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: Tue 11:00AM-1:45PM
Classroom: SIPA 503
Office Hours: Tue 3.00PM-4.00PM, Thur 12.00PM-1.00PM, or by appointment
Office: SIPA 324
Phone: 305.348-3651
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 incidentally published a book called 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 four 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. We will then examine issues of representation and practice in geopolitics, and how they can be critically deconstructed. In the third part we will turn towards an examination of war and terror (including the ‘war on terror’), one of the most salient themes in contemporary debates in both traditional and 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 seminar sessions thereby constitute an important training in the development of an articulated capacity of critical thinking that is the cornerstone of academic knowledge construction. The final course grade will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seminar Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly written analysis of assigned readings</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final critical paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
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**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. During the seminar I will call at random on students to answer questions concerning the reading. Failure to reply will result in a negative participation assessment. Unexcused absences from class will also 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 750 words), to be handed in during 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. For example, when examining Geopolitics and Latin America in Part IV of the course (see below), we start off with Galeano’s ‘Open Veins of Latin America’. In your weekly analysis, this reading should be related to the conceptual ideas that we will have already discussed in Part I by then. When we then turn to Escobar’s ‘Territories of Difference’ three weeks later, I would expect you to relate this also to Galeano’s text. 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 3,000 words in length – will be a 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 their PhD studies, but it is a fundamentally important exercise to spell out these possible connections. The final paper is due in Week 15 (April 17) 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
Harvey, David (2003), The new imperialism, Oxford University Press
Gregory, Derek (2004), The colonial present, Blackwell
Elden, Stuart (2009), *Terror and territory: the spatial extent of sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press
Slater, David (2004), *Geopolitics and the post-colonial: rethinking north-south relations*, Blackwell

**Additional Readings (articles, book chapters)**

Wittfogel, Karl (1985) [1929], “Geopolitics, geographical materialism, and Marxism”, *Antipode* 17(1):21-72 (special issue dedicated to the geographical ideas of Karl Wittfogel)

**WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE**

**Week 1: Jan 10**
- Introduction of seminar. Students introducing their work / research interests in class.
  Reading: none assigned

**Part I: Conceptualizations**

**Week 2: Jan 17**
  Reading: Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp.1-140

**Week 3: Jan 24**
  Reading: Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp.141-end
  Wittfogel, Karl (1985) [1929], “Geopolitics, geographical materialism, and Marxism”, *Antipode*, 17(1), pp.21-72

**Week 4: Jan 31**
  Hyndman (2003), “Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11th”
  Oslender (2009), “Anti-geopolitics”
Part II: Representation and Practice

Week 5: Feb 7
  Reading: Said (2003) [1978], *Orientalism*

Week 6: Feb 14
  Reading: Harvey (2003), *The new imperialism*

Week 7: Feb 21
  Reading: Gregory (2004), *The colonial present*

Part III: War and Terror

Week 8: Feb 28
  NO SEMINAR: Professor Oslender away at the AAG, New York
  Reading: Gregory & Pred (2007), *Violent geographies*

Week 9: Mar 6
  Reading: continue Gregory & Pred (2007), *Violent geographies*

Week 10: Mar 13
  NO SEMINAR: Spring Break

Week 11: Mar 20
  Reading: Elden (2009), *Terror and territory*

Part IV: Geopolitics and Latin America

Week 12: Mar 27
  Reading: Galeano (1997) [1971], *Open veins of Latin America*

Week 13: Apr 3
  Reading: Slater (2004), *Geopolitics and the post-colonial*

Week 14: Apr 10
  Reading: Escobar (2008), *Territories of difference*

Week 15: Apr 17
  Reading: continue Escobar (2008), *Territories of difference*
  *Final critical paper due in class!*

Week 16: Apr 24
  FINAL WEEK: we will discuss Critical Geopolitics as related to students’ research interests