ANG 6339: Seminar on Latin America

“Landscapes of Violence and Hope in Latin America”

cross-listed with GEA 6409: “Landscapes of Violence and Healing in the Americas”

SYLLABUS

[Please note, this syllabus is a draft schedule. Dates and content are always subject to change by University officials.]

Class meets: Monday, 10:00AM-12:40PM
Classroom: PC 445 (Charles E. Perry)
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 4:00PM - 5:00PM (or by appointment); SIPA 324
E-mail: uoslende@fiu.edu (please always put ANG 6339 in the “Subject” line when e-mailing me)
Course website: On Canvas at: https://canvas.fiu.edu/

A través de la tierra juntad todos
los silenciosos labios derramados
y desde el fondo habladme toda esta larga noche
...
Hablad por mis palabras y mi sangre.

“From across the earth bring together
all the silenced scattered lips
and from the depths speak to me all night long
...
Speak through my words and my blood”

Pablo Neruda - ‘Alturas de Macchu Picchu’ (1950)
About the Seminar

Welcome to our Seminar! As the subtitle suggests, in this seminar we will enquire into the ‘Landscapes of Violence and Hope in Latin America’. Nation-building in Latin America has been and continues to be a process of violence. From the violence of the European conquest and colonization meted out against the indigenous population, the enslavement of Africans and their descendants, via the wars of independence from Spain and Portugal, dictatorships and their dirty wars and ethnicides, to today’s wars against drugs or massive forced displacement, violence has been a deeply disturbing but also creative process throughout Latin American history. In fact, Latin American political, economic and cultural landscapes today are the direct result of these violent processes. At the same time, dominant violence has also always been resisted. These resistances have been fuelled by sentiments of hope. The wars of independence, and the numerous rebellions and revolutions maybe best exemplify these aspirations for better futures. Yet they also illustrate the entanglements of hope and violence that have characterized the political and cultural landscapes in Latin America for centuries.

In this seminar we will read a number books – including novels and testimonial writing – by Latin American and Caribbean authors and will attempt to map out these themes. ‘Mapping out’ means both examining where these landscapes of violence have been produced and to what effect, as well as making wider conceptual connections between different forms of violence along gender, race, and class lines. This seminar is a bit different from your ‘normal’ social science seminar, in that we will not read texts by U.S. or European scholars on Latin America, but works of literature by Latin American authors. As such, students interested in the seminar should have a general interest in literature, and particularly in fiction. We will read a lot! Please bear this in mind, when signing up for this course! Rather than an advisory, this is meant as an invitation for you to discover your poetic vein and share it with the rest of us in class.

Among the texts we will read are some classics of Latin American literature, such as the works by Bartolomé de Las Casas, Miguel Barnet, and Alejo Carpentier, as well as exciting and innovative classics in the making (you’ve heard it here first!), such as the mesmerizing Afrocentric novel ‘Changó, the Biggest Badass’ by Manuel Zapata Olivella. A particular focus will be on testimonio writing, an important literary genre in Latin America that emphasizes personal narrative, often from marginalized or exploited groups, such as in Barnet (the enslaved), Rigoberta Menchú (the indigenous), or Alfredo Molano (the displaced). We will finish the course with a stimulating account of the landscapes of hope created by the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico (as seen through the eyes of Gustavo Esteva, a self-proclaimed ‘de-professionalized intellectual’).

Seminar Requirements

In this seminar emphasis is placed on thorough reading and a critical engagement with the literature. This means that there will be little formal lecturing on my part. Instead, students will take an active role in the seminar, analyzing, critiquing and debating the weekly readings. The final course grade will be determined as follows:

- Seminar Participation: 20%
- Weekly written analysis of assigned readings: 50%
- Final critical paper: 30%
Seminar Participation

Seminar participation constitutes a significant part of the seminar grade. It will be assessed not just by the number of interventions of each student during class, but also by the quality of the contribution to the discussion. Students are highly encouraged to be well prepared to talk at length about assigned readings. Depending on the number of students, we will have individual or small group presentations on the week’s respective reading. Each student should be prepared to present on at least two books during the semester. In week 1 you will be able to put your name down for specific texts you would like to present on in class. These presentations will form part of the participation assessment. Unexcused absences from class will have a negative impact on seminar participation assessment. Seminar participation will make up a total of 20% of the final grade.

Weekly written analysis of assigned readings

Each week students will prepare a short analysis of the assigned readings (around 500 words), to be submitted before the session in which the reading is discussed. This should be a summary of the reading, in which you reflect in particular on the landscapes of violence and/or hope as they are portrayed by the respective author. That is, you will map out these themes in the respective book. As the seminar progresses, you should be able to relate the various readings amongst each other. For example, when discussing Barnet’s ‘Biography of a Runaway Slave’ in week 5, you should be able to relate this text to Carpentier’s novel on the slave rebellion in Haiti examined in week 4. When we turn to Zapata Olivella’s Afrocentric epic in the later part of the course, you should be able to relate this reading to both Carpentier and Barnet. That is, as the seminar progresses, your weekly analysis will become more complex, better formulated, and more far-reaching. The weekly written analysis makes up 50% of the final course grade.

Final critical paper

This paper – of around 4,000 words in length – will be a synthesis of the seminar that should critically examine the themes of violence and hope in Latin America, as elaborated during the course. You should be able to establish clear links at this stage between the different readings. You won’t have to refer to every text discussed in class, but may instead focus on those texts that are most relevant to your own scholarly activities, or that you are particularly interested in. I will explain more on this in class. The final paper is due on Dec 2 (Week 15) and constitutes 30% of the final course grade.

Policy on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is cheating. Plagiarism is pathetic. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please familiarize yourselves with the section on “Academic Misconduct” in the FIU Student Handbook. Should plagiarism be detected in your work, you will receive an automatic fail grade for the entire class, not just for the individual exercise. Please spare yourself and me the trouble. Thanks!
**Required Texts**

The following required books are available at FIU’s bookstore. Most are also available as new or used copies through on-line booksellers. Make sure you get the editions cited below. I’ve chosen those that come with a useful Introduction to the work:


**Alejo Carpentier** (2006) [1949], *The kingdom of this world*, FSG Classics (Introduction by Edwidge Danticat)

**Miguel Barnet** (2003) [1968], *Biography of a runaway slave*, Curbstone Press


**Alfredo Molano** (2005), *The Dispossessed: chronicles of the desterrados of Colombia*, Haymarket Books (Foreword by Aviva Chomsky)

**Gabriel García Márquez** (1991) [1968], *In evil hour*, HarperPerennial

**Edwidge Danticat** (2003), *The Farming of Bones*, Soho Press

**Manuel Zapata Olivella** (2010) [1983], *Changó, the biggest badass*, Texas Tech University Press (Introduction by William Luis)

**Gustavo Esteva** (2008), *Celebration of zapatismo*, Ediciones Basta! (book is out of print; I will distribute a pdf-file, made available by the author)

**Additional article (for week 5 and after):**


**Films to Watch**

Below is a short selection of films that may usefully accompany some of our readings. Please watch them in your own time before the day when the respective reading is discussed in class. The films should form part of class discussion. If available at FIU library, the library code is given here. Students are encouraged to add their film suggestions to the syllabus as we go through the semester.

“*Apocalypto*” (Dir. Mel Gibson)  
“Even the Rain” (Dir. Iciar Bollain)  
“Cobra Verde” (Dir. Werner Herzog)  
“Egalité for all: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution” (PBS)  
[click here](#)
WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE
(subject to adjustments)

Week 1: Aug 26
  Introduction of seminar.
  Reading: none assigned

Week 2: Sept 2
  NO CLASS: LABOR DAY!

Week 3: Sept 9
  Reading: De las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*
  Film: “Apocalypto” (Dir. Mel Gibson)
  Film: “Even the Rain” (Dir. Iciar Bollain)

Week 4: Sept 16
  Reading: Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*
  Film: “Haitian Revolution: Toussaint L’Ouverture” [click here]

Week 5: Sept 23
  Reading: Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*
  Literature in Latin America”, *Latin American Perspectives* 18(3), pp. 3-14

Week 6: Sept 30
  Reading: Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian Woman in Guatemala*

Week 7: Oct 7
  Reading: Molano, *The Dispossessed*

Week 8: Oct 14
  Reading: non assigned
  Discussing testimonial literature: possibility and controversy

Week 9: Oct 21
  Reading: García Márquez, *In Evil Hour*

Week 10: Oct 28
  Reading: Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*

Week 11: Nov 4
  Reading: Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass* (pp.1-202)
  Film: “Cobra Verde” (Dir. Werner Herzog)

Week 12: Nov 11
  NO CLASS: VETERANS’ DAY!
Week 13: Nov 18
  Reading: Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass* (pp.205-end)

Week 14: Nov 25
  Reading: Esteva, *Celebration of Zapatismo*

Week 15: Dec 2
  Reading: non assigned
  Wrap-up of class
  *Dec 2 (10AM): Final critical paper due!*

Week 16: Dec 9     FINALS WEEK