

Dragons, Mutants, and Drug Dealers

Topics in IR and IPE through Western Pop Culture

Dogus Aktan

Fall, 2019

Class Time and Location

To be determined

Contact Information

hayridogus.aktan@du.edu

1 Class Description and Objectives

This class is designed to introduce some of the key topics in International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE) through the lens of Western Pop Culture. In particular, we will be examining specific broad theories and topics within IR and IPE through the use of the television shows *Game of Thrones*, *The Wire*, and the early canon of comic series *the Uncanny X-Men*. The goal is to use these three pop culture forms as metaphors or caricatures of the real world to uncover certain key dynamics to improve our understanding of the much more complex real world. It is NOT designed to discuss at length about the fictional material or provide criticisms of the books, TV shows etc. used.

Students taking this class will highly benefit from having seen or read the fictional material involved, but this is by no means a prerequisite. We use references to fictional material to help simplify some complex issues and concepts and provide examples. They are not the content of the course. Rather they are intended to serve as mediators to the actual content of the course.

2 Required Texts and Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course and all available can be accessed online through the library or the course's Canvas page.

3 Class Format and Policy

The class format throughout will combine lecture and discussion, but the balance will hopefully shift from the former to the latter as the students gain familiarity with key perspectives and build confidence. While lectures are necessary, they are far from the best way to encourage and retain learning. Consequently, I expect students to come to class prepared and willing to engage with me, their classmates and the material.

Attendance is required and makes a significant portion of your participation grade. However, showing up to class is not sufficient to get a good participation grade and I expect active participation from all students.

I understand some students might be too shy to speak up in the class even when they are attentive and interested. For those students, I offer the option of a submitting an extra assignment to demonstrate their understanding of the material. Students willing to take this option must commit before the mid-term exam.

4 Grading

Participation 25% Active participation, and not just attending to class is required to get a good a good grasp of the material involved in this course. As mentioned in the previous section, I understand some students might be too shy to speak up in the class even when they are attentive and interested. For those students, I offer the option of a submitting an extra assignment to demonstrate their understanding of the material. Students willing to take this option must commit before the mid-term exam.

Mid-Term 25% There will be one in-class midterm. At the end of Week 5 all students will be required to complete a short-answer format exam on Canvas covering the material from the readings, lectures, and discussions up to that point.

Final & Presentation 35% All students will write a final paper (2000-2500 words, not including citations) as well as a short presentation (5 minutes in class), in which they use the analytical toolkit acquired in this class to analyze a real-world IR or IPE phenomenon through a piece of fiction.

Brief Response Paper 15% All students will write a brief (1000 to 1500 word, not including citations) response paper to comment on the assigned readings and how they help us understand the both fictional and real worlds.

Bonus Assignments TBA Depending on how our class discussions evolve, I

might come up with new questions, and material that I want students to explore and work on. I will assign these as short bonus assignments, where interested students turning them in get bonus points. But, students that do not turn in anything are in no way penalized.

5 Assignment and Exam Policy

All assignments and exams must be completed on time in order to pass this course. Make ups will only be granted under extraordinary circumstances such as documented and verified medical or family emergencies. All documentation corresponding to such emergencies should be forwarded to the professor. Personal reasons are insufficient excuses for making up missed assignments, exams, or quizzes.

I do not grade on a curve. Each student's work will be evaluated independently based on its quality. It is possible for every student in the class to get an A. However, getting such high marks will require hard work on your part. Here is how grades should be interpreted, as well as how a letter grade translates to a 0-100 numeric scale

A (94 and higher) = The student performed far beyond my expectations, displaying a grasp of the analytical and empirical material as well as creativity or insight beyond the material itself. A- (93-90) = I was impressed by the student's performance. The student has strong analytical, theoretical, and empirical skills. B+ (89-87) = The student met all of my expectations in the course. B (86-84) = The student met most of my expectations, but demonstrated weakness in either analytical or empirical skills. B- (83-80) = The student demonstrated weakness in analytical and empirical skills, but clearly attempted to prepare for assignments. C (79-70) = The student demonstrated disregard for the course requirements. D (69-60) = The student demonstrated negligence or disrespect in their assignments. F (Below 60) = The student violated a class policy, did not attend class, or did not perform to a level that I knew they were attending.

If a student wishes to dispute their grade on an assignment, they must contact me within 48 hours of receiving their grade and set an appointment to discuss it. At this appointment they must bring a typed summary of the reasons why they believe the grade is unfair. I will then reevaluate the assignment on the basis of these reasons. All revised grades are final, and they may be lower than the original grade.

All assignments must be turned in by the due date on the syllabus. An assignment turned in late at all will receive an automatic half-letter grade point deduction. Assignments turned in more than three days late may receive heavier

penalties, at my discretion. All exams and quizzes will be administered in class and online using the Canvas learning management system. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail.

All exams and quizzes will be administered in class and online using the Canvas learning management system. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas. I do NOT accept assignments via e-mail.

6 Disability Services

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or medical condition should contact the Disability Services Program (DSP) to coordinate reasonable accommodations. DSP offices are located on the 4th floor of Ruffatto Hall at 1999 E. Evans Ave. Staff are available by calling 303-871-2372 / 2278/ 7432. Additional information is available online at www.du.edu/disability/dsp, including the Handbook for Students with Disabilities. If you qualify for academic accommodations because of a disability or medical issue, please submit a DSP Faculty Letter to me in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed.

7 Academic Honesty

All work submitted must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (e.g. ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of violating the Academic Misconduct policy, refer to the University of Denver website on the Honor Code: <http://www.du.edu/honorcode>. See also <http://www.du.edu/studentconduct> for general information concerning expectations of the Office of Student Conduct. Your papers will be verified using the University of Denver's VeriCite system to evaluate potential acts of plagiarism. Quizzes, the midterm exam, and final exam administered in class will be monitored for violations of the Honor Code and addressed accordingly.

8 Policy on Student Questions and General Class Notes

I am always happy to answer student questions during office hours or over e-mail. I will generally reply to e-mails within 24 hours but make sure you send your questions in a timely manner. Keep in mind that most questions you may

have (about assignments, policies, etc. . .) can be answered by simply taking a close look at the syllabus.

Every student should read the entire syllabus carefully at the beginning of the class and before sending me a question. When you have finished reading the syllabus for the first time, send me an e-mail, telling me what your favorite animal is.

All students are expected to attend, be attentive, and come prepared for each class. This means having read the assigned readings BEFORE each session and contributing to class discussions. Attendance will be taken and contributions to discussions noted as part of your final grade. Disrespectful or distracting behavior will not be tolerated including the use of mobile phones, social media, messaging, or any other disruptive technology heretofore yet to be invented. Non-class related use of laptops, cell phones, or other electronic devices is not allowed during class time. Using laptops to check social media or engage in other non-class activities not only distracts you but is also highly distracting to the students around you. If I observe that you are using your electronic devices for any non-class activities, I may ask you to leave the class, and you will be marked as absent for that day.

Moreover, I expect students to follow the Chatham House Rule and to be respectful of the opinions and time of others in the class. We critique ideas, not people.

All work submitted must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (e.g. ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly acknowledged and documented. For the consequences of violating the Academic Misconduct policy, refer to the University of Denver website on the Honor Code: <http://www.du.edu/honorcode>. See also <http://www.du.edu/studentconduct> for general information concerning expectations of the Office of Student Conduct. Your response paper will be verified using the University of Denver's VeriCite system to evaluate potential acts of plagiarism. The midterm exam, final paper/presentation, and short paper administered in class will be monitored for violations of the Honor Code and addressed accordingly.

9 Tentative Schedule

9.1 Week 1

We introduce ourselves and give an overview of the class. We also give clear guidelines on what you can expect from the class and instructors, as well as what they expect from you. We talk about how Pop Culture can and cannot help us understand IR and IPE.

- Introduction, Overview, and Logistics
- Why use Pop-Culture? Goals, Advantages, and Challenges
Cahir O'Doherty, 2013, Pop Culture, huh, What Is It Good for? A Lot of Things, Actually, E-International Relations
Stephen Saideman, 2011, How to Make a Good IR Pop Culture Analogy
Daniel Drezner 2009, Theory of International Politics and Zombies, Foreign Policy

9.2 Week 2

We introduce the analytical toolkit that we will use throughout the class. We give a brief introduction on how to intentional behavior and study strategic interactions in a way that is as non-technical as possible. Furthermore we talk about modeling, metaphors, fables and theories and how to use and evaluate them.

- Analytical Toolkit: Rational Choice and Strategic Interaction
Gary Becker, 1993, Nobel Lecture: The Economic Way of Looking at Behavior, Journal of Political Economy
Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Chapters 1 through 5, in Principles of International Politics, 5th ed.
Chris Achen and Duncan Snidal, 1989, Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies, Vol 41
- Analytical Toolkit continued: Models, Metaphors, and Theories
Scott Page, 2018, The Model Thinker, Chapter 2
Kieran Healy, 2017, F*ck Nuance, Sociological Theory, Vol.35
Kevin Clarke and David Primo, 2007, Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach, Perspectives on Politics, Volume 5
James Johnson, 2017, Models-As-Fables: An Alternative to the Standard Rationale For Using Formal Models in Political Science

9.3 Week 3, Setting: Game of Thrones

The setting of A Song of Ice and Fire and its TV variant Game of Thrones, gives us complex world full of political intrigue, conflict, and magic. Nevertheless, it is still vastly less complicated than the real world. Nevertheless, some elements of the setting still baffles the “traditional” IR paradigms, which clearly demonstrates their inadequacy. Having demonstrated the shortcomings of the -isms, we then start to look at what modern approaches can (or cannot) tell us about the world of Westeros (and Essos).

- IR beyond -isms

David Lake, 2011, Why “isms” Are Evil: Theory, Epistemology, and Academic Sects as Impediments to Understanding and Progress, *International Studies Quarterly*, 55

Peter D. Feaver et. al., 2000, Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?), *International Security* Vol 25, No 1

Charli Carpenter, 2013, Game of Thrones as Theory, *Foreign Affairs*, March

Daniel Drezner, 2011, What can Game of Thrones tell us about our world’s politics?, *Foreign Policy*, June

- Conflict and War

Jonathon Renshon, 2016, Status Deficits and War, *International Organization*, Vol 70

Kristopher Ramsay, 2017, Information, Uncertainty, and War, *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol 20

9.4 Week 4, Setting: Game of Thrones

Political alliances, secret pacts, and backstabbing are all too common in the Song of Ice and Fire, but perhaps not as common as one would expect. How do we understand the (lack of) stability of alliances in this setting, and consequently in the real world? Similarly, the threat from the White Walkers and the upcoming Winter is common theme throughout the series. What are some connections we can draw with the real world and how do they help us understand some complex governance challenges?

- Coalitions and Alliances

Brad L. LeVeck and Neil Narang 2017, How International Reputation Matters: Revisiting Alliance Violations in Context, *International Interactions*, 43:5

Harrison Wagner, 2004, Bargaining, War, and Alliances, Conflict Management and Peace Science, Vol 21

- Climate Change and Governance

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Global Warming: Designing a Solution, in Principles of International Politics, 5th ed.

Doug McAdam, 2017, Social Movement Theory and the Prospects for Climate Change Activism in the United States, Annual Review of Political Science, Vol 20

9.5 Week 5, Setting: Game of Thrones (and Midterm)

We take a very brief look at social network analysis and its application to Game of Thrones. We discuss what this approach tells us about the concept of power and how it differs from other approaches. We also have the midterm.

- Power and Networks

Andrew Beveridge and Jie Shan, 2016, <https://www.maa.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Mathhorizons/Networks>

Daniel H. Nexon, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 1999, Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics, European Journal of International Relations

- Midterm

9.6 Week 6, Setting: The Wire

The streets of Baltimore as depicted in The Wire lack the rule of law, and the denizens often lead nasty, brutish, short lives. Yet, the concept of anarchy, as traditionally employed by IR, does not lead us far in understanding it. We look at The Wire and see if we can get a clearer grasp of what anarchy might actually entail. We also look at the understated connection between economics and conflict, especially the connection between production and expropriation.

- Beyond Anarchy: Commitment Problems

Helen Milner, 1991, The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique, Review of International Studies, Vol 17

Robert Powell, 2006, War as a Commitment Problem, International Organization, Vol 60

- Economics and Conflict

Dan Reiter, 2003, Exploring the Bargaining Model of War, Perspectives on Politics, Vol 1

Hirshleifer, Jack 1991, The technology of conflict as an economic activity, American Economic Review 81(2), 130–134

9.7 Week 7, Setting: The Wire

Many individuals within the Wire make their living through illicit markets—in particular, through the smuggling and trafficking of drugs and weapons, and the trafficking of people. We first look at how and why actors in the illicit markets use violence, and push back against some of the myths in public discourse. We then look at the impact of illicit activities. These activities, often beneficial or necessary for the participants, often impact participants as well as third parties negatively. We look at the concepts of social dilemmas and externalities to better understand these phenomena.

- Illicit Markets

Williams, Phil. "Transnational criminal organizations and international security." *Survival* 36, no. 1 (1994): 96-113.

Friman, H. Richard. "Drug markets and the selective use of violence." *Crime, law and social change* 52, no. 3 (2009): 285-295.

- Externalities and Social Dilemmas

Peter Kollock, 1998, Social Dilemmas: The Anatomy of Cooperation, Annual Review of Sociology, Vol 24

Ethan Bueno de Mesquita, 2016, Chapter: Externalities, and Social Dilemmas in Political Economy for Public Policy

9.8 Week 8, Setting: The Wire

We build on the previous weeks to deepen our understanding of the streets of Baltimore in *The Wire* (and the real world). Despite depicting the violent and lawless world of drug dealers, the Wire also portrays a surprising amount of cooperation between the drug dealers. The drug dealers come together to form a collective and keep the violence to a minimum. Why and how do they do this? And why does this cooperation does not survive the entrance of the violent newcomer, Marlo.

- Evolution and Cooperation Brian Skyrms, 2010, Chapter: Evolution in Signals: Evolution, Learning, and Information

Robert M. Axelrod, Effective in Choice in Prisoner's Dilemma, Journal of Conflict Resolution, vol 24

- Stability and Invasion Scott Page, 2018, Chapter: Learning Models in The Model Thinker

9.9 Week 9, Setting: X-Men

In our final setting, the X-Men we pick up two themes. First is the how and why repression, often employed against the X-Men and other mutants in the form of giant killer robots, is used against populations. And how do these populations respond to repression. Second, why do these populations sometimes resort to violence? A good deal of fighting X-Men do, is not against invader aliens or killer robots but against fellow mutants, who commit violent acts against the non-mutant civilian population. So we want to have a better understanding why this happens.

- Repression, Security, and Genetic / Ascriptive Traits
Christine Merle, David Siegel, Identifiability, State Repression, and the Onset of Ethnic Conflict, Public Choice, January 2014
Colaresi, Michael, and Sabine C. Carey. "To kill or to protect: Security forces, domestic institutions, and genocide." Journal of Conflict Resolution 52, no. 1 (2008): 39-67
- Terrorism and Insurgency
Kydd, Andrew H., and Barbara F. Walter. The Strategies of Terrorism. Quarterly Journal: International Security, vol. 31. no. 1. (Summer 2006): 49-80
Burcu Savun and Brian J. Phillips, Democracy, Foreign Policy, and Terrorism, The Journal of Conflict Resolution: Vol. 53, No. 6 (DECEMBER 2009), pp. 878-904

9.10 Week 10: Back to Reality

- Student Presentations
- Student Presentations cont., Wrap & Review