

[on the right] may have more in common with the left than you imagine, for *many on the left feel like strangers in their own land too*' (p. 236). In this commonality, Hochschild sees a possibility for a discourse overcoming political division. This hope is of course not new and, on the national level, it might seem almost utopian at the moment. But with its warm, respectful, and reflective perspective, *Strangers in Their Own Land* sets an example for how to begin in one's own life.

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What Is the Deep Story of America's Far Right?

In this superb book, American sociologist Arlie Hochschild sets out to cross the 'empathy wall' that separates people of the left like herself from sympathisers with the radical right Tea Party. Rather than looking for quick certainties and being hostile to those who hold different political opinions, she wonders whether it 'is possible, without changing our beliefs, to know others from the inside, to see reality through their eyes, to understand the links between life, feeling, and politics' (p. 5)? She starts the journey to the heart of the American right with formulating a great paradox. Why is it

that people who most need government services hate government the most? And more specifically, why is it that the people living in southwest Louisiana, which has among the worst environmental pollution in the United States, are also those who most fiercely reject governmental regulations of corporate polluters? Surely, even fervent right-wingers, especially those deeply wedded to the land they live on, do not enjoy being exposed to chemical explosions or seeing their livelihoods sucked up in gigantic sinkholes. Yet, major environmental disasters have affected all the people Hochschild meets. Despite this, they keep voting for those who promise to further lure in oil and chemical companies, deregulate environmental rules, deny climate change, and get rid of federal government.

Hochschild addresses several existing explanations—such as the strategy of big corporations to create an 'astroturf grassroots following' (p. 13); voters being systematically misled by politicians, or still putting their cultural values before their economic interests—none of which she finds entirely satisfying. The one thing she misses in all existing explanations is 'a full understanding of emotion in politics. What, I wanted to know, do people *want to feel*, think they *should or shouldn't feel*, and what *do they feel* about a range of issues?' (p. 15). To get to the politics of emotions, Hochschild interviews about 40 Tea Party advocates, 20 teachers, social workers, lawyers, and government officials, and closely follows a small number of people to become acquainted with their histories, everyday lives, personal stories, and politics. Based on this, she constructs what she calls the 'deep story' of America's far right. The deep story is 'a feels-as-if story'—it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgement. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel. It is 'the *subjective prism* through which the party on the other side sees the world' (p. 135). It is the central

concept of Hochschild's account. Getting to 'hopes, fears, pride, shame, resentment' (p. 135) and anxieties of people of the far right allows to cross the empathy wall and to understand their politics. But it is more: Hochschild sees in understanding the deep story of people on the right a precondition for advancing on her own political goals, such as environmental protection, ending homelessness, or averting global warming.

So what is the deep story of America's far right? It is a story about the American dream, which becomes increasingly difficult to realise. Waiting patiently in line, the rural white Christian middle class, which forms the backbone of America's far right, sees less and less advances for itself and its children. Worse, it sees all kinds of people 'cutting the lines ahead of them' (p. 137)—people of colour, women, immigrants, refugees, public sector workers. The biggest line cutter of them all is of course President Obama, who could not possibly have gotten fairly from his modest—and biracial—upbringing to the helm of the state. But even Louisiana's state bird, the brown pelican, is among the line cutters: 'unbelievably, standing ahead of you in line is a brown pelican, fluttering its long, oil-drenched wings' (p. 138). What is common about all these line cutters is that they were standing far behind originally. They only could take over because their powerful ally, the federal government, has created all sorts of rules to allow them to advance fast. And the same government pushes back those who made America great in the first place. This deep story is an emotional one. Tea Party sympathisers deeply resent line cutters, feel betrayed by the government who favours minorities over themselves, and feel humiliated by liberals who condescendingly look down on them and their way of life.

Where does the deep story of the far right originate? Hochschild offers a fascinating, multi-layered account. Arguably, most importantly, the deep story responds

to a real economic squeeze, a reversal of the American dream. Referring to the economist Philip Longman, she argues that those working- and middle-class men born after 1950 experience downward mobility where 'at every stage of adult life, they have less income and less net wealth than people their age 10 years before' (p. 141). However, while not everyone reacts to this squeeze by moving to the right, her interviewees did. Why is that? Class, gender and racial biases add to the economic squeeze. These biases, in turn, have deep historical roots. Quoting W. J. Cash's classic *Mind of the South*, she argues that the plantation system 'threw up walls [which] enclosed the white man'. Poor white people 'identified "up" the social ladder' with the white planter, rather than down with the black slaves (p. 208). With oil having replaced cotton, but not the plantation culture, contemporary rural white Southerners continue to identify up with the oil magnates, hoping that they bring much-needed jobs. Further, the legacies of the Civil War and Civil Rights Movement have instilled resentment against the moralising and interfering North. Finally, the turn to the right is also rooted in a deeply religious culture. Taken together, an economic squeeze, history, and culture have shaped individuals with deeply rooted class, gender, and racial biases, a tendency to identify up the social ladder, distrust in government, and a great capacity for enduring even the most traumatic economic and environmental disasters.

Hochschild focuses on the deep story of the American Right. However, she concludes by warning that 'versions of the deep story seem to have gone global' (p. 230). Indeed, the concept travels well. To take just one—important—example in contemporary Europe, it is possible to construct the deep story that underlies the increasingly far right Orbán regime in Hungary. As in Hochschild's account, Hungary's turn to the far right started with a real economic squeeze, brought about by the

global financial crisis in 2008. With this, the dream of 'returning to Europe', of joining core Europe's economic and living standards was smashed. Worse, because of skyrocketing public and private debt, the country had to ask for an EU/IMF bailout, and accept its harsh conditions. The deep story of Hungary's far right, which swept to power in this context, is something like this: 'We are a small and vulnerable country, and great powers have always taken advantage of us. In the last decades, we have worked hard and sacrificed a lot to become a full and respected member of the European Union. To this aim, we have always played by the EU's rulebook. But we have been—as so often in our history—betrayed. The socialists have betrayed us by selling our country to foreign companies and accumulating debt. The EU, rather than respecting our achievements and rewarding our sacrifices, has enslaved us with its harsh conditions and treats us as second-class citizens. But we will not take this anymore. We demand and deserve respect. We will free ourselves from debt slavery, restore our sovereignty and regain our dignity. No one will ever meddle with us again.' While liberal Europeans might not like this deep story and might feel appalled by the pathos with which it is presented, digging into the economic, historical, and emotional conditions of the turn to the right in Europe's new periphery arguably can provide for more adequate political answers than current reactions which alternate between hubris and ingratiation.

But there's the rub. Hochschild's quest to understand the politics and the deep story of the far right, and her genuine sympathy with her interviewees, who mostly come across as very decent persons, is compelling. Yet, the end of the book strikes a different tone, without however fully addressing the consequences. She shows that it is not by chance that Donald Trump attracts the vote of those on shaky economic ground, who feel culturally marginalised

and demographically in decline, and who are endowed with the Southern mindset of identifying up the social ladder. More than any other presidential candidate, Trump's agenda of putting America First speaks to the deep story of the far right. He is an 'emotions candidate' (p. 225) who focuses on bringing the hidden deep feelings of the decent people we meet in Hochschild's book into the open, and making them the agenda of a loud, intolerant, and politically incorrect crowd that gets high on its newly achieved unity. While the book was completed before the presidential elections that brought Trump to power, eight months into the Trump presidency we can no longer ignore the fact that what ultimately holds the deep story of the American far right together is racism and the belief in white supremacy. In a similar vein, ever since the refugee crisis of 2015, Viktor Orbán's economic freedom fight has transformed into an increasingly shrill fight for the defence of white Christian Europe against Muslim hordes. The complicity of Hochschild's decent people on the far right and Viktor Orbán's squeezed middle-class voters in potentially militant and violent racism raises intriguing questions about the limits of empathy and far right decency. Hochschild's conclusions do not fully live up to these challenges. Her quest to understand the other side and her conciliatory message might be a somewhat inadequate response to the far right's ascent to power. It seems to me that a red line has been crossed, where empathy comes to its limits and decent people of all political colours have a duty to stand up for basic principles of humanity and respect for whatever is still left from nature. Of course, this raises other intriguing questions: is there a deep story to tell that would unite all decent people behind these goals, and if so, why has it not been told?

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