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Between Silence and Power: Analysing
the European Union's Orientalist and
Gendered Discourse on the Gaza Wars

Linda

Zihlmann



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Abstract

This study critically examines the European Union's (EU) discourse on Israel-Palestine, focusing on its responses to Israel's five major military assaults on Gaza between 2008 and 2025. Drawing on decolonial and feminist theories, it explores how orientalist and gendered logics shape EU foreign policy discourse and identity constructions. Employing the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study analyses official statements and speeches by key EU representatives to trace recurring patterns and shifts over time. The findings reveal a persistent dichotomy: Palestinians are portrayed either as feminised victims or as masculinised threats, while Israel is framed as a civilised and legitimate partner. These discursive strategies not only reproduce colonial hierarchies and hegemonic masculinities but also reinforce an EU self-image grounded in moral authority. In doing so, the EU obscures structural injustice, depoliticises Palestinian suffering and ultimately undermines its professed commitment to peace and human rights.

Keywords: EU foreign policy; Israel-Palestine; Gaza; critical discourse analysis; hegemonic masculinity; gender; Orientalism; decolonial theory

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List of Abbreviations

CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis

CSDP – Common Security and Defence Policy

DHA – Discourse-Historical Approach

EEAS – European External Action Service

EES – European Security Strategy

EU – European Union

HR/VP – EU High Representative / Vice President of the European Commission

ICJ – International Court of Justice

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OPT – Occupied Palestinian Territory

PA – Palestinian Authority

UN – United Nations

1 Introduction

*“For those killed and those whose voices are silenced: what more evidence do you need now?
Will you act – decisively – to prevent genocide and to ensure respect for international
humanitarian law? Or will you say instead that ‘we did all we could?’”*

UN Relief Chief Tom Fletcher, 13. May 2025

The ongoing genocidal war in Gaza has exposed, in the most brutal way, that not every human life is granted the same worth. As of May 2025, over 50.000 Palestinians have been killed, and hundreds of thousands injured and displaced in the relentless war Israel is waging on the Gaza Strip, following Hamas’ attacks on 7 October 2023 (UN OCHA, 2025). Conditions are steadily deteriorating as Israel has blocked nearly all humanitarian aid from entering Gaza since early March, placing the entire population at risk of famine (UN World Food Programme, 2025). Although the International Court of Justice (ICJ, 2024) issued provisional measures to protect Palestinians from genocide, Israel has failed to comply. International organisations such as Amnesty International (2024) and the United Nations (2024) have since concluded that Israel’s actions amount to genocide. The violence against Palestinians in Gaza, alongside the escalating violence in the West Bank (OHCHR, 2025), has been described as the first genocide in history to be livestreamed, unfolding in real time as the world watches (Albanese, 2024).

Despite this unprecedented visibility, the European Union (EU), that self-identifies as a peace actor and global defender of international law (European Union, 2009), has responded with hesitation and silence rather than political action, continuing ‘business as usual’ (Sen, 2025). It has largely sidelined discussions about accountability and has mostly refrained from exerting meaningful pressure on the Israeli government (Kühn, 2025; Lovatt, 2025).

However, this is not merely a matter of political inaction. The erasure or downplaying of Palestinian suffering is not new but rooted in Europe’s colonial history and orientalist imagery of the Middle East, in which Palestinians are denied their own collective history and political agency (Said, 1978, 1980; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2014). These orientalist representations are no less gendered, with the Orient, and by extension Palestine, constructed either as a feminised space in need of rescue, or as a masculinised threat that justifies Western securitised responses (Nayak, 2006). Against this backdrop, this thesis argues that the EU’s discourse on Israel-Palestine is shaped by intersecting orientalist and gendered logics that determine whose security matters and whose suffering is acknowledged (Hoijtink et al., 2023; Sachseder & Stachowitsch, 2023). This discursive framework not only cements structural inequalities but

also limits the consideration of racial and gender justice in EU security policy, with catastrophic consequences not only for Palestinians but also for the EU's own image.

While existing scholarship has extensively analysed the EU's policy approaches to Israel-Palestine, few studies have critically interrogated the underlying epistemic and discursive structures through which the EU constructs meaning and legitimises its positioning (e.g. Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023; Peters, 2010). Recent work has begun to explore how colonial logics inform the EU's response to the ongoing war (Huber, 2025; Oleart & Roch, 2025), yet these analyses have focused exclusively on the period following 7 October 2023. Earlier research, by contrast, has examined EU discourse more historically, from the 1970s to 2010 (Peters, 2010). The period in between until the present thus remains largely underexamined, particularly regarding the intersection of orientalist and gendered representations in the EU's foreign policy discourse on Gaza. To address this research gap, this study raises the key question: *How have orientalist and gendered logics shaped the EU's discourse on Israel-Palestine since 2008, particularly in its response to Israel's five wars on Gaza?*

Adopting this extended temporal scope allows the tracing of discursive trajectories and shifts over time, revealing how the EU constructs not only its Others but also its own identity as a security actor. Furthermore, by situating the current war and genocide within a broader historical context, this thesis emphasises that the violence of the recent months is not a sudden event, but part of a *continuum of violence* experienced by Palestinians for decades (Albanese, 2024; Pace & Yacobi, 2021).

To explore these dynamics, this thesis employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Wodak, 2001, 2015), to examine official statements, speeches and documents from key EU institutions and actors.

The thesis is structured into four main parts. The first chapter provides a literature review and conceptual framework, introducing key theoretical concepts such as *Orientalism* and *hegemonic masculinities*. These concepts are situated within existing scholarship on the EU's engagement with the Middle East, with particular attention to Israel-Palestine. The second chapter outlines the research design and methodology with a focus on DHA as primary analytical tool. Chapter three presents the core analysis, tracing how orientalist and gendered logics have shaped EU discourse over time. Finally, the last chapter synthesises the findings and reflects on the implications for EU foreign policy.

2 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Orientalism and Constructions of the Other

Edward Said's (1978) concept of *Orientalism* is crucial for unpacking how Western knowledge production sustains colonial hierarchies and racialised logics, and how these continue to manifest today. In his critical work Said outlines how epistemological and ontological distinctions are made between the Self and the Other in Orientalism. The 'Orient' was constructed in European colonial discourse as a place of strangeness, exotic sensuality and difference, positioned in opposition to the West or 'Occident'. The Western Self is rational, developed, humane and superior, while the Orient Other is "aberrant, undeveloped, inferior" (Said, 1978, p. 300).

Said understands Orientalism itself as a discursive system, a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3), through which the West authorises specific representations of the Middle East. This process includes "describing it, [...] teaching it, settling it" and ultimately "ruling over it" (Said, 1978, p. 3). Crucially, Western orientalist discourse denies the Other and formerly colonised people their own place in space and history, reducing them to essentialist categories like the 'Arab Mind', which is connected with "dumbness combined with hopeless overarticulateness, poverty combined with excess" (Said, 1978, p. 320). These orientalist logics and processes of Othering not only justify Western intervention but also function to construct the Western identity itself in opposition as rational, modern and civilised.

Moreover, orientalist representations are closely tied to the Western imaginaries of Islam, which is often regarded as the region's defining feature. The deeply rooted historical image of Islam as "just a misguided version of Christianity" (Said, 1978, p. 61), has been central to constructing the Orient as inherently inferior and fundamentally different from the Western Christian world.

In the specific context of Palestine, Said (1980) points to how Orientalism silences Palestinian voices, contributing to their erasure from historical narratives. He describes the dominant narrative between the civilised Zionist-European Israeli settler identity and the uncivilised, "treacherous, unregenerate" oriental Arab (Said, 1980, p. 28). This dehumanising dichotomy renders Palestinian lives less valuable in Western imaginaries. Said (1980) emphasises how this discourse hegemony, particularly in liberal Western circles, obscures the historical realities and colonial roots of the conflict and marginalises or erases counter-narratives by deeming the Palestinian perspective irrelevant. Therefore, it is important to examine Orientalism as a discourse in order to understand how the relationship between the Orient and the Occident is underpinned by unequal power relations and how this materialises in reality (Said, 1978).

Within discourse, language operates as a “social construct” that reproduces cultural norms, values and hierarchies (Pace, 2002, p. 193). In turn, language mediates this materialisation as it produces not only orientalist logics but also gendered constructions. Feminist scholars show that orientalist discourses and securitisation are deeply entangled with gendered constructions of threat, vulnerability, and agency. Followingly, Nayak (2006) argues that while Said emphasises the importance of racialisation, he fails to include the intersection of gender in his analysis of how Orientalism is maintained.

2.1.1 *Gendering Orientalism: Feminist Interventions and Perspectives*

Processes of Othering not only racialise but also feminise or masculinise subjects in ways that legitimise intervention and sustain power hierarchies. Representations of the Middle East in Western discourse function through orientalist logics that racialise threats and gender the region as inherently unstable and irrational, thereby requiring European guidance (Bilgic, 2015). In the EU, the process of Othering and orientalising unfolds through a dual strategy: either by masculinising and demonising the Orient as threatening, or by feminising it as weak, vulnerable, and in need of help. This makes it essential to combine an orientalist approach with gender analysis.

Building on this, Nayak (2006) explores gendered Orientalism by examining how the United States (US) discursively constructed its War on Terror. She demonstrates how the US positioned itself as a Western saviour against a heavily orientalised enemy Other, which functions through the “violent remaking, disciplining and construction of race and gender” (Nayak, 2006, p. 47). In this framework, the oriental Other is either demonised as a threat, dehumanised as collateral damage, or infantilised as backward and dependent on Western rescue. Infantilisation constructs political actors or communities as vulnerable and passive, embodying feminised traits, which legitimises intervention under the guise of humanitarianism and civilizational, masculinist superiority. This denies the people of the Middle East their agency and political subjectivity. The logic of Orientalism is therefore inherently contradictory as it consists of “saving yet hating the Other, sympathizing with yet neglecting the realities of the Other” (Nayak, 2006, p. 51)

Elaborating on these dynamics, Gentry (2020) introduces the concept of *disordered violence* to describe how mainstream understandings of terrorism are shaped by intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, sexuality and class. She shows how these structures interact to create hierarchies of whose violence is seen as legitimate, whose suffering is visible, and whose agency is recognised. The forgetting of these structures creates a bias of “what is normal, right

and credible” (Gentry, 2020, p. 9). This intersectional interplay determines not only what we recognise as violence, but also who is (not) held accountable for their violence, and who is recognised as a victim.

Showing how gender works in tandem with Orientalism, Gentry (2020) explains how women affiliated with terrorist groups such as al Qaeda are feminised and deprived of their agency to the point of victimhood, while the men are masculinised and described as hyperviolent and barbaric. This gendered narrative has been used to justify Western intervention, for example when the Bush administration justified the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 as a mission to liberate Afghan women from male violence and oppression (Shepherd, 2006).

This ties closely to Western knowledge production, where the legitimacy of different kinds of violence and their acceptability is defined in relation to the Western state. A binary system emerges between the “legitimate militarism of liberal states” and the “political violence of non-state actors” (Gentry, 2020, p. 5). This distinction, as Gentry (2020) argues, is not neutral but created and maintained by gendered and racialised ideas of power. The case of Israel-Palestine illustrates how this binary logic works in practice. The Israeli government and most of the Western world presents Palestinian resistance not as a struggle against occupation, but within a depoliticised framework of an ethnonational conflict, in which Israeli state violence is legitimised as self-defence, while Palestinian resistance is reduced to illegitimate terrorism. This hegemonic narrative, rooted in Israel’s one-sided threat perception, has been largely internalised by the international community, including the EU (Del Sarto, 2019; Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023).

Central to this is the power of *rationality*. As a gendered construct, rationality serves as an instrument of power to delegitimise those who challenge dominant Western, state-centric narratives of violence. The Self of the West is built on attributes such as legitimacy and rationality. As Gentry (2020, p. 154) argues, the “masculinization and Westernisation of rationality means we expect certain things from certain bodies”, with the brown body mostly being seen as subversive or harmful. This creates a system in which states can act violently or breach international laws and norms without being regarded as illegitimate or facing the same level of scrutiny and condemnation as non-state actors (Gentry, 2020). As Kochi (2009) argues, this perpetuates the dominance of a Western, Westphalian state order, that privileges sovereign actors, while silencing the voices and struggles of those deemed ‘irrational’ or non-state, excluding them from political legitimacy.

The gross oversimplifications of the Middle East as a place of violence, irrationality and chaos continue to inflict harm on the space and its people. As Gentry (2020) and Nayak (2006)

show, gender works in tandem with Orientalism to produce these violent representations. Their conception of gendered Orientalism illustrates how the racialisation and inferior positioning of all people and knowledge associated with the Orient and Islam in the West is deeply gendered. These insights have not only shaped critical approaches to global security discourses but have also recently begun to be taken up in analyses of EU security practices.

2.2 EU Security and Hegemonic Masculinities

A growing body of literature in EU studies has begun to explore how gendered and racialised inequalities are central to the EU's self-construction as a security actor, and how security practices are constituted by these logics embedded in colonial continuities (e.g., Bilgic, 2015; Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020; Sachseder & Stachowitsch, 2023). While initial feminist research on EU security practices focused primarily on policies that explicitly address gender, for example by examining the EU's implementation of the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (e.g., Ansorg & Haastrup, 2018; Guerrina et al., 2018; Muehlenhoff, 2017), more recent scholarship has shifted attention to how EU security policies themselves are shaped by notions of gender, race and coloniality and how these influence the EU's self-understanding.

Illustrating this shift, the special issue of the journal *European Security* (Hoijtink et al., 2023) explores the extent to which EU security policies and practices are based on gendered and racialised ideas. The contributions analyse how EU security discourses (re)produce an idea of a "progressive, civilised and white Europe" in opposition to the racialised Other (Hoijtink et al., 2023, p. 336). The issue focuses on the important questions of *whose* security is prioritised by the EU and *whose* lives are considered worth protecting. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the contribution by Sachseder and Stachowitsch (2023), who analyse how the EU constructs itself as a masculine and white security actor through narratives of militarisation, technocratic professionalism and superiority. These narratives rely on the racialisation and Othering of non-European spaces and reinforce colonial logics that justify interventionist policies.

Moreover, in a comparatively early contribution Stern (2011) analyses how gendered and racialised discourses in the 2003 European Security Strategy (EES) underpin constructions of Europe's identity and how it envisions securing Europe. Stern's findings highlight how the ESS reflects Europe's colonial past by constructing its Others as both feminised, associated with emotional irrationality, and marked by subordinate masculinity, such as barbarism and aggression. The EU, in contrast, is framed as morally superior and rational. Similarly, Kronsell

(2016) shows how the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) reproduces militarised and protective masculinities, set against representations of vulnerable femininities and violent masculinities in conflict areas.

What both scholars uncover is the relational nature of the EU's hegemonic identity: its masculinised self-conception as a security actor is only made possible through the subordinating construction of Others. This dynamic is captured by the concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, originally introduced by Connell (1983). It refers to the dominant and socially privileged form of masculinity that secures its position by subordinating femininities, but also other non-hegemonic masculinities, in a hierarchical relationship (Connell, 1983).

Building on this, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff (2020) further developed the concept to analyse discursive constructions in EU security policy contexts, which is central to this work. They conceptualise *hegemonic masculinity* in a relational way that is characterised by “making other masculinities and femininities complicit in a consensus on the most valued form of masculinity” (Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020, p. 367). From this perspective, the EU emerges as a military power whose authority is constituted through characteristics typically associated with masculinity, such as bravery, rationality, competitiveness, and technological capacity. These qualities are constructed in contrast to a racialised Other, who is portrayed either through protective femininities (victim in need of rescue) or subordinate masculinities (threatening and violent), with the second often embodied in the figure of the brown men. Bilgic (2015) refers to the latter dynamic as the *hypermasculinisation* of the Other, whereby non-Western actors are depicted as excessively violent, aggressive, irrational, and barbaric. This exaggerated, racialised form of masculinity stands in a hierarchical relationship to the EU's hegemonic self-image and produces securitised logics that justify intervention based on the *hypermasculine* threat. This can be tied back to Orientalism and the portrayal of the oriental Other as uncivilised and inferior (Gentry, 2020; Nayak, 2006; Said, 1978).

At the same time, Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff (2020) argue, while women are largely absent in EU security discourse, they occasionally become *hypervisible* in ways that reinforce their racialised vulnerability, depicted through tropes of motherhood and victimhood. These representations reproduce protective and paternalistic security logics that centre the EU as the capable guardian.

In this context, the EU discursively constructs its identity and derives legitimacy through its association with hegemonic masculine traits such as rationality, strength and the capacity to protect. These traits are defined against femininities, associated with passivity and victimhood,

and against racialised subordinate masculinities, marked by irrationality and threat, thereby demonstrating its hegemonic nature (Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020).

In line with this, Muehlenhoff (2021) stresses the need for critical engagement with how EU discourses on the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region both employ and (re)produce gendered and racialised ideas, not only to legitimise policies but also to shape the EU's own identity. Similarly, Bilgic (2015) contends that EU-MENA security relations are structured through a gendered hierarchy, in which the EU performs a hegemonic masculinity over a subordinate 'Southern Neighbourhood'. Building on these insights, the following section turns to the specific dynamics of the EU's relations with the Middle East and how these are embedded in colonial continuities.

2.3 Hierarchies and Colonial Continuities in EU-Middle East Relations

Colonial legacies still inform the core logics of the EU's discourse and its securitised characterisation of the Middle East and the Muslim world in general today (Sen, 2021). While the era of formal colonial rule has passed, Western culture and Europe's relationship with the Other continues to operate through structures of colonial domination (Huber, 2025). This is encapsulated by the concept of *coloniality*, which is a form of domination still persistent in today's world due to the enduring effects of colonial power (Quijano, 2007).

International relations, foreign policy practices and narratives are based on colonial inequalities in knowledge production and epistemological foundations. Global knowledge production itself represents an expression of colonial continuities, as it reproduces existing power asymmetries by presenting knowledge from the 'Global North' or 'West' as universal, to which formerly colonised regions must orient themselves (Sadiki, 2022). This hegemonic relationship leads to alternative forms of knowledge being marginalised or merely devalued as 'local' expressions. Gentry (2020) refers to this mechanism as *epistemic injustice*, a concept developed by Miranda Fricker (2007) to describe how the epistemic authority of certain groups is denied on the basis of their identity and the subjugation of their knowledge. Such injustice distorts international thought by excluding feminised and racialised subjects as legitimate knowers, thereby reinforcing dominant epistemic frameworks and silencing alternative perspectives (Hutchings, 2023).

This logic is also visible in the EU's external relations, where the production of knowledge about the so-called 'Southern Neighbourhood' or the MENA region often abstracts and homogenises local contexts. The EU reproduces epistemic hierarchies by rendering local

struggles, knowledge and socio-political complexities invisible, while simultaneously projecting its own interests and values onto the Other (Sadiki, 2022).

A similar pattern can be observed in the EU's imagination of Israel-Palestine, where Palestinian personhood and agency are mostly absent. This applies not only in the sense of their absence on their own historical terms, but also in that they are "not set into a temporal or spatial relation with Europe" (Huber, 2025, p. 18). In the EU's engagement with the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) the interests of the Palestinian people are largely absent from external interventions and 'assistance' to the internal governance structures. From a decolonial perspective, Tartir (2018) argues that external intervention by the EU, particularly its engagement with the Palestinian Authority (PA), perpetuates colonial relations, as it creates a situation "in which unrepresentative and illegitimate local authorities function as subcontractors to the colonial regime" (p. 369).

Part of this dynamic is rooted in the historical construction of the Middle East within Europe. The Arabic-speaking Muslim has long been framed as the Other through cultural, socio-economic, and political characteristics that mark them as inferior (Cebeci, 2021). This representation originates in the colonial period, during which orientalist and Eurocentric perspectives dominated. These tropes persist in European discourse, where the image of "a specific Arab mentality resistant to progress and modernity" continues to prevail (Di Peri, 2022, p. 56). Moreover, in the context of EU security policy, relations are deeply embedded in a West/Non-West hierarchy, wherein Islam and Muslim identities are constructed as antithetical to reason and reduced to irrationality, backwardness and violence (Gentry, 2020). Pace (2002, 2006) argues that the EU creates a hierarchy in which it consistently positions itself above the MENA region. Within this framework, Middle Eastern countries are portrayed as backward learners or passive adopters of European norms, which justifies EU intervention (Pace, 2006).

Yet the *coloniality of knowledge* not only impacts the dominated but also shapes the dominating actor. Europe's imagination is marked by a "radical absence of the Other" (Quijano, 2007, p. 173). Pace (2022, p. 80) describes the EU as "amnesiac" about its colonial past and therefore unable or unwilling to recognise how historical patterns of domination and exploitation continue to structure the present. Cebeci (2021) points out that EU texts on the Middle East frequently begin by presenting the EU as an ideal, progressive actor with universal values, before contrasting this with a portrayal of the Middle East as conflict-prone and underdeveloped. On a discursive level, the Middle East thus serves as a backdrop against which the EU constructs and emphasises its ideational superiority. This process can be seen as a hegemonic discursive practice (Sen, 2021).

Today, European perceptions of the Middle East are increasingly shaped by associations of terrorism, instability, conflict, religious fundamentalism and illegal immigration (Cebeci, 2021). Particularly in relation to the latter, discourses often emphasise the potential risk of these ‘threats’ spilling over into Europe. This narrative creates an image of the Middle East as a distant region that poses a threat to an idealised and conflict-free Europe (Cebeci, 2021).

These securitised framings have increasingly shaped the EU’s policy approach. Regional stability has become the central objective of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), often at the expense of democracy promotion and human rights. This pragmatic shift also serves to safeguard the EU’s economic interests and privileged position in the region (Di Peri, 2022). Within this securitised imaginary, Palestinians are frequently framed as a threat not only to Israel’s existence and security but also to global stability more broadly. Especially since the early 2000s, this perception of threat has intensified sharply (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). Yet the colonial underpinnings of the EU’s approach to Israel-Palestine, and the Western epistemic framework on which they rest, have not been sufficiently challenged within academia (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). Therefore, having examined the EU’s relations with the broader Middle East, the next section turns to its engagement specifically with Palestine and Israel.

2.4 Israel-Palestine in EU Discourse

The so-called Israeli-Palestinian conflict has always been a central issue in EU foreign policy. Even before the Union was officially founded, it was on the agenda of the first meeting of foreign ministers of the then six member states in 1970 (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2021). Unsurprisingly, this has sparked extensive scholarly debate. Literature on the EU’s approach to Israel-Palestine has addressed the Union’s peace- and state building capabilities (Bouris, 2014, 2019; Diez & Pace, 2011; Pace, 2008; Tartir & Ejodus, 2018; Tocci, 2005; Yacobi & Newman, 2008), the (in)effectiveness of EU policies in resolving the conflict (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024; Bicchi, 2014; Del Sarto, 2019; Lovatt, 2020; Mueller, 2012; Tartir, 2018) or the EU’s inability to condemn or prevent Israel’s settlement policies and other violations of international law (Bouris & Fernández-Molina, 2024; Dajani & Lovatt, 2017; Del Sarto, 2014a; Huber, 2018; Pace, 2009). A smaller but growing body of literature approaches the EU-Palestine-Israel relations from a decolonial perspective (Badarin, 2023; Charrett, 2019; Huber, 2018, 2021, 2025; Oleart & Roch, 2025; Salameh-Puvogel, 2025; Tartir, 2018), though this remains relatively scarce. As this thesis focuses on EU discourse, the following section centres on the historical development and existing literature on this topic.

2.4.1 *Evolution of Discourse and Increasing Securitisation*

In the 1980s, the EU's discourse on the conflict was intertwined with its emerging self-identity as a global actor and an overestimated belief in its capacity to promote peace abroad. EU statements often referred to Europe's historical legacy and strong political, economic and cultural ties with the region, positioning the Union in a unique and special position. As they were lacking meaningful foreign policy instruments, the EU primarily framed the conflict in normative terms, putting justice, rights and opportunity at the center of the discourse (Peters, 2010). A decisive step was the 1980 Venice Declaration, which reaffirmed the importance of a just and lasting peace and referred to the principle of two-statehood (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2021; Bouris, 2014). From then on, the idea of a two-state solution came to define EU discourse (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024), which was later adopted by the international community as central solution to the conflict (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2021). While some research highlights the EU's limited or absent normative power in the conflict (e.g., Diez & Pace, 2011; Gordon & Pardo, 2015), Persson (2017) argues that its influence on discourse surrounding Palestinian statehood, as well as its contribution to legitimising the Palestinians and the PLO as actors in a future peace process, signalled an important normative role for the EU at an early stage.

Over time, the EU shifted towards a more technocratic approach, relying on economic, administrative and legal practices to manage the conflict in an inconspicuous manner and avoiding overt political intervention (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2021; Bouris & İşleyen, 2020). The EU increasingly stayed out of 'high politics' and pursued a strategy of selective engagement, deprioritising the two-state solution and its implications (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024). In both discourse and practice, the EU attempted to artificially separate economics and politics, thereby circumventing political realities of the occupation (Tartir, 2018).

However, the failure of the Oslo Accords in 1993-1995, the following collapse of the peace process in 2000 and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa (second) Intifada prompted a significant shift. Peters (2010) demonstrates how the discourse became increasingly framed by a sense of threat and danger, also linked to a growing fear of negative consequences for the EU's internal stability. Regional stability became the EU's key strategic priority, as laid out in the ESS, and thus the focus in Israel and the OPTs (Council of the European Union, 2003). The language of risk, urgency and security replaced earlier narratives of rights and justice, with the result that peace and democracy-building became less important in the discourse (Tartir, 2018). The growing emphasis on security is also addressed by Domínguez De Olazábal (2023), who questions the epistemological framework underlying EU policy, highlighting how the securitisation of Palestinians reinforces existing power asymmetries. She describes a 'two-step securitisation'

process, wherein the EU first adopts Israel's security concerns and then transfers them onto the Palestinians, ruling out alternative political imaginaries from the outset.

Moreover, Tartir (2018) points to the increasing discrepancy between the EU's rhetoric of promoting democracy and its actual practices on the ground. Through Security Sector Reform (SSR), the EU contributed to strengthening Palestinian authoritarianism by prioritising securitisation over democratisation, while failing to acknowledge the political consequences of its technical interventions. Scholars have similarly identified this discourse-practice, rhetoric-practice or norm-practice gap in other contexts as well (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2018; Bouris & Fernández-Molina, 2024; Del Sarto, 2014b; Huber, 2018; Miller, 2011). For example, Huber (2018) notes that since the Venice Declaration of 1980, the EU has repeatedly declared Israeli settlements illegal under international law, affirmed Palestinian self-determination and loudly insisted in discourse that Gaza remains part of the OPT. Yet the EU's political and economic agreements with Israel have effectively reinforced the occupation, with the EU remaining Israel's biggest trading partner (European Commission, 2024). Furthermore, the EU engages in selective legal framing: while emphasising democracy, human rights and the rule of law as shared values with Israel, it treats illegal Israeli policies in the OPT as exceptions rather than recognising their systematic and institutionalised character. By failing to address the different legal systems in Israeli-controlled territory and their discriminatory application (Huber, 2018), as well as the unintended consequences of its own state-building practices (Bouris, 2019), the EU not only contributes to the normalisation of Israeli occupation but is also complicit in sustaining it.

2.4.2 *The Coloniality of Discourse and Gaza*

The EU's increasingly reserved stance when it came to directly addressing Israel's actions during the 2000s and the Second Intifada became even more pronounced during the 2008-2009 Gaza war. The EU's response was notably minimal and uncritical of Israel's conduct, especially compared to reactions from the United Nations and human rights organisations (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023; Persson, 2019). The shift from a more critical position in the 1980s and 1990s to a more passive stance in the 2000s, often described as an increasing tendency to 'turn a blind eye' to Israeli actions (Bouris, 2014), has not yet been sufficiently analysed in EU studies.

From 2010 onward, growing divergences among member states made it increasingly difficult for the EU to adopt unified and unambiguous positions. As a result, the EU became mainly silent and held back from issuing strong statements (Bicchi & Voltolini, 2021), which increasingly undermined its position as a mediator in the conflict (Akgül-Açıkmese & Özel,

2024). The focus of EU foreign policy shifted, and the conflict increasingly receded into the background of the European neighbourhood discourse. However, the events of October 2023 marked a turning point, revealing the EU's dwindling interest on the one hand, but also the contradictions within the Union on the other (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024).

Recent scholarship has critically examined the EU's selective application of international norms from a decolonial perspective. Huber (2025) compares the EU's response to Russia's violations of international law in Ukraine with its response to Israeli policies in Palestine, demonstrating how coloniality structures EU policy. She argues that Palestine is discursively deprived of its history and its normative connection to Europe, and that the Palestinians are partially reduced to a subject without rights. This absence of the Other as a rights-bearing subject reflects broader patterns of the *coloniality of knowledge*, whereby principles of international law are only applied selectively. While Russia's actions are sharply criticised by the EU, it remains largely passive in the face of Israel's violations of human rights and international law. This selective recognition of suffering reveals a racialised hierarchy within EU policies and discourse. Similarly, Oleart and Roch (2025) analyse the EU's response to the crises in Ukraine and Palestine, showing how distinct imaginaries of 'Europe' shape the Union's reactions. They argue that Ukraine is portrayed as part of the 'European family,' while Palestinians are othered, highlighting the continuity of colonial thinking in the EU's foreign policy narratives.

Applying a decolonial lens, Badarin (2023) also critiques diplomatic relations between the EU and Palestine. He argues that the roots of the conflict are inseparable from European imperialist legacy and that EU's geopolitical interventions in non-European spaces remain influenced by (neo-)colonial logics. In the context of Israel-Palestine this is also specially pronounced as Israel and Zionism have since the 1950s and 1960s been framed by many European actors as embodiments of European progressive ideals, while Palestinian narratives are marginalized or denied.

Within the EU, Israel is often perceived as a civilised partner and Western-style democracy in the Middle East, while Palestinians are orientalised and securitised. These constructions are grounded in colonial power asymmetries and epistemological frameworks shaped by racialised narratives (Badarin, 2023). As Said (1980) points out, Israel as a nation and its history has been celebrated, whereas the Palestinians have merely been acknowledged as existing. While EU practice has gradually moved towards, although limited, acceptance of the existence and needs of the Palestinian people, it has done so without acknowledging their indigenous rights and the colonial origins of the conflict (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023).

As these authors argue, a colonial epistemological framework continues to shape EU discourse and policy towards Israel and Palestine to this day. The contributions by Huber (2025) and Oleart and Roch (2025) underline this continuity in a comparative analysis, with the latter placing particular emphasis on the discursive constructions and narratives that inform EU foreign policy. However, both analyses focus exclusively on developments after 7 October 2023, despite the protracted nature of the conflict. This underlines the need for further investigation into the development of EU discourse over a longer period of time. While Peters (2010) provides an important historical perspective on previous shifts in EU discourse, no recent studies have extended this analysis to the current context.

Furthermore, the discourse of the EU on Israel-Palestine has not yet been explored from a gendered perspective. And this even though the logic of gendering and racialisation appears to be central to the EU's practices and interventions in Israel-Palestine. Indeed, it has been argued that the securitisation of the entire Palestinian people is shaped through a dual prism: either the military/security prism or the humanitarian prism (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). In other words, the EU either views Palestinians as *threats* (military/security prism) or as *victims* needing aid (humanitarian prism), but rarely as political actors with legitimate claims and rights. This dual prism is deeply gendered, and such representations reproduce orientalist and patriarchal logics. The political origins of the conflict are obscured by a technocratic and managerial approach that depoliticises the situation and presents it as a problem of governance or a humanitarian crisis. Particularly in Gaza, the EU has long approached the situation not as a fundamentally political conflict rooted in occupation and siege, but as humanitarian suffering or a failure of governance (Peters, 2010).

2.5 A Critical Framework

Together, the literature review and these critical interventions demonstrate that the EU's discourse is shaped not only by geopolitical interests and institutional dynamics but also by deeper, intersecting structures of coloniality, racialisation, and gender. Working at the intersection of feminist and decolonial theory, this thesis combines the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 1983; Hoijsink & Muehlenhoff, 2020) with Said's (1978) concept of *Orientalism* to analyse the EU's discourse on Israel-Palestine, particularly its response to Israel's wars on Gaza since 2008. This builds on the work of other scholars who demonstrate the need to integrate gender into an orientalist critique (Gentry, 2020; Nayak, 2006).

While drawing on Said's formulations of *Orientalism* with its material and discursive dimensions, this thesis follows Nayak (2006) in arguing that Said's framework needs to be

expanded to include a gender dimension. This is essential for understanding how the EU's identity constructions and its security discourse are shaped not only by orientalist binaries, but also by gendered and racialised power structures embedded in colonial continuities.

The concept of *hegemonic masculinity* thus offers a valuable tool to analyse how the EU constructs both itself and its Others in foreign policy and security discourse. It enables a critical engagement with the ways in which security and policy narratives are gendered and racialised, as they are often grounded in dominant notions of masculinity that marginalise and subordinate feminised, racialised or alternatively masculinised actors.

Consequently, an orientalist feminist analysis helps to deconstruct the hegemonic discourses that sustain EU foreign policy by revealing “whose lives matter and whose bodies are seen as expendable” and why some humans are seen as lesser beings (Gentry, 2020, p. 195). This approach ultimately allows for tracing the intersections and mutual constitution of race and gender in EU discourses and security practices.

In light of these considerations, the central research question guiding this thesis is: *How have orientalist and gendered logics shaped the EU's discourse on Israel-Palestine since 2008, particularly in its response to Israel's five wars on Gaza?*

3 Methodology

3.1 Israel's Wars on Gaza as a Case Study

This thesis examines the EU's foreign policy discourse in response to Israel's military assaults on Gaza since the withdrawal of its military forces and settlers from the strip in 2005. Since then, Gaza has witnessed five wars: December 2008–January 2009, November 2012, July–August 2014, May 2021, and the ongoing genocidal war that began on 7 October 2023 (Damanhoury & Saleh, 2025). These events were selected because they represent distinct escalations of violence during which the EU publicly articulated its position. This approach enables an analysis of EU discourse over time to identify shifts and continuities in conflict framing, identity construction, and the legitimisation of political positions.

The Gaza Strip is a coastal enclave with a population of 2.1 million people, many of whom are Palestinian refugees, making it one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Gaza constitutes a part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), alongside the West Bank and East Jerusalem (UN OCHA, 2025; Sen, 2020). The EU and the wider international community do not recognise Israel's control and sovereignty over the OPT, as well as the Syrian Golan Heights, since it is illegal under international law (European Commission, 2013). While the broader context of the Israeli occupation encompasses all these territories, this thesis primarily focuses on Gaza because of its unique political, legal and humanitarian situation within the OPT. Often shielded or ignored by the international community, the Gaza Strip has returned to the centre of global attention since 7 October 2023 and the 'Question of Palestine' has re-emerged on the international agenda (Badarin, 2024).

However, even before this, humanitarian conditions in Gaza were catastrophic, with an unsustainable economy and development severely hampered by Israeli restrictions. Since 2007, Israel has enforced an ongoing blockade by land, air, and sea, effectively isolating Gaza and controlling its borders together with Egypt (Del Sarto, 2019). Through the blockade, border controls and other means, Israel exerts control over most aspects of life in Gaza (Milton et al., 2024). Gaza is often described as an 'open-air prison' (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Although the EU has repeatedly called for an end to the blockade as it constitutes a violation of international law, Israel has ignored these calls without facing any tangible consequences (Del Sarto, 2019).

Moreover, the blockade has deepened the separation between the West Bank and Gaza (Huber, 2018). Following Hamas' electoral victory and takeover of Gaza in 2007, the EU re-

refused to recognise its democratic mandate, given that Hamas has been listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU since 2003. The EU's strict no-contact policy has further contributed to the fragmentation of the OPT's political landscape (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024; Charrett, 2019). Simultaneously, the EU supported the US-initiated 'West Bank first' strategy, to maintain a Palestinian leadership under Mahmoud Abbas of the PA that was deemed acceptable by the West. Billions in aid flowed into Fayyad's projects to build up the West Bank, while the Gaza Strip remained isolated and suffered under Israel's total siege (Bouris, 2015).

In this context, the EU increasingly began to frame Gaza in neutral and depoliticised terms as a humanitarian crisis or a governance problem, largely excluding it from peace negotiations and political challenges (Peters, 2010). The political isolation and securitisation of Hamas led to a differentiated EU approach to Gaza compared to the West Bank, which underlines why it makes analytical sense to consider Gaza as a distinct case from an EU perspective (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). As Sen (2020) argues, Gaza is often positioned "outside the limits of any 'normal' discussion of the politics of Israel-Palestine" (p. 16).

All these dynamics have made Gaza not only a site of repeated military violence but also a symbolically and politically charged space, held to double standards by the international community and embodying contested narratives of security, resistance and international law. Gaza thus occupies a paradoxical position: it is largely invisible politically, yet *hypervisible* in its suffering and violence. This is partly due to the conflation of Gaza with Hamas in Western discourse, where the territory is treated as an extension of a despicable system (Sen, 2020).

Within less than two decades, Gazans have endured five wars. The toll of the violence is stark: between 2005 and the start of the ongoing war on 7 October 2023, 6,331 people were killed in Gaza, 6,053 of whom were Palestinians, mostly civilians (B'Tselem, 2024). Since 7 October 2023, the situation in Gaza has become indescribable. According to UN OCHA (2025), after Hamas' attacks killed around 1200 people in Israel and resulted in the taking of 250 Israeli hostages, 54,084 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's ongoing genocidal war as of 28, May 2025. Israel's bombardment and obstruction of humanitarian aid have next to mass civilian death, led to displacement, starvation, and the destruction of 70 % of all infrastructure in Gaza (UN OCHA, 2025). Due to its scale, intensity, and discursive centrality, this thesis places particular analytical focus on the genocidal war since 2023.

Yet this war and all the previous ones are not isolated 'outbreaks' or 'eruptions' of violence. For Palestinians, the violence is always present, embedded in a long history of structural, physical and epistemic violence against them. All these forms of violence are interrelated and part of a *continuum of violence* (Cockburn, 2004) experienced by the Palestinians living under

occupation and apartheid for decades (Albanese, 2024; Amnesty International, 2022; Pace & Yacobi, 2021). Palestine represents a colonised space in which Palestinians seek freedom and independence from their settler colonial power, Israel (Badarin, 2023; Sen, 2020). As such it offers a particularly revealing case for critically interrogating EU-Middle East relations, which are shaped by entrenched power asymmetries and orientalist assumptions (Cebeci, 2021; Di Peri, 2022; Sen, 2021). The Gaza wars, and particularly the current war, provide a prism through which to critically interrogate colonial, orientalist and gendered power hierarchies that inform the EU's foreign policy discourses.

Moreover, the selection of this case study is further justified by the fact that the EU's response to the violence in Gaza reveals tensions with its self-proclaimed identity as a normative actor committed to peace, multilateralism and international human rights.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

To answer the research question, this thesis employs a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), more specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). This method allows for a linguistic and contextual examination of how EU foreign policy is shaped by gendered and orientalist logics.

CDA offers a problem-oriented method for examining the relationship between language, power and social structures (Wodak, 2015). Discourse is understood here as a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (Hall, 1992, p. 291). Through discourse, issues are constructed in particular ways, which simultaneously limits alternative perspectives. In this sense, discourse becomes inherently linked to power, as it is about the production of knowledge and meaning through language (Hall, 1992), whereby certain depictions are granted more authority than others. Importantly, this methodological approach emphasises that discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs and legitimises particular narratives that determine what can be thought, said, and done (Fairclough, 2013). It is considered a form of social practice that contributes to the constitution of social identities and relationships (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014, 2016). As a critical social science approach, CDA interrogates power structures and scrutinises how dominant discourses reinforce social inequalities (Fairclough, 2001). It is thus not only a methodological tool but also a theoretical perspective on language and different social domains (Wodak, 2015).

3.2.1 Discourse-Historical Approach

The CDA methodology is heterogeneous, with many different approaches to operationalisation. For this study, the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is employed, which has been developed specifically for the analysis of political discourse (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2001, 2015). This approach is particularly suited for this analysis for two main reasons. First, it is designed to trace the construction of in-groups and out-groups identities in discourses, while incorporating the broader social and political context, both of which are central to this study (Wodak, 2001). Second, the DHA has been widely applied in European studies (see, e.g., Aydın-Düzgit, 2014, 2016; Krzyżanowski & Oberhuber, 2007; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Boukala, 2015), providing a robust analytical toolkit for examining processes of inclusion, exclusion, and identity construction.

A defining feature of the DHA is its attention to the historical context, enabling a dynamic understanding of how discourse evolves across time and policy domains. To avoid decontextualised analysis, discourse is placed within a continuum of social and political trajectories (Wodak, 2001, 2015). History becomes a tool for situating language in time and space, which is essential for a study focused on a long-standing conflict and postcolonial narratives such as the one analysed in this study.

DHA consists of three main analytical dimensions: *discourse topics*, *discursive strategies* and the *linguistic means* used to realise these strategies. In a first step, *discourse topics* are identified, which means that the key themes and narratives surrounding the research subject are outlined. Second, the *discursive strategies* used to construct identities and meanings are examined. This forms the core of the analysis and is structured around five questions developed by Reisigl and Wodak (2009):

1. *Nomination*: How are the main subjects (EU, Palestine/Palestinians, Hamas, Israel/Israelis) named and referred to linguistically?
2. *Predication*: What attributes, characteristics and qualities are assigned to these actors?
3. *Argumentation*: What arguments are employed to justify, legitimise or naturalise particular representations?
4. *Perspectivisation*: From whose perspective are these arguments and representations expressed?
5. *Intensification, Mitigation*: Are the respective expressions linguistically intensified or mitigated?

These questions are crucial for understanding how identities and power hierarchies are constructed and normalised within discourse. For argumentation strategies, particular attention is given to the use of *topoi*, which are content-related warrants that link arguments to conclusions. They are the most common argumentation scheme and take the form, explicit or implicit, of ‘because x is true, we must y’ (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009). The third dimension, the *linguistic means*, refers to specific word choices, rhetorical devices or syntactic structures used to realise the strategies and shape how narratives are presented (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014). The linguistic analysis is carried out in close connection with the identification of strategies, rather than treated separately. A major strength of DHA lies in this triangulation, as it minimises the risk of “cherry-picking” by integrating different analytical tools, historical context and theoretical frameworks (Wodak & Boukala, 2015). Moreover, this three-dimensional analysis allows for bridging macro- and micro-level discourse analysis (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014).

Applying CDA, and DHA specifically, to EU foreign policy enables an analysis of how discourse constructs identities and shapes representations of the European self and its Others. It exposes the power relations and ideological underpinnings of foreign policy discourse (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014). Given the choice of DHA, this study naturally follows a more inductive approach, identifying thematic patterns directly from the data rather than applying a pre-defined framework. Each document is examined for recurring themes and discursive patterns to allow for flexibility in dealing with the complexity of political discourse.

3.3 Data Selection and Collection

To analyse the EU’s discourse surrounding Israel’s wars on Gaza, this thesis focuses on statements and speeches by high-level institutional actors with formal authority in EU foreign policy. The primary data sources are official documents and speeches from the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the President of the European Council and the Council of the European Union. These actors were selected because they are institutionally and legally responsible for the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) and represent the EU’s external position (European Union, 2009). In particular, the HR/VP plays a central role in shaping and representing the EU’s foreign policy discourse and is therefore given prominent attention in this analysis. Instead of treating these sources as a unified voice of the EU, the analysis examines how key actors contribute to meaning-making and identity construction through discourse.

The dataset includes formal policy declarations, official statements, political speeches and one blog post. While official declarations such as ‘Council Conclusions’ carry institutional

weight and are widely recognized, they often reflect negotiated compromises. The analysis therefore also incorporates political speeches by the HR/VP or President of the European Council, as these offer more flexible and immediate expressions of foreign policy narratives and identity positioning (Aydın-Düzgit, 2014). This combination of genres provides a more comprehensive view of the EU's discursive practices.

In the context of the ongoing war that began on the 7 October 2023, statements by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen are also included. Although the Commission does not formally represent the EU in foreign policy matters, the Commission President has played a prominent external role in this conflict (Vinocur et al., 2023). Omitting this voice would risk overlooking an important element of the EU's external discursive presence.

Documents were sourced primarily from official EU websites, including the EEAS and European Council. For the earlier wars, where online archives do not consistently date back to 2008, additional materials were retrieved from the United Nations' UNISPAL (United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine) website, which archives official documents, including EU statements. The documents for the final data set were carefully selected following extensive online research using relevant keywords and systematic screening for relevance.

The final dataset comprises 21 documents issued between 9 January 2009 and 24 March 2025.¹ For each of the first four Gaza wars, 2-3 documents were selected (issued during or shortly after the respective war) to provide a consistent basis for tracing the EU's positioning and discursive evolution over time. Due to the higher intensity and duration of the ongoing fifth war, 11 documents were selected for analysis. The final document analysed was published shortly after Israel broke the January ceasefire agreement on 18 March 2025 (United Nations, 2025). This moment was chosen as a cut-off point because it marked a notable juncture in the EU's response and served to ensure the feasibility of the thesis, given that the war and genocide remain ongoing at the time of writing.

3.4 Reflections on Positionality

In addition to outlining the methodological choices, it is also important to reflect on one's own role as a researcher. Since CDA is an interpretative method, the meanings of discourse can be open to negotiation and are inevitably influenced by the researcher's position. A helpful way to address this methodological challenge is by making one's own positionality transparent and acknowledging the limitations this entails (Wodak, 2015).

¹ All documents used in the analysis are listed in more detail Appendix A.

As a white, Western European female scholar educated in Western academia, my perspective is shaped by dominant epistemologies and geopolitical privilege. This background influences how I approach and interpret discourse.

As Said (1978, p. 11) reminds us, “no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author’s involvement as a human subject”, especially when engaging with representations of the ‘Orient’ from within an European context. In line with decolonial, feminist thinking, this requires confronting the assumptions, hierarchies, and biases that shape one’s perspective. As Pratt et al. (2025) emphasise, genuine solidarity in feminist research demands rejecting imperial narratives that prioritise some lives over others and resisting the erasure of marginalised voices.

Given that this thesis aims to critically interrogate EU discourse on Palestine from within, I intend to avoid reproducing the same silences I critique, and to maintain a reflexive and ethically conscious approach throughout the project.

4 Analysis and Findings

4.1 The Oriental Other: The Figure of the Palestinian

Across the EU's discourse on Israel's wars on Gaza, consistent patterns emerge in the construction of Palestinians as the Other, shaped by orientalist, racialised and gendered logics.² These discourses portray Palestinians as either passive and dependent or irrational and threatening, stripping them of political agency. Drawing on Nayak's (2006) typology, this section traces how such framings operate either through the infantilisation and discursive erasure of Palestinians or through their demonisation via the figure of Hamas.

4.1.1 *Infantilisation and Discursive Erasure*

A dominant recurring theme in EU statements is the portrayal of Palestinians primarily as passive victims, characterised by vulnerability and dependency. Throughout the timeframe under analysis, whenever Palestinians are mentioned, they are put in a position of helplessness, whether they are described as “the suffering people of Gaza” (Council of the European Union, 2009), “those who are most vulnerable” (Michel, 2023a) or abstractly referred to as “innocent civilians” (Barroso and Rompuny, 2014) or simply as the “people in need” (Jolana, 2009).

While these framings reflect the suffering caused by the Israeli military operations, their reductive and repetitive nature becomes the sole mode through which Palestinians are represented, if they are mentioned at all. As Nayak (2006) argues, such infantilisation forms part of a wider feminisation of the oriental Other, wherein weakness, suffering and dependency take precedence over political subjectivity. Vulnerability becomes the defining feature of Palestinian identity, effectively denying their capacity to articulate claims, resist oppression or participate in shaping their future. As a result, Palestinians are represented in discourse as a homogeneous entity in need of rescue rather than as political actors, prompting paternalistic humanitarian responses rather than political solidarity.

Notably, the nature of *what* or *who* they are a victim of is often blurred or displaced. An exception occurs in statements following the Hamas-led attacks on 7 October 2023, where Palestinians are referred to as “also the victims of Hamas” (Borrell, 2023a) or as “also suffering from [Hamas'] terror” (von der Leyen, 2023). More commonly, however, their victimhood is disconnected from an identifiable agent or political context.

² Detailed tables for each analysed document, structured according to the five key questions and discursive strategies of DHA, are provided in Appendix B.

The process of infantilisation is further reinforced by the frequent invocation of “women and children” as emblematic casualties (e.g., Ashton, 2012; Council of the European Union, 2014; Borrell, 2021a). While women are absent from elsewhere in EU discourse, in these references they become *hypervisible* as racialised figures of victimhood, exemplifying vulnerability and having their agency stripped away (Hoijsink & Muehlenhoff, 2020). These references rely on heteronormative understandings of innocence and fragility, which bolster the legitimacy of European humanitarian concern as both moral and necessary (Gentry, 2020). Yet while the EU expresses grief for feminised bodies, Palestinian men are implicitly cast as suspicious or threatening, rendering their lives less grievable.

The ongoing war in Gaza, which started in 2023, has seen an intensification, regarding the emphasis on Palestinian suffering. Former HR/VP Josep Borrell stated:

“The situation is appalling, with hundreds of thousands of people having lost their shelters, having no food, being in an extreme miserable situation” (Borrell, 2024a).

Although Borrell’s emotional language and descriptions partially humanise Palestinians by evoking empathy, it reiterates their passivity and dependence. Overall, the European discourse reinforces the idea that other actors must act on behalf of the Palestinians – solutions are envisioned *for* Palestinians, but rarely *with* them.

Moreover, Palestinians are not only infantilised, but their lives are also frequently rendered invisible or abstracted as statistics. When deaths are acknowledged, they are typically expressed in passive, generalised terms. For example, during the 2008-2009 Gaza War the Council “deeply deplored the loss of life during this conflict, particularly the civilian casualties” (Council of the European Union, 2009), without naming perpetrators or acknowledging the asymmetry of violence. More than 1.000 Palestinian civilians were killed in Israel’s military operation, compared to three civilians in Israel (B’Tselem, 2024). While the EU rightfully condemns all loss of life, the rhetorical equivalence it employs when they stand in such stark contrast obscures accountability. The linguistic passivity disconnects Palestinian suffering from its cause, namely Israeli military and state aggression.

This pattern of abstraction contrasts starkly with the emotional particularity afforded to Israeli victims following Hamas’ attacks on 7 October 2023. Whereas earlier statements often obscured the distinction between Israeli and Palestinians victims by offering vague condemnations of civilian deaths on both sides, post 7 October discourse introduces a hierarchy of whose lives are mourned. For example, HR/VP Borrell vividly narrates the deaths of Israeli civilians two weeks after the attacks:

“Those attacks against the civilian population have left so many dead, affecting so many defenceless people at a time when they were celebrating life, but instead they found themselves facing death” (Borrell, 2023a).

By contrast, Palestinian deaths are referenced in the same speech through using legalistic or statistical language: “more than 3000 dead, a quarter of whom are children” (Borrell, 2023a). Palestinian casualties are quantified rather than described, creating a stark asymmetry with the emotional, humanising descriptions of Israeli victims. This establishes a hierarchy of empathy, where Western-identifiable grief with Israel is privileged, while Palestinian death is flattened to a mere acknowledgement. This asymmetry results from the EU’s construction of in-groups and out-groups, positioning Israel as part of a shared Western identity and viewing Palestinians as an externalised Other, to whom empathy is not extended (Badarin, 2023; Huber, 2025).

This hierarchy is further evident in statements by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (2023) and former President of the European Council, Charles Michel (2023a), also made two weeks after the attacks. Neither of them acknowledges the more than 3.000 Palestinian deaths by that time. Instead, von der Leyen focuses solely on the 1.400³ Israeli deaths, using emotionally charged language:

“What we have seen in the Kfar Azza kibbutz is pure evil. The blood, witness of horror, the burned houses, the abandoned children’s toys that no child would ever touch again” (von der Leyen, 2023).

Additionally, Israeli victims are described as having been “slaughtered” by Hamas, while Palestinians were simply “hit” or are experiencing a “[worsening] humanitarian situation” (von der Leyen, 2023). In other words, Israeli suffering is linguistically intensified through emotive and graphic descriptions, while Palestinian suffering is mitigated through vague references. This discursive dichotomy intensifies the grief for Israeli lives, while at the same time obscuring Palestinian suffering. As Said (1978) argues, this creates a hierarchy in the valuing of human life where the suffering of the oriental Other is deemed less visible, less urgent and also less mournable.

³ This number was later revised by the Israeli Foreign Ministry to around 1,200 casualties that died on 7 October 2023 (Reuters, 2023).

4.1.2 *Demonisation through the Figure of Hamas*

Alongside the infantilisation and erasure, the analysis reveals that the EU discourse further engages in the demonisation of Palestinians, primarily through the figure of Hamas. Hamas is depicted as the embodiment of the irrational, violent and barbaric Other, which are core orientalist tropes (Nayak, 2006; Said, 1978) and align with forms of non-Western subordinate masculinities (Bilgic, 2015; Gentry, 2020).

Although this becomes particularly visible in the ongoing war, such framing appears also in the EU's discourse concerning the 2012 war. The then HR/VP Catherine Ashton condemned Hamas's "executions" in Gaza as the "grossest violations of human rights," (Ashton, 2012) and the Council of the European Union stated:

"The EU finds inflammatory statements by Hamas leaders that deny Israel's right to exist unacceptable. The European Union will never cease its efforts to combat terrorism which seeks to undermine the openness and tolerance of societies through indiscriminate acts of violence against civilians" (Council of the European Union, 2012).

These depictions juxtapose Hamas' 'backward', oriental hypermasculine aggression with the rational, forward-thinking ethos of the West, thereby reproducing civilisational binaries (Bilgic, 2015; Gentry, 2020). Hamas is positioned as not merely a threat to Israel, but as a fundamental affront to Western liberal values and order. While in some statements the EU is concerned to separate Palestinians from Hamas (e.g., Borrell, 2023a), the persistence of the narrative of the uncivilised, barbaric and unregenerate Other surrounding Hamas contributes to the broader racialised and gendered perception of all Palestinians and their politics (Said, 1980; Sen, 2020).

Moreover, Hamas is consistently depicted as the primary aggressor that disregards human life and causes destruction. For example, it is accused of bargaining with civilian lives (Borrell, 2023b) and of using civilians as "human shields" (Council of the European Union, 2014). The latter is also used by the EU to justify the thousands of casualties amongst civilians in Gaza, suggesting that Palestinian civilian deaths are a tragic inevitability rather than the result of military decisions (Huber, 2025).

The discourse of demonisation intensifies in the aftermath of the 7 October attacks. Strongly charged language and intensifications such as "heinous terror attacks," "pure evil," (von der Leyen, 2023) and "indescribable horror" (Borrell, 2023a) illustrates the projection of moral depravity and irrationality onto Hamas, invoking the trope of the barbaric Other. In a speech in the European Parliament, HR/VP Borrell stated:

“ Hamas has been boycotting any attempt at peace. It has opposed United Nations and Arab League resolutions that would pave the way for a possible peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Hamas wants to eradicate Israel. It does not want peace; it wants destruction ” (Borrell, 2023a).

This characterisation constructs Hamas as inherently violent and incapable of peace and political negotiation, which reproduces orientalist narratives of the fanatical Other, incapable of change (Pace & Pallister-Wilkins, 2018). Likewise, HR/VP Borrell’s depiction of Hamas as a dangerous ideology reinforces this narrative:

“ Hamas is an idea, it represents an idea, and you cannot kill an idea. The only way of killing an idea - a bad idea - is to propose a better one ” (Borrell, 2024a).

Here, Hamas becomes not only an enemy but a civilisational threat by using orientalist tropes of political Islam and fundamentalism as regressive and oppositional to Western modernity (Gentry, 2020).

Crucially, this masculinised hyperaggressive framing not only demonises Hamas but serves as a discursive strategy to legitimise Israeli military responses. What becomes particularly salient throughout the entire discourse since 2008 is the asymmetrical application of the *topos of threat*. Hamas is consistently constructed as a threat: to Israel, to Palestinians themselves, and even to global stability as such. In contrast, neither the Israeli military nor the Israeli government are ever framed as a source of threat by the EU.

Although this asymmetry is often justified by Israel’s position as a sovereign state with the legitimate right to self-defence, and by the fact that Hamas is a non-state or ‘terrorist’ actor, this logic obscures the broader structures of ongoing occupation and settler-colonial domination (Badarin, 2023). Thus, the threat narrative does not operate neutrally but rather reproduces colonial hierarchies by denying Palestinians the ability to be threatened, only ever to threaten. This ties in with Gentry’s (2020) discussion of *disordered violence*, whereby the acceptance of violence is contingent upon its proximity to Western notions of statehood and therefore closely tied to the intersection of gendered and racialised logics. The Western understanding of terrorism, and consequently our perception of legitimate violence, leads to the EU portraying Palestinians and Israel asymmetrically with regard to their suffering and agency.

Altogether, this chapter’s analysis has revealed that Palestinians are consistently constructed through orientalist and gendered logics in EU discourse. Palestinians are portrayed either as feminised, helpless victims or as hypermasculinised embodiments of barbaric violence

(Bilgic, 2015). Such reductionist portrayals deny them their capacity for self-determination, which reinforces what Said (1978) has theorised as the oriental logic of denying the racialised Other the right to speak and act for themselves in Western discourses.

4.2 Israel as a Civilised Ally

In contrast to its construction of Palestinians, the EU consistently portrays Israel as a rational and civilised state actor – an exceptional ally in the otherwise unstable and Othered MENA region (Huber, 2025). This is reflected in a speech by former European Council President Michel in November 2023:

“For the EU, Israel is a friend and ally. It is a democracy that counts and must count in the region. [...] We will always support Israel’s right to defend itself in accordance with international law” (Michel, 2023b).

Here, Israel is positioned as a partner that shares EU’s values, creating a sense of proximity and kinship between the two. European Commission President von der Leyen similarly underscores this moral affinity by invoking a cultural-historical connection:

“Europe stands with Israel in this dark moment. [...] Jewish values have shaped our common European values. Among others, Jewish culture has for centuries enriched our common European culture. And this must continue to be the case” (von der Leyen, 2023).

Such declarations do more than express solidarity; they establish a civilisational and cultural continuity between Europe and Israel, while simultaneously excluding Palestinians and by extension the Muslim Arabic world from its imagined community. Von der Leyen’s articulations also rely on the discursive blurring of Jewish identity with the Israeli state, which is politically, historically and analytically contentious. While this thesis does not engage with this debate in depth, it acknowledges the problematic nature of such framing (see, e.g., Butler, 2012; Said, 1980). Von der Leyen’s personal visit to Israel in October 2023 further illustrates this symbolic European-Israeli affinity and her emotional proximity to its leadership (von der Leyen, 2023). Moreover, the statement by von der Leyen also implicitly shows how the European imagination has been influenced by the historical memory of the Holocaust, resulting in a sense of European guilt that translates into a commitment to Israeli security (Huber, 2025). The EU’s deep commitment to Israeli security is underlined on many occasions. For instance, during the 2012 war,

the Council “reiterates its fundamental commitment to the security of Israel” (Council of the European Union, 2012), reaffirming Israel’s privileged status in EU foreign policy.

These discourses construct Israel as a sovereign, rational actor who deploys force to protect its citizens. HR/VP Ashton noted in 2012 that Israel has “the right to protect its population from these kinds of attacks” (Ashton, 2012), performing a hegemonic protector masculinity rooted in liberal security logics, as seen in numerous other statements as well (e.g., Barroso and van Rompuy, 2014; Borrell, 2023a). This masculine ideal is marked by reason, restraint, and moral authority in the use of violence, standing in contrast to the hyper-violent masculinity and irrationality attributed to Palestinians and particularly Hamas (Hoijsink & Muehlenhoff, 2020). Such framing is underpinned by a racialised division between Israel as a civilised protector of its population, while reproducing imaginations of the irrational orient Other (Said, 1978).

Notably, affirmations of Israel’s right to self-defence are almost always invariably accompanied by a call to do so “in a proportionate manner and respecting International Humanitarian law” (Borrell, 2021a). Yet these references to international law function more as a normative reference point than as mechanisms of accountability. Consequently, the EU rarely condemns Israel for violations of international law or attributes excessiveness to Israeli military actions, despite there being ample evidence to the contrary (United Nations, 2024). This dynamic illustrates how the attribution of *rationality* influences the condemnation of violations of international law or norms (Gentry, 2020). Israel is portrayed as a rational state actor, whose violence can be restrained and “kept in line” (Borrell, 2023b), while Hamas are cast in more lawless terms and tied to irrationality. Von der Leyen encapsulates this civilisational contrast:

“Only if we acknowledge Israel’s pain, and its right to defend itself, will we have the credibility to say that Israel should react as a democracy, in line with international humanitarian law. And that it is crucial to protect civilian lives” (von der Leyen, 2023).

At the time of this statement, over 3000 Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip had been killed by Israeli military actions (Borrell, 2023a), yet the EU narrative continued to uphold Israel’s democratic and moral credibility.

Overall, the general framing of Israel sharing the EU’s values of rule of law, democracy and the respect for freedom (EEAS, 2021) obscure Israel’s “prolonged control over the OPT, where it applies other sets of laws that clearly violate democracy, respect for freedom and rule of law” (Huber, 2018, p. 359). The analysis shows that these representations sustain Israel’s hegemonic position in discourse, serving to normalise the asymmetrical power relations between Israel and Palestine. Arguably, it also misdirects the focus of comparison, as the EU

centres its discourse on Israel's claim to self-defence rather than on the right to resist occupation. Thus, it is crucial to contextualise this within a postcolonial global order that has so far insufficiently problematised settler-colonial contexts. Israel appears as a projection of the Global North, founded by European settlers, whereas Palestinians are framed as a disruptive element from the Global South (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). This framing enables the EU to cast Israel as a legitimate actor under existential threat, a narrative embedded in racialised hierarchies and colonial imaginaries.

4.3 The EU's Self-Image: A Tale of Values and Peace

As established in the theory chapter, the *coloniality of knowledge* impacts not only the construction of the Other in discourse, but also the construction of the dominating Self (Quijano, 2007), in this case the EU. A recurring theme in the EU statements is the Union's portrayal as a bastion of peace, rooted in its foundational narrative as a peace project after the World Wars:

“The EU is a political project that came into being last century in the aftermath of two tragic world wars. It is a project that has been made a reality thanks to reconciliation and the courage and the will of visionary political leaders” (Michel, 2023a).

This self-description implies that Europe has transcended violence and should serve as a model for others. In contrast, the Middle East is associated in the same statement with images of “division”, “polarisation”, and a “cycle of violence” (Michel, 2023a). This juxtaposition reinforces a racialised dichotomy in the discourse, with using the Middle East as a backdrop to emphasise Europe's moral superiority (Cebeci, 2021).

Furthermore, the EU consistently invokes values such as peace, tolerance and diversity as intrinsic to European identity, like in these examples:

“As human beings, as defenders of a free world, as citizens of Europe, where hate, terror and racism have no place” (von der Leyen, 2023).

“You can count on the European Union to make its contribution to these values, which we cherish and which we wish to see shared throughout the world” (Michel, 2023a).

Such statements imply a normative hierarchy and implicitly call upon the world and formerly colonised regions to emulate European values, revealing neo-colonial tendencies (Sadiki, 2022). This logic also underpins the EU's self-perception as a key peace actor, exemplified by

Borrell's claim that ending the current war "will require a strong commitment of the international community and to start with, the European and the Arab people" (Borrell, 2024a), despite the EU's declining influence in the peace process (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024). Still, references to the *topos of peace*, particularly the two-state solution, are prevalent in the discourse, as it remains one of the few internal consensus points (Del Sarto, 2019). Yet, these calls have become increasingly hollow due to the ongoing illegal Israeli settlement expansion, which renders the establishment of a Palestinian state structurally unattainable (Akgül-Açıkmeşe & Özel, 2024; Del Sarto, 2019; Lovatt, 2016). Against this backdrop, the frequent invocation of the two-state solution appears to serve more as a discursive tool to mask the EU's disunity and complicity than as a strong commitment to achieving justice and liberation (Huber, 2018).

At the same time, the EU positions itself as the authority that determines who is reasonable and worthy of being included in the peace process:

"The European Union will work with those who are willing to join in such a quest for peace, stability and prosperity" (Council of the European Union, 2012).

This statement asserts a paternalistic logic, whereby the EU assumes the right to judge the legitimacy of political actors. It creates the sense that the region needs Europe to lead the way, as the EU seeks to align its identity with modernity and progressiveness, setting itself apart from the Arab world, which is resistant to development (Di Peri, 2022). Similar dynamics can be seen in this remark from Commission President von der Leyen:

"What Hamas has done has nothing to do with the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. So it was good to hear President Abbas' clear words" (von der Leyen, 2023).

In this statement, von der Leyen positions the EU as arbiter of the legitimacy of Palestinian aspirations, reflecting paternalistic and neo-colonial dynamics. Across the analysed period, the PA and president Abbas are portrayed as the sole legitimate representatives of Palestinians, ignoring widespread criticism of corruption and their lack of democratic legitimacy (Bouris, 2014).

Alongside its paternalistic stance, the EU also adopts a protector role, performing protective masculinities by framing itself as a defender of Jewish life and universal human rights:

“There can be no hesitation on our side: Europe will always be on the side of humanity and of human rights. [...]. We have to protect Jewish life in Europe” (von der Leyen, 2023).

This puts the EU on a moral high ground as a defender of humanity. Correspondingly, the discourse strongly emphasises the EU’s “leading role on the humanitarian front,” (EEAS, 2012). By adopting the role of a benevolent and humanitarian actor, the EU draws on the colonial narrative of the “White Man’s burden” in relation to the oriental Other (Sachseder & Stachowitsch, 2023, p. 406). This self-construction relies on racialised and gendered binaries, with the EU’s identity built on neutral, rational and protective masculinities, made possible only through simultaneously constructing a feminised Palestinian Other, characterised by dependency and passivity (Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020; Nayak, 2006). The EU’s humanitarian posture thus reinforces its hegemonic whiteness and authority while reaffirming Palestinian subordination within a gendered and racialised framework.

In addition to its normative claims, the EU positions itself as a responsible and capable diplomatic actor, drawing on the *topos of diplomacy* (legitimising its presence through regional knowledge and partnerships) or the *topos of capacity* (emphasising its readiness and competence). These argumentative strategies serve to justify its involvement through an image of expertise, rationality and technological capacity, qualities typically associated with masculinity (Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020). The Union presents itself as solutions-oriented, with an important “contingent in the region” and continuing efforts “to broker a diplomatic solution to the crisis” (Solana, 2009). Such self-framing echoes colonial logics of stabilising ‘unruly peripheries’ (Cebeci, 2021) and persists throughout the wars.

Drawing on hegemonic masculinities, the EU’s discourse elevates calmness and self-control above emotionality or aggression, with the latter two often coded as subordinate femininities or non-hegemonic masculinities (Hoijtink & Muehlenhoff, 2020). For instance, a joint statement by then European Council President Van Rompuy and European Commission President Barroso during the 2014 war illustrates this:

“[Palestinian and Israeli leaders] need to exercise courage and wisdom to move beyond these cycles of violence and advance towards arrangements that will ensure peaceful and dignified coexistence, based on mutual respect” (Barroso and van Rompuy, 2014).

The invocation of “courage” and “wisdom” draws on masculinist ideals rooted in Western liberal thought, where peace is framed as an elite-driven, rational process requiring restraint and

maturity. By performing hegemonic masculinity, the EU assumes the role of an “enlightened father who is willing to teach his son the conditions of peaceful coexistence” (Bilgic, 2015, p. 337). These gendered and Eurocentric epistemologies casts resistance, especially when violent, as irrational and primitive (Said, 1978), reinforcing a hierarchical West/Non-West binary in which non-European identities are constructed as inherently opposed to reason (Gentry, 2020). In doing so, the EU reframes the struggle of an oppressed indigenous people as a diplomatic impasse (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023) and places responsibility on both actors in the same way. This thus creates a false equivalence between occupier and occupied, erasing the power asymmetries at the heart of the conflict (Huber, 2021).

In summary, the EU’s self-positioning draws on orientalist and gendered logics as they construct the EU as a rational, stabilising force in contrast to a supposedly irrational and passive Other (Said, 1978). Through technocratic language, masculinised ideals of order and restraint and a civilisational narrative of peace and modernity, the EU legitimises its role and positions itself as a voice of reason in a volatile world. This discursive dynamic is also symptomatic of the EU’s broader failure to adequately address root causes and its tendency to abstract political realities, as explored further in the next section.

4.4 Depoliticisation and Silences

4.4.1 *Humanitarianism and the Erasure of Politics*

In general, Gaza and Palestinian suffering are presented in the EU discourse as a humanitarian problem rather than a political conflict rooted in occupation and systematic human rights violations (Huber, 2025; Lovatt, 2020). While Israeli concerns are addressed primarily through the *topos of security*, Palestinian suffering is depoliticised through the *topos of humanitarianism*, meaning the general argumentation ‘there is suffering, so we must send aid’. This depoliticisation of the conflict through a humanitarian framing is a key strategy in EU discourse. It allows the EU to appear moral and compassionate while avoiding openly taking sides. However, this approach strips Palestinian suffering of its structural and political causes, reducing it to an apolitical tragedy. This discursive pattern was already evident during the 2008-2009 Gaza War, when former EU High Representative Javier Solana stated:

“In the foreseeable future to move the real peace process forward. We are far from that now and we have to concentrate now on how we can solve this crisis which is dramatic from the point of view of human suffering” (Solana, 2009).

Here, immediate humanitarian concern is foregrounded while the underlying structural violence is sidelined. Gaza is mostly described as ‘unsustainable’ or a ‘humanitarian crisis’, but not as a political space under siege and occupation, which decontextualises the situation (Sen, 2020). Likewise, the EU’s calls to “[open] Gaza crossings for humanitarian assistance, commercial goods and persons” (Council of the European Union, 2009) treat border control more as a logistical issue rather than a manifestation of political domination.

The EU’s emphasis on humanitarian relief amounts to treating symptoms rather than addressing root causes. The provisions of humanitarian aid into Gaza ultimately contributes to maintaining the status quo and the continuation of the cycle of violence by circumventing the underlying political realities. As Tartir (2018) argues, the EU’s failure to confront the structural violence embedded in the over 50 years of occupation renders its approach and policies ineffective. Occasionally, this tension is acknowledged. During the 2021 Gaza War, HR/VP Borrell admitted:

“The violence will come again. [...] In the past, you saw how many times we went to violence again? And Gaza was destroyed and then we rebuilt Gaza. This is not an option” (Borrell, 2021a).

Compared to the other three previous war, Borrell is more self-critical here and admits that the international community, including the EU, has been looking away, “hoping that the problem will be solved by itself” (Borrell, 2021a).

Nonetheless, after the start of the Israeli offensive on Gaza in response to Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023, the EU largely maintained the same humanitarian framing. HR/VP Borrell referred to the November 2023 truce as a “first step towards ending the ongoing horrific humanitarian situation in Gaza” (Borrell, 2023b), reaffirming the EU’s focus on relief. In general, when discussing Gaza, the “question of humanitarian support” (Borrell, 2023a) is always at the centre of the debate, while Israeli military actions continue mostly unchallenged. European Commission President von der Leyen defends this duality through the constructed neutrality of humanitarianism:

“And there is no contradiction in standing in solidarity with Israel and acting on the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people” (von der Leyen, 2023).

While the supposed neutrality of humanitarianism is a contested subject in any case (see, e.g., Pallister-Wilkins, 2021), especially given that Israel is using the halt of humanitarian goods and

aid into Gaza as a weapon of war (United Nations, 2024), the EU's apolitical framing becomes deeply political in itself.

The asymmetry is persistent: Israeli security is framed in militarised and state-centric terms, whereas Palestinian insecurity is depoliticised and recast through a humanitarian lens. This dynamic is further exemplified in a statement by former European Council President Michel:

“We will always support Israel’s right to defend itself in accordance with international law, especially humanitarian law. [...] That is why we have called for humanitarian pauses and corridors in Gaza, because humanitarian aid must be delivered to people in need.” (Michel, 2023b).

While the EU acknowledges the existence and needs of the Palestinian people, this recognition is filtered through a humanitarian prism that obscures the colonial roots of the conflict and marginalises the indigenous rights (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023; Sen, 2020).

4.4.2 Prioritising Security and Silencing Injustice

Building on the depoliticisation described above, the EU further reinforces asymmetry through a security-first approach that sidelines questions of justice and Palestinian self-determination. One could say that while humanitarianism masks structural violence, securitisation legitimises it. Security is framed in terms of regional stability and state protection, whereas Palestinian aspirations are marginalised or conditional. This becomes visible in a statement during the 2012 war:

“Moving towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would help the stabilisation of the entire region and reward those who are committed to non-violence” (EEAS, 2012).

Here, peace is seen not as a matter of justice and rights, but as a means to achieve regional stability, revealing the EU's prioritisation of “security along the EU Southern Borders” (Council of the European Union, 2012) over its normative commitments. The EU's claims to support peace, democracy and state-building in the OPT have become “mere functions of securitised processes and interventions”, driven by a ‘security first’ paradigm (Tartir, 2018, p. 366).

The instrumentalisation of peace as security is also evident in a statement by former HR/VP Borrell, who declared: “As long as there is no peace, you will never have 100% security” (Borrell, 2021a). Similarly, European Council President Michel affirmed that “peace is

the best and lasting security guarantee” (Michel, 2024). This reflects a liberal peace logic in which stability and order trump historical justice, allowing the EU to maintain a self-image as a peace actor while the root causes of settler colonialism and occupation are ignored (Bouris, 2014; Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023; Huber, 2021).

The EU’s securitised framing is reinforced by the frequent adoption of Israeli security narratives, leading to what Domínguez De Olazábal (2023, p. 20) calls the “securitisation of the entire Palestinian people” and a one-sided conception of security. Even humanitarian appeals are mitigated by the fact that Israeli security is discursively prioritised:

“Fully recognizing Israel’s legitimate security needs, the European Union reiterates its call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid” (Council of the European Union, 2012).

Palestinian insecurity is thereby confined to the humanitarian realm, while Israel’s security is foregrounded as a legitimate political concern. This state-centric approach aligns with the EU’s increasing tendency toward technocratic solutions, as noted by Bicchi and Voltolini (2021).

Moreover, Palestinian perspectives are further sidelined by framings of the wars as spontaneous or episodic, as if violence erupts without a cause. The EEAS, for example, referred to a “seismic shift in the political landscape” (EEAS, 2012), while Borrell described an “up-surge in violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories” (Borrell, 2021a), evoking metaphors of natural disasters. Similarly, von der Leyen stated:

“‘ Hamas’ terrorist attacks on Israel ignited a spiral of violence, which has brought the entire region to a state of extreme tension and volatility” (von der Leyen, 2024).

Such framings imply that the conflict began on 7 October 2023, which disregards the decades of structural violence, occupation and settler-colonial expansion that preceded it. This omission reflects a failure to acknowledge the *continuum of violence* that Palestinians experience daily, as violence is an omnipresent reality for an occupied population (Pace & Yacobi, 2021; Said, 1980).

In addition, EU statements tend to obscure violence by the Israeli military and their accountability through using passive language like in these examples by EU representatives: “The Council condemns the shelling of UNRWA infrastructure” (Council of the European Union, 2009), “two deaths after the use of Israeli live ammunition” (EEAS, 2012) or “depriving people of essential supplies and cutting off their water is not compatible with the law of war” (Borrell, 2023a). Even when naming violations, the actor – the Israeli state – is often omitted.

Phrasing such as “crossing points must be opened” (Solana, 2009) or “conditions should be improved by ending the Gaza closure regime” (EEAS, 2014), avoid attributing responsibility. This framing naturalises the violence, presenting it as inevitable or contextless.

However, one notable exception appears during the 2014 Gaza war, when the Council stated that it was “appalled by the human cost of the Israeli military operation in Shuja’iyya” (Council of the European Union, 2014). This direct attribution is rare and likely reflects the exceptionally high civilian casualties on the Palestinian side during the 2014 war (B’Tselem, 2024). Nevertheless, even when the EU has occasionally criticised Israel’s actions, it has not resulted in any political or economic consequences (Bouris, 2014). In fact, bilateral trade relations improved between 2008 to 2019 (Del Sarto, 2019).

The persistent blurring of Israel’s responsibility highlights the asymmetry in how different actors are treated, which is particularly evident in the EU response following 7 October 2023. EU statements uniformly attribute the attacks to Hamas, while the subsequent Israeli military attacks are abstracted, like for instance here:

“The tragedy started with a terrorist attack of Hamas, and then the bombing of Gaza and the unbearable number of civilian casualties” (Borrell, 2024a).

While Hamas’ is clearly mentioned as the aggressor in this statement, the violence against Gaza is acknowledged but without attributing responsibility, thus creating a hierarchy of guilt and blame.

Overall, the EU’s prioritisation of securitisation in its discourse, combined with depoliticisation through humanitarianism, systematically silences accountability and violations of international law by Israel (Domínguez De Olazábal, 2023). Israeli military assaults are often described in vague or passive language, while Palestinian suffering is acknowledged but stripped of its political context. This discursive strategy disconnects the wars and genocide from their root causes and reveals the EU’s strategy of framing violence in more apolitical terms in order to avoid losing credibility, while ultimately perpetuating the status quo.

4.5 Discursive Changes and Persistent Patterns

Despite a general continuity in EU discourse over the years, characterised by silence, evasive language and avoidance of accountability, some discursive shifts emerged during the fifth Gaza war, which began in October 2023. Most notably former HR/VP Josep Borrell and, to a lesser

extent, former European Council President Charles Michel adopted a more critical tone toward Israel, particularly towards the end of their terms.

This stands in sharp contrast to Commission President von der Leyen, whose statements one year after 7 October 2023 closely mirror her earlier rhetoric. She refers to the “humanitarian situation in Gaza which is appalling” and the “immense suffering [brought by Hamas] not only upon the people of Israel, also upon innocent Palestinians” (von der Leyen, 2024). While she once again condemns Hamas, Israel is notably absent as a military actor, despite having killed over 40.000 Palestinians in its relentless assault on Gaza by that point (UN OCHA, 2024). This erasure not only obscures the material realities on the ground but also exposes von der Leyen’s racialised bias in favour of Israel.

Diverging from this, European Council president Michel shifted towards exerting increased diplomatic pressure on Israel, strongly urging it not to carry out a ground operation in Rafah and to respect the ICJ’s orders (Michel, 2024). He also intensified the portrayal of Palestinian suffering, describing Gaza as a “nightmare” and evoking images of amputated limbs and the rising number of orphans (Michel, 2024). This reflects a departure in rhetoric from the EU’s typical mitigated language. However, despite his growing emphasis on ending the war, Michel continues to speak primarily from a humanitarian perspective, omitting root causes and consequences for the Israeli government.

Building on this, Borrell’s interventions, in particular, reflect an evolving stance and a rupture in the discourse. Unlike most EU representatives and institutions, he increasingly foregrounds Israeli responsibility and uses emotionally charged language, invoking historically resonant analogies such as comparing Gaza’s devastation to the destruction of European cities in World War II or to a “new Nakba” (Borrell, 2024c). His April 2024 speech in the European Parliament introduced legal critique of Israel and moral symmetry between victims (Borrell, 2024b), while his November 2024 blog post adopted an unprecedentedly critical tone (Borrell, 2024c). There, Borrell explicitly condemned Israeli leadership for their rhetoric of revenge, referred to the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and advocated tangible policy consequences – something the EU has always been reluctant to do. Invocations of humanitarianism and international law are used to critique Israel’s conduct, rather than merely to justify aid. Furthermore, Borrell proposes concrete political measures such as suspending political dialogue with Israel and is indirectly calling for sanctions against Israel, ending “business as usual” (Borrell, 2024c).

These shifts indicate cracks in the EU’s discourse, suggesting internal contestation over how to respond to the ongoing escalation of violence. However, this more confrontational stance by the EU proved short-lived, as both Borrell’s and Michel’s mandates ended in late

November 2024. The new HR/VP Kaja Kallas remained largely silent on Gaza at first, before quickly realigning EU discourse with its traditionally uncritical and diplomatically accommodating position. In February 2025, she invited Israel to the Association Council in February 2025 (Council of the European Union, 2025), resuming ‘business as usual.’ Further, after Israel broke the January ceasefire with surprise airstrikes on 18 March 2025 (United Nations, 2025), Kallas swiftly declared that “the European Union stands in solidarity with Israel and its people” and affirmed that “we are very good partners” in a meeting with Israel’s foreign minister Gideon Sa’ar (Kallas, 2025). These developments reveal that, despite discursive ruptures, the EU ultimately folds back into its longstanding pattern of rhetorical caution and political complicity.

5 Conclusion

This thesis examined how gendered and orientalist logics shape the EU's discourse on Palestine-Israel, focusing on Israel's five wars on Gaza between 2008 and 2025. Using CDA and DHA, the analysis shows that orientalist and gendered imaginaries lie at the heart of the EU's discourse. They constitute not only how the EU constructs its Others but also how it builds and performs its own identity. The Othering of Palestinians operates through three strategies: infantilisation, demonisation and dehumanisation through discursive erasure. This process exemplifies gendered Orientalism, wherein Palestinians are alternately feminised as passive victims and hypermasculinised as irrational and violent threats. In contrast to this imagined inferior oriental Other, the EU constructs itself as a peace-seeking and humanitarian actor, drawing on hegemonic masculinities such as strength, calmness and diplomatic authority. These findings contribute to scholarship showing how the EU's self-construction as a security actor and its discourse are based on gendered and racialised inequalities (e.g. Bilgic, 2015; Hoijsink & Muehlenhoff, 2020; Sachseder & Stachowitsch, 2023). The EU's superior self-positioning is only possible in tandem with the subordination of the Other. The EU thus *needs* the construction of an imagined inferior Other to imagine itself.

Israel is, by extension, discursively aligned with Europe through a shared commitment to liberal values such as democracy and the rule of law, as well as hegemonic masculine traits like rationality, restraint, and protectiveness. These analysed dynamics result in a one-sided securitisation that reveals the racialised and political hierarchies that underpin EU discourse: Threat as a category is reserved for non-state actors racialised as irrational and fanatical, whereas the state actor, despite its overwhelming military superiority and destructiveness, remains above suspicion.

Moreover, the findings reveal that the EU's discourse not only fails to confront Israeli violence but actively contributes to its depoliticisation. The persistent silencing of Palestinian voices results in the erasure of their historical narratives from European memory (Said, 1980). It reflects a broader pattern of *epistemic injustice*, where Palestinian historical claims and political subjectivities are erased (Gentry, 2020). They are 'radically absent' (Quijano, 2007) from European imaginations, not only in terms of political agency but also in how their history and rights are recognised. This absence contributes to a wider European amnesia regarding their own colonial entanglements and responsibilities in Palestine (Huber, 2025; Pace, 2022). This research provides further evidence that this is not accidental but produced by the systematic marginalisation of Palestinian subjectivity within EU foreign policy discourse. It ignores the

continuum of violence inflicted on the Palestinians through Israel's ongoing settler colonial occupation and genocide. The EU's silence on these issues has exposed its glaring double standards in foreign policy and severely damaged its credibility and moral authority on the international stage.

However, as this analysis has focused on dominant EU-level discourse, it does not claim to offer a complete picture. Critical voices exist within the EU, not least among member states such as Ireland, Spain, and Slovenia, which advocate for a stronger pro-Palestinian stance (Lovatt, 2025). The focus on official EU actors and institutions is due to feasibility and is justified by their representative role and formal responsibility for EU foreign policy. Nevertheless, internal divisions within EU institutions, and divergent positions among member states merit further academic attention. Moreover, this thesis is limited by its exclusive focus on the EU perspective. The absence of Palestinian voices reflects both the scope constraints of this thesis and the inherent power imbalance in foreign policy discourse. Precisely for this reason, this study contributes to the literature by introducing an orientalist-gendered lens to EU discourse analysis, demonstrating how these frameworks reveal structures of power and erasure often overlooked in mainstream EU foreign policy research. This is important as the intersection of gendered and racialised security logics in EU foreign policy remains underexplored, particularly in relation to the Israel-Palestine context.

Despite slight changes in tone, the analysis finds that discursive patterns have remained largely consistent throughout the studied period. The start of the fifth Gaza war on 7 October 2023 reinforced and intensified all prior dynamics. However, as the scale of Israeli violence becomes increasingly difficult to ignore, and criticism of the EU mounts from both inside and outside, some shifts in discourse emerge, with certain actors adopting a more critical stance towards Israel. After great pressure, the EU foreign ministers agreed on 20 May 2025 to review the Union's trade relations with Israel. But with 19 months of genocide and the Israeli government openly declaring its intention to forcibly expel over two million Palestinians from Gaza, this long-overdue decision appears 'too little, too late' (Kühn, 2025; Lovatt, 2025). What is needed are fundamental measures, such as the suspension of arms exports by member states, the imposition of sanctions, and genuine accountability for war crimes.

The hegemony of Israeli narratives within European discourse continues to obscure the conflict's colonial roots and asymmetrical power relations (Said, 1980). This discursive imbalance is not just rhetorical; this thesis shows that it underpins and legitimises practices of violence and impunity. The facts and figures on the ground tell a radically different story to that upheld by the EU over the past two decades. While the EU has consistently turned a blind eye

to the Israeli government's inhumane policies, the events of the past year and a half have made this ignorance increasingly untenable. Through its ongoing complicity and failure to act, the EU has strayed further than ever from the principles of humanity and international law.

6 Bibliography

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Appendix A: Dataset

First Gaza War (27. December 2008 – 18 January 2009)

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Appendix B: Discourse-Historical Analysis Tables

First Gaza War (27. December 2008 – 18 January 2009)

9.1.2009: Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP Solana calls for Gaza ceasefire during visit to Middle East and Turkey

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“the people in need” (Palestinians), “we”, “our people” (EU)	- depersonalising Palestinians - Israel not mentioned
Predication	“solve this crisis which is dramatic from the point of view of human suffering”; “The EU was prepared [...]”	- depoliticising the conflict as humanitarian crisis - EU self-positioned as flexible, responsive, and peace-seeking
Argumentation	- Topos of <i>humanitarianism</i> : Human suffering justifies action and aid: “the humanitarian situation which is extremely serious” - Topos of <i>diplomacy</i> : support for Egypt and Turkey, Political dialogue is the key to resolving the crisis - Topos of <i>capacity</i> : EU readiness, technocratic competence - “we are happy and willing to be part of the solution”, “we are ready to return”	- Legitimizes EU presence through past actions (EUBAM), technical expertise, and regional partnerships - EU as a neutral, capable mediator focused on diplomacy, humanitarianism, and technical solutions.
Perspectivation	- “I think the objective is common to everybody...” “we are going to do the utmost” “we have offered... to return”	- Personal authority of Solana reinforces EU actorness - emphasis on shared goals to create an inclusive ‘we’ - Confident tone; diplomacy as performance of reassurance and preparedness
Intensification / Mitigation	“unacceptable suffering”; “extremely serious”; “very grave concern”; “dramatic humanitarian situation”; “happy and willing”; “utmost”	- Strong intensification to convey urgency and EU’s engagement - Uses emotional and technical language together to show moral and strategic investment

26.1.2009: Council of the European Union, 2921st Council meeting General Affairs and External Relations

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“the suffering people of Gaza”; “all parties”; “Palestinian National Authority”; “President Mahmoud Abbas”	- Palestinians as victims - Hamas absent; Abbas nominated as legitimate actor - Israel not directly mentioned
Predication	“The EU’s readiness”; “deplores the loss of life”; “fully supports the Egyptian initiative”; “pre-	- care and strategic readiness without assigning blame - EU casts itself as generous, solution-oriented

	pared to work towards rehabilitation”; “strongly encourages reconciliation”; “sustainable economic recovery”	
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Topos of humanitarianism</i>: crisis justifies emergency aid - <i>Topos of diplomacy</i>: Egypt and Arab League as key - <i>Topos of capacity</i>: EU as technical actor (EUBAM, border management), readiness - <i>Topos of peace</i>: Two-state and reconciliation as key for peace and security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Builds legitimacy through technical aid and past engagement - Avoids power asymmetry or historical causality; peace is a procedural goal rather than political transformation
Perspectivation	“the EU is ready...”; “the Council welcomes...”; “The EU supports the idea...”; “The EU is convinced...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Institutional voice foregrounded (impersonal “the EU”), reinforcing technocratic authority - Emphasizes EU consensus and unity over individual leadership
Intensification / Mitigation	“deeply deplores”; “gravely concerned”; “urgent opening”; “sustainable economic recovery”; “strongly encourages”; “will follow closely investigations”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - moral and emotional when discussing humanitarian issues - Legalistic language for future action (investigations, assessments)

Second Gaza War (14 – 21. November 2012)

16.11.2012: Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton on further escalation of violence in Israel and Gaza

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	- “ Hamas and other factions in Gaza”; “Israel”	- Israel individualized as a sovereign state
Predication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamas attacks: “totally unacceptable” - Israel: “right to defend its population”; “ensure that its response is proportionate” - EU: “stressed the need to prevent further escalation”, “spoke with leaders” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aggressive attributes attached to Hamas - defensive, lawful framing for Israel; but proportionate - EU: rational mediator urging proportionality and dialogue
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of threat: Hamas attacks justify Israeli defence - Topos of humanitarian concern: loss of civilian life on both sides - Topos of diplomacy: EU promotes de-escalation - Topos of peace: “finding a solution to the Middle East”, “region can finally live in peace and security” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - humanitarian concern symmetrical but power asymmetries are downplayed - Peace as sustainable long term goal

Perspectivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU speaking through Ashton's personal diplomatic engagement - Naming Israeli PM Netanyahu; Egyptian presidency indirectly 	Highlights Israel as primary interlocutor; Gaza represented through Egyptian mediation
Intensification / Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamas: "must stop", "totally unacceptable" - Israel: "urge... proportionality", "deeply concerned" 	More intense language against Hamas, more softer/mitigated language toward Israel

21.11.2012: EEAS, Statement on Gaza on behalf of High Representative Catherine Ashton

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	<p>"Gaza"; "Israel"; "The European Union"; "civilian losses"; "Gaza Strip"; "Hamas and other armed groups"; "civilian population"; "Gaza population"; "Palestine refugee"; "Palestinian families"; "Palestinian Authority"; "innocent women and children"; "ordinary people"; "President Abbas"</p>	- Palestinians framed as passive, "innocent" civilians, while Hamas is constructed as a violent, "terrorist" and illegitimate actor.
Predication	<p>"seismic shift", "upsurge of violence"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamas: "grossest violation of human rights" - Israel: "legitimate security needs"; "fully recognized"; "use of Israeli live ammunition" - EU "strong and unequivocal"; "constant touch" - Civilians: "ordinary"; "tragic"; "overriding concern"; "protection" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Violence as erupting, like a natural disaster - EU as a diplomatic, humanitarian and mediating actor - Hamas as perpetrators of rocket fire and internal violence, named as illegitimate actors - To Israel no attribution of illegality or excessive force, violence is downplayed through legitimizing language and passive framings
Argumentation	<p>Topos of humanitarianism: "suffering of innocent civilians," "tragic loss of life,"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of security: "Israel's security needs," "rocket attacks", legitimises Israeli military posture - Topos of responsibility: "we owe it to the ordinary people" "will play a leading role" 	Humanitarian concern is evoked for both sides, but not equally. EU presents itself as a responsible moral actor calling for peace. Security justifications are granted to Israel, but not to Palestinians
Perspectivation	<p>"we have been in contact with..."</p> <p>"we are following developments closely"; "we fully support..."</p>	Institutional EU position, emphasizing diplomatic engagement and neutrality.
Intensification / Mitigation	<p>"strongly condemn," "fully recognized," "tragic," "innocent civilians," "the need to avoid further loss of life"; "humanitarian situation [...] precarious in Gaza"</p>	Moral intensifiers (e.g., "tragic," "strongly condemn") frame EU as compassionate. Vague or passive phrasing (e.g., "loss of life") mitigates attribution of responsibility

10.12.2012: Council of the European Union, 3209th Council meeting Foreign Affairs

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“The parties”; “Palestinians”; “Palestinian leadership”; “Palestinian Authority”; “President Mahmoud Abbas”; “Israel”; “EU”; “ Hamas”	- asymmetries blurred into “the parties” - Abbas as sole legitimate Palestinian voice - EU, US, Egypt, Arab League mentioned as key mediators
Predication	- EU: “ready to work”, “committed”, “commends mediation efforts”, “prepared to reactivate” - Palestinians: “aspirations for statehood and sovereignty; “need for “intra-Palestinian reconciliation” - Israel: “security needs”, “serious undermining” of peace, - Hamas: “inflammatory statements”, “deny Israel’s right to exist”, “unacceptable”, “terrorism” “undermines openness and tolerance of societies”	- EU as a firm, constructive actor - Palestinians encouraged but also warned to act responsibly - Israel’s security needs validated but settlement activity negatively predicated - Hamas negatively framed, opposing the Western ideals (tolerance, openness), violent against civilians
Argumentation	- Topos of peace: urgent need for negotiations - Topos of humanitarianism: Gaza ceasefire and crossings - Topos of diplomacy: Quartet and regional mediation - Topos of threat: Hamas as threat to their way of living	- Legitimacy of positions anchored in international law, humanitarian principles, and past agreements - EU places itself as moral guardian of peace process
Perspectivation	“The EU believes”; “The EU recalls”; “The EU expresses its readiness”; “The EU underlines”	- EU institutional voice foregrounded, technocratic authority - EU’s “neutral” but morally committed role
Intensification / Mitigation	“firmly believes”; “deeply dismayed”; “strongly opposes”; “vital threats”; “urgent opening”; “seriously undermine”, “The EU will <i>never</i> cease its efforts to combat terrorism”	- Strong language used especially to condemn settlements and violence - Mitigated tone toward Palestinian actions, focusing on “constructive use” of UN status

Third Gaza War (8. July 2014 – 26 August 2014)

22.7.2014: Council of the European Union, 3330th Council meeting Foreign Affairs

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“ Hamas and militant groups in the Gaza Strip”; “Israel”; “European Union”; “civilian population of Gaza”; “women and children”; “Palestinian government”; “Presideont Abbas”	- Hamas and militants as aggressors; - Israel individualized as a sovereign state actor; - EU positioned as diplomatic

		mediator and rational actor; - Civilians passive
Predication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamas: “criminal and unjustifiable acts”, “must end immediately”, “must disarm”; - Israel: “legitimate right to defend itself”, “military operation must be proportionate and in line with IHL”, “protection of civilians”; “EU appalled by human cost of Israeli military operation” - EU: “calls for immediate cessation”, “ready to support peace efforts”, “stresses the need for humanitarian access” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hamas associated with illegal and immoral violence; - Israel framed as legitimate but bound by international law and proportionality; - EU frames itself as a moral, rational, supportive actor promoting peace and humanitarianism.
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of Threat: Hamas attacks and deteriorating regional security justify Israel’s self-defence; “serious threats to the EU” - Topos of Humanitarian Concern: Emphasis on civilian deaths, urgent need for aid - Topos of Peace: renewed call for two-state solution and final status negotiations; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legitimization of Israeli defence framed within humanitarian and legal conditions - urgent framing of civilian suffering, but omitting deeper root causes - Long-term solution framed around negotiation and two-state paradigm, aligned with EU normative goals.
Perspectivation	<p>“The European Union expresses grave concern...”; “The EU calls for...”; “The EU is ready to support...”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU speaks collectively with normative and diplomatic voice; - Positions itself as supporter of peace and humanitarian efforts. - sees current developments also as threat to the EU itself (shows closer involvement to conflict)
Intensification / Mitigation	<p>“strongly condemns”, “criminal and unjustifiable acts”; “must act proportionately”; “appalled by human cost of Israeli military operation”; “extremely concerned”, “appalled”, “deeply concerned”, “urgent distribution of assistance”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Harsh language towards Hamas and militant groups, stronger criticism of Israel (but still legalistic) - humanitarian crisis intensified as severe and urgent

3.8.2014: Statement by President Barroso and President Van Rompuy in the name of the European Union on the situation in Gaza

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	<p>“European Union”, “Gaza”, “innocent women and children”, “Israel”, “citizens [of Israel]”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Palestinians as victims - Palestinian and Israeli leadership called to equally
Predication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU: “ready to support actively negotiations” - Palestinian and Israeli leader: “exercise courage and wisdom”; “mutual respect”; “terrible loss of lives” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong condemnation of Hamas - Israel’s right to defend itself is framed as legitimate but within the limits of proportionality - Humanitarian concerns for innocent lives are emphasized, but

	- "Israel has the right to live in peace"; "needs to maintain proportionality."	without detailing the root causes of the violence.
Argumentation	- Topos of diplomacy: Calls for "negotiated solution, based on two states." - Topos of security: "Israel has the right to live in peace in its recognized borders."	- Security is presented as Israel's right, with a call for negotiation but an underlying focus on Israel's need for peace. - The two-state solution is presented as the long-term goal
Perspectivation	- EU speaks as a moral authority calling for peace "Join our voice to those of the Secretary General of the UN"	- EU casts itself as a diplomatic mediator and moral voice alongside global actors like the UN
Intensification / Mitigation	- continued rocket fire: "unacceptable threat" - Israel: "right to live in peace in its recognized borders," "legitimate defence"	- Stronger language directed at Hamas, using terms like "unacceptable threat" for the rocket fire - Softer language toward Israel's right to defence, with the focus on proportionality

27.8.2014: EEAS, Statement on the ceasefire on Gaza

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	"Gaza," "Israel," "Palestinians," "Hamas," "other militant groups", "Palestinian government of national consensus"	- Gaza as a site of suffering - PA presented as the legitimate authority
Predication	- "The humanitarian situation in Gaza must now be urgently addressed.": "address all the root causes of the conflict." - "must stop all threats to Israel." - "A durable peace can only be achieved through the resumption of the Middle East peace process."	- Emphasis on the need to address humanitarian concerns in Gaza, while also putting responsibility on Hamas and militant groups for the conflict. The focus is on a sustainable peace agreement
Argumentation	- Topos of humanitarianism: "Brings an end to the suffering and loss of life, particularly among civilians." - Topos of diplomacy: Calls for "resumption of the Middle East peace process" and a "two-state solution." - Topos of security: "Hamas and other militant groups must stop all threats to Israel."	- humanitarian situation crisis needing immediate resolution, but focus on Israeli security and the need for a two-state solution, urgency of negotiation is emphasized
Perspectivation	- "We welcome the ceasefire.."; "We call on the parties"; "EU is ready to.."	- EU enabler of peace.

Intensification / Mitigation	“urgently addressed”; “urge the Israelis and Palestinians”; “Hamas [...] must stop all threats to Israel”	- humanitarian call is intensified, emphasizing the urgent need for change.
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Fourth Gaza War (10 – 21 May 2021)

18.5.2021: Press Remarks by EU High Representative Borrell on Israel/Palestine

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Israel”: “Occupied Palestinian territories”; “European Union”; “Hamas and other terrorist groups”; “Palestinians”; “Palestine”; “Hungary”, “Gaza”; “civilians”; “children and women”	- Israel named as sovereign state and defender - Different terms to refer to Palestine and Palestinians - EU as diplomatic actors engaged with International Community
Predication	“This is unacceptable”; “The violence will come again”; “Status quo is not an option”; “We support Israel’s right to self-defence... respecting IHL”	Attributes moral evaluations to events or actions. Terms convey judgement. The support of Israel is framed with limits.
Argumentation	- Topos of threat: “Too many casualties”; “violence will emerge again” - Topos of responsibility: “We need to reengage”; “our mission... is to help” - Topos of peace: “a true political solution as the only way to bring peace”	Uses common-sense or ‘logical’ warrants to justify EU action or inaction. - commitment to peace but more hesitant and future prospects not as ambitious
Perspectivation	“This is my takeaway”; “We consider”; “I have allowed myself to remind my colleagues...”; “I think this is very important”; “Surely you can guess easily, it is about Hungary”	Borrell as a mediator and responsible coordinator. Speech framed as reflective and transparent. Identifies EU’s internal disunity subtly with pointing to unity withing 26 Member (next to Hungary)
Intensification / Mitigation	“Very bad situation”; “really very bad”; “high number of children and women”; “strong support”; “we fully support... but...”; “only a short text”; “this is nothing new”; “unacceptable”	Emotional emphasis and mitigation coexist: the horror of the violence is highlighted, yet controversial issues like accountability or ICC jurisdiction are softened or avoided, caution in political tone.

21.5.2021: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the ceasefire

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“European Union”; “Gaza”; “Egypt”; “Gaza Strip”; “Israeli and Palestinian authorities”	- EU aligns itself with major international actors
Predication	“We are appalled”; “regret the loss of life”; “the situation... has long been unsustainable”; “restor-	- language signals concern, but remains general, vague critique

	ing a political horizon... is of utmost importance”; “restoring political horizon”; “renewing engagement”; “revitalise”	without naming responsible actors, appalled shows the moral engagement of the EU - soft implications for the need for peace and hinting at its stalemate
Argumentation	- Topos of responsibility: “the situation... has long been unsustainable”; “EU is renewing its engagement” - Topos of peace and future: “Only a political solution will bring peace” “towards a two-state solution”	- Argumentation rests on generalised calls for peace and sustainability, sense of urgency but solutions abstract, call for a “political horizon” substitutes structural critique with procedural optimism
Perspectivation	“The European Union welcomes”; “we commend”; “we are appalled”; “the EU is ready”; “the EU is renewing its engagement”	EU positions itself as a cooperative, facilitative actor, image of diplomatic maturity
Intensification / Mitigation	“We are appalled”; “regret the loss of life”; “long been unsustainable”; “utmost importance”; “only a political solution”; “fully support”	Emotional intensifiers (“appalled,” “utmost importance”) signal gravity, but the language is still cautious. Mitigation through vagueness and generality

Fifth Gaza War (7. October 2023 – ongoing)

18.10.2023: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell in the EP Plenary on the situation

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Israel”; “civilian population”; “civilian victims in Gaza”; “European Union”; “ Hamas”; “terrorist organization”; “Palestinian people”; “Palestine”	- Actors positioned in moral categories: Hamas = Terror, Israel = state entitled to defence, EU = moral actor
Predication	- Hamas: “indescribable horror”; “wants to eradicate Israel”; “boycotting any attempt at peace”; “wants destruction” - Israel: “suffered by Israel”; “celebrating life”, “right to defend itself...within the limits of international law”; - Gaza: “civilian deaths”; “no more water”; “also the victims of Hamas”	- Constructs Hamas as the main aggressor and peace spoiler - predicates victimhood to Israelis and Gazans differently: Israel is given agency and legitimacy; Palestinians are passively suffering (passive voice used for Gazan suffering), downplays responsibility
Argumentation	- Topos of threat: “cycle of violence”, “safety of our streets” - topos of humanitarianism: “we must also condemn the deaths in Gaza”; “urgent humanitarian aid get into Gaza” - topos of peace: “achieve a just peace”	- argues that conflict/hostilities are also a threat for the EU itself - Relies on moral and legal topoi to justify both support for Israel and concern for Palestinians - Evokes principled pragmatism: balance of condemnation and humanitarian concern

Perspectivation	“We have all condemned...”; “I was in Gaza in 2008...”; “We cannot make everyone in Gaza responsible...”; “Today, we undertake...”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uses first-person plural (we) to construct EU identity as unified - Borrell’s personal memory lends authority and indicates closeness/sympathy for Palestinians
Intensification / Mitigation	“Indescribable horror”; “so many defenceless people”; “I think we can all agree”; “we must also condemn”; “a quarter of [Gaza’s deaths] are children”; “really fear”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensifies horror of violence on both sides, often emotional, but legalism tempers critique of Israel - Emphasises urgency and repetition to construct crisis narrative.

18.10.2023: Speech by the President von der Leyen at the EP Plenary debate

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Hamas”; “Israel”; “Palestine”; “Hama’s terrorists”; “men, women, children and babies”; “Jews”; “State of Israel”; “Jewish life”; “Palestinian people”; “Europe”; “civilians in Gaza”; “President Abbas”;	Constructs a binary between “terrorists” (Hamas) and “democratic victims” (Israel). Jewish identity emphasised as central to Israel’s legitimacy and vulnerability
Predication	“pure evil”; “heinous terror attacks”; “slaughtered over 1,400 men, women, children and babies”; “abandoned children’s toys”; “hell of fire”; “shocked to the core”; “massive EU funding”; “dark past”; “legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people”	Hamas as evil and inhuman. Palestinians are described as victims. Israel is portrayed as morally upright, shocked, and in need of “solidarity”. EU is portrayed as a guardian of order, rights, and humanitarianism.
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of threat/danger: Hamas poses a threat, so EU must act in solidarity with Israel - Topos of responsibility: the EU has a normative and historical responsibility, it must protect Jewish life and act against hate (“never again”). - Topos of humanitarianism: Because people in Gaza are suffering, aid must be sent and humanitarian access ensured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uses security and moral arguments to justify solidarity with Israel, Humanitarianism for Palestinians is framed as a value-based imperative, but secondary to Israel’s security. - A tension exists between defending international law and implicitly condoning Israeli military actions. legality invoked not to hold Israel accountable, but to maintain EU credibility.
Perspectivation	“I saw a nation shocked to the core”; “it was important to pass this message of solidarity in person”; “we first have to listen, if we want to be listened to”	Von der Leyen centers her own perspective and actions, emphasising proximity to Israel. Palestinian voices are absent. EU as moral, responsive, humanitarian.
Intensification / Mitigation	Intensification: “pure evil”; “turned into a hell of fire”; “blood”; “burned houses”; “no hesitation on our side”; “zero tolerance for hate”	Emotional and moral intensity is reserved for Israeli suffering and antisemitism. Mitigations around Israeli actions are vague and passive, framed more as suggestions. Gaza is acknowledged but Israel’s role in

	Mitigation: “all facts need to be established”; “Israel should react... in line with international humanitarian law”; “it is crucial to protect civilian lives... even in the middle of a war”	its suffering is not named, which limits the potential for accountability.
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21.10.2023: Remarks by President Charles Michel at the Cairo Peace Summit

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“European Union”; “Hamass”; “Israel and its people”; “civilians”; “those who are most vulnerable”; “Palestinian Authority”; “Palestinian People”	- Hamas is criminalised and delegitimised, Israel as the victim and legitimate sovereign defender - Palestinians are depersonalised and generalised
Predication	- EU: “a political project”; “visionary political leaders”; “contributes to peace, security, [...], solidarity and mutual respect, [...], human rights”; “message of unity”; “EU is consistent”, “our duty”, “you can count on the EU to make its contribution”, - Hamas: “Hamass’s ignoble terrorist attack” - Palestinians: “most vulnerable”, PA “represents the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians”	- Value-laden language, paints the EU as morally upright and reliable, a peace project, protector of universal values, saviour narrative - Hamas is moralised as evil - Palestinian Authority framed as legitimate voice of Palestinians
Argumentation	- Topos of responsibility: EU must act due to its duty and values (e.g., peace, solidarity). - Topos of threat/danger: need to prevent regional escalation justifies intervention - Topos of humanitarianism: aid is justified by reference to human suffering and vulnerability.	- draws ‘clear line’ and emphasises the EU having no double standards - Humanitarian law is used selectively to rebalance a legitimacy asymmetry but without directly criticising Israeli military actions beyond the siege
Perspectivation	“It seems to us that...”, “we believe...”, “we affirm...”, “I would like to thank you...”	- Michel adopts the EU perspective as unified, authoritative but also humanitarian, institutional voice foregrounded with “we”
Intensification / Mitigation	“strongly condemn”; “call for the unconditional and immediate release” “must be exercised”; “affirm the importance of protecting civilians”; “always and everywhere and at all times”; “complete siege violates”, “tragedy”, “much suffering and misfortune”,	- Strong condemnation of Hamas, urgent about hostage release - emotive language about suffering intensified, but more indirect - Criticism of Israel is mitigated but support for military action is conditional (“must be in line with international law”)

6.11.2023: Speech by Charles Michel at the EU Ambassadors Conference 2023

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“‘ Hamas’ horrific attack”; “‘ people of Israel”; “‘ innocent civilians”; “‘ hostages”; “‘ Israel”; “‘ Gaza”; “‘ West Bank”; “‘ European Council”	Clear distinctions between aggressors (Hamas), victims (Israeli civilians, hostages, humanitarian workers), Israel is named as ally
Predication	- “‘ terrorist attack of unprecedented violence and cruelty”; “‘ unbearable loss of innocent women, children, men”; “‘ meticulousness with which [Hamas] prepared and carried out [attack]”; - “‘ Israel is a friend and ally. It is a democracy that counts”; - “‘ every civilian life matters”;	uses emotionally charged and moralising language to frame Hamas as barbaric and Israel as a valued democratic partner, casualties as tragic and painful
Argumentation	- Topos of danger/terror: “‘ Hamas’ horrific attack”; - Topos of humanitarianism: “‘ every civilian life matters,” “‘ call for humanitarian pauses and corridors”; - Topos of responsibility: “‘ It is the responsibility of the European Council...”	Invokes security, legal, and moral topoi to justify support for Israel while promoting humanitarian concern. EU’s role is framed as rational and moral.
Perspectivation	- “‘ We cannot say it enough”; We are also shaken”; - “‘ Let me give you one recent example...”	Highly personal and emotionally invested tone, EU is presented as strategic actor and a moral compass. Michel positions himself and EU as authoritative narrators of truth.
Intensification / Mitigation	- “‘ absolutely nothing can justify”, “‘ pure horror”, “‘ unprecedented violence and cruelty”, “‘ every measure must be taken”, “‘ devastated”, “‘ atrocious images”	Strong condemnation of Hamas and emotional language for civilian deaths

24.11.2023: Statement by High Representative Josep Borrell on the release of hostages and pause in hostilities

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“‘ EU”; “‘ Israel”; “‘ Hamas”; “‘ group of innocent women and children”; “‘ civilian lives”; “‘ Gazans”; “‘ civilians in Gaza”; “‘ Palestinians in the West Bank”; “‘ settler”; “‘ civilian casualties”; “‘ both peoples”; “‘ International community”	Hamas as terrorist aggressor, hostages as innocent victims, Gazans as suffering civilians, settlers as perpetrators of violence
Predication	- “‘ horrific humanitarian situation”, “‘ besieged Gazans” - “‘ Hamas’ horrific attack” - “‘ unacceptable” (settler violence)	- assigning moral values to events/actors (e.g., condemning violence, elevating international law as a standard)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “one horror cannot justify another” - “for the sake of both people” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - symmetry between Palestinians and Israeli with “both people”, linking their safety to each other
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of legality: references to international law as binding obligation: “Compliance with international law is not just a moral imperative... but a legal obligation.” - Topos of responsibility: EU and international community must act due to their role and duty - Topos of humanitarianism: urgent need for aid and protection, “The EU deplores the great number of civilian casualties” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The EU is cast as a responsible global actor driven by moral and legal obligations. - Humanitarian concerns allow critique without strong political confrontation. - The balancing of “two horrors” narrative reasserts EU’s claim to even-handedness
Perspectivation	“The EU welcomes...” “The EU asserts...”, “The EU has clearly stated...”	EU positioned as moral actor, mediator, promoter of law and diplomacy. Speaks on behalf of “the EU,” emphasising unity
Intensification / Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensification: “horrific humanitarian situation,” “great number of civilian casualties,” “unacceptable,” “unconditionally,” “nobody should bargain.” - Mitigation: “Israel’s right to self-defence... should comply with international law”) 	The use of strong language about Hamas and settler violence provides moral clarity while avoiding alienating Israel (modal verbs)

9.1.2024: Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell after his visit in Saudia Arabia

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Hamas”; “Gaza”, “civilian casualties”; “people in Gaza”; “Israel”; “Palestinian territories”; “West Bank”; “Palestine”; “European and Arab people”	Hamas is personified and politicised as both organisation and idea. Palestinians described as a suffering population.
Predication	“unbearable number of civilian casualties,” “miserable situation,” “Hamas has to be eradicated,” “you cannot kill an idea,” “Palestinians deserve dignity, freedom, security,” “only through political agreement”, “already a drama”	Emotional and moral language conveys urgency. Hamas is predicated both as a violent actor and as an “idea” to be overcome. Palestinians as victims in need of empowerment through a “better idea” i.e., a political horizon.
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of threat: “escalation,” “war spilling over,” “Red Sea,” “border with Lebanon” - Topos of humanitarianism: “hundreds of thousands... no food”, “dignity and freedom” - Topos of responsibility: “we have to stop,” “international community has to commit” 	Borrell justifies EU involvement through risk of broader war (threat), human suffering (humanitarianism), and shared duty (responsibility). He critiques past failures, while still advocating traditional peace process (two-state solution)

Perspectivation	“I came back to the Middle East...”; “we launched the initiative”; “we have to try”; “I am coming back to Brussels with the commitment...”	Borrell positions himself as an engaged mediator and eyewitness (creates closeness). Speaks from a moral, emotional but also political position
Intensification / Mitigation	“certainly,” “unbearable,” “has to stop,” “you cannot kill an idea,” “only way,” “strong commitment,” “not enough,” “proved,” “more difficult than 30 years ago”	Strong intensifiers stress urgency, inevitability, and moral obligation. Mitigating elements like historical context (“30 years”) and realist phrasing (“has always been difficult”) as softening frame

23.4.2024: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell in the EP plenary on civilian deaths

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“ Hamas”; “Gaza”; “Israel”; “civilians, women, children”; “humanitarian workers”; “the most vulnerable”; “journalists”; “Israeli government”; “Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)”; “European Union”; “Europe”; “victims”; “Palestinians”	- Gaza residents as victims, framed as innocent with reference to vulnerability, children, women - Israel more directly held accountable for strikes on convoy, ban of foreign media, war on Gaza
Predication	“More than 34,000 people killed, mostly civilians”; “starved to death”; “Israeli army against Gaza”; “cities in Gaza more destroyed than German cities during WWII”; “aid workers... killed”; “Israel must respect international law”	- Gaza is constructed as a site of humanitarian devastation, with civilians at the centre, heavy emphasis on suffering and destruction, invoking moral and emotional responsibility. - Israel is (indirectly) positioned as responsible
Argumentation	- Topos of humanitarianism: Human suffering justifies aid and calls for ceasefire, “we must not forget the gravity of human suffering in Gaza”; “dozens of children... starved to death” - Topos of legality: Appeals to international law as a basis for EU demands – “Israel must respect international law”, “implement the ICJ’s provisional measures” - Topos of freedom of press: Access to Gaza is necessary for truth and democracy, “journalists have to be protected” - Topos of peace: two-state framework as only solution	Borrell uses argumentative logic of law, moral obligation, and rational necessity to advocate for ceasefire and political action. Topoi serve to justify EU’s position while maintaining diplomatic balance. Notably, the topoi often rely on institutional or moral authority rather than direct blame (keeping EU’s cautious diplomatic discourse)
Perspectivation	“We continue condemning [Hamas]”; “we were very moved”; “we are now waiting to see how do we continue our cooperation	EU positioned as morally engaged, informed, and responsible. Attempts to balance empathy with

	with UNRWA”; “we cannot say...”	all victims, mediates between different truths rather than taking a sharply oppositional stance
Intensification / Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensification: “more destroyed than German cities during WWII”; “starved to death”; “I am talking about <i>aid</i> workers”; “appalled”; “dramatic error”; “catastrophic” - Mitigation: “It was a mistake”; “ask [...] more to protect civilians” 	<p>Strong emotional appeals are used to dramatize humanitarian urgency, killings of humanitarian/aid workers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mitigation: calling killings of humanitarian workers ‘mistakes’, not intentional acts, allowing space for diplomatic engagement while signaling disapproval

11.6.2024: Speech by President Charles Michel at the Gaza aid conference in Jordan

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“European Union”; “Israel”; “Hamas”; “Palestinians”; “Palestinian Authority”; “Gaza”; “Rafah”; “children of Gaza”; “aid workers”	Gaza’s civilian population (especially children) as suffering victims, and Hamas as aggressors. UNRWA defended and dissociated from terrorism, PA included as a partner.
Predication	- “brutal attack against the people of Israel”; “horrendous suffering and humanitarian disaster in Gaza”; “catastrophic humanitarian situation”; “each number represents a human life”	Emotional, humanitarian language. Palestinians, especially children, framed through extreme suffering (orphaned, amputated), Israel not negative, but policies are indirectly criticized (Rafah, withholding funds). Predication of the EU is moral.
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of humanitarianism: “each number represents a human life”; “catastrophic humanitarian situation” - Topos of responsibility: “we have no choice but to look beyond this darkness” - Topos of peace/security: “peace is the best and lasting security guarantee” 	Humanitarian arguments dominate speech and provide moral authority, legal arguments to bolster credibility and subtly pressure Israel (Rafah operation, ICJ). EU’s self-image as peace-bearer is reaffirmed
Perspectivation	“we have condemned Hamas’ brutal attack”- “we do not accept”; “we believe in international justice”; “you can count on the EU”	EU as principled, humanitarian, and morally engaged actor, “we,” reinforcing unity, EU as trustworthy
Intensification / Mitigation	“catastrophic”, “brutal attack”, “unconditional”, “absolutely heartbreaking”, “ultimate price”, “no choice”, “not a terrorist organisation”, “we will always be on the side of humanity”; “nightmare for the children of Gaza”	strongly intensifies humanitarian urgency and moral clarity, around Gaza. Israel’s role is carefully mitigated through omission and indirect language

6.10.2024: Statement by the President von der Leyen on the one-year anniversary of the 7 October 2023 acts of terror against Israel

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“ Hamas”; “Israel”; “Palestinians”; “victims”; “European Union”; “innocent people”; “Gaza”; “entire region”; “Palestine”;	Hamas constructed as the sole violent actor and responsible party, Israelis and Palestinians positioned as victims, but in asymmetric terms, EU as proactive
Predication	“unspeakable savagery”; “barbarous attacks”; “immense suffering”; “appalling humanitarian situation”; “spiral of violence”; “extreme tension and volatility”; “the only viable path forward”	- Hamas as morally depraved and irrational - Palestinians suffering, but cause is ambiguously shared (“spiral of violence”) - EU depicted as stabilizing, humanitarian actor
Argumentation	- Topos of threat: Terror justifies reaction, urgent international action – “no justification for Hamas’ acts of terror” - Topos of humanitarianism: Aid must be provided to relieve suffering, “EU will keep doing its utmost... for the Palestinian people” - Topos of peace: diplomacy and the two-state solution to restore peace, “only viable path forward”	- relies heavily on moral-legal discourses around terrorism, suffering, and coexistence, Hamas as the disruptor of peace - Structural root causes are left unaddressed, peace framed as a technocratic and managerial - humanitarianism implicitly frames the EU as benevolent, masking its complicity or political role in the conflict.
Perspectivation	“I condemn once again”; “we reiterate our call”; “the EU is ready to help”; “we will keep implementing”	- EU (and von der Leyen personally) positioned as morally consistent and future-oriented. - adopts a distance from direct political confrontation, while centering EU agency in crisis management, “we” assumes a collective European moral subject
Intensification / Mitigation	- Intensification: “unspeakable savagery”; “horrifying”; “etched in our minds forever”; “appalling”; “immense suffering”; “at all costs” - Mitigation: “spiral of violence”;	Strong language used to characterise Hamas’ actions, while mitigation appears in descriptions of broader conflict dynamics and Palestinian suffering

15.11.2024: Josep Borrell, Blogpost ‘War in Gaza: we cannot continue with business as usual’

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Israeli authorities”; “Gaza”; “EU Member States”; “Israel”; “Gaza Strip”; “Northern Gaza”; “Israeli Defence Forces”; “extremist settlers”; “Palestinian farmers”; “Israeli people”; “Israel’s former defence minister Gallant”; “Israeli Knesset”; “Israeli government”;	- Names a wide range of actors, from institutional to collective. There is a shift from generalized references to concrete responsibility, e.g. “Gallant,” “Knesset.” - Palestinians mostly framed as victims and innocent

Predication	“Relentless shelling”; “forced to leave at gunpoint”; “obliterated”; “charred bodies”; “revenge”; “illegal and immoral ideas”; “displacement”; “ethnic cleansing”; “destroying infrastructure”; “consumed by its rage”; “trauma of centuries of pogroms”; “lifeline for millions”	Israel strongly associated with acts of destruction, displacement, and collective punishment, links Israeli state behaviour to historical trauma and legal violations, stark terms to emphasize moral and legal transgressions
Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of humanitarianism: Unbearable suffering justifies urgent action - Topos of legality and justice: Violating international law must have consequences, “we cannot continue with business as usual”; - Topos of moral responsibility: Credibility and ethics require EU action, “we need to acknowledge... the approach... has failed” 	<p>Rhetoric marks a stark shift, foregrounding international law, ethics, and historical analogies, problematizes Israeli actions, introduces the language of ethnic cleansing, and calls for concrete measures.</p> <p>Argumentation justifies a policy shift by portraying the Israeli actions as illegal, exceptional, and destabilising.</p>
Perspectivation	“We pleaded”; “we understood”; “our immediate reaction”; “we doubled down”; “I have proposed”; “we cannot continue”; “we need to acknowledge...”	Borrell self-positions as both witness and actor, initially reflects collective EU identity (“we”), then shifts to personal initiative (“I have proposed”), showing disillusionment with prior EU stance
Intensification / Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensifiers: “apocalyptic wasteland”; “no food, no electricity, no water”; “forced at gunpoint”; “obliterated”; “trauma of centuries”; “illegal and immoral”; “too long to recount”; “longest information blackout ever imposed by a democratic state” - Mitigation: “widespread disregard by all belligerents...” 	Uses powerful intensifiers to highlight the extremity of suffering and Israeli actions. A brief attempt at mitigation is made by generalising violations to “all belligerents.”

24.03.2025: Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Kaja Kallas at the joint press conference with Minister for Foreign Affairs Gideon Sa’ar

Strategy	Examples	Interpretation /Notes
Nomination	“Israel”; “Europe”; “EU-Israeli Association Council”; “Hamas”; “Palestinian People”; “Israelis”; “Gaza”;	Israel, its citizens, and leadership foregrounded as partners and victims. Palestinians are primarily represented as passive sufferers, Hamas strongly marked as threats
Predication	“Israel is a very relevant trade and investment partner”, “appalling loss of life”, “unbearable uncertainty”, “horror and death”	Israel as rational, valuable, and democratic actor, Hamas associated with irrational violence, Palestinians with, EU peace-oriented

Argumentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topos of Threat: “What we are witnessing now is a dangerous escalation.”, unstable and volatile situation - Topos of Responsibility: “EU stands in solidarity”, “can help” - Topos of Humanitarianism: “horror and death for the Palestinian people.”; “More humanitarian assistance.” 	Threat to justify Israel self-defence and EU involvement, EU is positioned as a responsible actor (ready to help), and concerned for humanitarian situation
Perspectivation	“We met... after the EU-Israeli Association Council”, “we welcome the Arab plan”, “we support diplomatic efforts”	EU positioned as close to Israel (“good partners”), benevolent, rational actor seeking peace and humanitarian support
Intensification / Mitigation	“strongly condemn”, “extremely important”, “unbearable uncertainty”, “horror and death”, “definitely need”, “very good partners”, “concerns regarding West Bank”, “but also the rights of Palestinians need to be respected”	Intensification when discussing Israeli suffering, threats and EU-Israel ties. Mitigation on Palestinian rights and suffering