

Maylei Blackwell, *Scales of Resistance: Indigenous Women's Transborder Activism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1796-7 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-4780-1535-2 (cloth); ISBN: 978-1-4780-2260-2 (ebook)¹

In *Scales of Resistance: Indigenous Women's Transborder Activism*, Maylei Blackwell draws on decades of ethnographic research with Indigenous women activists in Oaxaca and Los Angeles to theorize scale. Blackwell argues that Indigenous women organize by “interweav[ing] different types of scale that include the formal political arena of Western, hegemonic spaces and discourses as well as Indigenous scales, spatial practices, knowledges, and epistemologies” (p.290). More specifically, Blackwell analyzes the way these activists in Mexico and its diaspora draw on insights they gain from their experiences of “different terrains of power at each scale” (p.6) as Indigenous (and, in some cases, migrant) women “scaled up and down”, “translocally or horizontally” to carve out more spaces for their involvement and to exercise Indigenous autonomy, as well as build solidarity with other sectors (p.291). She argues that Indigenous women activists build their own scales “in and between multiple scales of power” (p.4), “based on Indigenous relationships and commitments to land in ways that disrupt settler colonial nation-state borders of what scholars call ‘transnational’ organizing” (p.xix). Blackwell’s book is of interest to critical geographers thinking about scale as it relates to activism and (potential) solidarity in organizing. Additionally, scholars of critical migration studies will be pleased to see Blackwell’s work in Chapter 4 on “the transregional scale created by the dense networks of Oaxacan Indigenous migrant organizing and communal life...” (p.39). Finally, her text will certainly appeal to feminist geographers as it continues the tradition of “reconfigur[ing] conventions of scale” (Pratt and Rosner 2012: 1).

Given my own work that centers (im)possibilities of refusing colonial forms of solidarity in activism (Kartal 2022), I was delighted that, in Chapter 5, Blackwell highlights how displaced Indigenous migrant activists take up residence, make place, and organize on Tongva land (LA) and in relation to “Tongva Indigenous geographies of place, history, and community” (p.250). This is an important move to refuse settler colonial imagined Indigenous erasure. Blackwell is

¹ An open access (CC BY-NC-ND) version is available at <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/63478>

inspired by Tongva scholar Charles Sepulveda's (2018) theorizing of the possibility of arrivants (see Byrd 2011) choosing to be responsible guests in relation to Indigenous peoples and homelands. While Blackwell explores the potential power in the formation of a pan-Indigenous identity, she is careful not to erase difference and believes it important that Indigenous migrants learn about the "histories and places of the Tongva" (p.250) and engage in "transindigenous dialogue" about "the responsibilities that being a good guest implies" (p.256). Blackwell's (alongside other scholars') creation of the Mapping Indigenous LA Project (<https://mila.ss.ucla.edu/>) that represents the multiple and overlapping Indigenous geographies on Tongva land/LA provides inspiration to others committed to creating spaces of dialogue "about solidarities and responsibilities within these complex relationships" (p.250). Given that struggles for migrants' rights are occurring in multiple settler colonial contexts, and sometimes alongside Indigenous movements for decolonization, this chapter is very relevant.

However, as I was reading *Scales of Resistance*, I found myself wondering if Blackwell's focus on scale may have limited her analyses at certain points. While Blackwell takes a more nuanced approach to scale, for example highlighting horizontal networks that emerge, I agree with Marston et al. that scalar analyses potentially compel us "to think in terms of social relations and institutional arrangements that somehow fit their contours", which make it challenging to "deliver engaged and self-reflexive accounts of social life" (2005: 422). Against this tendency, Marston et al. call for "sustained attention to the intimate and divergent relations between bodies, objects, orders and spaces" (2005: 424). Far from minimizing the intimate, Blackwell shows how Indigenous women organizers "scale down", practicing autonomy at the level of the body and home, to refuse state control over the terms of Indigenous autonomy (see Chapter 1). It is precisely intimate experiences, whether at home, in their community, or moving from their community to other places for work or education, that inspired their organizing at multiple scales. However, there were times I wished Blackwell would have further fleshed out negotiations that presumably occurred when trying to build Indigenous women's organizations at the national or transborder scale. For example, Blackwell mentions that the women of CONAMI (National Coordinator of Indigenous Women / Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas) "represented the ideological diversity of various approaches and organizational sites of the

national Indigenous movement in Mexico in the 1990s” (p.71-72) and, later, that Abiyala ended up being “unscalable” in part due to an inability to “resonate within the international system and to encompass the great diversity of Indigenous women from northern Canada to Tierra del Fuego” (p.292). Blackwell could have added depth by describing the look of that diversity in understanding and practice, as well as negotiations required to build CONAMI across this difference, for example. Additionally, I think Blackwell could have produced a more nuanced analysis by exploring more fully the dissonance when trying to build solidarity around Abiyala. In short, while reading *Scales of Resistance*, I wondered if Blackwell’s focus on scale (whether up, down, across, or between) circumscribed her ability to examine relations across difference within the Indigenous women organizing spaces themselves.

Nonetheless, Blackwell’s engagement with Indigenous women’s scales of resistance is an important intervention because it refuses racist and gendered imaginaries of Indigenous women as “fixed in time and place” (p.226). Blackwell shows how Indigenous women activists read power dynamics in various places and build new scales that encompass their worldviews, which, at times, transcend colonial borders (see Chapters 2 and 4), and how this activism at various scales influences local organizing (Chapter 3). Accounts challenging racist and gendered imaginaries are essential, given that (settler) colonial states have used and continue to use these fictions to deny Indigenous autonomy (p.86), as well as to try to legitimize imperial interventions (see Abu-Lughod 2002). Additionally, by addressing Indigenous women’s agency and organizing that centers their cosmovisions, Blackwell opens us to other aspirations and ways of practicing justice. Amplifying Indigenous theorizing and practices at varying scales, as Blackwell notes, has the potential to transform Western feminism by opening it to alternative epistemologies and ontologies. For Blackwell, the hope is to start decolonizing “hegemonic feminism” by highlighting other ways of understanding “gender and sexuality” (p.292).

In conclusion, despite my desire that Blackwell take more care to examine relations across difference, given that “actors within... terrains [of power] are also complexly and differentially situated in relation to the intersectional ways power operates through categories such as class, gender, race, sexuality, and indigeneity” (p.8), I applaud her book. In *Scales of Resistance*, Blackwell rethinks scale beyond solely its colonial and masculinist forms by

centering Indigenous women's organizing and geographies. By highlighting the work that Indigenous women (sometimes migrants) do at varying scales, as well as the creation of new scales based on their readings of power in different places and their own cosmovisions, Blackwell's book is an important corrective to scalar analyses that invisibilize marginalized actors.

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