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‘Erik Olssen, The Origins of an Experimental Society: New Zealand, 1769-1860’

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Erik Olssen, *The Origins of an Experimental Society: New Zealand 1769-1860* (Auckland University Press), 584pp. Hardcover. NZ\$65.00. ISBN 978-1-7767-1113-0.

Aotearoa New Zealand is generally regarded as one of the most progressive nations in the modern world. From being the first nation to implement women's suffrage to the modelling of Indigenous empowerment through the Treaty of Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand has been at the forefront of progressive movements. However, it has also been the front of other, less well-regarded experiments. 'Rogernomics', for example, was an experiment in deregulation and neoliberalism is widely considered as one of the lowlights of the Kiwi experiment. The great 'Kiwi Laboratory' of social change and reform, therefore, has long roots that need to be examined to understand the great Kauri (large and important New Zealand tree) of the Pacific.

Erik Olssen has taken on this challenge by publishing the first book of a proposed trilogy, *The Origins of an Experimental Society: New Zealand 1769-1860*. This book looks at the origins of European settlement in Aotearoa New Zealand with James Cook's journeys in 1769. It discusses the social experiments of the creation of a 'New Britain' within enlightenment principles. As a history, it argues that Aotearoa New Zealand society is a series of social experiments that have been observed, grown and developed into the modern nation of today. This book aims to consider the impact of first European contact with Māori and the consequences of European settlement and early economic developments until the 1860s. It examines the creation of initial Pakeha communities and works, through to the development of established European settlements in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. It is interesting to consider Aotearoa New Zealand as a social experiment; indeed, as stated in the introduction of this book, many social experiments, such as suffrage and extreme Neoliberalism ('Rogernomics') have been thrust upon the Pacific's Triple Star. This book, however, captures those early social experiments and interactions between Indigenous peoples beautifully and with a degree of understanding for both sides.

Olssen has developed an incredibly detailed and informative book. As an Indigenous Australian, I always find it fascinating to see the level of care and focus that the colony of New Zealand took (certainly in comparison to its sister colonies in what became Australia) in developing positive relationships (within reason) between Māori and Pakeha and the development of colonial society. This does not mean that Olssen glosses over negatives; in fact, his thorough detail gives us a clear picture of a society undergoing transition. It is a beautifully written and presented book and would make a great inclusion to any research library, as I am confident the next two will be.

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