

Commissioned Book Review

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The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location by **Ben Wellings** and **Andrew Mycock**. Oxford: British Academy; Oxford University Press, 2019 248 pp., £55, ISBN 9780197266618.

This insightful collection interrogates the ties that bind the core Anglosphere countries together, enabling them to repeatedly unite on the battlefield, willingly share intelligence and cooperate in a plethora of (perhaps unexpected) policy areas, beyond security and defence. It brings together an impressive array of scholars, developing interdisciplinary insights into the Anglosphere's history, geography and future. In its assessment of the ontology, possibility and normativity of the Anglosphere, this book presents an important account of the 'state of the art', located at the forefront of a rejuvenated 'Anglosphere studies'. This bolstered research agenda emerges out of the turbulent Anglosphere politics of the twenty-first century, characterised by the mutual sycophancy of Bush and Blair after 9/11, the apparent lunacy of Brexit on the back of misguided colonial nostalgia, and the surprises of Trump's unabashed transactional realism. Of these, it is Brexit that predominates in setting the book's context.

In its first section, the book wrestles with the questions of ontology and history: what is the Anglosphere, when and where did it emerge, and what sustains it? The answer is necessarily multifaceted: the Anglosphere is an idea, a set of interlocking discourses and a series of policy networks. As an idea, the roots of the Anglosphere are traced, variably, to the Scottish Enlightenment, Victorian England and even a specific speech by Winston Churchill in 1917. As a series of discourses, the Anglosphere finds its origins in talk of

Greater Britain and Anglo-Saxondom, which helped to enable a remarkable feat of international relations: relatively peaceful hegemonic transition at the turn of the twentieth century, as London learned to play Greece to Washington's Rome. As a set of networks, the Anglosphere exists at multiple crucial sites of everyday interaction, with significant policy outcomes. This infrastructural architecture has occasionally been explored historically but rarely unpacked in the contemporary era, perhaps given how secretive so many of these networks are. This, then – the unveiling of murky channels of governance – is an important democratic function, helping the Anglosphere to be held to account.

In its second and third sections, the book explores the tensions, limitations and exclusions of the Anglosphere. These are particularly important as its proponents talk up the promise of Global Britain, following Brexit. Needless to say, overoptimism on trade is rigorously dampened and troubling racial imaginaries are unpacked, as the contemporary politics of history's narration is made apparent and persuasively deconstructed. The reader learns of the continued importance of war's memory and a geopolitical imagination that excludes on the basis of race as much as language, culture or regime type. The result is that, while 'Geography trumps history' for trade, it remains the other way around for alliance preferences. Contemporary world order comprises regional supply chains but global security governance. That, of course, is why there was such a powerful, rational argument for Britain's continued membership of the European Union, based on the trade benefits. The emotional impulse to look further afield, though, remains strong, as war memory undergirds an Anglo-American worldview that continues to spearhead global capitalism and sustain

international order, in part by tempering the ambitions of rising powers.

The book achieves its aims. To consider ‘where next’ for the Anglosphere, the contributors argue that it is important to understand where the alliance has come from and the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that define and sustain it. This is not, of course, a clear or linear story. Across thirteen chapters, the reader learns of the contested underpinnings, tensions and limitations, and broader intersectionalities of the coalition of the English-speaking peoples while never losing sight of the fact that – despite the relative scepticism and criticism of a majority of academics – this is an alliance that matters in shaping and sustaining world order.

That significance – the sustained operations of an alliance that has helped to build and perpetuate liberal international order as we know it – is not matched by the weight of evidence apparent in the pages of social science journals. We simply do not fully understand the nature of the Anglo ‘bloc’ or

the affinities that underpin the world’s most consequential military alliance, which ensure recurrent coalition warfare, in the name of freedom, democracy and shared values. Anglosphere research remains a significant lacuna, a fact that makes this volume all the more essential. It should be widely read and will appeal to scholars and students across the social sciences, setting the agenda for future research exploring the continuities, examining the tensions and investigating the shape and structure of the Anglosphere in historical and geographical context.

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