

## Searching for a Place in Global IR Through Exceptionalism: Turkey and the Mediation for Peace Initiative

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### Abstract

*This study is an attempt to rethink exceptionalism both in Turkish Foreign Policy and in Global IR. It critically engages with Turkey's contribution to the Global IR debate within the discourse of exceptionalism in Turkish foreign policy over its role in the Mediation for Peace Initiative (MPI). Following Nymalm and Plagemann (2019), we rethink exceptionalism used in Global IR, critically analyzing Turkey's role in the MPI within the framework of internationalist exceptionalism. In doing so, we aim to unbox exceptionalism in Global IR and understand how some exceptional foreign policy discourses of non-Western states may contribute to the interconnectedness between regional worlds, as well as the circulation of ideas and norms between the global and local levels.*

**Keywords:** Global IR, Exceptionalism, Turkish Exceptionalism, Mediation, Mediation for Peace Initiative

### 1. Introduction

*In today's world, Turkey's situation and location in our world is entirely exceptional and it is impossible to search for any similarities with other states.<sup>1</sup>*

*I do not find useful a discussion on Turkey's "true location" in the world; whether it is European or Asian, whether it is in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, or in the Middle East. Nor is there any need to choose "one or the other," for Turkey is the embodiment of them all. That is our uniqueness, our richness, and our strength.<sup>2</sup>*

*Turkey's unique access to both the global north and south makes it a suitable mediator over a wide geographical range. Turkey's cultural-civilizational background and long experience with Western political and security structures create an advantage in the field.<sup>3</sup>*

This study is an attempt to rethink exceptionalism both in Turkish Foreign Policy and in Global IR. Despite the reference to Turkey's geographical and historical uniqueness (a reflection on

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<sup>1</sup> Hamit Batu, "Dış Siyaset ve Tanıtma," *Dışişleri Belleteni* 2, no. 10 (1964): 115-116.

<sup>2</sup> İsmail Cem, "Turkey: Setting Sail to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Perceptions* 2, no. 3 (1997): 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections from the Field," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 1 (2013): 90.

its exceptionalism) since the establishment of the Republic in the quotations above, as Yanık aptly underlines, “Works explicitly discussing Turkish exceptionalism are rare and mostly focus on political or economic processes at the domestic level.”<sup>4</sup> Exceptionalism discourse in Turkish foreign policy and research on how it shapes the country’s behaviors have been largely neglected in the literature. In light of these criticisms, this study critically engages with Turkey’s contribution to the Global IR debate within the discourse of exceptionalism in Turkish foreign policy and its role in the Mediation for Peace Initiative (MPI).

Early scholarly debate in Global IR revolved around “the distinction between West and non-West” and broadening the conception of agency of non-Western actors by “eschewing cultural exceptionalism and parochialism.”<sup>5</sup> In this approach, exceptionalism is described as “the tendency to present the characteristics of a social group as homogeneous, collectively unique and superior to those of others.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is asserted that “claims to exceptionalism often underpin false claims to universalism.”<sup>7</sup> More recently, however, the agenda of the Global IR research program inspired by Chinese, Indian, and Japanese cosmovisions<sup>8</sup> aimed at demolishing the “cognitive prisons of one world versus many worlds.”<sup>9</sup> For instance, Shahi argues that West vs. non-West typologies create “plural local exceptionalisms,” not “plural global universalisms.”<sup>10</sup> She argues that ethnocentrism and exceptionalism, “irrespective of their source and form,” must be avoided in Global IR in order to reject “the West–non-West binary”<sup>11</sup> since these cognitive prisons create barriers to the establishment of effective global partnerships for addressing the challenges of global crises.<sup>12</sup> In this study, we aim to unbox the exceptionalism in Global IR and understand how some exceptional foreign policy discourses may contribute to the interconnectedness between regional worlds by avoiding creating new cognitive prisons.

Nymalm and Plagemann assert that exceptionalism is not “necessarily confrontational, unilateralist, or exemptionalist.”<sup>13</sup> The authors argue that exceptionalism is neither static, nor hegemonic, and they define four ideal types of exceptionalism: imperialist, civilizational, internationalist, and globalist.<sup>14</sup> Following Nymalm and Plagemann, we rethink exceptionalism in Global IR by critically analyzing Turkey’s role in the MPI within the framework of “internationalist exceptionalism.”

Starting in 2010, the MPI, co-chaired by Turkey and Finland in the UN platform, has been

<sup>4</sup> Lerna K. Yanık, “Constructing ‘Turkish Exceptionalism’: Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 2 (2011): 81.

<sup>5</sup> Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations and Regional Worlds: An Agenda for International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (December 2014): 649.

<sup>6</sup> Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 307.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> These cosmovisions are Tianxia (under all heaven) from China, Advaita (non-duality) from India, Mu No Basho (place of nothingness) from Japan, and Sufism. For detailed analyses, see; Deepshikha Shahi, “Advaita in International Relations: A Philosophical Restoration,” in *Advaita as a Global International Relations Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 21-50; Shahi (ed.) *Sufism: A Theoretical Intervention in Global International Relations*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2020); Kosuke Shimizu, *The Kyoto School and International Relations: Non-Western Attempts for a New World Order* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Zhao Tingyang, *All under Heaven: The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*, trans. Joseph E. Harroff, (California: University of California Press, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Deepshikha Shahi, “Global IR Research Programme: From Perplexities to Progressions,” *All Azimuth* 13, no. 1 (2024): 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Nicola Nymalm and Johannes Plagemann, “Comparative Exceptionalism: Universality and Particularity in Foreign Policy Discourses,” *International Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (2019): 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

a venue for developing mediation norms, procedures, and capacities by bringing together regional organizations part of the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). At this point, the MPI emerges as an interesting case contributing to the most recent Global IR scholarship by illustrating a case of an effective Western–non-Western partnership. Furthermore, Turkey being the only country co-chairing these mediation groups and its foreign policy discourse in this initiative can be evaluated in the internationalist exceptionalism category.

Hence, this study is an attempt to rethink exceptionalism both in Turkish Foreign Policy and in Global IR as a response to the invitation of Global IR to explore the multiple ways to enrich the discipline of IR.<sup>15</sup> It asserts that contrary to taking exceptionalism as a given category in Global IR, internationalist exceptionalism discourses illustrate how ideas and norms circulate between the global and local levels, thus contributing to the Global IR debate.

Through utilizing comparative exceptionalisms via the MPI, this article firstly aims to highlight the “disruptive potential”<sup>16</sup> of Turkey’s role in the MPI case to illustrate the need for modification of the existing perception of exceptionalism in Global IR. Secondly, by connecting a political discourse to the scholarly world of IR disciplinary sociology, it suggests a “renewed” thinking on one of the oldest debates on the contribution of the local (parochial) to the global. It, therefore, aims to establish a bridge between the local and the global in world politics. In a broader theoretical sense, we search if/how it might be sensible to talk about parochialism in Global IR discussions and argue for the reversal of exceptionalism through parochialism in building a genuine universal discipline. In this regard, this paper will analyze whether the MPI has the potential to contribute to the exceptionalism debate in Global IR in light of these questions:

How does revisiting exceptionalism from a Global IR perspective contribute to our understanding of global politics in IR? How can we conceptualize Turkish exceptionalism in foreign policy? How and with what tools did Turkey’s foreign policymakers operationalize this exceptionalist discourse in foreign policy in the 2000s? What might be the contribution of the local (parochial)—in this case, Turkey’s role in the MPI—to building a genuine Global IR endeavor?

To answer these questions, the article is organized around four main parts. Following the introduction, the second part of the article aims to reconceptualize exceptionalism and exceptionalist foreign policy in Global IR. To achieve this, it first discusses the exceptionalist conception of foreign policy discourses with regards to Western IR exceptionalism vs. Global IR exceptionalism. It then delves into a theoretical discussion/critique of exceptionalism in early works of Global IR, mostly in Acharya’s writings, and suggests a reversal of exceptionalism through parochialism, acknowledging the oldest debate of the contribution of the local (parochial) to the global in the evolution of the IR discipline.

The third part specifically scrutinizes Turkish exceptionalism in the case of the MPI.

<sup>15</sup> Amitav Acharya, “Global International Relations (IR) and Regional Worlds, A New Agenda for International Studies,” *International Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2014): 649, 657.

<sup>16</sup> Kate Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s recourse to Area Studies: Siloisation Anxiety and the Disruptive Promise of Exceptionalism,” *St Antony’s International Review* 16, no. 1 (2020): 209-210. She highlights the importance of Burawoy’s method of casing in challenging the dominance of some concepts. The method requires choosing a case according to its power to illustrate the disruption of a theory or general rule. Here the important thing is not to find a case representative, rather it aims for a change in the dominant understanding of concepts.

Building on Nymalm and Plagemann's framework of comparative exceptionalism, it first traces various previous conceptualizations regarding Turkey's exceptionalist foreign policy discourse. It then specifically analyzes the case of Turkey's position in the MPI in the framework of internationalist exceptionalism by deciphering the speeches of Turkish policymakers at various platforms, UN resolutions, as well as articles and books focusing on the themes of exceptionalism and uniqueness.

The fourth part is the discussion of findings and theoretical implications of the MPI case. The article concludes that the MPI contributes to the advancement of the Global IR research agenda on two main grounds: First, by connecting a political discourse to the scholarly world of IR disciplinary sociology, it suggests a renewed thinking on one of the oldest debates of the contribution of the local (parochial) to the global. Secondly, by highlighting the "disruptive potential" of the MPI, it illustrates the need for modification of the existing perception of exceptionalism in Global IR and argues for the reversal of exceptionalism through parochialism in building a genuine Global IR endeavor, as well as a universal discipline.

## 2. Conceptualizing Exceptionalist Foreign Policy

In emphasizing the distinction between "difference" and "exception," Holsti argues that the term exceptionalism means a rare form of behavior. He reasons that every state has different foreign policies based on various beliefs, rhetoric, and actions, but not all states "have universal aspirations that guide their foreign policy choices."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, he underlines that "foreign policy exceptionalism is not exceptional but rare,"<sup>18</sup> and, "It is a type of foreign policy."<sup>19</sup> As Yanik underlines, there are critical, favorable, and deconstructive analyses of exceptionalist foreign policy discourses in the literature.<sup>20</sup> As illustrated below, the variety of exceptionalisms challenges the understanding prevailing in the US-centric literature on foreign policy exceptionalism.

### 2.1. Western IR Exceptionalism versus Global IR Exceptionalism

Underlining the meaning associated with American exceptionalism, Holsti lists five traits of an exceptionalist type of foreign policy, including "subordination of self-interest to a universal good" and "to be free from rules and norms governing ordinary states," seen in almost all cases of exceptionalist types.<sup>21</sup> However, although the literature is dominated by studies focusing on American exceptionalism, research on Chinese, Indian, and Russian versions of exceptionalism are growing.<sup>22</sup> For instance, Zhang's study of Chinese exceptionalism as "an important source for policy ideas" underlines that exceptionalist narratives of the country vary in different historical periods. He discusses the changing meaning of exceptionalism even within a country.<sup>23</sup> Hence, not only do the examples of exceptionalist foreign policy cases differ, but also, it is difficult to agree easily about a universal understanding of

<sup>17</sup> K. J. Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy: Is it Exceptional?" *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 3 (2010): 384.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 384-385.

<sup>20</sup> Yanik, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism'," 81.

<sup>21</sup> Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy," 384.

<sup>22</sup> See, Kevork K. Oskanian, "A Very Ambiguous Empire: Russia's Hybrid Exceptionalism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 1 (2018): 26-52; Kate Sullivan, "Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy: The Origins of India's Moral Leadership Aspirations," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 640-655; Feng Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations*, 19, no. 2 (2011): 305-328.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang, "The Rise of Chinese Exceptionalism," 307.

exceptionalism.

Yanık categorizes the literature on exceptionalism into two groups. The first group includes studies focusing on the creation of “superiority vis-à-vis other states and nations” based on the differences regarding “the cultural, religious, historical, strategic or societal grounds of a state or a nation.”<sup>24</sup> The second category comprises other studies that focus on “anomalies in the political science or international relations literature.”<sup>25</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann’s recent work is a valuable contribution to exceptionalism literature since, other than US exceptionalism as a part of Western IR literature, they emphasize that exceptionalist foreign policy discourses carry different meanings that deserve detailed analysis. In other words, they unbox the concept of exceptionalism and help us to better understand the variety of sources and effects of exceptionalist foreign policy discourses experienced in Global IR comparatively. In their words:

Several other countries apart from the United States (and China) do have a long history of exceptionalist discourses. These foreign policy discourses have hardly ever been looked at comparatively, despite both their family resemblance and relevance for debates on international politics in a world composed of ever more self-confident foreign policy actors outside the transatlantic orbit.<sup>26</sup>

Firstly, they maintain that “exceptionalism is hardly an established concept which goes beyond the case of American exceptionalism.”<sup>27</sup> By looking into the cases having different power capacities, they show that exceptionalist foreign policy discourse is not unique to the United States. They analyze the variety of exceptionalisms across different regions of the world, including cases from India, Turkey, and China.

Secondly, they underline that at the core of all exceptionalisms considered in the literature is the belief in the universal good that is understood as vital for international society in international relations.<sup>28</sup> Here we see a relationship between the particularity and universality inherent in exceptionalism. If exceptionalism is constructed “as foreign policy discourse that is part of a society’s debates around its identity as a nation,”<sup>29</sup> one can find the relationship between universality and particularity. In terms of identity construction, Nymalm and Plagemann argue that an exceptionalist conception of the identities of states frames foreign policy discourses and, at the same time, their actorness.<sup>30</sup> In this context, contrary to the dominance of the US type of exceptionalism, they argue that “exceptionalism necessarily is not confrontational, unilateralist, or exemptionalist.”<sup>31</sup>

Sullivan de Estrada also attempts to unbox the concept of exceptionalism by underscoring the connection between the local and the global embedded in the cases of “narratives of nuclear exceptionalism in South Asia.”<sup>32</sup> By comparing and contrasting the Indian and Pakistani narratives on nuclear weapons, she asserts that exceptionalist foreign policy discourses might seek relations of solidarity and practices of resistance instead of uniformity and hegemony.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Yanık, “Constructing Turkish ‘Exceptionalism,’” 81.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>26</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, “Comparative Exceptionalism,” 13.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s recourse to Area Studies,” 207-214.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-212.

Therefore, in this paper, we argue that, together with Sullivan de Estrada's study, there is a potential in Nymalm and Plagemann's categorization of exceptionalisms to contribute to Global IR by taking exceptionalism as a term "not predefined." To further revolutionize the term, we need to explore the relationship between the concepts of exceptionalism, uniqueness, superiority, and exemption.

### 2.1.1. *Uniqueness and superiority*

By focusing on the distinction between difference and exception, Holsti underlines the common understanding of exceptionalist states as they are different from others. However, he highlights that this kind of difference inherent in exceptionalist states' identity construction involves superiority.<sup>34</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann demonstrate that the relationship between uniqueness and foreign policy is thought to belong to a higher order.<sup>35</sup> Uniqueness constitutes the basis of the belief in the creation of a "universal common good" through foreign policy. However, in contrast to Holsti, although exceptionalism necessarily involves superiority, their understanding of superiority assumes the impossibility of the duplication of one's unique qualities by others. A unique insight into universal values and their foreign policy implications may have sources from different perspectives, such as "a particular civilizational or spiritual heritage, political history, and geographical location."<sup>36</sup> These different sources make states' use of uniqueness different; therefore, uniqueness cannot be duplicated. In this context, exceptionalism may take two different forms: Exemptionalist or Non-Exemptionalist Exceptionalism.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.1.2. *Exemption or non-exemption*

Based on the American type of exceptionalism, Holsti describes two meanings in exceptionalism. One is Americans' view of themselves based on the perceptions of superiority rooted in American values. Secondly, based on these superiority claims, the US is argued to have the privilege of not being bound by multilateral regimes and agreements. This usage of exceptionalism is related to American actions in providing peace and security for the world populated by "enemies of freedom," "rogue states," "tyrants," and "axes of evil."<sup>38</sup> Here he underlines the exclusivity of reference to the common usage of exceptionalism regarding US foreign policy and its effects in global politics as exemptionalism. However, Nymalm and Plagemann argue that exceptionalism does not necessarily mean to be exemptionalist, and exceptionalism may take forms of *exemptionalism* or *nonexemptionalism* in global politics.<sup>39</sup> The confrontation and unilateralism inherent in exemptionalism are replaced with an emphasis on engagement, dialogue, and multilateralism in nonexemptionalism. In nonexemptionalist cases, the exceptionalist identity of states carries features of "adherence to international law, international cooperation amongst equals, and a conflict-mediating role in international politics."<sup>40</sup>

### 2.1.3. *Effects of various versions of exceptionalist foreign policy discourse in global*

<sup>34</sup> Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy," 384.

<sup>35</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, "Comparative Exceptionalism," 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> Holsti, "Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy," 381-382.

<sup>39</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, "Comparative Exceptionalism: Universality," 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

*politics*

The variety of exceptionalisms challenges the understanding prevailing in the US-centric literature, which presents exceptionalist foreign policy discourses as inherently confrontational. Sullivan de Estrada, for example, criticizes the main assumptions in the US and Western-centric perception of exceptionalism and argues that exceptionalism narratives can be read as a “response to hegemony” and “manifest resistance” in different geographies.<sup>41</sup> In response to the argument that “exceptionalism is unexceptional” by other scholars, she highlights that “not all exceptionalisms are created equal.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, why and how states need such narratives varies according to their cultural and historical circumstances, as well as perceptions of the existing international system. In this regard, exceptionalist states may follow either *missionary* or *exemplary* foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> Exemplary foreign policy discourses may include the same degree of moral superiority as the missionary type, but without the desire to convert others due to various reasons.<sup>44</sup>

In light of these dimensions, Nymalm and Plagemann introduced four ideal types of exceptionalist foreign policy discourses, namely imperialist exceptionalism, civilizational exceptionalism, internationalist exceptionalism, and global exceptionalism.<sup>45</sup> *Imperialist Exceptionalism* has both missionary and exemptionalist traits in global politics. There is this understanding of an exceptional duty to liberate others, and this creates justification for exemption from international law and other binding conventions for the “unexceptional rest.”<sup>46</sup> *Civilizational Exceptionalism*, on the other hand, has an exemplary foreign policy discourse with exemptionalism. This type of exceptionalism reflects an exceptionalist state’s understanding of itself “as the world’s center and most advanced civilization,” and therefore, it is believed to “stay out of entanglements with the unexceptional rest.”<sup>47</sup> Apart from these two exceptionalisms, *Internationalist Exceptionalism* differs in its having both exemplary and non-exemptionalist traits. It is nonexemptionalist since in this approach, “egalitarian multilateralism” is believed to be the basis of international politics. The exemplary character of this type takes its roots from “specific geographical, historical, or cultural circumstances that make the respective society an example for those situated at a lower level of political development.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, *Internationalist Exceptionalism* requires “a self-confident foreign policy and a paternalistic approach vis-à-vis the unexceptional rest.”<sup>49</sup> Although *Globalist Exceptionalism*, like internationalist exceptionalism, is nonexemptionalist in global politics, its missionary character makes it different. However, the missionary dimension does not necessarily bring interventionism. In this approach, “the unexceptional rest” is regarded as “objects of tutoring and paternalism.”<sup>50</sup>

These four different categorizations demonstrate that “exceptionalism is not necessarily confrontational, exemptionalist or a natural feature of great or rising powers.”<sup>51</sup> Based on this variation, we can further discuss the possibility of the existence of Global IR exceptionalism,

<sup>41</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s recourse to Area Studies,” 208-209.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>43</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, “Comparative Exceptionalism,” 14, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

and, if such a concept does exist, deciphering its contribution to the scholarly debate.

## 2.2. Exceptionalism in Global IR

Early scholarly work in Global IR, in Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan's words, aimed at "opening up the neglected story of thinking about IR that took place outside the West." To this end, they wonder "what IR theory would look like had the discipline been developed elsewhere than in the West."<sup>52</sup> Criticizing the dominance of American and Western perspectives in IR, both institutionally and in terms of setting the theoretical agenda of IR,<sup>53</sup> Global IR aspires to develop a truly "inclusive and universal discipline that reflects the growing diversity of its IR scholars and their intellectual concerns."<sup>54</sup> It is more a framework of inquiry and analyses of IR by due recognition of multiple actors' experiences, voices, and agency. Initially, Global IR scholars suggested that non-Western peoples, societies, and states' experiences introduce new understandings and approaches to the study of global politics.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the Global IR research agenda seeks not to displace Western-dominated IR knowledge, but only to "displace its hegemony by placing it into a broader global context."<sup>56</sup> Many most recent Global IR writings, however, propose a reconciliation between the West and the non-West dichotomy.<sup>57</sup> Shahi, for instance, underlines that "the Global IR neither imagines 'the national' as a homogenous conceptual category nor establishes 'the national' and 'the international' as areas of conflict."<sup>58</sup>

Also, another contribution to Global IR by Shimizu, inspired by Buddhist philosophy, claims that "the current international situation is localized in each region in its own way, which in turn affects international relations as a whole" and hence the whole international situation is created "in a continual process of multiple partial local-global interactions."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, for Shahi, Sufism can offer a universal discourse applicable to Global IR while accommodating the specific realities of IR within a particular province or region with a "universal alongside provincial" perspective.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the dialogic approach to Global IR has the potential to stimulate an intellectual stance of "universal alongside particular" or "single alongside plural."<sup>61</sup>

While categorizing Global IR's seven dimensions, Acharya and Buzan assert that "global IR eschews concepts and theories that are solely based on national or cultural exceptionalism."<sup>62</sup> Exceptionalism, as defined by them, is the "tendency to present the characteristics of a social group as homogeneous, collectively unique and superior to those of others."<sup>63</sup> Acharya and Buzan refer to examples such as the Western standard of civilization, China's tribute system, the idea of a league or concert of democracies to succeed the UN, or domestic agendas such

<sup>52</sup> Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>57</sup> Shahi, *Sufism*; Shimizu, *The Kyoto School, and International Relations*; Shahi, "Global IR Research Programme," 1-22; Deepshikha Shahi, "Global IR Research Programme: From Perplexities to Progressions," All Azimuth 13, no. 1 (2024): 1.

<sup>58</sup> Shahi, "Global IR Research Programme," 6.

<sup>59</sup> Kosuke Shimizu, "Buddhism and Global IR," *E-International Relations*, August 17, 2023, accessed date April, 2024. <https://www.e-ir.info/2023/08/17/buddhism-and-global-ir-from-part-of-the-whole-to-part-of-the-whole/>

<sup>60</sup> Shahi, *Sufism*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Shahi, "Foregrounding the Complexities," 172.

<sup>62</sup> Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, 2, 300.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.



as “Asian values” and “Chinese characteristics,” which are frequently authoritarian.<sup>64</sup> More importantly, exceptionalism in IR is regarded as a justification for the dominance of the big powers over the weak. American exceptionalism, in this regard, can easily be associated with the Monroe Doctrine, which might look benign from the inside, but could be read as self-serving global interventionism. According to Acharya and Buzan, introducing something like a “unique Chinese tributary system as the basis of a new Chinese School of IR” is a similar possibility.<sup>65</sup> However, referring to Africa, for instance, it is asserted that not all agencies need to be necessarily exclusive, but could also be inclusive. African agency is not solely about “African solutions to African problems.” It also encompasses a range of contributions in which Africans “define the terms for understanding the issues.”<sup>66</sup>

In Acharya’s understanding, exceptionalism is defined as a “poor and dangerous basis for scholars to organize themselves.”<sup>67</sup> He asserts that claims of exceptionalism “shut the door to genuine ideational intercourse between the global and the regional, or between regions,” and “exceptionalism can be a powerful tool to resist change.”<sup>68</sup> He criticized scholars of Asian Studies for making parochialism “to reify and essentialize shared characteristics” in countering the ethnocentrism of Western disciplinary concepts.<sup>69</sup> However, we argue in this paper that the prevailing perception of exceptionalism in the Global IR venue reflects a kind of parochialism seen in Western IR. In other words, by associating exceptionalism with parochialism, exceptionalism is used in Global IR as perceived by Western IR categories focusing on the US and Western Europe’s perceptions of exceptionalism. Nevertheless, the works of Nymalm, Plagemann, and Sullivan de Estrada show that exceptionalism has different meanings in different geographies, as will be explained through the lens of Turkey’s role in the MPI. Clearly, looking at the concept from different angles other than the Western perspective enriches the Global IR endeavor.

### 2.3. Challenging the Parochialism of Exceptionalism in Global IR

Long ago, Holsti identified parochialism as one of the problems in the field of International Relations. For Holsti, this was not only a problem created by national perspectives on international relations arising out of differences in geography, history, language, and culture, but also a conceptual and methodological one.<sup>70</sup> Referring to grand debates in IR, namely between behavioralism and traditionalism, Holsti argued that this form of parochialism “contradicts the scientific spirit which emphasizes exploration, novelty, and innovation.”<sup>71</sup> Years later, Thomas Weiss also asserted that our field is “on the edge of an abyss of irrelevance.”<sup>72</sup> For him, the problem was, again, arising from the “fragmentation” and “atomization” of our field. Weiss noted that theoretical fragmentation and “othering” proved unfruitful, if not destructive. Similarly, Smith argued that “liberating ourselves from a parochial approach

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>67</sup> Amitav Acharya, “Identity Without Exceptionalism: Challenges for Asian Political and International Studies,” *Asian Political and International Studies Review* 1, no. 1 (2015): 6.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>70</sup> K. J. Holsti, “Theories of International Relations: Parochial or International?” (Paper prepared for presentation at the 30th Anniversary of the Japan Association for International Relations, Tokyo, October 19, 1986, accessed date April, 2024, 18) [https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/kokusaiseiji1957/1987/85/1987\\_85\\_L17/\\_pdf-char/ja](https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/kokusaiseiji1957/1987/85/1987_85_L17/_pdf-char/ja)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> T. G. Weiss and Rorden Wilkinson, “Global Governance to the Rescue: Saving International Relations?” *Global Governance* 20, no. 1 (2014): 19.

will enable us to recognize a much wider range of theoretical innovations, and also allow for the discovery of similarities of seemingly different worldviews.”<sup>73</sup> What is interesting and striking about these excerpts from different eras is that they are all cautious about parochialism,<sup>74</sup> but also acknowledge the crucial contribution of parochialism to our field by opening up local theoretical discussions and innovations, which later became universal. Mainstream IR theories started out as parochial, too, but then took on a universal character.

The idea of Global IR, as formulated by Acharya, essentially builds on the critiques of IR’s parochialism. Sullivan de Estrada also underlines that Acharya aimed to develop the agenda of Global IR to advance IR towards a “truly inclusive” and “universal discipline” that better understands how multiple actors with diverse intentions, aspirations, and power resources co-produce the global from the local.<sup>75</sup> However, Anderl and Witt criticize the problematizing of the global in Global IR.<sup>76</sup> They argue that despite its “greater inclusiveness and representatives of politics around the globe,” Global IR idealizes “the model of one global knowledge canon.”<sup>77</sup> In this regard, Global IR aims to demonstrate concepts and theories of non-Western contexts that are “able to be applied to a larger global canvas.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, Anderl and Witt reject this “global applicability as an unquestioned benchmark for the value of the knowledge,” because they believe “it is de-legitimizing particularity while re-legitimizing globality.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, Global IR will only become a truly novel and pluralistic enterprise if it reengages with the questions of what the fundamental purpose of knowing is, as well as whose knowledge matters.<sup>80</sup>

Therefore, as seen in the prevailing perception of exceptionalism in Global IR, there is no place for claims of exceptionalism in this applicability of the local to the global canvas. In line with this, Lie also argues that “national IR must be saved” from exceptionalism since it is the “barrier” to creating “dialogue” between nations.<sup>81</sup> However, in contrast to these arguments, Nymalm and Plagemann’s comparative approach to exceptionalism and Sullivan de Estrada’s contribution to unboxing exceptionalism narratives show that exceptionalism is not a barrier to bridging the local with the global, which could also enrich Global IR.

While Sullivan de Estrada acknowledges the “fragmentation threat” in the discipline, creating an obstacle in providing the necessary ideational interchange in making IR global, she proposes to look at exceptionalism from a different perspective and provides a powerful contribution to overcoming this anxiety by establishing a close connection between local and global. She claims that “exceptionalism’s focus on uniqueness places local doing and thinking comparatively and along lines of similarity within a broader global and historical context, but is intended to highlight difference.”<sup>82</sup> She argues that if exceptionalism is studied as “exceptionalism-as-practice,” one can better understand not only how people from

<sup>73</sup> Karen Smith, “The Dangers of Parochialism in International Relations,” *E-International Relations*, August 30, 2018, accessed date April, 2024. <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/08/30/the-dangers-of-parochialism-in-international-relations/>

<sup>74</sup> “Parochial” means “restricted to a small area, or scope; narrow, limited, provincial.” See, Asbjorn Aide, “Global or Parochial Perspectives in International Studies and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 12, no. 1 (1975): 79-86.

<sup>75</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s Recourse to Area Studies,” 208.

<sup>76</sup> Felix Anderl and Antonia Witt, “Problematizing the Global in Global IR,” *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 49, no. 1 (2020): 32-57.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>81</sup> Xiaoting Li, “Saving National IR from Exceptionalism: The Dialogic Spirit and Self-Reflection in Chinese IR Theory,” *International Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (2021): 1399-1423.

<sup>82</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s Recourse to Area Studies,” 210.

different geographies “think and observe in a particular location and time,” but also how they “place their situation” comparatively in a wider global and historical context. In her words, “exceptionalism moves us towards an understanding of the global and the local not as two separate things in need of dialogue or reconciliation, but as already coexisting in a specific place and time, and constant co-constitution.”<sup>83</sup> Hence, in line with the Global IR research program, this endeavor refrains from creating many exceptionalisms to create a binary opposition between one world/the West and many worlds/the non-West.

Moreover, if the Western conception of exceptionalism is challenged, she asserts that “exceptionalist narratives can be leveraged as a significant analytical resource within Global IR,” and “they offer one solution to the challenge of bridging general IR theories and local-actor theorizations of the international.”<sup>84</sup> Hence, we argue that Sullivan de Estrada and Nymalm and Plagemann’s works offer solutions to the particularity/global problem in Global IR, which needs “a novel knowledge building enterprise recognizing the possibility and legitimacy of particular experience, informing and potentially transforming the abstract, general formulation.”<sup>85</sup>

Within this framework, while exceptionalist narratives may appear parochial, they reach beyond the local to embrace parts of a wider context since “the global is embedded in the local.”<sup>86</sup> In Sullivan de Estrada’s words, “If the hegemonic structures and logics at work at the global level in part constitute the local, then to study the local is also to study the global.”<sup>87</sup> In Shimizu’s perspective on Global IR, “Parts (many) are different representations of the whole (one) and vice versa.”<sup>88</sup> In light of these arguments, we claim that Nymalm and Plagemann’s categorization of exceptionalisms is an important contribution to analyzing exceptionalism from different angles in global politics and, hence, has a potential to revisit “unquestioned exceptionalism” in the contemporary world.

Drawing on Acharya’s call for scholars “to discover new patterns, theories, and methods from world histories and the need to change the way that we study, publish, and discuss IR,”<sup>89</sup> and building on Sullivan de Estrada’s suggestion to study “exceptionalism-as-practice,”<sup>90</sup> the rest of the article attempts to unbox the concept of exceptionalism in IR by seeking to discover different patterns, tools, and uses of exceptionalism in foreign policy with specific reference to the Turkish experience in the 2000s. In doing so, we aim to understand how this kind of exceptionalism may contribute to Global IR, following Aydinli and Erpul in thinking that local and native businesses’ contributions are important to create a “genuinely global IR.”<sup>91</sup> In this regard, we challenge the parochialism of exceptionalism in Global IR as an attempt to contribute to creating a genuinely global IR by arguing against Acharya’s idea of exceptionalism closing the door for ideational intercourse between the global and the local.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>85</sup> Navnita C. Behera, “Knowledge Production,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2016): 153-157; Anderl and Witt, “Problematising the Global in Global IR,” 45.

<sup>86</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s recourse to Area Studies,” 208.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Shimizu, “Buddhism and Global IR.”

<sup>89</sup> Acharya and Buzan, *The Making of Global International Relations*, 298.

<sup>90</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, “IR’s recourse to Area Studies,” 212.

<sup>91</sup> Ersel Aydinli and Onur Erpul, “The False Promise of Global IR: Exposing the Paradox of Dependent Development,” *International Theory* 14, no. 3 (2022): 421.

### 3. Turkish Exceptionalism and Global IR

In this section, we will evaluate Turkish exceptionalism with regard to Nymalm and Plagemann's categorization of internationalist exceptionalism, which has the potential to be accepted as a part of Global IR exceptionalism.

#### 3.1. Conceptualizing Turkish Exceptionalism as a Foreign Policy Identity

In both the general public and academia, one can easily witness the common belief that Turkey has unique features that make it different from other countries. In a way, there is a common and implicit belief in its exceptional identity traits. Hanioglu asserts that compared with American and French exceptionalism, Turkey is a society where the majority has internalized its exceptionalism without naming it and, therefore, this idea sustains its dominance without being exposed to any intellectual criticisms. He describes this implicit acceptance of exceptionalism as a fact lurking behind the political culture of "exceptionalism under shadow."<sup>92</sup> He claims that like France before the Second World War and/or the USA after 1945, the emphasis on authenticity, uniqueness, and the traits of "guidance of history" and "being a model" find popularity among many politicians, ordinary citizens, and academics. In the early Republican period, the Turkish Revolution has not only been compared with the 1789 French Revolution, but in the Turkish example, the emphasis on uniqueness has taken its roots from the neolithic age. It is asserted that the Turkish example is a model— "*numune-i imtisa'i*"—for oppressed nations— "*ezilmiş milletler*." In the following years, Turkey is being the only secular democracy in the Middle East and Muslim world is thought to be a kind of uniqueness, and this caught the attention of political scientists.<sup>93</sup> Turkish conservatism, on the other hand, constructed Turkish exceptionalism based on a different historical basis, via its Ottoman heritage. To explain the *sui generis* aspect of Turkish Islam, Mardin uses the concept of "Turkish exceptionalism." He describes Turkish-Islamic exceptionalism and states that it takes its roots from "the specifics of Turkish history that have worked cumulatively to create a special setting for Islam, a setting where secularism and Islam interpenetrate."<sup>94</sup>

As a valuable contribution to the field, Yanik's works shed light on how the geography and history of Turkey created an exceptional national self-image in the formulation of its foreign policy.<sup>95</sup> Turkey's liminality is based on the hybridization of its history, referring to the multiethnic and multireligious Ottoman past and geography. In line with "facts do not speak for themselves, they are spoken for," she underlines the role of elites' images and discursive practices in shaping unique reality. The liminal representation of Turkey taking its roots from geography and history empowers Turkish policymakers' perception of Ankara as a "mediator/peacemaker between East and West," making its place exceptional in world politics.<sup>96</sup>

Bilgin and Yeşiltaş also evaluate "Turkish exceptionalism" from a critical geopolitical perspective. Bilgin highlights "the historical centrality of geopolitical assumptions and

<sup>92</sup> Şükrü Hanioglu, "Gölgede Kalan İstisnacılık," *Sabah*, September 9, 2018, accessed date October, 2021. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/hanioglu/2018/09/09/golgede-kalan-istisnasilik>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Turkish-Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity, Rupture, and Reconstruction in Operational Codes," *Turkish Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 148.

<sup>95</sup> For some of these works, see: Yanik, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism'," 80-89; Yanik, "Atlantik Pakti'ndan NATO'ya: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde Türkiye'nin Konumu ve Uluslararası Rolü Tartışmalarından Bir Kesit," *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 9, no. 34 (2012): 29-50; Yanik, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors of Vision: 'Bridging' Turkey's location, Role, and Identity," *The Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 531-549.

<sup>96</sup> Yanik, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism'," 80-82.

language to Turkey's security imaginary" and "foreign policy discourse."<sup>97</sup> She describes this with the concept of "geopolitics dogma," meaning "a structure of well-established assumptions as to what geography tells one to do and why this makes sense."<sup>98</sup> She argues that one of the main features of Turkey's geopolitics dogma is related to its geographical location's uniqueness, which has "deterministic power over Turkey's policies more than the other countries."<sup>99</sup> The basis of this "extra-determinism" is its uniqueness, since it is considered a central state that "constitutes the hinge of the world island that is made up of three continents. It is both lock and key to this hinge."<sup>100</sup> Yeşiltaş also analyzes the codes of exceptional Turkish geography in the discourses of the Turkish military.<sup>101</sup> One of the features of discourses on Turkey's geopolitics is Turkey's being a central state or bridge. In line with that, its geopolitical position is located at the intersection of world politics. With these features, and together with history, culture, and society, Turkey is defined to have an exceptional status in human history. Therefore, Yeşiltaş contends that, in the military's geopolitical discourse, there is this double-layered uniqueness strategy.<sup>102</sup> In addition to these studies, Bagdonas's study on how geopolitical discourse in Turkey has been used by Turkish policymakers in its relations with the West/Europe claims that Turkey's uniqueness in terms of its geopolitical location, role, and identity is "marketed" by policymakers due to "Turkey's ontological anxiety vis-à-vis Europe."<sup>103</sup>

Although historical and geographical exceptionalism have been used as a foreign policy discourse during and in the aftermath of the Cold War, the promotion of Turkey as a mediator between East and West, as well as Islamic and Christian civilizations, increased after 9/11.<sup>104</sup> During the Cold War years, Yanık argues, Turkish elites perceived and portrayed Turkey, in terms of location, values, and culture, as being a part of the West, and its function in the international system as in between East and West, not fully belonging to one or the other. However, she asserts that this liminality in terms of function is different from the other forms of liminality that Turkey constructed in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>105</sup> According to İsmail Cem, who was the Turkish Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2002, "Turkey's function as a 'bridge' to which we historically and justifiably attached so much importance, will become a thing of the past in the 2000s."<sup>106</sup> Referring to Turkey's uniqueness, Cem argued that "there was a growing awareness that Turkey is uniquely poised to serve as a genuine model for modernization in societies with Islamic traditions."<sup>107</sup> In fact, after the 9/11 attacks, the bridge metaphor in the civilization discourse started to emphasize more "religious tones," such as portraying Turkey "as a bridge between West and Islam," especially with the Justice and Development Party

<sup>97</sup> Pınar Bilgin, "Turkey's Geopolitics Dogma," In *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, ed. Stefano Guzzini, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 151-152.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>101</sup> Murat Yeşiltaş, "Coğrafya Kaçınılmazdır: Militarizm, İstisnacılık ve Türkiye'de Ordu Merkezli Jeopolitik Zihniyetin İnşası," in *Türkiye Dünyanın Neresinde? Hayali Coğrafyalar, Çarpışan Anlatılar*, eds. Murat Yeşiltaş, Sezgi Durgun ve Pınar Bilgin, (İstanbul: Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 63-95.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>103</sup> Özlem Demirtaş Bagdonas, "A Shift of Axis in Turkish Foreign Policy or A Marketing Strategy? Turkey's Uses of Its 'Uniqueness' vis-à-vis the West/Europe," *Turkish Journal of Politics* 3, no. 2 (2012): 113.

<sup>104</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, "Comparative Exceptionalism," 28; Yanık, "The Metamorphosis of Metaphors," 531-549.

<sup>105</sup> Yanık, "Atlantik Paketi'nden NATO'ya," 50.

<sup>106</sup> İsmail Cem, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Opening New Horizons for Turkey at the beginning of New Millenium," *Transatlantic Policy Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (2002): 5.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 6.

(AKP) government.<sup>108</sup>

Nymalm and Plagemann's study is one of the recent studies evaluating Turkish exceptionalism from a comparative perspective in the IR literature. They point out that Turkish exceptionalism, besides the relationship between the state and Islam, is based on two sources: Turkey's Ottoman past and its geographical location between Europe and Asia. All three elements of Turkish exceptionalism—geographic, historical, and the relationship between the state and Islam—make Turkey an exemplary model, or “inspirational” state, to other Muslim and developing countries in the prevailing world order, where globalization issues, religious conflict, and the rise of new powers receive increasing attention. They assert that during the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) government in the early 2000s, in both academic circles and in the official discourse, Turkish exceptionalism has been much more emphasized in foreign policy discourse.<sup>109</sup> Güney and Mandacı also underline that the changing geopolitical vision of Turkey in the period where Davutoğlu's influence had its dominance in Turkish foreign policy formulation is called “Turkish exceptionalism” and “Exceptionalism a la Carte,” implying Ankara's setting “global objectives to bring order” to its geography and “address universal human problems.”<sup>110</sup>

As Arkan and Kınacıoğlu underline, former prime minister and foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had an ambitious Turkish foreign policy vision, and his perception of Turkey's foreign policy can be traced through various speeches and works. Davutoğlu argued that Turkey had a unique historical depth and legacy due to its Ottoman past and therefore had a unique position to play an effective role based on its historical accumulation and heritage despite the imposition of “artificial borders” following World War II.<sup>111</sup>

Given the unique identity that Turkey has in relations with its neighbors, it is expected to expand its international agency at the regional and global levels to play a more active and influential role. An important dimension of this foreign policy identity that Davutoğlu refers to in his speeches is the metaphorical conception of Turkey as a bridge country. Turkey's location between Europe and Asia as a meeting place of differing cultures and regions is reflected in the discourses as a bridge between civilizations. Emphasizing Istanbul's unique locality has also been frequently used with reference to Turkey's Ottoman past and multicultural heritage under a “pax-Ottomana.”<sup>112</sup>

However, the usage of this bridge metaphor later changed to “central country” with “multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified category” since he wanted to emphasize that “Turkey is no longer limited to playing a passive role like the Cold War years. It is time for transforming Turkey into a key regional and global actor with a special role in the making of a new and just global order.”<sup>113</sup> Within this context, Davutoğlu contended that Turkey's unique geographical and historical qualities give it the opportunity and responsibility to play a more active and effective role in international mediation. He argued that Turkey should better commence mediation because of its “cultural-civilizational

<sup>108</sup> Yanık, “Constructing Turkish ‘Exceptionalism’,” 86; Yanık, “The Metamorphosis of Metaphors,” 544.

<sup>109</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, “Comparative Exceptionalism,” 27-28.

<sup>110</sup> Aylin Güney and Nazif Mandacı, “The Meta-Geography of the Middle East and North Africa in Turkey's New Geopolitical Imagination,” *Security Dialogue*, 44, no. 5-6 (2013): 436.

<sup>111</sup> Zeynep Arkan and Müge Kınacıoğlu, “Enabling ‘Ambitious Activism’: Davutoğlu's Vision of a New Foreign Policy Identity for Turkey,” *Turkish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2016): 390.

<sup>112</sup> Nymalm and Plagemann, “Comparative Exceptionalism,” 28.

<sup>113</sup> Arkan and Kınacıoğlu, “Enabling ‘Ambitious Activism’,” 394.

background” together with its “unique access to both the global North and the global South.”<sup>114</sup>

### 3.2. Turkish Exceptionalism and Mediation for Peace

Turkey’s multilateral efforts to achieve cooperation and peace through mediation go back to the 1930s. Conceptualizing Turkey as a “middle power,” Barlas argues that the diplomats of the 1930s were aware of Turkey’s distinct status in the international power hierarchy.<sup>115</sup> She discusses that despite limitations on the outcomes, Ankara played the historic role of serving as both a land bridge and a fortress connecting Europe and Asia, inherited from the Ottoman Empire, and the city also initiated collaborative efforts to become a mediator between the great powers in the 1930s by forming coalitions like the Balkan Entente.<sup>116</sup> During the Cold War years, due to the systemic limitations regarding super power rivalry, as well as deadlock in international organizations like the UN, there was not much manifestation of Turkey’s mediation role per se. Turkey’s growing interests in mediation efforts increased in the post-Cold War era in various cases.<sup>117</sup> In the 1990s, for instance, Turkish policymakers followed an intense diplomacy and mediation effort to draw international attention to conflicts in the Balkans in an effort to develop a formula to end the 1992-1995 Bosnian war.<sup>118</sup> However, due to the unwillingness of the UN Security Council members, the war continued until the end of August 1995. As Altunışık and Cuhadar underline, with the influence of systemic and domestic factors, Turkey became more eager to play a facilitator role specifically in the Middle East region in the 2000s, based on Davutoğlu’s formulation of a new vision of foreign policy as security for all, dialogue, and inclusiveness.<sup>119</sup>

While referring to mediation, Davutoğlu emphasized Turkey assuming “for itself a central role in regional and international politics, and mediation is a necessary tool for contributing to peace and stability at various levels.”<sup>120</sup> Retired Ambassador Ertuğrul Apakan referred to Istanbul’s “unique geographic position at the center of Afro-Eurasia and its proximity to many conflict zones as offering an ideal location for a mediation center.”<sup>121</sup>

Before launching the Mediation for Peace initiative in the UN in 2010, Turkey acted in many mediation efforts—though it failed to produce tangible results—such as reconciliation efforts in Iraq, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan, trilateral cooperation processes in the Balkans, and searching for a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear program, as well as projects for resolution of the conflict in Somalia, among others.<sup>122</sup> Whether these efforts have been successful or not, the willingness of Ankara to play such a role deserves attention. We can assert that the most tangible results of Turkey’s mediation efforts have been achieved with the MPI initiative at the global level.

In this regard, the Friends of Mediation (FoM) initiative could be a test case for better understanding Turkey’s international exceptionalist foreign policy discourse, as well as how

<sup>114</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Mediation,” 90.

<sup>115</sup> Dilek Barlas, “Turkish Diplomacy in the Balkans and the Mediterranean Opportunities and Limits for Middle-power Activism in the 1930s,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 3 (2005): 442.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>117</sup> Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, “A New Sector in Turkish Foreign Policy: Mediation,” *Boğaziçi Journal* 25, no. 2 (2011): 189-213.

<sup>118</sup> Didem Ekinci, “The War in Bosnia Herzegovina and Turkish Parliamentary Debates (1992- 1995): A Constructivist Approach,” *Uluslararası İlişkiler* 6, no. 22 (2009): 57.

<sup>119</sup> Meliha Altunışık and Esra Çuhadar, “Turkey’s Search for a Third-Party Role in Arab Israeli Conflicts: A Neutral Facilitator or a Principal Power Mediator,” *Mediterranean Politics*, 15, no. 3 (2010): 372.

<sup>120</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Mediation,” 90.

<sup>121</sup> Ertuğrul Apakan, “Mediation: The Best Way Forward in Conflict Prevention and Resolution,” *All Azimuth*, 2 (2013): 41.

<sup>122</sup> Arkan and Kınacıoğlu, “Enabling ‘Ambitious Activism,’” 395.

it is practiced in global politics. Turkey and Finland agreed to introduce the FoM initiative at the UN in September 2010. Together with 20 member states, the UN, and 7 regional organizations, the membership has now increased to 58, including 50 states and 8 IOs. The FoM has a three-layered meeting/consultation structure in terms of its functioning. The first level is designed to include consultations between co-chairs and the UN Secretariat, especially the Mediation Support Unit. The second level is composed of the FoM's expert meetings, including groups that negotiate early drafts of resolutions before they are brought before the United Nations General Assembly. The third level includes the FoM members' ministerial meetings. Turkey and Finland, as co-chairs, periodically host annual high-level ministerial meetings in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly.<sup>123</sup>

An analysis of the Turkish leader's speeches at the UN General Assembly, as well as Security Council sessions regarding mediation, also reveals the exemplary character of Turkey's uniqueness discourse in the Friends of Mediation Initiative. For instance, in the 2006 UNSC Meeting,<sup>124</sup> the UN Representative to Turkey, Baki İlkin, emphasized Turkey's mediation experience in both its region and beyond, underlining Turkey's commitment to active involvement in mediation efforts in the UN platform.<sup>125</sup>

President Erdoğan also refers to Turkey's assuming responsibility for finding solutions to conflicts by referring to its unique identity as encompassing the cultural heritage of both Eastern and Western civilizations, as follows:

Turkey is a rightful successor to the collective heritage of both Eastern and Western civilizations, owing to its geographical location at the centre of the ancient world. Therefore, we are obliged to take the necessary steps, assume responsibility, and rise to the occasion. We will continue to fulfill our responsibilities to humankind because we are deeply affected, directly and indirectly, by the crises that besiege our region..... There are now 59 members of the Group of Friends of Mediation, which we co-chair. We have carried that United Nations initiative into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. I believe that it is within our reach to find fair, equitable, and conscientious solutions to all the global challenges we face.<sup>126</sup>

One can trace the non-exemptionalist but rather exemplary character of Turkey's uniqueness discourse in the mediation efforts made through international platforms:

Turkey and Finland are two experienced countries in mediating conflicts and reconciling differences. We have so far carried out active mediation efforts in the field ranging from the Middle East to the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, and Afghanistan. We feel that now is the time to carry our national experiences and those of our partners to another level...<sup>127</sup>

The exemplary character of Turkey, which carried some paternalistic features, as seen in other international exceptionalist cases, could also be found in Turkey's mediation efforts in the 2005 Iraqi elections. Davutoğlu, as the chief adviser to Prime Minister Erdoğan at

<sup>123</sup> Burak Akçapar, *Political Entrepreneurship in International Peace Mediation: A Study of Turkey's Role at the UN, OSCE, and OIC* (New York: Center on International Cooperation at New York University, 2019), 6.

<sup>124</sup> United Nations Security Council, *United Nations Security Council 6108th Meeting*, S/PV.6108, New York: UN Headquarters, 2009, accessed August 05, 2022. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/spv-6108.php>

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Statement by Recep Tayyip Erdogan on General Assembly Seventy-Fourth Session 3rd Plenary Meeting," *United Nations General Assembly Records*, September 24, 2019, accessed date April, 2024. <https://undocs.org/A/74/PV.3>

<sup>127</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu and Erkki Tuomioja, "Mediation for Peace: A Means toward a Better World," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 25, 2012, accessed date November, 2021. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-and-mr\\_-erkki-tuomioja\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-finland-published-in-turkish-daily-news\\_-25-february-2012.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/article-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-and-mr_-erkki-tuomioja_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-finland-published-in-turkish-daily-news_-25-february-2012.en.mfa)



the time, urged engagement “in discreet, confidential diplomacy to bring all the primary resistance leaders to Turkey to persuade them to participate in the elections as political parties.”<sup>128</sup> After months of negotiations, in the end, Davutoğlu described how the solution was achieved with these words:

I described the choice before them: “Either you will reestablish Baghdad as a center of civilization or you will be part of the destruction of Baghdad, as the Mongols were.” ... One of the leaders, the oldest one, in his seventies, from the Ubeydiye tribe, stood up and said, “Look, my sons” — the others were much younger — “we have to listen to this brother because he speaks like a Baghdadi.” He does not speak like someone from the outside. After that hour, we reached an agreement; these groups came together and formed what we call tavafuk, and they participated in the elections. The important thing is this: If we are mediating between Iraqi people, we should be speaking like Baghdadis. We have to speak like Damascenes if the issue is Syria, or like someone from Sarajevo if the issue is related to the Balkans. This is the most important aspect if we are to convince others.<sup>129</sup>

As Arkan and Kınacıoğlu underline, rather than “a superior role performed by the leader of an ancient civilization,” Turkey preferred to speak as “the wisdom of the eldest in the family.”<sup>130</sup>

Another example was Turkish leaders justifying their country’s uniqueness with reference to its ability to “empathize” and “build consensus” by being not a “neutral outsider” but an “interested insider,” as follows:

We indeed have a strong insight of the dynamics that undermine the peace in our region, as well as those that underpin it. As a result, we are able to empathize with a large group of countries around us and understand their concerns and aspirations... In other words, we are not a neutral outsider that has no special stakes involved in the resolution of the conflict. On the contrary, we are an interested insider guided by our own values, with an ability to build consensus on these values and interests.<sup>131</sup>

Here we can see the understanding of superiority as a kind of richness that cannot be duplicated by others. On the other hand, this superiority is not turned into a kind of missionary-nonexemptionalist foreign policy discourse. According to Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s unique access to both the global north and south makes it a suitable mediator over a wide geographical range. Turkey’s cultural-civilizational background and long experience with Western political and security structures creates an advantage in the field.”<sup>132</sup>

Having said that, an analysis of Turkey’s mediation activities demonstrates that the promotion of mediation in international organizations has been particularly successful in “setting the agendas” in IOs and generating “concrete outcomes” in the mediation field. In this regard, Turkey became the only country that co-chairs three distinct Friends of Mediation groups at three major international institutions. Firstly, Ankara introduced the OIC Contact Group of Friends of Mediation in 2018. After the launch of FoM, Turkey, together with Finland and Switzerland, initiated and led the establishment of such a group at the OSCE.

<sup>128</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Mediation,” 84.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Arkan and Kınacıoğlu, “Enabling ‘Ambitious Activism,’” 396.

<sup>131</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Speech Delivered by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Informal High-Level UN General Assembly Meeting in New York on the ‘Role of Member States in Mediation,’” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, May 23, 2012, accessed date November 25, 2021. [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-mr\\_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-informal-high-level-meeting-on-the\\_role-of-member-states-in-mediation\\_\\_23-may-2012\\_-new-york.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-informal-high-level-meeting-on-the_role-of-member-states-in-mediation__23-may-2012_-new-york.en.mfa)

<sup>132</sup> Davutoğlu, “Turkey’s Mediation,” 90.

Turkey and Finland took the lead also in the first UN General Assembly resolution on mediation in 2011.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the Istanbul Conferences on Mediation have become a crucial venue that brought multiple actors, from government representatives to civil society actors. The Istanbul Conferences on Mediation are also followed by another conference series in Istanbul by the OIC specifically.<sup>134</sup> In this regard, former foreign minister Cavuşoğlu conceptualized these multilateral initiatives as integral components of the MPI. Cavuşoğlu referred to Turkey's pioneering role as being "the first nation to offer a voluntary financial contribution to the UN's Innovation Cell."<sup>135</sup> He emphasized how the success of the Group of Friends initiative within the UN served as "a model," prompting the establishment of similar collaborative frameworks within the OSCE and the OIC.<sup>136</sup> On every occasion, the Foreign Ministry of Turkey emphasized the unique contributions of Turkey through the Istanbul Mediation Conferences to the development of the conceptual framework for conflict resolution and mediation.<sup>137</sup> For instance, in the 2019 Meeting of the Friends of Mediation, Minister Cavuşoğlu went on to underline the importance of incorporating digital technology in diplomacy with reference to Turkey's own initiatives, like "Digital Diplomacy" at the 11th Ambassadors' Conference and the focus on the matter during the Istanbul Mediation Conferences.<sup>138</sup> The UN's "Guidance for Effective Mediation" was translated into Turkish, which marks the first time it has been translated into a language outside the UN's official languages. Furthermore, Ankara's wide-ranging dissemination of the document across the academic and civil society circles illustrates Turkey's commitment to the field.<sup>139</sup>

Regarding outcomes, Turkey, and Finland's multilateral efforts to mobilize the UN through the Friends of Mediation have led to four crucial UN General Assembly resolutions regarding mediations.<sup>140</sup> The UN General Assembly resolution on July 28, 2011, was a landmark document, as it was the first UN Resolution on mediation.<sup>141</sup> It elaborated the normative basis for mediation with the result of intense negotiations. This was followed by three additional General Assembly resolutions. Draft resolutions were contested during 20 different expert-level meetings co-chaired by Turkey and Finland. As a result, on September 13, 2012, the General Assembly adopted the Resolution on UN Guidance for Effective Mediation, which introduces measures for "effective mediation."<sup>142</sup> Thirdly, Turkey and Finland conducted brainstorming sessions with academics and representatives

<sup>133</sup> Akçapar, *Political Entrepreneurship*, 12.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>135</sup> In January 2020, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs launched the Innovation Cell, an interdisciplinary team dedicated to helping the Department and its field presences to understand and explore, pilot, and scale new technologies, tools, and practices in conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding. See, "Innovation – Political and Peacebuilding Affairs," *United Nations*, January, 2022, accessed date April, 2024. <https://dppa.un.org/en/innovation>

<sup>136</sup> "Co-Chairs Summary, 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation entitled – Mediation as a tool for peaceful settlement and resolution of conflicts: Taking stock after 10 years of the first UN Resolution and looking ahead," *Istanbul Mediation*, February 2, 2022, accessed date April, 2024. <http://www.istanbulmediation.org/pdf/8-istanbul/Co-chairs-summary-Ministerial-mtg-Feb-2022.pdf>

<sup>137</sup> "Summary Report of 8<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Mediation Conference," *Istanbul Mediation*, March 22, 2022, accessed date April, 2024. <http://www.istanbulmediation.org/pdf/8-istanbul/8th-istanbul-Mediation-Conference-Report.pdf>

<sup>138</sup> "Co-Chairs' Summary of the United Nations Group of Friends of Mediation 10th Ministerial Meeting New York, 26 September 2019," *United Nations Peacemaker*, September 26, 2019, accessed date April, 2024. <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/3374>.

<sup>139</sup> Spyros A. Sofos, "Turkey as Mediator," *The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform*, 2022, accessed date April, 2024. [https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/119754/1/Turkey\\_as\\_a\\_Mediator.pdf](https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/119754/1/Turkey_as_a_Mediator.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> Akçapar, *Political Entrepreneurship*, 13.

<sup>141</sup> United Nations General Assembly. *United Nations General Assembly Sixty-Fifth Session Agenda Item 33, A/RES/65/283*, New York: UN Headquarters, 2011, accessed March 28, 2023. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/ares65283.php>

<sup>142</sup> United Nations General Assembly. *United Nations General Assembly Sixty-Sixth Session Agenda Item 34 (a), A/RES/66/291*, New York: UN Headquarters, 2012, accessed February 21, 2023. <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/487>

of regional organizations, including the OSCE, the African Union, and the European Union. Their findings were published in a report, which was then incorporated into the drafting of the UN General Assembly Resolution in July 2014.<sup>143</sup> Turkey and Finland co-chaired both the FoM group and the General Assembly deliberations on these above-mentioned resolutions, which were adopted by consensus on July 31, 2014. The resolutions invited the UN, as well as regional organizations, to “improve cooperation, coordination, coherence, and complementarity in specific mediation contexts.”<sup>144</sup> The fourth resolution was about the UN’s review processes and the role of mediation and was adopted in September 2016, again with the Turkish-Finnish leadership in cooperation with the UN Secretariat. Not only the UN General Assembly resolutions, but also Turkey and Finland’s efforts made important contributions to the UN Secretariat’s thematic guidelines that defined and clarified both the normative and procedural content of the mediation training.<sup>145</sup> As a result, the UN Secretary-General released the “UN Guidance for Effective Mediation” and “Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies” at an FoM meeting in March 2017. Therefore, together with the efforts of Finland, the FoM group at the UN, and the OSCE, Turkey’s multilateral efforts have been crucial in terms of creating awareness, advocating capacity-building, and developing mediation norms and procedures, as well as institutional infrastructure, through UN General Assembly resolutions and the UN Secretariat’s thematic guidelines.<sup>146</sup>

Apakan, in his 2013 article, contended that there has been a growing momentum built around the concept of mediation in the last decade, and Turkey, as the co-chair of the Friends of Mediation, played a leading role in this process. He also underlined that UN involvement conferred legitimacy and credibility to the mediation efforts initiated by Finland and Turkey in 2010. In the words of Apakan, the Friends of Mediation group acts as a “bridge between the UN Secretariat, Member States, NGOs, and civil society.”<sup>147</sup> He also underlined the “contestation” and “synergy in diversity” as building blocks of the Friends of Mediation initiative: “The mix of views, experiences, and realities that Friends of Mediation members bring to the group’s discussions and activities produces a synergy in diversity.”<sup>148</sup>

In response to the critics of the discrepancy between Ankara’s actual mediation efforts and its diplomacy concerning the MPI, Akçapar argues that the emphasis on mediation has been a continuous theme in Turkish foreign policy in its region and through international organizations. This was the case even after Turkey decided to recourse a different foreign policy concept in 2017; Turkish foreign policymakers had shifted to a *realpolitik* approach in 2016 with the use of hard power resources such as Operation Euphrates Shield in Syria, continuing through to 2018 with Operation Olive Branch.<sup>149</sup> In other words, since 2010, Turkey seems to have focused more on capacity-building diplomacy within international organizations such as the MPI than on engaging in actual mediation activities on the ground. However, the most recent mediation efforts, such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative (“Initiative on the Safe Transportation of Grain and Foodstuffs from Ukrainian ports”), is highly

<sup>143</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations General Assembly Sixty-Eight Session Agenda Item 33 (b)*, A/RES/68/303, New York: UN Headquarters, 2014, accessed date April 27, 2023. <https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/303>

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations General Assembly Seventieth Session Agenda Item 34 (b)*, A/RES/70/304, New York: UN Headquarters, 2016, accessed March 19, 2023. <https://peacemaker.un.org/GA%20Resolution%20A/RES/70/304>

<sup>146</sup> Akçapar, *Political Entrepreneurship*, 11-12.

<sup>147</sup> Apakan, “Mediation,” 40.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Akçapar, *Political Entrepreneurship*, 3

important in demonstrating the interplay between actual mediation efforts and the country's international diplomacy in producing outcomes. Turkey's mediator role between Russia and Ukraine has helped to achieve the Black Sea Grain Initiative in Istanbul on July 22, 2022, which was welcomed by the UN. This example is illustrative in the sense that Turkey stayed true to its exceptionalist discourse in the mediation efforts, and these efforts had tangible results on the ground, with "exceptionalism as a practice."<sup>150</sup>

Nevertheless, conceptualized as a middle power, Turkey also attempted to make international mediation a "niche diplomacy," with an evident will to institutionalize this practice through international organizations.<sup>151</sup> In other words, for Turkey, its activism has encompassed involvement in fostering mediation capacity at an international level, notably within the UN. Turkey's insistence on inclusive multilateralism and its efforts for mediation at the global level, together with its exemplary role to other nations, warrants the inclusion of Turkish exceptionalism in the "internationalist exceptionalism" category laid out by Nymalm and Plagemann. Moreover, Finland and Turkey's co-partnership in the MPI contributes to the most recent Global IR discussions as an illustration of a case of "Western along with non-Western." Such effective partnerships could certainly aid in tackling the challenges of current global crises.

### 3.3. Discussion

Long ago, Eide asserted that traditional approaches that analyzed conflicts only in their local settings were the parochial. Peace research, which locates conflicts and processes within the driving forces inherent in the international system, is what escapes parochialism.<sup>152</sup> However, as Sullivan de Estrada notes, if the hegemonic structures and logics at work at the global level constitute, in part, the local, then "to study the local is to study the global."<sup>153</sup> What is required is a method through which to engage "global-in-local" narratives in a way that purposefully disrupts and remakes global theories.<sup>154</sup> As Aydınli and Erpul assert, "For a genuinely global IR we need local and native businesses to thrive through their efforts and initiatives."<sup>155</sup> In this regard, the case of the MPI contributes to advancing local IR and developing a genuine Global IR from three main aspects.

First of all, with actual world politics often being omitted in the Global IR discussion, a topic like the MPI might be an ideal venue to explore the circulation of ideas and norms between the global and local levels. Thoroughly utilizing "exceptionalisms" via a Global IR case study (the MPI), this article connects a political discourse to the scholarly world of IR disciplinary sociology. In this regard, Turkey's role in the MPI demonstrates the characteristics of Nymalm and Plagemann's categorization of "internationalist exceptionalism" and could be considered an example of what Sullivan de Estrada calls "exceptionalism-as-practice."<sup>156</sup>

Secondly, it suggests a renewed thinking on the concept of exceptionalism in Global IR by

<sup>150</sup> For details on the Black Sea Grain Initiative, see: "The Black Sea Grain Initiative: What it is, and why it's important for the world," *United Nations News*, September 16, 2022, accessed date April, 2024. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126811>; Galip Dalay, "Why Turkey is in a unique position to mediate," *CNN*, March 29, 2022, accessed date April 3, 2024. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/29/opinions/turkey-mediator-russia-ukraine-dalay/index.html>

<sup>151</sup> Milena Dieckhoff, "International Mediation: A Specific Diplomatic Tool for Emerging Countries?" *European Review of International Studies* 1, no. 2 (2014): 116.

<sup>152</sup> Eide, "Global or Parochial Perspectives," 79-86.

<sup>153</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, "IR's recourse to Area Studies," 208.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>155</sup> Aydınli and Erpul, "The False Promise of Global IR," 3.

<sup>156</sup> Sullivan de Estrada, "IR's Recourse to Area Studies," 209.

de-emphasizing Western exceptionalism. Building on Nymalm and Plagemann's framework, Turkey's role in the MPI demonstrates that "neither all exceptionalisms are identical, nor are they created equal,"<sup>157</sup> and illustrates the non-exemtionalist yet "exemplary" character of Turkey's uniqueness discourse in mediation efforts at international platforms, which can be defined as "internationalist exceptionalism."

It then challenges the understanding that all exceptionalist discourses are hegemonic and dominant, and thus should be avoided in Global IR. In other words, Turkey's reference to its exemplary role, not superiority, to other nations, seen in its role in the MPI, offers a rethink of exceptionalism as bridging the local with the global. Therefore, we suggest a more productive engagement with the concept of exceptionalism in Global IR, in line with Sullivan de Estrada's selected cases, not to illustrate a theory or extract a general rule, but based on its disruptive potential.<sup>158</sup> Following her, we also argue that Global IR's exceptionalism *requires* a modification of existing theory.

Thirdly, from a wider theoretical perspective, this study attempts to contribute to one of the oldest debates between the local (parochial) and global. As Weber highlights, from the very beginning, IR's creation myths tell us what to study, why, and how, such that we do not or cannot question those assumptions. The myth function in IR theory is "the transformation of what is particular, cultural, and ideological into what appears to be universal, natural, and purely empirical."<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Smith demonstrates how international relations discourse "constructs the categories of thought within which we explain the world" in a manner that reinforces the particular (cultural) perspective of those authoring the discourse.<sup>160</sup> As Eide claims, "The global framework now taking shape would not have obtained its realistic content unless there had been close communication between scholars who seek to understand the relationship between the specific dynamics of their society and processes going on in different parts of the world and described by scholars from those other parts."<sup>161</sup> In the context of this study, we argue for the reversal of exceptionalism in Global IR through parochialism in building a genuine universal discipline. At this point, we suggest that social constructivism and its conceptual and methodological richness may provide a fertile ground to better and persuasively grasp the nexus between global and local in Global IR's future research agenda.

#### 4. Conclusion: Is There Any Role for Internationalist Exceptionalist States in Global IR?

At an IR meeting, Puchala and Fagan write that a distinguished scholar reportedly called for "a one-year suspension on methodological innovations" in the discipline.<sup>162</sup> "His reason was," the authors write, "so that actual research into world politics can be started." According to the authors, this inquiry pointed to a very crucial problem in the discipline of IR: "We probably do not understand contemporary international politics as well as we should, since theoretical development in our discipline is presently lagging behind the evolving reality

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>159</sup> Cynthia Weber, *International Relations Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005), 7

<sup>160</sup> Steve Smith, "Singing Our World into Existence: International Relations Theory and September 11," *International Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2004): 499.

<sup>161</sup> Eide, "Global or Parochial Perspectives," 79-80.

<sup>162</sup> Donald J. Puchala and Stuart I. Fagan, "International Politics in the 1970s: The Search for a Perspective," *International Organization* 28, no. 2 (1974): 247.

of day-to-day practice in international affairs.”<sup>163</sup> Following that, we argue that, with actual world politics often being omitted in Global IR discussions, a topic like the MPI might be an ideal venue to explore the circulation of ideas and norms between the global and local levels.

As shown throughout the paper, Nymalm and Plagemann’s recent work presents a valuable contribution to exceptionalism literature by unboxing the exceptionalist foreign policy discourses prevailing in Western IR literature. Their ideal types of exceptionalism help us to better understand the variety of sources and effects of exceptionalist foreign policy discourses experienced in Global IR. Their work also created the grounds on which to discuss or revisit exceptionalism in Global IR as Acharya and Buzan first described. Therefore, as answers to the first set of questions posed in the introduction, we can conclude that, with the help of Nymalm and Plagemann’s framework, revisiting exceptionalism from a Global IR perspective contributes to our understanding of global politics in IR and prevents the creation of new cognitive prisons caused by a Western IR/Global IR dichotomy. As stated in the paper, despite the common features of superiority and uniqueness claims present in all exceptionalism types, these do not necessarily turn into confrontational policy outcomes at the global level. Therefore, non-exemptionalist and exemplary exceptionalism discourses pave the way for reconciliation in global governance.

Evaluating Turkish exceptionalism with this new understanding of exceptionalism in Global IR, the paper concludes that, in line with Nymalm and Plagemann, Turkey’s position in the MPI can be regarded as an example of the “internationalist exceptionalist” category. Turkey’s foreign policy discourse in the 2000s underlined its unique historical and geographical features given Turkey’s location between Europe and Asia. Being a meeting place of differing cultures and regions is reflected in the discourses of the “bridge between civilizations” metaphor. This exceptionalist discourse is operationalized with mediation as a foreign policy tool in the international sphere via its efforts in the MPI. This is also an example of “exceptionalism-as-practice.” Unlike the Western IR exceptionalism approach of foreign policy as missionary and exemptionalist, Turkey’s role in the MPI could be evaluated as non-exemptionalist and exemplary. Therefore, the policy outcomes of internationalist exceptionalist cases as witnessed in the MPI demonstrate how some exceptional foreign policy discourses of states may contribute to the interconnectedness between regional worlds, as well as the circulation of ideas and norms between the global and local levels.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

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