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Transcript

Chris Martin: This is Chris Martin, the host of *Half Hour of Heterodoxy*. Before we start the show, a quick announcement. Heterodox Academy is now accepting applications for the HX Community Small Events Reimbursement Award. We have 10 awards of up to \$500 each available between January and August 2020 to support small events organized by members of HX Community's groups.

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[Welcome to *Half Hour of Heterodoxy*, featuring conversations with scholars and authors and ideas from diverse perspectives. Here's your host Chris Martin.]

Chris Martin: Eric Kaufmann is my guest today. He's a professor of politics at Birkbeck College, University of London, and he was one of the first people to join Heterodox Academy. We will be talking about his book *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*. It's about how the cultural and ethnic transformation of English-speaking nations, especially the United States, has threatened many citizens who have a white identity. He suggests a number of ways of dealing with this transformation including his preferred solution, multivocalism, which he contrasts with multiculturalism.

Hi Eric. Thanks for joining us on the show.

Eric Kaufmann: Hi Chris. Great to be here.

Chris Martin: So in your book *Whiteshift*, you talk about both the right and the left in the modern era in quite a bit of detail. Going to the populist right to begin with, what do you think is the reason for the rise of the populist right in the west in the last 10 years?

Eric Kaufmann: Well, I think I very much come down on the side of – that it is cultural factors and not economic factors first of all. So I think the data are pretty clear on that, that in the social sciences, I know sometimes there can be a debate and there is a debate of course.

But I really don't think that the explanations based on people who lose out economically due to globalization or inequality or even regional inequalities, I don't think those hold much water when you get down to the individual level data. It really comes down to attitudes towards in particular immigration.

Attitudes to immigration are absolutely central to I think understanding the rise of the populist right. Not the populist left but the populist right and in the West in particular, not India or Eastern Europe so much or Latin America. But certainly we're talking about the search that we've seen since 2014 in Western Europe and North America. Then this is very much connected to the immigration issue.

Chris Martin: And you differentiate between the US and Canada here. Canada has also changed quite a bit culturally. So talk a bit about how you investigated that difference and the history of Canada that you pulled into the book?

Eric Kaufmann: Well, yeah, so it's interesting. You do see some similarities between Canada and the US in terms of polarization. So Canadian politics is now more polarized than it has arguably ever been on the kinds of dimensions like immigration attitudes that are important also in the US.

So that has happened kind of in the same timeframe the last five, six years or so. However the differences that the – the left-right split in English Canada is more like 60 percent of people vote for broadly speaking left liberal type parties like the Liberal Party or the New Democratic Party and only 40 percent are kind of maximum for the conservatives whereas in Britain and the US, it's more like 50-50.

Then that, just that difference makes an enormous difference as to whether a populist right party can emerge.

So for example, if there was a proportional representation in Canada, you would – I would expect to see the People's Party which is this new populist right party be arguably on double digits. But because of the fact that there is pressure essentially to vote against someone like Trudeau and therefore to vote for a viable party, the conservatives will get the vote that would have gone to the populist right alternative.

So I think Canada is a little bit to the left of the US. But similar things are going on. The only thing I would say of course is that there is a difference in so far as in Anglo-Canadian history. It's a little different in the sense that the conservative tradition, the culturally conservative tradition, the collective memory in English Canada was tied to the British Empire and loyalism and that essentially declined with the British Empire the 1950s and 1960s when Canada got its current flag and switched from the Union Jack.

So the destruction of that tradition left a vacuum which sort of progressive left liberal ideology which became multiculturalism which was enshrined in Canada's constitution in 1971 was able to establish itself in a real deep way. But what we've seen I think in the last five years is the wheels coming off that consensus, so that conservative voters are very much cooler on multiculturalism for example than liberal or NDP voters.

So it's very much a – part of the partisan divide now. It's no longer consensus as it might have been perhaps 10 years, 15 years ago.

Chris Martin: And when you contrast the US with the rest of the Anglo sphere, because Australia, New Zealand and the UK also have a popular stripe now. In the US, there does seem to be a combination of populism and totalitarianism or anti-democratic tendencies. We've seen voter suppression. We've seen foreign interference in elections. We have consequences.

So do you feel like there are historical factors or current demographic factors that explain why the US is different there, different from say the UK?

Eric Kaufmann: Well, I think the US has had a more polarized, nakedly polarized form of politics perhaps for longer. You know, starting with Gingrich for example in the US contract with America. You can see that more partisan attack commercials which weren't – I mean they've come in more recently in Canada in particular. But that wasn't a part of the political culture.

So there's just this longer history of gloves-off kind of political combat, which maybe means some of the norms are stretched a little more and of course as you say with Trump, he has obviously been doing that.

I mean I think – you know, whether I call it totalitarian, I would certainly call it anti-democratic. But I guess when he defies a Supreme Court order or throw the journalist in jail, I think that will be a very important new step, which I haven't yet seen in fact. So I think it's worrying but it's not in my view alarming in the way that what's happening perhaps in Hungary and Poland might be. So yeah, I think part of it has to do with the polarization of the political culture.

Chris Martin: And another trunk of your book is about the left. You pointed the intellectual origins of the left not in the 19th century or early 20th century but to the 1960s specifically. So why do you point to that as a turning point?

Eric Kaufmann: Well, I think – I guess part of this is, is a dialogue a little bit and some of the excellent work that Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt have done on – where they're talking about this is a psychological issue, this issue of fragility linked perhaps to children not having as much freedom when they're younger to make mistakes and so on.

I think that's certainly part of the story but I guess I see this as more of an ideological development. So you can for example see in the 1960s the occupation of universities by militant

leftists for a year. People bringing guns into university offices, demanding 50 ethnic studies post, demanding that every colored – so-called colored student be admitted.

So it's much more radical stuff in many ways even then in Middlebury or in Evergreen State. So I guess I don't see that the – I think the template was already established. It's just a question of two things. One, the faculty in the universities were opposed to this kind of militancy for the most part. I mean there were a few sympathetic people. But it was generally opposed and they wanted actually – they supported the authorities cracking down on this.

Secondly I think the scale has changed. So with social media in particular, the ability to organize a flash mob. Say if there's an – a speaker that's deemed trans-phobic that goes on the network. Suddenly you've got a mob. You've got an unopened letter. You've got all this pressure that's brought to bear very quickly.

So I think the scale has changed but I don't think the fundamental template for the ideology which is a blend – really it's a hybrid of ideas that are kind of bohemian liberal, almost individualist anarchist, and a sort of cultural form of egalitarianism in these two things have kind of come into an uneasy hybrid, which has a whole bunch of contradictions but seems to be – it's not a socialist Marxist ideology and equally it's not a liberal ideology.

But it is a mix of the two and it has been unfolding steadily I think since the '60s. Now granted there are some new innovations like the trans issue, but the focus on issues around race, gender and sexuality I think has been there certainly since the late '60s, early '70s.

I don't see that much difference. I kind of compare it to evangelical Protestantism which went through its great awakenings. It had always certain core issues but there were innovations. So at one time it was Sunday opening and drink and then at another time, it's the abortion issue or school – so there are going to be new issues cropping up. But it's based in an underlying religious ideology and I think the same is true for what I call left modernism is hybrid ideology and it goes through these periodic awakenings.

One in the late '60s, one in the late '80s, early '90s when the term “political correctness” came in and “speech codes” came in and then another burst since about 2014, 2013.

Chris Martin: So speaking of Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, their book is primarily about the United States. I mean young people here. Jon has spoken on occasion about whether other countries are changing at the same pace or not. But since you're in England right now, what do you think about the UK and the rest of Europe? Do you feel like the psychological turn and that the tendency to view certain things is causing mental illness rather than just being uncivil or politically incorrect? Do you feel like that's affecting Europe as well?

Eric Kaufmann: I do. I think Britain has always been a few – it has been a bit behind the US in these developments. There is a sort of – there's an older kind of Marxist, more materialist left tradition which is in some ways a bulwark against the identity left tradition. But I think it's giving way to that – the newer generation.

People coming into the academy are more identity left and less materialist left. So I think it is entering at the faculty level and also amongst the students. I mean in the Academic Freedom Survey that Tom Simpson at Oxford and myself recently did, I mean you can see that when you ask people questions about the importance of academic freedom versus emotional safety, there's a significant group that would like to see emotional safety trump academic freedom when there's a conflict.

There's also a significant group that's pro-academic freedom, right? So it's a divided situation. But there is a – it's almost at a 50-50 split between those groups. Then you have a group in the middle that's malleable.

So I think that you definitely are seeing these things on British campuses. We've had a number of high profile platforming incidents. We've had some administrations, perhaps not as many as in the liberal arts colleges of America but some institutions for example paying students to record micro aggressions that they come and find. So just almost like a virtue police to go around.

So it's not biased response teams but it is getting there and the decolonization agenda is proceeding. So this agenda is making way. It seems to me that the Anglo sphere countries are the worst. Canada is probably where the US is. Brits, getting there. I don't know as much about Australia but you do hear about incidents down there.

I think Europe it depends. Sweden is perhaps closest to the Anglo sphere model. But some countries like Norway which I was in – one of the things you realize is in a very small country of whatever it is, four million, where people know each other personally across partisan lines, it's harder for that total form of polarization to take root. So I think those countries might have a certain resistance to the wilder forms of this.

Chris Martin: That's interesting. Speaking of the academy, you do mentioned Heterodox Academy in the book and it was a pleasant surprise to find my own name there all of a sudden when I joined the page.

One of the former guests on this show was Ashley Jardina. She talked about her book *White Identity Politics*, which has been cited by a number of people including you. So tell me a bit about what you took from her book and how that shaped your investigation of white identity because the investigation of white cultural identity is a big part of your book.

Eric Kaufmann: Yeah. So I've been influenced a lot by Ashley Jardina's work, both her dissertation which became a large part of the book and also the articles that she has done with Nicholas Valentino. One of the most striking arguments I think in the book was this idea that attachment to an identity is not the same as dislike of an out group. So attachment to in group and that holds as much for whites as minorities.

For example in the American National Elections study, a white person's warmth towards whites on a zero to 100 thermometer is actually – a white person who feels warmer towards white Americans does not feel cooler towards black or Hispanic Americans than a white American who doesn't feel warm towards white Americans.

So that kind of – and this turns out as a sort of – a well-established many decades of finding in social psychology unless there is of course a contest over resources or a violent contest over resources. It differs for example from the republican democrat relationship where warmth towards the republicans does translate into coolness towards the democrats. So it's a zero sum relationship whereas the black white or black Hispanic relationship is not a zero sum relationship and that's interesting in so far as – very often a lot of the research has assumed these two things go together for majority groups in particular.

So I found that interesting but also her work on white identification and how it was an independent predictor of support for Trump and I think that certainly influenced me.

I mean my book is very much about this concept of majority ethnicity. So group ethnicity which is about groups who consider themselves descendant from the same ancestors and groups that form around that belief and that can be a majority group like white Americans or it can be minority groups such as African-Americans and so the – and the other thing that I've sort of found in subsequent research by the way just – is that this identification with being white is very much tied to identification with ancestry.

So if you identify strongly as Italian or Irish or German, you're going to have a strong – tend to have a very strong identity with white. If you don't have a particularly strong identification with ancestry, then it will be weaker and that holds for minorities and majorities.

So I think part of this is to try and understand where a lot of this politics is coming from, people who are strongly identified to ancestry and by extension to the larger circle, which might be say white American and in a way does not see it as some sort of automatically toxic thing.

Now it doesn't mean that we want to encourage everybody to identify as strongly as possible with that identity but equally I think we need to have a discussion over how do we fairly treat different groups, all of whom have – some of whose members have this need to identify, some of whose members do not have this need to identify.

I think once you get into a symmetry is where one group such as ethnic majority groups are treated as toxic if they have this identity in others or not. Then I think we get into problems. The other thing I would say by the way is that – again, this is not work that I've published yet. But in Canada and the US, there's pretty similar, slightly higher level of white identity, at least in the surveys that I've conducted which are admittedly not –

Chris Martin: Are you talking about the question that says is having a white identity important to you or ...?

Eric Kaufmann: Right. Yeah, yeah. So exactly. So he's having how important to you is your racial identity. Essentially it's their question. The differences by partisanship are largest in America whereas in Britain and Canada, the differences are generally much smaller. But in all cases, this correlates highly to – people are asked, “What's your ancestry? Put it in this box. How attached are you to this?”

That is by far the strongest predictor of racial identity. So I think – I don't know. Part of this is to say we need to actually look at this thing more even-handedly and part of the problem does arise where you have this asymmetric treatment of people's attachments to these groups.

Chris Martin: And you pointed the incident at Georgia State University where a student tried to form a white student organization or white student union and similar occurrences and how there's a – it tends to be stigmatized. So in America, I as an immigrant, initially when I came here, I didn't see a problem with any students of any race including white students wanting to form a student union for people of their ethnicity but I've come to understand that historically speaking, an organization that's white only tends to be formed by people who are white supremacists, maybe not violent white supremacists.

So there's that historical aspect too and you pointed this interesting fact that we might be able to move toward an era where that isn't so and where we – the white race is just like any other race. It has its cultural identity. It can form groups. Do you think that's feasible?

Eric Kaufmann: Yeah, I do think it is. I mean I sort of have more of a view that the ethnicity, which is ultimately about subjective myths, unless I think about objective characteristics in the long run, like skin color – so I'm talking essentially about a group that could essentially become multi-hued if you like through intermarriage.

So I think that's the direction that I kind of would like to see this go. But I equally think that if – I don't think you can maintain asymmetries in terms of who you're going to allow to have an association.

Now you're right that of course the people who tend to then set these up – the only people who tend to set these up will tend to be white supremacists. But what you would hope for – it's a bit like the English identity here in Britain, the English flag. It has kind of become appropriated more by people who aren't associated with the far right. Even the Union Jack went through that trajectory.

So the hope would be that you might get it appropriated by more kind of liberal-minded, less – not supremacist groups. Then the issue is how do you ever get to that point if the instant this thing is trotted out, you get accusation of supremacy, right?

It's a bit of a chicken and an egg. So I do think there has to at some point be greater trust extended to some goodwill and then I think maybe that can encourage a more open-minded attitude towards things such as interracial marriage for example.

Chris Martin: What other solutions that you have or how might polarization – let me rephrase that. So what other solutions to polarization do you see? Since it's one of the topics of solutions.

Eric Kaufmann: Well, I think this ultimately will only abate when you have – I mean I think a significant assimilation into that ethnic majority group through intermarriage is ultimately where I see it going. That the notion that you can stigmatize this group, that they will decline demographically and everything will be OK I think is just not a recipe I think for getting rid of polarization.

I mean the populace could lose. There's no inevitability here, so they may lose. But you're going to have – I think Yascha Mounk talks about this. Is that really what you want, a society of – where you have a resentful populace voting minority?

Yeah. OK. You don't have Donald Trump in office but then you've still got a big problem and you may have – the Senate may become the focus as I mentioned in the book in the US of that sort of rearguard action that prevents government from working normally.

So I think you have to address the concerns of the majority group. What I argue is one way of addressing them is to think through this idea of well, actually your ethnicity in terms of collective memories and traditions can maintain itself arguably as a majority position, as a majority demographic. But the racial boundaries are going to become beige and blurred over time with intermarriage.

I think that is the model that I come up with, this idea of an inclusive majority, more inclusive than now in terms of skin color. But still that it's traditions and memories are something that are valued and continue.

But of course not everybody has to be part of this. So there is a voluntary melting pot that people can join. But there's also the wider nation which is politically defined, which is civically defined and individuals can connect to in their own way.

So I also have this concept of multivocalism which says this is not the idea of a hinge sheet. Everybody must attach through the constitution of the US and the American creed or the French republic but actually you can find your own way. It's like a menu. You can choose your own root and maybe for you, the US is a multicultural country and it's a nation of immigrants and that's what you love about it. That's great. That's fine.

I'm against this idea of a one size fits all national identity and more of a kind of menu where people can adapt, can pick the symbols that matter and mean something to them and it won't necessarily be the same symbols as someone else.

So it may be that Western settlements in Plymouth Rock matter to one person and on the other hand, the African-American experience in multiculturalism matters to another person. As long as no one is saying this is the only way to be American, I don't think there's a problem with having those different narratives as long as everybody is identifying to the same thing.

Chris Martin: So to some degree, it's like being in a city, a large city where people practice multiple religions but don't go to war over it.

Eric Kaufmann: Well, there's a difference I say between multiculturalism which is identifying back to another homeland and encouraging that which I'm not in favor of and what I call multivocalism which is just identifying with a different version of Americanism.

Chris Martin: OK.

Eric Kaufmann: So it's not the same as identifying with your roots in Somalia or France and that being a focus of your identity. But it's more identifying let's say with – if you're in a city that's multicultural, you identify multicultural diversity as what you value about America. That's fine but that's a different version of Americanism than someone who values the landscape in Western settlement.

So it's different symbolic configurations and symbolic and mythic signatures. But they are all about the same flag, the same country and that's a different thing from identifying with different flags, different countries, which by the way I think people should be free to do. I'm not saying that people shouldn't be free to do them. But in terms of what I think might be useful to encourage is this more this multivocalist approach.

Chris Martin: And going back to the topic we started with, populism, one of the concerns as you said is cultural change. But in the US, we've seen much more concern over immigration from Latin America and change due to immigration in particular from Mexico and not so much because of immigration from Asia even though Latin American or at least Mexican immigration in particular has plateaued. So there's actually more immigration – well, their rate is accelerating more noticeably from Asia. So what do you think of as the tension there?

Eric Kaufmann: Essentially in the US, once the Immigration Act of 1965 opened things up again, the predominant flow was coming from Latin America, especially Mexico. There was a significant undocumented component to that and so this connection between Latin American immigration in illegality becomes established. It becomes correlated in the data from the early 1990s.

So that becomes the established template. The Asian immigration tends to be legal. It tends to be middle class or higher skilled and so it doesn't have the same connotations.

So yeah, that and of course we start to see a shifting in the source. It's from Mexico to other Latin American countries particularly Central America, if you take host 2014 in particular.

So I don't think it's – the fact that there are more Mexicans leaving than arriving is not going to affect that picture in people's heads. However, I also don't think it's totally unrelated to what's happening at the border. So the fact that in this last year, there was a doubling of the number of people coming to the border I think is germane for the salience of that issue.

I mean immigration now amongst republican voters I think is 35 to 40 percent says their – the top issue facing the country which is unprecedented and really what we saw in Britain prior to the Brexit vote amongst lead voters. So that level of salience is something that yes, is partly a factor of Fox News and Donald Trump. But it's also connected to I think real events at the border.

Now you're right that in the future with Asian migration becoming the dominant flow, how is that going to then change the politics of this. That's an interesting question. I mean if we look at other countries, in New Zealand where in 2017 the labor government was elected in coalition with the populist right party called New Zealand First.

The promise there was to reduce and cut immigration in half and this was mainly Asian immigration. So – and also in Australia with Pauline Hanson and to some extent in Canada with the People's Party too. I think Asian immigration would be the main issue that tends to drive opinion. So I don't rule out the possibility that in America, at some point in the future, this could be the issue but the legacy of those decades of particularly undocumented immigration is simply fixed – a view in the public mind and focuses more on Latin Americans as well more recently on Islam. But that's to do more with the migrant crisis and perhaps terrorism.

Chris Martin: Right. As an Asian immigrant in the south, I do feel like there's a certain older generation of white southerners and as a segment of them that's perhaps suspicious of both Asians and Mexicans. But among younger generations including middle-aged people, I feel like there's definitely a contrast which is – it interested me as an immigrant.

Our time is almost up. But I would like to talk about your PX report with Tom Simpson on academic freedom in the UK. What have you found there and what are your recommendations?

Eric Kaufmann: Yeah. So we ran a survey. It was about 500 undergraduate students and we – what we find essentially is that there is a significant base of support for free speech and academic freedom amongst students. But there's also a significant group that prioritizes emotional safety over academic freedom.

What we really wanted to do was to set out a bunch of concrete situations. So Jordan Peterson for example being forced out from his visiting professorship at Cambridge or Germaine Greer being no platform. We wanted to know what people's views are on these concrete issues because often there is a support in the abstract for academic freedom.

But once you pit it against emotional safety, you start to see a division and it's partly gendered but it's certainly what we see is a range of views.

In terms of our recommendations, I mean I think – I guess we're becoming of the view that the – at least in Britain where higher education is government-run, that a greater degree of – essentially that some sort of protection for academic freedom probably needs to be institutionalized.

This notion of academic freedom champions. So there are equality and diversity champions in the universities but that you would need to have a sort of separate institutional architecture for oversight of academic freedom.

In addition, I think it's worth thinking about, government specifying more closely what the definition of some of these terms such as sexism, racism, transphobia are in order to prevent actors who would expand the meaning of those terms in such a way that they would then shut down academic freedom.

So those are just some ideas. I'm just not sure that the system will fix itself without some sort of government regulation of some kind. Not intrusive but some sort of specification of the meaning of some of these terms.

Chris Martin: Is there legislation pending in parliament at the moment about any of these things?

Eric Kaufmann: There has been more movement I would say in this administration than perhaps there has been in the past. What happened in the past was there was guidance issued to universities but it was – again, any guidance that's too non-specific that allows loopholes, those loopholes will be taken. So it didn't stop the no-platforms or any of the academic freedom problems. I think this government is more serious and I have some contacts in number 10 which is the policy unit and they are I think interested in trying to sort of further some of these ideas about – how do you close the loopholes in these definitions that allow essentially activists to shut down speakers they don't like by defining them as offensive and harmful to the institution and so forth.

There has to be a way of I think just becoming a bit more granular on some of these definitions in a way that would sort of take away that root because any opening, it's a bit like water, it will always find the point of least resistance. You need to kind of – you need to have a more watertight set of procedures that will prevent the emotional safety and harm trope from being used to shut down academic freedom.

Chris Martin: Well, Eric, thanks for joining us on the show. It has been great having you.

Eric Kaufmann: Thanks Chris. Thanks very much.

Chris Martin: Eric's book is *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration, and the Future of White Majorities*.

If you enjoyed listening to the show, please leave us a review on iTunes because it helps spread the word about the show. And as always you can reach me at podcast@heterodoxacademy.org and follow me on Twitter at [ChrisMartin76](https://twitter.com/ChrisMartin76).

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