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The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location

by Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock,
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The term “Anglosphere” refers to a group of English-speaking countries that share cultural, historical, and political ties originating from the British Empire. It is often presented as a distinct entity that differs from the rest of the world. While there is no single agreed-upon definition, the Anglosphere typically includes such countries as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. The concept of the Anglosphere emphasizes the commonalities between these countries and their shared values, including a commitment to democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law. It is often used in discussions on international relations, trade, and diplomacy, and is sometimes seen as a potential basis for a closer alliance between these countries.

The essence of the Anglosphere is explained by Ben Wellings and Andrew Mycock in the book named “The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location.”¹ The volume comprises a fascinating analysis of the concept of the Anglosphere and its potential impact on contemporary politics. The book seeks to answer the question of whether the Anglosphere is a coherent concept or merely a nostalgic myth.

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1. B. Wellings, A. Mycock, *The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location*, Oxford University Press 2020.

The book consists of thirteen chapters divided into three main parts. In each part, the authors try to describe and explain another aspect of the Anglosphere, namely continuity, dissonance, and location. The work opens with an introduction in which Andrew Mycock and Ben Wellings briefly explain the concept of the Anglosphere, its historical background, and the location of the mentioned countries. All of these issues are discussed in more detail in the following chapters of the book; at this point the authors only indicate the research issues.

At the beginning, the authors discuss the concept of the Anglosphere, which gained prominence after the United Kingdom had left the European Union. As it has been mentioned, the Anglosphere comprises the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, but its membership is fluid and ambiguous due to the historical origins and contemporary networks. The supporters argue that the Anglosphere represents a community with a commitment to liberty, free-market economics, and liberal democracy, as well as shared military commemorations and cultural ties. However, the idea encounters resistance and delegitimation due to its imperial and racist origins. Brexit has reignited debates about the British Empire and Anglophony, with the UK government's "Global Britain" narrative reflecting the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from the Anglosphere. Despite its commonalities, the Anglosphere is seen as an insufficient solution to Brexit.

The volume explores the idea of the Anglosphere and its transnational articulation, examining historical and contemporary forms of identity and community. It also assesses the Anglosphere's cohesion and coherence compared to the European Union. The volume delves into British Euroscepticism, political nationalism in the UK, and the legacies of the empire in other Anglosphere states. It also explores the complexities of geopolitics and the diverse experiences of colonized and indigenous communities. The enduring appeal and limitations of the Anglosphere are highlighted, emphasizing its durable commonalities, tensions, and connectives. The volume argues that the international and transnational nature of the Anglosphere is worthy of academic exploration as it recalibrates power and authority among political actors and the world order.

In the first part, specialists explain the historical aspects of the Anglosphere. The authors focus on its political genealogies and ideational lineages. The origins of the Anglosphere are explored by advocates and academics, who analyse its historical traditions and worldviews. The work highlights the conceptual fluidity of the Anglosphere concept, which makes it challenging to trace its origins and subject to varying interpretations. The volume mentions that the contemporary Anglosphere is

often associated with two conferences held by the Conservatives in 1999 and 2000. These conferences brought together influential figures from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, who discussed the renewed cooperation between English-speaking nations. The idea of the Anglosphere gained traction as a movement that appealed to the conservative values and the defense of Anglo values.

Different interpretations of the Anglosphere's origins are discussed, including its associations with the British Empire and the debate over "imperial federation" in the late Victorian era. The work notes the racialized pseudo-scientific political ideology of "Anglo-Saxonism" that linked the United States and the British Empire in the early twentieth century. While there are influences from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thought, each iteration of the Anglosphere tradition has distinct elements that reflect its chronological development and contemporary relevance. Advocates draw on these influences to argue for the effectiveness and desirability of the Anglosphere in global politics. However, the origins and meanings of the Anglosphere concept are complex and challenging to discern and expound, making it difficult for supporters to establish its legitimacy and efficacy. The authors also raise some important questions about the role of race and whiteness in the Anglosphere imagery, which can undermine its legitimacy.

The next part explains what is the Anglosphere nowadays. Moreover, the authors mark a dissonance between the historical thought and modern ways of thinking. The authors explicitly point out that while the Anglosphere has a common foundation rooted in representative democracy, free trade, and shared war memory, it also faces challenges and divisions. One of the main issues affecting the Anglosphere is the legacy of the Empire, which continues to influence and haunt its development. Another factor contributing to its weaknesses is the lack of evolution in the Anglosphere thinking since the late nineteenth century. What is more, the Anglosphere draws its legitimacy from the commonalities formed by the political and economic evolution of English-speaking countries worldwide. These commonalities are underpinned by a meta-narrative of liberty and freedom, which was defended by the core Anglosphere states during the twentieth century. However, the perception and acceptance of this narrative vary within each of the core states.

The authors emphasize that the ideology of the Anglosphere is built on three main pillars, which are: representative democracy, free trade, and war memory. However, there are some contradictions within these pillars. For example, the dominance of the United States challenges the narrative

of English and British political development. Free trade, another aspect of the Anglosphere, has an uneasy relationship with imperialism. The debate surrounding Brexit has highlighted the tensions between regional and global trade, as well as the complex historical and contemporary relationships. The war memory of the Second World War and the Cold War plays a significant role, but the remembrance of earlier conflicts can also create divisions and diplomatic tensions. Temporal discontinuities and the current political climate challenge the unity and exceptionality of the Anglosphere. The authors refer that attempts to establish a post-Brexit vision of “Global Britain” have also stimulated scepticism and criticism not only in the Anglosphere but also in its former empire.

The third topic addressed in the book is an attempt to answer the question where exactly the Anglosphere is. The authors discuss the concept of the Anglosphere, which refers to the idea of a transnational community bound together by the English language and culture. It explores the debate as to whether the Anglosphere is a largely rhetorical idea or a tangible identity rooted in specific territories. The concept of the “English-speaking peoples” has not been universally rejected and has gained support from influential conservative politicians, commentators, and intellectuals advocating closer ties within the Anglosphere. In that part, the authors also highlight the historical development of the Anglo-American view of the world order based on liberal principles. It mentions how the emergence of right-wing Euroscepticism in the UK in the 1990s led to a renaissance of Anglospherism as an alternative to EU membership. Following the Brexit vote, the concept of the Anglosphere has moved to the centre of British politics, with the UK government seeking to reimagine its diplomatic, trade, and security relationships. The idea of a post-Brexit “Global Britain” emphasized the importance of building relationships with the countries in the Anglosphere, including the USA, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

However, the authors argue that the aspirations for new trade deals with these countries may be misguided, and the UK should focus on replicating the terms and number of existing EU deals. While the Anglosphere gained momentum with Brexit, there are challenges and complexities in realizing this vision, and that is also noted by specialists in the volume. Different perspectives exist among Anglospherists outside the United States, and there is a lack of agreement on the constituent states of the Anglosphere, including such countries as India, Ireland, Singapore, and South Africa. The authors also acknowledge the need of sensitivity to historical complexities and issues of racism and neo-colonialism when considering geopolitical relations within the Anglosphere.

That work is the first one that refers in detail the idea of five ‘core’ states. Moreover, Wellings and Mycock argue that while there are commonalities between these countries, there are also significant differences that make the Anglosphere a contested and complex idea. That project has also engaged many international academic experts. Together they are trying to describe the history and challenges facing the development of the Anglosphere countries. The authors examine the historical roots of the Anglosphere, tracing its origins to the British Empire and the English-speaking world that emerged after World War II. They explore the idea that the Anglosphere is an attempt to create a sense of identity and belonging in an era of globalization and uncertainty. However, they also point out that the concept has been used to justify the policies and actions that are not always consistent with democratic values. Wellings and Mycock argue that the Anglosphere is not a monolithic entity and that there are significant differences between its members. They also point out that the Anglosphere is not an exclusive club, as there are other English-speaking countries that are not part of it.

Overall, “The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location” is a thought-provoking book that challenges the idea of a unified Anglosphere. It offers a nuanced analysis of the concept and its potential implications for contemporary politics. Wellings and Mycock demonstrate that while the Anglosphere may have some commonalities, it is also a complex and contested idea that requires careful consideration.

The lack of comprehensive research on the Anglosphere is a significant gap that highlights the necessity of this volume. It deserves widespread readership and will be of interest to scholars and students across the social sciences. This volume sets the stage for future research, exploring the historical and geographical context of the Anglosphere, examining its continuities, and delving into the tensions and structure of this influential entity.

Bibliography

Wellings B., Mycock A., *The Anglosphere: Continuity, Dissonance and Location*, Oxford University Press 2020.