Re-Singing the World

*Indigenous Pedagogies and Global Crisis during Conflicted Times*

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**Introduction**

Speaking of the global crisis of sustainability, Noam Chomsky observed, “Throughout the world, Indigenous societies are struggling to protect what they sometimes call ‘the rights of nature’, while the civilized and sophisticated scoff at this silliness.” In particular, Chomsky declared that,

Leading the effort to preserve conditions in which our immediate descendants might have a decent life are the so-called “primitive” societies: First Nations, tribal, Indigenous, aboriginal…. The countries with large and influential Indigenous populations are well in the lead in seeking to preserve the planet. The countries that have driven Indigenous populations to extinction or extreme marginalization are racing toward destruction.1

On an earlier occasion, the geographer Bernard Nietschmann made a similar contention.

Where there are nation peoples [place-based communities whose relationships with their homelands (both land and water) govern their roles and responsibilities] with an intact, self-governed homeland, there are still biologically rich environments […] the converse is equally striking: State environments—where the non-nation peoples live—are almost always areas of destructive deforestation, desertification, massive freshwater depletion and pollution, and large-scale reduction of genetic and biological diversity.2

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While Chomsky’s comment can of course be argued as overly simplistic and reductionist, it nonetheless highlights a critical point of tension for Indigenous peoples in the context of globalization, the tensions between economic development and participation in the global economy, and the preservation of traditional ways of life, including subsistence lifestyles, and of nature itself, with which historically they have held a deep and enduring relationship which defines their identity and their relationships. However, as Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel points out “When asked about living sustainably today, Indigenous peoples inevitably confront the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have disrupted their individual and community relationships with the natural world.”

I take these three sets of comments as my starting place for this article in order to contextualize one of the most critical points of tension for Indigenous peoples, that between economic development and participation in the global economy, and preservation of nature, in particular on Indigenous customary lands. As states increase their strategies of reincorporation or dispossession and extinction in response to both the demands of global capitalism and the demands of Indigenous peoples, these tensions are the backdrop for renewed acts of resistance by Indigenous communities across many areas of the globe. At the heart of these issues is the unprecedented expansion of unsustainable resource extraction across every resource-rich territory on the globe, including the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. This is the backdrop against which Indigenous communities across the globe are enacting a politics of refusal and the place from which Indigenous peoples are engaged in what I have referred to elsewhere as the “re-singing the world.”

In writing this chapter, I locate myself as an Indigenous person from Aotearoa New Zealand, a country in which the relationship between the peoples of the land and the settler government is held to be defined by the Treaty of Waitangi, now living as a guest in the traditional lands of the Cree, Dene,