

## Book Review

**Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*.**

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### Introduction:

The Politics of Resentment is a book by Katherine J. Cramer that examines how Donald Trump was able to be elected president in 2016. Cramer's research focuses on Wisconsin and the contentious politics surrounding the politics of Governor Scott Walker. Through her research, Cramer found that rural residents in Wisconsin felt ignored by the state and federal government, and felt that their values were looked down upon by city dwellers. This resentment led to deep hostility towards Madison and Milwaukee, and towards state workers. Cramer argues that this rural consciousness is key to understanding recent Wisconsin politics (Cramer 2016).

### Structure:

The book consists of 8 chapters, each of them dedicated to specific steps of research or explanation.

The first chapter describes a political phenomenon called the "politics of resentment," which is fueled by social identities and feelings of resentment toward certain groups of people. The author argues that this type of politics is more likely to arise when people feel insecure about their economic situation and view politics in terms of opposition to other groups. The divide between rural and urban areas in American politics is discussed, and it is argued that this divide is an important factor in shaping people's political perspectives. The author says that people in rural areas often feel ignored and undervalued by decision makers, and that this feeling of distributive injustice is a key element of what she calls "rural consciousness." She suggests that this perspective can have a significant impact on people's political preferences and behaviors.

The second chapter is dedicated to methodology. Other chapters describe the research in more details, tell the stories of interactions and provide some factual data.

### Methodology:

In this part I would like to describe the methodology used by the author in more detail. Most information about methodology is written in the second chapter of the book ("A Method of Listening") (Cramer 2016). An "ethnographic approach" in studying public opinion is used. Meaning a focus on listening to people in depth and in their own environments in order to understand how they interpret the world around them. The author argues that this approach

allows for a better understanding of the perspectives and social identities that people use to make sense of politics, and provides a more nuanced explanation of why people hold the opinions they do. The text also notes that this approach is not focused on causation or predicting how one factor causes another, but rather on examining the nature and function of a particular phenomenon.

### Summary:

The writer is a political ethnographer and is visiting local communities to gather information and observations. The writer's research is personal and involves getting to know the people she is studying and spending time in their environments. She also has to consider her own identities and how she is perceived by others. The author used a stratified purposeful approach to select 27 communities from across the state, and then sought out groups within those communities that regularly met in a public place. The author conducted multiple visits to each group, and added additional groups as the research progressed. The data was analyzed using a data display spreadsheet and memos, and the author took steps to ensure the validity of their conclusions. Overall, the author's approach was interpretive and focused on understanding how people make sense of politics, rather than establishing causality.

### Case selection:

The author used a stratified purposeful approach, dividing the state into eight regions and then choosing one large and one small community from each region. The regions were selected based on several characteristics, including partisan leanings, median household income, and population density. In addition to the communities chosen from each region, the author also added eleven additional municipalities for additional variation. The final sample included 27 communities.

As (Patton 2002, 240) explains, “the purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core, although the latter may also emerge in the analysis. Each of the strata would constitute a fairly homogeneous sample.” A stratified purposeful approach to case selection is often used in qualitative research when the researcher wants to ensure that the sample is representative of the broader population being studied. This approach can help the researcher to control for potential biases in the sample and to better generalize the findings of the study.

After selecting the communities for the study, she sought out groups within them that regularly met in a place where she could easily introduce herself. She obtained information about these groups from University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension educators and local newspaper editors. These groups often met at early morning coffee klatches at diners, cafes, and gas stations. She provides more information about these groups in appendix B of the text.

### Position of the researcher:

The author's initial approach to research was predominantly positivist, following the scientific method and trying to be a neutral, scientific instrument.

Though she eventually learned that being a human being and being attentive to others' reactions was more important in order to be welcomed into conversations and gain valuable information. The author's urbane identity influenced the conversations they had with rural communities, and they had to be aware of how their presence altered those conversations. She also discusses the fundamental perspective of rural consciousness and how it shaped the way people talked about politics.

As we can see additionally to drawbacks of the positivist approach in ethnography, the accessibility also matters while invisibility position doesn't exist (Pachirat 2017). It might be challenging to explore rather closed communities if you present yourself as a neutral and scientific tool, so building the relations with people who you try to explore and in general being more humane solves the problem of accessibility. People are more welcome to see a real person, not a machine-like scientist. And as discussed in "Among Wolves": "The ethnographer is always situated at the intersection of multiple identities— racial, gender, sexual, class, and so forth—and these impact both how people in the field interpret and therefore respond to her and how she herself filters her observations." (Pachirat 2017, 19) Therefore it is mostly impossible for a human being to actually be a machine-like neutral scientist.

In my own experience, during my ethnographic research, I initially tried to be a neutral observer from a positivist perspective as well. However, I soon realized that I was missing a significant amount of information that would be available to me if I was a participant in the group I was trying to research. Therefore, I can understand the appeal of a positivist approach from a theoretical standpoint, but when faced with the reality of the situation, it becomes clear that this approach has a lot of limitations and problems.

### Fieldwork:

The author's initial plan was to conduct three rounds of visits to 27 sites, but the research ended up lasting longer due to the importance of the rural-urban divide and interesting developments in Wisconsin politics. The author also discusses the challenges of gaining access to groups of people of color, and the decision to not have a representative sample of the state's population.

The study involved visiting groups of people in Wisconsin, USA, to listen to their conversations and observe how they made sense of political topics. The author used an interpretivist approach and collected data through multiple visits to each group, adding additional groups as the research progressed. The author used a data display spreadsheet and memos to analyze the data and looked for patterns and commonalities across the groups. The author also took steps to ensure the validity of the conclusions drawn from the research.

### Analyzing data:

This part of the text describes the author's methodology for analyzing data in interpretive research on social-class identity. The author looks for patterns in conversations to identify the tools people use to make sense of politics, such as categories and frames. The author

also discusses their plans to validate their conclusions, including looking for alternative explanations and asking participants if they agree with the conclusions. The author also reflects on what they would do differently if they could start the study again.

## Conclusion:

The book by Cramer is an example of good ethnographic research and, in my opinion, it may be a good introduction to qualitative research methods for those who are inexperienced. The author clearly describes the methodological nuances of her approach, which helps readers understand why she chose to act in a certain way.

The topic of the research is relevant and increasingly concerning, especially considering the phenomenon of election-deniers in the US and how polarization is influencing US politics. Therefore, the research is valuable in terms of its results.

## Bibliography:

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