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Indigenous political theory, metaphysical revolt, and the decolonial rearticulation of political ordering

Valentin Clavé-Mercier 🆔

School of Political Science and Sociology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), Madrid, Spain
Email: valclave@ucm.es

Abstract
Colonization processes have resulted in the naturalization and universalization of a particular Eurocentric construction of political ordering. As a result, Indigenous claims of sovereignty – especially significant in settler colonial contexts since the 1960s and 1970s – have historically been obfuscated and are still construed as anomalies or impossibilities. Based on poststructuralist international relations theory and Indigenous political theory, as well as interviews conducted with Māori actors participating in the mobilization of sovereignty politics, this article advances two main contributions. Firstly, it develops a particular approach to the state-Indigenous contention of political ordering by calling attention to the metaphysical foundations of the particular conceptions of sovereignty they respectively deploy. Secondly, it contends that Māori political actors are enacting a 'metaphysical revolt' through their reconceptualization of sovereignty theory and practice; one that contains potential for a decolonial rearticulation of political ordering. Through its direct engagement with Indigenous political mobilization and the theorizing sustaining it, this article illustrates how Indigenous theories of sovereignty translate into conceptual alternatives that break away from the colonial roots and underpinnings of paradigmatic sovereignty. Therefore, this article contributes to exploring alternative models of political ordering by illuminating the links between Indigenous thought and decolonial imagination.

For the past 500 years, Euromodern ontologies, epistemologies, and geopolitical interests have dominated the political thinking surrounding forms and modes of social, political, and international ordering.[1] Striking evidence of this stands in the fact that the generally accepted conceptualization of what 'sovereignty' means

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[1]Brown 2024.

has been defined by worldviews, values, and political models originating from the West and Euromodernity.[2] This is observable in both contemporary academic literature and political life. However, this naturalization of a particular understanding of sovereignty and its elevation to the status of conceptual paradigm restrict political imagination and praxis. For, as long as we think of the configuration of our political communities from within the Euromodern framework of sovereignty, other thoughts and practices of political ordering will be invisibilized and marginalized. The misunderstanding, distortion, and sometimes explicit hostility that Indigenous sovereignty projects receive in contexts of settler colonialism[3] demonstrate the limits of modern and paradigmatic political thought to approach alternative models of political order. In the words of Kanien'kehá:ka political thinker Taiaiake Alfred:

> One of the main obstacles to achieving peaceful coexistence is of course the *uncritical* acceptance of the *classic* notion of sovereignty as the framework for discussions of political relations between peoples. The discourse of sovereignty has effectively stilled any potential resolution of the issue that respects Indigenous values and perspectives.[4]

In furthering this idea, this article starts from a critique of existing Western theory of sovereignty and of its colonial entanglements. However, following Getachew and Mantena in their task of decolonizing political theory, its main intervention resides in the exploration of the 'reconstructive theoretical agenda' articulated from a decolonial politics.[5] Precisely, this article's contribution lies in shedding light on the decolonial purchase of the generation of an alternative thought of sovereignty articulated from an Indigenous political theorizing of political ordering. I draw together the work of poststructuralist international relations (IR) and decolonial theory to argue for the significance of adopting a metaphysical lens when approaching different conceptions of sovereignty. I place these scholars in conversation to demonstrate that adopting such an analytical gaze allows us to display the colonial or decolonial orientations of particular articulations of sovereignty. By probing the metaphysical foundations of the paradigmatic conception of modern state sovereignty, I maintain that it contains colonial legacies embedded in its very conceptualization and practice. Such legacies and their contemporary ramifications constitute an obstacle to the just and peaceful coexistence between peoples. Alternatively, this article proposes that exploring other conceptions of sovereignty based on a different metaphysical ground – here, Indigenous conceptions – reveals the decolonial purchase that the sovereignty thinking can contain when articulated

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[2]'Euromodernity' is undoubtedly a contested concept that has been used in a variety of ways by different authors. Here Euromodernity is understood as a social–cultural–political project based on ways of thinking, of knowing, and of understanding and exercising power typically articulated by European modernity. A project that has totalizing and universal aspirations, but one that is never complete nor has been totally completed in socio-political reality. For more on the idea of Euromodernity, see Dussel 1993, 1995; Restrepo 2014.

[3]Alfred 1999; Bauder and Mueller 2023; Clavé-Mercier 2022.

[4]Alfred 2005, 41–42, emphasis added.

[5]Getachew and Mantena 2021, 359.

differently. This article's contention is that such an Indigenous rearticulation of the theorizing of political ordering can provide theoretical resources to address the increasingly evident limitations of the political framework established by (Euro)modern state sovereignty.

However, Euromodern political theory and its core conceptions are still too often treated as the default cognitive and normative framework. By doing so, essential elements that require scrutiny for a genuine decolonial political horizon to emerge are already presupposed and presumed as rational, legitimate, or self-evident. Although Indigenous political theory is increasingly present in the fields of IR and political science – notably through the work of individuals such as Glen Coulthard, Audra Simpson, Leanne Simpson, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Sheryl Lightfoot, Kēhaulani Kauanui, or Dale Turner to name but a few – Indigenous contributions to understanding and constructing political life and the international are still too often left out of mainstream political thinking. Additionally, Māori politics is virtually absent in the international discussion about a potential Indigenous contribution to political theory-making and political order-building. A genuine *post*colonial[6] political theory and *post*colonial world cannot emerge fully until these gaps are addressed, both in academia and in politics. As such, this article aligns itself with already mounting calls for the decolonization of political theory and the related disciplines of IR and political science.[7] A core demand of these calls is to 'tak[e] up the political predicaments of the non-Western world as sites of political theorizing',[8] to consider loci of enunciation and thinking subjects other than those pertaining to Euromodernity. However, decolonization is not exhausted in the pluralizing of voices and sources. It also requires a certain normative orientation. A decolonial political theory needs to be committed to the construction and emergence of 'an-other world'[9] based on anticolonial matrices of power, being, knowledge, gender, etc. The decolonial attitude is marked by a double goal of critique and generation of alternatives.[10] Decolonization is thus to decentre Euromodernity *and* to engage with alternative worlding claims and projects that break with coloniality. This article explores the Indigenous rearticulation of sovereignty through this twofold lens.

A genuine decolonization of political theory thus also needs to question the traditional figure of the political theorist as a scholar or a philosopher. Answering Arturo Chang's call to study the political theory production of marginalized and disregarded groups from their very own textual and discursive production,[11] the

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[6]I argue that the term 'postcolonial', too often understood as 'the aftermath of the colonial' (Young 2009, 13), is misleading in that it presupposes the existence of such an aftermath. I concur with anticolonial and decolonial theorists in contesting such a claim, which is precisely a central part of this article. This is why I will thereafter limit my use of the word 'postcolonial' 'to describe a condition, referring to peoples, states and societies that have been through a process of formal decolonization' (Sidaway 2000, 594). This is a semantic decision pertaining to the confines of this article and does not mean to dismiss the many important contributions made by the postcolonial turn to the thinking of the colonial condition and its possible overcoming, many of which overlap with anticolonial and decolonial claims.

[7]Clavé-Mercier and Wuth 2023; Mills 2015; Sen 2023; Zondi 2018.

[8]Getachew and Mantena 2021, 372.

[9]Maldonado-Torres 2016, 30.

[10]Fanon [1952] 2021; Getachew and Mantena 2021; Maldonado-Torres 2016.

[11]Chang 2023.

current article recovers the political practitioner as a producer of political theory in their own right. In doing so, this article seeks to problematize the geographical and geopolitical confines of the political theory canon, as well as which voices and sites are generally accepted as legitimate and relevant in political theory production. Indigenous sociopolitical actors were here directly engaged with, through a series of in-depth interviews, in order to explore the political theorization resulting from the everyday deployment of their political thought and praxis. It has been argued that the production of political theory is intertwined with practice given that 'human knowledge making is necessarily a participant-first activity'.[12] Indeed, personal narratives and experiences are deeply intertwined in the processes of international political theory-making[13] while the everyday and mundane have been highlighted as sites of politics with crucial implications for political theorizing.[14]

Puerto Rican decolonial thinker Nelson Maldonado-Torres understands coloniality and decoloniality to be, among other things, particular metaphysics: 'coloniality and decoloniality refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization'.[15] It is through his notions of 'metaphysical catastrophe' and 'metaphysical revolt' that I explore how these metaphysics are at play in the Euromodern and Indigenous articulations of sovereignty. In its first part, through a reconstruction of the metaphysical foundations of the Euromodern conception of sovereignty already exposed in critical IR and political theory literature, this article reveals said conception's anchoring in a colonial metaphysics and its entanglement with coloniality. Specifically, it outlines how the production of Euromodern sovereignty relies on the disavowal of Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and subjectivities, resulting in a 'metaphysical catastrophe'.

The second part argues that Indigenous peoples are articulating other ways of thinking of political order through reformulation and retheorization efforts targeted at a sovereignty concept otherwise marked by a Euromodern and colonial genealogy. The findings of a case study examining the contemporary project of tino rangatiratanga – or Māori sovereignty – deployed by certain Indigenous sectors in Aotearoa/New Zealand suggest that said political mobilization constitutes a 'metaphysical revolt'. Approaching this Māori rearticulation through a metaphysical lens allows us to foreground its decolonial potential, thus arguing for the largely unexplored analytical purchase of decolonial theory in settler colonial contexts. It is important to note here that the notion of tino rangatiratanga is also contested within Māori thought and politics.[16] For instance, some Māori mould and deploy it as part of electoral or capitalist agendas[17] in which the notion undoubtedly loses this decolonial orientation. I argue that the link between tino rangatiratanga and

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[12]Brigg et al. 2022, 898.

[13]Picq 2013.

[14]De Carvalho et al. 2019; Enloe 2011.

[15]Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10.

[16]This means that the analysis and conclusions presented here cannot be extrapolated to every mobilization of the tino rangatiratanga discourse. Heterogeneity in its use exists, is significant, and should be properly addressed in further research.

[17]Poata-Smith 2005, 214.

decoloniality is observable in these political interventions that understand the former as a nexus of 'radical far-reaching strategies for change'.[18] This section of the article builds on about 30 semi-structured interviews conducted between 2019 and 2021 with Māori activists, leaders, and scholars belonging to this current, as well as on the analysis of public documents they have produced. Building on the centrality of oral exchange in Indigenous knowledge production,[19] these conversations were approached as instances of active political theorizing. Following the thematic analysis of these primary sources, I posit that these actors construct a conception of political order based on metaphysical assumptions arising from Māori worldviews that constitute a decolonial alternative contesting the dominance of the paradigmatic sovereignty conception and the colonial registers embedded in it. Finally, in the third section, I briefly discuss why this Indigenous political ordering should not (yet) be considered an overcoming of the idea of sovereignty and I foreground the importance of addressing it as a conceptual rearticulation. Ultimately, this article calls to explore in more detail the politics of sovereignty – particularly those articulated by non-state and Indigenous agents – in order to acknowledge and comprehend potential decolonial lines of thought contained within contemporary sovereignty claims.

Euromodern metaphysics, sovereignty, and coloniality

Critical IR scholars have increasingly pointed out that the building and workings of modern political ordering and the concept of sovereignty are deeply entangled with colonialization and imperialism.[20] Some even argue that the idea of state sovereignty was in fact developed in the European interactions with the colonized world, where it was trialled before being introduced in the European political systems themselves.[21] Besides a theoretical entanglement, the concept of sovereignty was thus also deployed as an instrument of colonization in practice. Indeed, the production of the Euromodern sovereign political order is historically intertwined with racialization and civilizatory processes in a way that underpinned colonial material and political dispossessions.[22] The political configurations of colonized peoples and their relationships with their lands and territories were delegitimized and qualified as inferior vis-a-vis an idea of sovereignty implicitly identified with a particular cultural framework and with a set of political practices and values emanating from Euromodernity. Indigenous peoples were not sovereign, nor could they be – except for an almost impossible process of deep acculturation and civilizational progress. This construction of Indigenous peoples as fundamentally and irredeemably different, and therefore non-sovereign, has been a cornerstone and necessary condition of the production of modern state sovereignty.[23] Not only is this the case in societies derived from explicit colonial invasion where it allows for the settler political and material domination to be established.

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Yunkaporta, 2020.

[20]Anghie 2005; Bauder and Mueller 2023; Brown 2024; Getachew and Mantena 2021.

[21]Branch 2010; Ford 2010.

[22]Barker 2005; Brown 2024; Nisancioglu 2020.

[23]Moloney 2011; Shaw 2008.

It also lies at the very intellectual roots of Euromodern theories of sovereignty where Indigenous peoples are presented as a distant Other embodying the alleged civilizational dangers of a lack of sovereignty (in its Euromodern form).[24]

However, from a critical IR poststructuralist theory perspective, it can be argued that this entanglement with colonization pertains to the particular Euromodern articulation of political ordering rather than to the essence of the sovereignty concept itself. An analytical differentiation is required here between the *concept* of sovereignty – which refers to processes of political ordering in which ultimate authority is constituted, located, and legitimized within a given political community, in other words, general processes of defining the functioning of said community in relation to issues of power and authority – and multiple *conceptions* – or concrete configurations offering particular responses and orientations to these macro-processes.[25] The concept of sovereignty is thus de-essentialized. Sovereignty production is recognized as a historical and contingent social process responding, among other things, to cultural specificities.[26] Indeed, poststructuralist thinkers argue that, in order to construct political ordering, particular conceptions of sovereignty articulate specific 'assumptions and resolutions of philosophical and political questions' providing definitive answers regarding the collective identity of the community, what can be known, what is political, or how we can exist politically speaking, among others.[27] The production of sovereignty is thus based on metaphysical claims about the essence of life itself, about the state of things and of being, about the nature of human beings and of politics. In Rob Walker's words, underlying sovereignty is a particular 'metaphysics of being'.[28]

How these politico-philosophical questions are resolved within a particular conception of sovereignty thus produces authoritative statements about metaphysical foundations that are consequently rooted in the very constitution of the political community itself.[29] As Shaw demonstrates, every conception of sovereignty depends on and establishes a 'configuration of knowledge, authority, subjectivity and order'.[30] The particular contents and orientations given to this configuration or, in other words, the politico-philosophical resolutions articulated by a particular conception, result in the construction of frameworks delimiting the political possibilities available in the construction of both political realities and political imaginations. As Walker eloquently exposed regarding the paradigmatic Euromodern conception of sovereignty:

> the principle of state sovereignty expresses an historically specific articulation of the relationship between universality and particularity in space and time. As such, it both affirms a specific resolution of philosophical and political options that must be acknowledged everywhere and sets clear limits to our capacity to envisage any other possibility.[31]

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[24]Hobbes [1651] 2018; Locke [1689] 1989; Tocqueville [1835] 1990.
[25]Prokhovnik 2007.
[26]Biersteker and Weber 1996.
[27]Walker 1990, 169.
[28]Walker 1993, 112.
[29]Prokhovnik 2007; Walker 1993.
[30]Shaw 2008, 182.
[31]Walker 1993, 176.

Therefore, conceptions of sovereignty are not merely differentiated sociopolitical articulations or structures. They are based on particular metaphysical assumptions that have profound ramifications for how we (are able to) understand the world we live in and the possibilities for living together. The currently paradigmatic model of (Euro)modern state sovereignty is thus revealed as nothing more than *a* possible conception attributed to the concept of sovereignty. Yet, it is a conception that, especially through the colonization processes, has been progressively portrayed and generally accepted as 'inevitable and universal'.[32] Given its particular (Euromodern) metaphysical foundations, I argue that this conceptual naturalization and universalization has played – and still plays – a significant role in the metaphysical eradication of the colonized depicted by Frantz Fanon:

> From one day to the next, [colonized peoples] have had to deal with two systems of reference. Their metaphysics, or less pretentiously their customs and the agencies to which they refer, were abolished because they were in contradiction with a new civilization that imposed its own.[33]

Therefore, this article starts from two interrelated claims regarding the purchase of a metaphysical approach to existing conceptions of sovereignty. First, and following Walker's quote introduced above, revealing and questioning the Euromodern politico-philosophical resolutions contained in the paradigmatic conception of sovereignty is a necessary step in opening up a political imagination otherwise constrained by specific metaphysical assumptions. If not, the marginalization of alternative and potentially counter-hegemonic conceptions of political order, such as the ones articulated in Indigenous claims of sovereignty, remains unchallenged. Second, I posit that unpacking the politico-philosophical resolutions embedded in particular conceptions of sovereignty constitutes a productive way to reveal and analyse the colonial or decolonial orientations of particular articulations of sovereignty. Although the rest of this section succinctly contributes to the exploration of the connections between Euromodern sovereignty and coloniality by addressing the colonial metaphysics of the former, the second section engages with Māori political theorizing to offer an example of politico-philosophical resolutions sustaining a sovereignty conception aligned with decolonial principles.

The colonial metaphysics of Euromodern sovereignty

The politico-philosophical resolutions embedded in the Euromodern production of sovereignty have been carried over time mostly unchanged as metaphysical assumptions of a paradigmatic conception of sovereignty understood as the articulation of a single source of absolute and indivisible authority, entirely covering a defined territory and its population, and primarily exercised through a vertical power with coercive potential.[34] What I foreground here is that these specific resolutions can be seen as constituting a colonial metaphysics on which the Euromodern conception is then produced.

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[32]Deudney 1996, 190; see also Hoffman 1998.
[33]Fanon [1952] 2021, 90.
[34]Shaw 2008; Walker, 1993.

At the core of Euromodern sovereignty is the assumption that the construction of a stable political community, with a clearly identifiable and recognized common overarching authority, requires that individual subjects share certain fundamental characteristics. This is what Karena Shaw designates as a need for 'resonance' between the members of the polity[35]; a resonance that is marked by metaphysical assumptions about a certain 'human nature'. It covers aspects such as a specific ordering of time and space (and concrete ideas of progress and territory), a common language as well as common laws and customs, a shared form of rationality, and a shared mode of knowledge production, all of them based on Euromodern subjectivity, ontology, and epistemology.[36] In other words, Euromodern sovereignty depends on the constitution of a uniformity defined on the basis of a particular metaphysical vision. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, it simultaneously produces and depends on a deeply shared identity – a 'resonance' – presented as a supposedly indispensable precondition for the constitution and legitimization of sovereign authority. The production of Euromodern sovereignty thus entails the articulation of a fundamental difference. It does so by defining

> the political ground we – supposedly – share (in fact, that we must share in order to communicate), which consists of a very specific ordering of time and space, one that functions to enable and privilege a certain form of reason, providing the basis for an identity differentiated by these very specific forms of difference.[37]

What is now the paradigmatic mode of political ordering is thus based on a metaphysical divide between same and other, identity and difference, that is reified in a way that makes convergence radically impossible. As such, it 'expresses an ethics of absolute exclusion' between a universal homogeneous identity inside and non-identity outside.[38] What is more, the definition of this resonance through a 'preaccomplished resolution of space, time, identity, by an assertion of who we are and what we are capable of'[39] on Eurocentric terms leads to a process of collective subjectification consisting in an authorization of certain (Euromodern) ontologies, epistemologies, and subjectivities that, in addition to being authorized, are established as *authoritative*, necessary and indisputable.

In its constant search for unicity, completeness, and resonance anchored in an ontological opposition to difference, Euromodern sovereignty is a political articulation of the colonial metaphysics of being a totality,[40] of the modern/colonial aspiration to a 'politics of purity'.[41] The rejection of ontological plurality and the

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[35]Resonance is to be understood here as a metaphor suggesting uniformity around a common core (in relation to the phenomenon that occurs when the frequency of two objects coincide). For more on the idea of resonance in the production of Euromodern sovereignty, see also Clavé-Mercier 2022.

[36]Shaw 2008, 19–25.

[37]Ibid., 23.

[38]Walker 1993, 66.

[39]Shaw 2008, 32.

[40]Dussel, 1995.

[41]Monahan 2011.

devaluation of otherness are central features of the modernity/coloniality project[42] that are in turn clearly embedded in the construction of Euromodern sovereignty. Indeed, the supposed need for collective resonance turns Euromodern sovereignty into a totalizing doctrine pursuing an 'empire of uniformity'.[43] By presupposing the possibility of sovereign political order itself on the existence of a core of resonance based on Euromodern politico-philosophical resolutions, this conception of sovereignty contributes to the establishment and sustaining of what decolonial scholars have called the 'ontological line' differentiating the space of humanity from lesser forms of humanity attributed to, among others, colonized peoples.[44] The production of Euromodern sovereignty thus functions as a way to manage this ontological line and to ensure Indigenous peoples remain outside of the fabricated 'civilizational zone' or at best to define the conditions of their access. This is illustrated by the continuous non-recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in international and national law therefore enshrining the border delineating various spaces of existence and the colonial hierarchization of human beings it rests on. The entanglement of othering process and world-making claim contained in the Euromodern sovereign articulation of political order is conducive to a 'metaphysical catastrophe' that reifies a division of humanity between humans, non-humans, and not human enough between which a dialectical relation is rendered impossible.[45]

Moreover, it can be argued that the naturalization and universalization of this Euromodern mode of political ordering reinforced the 'metaphysical catastrophe' brought by modernity/coloniality in that it radically transformed the existential coordinates of most – if not all – of humanity.[46] Indeed, through its resolution and definition of time, space, subjectivity, knowledge validity, etc., Euromodern sovereignty defined the confines of existence – political and otherwise – in a way that is particularly Eurocentric. It thus played – and still plays – a crucial role in the drastic alteration of modes of thought and existence, constructions of identity and otherness, temporalities, and spatialities in order to uphold a hierarchy between forms of human existence.[47] The naturalization and universalization of Euromodern sovereignty reinforces the assumption that the theorizing, worldviews, and practices emerging from Euromodernity are deemed superior. Not only that but, being based on the construction of metaphysical foundations that in turn depend on the disavowal of Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and subjectivities, Euromodern sovereignty is rooted in a 'nexus of knowledge, power, and being that sustains an endless war on specific bodies, cultures, knowledges, nature, and peoples'.[48] It thus contributed to an imposition of metaphysical coordinates on colonized peoples through the deployment of this nexus otherwise known as the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being.[49] The universalization and naturalization of Euromodern sovereign political order is a metaphysical catastrophe in that it

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[42]Dussel 1995.
[43]Tully 1995.
[44]Maldonado-Torres 2021; Mignolo 2000.
[45]Maldonado-Torres 2016.
[46]Ibid., 11.
[47]Maldonado-Torres 2018; Mignolo 2000; Wynter 1995.
[48]Maldonado-Torres 2016, 2.
[49]Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000; Wynter 2003.

attempts to erase Indigenous and Others' conceptions of the world. It is a worlding production that simultaneously rests on the negation of alternative worldings.

Beyond the central idea of 'resonance', Euromodern sovereignty is articulated around a constitutive desire for mastery that Chad Infante recently identified as one of the cornerstones of colonial metaphysics.[50] Human beings are conceived as rational beings – where rationality is, once again, implicitly defined on Euromodern grounds – who are naturally and universally autonomous – where autonomy is understood as not being constrained by social relations and where freedom is understood as an unconditional possibility for action. Such an ontological assumption then leads to a co-constructing relation between the liberal individual and the sovereign state.[51] The individual, understood as a sovereign whose self-ownership separates him from the social density of intersubjective relationships, becomes an analogy for a sovereign state characterized by absolute authority, autonomy from external interference, negative freedom, and an internal relationship between rulers and subjects marked by rationality. In turn, these metaphysical assumptions result in a certain construction of the political characterized by the presence of an absolute and indivisible authority whose relations with its citizens are hierarchical, paternalistic, vertical, and to some extent depoliticized.[52]

Additionally, the notion of mastery is also found at the heart of another Euromodern politico-philosophical resolution in regards to the relation between Euromodern sovereignty and the natural world. This resolution can be summarized as the assumption of a Cartesian license to dominate and exploit the natural world. Indeed, any conception of sovereignty is inherently intertwined with what Elizabeth Povinelli termed 'geontological orders', or the establishment and governance of the division between life and non-life.[53] Following this terminology, Euromodern sovereignty considers that only a fraction of the *bios* – here, humankind – has agency and political capacity while the *geos* or the inanimate – here, nature or the environment – is a mere stage on which to declare dominion. As a result, Euromodern sovereignty is not only fused with the idea of territorial exclusivity, but also with certain registers of humans relationships with land (property), land development (production, capitalism), and environmental relationships (domination).[54] This possessive nature of modern state sovereignty has already been underscored by several scholars, going as far as to characterize it as a property relationship.[55]

Poststructuralist IR scholarship already identified that the paradigmatic conception of sovereignty encapsulates a particular political normativity and an ideological project built on Euromodern underpinnings that translates into particular ontological assumptions, epistemological delimitations, and subjectivization processes. In turn, drawing on decolonial theory demonstrates that this project's orientation towards practices of domination – towards the Other, in the political, and in relation to the non-human – maintains clear links with coloniality. Multiple politico-philosophical resolutions operate within Euromodern sovereignty in a manner that

[50]Infante 2022.
[51]Bhandar 2011; Prokhovnik 2007.
[52]Getachew 2018.
[53]Povinelli 2016.
[54]Bhandar and Goldberg-Hiller 2015; Branch 2010; Muller et al. 2019.
[55]Jahn 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Philpott 2020.

constitutes its foundational colonial metaphysics. I have sketched out some. An ample discussion would require another venue. However, I believe that this succinct exploration helps to determine with more precision how an unchallenged universalization of Euromodern sovereignty sustains the contemporary reproduction of colonial modes of political thinking and ordering. Indeed, the production of Euromodern sovereignty depends on processes of disavowal and (violent) exclusion of Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, subjectivities, and political forms from the produced political community and its definition of the political.[56] It constitutes a cognitive and political framework contributing to the metaphysical catastrophe that disproportionately affects colonized and Indigenous peoples.

In this first section, I have argued that analysing the politico-philosophical resolutions embedded within the Euromodern conception of sovereignty is key to fully comprehending the metaphysical closure that constrains contemporary political thinking and practice. In the following section, I demonstrate how unpacking the metaphysical foundations of sovereignty conceptions that do not draw from Euromodernity may illuminate a path for a different theorization of sovereignty reoriented towards another political ordering. Although the concept of sovereignty itself is historically a 'native category of the West',[57] conceptual rearticulations are possible. I propose here that Indigenous interventions in the political terrain of sovereignty – both in theory and practice – represent a possible form of alternative. Due to prevailing Eurocentrism in political practice and theory, this alternative perspective is still largely marginalized, further reinforcing the naturalization of Euromodern political ordering. However, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have already emphasized the benefits of engaging with Indigenous political theory and the significant contributions the latter can make to political theory and the theory of the international.[58] Indigenous political theory holds the potential to reassess, reconfigure, and complicate the international as currently conceived and the realm and functioning of international politics. Yet, it remains insufficiently considered as a valid and productive body of political philosophy in its own right; particularly with regards to its potential contribution to the reformulation of contemporary political thought surrounding a central axis of international theory like sovereignty. Engaging with Indigenous, and more specifically here Māori, political philosophies thus represents an opportunity to explore how sovereignty can be conceived and articulated from a different metaphysical position. And, more importantly, what are the ramifications of such a rearticulation in terms of challenging the prevailing coloniality of political ordering.

Māori sovereignty and decolonial rearticulation

Since the early stages of colonization, and especially since the emergence of international movements in the 1960s and 1970s, Indigenous peoples have defied the framework of domination imposed by Euromodern political ordering through attempts at conceptual rearticulations. In spite of being a concept with a marked colonial genealogy and specific Euromodern cultural roots, several Indigenous

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[56]Anghie 2005; Shaw 2008; Wolfe 2018.
[57]Bonilla 2017, 334.
[58]Beier 2005, 2009; McMillan and Rigney 2016; Lightfoot 2016; Young, 2000.

political thinkers have argued that sovereignty should not be abandoned by Indigenous peoples.[59] As Audra Simpson notes: sovereignty 'is more than merely an ancestor to white, western political ordering confined only to Europe but is a language game that [sic.] historically been played under conditions of imperial settler coloniality'.[60] These Indigenous theorists advance a reconceptualization rejecting the now naturalized association between sovereignty on the one hand and Western political configurations and theories of power on the other. Sovereignty is thus not merely received as it is by Indigenous peoples but is radically transformed away from Euromodern coordinates.[61] I contend here that the nexus of this rearticulation operates at the metaphysical level, where Indigenous philosophies of power and justice are mobilized to devise the politico-philosophical resolutions of Indigenous political ordering. Native American thinkers have already identified that an Indigenous understanding of politics and power based on non-dominant and non-exploitative ways of being and thinking about human and more-than-human relations constitutes the 'grounded normativity' of Indigenous sovereignty.[62] This section takes this discussion beyond the North American context to explore how Māori, through collective political theorizing expressed in interviews and in mobilizations around constitutional transformation, are subverting and rearticulating the sovereignty idea. I propose to approach this contention as a 'metaphysical revolt' against the imposition of universalized Euromodern coordinates in the form of modern state sovereignty.

This section's central claim is thus that there is another metaphysics at play in the articulation of Indigenous sovereignty, one that is profoundly intertwined with an ontology of relationality as a central tenet of Indigenous political theorizing.[63] The following exploration of some of the politico-philosophical resolutions of Māori sovereignty foregrounds the centrality of this relational philosophy in the Indigenous theorizing of political ordering. However, this acknowledgement of relationality as a metaphysical axis of Indigenous political ordering should not lead to a romanticization of Indigenous political praxis and thinking. Indigenous peoples still can and have renounced relationality in varied contexts and circumstances.[64] Nonetheless, this Indigenous metaphysical orientation differs radically from the metaphysical foundations of conventional IR political ordering, thus holding significant implications for conceptualizing sovereignty. What is more, I contend that it is precisely by exploring the politico-philosophical resolutions of Indigenous political ordering that the decolonial character of Indigenous sovereign claims that are often forcefully assimilated to the Euromodern model of sovereignty but are in fact radically different can be foregrounded. Once again, it is important to make clear that decolonization is not understood here – neither by myself nor by

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[59]Alfred 1999; Coulthard 2014; Moreton-Robinson 2015.

[60]Simpson 2020, 687.

[61]This is the case at least in the kind of Indigenous politics that I engage with here conceptualized by Poata-Smith as 'radical far-reaching strategies for change'. Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty are heterogeneous and some – although generally marginal – adopt the Euromodern conception.

[62]Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2014, 2017.

[63]Brigg et al. 2022; Wildcat and Voth, 2023.

[64]Brigg et al. 2022, 905.

most Indigenous peoples – as Indigenous communities achieving political independence from an external colonial power but as in 'decoloniality' as

> efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world.[65]

Explicitly connecting metaphysical concerns and decolonial theory, Maldonado-Torres proposes to understand decoloniality as a 'metaphysical revolt' challenging the ontological, epistemological, spatio-temporal, and political organization of life by the modern-colonial framework.[66] Such a revolt does not pursue the recognition or inclusion of the colonized in the colonial framework, but rather

> necessitates the formation of new practices and ways of thinking, as well as a new philosophy, understood decolonially [...] as the opposition to coloniality and as the affirmation of forms of love and understanding that promote open and embodied human interrelationality.[67]

Decoloniality is thus conceived as the restoration of interrelationality in the face of colonial racial hierarchization, epistemic erasure, and imposition of political models. In this sense, it is already visibly aligned with the ontology of relationality present in Indigenous political theorizing. It is this alignment that I argue lies at the heart of the Māori rearticulation of sovereignty explored in this article. The thematic analysis of the interviews and documents making up the primary sources of this research allowed for the identification of politico-philosophical resolutions specific to the project of tino rangatiratanga[68] – the Māori conception of power and authority often translated as 'Māori sovereignty' – studied here. Cross-cuttingly, my interlocutors ground their construction of Māori sovereignty in a political ontology of relationality traditionally present in Māori political philosophy and praxis.[69] In turn, I point out how this commitment to Indigenous metaphysical foundations allows for a rearticulation of sovereignty towards the (re)construction of decolonial modes of political ordering and thinking.

Tino rangatiratanga and Māori politico-philosophical resolutions

Relationality appears as being etymologically inscribed in tino rangatiratanga. Indeed, 'rangatiratanga' is often presented as referring to the continuous action of 'weaving people together'.[70] Tino rangatiratanga thus extends beyond

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[65]Maldonado-Torres 2016, 10.

[66]Ibid., 30.

[67]Ibid., 22.

[68]'Tino rangatiratanga' is composed of the superlative 'tino' ('best', 'complete', 'absolute') and the noun 'rangatiratanga' (encapsulating the Māori idea of authority).

[69]Hoskins and Bell 2021.

[70]Paora et al. 2011.

ruler–subjects relations and emphasizes the creation and maintenance of relationships within the community: 'So it is the group that is in charge and it is why […] the people are the chiefs of the chiefs and the debate that surrounds the exercise of rangatiratanga binds us together'.[71] In its Māori conception, sovereignty is therefore antithetical to the idea of an imposed and top-down overarching authority.[72] The presence of this Māori ontology of power in the politico-philosophical resolutions of Māori sovereignty results in a different articulation of the political. This is apparent in the emphasis above on debate as a fundamental and cohesive element of sovereignty praxis. Traditionally, the power of rangatira (tribal chiefs) was restricted to minor decisions while decisions of significance to the community were made through consensus-oriented collective methods. This ideal of governance that prioritizes consensual decision-making and collective rights – often translated into aspirations towards localized forms of participatory democracy – is widely present in the descriptions of Māori sovereignty offered by my interlocutors. Therefore, tino rangatiratanga enters a lineage of anticolonial political imagination sustaining arrangements based on conceptions of sovereignty that are popular and non-dominative rather than statist and nationalist.[73] Such an Indigenous claim and reassessment of popular sovereignty is firmly grounded in ideals of decentralization, direct participation, and collective understanding of governance.[74] As a result, tino rangatiratanga contrasts significantly with the individualized sovereign–subject relations contained in the politico-philosophical resolutions of the paradigmatic conception of sovereignty.

Additionally, the relational ontology influencing the metaphysical foundations of the Māori conception of sovereignty is not limited to the internal ordering of the political community. The centrality of notions of interconnectedness and reciprocity in the Māori worldview[75] is also applied to relationships beyond the community. Although tino rangatiratanga undoubtedly refers to the existence of an independent authority, its exercise is understood to be conditioned by – and always taking into account – a multiplicity of relationships of equality, respect, and obligation towards other political communities, the environment, the spiritual world, and past and future generations. Interdependence is thus a constitutive element of Māori sovereignty, rather than indicative of an erosion of sovereignty as often portrayed in mainstream Western literature.[76] From a holistic and relational Māori worldview, there is no contradiction between asserting ultimate authority and simultaneously acknowledging and accepting the magnitude of relationships with others. Furthermore, ignoring and neglecting these relationships can lead to a loss of mana (authority, power, prestige) both symbolically and materially.[77] Tino rangatiratanga

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[71]Hohepa 2016, 5.

[72]Waitangi Tribunal 1998.

[73]Chang 2023; Getachew 2018; Mantena 2016.

[74]However, it should also be noted that tino rangatiratanga also differs significantly from the *Western* conception of popular sovereignty in which the demos is still often defined narrowly and binarily around human/non-human and self/others divides (see Temin 2023).

[75]Mikaere 2011.

[76]Biersteker and Weber 1996.

[77]Hoskins and Bell 2021.

has always been about interdependence as well. *That it's about being in your relationships with other communities*. And, you know, sometimes that will mean you can't do exactly as you want because you're focussed on maintaining your relationships with community as well or an agreement that you have or whatever it is. But I guess the authority is you hold your authority about how you enter into that relationship and maintain it.[78]

The presence of this political ontology of relationality among the metaphysical assumptions of tino rangatiratanga entails a rejection of the idea of an absolute, supreme, singular, and autonomous (in the liberal sense) authority. The Māori political ordering analysed here is therefore not associated with a declaration of universality but with the recognition and accommodation of particularities. Tino rangatiratanga, like other Indigenous articulations of sovereignty,[79] centres interdependence, relationships, and engagement on good faith in a way that works against the monologic dynamic of modernity/coloniality by openly confronting its hierarchical frameworks.[80] The political community itself is imagined as a plurality of separate, equal, and self-determined authorities intertwined by central Māori notions of relationality and negotiation of autonomy. On a practical level, debates exist regarding the definition and delimitation of these authorities, particularly between a tribal or national Māori articulation and about the authority sphere reserved for the New Zealand state. Matike Mai Aotearoa outlined six possible political configurations to give effect to this system of autonomous but interdependent authorities.[81] Further elaborating on this idea, and through an analogy equating sovereign authorities with gods, one interlocutor underlined the differences between a Euromodern idea of centralized and indivisible sovereignty and the plurality integral to tino rangatiratanga: 'where sovereignty says there's one God, and it happens to be a king or a prime minister or president or something like that, and so you've got that hierarchical idea of sovereignty, whereas tino rangatiratanga says there are several gods'.[82]

    This relational ontology is not limited to the human world. Its influence on the Māori conception of sovereignty also pertains to the relations with Papatūānuku (a Māori cosmological construction of nature as a living agent). Tino rangatiratanga is conceived as a relationship of 'occupation and use'[83] towards the environment and the land and not one of possession; as an authority 'embedded in this land, derived from, of and for the land'[84] and not *over* it. Continuous and reciprocal relationships towards nature are therefore construed as the source of Māori sovereignty. Papatūānuku has its own authority that requires constant negotiation with human

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[78]Interview, Carwyn Jones, 03/25/2020, emphasis added.
[79]Bauder and Mueller 2023.
[80]Maldonado-Torres 2007.
[81]Matike Mai Aotearoa 2016, 104–12. Matike Mai is a Māori group advocating for constitutional transformation in which several of my interlocutors participated. Their 2016 report was one of the most significant contributions to devising a contemporary political system based on tino rangatiratanga.
[82]Interview, Te Huia Bill Hamilton, 04/07/2020.
[83]Matiu and Mutu 2003.
[84]Jackson 2020.

authority. Here too, these metaphysical assumptions are central to the political ordering mode conceptualized by my interlocutors. The exercise of tino rangatiratanga is then conditioned by an ethical duty of kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship) translated into 'relational-ecological responsibilities',[85] something absent in the Euromodern territorial conception of sovereignty. For the Māori relational worldview, if the human right to declare political authority derives from their relationships with nature, it also implies responsibilities of care, protection, and balance that must guide – and sometimes even restrict – the exercise of political power and human activities in general.

In several of our conversations, interlocutors mentioned recent legislative changes granting legal personality to rivers, mountains, or forests in Aotearoa as steps towards tino rangatiratanga.[86] In their view, these changes – led by Māori communities – represent a departure from the metaphysical assumptions of Euromodern sovereignty and an authorization of Māori worldviews towards the environment. Tino rangatiratanga thus implies the blurring of the 'geontological order' naturalized in the Euromodern conception of sovereignty through an emphasis on the authority *of* nature, as well as on the need for reciprocal relationships for an ethical and legitimate exercise of human authority. The incorporation of holistic Māori worldviews, wherein the environment is an active and central agent in the constitution of the community's power and identity, into the metaphysical assumptions of this Māori conception of sovereignty thus entails the materialization of a spatial political imaginary and environmental relationships different from those enshrined in the Euromodern conception.

Finally, the influence of Māori politico-philosophical assumptions and resolutions on my interlocutors' particular conception of sovereignty can be observed in a third facet. In addition to kaitiakitanga, another traditional normative imperative determines the exercise of sovereignty in Māori political philosophy: manaakitanga (hospitality, solidarity). Manaakitanga extends this duty of care to members of the community. Human well-being is, therefore, an intrinsic and explicit responsibility to the practice of tino rangatiratanga:

> maybe for an outsider [Māori sovereignty] looks like rights, but to me it's responsibilities. It means that we have to look after people. We have to go out of our way to look after them, to make sure they are well and make sure they are alright.[87]

However, my interlocutors did not provide any ethnic or cultural definition for the term 'people', encompassing instead the entire population living on Māori land – in line with the meaning of manaakitanga as 'hospitality'. Interlocutors summarized this philosophical orientation as aroha ki te tangata ('love people') or kotahi aroha ('common love') and encapsulated it in notions of peace and mutual respect for diversity. Māori sovereignty thus commits to the idea of 'decolonial love'

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[85]Brigg et al. 2022, 904.
[86]As of May 2023, existing cases concern Te Urewera National Park (2014), the Wanganui River (2017), and Mount Taranaki (2017).
[87]Interview, Tiopira McDowell, 02/14/2020.

as a dialogic interrelationship between equals with great potential[88] and allows for the actualization of the 'trans-ontological' as a relation self-Other marked by generous interaction rather than supremacy.[89] In the Aotearoa context, this has been captured elsewhere as a 'politics of love'.[90] Although Euromodern sovereignty cannot conceive of predefined responsibilities or priorities because they would contradict its assumption of absoluteness and unrestricted autonomy, tino rangatiratanga, by being based on manaakitanga, is tied to and dependent on caring responsibilities towards fellow humans.

The inscription of the relational ontology and the manaakitanga principle in the metaphysical underpinnings of tino rangatiratanga means that such a sovereign conception, while constituting an authorization of Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, and subjectivities, explicitly resists the supposed need for resonance embedded within Euromodern sovereign forms of political ordering. The sovereign conception articulated by the Māori sector examined here does not only oppose the deployment by the colonial state of what in Aotearoa has been defined as a 'single ontology'.[91] It also commits itself – at least discursively – to avoid repeating the naturalization and universalization of certain worldviews at the expense of marginalizing others. Tino rangatiratanga, as advanced by my interlocutors, rejects the totalizing aspiration of unicity and singularity in favour of embracing ontological multiplicity and plurality. The ideal model of a political community in which different spheres would coexist and exercise authority independently and in accordance with their particular practices and worldviews is a significant example of this non-universality. In this sense, Matike Mai's constant use of the plural 'peoples' instead of '*the* people' is indicative.[92] Through their proposal and discourse, Matike Mai emphasize the need to respect the diversity between spheres of authority and their powers to self-define their respective composition, models of political organization, and metaphysical assumptions. In line with the Māori relational political ontology, where the mana of all communities is interconnected and either uplifted or diminished simultaneously, affirming Māori sovereignty necessarily entails affirming empowerment and respect for other communities, 'in other words, nothing short of respect for other worlds/ways of doing and being'.[93] Māori voices articulating this conception of sovereignty thus intend to strike a balance between Māori political empowerment and metaphysical authority on the one hand, and respect for a plurality of identities, cultures, and authorities on the other.

Summed up in the typically provocative words of famous Māori activist Tame Iti: '[Māori sovereignty] is not about me trying to make a Māori out of you. Not that at all'.[94] Tino rangatiratanga therefore differs from paradigmatic sovereignty in its refusal to constitute the political community and its identity on the basis of a negative relation to difference. It actually disrupts the self/other boundaries of Euromodern sovereignty in a theoretical move observed in other Indigenous

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[88]Sandoval 2000.
[89]Maldonado-Torres 2007.
[90]Harris 2017.
[91]Bell 2014.
[92]Matike Mai Aotearoa 2016.
[93]Hoskins and Bell 2021, 507.
[94]Salmon 2002.

conceptions of sovereignty.[95] Rather than imposing a totalizing resonance, Māori sovereignty articulates a non-dominative relationship to otherness that recalls the decolonial commitment to a respectful and relational encounter of alterities encapsulated in notions of 'diversality' or 'pluriversality'.[96] In my interlocutors' articulation of tino rangatiratanga, the political community is thought of and constructed differently because of metaphysical assumptions in which radical difference is not perceived as threatening but rather as productive for the emergence of a mode of being – political and beyond – based on a political ethos of relationality and on the subsequent need for constant negotiation and flexibility. In this sense, it questions the indivisibility and cultural uniformity of paradigmatic state sovereignty – typical of modern-colonial political thinking – and articulates a sovereign conception revaluing plurality, dissent, and overlaps.

Through the promotion, validation, and legitimization of specifically Māori ways of being, doing, knowing, and deciding, the sovereign conception articulated by my interlocutors' questions and attempts to alter the metaphysical coordinates established by Euromodern sovereignty. By granting authority to alternative and otherwise excluded ontologies, epistemologies, and subjectivities, the Māori conception of sovereignty challenges and complicates the assumptions of modern political ordering with respect to questions of resonance, territoriality, domination, independence, or political identity, among others. In doing so, it thus contributes to the decolonial metaphysical revolt and to its search for and generation of alternative ways of being, living, and deciding. Tino rangatiratanga thus stands as an example of the contemporary significance of Indigenous genealogies in the critique of colonial rule and in the profound transformation of political theory's modern repertoire towards the articulation of a decolonial imaginary.[97] In my interlocutors' theorizing, tino rangatiratanga means 'trying to come up with something that's not colonial'.[98] It is a 'practical way of achieving or supporting decolonization. It's about deconstructing those colonial structures and systems. It's about being disruptive and challenging the system'.[99] Indeed, by asserting the possibility of Indigenous sovereignty in the face of a denial rooted in the political construction of the modernity–coloniality system, and by articulating it as a metaphysical revolt, this Māori conceptual rearticulation maintains strong links to a decolonizing agenda. In Aotearoa as in other contexts, Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization are tightly intertwined: 'Fiercely claiming an identity as sovereign [...] has been a [Indigenous] strategy [...] of reasserting a politically empowered self-identity within, besides, and against colonization'.[100]

Moving beyond sovereignty?

Several authors have been critical of the continued use of the sovereignty concept in defining Indigenous claims and aspirations, often preferring notions of

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[95]Shrinkhal 2021.
[96]Bernabé et al. 1990; Escobar 2020.
[97]Chang 2023.
[98]Interview, Claire Charters, 05/25/2020.
[99]Interview, Hana, 02/24/2020.
[100]Barker 2011, 20, 2005.

'self-determination', 'relational self-determination', or even the antagonistic label of 'non-sovereignty' to signal an overcoming of sovereignty.[101] Most of their argumentation rests on the observation that what is described as Indigenous sovereignty is often antithetical to the politico-philosophical resolutions that the concept of sovereignty encapsulates in paradigmatic Eurocentric IR theory. This article has laid bare that tino rangatiratanga indeed somewhat goes beyond sovereignty as it deploys a configuration and understanding of power and authority fundamentally different from Euromodern sovereignty. However, the empirical data produced in this research have shown that sovereignty is still an important axis of Indigenous political discourse and mobilization. Indeed, what is originally a Euromodern/colonial intellectual production is simultaneously received and broken away from through a transformation process, as it similarly happens in postcolonial contexts other than Aotearoa.[102] Tino rangatiratanga indexes a contest of colonial political ordering in practice as well as a contest for the conceptualization of sovereignty. The (Euro)modern political vocabulary and conceptual frameworks are rearticulated to make them work towards different political agendas and horizons, as this article shows through the case of sovereignty theorizing on a colonial/decolonial spectrum. Therefore, the rupture is always incomplete.

I have referred to this elsewhere as a 'strategic entanglement' with the coordinates of political (Euro)modernity consciously deployed by Indigenous peoples.[103] Although my interlocutors repeatedly emphasized tino rangatiratanga as encapsulating a properly Māori way of thinking about political ordering, they also still found political purchase in presenting this political theorizing under the umbrella of, or at least in relation to, sovereignty. The decolonization of political theory certainly requires the acknowledgement and naming of political models and categories of thought proper to the specificities of non-Western contexts and of the decolonial agenda.[104] That is what tino rangatiratanga stands for. However, we should not gloss over its simultaneous work of stretching and transforming an inherited political idea like sovereignty. Beyond reasons of political relevance and strategic decisions for this continued conceptual entanglement, a total escape from paradigmatic Eurocentric political theory is not possible nor desirable from an Indigenous relational perspective.[105] In the task of critiquing and reinventing it, its fundamental ideas should be dealt with and its political ramifications acknowledged, however problematic they may be. Therefore, a total rejection of the Euromodern conceptual apparatus is discarded, thus avoiding an Indigenous ontologizing and totalizing move and articulating instead a certain theoretical relationality. The fact that Euromodern articulations of sovereignty and theories of political ordering such as tino rangatiratanga are different does not mean that they are incommensurable or incomprehensible to each other.

I thus contend that there are both analytical and political reasons for considering political projects such as tino rangatiratanga as sovereignty, at least temporarily, and

[101]Cocks 2014; Guardiola-Rivera 2010; Krause 2015; Temin 2023.

[102]Bonilla 2015; Getachew 2016.

[103]This is a significantly summarized account of what this 'strategic entanglement' is in Māori politics. For more on this, see Clavé-Mercier 2024.

[104]Getachew and Mantena 2021.

[105]Brigg et al. 2022.

always recognizing and affirming it as 'tino rangatiratanga' first and foremost, and, albeit, foregrounding it as a profoundly different form of sovereignty from its Euromodern origins and features. Recent research has convincingly argued that assuming that sovereignty is inherently and invariably Western is a Eurocentric claim in itself.[106] To do so is to mistakenly presuppose an exclusive Western authority claim on the concept. Keeping sovereignty alive in Indigenous politics – and in our analyses thereof – is one way to foreground the role of the non-Western in the theoretical and practical production of sovereignty, especially of colonized and/or Indigenous peoples. Not surrendering the language of sovereignty to Euromodernity is to confront the myth of European states as 'self-propelling actors that are hermetically sealed from external – non-European – relations, histories, relations or influences'.[107] I argue that conceiving tino rangatiratanga as a form of Māori sovereignty allows for a fuller description of the possibilities for decolonial subversion and rearticulation of the allegedly exclusively Euromodern theoretical apparatus. By contrast, to interpret sovereignty as inherently and invariably Euromodern fails to acknowledge this potential for an Indigenous decolonial rearticulation.

Furthermore, suggestions that Indigenous philosophies of power and configurations of political order should rather be referred to as self-determination instead of sovereignty entail their own associated political pitfalls. A possible understanding of tino rangatiratanga as self-determination has been contested by some of my interlocutors and by Māori scholars.[108] Indeed, self-determination claims are often misinterpreted – wilfully or not – for recognition claims and answered with policies that further entrench Indigenous dependence on colonial states. In regions governed by colonial settler states, 'self-determination has necessarily operated as a framework for Indigenous governance within a context of contested but near invincible state sovereignty'.[109] National and international state politics have often curtailed the transformative purchase of Indigenous politics by straightjacketing it in notions of self-determination or autonomy naturalized as subsumed to an unquestioned state sovereignty. For Indigenous peoples to pitch their claims as sovereignty or sovereignty equivalents, and for scholars to conceptualize them as such, is therefore to centre their challenge on Euromodern sovereignty and their aspiration for a form of authority unrestricted by the settler states' assumptions of authority. Dissociating political agendas such as tino rangatiratanga from sovereignty runs the risk of leaving the existing and prevailing paradigmatic sovereignty unchecked and unchallenged. Arguing that sovereignty has been overcome because what is pursued is not Euromodern sovereignty tends to reify the naturalization and universalization of Euromodern sovereignty as the only possible form of sovereignty. Analytically speaking, such a move disregards the disputed character of the sovereignty concept and occludes the conceptual politics surrounding it.

To be clear, the tino rangatiratanga politics explored in this article do not constitute a mere stretching of the predominant Euromodern conception of sovereignty

[106]Bauder and Mueller 2023.
[107]Nisancioglu 2020, 43.
[108]Toki 2017.
[109]Nakata 2020, 338.

for Indigenous peoples to be included within it. It is a profound reimagination and rearticulation, although one that is still – at least for now – entangled with the sovereignty framework for political and/or conceptual reasons. More than a mere derivative discourse, it is a radical transfigurative politics.[110] This transfiguration of sovereignty articulated in the everyday in-action Māori political theorizing contributes to the decolonization and vivification of political theory. It opens the door to a possible overcoming, one that is not yet achieved but whose potentiality is clearly present. If Euromodern sovereignty is ever transcended, the sovereignty framework may lose its usefulness in Indigenous politics. However, I posit that to pretend that overcoming sovereignty altogether is a possibility in the current political state of affairs is to ignore and misrepresent existing power relations in political praxis and theory.

Conclusion

Therefore, this article's contention is that, despite the theoretical and practical ubiquity of the modern state sovereignty model, the concept of sovereignty can be re-signified to encapsulate significantly different political and collective life projects. Due to their historically conflictual relations with the concept and practice of sovereignty, Indigenous peoples are key actors in the construction of alternative conceptions. This article offers novel insights through a direct dialogue with contemporary Indigenous collective theorizing and through an emphasis on the transformative potential rather than the mimicking dangers of Indigenous sovereignty. It has shown how certain Māori actors articulate a conception based on politico-philosophical resolutions and metaphysical assumptions emanating from their Indigenous ontologies and worldviews. By doing so, they enact a metaphysical revolt against the registers of Euromodern sovereignty and contest the imposition of a universalized form of political ordering. As Lenape scholar Joanne Barker puts it:

> Sovereignty is historically contingent. What it has meant and what it currently means belong to the political subjects who have deployed and are deploying it to do the work of defining their relationships with one another, their political agendas, and their strategies for decolonization and social justice. […] This is not to say that etymology is unimportant. Sovereignty carries the horrible stench of colonialism. It is incomplete, inaccurate, and troubled. But it has also been rearticulated to mean altogether different things by Indigenous peoples.[111]

 Similarities between the Māori resignification examined in this study and political strategies deployed in other colonial contexts reveal how some colonized and Indigenous sectors in different parts of the world are simultaneously thinking through, against, and beyond modern political concepts, realities, and imaginaries.[112] As this article suggests, Indigenous political theory turns sovereignty thinking into a terrain of struggle where the inherent coloniality of Euromodern political

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[110]Getachew 2016.
[111]Barker 2011, 26, 2005.
[112]Bonilla 2015; Simpson 2014.

ordering is met with a decolonial rearticulation grounded in metaphysical assumptions such as pluriversality, interdependence, and a constitutive openness to difference. Indeed, tino rangatiratanga exhibits the traits of a metaphysical revolt against the modern/colonial metaphysical catastrophe as it challenges ontologized difference and the verticality of human hierarchization in favour of human interrelationality. As accurately emphasized by Rob Walker in his study of modern state sovereignty: 'The politics of becoming otherwise will have to be a politics that challenges the modern framing of other as Other […] There is certainly no possibility of becoming otherwise if that account is assumed to provide an accurate portrayal of where we are now'.[113] This article precisely reorients contemporary debates about political ordering by centring the contribution that Indigenous political thought makes to the imagination of this 'becoming otherwise' through its conceptual rearticulation of sovereignty.

This aspired transcendence of the modern political imaginary extends beyond the construction of governance models that are more just for Indigenous peoples. By articulating different responses to the questions related to the constitution of political communities and identities, Indigenous sovereignties contain the potential to confront the main problems and challenges resulting from Euromodern political ordering, such as deadly environmental degradation, growingly unsatisfied demands for participatory democracy, or an apparent inability to foster coexistence in difference, among others. Engaging with the political philosophies of Indigenous sovereignties enables a questioning and rethinking of prevailing political assumptions and authority devices, of the limits and inheritances of how politics is predominantly understood and articulated. It enables a decolonization of political theory and practice.

However, it is important to note that not all Indigenous or Māori conceptions of sovereignty articulated are inherently decolonial. Although LaForme rightly asserted that 'while Aboriginal people may not achieve any greater results through self-government, they surely can do no worse [than settler governments]',[114] some Indigenous sovereignty projects end up mimicking Euromodern sovereignty and reproducing its exclusions, domination, and violence.[115] By grounding themselves in their own politico-philosophical resolutions and metaphysical assumptions, Indigenous sovereignties run the risk of resorting to imposition in the construction and functioning of their ideal political communities. Decolonial Indigenous articulations must therefore resist falling back on the modern dichotomies of internal/external, identity/difference, and particularity/universality that lie at the heart of the Euromodern metaphysics of sovereignty. They require constant reflexivity about their own exclusions; they require avoiding the reproduction of identities, cultures, and communities in their colonial forms, conceiving them rather as 'open, permeated by spontaneous, generous fertile lines of force'.[116] This article exposes clear indications of this decolonial orientation in the political thought of certain Māori political and intellectual sectors. Moreover, it suggests that

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[113]Walker 1993, 183.
[114]LaForme 1991, 264.
[115]Alfred 1999; Barker 2011; Shaw 2008.
[116]Fanon 1967, 34.

considering and engaging in dialogue with Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty is a key step towards imagining and constructing configurations of political order that better represent the diverse and complex political communities we inhabit.

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