LOCALISING THE SPIRIT OF BANDUNG? CITY DIPLOMACY AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH'S STRUGGLE FOR A JUST AND EQUITABLE WORLD ORDER

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Introduction

Research and debates on the legacy of the 1955 Bandung Conference have largely focused on the role and agency of states in the Global South and their formations such as the Group of 77 and the Non-Aligned Movement. A major blind spot in this literature and discourse has been the role and agency of cities in the Global South in localising the Bandung spirit through their internationalisation efforts. This is the case even though cities, including those in the Global South, have in recent decades re-emerged as significant actors in global affairs, using their bilateral and multilateral engagements to not only promote their economic interests, but increasingly to also influence global debates and policies on questions of migration and climate change, as well as global poverty and inequality. In this chapter, I take up this line of inquiry by examining the extent to which the spirit of Bandung has been kept alive in the internationalisation efforts of city governments in the Global South. Drawing on both documentary sources and interviews with city officials, I identify and analyse key moments where the struggle for a just and equitable world order has inspired, or shaped, the diplomatic involvement of Johannesburg in South Africa and Porto Alegre in Brazil. I show how these cities have at some point in their recent history used their international engagements to champion the social justice agenda embodied in the Bandung spirit. However, I argue that city diplomacy as a mechanism for localising the Global South's struggle for justice and equality faces significant challenges, which are reflected in the often ephemeral nature of this form of global activism and solidarity. The chapter reflects on some of these constraints, chief among which is the disciplining power of the dominant neoliberal paradigm, which, as seen in the pervasive influence and world-making capacity of the global city concept (Kangas, 2017), limits the imagination and pursuit of alternative forms of urbanisation and internationalisation. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections. Following this introduction, I review the legacy of the Bandung Conference to underscore its transformative undercurrents. This is followed by a discussion of city diplomacy as a tool for localising the Bandung spirit, drawing on the cases of the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre and the South African city

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of Johannesburg. In the last section of the chapter, I reflect on the implications of these two models of transformative city diplomacy from the South and the constraints they face.

The legacy of Bandung 70 years later

The Bandung Conference has been described as the manifestation of a moment of awakening of the people in what is currently referred to as the Global South, as they grappled with the legacies of Western imperialism (Eslava et al., 2017). The Bandung Conference and its final communique thus captured and crystallised the spirit of the raging struggle by previously colonised people for recognition, self-determination, socioeconomic justice, and peaceful coexistence in a world structured for and by Western interests. Notwithstanding its order-affirming undercurrents, the Bandung Conference bore the hallmark of an anti-imperial and antiracist movement, reflecting the colonised world's repudiation of a Eurocentric world order in which people of other races and civilisations were considered subordinate to European and Western societies (Phillips, 2016).

It also agitated for an alternative world order, while giving birth to a Third World/Southern solidarity movement. The former speaks to the more radical undercurrents of the gathering that advocated for the transformation of the international order, to rid it of its colonial and imperial vestiges. For scholars such as Umar (2019), while the bold vision of an alternative post-hegemonic and post-capitalist international order would be dimmed by subsequent domestic political challenges in postcolonial states and the dynamics of global politics, the conference was nonetheless transformative to the extent that it entrenched the global politics of decolonisation as a defining and enduring feature of the modern world order.

But perhaps the most important legacy of the Bandung Conference, stemming from what Phillips (2016) calls the order-building dimension of the conference, is that it advocated for and catalysed a South-South solidarity movement as an alternative to the prevailing North-South paternalistic relations and a strategy for constructing a more progressive world order. In the years following Bandung, the call for political solidarity gave rise to various formations and movements, including the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Group of 77 developing countries at the UN, as well as the agitations for a new international economic order (NIEO), which would underscore the potential for the Global South, working together, to challenge Western-dominated patterns of development and transform the international order.

The triumphalism of the neoliberal global capitalist system after the 1970s, coupled with the contradictions inherent in what Weber and Berger (2009) call the politics of emancipatory nationalism, would greatly contribute to undermining the nascent agency of this Third World project. As Weber and Winanti (2016) argue, the Bandung spirit and its associated politics no longer resonate as much with the elites as they did in the 1950s and 1960s. The solidarism of the Bandung spirit, according to the authors, resonates most clearly today at the societal level, as evident in the struggles for

justice, equality and development by transnational indigenous coalitions, peasant movements, the Occupy movement, and the politics around the World Social Forum, directed mainly against the reigning neoliberal orthodoxy. As demonstrated in the remainder of the chapter, it is a cause that has also featured prominently in the internationalism of some city governments in the Global South, in the context of the re-emergence of cities as significant actors in global politics.

City diplomacy and the localisation of the Bandung cause

The contemporary diplomatic involvement of cities is not without precedent. Not only did city diplomacy predate the diplomacy of sovereign nation-states (see, for example, Nijman, 2016), but even in the height of interstate diplomacy, cities and other municipal governments have at various points in history projected themselves onto the world stage, notably as advocates for a more progressive and humane internationalism. Consider, for example, the municipal foreign policy movement in the US in the 1980s as documented by Benjamin Leffel (2018), or the nuclear-weapon-free world solidarity campaign of the Mayors for Peace. There is no denying, however, that the current manifestation of city diplomacy is quantitatively and qualitatively different from these previous iterations of the practice. This is mainly because it is embedded in global structural transformations that have recast the character and fortunes of cities in the global political economy.

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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) 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). As Anni Kangas (2017) has argued, the very concept of global city has become a world-making tool, with the power to fashion the world in a form that privileges the city at the expense of the sovereign state. The implications of these global processes for governance and development in so-called or aspiring global cities in the South is significant. In addition to exacerbating urban poverty and inequality, the urbanisation of neoliberal global capitalism has also contributed to disenfranchising urban residents (Purcell, 2002).

In the context of the interplay between global economic pressures and lingering socioeconomic contradictions and their underlying politics at the domestic level, it is not surprising that the globalisation of cities in the Global South is in itself a contradiction of sorts. On the one hand, city governments in the South have sought to capitalise on the global cities phenomenon to enhance the competitiveness and grow the economies of their localities, while also leveraging the power of networking to access resources for socioeconomic development. This is particularly significant in a context where administrative decentralisation and the relative domestic autonomy of cities over urban governance and development are often not accompanied by substantial transfer of resources and fiscal authority. On the other hand, recognising the global and historical conditions that

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continue to drive urban poverty, inequality, insecurity and environmental degradation, some city mayors and their governments have found inspiration in the order-challenging, order-transforming and order-building currents of the Bandung spirit to develop city diplomacy agendas that attempt to subvert or circumvent the very system that is credited, at least partially, for the contemporary globalisation of cities (see Balbim, 2024; Nganje and Tladi, 2023; Nganje, 2024).

Porto Alegre as 21st century Bandung

Writing on the experience of cities in Brazil in city diplomacy and city networks, Trevas (2015), quoted in Balbim (2024, p. 52), argues that "Brazilian cities are the consumers of the world, not the producers", reinforcing a general perception that cities in the South engage in city diplomacy and city networks mainly as agenda-takers and hardly as agenda-setters. But it is also in Brazil that we have witnessed some of the most activist forms of city diplomacy from the South, which are aligned with the anti-hegemonic and alternative world order agenda of the Bandung legacy. As many scholars have documented (see, for example, Balbim, 2018; Balbim, 2024; Salomon, 2011; Gandin, 2011), the activist internationalism of Brazilian cities, notably Porto Alegre, can be attributed first and foremost to the emergence of the left-wing Workers Party (PT) as a major force in Brazilian politics in the 1980s. Owing to the nature of politics in Latin American countries and their geopolitical alignment at the time, these countries were not invited to the 1955 Bandung Conference. Yet as Bissio (2015) notes, key states in Latin America have since the 1990s aligned themselves with the Bandung spirit, with the formation and rise of the PT in Brazil an indication of this trend.

As a critical component of its domestic social democratic agenda, the international activism and solidarity of the PT is founded on an anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal globalisation discourse, making the party a contemporary torchbearer of the Bandung legacy. It is no wonder that Porto Alegre, the first Brazilian city to be governed by the PT, has been nicknamed "Today's Bandung" (Hardt, 2022). Under the leadership of the PT, Porto Alegre hosted four editions (2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005) of the World Social Forum (WSF), using the gatherings to not only forge global consensus around the possibilities of an alternative world that is not defined by the dictates of neoliberal capitalism, but to also showcase and propagate the city's participatory budgeting process and its model of deliberative democracy more broadly. As Gandin (2011) argues, Porto Alegre attained the status of a global city not because of its economic and financial importance in the world, as is the case with conventional global cities, but rather because it experimented with an alternative, counter-hegemonic vision of the world. Throughout the period when the PT was in power in Porto Alegre (1989–2004), the city leveraged its progressive urban policies, such as participatory budgeting and the citizen school project (see Gandin, 2011), to conduct one of the most proactive city diplomacies in Brazil, which was not merely in opposition to the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation but also sought to project and diffuse locally generated and transformative alternatives. In addition to its hosting of the WSF, Porto Alegre also championed the creation of the Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion and Participatory Democracy (FAL), a platform for progressive local governments across the world to

discuss and exchange experiences in the fight against global problems linked to social exclusion, including poverty, human rights violations and social justice (Salomon, 2011, p. 53). The FAL network has since been institutionalised as the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, one of the four Committees of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), dedicated to the global promotion of social inclusion, participatory democracy and human rights.

As part of its counter-hegemonic internationalisation outside the framework of the WSF and FAL, Porto Alegre was also able to capitalise on its brand as a "global solidarity city" or "democracy network city" (Salomon, 2011, p. 58) to pursue an active decentralised South-South cooperation programme centred mainly around the diffusion of its participatory budgeting model. According to Goldfrank (2012, p. 2), these efforts were embedded in a broader campaign by the PT, which encouraged its mayors to widely disseminate the participatory budgeting model, based on the slogan "*Orçamento Participativo – Bom para todo mundo*" (Participatory Budgeting – Good for Everyone, or Good for the Whole World). For example, it was predominantly thanks to the influence, mentorship and technical support from Porto Alegre that Maputo initially adopted and experimented with the idea of participatory budgeting in its radical democratic conception (Nylen, 2014). Brazil and Mozambique, it should be recalled, share a colonial legacy in the form of having Portuguese as the official language. According to Carolini (2015), besides the interest demonstrated by Maputo officials in the Brazilian model of participatory budgeting, there was also a push from local government authorities in Porto Alegre. In 2006, the mayoral office in Porto Alegre invited a group of technical experts from Maputo to take part in an international workshop on municipal administration and to learn more about participatory budgeting. The then mayor of Maputo from 2003 to 2008, Eneas Comiche, is also believed to have visited Brazil to familiarise himself with the participatory budgeting process. This is in addition to Maputo sending two municipal employees as interns in Porto Alegre. It was thanks to the exposure and support from Porto Alegre that the city of Maputo would initially adopt a framework for participatory budgeting that approximated what Nylen (2014) has described as a "maximalist" Brazilian-style model, which has its normative roots in the empowering and emancipatory discourse of the PT's radical conception of democracy (see also Nganje, 2016).

Johannesburg and the localisation of the Bandung spirit

The city of Johannesburg in South Africa presents another interesting case in which city diplomacy has been deployed to localise and pursue the legacy of the Bandung Conference. Unlike the case of Porto Alegre, Johannesburg's status as an aspiring global city is not unconnected to its role in global capital flows. Johannesburg is South Africa's biggest city and the country's economic and financial hub. With the most diversified and globally connected economy in South Africa, Johannesburg is a quintessential globalising African city. It is home to major global firms offering financial, legal, accounting, advertising, telecommunication and media services. As the hub of central and southern Africa's linkages to the global economy, Johannesburg is classified alongside cities such as Seoul, Buenos Aires, Istanbul, Melbourne and Atlanta as an Alpha-minus

world city by the Globalization and World Cities Research Network (GaWC, 2024).[1] Alpha-minus level world cities are considered important links between major economic regions and the world economy, with the latter coordinated by first league world cities such as London, New York and Hong Kong. Not surprisingly, Johannesburg describes itself as "a World Class African City of the Future" (Nganje, 2024, p. 5).

But Johannesburg is also a symbol of the entrenched socioeconomic and spatial inequalities that are the enduring legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Thus, as an aspiring global city, Johannesburg is characterised by the coexistence of a globally integrated advanced producer services sector with an impoverished informal economy. It is in this context that the internationalisation of successive city administrations has featured both order-affirming, as well as order-challenging/building undercurrents. The period between 2011 and 2016, coinciding with the mayorship of Parks Tau, marked the zenith of Johannesburg's activist city diplomacy that resonates with the Bandung spirit. Besides the then mayor's internationalist orientation and domestic political ambitions, Johannesburg's attempts to localise the Bandung spirit were significantly inspired by the progressive internationalism doctrine of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's foremost liberation movement turned political party, which governed both at the national level and in the city of Johannesburg at the time. The ANC had sent a delegation to the Bandung Conference in 1955, and upon assuming the reins of power in South Africa in 1994, it would ideologically anchor the country's foreign policy in the legacy of the conference, notably the agitations for greater development space and the need for cooperation and solidarity among the countries in the South. After all, for the ANC, the difficulty in resolving South Africa's national question, defined in terms of the continued economic dispossession of the country's majority black population by the enduring legacy of apartheid policies, lies partly in the inequalities and injustices of the Western-led international order.

It is in this context that, despite Johannesburg's aspirations for global economic competitiveness, the city's internationalisation has always featured an uncharacteristic emphasis on solidarity partnerships with cities such as Ramallah in Palestine, St Petersburg in Russia and Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. The partnership with Ramallah is of particular significance as it underscores the ANC and South Africa's continued support for the Palestinian cause, considered to be a symbol of the Global South's enduring struggle for recognition and self-determination. While the ANC has been in power in Johannesburg, the city has expended significant material and political resources to demonstrate its solidarity with Palestine, despite opposition in some quarters. In 2016, it donated a bronze statue of the late South African freedom fighter and statesman, Nelson Mandela, which was erected 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). As part of its commitment to diplomatic relations with the people of Palestine, the city council recently adopted a resolution to rename a popular street in the key business district of Sandton after the Palestinian freedom fighter, Leila Khaled. Given the location of the US Consulate on this street and the designation of Khaled as a terrorist by the US government, this decision

1. The GaWC classifies cities according to their level of global connectivity through four advanced producer services: accountancy, advertising, banking/finance and law. It uses the categories: Alpha, Beta, Gama and Sufficiency.

has stirred significant domestic and geopolitical controversy, at a time when US-South African relations are at an all-time low (Mkentane, 2024).

Johannesburg's role as a torchbearer of the Bandung spirit was most evident from 2011 to 2016, when Parks Tau was mayor of the city. As an anti-apartheid activist and a key figure of the ANC in his native Soweto, Tau came to office embodying the ANC's liberation ethos, including its belief in progressive internationalism as a doctrine against global injustices. Thus, throughout his time as mayor of Johannesburg, and president of UCLG (2016–2019), Tau championed a campaign that, on the one hand, sought to urbanise global development discourse and policy and, on the other, embodied an attempt to localise South Africa and the Global South's struggle against the legacy of Western domination. Having identified multilateralism and networking as key sites for global influence, Johannesburg under Parks Tau would use the convening and advocacy power afforded by these avenues to introduce and canvass for the adoption of new ideas and norms on urban policy and development, which draw on alternative worldviews to the neoliberal order, and embody values such as solidarity, a sense of community and the material construction of rights. For example, Johannesburg introduced and advocated for the concept of "caring cities" to be mainstreamed within the work of the city network Metropolis. The concept is rooted in the humanistic values of the African philosophy of Ubuntu and speaks to the need to transform urban policy and governance into tools for promoting socioeconomic redress, inclusiveness, respect for diversity and sustainability (see Nganje, 2024). It is also through this prism that Parks Tau's efforts to reorganise the decision-making structures and processes of UCLG during his tenure as president of the network could best be understood. I have argued elsewhere that this reform agenda, which included introducing UCLG Policy Councils and an Ubuntu Advisory Panel designed to enhance policy ownership and political participation among the network's membership, was consistent with various bilateral and multilateral attempts by countries in the Global South to transform Western-dominated institutions of global governance. In this case, the goal was 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, especially those from developing counties with limited representation in the network's secretariat (Nganje, 2024).

Despite their historical marginalisation, cities in the Global South have been sites of agency that has sought to demonstrate the potential for an alternative world order based on progressive principles.

Concluding reflections: The limits of city diplomacy as a tool for global social justice

This chapter is premised on the observation that, despite their historical marginalisation in the global economy, cities in the Global South have not always been bystanders in the making of world order. They have at one point or another been sites of agency that has sought to challenge, transform or at the very least demonstrate the potential for an alternative world order, based on progressive principles and values such as those that inspired the Bandung Conference. The significance of Bandung in this context thus lies in its embodiment of the liberatory aspirations of previously colonised societies that continue to suffer from the legacy of Western imperialism and domination. The cases of Porto Alegre and Johannesburg discussed here are by no means unique but

speak to the pressures and dilemmas that city governments in the South are confronted with, as they seek to navigate a globalising economy that is also increasingly urbanised, but which remains steeped in colonial and imperial legacies. Given their unique context, it is inevitable that city diplomacy in the Global South would in one form or another, subtly or overtly, embody the South's historical struggle for recognition and self-determination, despite the fact that the present-day internationalisation of cities is to a large extent enabled by neoliberal globalisation, which, as Samir Amin (2017) argued, is the current organising principle challenging the emancipation of postcolonial societies.

From the perspective of city diplomacy, two distinct models for the localisation of the Global South's emancipatory agency can be identified from the cases discussed in this chapter. On the one hand is the Porto Alegre model, which took the form of the municipal institutionalisation of what was essentially a grassroots and workers' social movement driven by a counter-hegemonic ideology. Arguably, its relatively successful impact, as seen in the global adoption of, and the discursive contestations around, the concept and practice of participatory budgeting, owed much to the coproduction of both the city's domestic and diplomatic initiatives by city officials and civil society actors. Moreover, in the Porto Alegre model, city diplomacy as emancipatory internationalism was partly enabled and strengthened by being embedded in a multilayered diplomatic structure that emerged in Brazil when the PT took over control of the national government in 2003. This experience contrasts significantly with the Johannesburg model, which although sharing a similar goal, was built predominantly on the vision and drive of the mayor. Johannesburg's approach to localising the Bandung spirit also relied heavily on the city's attractiveness to global centres of capital and networks of power, as opposed to drawing on the agency of its marginalised urban population, as was the case in Porto Alegre. This, together with the personalised approach to international relations, arguably prescribed the limits of what could be achieved from the city's diplomacy of solidarity and emancipation.

It is worth underscoring that, as mechanisms for localising the Global South's struggle for justice and equality, both the Porto Alegre and Johannesburg models of city diplomacy were enabled in varying degrees by changes in the structure of the global capitalist economy, which have allowed cities to assume a prominent role in the construction of world order. As Anni Kangas (2017) argues, these global capitalist cities operate under conditions of neoliberal dominance, which has a disciplinary effect on their internal and external organisation, as well as their transformative aspirations. This, in my view, constitutes the single most important structural constraint on the agency of city governments in the Global South to localise the Bandung spirit. The example of Porto Alegre is illustrative in this regard. Despite the largely grassroots foundations of its progressive municipal internationalism, the city would in subsequent years undergo governance transformations that are consistent with the principles of neoliberal urbanism and the conservative politics increasingly associated with it. This has contributed to not only diluting the city's radical experiments in participatory democracy, but also to dimming its alternative vision of the world (see Leubolt et al., 2008; Lothaire et al., 2021). In Johannesburg,

the disciplining power of the neoliberal paradigm has always been a major determinant of the city's internationalisation efforts, dictating the parameters of the adoption and diffusion of the leadership's progressive ideas in global city networks and other forums, and generally crowding out its emancipatory agenda with alternative, externally driven agendas and priorities. It is in this context that Parks Tau would face considerable backlash for attempting to localise the carbon emission reduction campaign promoted by the city network C40 by introducing a US$4.9m bicycle lane project in 2014, without due consideration of the social values, alternative transport systems, politics and topography of the city. While the idea of commuter cycling in itself has merits in a congested city like Johannesburg, the mayor was accused of putting the cart before the horse by championing the network's agenda over the priorities of the city's marginalised population (Morgan, 2017). Faced with similar neoliberal systemic pressures as a member of the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities (100RC) programme, the South African city of Durban responded differently by opting to pull out of the network rather than embrace a foreign conception of resilience that was not rooted in the politics and realities of the city. The constraining effect of the neoliberal hegemony on the transformative agency of cities in the South and how Durban chose to respond to it, in the context of the transnational discourse and practice of urban resilience, is succinctly captured in the following reflection by officials and scholars in the city:

> Durban reflects negotiated just resilience, critical resilience and socio-ecological resilience. 100RC's approach is more strongly aligned with mainstream approaches to resilience, which are less political, more technocratic and less cognizant of the structural relations that produce the need for resilience. It is perhaps these conceptual differences that resulted in Durban and 100RC parting ways. The 100RC programme did not have the space for different approaches, as this would undermine the rolling out of a global model of urban resilience upon which a market of resilience tools, instruments and practices could be built. Durban's core resilience team was not willing to shift the resilience strategy to the level required by 100RC, to align with its hegemonic approach, as this would have undermined the particular quality of the resilience building required in a city with transformative social, environmental, economic and governance goals…What surprised the authors the most in reflecting on this journey was that there was no space within 100RC's initiative for this debate or difference. When this dissent emerged, 100RC attempted to use its dominant global position to assert power over resilience building in Durban by trying to influence politics in the city. This is unfortunate, as we believe that both Durban and the 100RC lost an opportunity to work together and to develop innovative practices and knowledge for building transformative resilience in cities in the South, and more particularly in Africa. (Roberts et al., 2020, pp. 20–21).

The case of Johannesburg further brings to light the challenges to emancipatory city diplomacy associated with geopolitical dynamics. In the first instance, the enduring Francophone-Anglophone divide in Africa, a legacy of European colonialisation on the continent kept alive by continued French influence in its former colonies, has worked to undermine unity within the local government fraternity in Africa, in the

same way it has beset regional and continental diplomacy. Through a network of paternalistic institutions and so-called decentralised cooperation partnerships, France and French interests have remained embedded in the sociocultural, economic, political and diplomatic imaginations of francophone African cities. This neocolonial influence disguised as cooperation limits the space for Pan-African cooperation, coordination and solidarity necessary for amplifying the agency and effects of transformative city diplomacy initiatives such as those championed by Johannesburg from 2011 to 2016.[2] Geopolitics as a constraint on the agency of cities in the Global South to localise the Bandung spirit is also evident in the apparent backtracking of the city of Johannesburg in renaming Sandton Drive after a Palestinian freedom fighter. As noted earlier, the city council adopted a resolution to rename the street in 2018 to bolster its diplomatic relations with Palestine. However, in the context of rising geopolitical tensions between Pretoria and Washington, and mindful of the diplomatic implications of renaming the street, the city recently opted to subject the decision to further consultations, with the mayor arguing that solidarity with global causes such as support for Palestine should not be used to undermine South Africa's partnerships with other nations (Sidimba, 2025).

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2. To the extent that the Commonwealth can be construed as a neocolonial instrument, a British influence can also be identified in the development of city diplomacy in Africa, through the activities of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Arguably, this fades in comparison to the pervasive French influence over its former colonies.

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