

Mujeres, Migration & Arizona's SB1070: Codifying Patriarchy and White Privilege

January 17, 2011

By C. Alejandra Elenes



Detail of Diego Rivera mural at National Palace, Mexico City. Photograph by Theresa Delgadillo

There should be no doubt that patriarchy, white supremacy, and privilege are the ideological underpinnings of anti-immigrant legislation and policy in Arizona. The anti-immigrant climate in Arizona is not new, it is an intrinsic part of its history. Indeed at this historical juncture in the continuum of anti-immigrant legislation SB 1070 is taking center stage and has placed Arizona as the model for anti-immigrant legislation at the national level as other states are introducing similar pieces of legislation. As feminists we should pay attention to the link between public policy, power, nationalism, systemic oppression, and social and gender inequality. Laws such as SB 1070, not only create a hostile environment for Latinas/os in Arizona, but are part of a national narrative of race and gender in the U.S. resulting from demographic changes and fears about the “browning” of America. In this climate, the female brown body is particularly targeted and objectified.

SB 1070 was introduced by Arizona State Senator Russell Pearce who worked with Kansas attorney Kris Kobach. Among Kobach's credentials are his ties with the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). FAIR has a long association with eugenics and curtailing the reproductive rights and freedoms for women of color, especially Mexican and Puerto Rican women. Dr. John Tanton founder and Board Member of FAIR since the 1970s linked population growth and immigration. Sociologist Elena R. Gutiérrez argues in her book *Fertile Matters* there is an overlap between nativism and immigration. Gutiérrez documents that Tanton was concerned that the growth in the immigrant

population would undermine any effect to the limit of the U.S. population growth. Xenophobia coupled with demographic changes is at the center of legislation such as SB 1070.

Unfortunately, after the November 2nd election Republicans in Arizona made substantial gains; Republicans are in control of the Executive and Legislative branches of the State Government. Pearce became the President of the Arizona Senate, giving him the power to name committee chairs and create committees. Indeed, among his first actions was to create the Border Security, Federalism and States' Sovereignty Committee; recall that State Rights were used by Southern states as a ruse to counter the civil rights movement and legislation.

However, Pearce is also moving toward proposing legislation that will deny citizenship to children of "illegal" immigrants born in Arizona. An e-mail Pearce forwarded to his supporters from an acquaintance expresses his views about Mexican women in clear racist and sexist language: "If we are going to have an effect on the anchor baby racket, we need to target the mother. Call it sexist, but that's the way nature made it. Men don't drop anchor babies, illegal alien mothers do." Pearce is well aware that such law will be challenged on its constitutionality. This is a challenge he wants, as he believes that if the case goes all the way to the Supreme Court he will win. Given the composition of the Supreme Court today with a powerful and extremely conservative majority, a decision reinterpreting the Fourteenth Amendment to deny citizenship to children born in the U.S. to undocumented mothers is plausible. From a legal and practical level it is difficult and dangerous to ascertain how we can decide who gets or does not get citizenship. Is it only if the mother is undocumented? What happens if the father is undocumented and the mother a U.S. citizen or "legal" immigrant? Whenever a society a priori denies citizenship and basic rights to the most vulnerable it creates a group that does not have legal protection (in this case not even citizenship) is readably exploited and dehumanized.

Undoubtedly, there is a connection between xenophobic nationalism and gender/racial oppression that objectifies Mexican women's bodies and criminalize their children even before they are born. The language used by Pearce is similar to the words used to justify slavery and segregation. This is the time that Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social should step up on our activism and fight for our rights as mujeres and not let conservative forces deny our gender and civil rights, and to create an underclass of children with little hope for the future.

Comments

1. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:26 AM

Carmen Ponce Melendez wrote on January 19, 2011 11:05 pm

Estimadas Compañeras:

Vivo en México, D.F., soy economista y feminista, escribo en una revista sobre Mujeres llamada CIMAC, su blog me lo dió el Sr. Enrique Méndez Flores de Salinas, California. Tengo mucho interés en el tema de mujeres migrantes y me pongo a sus órdenes para intercambiar información, por lo pronto les envíe dos artículos sobre "mujeres migrantes", publicados en CIMAC, ahí mi mail, espero su respuesta.

Regards

Carmen Ramona Ponce Meléndez

¿Quiénes son las migrantes mexicanas? –CIMAC Noticias
Reforma Migratoria y Contracción de Remesas –CIMAC Noticias

2. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:27 AM

Susana Gallardo wrote on January 21, 2011 2:27 am

Alejandre, thank you so much for articulating this. This hateful anchor baby discourse just wrenches my soul like I cannot describe. Perhaps not only because I am a relatively new mom, but because I see so clearly how gifted and amazing my Chicana/o and Latina/o students, colleagues, DREAMers, and friends are, how much we have contributed, and will continue to contribute. To be reminded that we can be reduced to 'anchor babies' by some... it is just despicable.

3. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:27 AM

Theresa Delgadillo wrote on January 21, 2011 12:37 pm

Muchas gracias Carmen Ramona Ponce Meléndez para este trabajo sobre la vigilancia de la sexualidad y los derechos reproductivos de de la mujer, y su pobreza económica, en los dos lados de la frontera. Espero que nos mantiene informadas sobre el trabajo de CIMAC.

4. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:27 AM

Enrique Mendez Flores wrote on January 22, 2011 6:42 am

Congratulations to the editorial board of *Mujeres Activas for Social Change* for selecting this well written article of Ms. Elenes. I will send it to all my acquaintances because of its importance. Keep up your great work.

Enrique

5. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:28 AM

carmen ramona ponce melendez wrote on February 7, 2011 6:59 pm

Dear Friends/Estimadas Compañeras: Gracias, yo les envíare artículos de CIMAC sobre la pobreza, desempleo y violencia con que vivimos las mujeres en México, espero sus comentarios.

Regards

6. *Mujeres Talk Moderator* September 3, 2011 at 5:28 AM

Lillian Pittman wrote on March 8, 2011 9:26 pm

This incessant desire to stamp out the "browning" of America through the criminalization of Latino/a children is so reminiscent of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline disease that has infected our public education system. My fear is that Arizona is simply a testing ground for legislature that could possibly spread across the country like wildfire. Thank you for this piece, it has put much into perspective.

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