Escobar, Guadalupe. *Decolonial Witnessing: Cold War Afterlives in Latin American and Latinx Testimonios*. University of Texas Press, 2026. 244 pp.

Decolonial Witnessing offers a fresh perspective on what was once one of Latin America's most important forms of textual production: the *testimonio*. Escobar's book, however, does not revisit classic testimonies from the second half of the twentieth century; instead, it updates the discussion and explores twenty-first-century Latin American and Latinx cultural productions, especially those connected to Cold War violence. Contrary to my initial expectation, *Decolonial Witnessing* does not focus primarily on *testimonio*-like narratives (or memoirs) published in recent years (such as Javier Zamora's *Solito*, Roberto Lovato's *Unforgetting*, Steven Mayers and Jonathan Freedman's *Solito, Solita*, etc.). Rather, she uses "*testimonio*" more as a critical lens than as a label for certain works. This decision allows the author to analyze a diverse corpus (film, literature, performance, memoirs, etc.) to approach different experiences of political violence. The book positions itself as an intervention in hemispheric studies, paying close attention to the aftermath of U.S. interventions in Latin America during the Cold War while also offering an interwoven reflection on human rights violations and the search for justice in recent times.

Theoretically speaking, the book offers a nuanced, well-informed approach to the discussion about *testimonio*, bringing together the 1980s and 1990s debates that popularized the genre, with more recent ideas that connect *testimonio* to concepts relevant to the book, such as witnessing, feminism, human rights, and childhood. I particularly celebrate the inclusion of a wide variety of contemporary voices that refresh a discussion that has been going on for nearly four decades. The author extracts some elements from the traditional understanding of *testimonio* to make the term work in the post-Cold War era. Of particular relevance is the idea of witnessing, which would predate the testimonial narrative (or writing) act itself, and which will be at the core of the book. The other element is what Escobar calls the "testimonial effect," which can be transmitted by any form of cultural work as long as it channels the collective experience of a community (5). Escobar claims that in the twenty-first century, traditionally excluded groups (women, Indigenous peoples, children, migrants, etc.) in Latin America and the United States have turned to the *testimonio* genre as a way of giving visibility to otherwise overlooked crimes and events, putting pressure on discursive systems that suppress them and as a form of revaluing abject bodies. Yet, not unlike its original form, contemporary *testimonio* (broadly defined) serves to recover "manipulated memories to loosen the tangles of oppressive relationalities, particularly among corrupt nation-states, US empires, and global capitalism" (3). *Decolonial Witnessing*'s proposal is novel and useful, for it extracts some essential elements from the *testimonio* debate that

become instrumental to turn a genre into a lens that could be utilized to examine works that do not present themselves necessarily as testimonial.

With this framework, Escobar initiates an in-depth discussion of certain recent cultural productions to address the legacies of political terror. *Decolonial Witnessing*, comprising four chapters, is thematically divided into two parts. In the first two chapters, the book engages with Central America's historical reality, emphasizing state terrorism in both the Cold War era and the present. In chapter one, she discusses the representation of terror and violence against women during the Guatemalan civil war by analyzing works by Chicana playwright Ana Castillo and Guatemalan performer Regina José Galindo. The second chapter examines the films *La Llorona* (Jayro Bustamante, 2019), *500 Years* (Pamela Yates, 2017), and *Berta vive* (Katia Lara, 2016) to analyze political violence, land dispossession, and women's activism in Guatemala and Honduras. In the second part of the book, Escobar explores literary and visual representations of Latin American migration to the United States. Chapter three studies portrayals of Central American youth migrants, who are often presented as "wild" and victims of what she calls a "slow genocide," understood as the "hidden, prolonged captivity within the jurisdiction of the United States" (103). In this chapter, the book offers an in-depth analysis of Javier Zamora's *Unaccompanied*, Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends*, and Daniel Sawka's narrative film *Icebox*. Finally, chapter four shifts away from the Central American experience to examine how Latinx writers (particularly Chicanx and Dominican writers) have approached the struggle over migration, legal status, and education in the post-9/11 world. In particular, Escobar analyzes the work of Alberto Ledesma (*Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*), Reyna Grande (*The Distance Between Us*), and Dan-el Padilla Peralta (*Undocumented*). The book closes with a Coda, where the author briefly reflects on other contemporary struggles, such as the protest in favor of the Palestinian cause in U.S. universities and how contemporary music has responded to violence in Mexico and Colombia.

I would like to emphasize two major contributions of this book. First, it successfully proposes a reading perspective that expands the discussion around certain cultural works, especially those that, at first glance, do not have much in common with the *testimonio* genre (like Jayro Bustamante's film *La Llorona*). In doing so, Escobar displaces the writing-centric nature of *testimonio* while also offering a panoramic approach to political violence in Central America and the United States, and highlighting the commitment to justice and human rights exhibited by many contemporary writers, artists, and creators. Another important contribution is the effort to examine the interconnected histories of the civil wars in Central America, the postwar period, and the diasporic experience of the present century, three intimately connected periods and events that are often analyzed separately. Escobar's book demonstrates the continuum of violence toward certain marginalized populations, although currently disguised under new methods,

perfectly exemplified in the transition from an overt genocide during the Guatemalan civil war to a slow genocide in the present era.

While *Decolonial Witnessing* fulfills its objectives, a few aspects must be noted. First, the book's framework is slightly ambiguous. While post-Cold War offers a relatively clear historical frame (although U.S.-centric), this notion is also entangled with other relevant (and complex) temporalities, like "postwar Central America" and "post 9/11," which at times diffuse the temporal positioning of the discussion. The introduction also claims the book will focus primarily on postwar Central America, which it does in the first three chapters. However, the last one, "Reluctant DREAMers," explores Chicanx and Dominican experiences of migration to the United States (including the construction of race in the Dominican Republic), which do not connect smoothly with the rest of the book. Second, although the book successfully demonstrates the resurgence of a "testimonial effect" in contemporary productions and their commitment to bringing to the fore past and present atrocities and human rights violations, articulating a more ambitious hypothesis would have added an extra layer of density, especially considering the extensive scholarly debate regarding the issues explored in the book.

In conclusion, and despite some minor comments, *Decolonial Witnessing* contributes greatly to Latin American and Latinx cultural studies by updating the discussion around *testimonio* and turning it into a lens that enables a critical reflection on a diverse corpus that engages both with the recent traumatic past in Central America and the precarious experience of migration in the early 21st century. As Escobar extensively elaborates, contemporary cultural productions continue the ongoing struggle to draw attention to the numerous atrocities that took place during the Cold War in Latin America, challenging the state's gaze, whose consequences are still affecting the present.

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