

Blackwell, Maylei. 2023. *Scales of Resistance. Indigenous Women's Transborder Activism*. Durham, London: Duke University Press. 392 pp. Pb.: \$29.95. ISBN: 9781478017967.

Book review by

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In *Scales of Resistance*, Blackwell has produced an invaluable resource on Indigenous women's transborder activism. Focusing on women's organizing, mobilization, and resistance in Mexico, Latin America, and the Indigenous diaspora, Blackwell's text is based on ethnographic research—oral histories, collaborative research, and informal and formal observations—conducted over 20 years. The result is an expansive, multigenerational, multi-site examination of indigeneity, gender, agency, and transborder activism.

Blackwell clearly understands her relationship to the work as a researcher and participant. Incited as a doctoral student in the Indigenous rebellion by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, she explains that she came “to intellectual life and academia through politics and activism” (p. xv). In *Scales of Resistance*, Blackwell positions herself as an activist researcher, attending national and international conferences, nurturing long-term friendships, and facilitating training. From Santa Cruz, CA, to Mexico City, the southern Mixt region of Oaxaca, and Lima, Peru, Blackwell tracks, traces, and theorizes transborder activism through geographies of power.

Particularly noteworthy is Blackwell's use of scales of power to portray the women's “weav[ing] in and between local, national, transnational, transborder, and land-based scales of power to create new spaces of participation” (p. 15). She shows women navigating and contesting power – what she calls the hybrid hegemony of race, indigeneity, and migration in a global economy. Blackwell shows how women move in and across scales of power in home and pueblo, municipality and nation-state, and transborder and international geographies of difference, each with its organization of power. Blackwell

writes, “Moving in and between scales is a form of weaving. Weaving knowledge, weaving spaces, strategies, and discourses. This mode of organizing is specific to Indigenous women, who weave worlds to produce modes of social change relationally” (p. 16).

Scales of Power is organized into five chapters, preceded by a Prelude and Introduction, followed by what Blackwell titles a Coda. In *Chapter one*, she focuses on the women’s shift from a “discourse of rights to a practice of autonomy”. Based on ethnographic data and oral histories with 25 Indigenous activists, she describes the women’s founding and the growth of the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indigenas de Mexico (CONAMI) as a national network of Indigenous women. The oral histories illuminate the women’s lived experiences as they move through what Blackwell frames as multiple scales. They create collective spaces and collective consulta in which they deliberate, create proposals, and demand space on the national stage, as well as in national peace dialogues and international conferences.

In *Chapter two*, Blackwell traces the scale up of CONAMI, as women joined Indigenous activists from 26 organizations and 22 countries in the creation of Enlace Continental de Mujeres Indigenas de Abya Yala (ECMIA). Drawing on oral histories with network leaders and founders and her observations and participation at gatherings and meetings, Blackwell describes the ways Indigenous women navigate differentials in power around race and class in the larger Latin American feminist movement. They question representation and bring a transnational understanding, a double consciousness, a double mirada, to the network. Blackwell moves her focus to the local in *Chapter three*, drawing on the life stories of key members of CONAMI to trace what she calls the meshworks of the local and transnational. The women talk about multiscale weaving of horizontal approaches, dominant and subaltern knowledges, regions and pueblos, and the local and inter/national. Their stories trace their paths to leadership in highly gendered worlds. Blackwell extends her lens in *Chapter four* to encompass transborder activism. Drawing on collaborative research with activists, critical ethnography, participant observations, and more than 20 oral histories, Blackwell shows how Indigenous women organize in unique ways based on region, scale, and country. She employs geographies of difference as an analytic and framework to illustrate how the women navigate colonial power that is organized differently across settler borders. In *Chapter five*, Blackwell shifts to Los Angeles to examine how Indigenous diaspora and transborder activism shape geographies of indigeneities in the city. Employing Critical Latinx Indigeneities as a framework and collaborative research as a methodology, she traces Indigenous women negotiating multiple scales in the city. Blackwell, in the final Coda, asks how hope is maintained in the

contemporary context of neo-liberal economic policies, increased migration, and the development of narco-states and focuses on the seeds of resistance that have been planted.

Scales of Resistance is a project of hope and a testament to the strength of Indigenous women's activism. Among the many photographs, vignettes, and quotes in the text, a passage by Ernestina Ortiz, an early member of CONAMI, has particular resonance:

Now we have a voice. We live in a context of extreme violence and repression. It seems difficult to hold those two historical trajectories together and make meaning out of them. While there is no linear history of progress that can be ascribed to processes of social change for Indigenous women, their gains have been made in tremendous times of structural realignment and social and political repression.
(p. 238)

Blackwell's work is a real contribution to Indigenous scholarship, transborder studies, and feminist analysis. Always explicit about the particularly severe impacts of Latin American wars and the geopolitics of neo-colonialism on Indigenous women, Blackwell's project provides a rare glimpse into the power of Indigenous women's agency and the agency of their power in organizing and resisting.