

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Becoming a humanitarian state: A performative analysis of ‘status-seeking’ as statecraft in world politics

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Abstract

Status-seeking is ubiquitous in world politics, and the literature is currently dominated by state-centrism and rationalism, which is almost exclusively focus on state elites. This results in a thin and limited understanding of what ‘status-seeking’ is, where it works, and how it is effected. This article challenges the existing approaches by introducing a performativity framework and offers an overhaul of how ‘status’ can be studied. It suggests replacing ‘status-seeking’ with ‘status performances’ that are conceptualised as part of ‘statecraft’ process. Drawing on post-structuralist and queer approaches as well as aesthetics in International Relations (IR), it is argued that status performances participate in the production of the state itself as a subject in world politics, so all states are ‘status-seekers’. This subject-production process occurs in multiple political sites, including the academic IR discourse in a country and visual presentations in the media. It is concluded that there is no ‘status’ beyond the subject, and status can never be achieved because it always needs repetitive performances. The argument is illustrated by an analysis of the production of ‘Turkey’ as a humanitarian state and demonstrates how this is effected in state-elite pronouncements, IR scholarship in Turkey, and visual representations.

Keywords: humanitarianism; performativity; status; status-seeking; Turkey; visuals

In International Relations (IR), the political process of how a state pursues a position in international hierarchies, or elevates its relative standing vis-à-vis others, has been theorised as ‘status-seeking’. However, current (neo-)realist and constructivist understandings of status-seeking do not ask what the relationship is between ‘status-seeking’ and the production of ‘the state’ as a subject in world politics and how this relationship can be theorised. This is because they accept ‘the state’ as pre-discursive and given to ‘status-seeking’. The statist ontology along with rationalism results in a thin and limited understanding of what ‘status-seeking’ is, where it works, and how it is effected. First, although deference and recognition are conceptualised as the main ways of ‘achieving’ a desired status, the question of when exactly a status-seeker is deemed to be satisfied with deference or recognition of others and ‘ends’ its status-seeking is not theorised. In other words, there is an untheorised assumption of finality of status-seeking. This problem originates from the fact that ‘status’ is thought to exist independently of ‘the state’ as a subject. Furthermore, the literature concentrates largely on the state elite as the agents of ‘status-seeking’, partly due to tying the analysis to a fixed object.¹

¹The positioning of current status-seeking analytical approaches (and the performative alternative proposed in this article) can be framed through modal positions of IR theories by Jackson and Nexon. The current status-seeking literature oscillates

Drawing on poststructuralist and queer approaches as well as aesthetics in IR, this article proposes a performativity framework of status analysis in IR. In this framework, ‘the state’ and ‘status’ are conceptualised as *ontological effects* of repetitive citational performances in autobiographical narratives as to ‘who the state is’. Therefore, the analytical focus shifts from identity to the subject-production process, and from ‘status-seeking’ as a state-centric, rationalist foreign-policy behaviour to status performances as part of statecraft. The framework offers an innovative opening into status analysis by addressing the limitations mentioned above and transforming how status can be rethought in IR. It purports that status performances are integral to statecraft, an ongoing process of producing ‘the state’. These performances produce the subject in a particular way in a complex normative context: ‘great power’, ‘normative power’, ‘humanitarian’, and so on. While current debates work through the assumption of intentionality and rationalism of ‘status-seeking’, the performative framework sheds light on how *normality* about the subject is generated through repetitive citational practices. Recognition and deference as hypothetical end points are replaced by a never-ending process of subject production. Status can never be achieved.

The performative framework rejects binding the analysis to a specific actor with intentions to seek status. Instead, it enables an exploration of multiple political sites, where the subject is produced as ‘normal’ through citational practices beyond the state elite-level foreign-policy discourse and behaviours. In multiple political sites, both ‘the state’ and ‘status’ are produced *together* as ontological effects of citational practices, and this process never ends. This is because both ‘the state’ and ‘status’ need constant reiterations to exist; neither exists pre-discursively. Furthermore, the performativity framework points at history as a normative context of status performances, because citational practices often use selective historical representations (in the form of memories) in autobiographical identity narratives told by the state elite and IR scholars. Both generate the effect of normality of the subject. Finally, the framework urges status researchers to explore citational performances in visual narratives and what they do in the subject-production process. Images can have a performative role through ‘how it shows what it shows’.²

The performative framework can offer new ways of understanding and studying status in world politics. Primarily, by linking status performances to statecraft, the performative framework enables us to analyse all states as ‘status-seekers’ in the conventional terminology. Secondly, the framework offers an alternative view on the debates on whether status ambitions can be satisfied or accommodated. The answer is no, because the subject always needs performances to *exist*, so the focus should be less on accommodation and more on what performances do politically, and how they do it. Finally, by refusing to tie analysis to a referent object, the framework challenges the state-centrism of current status literature. It moves the focus from ‘the actor’ to linguistic and material performances in multiple political sites. This deepens the status analysis by pluralising it.

This article is divided into two sections. The theoretical section focuses on building the performative analytical framework. It starts with a discussion of current approaches to status in IR and their limitations, which necessitate an alternative process-based framework. This is followed by the debates on ‘the state’ as a subject that is constantly produced through performances. Performative studies in IR will be employed to conceptualise the state and status as ontological effects of status performances. This section will discuss what exactly can be studied in this framework: history as the normative context of citational practices in autobiographical narratives told by the state elite and IR scholars. Finally, the discussion turns to visuals as an emerging political site where the normality of the subject is produced through citational practices.

between the choice-theoretic approaches that treat limited number of actors as autonomous decision-makers and social-relational approaches that aim to examine relations of actors in broad social settings. The performativity approach developed in this article resonates with the third group: experience-near approaches that treat the context as constitutive to various actors whose lifeworlds are put under spotlight; see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, ‘International theory in a post-paradigmatic era: From substantive wagers to scientific ontologies’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:3 (2013), pp. 543–65.

²Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Life is Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 71.

The performative framework will be illustrated through the analysis of the production of ‘humanitarian Turkey’ in Africa. Turkey has been increasingly studied as a ‘status-seeker’, although the limitations outlined above lead to rationalist, state-centric, and often ahistorical analyses.³ This article will focus on Turkey’s engagement with Somalia, launched in August 2011 with the high-profile visit of Turkish foreign-policy makers to camps in Mogadishu along with popular culture figures, non-governmental organisations, and business groups. It will unpack state elite, academic, and visual narratives revolving around the visit and how ‘humanitarian Turkey’ was produced as a subject in this moment. The objective of the empirical illustration is not how and why Turkey sought humanitarian status, or in what ways a certain object successfully or unsuccessfully pursued such an identity. Rather, it unpacks the production process of ‘humanitarian Turkey’ through citational practices as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ in different political sites without tying the analysis to a specific actor. In other words, the performative approach focuses not on the actors or their intentions, but on what their performances do politically: the ‘appeared naturelness’⁴ of ‘humanitarian Turkey’. Although the focus will be on a significant moment in 2011, the process continues today. ‘Humanitarian Turkey’ as an ontological effect always needs statecraft performances.

A caveat is in order. The performativity approach has been criticised for over-reliance on language and discourse, overlooking the performative role of materials and spaces or the relationship between performances and lived experiences.⁵ The proposed status analysis framework in this article aims to tackle the dominance of language by exploring images in performative status analysis. However, it does not imply that the framework should be limited to the political sites identified in this framework. For example, it will be important to integrate how material performances (possession of nuclear weapons, delivering humanitarian aid) produce the subject as ‘having’ the status, albeit not at the expense of citational performances. The latter is constitutive of the discursive context in which materials are interpreted.⁶

From status-seeking to performative status

In IR, status is accepted as ‘collective beliefs about a given state’s ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organisation, and diplomatic clout)’. It manifests itself as ‘membership in a defined club of actors, and as relative standing within such a club.’⁷ A (neo-)realism-driven understanding of status competition among great powers⁸ as well as small powers⁹ analyses status-seeking as a zero-sum competition of power.

³Emel Parlar Dal, ‘Status-seeking policies of middle powers in status clubs: The case of Turkey in the G20’, *Contemporary Politics*, 25:5 (2019), pp. 586–602; Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, ‘Turkish foreign policy in a post-Western order: Strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence?’, *International Affairs*, 97:4 (2021), pp. 1085–104.

⁴Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Performative Revolution in Egypt: An Essay in Cultural Power* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), p. 3.

⁵John H. S. Aberg and Derick Becker, ‘The world is more than a stage: Foreign policy, development, and spatial performativity in Ethiopia’, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 9:1 (2021), pp. 1–16; Anthony Amicelle, Claudia Aradau, and Julien Jeandesboz, ‘Questioning security devices: Performativity, resistance, politics’, *Security Dialogue*, 46:4 (2015), pp. 293–306; Mark Laffey, ‘Locating identity: Performativity, foreign policy and state action’, *Review of International Studies*, 26:3 (2000), pp. 429–44.

⁶Kevin C. Dunn, ‘There is no such thing as the state: Discourse, effect and performativity’, *Forum for Development Studies*, 37:1 (2010), pp. 79–92 (pp. 81–2).

⁷Deborah W. Larson, T.V. Paul and William C. Wohlforth, ‘Status and world order’, in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 3–29 (p. 7).

⁸Thomas J. Volgy, Renato Corbetta, J. Patrick Rhamey, Jr., Ryan G. Baird, and Keith A. Grant, ‘Status considerations in international politics and the rise of regional powers’, in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 58–84.

⁹Rasmus Brun Pedersen, ‘Bandwagon for status: Changing patterns in the Nordic states status-seeking strategies?’, *International Peacekeeping*, 25:2 (2018), pp. 217–41.

Broader status-seeking literature, however, explores the myriad interactions between identity construction and status-seeking. Deriving from Social Identity Theory (SIT), Larson and Shevchenko argue that states compare themselves with others unfavourably, which prompts them to improve their position through 'identity management strategies' by embarking upon a status-seeking process.¹⁰ This framework has been widely accepted and applied to analysing the status-seeking behaviours of Turkey, Brazil, Russia, and China, to name a few.¹¹ Status-seeking as a politically motivated, intentional foreign-policy behaviour refers to the process where a state seeks recognition of its identity by (superior) others (i.e. deference) through obtaining 'status-markers' to signal its ambitions.¹² The SIT-based understanding has been criticised because, first, it offers a limited understanding of what status is and how it can be studied;¹³ and second, because of its rationalist and objectivist undercurrents.¹⁴ The critics argue that the SIT-driven approaches do not sufficiently theorise and understand the role that social interactions and practices play. Additionally, along with the (neo-)realist understanding, it tends to focus on the resource-based materialistic expressions of status, thus overlooking the broader discursive expressions of status-seeking.¹⁵

The rationalist, objectivist, and resource-focused accounts of status-seeking are countered by a constructivist understanding that addresses the social dimension of status-seeking more effectively. Status, according to this approach, is intrinsically connected to identity as a 'subcategory of identity politics'¹⁶ or even an 'element of identity narrative.'¹⁷ Constructivist approaches unpack identity construction as a social process in status-seeking and argue that it is a subjective process where the actor's own perception of its standing shapes the actions it takes.¹⁸ Status, in contrast, is conceptualised as inter-subjective because 'there is no status without recognition' of the others; status, in other words, becomes 'the result' of an inter-subjective process.¹⁹

The constructivist turn has allowed status scholars in IR to develop deeper and more complex analyses of status-seeking. Ward, for example, points at ideas and discourses about what is valued in a hierarchy that are collectively held at a deeper structural level. He argues that status-seeking practices as part of identity narratives may not be accommodated by others should they be perceived as challenges to these ideas and discourses.²⁰ Another strand, which is best exemplified by Wolf's works, is that status disputes cannot be reduced to whether a state embodies valued attributes or not, but factors such as honour and glory can also be sources of such conflicts in 'esteem hierarchies'. Wolf's theoretical model enables one to conceptualise status disputes in a way that psycho-social

¹⁰Deborah W. Larson and Alexander Shevchenko, 'Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to US primacy', *International Security*, 34:4 (2010), pp. 63–95 (pp. 71–4).

¹¹Emel P. Dal and S. Dipama, 'G20 rising powers' status seeking through social creativity: The case of South–South development cooperation', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 26:4 (2019), pp. 663–84; Deborah W. Larson and Alexander Shevchenko, 'Managing rising powers: The role of status concerns', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 33–57.

¹²Larson, Paul and Wohlforth, 'Status and world order'.

¹³Reinhard Wolf, 'Taking interaction seriously: Asymmetrical roles and the behavioral foundations of status', *European Journal of International Relations*, 25:4 (2019), pp. 1186–211.

¹⁴Vincent Pouliot, 'Setting status in stone: The negotiation of international institutional privileges', in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 192–215 (pp. 193–4).

¹⁵Volgy et al., 'Status considerations in international politics'; M. G. Duque, 'Recognizing international status: A relational approach', *International Studies Quarterly*, 62:3 (2018), pp. 577–92.

¹⁶William C. Wohlforth, Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira and Iver B. Neumann, 'Moral authority and status in international relations: Good states and the social dimension of status seeking', *Review of International Studies*, 44:3 (2018), pp. 526–546 (p. 528).

¹⁷Steven Ward, 'Status, stratified rights, and accommodation in international relations', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 5:1 (2020), pp. 160–178 (p. 160).

¹⁸Iver B. Neumann and Benjamin de Carvalho, 'Introduction', in Benjamin De Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann (eds), *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 5–7.

¹⁹Wohlforth et al., 'Moral authority and status in international relations', p. 528.

²⁰Ward, 'Status, stratified rights and accommodation'.

factors play a distinctive role.²¹ Similarly, Ward explains revisionist state behaviours not as policies to seek status per se, but as policies that manage social psychological dynamics mainly originating from domestic politics.²²

The aforementioned approaches do not take hierarchical structures or state identities as 'given'. Instead, they point at different status hierarchies but still suffer from a problem shared with the objectivist and rationalist accounts. Although status is inter-subjectively constructed, there is no understanding of how 'status-seeking' as a practice produces the state, which presumably seeks status, as the focus is on identity. This understanding generates important limitations for constructivist status analyses. These analyses carry a strong state-centrism, and state elites are almost exclusively studied as the agents of the process. Such state-centrism and analytical assumption of a homogeneous unit are inevitable because of the analytical choice to identify a unit, which can be taken for granted as pre-discursive and accepts this actor as the agent of status-seeking. In other words, although they do not take identity and hierarchical structures as given, they take 'the state' as an intentional actor as given. Consequently, they do not enable an analysis of what ways 'status-seeking' participates in how the effect of 'the state' as a homogeneous unit, as a subject in world politics, is produced. This calls for a new approach. Furthermore, despite various conceptualisations of status, there seems to be no disagreement regarding the finality of status-seeking. This means that a status can *theoretically* be achieved; status-seeking can end with success because it is, after all, 'the result' of an inter-subjective process. 'The state' and 'status' are ontologically separated, and how status performances can be thought in terms of production of 'the state' is overlooked.

This article offers an alternative view for status studies in IR from a performativity perspective, which unfolds the process of subject production through repetitive citational practices. The conceptualisation of status as a practice or performance has precedence in status-seeking debates. For example, Subotić and Vucetic conceptualise status-seeking as a performance that is staged for multiple audiences in consideration of acceptable behaviours in international society. They argue that 'the more successful the performance, the better the chances for higher status'.²³ Pouliot follows Bourdieu and identifies status-seeking as a 'social game', a form of '*illusio*', 'a disposition acquired through playing a game, which leads players to come to value its rules and stakes as the natural order of things'.²⁴ These approaches underline the importance of the context in which status-seeking performances occur. However, they fall short of conceptualising how these performances constitute the subjects (and 'truths' about them). Consequently, they generate a normalcy of the subject as having the status.

A performative framework

The theoretical framework that conceptualises 'status' and 'the state' as ontological effects of citational practices is derived primarily from post-structuralist studies of 'the state'. They argue that 'the state' does not exist pre-discursively but should be understood as a process that is in need of constant production. That is why Campbell²⁵ and Doty²⁶ use the concept of 'statecraft', which highlights the role of linguistic and non-linguistic practices that constitute this process. These practices generate material effects (such as customs, taxation, or immigration), and these effects are often misidentified as 'the state' as a material being. In contrast, 'the state' is always a 'becoming' in the making.²⁷ It needs repetitive practices to be reproduced, as the state does not exist prior to

²¹ Wolf, 'Taking interaction seriously', p. 1198.

²² Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 5.

²³ Jelena Subotić and Srdjan Vucetic, 'Performing solidarity: Whiteness and status-seeking in the non-aligned world', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22:3 (2019), pp. 722–43.

²⁴ Pouliot, 'Setting status in stone', pp. 197–8, italics original.

²⁵ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

²⁶ Roxanne L. Doty, *Anti-Immigrantism in Western Democracies: Statecraft, Desire and the Politics of Exclusion* (London: Routledge, 2003).

²⁷ Dunn, 'There is no such thing as the state', pp. 86–7.

these practices.²⁸ Discourses of state are repetitional citational practices that ‘produces the effect [sovereign nation-state] it names.’²⁹

Once the state is not accepted as a pre-discursive being and the focus shifts to citational practices, where does the concept of status fit in ‘statecraft’?

Status performances produce the subject [‘the state’] in a particular way, such as ‘great power’, ‘rising power’, ‘nuclear state’, or, as in this article, ‘humanitarian state’. As Laffey argues, ‘subjects do not exist somehow behind or outside discourse but are constituted in and through it.’³⁰ Performativity can explain how. Derived from Judith Butler’s performativity framework, going back to the production of ‘the state’, Weber articulates subjects and their identities ‘as the effects of citational practices.’³¹ In particular, constant repetition of such citational practices (performances) produces the subject as an ontological effect. The subject can never be finalised or fixed, as it always needs repetitional citational practices. As Dunn argues, structures *appear* to exist with material effects as a result of citational practices (i.e. borders, taxation); citational processes ‘give materiality to the abstract concept of state.’³² A key difference between the practice or performance approach (see above for examples of status-seeking) concerns the question of normality. According to performativity, performances originate from a complex normative context; they reiterate norms and generate ‘truths.’³³ Consequently, the subject is produced as *normal*. Citational performances in different political sites generate a normalcy of the subject’s existence, and the subject appears to exist as pre-discursive, normal, ‘given’.

From the perspective of performativity, status performances as repetitive citational practices produce the subject (in the language of the existing studies, ‘the status-seeking’ state) as having the desired status. In this framework, status, like the subject, does not exist pre-discursively, but is an ontological *effect* of citational practices. Status performances are part of the statecraft process. For example, as will be discussed below, when ‘Turkey’ is cited as ‘humanitarian’, this performance does not produce *Turkey the state* but *humanitarian Turkey as the state*. As subject production has no finality, status will never be achieved, because its very existence relies on constant reiterations. What matters in status performances is not recognition or deference by ‘the Other’, but generation of normality of the subject through citational practices. This raises the question of what can be studied to analyse these practices, and which political sites can be explored in the subject-production process. Therefore, the discussion will now focus on autobiographical identity narratives constructed at multiple sites.

Citational practices in identity narratives: Language and beyond

The status literature that focuses on identity often unpacks national identity narratives. However, these almost exclusively focus on the state elite-level narratives of national identity. This attributes intentionality to these narratives, constructing a national identity narrative that is intentionally articulated to seek a status. The performative approach does not deny the possibility of intentionality behind status performances. In fact, such intentionality cannot be ruled out, particularly in relation to the state elite. However, the analytical focus is not on intentions, but on what performances (i.e. repetitive citational practices) do: producing the subject as meeting ‘standards of normality’, which generates the effect of both subject and ‘standards or normality’ looking like they are natural instead of cultural.³⁴

²⁸Luiza Bialasiewicz, David Campbell, Stuart Elden, et al., ‘Performing security: The imaginative geographies of current US strategy’, *Political Geography*, 26:4 (2007), pp. 405–22.

²⁹Cynthia Weber, ‘Performative states’, *Millennium*, 27:1 (1998), pp. 77–95 (p. 81).

³⁰Laffey, ‘Locating identity’, p. 431.

³¹Weber, ‘Performative states’, p. 79.

³²Dunn, ‘There is no such thing as the state’, p. 88.

³³Claudia Aradau, ‘Performative politics and international relations’, *New Perspectives*, 25:2 (2017), pp. 70–76 (p. 72).

³⁴Weber, ‘Performative states’, p. 81.

Norms in ‘standards of normality’ play an important role for the performative status framework regarding where these norms originate. As some works in the status literature rightly demonstrate, what is collectively and normatively acknowledged as ‘valuable’, ‘legitimate’, and ‘acceptable’ in an international/regional community³⁵ or society³⁶ provides the context where status-seeking occurs. However, sole focus on the international context overshadows an equally important normative context that is endogenous to the subject-production process. The performative approach unpacks how history is invoked as part of the normative context into the formulation of narratives that produce the subject – in the case of this article, ‘humanitarian’ – and generates the effect of normalcy.

Autobiographical narratives are, in essence, generally consistent stories of ‘the Self’ vis-à-vis ‘the Other(s)’:³⁷ ‘A narrative tells a story about concrete events and protagonists, which captures and exemplifies experiences that people can relate to and empathize with.’³⁸ Narratives are meaning-ascribing stories that connect the past, present, and potential futures of ‘the Self’. Whereas studying ‘the state’ through narratives has a history in IR,³⁹ Berenskoetter competently conceptualises how history is articulated in autobiographical narratives in the production of ‘the state’. ‘Memories’, he argues, ‘serve as temporal orientation devices that make the past meaningful by providing a sense of where “we” come from and what “we” have been through.’⁴⁰ However, memories are selectively used; some negative or positive experiences are expressed, while others can be silenced.⁴¹ Production of ‘the state’ as a subject through autobiographical narratives occurs in a context where a selective use of memories constitutes these narratives. In Dunn’s words, history is re-presented selectively.⁴²

While autobiographical narratives are instrumental in the production of ‘the state’ as a subject, certain citational practices in these narratives can produce the subject as ‘having’ the status. In this way, autobiographical narratives can be identified as discourses where ‘the state’ and ‘status’ are produced together as ontological effects of citational practices. Selective memories can be repeatedly cited to generate the effect of normality of the subject in the present. In other words, history through certain articulations of memories provides a normative context for contemporary status performances along with the international context that has been much studied in the status literature. Values and norms articulated through selective memories are brought back in citational practices, and this generates the normality effect. ‘The Others’ vis-à-vis the Self are identified in different ways in these practices.

The performativity framework of status analysis points at the importance of how the subject is produced through citing selective historical memories in autobiographical narratives. The state elite-level citational practices are a necessary area of study for analysing the ways such normality around the subject is generated. However, history and the story of ‘the Self’ is not (re)told solely by the state elite. As has been recently explored by queer IR approaches, performativity allows examination and exploration of ‘the regimes of normal’ by not binding the analysis to a clear reference

³⁵Iver B. Neumann, ‘Status is cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians seek great-power status’, in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 85–114; Ward, ‘Status, stratified rights, and accommodation’.

³⁶Subotić and Vucetic, ‘Performing solidarity’.

³⁷Janice Bially Mattern, *Ordering International Politics: Identity, Crisis, and Representational Force* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 129.

³⁸Linus Hagström and Karl Gustafsson, ‘Narrative power: How storytelling shapes East Asian international politics’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 32:4 (2019), pp. 387–406 (p. 390).

³⁹For example, Erik Ringmar, ‘On the ontological status of the state’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2:4 (1996), pp. 439–66.

⁴⁰Felix Berenskoetter, ‘Parameters of a national biography’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 20:1 (2014), pp. 262–288 (p. 270).

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Kevin C. Dunn, ‘Historical representations’, in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (eds), *Qualitative Methods in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 78–92.

object.⁴³ After all, as Roxanne Doty argues, ‘practices of statecraft can come from anywhere and from anyone.’⁴⁴ This enables an exploration of multiple political sites where the subject is repeatedly produced as ‘having’ the status by generating a normality effect through citational practices. One of these political sites is academic IR discourse in a so-called status-seeking country.

Much ink has been spilt by the sustained critiques from post-colonial, decolonial,⁴⁵ and feminist⁴⁶ approaches, or through reflexivity,⁴⁷ on how knowledge-production practices in IR can normalise power hierarchies in international politics; erase peoples, histories, and geographies; and frame them in line with racialised, gendered, and classed power relations. Inspired by these studies, this discussion concentrates on how IR discourse in a country can produce the subject as ‘having’ the status in autobiographical national narratives through citational practices. In this endeavour, it focuses on the performative role of representations.⁴⁸ Problematising quantitative and qualitative academic representations in IR discourse, Van der Ree identifies three functions of these representations.⁴⁹ First, representations distort what they claim to represent *objectively*. It means they reduce what they represent by focusing on selective dimensions and imposing predications – inventing post hoc meanings to explain similarities between representations and the reality under investigation. Second, representing is a social activity, so representations constitute socially constructed meanings. Divorcing representations from the social reality they claim to represent conceals the mutual constitutiveness between them. Finally, representations cannot be separated from power.⁵⁰ ‘Modes of representation can become so “commonsensical” or “natural” to us that their subjective origins and values are forgotten.’⁵¹

Representations in IR discourse can play a significant role in the production of the subject as ‘having’ a status by telling autobiographical narratives. This is done by citational practices that frequently refer to selective memories under the cloak of ‘scientific objectivity’. Consequently, the subject as ‘having’ the status appears to be ‘right’ and ‘normal’. As will be discussed in the process of production of ‘humanitarian Turkey’, a particular type of IR discourse originating in Turkey around a high-profile visit in Somalia offers ‘arguments’ and ‘analyses’ that rely on repetitional citations of certain representations of history, Turkey, the West, Africa, and Somalia. These representations as repetitive citational practices produce ‘humanitarian Turkey’ as given and pre-discursive. It must be highlighted that this is not about the intentions of the IR scholar, but the political work the performance does. Such an academic narrative does the political work of producing the subject (i.e. Turkey) in a particular way (i.e. humanitarian Turkey). Turkey’s humanitarianism is articulated as something so normal by referring to the historical memories (see above) – connections between the Ottomans and Somalis as demonstrations of how ‘normal’ Turkey’s ‘return’ to Africa is. In other words, status performances in IR discourse become a part of the performative process that is constituted by selective and political representations of history and is mutually constitutive to

⁴³Melanie Richter-Montpetit, ‘Everything you always wanted to know about sex (in IR) but were afraid to ask: The ‘queer turn’ in International Relations’, *Millennium*, 46:2 (2018), pp. 220–240 (p. 222); Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁴Doty, *Anti-Immigrantism*, p. 12.

⁴⁵Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North–South Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Siddharth Tripathi, ‘International Relations and the “Global South”: From epistemic hierarchies to dialogic encounters’, *Third World Quarterly*, 42:9 (2021), pp. 2039–54.

⁴⁶Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Brooke Ackerly and Jacqui True, ‘Reflexivity in practice: Power and ethics in feminist research on International Relations’, *International Studies Review*, 10:4 (2008), pp. 693–707.

⁴⁷Inanna Hamati-Ataya, ‘The “problem of values” and International Relations scholarship: From applied reflexivity to reflexivism’, *International Studies Review*, 13:2 (2011), pp. 259–87.

⁴⁸Laffey, ‘Locating identity’; Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁴⁹Gerard Van der Ree, ‘The politics of scientific representation in International Relations’, *Millennium*, 42:1 (2013), pp. 24–44 (pp. 25–8).

⁵⁰See also Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics*.

⁵¹Van der Ree, ‘The politics of scientific representation’, p. 27.

the state elite-level autobiographical narrative. However, these representations cannot be limited to academic discourse.

Moving from ‘status-seeking’ of intentional actors to performative status framework enables multiple political sites where a normality effect is generated. Although there is a growing body of literature that investigates how global politics is created through visual representations, status-seeking in IR has so far neglected the aesthetic dimension, because it overwhelmingly focuses on either the material dimension of status-seeking (e.g. possessing status markers such as nuclear weapons) or discursive practices (e.g. statements and speeches of foreign-policy makers who express their status ambitions/frustrations). Therefore, the performative status framework aims to point out a particular materiality and images in the process of subject production. Like the autobiographical narratives in academic IR discourse, visual narratives⁵² play a performative role in the production of the subject in a particular way – the subject with the responsibility of developing policy responses.

Since the ‘aesthetic turn’ in IR,⁵³ the study and analysis of visuals in global politics have opened new sites for developing a critical understanding of war, security, geopolitics,⁵⁴ diplomacy,⁵⁵ and migration,⁵⁶ among others. This flourishing literature demonstrates that production, communication, and reception of visuals are unequivocally political and deeply constitutive to power hierarchies. Visuals ‘have the potential to shape what can and cannot be seen, and thus also what can and cannot be thought, said, and done in politics.’⁵⁷ What is made visible in politics, in other words, aims to frame political actors, issues, or events in a way that serves certain political interests. According to this understanding, which is adopted in this discussion, visuals, like academic representations, are not mediums that objectively reflect reality. In Callahan’s conceptualisation, they are socially constructed.⁵⁸ Who/what is being included in (and excluded from) images, and how images are presented and communicated, concerns the politics of visibility ‘where representations do not simply reflect the world but are social constructions that lend meaning and value to things’.⁵⁹

However, visibility partially reflects the political role that visuals play. As discussed earlier, representations in the formation of national narratives in academic discourse are performative. While IR discourse contributes to the subject-production process with the pretence of objectivity, visual representations can do this affectively. A performative approach is put forward by Callahan through the concept of ‘visuality’, which is ‘a political and moral performance in which people actively visualise the world they want to live in’ through making people feel, thus shaping what is

⁵²Visual narratives are ‘stories that are told through visual media such as photographs, films, memes, cartoons, and so on, where such media are used to visually link together and give meaning to actors, their actions, intentions, and motivations as well as the events and places they are embroiled in’; Rhys Crilley, Ilan Manor and Corneliu Bjola, ‘Visual narratives of global politics in the digital age: An introduction’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33:5 (2020), pp. 628–637 (p. 631). However, this definition can be associated with visibility more closely than visuality (i.e. the performative role that visuals play through emotions).

⁵³Roland Bleiker, ‘The aesthetic turn in international political theory’, *Millennium*, 30:3 (2001), pp. 509–33.

⁵⁴Michael C. Williams, ‘Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 47:4 (2003), pp. 511–31; Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics* (London: Routledge: 2008); Lena Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for security studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad cartoon crisis’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 17:1 (2011), pp. 51–74.

⁵⁵Alister Miskimmon and Ben O’Loughlin, ‘The visual politics of the 2015 Iran deal: Narrative, image and verification’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33:5 (2020), pp. 778–98.

⁵⁶Roland Bleiker, David Campbell, Emma Hutchison and Xzarina Nicholson, ‘The visual dehumanisation of refugees’, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 48:4 (2013), pp. 398–416; Lene Hansen, Rebecca Adler-Nissen, and Katrine Emilie Andersen, ‘The visual international politics of the European refugee crisis: Tragedy, humanitarianism, borders’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 56:4 (2021), pp. 367–93.

⁵⁷Roland Bleiker, ‘Pluralist methods for visual global politics’, *Millennium*, 43:3 (2015), pp. 872–890 (p. 884).

⁵⁸William A. Callahan, *Sensible Politics: Visualizing International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 29.

sensible, normal, or right in politics.⁶⁰ A more direct theorisation between emotions, images, and policy is created by Rebecca Adler-Nissen, Katrine Emilie Andersen and Lene Hansen through a performative–discursive approach.⁶¹ They argue that images are discursively constituted as invoking emotions, while certain codes from the socio-historical context are attached to the images in this performance. For example, when an image is described as ‘painful’, it is performatively produced as such. This leads to the second foundational pillar of their theorising: ‘the articulation of emotion [in visuals] always also constitutes a subject speaking as someone who feels’ and produces the subject who is responsible for developing policy responses.⁶²

The performative framework of status analysis enables the exploration of what citational practices do in the production of the subject through the formation of visual-identity narratives. As will be discussed in the empirical section, a visual narrative tells a story about ‘Turkey’ and generates the effect of normality about ‘humanitarian Turkey’ through citational practices. These practices can be studied by using the visibility and visuality frameworks. In terms of visibility, the performative framework focuses on the construction of images in order to explore who/what is *made* visible through representations. These representations are citational practices by telling a story that *produces ‘the subject’ and ‘status’ as normal*. However, images can generate normality *affectively* as well. Following the framework of Adler-Nissen et al., images are produced discursively in a way that normalises the subject and ‘truths’ about the subject. This requires an analysis of the interaction between image and text through which the image is interpreted. At the state elite level, when a policymaker articulates an image affectively (e.g. painful, heartbreaking, compassionate, concerning, and so on), this produces the actor (‘the state’) as a feeling object that is *normally* expected to produce policy responses to the issue depicted in the image. In other words, the subject is again produced as normal (pre-discursive, natural rather than cultural) through citational practices about the images that tell a visual story about the subject. Visual-identity narratives are constructed through images as well as talking about the images.

The performative framework of status analysis challenges the pre-discursive understanding of ‘the state’ by rethinking status performances as part of ‘statecraft’. It argues that status can never be achieved, as it does not exist beyond the subject, and both require repetitive citational performances to exist. State elite performances are important for analysing the process; however, the status analysis cannot be limited to them, as the subject production is a complex process that requires the exploration of multiple political sites. While the proposed performative framework in this article sheds light on the academic IR and visual discourses, the framework is by no means limited to them. The discussion above offers a way of critically studying what the academic discourse does objectively and what images do affectively in the production of subject and status.

Methodology

The methodology is threefold in line with each political site (state elite, IR, and visuals). To conduct the state elite-level narrative analysis, the research focused on the architect of Turkey’s Somali policy, the former foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009–14). Davutoğlu’s speeches as a foreign minister, included in this analysis, were delivered to both international conferences and the Turkish parliament in Ankara. Somalia did not appear in the speeches until 2011, the year when Turkey organised the high-profile visit to distribute aid in the country. As there are many repetitions in the speeches, the most representative examples were chosen, adopting an interpretative and flexible approach. The search results were manually read and interpreted. The cut-off date marks the end of Ahmet Davutoğlu’s tenure as foreign minister in 2014.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶¹ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, Katrine Emilie Andersen and Lene Hansen, ‘Images, emotions, and international politics: The death of Alan Kurdi’, *Review of International Studies*, 46:1 (2020), pp. 75–95.

⁶² Ibid., p. 80.

The narrative analysis of academic IR discourse in Turkey mirrors the previous method. A Google Scholar search (in Turkish) of ‘Turkiye’, ‘Afrika’, ‘Somali’, ‘dis politika’, and (in English) ‘Turkey’, ‘Africa’, ‘Somalia’, ‘foreign policy’ was conducted for the period between 2009 and 2014 and found 145 relevant sources in total. As with the elite-level speeches, the online sources about Turkey’s foreign-policy relations with Africa and Somalia were studied, and the most representative examples were chosen to illustrate the shared articulations. The sources include articles, books, policy briefs, and reports written for think-tanks based in Turkey. The main selection criterion for the sources was the author’s affiliation with a university or think-tank in Turkey at the time of the publication. For both elite-level and IR narrative analyses, four representations were investigated: history, Turkey, Africa/Somalia, and the West. These representations were used to analyse citational practices that produce ‘humanitarian Turkey’.

The analysis of the visual citational practices differs from the linguistic ones and focuses on the specific event of the Somalia visit in 2011. At this level, the time period starts with the high-profile visit of then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, business and NGO representatives, and popular culture figures to the camps in Somalia to distribute aid (19 August 2011). It ends six months later. Research was conducted to explore how the state elite referred to the photos taken during the visit. As this visit laid the foundation of Turkey’s ongoing presence in Africa as a humanitarian actor, the images circulated in the digital media (*Sabah* and *Milliyet*, namely the most visited news websites in 2011)⁶³ were analysed from the perspective of visibility and visuality. Regarding visibility, the ‘who, when, where, and how’ of the images were analysed to identify representations as citational practices that produce Turkey as humanitarian: where the images were taken, who was included or excluded, how the people and things in the images were represented, when the visit happened, and in what domestic and international context.

A complementary analysis of visuality explores the affective political work that images do. Images are often presented with accompanying texts and are discussed by political actors, so ‘anchoring’ images into discursive texts⁶⁴ is instrumental to their emotional constitution. Following Adler-Nissen et al., the text presented with the images and policymakers’ reflections on the images are explored. In particular, the article investigates how images are constituted with emotional meanings and how policymakers use emotional articulations about them. Non-discursive and discursive constitution of images worked together in the production of Turkey as a humanitarian, ‘feeling’ state.

Turkey in Somalia: Producing Turkey as a feeling state with responsibility

After the end of the Cold War, Turkey’s foreign policy started to target Africa, Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Middle East. In 1998, the ‘Opening to Africa Action Plan’ was announced. The plan aimed to improve political, economic, and cultural relations between Turkey and African countries. The plan’s objectives included increasing the number of Turkish diplomatic representations in Africa, high-level diplomatic exchange, humanitarian aid, Africa Ex-Im Bank membership, business trips, and donor status to the Africa Development Bank.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government continued the process launched by previous Turkish governments by highlighting the importance of economic factors. In 2003, the undersecretary of foreign trade prepared a ‘Strategy for Improving Economic Relations with African Countries’. In 2005, Turkey obtained observer status in the African Union (AU). The same year was declared as ‘Year of Africa’ in Turkey. In January 2008, Turkey became an AU ‘strategic partner’, a non-regional member of the African Development Bank, and a member of the

⁶³ On the relevant webpages of the newspapers, the photographers are not cited. That is why, in the case-study analysis, the references will be given to the pages where the photos were taken from.

⁶⁴ Adler-Nissen, Andersen and Hansen, ‘The visual international politics of the European refugee crisis’, p. 373; for the concept of ‘anchoring’, see Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 39.

Intergovernmental Authority on Development Partners' Forum. According to figures from 2012, steel and iron products made up the highest share of Turkey's exports to sub-Saharan Africa, and valuable stones were the main imports from Africa. In 2010, Turkey showed further interest in Somalia by hosting the UN Istanbul Somalia Conference on 21–3 May 2010.⁶⁵ The following sections will analyse citational practices at the state elite level, both in IR discourse in Turkey, and in the images that are related to the significant moment in 2011 when the delegation from Turkey visited Somalia. The discussion will first reveal how historical memories are articulated in both state elite and academic discourse, and will then move to visual citational practices.

State elite level citational practices: Somalia as Turkey's 'responsibility'

The production of 'humanitarian Turkey' by the state elite level of citational practices pointed at two different ways of telling an autobiographical national narrative. The first one articulated Turkey as a 'good' citizen in international society. Order and stability in Somalia became integral parts of then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's multiple speeches and statements about Somalia. In international conferences, Turkey was produced as a member of international society that had a leading role in state-building in Somalia, like other developed, liberal, Western states:

Under his [President Mahmoud's] leadership, the Somali administration has undertaken tireless efforts to secure the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of Somalia ... A Somali federal state that controls its borders and ensures internal and external stability and security should be considered as an inseparable part of peace and stability in the Horn of Africa ... In short, trust and confidence should be re-established between the Somali people and the regional and international community.⁶⁶

Through the discourse of state-building in Somalia, an effect of normality was generated about 'humanitarian Turkey'. He cited Turkey as a member of international society that was concerned with controlling borders and establishing domestic order and stability. Davutoğlu emphasised the importance of domestic, regional, and international security as 'a priority' for Turkey:

As Turkey, we would like to underline the importance of political reconciliation, the rebuilding of the Somali security forces, and economic recovery and infrastructure development as immediate priorities in Somalia ... Widening the [federal government's] authority to the rest of Somalia is our main priority ... I would like to emphasise that Turkey and the Somali authorities have already prepared a comprehensive plan on the future of the Somali military and police forces. My country has allocated 10 million USD for security structures and military and police training, in addition to our humanitarian and economic development assistance package of 300 million USD.⁶⁷

Another important dimension of the production of 'humanitarian Turkey' is the way Davutoğlu talks about Turkey as a partner of local Somali actors, a 'humanitarian Turkey' who can speak on behalf of Somalia to the international community. Regardless of a particular political actor's intentions, the performativity framework points at citational practices that generate the normality effect of Turkey's humanitarian identity in Somalia.

However, in order to analyse how these citational practices generate the effect of normality of 'humanitarian Turkey', the historical normative context must be studied, including how selective

⁶⁵For more information about Turkey–Africa relations, see Ali Bilgic and Daniela Nascimento, 'Turkey's new focus on Africa: Causes and challenges', NOREF Policy Brief, 2014.

⁶⁶Statement by Mr Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey at the Somalia Conference, 7 May 2013, London, available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-at-the-somalia-conference_-7-may-2013_-london.en.mfa.

⁶⁷Ibid.

memories are cited. In Davutoğlu's speeches addressing the Somali actors, Turkey was represented as 'different' from the West. Its difference was articulated through selective memories from Ottoman history. In 2012, during the Somali Civil Society Groups Meeting in Istanbul, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu appealed to the Somali audience through an identity discourse on Turkey's 'difference', as stemming from its history:

Somalia has become one of the priorities of our foreign policy. There are multiple reasons for this. Primarily, Turkish and Somali people share a deep-rooted history, which peaked with Ahmed Gurey. In the 16th century, Turkish and Somali people fought together against the colonialists in the name of peace, security, and dignity. In the 19th century, they again fought together against the colonialists. For us, Somalia is not a land far away. It is a hub of dignity and civilisation. Therefore, our interest in Somalia stems from these deep-rooted historical relations.

Furthermore, he underlined Turkey's historical uniqueness vis-à-vis Somalia:

While the whole world is watching Somalia as an outsider, conveying meetings in other cities, Turkey has sent its most precious diplomats and its most effective civil society and aid organisations to Mogadishu, and has tried to prove this: that our destiny is the same with Somalia's destiny. In the past, we merged our destiny with Somali people; we are merging them again today, and will do so in the future. We do not see Somalia as an area of rant and interest. We do not see it as an area of risk or a security threat. We see it as a geography where the consciousness of humanity is put to the test.⁶⁸

The citational performances above produced a subject by telling an autobiographical narrative based on selective memories, which omit a fundamental dimension of Ottoman presence in the region. This dimension is the Ottoman geopolitical imagination of Somalia as a strategic point to control trade in the Horn of Africa. In fact, in the 16th century, the Ottoman navy allied with Somali leader Ahmed Gurey against the Portuguese–Ethiopian forces. Throughout this period, the Ottoman Empire was in constant struggle with Portugal for trade control in the Red Sea, which connected Indian trade through the Horn of Africa. The Ottomans had similar struggles with Venice and Florence in the Mediterranean. In fact, Ottoman presence in Somalia did not go beyond the coastline and important ports, which were neglected until the new imperial powers started to show interest in Somalia. Challenging Davutoğlu's representations and differing from the academic IR narrative on Africa in Turkey (see below), Ottoman historian Cengiz Orhonlu, makes the following point:

The Ottoman state did not show any interest in the Somali region for a long time. They left the issues to the local clans. The Ottoman Empire remembered that it had a legal presence in the region when the colonial powers [Britain and Italy] became interested in northeastern Africa. Questions such as 'is there a government in Ras Hafuna in the Somali region? How is the region administered? How does taxation work?' were often asked and could not be answered even at the state level.⁶⁹

It is questionable how much the Ottoman presence in the region, and the way Somalia was imagined by Ottoman decision-makers, differed from the colonial powers. Yet Turkey's difference from

⁶⁸ 'Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Somali Sivil Toplum Grupları Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma [The speech of Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu at the Somali Civil Society Conference], 27 May 2012, Istanbul, available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-ahmet-davutoglu_nun-somali-sivil-toplum-gruplari-toplantisinda-yaptiklari-konusma_-27-mayis-2012_-istanbu.tr.mfa.

⁶⁹ Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Güney Siyaseti: Habeş Eyaleti [The Ottoman Empire's Policy of the South: The Province of Habesh]* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1996), p. 154.

the West was built upon selective memories of the Ottoman past, as shown above. Turkey's 'difference' was repeatedly cited and produced Turkey as a paternal protector of Somalia: as a saviour and protector from 'the Other' (i.e. the West). The normality of Ankara's intervention in Somali domestic politics was cited as being for their own self-interest:

We wish that you could sit and plan your future together in Istanbul, in your city, in Dersaadad [meaning, the door to/of happiness], which established links with you in the 16th century. Our target is that our Somali brothers would determine the future of Somalia without foreign-power intervention and any external effects.⁷⁰

Davutoğlu's historical references to Somalia generate the normalcy effect for the reinvention of Turkey's presence in the region. His citational performances normalise Turkey's *return* by advocating that the Ottomans (not Turkey) fought against colonialists in the past; therefore, this historical role gives Turkey the responsibility to pursue a policy of saving Somalia from 'the West' in the present day.

The production of humanitarian Turkey through citational practices does not mean that the state elite did not talk about its geopolitical objectives in the region. In 2012, then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu explained to the domestic audience why Somalia was important for Turkey:

Why is Somalia important? Not because it is Somalia. We have historical ties and connections whose roots go back to the 16th century. We had our navy there; we know Seydi Ali Reis sailed to the southern shores of Somalia. However, beyond these, the Gulf of Aden where Yemen and the Horn of Africa are positioned will be one of the most strategic places in the future, and currently 60% of world trade is travelling through there. We will be there because when we look at the world, we look at it in this way: we look at the map and see that we need to be in this region and that region, we should be everywhere ... We will continue to intensify our presence there. This is both our humanitarian and strategic objective.⁷¹

What is worth noting is that the productions of 'humanitarian Turkey' and of Turkey as a state with geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa are interacting and supporting each other. Citational performances generate the normalcy effect for both. The subject is not fixed or pre-discursive but always 'becoming'.

Academic IR narrative: 'Return' of Turkey to Africa and Somalia

In Turkey's IR scholarship, Turkey's engagement with Africa was overwhelmingly analysed from a historical perspective, through representations of the Ottoman Empire as an anti-colonial actor that was different from the West. This historical difference was 'analysed' as a justification for the *return* of Turkey to Africa. These representations articulate a benign, protector image for the Ottoman Empire in Africa as opposed to Western colonial power, through dichotomising the West and the Ottomans. These 'academic analyses' often highlight that the presence of the Ottoman Empire in Africa *delayed* the colonial expansionism of the West. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire was represented as a 'block' against the exploitative intentions of Western colonialism.⁷² In tandem with this argument, the second type of representation in the identity narrative focuses on the *benign* character of the Ottoman rule in Africa as opposed to colonial Western powers. Some historical incidents are repeatedly cited to construct this representation, such as the South African Muslims' request for an imam from the empire in 1863, and the taxation of South African Muslims

⁷⁰ Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun Somali Sivil Toplum Grupları Toplantısında Yaptıkları Konuşma.

⁷¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Annual Budget Meeting in 2012, available at: www.tbmm.gov.tr.

⁷² Mehmet Seyfettin Erol and Ahmet Said Altın, 'Turk dış politikasında Afrika: Osmanlı Mirası Uzerinde Ortak Gelecek [Africa in Turkish Foreign Policy: A common future based on the Ottoman heritage]', in Haydar Cakmak (ed.), *Türk Dış Politikası [Turkish Foreign Policy] 1919-2012* (Ankara: Baris, 2012), pp. 227-239.

for the construction of Hejaz railway.⁷³ According to these studies, the Ottoman rule was not only an alternative to ‘malign’ Western colonialism, but also the foundation of its contemporary policy. For example, Boztaş argues:

Western colonial states, which focused on power and trade based on realist and liberal views, did not care about what they left behind ... [They] obtained considerable wealth but failed to earn hearts. On the contrary, the Turks, who focused on the future of foreign policy, adopted a human-centred approach, *which provided the foundation of contemporary foreign policy towards Africa*.⁷⁴

During the Cold War, Turkey’s alliance with the Western bloc was often criticised. This criticism enables contemporary IR scholars to construct a representation of the *normality* of post-Cold War Turkey’s *return* to Africa (especially in the post-2002 era). Both the West and the decision-makers of the pre-AKP Republican period were represented as the reason for the ‘lowest level of relations’ between Africa and Turkey. This ‘aberration’ started to end in 1998 with the Action Plan but came to a close mainly with ‘the proactive new foreign policy’ of AKP governments. It is argued that this is a ‘natural’ geopolitical course of action for an ‘Afro-Asian’ country.⁷⁵

Although the autobiographical identity narrative in IR discourse tells a story of the Ottomans and Turkey as a benign and protective power in Africa, similarly to the state elite citational performances it is possible to detect a representation of the Ottomans through their geopolitical vision vis-à-vis Africa. The Ottoman Empire’s presence in Africa started with Sultan Selim the Grim’s quest to Egypt and the transfer of the Islamic caliphate to Istanbul in 1516. However, apart from this specific expansion, the Ottomans’ interest in the rest of Africa is explained in relation to the empire’s conflicting maritime trade interests with Western powers. In North Africa, the Ottomans’ main objective was to challenge, balance, and eventually remove Spanish dominance in Mediterranean trade.⁷⁶ Geopolitical IR discourse often explains Ottoman expansionism in East Africa in terms of an economic and military interest in challenging Portuguese domination in West African maritime trade. As a result, several African countries, including Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia, came under the control of the Ottomans. In addition, the Ottoman Empire developed close relations with the Kanem Burnu Empire in an attempt to become a player in the balance of power in northern sub-Saharan Africa.⁷⁷ In parallel with trade interests, the Ottomans were keen to control coastal areas in order to regulate maritime trade.⁷⁸ Production of ‘Turkey as the state with geopolitical interests’ is performed through representations of selective historical memories.

While the academic discourse generates the normality of Turkey’s presence in Africa, Somalia enables scholars to represent Turkey’s new role in global politics as a ‘different’ state-building and/or peace-building actor. This representation uses West-centric liberal concepts such as ‘soft power’, ‘state-building’, and ‘civil society’ to conceptualise Turkish–Somali relations. However, hybridity emerges in relation to what Turkey is doing differently from the West in this statecraft process: ‘Turkey’ as a state-builder and peace-building actor values society-to-society relations, unlike the

⁷³Numan Hazar, *Küreselleşme Sürecinde Türkiye Afrika İlişkileri (Turkey–Africa Relations in the Age of Globalization)* (Istanbul: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2003), p. 21; Mehmet Ozkan, ‘Turkey Discovers Africa: Implications and Prospects’, SETA Policy Brief, 22 (2008), p. 2.

⁷⁴Asena Boztaş, ‘Türkiye’nin Afrika ile İlişkilerinde Proaktif Politikaların Teorik Analizi: Konstruktivist Teori, Eleştirel Teori ve Uluslararası Toplum Teorisi [Theoretical analysis of Turkey’s proactive policies in relations With Africa: Constructivist theory, critical theory and international community theory]’, *Dumlupınar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 31 (2011), pp. 139–158 (p. 145, italics added).

⁷⁵Numan Hazar, ‘Türkiye Afrika’da: Eylem Planinin Uygulanması ve Değerlendirme Onbes Yıl Sonra [Turkey in Africa: The implementation of the action plan]’, ORSAM [Center of Middle East Strategic Studies], 124 (July 2012), Ankara, available at: <https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/turkiye-afrika-da-eylem-planinin-uygulanmasi-ve-degerlendirme-on-bes-yil-sonra/>.

⁷⁶Boztaş, ‘Türkiye’nin Afrika ile İlişkilerinde Proaktif Politikaların Teorik Analizi’, p. 144.

⁷⁷Ozkan, *Turkey Discovers Africa*, p. 2.

⁷⁸Hazar, *Küreselleşme Sürecinde Türkiye Afrika İlişkileri*, p. 38.

West, which engages with the political actors they would like to work with.⁷⁹ It also articulates Turkey as a ‘humanitarian diplomatic power’ and ‘regional mediator’.⁸⁰ This approach produces ‘Turkey’ as a different type of liberal humanitarian actor that uses ‘soft power’ to help a ‘fragmented’, ‘war-torn’, and ‘complex’ country such as Somalia. Turkey’s ‘humanitarian responsibility’ to help such a ‘fragile’ state through state-building practices is frequently cited.

The ‘victim’ image of Somalia in IR discourse has been enhanced by representations of Somali local actors, who appreciate Turkey’s ‘difference’ and are grateful to this new protector and saviour. One of the most striking examples of such a representation was published in a journal called *Insight Turkey*, published by pro-government think-tank SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research). A journalist from Somalia writes:

In August, PM Erdoğan became the first foreign leader in two decades to brave into Mogadishu, arguably the most dangerous city in the world. With his wife, Emine, their daughter, five cabinet ministers, and a planeload of food and medical aid in tow, he ventured into camps set up by Turkish charity organisations for thousands of famine victims. Pictures of Erdoğan and his misty-eyed wife holding malnourished Somali children left a powerful mark on the psyche of the Somali people. Ignored by the rest of the world, Somalis felt that, after 20 years of civil war, statelessness, and terrorism compounded by droughts and famines, a distant leader was compassionate enough to dedicate time for their plight out of his unimaginably overbooked schedule.⁸¹

The visit is also narrated as a personal achievement for Erdoğan:

The visit was truly special in Somalia: a red carpet was rolled out for Erdoğan – the first in 20 years – and Turkey’s national anthem was dutifully played by a Somali police band. In the days leading up to his visit, Erdoğan’s picture, alongside that of Somalia’s president, was nailed onto the smashed-up buildings and streets across Mogadishu. There were more Turkish flags on the streets of the capital city than Somali flags. Local radio stations played Turkish music, and hospitals reported that, since Erdoğan’s visit was announced, ‘Istanbul’ was by far the most popular name for newborn girls.⁸²

This Somali policy gratifying Erdoğan as a father and leader was studied as ‘Erdoğan’s altruism’.⁸³ In Erdoğan’s body, Turkey was produced as a benign, protective, altruistic, and brave ‘brother’ visiting dangerous and risky Mogadishu. It is argued that Turkey can do what the West has been failing to do in Somalia.⁸⁴

The autobiographical narrative constructed by IR scholarship in Turkey relied highly on history to normalise ‘Turkey as a humanitarian state’ in Africa and Somalia. The production of Turkey as a state-builder or as a benign power who is fundamentally different from the West bestows Turkey with a ‘responsibility’ to help Somalia.

⁷⁹Volkan İpek, ‘The 2011 landing of Turkey on Somalia: The “state-to-people” aspect of Turkish foreign policy towards sub-Saharan Africa’, *European Scientific Journal*, 10:10 (2014), pp. 412–428.

⁸⁰Teri Murphy and Auween Woods, ‘Turkey’s international development framework case study: Somalia’, Istanbul Policy Center-MERCATOR Policy Brief, February (2014), p. 5.

⁸¹Abdirahman Ali, ‘Turkey’s foray into Africa: A new humanitarian power?’, *Insight Turkey*, 13:4 (2011), pp. 66–7.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁸³Matthew T. Gullo, ‘Turkey’s Somalia adventure: The quest for soft power and regional recognition’, Centre for Policy Analysis and Research on Turkey (ResearchTurkey), p. 6, available at: <http://researchturkey.org/?p=1226>.

⁸⁴Murphy and Woods, ‘Turkey’s international development framework’, p. 10–11.

Visibility/visuality performances of 'humanitarian Turkey'

To conduct a performative status analysis through images, the context in which the images were constructed must be explained. This is because the context can help explain how a normalcy effect is generated: Turkey as a feeling state because of Islam.

Davutoğlu was appointed foreign minister in 2009 and then operationalised 'strategic depth'. The concept refers to Turkey's need to expand its political, economic, and social influence in the former territories of the Ottoman Empire. The repeated references to Ottoman history during the Somali conference in Istanbul were one of the discursive manifestations of this type of foreign policy. Although this new proactive policy, sometimes identified as 'neo-Ottomanist', was reproved by the oil-producing Gulf countries, in particular Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,⁸⁵ Turkey and Erdoğan were enjoying a high level of popularity in the Middle East in 2011. Erdoğan had stormed out of a panel at the World Economic Summit in 2009 in defence of Palestinian rights, which increased Turkey's appeal in the Arab public opinion. Then, in June 2010, the Mavi Marmara aid convoy flotilla was assaulted by Israeli forces en route to Gaza after challenging the Israeli blockade, which also raised his popularity.⁸⁶

The 2011 uprisings from Tunisia to Bahrain became a window of opportunity for the foreign-policy elite to challenge the status quo powers in the Sunni-dominated Middle East, mainly the Gulf states and authoritarian regimes traditionally allied with Saudi Arabia, such as Mubarak's Egypt. Turkey and another revisionist power, Qatar, publicly begun to support the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and affiliated groups, particularly in Egypt and Syria.⁸⁷ The MB had already gained considerable political influence and power through charity work, building infrastructure, and providing services such as health and education to low-income populations. In the case of Egypt, this rendered them a significant political actor in the post-uprisings Middle East.⁸⁸

Erdoğan's visit to Mogadishu in August 2011 signifies a new turn in Turkish foreign policy. The Somali famine provided Turkey with another opportunity to challenge the status quo powers (in particular their oil-based wealth) with reference to Islamic values and norms of charity and sharing. The timing of the visit was carefully arranged. On 9 August, the foreign ministry called for an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, which took place on 17 August in Istanbul. In his speech, Erdoğan implicitly targeted oil wealth by stating that 'if you drive a luxury car, you should be generous to people struggling with hunger'.⁸⁹ Two days later, the Turkish delegation arrived in Mogadishu. It must be noted that Turkey carefully chose the month of Ramadan for this policy (31 July–29 August 2011), as it is considered the month of charity by Sunni Muslims.

Mogadishu's refugee camps were chosen as the main site for images that repeatedly show certain representations and citational practices that produce 'humanitarian Turkey'. These camps mainly hosted people that were internally displaced because of famine, but also because of the increasing control of Al Shabab, which conducted terrorist activities that had forced several humanitarian organisations and Western institutions out of Somalia. This refugee space enhanced the humanitarian and charitable character of the visit by depoliticising it thoroughly. Such depoliticisation was strengthened by the framing of the images (i.e. who is included in the frame/excluded from it). The images mostly showed Erdoğan and his wife, Emine Erdoğan, with Somali women and children, with Erdoğan often standing behind his wife. In one image, Erdoğan is standing behind his

⁸⁵ Asya Akca, 'Neo-Ottomanism: Turkey's foreign policy approach to Africa', *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 17 (2019), available at: <https://www.csis.org/neo-ottomanism-turkeys-foreign-policy-approach-africa>].

⁸⁶ Ziya Onis, 'Turkey and the Arab Spring: Between ethics and self-interest', *Insight Turkey*, 14:3 (2012), pp. 45–63.

⁸⁷ Meliha Benli Altunisik, 'Turkey after the Arab uprisings: Difficulties of hanging on in there', *ISPI Analysis Paper 223* (December 2013).

⁸⁸ Khalil Al-Anani, 'Upended path: The rise and fall of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood', *The Middle East Journal*, 69:4 (2015) pp. 529–30.

⁸⁹ Ibon Villeda, 'OIC pledges \$350 million to Somalia at Turkey summit', *Reuters* (17 August 2011), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-turkey-somalia-20110817-idAFJ0E77G0NX20110817>].

wife and caressing a Somali's child's head.⁹⁰ In other photos, popular culture figures were framed with women and children. Somali men were very rarely included within the frame. Gendered framing of images is instrumental to highlighting the humanitarian and emotional nature of Turkey.

While it is important to acknowledge that at least some of the images are produced deliberately or strategically by state actors' agents, many, however, are not, and the production of such representations cannot be explained by rational instrumental state actors, as in rationalist, state-centric accounts of status-seeking. Here, representations in images are studied as significant citational performances. In most images, the visitors from Turkey stood above or crouched down by Somali women and children, who were sitting on the floor.⁹¹ Some images showed popular culture figures giving toys to children on the ground. The images show that the hierarchy between the Turkish visitors (above) and Somali people (below) is maintained. As Chouliaraki argues, the 'positive imagery' not only empowers 'the sufferer' (mainly children and women who are made visible in the frame), but also ironically reproduces a power hierarchy between 'the donor' and 'the sufferer' as 'the perpetual objects of "our" generosity.'⁹² In her study on 'images of poor' in Turkey-centred aid campaigns to Somalia, Nilüfer Nahya arrived at a similar conclusion. Nahya focused on Erdoğan's visit to Somalia and argued that these images constructed a hierarchy between Turkey as a helper, giver, and donor, and Somali people, who are represented as grateful to Turkey (especially images of smiling Somali children carrying Turkish flags after they received aid from Turkey).⁹³ She argued that 'the images [of the visit] have developed into more than poverty and difference. For example, after this visit, the Turkish media wrote more about Somalia's nature, underground treasures, and lifestyle in Mogadishu. We learned that Somalia has untouched uranium reserves, petrol, natural gas, and savannah forests.'⁹⁴

Chouliaraki also points to the performativity of benevolent emotions in the positive imagery through moralising 'the donor' as an empathetic, compassionate, and tender-hearted political agent, while appropriating 'the sufferer's otherness.'⁹⁵ In Callahan's framework, the visibility strategy in these images is to visualise a new (social) order where Turkey is constituted as a feeling humanitarian actor who works towards ending the suffering of 'the Other'. Performativity can also be studied through 'anchoring' the images in texts. The news texts accompanying the images explain the 2011 famine and humanitarian crisis in Somalia extensively, whereas less textual space is given to Al Shabab's activities in the country and the absence of Western actors. The images of the visit were textualised through highly emotional language with Islamic references: 'Erdoğan and his wife Emine Erdoğan were emotional during their visit to the Turkish Red Crescent's Hayat Camp. They shed tears when the children read verses from Quran.'⁹⁶

The constitution of Turkey in texts as a feeling actor is not limited to the Prime Minister and his family. One image and its accompanying text strikingly represent the pattern and tone of discourse in the news about the visit. In the image, a popular culture figure from Turkey crouches down to a Somali woman and child.⁹⁷ The former smiles, reaching out to the baby, and the Turkish Crescent logo appears in the background. The text under the photo reads: 'Artist Nihat Doğan cried while he was holding a 2-year-old child named "Faysal". Doğan cried his heart out by saying "What is going

⁹⁰ Basbakan Erdogan be Heyeti Afrika'da, Sabah, 19 August 2011, available at: <https://www.sabah.com.tr/galeri/dunya/basbakan-erdogan-ve-heyeti-somalide>}.
⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Lilie Chouliaraki, 'Humanitarianism', in Roland Bleiker (ed.), *Visual Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 163–168 (p. 167).

⁹³ Nilüfer Nahya, 'The images of poverty and the poor in Somalia in the context of the aid campaign in Turkey', in Veronika Bernard and Serhan Oksay (eds), *Images (II): Images of the Poor Conference Proceedings* (Berlin: Lit, 2013), pp. 135–151 (p. 146).

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 144.

⁹⁵ Chouliaraki, 'Humanitarianism', p. 168.

⁹⁶ Somali Ucaginda Panik, Milliyet, 20 August 2011, available at: <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/somali-ucaginda-panik-1428984>}.
⁹⁷ Ibid.

to happen to these children?’”. He also mentioned that he would think of adoption. It is reported that 300 applications have been filed so far for adoption from Somalia.⁹⁸ The text produces Turkey, embodied in the popular culture figure, as a feeling actor.

Referring to the images widely circulated in Turkish media, Prime Minister Erdoğan gave a speech at the Iftar (breaking of the fast in Ramadan), organised by the Istanbul branch of Justice and Development Party on 21 August. He stated that ‘what we witnessed in Somalia was more painful and more tragic than what we saw in the media.’⁹⁹ He said:

We have all seen and felt the pain. What is worse than poverty, draught, and famine is hopelessness. We are trying to reach out anywhere where people suffer. God bless our nation with its great compassion and conscientiousness ... We have seen the great suffering in Somalia. We all know that we have a great responsibility to end this suffering.¹⁰⁰

The repeated citations of ‘suffering’ in the images produce them affectively and produce Turkey as a feeling actor with ‘responsibility’. Such responsibility is connected to the idea of humanitarianism as intervention, ‘one that goes beyond relief and incorporates demands for progress and improved livelihood for vulnerable others’, according to Chouliaraki.¹⁰¹ Erdoğan’s speech reflects this interventionist approach as enabled by the images of suffering: ‘We are planning to take significant steps in building infrastructure and superstructure to ensure the self-sufficiency of the population ... to rebuild the road between the airport and the centre of Mogadishu as well as a new permanent hospital.’¹⁰² For Erdoğan, the production of Turkey as a feeling actor with responsibility bestows it with a global moral responsibility: ‘Turkey in this holy month is giving a lesson of virtue to all humanity by extending its compassionate hand to Africa ... Turkey as the consciousness of humanity has become the reminder of virtues the world has abandoned.’¹⁰³

After this visit, and in line with the responsibility explained in the speech above, Turkey’s progress and development investment in Somalia intensified. In 2021, Turkey’s state-owned broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) identified the progress as a ‘new model’ that Turkey tried in Somalia and which succeeded. This model provided aid within Somalia, instead of sending it from abroad, and expanded Turkey’s political, military, and economic presence in the country. The images included new government buildings constructed by Turkey and Somali soldiers trained by the Turkish military.¹⁰⁴ Citational practices in the images (what the images show and how and textual affective references to the images) are status performances that produce a feeling of ‘humanitarian Turkey’.

Conclusion

This article has offered a performative analytical framework to study status in international relations. It has been argued that this framework could offer new openings in contemporary debates on status analysis by focusing on the subject production as part of statecraft. A moment in the still-ongoing production process of ‘humanitarian Turkey’ has been discussed.

The normative context should include an engagement with a country’s historical experiences that feed into and shape contemporary status performances. The historical context, and how history is represented, can be explored in order to understand the historical underpinnings of identity

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, ‘Beraber Yuruduk Biz Bu Yollarda [We Have Walked Together]’, National Library Online Catalogue, pp. 412–418 (p. 417), available at: {https://mk.gov.tr/GalleryFiles/242/Beraber_Y%C3%BCr%C3%BCd%C3%BCk_Biz_Bu_Yollarda_7_-_net-5d9be52a-5862-4d0f-925c-4c3b4785f4db.pdf}.

¹⁰⁰Ibid, p. 416–17.

¹⁰¹Chouliaraki, ‘Humanitarianism’, p. 167.

¹⁰²Erdogan, ‘Beraber Yuruduk Biz Bu Yollarda’, p. 417.

¹⁰³Ibid., pp. 415–16.

¹⁰⁴Selami Kokcam, ‘Yeni Bir Model: Türkiye-Somali İlişkileri [A New Model: Turkey-Somalia Relations]’, TRT Haber (21 May 2022), available at: {<https://www.trthaber.com/haber/dunya/yeni-bir-model-turkiye-somali-iliskileri-581920.html>}.

narratives that produce a state as having the desired status as normal and right. Furthermore, the analytical focus must abandon state-centrism, which solely focuses on state elite behaviours and discourses that dominate the identity-based approaches. Such state-centrism reduces the process of statecraft through status performances in international politics to a state elite-level practice. It discounts other political sites that contribute to, or even sustain, the subject-production process. Identity narratives in a country are created in a broader context where themes and motifs that constitute these narratives are (re)produced. However, to explore these dimensions, the status analysis should be freed from the limited identity paradigm and rethought from the prism of performativity. Status performances produce the political subject as having the desired status, which is 'normal' and 'natural' or 'right', in the normative and discursive context it operates. Therefore, the discussion suggests dropping 'status-seeker', which implies intentionality of a certain referent object in favour of status performances, as well as studying 'status' and 'the state' as ontological effects of citational performances. Finally, the article aims to offer new political site (visuals) in status analysis. The analysis suggests that their performative roles should be in relation to broader citational practices in different sites.

Status performances as part of statecraft urges IR scholars to go beyond inter-state relations in hierarchical orders and analyse 'status' as an effect of repetitive performances. Although this article has focused on three sites originating from Turkey, 'status' should also be studied in performances outside Turkey, for example in the media performances in the Middle East and Africa. However, the focus should not be on the 'success' of Turkey's humanitarian policies but how the normality of 'humanitarian Turkey' is being generated.

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