WS 306-4: Latin American Women’s Autobiographical Writings & Testimonial Narratives

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In this course we will examine how the notion of subjectivity or representations of selfhood emerge in autobiographical texts by Latin American and Latina women. Emphasis will be placed on constructions of selfhood in terms of social categories such as class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality as they appear in a variety of texts ranging from travel memoirs, culinary autobiographies, epistolary literature, adolescent girls’ diaries, and in particular testimonial literature and prison diaries. Socio-historical phenomena and aspects specific to Latin American women’s testimonial literature such as the issue of the disappeared and social movements such as the Argentinian protest movement of The Mothers of La Plaza de Mayo will also be examined. Visual material such as the Chilean *arpilleras* or testimonial text/iles and film will enrich our discussions.

**Required readings:**
1) **Travel Memoirs:** Selections from: Isabel Allende’s *My Invented Country*.
2) **Culinary Memoirs:** Selections from: Arlene Voski Avakian’s (ed) *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking*; Isabel Allende: *Aphrodite: A Memoir of the Senses*.
3) **Latina Queer Autobiography:** Selections from: Cherríe Moraga’s *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*.
4) **Adolescent Girls’ Diaries:** Sandra Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street*.
5) **Latin American Jewish Women’s Memoirs:** Nora Strejilevish: *A Single, Numberless Death*.
6) **Testimonials and Prison Diaries:** Selections from: Rigoberta Menchú’s *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and Alicia Partnoy’s *The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and survival in Argentina*.

**Required theoretical readings** (Note: selections of required theoretical and primary texts will be distributed in form of a courseware which will be available at the university bookstore)
Selections from: Linda S. Maier and Isabel Dulfano: *Woman as Witness: Essays on Testimonial Literature by Latin American Women*;
George M. Gugelberger (ed.): *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*;
Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson: *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*.

**Films:**
*Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, dir. Lourdes Portillo and Susana Muñoz; *The Official Story*, dir. Luis Puenzo.

**Course requirements and Grading**
One term paper (maximum 10 pages): 30%
One presentation: 25%
Assignments and participation: 20%
One take home exam: 25%

**Prerequisites:** Six credits in WS including ws 101 and/or Ws 102.