



Pregnant on Arrival: Making the Illegal Immigrant (Difference Incorporated)

Eithne Luibheid

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“State alert as pregnant asylum seekers aim for Ireland.” “Country Being Held Hostage by Con Men, Spongers, and Those Taking Advantage of the Maternity Residency Policy.” From 1997 to 2004, headlines such as these dominated Ireland’s mainstream media as pregnant immigrants were recast as “illegals” entering the country to gain legal residency through childbirth. As immigration soared, Irish media and politicians began to equate this phenomenon with illegal immigration that threatened to destroy the country’s social, cultural, and economic fabric.

Pregnant on Arrival explores how pregnant immigrants were made into paradigmatic figures of illegal immigration, as well as the measures this characterization set into motion and the consequences for immigrants and citizens. While focusing on Ireland, Eithne Luibheid’s analysis illuminates global struggles over the citizenship status of children born to immigrant parents in countries as diverse as the United States, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. Scholarship on the social construction of the illegal immigrant calls on histories of colonialism, global capitalism, racism, and exclusionary nation building but has been largely silent on the role of nationalist sexual regimes in determining legal status. Eithne Luibheid turns to queer theory to understand how pregnancy, sexuality, and immigrants’ relationships to prevailing sexual norms affect their chances of being designated as legal or illegal.

Pregnant on Arrival offers unvarnished insight into how categories of immigrant legal status emerge and change, how sexual regimes figure prominently in these processes, and how efforts to prevent illegal immigration ultimately redefine nationalist sexual norms and associated racial, gender, economic, and geopolitical hierarchies.

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