

PROFESSOR: ULRICH OSLENDER

GEO 6478-U01: CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS

[cross-listed with SYO 6306-U01: Political Sociology]

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: Ziff Education Building 120
Office Hours: TBC
E-mail: uoslende@fiu.edu (please always put class ID in the “Subject” line when e-mailing me; i.e. GEO 6478 or SYO 6306)
Course website: On Canvas at: <https://canvas.fiu.edu/>

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 U.S., 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 even 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 focuses 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 taken-for-granted assumptions and often aims at providing 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 includes 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 resistance, 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 and resistance 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:

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. Students are highly encouraged to be well prepared to talk at length about assigned readings. Each student should be prepared to lead the conversation on at least two books during the semester. In week 1 you will be able to put your name down for specific texts that you would like to lead the conversation on in class. 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 500 words), to be submitted via a Turnitin link on Canvas 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. As the seminar progresses, you should be able to relate the various readings amongst each other. That is, your weekly analysis becomes 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 – is 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, if applicable, this paper should include a 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 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 16 (Apr 24) and constitutes 30% of the final course grade.**

Academic Misconduct

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

Cheating: The unauthorized use of 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 be 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 B in class, you would get a C instead, etc.).

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
Said, Edward (2003) [1978], *Orientalism*, Random House
Gregory, Derek (2004), *The Colonial Present*, Blackwell
Anonymous (2006), *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City: a Diary*, Picador
Slater, David (2004), *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations*, Blackwell
Zibechi, Raúl (2012), *Territories in Resistance: A Cartography of Latin American Social Movements*, AK Press

Additional Readings (articles, book chapters)

Flint, Colin (2011), "Prologue", in C. Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics* (2nd ed), Routledge, pp.1-15
Dowler, Lorraine & Joanne Sharp (2001), "A feminist geopolitics?", *Space & Polity* 5(3):165-176
Hepple, Leslie (2000), "Géopolitiques de gauche: Yves Lacoste, Hérodote and French radical geopolitics", in K. Dodds & D. Atkinson (eds), *Geopolitical traditions: a century of geopolitical thought*, London: Routledge, pp.268-301
Hyndman, Jennifer (2003), "Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11", [ACME](#) 2(1):1-13
Lacoste, Yves (1973), "An illustration of geographical warfare: bombing the dikes on the Red River, North Vietnam", in H. Bauder & S. Engel-di Mauro (Eds), *Critical Geographies: A Collection of Readings*, Praxis (e)Press, pp.620-636 [click [here](#)]
Oslender, Ulrich (2009), "Anti-geopolitics", in R. Kitchin & N. Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography*, vol. 1, Oxford: Elsevier, pp.152-158
Ó Tuathail, Gearóid (1996), "An anti-geopolitical eye: Maggie O'Kane in Bosnia, 1992-93", *Gender, Place and Culture* 3(2), pp.171-185

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.

- "[Said on Orientalism](#)" (Documentary/Interview) DS12 .E39 2002
- "Taxi to the Dark Side" (Dir. Alex Gibney) HV6432.7 .T39 2008
- "Zero Dark Thirty" (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow) NVS 934
- "A Woman in Berlin" (Dir. Max Färberböck; 2008) NVS 2090
- "[The War on Democracy](#)" (Dir. John Pilger) F 1418.W36 2007

WEEKLY READING SCHEDULE

(subject to adjustments)

Week 1: Jan 10

Introduction to seminar. Students introduce their work / research interests in class.

Reading: Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, pp.1-15

Part I: Conceptualizations

Week 2: Jan 17

Reading: Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, pp.1-140 (book)

Week 3: Jan 24

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

Week 4: Jan 31

Reading: Hepple (2000), “*Géopolitiques de gauche*: French radical geopolitics”

Lacoste (1973), “An illustration of geographical warfare”

Week 5: Feb 7

Reading: Dowler & Sharp (2001), “A feminist geopolitics?”

Hyndman (2003), “Beyond either/or: a feminist analysis of September 11”

Ó Tuathail (1996), “An anti-geopolitical eye: Maggie O’Kane in Bosnia, 1992-93”

Oslender (2009), “Anti-geopolitics”

Week 6: Feb 14

Reading: Said (2003) [1978], *Orientalism* (book)

Documentary / Interview: “[Said on Orientalism](#)”

Part II: War, Terror, Resistance

Week 7: Feb 21

Reading: Gregory (2004), *The Colonial Present*, pp.1-143 (book)

Film: “Taxi to the Dark Side” (Dir. Alex Gibney)

Week 8: Feb 28

- NO CLASS: Spring Break!

Week 9: Mar 7

Reading: Gregory (2004), *The Colonial Present*, pp.144-end (book)

Film: “Zero Dark Thirty” (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow)

Week 10: Mar 14

Reading: Anonymous (2006), *A Woman in Berlin* (book)

Film: “A Woman in Berlin” (Dir. Max Färberböck)

Week 11: Mar 21

War, Terror, Resistance, and Critical Geopolitics: open discussion

Reading: none assigned

Part III: Geopolitics and Latin America

Week 12: Mar 28

Reading: Slater (2004), *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial*, pp.1-114 (book)

Film: "[The War on Democracy](#)" (Dir. John Pilger)

Week 13: Apr 4

Reading: Slater (2004), *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial*, pp.115-end (book)

Week 14: Apr 11

Reading: Zibeche (2012), *Territories in Resistance*, pp.1-186 (book)

Week 15: Apr 18

Reading: Zibeche (2012), *Territories in Resistance*, pp.187-end (book)

Week 16: Apr 25

FINALS WEEK: we will wrap up course, and discuss Critical Geopolitics as related to students' research interests

Final critical paper due: Apr 24