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‘Matthew Scobie and Anna Sturman, The Economic Possibilities of Decolonisation’

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Matthew Scobie and Anna Sturman, *The Economic Possibilities of Decolonisation* (Bridget Williams Books, 2024), 155pp. Paperback. NZ\$17.99. ISBN: 978-1-9910-3374-1.

The Economic Possibilities of Decolonisation by Scobie and Sturman marks a refreshing turn in the conversation regarding Aotearoa New Zealand's economic decolonisation. The authors introduce the readers to the essence of the book with their upfront beginning statement, 'The future of Aotearoa New Zealand depends on how Māori engage with capitalism.' Although the book has a pro-Māori focus, the idea that Māori maybe stuck with, or even intentionally and willingly operating with capitalist arrangements, systems and institutions pushes a narrative that may rub up against anti-capitalist purists. Instead the book tries to directly deal with a significant Indigenous conundrum – that is – Indigenous people are simultaneously living, operating, and working within a system they are also fighting against. Hence the book offers more than simplistic rejection critiques of capitalism. Nuanced and alternative possibilities are explored that try to pragmatically deal with the existence of Māori in a 'capitalist' reality, balancing future Māori aspirations for sovereignty and self-determination.

The theoretical underpinnings of the book, takes a historical materialist approach, suggesting that the material conditions created by colonial-capitalism heavily influences how Indigenous peoples engage with the modes of production. Then, they detail traditional Māori economies, emphasising how relationships and connection to land underpin all dimensions of trade and economics. From there, they outline how initial Māori relationships with colonists were economically favourable to Māori. However, once Māori became overwhelmed by waves of settlers arriving to the shores and an insatiable Crown appetite for Māori land and resources, the trajectory of Māori economies took a drastically different pathway than what Māori had originally envisioned for themselves. Scobie and Sturman utilise the case study of Ngai Tahu to demonstrate how an Iwi can simultaneously be working within capitalist forms to acquire assets and resources and then wield that power to work against colonial capitalism.

The book highlights a number of themes, one of which, is an interesting proposition of the Māori role in the 'stabilisation' of capitalism. The authors suggest that Māori forms of wellbeing can play a significant role in capitalist economies because of their stabilising effect. At the forefront of Te Ao Māori economic systems, are highly valued relational dimensions e.g., kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga. These relational values tend to be less prevalent in 'hyper' competitive capitalist behaviours, which lead to vicious cycles of overt overextractions of environmental resources and human labour. Consequently, this stabilisation aspect provides the groundwork for a prefiguring lens on Aotearoa New Zealand. They suggest that if Aotearoa New Zealand can embody these Māori values, the nation can begin to prefigure alternative economic realities. The final point they drive home is the need for Aotearoa New Zealand to enact the work being done on constitutional change that recognises the three spheres: kawanatanga sphere, rangatiratanga sphere, and relational sphere.

By moving past just problem defining of colonial-capitalism, to alternative solutions focus, they build an argument of Māori business and economies as operating within, against, and beyond colonial-capitalism. These categories account for the multiple intersections operating between Te Ao Māori and colonial-capitalism and hence

the book allows us to interrogate the economic realities and possibilities of decolonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, to ultimately create the future Aotearoa New Zealand they desire to achieve.

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