

Tracing modes of politics at the United Nations: spatial scripting, intimidation and subversion at the Forum on Minority Issues

Speaker: Assoc Professor Fiona McConnell
University of Oxford

Chair: Dr Woon Chih Yuan
Department of Geography, NUS

Date/Time: Wednesday, 7 March 2018, 3:30pm – 5pm

Place: Honours Room, AS2-03-02, NUS

Abstract

This seminar seeks to add empirical depth and conceptual nuance to how we understand the dynamics of geopolitical interactions and the role of space in how modes of politics are articulated. It does so by turning attention to the micro-spaces of international institutions and examining how geopolitical actors of different prescribed statuses – state diplomats and representatives of minority communities – interact in the spaces of the UN Office at Geneva.

Focusing on the UN Forum on Minority Issues the paper adopts an inductive approach to draw out dynamics of scripting, disruption, (in)visibility and affective atmospheres in this space. Three empirical snapshots of the 8th and 9th Forums are presented. The first focuses on spatial scripting within Room XX and examines experiences of sublime aesthetics and the cadences of the Forum's proceedings. Attention then turns to the actions of particular states which interrupted minority speakers and engaged in spatial practices of intimidation. Third, the agency of minority representatives in asserting their presence through reclaiming space and small acts of subversion is examined.

The presentation concludes with a discussion of how to approach the often contradictory modes of politics articulated at the UN and the potential for further geographical investigation of this international institution.

About the Speaker



Fiona McConnell is Associate Professor in Human Geography at the University of Oxford and Tutorial Fellow in Geography at St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Her research focuses on issues around sovereignty, legitimacy and diplomacy with a particular interest in communities officially excluded from formal state politics. During 2017 she held a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship for a project titled 'Representing the unrepresented: the politics and practices of subaltern diplomacy'. She is author of *Rehearsing the State: the political practices of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile* (Wiley 2016) and co-editor of *Geographies of Peace* (IB Tauris 2013) and *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics* (Routledge 2016).

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