

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Sovereignty in Decolonization

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In her 1983 *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, feminist science fiction author Joanna Russ outlined the many approaches used to ignore, condemn, or otherwise belittle the intellectual productions by members of the “wrong” groups.¹ In addition to discouragement and blocking access to requisite materials and training, other regular tactics include isolating a given author or one of their texts from the tradition to which they or it belong and simply “ignoring the works, the workers, and the whole tradition,” which Russ considers both most common and most difficult to combat.² Among the many contributions of Temin’s *Remapping Sovereignty* is his actively counteracting the ignoring of “the works, the workers, and the whole tradition” by refusing to isolate the six individual North American Indigenous political thinkers who are his focus from the larger, internally diverse, dynamic political worlds of which they are part. Far from monolithic or univocal, what emerges is an intergenerational multi-nation effort to articulate aspirations and concerted action that respond with dignity and power to distinct and overlapping moments in ongoing processes of settler-colonial genocide and dispossession.

Given the tremendous richness of Temin’s work, my questions focus on two central formulations—that of earthmaking and of transnational internationalism—and on clarifying the implications of what it means to remap sovereignty.

Quoting from Winona LaDuke (White Earth Anishinaabe), Temin defines earthmaking as a distinctive response to settler-colonial, earth-destroying violence which in both past and present parasitically invades and disrupts the

¹ Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983).

² Russ, *How to Suppress*, 5.

ecological and social reproduction of Indigenous societies. Rooted in anticolonial struggles that treat human beings as thoroughly dependent on webs of relationship that exceed our endeavor, “making” entails the active pursuit of responsibilities of care that mutually sustain human and other-than-human beings. Against the extractive domination of colonial sovereignty that conditions its surroundings through treating land as property (16), in earthmaking practices, the “self” in “self-determination” becomes through avowing, sustaining, and deepening interdependencies that tie the “liberation of both colonized peoples and the earth together” (100).

Invoking Adom Getachew’s framing of Black Atlantic anticolonial struggle as a worldmaking (rather than a narrowly nation-building) enterprise, earthmaking seeks a new international that adds an explicit break from anthropocentric modes of developmentalism that celebrate territorial sovereignty over natural resources (17). A stewardship world order refers to “(re)making (relations with) the earth” in non-exploitative and reciprocity-oriented networks (19) that pertain to self-determination of *all* aspects of social-ecological reproduction. Temin explains that Ella Deloria’s account of the meaning- and relationship-nurturing practices of treaty, her “earthmaking,” rejects and transcends the disavowals of interdependence that define colonial sovereignty, replacing self–other with kin–kin relations. Extending kinship to previously human strangers, as well as to nations of mice and buffalo, treaty-making as a form of earthmaking enacts anticolonial agency through co-creating shared conditions of care and flourishing (84). Temin clarifies that Deloria did not expect that this mode of treaty-making could be engaged in with colonial states. Indeed, it was a thoroughgoing critique of how settlers made and continue to break treaties. As such, if it does not presume universality, it could, in its attention to repairing interdependence, achieve it.

In a spirit of appreciation for the essential nature of the practices described here, I wonder about the language and processes involved. First, *earthmaking* seems to reinscribe the centrality of concerted human fabrication in ways that fail to capture George Manuel’s account of the earth as sacred because it is the source of all life (119). Presumably our efforts to decommodify our relationships with the earth may require a vocabulary that signals a less instrumental and more revering orientation? What are mechanisms or rituals for assuring that we humans, as mediators and interpreters of other-than-human life, are not engaged in acts of projection? Similarly, if a sign of political health is a multiplicity of interpretive actors, committed together to stewardship, how is guardianship of ecology informed and mobilized? What are the forms of communication, learning, and knowing required and when potentially competing conclusions arise, how are they adjudicated? Although LaDuke speaks of “remaking” (1, 16) another verb might better capture how we cultivate mutually beneficial relations among humans, other-than-humans, and the earth.

In a related effort to break with “methodological nationalism,” Temin coins the term “transnational nationalism” to capture the category-defying ways that Indigenous kinship moves across settler nation-states and dominant international institutions. Challenging the grammars of sovereignty that organize political authority in the global order by determining what counts as internal

authority and external structures of representation of colonial states (20), place-based political formations express relational networks that decenter the current planetary order. Temin explains that Lee Maracle's work with the Native Alliance for Red Power (NARP) aimed to transcend US and Canadian unilateral control over defining the internal and external, domestic and international, mobilizing the language of internal colonization to knit "together a variety of struggles in a web of relations with global revolutionary ambitions" (160). In such transnational linking, not only was the "aura of inevitability" (161) of colonial sovereignty unsettled, members of NARP emulated how internal and foreign policy experts regularly forge global relations to try to secure their hegemony. Affirming Maracle's observation that "[c]olonial hegemony never fully subsumes lived reality or the capacity to remember and imagine otherwise" (169), in alternative international modes of social coordination, Indigenous peoples form a global majority with "expropriated and racialized peasants [and] workers" (162).

I wonder about Termin's selection of the term transnational globalism rather than transnational internationalism. Are there particular, continued commitments to the unit and site of nation and relations among nations as entities smaller and larger than currently organized sovereign states? Or is nation—a feature of particular historical contexts of political struggle—also in need of reconsideration? Must it be one of the levels of political association and relationship that we are trying to cultivate or is it an impediment to nurturing global circuits of place-based polities we seek? Do we want nation to remain an organizing node in networks that span the earth?

Turning to the implications of remapping sovereignty, Temin declares his focus on "the role of sovereignty in (de)colonization" (2) and on unsettling and reimagining "the most basic features of modern political rule" (3). This includes defying the US state's claim to unilateral authority and that political order must be forged through a monopoly of violence projected over a delimited territory. Treating sovereignty as a question rather than "the self-evident container or normative aspiration for anticolonial struggles" (3), Temin identifies efforts to "disentangle the meaning of self-determination ... both from the *institutions* of the state and the conceptual *logics* of sovereignty" (6; emphasis original).

Temin highlights debates within Indigenous studies over whether "sovereignty" accurately describes Indigenous political aims. His "use of the notion of 'Indigenous self-determination' ... powerfully *name[s]* this refusal of dominant colonial notions of sovereignty ... to underscore ... contrasts between Indigenous sovereignty and colonial sovereignty" (8; emphasis original). At stake is whether hierarchical, racialized, gendered unliteral coercive power can be transformed into collective and individual relations of nondomination authored on Indigenous societies' terms. This is to imagine self-determination as "*freedom from* the colonial domination of the sovereign state" (13; emphasis original) and the overturning of "the international order of sovereign states that has been underwritten since World War II by US imperial hegemony" (13).

When Temin states that "there is no pluralizing colonial sovereignty, only countering and forging alternatives" (188), this raises the question of whether we want to do away with sovereignty entirely because its Eurocolonial capitalist forms so dominate the human political imagination or only that we replace its

most familiar expression with a human- and earth-sustaining version. We must ask about the expectation for how the more familiar Euromodern version of sovereignty responds to the nourishing and multiplying of a more viable alternative that ultimately aims to displace or render it irrelevant. Do these two asymmetrical and distinct visions vie with each other in perennial, political antagonism? If so, must the Indigenous conception entail continued preparations for such protracted battle? It also poses the question of whether there are aspects of colonial sovereignty that, even if subject to criticism, the anticolonial version has a record of and reason to retain. Sarah Deer suggests that the right to exclude from particular territorial bounds has been useful, even indispensable, to sustaining reciprocal relations of care and mutual flourishing in responding to sexual violence against Indigenous women.³ If there are clearly ways of enacting power to avoid, are there forms that we know best in their colonial mode that could still be vital to Indigenous self-determination?

³ Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).