This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter published by Routledge in Folklore and the Nation on 30th August 2021, available online:
http://www.routledge.com/9781003007531

Abstract

The rise of exclusionary, populist ideologies in the post-industrial Global North is a well-documented phenomenon: posing moral and physical challenges to civil society, manifestations of these ideologies occur in a diverse range of European localities. A strong commonality between these local expressions is the recourse to both the context and the content of folklore and folklore scholarship. This chapter considers the deployment of folklore by English, ethnonationalist, neo-Pagan communities as they gain confidence and claim legitimacy as recognised religious organisations. Part of this claim rests on the construction of a traditional cosmology, one feature of which is the observance of calendar customs. Examination of the way in which a range of folkloric calendar customs is used to create their model of a 'traditional' year traces the historical development of the English, ethnonationalist, Pagan ritual year focusing in particular on the rituals associated with Plough Monday. In its incorporation of socially progressive and politically regressive discourses, English ethnonationalist spirituality presents a compelling challenge and field of study for folklorists, geographers and other scholars of nation and identity.

Blood, Blots and Belonging: English Heathens and Their (Ab)uses of Folklore

Kate Smith

The rise of exclusionary, populist ideologies in the post-industrial Global North is a well-documented phenomenon (see, for example, Kaltwasser et al. 2017; Beirich and Buchanan 2017; Lowles 2019). Posing moral and physical challenges to civil society, aspects of these ideologies occur across all global contexts. As they formalise their political manifestations, populist ideologies have gained confidence and claimed legitimacy as social movements. They have become highly visible, locally distinctive mechanisms for individuals and communities to mobilise their perceived marginalisation by neoliberalism, globalism and perceived progressivism. A strong commonality between the distinct local expressions of these mechanisms is the recourse to both the context and the content of folklore and folklore scholarship. These ideological communities co-opt motifs, spaces and places that folklorists and other interdisciplinary scholars have regarded, rightly or wrongly, as their fields. Like von Schnurbein (2015), I come to this research via medieval language studies and ethnography; we both have skin in the game of resisting the co-option of Norse and Anglo-Saxon studies by white supremacists. Like her, I acknowledge the illegibility of such co-option to my younger, more naïve self.

This chapter is a response (and a resistance) to that co-option. As a folklorist, my questions are about the 'how' of the 'life of forms in society' (Noyes 2016, 15): what happens to our beliefs, customs and behaviours as we observe them across the boundaries of time, space, economics and social groupings. It considers their deployment in the construction of the exclusionary ideology of one intersection of the wider far-right populist network: the Pagan far right. Part of the Pagan far right's claim to legitimacy rests on the construction of a traditional cosmology that both supports and is supported by its political ideology. One aspect of traditional cosmology takes the form of calendar customs that comprise a ritual year. This chapter explores the development of one element of that ritual year, using it to explore how calendar customs are used to create a far-right Pagan traditional year. It argues that folklore is instrumentalised as a means of legitimisation for English far-right Paganism.

Names and Numbers: A Note

There is significant plurality in the naming of subcultures within contemporary Paganism. This chapter follows Hutton's (2008) use of Paganism to denote the broad category of belief that reconstructs and recreates pre-Christian belief systems. Paganism comprises many traditions, of which three are the most commonly practised in the UK. The oldest is Druidry; it has origins in the eighteenth-century Romantic imaginary of Welsh and British pre-Christian religion and is often characterised as an animistic nature religion. The youngest, Wicca, was developed in the UK in the mid-twentieth century whence it spread to become a worldwide religion. It is characterised by eclecticism, liberation, environmentalism, feminism and mysticism. Although Druidry predates Wicca by 100 years or more, contemporary Druid practice has clear structural parallels to the repertoire of ritual and ceremony formalised by Wiccan writers, notably Starhawk (1979). Sitting between Druidry and Wicca in age, Heathenism draws on a complex system of beliefs and rituals focused on a Germanic or Scandinavian pantheon. It originates with Germanic Romantic nationalists and their nineteenth-century imaginaries of place and identity. As a practical belief system, contemporary Heathenism originates from the mid-twentieth century; significant aspects of it derive from esoteric Aryanism (notably, Folkish ideology is a direct cultural and linguistic translation of the German Völkisch movement). As noted by Wilson in this volume, Folkish belief holds that there are clear

ethnic and racial foundations to spirituality, which represent the outward expression of a racial or ethnic group's 'folk soul' (Gardell 2003, 29–31).

Just as there are multiple branches within Paganism, so there are multiple variations and denominations within Heathenism. As the wider Pagan community has grown in confidence and visibility, the euphemistic 'Northern Tradition' has been dropped in favour of the more assertive 'Heathenism' or 'Heathenry' to describe those Pagans who worship within a broadly Norse or Germanic tradition. Within Heathenism, differently named subgroups are often associated with positions on the ideological spectrum. Thus, Ásátru has often been used as the label for Heathens who adopt a more inclusive cosmology. Overtly racist, Aryanist exclusionary Heathens have commonly been identified as Wotanist, Odinist or Folkish: the Heathen communities with which my own research was conducted identify as Folkish Odinists. For clarity and brevity, this chapter refers to the far-right, Pagan subjects of my research as Odinists and to the broader community of reconstructivist Germanic and Scandinavian Pagans as Heathens.

The 2011 UK census permitted self-identification of religious belief under a broad category of 'other;' within that other over 75,000 people self-identified as broadly 'pagan.' Vivianne Crowley (2014) synthesised numbers from the overall return for other, proposing a subtotal of 1,867 Heathens. As Heathenism is often regarded as the most Reconstructionist of all the Paganisms, we may include Crowley's 223 Reconstructionists to give a proposed total of 2,090 Heathen Pagans in 2011.

There are no reliable or recent figures for the current size of the Pagan or Heathen communities in the UK, but it seems likely that they will have grown considerably since 2011. This chapter is based on six months of digital ethnography within those communities, during which I compiled and collated material from the institutional social media feeds and websites of UK-based, far-right Pagan groups, in particular the Odinic Rite. Ethical restrictions limited the extent to which I was able to collect and analyse material from individual or personal social media accounts. See the following for further discussion of my ethical position in relation to social media data. The material I collected (comprising 365 multimedia and text-based samples) was extracted, coded and analysed using QSR-NVivo and a grounded theory, critical discourse analysis approach.

Because my data set is derived largely from social media, one strategy for reckoning the possible size of the UK Heathen community is to use numbers of social media group members and page followers for UK Heathen organisations and communities. The Odinic Rite (OR) has 7,316 Facebook page followers; there are no official OR Facebook closed or open groups. The largest closed, exclusionary Heathen Facebook group has 80 members; the largest inclusive group (coordinated by the umbrella organisation Asatru UK) has 2,455 group members and 2,188 page followers. It should be noted that these figures suggest that although the far right is an active and voluble presence within Heathenry, it is still a minority. Indeed, it is heartening to remember that the largest UK-based Heathen organisations are all signatories to Declaration 127, which denounces exclusionary ideologies.

Context

The period immediately following the financial crash of 2007–8 will be remembered not just for its catastrophic economic consequences and for the deployment of austerity as a means of socioeconomic control, but also as a period which saw Europe's far-right populist movement incarnate solidly in economically and/or civically marginalised communities of majority populations. Much has been written about the rise of radical right populism; Vieten and Poynting (2016) present a particularly lucid history and historiography of recent scholarship on this subject. Until recently,

there has been little consideration of the sociocultural dimensions of exclusionary ideologies (Ostiguy 2017) and almost no consideration of the subject by folklorists.

Attention has been paid to the deployment of folklore to construct historical and national identities (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983; Bendix 1997; Baycroft and Hopkin 2012). There has been less focus on the specific intersections of folklore (whether as object-behaviour-belief or as subject-lens-culture) and contemporary nationalist politics. There is little, for example, to provide a contemporary counterpoint to the historical research in Baycroft and Hopkin (2012). Similarly, the study of Paganism by folklorists is relatively limited (Hutton 2008), despite the fact that contemporary Paganism, as Magliocco (2004, 25) notes, can be read as a folk tradition on several levels. Indeed, Magliocco is rare in sharing this chapter's interest in the uses and reuses of folklore within the context of contemporary Paganism. The synthesis of folklore studies, religious studies and political studies has certainly been helped by the emergence of the 'folkloresque' as a way of understanding culture and its artefacts. As Wilson notes in this volume, Foster's proposal of the folkloresque as a heuristic tool gives us a vocabulary for articulating the complex, mutually modulatory dynamics that characterise populist ideologies (Foster and Tolbert 2016) and their propensity to weave folkloric elements into narratives rich with 'fuzzy allusion.'

We should also note the significant contribution of scholars of religion whose view extends to spirituality's links to culture and behaviour. Notably, Bowman and Valk's consideration of 'vernacular religion,' while focused primarily on Christian expressions of popular or vernacular religiosity, offers us a useful way of approaching the genres of belief and how they are made up of 'vernacular beliefs not grounded in institutionalized truths but in individual creativity, expressed in a variety of local and social contexts and shaped by the power of tradition' (Bowman and Valk 2012, 17). Their work notwithstanding, much of the work on the specific intersection of belief, identity and far-right politics has fallen to sociologists or historians of religion. In his history of reconstructive Germanic Paganism, Jeffrey Kaplan (1996) provides a clear account of the history of Odinism and Ásátru in the USA. Gardell's (2003) anthropological approach situates racist Paganism in the USA within a web of imaginaries pertaining to identity, inheritance and entitlement. Of particular relevance to the present volume is his theme of enchantment: one function of Paganism is to re-enchant the world for individuals left disenchanted by what Giddens (1990, 53) identifies as the 'disembedding mechanisms' of modernity and globalisation.

Gardell informs the more recent work of Jennifer Snook (2015) and Jefferson F. Calico (2018). Both are sympathetic enquirers, who at times render the troublesome surface of Heathen historiography too smooth. Both fail to adequately acknowledge their emic, embodied and subjective position (Bennett and Shurmer-Smith 2002); both reject as conflation the links between white supremacy and Heathenism. This lack of critical positionality vis-à-vis insider perspectives and on the contested origins of Heathenism is widespread: Strimska and Sigurvinsson (2005), for example, are similarly confident that the link between the far right and Heathenry has been overstated. Calico (2018) also dismisses the Heathen-racist connection. The case, however, needs to be made more robustly. Pagan studies' failure to adequately address the common origins of esoteric racism and some kinds of contemporary Paganism problematises many of the 'insider interpretations of social processes' (Davidsen 2012, 192) on which its scholars often rely.

My own position in relation to the study of Heathen and Odinist culture is to assume rationality in all actors (Stark and Finke 2000), in such a way that does not excuse those actors from complicity when their behaviours are exclusionary across any axis of differentiation. My own ethnicity and family history may mean that I would be perceived by Heathens as 'in-group;' that is not how I characterise myself. Whilst my doctoral research was based in part on participant observation with several Pagan

communities, this time I have observed without participating: sharing and participating in sacred customs with informants creates a solidarity which, for me, has the potential to disrupt my rationality. This is not an informant community to which I have sought to become close. Furthermore, when hate speech and unacceptable content have appeared in my research materials or in comments relating to them, I have reported them to the relevant moderating authority.

The tension embodied in Heathenism is more than a 'human-centred conversation about race, and a male-centred conversation about power' (Harvey 1997, 68): in the face of the weaponisation of Anglo-Saxon and folklore studies, failure to address the co-option of these disciplines' outputs by racial supremacists looks more like apathy and less like balance.

Whereas Gardell, Snook and Calico's explorations take a broadly historical materialist perspective, my study understands (after Stuckrad 2003) the far-right, neo-Pagan ritual year as a system of communication and shared action. My research is informed by folklore studies, cultural and historical geographies and the anthropology of religion. It is guided by the discourse analysis frameworks developed by Reisigl and Womak (2001) in the context of racist, anti-Semitic political rhetoric. Any resulting lack of theoretical specificity should be counterbalanced by the advantages of such interdisciplinarity (Doyle White 2016).

In terms of putting far-right ideology in its sociopolitical context, Kinnvall (2015) provides a helpful gloss of the EU legal position, often cited as a causative factor in the rise of the reactionary right wing (see, for example, Mischi 2013; O'Flynn 2019). She identifies a post-Maastricht turn across the right wing towards increasingly fervent economic nationalism and antiglobalism. In making this turn, the populist radical right both creates the problem and sets the agenda for solving it, defining the limits of our fear about invasion by the 'other' (Betz and Johnson 2004). The exclusionary ideology that underpins Odinist identity clearly sits within these fears. Experimental research has shown that the adoption of exclusionary ideologies is more strongly associated with a sense of cultural threat than with economic hazard (see, for example, Mudde 2007; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Sniderman et al. 2004). Heathenism responds to that cultural threat with the promise of restoring strength to faith, family and folk (Odinic Rite 2019a, 2019b).

The match between the populist radical right and contemporary Paganism could not be better made. Populism suits a cosmology in which identity is synonymous with ideology (and vice versa) and in which—as Wilson's chapter explores in the context of British National Socialism—performance of ethnicity is a creed (Davies 1999). Furthermore, as an organisational model, Heathenism is useful to the populist radical right: its institutional structure is cellular and self-organising, comprising a network of semi-independent local groups called Hearths. Leaders are self-selecting from the broad membership base. As in radical Protestantism, Heathenism eschews strict religious hierarchies; places at the high altar are earned by dedication, application and education. Local Odinist Hearths reflect their community, landscape and members' concerns: Idunn's Somerset Orchard Hearth includes local wassailing customs within its community year, whereas Frey's Beacon Hearth (based in Lancashire) includes environmental improvement at Beacon Fell in the Forest of Bowland as part of its calendar of communal activities. It is to the construction of that calendar that I will now turn.

The Neo-Pagan, Far-Right Ritual Year

A ritual year, at its simplest, is a pattern of festivals and celebrations practised by people at regular or specific points in the year; most, if not all, religions have one. The individual nodes within a ritual year are both medium and message: they are part of how communities at all scales recognise and

define themselves, both inwardly and in relation to their divinities. The ritual year of Paganism has as its foundational metaphor the 'wheel of the year.' The wheel of the year features eight festivals: four solstices or equinoxes and four quarter days. The quarter days reflect historical agricultural-economic cycles. Its structure is consistent and pervasive; it is sufficiently ubiquitous to have become the schema through which many understand all 'traditional' calendars (Hutton 2008, 259).

Regardless of the extent to which many Heathens see their kind of Paganism as being distinct—more robust, more authentic, more rugged—from the rest, their ritual year shares the same basic structure as that observed by other Pagans. Towards the exclusionary ideological pole of Heathenry, other Paganisms (particularly Wicca) are regarded as inauthentic, insubstantial, or 'fluffy' (Reddit.com 2014), and their versions of Paganism are derided. Those Heathens who actively seek to reconstruct what they believe to be their ancestral religion have questioned the use of a calendar that both mirrors the Wiccan wheel of the year and (in some iterations) contains celebrations associated with Christian figures such as Walpurga. Attempts have therefore been made to (re)construct a more 'Germanic' ritual year; the success of this project is limited both by the scarcity of reliable historical resources and by the difficulty of mapping ancient time-reckoning onto the modern calendar.

Any attempt to fit the reconstructed Germanic calendar into our contemporary year is challenging: it has an uneven spread of months across the year, with some spanning two or more of our contemporary months. Furthermore, what festivals we do know about [from Christian, medieval Icelandic calendars, for example (Bjarnadottir 2010)] are inconsistently spaced across the year, creating an unevenness that contrasts unfavourably with the rhythm observed by other Pagan communities. The syncopated ritual year derived from historical sources seems to be seldom used by the Heathen community, even when that community is very determined (like the OR) to present an authentic Anglo-Saxon (and/or Germanic, and/or Norse) identity. Figure 16.1 shows my reconstruction of the OR's ritual year, derived from accounts published on their website (OR 2009), which is in turn based on the Book of Blots published by the OR's founder in 1991 (Yeowell [1991] 2014).

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Figure 16.1 The Odinic Rite ritual year.

It is clear from this schematic representation that there are echoes here of both the Wiccan wheel of the year and the Christian calendar: there are regularly spaced rituals, with something to do every month.

The OR ritual year has multiple layers of organisation and signification. In the OR's writings, they identify four 'tides' or themes which correspond to the seasonal round in Northern Europe. Layered over this are the standard European calendar months; layered over that are a corresponding number of blots or celebrations. Blots are linked either to an individual god or goddess within the Norse pantheon or to a seasonal change. Most broadly fit into the secular ritual and seasonal year that pervades in the UK: remembrance, for example, has become a ubiquitous element of November's cultural signification. There are additions to the standard Pagan wheel of the year that are peculiar to the OR, notably in April and October, when celebrations of colonisation or settlement and homelands are held.

The material I collected spans the whole of the ritual year, covering 12 months of rituals, activities, narratives and visual motifs. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the first festival of the OR year: Charming the Plough. This ritual provides a useful lens to highlight the way that the OR

constructs a bricolage from the 'stuff' of folklore into its practices, with the effect of giving them the burnished patina of an ancient folk practice that has its roots firmly planted in English soil, which is the 'true heart of England' (Garland and Chakraborti 2006, 167).

Charming the Plough

Customs and traditions connected to ploughing and the large community of agricultural labourers associated with it were once widespread, seemingly occurring wherever Neolithic farmers set seed. Contemporary changes to agricultural practice (notably the development of winter wheat varieties) have meant that the job of ploughing is no longer concentrated as it formerly was between January and March. Whilst only vestigial remnants of the various ploughing traditions are extant in contemporary England, sufficient historical evidence for them exists for Hutton (1996, 124–33) to have devoted a chapter to 'Speeding the Plough.' He records a wide range of customs, from driving ploughs round fires to the installation of 'plough lights' (special candles kept alight all year, often funded by plough guilds who collected money for this endeavour on Plough Monday) in rural churches. Whilst there are some premodern references to 'conjuring of ploughs' with charms or prayers, the most widespread records are of (as ever) customary begging. These customs diminished and often disappeared as agricultural labour became better paid and regularised. Over the same time span, church blessings of ploughs began to be revived, especially in the southwest where they continue: the Salisbury diocese, for example, encourages parishes to bless ploughs and remember farmers and agricultural workers in their prayers (Diocese of Salisbury 2013).

These modern plough blessings are in some ways reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon Æcerbot recorded in the MS Cotton Caligula, A VII folios 177–178. This metrical charm gives instructions for obtaining the intercession of a very Christian God for improving unhealthy fields by anointing the plough with incense, fennel, holy soap and holy salt and then depositing a loaf under the furrows. These actions are accompanied by dramatic incantations and prayers. Modern scholars reject the historical notion that such charms represent the survival of Anglo-Saxon Paganism (Arthur 2013, 4). Contemporary scholarship reads the Æcerbot as an emblematically Christian text intended to be both effective (improving the land) and affective (signalling the power of both priest and God).

The OR's custom is not so different. As shown in Figure 16.2, the four core motifs of the ritual are the deposition of the corn mother and bread, the pouring of libation and the incantation of special or magical words. These motifs occur within and on top of the layers of signification identified in Figure 16.1. In the OR ritual, while the plough is blessed with a libation and an incantation, the focus of the ritual is on the burial of the corn mother together with a bread roll, which 'like our ancestors before us . . . [we] cast to the first furrow' (Odinic Rite Media 2019). This deviates somewhat from the use of the corn mother indicated in the Book of Blots (Yeowell [1994] 2014, 6), which suggests that this corn-dolly is a representation of the agriculture goddess and should be presented to the Gothi (priest) at Winter Finding in September and then given by him 'to a younger member of the Rite (the Corn Mother is a symbol of fertility, so the implications of this part of the ceremony are plain), whose property it then becomes' (ibid.).

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Figure 16.2 Schematic representation of Charming the Plough.

By contrast, the OR community's relationship with the physical land around them is embodied in the symbolic figure of the corn mother, who is literally returned into that physical land as a token of their status as 'sons of the land' (Odinic Rite Media 2019). While there is so much we could do with this thickly descriptive phrase, within the limitations of the present chapter there is space only to

note that this autochthonous turn strongly echoes a similar motif that emerges regularly in ethnonationalist populist discourse: who does (and does not) belong to the land is a core concern of ethnonationalism.

Historical accounts of harvest suggest that it has a social rather than a religious or animist function (Hutton 1996). As the customary doles given to labourers were abandoned in favour of monetary payments, the labourers' status at harvest end became ambiguous: they no longer owned a token part of the harvest, yet the experience of gathering in the crop was central to their working culture. Bushaway (1982) argues that rituals involving temporary possession of the last sheaf (which signalled the end of this critical period of labour) were a potent symbol of group solidarity and so persisted; these rituals then acquired a layer of mystery (as persistent customs tend to do when dissociated from their functional origins) and became, as Terry Pratchett would have it (Pratchett and Simpson 2009), part of the lore. Contemporary collections of folklore associate the retention of a token sheaf with various kinds of luck, either for the household or as a way of returning the 'spirit of fertility' to the soil as a guarantee of future good harvests (Bloxham 2002; Cooper and Sullivan 1994). The ongoing popularity of these kinds of associations belies the scholarly conclusion that there is little to nothing in the historical record to support this interpretation. All of these factors combine to provide the fertile ground from which a folkloresque cluster of contemporary ploughing, harvest and last sheaf rituals can spring forth with vigour and authenticity.

The OR ritual includes, as does the *Æcerbot*, the deposition of a wheaten roll or loaf into the furrow. While Frazer's (2004) paradigm of 'sympathetic magic' may have its flaws, it is a useful way to think about this element of Charming the Plough: the product of the harvest is returned to the field to ensure the production of future harvests. In the OR's ritual, the deposition has a metonymic quality: it is not a whole sheaf or a whole loaf that is deposited, but a part of the sheaf and a small bread bun which stand for the return of the harvest to the spirits of the land, just as the small OR Hearth sees itself as standing for the strength and vitality of the wider Folk Group (capitalised per OR usage).

Discourse analysis of the language used around the OR ritual year indicates that the community's own perception of its activities embeds them in a historical tradition of ancient ritual practice which pertains to a specific ethnonational imaginary. Whilst they shy away from any direct definition of what that ethnonationalist identity could be called (quite possibly as a matter of pragmatism due to their internationality), messages about honouring the ancestors and loyalty to the Folk Group are regularly deployed as emic and etic boundary markers. These rituals are for the OR members' Folk Group to enjoy: 'If you are of a stranger folk then do not apply' (Odinic Rite 2019b). The implication is that if you are unlucky enough to be of a stranger folk, then this is not your land: you will never belong to it, nor it to you, and your participation in this ritual is unwelcome. Framing it in such clearly ethnic terms makes the inherent racism of this position easier to read than it is in the more ubiquitous appeals to 'localism' discussed by Garland and Chakraborti (2006).

For the creators of a new religion explicitly aiming to create something autochthonic, ancient and mystical, incorporation of the ritual deposition of the corn-dolly and bread works well. It is a perfect deployment of the postmodern folkloresque: it matters not at all that their 'ancient tradition' consists of simulacra which bear little resemblance to any historical lived tradition. It connects the adherents of the OR's invented religion with an imaginary rural past in which connection to the land was deep and true, providing a metonymic assurance that OR adherents are truly connected to that powerful signifier, the land (Foster and Tolbert 2016). The truth-bearing component of its authenticity is less relevant than its emotional appeal to 'those who are unhappy and alienated, for whatever reason' (Newall 1987, 133). For the OR community it evokes heartfelt longing for the re-enchantment of the life of the rural working class:

[O]ur ploughmen down the ages, down the centuries ago, we carry on our ancient tradition in accordance with our customs and our ancient traditions, hail the farmers, hail the ploughmen, hail the workers who do work the land.

(Odinic Rite Media 2019)

The OR's revisionist interpretation of the corn-dolly as being an embodiment of the fertility of the land is echoed in works of contemporary antiquarianism as noted previously; whilst contemporary critical folklorists have moved on from Frazer and survivals theory, the idea that engaging in mysterious rural pursuits is in some way engaging with an authentic popular past continues to dominate public perception (Hutton 1996, 505; Rodgers and Cowdell in this volume). We should recall here that far-right Heathenism is situated in a broader populist movement. Note that the appeal to sentiment rather than reason is a hallmark of political populism's anti-elite 'flaunting of the low' (Ostiguy 2017, 74), in which the feeling of the people trumps the knowledge of experts. Indeed, the far right in Heathenism relishes its 'bad-boy' status, flourishing its culturally 'low' polemic as a badge of transgressive honour:

We don't expect any other group to be accountable to us, we aren't even interested in them enough to want that to be the case, so why those who clearly don't like us should imagine we should be accountable to them, and then whine and bleat because we are not, is baffling.

(Heimgest 2010, np)

From the evidence just presented, I argue that the incorporation of motifs from the familiar-strange repertoire of English folk in the first ritual of the far-right, Pagan ritual year is an intentional move to construct an acceptable face for the ritualisation of exclusionary ideology. It works by weaving historically inspired motifs into a narrative about identity and belonging, based on an ancestral legacy of ancient custom and tradition.

This chapter was envisaged in no small part as a cri de coeur in response to the inertia of the academic disciplines that I love. I hope to have shown here that it is possible to deconstruct this very specific discourse of exclusion and to have demonstrated that its claims to authenticity and historicity are based on flimsy premises. Beyond that, this chapter shows that the assemblage of the Heathen ritual year blurs the boundaries between the empirical, the interpretative and the imaginative. Charming the Plough is an embodied, unifying performance of belief in the existence of a spiritual Folk Group as an exclusionary social field with unbreakable ties to a given land. The deployment of this concept of the Folk Group by the OR as a boundary marker has dangerous implications: some exclusionary politicians have already sought to use ancestry as a way of conferring or denying personhood to their country's citizens. The co-option of folklore studies' words and subject matter in the creation of this exclusionary field has, I believe, to be resisted. It is our words and our discourse that are being recycled as justification for exclusion. It is our scholarship that is being misconstrued and misrepresented as a legitimisation for racism. We have, as folklorists, historians, archaeologists and linguists, an absolute moral responsibility to engage with the co-option of our work for these ends.

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