

The Measurement of Fear



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What does it mean to be fearful in the eyes of the law? Recognizing fear, evaluating its plausibility and verifying its rationality has been at the core of asylum law ever since the United Nations established that refugee is a person with a well-founded fear of past and future persecution. My research is concerned with the political effects of US asylum law's reliance on the measurement of fear, and the implications of its presumed access to a person's psychic state.

I will present the case of an asylum seeker whose process I followed closely during my preliminary research in New York. I will take you through Maria's "Reasonable Fear Interview," and her appearance before the immigration judge to prove the "well-foundedness" of her fear. Her case was particularly relevant to my research for two reasons: 1) It exposed how psychiatric practices and legal culture together define who is mentally ill and who is a reasonable subject before the law; 2) It showed how unpublished cases and appealed decisions are the locus of epistemic uncertainty in statecraft.

I will close the presentation by sharing some of the graphic references I will use to write this project in comics form.

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12:30 - 1:20pm
Building 50, 51A



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BROWN BAG FORUM