

John Connell and Robert Aldrich (2020). *The ends of empire: The last colonies revisited*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN: 978-981-15-5905-1. Hbk: €74.89; pbk: €53.49.

Eminent Sydney University academics Robert Aldrich and John Connell have teamed up once more to produce *The ends of empire*, an update of *The last colonies* published in 1998. The volume is both an invaluable update and stand-alone review of the current context and issues relating to the lingering overseas territories of the Western powers to which the authors limit their focus (France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark, United States, Australia and New Zealand). It is a dispassionate analysis of the benefits and costs, to both metropolitan states and their territories, of continued metropolitan sovereignty, and provides strong insights into the meaning and blurring of independence and sovereignty in today's world.

The authors canvass major issues and trade-offs between metropolitan capitals and their territories *inter alia* from Greenland, Ceuta and Melilla and Gibraltar around Europe, to Pitcairn, Wallis and Futuna, Guam and the Falklands in the Pacific, and Diego Garcia and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean. They cover areas of governance, migration, the economy and budgets, and culture and identity. Their skilful analysis reflects years of combined experience evident in their collaboration over numerous works on empire and colonialism, enriched by their respective wider interests in the Pacific and other small island states, development, culture, migration and just plain travel.

The principal value of their latest work over that of 1998 is suggested by the respective titles. *The last colonies* captured the idea of leftovers of Western colonialism. As the authors point out, since it was written, the term 'colonies' has fallen out of use, in part because of widespread devolution and multi-level governance. *The ends of empire* goes beyond its prequel in describing not only 'remnants' of colonial authority, but also elaborating on broad geo-strategic ambitions, "ends" as opposed to "means" in retaining territory. It thus raises vital questions about the future of these territories and their role amidst a period of geopolitical flux.

As the issues are explored, it becomes clear that one should not get too carried away by the idea that colonialism is obsolete. Early on, the authors note that none of the territories they focus on have sought independence since their last book, and that "few [metropolitan] powers were anxious to exert power or even presence". And yet, as they traverse issues of legal governance; identity, culture and politics; economics; migration and geopolitics, with a case study of France's Pacific territory New Caledonia, the many exceptions suggest a revision of these preliminary assumptions.

Take the idea that none of the territories have any "taste for independence yet". Hong Kong's management by China has been resisted. Greenland's situation is at the least equivocal. And the authors' own example of New Caledonia's 2018 referendum returned a not inconsiderable 43.3% support for independence, almost entirely from the indigenous Kanak population. There is little mention of two further planned votes, one in October 2020 (after the book's publication) that showed a significant increase in support for independence to 47.6%, with a third due by end 2022.

When citing New Caledonia's Kanaks, the authors claim that, for indigenous communities, sovereignty is a matter of indigeneity; yet the mainly Kanak independence parties specifically include non-Kanak "victims of history" in their idea of an independent New Caledonia.

The independence movement in French Polynesia, which has taken some inspiration from events in New Caledonia, is given short shrift; this is surprising, given the re-listing of that territory with the UN's Committee of Decolonisation as recently as 2013, over virulent French

opposition. The authors dismiss the UN Committee as an anachronism, saying France ignores it; and yet France reports to it on New Caledonia every year, and sought to head off its consideration of French Polynesia. The Committee is deemed relevant enough by powers such as China, Russia and Indonesia to ensure their own membership, presumably to prevent any secessionist ‘domino effect’ on their own territories. The authors also recognize independence movements in Guam and Puerto Rico, and refer to the push by descendants of the Chagos islanders to return to Diego Garcia.

Equally the suggestion that few sovereign powers were anxious to exert their power, that “empires have lost any residual glow”, is diluted by the authors’ listing the military bases in their overseas territories of many of the apparently disinterested powers. The chapter on geostrategic considerations notes the increasing returns to metropolitan powers from even the tiniest of their overseas territories, arising from shifting global balances and preoccupations. These shifts include the heightened global value of actual and potential resources; geographical positioning at a time of geostrategic change, especially when viewed against the recent concept of the Indo-Pacific, where most of the territories discussed are located, and the rise of China; the demands of control and management of space activity; and the effect of full implementation of UN Law of the Sea claims. The authors point to ice-melts in the Arctic exposing more potential resources, and to the more numerous contesting claims in the Antarctic, engaging major powers. They cite the key role of tiny islands such as Diego Garcia and Guam in maintaining security balances in western interests.

In this setting, a telling quotation is the claim made in October 2019 by French President Macron visiting the tiny Îles Éparses [literally, Scattered Isles] off East Africa: “Here is France; it is our pride, it is our wealth. This is not a hollow idea ... France is an archipelagic country, a world country. We are not here to have fun, but to build the future of the planet.” The authors argue: “If the Éparses are worth retaining, it is difficult to identify any overseas territory that is not”.

The complex issues raised in the geopolitics chapter are likely to increase in relevance for Western overseas territories in coming years, and present valuable material for further study and analysis. Curiously, France’s strategic attachment to its territories is noted but underplayed. One area touched upon, but not explored extensively, is the role of overseas territories for the European Union. No mention is made of the EU’s 2011 strategy towards the overseas territories of its members, which specifically describes these territories as EU strategic outposts.

Similar tantalising remarks are made about neo-colonialism beyond the book’s purview of Western overseas territories, often blurring notions of sovereignty. Situations cited include China’s ventures in the South China Sea; its treatment of Taiwan, Tibet and Uighurs in Xinjiang; Russia’s actions in the Crimea, Ukraine and Georgia; the fate of Myanmar’s Rohingyas; and Indonesia’s dealings in West Papua. The authors refer to newly independent states that have emerged beyond the territories under scrutiny (South Sudan, Timor-Leste) and independence movements active elsewhere within Western sovereign territory (Catalonia, Scotland).

The ends of empire offers a broad sweep of the West’s overseas territories and their changing place in the world. It deserves a close read, not just for its review of negotiated governance which has overtaken the concept of colonialism, but for its insights into why some powers – and not just Western ones – consider their scattered possessions worth hanging on to.

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