

Book and film reviews

The body politic

GAUTNEY, HEATHER; introduction by Adolph L. Reed, Jr. *Crashing the party: from the Bernie Sanders campaign to a progressive movement*. xxvi, 180 pp., bibliogr. New York: Verso, 2018. £9.99 (paper)

In *Crashing the party*, Heather Gautney provides an ‘autopsy’ (p. 2) of the presidential election of 2016 in the United States and offers a description of the political dynamics within the Democratic Party that contributed to today’s trying political moment. (Note that I initially wrote this review the day after two mass shootings. One of them was perpetrated by a white supremacist who targeted Latinx in the city of El Paso, Texas, because he believed he was helping to deter the ‘Hispanic invasion’.) This book offers some answers to the poignant questions that many of us in the United States ask ourselves daily, and especially today: how did we get here, and how do we overcome this moment in history?

In this account written from the vantage point of a political insider within Senator Bernie Sanders’ primary campaign, Gautney argues that his defeat, and the rise of Trump, shattered the Democratic Party establishment. Sanders’ bid shed light on the party’s decades-long neglect of working-class interests and voters. Cynical resorts to empty slogans on race and gender equality used as pure marketing tactics and the party’s disregard for the popular vote in favour of machine politics resulted in popular discontent. This dissatisfaction, Gautney argues, has taken two different forms. One is the racism and white nostalgia manifest in the support for Donald

Trump. The other is a galvanized progressive solidarity movement within the Democratic Party attentive to class, race, gender, and environmental disparities. Sanders, Gautney argues, planted the seeds of that movement.

I read *Crashing the party* in the midst of another Democratic primary where Sanders is, once again (as of early March 2020), trailing behind an establishment candidate, Joe Biden. This time, however, single-payer healthcare, the protection of workers, economic opportunity, and climate readiness are at the centre of the Democratic debates, and other candidates are echoing his proposals. It is stunning that Sanders has made his politics mainstream within the party after years of being side-lined and vilified as a socialist. Gautney provides insight into how his campaign achieved this shift by engaging in a serious grassroots operation, organizing locally, and addressing structural problems head-on with ambitious policy proposals to meet voters where they are rather than expecting them to show up when they have nothing to gain from it. Gautney suggests that establishment Democrats – whose campaigning style the author characterizes as pyramidal, top-down, embedded in deep patronage networks, image-ready, and stylized (see R.K. Nielsen, *Ground wars: personalized communication in political campaigns*, 2012) – need to catch on if they want to have a serious chance at winning the presidential election in 2020.

The author effectively demonstrates that during the Democratic primary in 2016, Hillary Clinton’s campaign used race and gender to undermine Sanders, painting him as the senator ‘from the White state of Vermont’ (p. 74) too narrowly focused on economic justice and lacking

experiences of others – not only same-sex couples with or without children, but also single people, transgender people, or people living in shared households – constitutes the book's main argument. However, there are more similarities than not in people's feelings regarding home when the various dimensions of its meaning are considered.

Take, for example, Lilian Chee's chapter 2 on the home life of three single Singaporean women, each one living in one of the city's many apartment blocks. One, a Muslim transgender woman, was not only keen on maintaining her feminine appearance and her flat's interior, which was 'theatrical' when compared to Singaporean standards, but she was also eager to present herself in the apartment's communal corridor, which she used as an extension of her home when giving a banquet for numerous guests. Her outgoing and expressive behaviour in combination with a permissive home environment contrasted not only with the more home-bound experiences of the other women, but also with the home-related experiences of three single transgender men living in the UK, who in the process of their transition had to cope with the hostility and narrow-mindedness of their middle-class neighbours or parents, as described by Laura Marshall (chap. 11). In response to the hostility of their home environment, the men became reclusive, moved, or fled the parental home. More than anything, these transgender men prioritized the dimension of privacy, if only to protect the material evidence of their gender transition – 'female . . . ornaments and things like that' (p. 193) – from the eyes of strangers.

The need to protect the privacy of their home and sexual identity by keeping a potentially hostile environment at bay is a recurring theme in the chapters dealing with the United Kingdom, which also led to a demand within the London LGBTQ community for trustworthy home services, such as a gay plumber, as described by Brent Pilkey (chap. 10). Rachael Scicluna's chapter 8 on older lesbians gathering within the seclusion of their living rooms illustrates also that need for privacy is habitually strong even when living in Brighton, the most gay-friendly town in the United Kingdom.

Confronting the case of the British transgender men with the case of the seemingly unproblematic home life of a Singaporean transgender woman, especially considering her Muslim background and Islam's well-known intolerance towards other sexual dispositions, provides an insight into the complex relationship between sexuality and the home. Singapore's

state ideology of harmony among the different ethnic populations within its borders might explain a more overall tolerance. Still the cross-cutting issues of religion, class, and sociopolitical context – all pertaining to the dimension of the wider home – evidently complicate the individual relation between sexuality and the home. Moreover, the issue of class plays a more prominent role in the relation between sexuality and the home than acknowledged in this volume. Matt Cook's chapter 7 on the upper-class occupants of a house in Hammersmith illustrates that in the past bohemian lifestyles and liaisons were tolerated because their upper-class status made them more or less shame-proof. Despite this shortcoming, the different chapters in this volume are valuable illustrations of the precarious social position of LGBTQ people even within the privacy of their homes. From the perspective of teaching, the three parts with their separate introductions could be practical components of reading lists in courses on sexuality and gender, or seminars on queer studies.

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Escalating change

ERIKSEN, THOMAS HYLLAND & ELISABETH SCHOBER (eds). *Identity destabilised: living in an overheated world*. ix, 260 pp., maps, tables, illus., bibliogr. London: Pluto Press, 2016. £19.99 (paper)

Using the metaphor of an overheated world, *Identity destabilised* offers an innovative approach to conducting and conceptualizing anthropology in the early twenty-first century. In their introduction, editors Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Elisabeth Schober recognize a long-standing (though typically only tacit) object of anthropological analysis: the concept of identity. Ubiquitous in the 1990s, the concept's popularity within the social sciences has faded. Yet, given today's overheating, 'fast-changing world with rapidly increasing connectivity and mobility, with mounting environmental challenges, rapid economic transformations and the rise of often virulent nationalisms', the editors contend that this situation must be rectified (p. 1). Identity, 'delineated as both social belonging and self-consciousness' (p. 154), must be revived and theorized further. Few analytic categories are as effective as identity in encapsulating diverse groups' and communities' forms of and claims to belonging. To approach this topic, the editors

and book contributors introduce *overheating* as a core metaphor to describe the economic, social, and environmental changes provoked by contemporary globalization. For Eriksen and Schober, overheating both recognizes globalization's current stage of escalating changes and conflicts while also implicitly gesturing towards 'deceleration or cooling down' via 'dialectical negation' (p. 2).

At fourteen chapters, the edited volume employs this novel approach via various ethnographic case studies. Throughout these examples, the tension between temporalized localization and globalization is foregrounded – most acutely through debates around territorial borders and their accompanying encounters. For example, in his chapter 9 on the politics of localness in rural Sierra Leone, Robert J. Pijpers describes how shifting access to once more stable opportunities in the region's rapidly overheating (i.e. globalizing) mining industry has had a contradictory effect: locals' intensified calls to protect once-bounded ideas of group identity from perceived external threats work alongside greater aspirations towards gaining access to imagined opportunities through global power (p. 154). In turn, new forms of exclusion have emerged, such as those drawing on reconfigured ethnic backgrounds and social belongings. In another example, contributor Heike Drotbohm (chap. 3) explores how decelerated mobility or so-called 'frozen cosmopolitanism' can have an equally powerful effect on personhood. Looking at forced return migration in Cape Verdean contexts, Drotbohm describes migrants who were able to access international travel and sought lives outside their territorial beginnings only to be coercively removed from this territory through statecraft and later reintegrated into their communities of origin. Hence overheating's opposite, deceleration, demonstrates how spatial confinement is just as powerful in affecting identity as more conventional collective experiences of mobility.

Conversely, focusing on three ethnographic examples in Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the Basque Country, Jeremy MacClancy's chapter 2 warns against the temptation of identity-based studies to inadvertently reify new sets of categories – however anthropologically mindful. One would think that overheating, particularly 'ever increasing levels of multi-ethnic mix in urban areas' (p. 36), might produce greater identificatory chauvinism and xenophobia. But MacClancy's European case studies suggest an increase in conviviality rather than categorization where 'an open-ended commonality is more the

norm than a virulent sense of identity' (p. 35). At the same time, the debate persists, with contributors like Chris Hann arguing against an over-hasty discarding of the concept of identity. In contrast, Hann's chapter 14 argues for 'multiple scales of collective identity' (p. 245) that also emphasize 'the contingencies of the original constructions' (p. 246).

Identity as a concept conjures an array of interrelated epistemological and ontological traditions. These variegated ways of knowing and approaching the self, as both individuated and collectivized, occur under destabilizing forces – such as heightened cross-border mobility, migrant surveillance, and neoliberal globalization – that complicate conventional understandings of ethnic, national, regional, gender, and sexual based identity. At times, Eriksen and Schober's metaphors of overheating and cooling down risk being indistinguishable from that other analytic category which signifies a similar phenomenon of intensified connectivity and mobility: globalization. This tendency becomes most apparent during its sometimes-cosmetic usage within the volume's diverse yet disparate chapters.

Nonetheless, *Identity destabilised* still offers timely insights. Eriksen and Schober's claim about the overt explorations of the identity concept losing favour appears to be largely correct. Although still common within some academic fields, particularly within studies on race, identity as a foregrounded anthropological analytic has lost its mainstream prominence since the early 2000s. Despite the theoretical developments engendered by postmodernism and feminism – to name two – our discipline's attention has shifted to personhood's relationship with the domain of other emerging genres such as technology, medicine, the environment, and animals. Consequently, *Identity destabilised* provides a valuable corrective in foregrounding once more a fundamental anthropological subject through rich ethnographic examples and innovative theory.

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KAULI, JACKIE. *Mobail Goroka*. 17 mins, colour.
Digital download. Goroka: Centre for Social
and Creative Media, 2018. Free

Anthropologists know only too well the environmental destruction, culture loss, and hopelessness that prevail along the frontiers of global capitalism. The short ethnographic film,