

Arizona: A Reflection and Conversation on the Migrant Rights Movement, 2015

Michelle Téllez*

Arizona is Ground Zero. Everything happens here. What other states can learn from Arizona is what we've learned—how to survive each and every day after being attacked through these racist laws. Just resisting and fighting back—Sandra (human rights activist, 2015)

SINCE THE PASSAGE OF THE NOTORIOUS SB1070 IN 2010, ARIZONA HAS BEEN THE center of critical attention in the national media, public opinion, and popular culture. The city of Phoenix has become synonymous with anti-immigrant/migrant sentiment, and bold, law and order--driven conservative politicians who vie for the spotlight with a perpetual stream of sound bites calling for stricter border enforcement and the removal of undocumented migrants who are always assumed to be Mexican. Captured in the public imagination are the bodies of brown people who are continuously defined as migrants, as not belonging, and as a people who need to be policed.

As a 10-year resident of this state, I am frustrated by the constant erasure of the people who live here and work everyday to challenge the dominant narrative presented by the state legislature and the media's carefully selected sound bites. In this essay, I share some of the stories of these Mexican/Chican@/Indigenous people whose counternarratives have been systematically ignored and whose long histories of struggle for labor rights, rights to a just education, and rights to living without fear are tied to a memory of a time when the US/Mexico border as we know it today did not exist. I choose to cluster these identities because in the subsequent narratives all individuals self-identify differently; their identity relates to their experiences, their ways of being in the world, and their ways of understanding the world. Some identify strongly with the nation-state of Mexico, others with a politicized Chicana/o experience that is both bilingual and bicultural, and others as Indigenous or native to both the land and continent. This article is not about unpacking particular identitarian positions as much as it is about beginning the conversation from their self-defined identities. Moreover, the international demarcation along the United

* DR. MICHELLE TÉLLEZ, a faculty member in Ethnic Studies and Sociology at Northern Arizona University, is an interdisciplinary scholar who writes about identity, community formation, resistance, and gendered migration. She is a founding member of the Arizona Ethnic Studies Network, the Entre Nosotr@s Collective, and is on the editorial review board for *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*.

States and Mexico has differentially affected workers, families, and communities in its 167-year history, both limiting and forcing migratory movements that have continuously forged new social, political, and economic relationships.

However, this essay takes as a point of departure more recent, emerging movements of Mexican/Chican@/Indigenous resistance and struggles for social justice that have developed in response to the changing climate of fear in the last decade, movements that should be on the frontline of our contemporary understanding of Chican@/Mexican@ social movements. The widespread anti-migrant, mostly anti-Mexican, sentiment in Arizona can be attributed to six-times-elected County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has been instrumental in creating an environment of hostility, fear, and hatred. He has gone so far in his fear tactics to say, in his 2008 autobiography, that there is “a growing movement among not only Mexican nationals but also some Mexican-Americans that the United States stole the territory that is now California, Arizona and Texas, and that massive immigration over the border will speed the *reconquista* [reconquering] of these lands, returning them to Mexico” (as cited in Anti-Defamation League 2012). Arpaio also asserted, “No other group except the Mexicans, and other Hispanics as well, has broken the immigration laws in such astonishing numbers” (ibid.). This kind of misinformation and oversimplification of migratory movements across Arizona’s southern border, with no mention of economic policies such as NAFTA or other economic push factors, has dire consequences for Mexican-origin communities. Local politicians have strategically built a climate of fear and dehumanization of Mexican/Chican@/Indigenous migrants and, in many ways, have been quite successful at codifying it into law and popular consciousness. Yet the push-back from the very people most affected began in March 2006, when over 20,000 people descended on Arizona State Senator Jon Kyl’s office in Phoenix in support of immigration reform and against the now infamous Sensenbrenner Bill (HR-4437) proposed to Congress in that year.

Grounded in the contemporary political and social environment, this essay weaves the stories and perspectives of five Chicana/Mexican women activists in the metro Phoenix area. I focus on these women because they play significant roles in shaping this growing movement in Arizona. In the same spirit as the Latina Feminist Group (2001, 19), I utilize the *testimonios*, or testimonies, of five women activists as a tool to “theorize oppression, resistance and subjectivity.” Marginalized people are often silenced, pushed out, and unrecognized, so we as scholars must ensure these experiences and voices, which hold the power for transformation, are at the forefront of mutual knowledge creation and political collaboration. Their narratives, based on interviews conducted in Phoenix in 2015, offer a glimpse into life in Arizona pre- and post-SB1070 and capture the urgency of their work and message. As Dulce told me, “Arizona matters because we are a resilient community. We are fighters. We are freedom fighters. We know what it feels like to be caged.” And Sandra said “in Arizona we are ground zero for the immigrant rights movement and [human right] violations, but also the place of experiment for resistance

and for organizing.” Significantly, what might start out as a movement in reaction to these policies turns into a community organizing effort where communities become leaders and begin to transform fear into action for a different kind of life. In this essay I will map these pathways to activism, organizational histories, and the transformation of reactive activism into community organizing and building.

Arizona: A Laboratory of Exclusion

The politics of exclusion in Arizona are rooted in a long history of border disputes, land takeovers (primarily of the Tohono O’Odham Nation, whose nation was also sliced in half by the creation of the US/Mexico border) by Anglo settlers, and restrictive labor practices tied to Mexican workers laboring in agriculture and mining. Migrants, primarily Mexicans, have been a significant part of Arizona’s cultural mix since the early eighteenth century, yet Anglo Arizonans have maintained cultural and demographic dominance since statehood in 1912 (Santa Ana and Gonzalez de Bustamante 2012, 20). Reinvigorated by the conservative ideas about race relations of post-1980s migrants to the Midwest, who are overwhelmingly white and retired, and reinforced by recent legislation and Arizona’s political leadership, the state’s long history of conservative and libertarian ideas has not surprisingly led to an acrimonious climate and culture of fear, especially among undocumented and mixed-status families (Sanidad 2011).

To illustrate how this culture developed, I trace the pertinent legislative action that has methodically eroded the fundamental rights of migrants living and working in Arizona. In November of 2004, Arizona passed Proposition 200, an initiative that required “individuals to produce citizenship documents when voting or receiving government social services” (The Leadership Conference 2004). Proposition 200 not only required proof of citizenship but also charged government employees with misdemeanors if they provided services to anyone believed to be undocumented (*ibid.*). This was the first in a series of exclusionary laws enforced at the local level but with significant national implications.

Two years later, in 2006, anti-migrant legislation, primarily introduced by ultra-conservative (then) Senator Russell Pearce, had more direct consequences for migrant communities living in Arizona.¹ First, Proposition 103 (the “English-only law”) was passed, making English the state’s official language and requiring that all “official state business”—which includes all activities in the court and government agencies that protect workers’ rights—be conducted in English (Arizona Secretary of State’s Office 2006). In November of that same year, Arizona voters approved Proposition 300, mandating that immigrant university students who are not US citizens or permanent residents are ineligible for in-state tuition or financial aid that is funded or subsidized by state monies. Also implemented in 2006, but recently overturned by a federal appeals court, Proposition 100 made bail unavailable to those charged with “serious felony offenses” if they were in this country “illegally” and if “the proof is evident or the presumption great” that the person is guilty of the

offense charged (Fischer 2014; see also Kiefer 2014). This proposition effectively increased the presence of undocumented migrants both in local detention centers and in Arpaio's tent city, an extension of the Maricopa County Jail for convicted and sentenced prisoners that has received much criticism for abusing inmates, singling this group out for categorization and disparate treatment, and reinforcing the image of "illegal" migrants further criminalized by incarceration. The buildup of this incarceration apparatus gave more visibility to migrants as well as to the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) and MCSO workers.

The confrontations between conservative nativists and the emerging intergenerational migrants' rights movement that began to gain national media coverage in 2006 were highlighted at Pruitt's furniture store in east central Phoenix that fall. Pruitt's owners hired six people to arrest day laborers waiting for employment on a nearby street corner citing their presence as loitering. Arpaio defended the store, as did local anti-immigrant groups. For three months, day laborers, churches, students, and immigrant/migrant rights groups organized demonstrations twice a week. A boycott of the store soon followed. This particular moment proved to be galvanizing as the interviews below demonstrate. Yet the Arizona legislature, building on federal legislation passed during the Clinton administration, continued to introduce and pass restrictive laws based on a politics of attrition.

This wave of anti-immigration laws relied on previous restrictions introduced by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which added Section 287(g), a program that authorizes the secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security to enter into agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies and permits designated officers to enforce immigration laws. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement, local law enforcement officers receive training and function under the supervision of sworn US Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2008). In Arizona, the 287(g) agreement was not enacted until 2007, at which time agents of street and jail task forces were trained to verify the immigration status of any person they might encounter during their daily work (*ibid.*). Previous legislation and the 287(g) patrols increased workplace raids and roadblocks in areas that were predominantly inhabited by migrants from anywhere south of the border, serving as aggressive measures to identify people working and residing in the country without documentation.² These full-blown operations included armed agents, volunteers, and mobile headquarters commanded by Sheriff Arpaio, and, as always, a media circus surrounded these events. Undocumented workers and documented workers of mixed-status families became frightened to leave their homes as these raids, checkpoints, and operations relied on racial profiling (Romero 2011). Garnering more visibility, Sheriff Arpaio became a hero for the extreme anti-immigrant vigilante group the Minutemen, the equally anti-immigrant Federation for American Immigration Reform, and other nativists groups in the state and across the country.³

In 2008, the Employer Sanctions law (known as the Legal Arizona Worker's Act) took effect. In name, the law penalizes employers for knowingly hiring undocumented workers. In practice, it targets undocumented employees, rather than employers, as evidenced by the fact that until 2014, only three employers had been prosecuted despite hundreds of arrests of workers (Hansen 2013). This barrage of anti-immigrant legislation implemented in Arizona over the span of eight years has not only created a culture of fear in which racial profiling and anti-immigrant sentiment has been codified into law enforcement policies, but has also criminalized and constructed legal barriers around daily activities.

In May of 2010, Arizona passed an omnibus law called the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, also known as Senate Bill (SB) 1070, signed into law by governor Jan Brewer. The "papers please" legislation authorized state and local police officers to assume federal immigration responsibilities by checking the immigration status of anyone they arrest or suspect is in the country "illegally." Enforcing an "attrition through enforcement" policy to apprehend and decrease the numbers of undocumented migrants in the state, SB 1070 criminalized not just Arizona residents and citizens, but also transient people who "looked illegal" and who were subjected to random police stops. The law made residence in the United States without proper authorization into a misdemeanor crime, and it also criminalized harboring or transporting undocumented immigrants and hiring and transporting day laborers. The law also spurred workplace raids throughout Arizona under the Employer Sanctions component of the law (SB 1070). The implementation of Section 287(g) has turned the police into the *poli-migra*, creating a culture of fear for immigrants and Latinos living in Arizona.

The implementation of SB 1070 has amplified the targeting of brown bodies, further criminalizing an entire community through their perceived (manufactured) illegality. Residents found their daily lives restricted. Although four provisions of the law were blocked by a temporary injunction in April 2011, including the highly criticized "reasonable suspicion" provision allowing law enforcement to stop or question anyone who appears to be an "illegal immigrant," other sections of the law remain in effect. The remaining sections continue to force racialized brown bodies to live in a state of fear and insecurity in Arizona, disrupting lives and traumatizing families forced to face the reality of detention, deportation, and the excruciating pain of family separation. Critically, the pushback and rollback of these laws has been due to the power of people organizing and creating coalitions, and it is to that power and those people that I now turn my attention.

Defining Movements and Moments: *Testimonios*

Whereas laws forced people to fear and hide, the testimonies reported below highlight the possibilities for change when we dream, build, and imagine. Political organizing is complicated, especially when it deals with indigeneity, the differences between Chican@ and Mexican@ identities, and the politics they engender. Though people

are organizing together, this complexity requires coalitional work between these different identities. Diana, Sandra, Jovana, Evie, and Dulce, the women whose voices and experiences shape the conversation below, represent three of the most visible Phoenix-based organizations, with overlapping but distinct goals and tactics: the Puente Human Rights Movement, Tonatierra-Nahuacalli: A Cultural Embassy of Indigenous Peoples, and the Arizona Dream Act Coalition.⁴

Our conversations centered on three issues: identity, family unification, and cultural survival and recognition. The stories told here flow from their answers to the following questions: (a) define your movement and the tactics your organization uses; (b) describe how you became involved in your organization; (c) describe the strengths/weaknesses of your work; and (d) describe the politics of resistance in Maricopa County and what that means and looks like for Mexican@s/Chican@s. The tactics and projects used to resist anti-immigrant/migrant legislation in Arizona are part of a larger context of human rights organizing and of an emerging social movement comprised of both national and international coalitions, alliances, and forms of solidarity.

Sandra describes the growth and changes in political organizing:

In 2006, there were zero migrant rights organizations in the state of Arizona and now we have ADAC, we have Mi Familia Vota, PAZ, Citizens for a Better Arizona, Somos America, Center for Neighborhood Leadership. Now our communities have many options.... In essence, people are targeting different issues based on the needs and issues that they see as important.

Sandra's perspective is important in that it recognizes that the political landscape in Phoenix has shifted in the last 10 years and underscores the counternarrative I highlight in this essay. In what follows, the women introduce their respective organizations in their own words.

Tonatierra has a long history in the Phoenix area, starting with the Maricopa Organizing Project (MCOP) and the United Farm Workers movement in the fields during the late 1970s to the mid-1980s (Maldonado 1995). MCOP moved to Phoenix in 1988, and in 1993 it fully transitioned to Tonatierra Community Development Institute, also known as Tonatierra Nahuacalli. Evie describes the evolution of Tonatierra:

Tonatierra originally was in the community of Milpas and was called MCOP. It was founded by Gustavo Gutierrez before it moved to its central Phoenix location. MCOP is the roots of Tonatierra and from it our nonprofit was founded. We originally worked with farmworkers and other movements within Mexican/Chicano/Chicana communities in the early nineties, then expanded into more work around indigenous communities.

Tonatierra's goals were cultural awareness and cultural education. I think there's always a struggle within the communities around issues of

social justice but there's also the other part of it, which is preservation of our culture and our language and how we identify ourselves. A lot of the work focused on education, culture and the youth because ... it's important to nurture them and open those doors for them to continue on this path. There are a lot of challenges that come from living in a society where you are viewed as a minority. Those things can't be ignored. A lot of the movements were movements that were important to native, indigenous, Chicanos/Mexicanos people. Some [movements] were so complex because we were dealing with larger corporations contaminating water. Or, some things were as simple as families being taken advantage of in the places they lived ... the scope of the work of Tonatierra back then was all over the place.

We attended different conferences or *cumbres*, and through the relationships we built with these people we realized that many of the communities in other parts of the world, indigenous communities, are facing the same types of injustices and many of them by the same corporations. So, we started to build relationships and alliances with other organizations and communities, and that's how Tonatierra ventured into more of the international work around indigenous issues.

People who fight in the Chicano movement have different ideas of what their identity is. They might know there is an indigenous root, but they do not know what that means. For me, I've never put myself under that identity as a Chicana because I really feel I identify with my indigenous roots.... I have a more in-depth understanding of my language and my culture and I try to abide by that in the way I live and the way I raise my children.

Evie's discussion of the cultural revitalization work of Tonatierra explains the strong presence that the organization has had in local universities and high schools through student organizations such as MEChA. In fact, all women in this study at some point had passed through Tonatierra:

Tupac [one of the cofounders of Tonatierra] would speak a lot in the community and to students. He wasn't just talking about the movement and the political side to it. He was talking about the spiritual part and people made a connection there. They felt something they remembered from their distant past and it sparked them and brought them back to this place—to Tonatierra. That hunger and desire to learn is what kept them here, and out of those young individuals relationships were made, families were formed, and now we have children and grandchildren and it's become a generational thing. It grew from a seed that was planted and that's why we call that program the Xinachtli program.⁵

The Puente Human Rights Movement began as a project of Tonatierra. In 2011, the group split, leaving many wounds and disparate political affinities.⁶ The project formed in 2007 in response to the first agreement between police and federal immigration agencies [Section 287(g)] in Arizona. As stated on the organization's website:

This agreement led to cruel attacks on our community at the hands of Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio. Our membership and leadership has always been comprised of those most impacted by anti-immigrant policies and laws: currently and formerly undocumented people, those in mixed-status families, and people of color affected by rampant racial profiling. Some of our previous work includes the Alto Arizona campaign, lifting up the human rights crisis in Arizona in the wake of the passage of notorious anti-immigrant law SB1070, and the No Papers, No Fear Ride for Justice (Undocubus). (See <http://puenteaz.org>.)

Sandra and Jovana are intensely involved with Puente and describe their introduction to the work. Jovana says:

I grew up in Arizona. My family were field workers so we migrated from crop to crop.... We settled in West Phoenix. I always asked myself why it was that my family was targeted. When I started high school at Trevor Brown I found MEChA and, one day, Tupac came to our school. He came and did the four directions [with the students; this is a ceremonial practice that recognizes the four cardinal directions in the opening and closing of a ceremony], and that was something that really opened my eyes. Between 1994 and 1998 I was involved [as a student organizer]. Then I graduated and went to college at Ottawa University and started working for a mining company, but I was feeling empty. I was seeing the Arpaio stuff starting [in the media], the Pruitt stuff and I remembered Tupac so I showed up at the blue building in 2007.⁷ I walked in and I haven't left the movement since.

Similarly, Sandra remembers:

My involvement in the movement was more of a healing process. Growing up in LA, everyone's Mexican, but I always saw how my mother was treated for having an accent or for not knowing English. I didn't know about discrimination and oppression but I felt terrible about the way I was treated and the way my community was treated. I grew up in a big community of immigrants who were Mexican, Salvadorean, and Cuban, and we coexisted. Everyone got amnesty through Reagan in 1986. But, you know, just having documentation does not free you from discrimination. I grew up with a lot of self-hatred and confusion about being treated differently and knowing that [others felt] our people were not supposed to be in the colleges and universities. Once I got to Arizona, I saw this

happening. I saw the direct attack on the *señoras* [women] who took care of me. I wasn't involved in MEChA until that same year and I knew that it was the responsibility of Chican@s. As a daughter of immigrants, I had the responsibility to act because I had grown up in this community. I had to do something to stop it. I saw the Pruitts issue on the news when I was working at Target and I vividly remember seeing men with long braids, carrying picket signs. Opposite them was a whole army of minutemen and people waving the [US] flags. I was shocked to see it happening, so at the next MEChA meeting I brought it up. We ended up at Tonatierra and started making banners, and well, the rest is history.

The Arizona Dream Act Coalition (ADAC) emerged as a response to Prop 300, which, as stated on the organization's website,

was the first law targeted at immigrant students. Many students dropped out of school and went deeper into the shadows. Yet, a small group of students from Arizona State University began a support group in which they were able to embrace their stories as immigrant youth. This group was the founder of ADAC, whose members have long ago stepped out of the shadows and announced their status as "Undocumented and Unafraid." (See <http://theadac.org>.)

Both Diana and Dulce deeply felt the effects of Proposition 300 in their own lives, which led to them getting involved at various levels. Diana shared:

I grew up undocumented, so I was directly impacted. I have been in deportation proceedings twice so I've had that experience and seen it in my community and family. I am from the border. Growing up in a border town influenced my decision to get into this work in the first place. We had a V1 Visa, which allowed us to go across to spend money on US soil. Yet to go across and see the militarization was very shocking. For me it's been one thing after another. I remember in 1996 my mother was excited about getting her driver's license and when we moved here she no longer could get it. I always thought that I was going to go back to Mexico. I didn't want to live here. We knew they didn't want us and I felt the anti-immigrant sentiment growing. I grew up being scared of the cops. For me, the work that I do is how I heal, and it has been liberating me. When I finally got to college, my tuition tripled because of Prop 300, so it was one thing after another, after another.

Dulce remembered:

I started in the movement because I wanted to go to college and I wanted to be the first woman in my family to go to school. My friends were the

Wilson Four.⁸ In 2006, I graduated from high school and was awarded the ASU leadership scholarship program that only 21 people get and which pays for four years of all college expenses. Only one person per high school is allowed to apply and I was one of the winners. After about a year of being at ASU, I lost my scholarship; not because I was no longer qualified, but because of Prop 300 that Senator Pierce had introduced. That made me see why we needed the Dream Act, why we needed to fight more, and why we needed to be out there protesting. I got connected with MEChA there and I connected with another dreamer who had a history of *teatro* [theatre], so we started doing theater to tell our stories about losing our scholarships. It was very Spanglish. Chicano. People started calling us Teatro Nopalero [Cactus Pear Theatre], so I said we should call ourselves that. Because Prop 300 snuck out and took programs for undocumented families, we decided we needed to tell people what was happening to us and to let people, professors, know we couldn't pay for school. There was a lot of fear.

The women became conscious activists through various avenues: some through student organizations, others through work, and others through their lived experience. Each avenue produced different identities and affinities. The *chispa*, or spark, that drew each to her work was different, but their narratives all highlight the power of creativity and collective visions and the very personal, often healing, relationship that the women have with their commitments. Each also emphasized the physical and emotional burnout that being intimately involved in the movement can cause; however, four of them also noted that self-care is also a method of resistance because the stronger, healthier, and more resilient they are, the longer they can fight. Furthermore, they also reflected on the definitive moment in which they decided to do something about the conditions they were witnessing and living in their city of residence.

Narratives of Resistance: Strategies, Building, Transforming

In this section, each activist narrates the conditions that led to her analysis and actions. Each is distinct in how she names her conditions and in her analysis and chosen tactics; yet, their dreams, their desire for transformation, and their commitment are parallel. Evie analyzes the calculated strategy changes Tonatierra made after seeing the impact of then-recent legislation on the community:

Before 2007, there was a lot more focus on education, cultural preservation, our traditional ceremonies, and support for other movements happening in other communities. We focused on positive things, [on the fact] that we were going to bring change into our community through preservation of culture, through songs, through teachings and learning our calendar....

After some of these laws changed and the legislation passed, our focus shifted. Instead of being able to focus on the things we wanted to focus on ... we had to focus on the fight. SB1070 made us fight for our survival and everyday life. People weren't afraid to go to their local food banks, or to drop their kids off at school until these bills started passing. Once that happened, it shifted the dynamic of life in general here for our community. We went into panic mode because of the way everyday life was being changed for people in the community.

Diana of Puente remembers:

Our strategies have been all over the place because things were happening so quickly, but there was always a plan of action. We were acting in a state of emergency, and because things happened so quickly there wasn't capacity to navigate everything.

Various tactics were utilized to resist the political change and its effects. Puente Human Rights Movement, still operating out of Tonatierra at this time, and Dreamer [belonging to the Dream Act Coalition] activists were drawing attention to how legislation was affecting the everyday life of workers, students, and families in order to push for public pressure to challenge the legislation. These strategies included banner dropping, nonviolent civil disobedience, sit-ins, street takeovers, public theater, marches, and massive protests. For example, Dulce remembered how Teatro Nopalero was doing *teatro* in churches, youth groups, and at marches, and described one particular event:

One of our biggest protests was in front of the Memorial Union at ASU. We brought a huge cage and we called it "Aliens in the Cage." The cage was representative of the system and we couldn't get to the books because we were being shackled. It was a very thought-out performance. The Arizona Dream Act Coalition emerged out of this work at the same time that the United We Dream Coalition and the Undocumented and Unafraid movements were spreading nationally.

Dulce also shares her memories of another public action that took place a few months later:

In December of 2010, I fasted for 11 days with other ADAC members in front of Senator John McCain's office. We were demanding that he meet with us and vote for the Dream Act. We were trying to create buzz around the Dream Act and to raise awareness but also to raise his awareness of his constituents, even if we are unable to vote. Dolores Huerta joined the fast for a few days. Hundreds of students protested in front of his offices. In many ways these were symbolic events. We delivered a huge check to

demonstrate all the ways in which we as workers would contribute to the state of Arizona. In the end, McCain walked out during the congressional session and didn't cast a vote. We only lost by eight votes in Congress. Prop 300 was intended to prevent the education of undocumented kids, but what it did instead was light fire under our feet. It got us to be more powerful than we could have ever imagined.

With time, the large rallies and actions needed to shift. Sandra recognizes that growth and change are constant when she says:

We are constantly learning new things every single day. You're never an expert when you're an organizer, because the game is constantly changing. You have to be very patient. It sucks when people get deported. It sucks when we lose. It sucks when there is a raid. We take these things very personally. Part of our learning experience is that we can only do so much. We can't carry the work home.

One specific project that grew out of this work and that introduced a new political tactics and focus was the *Comités de Defensa del Barrio* (Neighborhood Defense Committees). Evie noted that even though the media was no longer as present and the spotlight had disappeared, vulnerable communities were still dealing with everyday struggles and discrimination. She recalled the following history of the *comités*:

After the large marches people were coming back to Tonatierra and asking us, now what are we going to do? Now all the people from other states and other organizations were going home but we are still here facing the same realities. Out of that, the community meetings started and the *comités de defensa* were born. The communities themselves starting organizing with our help.

We decided we didn't have to meet just to decide what routes to take or make posters, but we could meet and talk about the issues happening in our community. So we started meeting twice a week with the community and we started talking about how we wanted to organize ourselves and how the community wanted to move forward. We wanted to make sure that the people being most affected dictated how we moved forward. And the issue that was most prevalent was the detentions. The detainees didn't have access to lawyers, and they didn't know their rights, so we started to do human rights training: what to do and not do when arrested, etc. We started educating people about this. Then they started to organize their own fund to have a lawyer, a legal defense fund, to be able to hold a lawyer on retainer. Once the people started saying I want to call my lawyer, the police would let them go.

In all of Phoenix, we had different *comités*: north, south, east, and west. So they started to figure out what issues were affecting them in their communities and we kept meeting to discuss strategies to address different issues. Every *comité* had something they wanted to focus on: police harassment, landlord issues, etc. That's how *comités* evolved from massive protests into something more in depth, more everyday type of work, everyday organizing.

Diana added:

We wanted to build points of contact in different areas of Phoenix so that we could build leadership, which developed into the *comités de defensa*. The sexy work is being on the streets and chanting, but then a small group of us started doing political education. Meanwhile everyone else was doing other work, planning the big marches, dealing with the raids. Initially it was the people who had been affected who were the ones meeting. For example, someone who comes out of detention... Well, that person coming out of that experience is the best person to tell that experience, to teach about that experience.

From this work the *cursos de defensa* [defense course] developed, and eventually we had *comités* in all four directions until we had 23 *comités* all over the city. We were doing English classes, know-your-rights training, political education; all components that became the six sessions that we have now. All are based on popular education, which includes a lot of dialogue and people sharing their stories and their concerns.

Jovana of Puente elaborates about the defense courses:

We pulled materials together as people were being detained. We realized that folks would go to know-your-rights training but then if they were detained they may not actually know how to respond. If they remained silent, they were further detained. So the *cursos de defensa* have been created through trial and error. We can't just give people a two- to three-hour know-your-rights training. That's why we created the *curso de defensa*. At the end of the training, they meet with a lawyer who will take them step by step through the process of what could potentially happen.

Protests and marches helped bring about awareness of the migrants' everyday struggles, but their impact was limited. Eventually through meetings the *comités* and the *cursos de defensa* emerged, which shaped the future direction of the movement by turning to a more focused plan of action at the neighborhood level. As Diana says:

[Initially] the work was very reactive to what was going on... [then] we became more intentional. There are two categories: organizing and activism. Some people think they are doing community organizing, but they're not. [There is a difference between] community organizing for activism vs. community organizing for community building. What attracts me is analyzing the root causes. What is happening in our society that affects our quality of life? I define it as the immigrant rights movement but I think it's bigger than that. Before 2010 it was more of a reaction to what was happening and trying to defend ourselves to try and have a space for ourselves in the media. You know, the activist work. We were being reactive. We have to be able to defend ourselves and feel empowered and be able to facilitate places where people are able to assert their power.

Through their narratives, the women articulate a distinction between community building and activism, and they place emphasis on the needs of those who are most affected by migration control, not those who necessarily identify as Chicana/o but rather those who might have unauthorized status in the United States. As Jovana says:

What I think is different about this movement is that I have seen the people who are in direct risk be their own advocates. We, as activists and organizers, play the support roles. It is the people who tell us that they need resources for their children, DACA information, DAPA information, and need to build a resistance against the state and its agents, who are the people who inflict pain and separation on their lives. Oftentimes there are movements that make the decisions and strategy in the "best interest" of the people. For us it really is an upside-down triangle.

Sandra makes this point when she says that through the creation of the *comités*, the work transitioned from "Chican@s to communities themselves being organized. I noticed a shift in leadership. The *cursos* helped. As people became more empowered and gained the knowledge of identifying your beast, they lost their fear."

While noting the distinction between "activists" and "community members" in our conversation, when I probed further and asked them each to define what community meant to them, none actually articulated a distinction in their own definitions. For example, Sandra says, "Our community is anyone in our barrio, we are all connected. Our *vecinos* [neighbors], *los paleteros* [the street vendors]... In terms of our political community, it's everyone who is at risk." Diana adds:

Community is about place and getting to know what impacts you.... Whoever is in that space needs to move together to protect each other and defend each other to collectively improve their quality of life. Your neighbors impact you. The way you interact with them is community building. It's not just a cause. It's more genuine when people are connect-

ing to a place, not just an issue. It forces you to say that I am part of that community. Regardless of your political background.

Finally, Evie states:

Some people see community within their neighborhoods, or people who don't live in same neighborhood but are affected by similar things and come together. Here at Tonatierra our community is broader than that. We have people who come from all over Phoenix even though we don't live next door; struggles we share culturally and economically give us that sense of community. Also, we have more in-depth relationships through ceremony and culture, but sometimes folks who share a ceremony with you do not have the same everyday struggle with you.

Community for the Dreamers emerged through this movement as they feel they walk between the two experiences of being raised as a Chican@ but not having the privileges that come with that identity [e.g., US citizenship]. However, Dulce reasons, "we have been able to risk more in this community. To not be afraid to say we were undocumented. We've been taking matters into our own hands, being the face of our movement."

In the end, what these women demonstrate is that community is built through struggle and new knowledge always emerges in struggle. Although an understanding of community is multilayered and never unilateral, all women narrate the importance and power of collective action, as summarized by Sandra when she says that "community is the only people who can protect you from the government when the government is the one who is attacking you."

Political Outcomes

Given the political turmoil of the last ten years, the organizations have moved into particular directions, or perhaps have gone back to their original positions in order to move forward. In outlining their continued work below, I am also demonstrating how reactive organizing methods have led to sustainable community practices.

Puente: Not One More

Our goal is for our people to lose the fear in one of the most hostile states in the country—Jovana

Puente continues to challenge criminalization through campaign work. Their goal is to keep families together and to stop the deportations. Jovana recalls:

On July 29, 2010 [the day SB1070 went into effect before the injunction], we started doing messaging in response to SB1070's implementation and Joe Arpaio saying that he was going to have a celebratory raid. We locked

ourselves to the capitol and dropped the banners and said “not one more!” We realized the huge need to build this movement because people were being incarcerated and deported without a fair trial. That was the birth of the Not One More campaign. We also started the Uno por Uno (One by One) program and started fighting case by case. We no longer could wait for attorneys. We would go to immigration court cases and started doing legal work. So far this program has been very successful. We have liberated 131 people from detention and reunited that many families.

Puente developed a critique of the idea that there were “deserving” migrant, those who, despite their immigration status, were otherwise law-abiding and morally righteous would-be citizens deserving of support; the organization wanted to push mainstream immigrant rights movements to fight for all undocumented persons living in the United States. Jovana explains:

We say yes to folks who have prior criminal records, and due to the non-profit industrial complex,⁹ there are other orgs who cannot and will not stand by families with past criminal records. We think it’s important to say all families matter and we’ve already started “felons are family too” ... DACA for all, not just students but their parents too. We are working with the population that wouldn’t have a chance otherwise. They don’t have funds to get an attorney or pay for the application.

Puente has been successful in family reunification due to its social media presence and organizing, which allows tactics such as live streaming actions and online petitions and makes use of extensive mailing lists of other 12,000 people and active Twitter and Facebook accounts. Not One More is a national campaign based on Arizona’s model. Jovana says:

We created the blueprint. Not because we know what we are doing, but because we had to figure it out. People will call us from across the country who are dealing with a specific case, or they’ll call us to ask how to do a direct action in response to a particular issue they are having. We’ve gone to Alabama, New Orleans, Chicago, and done a tour with the UndocuBus.

Arizona Dream Act Coalition (ADAC)

It was so beautiful to watch them, from 2010 to that point to where they say, I’m not scared. Arpaio, come and get me—Dulce

One of the most important aspects of the Dreamers movement is its vocal and visible presence, which has shaped the perception of migrants and migration politics at the state and national levels. For example, in March 2011, the parents of Arizona Dreamers formed their own chapter, called Arizona Dream Guardians, to support

the Dreamers in passing the Dream Act and to coordinate fundraisers and events to finance the Dreamers' education. Its objectives now also include fighting for their own path to citizenship.

Although the Dream Act has not been passed, the Dreamers and their allies have organized nationally to apply pressure on state representatives and the president, resulting in President Barak Obama's 2012 deferred action program (DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). This temporary relief defers the deportation of individuals under 30 years old who came to the United States prior to age 16 and meet other criteria. The Dreamers and their parents also lobbied for additional relief in the form of executive action, and in November 2014, such relief was announced. While DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents) has yet to be implemented due to a legal battle, ADAC, along with other community partners in the One Arizona Coalition, has continued preparing DACA and DAPA eligible individuals since December 2014 through the coordination of information forums and assistance with immigration applications. Also, because of public pressure, mostly by the Dreamers, in May 2015 the Arizona Board of Regents and the Maricopa County Superior Court announced their decision to grant in-state status to anyone accepted into the Obama administration's DACA program if they meet other residency requirements. This was a huge victory that was short-lived, because Attorney General Mark Brnovich appealed the decision of the judge (Fischer 2015). Yet ADAC activists are not deterred and will continue to broaden their "dream." These are the tangible consequences of the ideological shift from "illegal aliens" to Dreamers; as Dulce says, "We have been able to change the rhetoric and identity of the immigrant."

Promotora de Bienvenir

Access to health care and services was identified in the *comités* as a gap that few nongovernmental groups were meeting. The connection between health and immigration was blatantly clear to Diana, and she realized that immigrants' rights groups could meet immigrants' health needs through culturally sensitive means that at the same time empower people and respond to the particular fears the community has of government agencies and hospitals and its concerns about confidentiality around status. Understanding that living and thriving is also an act of resistance, Diana led the efforts to meet this gap:

The *comités de defensa* led me to my work in public health because the women said they needed health care. We started having health fairs and people showed up more often to these than to the know-you- rights classes or English classes. Depending on the needs of the *comité*, the location and frequency of the fairs changed. One fair had about 400 people and we took a survey of 71 people with four questions. We found that one of the

biggest impediments to health was racism. Out of this work the Phoenix Allies for Community Health (PACH) was born.¹⁰

Rather than rely upon a power dynamic involving service or charity, Diana helped develop a Promotoras [promoters] program through which community members are trained to provide health information to their own communities and to identify common risks and signs of diseases and ailments specific to the Latino community. Empowered and having a unique relationship to their own community, community health workers create a new language around health. In Diana's words:

Community health workers are people in the community who are from the community who have a unique relationship to the community. We need to connect our needs from our communities and immigrant rights fall under this umbrella. Our name should change to Promotora de Bienvivir. Because that's what we are doing.

Indigenous Rights

Although Tonatierra has responded to the legislative push back and has organized with and for communities egregiously affected by the laws, the organization has remained steadfast in its analysis of migration: Migration of indigenous people from the southern tip of the continent to the northern tip is as natural as the rivers that flow across geography despite political demarcations. It is a movement that predates colonization. Evie explains:

The difference between other organizations and Tonatierra is that we focus on indigenous rights, the people who are so-called immigrants or migrants, the majority of them are native people, indigenous people to their areas, to their territories.¹¹ You can't put them in the category of Latino/Hispanic because their rights are very different. They have self-determination, territorial rights, they have a whole different set of ideals. Not everybody wants to be assimilated into the US American Dream, many of the people who are here are forced to be here because of economic situations, because of violence, because of other factors that we believe have a lot to do with NAFTA.

For example, corn, which was a local commodity, cannot keep up with US corn market price. It's so much cheaper, a company can go down from the US and set up shop, exploit workers, produce cheaper products. You have communities of farmers being pushed out of their livelihood, they are forced to migrate to feed their families. Any human being has a natural instinct for survival and they are going to do what they have to do to survive, and if it means stepping over this imaginary line to feed their families or themselves, then that's what they are going to do.

So not everyone who comes wants to be assimilated, they want to retain their right to self-determination, their language, their culture, and they just want to live like everybody else. We focus on those things, we have rights as indigenous peoples. We have a right to migrate, to work, to have our language, our culture, our ceremonies, and we want to retain those rights no matter where we go and no matter who we come across and no matter whose territory we are in. We as people want to maintain that.

The strategies that emerge from this analysis include continuing the work of cultural regeneration (and retention), reciprocal economics, and sustainability; they operate at the national, international, and at the UN level. One project that has become central to their work and that connects all these levels is the cooperative known as Quetzal Co-op. The co-op works to maintain sustainable relationships between indigenous communities according to principles of just trade—not to be confused with fair trade, a project that many feel has been usurped and leaves little growth for the communities they are supposed to be supporting. Through the sale of coffee and other items made by indigenous communities in the south and north, not only is awareness being built around just trade, but also economic reciprocity is created between the growers of the coffee and the local distributors.

Conclusion

How do I draw a conclusion to the narratives and analyses of people and communities working on such a broad range of issues, ranging from culture, the economy, trade issues, migration, indigenous peoples (in Mexico and the United States), policy, identity, feminism, community, colonial systems, and funding? The analyses of these women are powerful when woven together as well as in their singular parts.

What I can say is this. Through my involvement in issues surrounding border justice and workers' rights as both an activist and a scholar, I witnessed the evolution of Phoenix's cultural and political landscape, beginning with Proposition 300 and further intensifying in the spring of 2010 (Garcia and Téllez 2012; Téllez, Sanidad, and De la Fuente 2011). My daughter, who is now nine years old, was an infant when the massive marches took place in Phoenix, and she definitely does not remember them as I watched them unfold from the couch of our first apartment in Phoenix in 2006, and she may not remember the marches and carrying signs at the state capitol at the height of the public battle against SB1070 in 2010. But she has been shaped by a social and political environment and by a culture of resistance that formed here. The ingenuity, creativity, and courage of activists here have resulted in a "frontlines" movement, because as Sandra says, "everything that has happened on a nationwide scale has been birthed here." Evie agrees that the social conditions have led to increased political engagement, and that the attack on migrant communities was a "blessing in disguise for the social movement that

awoke the sleeping giant. People from different communities that were being affected by laws started this movement here in Phoenix.”

For my daughter this has meant an early understanding of border crossings and exclusions, of late-night meetings discussing workers’ rights, and of in-depth conversations about family separation and privilege. But it has also taught her the power that people have in challenging their conditions and in reclaiming their culture and ancestral ways, and she knows that there is a community to which she belongs, even if the definition of community is not neatly packaged or easily defined. The sociopolitical landscape of Arizona has taught her that.

For Diana, “Arizona is important because with all of the different things we have been able to accomplish, we not only talk about possibilities for our communities but we are showing that the system has a problem, and we are here to fight for liberation.” And Dulce concludes:

Because of all that has happened in Arizona, we’ve spent a lot of time being against, against, against. And now I’m looking towards building the world I want with individuals who are like-minded. I’m burnt out on the resistance. I want to fight from a different place. And even change my language. I don’t want to fight anymore. I want to build. You have to want to change the community you are part of for a positive reason.

We no longer want to be seen as the state with the regressive politicians, but instead as the place where hope and transformation reside. Therefore, in Arizona, we will continue to build and sustain our communities.

NOTES

1. In a historic recall election in November 2011, Pearce was ousted out of office (Nelson 2011).
2. By 2010, one-third of the population in Arizona was Latin@/Mexican (Santa Ana and Gonzalez de Bustamante 2012). Also, according to the Pew Research Center, there are 300,000 undocumented migrants living in the state of Arizona (Passel and Cohn 2014).
3. In January of 2015, a federal judge ordered Sheriff Arpaio to stop conducting raids on undocumented migrants, after the Department of Justice had found that Arpaio’s office had engaged in racial profiling and unreasonable prolonged detentions of Hispanics. Furthermore, it was found responsible for the deportation or forced departures of more than 26,000 undocumented migrants, representing about a quarter of the national total, according to The Associated Press. See <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/05/justice/arizona-arpaio-immigration-raids/>.
4. I would like to acknowledge here that there a number of organizations exist that focus primarily or secondarily on immigrants’ rights issues and that have helped build the culture of resistance in Arizona. I selected these three organizations because they represent organizations that are primarily led by migrants.
5. Xinachtli is the name of a curriculum of Indigenous community cultural empowerment that is used by Tonatierra for young people (and others).

6. The women hesitated to unpack this story, but I do not think it is essential knowledge for the purposes of this essay. Perhaps for future research it can be analyzed as a way to understand power and intergenerational organizing within the Chican@/Mexican@ movement.

7. The “blue building” is actually known as the Nahuacalli, Embassy for Indigenous Peoples.

8. The Wilson Four are the Phoenix high school students who in 2002 went to a competition for robotics in Buffalo, New York, and were arrested when visiting the Niagara Falls in Canada due to migration status. They bear the name of their former high school.

9. The nonprofit industrial complex is a system of relationships between the state/foundations and nonprofit/NGO social service and social justice organizations that results in the surveillance, control, derailment, and everyday management of political movements.

10. PACH began as a project supported by students and teachers in the health field and has become a nonprofit with its own physical location in central Phoenix that provides health care for those who would not have access otherwise (see www.azpach.org).

11. Territories are both national and global, and the work of Tonatierra goes beyond Arizona. Reclaiming an indigenous way of life is not just about returning to a “homeland,” but about having a relationship and commitment to healing the land you live on and build community in. Furthermore, statistics show that because of the effects of NAFTA, larger numbers of indigenous peoples have been forced to leave their communities and territories of origin in Mexico, Guatemala, and other regions.

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