

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.

In 1998, Robert Aldrich and John Connell published their much-praised book, *The last colonies*, the first book-length comparative discussion of the world's remaining non-sovereign jurisdictions, legacies of a past age of formal colonialism. At that time, these territories' choice against full sovereignty might have been counterintuitive to those who still expected all former colonies to opt for full independence at some stage. The book made it abundantly clear why these 'confetti of empire' scattered across the globe had very good reasons to shy away from parting with their metropolitan states, and why the latter were accepting this, whether enthusiastic or not. Aldrich and Connell cautiously predicted that this status quo was not likely to change anytime soon.

The ends of empire – this time written by Connell and Aldrich, in that order – is the sequel to *The last colonies*. Not surprisingly to anyone who has been engaged in the academic or political debates about the 'overseas territories' scattered across the globe, they conclude that non-sovereignty is indeed a widely accepted and more or less permanent constitutional status, a 'half-way house between independence and integration' (p. 425). In the quarter of a century between the publication of these two books, much scholarship has dealt with the changing meanings of (non-)sovereignty, and of course *Small States and Territories Journal* is one of the major platforms too for scholarly debates about the connections between, and implications of, non-sovereignty, islandness, small-scale and government pervasiveness.

With *The ends of empire*, Connell and Aldrich again provide a most welcome overview both of these non-sovereign entities worldwide and of the relevant academic debates. For this symposium, rather than summarizing the contents and arguments of this admirable and quite exhaustive book, I would like to advance a couple of reflections. I do this not as much to criticize their approach; but rather in recognition of the dilemmas Connell and Aldrich must have faced, much the same as I have done in my own comparative work on this field, with a particular focus on the Dutch Caribbean territories and their position within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The book has nine chapters, all but one being thematic. The reader will soon discover an inevitable and repetitive overlap, but nonetheless the choice of themes covered makes perfect sense: an overall introduction to the non-sovereignty worldwide, chapters on constitutional arrangements; identity, culture and politics; economics; migrations; geopolitics; globalization and the diminishing relevance of sovereignty; and a conclusion. But why one separate chapter on New Caledonia? Long and encompassing as it already is, the book could have well done without. But, more importantly, I had hoped to read more about the exceptionally urgent problem of climate change, an issue not that much on the radar twenty-five years ago. There is some discussion of this (pp. 274-281, 360-367), but this leaves too much unanswered. Are non-sovereign territories active at all in mobilizing metropolitan politics to counter climate injustice; and if so, are they successful in this and what is the prognosis? And how does this affect their relations with neighbouring sovereign (island) states? Likewise, given that this book would have gone to print pre-pandemic, there is only scant attention to the effects of COVID-19, which has affected many of the overseas territories disproportionately, because of their dependence on tourism.

As for the various constitutional arrangements and adaptations, Connell and Aldrich rightly point at continuous change and more complexity, and tend towards a rather optimistic conclusion. They argue that ongoing globalization has further eroded the significance of sovereignty and that in most non-sovereign territories, a possible step towards full

independence has remained a non-issue, while the real issue is about ‘true equality’ and the recognition of a separate identity. Throughout the book they rightly indicate that the struggle for equality is anything but over – in comparison with neighboring sovereign states the overseas territories are doing well economically, but just like a quarter of a century ago, they fall far behind metropolitan standards. But they seem to suggest that on balance, not only is there more metropolitan respect now for cultural issues, but also that ‘bread and butter’ issues have become less prominent and less conflictive (p. 438). I am not so sure about the latter. In the Dutch Caribbean at least, massive extra metropolitan funding to offset the disastrous consequences of the 2017 hurricanes and next the pandemic was combined with ever stronger metropolitan intervention in local politics, leading to bitter accusations of ‘recolonization’. Is this really only a Dutch Caribbean issue? I don’t think so.

Finally, a minor point, but still one that merits mentioning precisely because of the ideational dimension of the debate. For their 1998 book, Aldrich and Connell simply used ‘last colonies’ in their title. In the Preface to the present book, they rightly argue that it is questionable whether ‘colonial’ is an apt adjective at all – and yet they chose *The Last Colonies Revisited* for a subtitle. I can understand why a publisher would like a title like that, as it is immediately clear what the book is all about. But what is the message now? That after all, the overseas territories are indeed still colonies at the mercy of their metropolitan masters? That is clearly not the message that the authors want to convey, as they emphasize the agency of these non-sovereign places instead. In that sense, the choice for ‘colonies’ may even be offensive for some in the overseas territories who feel that the pragmatic choice against full independence is compatible with an outright refusal to accept the legitimacy of the preceding colonial project. Which, again, points to the conceptual minefields we are all dealing with in writing about the non-sovereign territories in postcolonial times.

There is much more to praise in this book, and also more to ask. Thus, I think more could be said about the political significance of the diasporic communities to metropolitan debates about colonialism, cultural identity and transnational diversity, or about the question whether ‘enthusiastic’ metropolitan states such as France make better partners for non-sovereign territories than reluctant ones such as the Netherlands. On a more fundamental level, the question whether there is an optimal compromise, an ideal ‘half-way house between independence and integration’ remains open. But, of course, it would be unfair to take Connell and Aldrich to task for not being able to answer that all too broad question.

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