

Professor Ulrich Oslender

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: Tuesdays 5:00PM - 7:40PM
Classroom: GC 273B (Graham Center)
Office Hours: Thursdays, 4:00-6:00PM (or by appointment); SIPA 324
E-mail: uoslende@fiu.edu (please always put ANG 6339 or GEA 6409 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 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 and 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 of 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).

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. Students are expected to be well prepared to discuss 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 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 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 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 6, 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 Apr 18 (Week 15) and constitutes 30% of the final course grade.**

Using Canvas

Our course is on Canvas at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/>. Additional readings are posted here together with announcements. It is your responsibility to ensure that you know how to use this site. If you experience problems, contact Canvas support at 305.348-3630, or <https://canvas.fiu.edu/support/>.

Academic Misconduct, Cheating and Plagiarism

Academic Misconduct is defined, amongst others, as the following intentional acts or omissions:

Cheating: The unauthorized use of any materials, information, study aids or assistance from another person on any academic assignment or exercise. Assisting another student in the unauthorized use of any materials, information, study aids. Having a substitute complete any academic assignment or completing an academic assignment for someone else, either paid or unpaid.

Plagiarism: The use and appropriation of another's work without any indication of the source and the representation of such work as the student's own. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas, expressions or materials taken from another source, including internet sources, is guilty of plagiarism. Any student helping another to plagiarize may be found guilty of academic misconduct.

Multiple Submission: Submitting the same or substantially the same academic work (including oral presentations) for credit more than once.

Penalties: Academic Misconduct will not be tolerated and dealt with according to the proceedings outlined in the Student Conduct and Honor Code. Please familiarize yourselves with this policy. Any student suspected of Academic Misconduct will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity (SCAI). The suggested minimum penalty for Academic Misconduct in this class shall be zero points for the assignment in which misconduct occurred, plus one full grade deduction in the student's final grade (i.e., if you were to receive a A- in class, you would get a B- instead, etc.).

Important Notice on Use of Generative AI Tools in Submissions: After careful consideration and in alignment with our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic honesty, I must inform you that the use of generative AI tools, including but not limited to text-generating platforms such as ChatGPT, is strictly prohibited when completing and submitting your assignments. While acknowledging the rapid advancements in technology and the potential benefits they may offer, academic success is best achieved through your individual efforts, critical thinking, and creativity. Utilizing generative AI tools undermines the learning process, diminishes the value of your education, and compromises the integrity of your work.

To help you further gain awareness of these matters, you are required to include in your submissions the following statement:

"I hereby confirm that I have not made use of generative AI tools in the preparation of my work I am submitting here."

There is an exception to this rule: Should you use AI tools that help improve your grammar and general writing skills, such as Grammarly or DeepL, then please acknowledge that in the following statement:

"I hereby declare that I have made use of the following AI tools in the preparation of my work I am submitting here: [Name of AI tool]. This tool was exclusively used to improve my grammar/writing skills. All work submitted here is mine."

Please note that failure to correctly declare your use of generative AI tools will lead to a charge of academic misconduct (see above).

I believe in your abilities and am confident that your dedication to learning and personal growth will yield the best possible outcomes. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in upholding the principles of academic integrity.

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. Try to get the editions cited below. I've chosen those that come with a useful Introduction to the work:

Bartolomé De las Casas (2004) [1542], *A short account of the destruction of the Indies*, Penguin Classics (Introduction by Anthony Pagden)

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

Rigoberta Menchú (2009) [1983], *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian woman in Guatemala*, Verso

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

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)

Additional article:

- Gugelberger, Georg & Michael Kearney (1991), "Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America", *Latin American Perspectives* 18(3), pp. 3-14

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)	NVS 819
"Even the Rain" (Dir. Iciar Bollain)	NVS 36
"Cobra Verde" (Dir. Werner Herzog)	
"Egalité for all: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution" (PBS)	click here
"Mayan Renaissance: the Untold Story of the Maya" (2012)	click here
"Birds of Passage" (Dir. Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra)	NVS 9318

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

(subject to adjustments)

Week 1: Jan 9

Introduction of seminar.

Reading: none assigned

Week 2: Jan 16

Class discussion: Violence, Resistance and Hope in Latin America. Prep for Course Readings.

Reading: none assigned

Film: “Apocalypto” (Dir. Mel Gibson)

Film: “Even the Rain” (Dir. Iciar Bollain)

Week 3: Jan 23

Reading: De las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

Week 4: Jan 30

Reading: Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*

Documentary: “Haitian Revolution: Toussaint L’Ouverture”; click [here](#)

Week 5: Feb 6

Reading: Gugelberger, G. & M. Kearney (1991), “Voices for the Voiceless: Testimonial Literature in Latin America”, *Latin American Perspectives* 18(3), pp. 3-14

Week 6: Feb 13

Reading: Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*

Week 7: Feb 20

Reading: Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian Woman in Guatemala*

Documentary: “Mayan Renaissance: the Untold Story of the Maya”; click [here](#)

Week 8: Feb 27

- NO CLASS: Spring Break!

Week 9: Mar 5

Reading: none assigned

Discussing controversy over Rigoberta Menchú

Week 10: Mar 12

Reading: Molano, *The Dispossessed*

Film: “Birds of Passage” (Dir. Cristina Gallego and Ciro Guerra)

Week 11: Mar 19

Reading: none assigned

Discussing testimonial literature: possibility and controversy

Week 12: Mar 26

Reading: Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*

Week 13: Apr 2

Reading: Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass* (pp.1-202)

Film: “Cobra Verde” (Dir. Werner Herzog)

Week 14: Apr 9

Reading: Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass* (pp.205-end)

Week 15: Apr 16

Reading: non assigned

Wrap-up of class

Apr 18: Final critical paper due!

Week 16: Apr 23 FINALS WEEK