FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL & SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES  
PROFESSOR: ULRICH OSLENDER

GEO 6478: CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

SYLLABUS

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

Class meets: Tuesdays, 17:00-19:40  
Classroom: SIPA 502  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 15.00-17.00, or by appointment  
Office: SIPA 324  
E-mail: uoslende@fiu.edu

“Each nation has the geopolitics it deserves”  
Hans Weigert (1942), Generals and geographers: the twilight of geopolitics

About the Seminar

Welcome to the exciting world of Critical Geopolitics! Here we will deconstruct, re-read and critique much of what has been taken for granted in the world of global politics.

Originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899 to express the territorial basis of the modern state, the concept of ‘geopolitics’ has been on a rollercoaster of emotions, betrayal and reinvention ever since. Associated with Hitler’s policies of spatial expansionism in Nazi Germany, geopolitics was condemned by some as ‘an intellectual poison’ and ‘pseudo science’ in the 1950s, only to be rehabilitated as term in the Cold War context of the 1970s by security intellectuals and foreign policy advisors in the US, such as Henry Kissinger. In Latin America, geopolitics has been linked to military regimes in Brazil, Argentina and Chile (Chile’s dictator Augusto Pinochet, e.g., was a Professor of Geopolitics at the National Military Academy in Chile; he published a book titled Geopolítica in 1974).

Geopolitics has traditionally been used to refer to the study of the geographical representations, rhetoric and practices that underpin world politics. Classically associated with issues related to nation-states, territoriality, sovereignty, international boundary disputes, and the practice of warfare between states, the term now includes such phenomena as global security and global terror. Importantly, geopolitics has historically been tied to the way dominant and powerful sovereign nation-states represent the world spatially with a view to their foreign policy agenda.
Geopolitics has always been a contentious form of knowledge and practice, and there have been many critiques to dominant geopolitical reasoning. This seminar will focus on ‘critical geopolitics’, a school of thought that emerged in the 1980s that challenges hegemonic ways of seeing and representing such as in foreign policy discourse. Critical geopolitics takes apart the normalized categories and narratives of geopolitics. It questions assumptions in a taken-for-granted world and provides an alternative perspective on seeing and representing the world.

The seminar is broadly structured in three parts. We will first approach some of the conceptual issues of what critical geopolitics actually is. This will include quite recent and exciting engagements with notions of feminist and anti-geopolitics. In Part II, we will turn towards an examination of war, terror, and evil, including the “war on terror,” one of the most salient themes in contemporary debates in critical geopolitics. Finally, we will turn towards Latin America and examine a number of critical approaches to geopolitics in this part of the world.

Throughout the seminar, students are encouraged to relate the conceptual themes addressed to their own research interests and agenda. It will become apparent that critical geopolitics provides not only a conceptual and theoretical critique of traditional geopolitics, but also an innovative methodology of enquiry in the social sciences that can be applied to a wide spectrum of concrete research situations.

**Seminar Requirements**

In this seminar emphasis is placed on thorough reading and a critical engagement with literature pertaining to the field of critical geopolitics. 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly written analysis of assigned readings</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final critical paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 thus 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 makes up 20% of the final grade.**
**Weekly written analysis of assigned readings**

Each week students will prepare a short analysis of the assigned readings (around 750 words), to be sent to me before the session in which the reading is discussed. This should be a summary giving the gist of the reading, clearly outlining the author’s principal argument and the theoretical perspective employed. It should also include a commentary on your part, in which you may agree or disagree with the arguments brought forward. As the seminar progresses, you should be able to relate the various readings amongst each other. That is, 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 critical synthesis of the seminar that should establish links 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. Moreover, this paper should include a separate section, in which you relate the course readings to your own research interests and agenda. You may feel inspired by certain methodological approaches that we will discuss, or particular perspectives covered during the course, such as feminist geopolitics. You may be drawn to particular empirical case studies that you are interested in developing in your own research. In sum, in the final paper you should critically outline the relevance of the seminar’s reading to your future research agendas. This might be quite tentative for some of you at the early stages of your studies, but it is a fundamentally important exercise to spell out these possible connections. I will explain more on this in class. The final paper is due in Week 15 (Apr 21) and constitutes 30% of the final course grade.

**Policy on Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is cheating. Plagiarism is pathetic. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. The disciplinary action that will be taken in the case of plagiarism is explained in the section on “Academic Misconduct” in the FIU Student Handbook. Please familiarize yourselves with this policy.

**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.

Ó Tuathail, Gearóid (1996), Critical geopolitics: the politics of writing global space, Routledge


Gregory, Derek (2004), The colonial present, Blackwell

Arendt, Hannah (1977) [1963], Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil, Penguin

Shapiro, Michael (2009), Cinematic geopolitics, London: Routledge

Demick, Barbara (2012), Logavina Street: life and death in a Sarajevo neighborhood, Spiegel & Grau

Mignolo, Walter (2005), The idea of Latin America, Blackwell

Slater, David (2004), Geopolitics and the post-colonial: rethinking north-south relations, Blackwell

Additional Readings (articles, book chapters)

Kearns, Gerry (2008), “Progressive geopolitics”, Geography Compass 2/5, pp.1599-1620
Dalby, Simon (2010), “Recontextualising violence, power and nature: the next twenty years of critical geopolitics?” Political Geography 29(5), pp.280-288

Films to Watch

The following are films that accompany many of our readings. They are to be watched in your own time before the day when the respective reading is discussed in class. The films will form part of class discussion. If available at FIU library, the library code is given here.

- “Taxi to the dark side”, (Dir. Alex Gibney) HV6432.7 .T39 2008
- “Hannah Arendt”, (Dir. Margarethe von Trotta) NVS 607
- “Salvador” (Dir. Oliver Stone) FF 1690
- “The War we are living” (Documentary on La Toma, Colombia) http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/full-episodes/the-war-we-are-living/
WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE
(subject to adjustments)

Week 1: Jan 13
Introduction to seminar. Students introduce their work / research interests in class.
Reading: none assigned

Part I: Conceptualizations

Week 2: Jan 20
Reading: Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, pp.1-15
Ó Tuathail, *The Geopolitics Reader*, pp.1-14
Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp.1-140 (book)

Week 3: Jan 27
Reading: Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp.141-end (book)

Week 4: Feb 3
Hyndman (2003), “Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11th”
Oslander (2009), “Anti-geopolitics”

Week 5: Feb 10
Reading: Kearns (2008), “Progressive geopolitics”
Megoran (2010), “Towards a geography of peace”
Dalby (2010), “The next twenty years of critical geopolitics?”

Week 6: Feb 17
Reading: Said (2003) [1978], *Orientalism*
Documentary / Interview: “Said on Orientalism”:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g

Part II: War, Terror, Evil

Week 7: Feb 24
Reading: Gregory (2004), *The Colonial Present*
Film: “Taxi to the dark side”, (Dir. Alex Gibney)

Week 8: Mar 3
Reading: Arendt (1977), *Banality of Evil*
Film: “Hannah Arendt”, (Dir. Margarethe von Trotta)

GEO 6478 – Syllabus – Spring 2015
Week 9: Mar 10
SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Reading: none assigned

Week 10: Mar 17
Reading: Shapiro (2009), *Cinematic Geopolitics*
Film: “Salvador” (Dir. Oliver Stone)  FF 1690

Week 11: Mar 24
Reading: Demick (2012), *Logavina Street*

**Part III: Geopolitics and Latin America**

Week 12: Mar 31
Reading: Mignolo (2005), *The Idea of Latin America*

Week 13: Apr 7
Reading: Slater (2004), *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial*

Week 14: Apr 14
Reading: Escobar (2008), *Territories of Difference*, pp.1-155
Film: “The War we are living” (Documentary on La Toma, Colombia)
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/full-episodes/the-war-we-are-living/

Week 15: Apr 21
Reading: continue Escobar (2008), *Territories of Difference*, pp.156-end
*Final critical paper due!*

Week 16: Apr 28
FINAL WEEK: we will discuss Critical Geopolitics as related to students’ research interests