
CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear *Friends*,

We hope this 12th newsletter reaches you well and safe. It comes a little later than usual, as May is a busy month for us all, and before we get into the notes from the Beltane public meeting, we want to give some thought to the recent situation with campus protests in support of Palestine.

A number of you are based in the United States, as is one of our committee members, and as many of us are academics this is a topic that concerns us directly. If you are based elsewhere, and/or have not been keeping track of events, we have now seen hundreds of police invade Columbia's campus in NYC, dispersing peaceful protests with egregious violence. Snipers have been seen on top of university buildings in Ohio taking aim at protesters, not shooting but enforcing the police state panopticon. At the university of Texas, a faculty member has been beaten by police for taking part in peaceful actions demanding divestment from genocide. At UCLA, a militia-like group of 200 counter protesters invaded the pro-Palestine encampment, beat protesters and were allowed to leave with no consequences whatsoever. In Georgia, students refusing to remove their kuffiyah were escorted off the graduation stage. At my own institution, Princeton University, 14 students have now been arrested for taking part in a long-standing tradition of peaceful sit-ins in administration buildings. Like the arrested students of Columbia and other universities, they were immediately evicted from campus housing, and although they have since been unbanned from campus, they may still be suspended or expelled. This brutal repression of peaceful protests calling for an end to genocide is atrocious and has frightening implications. There is no doubt for us that we are witnessing the latent fascism of an immoral police state flexing its muscles and actualizing its ever-present threat of violence. University administrators involved in these egregious acts of repression are showing us the power and corruption of the military-industrial-academic complex.

One of the aims of Carantes has always been to attempt to understand the ways in which fascism intersects with academia. We usually read articles, discuss theory, try to define "vibes." However, we have slipped now into the domain of praxis: we are seeing fascism at work. A significant mechanism at the heart of these violent events has been fear, something we have not talked about enough. A frequently used argument in justifying the repression is that "Jewish students feel unsafe." Antisemitism is a scourge and we condemn it wholeheartedly. We also recognize that the term is being used to repress valid and necessary dissent. Many of the solidarity encampments have Jewish organizers and Jewish members, who have openly spoken about how safe they feel in these peaceful protests.

What jumps out to us is the fact that, according to Zionist rhetoric, **the feeling of being under threat justifies violent action**. As such, it seems that violence is not a driving force of fascism, but a necessary and acceptable means to its ends. This provides people who may not think of themselves as authoritarian with a powerful justification for taking part in fascist violence. Radicalization is happening before our very eyes.

Why does this matter? Because it is present in different ways in movements other than Zionism. White supremacy, conservatives, and TERFs are famously eager to invent threats to their existence that must be countered at all costs. But, where in some cases it appears that these threats are manufactured in bad faith in order to appease a few individuals' desire for violence or political power, we now see that it can still spread like wildfire. There is no need for the fear to be justified; it need only seize one's heart. The central question of fascism has often been for us, how are people radicalized into such narrow worldviews? Here is an answer. They are frightened into killing their neighbors. Let us then **pay particular attention to the ways our topics of study and interest are appropriated to stoke fear above all**, so that any violence might be justified.

This is a bleak picture of the world, and another of Carantes' goals has always been to make it better. How do we do this now? I will end this long intro with what makes me, writing this now, hopeful: the encampment at Princeton is the brightest, most heartwarming example of solidarity and community I have ever seen. The protesters on campuses at Columbia, in Texas, in Ohio, and everywhere else, who return again and again after raids by hundreds of police and in spite of the violence they face, are the bravest I have ever seen. Antarctica, land of scientists, has had its own pro-Palestinian demonstration. And though many camps have been shut down, including our own, we have also seen more and more universities choose to divest from genocide. Notably, all 76 Spanish institutions of higher learning have chosen to cut ties with complicit Israeli universities. This tells us one thing: we, the academics, have the power to form **communities of resistance**. The sense of purpose many of us have often felt, that it is our duty to fight fascism, to free the fields we love from its grip, and to safeguard knowledge against being used to stoke the fear that leads to such violence, is more justified than ever. We have the power to change the world. And it has never been more obvious that fascists fear that power. So, dear friends, thank you once more, from the bottom of our hearts, for doing this work with us. Witness the violence that meets these protests, and let it convince you of the power of this truth: **our work matters**. Justice is not a pipedream, and freedom is non-negotiable, for Palestinians and all other oppressed people.

And now, on to regularly scheduled programming.

LOGISTICS



There won't be a newsletter in June, as we are taking a much needed break. But we will be back around the 15th of **July**!



We will be holding a **round table** discussion at the Celtic Students Conference in Brest and we look forward to seeing you there: Friday May 31st, from 3:30 to 5pm in room C219.



Also, you can join our **discord server**! [Link active for the next 7 days.](#)

BELTANE PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

The meeting started, we went through introductions and we shared some news that we thought would be relevant for our working group. Many things have come up since our last public meeting: on the topic of paleography and early writing systems, we discussed the use of ogham for pro-palestinian messages during Eurovision. The Irish finalist Bambie Thug displayed on their outfit, in ogham script, the word 'peace'. It was really interesting to see people relying on the relative unknown character of ogham in a wider context to try and convey a strong message.

Apart from this, we have also noticed miscellaneous attempts from Irish far right movements to be in the spotlight. We then discussed the student pro-Palestine protests that mainly happened in US universities. They had to face much pushback from the police, but we noticed it spread to other places in the world, which is encouraging. In France, students have been blocking universities, but the government has begun to cut funding in retaliation. Someone brought up an interesting topic: the weaponization of the Book of Kells in the protests of Trinity College Dublin. Indeed, the students have been protesting over the University's ties with Israel and, as a consequence, the Book of Kells has remained closed to the public, resulting in significant financial losses. In this specific case, **medieval Irish heritage is somewhat involved in pro-Palestinian protests!** In the US, House Republicans have modified an anti-semitism law that now decrees that any criticism directed towards the State of Israel would qualify as anti-semitism. This has yet to pass the Senate but the fact that Congress is redefining the concept in order to legitimate their actions against pro-Palestine protests is terrifying. It's interesting to think about how those in power can reshape and redefine words and concepts that we are using. The media also seem to be going along with this new law, with some renaming pro-Palestinian protesters 'pro-terror'. The general weaponization of vocabulary extends to trans issues and many other topics. Here, the purpose is to redirect the conversation towards where those in power want it to be instead of where it should be.

Article discussion: on “‘Irish Slaves’: the Convenient Myth’ (Liam Hogan) / Blog posts ‘Irish Slaves, from Myth to “Debate”,’ and ‘How to Change History: William Petty, Irish Slavery, and a Fake Debate’ (Ted McCormic)

This Beltane meeting's topic was definitely in relation to this idea of changing the meaning of words. The myth of Irish slaves has been widespread for hundreds of years, but now scholars such as Liam Hogan are trying to deconstruct this myth. In short, this pseudo-historical claim suggests that Irish people who travelled to North America as indentured servants were slaves in the same way as Africans who were captured during the transatlantic slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. This has been used in white supremacist group chats to dismiss the experiences of enslaved Africans forcibly brought to the Americas. Liam Hogan has gone through these online groups and created an archive of memes and comments using the Irish slaves myth. The word 'slave' itself incorporates a large range of meanings which can be problematic as well. People have intentionally and unintentionally lost the nuance of the word 'slave'. It might well be because slavery is such an open notion in the English language, that a comparison between enslaved African peoples and Irish indentured servants has been made. We also need to think about what was considered slavery at that time. The myth was very much alive from 2014 to 2018, some of us witnessed the ongoing debate on the internet. What is also interesting is **why the idea of indentured Irish is more prevalent in these spaces than the British colonization of Ireland**, although this is well attested and has material evidence proving its factuality. This seems engineered to justify hatred of a particular group, in this case black people.

The same pattern emerges during the mid-19th century waves of migration to the USA. In order to integrate into US society, Irish immigrants might have sided with the dominant group and might also have participated in the deterioration of non-white people's condition. Could the myth of the Irish slave and the appropriation of slavery be a remnant of this form of attempted progression through social strata?

Here, the professional historian is essential to debunking old academic works that promote the myth. In that view, we need to realize how much responsibility we have as scholars and how important it is to do our job properly. By doing so, we can fight this kind of idea, like Liam Hogan did with the myth of Irish slaves. Doing the work that should have been done helps to fix the situation. Also, making academic material and reliable information accessible to all (articles shared online for instance). The sources accessible to the wider public are often unreliable: for instance, a history magazine propagated the myth of the Irish slaves in the first place. We need to discuss the role of these magazines in spreading misinformation, especially related to Celtic things. This type of media needs to publish because people pay for it, so they sometimes print re-imagined or outdated information.

A recurring pattern then emerges: the media or even sometimes academics need to get a certain amount of words out on a topic, so they stretch the truth or speak very broadly. It would not have to be inaccurate to lead an uninformed member of the wider public to assume things about this specific topic. This is a real problem, because there's no way to get into proper academic Celtic studies as a non-Celticist. People are drawn into things related to Celtic-speaking people by material that is most often not produced by specialists. **There is a wide gap between academic and public facing works in Celtic Studies.** If we want to fight against the misinformation that is spread in our field, we need to open our work and welcome people into our field, by sharing knowledge and reliable sources. We also realized that academia tends to prevent you from speaking in an accessible way. Finding ways to talk and write to a wider audience is something that senior scholars might not have had needed to be trained in, and this unfortunately does not help. There is little public outreach in our field but thankfully some scholars are aware of the situation and try their best to reverse the trend. There's also the problem of people not accepting new information. We concluded the meeting by discussing the future of academia, and we shared ideas about how to make Celtic Studies a more open and welcoming field: focusing on simple discussion pieces that foster a non-exclusive sense of belonging, thinking about how to adapt pedagogical principles to Celtic Studies, and centring empathy in our epistemological practises, especially when speaking to non-experts.

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 thank you for doing this work with us,
Your friends at



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