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The domestic sources of city diplomacy: The case of the city of Johannesburg, 2011-2016

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ABSTRACT

The mainstream literature on global cities tends to explain the internationalization of cities almost exclusively from the perspective of recent developments in global capitalism, developments that have put cities at the heart of an increasingly globalized, financialized, and deregulated world economy. The internationalization of these so-called global cities is seen as a response to, and is conditioned by, external, and mainly economic, exigencies. Research on the foreign relations of city governments has followed in this tradition, with a predominant focus on the global drivers and manifestations, as well as the systemic implications of this phe-

nomenon. Little academic attention has been given to the domestic contexts within which city governments develop and exercise their international agency. This paper is inspired by the emergence of alternative accounts in the global cities literature, which have underscored the importance of the domestic context in making sense of the contemporary internationalization of cities, to analyze the domestic sources of the City of Johannesburg's foreign relations from 2011 to 2016. While acknowledging Johannesburg's global cities ambition as a major driver of the city government's international relations during this period, we identify and analyze a set of local and national factors that equally inspired and conditioned the city's

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foreign engagements. These include the huge socio-economic and spatial divide that continues to define the city, the influence of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and its doctrine of progressive internationalism, as well as the then mayor's internationalist outlook and domestic political ambitions.

Key words: City diplomacy; paradiplomacy; mayoral diplomacy; global cities; Johannesburg.

Las fuentes internas de la diplomacia de las ciudades: el caso de la ciudad de Johannesburg, 2011-2016

RESUMEN

La literatura dominante sobre ciudades globales tiende a explicar la internacionalización de las urbes casi exclusivamente desde la perspectiva de los desarrollos recientes en el capitalismo global, desarrollos que han puesto a las ciudades en el corazón de una economía mundial cada vez más globalizada, financiarizada y desregulada. La internacionalización de estas llamadas ciudades globales se concibe como una respuesta y está condicionada por exigencias externas y, principalmente, económicas. La investigación sobre las relaciones exteriores de los gobiernos de las ciudades ha seguido esta tradición, con un enfoque predominante en las conductas y manifestaciones globales, así como en las implicaciones sistémicas de este fenómeno. Se ha prestado poca atención académica a los contextos domésticos dentro de los cuales los gobiernos de las ciudades desarrollan y ejer-

cen su agencia internacional. Este artículo se inspira en el surgimiento de relatos alternativos en la literatura sobre ciudades globales, que han subrayado la importancia del contexto doméstico para dar sentido a la internacionalización contemporánea de las ciudades, con el fin de analizar las fuentes domésticas de las relaciones exteriores de la ciudad de Johannesburg desde 2011 hasta 2016. Si bien reconocemos la ambición de Johannesburg de convertirse en una ciudad global y en un importante impulsor de las relaciones internacionales del gobierno de la ciudad durante este periodo, identificamos y analizamos un conjunto de factores locales y nacionales que igualmente inspiraron y condicionaron los compromisos extranjeros de la ciudad. Estos incluyen la enorme división socioeconómica y espacial que continúa definiendo la ciudad, la influencia del partido de gobierno, el Congreso Nacional Africano (ANC), y su doctrina de internacionalismo progresista, así como la perspectiva internacionalista del entonces alcalde y sus ambiciones políticas internas.

Palabras clave: diplomacia de ciudad; paradiplomacia; diplomacia de alcaldes; ciudades globales; Johannesburg.

INTRODUCTION

The academic literature on city diplomacy has evolved almost in parallel to that on paradiplomacy, which studies the broader phenomenon of subnational governments developing an international presence. The latter has generally been biased towards the internationalization of so-called meso-level governments (provinces, regions, states). This trend has been encour-

aged over the years by the often-indistinct conceptualization of subnational or substate governments, with some paradiplomacy scholars opting for a narrower understanding of the concept, which excludes cities and other local governments. But perhaps of greater significance is the observation that, while the paradiplomacy literature has tended to emphasize political and identity factors as key explanatory variables of the practice, the literature on city diplomacy, with its strong links to urban studies and the global city phenomenon, remains steeped in the processes and institutions of economic globalization. Consequently, unlike the paradiplomacy literature that has developed an extensive research agenda on the domestic determinants of the foreign relations of subnational governments, there has yet to be a dedicated focus on the study of the domestic sources of city diplomacy. The study of city diplomacy has thus far focused largely on the systemic drivers and manifestation of the phenomenon, a bias that has delayed efforts to bridge the literature on paradiplomacy and city diplomacy.

In this paper, we move away from the dominant framing of the contemporary internationalization of cities to analyze the domestic sources of the City of Johannesburg's foreign relations from 2011 to 2016. We argue that, although developed against the backdrop of the global cities discourse, the city's diplomatic agency during this period was equally inspired and conditioned by the interplay of a set of local and national factors. These include the huge socio-economic and spatial divide that continues to define the city, the ideological and political influence of the ruling African

National Congress (ANC), as well as the then mayor's internationalist outlook and domestic political ambitions.

The argument is developed in four parts. We begin by making the case for greater academic attention on the domestic sources of city diplomacy before discussing the key features of what we consider to be the golden age of the City of Johannesburg's diplomatic exploits. The third section of the paper analyses the domestic sources of the city's diplomacy during this period. We conclude the paper with a brief reflection on the significance of the findings for our understanding of the domestic sources of city diplomacy.

ALL DIPLOMACY IS LOCAL: TAKING THE DOMESTIC CONTEXT OF CITY DIPLOMACY SERIOUSLY

The world/global city paradigm championed by John Friedmann and Saskia Sassen has had an overbearing influence on the study and understanding of the contemporary internationalization of cities, including the diplomatic involvement of their governments. This is hardly surprising, given that the changing fortunes of cities as global actors is inextricably tied to the ascendancy of a neoliberal global capitalist economy. The shift from a state-regulated international economy to a market-led globally integrated economy that occurred in the last decades of the 20th century (see Nijman, 2016, p. 216) created conditions for the emergence of a new category of city whose fortunes are untied to the fate of the nation-state. These so-called global cities have become the strategic nodes and constitutive elements of the global

capitalist economy, serving as the locus from which the latter is commanded and controlled by global oligopolies and other transnational corporations (Sassen, 2005). It is from this perspective that early writings on global or world cities emphasized the processes of economic globalization as the single most important explanatory variable for the modern-day internationalization of cities. In this regard, Friedmann (1986) introduced the concept of 'world city' to suggest a global hierarchy of cities based on the position and function of a city in the world capitalist system. World cities, according to Friedmann, are those cities that are at the heart of transnational flows of capital, providing critical infrastructure for transnational corporations to perform key globally oriented functions. From this perspective, the most significant world cities are mostly located in the Global North. What is more, Friedmann considered the position and function of contemporary cities in the world economy as the single most important determinant of their internal socio-economic, political and spatial dynamics (Friedmann, 1986).

Sassen (2005) built upon this line of theorizing to introduce the 'global city' concept, which identified contemporary cities as the concrete sites that make it possible for transnational capital to command and control an increasingly globalized networked economy. For Sassen, what makes a global city is not so much the concentration of transnational corporation headquarters, but the fact that these cities feature the agglomeration of highly specialized and networked services sectors, which offer the capability to produce and coordinate the global economy. Global cities are

thus defined primarily by their connection to, and the functions they perform for, the global economy. This creates a separation between global cities and their national economies, while also transforming the former into a site and an engine of spatial and wealth inequality (Sassen, 2005).

The world/global city paradigm has since been criticized for not only legitimizing and giving hegemonic status to a particular model of the city, but for also downplaying the role of local dynamics in shaping the globalization of contemporary cities. For example, in her postcolonial critique of the global city concept, Jennifer Robinson (2006) argues against the hierarchical categorization of cities based on their perceived modernity and importance in the global capitalist system, and which casts Western cities as the idealized model to be emulated by other cities. Robinson introduced the concept of 'ordinary cities' to make the case for a new theorizing of the city in which the world's cities, with all their diversity and complexity, are placed within the same analytical field. This argument resonates with Anni Kangas' (2017) observation that the global cities concept has been appropriated and deployed by proponents of neoliberal capitalism to entrench a particular image of the city at the expense of alternative imaginations of the modern city and its relationship with a globalizing world. A related critique of the world/global city paradigm is offered by Serife Genis (2007), who believes that, by giving primacy to the structural economic determinants of the globalization of cities, this approach fails to acknowledge the many ways in which local and global dynamics are co-constituted. For

a more extensive critique of the global/world city literature see, among others, Peck (2015), McFarlane (2010) and Seekings (2013).

Despite this new wave of thinking about the city and its relationship to global dynamics, studies on the diplomatic involvement of city governments have predominantly adopted a system level analysis to explain the international agency and behaviour of city governments, arguably because of the legacy of the global/world city paradigm. Consider, for example, the pioneering works of scholars such as Michele Acuto (2010, 2013) and Simon Curtis (2011), which examine the conditions under which cities have re-emerged as significant diplomatic actors and the implications of this development for the practice and understanding of international relations. The tendency for research on city diplomacy to emphasize the global economic and political dimension of this phenomenon is also observed in the many edited volumes produced in recent years on the subject. Examples include *The Power of Cities in International Relations* by Simon Curtis (2016); *The Role of Cities in International Relations: The Third-generation of Multi-level Governance?* by Agnieszka Szpak and her colleagues (2022); *Cities in Global Governance. From multilateralism to multi-stakeholderism?* by Agustí Fernández de Losada and Marta Galceran-Vercher (2021); as well as *Cities and Global Governance: New Sites for International Relations* edited by Mark Amen and his colleagues (2011). What these works have in common is the focus of most of the contributions on system-level themes such as the role of cities in global governance, cities and the future of the multilateral world order,

as well as the implications of city diplomacy for international law.

Few studies of the internationalization of city governments (what we call here city diplomacy) have paid attention to the domestic determinants of the diplomatic actions of these actors. This is the case even though, as Genis (2007, p.73) contends, “the globalization of cities is produced not only economically but also politically and not only by the global actors but also with the participation and initiatives of the national/local actors”. From this perspective, the globalizing city is not exclusively a product of the forces of economic globalization, but also embodies the politics and history of a city’s urban and national contexts. This political understanding of the internationalization of the contemporary city thus invites us to appreciate the globalization of cities as both a process and a project, and to unmask the contending local, national, and transnational actors, interests and power relations that drive this project in any given city. Likewise, our understanding of the diplomatic involvement of city governments cannot be complete without an appreciation of the domestic forces and dynamics that serve as co-constituents of the international agency of these actors alongside global factors.

The more developed literature on the broader involvement of subnational governments in international relations, or what is commonly referred to as paradiplomacy, offers interesting insights into the significance of the domestic context in making sense of the internationalization of subnational governments. A review of this literature suggests that, while a set of regional and global opportunity

structures have turned paradiplomacy into a global trend, domestic circumstances are not only critical in determining whether a specific subnational government would develop an interest in international relations, but also contribute to shaping the focus, scope, intensity, and ultimate success of any international involvement. In this regard, various studies have demonstrated that a country's constitutional and institutional framework, its unique political, historical and socio-economic dynamics, as well as its foreign policy orientation all have a bearing on the international agency and behaviour of its subnational governments. The same could be said of the prevailing party-political system in the country and even the political and ideological orientation of specific subnational leaders (see, for example, Lecours, 2002, Lecours & Moreno, 2003; Crikemans, 2006; Michelmann, 2009; Schiavon, 2009; Reinsberg & Dellepiane, 2022). Through the following sections, we draw on these insights from the paradiplomacy literature to analyze the domestic sources of the diplomatic activities of the city of Johannesburg from 2011 to 2016. We start by reviewing the nature and strategic objectives of the city's international relations during this period, before turning our attention to the drivers of these activities.

THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG ON THE WORLD STAGE: 2011-2016

The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality was established in 2000 from five previously independent local authorities. It distinguishes itself as the largest of eight metropolitan municipalities in South Africa,

and doubles as the country's economic powerhouse. Johannesburg contributes about 16.5% to South Africa's GDP, employs 12% of the country's workforce, and is considered to be the financial capital of Africa, playing host to the largest stock exchange on the continent, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). It is home to the headquarters of more than 70% of South African companies. With a Gini coefficient of 0.65, Johannesburg is also recognized as one of the most unequal cities in both South Africa and Africa in general. It is essentially a city of contrast, characterized by the co-existence of pockets of affluence and a globally connected economy on the one hand, and huge swathes of poverty underpinned by a predominantly informal economy on the other (COGTA, n.d.).

Socio-economic and spatial inequalities in Johannesburg owe largely to the city's history as one of the major sites for the manifestation of apartheid policies of racial segregation and development. But they have also been reproduced in the democratic dispensation by poor governance and management, as well as the determination of a predominantly white, wealthy elite to maintain its apartheid-era privileges by undermining the capacity of the local government to meaningfully transform the structures of inequality in the city (Bradlow, 2021). Johannesburg's socio-economic challenges are also reflected in the political governance of the city. Until 2016, the city was governed by the African National Congress (ANC), the liberation movement-turned-political party that has been the dominant political force in South Africa in the post-apartheid period. Similar to its manifesto at the national and provincial levels,

the ANC has competed for and accessed political power in the city of Johannesburg on the promise of socio-economic transformation. Its major opponent has been the Democratic Alliance (DA), which is seen to be a defender of the interests of the wealthy elite. Reflecting the declining political fortunes of the ANC in South Africa, since 2016 political power in the city of Johannesburg has alternated between the ANC and the DA, or multiparty coalitions led by either of these two parties.

The metropolitan city government in Johannesburg has been active internationally since it was created in 2000. As was the case with other South African subnational governments in the immediate post-apartheid period, the city's international relations in the first years of its juristic existence were largely of an ad hoc nature and embodied both the pragmatic and idealist dispositions of contemporary city diplomacy. On one hand, the city's twinning partnerships with Birmingham in the UK, New York in the US, Windhoek in Namibia, and Addis Ababa in Ethiopia reflected the desire to leverage international partnerships to enhance the provision of municipal services and unlock opportunities for socio-economic development. On the other hand, Johannesburg's partnership with Ramallah in Palestine was an expression of the solidarity thrust that inspired early iterations of the municipal international relations movement, and which would also find resonance with the progressive internationalist doctrine of the city's governing party, the ANC. Despite the absence of a strategic thrust to its international relations in the early 2000s, the city of Johannesburg also experimented with multilateralism

during this time. It was a founding member of the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) network, under the leadership of its first executive mayor, Amos Masondo, who would later become one of the co-presidents of the network in 2007 (COJ, 2009).

As was the case in other South African municipalities and provinces, city diplomacy in Johannesburg was generally couched within the developmental discourse of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), South Africa's immediate post-apartheid socio-economic blue-print. The RDP provided a policy framework for the South African state, including its subnational governments, to attract significant international goodwill and access much-needed international development assistance for its social reconstruction and state capacity building programmes. It also allowed the international community (read Western donors) to shape the institutional character of the post-apartheid state. This mutually beneficial partnership of sorts was thus a key determinant of city diplomacy in Johannesburg. Pretoria's activist foreign policy posture during the presidency of Thabo Mbeki, including its Africa policy dubbed the Africa Agenda, also had an overbearing influence on early iterations of city diplomacy and paradiplomacy in the city of Johannesburg and the rest of South Africa (see Nganje, 2013). However, given the experimental nature of the phenomenon in the country in the first decade after apartheid, this preoccupation with the Africa Agenda in city diplomacy and paradiplomacy was largely confined to official rhetoric.

The period from 2011 to 2016 can be considered as the golden age of the city of

Johannesburg's diplomatic foray. This period coincided with the leadership of the city's former executive mayor, Parks Tau. Not only did international relations become a major preoccupation of the city's political leadership during this time, but there was equally a marked shift from the largely ad hoc approach to international engagements to a more concerted and strategic presence. In this regard, a new international relations policy framework was developed and adopted in 2012 to provide strategic direction to the city's international activities. Titled: 'An Integrated International Relations Agenda for the City of Johannesburg', the framework identified four pillars on which Johannesburg's engagement with the outside world would stand. The first priority was bilateral city-to-city partnerships, with a focus on fostering a culture of learning and exchange for mutual benefit with key and like-minded cities across the world. Second, the city of Johannesburg sought to maintain an active presence in city networks not only to enhance opportunities for learning, exchange, and joint action, but also as an expression of its desire to leverage the collective voice of cities to shape global policy discourse on issues relating to urban governance and development. As the third thrust of the city's 2012 international relations strategy, intergovernmental relations, there was an attempt to harness South Africa's multilevel system of government to enrich the city's international relations experience. Meanwhile, the last pillar, knowledge management, reflected

the recognition that an effective knowledge management system was central to localising and institutionalizing the benefits of city diplomacy in the context of today's knowledge economy (COJ, 2012).

From a geopolitical standpoint, Johannesburg's international relations strategy was to prioritise partnerships and engagements with other cities in Africa, consistent with a desire to position itself as a leader and voice of local government on the continent. Developed at the height of the BRICS moment, the city's 2012 international relations policy framework also intended to capitalize on the new South-South cooperation wave that came with the formation of this bloc to forge strategic and mutually beneficial partnerships with key cities in other BRICS countries. The city, nonetheless, intended to keep and strengthen its bilateral ties with traditional partners in the Global North. In structuring its international relations this way, the city of Johannesburg was in effect aligning its diplomatic activities with the international orientation of the national government, which, under the presidency of Jacob Zuma, had made economic ties with other BRICS countries the linchpin of the country's foreign policy. Even so, the African Renaissance rhetoric and aspiration of the Thabo Mbeki era continued to loom large in the diplomatic imagination of the leadership of the city (COJ, 2012).¹

By the time the third administration left office following the local government elections

¹ Part of the information in this paragraph was from personal communication with Parks Tau, former mayor of Johannesburg, February 2016.

of August 2016, the city of Johannesburg had developed one of the most vibrant diplomatic presence by a South African local government. Johannesburg's international relations during this period displayed three key features. The first was a fairly weak record of sustained, active, and productive city-to-city partnerships as contemplated in the city's 2012 international relations strategy. While the city was able to leverage its partnerships with cities such as New York and Sao Paulo to enhance its public safety, drawing on the experience and expertise of its American counterparts, it generally struggled to sustain these engagements. The same could be said of bilateral partnerships with African cities, despite prioritising the continent in its international relations. While the city remained an inspiration and role model for its African peers on various aspects of urban governance and management, its engagements with cities such as Addis Ababa and Windhoek were generally of an ad hoc nature, even in instances where a strategic partnership agreement existed, as was the case with Addis Ababa. The absence of a concerted and sustained bilateral engagement by the city of Johannesburg during this time has been attributed mainly to the constraints associated with limited human and financial resources, but also to the instability and disruption that comes with frequent changes in the political leadership of the city and its foreign counterparts (COJ, 2016).²

The second major characteristic of the city of Johannesburg's foreign relations during the period under review was an evident tendency to forge so-called solidarity partnerships, sometimes even outside of what was envisaged in the city's international relations policy framework. Johannesburg's partnerships with three cities in the Global South stand out in this regard: Ramallah in Palestine, St Petersburg in Russia, and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. As suggested by the choice of these cities, such partnerships were premised mainly on the understanding of a shared history of their respective country's struggle against colonialism and imperialism. They were thus often given concrete form through symbolic gestures such as when, in April 2016, the city of Ramallah and the city of Johannesburg collaborated to erect a bronze statue of the late South African freedom fighter and statesman, Nelson Mandela, in the Palestinian city. As noted by the then mayor of Ramallah, the initiative was intended to convey a message of freedom and equality to the world, in the context of the continued struggle of the Palestinians against what they consider to be an illegal and immoral occupation by the state of Israel (Anadolu Agency, 2016). Attempts to broaden such partnerships away from their predominantly symbolic focus by bringing in a technical cooperation dimension proved difficult against the backdrop of limited resources on both sides of the partnership.³

² Part of the information here is derived from personal communication with officials in the international relations unit in city of Johannesburg between 2016 and 2022.

³ Personal communication with a former official in the international relations unit in the city of Johannesburg, December 2022.

The third, and perhaps the most defining feature of the city of Johannesburg's international relations during the mayorship of Parks Tau, was the priority accorded to multilateral engagements, a corollary of which was an unprecedented and highly visible mayoral diplomacy. As a commissioned review concluded in 2016, despite the four-pillar approach stipulated in the city's 2012 international relations strategy, it was Johannesburg's efforts towards repositioning itself in, and leveraging the influence of, global city networks that would animate the city's international relations during this half a decade (COJ, 2016, p. 47). With the mayor firmly at the helm, supported by members of the mayoral committee (MMC) and a small team of international relations experts, Johannesburg's multilateral ambitions would translate into an active presence in major high-profile global city works and their subsidiaries. These included the UCLG and its metropolitan arm, Metropolis, the Local Government for Sustainability (ICLEI), the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, the Global Network of Safer Cities (GNSC), the Global Fund for Cities Development (FMDV), as well as the Network of Local Women Elected in Africa (REFELA). The intent of this multilateral involvement, as outlined in the city's 2012 international relations strategy, was to raise the global profile of the city as a leader on the African continent, while also using the influence of city networks to shape key global policies and actions on issues of interest such as the sustainable development goals (SDGs), climate change, financing for development, as well as migration and social cohesion (COJ, 2016).

To this end, the city identified participation in the decision-making structures of these networks and the hosting of network events as key strategies for achieving its objectives. Thus, at various points between 2012 and 2016, the mayor of Johannesburg served as one of six co-presidents of Metropolis, while the MMCs for Finance, and that for Health and Social Development held the positions of co-president of the FMDV and REFELA respectively. It was also during this time that, as mayor of Johannesburg, Parks Tau would launch a spirited campaign for the presidency of the UCLG. Although Tau would lose the mayor's office following the local government elections held in 2016, he was able to take the reins of the UCLG in his capacity as president of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), after emerging victorious against the mayor of the Russian city of Kazan in the 2016 election for UCLG presidency.

During the administration of Parks Tau, Johannesburg hosted at least four high-profile international events associated with its membership of major global city networks. It hosted the annual meeting and board of directors' meeting of Metropolis in 2013, during which it introduced and advocated for the concept of a 'caring city' to be mainstreamed in the work of the network. This was followed by the hosting of the fifth biennial C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group Mayors Summit from 4 to 6 February 2014. In partnership with ICLEI, Johannesburg also hosted Africa's first Eco-Mobility World Festival in October 2015, a month-long event that is designed to promote the reduction of greenhouse emissions through eco-friendly modes of urban transportation.

Meanwhile, from 29 November to 3 December 2015, the city hosted the seventh edition of the Africities Summit, the flagship event of UCLG-Africa. It was during this event that the then mayor of Johannesburg was nominated as Africa's candidate for the Presidency of the UCLG. We will now turn our attention to analysing the domestic drivers of the city's diplomatic activities during this period.

DOMESTIC SOURCES OF JOHANNESBURG'S DIPLOMACY 2011-2016

As a major regional economic hub, Johannesburg, no doubt, is a globalizing city that plays a major role in connecting key economic centres in Africa and the rest of the world. This means that the internationalization of the city has partly been motivated and shaped by its real and perceived position in the global political economy and the expectations that come with this positioning. It was such perceptions of influence, for example, that motivated ICLEI to relocate its Africa Secretariat from Harare (where it was founded in 1995) to Johannesburg in 2001, with the expectation that the city's leadership would invigorate the network's sustainability agenda on the continent.⁴ Even so, explaining the city's foreign relations would not be complete without giving due regard to a host of domestic socio-economic, political and historical factors, which have had a major influence in determining why and how the city developed and exercised its international

agency during the period under review. Chief among these is the legacy of unequal spatial and socio-economic development bequeathed to it by the apartheid system and which has been reinforced in the post-apartheid dispensation by the embrace of neoliberal economic policies. As noted earlier, this has given rise to a city that, on the one hand, sees itself and is seen as a major node of the global political economy and, on the other hand, epitomises urban poverty and underdevelopment. This complex identity means that, from the perspective of what Janne Nijman (2016) calls the 'global public city', Johannesburg has been a reluctant, or at best, cautious participant in a global political economic system that has historically reproduced poverty and inequality in its urban space. This understanding of Johannesburg's place in the world would find expression in an activist diplomatic posture that would seek to transform the dominant discourses, institutions, and processes of the global political economy as much as it sought to directly extract resources from the very system for the city's socio-economic development.⁵

Insight into South Africa's post-apartheid foreign policy orientation and posture is useful in appreciating the role of apartheid's socio-economic and spatial legacy in conditioning the city of Johannesburg's foreign relations. As a reformed international actor, post-apartheid South Africa's foreign policy has been predicated not only on upholding the tenets of the liberal international order, but also on a desire

⁴ Personal communication with a former official of ICLEI, July 2019.

⁵ Personal communication with Parks Tau, former mayor of Johannesburg, February 2016.

to champion, on behalf of and in partnership with other previously colonised societies, the transformation of the institutions and processes that give expression to this order. This is because, for the ANC, which was at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid and has been the governing party in South Africa since 1994, apartheid was a local manifestation of a hierarchal and unjust global political economic system that has outlived political change in South Africa. In the reasoning of South Africa's ruling party, the country's socio-economic challenges cannot be successfully addressed outside the framework of transformed global economic structures and relations. This mandate has since 1994 become the pivot on which the foreign policies and diplomatic activities of successive ANC governments at the national, provincial and local levels have been anchored.

This 'developmental foreign policy' (Landsberg, 2005) would provide a significant backdrop against which the city of Johannesburg and all other subnational governments governed by the ANC would attempt to define their foreign activities. As a fervent ANC activist and an internationalist in his own right, Parks Tau became a torchbearer of this mandate when he assumed the mayoral office in Johannesburg in 2011. A major driver of the city's diplomatic activities during this time was, therefore, the need to internationalize the ANC's socio-economic justice agenda. This partly explains the strong preference for

multilateralism in Johannesburg's international relations during Tau's administration, as well as the determination to have the city represented in the decision-making structures of major city networks. Once at the centre of these networks, there was equally an attempt to either transform the thinking, agenda, and power relations within the networks or use the networks to shape global policy debates on questions of urban governance and development, from a Global South perspective. For instance, as part of the presidency of Metropolis from 2014 to 2016, Johannesburg successfully advocated for the network to adopt the Caring Cities Initiative as a framework for promoting socio-economic redress, inclusiveness and diversity in urban spaces across the world. The efforts of Parks Tau to reorganize the decision-making structures and processes of the UCLG, after taking over the presidency of the network in 2016, can also be interpreted as an expression of the ANC's progressive internationalism doctrine, which he championed both as the mayor of Johannesburg and the president of the South African Local Government Association. The reform agenda was arguably an attempt to curtail the power of the UCLG Secretariat, which was seen to be having an undue influence on the policy agenda and direction of the network, at the expense of the democratic participation and ownership of network policies by its members (see Tau, 2014; COJ, 2016; UCLG, 2017).⁶

⁶ Some of the insight in this paragraph comes from personal communication with an official in the international relations unit in the city of Johannesburg, June 2017.

The influence of the ruling ANC on the city of Johannesburg's international relations in the period under study was also evident in the priority the political leadership of the city accorded to so-called solidarity partnerships with cities such as Ramallah, St Petersburg, and Ho Chi Minh. Rooted in the historical ties between the ANC and the ruling parties and elite in the relevant countries, these partnerships have invariably been signed when the ANC has been in power in Johannesburg. It is also during the leadership of the ANC that any significant and high-profile engagements have taken place between Johannesburg and these cities. The partnership between Johannesburg and Ramallah, for example, stems from the ANC's historical support for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the broader Palestinian cause. When Johannesburg was firmly under the control of the ANC until 2016, it was one of the most active relationships maintained by the city. This was the case even though there were concerns among city officials about the partnership being characterised by a one-way flow of resources. Since the ANC lost its majority in the city council after 2016, this and other solidarity-based partnerships have largely remained dormant.⁷

Apart from the socio-economic legacy of South Africa's political history and the ideological influences of the ANC, another major driver and determinant of the city of Johannesburg's international relations from 2011 to 2016 was arguably the diplomatic interests and goals, as well as the domestic political

ambitions of the mayor at the time. Existing research is unequivocal that the contemporary internationalism of cities is built around the image and activism of the city mayor. Much as the office of the state president or prime minister has traditionally been vested with the powers to conduct foreign policy on behalf of the state, mayors, as chief executives of cities, have emerged as the primary authority and face of city diplomacy. Not only do mayors oversee the articulation of the international relations priorities of their respective cities, but they also generally set the tone and style of a city's foreign engagements (see Barber, 2013; Salomon, 2011; Powell, 2014). The underlying motivation behind this mayoral diplomacy is perhaps best captured by Michele Acuto (2013, p. 485) when he argues that, "city leaders have long sought to expand their influence beyond the limited confines of their constituencies". In a recent analysis of the diplomacy of the mayor of the Moldovan capital city of Chişinău, Cristian Cantir (2021) reinforces this claim with the conclusion that city mayors have their own foreign policy preference born out of their political beliefs, and they often seek to actualise these using the diplomatic machinery of their cities.

Parks Tau was born and grew up in the township of Soweto, which was arguably the epicentre of the indigenous anti-apartheid struggle. Not surprisingly, he describes himself as an activist (see Cele, 2016), having spent a good part of his teenage and early adult years at the forefront of the struggle against apart-

⁷ Personal communication with former official in the city of Johannesburg, December 2022.

heid, before joining local government on the ticket of the ANC. Tau saw his participation in local government, including his ascension to the mayoral office of Johannesburg as a 'natural evolution' of his involvement in the anti-apartheid movement. It is this experience more than anything else that has shaped his political and ideological orientation both on domestic and global affairs (Cele, 2016).⁸

Thus, apart from championing the cause of his political party, Tau was an internationalist in his own right. His global vision was anchored in three major pillars: an improved voice and role for local government in global governance; socio-economic justice for the Global South; and the liberation of the people in occupied territories of Palestine and Western Sahara. The activist diplomatic posture of the City of Johannesburg during this period can also be explained as an outshoot of this vision. The mayor sought to use Johannesburg's leadership position in influential city networks such as the UCLG and he C40 to access major global governance platforms such as the UN to promote his vision of the centrality of local government in the search for solutions to contemporary global challenges such as climate change and poverty.⁹ A notable achievement in this regard was when Johannesburg was awarded a grant of US\$8.5 million by the UN-backed Global Environment Facility (GEF) in 2016 to support the city's Corridors of Freedom project. This was

interpreted by the mayor as an outcome of his advocacy, using forums such as the UCLG, for local government to be given a greater stake in international development financing (COJ, 2016). Consistent with Mayor Tau's preoccupation with the persistent socio-economic gap between the Global North and the Global South, Johannesburg also sought to position itself in major global forums under this leadership, as a representative and voice for the socio-economic development agenda of the South and the African continent in particular. Arguably, it was this concern that partly drove the former mayor's reform agenda of the structures and processes of the UCLG when he was elected president of the network in 2016. Putting the formulation of the network's policy agenda in the hands of its members could be interpreted as an attempt to guarantee greater representation of the interests and priorities of cities and regions in the Global South in the activities of this network.

A case can equally be made that the domestic political ambitions of the then incumbent mayor and the electoral interests of his political party were major drivers of the city of Johannesburg's diplomatic engagements during the third administration. Before becoming mayor of South Africa's richest city, Tau had served in the mayoral committee of his predecessor from 2000 to 2007. As part of the leadership of the party in the Johannesburg region, he was seen as a rising star destined to become

⁸ Some of the insight in this section was obtained from personal communication with Parks Tau, former mayor of Johannesburg, February 2016.

⁹ Personal communication with Parks Tau, former mayor of Johannesburg, February 2016.

the chairperson of the ANC in Gauteng and thus the premier of the province. His high-profile city diplomacy was in some respects an image-building exercise that sought to position him in the party as a leader with global appeal. It is no surprise that when Tau was contesting the position of deputy chairperson of the ANC in Gauteng in 2018, his supporters would liken him to former French presidents who commenced their political careers as mayors of global cities such as Paris (Author, 2018). Although Tau would lose out on the provincial deputy chairperson position, his subsequent appointment as deputy minister in charge of cooperative governance and traditional affairs in the national government may have benefited from his diplomatic exploits that projected him as a global authority on matters of local government and decentralization.

Events leading up to and after South Africa's 2016 local government elections suggest that the ANC itself had become heavily invested in, and its electoral interests had become a key driver of, Johannesburg's city diplomacy under Parks Tau. In promoting Tau as its mayoral candidate for the August 2016 polls, the ANC sought to leverage the mayor's international reputation, with a campaign poster on Twitter describing him as not just the incumbent mayor of Johannesburg, but also as co-president of the Metropolis network. When the ANC lost control of the Johannesburg City Council, Parks Tau faced the possibility of disqualification from running for president of

the UCLG, for which he had launched a fierce campaign in his capacity as mayor of Johannesburg. However, the party used its dominance in the local government space in South Africa to secure him the position of president of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA). This provided the now ex-mayor the required institutional platform to continue his campaign to lead the UCLG, at a time when the new political leadership in the city of Johannesburg had opted to discontinue the activist and high-profile diplomacy of the city. Herman Mashaba, the mayor of Johannesburg from 2016 to 2019, saw his predecessor's active international involvement as an expression of what he and his party, the Democratic Alliance, considered to be the ANC's wasteful and corrupt governance style in the City of Johannesburg.¹⁰

CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON THE DOMESTIC DRIVERS OF CITY DIPLOMACY

This article examined the domestic determinants of city diplomacy using the case study of the city of Johannesburg during the third administration from 2011-2016. Drawing mainly on official documents and interviews with officials with intimate knowledge of the city's diplomatic pursuits during this time, we found that, consistent with the dominant global cities literature, the globalization of the city of Johannesburg as a spatial economic unit, is conditioned to a large extent by the

¹⁰ Personal communication with former official in the international relations unit in the city of Johannesburg, December 2022.

role of the city as a regional economic node that connects large parts of Africa to the key centres of the global economy. In other words, from this perspective, Johannesburg's internationalization like that of other global cities such as New York, London, and Sao Paulo could be interpreted largely as a response to the economic exigencies of a global economy in which cities and not states were increasingly becoming the main anchors. However, as a city government, Johannesburg's global actorness during the period under review was determined by a host of other factors that were not always of an economic nature. Among these was South Africa's history of apartheid, which bequeathed to the city and the rest of the country a legacy of socio-economic and spatial inequality. Together with the ideological and political influence of the ANC, which governed the city at the time, the apartheid legacy of uneven development and wealth distribution inspired an activist diplomatic posture on the part of the city leadership dedicated to transforming global structures and processes that were seen to be reproducing this legacy. In a sense, Johannesburg's diplomatic approach during this period could be interpreted as an attempt by the then mayor and his ANC party to use the city's international relations to add a local dimension to a key pillar of post-apartheid South Africa's strategic foreign policy orientation – that of bringing change to the structures and power relations of the global political economy that have historically worked against the socio-economic development of previously colonized peoples. Since coming to power, the ANC has justified this foreign policy orientation as a logical extension

of its historical struggle against the system of apartheid in South Africa.

Few cities in South Africa under the leadership of the ANC, even those that occupy the same metropolitan status as Johannesburg, have displayed such conscious activism in their foreign relations. Even in the case of Johannesburg, the period under review is unique in the sense that previous and subsequent ANC-led municipal administrations have failed to demonstrate a similar level of diplomatic engagement. Our research suggests that this variation within and between cities can be explained mainly by the critical role of the mayor at the time. Put differently, in addition to a city's socio-economic and political history, as well as the ideological orientation and diplomatic preferences of its governing party, the global vision and domestic political interests of the incumbent mayor are key determinants of city diplomacy at any given time. In the specific case of Johannesburg, while South Africa's history of apartheid and the ANC's doctrine of progressive internationalism served as important opportunity structures, it was mainly Mayor Tau's vision of a just global order in which local governments local were a key stakeholder, as well as his ambitions to scale the heights of political power in South Africa that would give Johannesburg's city diplomacy its activist and high-profile flavour.

These findings reinforce arguments for a more nuanced analysis of contemporary city diplomacy as an outcome of the interplay between global and local forces and dynamics, and not just the exigencies of economic globalization. They also add to the emerging body of literature arguing that city diplomacy is for

all intent and purposes mayoral diplomacy. In other words, unlike at the national level where the head of the executive sometimes compete with other members of the executive for foreign policy influence, city diplomacy is personalized around the motivations, beliefs, preferences, and leadership style of the incumbent mayor. As argued elsewhere, this comes with the advantage of lending greater political support to a city's diplomatic initiatives, but also has a major drawback in terms of sustainability, given that the preeminent role of mayors tends to undermine the effective institutionalization of city diplomacy. In the context of the fluidity of urban politics in multiparty systems, the understanding of city diplomacy as mayoral also brings into sharp relief the fragile and ephemeral nature of the diplomatic agency of cities.

Finally, our analysis of the domestic sources of the city of Johannesburg's international relations underscores the paradoxical relationship that exists between cities in the Global South and the processes of economic globalization that have given rise to the global city phenomenon. Cities in developing and emerging economies, similar to their counterparts in the more developed economies, owe their insertion into the global city order to the processes of late capitalism that have given rise to a highly deregulated and financialized world economy. While encouraging the development of modern and highly specialized economic activities in Global South cities, these same global capitalist processes continue to breed or reinforce urban poverty, inequality and underdevelopment in these cities. Thus, while striving for global economic competitiveness

as dictated by their global or globalizing city status, the governments of these cities, particularly those in countries of an emerging or middle power status, have to simultaneously use their diplomacy to seek to alter the underlying material and ideational structures of economic globalization, in deference to local dynamics and pressures.

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