

## POLITICAL THEORY

**Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought.** By David Myer Temin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 288p. \$99.00 cloth, \$32.50 paper.

**Indigenous Peoples and Borders.** Edited by Sheryl Lightfoot and Elsa Stamatopoulou. Durham: Duke University Press, 2024. 384p. \$114.95 cloth, \$30.95 paper.  
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If indeed the fields of political theory and political science more broadly are anchored by certain perennial concepts, it would be understandable to center on sovereignty and borders as two prominent guideposts. Sovereignty, as a concept of legitimate political power (as well as who can lay claim to it), carries a long tradition in the field. Whether monarchs, groups, or states, the language of sovereignty and its conceptualizations have informed the way scholars think about land, institutions, subjectivities, and publics. The border, in its physical, institutional, and epistemic forms, is directly connected to these debates today. As state power is deployed, borders are conventionally bound to it as a regulatory tool.

Given the saliency of these topics in the field, it is perhaps surprising that Indigenous politics have not figured into these debates more prominently. Indigenous nations, after all, were at the forefront of novel claims about sovereignty and borders as the nation-state system crystalized. Today, Indigenous communities remain at the center of sovereignty debates related to native lands, practices, and cultures which problematize static conceptions of the border. It is within this conversation on the connection between Indigenous politics, sovereignty, and bordered thought that David Myer Temin's *Remapping Sovereignty: Decolonization and Self-Determination in North American Indigenous Political Thought* and Sheryl Lightfoot's and Elsa Stamatopoulou's *Indigenous Peoples and Borders* intervene.

Temin's *Remapping Sovereignty* offers a good starting point for assessing the linkages between Indigenous sovereignty and bordered practices. His text problematizes existing theories of sovereignty by illustrating how Indigenous nations have long rejected appeals to sovereign authority as an extension of colonial logics of power (p. 184). The book, for example, opens with the 2016 movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline (NODAPL) to show how anticolonial Indigenous praxis deploys an "interplay between political thought and practice" to reject extractivist practices, protect the land, and claim Indigenous sovereignty (pp. 2–3). These movements, in turn, center Indigenous decolonization

as a proposal to "transfigure and replace" prominent "colonial architectures" through visions of "restitution, repair, and radical transformation" (p. 3). As such, the NODAPL movement operates within a tradition of Indigenous movements in which claims to sovereignty stand at the center of anticolonial resistance and decolonial futures.

*Remapping Sovereignty* demonstrates that sovereignty, in its varied conceptualizations, is central to Indigenous decolonization at two levels. First, the colonizer's claim to sovereign power operates as both a coercive and normative tool that seeks to legitimize the state's displacement of Indigenous peoples. Second, and by extension, Indigenous groups turned to sovereignty to contest the regulatory capacities of empire, settler-colonialism, and extractive capitalism through appeals to self-determination, native genealogies, and landed authority. To illustrate these two levels of contention, Temin reconstructs the North American tradition of Indigenous political thought in such a way as to think *from* the decolonial Indigenous proposals that have long been overlooked in the field. These include the political thought of Zitkala-Ša, Vine Deloria Jr., Ella Cara Deloria, George Manuel, Howard Adams, and Lee Maracle across four substantive chapters. This approach to the study of Indigenous decolonization, Temin argues, "remaps sovereignty" by "remaking social relations and stripping away powers from the state and its tributaries as the self-designated *locus* of authority, so as to forge alternative arrangements that (re)instate the powers of Indigenous societies to govern themselves" (p. 15).

Importantly, Temin's account of Indigenous decolonial sovereignty moves beyond historical reconstruction. *Remapping Sovereignty* brings the North American Indigenous tradition to bear on contemporary political problems related to "earth-destroying violence," anticolonial solidarity, and international politics (p. 16). This manifests in the book through two conceptual interventions. First is Temin's account of "earthmaking" as a "prominent mode of Indigenous anticolonial thought and agency" which encapsulates the "core, distinctive dimensions of constructive political projects" that comprise Indigenous politics (p. 16). Second, Temin's earthmaking lens leads to an interpretation of Indigenous practices as grounded in a "transnational internationalism" that encompass interactions between nations, collective action across borders, and the contestation of settler-colonial boundaries (p. 19). These efforts in turn "reconfigure the very legitimacy of sovereignty itself as a moral and political grammar that organizes international politics" (p. 19). As such, *Remapping Sovereignty* builds on recent work on international, transnational, and hemispheric solidarities framed by anti- and decolonial proposals, such as Adom Getachew's 2019 book, *Worldmaking after Empire*, and Juliet Hooker's

2017 *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos*. Yet, the North American Indigenous tradition was largely absent from these debates, and thus, *Remapping Sovereignty* makes strong contributions to the field via its interventions in historiography, analytic scope, and conceptual proposals.

*Indigenous Peoples and Borders* is a particularly good interlocutor for extending the problematization of colonial sovereignty into the state and nonstate structures that mobilize its power. As Sheryl Lightfoot and Elsa Stamatopoulou write in their introduction, the study of borders and Indigenous peoples has largely focused on historiographic studies or the “problems” of borders (p. 10). Their edited volume, in turn, expands the scope, methods, and communities associated with this research area by approaching the border as a multifaceted concept bound to institutions, epistemes, and cultural divisions as well as physical boundaries. *Indigenous Peoples and Borders* also moves beyond the state-centered models prevalent in border studies by working from “Indigenous peoples’ critical perspectives” and their “novel insights into the intellectual sources (epistemology) underpinning key international instruments such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (p. 2). Decentering the state, and the production of institutionalized nationalities, to instead center “cultural nationhood” (a conception of collective belonging bound by shared cultural identities rather than state structures) as the key object of border studies is a necessary, but certainly difficult task (pp. 2, 27). Lightfoot and Stamatopoulou take on this effort by linking interdisciplinary contributions from 15 authors across Indigenous Studies, Environmental Politics, Comparative Political Studies and Law, International Organizations, and Human Rights. As such, *Indigenous Peoples and Borders* should be of interest to experts in border studies while also offering an expansive point of entry for those new to the field.

The book’s interventions are divided into four areas that illustrate the contributions and contentions of Indigenous peoples at local, national, and international politics. Part I, on “Rethinking Borders, Sovereignty, and Power in Indigenous Spaces,” includes contributions from Tone Bleie, Melissa Z. Patel, and David McDonald. Much like Temin’s analysis in *Remapping Sovereignty*, the chapters in this section reconstruct Indigenous practices to illustrate how they rethink borders as epistemes of collectivity, respond to colonial power, and contest neoliberal capitalist extraction. Among these are Hor Hopon (Santals) cosmopolitanism as an “interplay between cognition and society” (p. 42), Kurdish women’s engagement with internet communication technologies and neoliberal reforms in Northern Iraq, and an account of the “settler lines” which further marginalize Indigenous

communities (pp. 101–102). Part II of the book turns to “Borders as Obstructions to Indigenous Peoples’ Rights” with contributions from Binalakshmi Nepram on armed conflict and narcotics trafficking in Northeast India, Liubov Suliandziga and Rodion Sulyandziga on Indigenous disempowerment in the Arctic as an “extractive frontier” (p. 144), Hana Shams Ahmed’s account of the Jumma people’s resistance to biopolitics of surveillance in Bangladesh, and a closing chapter on COVID-19 and Indigenous self-determination amidst states of exception by Rauna Kouokkanen. As such, Part II of the book links many of the central concepts of Indigenous politics to issues ranging from technocratic development and environmental extraction to governmental exclusion and organized crime.

Part III of the volume, “Globalization and Economic Integration’s Impacts on Cross-Border Indigenous Peoples,” centers on interventions related to capitalism and transnational politics. These include Andrea Carmen on environmental violence among the Indigenous communities of the Rio Yaqui, legacies of colonialism in relation to climate change by Jacqueline Gillis, and Elifuraha Laltaika on East African Indigenous integration processes. Part IV—on “Indigenous Peoples Exercising Self-Determination Across Borders”—concludes the collection with four chapters focused on the future of Indigenous solidarities, transnational cooperation, and cultural exchange between communities. Yifat Susskind, Madre opens this section with an analysis on the importance of social justice and human rights campaigns for building transnational networks among Indigenous women and girls. Tao Maldonado Ruiz’s chapter on A’i Cofán nationality demonstrates how histories of conflict affect the lives on transborder Indigenous communities in Ecuador. Erika M. Yamada and Manoel B. Do Prado Junior provide an account of immigration and displacement in Indigenous South America. And in the final chapter, Sheryl Lightfoot traces the importance of Haudenosaunee passports as tools of decolonial border crossing along the United States–Canada border.

Temin’s *Remapping Sovereignty* and Lightfoot’s and Stamatopoulou’s *Indigenous Peoples and Borders* model the contestatory value of Indigenous politics when it comes to the problematization of concepts central to the field of political science. Both works recast the histories, ideologies, and politics that undergird claims to sovereignty and the investment in the border. Importantly, these engagements move beyond the “problems” of bordered politics and sovereign power. Rather, both texts demonstrate that even the most inclusive conceptions of sovereignty and the border have their roots in colonial and imperial practices, and as such, are never ready to willingly concede power to those displaced by it.