

# “Who Is the Most European of Us All?”

## Occidentalism, European Identity, and Counterknowledge on Race and Genomics

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**Abstract** *This article examines how various online communities with racist or identitarian agendas, such as White nationalists or European preservationists, engage with and produce knowledge about human genomics and biogeographical ancestry. It begins by showing how these communities have developed and disseminated a form of “counterknowledge” online, focusing on human biodiversity, race, and genomics, in opposition to what they perceive as “mainstream science.” It emphasizes that this counterknowledge cannot be dismissed as mere “ideology” or “junk science,” highlighting its complex and ambivalent relationship with mainstream population genetics. It characterizes this counterknowledge as a form of decentralized citizen science that fosters participatory research programs on the internet, often exploring the deep genomic history of specific ethno-political groups. The second section examines how the genetic identity of Europe is a contested topic within these online communities. Rather than broadly referring to “Whiteness” or “European descent,” these discussions often emphasize distinctions within “Whiteness,” particularly between “Mediterraneans” and “Nordicists.” The third section investigates how notions of European DNA acquire a “social life” on these forums and how individual identities are negotiated in these spaces. The article underscores that the genomic identities discussed on these platforms are not entirely novel biosocialities; instead, they are deeply rooted in older frameworks for constructing and defining identity, such as race, blood, territory, and ancestry.*

### Introduction

In this article, I examine how various online communities with racist or identitarian agendas, such as White nationalists or European preservationists, engage with and produce knowledge about human genomics and biogeographical ancestry.<sup>1</sup> During the

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1 It is difficult to find the appropriate label to describe these communities. While some explicitly claim they are White supremacists or “European preservationists,” many others prefer to define themselves as “Nordicists” and “Mediterraneans.” It would be inappropriate to picture them

early years of the internet's development, enthusiastic naiveté abounded. Some scholars sincerely believed that the internet would enable a global and fluid world and put an end to racial identifications and racist claims, leading to the formation of radically new biosocialities.<sup>2</sup> Since then, however, a very different, bleak reality has appeared. Scholars are now focusing mainly on the fact that the internet and social media are actually a locus of intense work reelaborating racial identities and hierarchies. Many groups with racist or racialist agendas have used the internet as a strategic field to promote their claims.<sup>3</sup> I focus here on a specific dimension of this phenomenon, which was still largely ignored when I launched this research in 2013.<sup>4</sup> White nationalists, self-described European preservationists, and other racist communities have largely appropriated the theme of human biological diversity on the internet. They have harnessed the growing knowledge about genomic variations and biogeographical ancestry to claim that race is a biological reality, reinforce their own racial identities, and, more broadly, promote genetic determinism and racial hierarchies. Until very recently, scholars have focused largely on the uses that Afro-American, Jewish, Native American, Irish, and other minority groups had made of DNA ancestry testing, showing how DNA had been integrated into a positive (albeit highly problematic) quest for social justice, reparation, and heritage (Nash 2008 and Nash 2015; Abu El-Haj 2012; Bliss 2012; TallBear 2013; Nelson 2016; Abel 2021). They have also analyzed how genomics has been integrated, through national genome programs, into national identity building or genomic sovereignty (Wade et al. 2014; Rear-don 2019). While these are all very important points to study, we should not neglect other

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as forming homogeneous groups. On some forums, such as anthroscap or forum.biodiversity, one finds not only individuals clearly driven by ideological and political agendas, but also people merely interested in genetic ancestry and in the deep history of their regions, without necessarily sharing the same racialist or identitarian agenda. The Apricity, Occidental Enclave or Stormfront are more explicitly White supremacist and racist.

- 2 The concept of biosociality was initially coined by Paul Rabinow in his seminal article "Artificiality and Enlightenment: From Sociobiology to Biosociality" (Rabinow 1996), to describe how natural or biological material (such as genes) can be invested and worked on through sociocultural practices, in such a way that it may lead to the formation of radically "new group and individual identities." This concept has since been widely used, especially by Hacking, Novas, Rose, and others, to contrast the old ways of thinking about race, ethnicity, or biomedical entities, with more creative and plastic identities articulating biological materials to define new collective identities and forms of subjectivities.
- 3 On this renewed interest in race and racism on internet since the mid-2000s, see, among others, Daniels 2009; Daniels 2013; Chow-White 2008; Nakamura, and Chow-White 2012.
- 4 The situation has changed after Donald Trump's first election, which showed the strength of alt-right communities online in the United States, and after the growth of explicitly racist political agendas in numerous countries, which were largely promoted through internet and social networks. In 2016, the Jewish New York-based journal *The Forward* published an article on "Human Biodiversity: The Pseudoscientific Racism of the Alt-Right," rightly insisting on the fact that the keywords "human biodiversity" were systematically associated with far-right websites on the Internet. An article in *Vox* reiterated the same point in 2017. Between 2019 and 2021, Aaron Panofsky and his colleagues published some results of their important studies on US White supremacists (Panofsky and Donovan 2019; Panofsky, Dasgupta, and Iturraga 2021). These studies, which mainly focus on US White nationalists, converge largely with my own, which was more interested in European preservationists. On the US White supremacists' agenda, see also Stern 2019.

political and social uses relating to neither discriminated minorities nor national programs. One of the first empirical surveys on bloggers who revealed their DNA ancestry tests emphasized that a vast majority identified as "White, European and European American" (88 percent) (Wagner and Weiss 2012).<sup>5</sup> This information contrasted with the scarcity of studies focusing on the uses of DNA ancestry tests by this kind of population in scholarship. I examine some of these uses here, which are clearly connected to alt-right and European ethnonationalist agendas. I am certainly not claiming that these uses represent the majority of the uses of DNA ancestry tests by this population; many individuals are only interested in their genealogy or the deep history of their country. It is, however, worth noting that these uses are far from marginal. In 2019, the forum The Apricity claimed to have 20,000 members and some 180,000 visits per month; until it was closed down in 2020, Forumbiodiversity claimed to have 12,000 members and 290,000 visits per month; and Dieneke's anthropology blog counted approximately 1.3 million page views since its foundation in 2005, as well 1,500 followers, mainly from the United States and Europe.<sup>6</sup> This is not a huge community, but it does not address a small audience, either. Moreover, one has to keep in mind that, on the internet and social media, the main issue is *visibility*, and in terms of visibility, alt-right and European ethnonationalists strategically dominate the field of human biological variations. The term "human biological diversity" has been largely monopolized by these groups on internet, and an online search for information on this theme immediately leads to their websites.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, they are pushing an ideological struggle on this issue, enabled by their clever use of various internet tools: page ranking, cloaked websites, blogs presenting themselves as purely informative, specific links or information excerpts, online communities and participatory programs, etc. They are thus producing something that I describe as a "counterknowledge" on race and genomics.

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- 5 As the authors noted, "the demographic characteristics of our sample are ... worth noting: there is no clear explanation why our sample predominantly comprised White, European or European-American males. This is intriguing since many scholars assume that the industry is predominately marketing its products to other demographics, e.g. Blacks or Afro-Americans and Native Americans" (Wagner and Weiss 2012, 53).
  - 6 The internet is a living archive that evolves rapidly. I did this research mainly between 2013 and 2015 and its results were still valid as a description of the present in 2020. Since then, a large part of the landscape I am describing here has, however, suffered a major transformation, probably due to the rise of violence on the part of White supremacists and its potential political and juridical consequences. Forums such as Anthroscap and Forumbiodiversity have been closed and are now history.
  - 7 This was true until 2020. See, for instance, the website Humanbiologicaldiversity.com. Quite interestingly, one of the first results that a search on Google now yields (in 2023) is an article by Jon Entine and Patrick Whittle disclaiming that, as "many people believe" due to recent press articles, "human biodiversity" is an alt-right code for embracing racism. This article has been published on the Genetic Literacy Project, a program run by the same Jon Entine whose motto is "science not ideology," though it is in fact mainly run by nonscientists and clearly designed to promote genetic reductionism and genetic engineering. It is worth noting that Entine was one of the members of the Human Biodiversity Institute founded by Steve Sailer, which mainly featured heroic figures of the counterknowledge on race, genetics, and intelligence, such as Rushton, Bayley, Murray, Pinker, or Entine himself.

## A Counterknowledge on Race and Genomics: An Alternative Truth about Racial Reality

### The Main Features of This Counterknowledge

I am using “counterknowledge” in the sense that Michel Foucault uses it in *Il faut défendre la société* (*Society Must be Defended*), where he describes the discourse on the struggle of races promoted by French nobility in the seventeenth century as a “counterknowledge” directed against the juridical and administrative apparatus of absolute monarchy. As Foucault showed, these counterknowledges proposed alternative narratives, based on a mix of erudition (a form of expert knowledge) and the revalorization of forgotten, disqualified or lay knowledge. They were weapons in a struggle against the centralizing and homogenizing power of the monarchy (Foucault 2003, 129). I do not want to push the analogy too far, particularly because Foucault rightly praised the richness of this counterknowledge, which is absolutely not the case with that which I study here. However, I believe that the concept of counterknowledge in Foucault’s sense is pertinent to capture some dimensions of how genomics is used by these online communities. It helps us to avoid dichotomist oppositions, such as the one between science and ideology (or “counterknowledge” mainly reduced to “nonscience”), and to describe more adequately some of the operations involved in this case. I will successively emphasize two points.

First, such counterknowledge has a *strategic* dimension. As we will see, it is clearly directed against certain enemies and narratives considered to have dominated the field of human genetics from the 1970–1980s. Rather than treating this counterknowledge as being merely junk science, we must note the fact that those who produce it select and emphasize some widely admitted scientific results and techniques, but turn them into weapons to contradict what they describe as “official science.” They cleverly play on various ambivalences in dominant scientific discourses on race, genomics, and human variations, which means that the best strategy to fight such counterknowledge cannot be to reassert only “true” science against its ideological misuses. It is also necessary to clarify some ambivalences of core concepts (such as heritability, ancestral populations, etc.), categories (such as racial and ethnic labels) and techniques (such as admixture studies or uses of PCA) from human genomics. It is also important to develop more suitable ways of communicating and teaching these ideas so that the public at large, and geneticists themselves, embrace a more critical and reflexive perspective on genomic narratives and genomic data.

Second, the development of such a counterknowledge is strongly linked to a broader movement of decentralization in knowledge production. In that respect, the internet and social media have played a decisive part. Foucault’s concept of “counterknowledge” is very useful in this context because he rightly draws a historical contrast between the building of counterknowledges, on the one hand, and the processes of “disciplining knowledges” through central institutions, control of procedures, and so on, on the other, that occurred during the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries (Foucault 2003, 178). What is

described, today, as a "post-truth era"<sup>8</sup> may more adequately be seen as a moment in which the main institutions that regulated and controlled the production and circulation of knowledges are experiencing a multifaceted crisis. In particular, they have faced widespread criticism concerning their legitimacy, their connections with political or economic interests, and the ways in which their modalities for the production of knowledge have tended to exclude or neglect "lay expert knowledge" and many other forms of knowledge. One consequence of this crisis is that it allows various groups and individuals to participate actively in the production and circulation of knowledges, and thus to secure access to new forms and levels of visibility through internet and social media. As we will see, this is a striking feature of the counterknowledge of genomics and human diversity: it is strongly linked to the participative and citizen sciences and to the blurring of the divide between professionals and amateurs.<sup>9</sup> But, as in many other cases of participative movements, beyond the so called symmetry and democratization of participative knowledge, it will prove easy here to identify distinct political strategies and establish that certain groups acquire more visibility than others.

## A Counterknowledge and Its Enemies

As noted above, such counterknowledge on race and genomics has a clear strategic and polemic dimension: it is directed against four main enemies.

### 1. Emphasizing genetic diversity between human groups versus homogeneity of humankind

First, this counterknowledge is directed against those who, inspired by a narrative stemming from antiracist population genetics of the early 1970s, insisted both on the remarkable genetic *homogeneity* of humankind and on the fact that variations between individuals (or "interindividual variations") are far more important than differences between populations (or "interpopulation differences"). The promoters of such counterknowledge insist, on the contrary, on human biological *diversity* and on the existing gaps between populations, in particular between what they call "racial groups." In that respect, they strategically use the numerous biomedical studies that have focused on genomic diversity since 2000 and on several statistical devices that help to visualize separate racial clusters. It is important to keep in mind that the interpretation of genomic data depends heavily on

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8 On this topic, see Sismondo 2017 and McIntyre 2018. As we will see, it would be totally wrong to describe the counterknowledge I am referring to as a kind of "science denial." On the contrary, its proponents generally claim to be fighting for "real science." The question here is not the repudiation of "truth," or even of "scientific truth," but rather a struggle over what constitutes scientific truth as far as genomic human diversity is concerned.

9 On the various meanings and practices covered by the label "citizen sciences" and the problem of public participation in science's production, see Strasser et al. 2019. To use Strasser's typology, the counterknowledge on genomics goes from mere self-reporting (i.e., exposing and giving access to one's own genetic results) to computing and analyzing (i.e., developing software to analyze genomic data) and even "making" science (through the building of ethnonational programs on genomic diversity).

the dimension that is emphasized, and the purposes for doing so. Lewontin's groundbreaking 1972 article emphasized that the percentage of genetic variations covered by interpopulation differences, and more specifically by taxonomic categories such as races or ethnic groups, was very poor (15 percent) compared to the percentage covered by interindividual variations (85 percent).<sup>10</sup> This led him to conclude that these taxonomical categories were not relevant as far as genetic information was concerned. Significantly, even in Lewontin's mind, this did not imply that one could not use such a small number of genetic variations for various practical aims, such as, for instance, tracing ancestry (Gannett 2021). Lewontin—and later the Human Genome program—emphasized the unique homogeneity of the human species, insisting on the fact that about 99.8–99.9 percent of the human genome is similar. On the other hand, the remaining 0.1–0.2 percent still represent millions of differences in human DNA, and biomedical and human genomics studies from the 2000s have focused mainly on these differences either for medical and pharmaceutical purposes, or to develop various applications, such as forensic, commercial, or political identity uses. These investigations primarily looked at supposedly significant patterns of variations between races or biogeographical ancestry groups. They did so not for taxonomical reasons, but for many other purposes, such as tracing individual biogeographical ancestries, breaking down a given population into ancestry groups, associating genomic variations with an augmentation of risk diseases, and so on.

The promoters of new forms of online racialism only needed to select some of these studies to advance their own agenda. The emphasis on genomic differences between races or ethnicities, which became so fashionable in biomedical research after 2002, has actually found a ready welcome on White supremacist forums. Beginning in 2005, for instance, the main such forum in the United States, Stormfront, opened with the thread: "Evidence that Racial Groupings Match Real Genetic Profiles." This thread aimed to collect links to scientific studies that supposedly established such a correspondence. It included numerous biomedical studies linking risk factors to race. The thread grew considerably over the following years and its contributors grew more confident as they accumulated more "proof" from scientific publications. When Ancestry Informative Markers (AIMs) were first used for forensic purposes in 2005<sup>11</sup>, one of the contributors claimed: "I saw this today! The Boasian anthropology 'no such thing as race' crowd are taking some major hits these days."<sup>12</sup> In 2006, another contributor, referring to the developing research on haplotypes,<sup>13</sup> concluded: "I think the genographic findings will

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- 10 "The mean proportion of the total species diversity that is contained within populations is 85.4% ... Less than 15% of all human genetic diversity is accounted for by differences between human groups! Moreover, the difference between populations within a race accounts for an additional 8.3%, so that only 6.3% is accounted for by racial classification" (Lewontin 1972, 396).
- 11 Ancestry Informative Markers are a set of selected punctual variations on the genome whose proportions vary strongly according to populations and that are used to identify the different components of the biogeographic ancestry of an individual or a group.
- 12 By "Boasian anthropology," these groups generally mean a cultural anthropology which supposedly comes, in the United States, from the anthropologist Franz Boas and emphasizes the influence of culture and education rather than focusing on biological and genetic determinations.
- 13 Haplotype is a group of genomic variations that are linked and tend to be inherited together. Haplotypes on Y-DNA or Mt-DNA are generally used as a "signature" to link one paternal or maternal

play right into our hands. For example, to be a native European, your DNA must display certain Y and mtDNA markers."<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Proving that "race is a biological reality" and how former racial categories match genomic studies

This brings us directly to the second enemy of the advocates for this counterknowledge: the "liberal creationists" or "cultural Marxists"<sup>15</sup>, as they label them, who argue that race is a social construct. Proponents of this counterknowledge contradict this claim by affirming that race is a "biological reality."

*Figure 1: The "war" against cultural Marxists and liberal creationists*

### **The Cultural Marxist War against Darwinism**

Creationists: evolution is a social construct, not biologically real.

Liberal Creationists: race is a social construct, not biologically real.

Charles Darwin: I'm not a creationist; I actually wrote: "There is, however, no doubt that various races, when carefully compared and measured, differ much from each other...."

Source: <http://www.humanbiologicaldiversity.com>, last accessed march 2017.

They try to prove that the most advanced genomics confirm the reality of common sense and of older racial categories. Here again, they cleverly play with certain ambiguities in the arguments of various geneticists concerning the overlap between genetic ancestry and racial categories (Bliss 2012). The proponents of this counterknowledge thus welcomed AIMS as a way to construct clusters that correspond broadly to traditional racial categories ("Caucasoid," "Negroid," etc.) and they seized upon a quite famous study by Rosenberg & al. (2002), along with others studies, to translate AIMS into these categories (Figure 2).

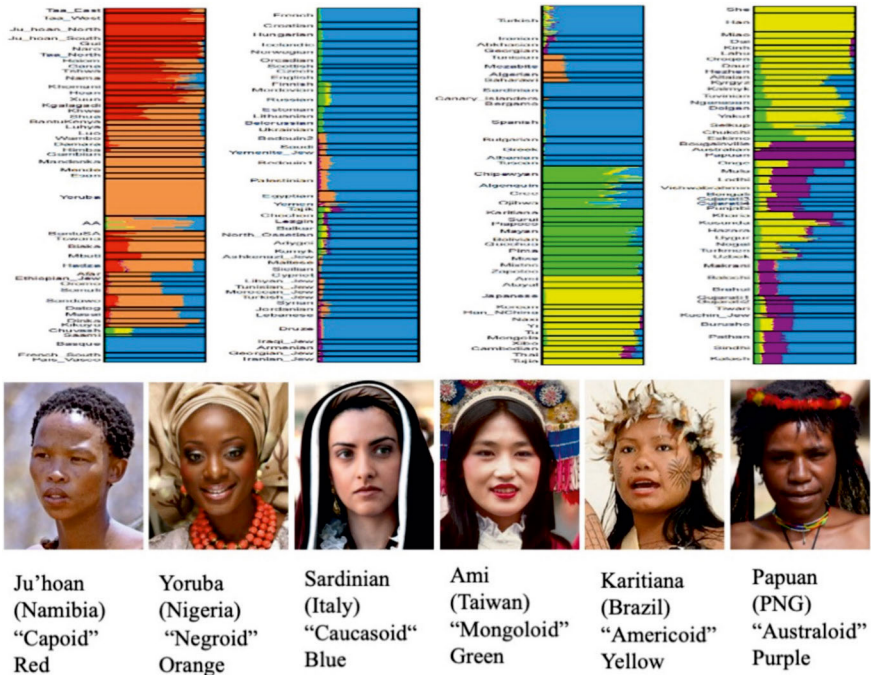
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line of one individual ancestry to an ethnic group where these haplotypes are supposedly statistically more frequent.

14 All these quotations are taken from the thread "Evidence That Racial Groupings Match Real Genetic Profiles" on <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t182050/>, last accessed 12 June 2014.

15 "Cultural Marxism" is a concept that was initially coined by German far right groups during the Weimar Republic years.

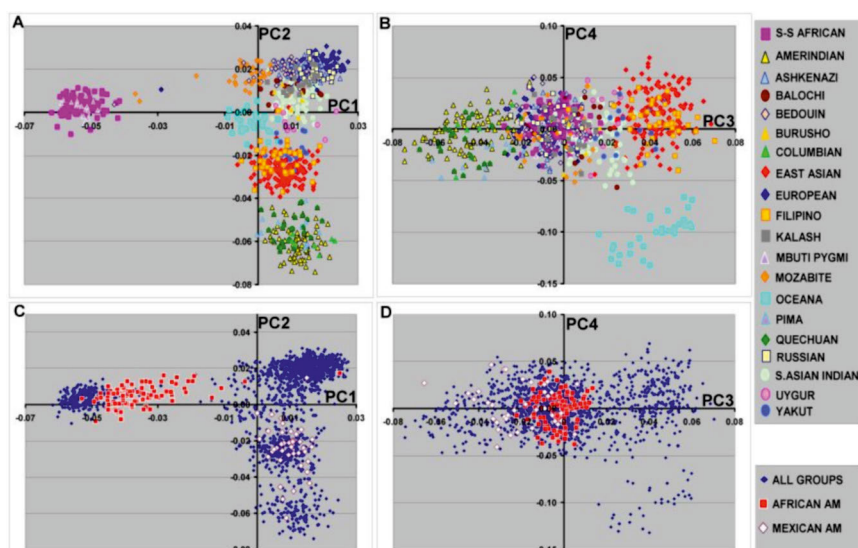
Figure 2: AIMS as supposedly corresponding to more traditional racial groups. In this illustration, the blog “racialreality,” operated by an Italian blogger, wants to show “clearly the divisions and admixture between the six main racial groups: Capoid (red), Negroid (orange), Caucasoid (blue), Americoid (green), Mongoloid (yellow) and Australoid (purple).” The aim is to demonstrate that phenotypes and more ancient categories from the first half of the twentieth century (here from Carleton S. Coon’s physical anthropology) largely correspond to the results of more recent AIMS and admixture studies.



Source: <http://racialreality.blogspot.com/2013/12/global-admixture-analysis-at-k6.html>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

One of the main problems in human genomics is the vast amount of data it has accumulated, which requires different visualization techniques to be understood. These techniques have numerous limits and biases, which are generally not made explicit (Ekhaik, 2022). They give the false impression of a self-evident representation of reality, immediately accessible to the mind. This is particularly true for studies using what is known as “Principal Component Analysis” (PCA) to visualize the distribution of genomic variations into different clusters. Some of the main actors in the counterknowledge on race and genomics are perfectly aware of the pitfalls of PCA studies, but they nevertheless use them to illustrate supposed correspondences between ancient racial categories and genomic “data.” It is worth noting that this line of argument is not exceptional, for one can easily find scientific publications or interpretations by authors inspired, for instance, by the new realist trend of the philosophy of race that draw the same conclusions from the same so-called “data” (Spencer 2015).

Figure 3: Racial groups supposedly confirmed by PCA studies on *dienekes.blogspot.com*. The genome blogger Dieneke comments on the above graph, taken from Nassir et al. 2009, as follows: "In PC1 vs PC2 (top left), the five major races (Caucasoids, East Asian Mongoloids, Amerindians, Australoids, Negroids) are clearly separable." This is a typical PCA visualization of genomic variations. In Dieneke's interpretation, the predominantly purple cluster on the top left of graph A supposedly represents "Negroids" (though it actually reflects a few individuals classified as "South-Africans"); the top right cluster of widely mixed colors, "Caucasoids"; the predominantly light blue cluster, "Australoids" (who are described as being better identified by graph B as a neatly separated cluster); the predominantly red/yellow cluster, supposedly "East Asians"; and the predominantly green cluster, supposedly "Amerindians." Noteworthy is how problematic the varying labels applied to these populations are, as well as the fact that only a few individuals are taken to represent an entire population.



Source: <http://dienekes.blogspot.com/2009/07/ancestry-informative-marker-set-for.html>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

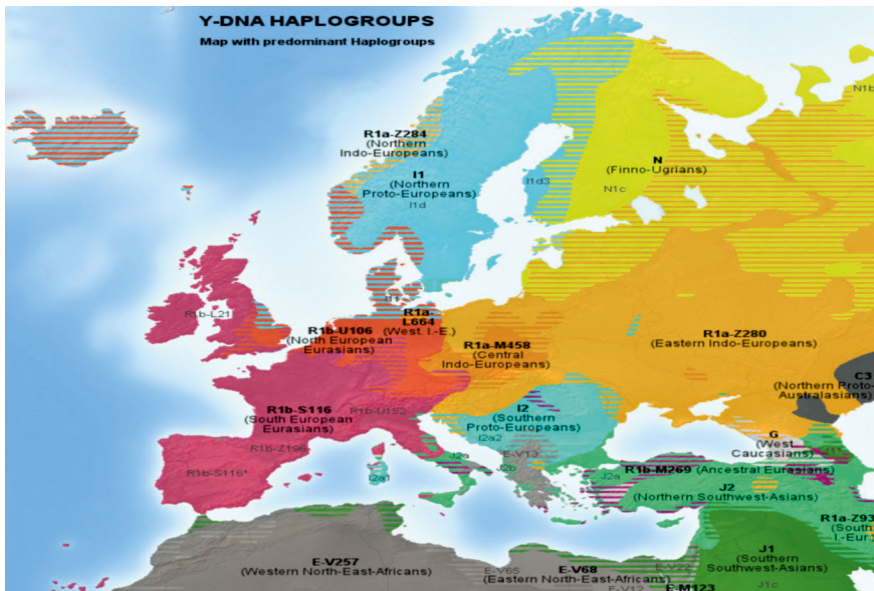
They also focus on haplotypes, which they always describe as "racial markers": "I think Negroid Y-DNA is E1b1a or something of that nature. J1+2 and R1b/a are all Caucasoid/Middle Eastern and are not found in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of a special branch of R1a or b and J1 in some parts of Ethiopia where they are mixed race (J1 was given to them by Caucasoid Mediterraneans on the paternal side)."<sup>16</sup>

This same desire to establish overlaps between the racial categories of traditional physical anthropology and the results of genomics lies at the heart of various projects, such as the Society for Nordish Physical Anthropology, founded in 1999 and hosted on the website *The Apricity*, or numerous blogs that focus on "human biodiversity." One such blog, *racialreality.altervista.org*, explicitly aims to show that Carleton Coon's classification

16 <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t182050/>, last accessed 12 June 2014.

of races is not “outdated”; it adopts his major taxonomic categories by relating them to studies of human population genetics and embodying them in portrait-types (Figure 2).

*Figure 4: Y-DNA haplotypes European distribution. Here, as in many other examples one can find on the web, haplotypes are directly connected to so-called ethnic or racial groups. It is worth noting, again, that this is not peculiar to this kind of website. One finds similar operations, for instance, in various DNA ancestry testing companies.*



Initially published on Eupedia.com, it can now be found everywhere on the web: for instance, [https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/3o22o2/genetic\\_map\\_of\\_europe\\_with\\_dna\\_haplogroups\\_743\\_764/](https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/3o22o2/genetic_map_of_europe_with_dna_haplogroups_743_764/) (last accessed 9 April 2024), sometimes with notes such as “if European borders were drawn by DNA instead of ethnicity.”

### 3. Genetic barriers and genetic determinism

Third, arguing against those who celebrate or, at least, insist on admixture and fluidity as the fundamental patterns of human population dynamics, and on the clinal dimension of human variations, these websites and forums generally emphasize biogeographical barriers and stable genetic identities. This is a point I will explore in more detail in the second part of this article, when I examine their approach to the issue of European genetic identity. But it is important to stress the fact that, here again, these sources are able to cleverly rely on some recurring ambiguities in human population genetics, particularly the fact that, for methodological purposes, geneticists tend to build stable and distinct groups and exclude the most recent migration waves from their studies. For methodological reasons, many human population studies tend to include only individuals whose four grandparents lived within a defined perimeter of the locality being studied. The famous study published in 2008 under the title “Genes Mirror Geography within Europe,” for in-

stance, which claimed to describe the distribution of genetic variations in Europe, systematically excluded from its studies those whose "putative geographic origin was from outside Europe" or were "not European," according to their grandparents' origins (November et al. 2008).

One can understand the scientific motivations for such exclusions, which are actually quite common in mainstream human population genetics.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, methodologically it mirrors the political logic of Far Right movements in Europe, who tend to consider the last waves of migrants as not European, even if they were born in Europe and are citizens of a European country. It is therefore not surprising that a self-confessed Nordacist, such as the genome blogger running the Fennoscandia Biogeographic Project, which aims to neatly map and differentiate Fennoscandia (e.g. Scandinavia, Denmark, and Finland) as a genographic entity, can proceed in exactly the same way. As he explains, his project proceeds in two phases. In its first phase,

the project is open for participants of close to 100 percent Fennoscandian origin. Individuals of mixed Norwegian, Swedish, Finn or Saami origin are acceptable. Individuals of only partly Fennoscandian origins are not accepted in this project, nor are people of non-Fennoscandian origin [Then, in the second phase] we look at the analysis possibilities of differentiating Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians, Danes). This time all individuals who showed considerable Saami (both North-Saami or South-Saami) or Finnish admixture in the previous analysis were removed from further analysis to keep any outside influence reduced to a minimum and lumped into the "other" group containing the rest of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, this counterknowledge—or at least some of it—is also directed against those who, after the Bell Curve controversy<sup>19</sup> and the marginalization of racist psychologists, claim that the majority of genomic variations that are used to trace ancestry have no impact on the phenotype and, in particular, on behavioral and cognitive traits. I will not focus specifically on this question in this article, but most of the actors we are studying generally insist on the fact that race matters, that genetic ancestry is a fundamental

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17 Selecting only individuals whose grandparents are known to be born in a restricted area around the place under study has been usual in many population genetics studies from the 1950s, in particular for European territories. It has been justified by different arguments. Due to the important movements of populations (internal migrations, immigration from non-European countries, etc.) that happened from the 1950s to the 1960s, describing the distribution, structure, and dynamics of genetic variation in different regions of Europe supposedly required selecting individuals whose family was known to have lived in such a region before the 1950s. It is also described as a way to build a reference panel and avoid false associations when trying to identify correlations between the distribution of genetic variation and risks of some diseases.

18 <http://fennoscandia.blogspot.com/2011/03/?m=0>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

19 *The Bell Curve* was a book published in 1994 by psychologist Richard Herrnstein and political scientist Charles Murray. Among other themes, they claimed to identify some correlations between IQ average and racial groups, insisting that these IQ differences were largely determined by genetics and suggesting that misguided public policies and immigration had caused the United States to suffer a degradation of average IQ. The book sparked a controversy among North American psychologists, as well as strong criticism from other scientists opposed to sociobiology and genetic reductionism. It is now a widely shared reference in White supremacist groups.

component of individual and collective identities, and that it determines many mental or behavioral abilities.<sup>20</sup>

## Beyond the Science and Ideology Divide

### 1. A counterknowledge that cannot be reduced to mere denial of science

As argued above, it would be misleading to dismiss such counterknowledge as mere “junk science” or an “ideology” that can easily be opposed to “science” and “scientific facts.” This is why I am referring here not to “counterknowledge,” defined by Damian Thompson as “misinformation packaged to look like fact” (Thompson 2008, 1), referring to conspiracy theories and so-called “alternative facts,” but rather to Foucault’s more fertile concept. It would certainly be comfortable and reassuring to believe that this counterknowledge has no connection to scientific research and science. But in fact, their relationship is far more complex. First, as noted above, the contributors to this counterknowledge often exploit ambiguities inherent in the scientific discourse on human population genetics, race, and ancestry. These ambiguities enable them to selectively use scientific studies, fitting them into their ideological framework without distorting the studies themselves. To debunk this counterknowledge, one in fact needs to criticize some of the concepts and ways of reasoning and of interpreting data that are common in mainstream human population genetics. Second, some of these contributors have truly expert knowledge on genomics that helps them to select and interpret the articles they use, to choose the right software and ancestry tests to maximize their Whiteness or their European ancestry, or even to design programs that fit their political agendas. Some are scholars trained in population genetics, well aware of academic debates, and two of them were even celebrated by *Nature* in 2010, in an article titled “the rise of the genome bloggers.” This article portrayed two central figures of these online communities: Dienekes Pontikos and David Wesolowski, the latter known as “Polaco” (Callaway 2010, 880). Ironically (the author of the article in *Nature* did not know their ideological positions), they represented the two trends dividing European identity discussions on the web: Dienekes can be described as representing the “Mediterranean” point of view, while “Polaco” is one of the main figures referred to by the “Nordicists” and was an administrator of the forum *forum biodiversity*. In *Nature*’s article, the population geneticists Doron Behar praised them, claiming “they are not amateurs. They are far from being amateurs ... I cannot stress enough the level of appreciation I have for their efforts.” The fact is that many of them are perfectly aware of the most technical aspects of population genetics.

Such counterknowledge is located in a hybrid space between science and folk knowledge. On the one hand, it tends to praise common sense and the supposed self-evidence of the existence of races. Such self-evidence is said to be denied by “mainstream scientists” only because of ideological and political biases. On the other hand, many of them are truly experts on population genetics and claim to have a scientific ethos. In their view, “official science”, as they would call it, is biased with unscientific and ideological positions. They distinguish between “scientific facts”, which they present as corresponding

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20 They should consequently be located in an older history that goes back to the debates from the 1970s to the 1980s on sociobiology, genetic determinism, and IQ.

to common sense and being congruent with the existence of races, and the way scholars present these facts under the sway of "political correctness" or unscientific, ideological reasons. In this respect, the proponents of this counterknowledge skillfully play with the ambiguities of scholars, opposing their off-stage versus on-stage discourses.<sup>21</sup> Following a very common strategy of alt-right activists, they oppose mainstream media and official science in the name of a supposedly concealed truth, a denied reality that people are well aware of but that officials try to conceal. In so doing, they turn the demand for "free speech" (vs. "political correctness") and of "true science" (vs. "ideology") against their opponents (Titley 2020). The motto of the Genetic Literacy Project is a fine example of this strategy: "Science, not ideology." This is why they eagerly spread declarations of renowned scientists or journalists (such as David Reich, James Watson, or Nicholas Wade) that are dissonant with so-called "political correctness." For instance, in France, Far-Right networks have widely promoted extracts of David Reich's work. In 2018, the cloaked website operated by Far-Right identitarians, Breizh-Info, noted: "according to a respected American geneticist, genetic differences between races are real." A positive review of David Reich's work has also been published on the Illiade Institute for "the deep European memory." This Institute "refuses the great replacement and calls for the defense of our civilization." It features all the greatest names of the French Far Right, including Renaud Camus, Marion Maréchal, Alain de Benoist, Jean-Yves Le Galloux, and others. This institute also offers training courses at the European Awakening School, with its own ENA-type "promotions" with evocative names: promotion Jünger, Dominique Venner, Tolkien, and so on. This example shows another dimension of such counterknowledge: its efforts to duplicate official science and bear the external signs of a respectable knowledge. Some of these online communities produce their own online journals, such as *Mankind Quarterly* or the platform *Openpsych*. They have their own so-called scientific institute, with affiliated researchers (the Ulster Institute for Social Research, created by Richard Lynn). They organize series of conferences (such as the London Conference on Intelligence, at the University College of London, from 2014 to 2017).

## 2. A peculiar kind of participative knowledge

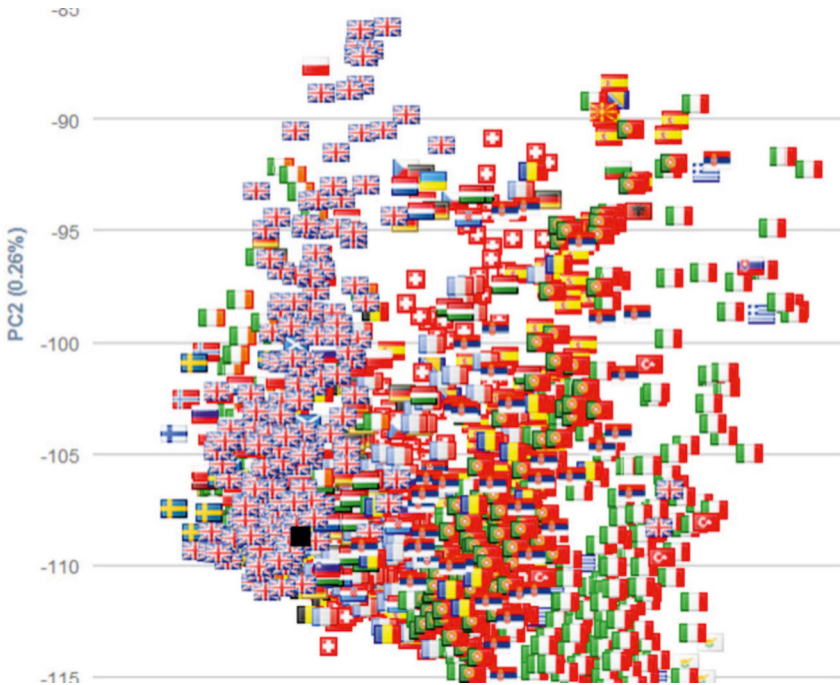
Yet the most interesting side of this counterknowledge is elsewhere, in the fact that it exploits all the resources internet provides for the development of new forms of participative knowledge or "citizen science." The internet has paved the way for a radical decentralization of the production of knowledge on genomics. People can edit their own blogs and publish posts without any oversight or gatekeepers and, most interestingly, they can even build their own participatory research programs online. I want to emphasize this point, which is probably the most original feature of such counterknowledge. Genomic data can easily be translated into informatics data that can be exchanged, transferred and accumulated online. Today, many clients of direct-to-consumer DNA testing companies use these services not only to obtain interpretations and narratives about their ancestry. They use them, rather, as mere extractors and providers of raw genomic data that

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21 On these ambiguities, see, for instance, Bliss 2012, 112–135, who discusses in particular the positions of Rosenberg, Pritchard, and Reich.

they can then introduce themselves online, directly, into software such as GEDMATCH, GENOtation, or INTERPRETOME (Figure 5).

*Figure 5: An INTERPRETOME result. This graph shows how a personal result (the black square) introduced into Interpretome is located in supposedly national clusters of DNA. It is worth noting the choice of picturing DNA data with national flags. Such pictures can then be displayed in forums to show one's personal DNA identity as, in this case, in the Occidental Enclave.*



Source: <http://www.occidentalenclave.org/viewtopic.php?f=28&t=3208>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

Such users of these tests can also send these data to “genome bloggers,” who may incorporate the data into their own research projects, advancing more or less explicit political agendas. Generally, these online projects are designed to identify the genomic bases of a region (such as Fennoscandia, Austrasia, or Armorica) or of an ancient political entity (such as the Duchy of Lithuania). Some also aim to determine the most important components of European identity, as we will see later. The following box contains an indicative list and brief description of some of these programs.

Table 1: Description of the main genome bloggers' sites and programs, and of their (nordicist or mediterranean) agendas

<b>I Mediterraneans ("Meds")</b>
<p><b>Dodecad Ancestry Project (Dieneke)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– "To provide detailed ancestry analysis, primarily for Eurasian individuals"</li> <li>– "To build samples of individuals for regions of the world (e.g. Greeks, people from Anatolia and Caucasus, Balkans, Southern Italians, etc.) currently under-represented in publicly available datasets"</li> <li>– To establish the importance of the Med component in European identity</li> </ul> <p><b>Italianthro.blogspot</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– "This blog [is] a collection of material focusing on the biological and social anthropology of Italy and Italian people around the world ... An underlying aim will be to refute falsehoods about Italians spread by Afrocentrists, Nordicists and Northern Italian supremacists"</li> </ul>
<b>II. Nordicists</b>
<p><b>Eurogenes (Polaco)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To provide different admixture tests (K 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 + Hunter gatherer vs. Farmer) that focus on European populations and give detailed individual admixture analysis</li> <li>– To collect more data on the genetic components of Europe populations (specifically the Baltics and northeast Europe), or on similar supposed populations, such as Polish genes</li> <li>– To define the main components of European identity (hunter-gatherers from the Baltics)</li> </ul> <p><b>Magnus Ducatus Lituaniae Project</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– "BCA analysis project for the territories of former Grand Duchy of Lithuania"</li> </ul> <p><b>Fennoscandia Biographic Project (Anders Palsen)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– To map the genetic relationship and origin of the current populations in Fennoscandia: Norwegians, Swedes, Finns and Saami</li> <li>– Then to "look at the analysis possibilities of differentiating Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians, Danes). This time all individuals who show considerable Saami (both North-Saami like or South-Saami like) or Finnish admixture in the previous analysis were removed from further analysis to keep any outside influence reduced to a minimum, and were lumped into the 'other' group containing the rest of the world"</li> </ul>

These programs generally operate through an exchange of services between the participants, who provide the data, and the designers of the projects—not so different from the way more official research programs work to attract participants.<sup>22</sup> It is important to keep in mind that, contrary to DNA ancestry services specifically designed for Afro-descendants or other minority communities, there is no company offering specific and detailed information for people claiming their "White," "European" identity or wanting to explore their regional roots in detail. Therefore, many of them are not satisfied with the information provided by generalist DNA testing companies. To obtain more information and tests for their uses, they may turn to these "genome bloggers" who provide this information in exchange for their data. "Polaco," in particular, has designed a specific test ("Eurogenes") which is very popular among these clients.

22 To enroll participants, the CANDELA program, for instance, led by a consortium of various universities in South America, proposed personalized ancestry tests for its contributors (Abel 2021, 72).

To illustrate how these programs work, we can pick the more neutral project called “Explore Your DNA/France Project”<sup>23</sup>. Noting that “in the world of ethnicity research by DNA, France is still at the end of the pack,” “a group of enthusiasts,” who describe themselves as a “team of specialists ... made up of enlightened amateurs” (originating mainly from a group that investigated the region of “Brittany”) proposes to “dissect” participants’ “raw data” and to give them “more precise” results “than what your DNA genealogy site gives.” To do so, they rely on “a revolutionary tool [that] has appeared on the scene of ethnicity research, created by David Wesolowski [a.k.a Polaco]”: the calculator Eurogenes. They ask participants to send their “raw data” to Polaco, as well as twelve dollars to cover the expenses of the tests, allowing them to be enrolled in the program and receive the information they seek. For this group, the project offers a means to progressively build detailed maps of biogeographical ancestry components from France and Brittany. It is worth noting that, in this case as in many others, the analogy with Foucault’s analysis of “counterknowledge” is striking: by articulating erudition, amateurism, and localism, these counterknowledges largely continue the trends encountered in the formation of various antiquarian societies in Europe from the eighteenth century onward.<sup>24</sup>

This localism, focusing on specific local roots and identities, does not imply that the various groups building this counterknowledge are isolated and trapped in their own local identity; quite the contrary. The internet is also a highly effective way to build connected transnational communities through links, networks, and forums. This is an important point, because the internet helps to build racial, transnational communities based on supposed shared ancestry, a shared sense of belonging, and shared fears of endangered identities supposedly needing to be preserved against common enemies (migrants, Muslims, liberal politics).<sup>25</sup> Such communities can be based either on the claim of a common “Whiteness” and shared European identity (in forums such as Stormfront, The Apricity, The Occidental Enclave) or on more dividing affinities within this “Whiteness,” such as the very important line opposing Mediterraneans (“Meds”) versus Nordicists, which actually structures the landscape of many blogs and forums. This is what we will examine now.

### **“Who Is the Most European of Us All?” European Genetic Identities and the Division of Whiteness**

In this section of my chapter, I investigate more closely how certain members are discussing the issue of European genetic identity in these online communities. On the one

23 <https://www.exploreyourdna.com/index.aspx>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

24 On the importance of local antiquarian societies all over Europe in the building of racialized regional identities, see for instance Thiesse (2001), Sweet (2004), Manias (2013).

25 It is important to keep in mind that various mass killings over the past decade in the United States and New Zealand were carried out by young White nationalists who were part of this online community and believed in the “great replacement” theory. The “Manifesto” of Payton Gendron, for instance, who shot ten people in Buffalo in 2022 and claimed he was “simply a White man seeking to protect and serve my community, my culture and my race,” was full of references picked up from these online forums.

hand, Europe appears on these forums as a central point of focus, where it is described as the "homeland" from where Whites or Indo-Europeans originated. "Europe" in this sense is taken to define a shared ancestry and a common origin, which is supposedly endangered by immigration and liberalism. This is why some of those on these forums explicitly describe themselves as "European preservationists." They embrace the language of biological conservation and picture themselves as attempting to investigate and preserve the vanishing genetic human diversity of Europe. Yet, surprisingly, on forums such as Anthroscapes, Forumbiodiversity, The Apricity, or The Occidental Enclave, as well as on many blogs, the main issue appears not to be Europe as a shared genetic identity or Whiteness as a common status.<sup>26</sup> Quite the contrary, as we will see, the main issue is rather distinguishing and hierarchizing different groups within Whiteness and separating various unequal components of a supposed European identity. In doing so, many of them explicitly connect their own way of identifying with the mid-nineteenth-century opposition between Nordics and Mediterraneans. Others seem to be more preoccupied with more regional identities, which they see as suffering from political and cultural erasures (Brittany, Duchy of Lithuania, etc.).

### A shared sense of community? Europe as a common endangered homeland

It is useful to bear in mind two important principles that one finds, for instance, in the US alt-right leader Richard Spencer's Charlottesville statement in 2017, titled "What It Means to Be Alt-Right?": "1. Race is real. Race matters. Race is the foundation of identity. 'White' is a shorthand for a world-wide constellation of peoples ... derived from the Indo-European race ... European refers to a core stock ... from which related cultures and shared civilization sprang. 2. The ethno-state: [the State is an] existential entity, [the] physical manifestation of people's being, order and will to survive."<sup>27</sup> According to Spencer, "racially or ethnically defined states are legitimate and necessary."<sup>28</sup> Here, the counterknowledge of genomics is often taken to provide supposedly "scientific" underpinnings to these kinds of claims.

As Spencer's quote clearly indicates, Europe occupies a specific place in these narratives: it is pictured as the ancestral homeland of the Indo-Europeans, as the place from which White peoples originated, along with their civilization and culture. Moreover, the narratives of European preservationists generally describe the biological and cultural identity of such a homeland as endangered. For those living outside Europe, to put forward their percentages of European ancestry is also a way to claim their Whiteness. This is why defining European genetic identity is so central in all these blogs and forums. In a thread on forumbiodiversity titled "Which Are the Purest Races/Ethnicities?," David Wesolowski reformulated the question as follows: "who is the most European of us all?"

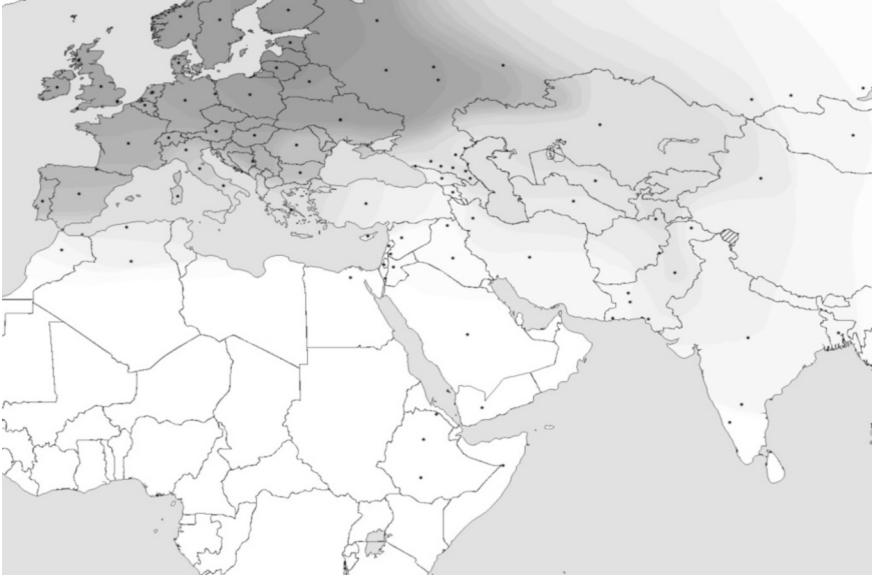
26 These findings contrast with the existing literature, which has focused more on Stormfront and other predominantly North American White supremacist communities.

27 <https://altright.com/2017/08/11/what-it-means-to-be-alt-right/>, last accessed 2 February 2018.

28 Ibid.

Arguing against someone who claimed that Europe was a mere geographical entity, he then affirmed: “as you can see from my map, it’s also a genetic concept.”<sup>29</sup>

Figure 6: Europe as a genetic concept according to David Wesolowski (Polaco).



Source: <https://www.forumbiodiversity.com>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

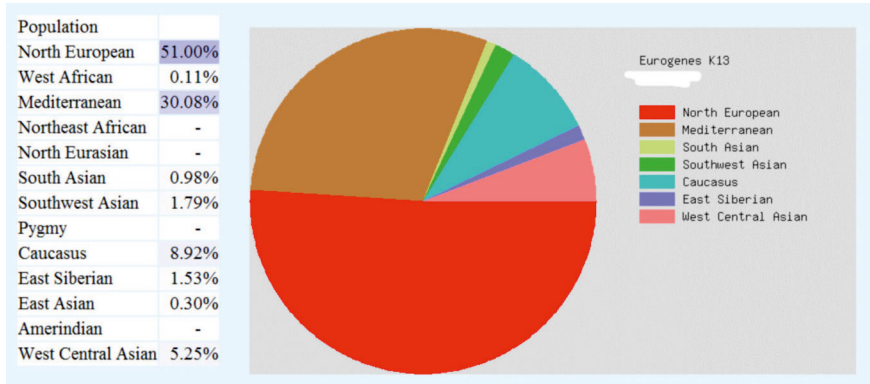
Wesolowski’s map (Figure 6) supposedly shows that “the European component correlates precisely with the indigenous Upper Paleolithic/Mesolithic hunter-gatherer ancestry ... based on ancient genomes.”<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, Wesolowski is also the designer of the Eurogenes admixture test, which is the favorite test for White supremacists and other European ethnonationalists, because it maximizes information on their European ancestries and minimizes their potential non-European admixture. This test also helps them to know to which side of “Whiteness” they belong: Nordicist or Mediterranean.

The latter question seems to be the most important one; for many of the users of these forums, the main problem is not, as we will see, to prove their Whiteness but rather to prove that they belong to the right side of the Whiteness: the *most European*. It is worth noting, in this respect, that another very fashionable test proposed by Polaco is an admixture test evaluating the proportions of Mesolithic Hunter Gatherer vs. Neolithic Farmer in one’s ancestry. To naïve scholars, this test may seem to be a mere recreational tool or a way to define a new form of “biosociality,” but Polaco’s claim, which connects explicitly European genetic identity with Mesolithic hunter gatherer ancestry, reveals it to be a strategic test for determining one’s genetic European identity.

29 <https://forumbiodiversity.com>, last accessed 8 January 2018.

30 Ibid.

Figure 7: Selfportrait of a Nordacist according to Eurogenes. "Rambo Von München," who presents herself as "female, nationality: American; meta-ethnicity: German and colonial American; ethnicity: German; political orientation: conservative preservationist; mtDNA: H1," uses this picture showing her Eurogenes results as an identity marker on the forum Occidentalencave.org. She very clearly emphasizes her two main components, "North European" and Mediterranean, and which of the two is the most important for her.



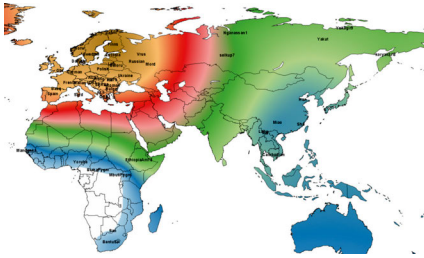
Source: <https://www.occidentalencave.org>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

Genetically defining such a European identity first requires to establish the contours of Europe’s frontiers and emphasizing its biogeographical barriers. We can take one example of that operation from a blogger who is located on the fringes of Europe and could therefore be suspected of being admixed with non-Europeans, as part of the great debate between Meds and Nordacists.<sup>31</sup> The Norwegian Anders Palsen, founder of the Fennoscandia Biographic Project, stresses that it is of the utmost importance to distinguish Scandinavian people genetically from Mongoloid people and to show, in particular, that Finns and Saami are “genetically Caucasoid or European.” For that purpose, he employs a combination of various PCA studies to distinguish Europeans from Africans and Asians (Figs. 8 and 9).

These two illustrations take a global perspective to emphasize the fact that, at a broader scale, Finns/Sammi cluster systematically with “Europeans” and are neatly differentiated either from Africans (Figure 8) or from East Asians/Siberians (Figure 9).

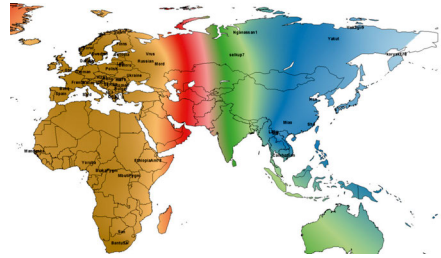
31 Meds and Nordacists tend to fight over the percentage of non-European admixture in their respective genome.

Figure 8: PCA1—Brown: Finns/Sammi; Blue: Africans



Source: <http://fennoscandia.blogspot.com/2014/01/is-there-east-asian-influence-in.html>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

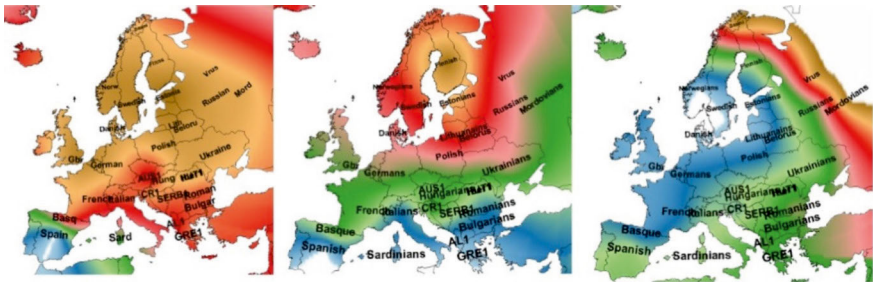
Figure 9: PCA2—Brown: Africans; Blue: East Asians/Siberians.



Source: <http://fennoscandia.blogspot.com/2014/01/is-there-east-asian-influence-in.html>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

### Beyond Whiteness: building genetic frontiers and hierarchies within European identity

Figure 10: Zooming into Europe to define internal hierarchies. Here, Anders Palsen uses the same operations to show how people from “Fennoscandian” descent are those with the least African, East Asian, and Siberian influences in Europe, while “Meds” are supposedly deeply infused with either African or East Asian influences.



Blue green: most African  
Brown: less African

Blue: most East Asian  
Brown: less East Asian

Blue: least Siberian  
Brown: more Siberian

Source: <http://fennoscandia.blogspot.com/2014/01/is-there-east-asian-influence-in.html>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

As we have seen, genomics can be used in various participatory projects (such as Fennoscandia) to determine the peculiar genetic make-up of some specific European regions, reinforcing them as ethnopolitical stable entities. One should always keep in mind that, in Europe, Whiteness is far from being homogenous. It is a divided field, pervaded by tensions between transnational or regional identities. “Whiteness” may be a relevant concept to describe the political stance of some White supremacists in the United States, but it is not very effective as far as European identitarians are concerned. Of course, they all share a European preservationist agenda, and they always exclude

the last waves of migrants from European genetic make-up. However, the true purpose of many of blogs and forums is to highlight the numerous distinctions and differences within so-called "Whiteness," especially the supposed great divide between Nordicists and Mediterraneans. Admixture with non-Europeans and migrations can be instrumental in these debates. Palsen, for instance, zooms inside Europe and uses his components to define a gradient showing who is the most European of all (unsurprisingly, the Scandinavians) and who is the most "infected" with non-European admixture (unsurprisingly, the Meds) (Figure 10).

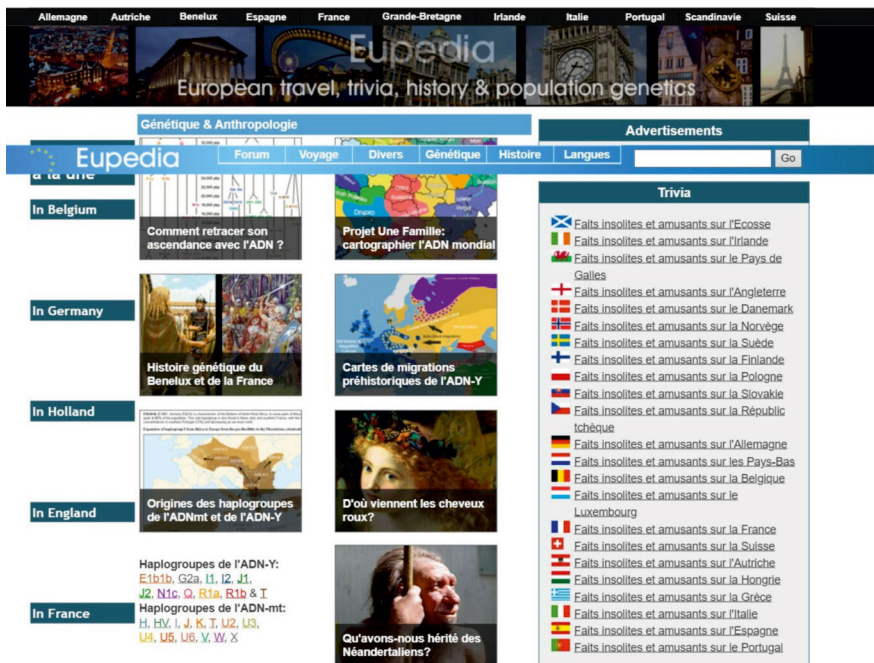
The great divide between "Meds" and "Nordicists" structures and polarizes the whole field of Occidentalism and European preservationism on the internet. One can trace it through blogs' constellations and preferential links, which define differentiated and polarized networks of websites. One can find it in the opposition between forums: anthroposcope, for instance, was mainly Med (created by the Italian blogger "racialreality"), while forum.biodiversity and the Apricity were more neatly Nordicist. Ironically, we even find this distinction in the two genome bloggers who were celebrated in *Nature*: David Wesolowski (Polaco) is a Nordicist of a peculiar sort who, unlike some other Nordicists, insists on European Baltic and northeastern roots, rather than on Germanic or Scandinavian ones. He claims that the fundamental component of European genetic identity date from the Upper Paleolithic/Mesolithic hunter gatherers. The other prominent genome blogger, Dienekes (Pontikos), can be associated with a "Med" agenda. He wants to ensure better representation of peoples from southeastern Europe (Greeks, Italians, etc.) and from the Middle East in genomic databases, and he emphasizes the importance of Neolithic migrations from the Caucasus and Anatolia to southern Europe as the core component of European identity. This opposition between Nordicists and Meds dates back to nineteenth-century racial science, but today it also mirrors political oppositions inside Europe, particularly in light of the opposition of Greek or Italian nationalists to Germanic influences in Europe, which some, in these forums, define as a "Nordicist imperialism." Such a differentiation also appears clearly in the ways individuals present themselves on the forums and how they exhibit their pedigrees through admixture tests.

This leads us to another point. Genomics can be used not only to define ethnopolitical identities, to differentiate Europeans from others, and to create divisions inside Whiteness. Genomics can also be used—albeit *not always*—to hierarchize races or ethnic groups according to a narrative of genetic determinism that correlates genomic clusters with psychological and cognitive abilities, criminal or behavioral tendencies, or entrepreneurial skills. In this case, the counterknowledge on race and genomics comes together with the widely developed counterknowledge on racial psychology and behavioral genetics. This field has been largely marginalized in academia since the 2000s<sup>32</sup>, but it is thriving online. It can be illustrated, in particular, by the Ulster Institute and figures such as Emil Kierkegaard or Razib Khan. I will examine only two examples to illustrate these connections. The first is the French blog *intelligence.humaine*, which is praised by the most far-right movements in France and has been involved in an online controversy with the son of Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (the wife of the former French president). This blog relies mainly on Richard Lynn's works and states that "the genetic bases of intellectual

32 On the history of this field of research, see Panosky 2014.

differences between nations are due to the racial identity of the population.” It correlates the racial composition of the world’s populations (according to their genetic admixture), their mean IQ, and their average salary.<sup>33</sup> The second example comes from the site Eupedia.com, created by Maciamo Hay (whose alias is Satyavrata, the ancestor of the Aryans), who was highly active on Academia.edu, publishing a cartography of haplotype distribution in Europe.<sup>34</sup> Eupedia (Figure 11) is a cloaked website that presents itself as an informative guide to European countries but focuses mainly on northwestern Europe (countries with Frankish or Germanic influences). It is largely devoted to human population genetics and to European peoples’ cultural traits, supposedly determined by genetics.

Figure 11: Eupedia.com and European genomics



Source: <https://www.eupedia.com/forum/threads/are-some-countries-doomed-to-high-unemployment-due-to-their-genetic-pool.26930/>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

Maciamo Hay promotes an internal hierarchy inside Europe, based on genetics. He has developed an “entrepreneurialism index,” for instance, based on the relation between individualism and uncertainty avoidance, to classify European countries and explain their rate of unemployment. He correlates his index with the genetic pool of

33 <https://intelligence-humaine.com/qi-par-pays-et-economie/>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

34 Maciamo Hay describes himself as “a Belgian-born researcher in genetics, as well as a techno-progressive futurist, an historian and a travel writer” (<https://www.vitamodularis.org/about>, last accessed 9 April 2024). He is a promoter of transhumanism.

these countries, convinced that "individualism is a trait shared by ethnically Celtic and Germanic countries" and that "entrepreneurialism, like individualism and uncertainty avoidance, is deeply rooted in one's genes." He argues that the Italians, Greeks and Spanish have significant rates of unemployment precisely because of their gene pool. Such articulation between economic neoliberalism, transhumanism, and racial, genetic determinism is far from being rare on internet and warrants more scrutiny.

## The Social Life of European DNA:<sup>35</sup> How New "Biosocialities" Incorporate Old Racial Identities

### Negotiating biological identities online: a new biosociality?

I want to conclude by detailing how such European DNA acquires a social life in these online communities. These forums cover a wide range of activities, from quite serious and scientifically informed discussions concerning European haplotypes, biases of genetic genealogy software, and so on, to more unconventional activities. People may ask others to classify individuals (celebrities, anonymous, friends, oneself, etc.), for instance, based upon a photo. This strange practice oscillates between a kind of folk taxonomy and a practical exercise of racial prejudice that is an occasion for the worst racist commentaries.

I do explore these activities here, focusing rather on how individuals on these forums present and negotiate their racial and ethnic identities through genomics. This question has been widely studied in the recent literature on DNA ancestry tests, through interviews and other methodology, primarily to determine the extent to which DNA results may modify and destabilize the ways clients perceive and live their racial or ethnic identities, and how they effectively negotiate the tensions between the results they obtain from these tests and their expectations. Scholars' answers are, generally, quite disappointing. They tend to conclude that individual attitudes towards DNA results vary widely, from deep disorientation to mere confirmation of initial self-identifications, with many people selecting what they want to retain (or not) from their DNA tests (e.g., Nelson 2016, Abel 2021, Panosky and Donovan 2019). Scholars tend to emphasize (and rightly so) the fact that clients are generally not passive in the way they relate to their tests. They may buy multiple tests, and they may selectively affiliate and retain some elements from their results and discuss the validity and pertinence of others. It is worth noting that such an active relation to genealogy and ancestry is not at all new, and that genealogy has always been selective, emphasizing strategically such or such ancestry and obscuring others. It has nothing to do with a "new" relation to nature and biology, which should be distinguished from older, more essentialist ways of conceiving this relation, such as those claims sometimes found in Rabinov- or Rose-style narratives on biosociality.<sup>36</sup>

35 The title paraphrases Nelson 2016

36 These narratives, which sharply contrast new "biosocialities" from "old" ways of relating to biology, nature, race, and identity, are generally based on a partial and in parts grossly exaggerated vision of how racial identities, ancestry, and heredity have actually functioned in the past, and on a largely

Figure 12: Two exercises (among many others) of folk taxonomy or racial prejudices. The second picture showed the photo of an individual. I purposely altered it to avoid any identification.<sup>37</sup>



[The question]: “Classify Ron Paul”

[One example of answer]:

“Atlantid-North Atlantid/Kelto-Atlantid type, with strong Brunn/Cro-Magnon influences, perhaps approaching a more general Cro-Magnon nature, than stereotypical Brunn qualities.

I’d say his type looks quintessentially British derived”



[The question]: “Classify this Romanian (?) criminal on the run”

[The answer]:

“I wondered whether he’d be a normal Romanian, or a Gypsy. If this guy is not a gypsy (in other words, if he’s a genuine Romanian) I must conclude my pan-Europeanism/’pan-White-ism’ is a rather rational-only affair — artificial even — because if one of my daughters came home with such a guy looking like that (even when not a criminal), it would be almost as bad as a Turk or Moroccan to me on the emotional and the biological level. He just looks too racially alien to me.”

Source: <https://www.theapricity.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?25-Taxonomy>  
(last accessed 9 April 2024).

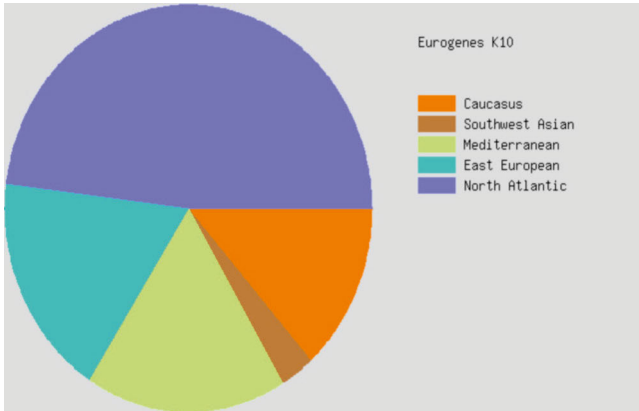
It may be true, as Rabinow and Rose have argued, that genomics can sometimes produce radically new biosocialities and imply new forms of relations to oneself and others. On these forums, for instance, almost everyone identifies themselves indicating, among other information, their haplotypes on Y-DNA and Mt-DNA, which they may even integrate into their avatars or pseudonym. They also publish their personal admixture results and discuss others’ tests, integrating these results in their signatures (Figure 13).

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fantasized dichotomy between “nature” and “culture” that was supposedly dominant in the past and is “dissolving” through the “transformations of the category of life” (Gibbon and Novas 2008, 3).

37 At the source one can find more than 5000 examples of this kind. Ron Paul is a key libertarian political figure in the United States. As there are many links between libertarian ideology and the groups I am analyzing, one should not be surprised to see his “type” discussed on the forum.

Figure 13: Two examples of signatures integrating Y-DNA, Mt-DNA and Eurogenes admixture results.



Source: <http://www.occidentalenclave.org>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

Figure 14: Locating oneself in a national cluster. Angharad's 23andMe results and his comments: "Well I am 100 percent European. Unsurprisingly, I cluster with Northern Europeans."



<http://www.occidentalenclave.org>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

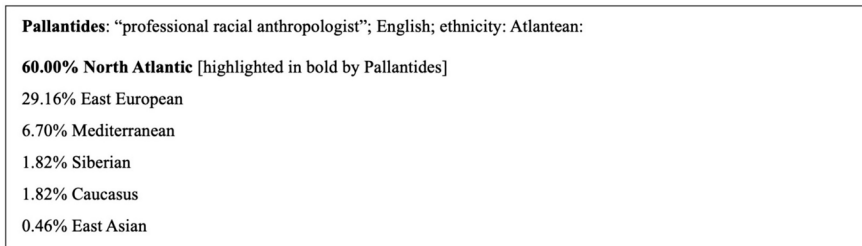
They may even use maps obtained from genealogical testing services or certain blog projects, locating them individually within more broader entities or clusters (ethnic groups, nations, etc.) (Figure 14).

Here, DNA acquires a true social life. It helps to claim identities through various markers that are exhibited online. These identities are negotiated and discussed with other members of the forum. DNA serves to prove membership of larger communities, to demonstrate relative purity, and, sometimes, even to facilitate dating (some websites can have a dating section).

### **“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”**

In most of the cases, however, we are very far from the dream of an *ex nihilo* creation of brand new biosocial and fluid identities. First, the individuals generally pick their genealogy tests with a specific purpose in mind, namely, to reinforce and confirm their feeling of belonging to a preestablished community. The strategies they follow may differ slightly, depending on whether they are from the United States or from Europe. American citizens seem to be more eager to prove their European roots in general and to minimize their African or Native American ancestry.<sup>38</sup> In the case of Europeans (but also many Americans or citizens from other countries, such as Australians), the question is generally more complicated, because they also want to assert a position between Nordacists and Meds. Pallantides (an English member), for instance, emphasizes very clearly his “North Atlantic” component (Figure 15).

*Figure 15: Claiming a Nordacist identity*



Source: <http://www.occidentalenclave.org>, last accessed 9 April 2024.

The vast majority of them are very well aware that race, nowadays, is a matter of statistics and admixture, but they also know how to select their genealogical tests in such a way that they can minimize their non-European components. They thus come as close as possible to a claim one finds everywhere on these forums: “I’m 100 percent European”;

38 Some may be looking for a kind of “diploma of Whiteness,” like one Brazilian White supremacist mentioned by Abel 2021, 81, who stated he wanted “a legal certificate” to prove he was 100 percent European. These individuals are, however, generally aware that race is a matter of percentages rather than absolute purity.

"I'm exceptionally White. No surprise there." They also tend to favor tests that help them to emphasize in detail certain European ancestries. In that respect, White supremacists and European ethnonationalists cannot resort to specialized ancestry testing companies on the web. People looking for their African roots can turn to numerous companies, such as African Ancestry or LivingDna, which employ specific databases to provide details about various African origins and "tribes." This kind of service does not exist for European identitarians or White nationalists,<sup>39</sup> which is partly why they resort to Eurogenes and other tests developed online by genome bloggers, which maximizes their information on European DNA.

The integration of Y-DNA or Mt-DNA haplotypes in signatures and profiles is also far from being neutral. Its main function is not to claim any new biosociality but rather to prove belonging to very traditional ethnic groups that tend to be valued (Germans, Vikings, Saxons, ancient Greeks). If these claims connect to any kind of "biosociality," then it is to old biosocial entities from nineteenth-century racial science. One should analyze these DNA identifiers in the more general context of avatars or aliases, which work as a single, connected system of identification markers. All the elements comprising these avatars send a clear message. First, ethnicity and meta-ethnicity are always indicated, metaethnicity referring to what used to be called "historical races" (such as Slavs, Germans, Celts, etc.) or to broader races such as Caucasians and other identities (Neanderthal). Phenotypes are usually mentioned, as well (e.g., Alpinids, Barbarians). Aliases regularly refer to a mythology (e.g., Loki, Angharad, Satyavrata) and a romantic-racial imaginary that would sound quite familiar to any historian of the nineteenth century. The same goes for the visual elements of these avatars, which are often quite explicit and may sometimes look very offending to racialized groups. The haplogroups themselves are far from being neutral: haplogroups are considered to be markers of certain ethnocultural identities. Classical Greeks, for instance, are supposedly J2, E1b1b or R1b; Vikings, I1. One finds threads discussing "Which Y haplogroup is most superior?," where R1b, supposedly a marker of Indo-European ancestry, is generally considered as the best, with the following arguments: "R1 has conquered most parts of Europe," "everyone in Europe has R1 ancestors!! It's the greatest of them all."

On the other hand, beyond such echoes from nineteenth-century racial science, many of these genealogical uses of genomics allude to what is actually the core of the concept of race: its genealogical dimension, inscribed in the "blood." If the more recent confusion between race and color has partly obscured this relationship in such a way that some scholars even believe it is possible to distinguish "race" from "ancestry," the history of the concept of race tells a very different story,<sup>40</sup> and these European or American na-

39 At least, they do not seem to consider some existing companies, such as Igenea, to provide services they need for their interests. On Igenea, see Sommer 2012, 115–140.

40 It is not the place to develop this point extensively. Historically, the genealogical dimension of the concept of race is clear and can be traced in any fields where it has been used from the fifteenth century onward. "Race" systematically referred to ancestry and to certain lineages in which physical and moral traits were transmitted over generations (see, for instance, Doron and Haddad 2021). Even in the specific field of natural history—and then, in physical anthropology and biology—the concept of race was introduced and used to describe inherited varieties and genealogically grounded groups within a species (Doron 2012; *ibid.* 2016). Skin color was one characteris-

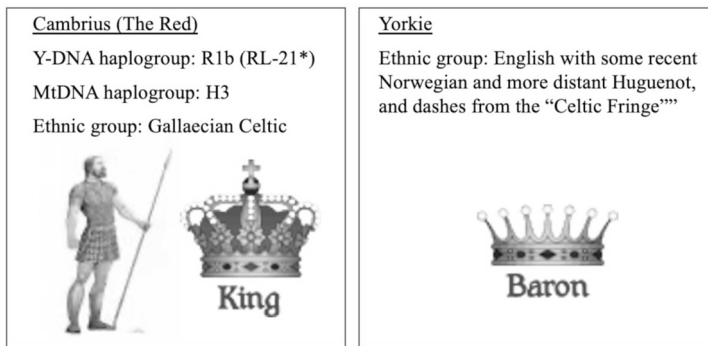
tionalists seem to understand it quite well. More specifically, their genealogical practices and references allude directly to the old background of the concept of race referring to nobility and quality of blood. Such a background never disappeared from certain racist doctrines of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (especially the Nazis' interpretation of race). This link is perfectly illustrated on [humanbiologicaldiversity.com](http://humanbiologicaldiversity.com). Surprisingly, in a glossary that is supposed to explain technical terms to understand biological human diversity (alleles, bottleneck effect, etc.), one finds the following definitions:

*Aristocracy*: Historically, aristocrats originated as a military caste and have tended to be fairer-skinned and taller than commoners (e.g. the “fair princess”), both in Europe and North Asia. Aristocrats also have reproduced at a higher rate than commoners. According to Guillaume Faye, aristocrats are those who defend their people before their own interests. An aristocracy has a sense of history and blood lineage, seeing itself as biologically representative of the people it serves.

*Blue Blood*: The fair-skinned upper-class / aristocracy (e.g. a fair princess). During the Medieval period in Southern Europe, one's skin was supposed to be fair enough to see the blue veins (hence ‘blue blood’), thus distinguishing fair-skinned Europeans from the duskiest Moors and others.

The fact is that these forums are saturated with references to nobility, as many members choose titles such as Duke, Prince, King, and so forth as aliases (Figure 16). An example is motto of the Skadi forum, which was described as “a free speech forum for people of Germanic heritage,” dedicated to “the preservation of our Germanic heritage” and the “development of all-Germanic consciousness”: “Are you noble enough to join?”

Figure 16: Two examples of aliases with nobiliary references.



Source: <https://www.eupedia.com>, last accessed 9 April 2024

tic, among many, that was supposed to be hereditary and could serve to define these groups. All this was still true in the 1930 to 1950s, when genetics began to be presented as the best way to define scientifically “race” and identify “racial relations” by scholars such as Laurence Snyder, William Boyd, or Ronald Fisher, precisely because genetics gave access to supposedly strictly inherited traits that are stable and insensitive to environment. See for instance Boyd and Asimov (1958).

Many contributors insist on the fact that their ancestry is related to the history of noble, conquering, and "smart" peoples and the very use of admixture proportions clearly echoes "quarters of nobility." An individual's proportion of "noble blood" is quantified through the various contributions of their ancestors, in terms of ethnic or racial components. Just as the genealogical knowledge of nobility has often proved quite plastic and easy to manipulate in order to emphasize a particular ancestry, depending on the political or symbolical stakes<sup>41</sup>, so too does a similar game operate in these peculiar communities.

## Conclusion

This article had three main objectives. The first was to explore how various online communities that share European identitarian and racist agendas use genomic data. It is important to emphasize one point in this respect. Even though these online communities can be described as developing a new kind of decentralized, participative counterknowledge on race and genomics, it would be misleading to believe we can dismiss it as mere junk science or an ideology opposed to the pure science of human population genetics. Fighting such a counterknowledge and its extrapolations supposes a drastic epistemological and historical critique of some of the core categories and techniques of mainstream human population genetics itself. In its ways of producing, processing, and reasoning from genomic data, the discipline more or less consciously incorporates problematic assumptions, ambiguities, and biases that can then be exploited for political and ideological motives. The second objective was to examine how these online communities focus, in particular, on European genetic identities and how they define them. One important element here is to emphasize that, in most of these cases, such identity debates relate not to Whiteness, but rather to structural divisions within Europe, which refer to more ancient distinctions in European racial science, such as that between Nordacists and Mediterraneans. Third, I aimed to explore how, in these online communities, European DNA acquires a social life. In this respect, it is important to note that we are very far from the dream of radically new biosocialities celebrated by various scholars. Even in the cases that may look as creative as new biosocialities, when individuals exhibit their Y-DNA or mt-DNA results and include their admixture tests in their signatures, they actually define their identities according to older categories and ways of reasoning. I conclude by paraphrasing Karl Marx (1852, 176):

men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they [make it] under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with ... creating something that did not exist before ... they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them

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41 This is a common place well known among the historians of nobility and genealogy. See Jettot and Lezowski (2016), Pietri and Butaud (2006), Rouchon (2014).

names ... and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.

This conclusion actually holds true both for the most advanced population genomics and for the so-called new biosocialities that supposedly emerged from it. The only way to completely eliminate the spirit of the past is to investigate, without complacency, how it is continually reinscribed in scientific practices and in common methods of identification and categorization.

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