

CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,


As we are sending this 14th newsletter, here at Carantes we are happy to celebrate one year since we started holding public meetings! We are all so grateful to all of you for making this endeavour so enjoyable, and for supporting this initiative. All of us at the Steering Committee have been uplifted by each interaction and discussion that have happened since the creation of this organisation, and we hope that it has been the same for all of you! Now, before getting into the last public meeting's minutes, a word about current events.

Some of our members in the United Kingdom have been rightfully concerned by the recent riots and fascist violence that erupted following a serial stabbing. After the perpetrator of the attack was falsely identified as a muslim migrant, far-right rioters engaged in violent and intimidating actions mostly targeted towards muslim and refugee communities across the country. This is coming as a result of years of anti-immigration propaganda, through the Brexit campaign and since, the complacency of institutions and the media towards far-right rhetoric, as well as the worsening material conditions of working and middle-class people who are then pushed to find easy targets to vent their frustrations with the oppressive capitalist system they live under. The violence and despicable racist talking points that came out of these riots are to be condemned, and must also serve as a concrete example of what happens when systemic issues are not properly addressed, when racism - and here especially islamophobia - is allowed to fester and grow. This must serve to push discussions regarding not only what created this situation, but how to do better when it comes to protecting non-white and marginalised communities. This must inevitably come through denormalising how muslim communities have been talked about in the media, in Europe and elsewhere, even more so since the start of the genocide in Palestine, as well as by advocating for the improvement of everyone socio-economic situation through consistent opposition to neoliberalism.

As concerning as these events have been, we also want to point out the impressive wave of anti-fascist protests that followed across the UK. A great number of people came together to take a stand against these hateful actions, and to raise a counter-message of acceptance and inclusion. These gatherings have shown that there is support for the marginalised communities, for our muslim siblings out there, and that our first line of defense against bigotry must always be solidarity first and foremost. We cannot be divided in the face of hate and oppression, and regardless of ethnicity, religion, orientation, or class, we are stronger together. Resistance is built on the principle that we can help each other achieve a better world, and as the song says: There is power in unity.

LOGISTICS

 Our next newsletter will be out on or around September 15th!

 Also, you can join our **discord server**! This link will be active for the next 7 days:
<https://discord.gg/ma9AQeTS>

MEETING NOTES

On July 30th we had our second Lughnasadh public meeting, where we had a really excellent discussion on a range of topics covered in the two selected papers, Sabina Magliocco's 2004 '“The Heart Is the Only Nation”: Neo-Paganism, Ethnic Identity, and the Construction of Authenticity', and Brett H. Furth's 2017 'Ethnic Neo-Pagan Altars and Ancestors in Texas: An Ethnoreligious Strategy to Reconfigure European Ancestry and Whiteness'. Both of these were recommended readings in our July newsletter.

Our discussion of these articles opened on the relationship between American Neopagan traditions and ideas of '**Blood Memory**' mentioned in the second paper, according to which **a specific person might worship specific figures due to feeling a link to an ancestral past**, and how the communities discussed in the articles grappled with the more troubling implications that arise from connecting religion and (perceived) blood descent.

The discussion in the meeting focused heavily on this topic of 'Blood Memory', and how this idea, which has natural links to ideas of genetic inheritance of non-biological traits popular among far-right ideological movements, are present even in traditionally left-leaning NeoPagan communities. We brought attention to the fact that some of the left-leaning communities discussed in the articles were conscious of this issue, and were trying to simultaneously hold this belief in 'Blood Memory' (or similar concepts) while also championing the idea that ethnic identity should not prohibit worship of certain figures or participation in rituals. This ideological conflict caught our attention, and after much discussion, we came to the conclusion that these ideas of inheritable cultural traditions may circulating be in these communities as the result of the wider social and political context of the United States of America where these forms of NeoPaganism developed. The emphasis placed on (perceived) descent from particular ethnic groups, be they Celtic, Norse, Sicilian, or others, in these NeoPagan communities seemed to us as **an element in the wider problem of the construction of individual identity in America (and Canada)**, where people who have distant ancestors from European countries may heavily incorporate this ancestry in their personal identity.

As part of this discussion, several attendees at the meeting who are from North America brought attention to their experiences with this phenomenon. One attendee noted that, while back in North America, they were told that they must enjoy living in the part of Europe one of their parents were from due to that ancestral link. Another brought up their personal experience semi-romanticizing the part of Europe their ancestors had come from, and explained how that romanticization was dissolved when they traveled there and saw that it was a place like any other.

From here, our discussion moved towards **the importance of aesthetic in NeoPagan and New Age traditions**, and how, as discussed in the readings, some Celtic NeoPagan traditions have issues appropriating material from Indigenous North American cultures, following out-of-date scholarly views that Celtic peoples and Indigenous North American peoples were at the same stage of development and therefore comparable. The importance of aesthetic in these communities was likened to far-right and fascist groups' heavy reliance on historical aesthetics, as covered in previous readings.

This led to a discussion of the lack of well-researched public-facing resources for non-scholars who are interested in learning about Celtic peoples, be it for religious reasons or personal interest. One attendee flagged that several of the (clearly unintentionally) appropriated Indigenous North American traditions in Celtic NeoPagan or New Age traditions, such as the use of sweat lodges, vague ideas of ‘shamanism’, systems of sacred directions, and ‘spirit animals’, were based on outdated but easily accessible works of scholarship. This then led to a remark from an attendee from Australia, who noted that traditions and cultural markers from Indigenous Australian peoples are not absorbed into Australian New Age or NeoPagan traditions, and suggested that this was due to the widespread education in Australia about these cultures and the (often quite recent) inhumane treatment and attempts at ethnocide directed at them, leading the Australian public to reject the appropriation of Indigenous Australian traditions.

Our discussion eventually drifted towards the **influence of Cultural Christianity** on these various religious traditions, discussing the similarities between the personal shrines described in the second paper and traditional shrines dedicated to Catholic Saints. In particular, one attendee discussed the role that the increasingly culturally dominant force of American Evangelical Christianity may have in shaping American NeoPaganism and then, due to American cultural dominance, these ideas may be functionally ‘exported’ elsewhere.

To cap off this summary of a fascinating discussion, we’d like to recommend a third article by **Rhys Kaminsky-Jones**, titled **“Anti-Woke Druids and Radical Bards,”** (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/anti-woke-druids-and-radical-bards>). It provides a thorough and accessible overview of some of Iolo Morgannwg’s activities and their descendants in the modern day, in the shape of Nina Power and other online personalities known for their links to radical anti-woke spaces and their taste for Celtic material. It’s an important read that brings together many threads discussed during our public meeting, and before. Of particular note to us is the idea that gender essentialism in these online spaces parallels Iolo Morgannwg’s claims that the tradition he was reviving was part of the natural order. We’ve been aware for some time that gender is a part of the tangled knot that is fascist appropriation of Celtic material, but unsure how best to approach it. Here, the relation is laid out clearly: **just like Iolo, people arguing that the Celts had it right when it came to gender mistake their own cultural context for the truth of nature.** To us, this is an essential piece of insight into the workings of those whom we must oppose at every turn, and we highly recommend you read it.

That is all for us now at the CARANTES steering committee. Please feel free to contact us if you have any reactions, thoughts or concerns, or if you would rather not get any more emails. We’d love to hear from you on the discord server or by email.

Until next time, keep well and safe,
and thanks for doing this work with us,
Your friends at



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