

INTA 4803R: The Politics of the Lord of the Rings

Summer 2024

Meeting Days: T,Th 1:30-3:25

Meeting room: Brown

Instructor: Peter Brecke

phone: 404-824-6715

email: peter.brecke@inta.gatech.edu

Office: TBD

Office Hours: TBD or by appt.

Introduction

This class is about how to identify, characterize, and evaluate societies. We do this because it is highly likely that the character of a society has a significant influence on how the citizens of that society live and how that society interacts with other societies. Assuming that is so, and we care about making this a better world, it would be nice to be able to determine what characteristics of societies actually do correspond or correlate with how well the people in those societies live and whether the society has peaceful relations with its neighbors or not.

An example of this relationship between characteristics of societies and the quality of life experienced by its citizens can be gleaned from Jackson's visualization of Tolkien's articulation of Middle Earth in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. For that reason we will make use of the movies so that Middle Earth can serve as a window into how our own Earth operates in this regard.

This class will begin by our watching and then discussing selected chapters of the extended versions of the three *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* DVDs. These chapters (or sometimes parts of chapters) are those that contain relevant information regarding the politics, economics, social structures, and cultures of the different societies of Middle Earth. From these discussions, we will "reverse engineer" the societies to determine what distinguishes a good society from a bad one. Why are the Shire or Rivendell good places to live while Isengard and Mordor are not, for example? How does the governance system of these societies and the politics within and between them affect that? How can we transform this understanding into a way to evaluate different societies in our modern world?

This transformation is done in the context of my Human Well-Being Index, which is a very broad measure of the circumstances in which people live, as well as other cross-national measures of societies available on the web. We will determine what variables, and the corresponding data we can gather, will give us insights into current countries consistent with what we have gleaned from the movies. From this foundation, you will then conduct research to determine how the countries of the EU stack-up in terms of the criteria you have developed to evaluate societies. In particular, you will compare across the European countries and then more broadly compare them with other countries

around the world. I hope you will “ground-truth” what you have determined and learned in the class with what you see and experience as you travel on the weekends.

The goal, the learning outcome, for this class is that by the end of the semester we will be able to compare and contrast and even judge different societies in the world with respect to a coherent and carefully established set of criteria. In summary, we are going to try determine what makes a good society, identify and collect data that gives us a way to measure different societies in terms of what we decide makes a good society, see how different countries stack up against these criteria, and present visual evidence to make concrete, as do the LOTR movies, how people actually live in different countries.

Note: If you have not done so, you may want to watch the entire set of movies before the semester begins, preferably the extended versions of the LOTR movies. You may also want to watch *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power*.

I expect integrity in all of your work consistent with the Georgia Tech Code of Ethics.

Schedule:

- May 14 **Introduction**
- how the class will be conducted
 - overview of the different societies we will use as exemplars
 - how to view the movie chapters
 - example of my research
- May 16 **Brief Introduction to Comparative Political Economy**
- how do the citizens live
 - how do the societies interact, what is their history
 - what forms of governance operate there
- May 21 ***The Fellowship of the Ring***
- the Shire/Hobbits
 - Bree
- Read: *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, Overview and Chapter 1
<https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2023-24reporten.pdf>
- May 23 ***An Unexpected Journey I***
- Erebor/Dwarves
- May 28 ***The Fellowship of the Ring***
- Rivendell/Elves
 - Goblins
 - Isengard/Saruman/Orcs

Read: *Human Development Report 2023/2024*, Chapters 2-3

May 30

An Unexpected Journey II

Read: *Freedom in the World 2024*

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/united-states/freedom-world/2024>

June 4

The Fellowship of the Ring

- Lorien/Elves
- Woodland Elves
- Uruk Hai

Read: *2022 Special Report on Human Security*, pp 1-39

<https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/srhs2022.pdf>

June 6

The Desolation of Smaug

- Lake-town

June 11

The Two Towers I

- Edoras/Rohan
- Minas Tirith/Gondor
- Fangorn/Ents

Read: Transparency International *Corruption Perceptions Index*

<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>

June 13

The Two Towers II

Read: Transparency International *Global Corruption Barometer*

<https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb>

June 18

The Return of the King* and **Summarizing the Politics of LotR*

- Minas Morgul/Mordor

June 20

Midterm

June 25

Characterizing Societies

- variables, proxies, indices, scales

Read: Brecke, *Human Well-Being Index* (on Canvas)

June 27

Characterizing Societies II

- existing ways of characterizing societies
- new measures of societies
- data sources

Read: De Neve and Sachs, *Sustainable Development and Human Well-Being*

- July 2 **Characterizing Interactions Between Societies**
- intentions and capabilities
- events data
- the role of institutions and regimes
Read: Goldstein, A Conflict-Cooperation Scale for WEIS Events Data (on Canvas)
- July 4 **Ground-truthing the Data**
- July 9 **Evaluating Societies: Putting the Evidence Together**
- converting information into usable data
 * characteristics
 * events
- choosing what is important
- the importance of what we choose
- July 11 **How Do the Countries Compare?**
- July 16 **Presentation of Research**
Due on appropriate class session of this week: **Paper on measuring and comparing (real) Earth societies**
- July 18 **Presentation of Research**
- July 23 **Wrap-up**

Requirements and Grading:

Participation	20 % of final grade (participation is more than physical presence in room)
Midterm Exam	15 % of final grade
Final Paper	35 % of final grade
Presentation of Findings	20 % of final grade
Documentation of Evidence	10 % of final grade