**\*Transcripts from Studio Erasmus with
Prof. Irene van Staveren

Moderator:**
A housing crisis, a manure crisis, an asylum crisis, a climate crisis, and we could go on. These are not coincidences but the results of decades of neoliberal policies. Things can and must change, says my guest tonight, Irene van Staveren. A warm welcome to you, Irene.

**Irene:**
Thank you, happy to be here.

**Moderator:**
This isn’t your first time here. It’s probably your third or fourth time, right?

**Irene:**
I think so, yes.

**Moderator:**
How are you?

**Irene:**
I’m good, thank you.

**Moderator:**
You've been writing columns for *Trouw* for years. At some point, you decided to write a book. Was there a particular reason for the timing?

**Irene:**
Well, unlike some columnists who write weekly, I write bi-weekly, which makes producing a book take longer. But the idea started when the editorial team approached me. Writing for a wider audience on a new platform was a unique opportunity.

**Moderator:**
What’s the main challenge of writing columns as an academic?

**Irene:**
Condensing ideas into 520 words is certainly challenging. But it’s rewarding to share a strong, concise message on such a broad platform.

**Moderator:**Your book is titled *The Free Market Does Not Exist*. Why did it need that title?

**Irene:**
The "free market" is often treated as an ideal—the standard for a good economy. But in reality, no market is truly free. For instance, even buying a sandwich involves regulations from the food authority. Markets are regulated for the common good and influenced by corporate power, like tech giants or Big Pharma, which limits consumer choice.

**Moderator:**
This title challenges the common belief that fully free markets are inherently good. Where does that belief come from?

**Irene:**
It gained traction in the 1980s with leaders like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, who pushed privatization and deregulation. Even in the Netherlands, successive governments embraced the idea that markets are more efficient than governments.

**Moderator:**
Has the free market ever delivered a "golden era" that later went too far?

**Irene:**
People often conflate capitalism with markets. Many small businesses operate on principles that aren't purely capitalist, prioritizing fair practices over maximum profit. Capitalism, however, has hijacked the market system, leading to issues like climate change.

**Moderator:**
Why is it so hard to imagine alternatives to capitalism, even as crises pile up?

**Irene:**
The problem is that there's no single, clear alternative. However, there are many puzzle pieces—like circular or regenerative economies—that need to be assembled.

**Moderator:**
Are there signs of hope?

**Irene:**
Yes, like Generation Z, who seek meaningful work. But change will likely come through a gradual collapse of capitalism rather than a revolution. For example, fewer companies are going public, as they don’t want to be beholden to short-term shareholder interests.

**Moderator:**
One of your columns asked, "What kind of economy do you want for your grandchildren?" How does that shape the vision?

**Irene:**
It encourages long-term thinking. We already produce enough food and goods for everyone but waste so much. The economy of the future should focus on sustainability and equity, like Kate Raworth's "doughnut economy," staying within ecological limits while ensuring social minimums.

**Moderator:**
Should more academics engage in public discourse, like writing columns?

**Academic:**
Not everyone, but those who can bridge the gap between academia and the public should. It’s a skill I had to learn, but it’s rewarding to contribute to societal discussions.

**Moderator:**
Do you have a favorite column?

**Irene:**
One that sparked many reactions was about my stance against a universal basic income. It’s a tempting idea, but it turns people into passive consumers while small businesses bear the tax burden.

**Moderator:**
Will there be more books or columns from you?

**Academic:**
I’ll keep writing as long as I can.

**Moderator:**
Thank you for being here, Irene.

**Irene:**
Thank you.

*\*The following transcripts were gathered from YouTube subtitling, then translated from Dutch to English using AI.*