

February 2026

Dear friends,

As Imbolc season continues to pass, we hope you are keeping warm and dry, whether you're in north western Europe, which has been hit with storm after storm, or in the parts of the United States where a cold spell has the country in its grip. If you're already in a warm, dry place then we hope you're able to handle current world events with resilience in compassion.

A particularly difficult story to stomach lately has been the continuing release of the Epstein files by the USA's Department of Justice. Done in an irresponsible way that has visited fresh violence on survivors and been [heavily criticized](#), these newly published documents contain the record of atrocities that we won't detail here. We're sure you've heard some of them, and feel that it is up to each of us to decide how much we're able to take on. It's enough to know that these files tell the story of an international elite consumed by a cruelty seemingly without bounds. For many of us, it has felt strangely unmooring. Antifascists are optimists by nature: we believe a better world is possible and worth fighting for. But in light of these new revelations, it seems more difficult than ever to maintain that belief. Is there not something truly rotten about human nature, if this is what we're capable of?

At the same time, these alleged abominations, committed so gleefully by such powerful people, appear to be outside the very stuff of reality most of us are used to. They are so evil that they feel supernatural, in the literal sense that they exceed what we expect from the world around us.

The temptation to freeze and give up is greater than ever in the face of these horrors and the contradictory emotions they elicit.

But we must face the fact that they are neither exceptional, nor inevitable. **It is essential that we reframe what is mentioned in these files in systemic terms.** [Blindboy's analysis](#), which contextualizes the evil acts of the international elite within the framework of organized crime, provides a helpful first step in understanding what is at play here. We recommend caution in listening to this podcast, as he cites some of the documents directly. By describing the historical induction rituals common to criminal groups, Blindboy highlights the dreadful pragmatic aspect of these acts. It is a form of blackmail that serves to build a network and keep its members in line.

In line with what? This is only alluded to in the podcast. Antifascist methodologies encourage us to look at structure next: how do these acts relate to the structure of society? It becomes clear, looking through this lens, that the atrocities allegedly committed by the international elite serve to bolster the symbiotes of capitalism: white supremacy, patriarchy, colonialism, fascism. As someone stated on the CARANTES discord server: **"it's not just tolerated, it's rewarded by the system."**

In this sense, then, the staggering extremities of violence alluded to in the Epstein files are the logical culmination of a society built on exploitation. The election to the US presidency of a man mentioned [38,000 times](#) in this new release alone is not an aberration, it is entirely congruous with contemporary history. Those of us who feel particularly shocked at what we have read or heard must now face our privilege head-on: that we have not seen this violence before, laid out in such clear terms, and that we find it so unexpected, is a mark of the place

we hold in this system of exploitation. **Our responsibility, then, is to resist the urge to give up.**

And thus, the fight against these monsters is the fight of antifascists: a [labourous battle of the every day](#) to overturn a system that seeks to consume us, and build a world that protects and cares for our most vulnerable relatives.

Logistics

To continue this task, we invite you to attend the next Reading Group meeting on **Friday 20 march from 4 to 6pm (UTC+0)**. We will discuss Josie Giles' [On Wilfion and the search for trans stories](#), as well as Finn Longman's [‘What manner of man is this Hound?’: Gender, Humanity and the Transgressive Figure of Cú Chulainn](#). The piece by Josie Giles is the first in a series of three, and recommend the last pieces as well. As always, please RVSP if you'd like to attend!

Meeting Minutes

Our Imbolc Public Meeting, felt, as always, like a luminous dot in this tapestry of hope we are all weaving together. Our thanks to those who attended, and be assured we missed you if you didn't! Here are the notes of that conversation.

We discussed Jernej Kaluža's 2022 article, "[Habitual Generation of Filter Bubbles: Why is Algorithmic Personalisation Problematic for the Democratic Public Sphere?](#)" published in Javnost - The Public, 29(3).

We began with a recap of the article and a look at its abstract before focusing on a particular quote that appeared to embody both the merits and the limits of this piece. On p. 272, Kaluža states that "The principle of publicness should be inscribed in the very design of recommending algorithms, which are public-forming tools co-responsible for public opinion. Their functioning should be judged not only from the perspective of individual users but from the perspective of the functioning democratic public sphere."

Here, Kaluža means that **algorithms are not just beholden to individuals, which has been a common critique of their opacity, but also to the public sphere**. While this is an important point, we noted that the idea of public sphere is not very clearly defined in the piece. [Habermas' definition](#) is alluded to in the final pages, but not fully examined, which is a shame as it does appear to merit some critiques.

Additionally, the question arose, from a public policy perspective, of **enforcement**. How can we ensure that algorithms are "judged from the perspective of a functioning democratic public sphere"? What does this entail? Through which institutions should this judgment be made, and by whom can it be enforced?

From here, we took a small tangent to discuss the Online Safety Act, which has been heavily [criticized by experts](#) as a movement that will, deliberately or not, effect stringent censorship on essential online spaces. Here, someone made the point that these new regulations will simply translate class divides onto the internet, which has up until now been a remarkably equalizing force. While there are clear economic incentives at work, we noted that the opacity

of digital mechanisms described by Kaluža means that legislators really don't understand what they're legislating on.

Then we moved to a section of the article that discusses two shootings and the differences in each shooter's online media consumption. Notably, the earlier Anders Breivik was more active in choosing what digital environments he interacted with, whereas the later shooter, Dylan Roof, was much more passive.

In relation to this shift, occurring around 2009, someone made the point that we are in a new era of propaganda and that habituation, Kaluža's key concept, takes on a central role: **the more you hear a certain idea the more common it seems, although it might not actually be mainstream at all.** The internet multiplies this effect, which was compared to billboards by the highway that advocate for niche ideas. The more you see these billboards, the more common they seem. To combat this, the article stresses the importance of having different points of view in the public sphere, but this seems to require the nuance of the [overton window](#). **Is everything open to public debate? Should it be?**

Another attendee added that the bubble idea assumes people keep to particular bubbles, and previously it used to be that various newspapers had various opinion biases, reflecting a variety of bubbles. But today there is wall to wall agreement in mainstream media, for example on trans issues, whereas according to polling it's not something the public is that worried about. But legislation follows public media, rather than the opinions of constituents.

Someone suggested an **action item for Carantes**: to set up a petitioning campaign under the CARANTES name to get academic institutions off X, a platform where [hate speech has increased by 50%](#) since it was acquired by Musk. In light of this Imbolc's reading on algorithms and radicalisation, we feel it is more important than ever to move to spaces that honor the principle of neutrality at the heart of the internet. We are going to work on materials to make this campaign happen, and in the meantime if you have any sway in an institution that retains a presence on this platform, we encourage you to advocate for deactivation. Feel free to contact us if this is something you'd like to participate in.

After a quick break, we moved on to discussing red flags we have noted in our various fields. The purpose of this is **to make our activism as scholars more flexible.** We do not always know what to look out for in relation to topics we are sometimes asked to teach, or encounter in our work. Thus, it is helpful to compare notes, and we hope to build an informal database that we can share with the [MATER project](#). We will certainly do it again, and if you cannot attend public meetings, we welcome any suggestions by email or on discord.

This time, we focused on various Celtic saints. Someone informed us that it is part of the Reform party's policy in the UK to make Saint David's Day a public holiday. There's also a big push of far-right evangelicalism in Wales, both in public and online discourse, which might seize upon medieval hagiography for new material to galvanize their hateful endeavours. In relation to this, someone else spoke about the splitting of the figure of Patrick, who is presented by some far-right groups as a representative of feminizing christianity coming in and wrecking northern european hypermasculine culture, while others may use it in a form of nationalist christianity. Notably, the idea that christianity came into Celtic areas and reduced the status of women can be used in the arguments of both left wing and far right groups. Thus, anyone working on Celtic histories through a feminist lens is doing essential work!

That is all for now from us 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. As a reminder, we will not be publishing a newsletter in March, but hope to email you soon with the details of our next meetings.

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



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