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Book Reviews

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Reform Without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State

BY ALFONSO GONZALES. NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014. VII, 220 PP. ISBN 978-0199342938

Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities

BY KARMA R. CHÁVEZ. URBANA, CHICAGO, AND SPRINGFIELD: UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS, 2013. VII, 232 PP. ISBN 978-0252079580

The increased violence experienced by migrant communities in the U.S. during the past three decades has prompted massive mobilizations. While migrant rights is the thematic bond, within these efforts there is great disparity in the meaning of migrant rights and the logic, methods, motivations, and participants involved in these struggles. Alfonso Gonzales,¹ in *Reform Without Justice*, and Karma R. Chávez in *Queer Migration Politics*, critically engage the discussion of the political effectiveness of migrant rights mobilizations. A central concern for both authors is the limitations of dominating inclusionary politics, which attempt to demonstrate migrants' social and economic contributions and argue for migrants' rights to be part of the nation. Both Gonzales and Chávez maintain that this approach fails to address the root causes of migration, centers short-term solutions, and overall is ineffective to make structural changes necessary to bring about social justice. Although Gonzales and Chávez have similar critiques of inclusionary politics, they differ in their projects' objectives and approach.

Gonzales asks why migrants and their allies have been unable to create significant structural changes for migrants despite massive mobilizations. He argues that the post-9/11 consolidation of what he and others term the "Homeland Security State" placed national focus on migration control and anti-terrorism efforts. The state and civil society are joined in attempts to protect the nation from perceived foreign threats, mainly Latina/o migrants who are primarily racialized through the language of criminality. Gonzales draws from Gramscian theory and argues that an anti-migrant bloc began forming in the 1980s and established its hegemony over the immigration debate. This anti-migrant hegemony relies on migrant criminalization and constricts migrant rights struggles. The "common sense" of migrant criminality is so entrenched that it places rhetorical limitations on the Migrant Rights

Movement and at times turns it reactionary. Gonzales maintains that these efforts frequently aim for what are perceived feasible victories, which often include compromises with anti-migrant forces that promote migration control and result in additional violence. Rather than challenge anti-migrant hegemony, the Migrant Rights Movement attempts to demonstrate the merit of migrants for inclusion. He argues that if immigration reform takes place within these boundaries, very few will actually benefit and the negative consequences for ineligible and future migrants will be great. Methodologically, Gonzales uses critical discourse analysis and ethnography that includes participant observation and interviews. The chapters are case studies that demonstrate how anti-migrant hegemony exerts power at different levels of governance and how migrant rights mobilizations sustain and challenge it.

The power of Gonzales' argument is highlighted as he himself participates in attempts to distance migrants from criminality, reinforcing the good/bad migrant binary he critiques. He frames his book with the powerful story of Bernardo, a U.S. veteran deported to Mexico, citing that Bernardo was one year old when he migrated to the U.S. and was deployed to Iraq in 1991 and 1993. He was convicted of a misdemeanor for a DUI in 1993 and this was used to deport him in 2010. When discussing anti-migrant hegemony, Gonzales maintains that "... the criminalization of migrants is what makes it easy, almost dutiful (i.e., "common sense"), for a judge to deport someone *like* (emphasis added) Bernardo, without thinking about the impact of the deportation on his wife, children, mother, community, or even his life" (6).

In the concluding chapter, Bernardo reappears: "After more than a decade of struggle, the movement has not been able to win justice for people like Bernardo, the father and veteran deported to Mexico because of a minor criminal offense ..." (152). The emphasis of the infraction

as *minor* underscores Gonzales' attempts to distance Bernardo, and others *like* him, from criminality. This maneuver values some migrant lives more than others. Individuals with serious criminal convictions are rendered less worthy. Rather than a criticism of Gonzales, I note how he inadvertently participates in reinforcing boundaries of deservingness to underscore the significance of his argument that an anti-migrant hegemony grounded in the criminalization of migrants greatly informs migrant rights efforts, including Gonzales' work.

Akin to Gonzales, Chávez critiques inclusionary politics and asserts that they serve to maintain oppressive systems of power in place and fail to be transformative. However, her primary concern is not to provide a theory for why the Migrant Rights Movement has not been more successful. Rather, her main objective is to demonstrate that there are alternatives to inclusionary approaches (and utopian approaches that emphasize future possibilities, which are promoted by certain queer theory). Chávez's study extends between 2006 and 2012, and she examines several coalitional moments within this time frame where queer politics and migration politics convene to demonstrate the possibility of moving beyond the inclusionary model. Chávez examines queer migration politics, which she defines as "activism that seeks to challenge normative, inclusionary perspectives at the intersection of queer rights and justice and immigration rights and justice" (6). Drawing from queer and of color theory, and women of color feminist theory, Chávez advances that coalitional work provides innovative responses to bring about social and political change. Largely using rhetorical analysis of texts, specifically social movement rhetoric, in chapters two through five, Chávez examines coalitional moments where queer politics and migration politics interconnect and provide political visions and strategies to resist hegemonic relationships of power.

As imperfect as it may be, Chávez shows how coalitional work in the present moment generates possibilities for a more "livable life." Unlike inclusionary politics, coalitional work challenges normativity as the main avenue for belonging and being, and in the process labors to undo the good/bad migrant binary. Chapters three and four are particularly powerful in demonstrating coalitional work on the ground. For example, in Chapter Three, "Coming Out as Coalitional Gesture?" Chávez examines the "coming out of the shadows" strategy employed by migrant rights activists that draws from the

LGBTQ rights movement's central tactic, "coming out of the closet." Chávez examines migrant youth activism during 2010, particularly as it relates to the DREAM movement, and demonstrates that while this activism engages inclusionary and utopian politics, the linking of migrant and queer struggles engenders transformative possibilities that go beyond these politics. One of the most powerful aspects of Chávez's work is her ability to move beyond binaries in the discussion of the political effectiveness of migrant rights organizing. While she notes the limitations of inclusionary and utopian politics, she demonstrates that venturing into such politics can actually generate alternatives.

Gonzales' and Chávez's works compliment each other. While Gonzales presents an understanding of why migrant rights struggles have not brought about significant change, Chávez examines queer migration politics as coalitional moments that not only present the possibilities for change, but also represent change in and of themselves. Both Gonzales' and Chávez's works are significant contributions to the field of immigration studies since they depart from the traditional models that assume the inevitable acculturation of migrants and that attributes their levels of "success" to their initiative and hard work. Rather than focusing on migrants' merits for inclusion, both authors problematize the notion of inclusion, particularly to the U.S. nation-state, and call for alternative ways of being rather than the possibilities offered by legal citizenship. These works are theoretically rich and politically necessary conversations. Their timing is meaningful given President Barack Obama's November 2014 executive action on immigration, which is largely framed by the good/bad migrant binary that both Gonzalez and Chávez critique and that will potentially exclude more than half of the undocumented migrants in the U.S. *Reform Without Justice* and *Queer Migration Politics* are valuable scholarly contributions as well as significant interjections in struggles for social justice.

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ENDNOTE

- ¹ Alfonso Gonzales does not use an accent in his last name.