as enlargement and Europeanization, not focusing on the actual challenges and instabilities the areas were facing. The adoption of resilience could help the EU in building more efficient foreign policies that had the chance to acknowledge the actual crises those societies were exposed to. However, she notices how "resilience as a goal was never meant to replace the normative agenda: supporting peace, democracy, rights, and development remained core goals of the Union in its surrounding regions" (Tocci, 2020: 180).

Svitková (2017) illustrates the increase of 'resilience' in strategic discourses and, concerning the EU, she provides another interesting finding. In fact, according to her analysis, the concept of resilience in the EU discourse is mainly external, referring to neighbour and partner countries, and in regard to state-building and good governance.

Finally, Juncos (2017) scrutinizes the role of resilience as a new EU's foreign policy priority and what it might entail. She argues that it goes together with a new more pragmatist global governance

that takes into account “the practical consequences of actions and local practices” (Juncos, 2017: 2). However, this raises a problem regarding the EU’s identity, as it cannot be both pragmatic and principled at the same time. In fact, with a new pragmatic resilience-focused approach, the EU should start promoting democracy and human rights on a case-by-case basis, and not in a universal way as before, and this is certain to increase allegations of self-interest, selectiveness, and double standards as well as highlight the EU’s vulnerabilities and limits as a global player, weakening its reputation as a normative authority. In practice, the EU has embraced the new idea of resilience and a more pragmatic approach, but it is still bound to the old liberal and normative foreign policy (Juncos, 2017).

3.4 Research gap

As explored throughout the literature review, a great variety of writings have examined whether the EU acts according to its values or interests in both development cooperations (Tallarita, 2023; Hurt 2010) and exercising its normative power (Aydin-Düzgit, 2014; Huber et al., 2017), with Diez (2005; 2014) providing inquiries on the role of normative power in the EU’s identity. Concerning the EU-Africa relations, Langan (2012) and Rutazibwa (2010) question the conduct of the EU and its debated moral/ethical facade, while Pirozzi (2010) and Kammel (2017) provide an analysis of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy’ strengths and flaws. The concept of resilience, instead, got the attention of different scholars who provided inquiries regarding its role in the EU’s discourse and how it gained dominance in it (Tocci, 2020; Svitková, 2017; Juncos, 2017), with Joseph (2014) examining the nature of the EU’s resilience project in the Horn of Africa. However, in analysing the EU’s behaviour, a gap seems to arise when looking at the resilience discourse in policies towards Africa and the effects it might produce. This makes the focus on the EU’s resilience discourse in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy an original one, that today is lacking in the field. Moreover, the originality of this study is sustained by the choice of the methodological framework. In fact, despite the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach, developed by Bacchi (2009), gained a significant relevance in the field of policy analysis, the use of this method in research concerning the resilience discourse in EU-Africa policies is still lacking.

4. Theoretical and conceptual framework

This chapter will provide the theoretical foundation of the thesis, consisting of postcolonial concepts and perspectives, and will outline a conceptual framework regarding some of the research’s key concepts that need a deeper explanation, such as the concepts of resilience and problem representation.

4.1 Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism firstly emerged in the mid-20th century, years characterized by many countries experiencing decolonization, and became a significant standpoint in the 80s, fuelled by the critique of newly independent countries towards their nation-states in delivering modernization promises (Majumdar, 2021, 164). In general, it can be said that postcolonialism as a theoretical position was produced from the political and cultural experiences of the oppressed periphery, and challenged western academic and political processes that were conceived as objective knowledge. The aim was not to overcome western ideas, but rather to create a more democratic stance in which also the voices of the colonial outcome were considered relevant (Majumdar, 2021, 164-167).

In particular, the critique of 'Orientalism' constituted a significant postcolonial theory feature that challenged western understandings. Orientalism can be described as the portrayal of the Orient through the imagination and ideas of the Occident (Said, 1977). In this, the portrayal is produced and shaped in order to construct a reality in the world that is the opposite to its modern and civilized self (Majumdar, 2021, 167). In other words, the Orient gets 'Orientalized' by the prevailing Eurocentric political, academic and cultural norms (Said, 1977), and postcolonial approaches aim at disrupting this narrative through processes of decentring (Sebhatu, 2020).

Eurocentrism is still one of the dominant narratives in European and International Relations studies and this is why I decided to employ a postcolonial lens for this research. Decentring can be considered as necessary and a key-player in inquiries regarding Europe's relations with non-European regions, in order to not undermine the multipolarity of the world we live in (Sebhatu, 2020).

Another postcolonial concept that is relevant for this thesis is the one of 'Othering'. The concept usually refers to episodes of racialisation and stereotyping and, in relation to European imperialism, can be referred to as practices aimed at producing a knowledge that legitimises dominance and oppression (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). By constructing the Other as a negative and antagonistic character, the self-image appears as distinctive and therefore as something to be approved. This process links the one within Orientalism, as the Occident produces a picture of the Orient that results opposed to the one it presents of itself (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011).

The concept of Othering, and the knowledge it produces, can be utilized to identify and analyse mechanisms that uphold the colonial ideologies that construct Others in contemporary postcolonial interactions (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011). Eurocentrism contributed to perpetuate Othering, and this is why today Europe still conceives Africa as itself's Other, despite the interdependence that contradicts the two (Sebhatu, 2020).

Given what has been stated so far, it can be argued that concepts such as Orientalism, Otherism and Eurocentrism explains the relevance of postcolonial theory to the topic of my research. Moreover, the approach to asymmetry discourse through this lens will allow to not deny the economic disparities between the actors involved, but rather to emphasize how these disparities originated (Sebhatu, 2020).

4.2 The concept of resilience

In order to provide a clear research, I will now proceed in further addressing the concept of resilience. As a matter of fact, despite it being generally referred to as the ability to recover after something traumatic has happened, the concept of resilience is employed by different scholars and in different fields, providing contrasting points of view regarding how and when the concept should be used.

From the Latin word *resilire*, which can be translated as “rebound”, resilience entered the English vocabulary in the 17th century and only in the 20th century it started being used in academic fields such as psychology and ecology (Svitková, 2017).

Resilience has now entered the social science terminology and is used in a variety of different fields. However, its definition varies across contrasting disciplines, and it is difficult to argue for an official meaning of the word that is satisfactory enough for each field of study (Juncos, 2017).

Moreover, the definition not only varies across disciplines, but also across countries, organizations and institutions. The UN, for example, provides a definition of resilience as “the capacity to identify and stay away from risks and, when risks become shocks, the capacity to cope, to adapt to them or to reshape them. It is not about new ingredients (poverty reduction, peace building, job creation, gender equality, food security), it is about a new recipe that combines them to create a capacity to identify risks and shocks and recover from them” (UNDP, 2023). Despite this might appear as an acceptable and satisfactory definition of resilience, other institutions employ different ones, and this is why the concept is being further addressed. As a matter of fact, by considering the goal of building resilient states and societies in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the understanding of what definition of resilience is taken into account is crucial in order to provide a complete analysis and more reliable findings.

Despite the partnership that unites them, the European Union and the African Union employ the concept of resilience in different ways. Whereas the European Union defines it as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (European Parliament, 2021, 8), not mentioning specific areas the concept relates to, the African Union and other African organizations usually relates it to natural and climate events. By considering this announcement: “The African Union Commission (AUC) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) alongside African states have instituted normative frameworks to build resilience of African

nations. These include development of strategies on Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change, Weather and Climate services, biodiversity and ecosystem-based solutions” (African Union Commission, 2019), we can notice how the commitment of African agencies in building resilience concerns the employment of strategies that can better prepare African nations to face natural challenges.

This shows how the ‘limits’ in which to inscribe the concept are different according to what institution we refer to. However, given the fact the JAES documents subject to analysis are implemented by the EU and do not provide a complementary definition that combines the two approaches, this research will be conducted by considering the concept of resilience defined by the European Union.

4.3 The concept of problem representation

Problem representation constitutes the central feature of the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) approach and, because of this, it merits a further explanation. As already stated, Bacchi (2009) developed the WPR model as a method for policy analysis. In this, she highlights how policies can be conceived as ‘programmes’, issued and followed by governments or political elites, that imply the presence of a problem that needs to be solved or managed. It is on this ‘implied’ problem that the concept of problem representation finds its basis (Bacchi, 2009). This approach allows us to emphasize how issues develop into policy problems, thus becoming problematised, and aims at uncovering how problems and their provided solutions are discursively framed (Riemann, 2023). In doing this, it is important to think of problems as endogenous rather than exogenous, meaning that policies do not just address problems, but rather give them shape (Bacchi, 2009).

To analyse problem representations in relation to the field of IR can be crucial, as the way problems are represented plays a major role in how governing takes place. “(W)e are governed through problematisations rather than through policies” (Bacchi, 2009, xi), therefore we need to move beyond the assumed problems and refer to problematisations, i.e. how a problem is represented or constructed, to critically assess what is included and what is left out (Bacchi, 2009).

Given the nature of this thesis, we can say that problem representation constitutes the inquiry’s driving concept, and its investigation will allow us to uncover what ‘problems’ are believed to exist behind the concept of resilience in the JAES and how they are thought about.

5. Methodological framework

This chapter will outline the methodological approach chosen to best conduct this research. First, the ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ method’s approach to policy analysis will be outlined,

followed by the operationalization of the method itself and the related questions to ask the material. Finally, also the chosen material will be described.

5.1 A different approach to policy analysis

As earlier addressed, the methodological approach of this thesis is characterized by a focus on problem representation, and this is what distinguishes the chosen method from more conventional approaches to policy analysis. As a matter of fact, policy analysis is generally believed to be characterized by three different perspectives: comprehensive rationalism, political rationalism and social construction (Bacchi, 2009).

Comprehensive rationalism sees policies as a way to fix problems that are already identifiable, political rationalism focuses on the involved voices and political constraints in identifying policy problems and policy directions and, finally, social construction considers how the policy-makers conceive and make sense of the world they live in. The methodological premises of this research draw upon the latter constructionist perspective. In fact, by employing the Bacchi (2009) ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ approach, I will consider how socio-political processes shape reality’s knowledge and I will conceive governments/institutions as the creators of policy ‘problems’ (Bacchi, 2009, 32-33).

In this, the concept of discourse plays an important role. WPR conceives discourses as socially constructed forms of knowledge that place restrictions on what can be said or written about a certain social practice or topic. Despite being commonly acknowledged as truth, this ‘knowledge’ does not exist independently of the claims that constitute it. Therefore, referring to a statement as ‘discourse’ means questioning its truth status (Bacchi, 2009, 35)

5.2 WPR approach

By having a focus on the EU discourse in written policies, ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ (WPR) results to be a suitable method for this research. It can be defined as a discursive approach to policy analysis, and it challenges more mainstream policy making analyses that conceive policies as responses to problems that already exist in the world we live in and wait to be solved. In fact, WPR emphasizes the problems’ construction feature of policies and conceives them as a discourse in which problems originate (Riemann, 2023).

As already stated, problem representation is at the basis of this method and constitutes the key feature of the following analysis part. This is because the way a problem is represented has a variety of effects on how it is conceived, how it is handled, and on how the individuals involved are thought about and

encouraged to view themselves. Problem representation aims at identifying the implicitly addressed ‘problems’ and make them explicit and, to reach this goal, Bacchi (2009) developed a set of interrelated questions to be applied to the chosen problem representation i.e., chosen policy. Among the six provided questions, I identified four of them as the most suitable for my research. The questions are as follows:

1. What’s the ‘problem’ of resilient states and societies represented to be in the specific policy?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the problem representation?
3. How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

(Bacchi, 2009)

In the analysis, the questions will be applied to documents pertaining to the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and presented in the stated order.

5.2.1 Questions in detail

Question 1 builds on the premise that policies contain implied problem representations. By looking at the intervention proposed by the policy, I will be able to uncover how the problem is thought about. Hence, question 1 will allow me to reveal the problem representation in the chosen policy. Once the problem representation is identified, it is important to consider the knowledge and perceptions that underpin it. This will be assessed by answering question 2. Through examining assumptions and presuppositions, I will be able to determine the conceptual premises that lie behind the problem representation. This will be achieved by analysing binaries, key concepts and categories included in the policy. However, a necessary point needs to be clarified here. Question 2 does not refer to policy makers’ beliefs, but rather to the assumptions embedded in the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009, 2-9).

The answer to question 3 will allow me to stress the conditions that supported the problem representation to take place and become dominant. This will include an examination of its origins, mechanisms, and history. Finally, by answering question 4 I will be able to identify issues and perspectives that are not taken into account in the problem representation. This will highlight both the limits and what failed to be addressed in it (Bacchi, 2009, 10-14).

5.3 Material

The analysis of the problem representation of ‘resilience’ concerning the EU-Africa relations will be conducted by considering policies and institutional documents that regulate the relationship. Being the first EU-Africa official document in which the concept of resilience has been introduced, the 2017

Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) will constitute the main body of the research and, in order to provide a complete explanation of the EU's resilience discourse in relation to Africa, both prior and subsequent documents will be taken into account. Therefore, the chosen documents are:

- the 2007 Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, 82 pages
- the 2017 Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, 52 pages
- the 2020 Joint Communication Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa, 19 pages
- the 2020 Council conclusions on Africa, 9 pages

Despite this might appear as a considerable amount of documents, I want to pinpoint the fact that the chosen questions will be specifically applied on the 2017 Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The other documents will serve to provide a framework regarding the use of resilience before and after the EU's change of discourse.

The idea behind the creation of the 2007 Africa-EU Strategic Partnership was to provide a consistent framework for an integrated and efficient future cooperation between the two parts. Published by the Council of the European Union, the document claims for a shared vision and common objectives, mostly aiming at strengthening economic cooperation and promoting a sustainable development (Council of the European Union, 2007).

The 2017 Joint Africa-EU Strategy, published by the directorate-general for external policies of the European Parliament, is a 54 pages document that aims at refining the objectives identified in the 2007 Strategy. In this, the overarching goals remain consistent but new priorities are introduced in order to meet the needs of the contemporary reality (European Parliament, 2017). As of March 2023, a new Joint Africa-EU Strategy remains "under construction", and this brought my analysis to consider the 2020 and 2022 documents that complement the ongoing process of creating it.

5.4 Delimitations and limitations

This study is limited to the problem representation of the concept of resilience in EU-Africa documents in order to assess the EU's discourse and interests, therefore it does not analyse in-depth other aspects of the EU-Africa relations or the EU's use of the concept of resilience towards non-African actors. Moreover, the research is limited to the solely analysis of documents, more specifically EU's documents concerning its relations with Africa. Due to this, the study is limited to written elements and discourse and does not further inquire the implementation or effects of the policies analysed.

Finally, the nature of the method chosen to conduct this research raises one of the main limitations of this study and its findings. As a matter of fact, discourse analyses and, in this case, the WPR approach, are subjected to personal interpretation and understanding. “We are governed through problematisations that influence who we are and how we think” (Bacchi, 2009, 264), therefore I cannot ignore the possibility of bias in both selecting and interpreting the documents, and I acknowledge the chance of producing different findings by conducting the study through a lens that is not mine. However, in order to counteract this risk, I will try and remain as objective as possible when analysing the material and take into consideration different perspectives and ideas.

6. Analysis

In this chapter, the chosen material will be analysed according to Bacchi’s WPR approach and the related questions. The findings will be provided through the illustration of examples, i.e. direct quotes from the documents.

6.1 What’s the ‘problem’ of resilient states and societies represented to be in the specific policy?

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this question is to uncover the problem representation that lies in the policy by looking at how the problem is desired to be fixed and ‘working backwards’ from there. However, this might result in a difficult task as a policy may contain different problem representations that contradict each other (Bacchi, 2009, 3-4). In relation to building more resilient states and societies in the 2017 Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the EU addresses different areas that require EU-Africa cooperation in order to reach the already stated goal. This means that the goal of building resilient states and societies includes more than one problem representation. However, these will not result to be contradictory or in conflict with each other, instead, they will show how the EU conceives Africa as a continent that needs improvements in several fields in order to be considered as resilient.

In the Communication, the concept of resilient societies is firstly introduced in this way:

“The Joint Communication refers to the role of resilient societies, but this challenge stretches well beyond the governance system mentioned in the document, including accountable, democratic, effective and transparent institutions, protection of human rights and inclusive participation of citizens in public decision making” (European Parliament, 2017, 9).

Further, under the paragraph titled “building more resilient states and societies” the EU deeply focuses on the different areas. First of all, the enhance of resilience is discussed in relation to preventing conflicts and addressing crises:

“Conflict prevention is centred on a series of actions, including strengthened support to achieve full APSA operationalisation with the building of African capacities. It is completed by actions aimed at addressing crises and improving conflict management, including initial steps for post conflict peacebuilding such as disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, [...]. However, financial sustainability options have yet to be implemented which will turn the African ownership principle into reality” (European Parliament, 2017, 33).

Here, it is highlighted how the African means need to be implemented, including the African Peace and Security Architecture, for the continent to be able to manage conflicts and crises, as well as to make the concept of ownership more concrete.

The EU, therefore, implies that the African abilities in avoiding and solving conflicts and crises are not yet sufficient to reach a satisfactory level of resilience. Consequently, a need to strengthen Africa’s governance systems is argued:

“The Communication refers to the role of resilient societies highlighting links between governance, development and security” (European Parliament, 2017, 34).

And continues:

“a stronger focus is paid to illicit financial flows and [...] this challenge stretches well beyond the governance system mentioned in the document, such as accountable, democratic, effective and transparent institutions, protection of human rights and inclusive participation of citizens in public decision making” (European Parliament, 2017, 34).

As the ‘solution’ is here presented to be the improvement of African governance systems, the ‘problem’ is therefore represented as the presence of governance systems that are not accountable, transparent and democratic enough. A similar problem representation is provided in relation to the rule of law and human rights:

“The EU seems, in fact, more oriented than in the past toward a pragmatic approach to the human rights dimension, including conditionality, ICC or related issues, with a view to give the AU full responsibility for implementation. For the AU, the main challenge lies in exercising adequate political weight and using the right leverages to push for the adoption of its own human rights instruments at national level” (European Parliament, 2017, 34).

To suggest the exercise of a more adequate political weight and a more appropriate effort for the adoption of human rights implies that the improvement of the two is one more necessary condition for resilience to be in place.

Further areas of concern are environmental and humanitarian crises:

“The Communication presents the EU’s support for African partners on disaster risk reduction, vulnerability to disease and strengthening Africa’s own capacity to manage environmental and societal challenges” (European Parliament, 2017, 35).

And eradication of poverty:

“A clear challenge exists, therefore, in trying to link all resources to the goal of eradicating poverty, still considered by the last EU documents as the main objective of development aid” (European Parliament, 2017, 36).

Again, Africa is portrayed as in need of EU’s support and development aid to face crises and eradicate poverty. Therefore, the problem is again represented as the lack of African competences in facing the stated issues.

For what it concerns migration, in relation to enhance resilience, the EU claims:

“Migration and mobility are presented as a two-fold issue that can strengthen societies but also destabilise them if not managed properly. In this light, the Communication invokes a shared responsibility, calling also for global solutions, based on the principle of solidarity and responsibility-sharing” (European Parliament, 2017, 35).

And continues:

“The Communication mentions adequate measures and comprehensive legislative frameworks to fight against trafficking and smuggling networks. It also presents ‘preventing and discouraging the use of irregular channels’ in tandem with ‘promoting regular migration and mobility opportunities’” (European Parliament, 2017, 36).

In these quotes, the provided ‘solution’ is to properly manage migration in a way that contrasts trafficking and irregular channels but promotes it as an opportunity to strengthen societies. The implied ‘problem’ is thus that migration, without the proper managing that the EU suggests, prevents Africa from improving a sufficient resilience level.

To conclude the answer of this first analysis’ question, one can argue that by ‘working backwards’ from the proposed ‘solutions’ to uncover the problem representation, provided us with similar

findings. Despite the problem of building resilient states and societies resulted to be related to different fields, its representation in the chosen policy can be conceived as the EU portraying Africa as unequipped to prevent conflicts, address crises, respect human rights, manage migration and provide a satisfactory governance. Conditions that seem necessary, according to the EU, for an actor to be perceived as resilient.

6.2 What presuppositions or assumptions underlie the problem representation?

Having the implied problem representation identified, I can now proceed by answering the second question. This will help to highlight the understanding that underlies the problem representation, including what is assumed and taken for granted (Bacchi, 2009).

In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to take into account binaries and categories.

6.2.1 Binaries

A binary or dichotomy highlights a relationship between different concepts in which what is on one side has to be considered different and therefore excluded from what is on the other. In the under-examination policies, a recurrent binary is between resilient and fragile.

Here, clear examples of the resilient/fragile binary will be listed:

“the EU’s choice of language has switched from ‘peace and security’ to ‘resilient states and societies’, stressing the aspect of ‘fragility’ as a direct threat to the EU” (European Parliament, 2017, 32).

“While the objective is to achieve peace and security throughout Africa, efforts should be made in priority in regions where tensions are the highest. [...]. Resilience should in particular be at the heart of African and EU efforts to address protracted conflict and fragility (European Commission, 2020, 10).

When fragility is not explicitly mentioned, we can still find examples using synonyms:

“the EU will keep investing in people and empowering them, [...]. This requires increased efforts to eradicate poverty and growing socio-economic inequalities and to strengthen resilience, particularly among the most vulnerable” (Council of the European Union, 2020, 6).

By claiming that resilience should be enhanced in order to contrast fragility and vulnerability, it is implied that Africa, by the time the documents have been released, is considered as a fragile and

vulnerable continent. This is strengthened by the fact that the claims we find in the documents are all from a European perspective, being the documents published by European institutions.

The resilience/fragility binary allows the EU to highlight the on-going African processes that do not benefit the Union and, therefore, need to be ‘fixed’, by hiding them behind the desire to build a more resilient Africa. This can be noticed in the following examples:

“The initiative should consider the fact that today Energy R&D is regrettably the least developed/advanced dimension of the Energy Union: however, the financing and market opportunities offered by the African continent may prompt European acceleration in this domain” (European Parliament, 2017, 39).

“In the Joint Communication, the priority actions to be included in the next Roadmap 2018-2020 are anchored to an African vision, but mainly linked to the EU’s strategic interests” (European Parliament, 2017, 43).

The first example refers to the need to energise Africa in order to increase resilience. In this, the mentioned initiative is the EU-Africa Research and Innovation Partnership on climate and sustainable energy. The latter example, instead, refers to the JAES as a whole, showing how every action, including the goal of building more resilient states and societies, has to consider the EU's interests.

6.2.2 Categories

In order to identify the assumptions that underlie the problem representation, it can be useful to also outline what categories are represented and how. As Bacchi (2009) claims, to identify categories and analyse their functioning allows one to gain a deeper understanding of problem representations. Categories can be of different kinds, and the ones I will take into account are subject and people categories.

Subject categories, in this inquiry, are represented by two main actors, respectively the EU and Africa. As mentioned earlier, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy is a partnership devoted to cooperation, equity and mutual effort, and this is repeatedly stated in the documents:

“Africa is Europe’s closest neighbour. The ties that bind Africa and the European Union (EU) are broad and deep as a result of history, proximity and shared interests. [...]. We need to partner with Africa, our twin continent, to tackle together the challenges of the 21st century and to further our common interests and future” (European Commission, 2020, 1).

“The EU is determined to strengthen this relationship with the African states and the AU, and to build a stronger political partnership, based on mutual interests and commitments, reciprocity, shared responsibility and joint action, and which is responsive both to European and African aspirations” (Council of the European Union, 2020, 2).

However, it is also repeatedly implied how the EU sees itself as the leading actor who has the means to help and sustain the other one. Examples of this will be listed below:

“The EU is still Africa’s principal partner, not only for trading but also for development and humanitarian assistance” (European Parliament, 2017, 11).

“The EU’s significant financial support to the AU, African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs) as well as African countries is a central feature of Europe-Africa relations, representing true added value for Africa” (European Parliament, 2017, 7).

“Despite its present energy poverty, Africa has great energy potential, both in terms of conventional and renewable resources. In the latter domain specifically, cooperation with the EU - the global leader in clean energy transition - is fundamental [...]” (European Parliament, 2017, 38).

“The EU proposes to support the efforts of its African partners to address the full spectrum of challenges and increase their overall resilience” (European Commission, 2020, 11).

In general, numerous are the areas in need of improvements and mutual efforts, and the actor ‘in need’ is always portrayed to be Africa. The EU, on the other hand, portrays itself as the ‘supporter’ and ‘donor’, willing to provide its capabilities for a ‘better’ Africa. Help and support never appear to come from the opposite direction.

When it comes to people categories, it is important to highlight the fact that the kind of documents I decided to take into consideration are not explicitly directed to one or more categories of people. However, the JAES and its related documents have partnership and cooperation as main purpose, implying the will to create better life conditions and opportunities for the citizens living on the territories of the actors involved. As already stated, the discourse used in the documents seems to conceive the African territory as the only one in need of enhancements, therefore only African people

are included in the discourse. More specifically, the people category we can find is (African) ‘young women’.

In different analyses using the WPR approach, ‘youth’ and ‘women’ could be considered as two different people categories. However, in the under-scrutiny material, the categories are recurrently integrated, therefore I will consider it as one single category. An example of this is presented below:

“The Communication raises expectations on the participation of citizens in decision-making processes, in particular youth and women. [...]. This could be a way of encouraging mutual understanding between the peoples and cultures of the two continents, as already presented in the JAES, and would certainly be in the full spirit of reciprocity” (European Parliament, 2017, 34-35).

According to Bacchi (2009), taking into account people categories plays an important role in assessing how governing processes take place. Moreover, considering the constructionist standpoint of the approach, categories can be conceived as socially constructed, meaning that their content is simply established by social and historical context. Therefore, if we consider how the category of young women is discussed in the texts, even when not explicitly related to the concept of resilience, we might be able to detect further deep-seated assumptions:

“Investing in people, in particular in youth, is of paramount importance for building an even stronger partnership between our two continents. [...]. This requires that special attention be paid to girls and women. Supporting women’s empowerment requires tackling discriminatory regulations and practices and making sure that they have access to knowledge, skills, microcredit and finance for entrepreneurship” (European Commission, 2020, 9).

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, their full enjoyment of all human rights, the elimination of all forms of discrimination and exclusion, and all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and full and meaningful participation of women and girls are fundamental for sustainable development, economic growth, peace and security” (Council of the European Union, 2020, 4).

In the quotes presented above, for example, we can notice how the category of young women is represented in relation to their empowerment and gender equality, implying the lack of the two. Moreover, their empowerment is linked to more participation and entrepreneurial practices, constructing the category as necessary for economic growth and, therefore for more investment chances.

6.3 How has this representation of the ‘problem’ come about?

Once the problem representation has been detected, the assumptions that underlie it analysed, and binaries and categories identified, we can proceed to uncover how the representation of the problem came about. The main purpose of this question is to identify the specific actions and events that led to the formation of the recognized problem representation, and therefore to emphasize the circumstances that allow a certain problem representation to emerge and gain dominance (Bacchi, 2009, 10-11).

First of all, it is important to reiterate the fact that the concept of resilience made its first appearance in EU’s policies only in 2016. The EU explicitly claimed for this change of discourse, however not changing its priorities and objectives. This is particularly evident in relation to the JAES, as the document released in 2017 is only a developed and updated version of the first one published in 2007. Priorities, goals and challenges stayed unaltered, although adapted to the new decade, and the concept of resilience was included, not as a new challenge, but rather as a new discourse feature that could bring together various issues under the same goal. Because of this, to answer this question, I will not consider the problem representation behind the concept of resilience in itself, but rather what are the conditions that brought the EU to categorize the already addressed ‘problem/s’ under the goal of ‘building resilient states and societies’.

The problem representation behind the objective of increasing resilience, identified in question 1, resulted in the lack of African capacities and competence necessary to deal with several issues and, thus, to enhance resilience. It is important to note that this EU’s conception of Africa is a recurrent element in the EU-Africa relations’ history, even when resilience was not a feature of the EU’s discourse. As a matter of fact, the EU always played an important role in development support and aid towards the African continent and, over the years, different trade and economic negotiations were supplemented by the EU’s exercise of its normative power. In other words, while the EU consistently sought for economic and durable relations with Africa, it also advocated for a need of poverty reduction, respect for human rights and a preferable governance in the African territory. Although it might appear as benevolent, this EU’s way of acting implies how a more stable Africa could be of benefit for both parties, and the introduction of ‘resilience’ in its discourse can sustain this argument (Langan, 2016, 2).

By defining resilience as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (European Parliament, 2021, 8), the EU highlights the importance of developing the right competence and abilities that can allow a recovery from crises. By setting this as a goal in the JAES, the Union is able to allocate the ownership in the African

territory and to decrease the amount of aid and support Africa receives, aiming at a win-win solution where Africa can face and recover from crises by itself, and the EU economically benefit from a more stable continent.

Given all this, we can say that the possibility of a win-win outcome led the EU to include resilience in its discourse concerning the relations with Africa, thus enabling the problem representation to come about and gain dominance.

6.4 What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?

The fourth and last question to apply to the chosen material is what has been left unproblematic in the problem representation. The aim of this question is to detect limits and silences of the problematisation in order to highlight some issues or perspectives that are not brought into discussion in the first place. In doing this, the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy will also be taken into account. The consideration of such a prior document will be useful in emphasizing what was claimed and stated in the first partnership document before the goal of resilience was introduced, and therefore in highlighting what has been silenced or left out when ‘building resilient states and societies’ was included and thus problematized.

The problematization behind ‘building resilient states and societies’ appeared to be strictly related to the lack of African abilities and capacities in different fields. Despite the fact that the JAES should be a partnership that supports a cooperation aimed at the improvements of both parties, the only continent that has been taken into account in the problem representation resulted to be the African one. The resilience goal appears to be included only for Africa and therefore the problematization results directed only to it. In this, different and numerous issues have been listed, never emphasizing, instead, what are the factors that contributed to the various improvements the continent achieved in the years. On the other hand, the 2007 document intended to:

“promote more accurate images of each other, in place of those that are dominated by inherited negative stereotypes and that ignore the overwhelmingly positive developments on the two continents” (Council of the European Union, 2007, 4).

Given the fact that the enhancement of resilience is targeted to the African continent and pictures the EU as the party in possession of the abilities and capacities necessary to help Africa in achieving the goal, it can be claimed that the stereotype of the donor/recipient relationship gets reiterated, as well as the one portraying Africa as unequipped and underdeveloped. This argument is sustained by the resilience/fragility binary, identified in question 2, that highlights the vulnerability of the African continent and the enhancement of resilience as the only possibility to decrease fragility. All these

elements produce a problem representation that silences the positive developments Africa achieved so far, and implies that they are not enough for the continent to be considered as not fragile.

One more element that has been left unproblematic in the problem representation concerns the cultural factors. Among the 2007 JAES objectives we can find:

“To encourage mutual understanding between the peoples and cultures of the two continents and promote better and more systematic use of our shared cultural and social heritage and our cultural diversity, as well as the economic wealth and opportunities that exist in Europe and Africa” (Council of the European Union, 2007, 4).

However, in the 2017 resilience strategy the understanding of culture and the consequent respect of it are not mentioned, and this results in an underestimation of culture’s influence on several aspects of society. The problem representation that lies behind ‘building more resilient states and societies’ touches upon different fields in which culture might play a significant role. Among them, for example, we find more democratic and transparent governance systems, the protection of human rights, a more adequate political weight and an inclusive involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. Improvements in these areas are believed to be crucial, by the EU, to build resilience. At the same time, this implies that the African behaviours in these fields are not ‘good enough’, according to European standards and consequent idea of resilience. What is left unproblematic here, is the role of cultural factors and the different standards they might set. In other words, what the EU might perceive as ‘bad’ and in need of improvements, might be perceived in the opposite way by African culture and standards. Therefore, to leave cultural factors unproblematic in this problem representation consequently underevaluates them.

Leaving cultural factors out of the problem representation links us to another ‘silenced’ element: Africa’s understanding of resilience. As previously mentioned, the EU and the AU present a different approach to the concept of resilience and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy do not provide us with a new definition that could combine the two views. Being the document written by the EU, it let us think that the concept’s understanding that has been followed is the European one, and this deduction is strengthened by the fact that the goal of building resilience societies in the documents relates to numerous different areas. Environmental issues are certainly mentioned and, under the sub-heading called “Building resilience to environmental degradation and humanitarian crises” the EU claims:

“[t]he Communication presents the EU’s support for African partners on disaster risk reduction, vulnerability to disease and strengthening Africa’s own capacity to manage environmental and societal challenges” (European Parliament, 2017, 35).

However, this is the only attention that has been paid to the topic and it certainly does not present resilience as a concept which is tied to environmental risks alone.

The problem regarding the ‘silencing’ of the African view draws upon the nature of the African understanding of resilience in itself, as it applies to natural and climate disasters only. Thus problematizing resilience solely according to the EU’s perspective might link African societies to a concept of resilience they do not recognize or do not agree with.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, the findings resulting from the analysis will be summarized and consequently discussed according to the existing literature and the postcolonial framework.

By answering the WPR given questions, the discussion topics that emerged are numerous and deserve to be further addressed.

First, I reiterate that the ‘problem’ of building resilient states and societies is represented to be the lack of African capacities in different fields. The problem representation relates only to African issues, as Africa is portrayed as the actor in need of improvements, and the EU as the actor whose help and abilities can contribute in finding and implementing solutions. The EU’s discourse reproduces the image of Africa as a continent that needs to develop, eradicate poverty, have more respect for human rights, modernise and enhance democracy. This is done behind the emphasized goal of building resilient societies, which achievement results necessary for a ‘better’ and more competitive Africa.

The fact that even in a ‘common’ partnership this is the only portrayal Africa receives by the EU, shows the never-ending colonial narrative that reiterates the ‘Other’ aspect. This is particularly evident in the EU promoting a positive self-image through the portrayal of a negative and underdeveloped Other, i.e. Africa (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011).

The ‘Othering’ behaviour relates also to the concept of resilience in itself. In fact, the discourse concerning the goal of building more resilient states and societies in the JAES results to be directed to African states only, despite the different non-JAES related documents in which the EU claimed for a need to enhance resilience in relation to some field, such as security, in its territory as well (see European Parliament, 2021). The image of Africa, presented in the JAES as the only actor in need of building resilience, contributes to increasing the ‘Othering’ conduct, implying that what Africa needs to achieve, the EU already did.

This is an aspect which is embedded into the normative behaviour the EU is characterized for. In fact, normative power and its related ‘norms transmitting’ are a recurrent feature of the EU’s foreign policy discourse (Diez, 2014), through which the EU aims at influencing actors’ behaviour for its own benefit (Diez, 2005). Whether the normative power is used for strategic purposes or for mere norms and values’ projection is an ongoing discussion. However, in both cases, the presence of a sphere of interests cannot be denied (Diez, 2005), and often “it is difficult if not impossible to empirically differentiate between foreign policy that is motivated by norms and foreign policy that is motivated by interest” (Diez, 2013, 197). This helps to explain the presence of numerous inquiries concerning the ‘real’ EU’s interests, as well as the motive behind this research. Is the problem representation behind ‘building resilient states and societies’ motivated by norms or by interests? Elements such as the enhancing of democracy and the respect of human rights might appear as related to the transmission of norms and values but, at the same, the need to increase capacities to manage crises and migration might be motivated by the EU’s interests. As a matter of fact, an African continent that can manage these issues by itself can be favourable for the EU as well (Olivier, 2011).

Moreover, this particular point of view is supported by the recurrent resilience/fragility binary and the EU’s explicitly claiming that “the EU’s choice of language has switched from ‘peace and security’ to ‘resilient states and societies’, stressing the aspect of ‘fragility’ as a direct threat to the EU” (European Parliament, 2017, 32). With this claim, the EU implies the fragility of the African continent and its need to become more resilient in order to not be a threat for the Union anymore. Again, the EU and its own possible need to increase resilience are not mentioned. On the contrary, the discourse adopted in the partnership shows that the only EU’s need, in relation to building resilience, is the enhancement of African resilience, in order for Europe to not deal with a fragile continent anymore.

In relation to the EU’s normative power, concepts such as ‘Othering’ and ‘Eurocentrism’ are still relevant. First of all, ‘Eurocentrism’ is particularly evident in the promotion and transmission of European norms and values as the only acceptable conduct. This conduct may clash with the interests and norms of other actors, which, on the other hand, may see it as an imposition (Diez, 2013, 203). As we saw in chapter 6.4, the EU’s discourse exhorts Africa in following certain values and achieving certain objectives to increase its resilience, leaving out elements such as Africa’s own values and culture and not taking into account the African conception of resilience, which claims for different aims. This shows how the Other’s reality is perceived as irrelevant compared to the one of the intervening self (Rutazibwa, 2010).

To ‘decentre’ Europe, in this case, the enhancement of resilience should be related to both continents, following both parties’ definitions, and respect each other’s own values in a way that could allow

societies to become more resilient while preserving their identities. In fact, a postcolonial challenge is the one of incorporating the Other's reality and capacities into the way we portray the self and the other in normative ambitions and processes abroad (Rutazibwa, 2010, 223).

The constructing of the self and the Other in European normative processes is articulated and projected in different ways. As a matter of fact, in the international politics realm we can often see the Other represented as a threat, as inferior, as different, and as violating universal principles (Diez, 2005, 628), and the implied representation of Africa in the EU's resilience discourse appears to include all these elements. In fact, Africa is represented as a threat when it is pictured as a fragile continent that needs to enhance resilience in order to tackle fragility and thus no longer being a 'danger' for the EU, and it is represented as inferior and different when EU's capabilities and norms are presented as the solutions to tackle its fragilities. Moreover, by mentioning that Africa needs to increase its attention to the respect for human rights, the EU produces a representation of the continent as an actor violating universal principles.

Given what has been stated so far, we can claim that the aim of a concrete, equal and emancipatory partnership between the two actors can be reached only by revolutionizing this colonial narrative and employing a postcolonial discourse that is able to discard fabrications and take into account the presence of a power asymmetry without ignoring the experiences and events that led this asymmetry to originate (Sebhatu, 2020).

8. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to find out how the goal of 'building more resilient states and societies' is represented and interpreted by the EU in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. Given the colonial past they share and the many geopolitical interests the African region offers to the EU, it has been done through examining how the EU represents the concept of resilience in the chosen partnership. By employing the constructivist lens of the 'What's the problem represented to be?' approach, developed by Bacchi (2009), the analysis applied four methodological questions to different EU's documents concerning the JAES partnership, and attempted to investigate how the problem of 'building more resilient societies' is represented. The findings have been later discussed from a postcolonial standpoint, with a greater emphasis on the concepts of 'Otherism' and 'Eurocentrism'.

Throughout the thesis it has been noted that the material does not provide an explicit definition of resilience, therefore the EU's resilience discourse in the partnership has been analysed according to a definition of resilience the EU provided on different occasions. Moreover, among the delimitations of the study it has been stressed that the aim of the research does not include the analysis of the

implementation or effectiveness of the policy. The policy analysis presented in this research focuses on how the ‘problem’ is discursively represented, and this means that the actions and solutions suggested in the documents are not negative as such. Instead, the major attention has been paid to the problem representation these actions and solutions imply and how the enhancement of resilience is represented through them. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate how the point of view of the researcher and the selection of material play a significant role while conducting a research of this kind. Thus, the findings and their related interpretation are not to be considered as ‘truthful’ or ‘exhaustive’, but rather as a result of my own interpretation.

Given this, the study was able to answer the research question and identified the problem representation that lies behind the goal of ‘building more resilient states and societies’ as the lack of African capacities to deal with several issues. Among them we find the ability to prevent conflicts, address crises, respect human rights, manage migration and provide a satisfactory governance. The assumptions underlying this problem representation resulted to be the consideration of the African continent as fragile, emerging from the resilience/fragility binary, and as the actor in need of improvements and support from the EU, considered instead as the “donor” subject. Moreover, the problem representation appeared to leave unproblematic elements such as Africa’s culture and understanding of resilience, both constitutive of its identity. For what it concerns the factors that brought the EU to categorize the addressed ‘problems’ under the goal of building resilience, the analysis concluded that the enhancement of resilience is related to the concept of ownership. In fact, by building a more resilient Africa, the EU is able to allocate ownership in the continent, decrease the amount of support it receives and consequently benefit from a more stable partner.

These findings have been further discussed in relation to the postcolonial framework. Concepts such as Otherism and Eurocentrism appeared dominant, showing how EU-Africa relations are still shaped by an imperialistic discourse, and the shift in the EU’s language, with the inclusion of ‘resilience’ and its enhancement as a goal, still produces the colonial narrative in which their relation is framed. Therefore, I can conclude by claiming that despite the goal of ‘building more resilient states and societies’ aims at increasing African ownership, it is still far from being concretely emancipatory. We will be able to consider it as such when the EU’s resilience discourse will not present a colonial narrative anymore.

8.1 Further research

A final attention deserves to be paid to the possibility of further research in this field, as the WPR approach might produce interesting findings concerning the problematisations behind the EU’s resilience discourse employed in different contexts than the African one.

For what it concerns the African context, instead, further research could focus on the analysis of the EU's resilience discourse towards Africa in a new set of policies and documents. In fact, moving beyond the JAES framework might provide a deeper understanding of the EU's problematization behind the enhancement of resilience in Africa.

Moreover, future research in this field might produce broader findings if all the WPR approach's questions are taken into account. As a matter of fact, Bacchi (2009) elaborated a total of six questions with the aim of guiding the researcher to a complete and satisfactory problem representation's analysis. However, due to limitations on time and a restricted word limit, this research has not been able to include all the questions proposed by the WPR approach. The two and last questions of the approach that have not been included in this research are: "What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?" (Bacchi, 2009, 15), and "How/where is this representation of the problem produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?" (Bacchi, 2009, 19).

The former aims at interrogating the effects of the problematisation and how it functions to either benefit or harm certain social groups, and the latter aims at questioning the means through which the problem representation gains dominance and legitimacy and, at the same time, interrogating the possibility to disrupt it, if it is judged to cause harm (Bacchi, 2009). Therefore, the use of these questions in future inquiries is suggested, so that an even clearer picture of the EU's problematization of resilience in the African context can be portrayed.

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