

Can “Self-determination” Really Get Away from the Western Theoretical Roots of Sovereignty?

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***Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination.* By Joanne Barker (editor), Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005 (Dec). 236 pages. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 0803262515.**

This anthology came together out of a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) that was co-organized by the editor Joanne Barker and Alfreda Mitre called, “Sovereignty 2000: Locations of Contestation and Possibility.” The Cultural Studies Institute staff and Native American Studies Research Cluster staff, students, and faculty helped support this conference endeavor. Alfreda Mitre helped involve the California Indian Tribal communities which made it possible for the conference to have local Indigenous involvement and support and bridge contacts to have more participants from various locations around the world (vii). The conference participants as well as “additional contributors whose work has addressed sovereignty,” were invited to contribute their essays to the anthology (ix).

As Barker states about the conference, “The diverse geography of nations, debates, and cultural and political perspectives represented by the speakers and participants was never intended to be exhaustive (a colonial strategy that promises objective comprehension over subjects that can be mastered). Other geographies and conversations exist. The conference was one instance of the ongoing political and cultural alliances and conversations about what sovereignty means as a category of scholarship, activism, and cultural production among indigenous peoples in the Americas and the Pacific”(viii).

The participants within the anthology have many different conceptual and tactile ideas about what sovereignty is and what it means to different Indigenous communities. The articles range from historical implications of Indigenous sovereignty in the U.S. and Canada and these nation-state's colonial endeavors in part of the Pacific to contestation of state formations of blood quantum, dependant sovereignty, and identity construction. The eleven contributed articles included in the anthology are: "For Whom Sovereignty Matters," by J. Barker (Lenape), "Sovereignty" by Taiiaki Alfred (Mohawk), "Backgrounding Maori Views on Views on Genetic Engineering," by F. Cram (Maori), "First Peoples/African American Connections" by G. Delgado-P. (Quechua) and J.B. Childs (Massachusetts/Brothertown-Oneida/Madagascan), "The Politics of Hawaiian Blood and Sovereignty in Rice v. Cayetano" by J. Kehaulani Kauanui (Native Hawaiian), "The Passive Resistance of Samoans to U.S. and Other Colonialisms" by D. Taulapapa Mc Mullin (Samoan), "Tribal Cultural Self-Determination and the Makah Whaling Culture" by R.J. Miller (Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma), "A Spiritual Definition of Sovereignty from a Kanaka Maoli Perspective" by K. Ontai (Native Hawaiian), "Chamorro Resistance and Prospects for Sovereignty in Guam" by M. P. Perez (Chamorro), "Asserting Indigenous Theories of Change" by L. Pihama (Maori) and "Indigenous Identity and the Struggle for Independence in Puerto Rico" by D. Santana (Puerto Rican/Boricua). The Indigenous scholars that are included in the anthology contribute many important points about how to mobilize these theoretical ideas of different kinds of self-determination and identity construction that are one of many conversations to take back the ideas that are underlying and have roots within Indigenous communities about the western term sovereignty. While this

conversation opens up doors, there are many voices that are being left out. The space for mixed, diaspora, urban, and other than English language Indigenous peoples around the world need to have space as well. We also need many voices from any one Indigenous viewpoint to get at the complexity within our individual communities as well as how complex Indigenisms are, how they have commonalities, overlap, and have vast differences that rub and tear at each other which if unchecked or unexamined can and are destructive.

This opening up of fixed Indigenous identity constructions begins in this conversation with the article by Guillermo Delgado-P. and John Brown Childs about First Peoples/African American connections as well as the article by J.Kauanui about Hawaiian Blood and Sovereignty. Delgado-P. and Childs address sovereignty by stating, "Sovereignties are shaped by retrieval, by acknowledging the destructive forces of colonialisms, and by restoring the healing powers of pasts in the praxis of our own Indigenous languages and memories" (69). This is very important for those Indigenous communities who still have the ability to revive our languages, for those within the diaspora it is important to acknowledge the effects of more years of colonization and imperialisms that have made this revitalization more difficult or not an option in parts of the Americas, the Pacific, and other locations around the world.

The interirrigation of sovereignty as a dependent relationship upon the state by Indigenous tribalized peoples is deconstructed in Hawaii by J. Kauanui. She complicates why the Native Hawaiian people should change their status with the U.S. government to be like Native American tribal nations to gain and lose some rights, but still not have complete self-determination (96-97). She also complicates the idea of blood quantum and how this was used in the past and

now to disqualify descendants of Indigenous and Native Hawaiian people to lands claims and places them within the states hierarchical construction of racialization. The smaller number of descendants means lesser amounts of land and provisions that the state and multi-national corporations have to give back to the people (94-95). J. Kauanui's article gets at the tangible/tactile complexities of enforced western ideologies of identity regulation, policy, law, and colonial cultural practices that have impacted and still impact Native Hawaiian as well as many different Indigenous peoples of the world.

The foundation in the beginning of the anthology to bridge the ability of access to this and the multiple conversations within and about sovereignty, self-determination, and identity construction are well laid out by Joanne Barker and Taiiaki Alfred. Barker gives us a western historical, theoretical, religious, and political grounding about how the western term sovereignty got applied and related to Indigenous peoples. Without this contextualization the later articles about self-determination, identity construction, and sovereignty would not be as lucid for the reading audience.

To bridge off of Barker's foundation of contexts Alfred continues on to frame sovereignty within internal colonization. He complicates the U.S. and Canadian systems of state hegemony with "intellectual sovereignty" that is another way to think of self-determination and Indigenous roots of independence that coincide with the multiplicity of Indigenous forms of culture (38). Alfred also begins to question how we can have any form of self-determination that breaks free from the colonial system embedded within our Indigenous communities. His arguments are concise and well contextualized, but I am left to wonder where the rest of the continent of North America is in his

argument. Where is Mexico in all of this? Why are the Indigenous communities that straddle the southern border of the U.S. and the ones within the national construction of Mexico not included in his argument when he is referring to the North American settler states and predecessor states that include in the list, Spain? (34) Aren't the Doctrine of Discovery and the Doctrine of Conquest by Spain that Barker refers to the same thing? This inclusion could only strengthen his well laid out argument. This is a departure from his latest book *Wasáse Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* that on the website has the first excerpts in Spanish as well as English and references the Zapatistas' movement as a lesson for all Indigenous communities to learn from in the face of state systemic violence (281). Was this construction of North America as U.S./Canada based on the political systems of the state and how they "deal" with Indigenous people? Whatever the reason, this omission is working against struggles for solidarity of multiple Indigenisms that the rest of his arguments support.

All in all this anthology begins a conversation about sovereignty that complicates the western notion, and the generalizations about Indigenous issues in regards to self-determination, identity construction, and the settler states involvement in these ideas as sovereignty. Cultural, political, and language revitalization efforts cannot be completely effective until colonization and imperialism is addressed and unpacked within our communities.