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Kaufmann, Eric (2020) Why evidence, not narrative, must guide us: responding to my critics. *Ethnicities* 20 (1), pp. 240-245. ISSN 1468-7968.

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Why Evidence, not Narrative, must Guide Us: responding to my critics

Eric Kaufmann

I thank *Ethnicities* and the contributors to this discussion for taking the time to read and comment on *Whiteshift*. I appreciate that with 600 pages and 100 graphs, it may shock those seeking a swift Albert O. Hirschman read. Indeed, this is one of the few points of unity among my interlocutors!

Be that as it may, I felt that nothing less could provide the multifaceted macro-perspective I felt was lacking in the literature. The aim was to draw connections between a series of relatively self-contained discussions around majority ethnicity in the West. Namely white flight and segregation in geography; national populism and the politics of immigration in political science; trust, assimilation and pluralism in sociology; the evolution of left-wing ideas and notions of national identity in history; and questions of liberal nationalism and multiculturalism in political theory.

I sought to cleave as closely as possible to large-N analysis, while adding a historical perspective and qualitative material to explore the complexity behind the trends. I sought to transcend disciplinary and methodological boundaries to make connections between four white majority responses to demographic change: fight, flee, repress and join. My wide angle approach will fail to satisfy specialists who, quite understandably, seek a more exhaustive picture of a smaller problem.

Without question, Ron Johnston is right that traversing this vast terrain produces a sensation of island-hopping incompleteness, yet the view from 10,000 feet can help place more focused

efforts in perspective. The chapters are spokes connected to the central axle of white majorities and national ethno-traditions passing through a period of rapid ethnic change. These shifts have been in train for five decades or so, yet I hold that we are in the early stages of a journey whose terminus is a century or two away.

If I had to characterise the political leaning of my critics, I would describe Johnston as realist/empirical but relatively apolitical, Ford as liberal-left and Holmwood as radical-left. This matters because *Whiteshift* is not simply a work of social science, but offers an ‘inclusive majority-within-inclusive nation’ normative vision that has generated considerable consternation among both far right and cultural left commentators. On alt-right websites, videos with thousands of likes assail me as a mongrel Jew trying to sell whites on race suicide through miscegenation. On the radical left, my ideas are supposedly a stalking horse for white supremacy. I am, however, gratified to have received a broadly favourable reception in the political centre, from, for instance, John Lloyd at the *Financial Times* to Tyler Cowen at *Marginal Revolution*.

Ron Johnston expresses a justified skepticism that political elites will be able to navigate the immense ethno-demographic upheavals to come. I accept this possibility, but believe that a multivocal approach to nationhood and liberal majority ethnicity offer western societies their best hope of piloting their kayaks (excuse the Canadian metaphor!) through these swirling waters.

Like the other reviewers, he occasionally toggles between ethnicity and nation, and between my empirical ‘is’ analysis and normative ‘ought’ prescriptions. Yet Johnston isn’t correct when he claims I hold Canada up as an exemplar. Indeed, English Canada is exceptional

among western nations due to its lack of popular collective memory (a legacy of loyalist collapse) and its cross-cutting economic and ethnic cleavages. Even if it succeeds in forging a northern version of polycentric Guyana or Mauritius, I doubt this will function as smoothly as more unipolar nation-states with their melting-pot majorities. Moreover, the English-Canadian model is not transferrable to most other places, which possess historical narratives to which conservatives are attached.

My view is that an important part of the civic unity that western societies have hitherto enjoyed stems from their secure ethnic majorities. As this stool is kicked away, I expect more social and political division. This said, I am not a scaremonger: I think the result will remain peaceful because of the many mechanisms which Steven Pinker shows to be reducing rates of violence in modern societies. Yet my own predilection is for a multivocalism-with-majority model, not a multicultural one. Here it's vital to distinguish my view of what the *ethnic* majority should do – open up to intermarriage but conserve myths of ancestry, traditions and subjectivity – and what *nation*-states can do to regulate ethnic relations and narrate their identity. In terms of the latter, I oppose attempts at compelled assimilation to a hymn sheet of approved symbols. Rather, I favour a multivocal arrangement in which people become attached to a range of symbols they select from a wide palette, so long as they respect broad red lines such as gender equality. The state will be an important voice in the conversation but much will emerge from below (Edensor 2002) rather than through the top-down processes of the French Third Republic so ably outlined by Eugen Weber (1976).

'Beiging', to borrow Michael Lind's term for the absorption of other racial strains into white majorities, is an ethnic process, multivocalism a national one, and neither is multiculturalist in the sense of using the state to propound diversity as the official version of national identity.

Having said this, multivocalism endorses the idea that *some* people – especially cosmopolitans or ethnically-conscious minorities – may be attached to a multicultural vision of the nation, which is as legitimate a way to be national as any other (Kaufmann 2016).

Highly-educated folk tend to tolerate racial and sexual diversity more than those without degrees, but are less tolerant of divergent political opinions. Accordingly, western social sciences and humanities, with the possible exception of economics, have grown ever more ideologically homogeneous since the 1960s to the point that those who challenge progressive narratives face considerable professional headwinds. Even within a discipline like political science where, say, Republican voters are extremely scarce, the ideological diversity that exists tends to reside in less contentious specialisms such as legislative studies. Ethnic and racial studies, which emerged out of New Left activism, is particularly inhospitable to those who challenge what Arthur Sakamoto terms the ‘majority-minority’ paradigm.

Despite this, I have chosen to go where I believe the evidence and logic take me, which is occasionally off the progressive piste. Confirmation bias and motivated reasoning are risks every individual should seek to overcome. In my estimation, the only way to do this is to begin with analytic logic, in which concepts are measurable, and instruments valid and reliable. Conclusions should follow from premises, and concepts such as racism should make analytic-empirical sense rather than being stretched, in Sartori’s terms, for political purposes.

Ordinarily, qualitative methods are robust due to a critical mass of conflicting viewpoints. However, where ideological diversity is lacking, as it is in ethnic studies, quantitative methods offer a better bulwark against confirmation bias. Rob Ford comes from the quantitative tradition, and this helps explain his critical, but generally liberal and rigorous,

approach. He compliments the range and richness of my material, but points to a series of omissions. Methodologically, he notes that I occasionally use unorthodox samples. I was upfront about this, and would never suggest that opt-in platforms like MTurk are as externally valid as representative surveys. Yet it is also true that when comparing between groups in a sample, while controlling for demographic and other key variables, one can draw inferences that will almost always hold up in larger datasets. We largely see this in my work on racial self-interest, in which opt-in and representative large-N sources broadly tell the same story. Indeed, thousands of academic papers and much of the psychology field rely on these platforms.

I didn't spend much time on the South. In a book where it was a struggle even to connect the dots I do, I didn't feel the need to rehash what everyone already knows. Moreover, the American immigration experience is, in my view, far more germane for understanding present trends than that of Slavery. Ford claims that antipathy to African-Americans was inherent in southern white identity prior to the Civil Rights era and that anti-Catholicism pervaded the Scots Protestant identity of the 1930s. Correct, but it doesn't follow that the same holds true today. Is anti-Catholicism inherent in contemporary Presbyterianism? Are Catholics soaked in anti-Semitism, as they were for centuries?

The point here is that it is important to step outside the majority-minority paradigm which views white supremacy as an iron law of nature. The past may mean that: a) white identity remains anti-black; b) has become unusually pro-minority, or c) there is no relationship between these two variables. The 2016 American National Election Study would suggest the latter. If today's white identity is actively anti-black, or today's Protestants anti-Catholic, it is incumbent on researchers to disprove the null hypothesis that there is no relationship. One

cannot ground claims in narrative - whether that of an eternally fallen whiteness or a forever downtrodden blackness.

Ford fears I have maligned the cosmopolitan left, and that extremism on campus doesn't represent the whole loaf. I agree. In the book I am very clear that most academics are centre-left rather than radical, and that cosmopolitans are an important and valuable part of society who are also important for nationalists!

Yet I am not sure the moderate left has come to terms with its radicals. What is the centre-left argument against bias response teams, open letters against scholars who wish to objectively assess the historical record of colonialism, or activists who insist that an innocuous phrase like 'long time no see' is racist? The campus centre-left is largely silent on these matters because it's not obvious, when equity and diversity have been canonised as sacred values, why any limits should be placed on those seeking to weaken 'privileged' groups and minister to the most sensitive individual.

I applaud the liberal leftists who helped bring about racial equality and I would have been on the cultural left if the year was 1963. The struggle isn't over: I wrote that anti-Muslim prejudice is a problem, Donald Trump's remarks on Mexicans were racist and that it is important to monitor and address discrimination on the basis of race. But I would like this to be done in a collaborative way that is evidence- rather than narrative-led, and recognises that all groups participate in discrimination against all groups. For instance, black police shoot African-American suspects at higher rates than white police do, and it is the overwhelmingly Latino, Asian and black cab drivers of Los Angeles that discriminate against black riders.

Setting this up as a white-versus-minority issue, or conflating white privilege – which is real – with active white domination, is both misleading and counterproductive.

Power is important, but must be defined and measured rather than serving as an unexamined trump card. I remain unconvinced that it's a major driver of identity. There are dominant ethnic groups and subaltern ones. People are attached to both because psychologists tell us that these attachments crystallise at a very early age. Sometimes the power ranking shifts, as with Russians in the Baltic states, but this doesn't lead members of the demoted group to automatically drop their old affiliation. If Black Caribbean earnings in Britain came to exceed that of White Britons and all prejudice disappeared, I wouldn't expect a withering away of their identity. Dominance seems largely orthogonal to processes of identification, though I am open to experiments or process-tracing which might prove me wrong.

Finally, I take Ford's point that Alba's view of assimilation is more two-way than mine. I think this is an empirical question. For example, if we consider language, there is no question that the number of words added by immigrant groups ('hamburger', 'schmuck'), however impressive, is dwarfed by the vocabulary which immigrants acquire from the host society. In other respects the ratio may differ, but I would need to be convinced by proper evidence.

John Holmwood represents the critical race perspective, which I fear is grounded in a style of argument based on foundational narratives such as white supremacy. A lack of viewpoint diversity within the field, combined with an often anti-positivist methodology, means debate takes place in a self-referential, self-confirming way, within an intellectual arena bounded by self-evident truths. There is no real discussion here of data and method, but merely a recourse to the bad old past (which by implication – but *sans* evidence – must pervade the present). He

misreads (wilfully?) my argument on immigration as clamouring for a policy which is restricted to 'only' religious and racial groups that resemble the majority (with the obligatory shout out to Enoch Powell as the clincher). He mistakenly claims I treat white supremacist survey respondents sympathetically, that I suggest the media is somehow 'all left modernist' or that I endorse white genocide theory when I painstakingly detail precisely where it is false and conspiratorial.

He finishes with Pastor Niemeyer's parable. He might as well have garnished it with a biblical passage for all this tells us. It does, however, offer us an insight into what passes for too much scholarship in this genre. The field begins from sacred founding events like the Holocaust and Jim Crow rather than testable propositions. To extrapolate from rare tragedies like the Holocaust, beginning with the dogs that bark, is a classic case of selecting on the dependent variable, a mark of bad science. I understand the stakes involved: I wouldn't be writing this if my grandfather didn't escape from Czechoslovakia in 1938 with a fanatical anti-Semitic regime on the march. But grasping genocide is about more than assuming that past equals present. Rather, it requires us to consider all countries over time, noting which variables correlate with genocide onsets. Harff (2003) finds, for example, that a universalist ideology like socialism or Islam, or civic nationalism, is no less likely to correlate with genocide than ethnic nationalism, to say nothing of ethnic majority identity, which is the norm in 80 percent of the world's countries.

Finally, is the current progressive approach of pressing for cosmopolitanism in elite institutions making the world more or less secure? I won't mimic the vogue for manipulating fear by suggesting the end is nigh, but if the claim is that permitting the expression of

moderate majority identity is risky, this has to be compared not with the peaceful present but with the risks that continuing to suppress it carries.

The rhetoric of 'normalising' and 'mainstreaming' that is the evidence-free mainstay of radical doctrine relies on the idea that people are blank slates, and that the whites among them would be cosmopolites if one could only control the flow of information they receive. To which my question is the standard scientific one: how do you know you're right? If you're wrong, as the communists were, what are the consequences, and at what point will you accept responsibility for them?

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