

EVRN/GEOG 371: Environmental Geopolitics

Final Project:

Decoding Political Claims About the Environment

(Or: Demonstrating a critical geopolitics analysis of environmental discourse)

Overview

Critical geopolitics looks at how certain kinds of knowledge are used to make claims about the world and analyzes how that knowledge is not always complete, comprehensive, or applicable to all cases. Your task is to demonstrate a critical geopolitical approach to a claim about the environment of your choosing. You may choose to analyze a mainstream understanding of an environmental situation, a political claim about why we should (or should not) do something in relation to an environmental feature, or a statement about what is important (either threatening or worth protecting) about an environmental feature. The idea is to expand on and contribute to the discussions in the *Environmental Geopolitics* book we are using for this class and to share your work with other students in this class now and in future iterations of this class and with people beyond KU. Steps 1 through 5 of this project will be in written form as described below. Your final project may take the form of a paper, but it could also take a different form such as a video, a podcast, a poster, or another format that you feel reflects and communicates what you have learned..

Instead of a final exam, you will present your work at the Center for Undergraduate Research 2020 Fall Undergraduate Research Showcase (Online Event). Everyone in the class will also register at this event as an (online) attendee to comment on other people's work. For more info see:

<https://ugresearch.ku.edu/student/share/fall>.

Step 1: Brainstorm (50 points)

Choose a mainstream discourse or political claim about the environment that you find interesting, compelling, or perhaps frustrating. You might think of such claims as expressing a particular view of the world. In class, we have considered topics such as climate security, resource conflict, human population growth and environmental scarcities. You might select a particular claim under one of those larger concepts, or you might choose to focus on a topic nearby or maybe completely different from those topics. There will be opportunities in class to work on your selection.

Due:

- A paragraph or page-long description of your chosen claim about the environment that specifies what the claim is and how it is evident in the world.
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Step 2: Refine and identify sources (50 points)

Identify the form of discourse that you are examining. In this class, we look at four forms of discourse: text/narrative, practice, materiality, and identity. Is your chosen political claim about the environment in the form of a map or document? Is it in the form of a practice that people learn and do? Is it in the form of a physical structure, construction, or type of place? Is your chosen claim or perspective centered on how a group of people labels themselves or is labeled by someone else? Describe the form of the discourse of

your chosen topic, and describe, as best as you can, the claim or view of the world that this particular discourse seems to communicate. Pay particular attention to what kinds of knowledge, such as scientific information, supports or serves to legitimize this view of the world.

Sources: If you are working with a textual discourse, identify a current news article, political website, non-profit website, policy document, map, infographic or video that articulates this viewpoint. If the claim you are interested in examining takes a different form, such as material, practice, or identity, you will need to identify that claim or view of the world by describing the tangible structure, the practice and how it is evident, or other sources that describe and label the identity. In other words, you are identifying the claim or view of the world that you would like to examine for your final project, and in this step you are describing or explaining how that claim or view of the world is observable and how it establishes or communicates a particular view of the world. Where or how is this claim about the environment evident in the world?

Due:

- Approximately 500 word summary of your chosen claim or discourse;
 - At least two references with full citation information; include a few sentences on each about what the source contributes to your analysis or how it helps you to understand your chosen claim about the environment.
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Step 3: Ask questions about environmental definitions, human agency & spatial scale (100 points)

Analyze your selected discourse or claim in terms of each of the three observations of environmental geopolitics discussed in class: How are the role and meaning of the environment described and specified? What is the role of human agency within this claim or view of the world? What is the spatial focus of this particular claim? In this analysis, describe each of these three aspects of your chosen claim or perspective as clearly as you can.

Sources: You may need to do additional research (of current events or in academic and scientific journals, for instance) to investigate or learn more about the details of your chosen discourse or view of the world.

Due:

- Approximately 800-1000 word summary – total -- of each of the three observations of environmental geopolitics as they apply to your chosen claim about the environment. See Environmental Geopolitics book, pp. 5-9. Please be sure to indicate each question or section clearly with section headings.
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Step 4: Analyze the bigger picture and interrogate the claim (100 points)

What is missing? Using the information and any answers you found in Step 3, do some additional research to fact check, explore, and find out more about these features of your chosen claim or perspective. What other scientific evidence or information could expand how this topic is understood? Is human activity represented fully, or are there aspects of human agency that are not considered or obscured from view? What happens if you zoom in or zoom out in terms of spatial focus on this topic? To what extent does the claim still work at a smaller or larger spatial scale, or is the claim not “scalable”?

You might ask these sample questions about your chosen claim or perspective. Aim to interrogate each of the three observations in some way. The important part of this step is to question the claim or perspective to see what it might be missing, over emphasizing or misrepresenting. Are there certain groups of people or places who stand to benefit from your chosen claim or view of the world? Are there certain groups of people or places or other features that are disadvantaged or even threatened by this claim about the environment or view of the world?

Due:

- At least three additional references (not the same as in Step 2) or sources with full citation information.
 - Approximately 500-1000 word discussion on the bigger picture of your chosen claim about the environment.
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Step 5: Reflect on what you have learned (50 points)

How has your understanding of your chosen claim or perspective changed through the process of analysis?

What else have you learned in this process?

Due:

- Approximately one paragraph to a page describing your chosen format for your final project. Explain why this format will help you to demonstrate what you have learned in this process and why you are choosing it (e.g., perhaps you spent considerable time during the Covid19 lockdown learning how to make action-packed, informative videos).
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Step 6: Putting it all together (200 points)

Demonstrate what you have learned in a format that you prefer. You are welcome to write a paper (approximately 5,000 words or less), but consider other creative formats to communicate what you have learned: a short video (less than ten minutes), a podcast (less than ten minutes), or a poster. If you have other ideas, discuss them with Prof. O'Lear as you work on the early steps of this project.

Your final project should demonstrate:

- What your chosen claim about the environment is (in the form of a text, document, map, image, practice, identity, or physical structure) and how it communicates or represents a geopolitical narrative or view of the world.
- That you have used information from at least three, different, high quality sources (academic or reliable and relatively objective news sources that discuss or analyze your chosen claim without merely reinforcing the same claim). These sources should describe or examine your chosen claim and perhaps explain parts of it such as who promotes and benefits from this view of the world, who opposes this view and why, or what kinds of scientific information support this view.
- An investigation of your chosen claim based on the three questions of environmental geopolitics (questions about environmental definitions, human agency & spatial scale).
- A “big picture” analysis of your claim that considers questions such as: Which groups of people or places benefit from this view of the world? Which groups of people or places are

disadvantaged or overlooked by this view? What kinds of information or perspective are missing from this claim about the environment and the view of the world that it represents?

- What you have learned in this process.

Due:

- Submit your final project to the Center for Undergraduate Research Showcase website by November 20th no later than 5:00 pm.
- You will also get credit towards your final grade for (virtually) attending the CUR Showcase and offering constructive feedback on others' projects. More information is available on the CUR Showcase website and in class.