COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course helps students understand oral history as part of a political battlefield in Latin America in which popular political consciousness, collective identities, and social movements are made. We will unpack the concepts and practices of oral history by discussing the theoretical and methodological challenges that professional historians and social scientists confronted when doing oral history in the region and beyond. Then, we will study the “archives of terror” of the Dirty Wars of Central and South America (1960s-1990s), and how various forms of orality (i.e. documentary film, testimony, life histories, interviews, and truth commissions) helped victims of violence to intervene in their countries’ peace processes and/or democratic transitions. We will analyze how oral history was a vehicle in the seeking of justice, reparation, forgiveness, forgetfulness, amnesty, and immunity. We will analyze the political, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic limitations of these efforts to heal the wounds of state-led violence, dictatorship, genocide, and guerrilla warfare. The goal is to understand oral history as a prism that refracts oral, written, and audiovisual forms of making sense of the past, and to understand why it has played such a fundamental role in the definition of “truth” in the turbulent recent history of Latin America.

AREA OF CONCENTRATION: Americas

TEACHING METHOD: Seminar

EVALUATION METHOD: Attendance and participation, oral presentations, response papers, and final paper.

GRADING BASIS: ANC


NOTES: Attendance and participation are evaluated. Attendance at first class is mandatory. No lap-top use in classroom. Special cases will be considered. Electronic devices should be silenced or turned off.

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE: Professor Lina Britto is a Colombian historian and journalist. She received her Ph.D. in Latin American and Caribbean History from New York University. She has been a fellow at the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Harvard University. While still residing in Latin America, she studied a M.A. in Anthropology, a B.A. in Journalism, and reported on various social and political issues for Colombian, Bolivian, Spanish, and American newspapers, magazines, and online journals. She brings this interdisciplinary training and experience to the classroom to help each student to work on reading capacity, writing talent, and oral expression. By encouraging different points of view and meaningful dialogue, this seminar creates an atmosphere of cooperation and collective work that helps students to develop their own critical reasoning skills, analytical abilities, and argumentative and organizational capacities.