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Emotional Geopolitics: Geographies of Diplomatic Performance in New York

Alun Jones and Julian Clark

Abstract

Emotions are decisive to geographies of performance, yet our understanding of their role in critical geopolitics is non-existent. This paper addresses this deficit. We argue performances link statecraft with statehood to create geopolitical power in what we term ‘spaces of possibility’. Examination of these spaces – where state claim-making materialises through diplomatic performance and emotions – is we argue crucial, for representing the state is far more than the simple articulation of claim-making discourses. Instead, it is an active ‘lived experience’ for diplomats that exposes the challenges and vulnerabilities of personal performance through everyday political geographies. Consequently, here we set out a new research agenda for an emotional geopolitics that directly addresses the pivotal role of performance in state claim-making. Our focus for this is the ‘topography of action’ of the United Nations (UN) in New York. Deploying assemblage thinking and using extensive primary interview data from 11 current and former UN Ambassadors, we illustrate the centrality of material, visceral and sensual embodiments as they emerge out of and through diplomatic claim-making in different performative contexts. In doing so, we advance geographic debates by demonstrating how emotions are inseparable facets of diplomatic life.

Keywords: Performance, Emotional Geopolitics, Assemblage, Diplomacy, United Nations

1. Introduction

This paper argues for an emotional geopolitics of state claim-making. While there is growing interest among political geographers in the geopolitics of performance and geobodily experiences (Pain 2009; Closs-Stephens 2015; Merriman and Jones 2016), there is a chasm in our understanding of how the emotional geopolitics sustaining the global state system are mobilised through individual performance. The significance of this is crucial, for emotions are at the heart of world politics: they underwrite the defence and legitimation of the political-territorial integrity of states. They cement the advocacy of ideas about the cultural-historical character of state territory, and animate its changing roles under different political-geographical circumstances (Agnew 2008; Murphy 2010). Within this vibrant tapestry of emotional geopolitics, diplomats are critical because their performances link statehood with statecraft to create geopolitical power (Brenner and Elden 2009). Here, we explore how claim-making intertwines and co-constitutes the subjective and the collective to (re)produce the state through emotional geopolitics. For us, emotional geopolitics emphasises subjectivity, meaning, feeling and voice and, through its affects on the body’s increased or diminished power of acting, continually shapes diplomatic identities.

Consequently, in this paper we set out a new research agenda for state claim-making through an emotional geopolitics that emphasises the sensing, experiencing, and understanding of diplomatic performance. We contend that this focus on the ‘lived experience’ of the diplomatic self provides profound and illuminating insights into the production of statehood and the anthropology of the state (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Elden 2013; Jones and Clark 2015, 2017). In sum, our objective is to expose the performative in its immanence within a hitherto unexplored empirical setting for state claim-making: the United Nations (UN) in New York.

In our view, too many studies conflate performance with practice in political agency. This has obscured the contours of emotional geopolitics by viewing practices as ‘broadly competent’ performances. Not only has this hampered analytical insight into the individual lived experience of diplomatic performance – critically it has also concealed the sites and spaces of emotional geopolitics. Practices have none of the experiential richness of a performance, and do not provide a satisfactory description of what a subject is. Neither do they furnish a satisfactory account of how subjects are constituted. Our advocacy of an emotional geopolitics corrects this: it uniquely prioritises an ‘embodied’ diplomacy, to address the central role of performance in processes of state claim-making in the ‘topography of action’ of the UN (Dewsbury 2000). In doing so, it furnishes an entirely new perspective on the roles of diplomacy, performance and emotion in the modern geopolitical imaginary.

The paper proceeds as follows. First we show how diplomatic performance can be understood through the more-than-human relationalities of assemblage thinking. This informs the scope, aims and challenges of our novel methodology for exploring emotional geopolitics. Drawing upon UN diplomats’ own articulations of the connections between performance and emotions, we then assemble an everyday geography of diplomacy to explore how these co-constitutional interactions create ‘spaces of possibility’ for diplomatic performance. Next, using recorded accounts of diplomats’ consciously recognised and expressed feelings of performance, we show the centrality of material, visceral and sensual embodiments as they emerge out of, and through, diplomatic claim-making. We conclude by setting out a research agenda for further geographical work in this important new area of scholarship.

2. Diplomatic Performance and Emotional Geopolitics

The state materialises as a result of its performance. Diplomats are articulators and practitioners who bring the state into being through their performances. They are indeed the ‘plumbers of the state’s international relations’ (Jones and Clark 2015, 2), enacting state identities and interests on a quotidian basis and interacting with others over the reception and interpretation of their claims (Neumann 2013; Medby 2018). Diplomatic performance therefore has an affective capacity, aiding or restraining, increasing or diminishing the body’s power of acting. Performance limits and empowers, silences and vocalises, impresses and distresses, and is thus critical to how state claims are endorsed or challenged in fluid spatiotemporal contexts. Claim-making braids the individual with the collective, and the discursive with the material in a continual state of becoming.

However, we argue representing the state is more than the articulation of its claim-making discourses. Rather, it is an active ‘lived experience’ that exposes the challenges and vulnerabilities of personal performance in emotional geopolitics. Emotional displays within diplomatic performance have the capacity to go beyond the merely factual, cognitive basis of state claim-making. Emotional registers link state claims with the human condition by lending immediacy, resonance, passion and conviction to these claims. Emotional performance thus has the potential to inspire, reinforce views or change opinions, prompt imitation and emulation. It charges individuals with immense responsibility for the [de] legitimising of state claims and, simultaneously, enhances or impairs their own reputations. Significantly therefore, as Pouliot and Cornut (2015, 303) have argued, how diplomats “perform their trade, is taken to be the basis for explaining world politics”. Nevertheless, performing for the state does not come easy for diplomats – it tests personal capacities, challenges social agility and confronts an individual’s adaptability to different formal and informal socio-cultural, institutional and material contexts for state claim-making. In short, rendering state claim-making through emotional geopolitics is a deeply personal experience.

Conceptualising performance continues to draw attention from geographers, and provokes much debate amongst them (Rose-Redwood and Glass 2014; Rogers 2017). Much of this work has considered the spaces and places for the choreographed or improvisational emotionally charged, performing body and, in turn, focused on how to extract the performative qualities from encountered events and moments of happening. In sum, our objective in this paper is to expose “the performative in its immanence within any topography of action” (Dewsbury 2000, 474). Using assemblage thinking, such ‘topographies of action’ comprise varying domains, capacities and objectives. These, in effect, furnish ‘spaces of possibility’ that, in diplomatic terms, open up (and close down) possible worlds of coexistence and interaction (Jones and Clark 2017). Performance takes place in these spaces of possibility, which are disruptive, unpredictable thresholds of awareness characterised by “habit, affect and plasticity...the present, micro-worlds of creativity and affectual embodiment for the “uncertain worlding of politics” (Dewsbury 2013, 141). They are actualised or virtual, formal or informal spaces characterised by heterogeneity, fuzziness, and areas of indeterminacy, instability and openings to change. Investigating performance through ‘spaces of possibility’ in assemblages thus emphasises the mutability and multidimensionality of these emergent spaces, to expose not only their variability, fragility and ephemerality but also their performative vulnerabilities. These spaces are suggestive, experimental, and prone to unexpectedness. They are, as Alexander (2004, 529) suggests “ambiguous and slippery contexts for performative action”. Critically, diplomatic claim-making on behalf of states is performed in these spaces. In such spaces of possibility, diplomatic performance embraces a vitality and spontaneity encompassing risk and chance associated with the not-yet known. It is indeterminate and never fully under self-control; an energy demanding and expending act, with a multitude of possible emotional outcomes, happenings and un-happenings. Crucially, in performative terms, state claim-making is fundamentally unpredictable.

We argue assemblage thinking offers analytical purchase on investigations of diplomatic performance for state claim-making for a number of reasons. First, diplomatic performance links different components within and between assemblages, and in doing so creates capacities to further state claim-making, transform and deepen interactions, and enhance the performative track record of individuals working on behalf of the state. State worlds and identities have to be made: their sustenance requires “constant maintenance and re-enactment” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 6). The state is reproduced through diplomatic performances that imbricate the material and expressive components of a diplomatic assemblage. Material components include Embassy buildings and offices, desks, [mobile] phones, chauffeured vehicles, exhibition spaces and technical equipment, while expressive components comprise embodied subjects, hierarchies, regulations, [mobile] texts and speeches, meetings, policies, and protocols. This co-constitutional interaction between human and non-human worlds gives rise to systems of correspondence (DeLanda 2006) that involve linguistic and non-linguistic performance (McFarlane 2009; Jones and Clark 2015; 2017). These performances are neither materially nor linguistically immutable and contain dynamic (including improvisational, see Jeffrey 2013) possibilities for the productive emergence of space for, and identities of claim-making (Rogers 2017). Second, diplomatic claim-making on behalf of states is both embodied and affective. For example, expressive components such as diplomatic speeches not only produce affect and subjectivity but also create possibilities as they are “read, used and enacted by others” (Rogers 2010, 53). Third, assemblage approaches do not reduce all performative action to the textual and representational but rather consider embodied accounts of the doings and sayings of diplomatic performance in their heterogeneous material worlds. In doing so, diplomacy’s materiality and corporeality is highlighted, as well as the possibilities their interaction creates. Thus, whilst state claim-making “walks and talks before our eyes” (Boulton 1960, 3), diplomatic performance then is “the seeing... listening [and responding] to the walking and talking” (Alexander 2004, 530). Importantly therefore, assemblage thinking usefully enables a focus upon the material instability and emergent nature and emotions of diplomatic performance to reveal the contingency of state claims.

Our focus on the emotional geopolitics of claim-making acknowledges that diplomatic performance is “fundamentally specific to the context in which it is sited” (Dewsbury 2000, 475) and that it can take place in a range of “settings, relationships and dispositions” (Jeffrey 2013, 40). More than this, emotions anchor claim-making in the world. There is, thus, an individual consciousness surrounding diplomatic performance since it locates the diplomatic body in an environment with which it is in constant and inevitable interaction, struggle and adaptation. Performance requires social awareness and attentiveness by diplomats in which their consciousness and sense of self are intrinsically connected (Davidson *et al.* 2017). Moreover, within state claim-making, the performing diplomatic body, through its presence in the here and now, can be used symbolically in order to signify importance, reputation, order, beliefs and values (Giblin 2017). The diplomatic body can thus be ‘read’ or perceived in particular ways in state claim-making. Performance therefore makes the world meaningful through our “direct bodily interaction with it; meaning is something felt, something perceived, the qualia through which we experience life” (Ringmar 2014, 12-13).

Given that “much of what takes place in world politics is best described not as events but as performances” (Ringmar 2014, 1), the ‘lived experience’ of performing claim-making exposes not only the interaction between performer and audience (Goffman 1959; Butler 1990). It also reveals the emotional capture by diplomats of claim-making’s affects resulting from the “hurly-burly of everyday events, crises, deadlines, and myriad pressing demands” (Rabinow 1997, xviii) they must face as they try to etch out state claims; for such claims are often confronted by “refusal, fracture and torsion within specific sites” (Dewsbury 2000, 475). Since the embodied and enacted nature of claim-making is located within mutable socio-spatial assemblages, the material qualities of performance are thus always subject to change (Rogers 2017). We contend that the affectual nature of these performances discloses the challenges, responsibilities and vulnerabilities of everyday diplomacy. Performance is reflective; diplomats in anticipation of, during, and post- performance may experience dread, exhilaration, stress, isolation, fear, or anger over their (potential) effectiveness in articulating state claims and convincing others of the veracity of them, as well as the impact of this upon their own reputations. State claim-making is thus fundamentally *personal*.

To explore the emotional geopolitics of diplomatic claim-making, we focus upon the UN as the most internationally represented intergovernmental (and intercultural) body in global order. The UN epitomises the struggle over state claim-making, its contentious knowledge base (s) and the emotional performances requires diplomats to advance these claims through the “everyday social dynamics in which [they]...are inevitably ensnared” (Agnew 2016, 1). Specifically, performance in the UN assemblage (here defined as the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Secretariat, and the Diplomatic Missions accredited to the UN and based in Manhattan, New York), elicits an emotional geopolitics connecting the material, visceral and sensual embodiments as they emerge out of, and through, claim-making. This involves the expression (and suppression) of emotion in fluid, material relations between performing diplomatic bodies and their environments. In this way, emotions structure the social worlds of diplomacy (Mercer 2010; Crawford 2014; McDermott 2014; Holmes 2015).

3. Methodology

“I have now realised that this kind of talk is a useful way of reflecting on one’s work” (email from senior UN Diplomat, 4th May 2017, Brussels)

As the above email illustrates, exploring diplomatic performance demands close interviewer connections with diplomatic actors. The research process is two-way structured. Mutual trust and confidentiality between interviewer and diplomatic subject are paramount when the exploration of personal feelings, limitations and anxieties over performance are being investigated. The capacity to express emotions is far from easy (Flam and Kleres 2015) and the highest level of self-awareness and sensitivity is needed on the part of the researcher (Yow, 1995). Performance is, of course, deeply personal yet has public consequences; in diplomacy, the stakes can be particularly high (Demertzis 2013; Constantinou *et al* 2016). Capturing the emotions of diplomatic performance is thus a challenging research task, not least because the ‘kind of talk’ referred to above exposes the general discomfort of practitioners in speaking about emotion given diplomacy’s norms of ‘emotions management’

(Hochschild 1979); a point reinforcing Nicolson's (1939, 76) observation that the essential qualities required of a diplomat are "good temper and courage...and above all, not swayed by emotion...". Consequently, few studies have systematically analysed "how emotions matter in concrete political settings" (Bleiker and Hutchinson 2008, 124; 2017), and none to our knowledge set out how to go about studying them.

Our emphasis upon embodied diplomacy required innovative research methods. An autobiographic narrative approach was adopted to enable interviewees to speak personally about diplomatic performance in the socio-material world of the UN and the possibilities for state claim-making that are opened up in particular settings of its 'topography of action'. This novel approach enabled each diplomat interviewed to focus on their emotions surrounding performance, and in doing so, convey their experience and inner struggles by self-interruptions, choice of words and sentences, and often spontaneous recall of personal happenings. Autobiographic narrative interviews offer much valuable insight into the "contextualised symbolic worlds, orientation patterns, and ... expectations [of diplomats] ... they tell whether, how, and why these changed as a result of their lived- reflected and felt-experiences" (Flam and Kleres 2015, 13). Such an approach requires careful handling of the interview process. Emotions are inherently ambivalent and there is a multitude of ways in which individuals feel, express and interpret them. The interviewer's task is to take note of emotional expressions and in conjunction with the interviewee zoom in, clarify and contextualize these. Through this process interviewees were able to acknowledge "not all emotions are equally political or relevant, nor is every attempt to understand and interpret them" (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008, 128). In some cases, this contextualization was assisted by recent stock photographs of the individual's participation in UN Security Council meetings as a means to draw out, authenticate and communicate the emotional dimensions (both expressed and suppressed) of diplomatic performance. Moreover, these material photographs also prompted discussions on the affective consequences of performance, that is, how the setting, positioning, distance and movements of diplomatic bodies in relationship to each other have emotional affects.

In political terms, this research is highly sensitive. Consequently all reference to the diplomats' home countries has been removed here, and materials redacted that would assist individual traceability and identification. Indeed, this was a condition stipulated by one country's diplomats ahead of interviews. The diplomats are men and women drawn from European and non-European high-income countries working at the most senior levels in the UN in New York. In almost all cases, they have been in post for up to four years and hold (or held) Head (Ambassador Rank) or Deputy Head of Mission (in some larger Missions this is also Ambassador Rank) posts. In their posting they are responsible for management of the Mission, and their country's claim-making and vote casting in the UN General Assembly (GA) and Security Council (SC). On a daily basis, they have participated in the meetings of the GA and its committees and the SC (open or closed sessions), have responsibility for ensuring their capital is informed of diplomatic twists and turns by regular reporting, for building relations with other Missions to establish common positions, receiving delegations canvassing for votes for UN Committee elections, and participate in a range of UN social

events and in Manhattan itself where “much of the most difficult coalition building... happens out of the spotlight, in private and informal settings” (Smith 2006, 11).

Interviews were conducted in three intensive rounds: with current serving diplomats in New York in June 2016 and April 2017, and with former UN diplomats now based in Brussels in March and May 2017, and a further set of diplomatic interviews in New York in October 2017. Each interview was held at the Permanent Mission of the country to the UN in New York. Interviews also took place in Brussels with former UN diplomats now serving at the specific country’s mission to the European Union (EU). Each interview lasted from one and a half to two and a quarter hours, was conducted in English, and was taped. In total eleven interviews were held and over 20 hours of interview recorded, providing an initial exploration of emotional geopolitics in diplomacy.

Next, we examine the UN assemblage as a ‘topography of action’ for state claim-making, highlighting its principal components and features within which diplomacy occurs.

4. Assembling Everyday Diplomacy in the UN

Within the UN assemblage, diplomatic performance etches out state claims for endorsement, rebuttal, or support to unmask the evanescent alliances by which the global state system is sustained through the bodies politic of diplomacy. The UN is the largest and most internationally represented intergovernmental organization for state claim-making. Based on a Charter signed in 1945 and with its headquarters on the East River in Manhattan, its key objective is to further cooperation between states and maintain peaceful international order. Its work is conducted through five main agencies - the Security Council (SC) (five permanent members - USA, Russia, China, France and the UK, who each hold a veto over UN resolutions, and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms); the General Assembly (GA), whose work is underpinned by six committees, and is the key deliberative chamber comprising all member states; the Secretariat which provides information and resources (including translation) to the member countries; the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (based in The Hague) the UN’s primary judicial body; and the Economic and Social Committee, which assists the GA in promoting socio-economic development.

Throughout its history, the UN has attracted varying degrees of praise and criticism. At the height of the Cold War, Gardner (1970, 660) described the organisation as “Not dead but...certainly ill”, while by the end of that decade some contended that “one of the chief dangers to the UN is its irrelevancy” (Kaufmann 1980, 12). By the 1990s, Barry-Jones (1995,19) claimed “Today’s UN warrants neither the naïve idolatry nor the casual dismissiveness with which it is conventionally treated”, while a decade later Rasch (2008, 1) argued that “the UN is a house of words rather than of straight actions”, a theme picked up by then U.S President elect Donald Trump, in December 2016: “right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time. So sad!” As of 2018, 193 countries are members of the UN. Their embassies (known as Permanent Missions and housing over 2,000 diplomats in New York) (NYCEDC 2016) occupy prime real estate across Manhattan’s Midtown East side, along with key lobby groups, UN-affiliated agencies and mimicking non-

state diplomatic representations in what, in assemblage terms, has been described as a territorialised “diplomatic community” (Wiseman 2015, 328).

In research terms, and drawing upon the perspective of the ‘lived experience’ of diplomats, state claim-making in this international organisation is not well understood. The UN diplomatic assemblage in Manhattan offers, as one senior diplomat explained pithily: “*a masterclass in international diplomacy*” (Interview 23rd June 2016, New York). It affords conditions for communications between various human and non-human components and provides possibilities for action and reaction among them. Diplomats consciously examine ways to expose and exploit the assemblage’s creative capacities to further state claim-making, transform and deepen interactions and enhance the performative track record. The UN assemblage therefore has both a form of content and expression (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Its form of content is constituted by connected material components such as meeting rooms, debating chambers and their layout, as well as voting technologies. The assemblage also collectively has an invisible constitution of linguistic and non-linguistic expression involving work processes, schedules and procedures. These constituents are displayed in the *UN Journal*, which is published on line daily and is a co-articulation of both the form of content and expression of the assemblage. It specifies what meetings are being held, when and where, what topics are being discussed and what documents are the bases of those discussions. In effect, for state claim-making, it sets out opportunities within the assemblage for diplomatic organisation, alliance building and intervention through the intersection of a form of content (action, diplomatic bodies and material things) and a form of expression (emotions, words, and ideas). Its material agential significance for claim-making is explained by a senior diplomat:

“I walk from home across Central Park arriving here about 8.30am. I check first the UN Journal which comes out online daily. I look at it to see the order of business [shows today’s copy]. First, I would check what the Security Council’s doing, are there any meetings which we have to cover, either me or my colleagues, to ensure we cover all the bases. My colleagues would individually, independently check as well...we are all looking at this...for anything we have to cover, and then anything that’s interesting. You get the Security Council listed first, and you can see which of the sessions are open, that one’s closed thus only for members, and then you have General Assembly - [points to list of sessions] - this one’s interesting because it’s something we are facilitating at the moment- my Permanent Representative is facilitating this with the Ambassador of Argentina- I would notice that and we’d check that, and there are other informal meetings going on under the structure of the General Assembly. Then you’ll see there’s a whole set of things going on in the committees... [Points to another committee session]- I will be going to that, we’ll have colleagues at that....” (Interview 23rd June 2016, New York).

This interviewee demonstrates how the UN assemblage is coded by the Charter and its operating regulations that set out rights and obligations for member states and their diplomatic missions. The assemblage is also coded by the doings and sayings of diplomacy; norms that serve to consolidate and rigidify the assemblage’s identity. Simultaneously, these ‘glue’ the assemblage together, shaping diplomatic performance and expectations and

influencing and directing its functional capacities. The significance of these codings, in particular, the imperative to work with others for claim-making, is summed up in the following ways by two other UN diplomatic sources (24th June 2016 and 19th April 2017, New York):

“There’s a realisation that unless you are the USA or Russia [Missions], you can’t do anything on your own ... in almost everything you do in New York you have to cultivate allies. You can maybe stop things on your own, if it’s really of vital national importance, and then only if you are prepared to make yourself very unpopular, with a huge fuss”

“You cannot be a lone voice in the wilderness. Obviously wording and presentation are important but basically it’s getting together a group of countries who will speak on the issue in the same vein and that’s true whether it’s on oceans, human rights, or gender issues”

Claim-making within the UN is also critically dependent on available resources. The human and material resourcing of Permanent Missions influences their capacity for diplomatic action. Some Missions are clearly better resourced (e.g. those missions which are permanent members of the Security Council), whilst other Missions struggle with *“the challenges here of finding a relevant role for you as a small country. We are not in the Security Council so it’s finding a way of contributing to what is a very large slow moving machine and where you’re never going to have an immediate effect on the tectonic plates of the different political cultures of the world...it takes huge amounts of time and effort and the progress one makes is always incremental- nothing here changes very quickly. It’s a huge beast to tame in many ways”* (19th April 2017, New York). What we can infer from these metaphors is the complexity of diplomacy in the UN assemblage: its geological slowness, its geopolitical vastness, and its unpredictability and unknowability.

Claim-making within the UN assemblage is also facilitated by the grouping of member countries into geographical blocs. There are currently five such groupings within the UN-Africa Group (54 member countries); Asia-Pacific Group (53); Latin America-Caribbean Group (33); Western European and Others Group (plus the USA as an observer) (28); and the Eastern European Group (23). Depending on the UN context, regional groups control elections to UN-related positions (such as non-permanent membership seats on the SC) based on established geographical formulae, as well as coordinate substantive policy, and form common fronts for negotiations and voting. These groupings enable states to *“fly the flag”* as well as support and promote particular world views as a means of claim-making. This is explained by a senior diplomat: *“On the one hand, it’s about reaffirming your sovereignty in a way and existence as an independent country in this multilateral system and, on the other, working together with like-minded countries to maintain and safeguard, and sometimes establish norms”* (20th April 2017, New York).

Critically, however, it is the capacity to build connections across groupings in the UN assemblage that spurs diplomatic possibilities for state claim-making by identifying mutual goals and using a range of socio-materialities for their advancement, as a diplomat explained: *“There is no other posting in the world where you interact with so many different countries.*

Your skill as a diplomat is not about working with your like-minded states, it's also about having excellent networks with others...you have to be able to reach out to them, and they need to be able to pick up the phone when you ring. This enables a track record of performance to be built” (17th October 2017, New York). Claim-making within the UN assemblage thus necessitates a dynamic engagement with a range of socio-materialities that open up new modes of connection and dialogue. However, diplomats emphasise the heterogeneity of the assemblage, the indeterminacy of its components, and the consequent uncertainty over individual performance. This is lucidly explained by a diplomatic source: *“When you are starting off you are trying to learn a whole lot of things not just the background of particular countries and their social, political and cultural history...you have to have that but you also have to invest time to fathom what are the ways of communicating, what do these documents mean and how do I get things done?* (19th April 2017, New York). The significance of assembling alliances between these heterogeneous components and expanding connections in rhizomatic ways to actualize diplomatic potential is explained by a diplomat source. They recounted how the Permanent Mission embarked on this alliance building: *“In our first month we drew up a list of all the people we should try and meet in our first six months. It was a way of putting the [assemblage] pieces together”* (17th October 2017, New York).

The UN diplomatic assemblage is also the product of historical processes; mixtures of material and expressive components that exercise capacities at different moments. The assemblage therefore has a past; a resource that affects its composition, emergence and interactions in the present, leaving one diplomat to comment that: *“there is a long back story for many things here at the UN”* (23rd June 2016, New York). Notably, the UN assemblage is imbued with a variety of performative national diplomatic styles of approach, conduct and operation that involve both linguistic and non-linguistic components. These tendencies have the potential to not only shape debate and influence diplomatic outcomes but also affect the individual ‘lived experience’ of cultural interaction arising from diplomatic agency. The affect of these embodied interactions between diplomats in the UN is illustrated by a non-European diplomatic source (17th October 2017, New York): *“We are very happy to talk so long as you’re getting somewhere. We are very transactional...whereas the European style is about sharing ideas but not getting an outcome. There’s a strong element of that here in the UN in certain fora. You know when you go into a committee and the first two weeks are just throat clearing...We like to be bridge builders and not ideological”*.

This ‘topography of action’ indisputably affects the ‘lived experience’ of diplomatic claim-making. Having sketched out some of the central features of the UN diplomatic assemblage, we turn next to identify and examine the ‘spaces of possibility’ and their multiple sociomaterialities for the emotional performance of state claim-making. ‘Spaces of possibility’ are, we argue, more than spaces of social interaction (cf. Bachmann 2016). They are emergent and comprise multiple capacities, only some of which will ever be actualised. Their evolving nature as ‘in-between’ spaces renders them unpredictable and fleeting, producing at any given moment stabilities or instabilities in the assemblages they populate, since they comprise potentialities that exist at particular moments. Critically, diplomatic

performance takes place in these mutable, multidimensional and unpredictable spaces. They are spaces in which thoughts, feelings, beliefs and bodily sensations occur. Thus, emotions are inseparable dimensions of the personal, social and political life of UN diplomacy.

5. ‘Spaces of Possibility’ for Emotional Diplomatic Performance in the UN

There are a multitude of ‘spaces of possibility’ (sites, venues and more nebulous spaces for diplomatic claim-making) where performance takes place and unfolds through creative materiality, and through which matter/matters critical to state claim-making in the UN assemblage become politicized. These include physical locations such as meeting rooms and debating chambers, to more serendipitous sites for diplomatic encounters. Social encounters in less diplomatically designated sites such as art exhibitions, musical soirees, and sponsored outings enable acquaintances to be struck, as do the virtual spaces and networks of social media. In all these spaces, emotional diplomatic performance is critical to how state claims are endorsed, interrupted and fractured. A good example is US Ambassador Nikki Haley’s recent (2018) castigation of Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya. In a SC debate on Syrian use of chemical weapons, Haley acidly remarked “I am in awe, Vasily, of how you say what you say with a straight face”, provoking startled reactions from other delegates. Emotions here are generated not just by the spoken word but by moving away from a prepared script, to discomfort as much as to discredit Russia’s claims. Emotional diplomatic claim-making thus not only necessitates elements of “comportment, vocality and gesture”, but also furnishes a “wealth of possibilities for performance” (Rogers 2010, 55-7). Additionally, diplomatic performance produces subjectivity and visibility, and in doing so, cements the identification of the diplomatic body with state claims. One recent example of this is a SC debate (2018) on alleged use of Russian chemical weapons on British soil. Here, Russian UN Deputy Ambassador Vladimir Safronkov yelled at British ambassador to the UN Matthew Rycroft “look at me when I am speaking to you”, revealing not only the importance of strong emotive advocacy of claims but also embodied diplomatic pressure as a means to signal the significance of state claim-making. Thus, within these ‘spaces of possibility’ the degree of performative activity required of diplomats is great.

Formal ‘spaces of possibility’ abound in the meetings culture of the UN assemblage. However, the nature of emotional diplomatic performance varies greatly between these spaces. Emotional grandstanding of the sort exhibited by Haley and Safronkov are the exception not the norm. More mundane emotional performances include those for information gathering to support state claim-making, symbolic presence as a performance to legitimise state claims, to more scripted performative claim-making. These spaces and their performative attributes are explained by a number of diplomats:

“There are meetings that are interesting to be at from which, personally and from the Diplomatic Service perspective, you might learn things that might equip you better, if you like, of slightly more academic interest and more long-term benefit [for state claim-making]” (17th October 2017, New York).

These meetings buttress claim-making, with diplomats seeking to plunder material evidence (e.g. research data, scientific presentations) in order to shore up state claims (often through re-tweeting ‘informational bites’) as a diplomat explained: *“In terms of our approach at the UN, our strong line is evidence and knowledge. This approach contrasts greatly with some countries...Through this, we are trying, not so much to silence but to influence and encourage others to our way of thinking. We use examples; we draw on evidence over time, where outcomes have been better because of a certain approach, citing the problems etc... So we really try to argue on the basis of fact”* (23rd June 2016, New York).

By contrast, there are UN meetings where diplomatic attendance is designed to legitimise claim-making. In such spaces, the performance is designed to imbue authority, as one diplomat commented: *“almost a non-speaking part where you need to be seen. The country needs to be there and visible. Here, it makes a lot of difference at what level. There’s a big difference from the visibility point of view whether it’s one of my junior colleagues or me. This is purely symbolic, that is, the country thinks this issue is really important [to its claim-making] because they have sent their Permanent Representative”* (20th April 2017, New York). Critical in the performance of diplomatic symbolism is the calibration of embodied diplomacy of claim-making. This is especially so when meetings are requested by NGOs and other stakeholder groups at the UN. The perception of other States as to a country’s position on a particular issue is often read from the seniority of the diplomat attending these meetings. Unless intentional, states are careful not to elevate the significance of particular issues to their claims. This is explained by a senior diplomat: *“For example, we meet representatives from international NGOs on things like the Kashmir issue or the Western Sahara. We would have about twenty of these per year, particularly in the fall when the GA is in full swing. We often meet these with other like-minded delegations. You have got to be very careful about issues that are sensitive to certain member states. It’s important whether you put your PR, the Deputy PR or an expert up”* (20th April 2017, New York).

State claim-making also takes place through what one diplomat describes as *“active performance”* in the UN. These performances occur in relation to negotiations within Committees to establish UN Regulations, the delivery of statements in the GA or SC, election campaigns for non-permanent membership of the SC or UN Human Rights Council, Presidency of the GA, or chairmanship of key committees. Emotional performance in the Committees is, as one diplomat explained: *“behind-the-scenes negotiations where we are defending or advocating for specific issues, and there we are always doing it with other delegations...where we are involved in the nitty-gritty of hammering out UN resolutions”* (17th October 2017, New York). There is a strong linguistic emphasis to this claim-making as diplomatic performance *“starts with being really out there, and pushing the boundaries of what you are asking for...some countries are far worse in throwing in ‘language and spoilers’ that they know are going to force compromise... Others will perform around procedures, so if things aren’t going their way they will look at all the procedural ways they can get rid of the problem”* (17th October 2017, New York).

The most public ‘spaces of possibility’ in the UN are the GA and SC. Here, performance is often statement driven but as a diplomat commented: *“more ceremonial in the way in which*

they are made". For diplomats, performing scripted language in the UN means *"We have clear positions and redlines and we've sort of pre-set that if we have written a good statement then your performance is based on the quality of what you've said that has been pre-agreed"* (20th April 2017, New York). Word selection, phraseology, emotional tone and emphasis and careful attention to past statements to safeguard the consistency of claim-making are thus vital. To this end, statements undergo much change between Capital and the Permanent Representation to ensure scripted language maximises its claim-making potentialities. This interaction between materiality, subjectivity and performance is confirmed by senior diplomats from European and Pacific states who explain how a scripted statement must capture both the intention of claim-making and resonate with diplomatic assessment of its likely reception:

"The statement is prepared with our 'Head Office' and can happen in a couple of ways: it can be generated here in New York and we get clearance or we can give them ideas and say we'd like to see these type of issues raised. So they then draft, but we always have time to go back to capital if we don't entirely like it, and we do make changes... and we know if we can make changes to make it sound better and preserve the content then we would do that" (18th October 2017, New York).

"Our SC statement is checked absolutely with capital, and if it's a sensitive issue, such as this one on the Middle East situation, it would also go to the Prime Minister's office and the Foreign Minister's office as well, so it's all thoroughly vetted and some changes were made, softened a bit or whatever, that's how the 'thing' starts" (23rd June 2016, New York).

Campaigns for elections in the UN open up more diverse and extendable 'spaces of possibility' for diplomatic performance to further state claim-making. Each Permanent Representation in New York has an 'election officer', a diplomat with responsibility for handling electioneering, as one senior diplomat explained: *"if it's an important election in the UN such as for Security Council membership, performance would be at all levels. The Ambassador of the country would come to our Ministry (back in Capital) and present a diplomatic note, then when things hot up you would have visits from the Election officer, then Deputy PR and then the PR. Moreover, when the high level segment of the UN General Debate is taking place over 10 -14 days in the fall, you have all Presidents and Prime Ministers flying in to New York. Everyone is then trying to use the opportunity to have bilaterals to broker all kinds of exchanges particularly on voting and UN elections"* (4th May 2017, Brussels).

Election campaigning brings sharply into play diplomatic performance and creative materiality. The UN buildings as well as the built and natural environment of New York become a sensory environment designed to weave diplomatic claim-making with the gamut of national imaging, policy brands, and issue campaigns. Our research exposed numerous examples of the co-constitution of active material and social worlds in diplomatic claim-making in the UN. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has striven to extend its international diplomatic reach and be a cooperative UN member. To this end, as a diplomat

explained: *“the wealthy missions would hold receptions in the big hotels around here or in venues like the City Library, a wonderful old 19th century building downtown, Gotham Hall is another venue...The UAE holds a massive reception each year down at the New York City Library”* (20th April 2017, New York). The significance for Sweden of securing the necessary GA votes for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat in 2016-7 involved *“a huge reception for over 300 people, embossed invitations and a splendid programme with their foreign minister and lots of big wigs from the UN system in attendance”* (20th April 2017, New York). The Icelandic mission, ahead of a key UN debate on oceans and sustainability, central to the State’s maritime territoriality claims, organised an exhibition by an Icelandic artist in 2016 which was put on display in the foyer of the diplomatic entrance to the GA building. Similarly, the Australian mission as part of their 2017 bid for a Human Rights Council seat which prioritised indigenous rights and the integrity of indigenous populations, held two large art exhibitions and an ‘indigenous event’. This involved a curated photo exhibition by an Australian indigenous artist profiling different indigenous women, and an indigenous dance group *“that had been by chance performing in the building that night at another event hosted by the President of the GA”* (18th October 2017, New York). Currently, the Estonian mission, keen to demonstrate the state’s Finno-Ugric roots, has put on a large exhibition on the Sami people in the foyer of the UN building as part of its campaign for membership of the Security Council in 2019.

The natural environment of New York is also a ‘space of possibility’ enrolled diplomatically to open up new potentials in state claim-making. For example, the Dutch as part of their bid [costing some €4 million excluding personnel costs] for a Security Council seat for 2017-2018, and particularly wishing to garner support from the African regional grouping in the UN for the Dutch campaign for disaster risk reduction *“took everyone on a boat trip down to New Jersey because water is their thing - it was amazing and this was particularly about disaster risk reduction and water. It was a really great alignment and it turned out that they had a number of speakers and one of them was Dutch and was brought in after Katrina and Hoboken flooding, and it was a really nice ‘tie-in’ for their campaign”* (17th October 2017, New York).

‘Spaces of possibility’ thus elicit an emotional geopolitics connecting the material, visceral and sensual embodiments as they emerge out of, and through, diplomatic claim-making. Exploring the ‘lived experience’ of diplomatic performance helps expose the emotional production of statehood in the UN assemblage. To do this, we draw next upon individual accounts of consciously recognised and expressed feelings associated with their personal performance of diplomacy.

6. Emotional Geopolitics: The ‘lived experience’ of diplomats in their performance of claim-making

As we have argued, claim-making is fundamentally personal. Diplomats deal with themselves and things in their everyday coping in, and navigation of the micro-contexts of the UN in which actual and virtual possibilities open up and close down. Their ‘lived experience’ stems

from a “dynamic capacity for affecting and being affected” by other diplomatic bodies (Dewsbury 2000, 486). Their performance of state claims in ‘spaces of possibility’ has different emotional intensities. As we explained earlier, performances are always “to a greater or lesser extent, an encounter with the not yet known: they are risky, continually testing our insecurities” (ibid, 493). Feelings and emotions infuse and are central to understanding the intersections between and among diplomats and the UN environment. Despite being “messy matters” (Bondi and Davidson 2011, 596), diplomatic emotions are the most intense expression of the capture of the affects of linguistic and non-linguistic claim-making (Curti *et al* 2011). These are embodied, material, political, and immanent (Anderson and Smith 2001).

The emotional geopolitics of claim-making in the UN work through the anticipatory, the interactive, the relational and the emergent. Comments from a former serving UN diplomat reveal some of the performative desires, expectations and anxieties: *“I was very excited about the posting but I had no idea what I was getting myself into really...I can be pretty blunt on this - there was no training ahead of the posting. The Permanent Secretary of State came into my office and said ‘What do you think about going to New York?’ It came right out of the blue. I did not get any training on how to get our objectives across in this multilateral setting. I was pushed in the deep end...just left to swim...I felt abandoned”* (15th March 2017, Brussels).

The emotional response of this diplomat to their new environment can be grasped through his account of the mundane nature of quotidian diplomatic claim-making in the UN: *“The typical day was being at the office at 08.30 in the morning, working for about 1.5 hours. You go to the UN building for a meeting that takes place from 10-1pm. Then there’s two hours of lunch, so you go back to the office or if you are not having lunch with a colleague or you go to the cafeteria in the UN - shovel down some food, and then, go back to the office to do some more work- read the emails etc. Then having worked until 3pm, then back to the UN for meetings from 3-6pm”*. This ordinariness of the diplomatic everyday spurred considerable self-questioning about individual performance: *“It took me a long time not feeling bad about not being in the office and writing a memo or something - just sitting in the UN in meetings that were not very productive - people over-speak, they take up so much time...It took me a long time to realise that this is the way the system works”* (15th March 2017, Brussels).

Many diplomats expose rather than ‘play down’ their individual frustrations of performing state claim-making in the UN, and especially those with experience in the EU, who refer to *“the cultural shock in coming from Brussels...where you take a decision, you apply the decision, and if you don’t apply it you get taken to court. By contrast, here in New York, you take a decision, in the form of a resolution in the General Assembly, and you take the same decision again next year and again the following year. So how much is your influence in the UN? All the states in the world are there but I don’t know to what extent you can influence them”* (23rd June 2017, New York). This respondent’s perspective on living the diplomatic life is clearly shaped by a daily frustration over the claim-making process. Their emotional reaction is one of futility and despondency over state claim-making in the UN diplomatic assemblage.

Critically, ‘spaces of possibility’ for claim-making in the UN are emotionally heightened and mediated by feelings and sensibilities that surround individual performance and its affects. The emotions of these spaces are particularly revealed in an intimate account by a senior diplomat of performative anxiety surrounding their first speech in the General Assembly:

“After our Security Council membership finished, I arrived in New York about 10 days before our PR, as I arrived our outgoing PR became quite sick and was due to give a statement in the UN on Human Rights in their last week, my first week, and of course they weren’t there, so I ended up delivering it. It was both exciting and scary, I can still remember the colleague who took me down to the UN, I think we walked down, and I had just got my pass, and I had never been into the bottom of the Secretariat office before and I said ‘I don’t even know where I’m going’ and she said ‘its ok just follow me around’ and there’s this whole formality...there’s this whole pageant around it and when you speak in the GA you come up to the podium so I said ‘what do I, what am ... How do I? There’s a whole lot of procedure and formality and I just didn’t know what to do. She said ‘It’s ok. You sit here and when it’s your turn to speak someone will come up two people before you and then you sit on the side line and then they’ll...that was the only nervousness how does this all work and where do I go? Beforehand I read the prepared statement several times and made sure I was comfortable with it, and that I liked the way it read and flowed properly” (17th October 2017, New York).

The emotional geopolitics of diplomatic life underpinning claim-making is further acknowledged in accounts of UN Security Council performances. Here, performance tangibly ties “the personal to the political, the aesthetic to the material, the emotional to the social, [and] the individual body to the collective enterprise [of state claim-making]” (Smith 2000, 633). The Security Council chamber, designed by Norwegian architect Arnstein Arneberg with its iconic horse-shoe shaped seating plan laid out in front of a mural painted by the Norwegian artist Per Krohg (depicting a phoenix rising from its ashes, symbolic of the world’s rebirth after World War I), is a setting for often highly theatrical performances as a senior diplomat explained: *“You see some of the PRs are amazing- they are theatrical and can respond to prepared speeches in passionate and convincing ways and they don’t necessarily have a substance, but it’s the way they can convey a message - it’s phenomenal. The SC is very theatrical. Historically, there were some very strong personalities permanently in the SC who were known for their theatricality” (17th October 2017, New York).* There are numerous examples of this theatricality. For example, US Ambassador Adlai Stevenson addressed the UN Security Council and his Soviet counterpart Valerian Zorin at the height of the Cuban Missile crisis on 25 October 1962 by declaring “I want to say to you, Mr. Zorin, that I do not have your talent for obfuscation, for distortion, for confusing language, and for doubletalk. And I must confess to you that I am glad that I do not!”

For some debates the SC is open to non-members who patiently wait for their opportunity to perform. What is interesting is how the content of these speech performances affect individuals by discomfiting them in the presence of and proximity to, other diplomatic bodies particularly where the personal connection with others is strong. A good example of this was provided by a senior diplomat called upon to deliver their country’s position on the

Arab-Israeli dispute, in which a two-state solution is proposed. In this, the diplomat's physical positioning at the Security Council table alongside the PR from Israel, an individual with whom they have close connections, provokes a sense of personal unease. The emotional significance of situatedness to the performance of claim-making is readily apparent from this:

“On the day (of the Security Council meeting) I wasn't hugely nervous. I had a text which I've got to read. I made that statement at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon now the meeting began at 10 o'clock... and I wouldn't have been the last by any means. You've got a text in front of you. It's always interesting to see which side you'll sit. It's a ring with a break in the middle. The guests sit (points to picture)... I was sitting here. Either you are sitting next to the Palestinians if you are on this side or the Israelis if on this side. I was next to the Israeli delegation. So that's always very interesting. I know my colleague from the Israeli delegation very well; he's actually a very nice guy. I felt a little uncomfortable...but just focussed on reading the text very clearly without too many stumbles. You are not supposed to take more than 4 minutes” (23rd June 2016, New York).

This respondent demonstrates their emotional commitment to this statement acknowledging that they have stumbled in their delivery. However, this did not compromise the claim they sought to advance which was that *“Like minded countries need to maintain and safeguard international norms that describe the world as you would like it to be”*.

Personal reputation is formed through the display of distinctive diplomatic performance and is strongly related to individual diplomats' capacity to perform appropriately, including cooperation and helpfulness towards others. Within the UN assemblage diplomats must be able to perform to those around them in ways both adequate for their reputations and influential for state claim-making. As we have already seen, the emotions of individual diplomatic performance can be extensive either through word of mouth, or through social media platforms. Prospective alliances for claim-making or reinforcement of existing diplomatic cross-cultural networks are facilitated through these performances as explained by a senior diplomat: *“We use text and Whatsapp a lot. If you're doing a statement in a meeting we often send a photo through mobile phones saying 'saw you speaking that was a great statement...thanks for mentioning our country...or thanks for the shout-out for the Pacific'” (17th October 2017, New York).*

The pressures of diplomatic performance can weigh heavily on individuals. Diplomatic emotions and sense of self are intrinsically connected in claim-making. Periods of non-permanent membership of the Security Council, for example, bring with them opportunities not only for states to further the veracity of their claim-making, but also for individuals to enhance their own visibility and reputation through performance. When such periods finish, as one diplomat explained: *“You feel like 'you were this really popular kid who gets invited to all the parties and suddenly find yourself off the invitation list'” (17th October 2017, New York).* For some diplomats, performance in the UN may be explicitly lived through a palpable sense of self-doubt as a senior diplomat explained: *“I never spoke directly to my PR about this but I felt the weight of a very successful predecessor and high acclaim, and lots of experience and an incredible network and influence” (18th October 2017, New York).*

Crucially, the private emotions and sensibilities of diplomats affect state claim-making in the UN in multiple ways. Contending with the claim-making of others may personally displease, as one diplomat explained after an encounter with the Syrian representative at the UN: *“It’s interesting that...chatting to a Syrian colleague for example...you are always in this slightly difficult position of where Syrians think the Syrian government are doing absolutely dreadfully, and I had to listen to their Ambassador this morning speaking complete rubbish”* (23rd June 2017, New York). Keeping one’s emotions under control in diplomatic claim-making can be difficult even for the most patiently minded and experienced, as a senior diplomat explained: *“Some of my colleagues will come back from meetings and have said ‘such and such got up and just yelled at people’ or that the PR was very upset because someone had stood up and made a comment about something which was seen as challenging their experience and expertise and they are now going to be blocking other things that are going on as a result”* (18th October 2017, New York).

State claim-making through diplomatic performance in the UN is thus steeped in emotional geopolitics. Performance and emotions are constitutive of the political dynamics of the UN assemblage. Crucially, representing the state, as we have demonstrated, is more than the articulation of its claim-making discourses. Rather, it is an active ‘lived experience’ for diplomats that exposes the challenges and vulnerabilities of personal performance in their everyday lives.

7. Conclusions and a Future Research Agenda for an Emotional Geopolitics of Critical Diplomacies

This paper has exposed the complex emotional geopolitics of the UN to show for the first time the manifest and pervasive role that emotions play in the performance of world politics. We have argued for the inclusion of performance and its emotional geographies as a key contribution to the growing field of critical geopolitics. Using assemblage thinking, we have shown the emergent nature of state claim-making in what we have described as micro-scaled ‘spaces of possibility’. Crucially, we have exposed how the everyday crafting of the state through performances in these spaces elicits an emotional geopolitics connecting the material, visceral and sensual embodiments as they emerge out of, and through, diplomatic claim-making.

Our focus on the ‘lived experience’ of diplomacy in the UN has revealed how performance limits and empowers, silences and vocalises, impresses and distresses. Diplomatic performance is thus indisputably central to state claim-making. These performances are fuelled by a range of emotions which, as we have shown, disclose the personal contests, responsibilities and vulnerabilities of everyday diplomacy in the UN. We have shown that the resulting emotional geopolitics are volatile, not least because of the expressive range displayed and their variable reception by different audiences. Here we are thinking not only of participants or immediate spectators of diplomatic performances, but also how increasingly these performances are stored and (re)circulated to global audiences through mainstream and social media platforms. Diplomats reflect on their performance, scrutinising its effectiveness in articulating state claims and convincing others of their veracity, as well as the

consequences for their own professional reputations and everyday lives. Without doubt, performing for the state does not come easily for diplomats – it tests their personal capacities, challenges social dexterity and confronts individual’s adaptability to different formal and informal socio-cultural, institutional and material contexts for state claim-making. Diplomatic performance is therefore critical to explanations of the work and effort needed in the making of states.

We have provided detailed analysis of some of these fruitful and substantive issues in this paper. However, we have only been able to broach this new area of enquiry, and our work opens up a new agenda for future research in what we have termed the emotional geopolitics of state claim-making. Here we highlight two areas that in our opinion are richly deserving of study. The first is exploring the interpretation of emotional disclosures in diplomatic performance. How diplomats read the resonances and emotional registers of others’ performances in everyday diplomatic encounters and, specifically, how these are refracted through their own diplomatic culture is largely overlooked in current geopolitical scholarship. Such work would chime strongly with the growing interest in culture in critical diplomacies (Dittmer 2017). A second promising area for future research is emotional expression and disclosure on behalf of particular collectivities that seek to engage with state sensibilities. Emotion and its performance is a critical resource that is played upon to deliver meaning and bolster support for the legitimation of particular claims, not least those made over indigenous rights and regional identities. The study of emotional geopolitics is thus central to inaugurating entirely new understanding of the communicative qualities of state and non-state diplomacies that geographers are uniquely well placed to address.

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