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Paradiplomacy and political geography: The geopolitics of substate regional diplomacy

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Abstract

Political geographers have increasingly engaged with “alternative” diplomatic practices, actors, cultures, and sites which transcend traditional state-centric modalities. Despite this growing interest, the term paradiplomacy, referring to the international activities of substate regions, has not featured heavily in the geographical literature. This paper brings debates surrounding the nature and practices of paradiplomacy into conversation with recent political geography scholarship on diplomacy and, in particular, geopolitics. It begins by introducing the increasingly plural understandings of diplomacy that have challenged dominant state-centric discourse and foregrounded the inherent spatiality of diplomatic practices. This is followed by an examination of the dynamic evolution of the term “paradiplomacy.” The paper goes on to suggest how theoretical and methodological insights from political geography could be productively interwoven with the study of paradiplomacy. The final section exemplifies this through an exploration of the geopolitics of substate diplomacy. It is argued that by building on methodological insights from critical readings of geopolitics, it is possible to offer a multi-scalar analysis of paradiplomacy which contributes to an ongoing project of political geography—to unsettle and challenge ingrained imaginaries which underpin our understandings of the region, the state, and the international political system.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Defining diplomacy is becoming an increasingly difficult task as the widely held and deeply ingrained statist perspective is challenged by the growing significance of alternative actors in the international political system. While there has been plentiful discussion in the academic literature about the rise of “new” non-state diplomacies, including that of substate regions (paradiplomacy), the popular framing of diplomacy remains attached to the state in two key ways. First, diplomacy is done *by* states. The actors, processes, materials, and sites of diplomatic practice including

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diplomats themselves, their day-to-day interactions, the physical treaties and agreements which they produce, and the foreign ministries which house their offices are perceived to be tightly controlled and governed by the authority of the state. Second, diplomacy is said to be carried out *among* states. As McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer (2012) note, diplomatic interactions are assumed to exist in the realm of “high politics” between states which afford one another legitimising recognition as peers and thus exclude non-sovereign others.

This paper reflects an exciting moment in the academic retheorisation of both diplomacy and the state itself. Across the social sciences, emerging ontologies have offered nuanced understandings of statehood which seek to undermine traditional realist assumptions of fixity and robustness. In foregrounding the contingent processes which constitute the state, including imaginations, representations, practices, and tangible materials, scholars have foregrounded the multiple, and often mundane, ways in which states are made meaningful as political units (Painter, 2006). And of course, diplomacy is an integral scene in the theatrical performance of the state. The growing academic interest in “alternative” diplomacies presents scholars with the opportunity to apply these innovative ontological perspectives to new subject matter. For example, it is possible to interrogate the role which substate regional diplomacy has in the production of the region itself as a political unit and how such practices interact with notions of national and local identity. Examining the forms which non-state diplomatic practices take facilitates a critical analysis of the role which these “new” actors have in constructing and challenging established modalities of international politics.

This conceptual broadening of “who” and “what” can be considered as diplomatic has raised the question of the limits of diplomacy. Interpreting diplomacy as a category of analysis rather than simply a category of practice, Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann (2015, p. 6) define it as “a claim to represent a given polity to the outside world.” The authors argue that this interpretation stresses three key aspects: diplomacy as a *process* of claiming authority; diplomacy as *relational* between one polity and another; and diplomacy as *political* as it involves both representation and governance. Of particular significance is the form which representation takes and, more specifically, who or what is represented. The authors’ use of the word “polity” where a more traditional definition may use the term “state” reflects the increasingly broad pool of actors and practices which are thought of as “diplomatic.” While this definition does not reflect the perspective of all scholars working on diplomacy, it is emblematic of a trend in literature to broaden our understanding of what constitutes diplomacy. For example, Constnatinou (2016, p. 23) extends his definition further still:

... diplomacy can be broadly understood to emerge whenever someone successfully claims to represent and negotiate for a territory or a group of people or a cause, or successfully claims to mediate between others engaging in such representations and negotiations.

According to this interpretation, the process of representation is not constrained to a “polity” or specific form of political entity. Diplomats may represent a cause or even act as intermediaries between other actors engaging in negotiation. By citing these definitions, the aim is not to suggest that either of these understandings of diplomacy is somehow more valid than another. Neither is it to enter into debates over the genuine “newness” of these non-state diplomatic actors. The aim, however, is to illustrate the increasing scope of the term diplomacy as various emerging actors beyond the state have their practices classified as diplomatic in the academic literature.

This paper emphasises a specific kind of “new” diplomatic actor: the international activities of the substate region, often referred to as “paradiplomacy.” Building on important conceptual mappings of paradiplomacy (Aguirre, 1999; Dickson, 2014; Kuznetsov, 2015), its overarching goal is to introduce literature on paradiplomacy to theoretical and methodological debates in political geography and to point to a productive way in which geographers can engage with paradiplomacy through the lens of geopolitics. The paper is presented in three substantive sections. The first traces the emergence of the term “paradiplomacy” noting the extensive range of approaches to its study across disciplines and identifies two trends in scholarship: (a) the diversification of empirical studies and (b) the increasingly agency-centric conceptualisation of regional diplomacy practices. The next section highlights the dearth of usage of the term in political geography and argues that the concept of paradiplomacy could be fruitfully interwoven with fundamental debates in political geography. It reflects on pioneering works from geographers which, drawing on theoretical and

empirical contributions from critical diplomacy studies, have shed light on the multiplicity of “alternative” diplomatic practices and, in turn, contributed to an ongoing project aiming to unsettle our understandings of the state. The final section of the paper argues that the multiple approaches to geopolitics which have emerged in political geography present a range of possibilities through which the concept of paradiplomacy can be integrated into the discipline. It is argued that by drawing on the breadth of methodologies present in critical geopolitics research, which encompass representational, embodied, and material enquiries, political geographers can meaningfully interrogate the geopolitics of paradiplomacy across multiple spatial scales.

2 | THE EVOLUTION OF PARADIPLMACY: CASE STUDIES, FRAMEWORKS, AND AGENCY-BASED APPROACHES

Although there is no single bounded definition of paradiplomacy, it generally refers to the international activities and foreign policy capacities of substate political units (Wolff, 2007), sometimes including cities but, more commonly, referring to regional governments. The term first began to gain traction in the 1980s as regions increasingly ventured into international affairs. Aguirre's (1999) genealogical account traces its emergence to the works Duchacek (1986, 1990) and Soldatos (1990) which were influential in the coinage and development of the neologism and its eventual preference over Duchacek's original term “microdiplomacy.” However, while paradiplomacy has emerged as a catch-all term for the phenomenon, it remains a deeply contested classification.

The use of the prefix “para” is itself contentious. It was adopted, in Duchacek's (1990, p. 32) words, because “... it has no derogatory sound, but ‘para’ expresses accurately what it is about: activities parallel to, often coordinated with, complementary to, and sometimes in conflict with centre-to-centre ‘macro-diplomacy.’” Notwithstanding Duchacek's reasoning, the prefix does connote a form of subordination where regional activities resemble but are distinct from “official” practices of diplomacy which remain the preserve of the state. This perceived deviance from idealised practice is drawn upon by Cornago (2010) who argues that paradiplomacy is driven by two competing forces: (a) the mobilisation of substate governments and (b) attempts to place limits on their pursuit of international involvement by the state through legal and political means. He argues that the result is the “normalisation” of paradiplomacy which he defines as “a mode of institutional control that recognizes as valid—albeit reluctantly—an otherwise deviant practice, while the limits of that practice are immediately fixed and carefully monitored” (2010, p. 34). In other words, acceptance of some forms of paradiplomacy by states is a mechanism through which they limit its overall scope.

The tendency to position the diplomatic practices of regions relative to that of states has led scholars to develop a number of alternative neologisms. For instance, Kincaid (1990) argues that the implicit hierarchy which is placed on the diplomatic practices of regions as secondary to that of the state can be reconceptualised by the term “constituent diplomacy” which more accurately describes the political unit in question as a constituent government. Similarly, Hocking (1993, pp. 1–2) prefers the term “multi-layered diplomacy” as it gestures towards the complex relationship which regions may have in relation to other state and non-state diplomatic practices, or, as he puts it, a “bewildering network of linkages between those arenas through which actors relate to each other in a variety of ways.” In a detailed tracing of the lineage of paradiplomacy, Kuznetsov (2015, p. 25) demonstrates the variety of expressions which have emerged:

... besides the concept of “paradiplomacy,” we can find a number of different terms that label a region's performance in the international arena such as “constituent diplomacy,” “regional diplomacy,” “sub-state diplomacy,” “microdiplomacy,” “multilayered diplomacy,” “catalytic diplomacy,” “protodiplomacy,” “post-diplomacy,” and so on.

The very existence of these multiple terms is indicative of the plurality of processes which analysts have attempted to capture. In fact, this breadth has led some to question whether paradiplomacy is indeed a meaningful

concept. The conclusion which Aguirre (1999) reaches from his genealogical account is that these multiple phrasings attempting to extend what is considered as diplomatic practice serve to mask the underlying complexity of diplomacy. Instead, he suggests that in order to look beyond our limited understandings of diplomacy and the nation-state, we may better conceptualise the multiplicity of actors and relations as a new, "post-diplomatic" world. In the context of these numerous critiques and the seemingly endless stream of neologisms, paradiplomacy (still used here despite its limitations as a general term for non-central government diplomacy) research trajectories are naturally complex and crosscutting, but it is possible to identify two key trends.

First, there has been a significant diversification in the empirical locus of research on paradiplomacy. In his survey of literature, Kuznetsov (2015) was only able to find works relating to American, Canadian, and Australian states over the decade of the 1970s which he relates to the academic interest in new forms of federalism emerging in these contexts, such as Nixon's "New Federalism" in the US. However, interest has stretched beyond its early North American focus as global paradiplomatic activities have burgeoned. In the introduction to their influential edited volume *Paradiplomacy in Action*, Aldecoa and Keating (1999) relate the spike of activity to the ever-creeping erosion of the distinction between domestic and foreign affairs as a result of globalising forces and the emergence of continental trading platforms such as NAFTA and the EU. In fact, Aldecoa and Keating's collection itself demonstrates the growing interest in paradiplomacy in Europe, both in its weighting of case studies and by drawing together predominantly European scholars, many from the University of the Basque Country. While the EU, in particular, has become a focal point of research, Kuznetsov (2015) also highlights the continued diversification of research into the 2000s and beyond as a number of scholars have pioneered paradiplomacy studies globally and innovatively in non-federal states. Indeed, Tavares' (2016) recent account of global paradiplomacy from a practitioner's perspective includes case studies from Africa (1), Asia (3), Europe (6), Latin America (3), North America (5), and Oceania (2). While this narrative of expansion in case studies is indicative of a general trend, it must be noted that interest in certain regions can also decrease. For example, research into Russian paradiplomacy peaked in the 1990s as the Yeltsin Administration devolved significant power over international activity to certain regions through a series of bilateral agreements. However, Putin's programme of centralising federal reforms have greatly constrained the diplomatic practices of regions (Moreno & Obydenkova, 2013), and academic interest has thus faded.

A second identifiable trajectory has been the ontological reframing of the processes of paradiplomacy from generally structural to more agency-centric conceptualisations. As mentioned, early scholarship in the 1970s favoured a case study approach targeting individual states or regions, primarily focused on legalistic discussions (Hocking, 1986). What are the legal structures which shape and limit paradiplomacy? What impact does it have on the constitutional integrity of the federal state? The primary concern was for the state itself rather than the practices of paradiplomacy. Over time, this heavily descriptive methodology was greatly enriched by attempts to theorise and not simply describe these practices. Of particular influence were the typologies presented by Duchacek (1990) and Soldatos (1990) which sought to categorise the motivations and actions performed by subnational governments. These frameworks built on a relatively structural interpretation of paradiplomacy and created models to illustrate how certain "inputs" lead to certain "outputs" and that, in the context of globalising forces, paradiplomacy was as a functional and necessary economic reaction for regions.

Again turning to the significant influence of Aldecoa and Keating's collection published in 1999 during a surge in interest in paradiplomacy, it is possible to identify the increasing concern for the practices of paradiplomacy themselves rather than the structural conditions which foster their existence. For instance, Brian Hocking's (1999) chapter still closely links the motivations for paradiplomacy with processes of globalisation but also encourages reflections on the "actorness" of regions in order to highlight the subtlety and complexity of international relationships. Similarly, two chapters using the case studies of Quebec and the Basque County (by Balthazar and Ugalde) explicitly deal with the question of nationalism. The foregrounding of the practices themselves over contextual factors such as state legal frameworks or forces of globalisation has guided the trend to more agency-based scholarship on paradiplomacy. Reflecting this, Dickson (2014) has considered the linkages between paradiplomacy and the large body of literature relating to "multi-level governance" (MLG). Although distinct in their theoretical roots, MLG and paradiplomacy are

both concerned with the activities of substate regions in relation to alternative units of political authority. Furthermore, when examining the international activity of a region, that is to say, its paradiplomacy, one is necessarily concerned with the region's position within a domestic and international governance structure. In this sense, paradiplomacy shares MLG's interest in autonomy devolved to regions, the bureaucratic systems determining this, and the relationship between practices and other levels of administration such as a central government. Despite these synergies with MLG, Dickson (2014) argues that paradiplomacy represents a distinct theoretical approach due to its emphasis on the agency of regional governments themselves rather than the governance structure as a whole. This particular aspect of paradiplomacy research offers a significant opportunity for political geographers to draw on a wide range of agency-centric methodologies which have developed in the sub-discipline to productively enter into debates in the field of paradiplomacy.

3 | POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY AND PARADIPLMACY

At a basic level, the term has not penetrated the geographical literature, and the word itself is yet to appear in many of the leading journals in the discipline. Occasional appearances in *Geopolitics* (6 times), *Political Geography* (4), *Regional Studies* (2), *Progress in Human Geography* (1), and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (1) generally reference paradiplomacy in passing rather than engage with the field of research (a notable exception being the work of Francesca Dickson (2014) in this journal which offers an insightful theoretical clarification of the term). More problematic than infrequent usage is that in the brief intellectual history of paradiplomacy sketched out by the preceding section it is notable that political geographers have been predominantly absent from the debates which have shaped how the subject is conceptualised and researched. There are a number of possible explanations for this. Aguirre (1999), for instance, has argued that the difficulties in fixing a bounded definition have limited the term's potential to be exported to other disciplines. Perhaps too, the lack of a holistic analytical framework to guide research has been a limiting factor, although attempts have been made to develop a historical institutionalist approach to substate diplomacy (Lecours, 2002; Royles, 2017).

The fundamental claim of this paper is that despite these difficulties political geography is exceptionally well placed to interrogate previously unconsidered aspects of paradiplomacy. Until recently, the study of diplomacy was notably absent from geographical literature (Van der Wusten & Mamadouh, 2010). However, recent contributions made by political geographers to correct this omission have gestured as to the possibilities for paradiplomacy research. Dittmer and McConnell's (2016) edited collection *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics* draws on great interdisciplinary breadth to emphasise the social relations which compose overlapping and interweaving "diplomatic cultures." At the core of their analysis is a reflection on how diplomacy is theatrically performed in settings which transcend the taken-for-granted authority of the state. Also at the vanguard of diplomacy research in political geography, Merje Kuus (2007, 2013a, 2015) has published extensively on the symbolic, social, and practical intricacies of conducting diplomacy in the context of an EU bureaucracy. By offering a "bottom-up" analysis of the micro-spatial details of everyday practices in Brussels, Kuus is able to illuminate how practices crosscut the everyday, national, and supra-national scales of political analysis. Also empirically focused on an EU setting, Jones and Clark (2015) promote a practice-based geopolitical reading of diplomacy to demonstrate the significance of practice in producing and challenging "big picture" geopolitical representations. This disruption of statist-diplomacy discourse has also been the cornerstone of the examination of "alternative" diplomacies by political geographers. McConnell, Moreau, and Dittmer (2012) target their post-structuralist critique at three examples of "anomalous" diplomatic practice (the Tibetan Government-in-Exile, The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, and micropatrias). Adapting the notion of mimicry, the authors argue that

... following the argument that the abnormal has something to tell us about the normal, attending to articulations of formal diplomacy in 'unusual' places exposes the contingent practices that underlie political power in so-called 'conventional' states (2012, p. 812).

These pioneering projects which insert a geographical analysis into the study of diplomacy have made significant progress in extending the established confines of the discipline and have forged exciting new research trajectories. However, the extension of this geographical logic to the study of the diplomatic practices of *regional* governments remains an innovative and incomplete project for political geographers. A valuable contribution has been made by Mamadouh and Van der Wusten (2016) which presents a framework reflecting a distinction between cities and regions as paradiplomatic actors. Further attempts to interweave the theoretical and methodological insights from political geography with paradiplomacy can enrich and advance both the discipline itself and the study of phenomenon in two key ways: (a) it can offer a nuanced spatial reading of paradiplomacy which is lacking from the IR dominated literature and (b) in turn, can contribute to a central project of political geography which questions the functioning and constituent processes of political units, namely, the region and the state.

In relation to the first point, the multiplicity of ways in which regions act internationally raises a number of interesting spatial concerns across multiple scales. At a global scale, it is clearly apparent that the distribution of paradiplomacy practices is deeply heterogeneous with some regions, often in federal states such as Belgium, Canada, Australia, USA, and Russia, developing far more sophisticated paradiplomatic infrastructure than others. Even within these states, practices are extremely diverse. Look, for example, at the differentiated international activity between and within the various classifications of Russian federal subjects (Moreno & Obydenkova, 2013). Political geographers can foreground this inherently spatial differentiation and enter into existing debates surrounding its causes and implications.

However, the spatial reading of paradiplomacy offered by political geography goes much beyond the identification of heterogeneity. Drawing on recent methodological trends in the discipline towards the everyday (Megoran, 2006), focus can be shifted from the outcomes of paradiplomacy (the agreements, the treaties, the trade statistics, and so on) to the social production of the phenomenon itself. McConnell (2016a) demonstrates this in her discussion of the "liminal geopolitics" of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). She deploys broadly ethnographic methods to examine the organisation consisting of nearly fifty stateless nations and emphasises the marginality of this diplomatic practice. This discussion of the spaces at the threshold between the state and non-state is suggestive of the nuanced spatial reading of paradiplomacy offered by political geographers and how it can greatly enhance our understanding of what makes these regional practices distinct from established modalities of diplomacy.

This leads onto the second point; an analysis of paradiplomacy can offer a theoretical insight into state and region formation. As a fundamental unit of geographical analysis, the state is rooted at the heart of political geography and attempts to unpack the "black box" of statehood have featured heavily in the sub-discipline. A number of metaphors have been deployed by geographers to demonstrate the contingent aspects of states' social production. For instance, Jeffrey (2013), examining state formation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, suggests the lens of "improvisation" as an analytical tool which highlights the "resourcefulness" of a new state seeking to perform legitimacy. Similarly, McConnell (2016b) speaks of the "rehearsal" of statehood in the case of the Tibetan Government in Exile which performs state functions dislocated from its territorial base. These attempts to highlight the heterogeneous processes which constitute statehood have been extended to alternative political units. As Agnew (2013) suggests, a number of conceptualisations of "regions" as geographical classifications exist in the social sciences, often deployed to explicitly shift attention away from the scale of the state. By conceptualising the formation of subnational regions as the complex interplay of identity and place (Paasi, 1991), the specific performances and practices which reify their existence as meaningful political entities can be analysed. Paradiplomacy highlights a distinctive set of processes relating to international activity operating at this regional scale to both constitute and externally project the region. Moreover, paradiplomacy practices are situated in a complex web of activity which transcends the region itself. By considering how paradiplomacy relates to region formation, it is possible to extend analysis further to consider its relationship with the production of other political units such as states. In other words, a bottom-up approach to paradiplomacy offers political geographers the opportunity to advance our understanding of these entangled aspects of both region and state formation.

4 | THE MULTI-SCALAR GEOPOLITICS OF REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

The far-reaching scope of research in political geography sits at the nexus of “bottom-up” and “top-down” epistemologies, and nowhere in the sub-discipline is this more apparent than in the study of geopolitics which has experienced resurgence since the late 1980s. The resultant field of “critical geopolitics” built on post-structuralist foundations to define geopolitics as “a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft ‘spatialize’ international politics and represent it as a ‘world’ characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas” (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 190). As the field has grown, a significant methodological and ontological breadth has emerged which can offer a unique, multi-scalar perspective on paradiplomacy. As Dodds, Kuus, and Sharp (2013, p. 7) suggest, “[critical geopolitics] has no single theoretical canon or set of methods. It rather advances diverse critiques of, and alternatives to, conventional analyses of international affairs.” At the core of early critical geopolitics works was a concern for the representational; the discursive production of the “self” and the “other,” the “here” and the “there,” the “right” and the “wrong.” Working almost exclusively with the discourses of political elites, the task of the scholar was thus to deconstruct geopolitical language which (re)produces certain spatialised visions of world politics. An appreciation for the wider reproduction of geopolitical scripts was incorporated by the emergence of “popular geopolitics” (Sharp, 1993) which, still focused on geopolitical representations, expanded the analysis beyond the practical and the formal spheres of politics.

While recently this broadly “representational” tradition, heavily associated with discourse analysis as a critical tool, has become less prominent in critical geopolitics scholarship it can contribute greatly to our understanding of paradiplomacy. The performances of regions in the international arena are situated in, and contribute to, discursive framings of their activity. This is perhaps most easily demonstrated in the role which nationalism plays for a number of paradiplomatic regions. For instance, the Republic of Tatarstan in the Russian Federation has been the subject of a number of studies as a region with particularly advanced international activities underpinned by nationalist discourses. The region’s declaration of sovereignty in 1990, establishment of a “Ministry of Foreign Economic Affairs” in 1993, and the opening of 16 trade missions abroad (Sharafutdinova, 2003) cannot simply be understood as a functionalist response to globalising economic conditions but must be considered a symbolic expression of sovereignty which, by emulating practices of the Russian Federation, drew on the mimetic legitimacy of state-like performance. The significance of nationalist discourse in these diplomatic performances naturally raises the question of how actions are discursively framed by actors in the region and beyond. For example, interesting questions have been raised as to whether the main goal for political elites in Tatarstan was genuine sovereignty or simply the development of a bargaining position with the federal centre (Albina, 2010; Makarychev & Valuev, 2002). While Tatarstan provides a particularly stark example, the international activities of every region are guided by geographical representations and spatialisations of the world. The methodological tradition in critical geopolitics which implements various forms of discourse analysis and affords acute attention to how political activity can be discursively challenged and legitimised can be an insightful critical approach in the study of subnational diplomacy.

However, a critical geopolitical analysis of paradiplomacy is not confined to the examination of geopolitical representations. Reflecting changes in the social sciences more widely, recent research in critical geopolitics has been characterised by a downward refocusing in the scale of analysis towards the everyday which has been adopted through a variety of theoretical perspectives. In his theory of practice, Schatzki (2002) makes the useful distinction between theories of *arrangement* and theories of *practice*. Arrangement theories including Actor Network Theory and assemblage theory are primarily concerned with how the social space is ordered. For Schatzki, these reflect the material (including both human and non-human) and the immaterial (including discourses and imaginations). Practice theories, however, centre on the actual doings and sayings without privileging one or the other (Everts, Lahr-Kurten, & Watson, 2011). Critical geopolitics scholars have drawn eagerly on a number of these theoretical approaches to the everyday including through assemblage theory (Dittmer, 2014) and materialist geopolitics (Squire, 2015). Perhaps most significantly, this bottom-up approach can be seen in the increasing consideration for the embodiment of international politics building on insights from feminist scholarship (Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman,

2004) which has encouraged reflection on the multiplicity how the geopolitical is experienced by individuals. Methodologically, this has opened up a new terrain of opportunities and, in particular, ethnographic methods have flourished. Megoran (2006), for example, has made the case that the sole implementation of discourse analysis centred on macro-political representations can obfuscate the everyday experiences of ordinary people excluded from the elite sphere of geopolitical knowledge production.

This refocus in the scale of analysis has significant methodological implications for the study of diplomacy. From a critical geopolitics perspective, Jones and Clark (2015, p. 1) have argued that this attention to quotidian practice of the geopolitical must extend to the study of influential actors “employed to construct, promote and represent geopolitical productions: that is, diplomats themselves.” Using the example of Iceland’s potential accession to the EU, the authors argue that a practice-based account of diplomacy, recovered through extensive interviews with officials, can highlight the ways in which diplomats perpetuate and subvert geopolitical representations through their everyday activities (Jones & Clark, 2015). Outside of political geography, Iver Neumann’s (2002) influential call to insert the practice turn into International Relations scholarship deals specifically with the field of diplomacy. He emphasises that practice accounts must build on, rather than detract from, insights of the representational approach. In a diplomacy setting, practice is a concern for social actions themselves which span the discursive and the practical (Neumann, 2002, p. 651):

... the key point is not the substantial one that diplomacy may be changing as a result of a disaggregation in state practices, but the methodological one that this question of changing practices may be empirically studied in terms of an analysis of the interplay between discourse and practices.

Of course, the reframing of analysis to the everyday minutiae of diplomatic practices raises practical problems for researchers. Perhaps most significant is the question of what cannot be analysed using these methods; does this style of enquiry produce conclusions which cannot speak to wider geopolitical phenomena beyond the context of the specific study? Furthermore, diplomacy is a restricted sphere of activity and the difficulty of ethnography is widely acknowledged (Kuus, 2013b). However, so too are examples of researchers deploying interview-based methods to recover accounts of practice without immersive access (Hitchens, 2012) which can be successful in the diplomatic setting (Pouliot 2010). The fundamental task for the scholar of critical geopolitics studying paradiplomacy is to reflect the multiple scales in which geopolitical knowledge is produced, experienced, and made meaningful. In the case of paradiplomacy, this scalar intricacy is emphasised by a complex web of interactions between actors. When a regional government enters into trade negotiations or opens an overseas representational office, the geopolitical motivations and execution of these practices are constituted across multiple scales; from the materiality of the physical trade documents to the experiences of the diplomats who sign them; the physical buildings which house the offices to the discursive framing speeches; narratives produced in national newspapers to the affective reactions of “ordinary” citizens. This assemblage of actors is not bound to the representational or the material, and analysis should reflect this. The claim of this paper is that the interweaving of various aspects of the rich methodological canon of critical geopolitics opens up exciting possibilities to examine the geopolitics of paradiplomacy without privileging or obscuring a single geopolitical scale.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The statist conception of diplomacy remains a powerful and popular framework. Legal divisions of authority seeking to preserve diplomatic legitimacy for the state are commonplace and the deep entrenchment of this discourse results in alternative modalities to state diplomacy being classified as deviant. However, recent scholarship has sought to challenge the abnormality of non-state diplomatic practice. As well as taking issue with the “newness” of these non-state actors, scholars have successfully illustrated the inherent “messiness” of contemporary diplomatic activity encompassing both actors and settings which transcend prescriptive legal frameworks. In part, this reflects

Hocking's (1999) observation that the multilayered aspects of diplomacy do not fit neatly into discrete hierarchical levels of activity. This paper has suggested that political geographers can do more to celebrate this "messiness" through turning their analytical attention to a specific realm of practice or apparent "layer" of diplomatic activity, the substate region.

There are a number of ways in which political geographers can study paradiplomacy as it raises multiple, inherently spatial questions. For instance, Mamadouh, Meijer, Sidaway, and Van der Wusten (2015) focus on the urban dimensions of diplomacy in a spatial and historical analysis of a specific city, The Hague. This paper has suggested that geopolitics offers an alternative and productive avenue for geographical engagement with paradiplomacy. Geopolitics, in this context, refers to the plurality of ways in which the political world is spatially demarcated, scripted, imagined, and represented *as well as* the materials, practices, and embodied experiences which constitute it. Drawing on the broad methodologies associated with critical geopolitics, it is possible to examine both representational and embodied aspects of regional diplomacy and thus interrogate the production of geopolitics across multiple scales. Furthermore, this multi-scalar geopolitical analysis can advance the theorising of the emergent processes which produce the state and the region as geopolitical units. This serves as a starting point to construct a framework which facilitates the geographical analysis of paradiplomacy.

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