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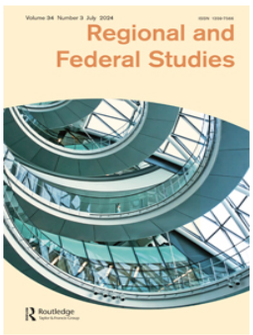
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Regional & Federal Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/frfs20

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To cite this article: Ohiocheoya Omiunu & Fritz Ikome Nganje (2024) Contemporary expressions of the foreign relations of subnational governments in Africa: Introduction to the Special Section, Regional & Federal Studies, 34:3, 247-268, DOI: 10.1080/13597566.2024.2361677

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2024.2361677

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Published online: 12 Jun 2024.

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REGIONAL AND FEDERAL STUDIES
2024, VOL. 34, NO. 3, 247–268
https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2024.2361677

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Contemporary expressions of the foreign relations of subnational governments in Africa: Introduction to the Special Section

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ABSTRACT

This special section explores contemporary foreign relations of African subnational governments (SNGs), a phenomenon popularly referred to as 'paradiplomacy.' In this introductory article, we examine the historical development of paradiplomacy research in Africa, highlighting its gradual progression from initial academic interests in the 1990s to its present state. The issue comprises four full-length articles focusing on case studies from Nigeria, South Africa, and Ghana. These contributions to the special issue present salient examples of African subnational governments and cities engaging in external relations, which have hitherto been overlooked in the global literature. The issue aims to expand scholarly understanding of African paradiplomacy, underscoring its significance for broader debates on statehood, governance, socio-economic development, and international relations. It also seeks to elevate the profile of African paradiplomacy studies and set the future research agenda, urging further research to explore the implications and effectiveness of African SNGs operating in the international arena.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 December 2023; Accepted 24 May 2024

1. Introduction

In the past century, conventional diplomatic and international relations protocols have progressively been distorted by geopolitical and economic forces, popularly referred to as globalization (Elaigwu 1998, 72; Keating 1999, 14; Scholte 2005, 14–17). Particularly after the end of World War II, there has been a noticeable rescaling of political and economic power outwardly towards supranational, intergovernmental and transnational organizations

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and inwardly towards a host of sub-state and non-state actors (Hayes 2004, 9; Slaughter 1997, 183; Keating 1992, 49–50; Cf: Warner and Gerbasi 2004, 858–860; Omiunu 2014, 74–75). A corollary of these transformative processes is the growing international involvement of subnational governments, i.e. sub-national, regional, provincial, or local governments in an increasingly complex and interdependent global economy (Ravenhill 1999, 134; Kincaid 1990, 54; Fry 1990, 296).

In the context of the increasing internationalization of domestic policy processes, subnational governments that have traditionally exercised authority over policy areas such as health, education, environmental protection, and culture have developed strong incentives and varying capacities to engage in international relations in pursuit of their domestic mandates (Garesché 2007, 25). The growing prominence of cities and other urban conurbations in the modern global economy is another primary driver of the internationalization of subnational governments, especially as this level of government is also increasingly tasked with promoting the economic development of their localities (Keating 1999, 2; Hocking 1999, 23).

The international relations of subnational governments, sometimes referred to as 'paradiplomacy', have for a while now been the subject of scholarly attention (e.g. Tavares 2016; Cornago 2010; Aldecoa and Keating 2013; Soldatos 1990; Michelmann and Soldatos 1990). Due to the differences in focus, objectives, and motivations for the external relations of subnational governments (Chaloux and Paquin 2013, 310), scholarly understanding of the phenomenon has evolved in phases since the 1970s (Stremoukhov 2021, 666-667; Liu and Song 2020). In particular, since the 1980s, scholarship on the subject has evolved significantly, from a focus on single or multiple case studies to attempts at developing theoretical explanations for the phenomenon (see, for example, Duchacek 1984; Keating 1998; Aldecoa and Keating 1999; Soldatos 1990).

However, efforts to understand the internationalization of subnational governments continue to be hamstrung not just by the diversity in the manifestation of the phenomenon but also by the fact that the experience in Western countries still dominates the literature on the subject. While significant studies have been conducted in the past two decades, which have given us considerable insight into the phenomenon in Latin America and Asia, more is needed to understand the contours of international relations of subnational governments on the African continent.

In light of the above, this issue focuses on the contemporary manifestations of the foreign relations of African subnational governments (provincial, regional or local governments), aiming to initiate critical and empirically informed debates on the significance of the African experience.[1]

The issue contains four full-length articles. Two contributions focus on subnational foreign relations of Nigeria's sub-states. The third focuses on the city

of Johannesburg, South Africa. The final contribution focuses on Accra, a municipality in Ghana. The contributions address the dynamics of subnational governments in a federal system (Nigeria), one decentralized political system (South Africa), and one unitary system (Ghana). They engage with several cross-cutting themes and employ various methodological and theoretical approaches.

Aniyie's contribution (this issue) focuses on the challenges that Nigeria's non-central governments (NCGs) face in their bid to meet the development targets under Aspiration 1 of the African Union Agenda 2063. Premised on his analysis of the socioeconomic indices of Nigeria's NCGs at the end of 2018, Aniyie reveals a mismatch between the fiscal powers and constitutional responsibilities of NCGs that adversely impacts their ability to meet the developmental aspirations under the AU Agenda 2063. Notably, he argues that non-convergence in the income-expenditure dynamics of Nigeria's NCGs is a catalyst for the internationalization-focused strategies introduced by these actors to mobilize foreign capital for public expenditure financing.

In the second contribution, also focusing on Nigeria, Omiunu and Aniyie (this issue) adduce further evidence of internationalization-focused strategies implemented by Nigerian sub-national governments (SNGs) between 1999 and 2019 specifically to attract and retain inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into their respective jurisdictions. Building on Duchacek's categorization of strategies used by sub-states to permeate intersovereign 'sieves' designed to restrict their forays into the international plane, Omiunu and Aniyie conceptually map and empirically assess the varied expressions and prevalence of these strategies utilized by Nigeria's SNGs.

Nganje (this issue) focuses on the growing agency of African cities in transnational city networks. The contribution examines the City of Johannesburg's involvement in the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) from 2011 to 2016. In his analysis, Nganje challenges the assumption that North–South power dynamics dominate global city networks. Specifically, Nganje narrates how, despite finding itself at the bottom of the global city hierarchy, the City of Johannesburg was able to capitalize on the visionary leadership of Mayor Parks Tau and a favourable domestic political alignment to direct the affairs of the UCLG and, in the process shape global discourse on urban development. Nganje's analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how cities from the Global South, like Johannesburg, navigate and potentially alter the traditionally skewed power structures in global governance through strategic network engagement and leadership. Nganje argues that the case of Johannesburg illustrates a broader potential for cities in the Global South to assert their agency in global affairs despite systemic constraints. He calls for a reevaluation of

how the agency of such cities is conceptualized and recognized in international relations.

Yankson (this issue), using Accra, a metropolitan area in Ghana, as a case study, evaluates regionalism through a glocal lens. Yakson applies a metagovernance framework in his analysis on the premise that the foreign engagements of sub-national regions or localities are inherently linked with regionalism at a metropolitan aggregate scale as simultaneously mediated by global and local factors. He also argues that sub-national foreign relations encapsulate matters of territory, place, scale and networks due to blurring traditional boundaries while simultaneously re-emphasizing the importance of context-specific geographical domains. As such, Yankson uses Accra to illustrate the utility of metagovernance as a conceptual framework for understanding the impact of national-local relations in a unitary political system on the dynamics of cross-border interactions in the African context. Unsurprisingly, Yankson's analysis reveals that Accra has limited ability to forge external relations within a centralized political system where subnational actors are relatively constrained by the powers of the national government. The implication is a limited agency for political appointees in Accra to engage with cross-border actors. This notwithstanding, Yankson finds that the predisposition of the Ghanaian central government towards international engagement, for instance, the promotion of foreign direct investment, creates avenues for the municipal government in Accra to engage with external actors.

These contributions to the special issue present salient examples of African subnational governments and cities engaging in external relations, which have hitherto been overlooked in the global literature. For example, the two contributions focusing on Nigeria, a case study which has gone largely unnoticed in the paradiplomacy literature, present empirical evidence of the external engagements of Nigeria's sub-states and the motivations for these strategies. Overall, the contributions demonstrate that African SNGs are engaging in external relations despite having limited constitutional scope to engage in foreign relations. The studies in this issue also highlight the limitations of using the standard definition of diplomacy in international relations to understand the complex foreign relations of African subnational governments and cities.

To better appreciate this issue's distinct contributions to our understanding of contemporary foreign relations of African subnational governments, it is imperative to understand the evolution of the scholarship on paradiplomacy in Africa. This also provides context for the earlier assertion that there is a dearth of literature focusing on paradiplomacy in the African context. In the following section, we briefly examine the historical development of paradiplomacy research in Africa, charting its progression from initial academic pursuits in the 1990s to its present state.

2. Tracing the Evolution of the Scholarship on Paradiplomacy in Africa

In the 1990s, there was scholarly interest in the international relations of African subnational governments. This coincided with the emergence of what is often cited as the pioneering literature on the paradiplomacy phenomenon, including the works of Panayotis Soldatos (1990) and Ivo Duchacek (1990). Leading authorities on federalism and international relations in Africa, such as Gambari (1991), De Villiers (1995), White (1996), Van Wyk (1997), Elaigwu (1998) and Geldenhuys (1998; 1996), to mention a few, had identified the salience of this phenomenon in Nigeria and South Africa (two of the largest economies in Africa, which had returned to democratic rule in 1999 and 1994 respectively). These scholars offered preliminary assessments of its contours and future trajectory on the continent. For example, Gambari (1991), anticipating Nigeria returning to civilian democratic rule in 1992, reflected on the potential for Nigerian sub-states to engage in foreign relations. He argued that this was plausible despite the prevailing conventional theories on the need for nations to speak with one voice in foreign policy (Wheare, 1963, 183–186; Bernier, 1973, 10–11; Nwabueze, 1982, 37; Akindele and Oyediran, 1986). He noted that constitutional and financial constraints were major inhibitors to Nigerian sub-states engaging in any meaningful way in the foreign policy space. Despite his reservations based on these constraints, Gambari predicted an increase in the foreign relations activities of Nigeria's subnational governments in the 1990s (1991, 122–124). Gambari's predictions proved true after the eventual return to civilian rule in 1999 (see Omiunu 2014). However, this trend went largely unnoticed in the federalism and international relations scholarship at the turn of the millennium. Elaigwu (1998) touched on this topic, albeit tangentially, when he recognized the changing dynamics of international relations in Africa due to globalization. He recommended a federally derived compromise that accommodated demands for self-determination by constituent units in federal systems (1998, 78).

From a South African viewpoint, Geldenhuys (1998) and Van Wyk (1997) critically examined provisions under the 1994 South African Constitution, which allocated some competence for the provinces to operate in the foreign policy space – in addition to exploring the innovations under the 1994 South African Constitution, Geldenhuys and van Wyk also mapped the evidence and emerging patterns of international relations in several South African provinces (see also White 1996, 25). Geldenhuys (1998, 41), for example, using Duchacek's typology on types of paradiplomacy, categorized the expressions of subnational foreign relations by South Africa's nine provinces as predominantly fitting the description of global paradiplomacy (Duchacek 1986, 246–247). Van Wyk (1997, 25–26), building on the work of

Geldenhuys, also pointed out that globalization, coupled with the economic opportunities that opened up to South Africa following the end of apartheid, were motivations for the involvement of South African provinces in the international sphere. van Wyk further argued that the forays of the provinces into the international arena were also motivated by a need for survival and autonomy, exacerbated by national policies that failed to meet local socio-economic demands (ibid).

These scholarships and the early empirical insights laid the groundwork for what promised to be an exciting research agenda on paradiplomacy in Africa.

However, scholarship on African paradiplomacy dwindled at the turn of the millennium. The follow-up on the initial scholarships cited above was tepid. This was especially the case for Nigeria, with no study known to the authors focusing on the evolution of paradiplomacy under the 4th democratic republic, which commenced in 1999. The follow-up in South Africa was a little more promising, with scholars like Nganje picking up on the trail laid by Geldenhuys (1998) and Van Wyk (1997).

At the same time, the study of the foreign relations of subnational governments in other regions blossomed and evolved rapidly. For example, two special issues published in this journal on the subject do not feature any contribution from Africa (see Aldecoa and Keating 1999, and Klatt and Wassenberg 2017). Also, studies on the foreign relations of constituent units of federal systems, such as Michelmann (2006), selected 12 federal systems for appraisal, with South Africa being the only African country considered (see also Michelmann and Soldatos 1990).

In addition to these special publication issues and edited books, individual and comparative studies have been conducted in the past two decades, which have given us considerable insight into the phenomenon in Europe (e.g. Blatter et al. 2010; Ciesielska-Klikowska and Kamiński 2022; Tatham 2010; 2012; 2015), North America (e.g. Kukucha 2008; Zepeda and Virchez 2019; McMillan 2008), South America (e.g. Iglesias 2006; Andrade e Barros 2010; Junqueira 2021), Latin America (e.g. Alibalaev and Kuznetsov 2022) and Asia (e.g. Mukti et al. 2020; Liu and Song 2020). However, Africa stands out as a region where what is known about the international involvement of subnational governments is limited compared to the other regions mentioned above.

Although there has, indeed, been renewed interest in the foreign relations of African subnational governments in recent years (see, for example, Cornelissen 2006; Zondi 2012; Nganje 2013; 2014; 2016a; 2016b, Omiunu 2014; Omiunu and Aniyie 2018; 2022), these studies have remained limited and concentrated in South Africa. On the latter point, Tavares, writing in 2016, argued that: 'in the African context, Paradiplomacy is still young and only in South Africa does it deserve a public eye' (224).

However, this view of paradiplomacy as an underdeveloped practice in Africa might be overly simplistic. Alternative explanations that account for the nuanced and often informal ways in which these governments operate within the international sphere are essential.

It could be argued that little is known about paradiplomacy in Africa, as Tavares points out, precisely because the practice remains underdeveloped on the continent both in scope and significance since the early scholarship cited previously. This explanation would resonate with studies on decentralization on the continent, which have, in the main, underscored the preponderance of centralized governance even in instances where the legal framework prescribes otherwise (see Erk 2014, 2015). In the context of strong centripetal forces and tendencies, subnational governments that are generally beholden to their national governments have limited capacity, resources and the manoeuvring space to engage in international relations, even if there are strong incentives and it is in their interest to do so (Willis et al., 1999). Nevertheless, attributing the limited visibility of paradiplomacy in Africa solely to centralization and resource constraints may obscure the complex and dynamic ways subnational entities engage internationally.

More so, due to the often assumed universality of what constitutes international relations within the IR literature, it is easy to overlook the many ways, both formal and informal, in which African subnational governments, especially of contiguous territorial units, have sought to respond to and manage the everyday socio-economic and cultural realities that flow from global interdependence and Africa's imaginary and artificial borders (Agnew 2008, 181–182). Hocking (1999, 20) speaks to this issue, highlighting the limitations of conventional IR concepts when interrogating the 'actorness' of non-central governments. He argues that concepts such as paradiplomacy and proto-diplomacy can be limiting by suggesting that the internationalization of subnational governments are 'pale imitations of real diplomacy' (ibid). He argues that with this characterization, there is a propensity to classify the international engagements of subnational governments as second-order activities, thereby downplaying their importance and distinctiveness. This observation is important in the context of Africa because it reiterates the need to adopt a dynamic perspective if we are to grasp fully and appreciate the often informal or nuanced approaches these actors adopt in patrolling the edges of what Hocking describes as territorially imagined and yet partially deterritorialised spaces (ibid, 17).

More so, we also need to look beyond dominant paradigms, which assume the drivers and determinants of these activities are similar to their counterparts in the global north. Nganje and Tladi (2023) expand on this latter point in the context of city diplomacy, arguing that mainstream literature on global cities primarily explains internationalization from the perspective of global capitalism, overly focusing on city diplomacy as a response to

external economic exigencies and the globalized, financialised, and deregulated world economy (Robinson 2011; Curtis 2016; Curtis and Acuto 2018). Using the City of Johannesburg as a case study, Nganje and Tladi offer an alternative account of domestic factors that have informed this African city's foreign relations from 2011 to 2016. These findings reinforce arguments for a more nuanced analysis of contemporary city diplomacy in Africa and, indeed, the international relations of African subnational governments as an outcome of the complex interplay between global and local forces and dynamics and not just the exigencies of economic globalization.

An alternative explanation would be that little is known about paradiplomacy in the African context because of the failure of the practice to attract the gaze of scholars and researchers within and outside Africa. As we pointed out earlier, African case studies have been absent from prominent studies on the paradiplomacy phenomenon in the last two decades. This gap in the literature motivated the research activities that birthed this special issue. We highlight this point because it was particularly challenging to find scholars studying the international relations of African subnational governments. From anecdotal evidence and recalling the observation of Tavares (2016), contemporary scholarship on paradiplomacy in Africa is concentrated in South African universities and research centres. This, however, does not mean that paradiplomacy is absent in other countries and regions across the African continent. Instead, it highlights the limited attention given to the teaching and research of this phenomenon outside South Africa. These challenges could also be due to a lack of cohesive networks on the continent and beyond dedicated to understanding this phenomenon in Africa.

What is evident from this project is that the international involvement of African subnational governments may not be as extensive and with significant systemic implications as the protodiplomacy of subnational states and regions such as Quebec, Catalonia and Kurdistan or even the activism of the municipal foreign policy movement in the US in the 1980s (see for example, Shuman 1992, 158–159). There is, however, sufficient anecdotal evidence pointing to extraterritorial activities on the part of African subnational governments. From the efforts of Nigerian state governments to attract foreign investments to the decentralized cooperation partnerships of municipal authorities and communities in Africa with their mostly European partners, or even the involvement of subnational authorities in cross-border security arrangements of volatile regions such as the Karamoja in east Africa, and the Lake Chad basin region in west Africa, subnational governments across the continent are involved in a variety of international activities that continue to escape the academic scrutiny of scholars on the continent and beyond. As such, in putting together this special issue, we sought to draw scholarly attention to this blind spot in the study of Africa's international relations, encourage research into the various manifestations of paradiplomacy on the

continent, and provoke debate on the significance of this phenomenon for questions of statehood, governance, socio-economic development and international relations in Africa. We also hoped to elevate the profile of African paradiplomacy studies to shape academic discourses on the phenomenon globally.

In the remainder of this introductory article, we frame the debate by teasing out and reflecting on the significant themes that run across the various contributions in the special issue. We then reflect briefly on the implications of the findings in the special issue for the literature and debates on the foreign relations of subnational governments. We also point out possible areas for future research on paradiplomacy in Africa.

3. Paradiplomacy in Africa as a Functional Project?

If, in other parts of the world, the foreign relations of subnational governments have sometimes been infused with ideological and political considerations, the various contributions to this issue suggest that in the African case, paradiplomacy is driven mainly by socio-economic and other practical imperatives. This is because African subnational governments under post-colonial constitutions generally lack formal legal authority as foreign policy actors and operate in institutional environments that constrain their authority to engage unilaterally in the foreign policy space. Consequently, subnational governments in Africa have tended to define their foreign activities mainly to fulfil their domestic socio-economic development mandates, which have been conceptualized elsewhere as developmental paradiplomacy (Nganje 2014).

As Aniyie (this issue) points out in the case of the foreign relations of Nigerian states, paradiplomacy in this context has predominantly taken on a resource mobilization function to make up for the substantial revenue deficits that subnational governments have to contend with in pursuit of their ever-increasing responsibilities. This finding aligns with a similar pattern identified by Stremoukhov (2021, 668) and Alexeev and Vagin (1999) in their studies on Russian Paradiplomacy.

This utilitarian approach to paradiplomacy has allowed African subnational governments to circumvent strict legal and institutional frameworks to insert themselves into the international space without major backlash from national governments that are otherwise obsessed with protecting their national sovereignty and the integrity of their foreign policies. Framed as a resource mobilization or, in some cases, capacity-building intervention, the foreign relations of African subnational governments are generally seen to pose little threat to the policy authority of national governments.

If anything, consistent with Brian Hocking's (1996) understanding of paradiplomacy as the localization of foreign policy, the international activities of African subnational governments have generally been embraced by national

governments, at least in their official rhetoric, as an integral part of their development-oriented foreign policies and diplomatic engagements. It is thus not surprising that in some instances, the foreign activities of subnational governments have been undertaken in collaboration with national government ministries, agencies, or diplomatic missions abroad.

This resonates with the European experience, especially with the dual concepts of 'cooperation' and 'conflict' in central-sub-national relations (Tatham 2013, 65; Antunes, Guimarães, and Egan 2023, 4). According to Tatham (2016), it is common for regions to either work collaboratively or go solo, but rarely do regions work at cross-purposes with member states, i.e. engaging in conflicting paradiplomacy (see also Tatham 2013). Contributions to this issue highlight similar trends, with evidence of collaborative and unilateral actions taken by subnational governments to forge international partnerships. For example, Omiunu and Aniyie (this issue) highlight both collaborative and solo efforts by Nigeria's subnational governments in their overseas engagement within the specific context of inward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) mobilization. According to the authors, these solo efforts by Nigerian SNGs to forge external partnerships represent a deviation from the conventions under the extant constitutional and institutional regime for inward FDI mobilization in Nigeria. Although their evidence is inconclusive on these solo efforts leading to conflicting paradiplomacy, they highlight the ineffectiveness of the existing intergovernmental frameworks that govern FDI mobilization in Nigeria to mitigate conflicting paradiplomacy if it does occur.

In mapping the methods and strategies Nigeria's subnational governments are adopting to engage in FDI mobilization, Omiunu and Aniyie (this issue) highlight the prevalent use of soft law mechanisms such as Memoranda of Association (MoUs) twinning, sisterhood or cooperation agreement, declaration of intent, joint declaration or communiqué; and protocol. They argue that this approach is popular because it enables Nigeria's subnational governments to avoid potential conflicts with the central government while allowing them to forge external relationships.

Tavares (2016), writing in the context of subnational governments in the USA, argues along the same lines to the effect that MoUs are an instrument of choice by American subnational governments seeking to avoid creating conflicts with the Federal Government while retaining the manoeuvrability to engage in the international scene (Tavares 2016, 82; See also Setzer 2013, 181; Lessa 2007 who have explored a similar trend in the context of Brazilian subnational environmental Paradiplomacy). Setzer (2013), in particular, characterizes MOUs as a weak commitment used by subnational governments in their paradiplomatic interactions. This may be true, but it also provides wriggle room for subnational foreign relations to thrive with little disruption to the status quo.

These findings by Omiunu and Aniyie build on the findings of the 1990s scholarship by scholars such as Van Wyk (1997) and Geldenhuys (1998). For example, Van Wyk (1997, 35–49) in an assessment of the patterns of international interaction by five South African provinces, had identified the use of such mechanisms (see also White 1997). Van Wyk concluded that these agreements posed little significance in international law because they are best classed as non-binding instruments (ibid: 51). Omiunu and Aniyie (this issue) question this thinking about the legal status of MoUs and other soft law mechanisms used by subnational governments in their paradiplomatic engagements. In particular, they raise concerns about the lack of guidance and coordination of MoUs signed by Nigeria's subnational governments.

Their concerns are partly due to interpretations of the legality of these instruments in international law jurisprudence. For example, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in Qatar v Bahrain[2] held that the determination of whether an agreement other than a treaty is legally binding on the parties is dependent on (1) the actual terms used in the document, (2) the inclusion of actual commitments in the document, and (3) the particular circumstances leading up to the drawing up of the document and/or surrounding the signing of the document.[3] Although this case was decided in the context of state-to-state practice in international law, the United Kingdom's Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers detailed and periodically updated guidance on the practice and procedures relating to the formation of Treaties and MOUs (see UK FCO 2020, 15-18).[4] According to the 2020 guidance, '… in order to ensure that MoUs are not worded in such a way as to amount to treaties care should be taken to avoid the use of "treaty language".'[5] This is apparently done to avoid the possibility of the UK's devolved governments creating a contingent international liability or a policy that may have adverse implications for the UK's foreign policy direction.

Arguably, the risks of such issues arising are less under a federal constitution, especially in federal countries that operate a dualist system for implementing international law. However, in an era where subnational governments have unprecedented access to the international scene, it is surprising that Nigeria does not have a coordinated monitoring and risk assessment framework for guiding the proliferation of MoUs between SNGs and foreign entities. In the absence of a monitoring and risk assessment framework, there is the possibility of misunderstanding arising among users about the meaning, scope, and impact of MoUs on their relationships. Future research on this topic would need to evaluate the legal implications of MoUs signed by African subnational governments to ascertain the efficacy of these soft law mechanisms in the paradiplomatic activities of African subnational governments.

While a strong case can be made that the foreign relations of African subnational governments are generally an expression of, and an attempt to

localize and give concrete form to, the foreign policies of national governments, the contribution by Nganje (this issue) points to a promising independent foreign policy capacity and agency at the subnational level, particularly among the continent's metropolitan cities. Buoyed by the pervasive global city phenomenon, Nganje (this issue) argues that cities such as Johannesburg have at times attempted to punch above their weight in their foreign relations, demonstrating the ability to shape global discourses and processes, often away from the tutelage of their national governments. This nascent subnational international activism, which is reminiscent of the global role of Brazilian cities such as Porto Alegre during the first presidency of Lula da Silva from 2003 and 2011 (see Salomon 2011; Nganje 2016a; Stren and Friendly 2019), is, however, rendered precarious by its weak material base and the over personalization of diplomatic relations at the subnational level.

As the example of the city of Johannesburg reveals in Nganje's contribution to this issue, the level of international involvement of African subnational governments has tended to fluctuate with the frequent shifts of political power at this level of government. On this point, Nganje (this issue) identifies a distinction between the international relations of the City of Johannesburg during the mayorship of 'outward and 'inward-looking' leaders. This research finding is consistent with other studies that indicate subnational leaders' individual characteristics, personal interests in foreign affairs, and national aspirations were the most significant predictors of foreign policy activism (McMillan 2008, 244; Kincaid 1990). A similar pattern is found in the case of Nigeria, where state governors in Nigeria who have displayed visionary leadership characterized by bold socio-economic development plans during their tenure in office have been more active within the foreign relations sphere. Notable examples include Governor Ayade of Cross Rivers State and Governor Fashola of Lagos State (Omiunu and Aniyie 2022).

Nganje associates the shift in Joahnnesburg's international agency with the visionary and strategic leadership of Mayor Parks Tau, whose tenure catalyzed the city's ascent in transnational networks. The analysis of Johannesburg's influence within global city networks under Mayor Parks Tau demonstrates the potency of personal ambition and a keen sense of urban development imperatives as drivers of city diplomacy. This dynamic interplay of leadership vision and geopolitical savvy underscores African cities' fluctuating yet assertive role in global governance. This case study also reflects an ambitious effort by an African city to navigate and mould its international engagement in response to both local and global imperatives.

However, the precarious nature of this nascent city diplomacy in this case study is evident in the challenges of aligning international aspirations with local socio-economic realities and political configurations. Johannesburg's experience, as it navigated between transnational market forces and local

political resistance, highlights the delicate balance required in actualizing city diplomacy that resonates locally and globally. Therefore, the ascent of cities like Johannesburg in international relations reflects the growing strategic importance of Global South cities in addressing critical challenges of the global community in the twenty-first century. It is also emblematic of the broader complexities and evolving dynamics of global governance in the last century.

The differentiation between the occurrence of the paradiplomacy phenomenon in federal and unitary states is still largely under-researched. The preponderance of case studies typically involves the constituent units of federal states or states with politically decentralized political systems. However, it is recognized that paradiplomacy occurs in countries with unitary regimes and 'devolved' or 'asymmetrical' union states such as the United Kingdom. Previous case studies explored in depth on these types of political structures include studies on Scotland in the UK (Paquin 2021; Dellepiane and Reinsberg 2023), Rhône-Alpes and Alsace in France, and Salzburg in Austria (Tatham 2016). In the context of post-colonial Africa, which is dotted by states with political and constitutional configuration variations, several sovereign states are classed as unitary states. Ghana is one such example.

In the contribution to this issue focusing on Ghana, Yankson (this issue) argues that sub-national foreign relations by a municipality within a centralized political system, such as Ghana, are relatively constrained by the powers of the national government. He argues that there is limited agency for political appointees of regional governments, affecting their engagement with cross-border actors.

Yankson's contribution also demonstrates the importance of the metagovernance framework in understanding the complexities associated with regionalism, including the interplay between global and local factors and the role of territorial structuration, inter-governmental partnerships, multilevel governance, political rescaling, and institutional restructuring. Notably, he argues that the central government's inclination towards international engagement can lead to similar initiatives at the sub-national level. In essence, cross-border networks spearheaded by political actors are a function of public policy at the national level, guided by the benefits of global governance as well as the need to respond to metropolitan-wide development challenges.

For instance, in Accra, Yankson (this issue) argues that the promotion of foreign direct investment, although a policy objective of the central government, aligns with the municipal government's goals of attracting foreign capital for jobs and wealth creation. To buttress this point, Yankson argues that the establishment of international bodies such as the World Trade Centre Accra and the African Continental Free Trade Area, despite being a

central policy objective, has significantly increased Accra's engagement and prominence on the global stage.

Undoubtedly, much of the processes associated with the emergence of these policies were spearheaded by national and international actors, with sub-national authorities largely playing secondary roles. As such, Yankson reminds us how transnational economic partnerships and political rescaling in a unitary state like Ghana are shaped by the nuances of government bureaucracy and centralization. Despite the political and administrative processes that centralize policies on cross-border relations in a unitary state, Yankson's contribution is a reminder of the critical role of the urban landscape as a site for transnational engagements. Policies from the centre may drive international engagements in unitary states, but invariably, the context-specificities of city regions will continue to be a key determinant of external engagements of the nation-state.

4. Conclusion: Mapping a Future Research Agenda

This special issue draws attention to the contemporary expressions of the foreign relations of sub-national governments in multiple African countries and on cross-cutting themes. The importance of this special issue lies in the fact that very little is known about the paradiplomatic activities of subnational governments outside of advanced industrial democracies/OECD countries. What research has been conducted on the global south has either overlooked Africa altogether or tended to focus on only South Africa. The contributions to this issue have barely scratched the surface of what is going on around the African continent. We are confident that the contributions in this special issue will catalyze more in-depth studies to understand the contours of sub-national international relations on the African continent with all its diversity.

For example, future research should consider the so-called housekeeping functions subnational governments carry out along Africa's long and porous land borders. Whether dealing with cross-border crime, controlling diseases such as malaria in border communities, managing shared border resources, or simply maintaining cross-border social cohesion, subnational authorities have demonstrated the potential to serve the continent's borders and contribute to regional integration efforts. In the context of the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, understanding the internationalization of African subnational governments assumes salience as there is a need for more research exploring how African subnational governments responded to the pandemic. There is precedence in the pre-COVID-19 period that demonstrates the value of such research. Consider, for example, how, through the Fast Track Cities network, cities have been learning and supporting one another to end the HIV, tuberculosis, and viral hepatitis epidemics by 2030 or the World Bank-

funded partnership between the cities of Johannesburg and Addis Ababa, which among other focuses allowed the two African cities to learn from each other to strengthen their HIV-AIDS interventions. With its limited financial and technological resources but immense innovative potential, these international partnerships become even more crucial for African subnational governments as they navigate the new reality imposed by the coronavirus pandemic.

Future research should explore the paradiplomatic activities in regions with shared ecological resources, such as the Lake Chad Basin (LBC). The common existential threats to human and environmental systems, including terrorism and climate change, and cultural ties among local communities within the LBC region create an enabling environment for the direct involvement of subnational actors, including sub-national governments, in foreign relations. However, this potential has, for the most part, remained underdeveloped, not least because of incongruences between the requirements for effective cross-border paradiplomacy or, better still, multilayered diplomacy as suggested by Hocking (1993) on the one hand, and national institutional frameworks and inter-state governance arrangements on the other hand.

Future research should also explore the extent to which the determinants and expressions of paradiplomacy in Africa align with or deviate from classifications and explanatory factors developed in other regional contexts. For example, it will be interesting to see if the paradiplomacy scholarship in Africa develops along the dichotomous lines evident in European literature, where there appears to be a local/regional divide in the study and understanding of paradiplomacy. At a glance, case studies discussed in this special issue align more with the explanatory factors emphasized in the European local paradiplomacy literature, i.e. paradiplomacy informed by the agency (e.g. Johannesburg) or a lack thereof (e.g. Accra) of African SNGs. The entrepreneurship and ambition of political leaders (e.g. the visionary and strategic leadership of leaders such as Mayor Parks Tau of Johannesburg and Governor Fashola in Lagos) and the role of transnational city networks in addressing functional issues at the domestic level (e.g. Johannesburg) are also prominent factors in the African context.

Although beyond the scope of this special issue, anecdotal evidence also indicates that some of the prominent explanatory factors that account for regional paradiplomacy, as it presents in the European context, have some similarities and expressions in the African context (see Antunes, Guimarães, and Egan 2023; who attempt to map these factors within the US context). These explanatory factors are: – Institutions and institutional environments, such as federalism, decentralization, self-rule, and shared rule (e.g. Donas and Beyers 2013; Hocking 1997, 105; Tatham 2017; Tatham and Thau 2014; Ward and Williams 1997, 445); history, identity, and cultural distinctiveness (Marks et al. 1996, 170; Soldatos 1990, 50–1); party politics, such as the

partisan congruence and incongruence between levels of government (Bauer 2006, 34; Marks 1996, 411–2; Marks et al. 1996, 185; Tatham 2010; 2012; 2016); regional population size and wealth (Marks et al. 1996, 169; Nielsen and Salk 1998, 244; Tatham 2013, 78–9; 2015: 395; Tatham and Thau 2014, 265) and policy-level factors, such as regulatory vs financial mobilization (Callanan and Tatham 2014, 191–3, 198-200) or various levels of preference intensity on a particular issue (Tatham 2012).

Regions like the Gauteng and the Western Cape in South Africa, urban conurbations in Lagos, Nigeria, and the semi-autonomous archipelago Zanzibar in Tanzania align to some degree with the five prominent explanatory factors above. For example, with South Africa's federal-type structure, which grants a degree of autonomy to its provinces, Nganje (2014) has explored the extent to which the constitutional and institutional environment enables or constrains paradiplomatic activities. Omiunu and Aniyie (2022) conducted a similar study for Nigeria. Both Nganje (2014) and Omiunu & Aniyie (2021) highlight how the restrictions on the constitutional competencies of South African Provinces and Nigerian SNGs are explanatory factors for the toned-down paradiplomatic endeavours of SNGs in these two countries. Nganje (2013) also explores the impact of partisan (in)congruence on the paradiplomatic activities of South African provinces. Notably, Nganje highlights the distinctiveness of the paradiplomatic activities of the Western Cape under the rule of the Democratic Alliance (the current official opposition to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the national assembly). A similar inference can be made in the context of Lagos State under the rule of the All Progressive Congress (APC), the opposition to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) from 1999 - 2015. Conversely, in Zanzibar, Tanzania, which has a distinct cultural and historical identity separate from mainland Tanzania, except for the promotion of tourism since the 1980s and the existence of a few foreign consulates on the island, there has been little effort to project Zanzibar's distinct identity on the international scene. Arguably, partisan congruence is an explanatory factor for the muted projection of this territory in the international arena. Further studies will be needed to test this hypothesis.

Wealth and population size can also be linked to the paradiplomatic activities of Gauteng Province, South Africa, and Lagos, Nigeria, the regional powerhouses in South Africa and Nigeria, respectively. There is also evidence to indicate that Kigali City, Rwanda, has focused on specific policy-level factors, such as urban planning and environmental sustainability, to drive its international engagement.

Ultimately, it is essential that future studies not only interrogate these preliminary assumptions espoused above from the lens of other regions but also look out for the distinct expressions and unique socio-economic contexts that inform the practice of paradiplomacy in Africa.

Notes

1. The contributions to this issue emanated from a 2019 symposium/writing workshop titled Sustainable Development and the Foreign Relations of African Non-central Governments (NCGs).
2. *Martine Delimitation and Territorial Questions between Qatar and Bahrain, Jurisdiction and Admissibility Judgement*, ICJ Report 1994, p. 112. Available at https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/87/087-19940701-JUD-01-00-EN.pdf (accessed 20 April 2019)
3. This includes the parties' intention and the status or position of the respective signatories/negotiators (i.e. whether ministerial level, CEO or head of government)
4. See Treaties And Memoranda Of Understanding (Mous) Guidance On Practice And Procedures (Second Edition: Treaty Section Legal Directorate Foreign And Commonwealth Office) 2020.
5. Ibid (UK FCO, 2020) p 1.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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