

Book Review: Imagining Decolonisation, Bianca Elkington, Moana Jackson, Rebecca Kiddle, Ocean Ripeka Mercier, Mike Ross, Jennie Smeaton and Amanda Thomas, Bridget Williams Books, 2020

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DAVID HAIGH

This is a valuable introduction to an important contemporary issue that will surely not go away or be swept under the carpet. The book starts by explaining the impacts of colonisation on Māori, stating that colonisation “transforms a land and a society in profound ways ... it takes a toll on colonised people” (p. 40). Colonisation “is a process of dispossession and control” (p. 134), which has certainly been true in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the process of colonisation, Māori lost control of their land, te reo and institutions of governance. The new settlers did not come empty handed; they came with a strong desire to own property (often for the first time) coupled with a cash economic system to make it happen. The onward march of classical liberal economic policy in the 19th century and neoliberalism in the 20th and 21st centuries has seen the individual ownership of property and the privatisation of natural resources; processes detrimental to the wellbeing of Māori.

So what does decolonisation involve? Moana Jackson suggests that, in its simplest sense, it is “the reclaiming of the right of indigenous people to once again govern themselves” (p. 135). Ocean Mercier says that “decolonisation does not mean the removal or withdrawal of colonial occupiers so much as a fundamental shift in the ideas, knowledges and value sets that underpin the systems which shape our country” (p. 51). This involves a return to pre-colonial ways in terms of te reo, education and tikanga.

Jackson suggests that decolonisation may not be the right word, and proposes an ethic of restoration. As with colonisation, there would be a process of change. He says:

[I]t will require a change of mind and heart as much as a change of structure. This will require adoption of certain values:

- The value of place (for good relations and protection of Papatūānuku).
- The value of tikanga (core ideals of living in Aotearoa).
- The value of community (good relations between all people).
- The value of belonging (the need for everyone to have a sense of belonging).
- The value of balance (maintenance of harmony in all relationships).
- The value of conciliation (a guarantee of conciliatory and consensual authority). (p. 152)

These values are essential for a peaceful process of decolonisation or an ethic of restoration.