



Emotions in Radical Left Populists' EU-Security Discourse: Challenging Populism through Laclau and Mouffe

**An emotional discourse analysis of Sinn Féin's political rhetoric ahead of
the 2024 EP election**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the paradox of perceived human insecurities in high-HDI nations despite improvements in well-being, linking this to the rise of populism in European politics. It examines Sinn Féin, a populist left-wing party in Ireland, focusing on security as a floating signifier in the party's EU-Security discourse and its emotional expressions. Utilising poststructuralist Discourse Theory and Emotional Discourse Analysis and drawing on research about Populism, emotions and Ontological security, the study identifies four nodal points- sovereignty, justice, neutrality, and change- that stabilise Sinn Féin's discourse while highlighting ambiguities in empty signifiers. The analysis shows that nodal points are reinforced by emotional expressions like pride and nostalgia for sovereignty, existential anxiety over neutrality, anger at injustice, and hope for change. Sinn Féin balances inclusive values such as multiculturalism and solidarity with exclusionary views on migration and sovereignty, challenging the binary categorisation of populism. By illustrating the fluidity of security and the role of emotions in populist rhetoric, the thesis broadens the understanding of populism as a discursive continuum, not merely an ideological dichotomy. The study highlights the interplay of inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics in populist identity construction. By broadening the conceptualisation of Populism, the thesis challenges dominant security interpretations and emphasises the need for further research into the emotional and ideological complexities of populist discourses, especially in left-wing contexts.

Keywords: *Affect, Discourse Theory, Emotional discourse analysis (EDA), Empty signifier, European Union, Euroscepticism, Floating signifier, Nodal point, Ontological (in)security, Populism, Radical Left Populist Party, Sinn Féin.*

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1. Introduction

Populist security rhetoric has traction because of the emotion-inducing repertoires used to tell a story rather than through any measurable or objective truth contained in it. (Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021, p.2).

A puzzling security paradox

The UNDP's report "New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene" (2022) highlights rising anxiety in high HDI nations. To assess security perceptions beyond well-being metrics, the UNDP developed the Index of Perceived Human Insecurity (I-PHI), evaluating threats like violent conflict and socioeconomic insecurity. Using data from the World Values Survey across 74 countries, the report shows that fewer than 1 in 7 people feel secure, with over half of the global population experiencing high levels of insecurity. Insecurity is widespread across all HDI nations, with more than 75% feeling insecure in very high HDI nations. Notably, perceptions of insecurity have increased, especially in these countries. The I-PHI also shows a link between higher perceived security and greater interpersonal trust. These paradoxes require further academic investigation.

Ireland embodies such a puzzling context. Consistently ranked among the top performers on the HDI Global Development Map (UNDP, 2023) while simultaneously facing significant emigration concerns. In 2024, nearly 10% of individuals aged 18-34 planned to emigrate, with one-third considering it (The Journal, 2024). Over 64,000 people emigrated in 2023, one of the highest rates in recent years (The Journal, 2023). Research by the National Youth Council revealed that in 2022, over 80% of Irish youth were "fearful for the future," with more than 70% of those aged 18-24 considering emigration for a better life (The Journal, 2022).

With UNDP's report (2022) as a backdrop, the Irish trend exemplifies the growing disconnect between improvements in objective measures of well-being as a high-ranking HDI country while facing increased feelings of insecurity among its population- primarily the young. This paradox underscores the complex relationship between psychological and physical dimensions of security, presenting a puzzling phenomenon in modern security studies.

International relations (IR) scholars increasingly emphasise existential anxiety through ontological security theory (OST). This view connects globalisation's 21st-century security challenges to rising societal anxiety and insecurity. Political audiences become more receptive to specific narratives as populist leaders exploit issues like immigration, terrorism, and economic inequality with "othering" strategies. These tactics have fuelled populist authoritarian attitudes and Euroscepticism, threatening institutions like the EU and international cooperation. This trend undermines European security cooperation and complicates addressing shared security concerns.

The thesis approach to addressing the puzzle

To begin addressing this puzzling security paradox, this thesis will explore the intersection of psychological security and political articulations within the EU-security discourse. It argues that understanding and examining the increasing sense of psychological insecurity requires placing the emotions that underpin security discourses at the core of the analysis. Traditionally, a dichotomy has existed between rationality and emotionality in political thought. However, an expanding body of literature challenges this binary perspective as overly simplistic, asserting that it fails to capture the complexity of human decision-making, especially within contemporary political dynamics. Beyond mere irrational impulses, emotions are essential in shaping political opinions and behaviours (Bonansinga, 2020). Consequently, the thesis will address perceptions of security and its emotional expressions through a poststructuralist discursive lens. This approach highlights the importance of examining and contesting hegemonic understandings of discourses, as well as recognising the significance of emotions in meaning-making and identity formation. The practice of articulating security through emotional expressions in discourse constitutes a political act that leaders can employ to resonate with voters' need to mitigate psychological anxiety.

This paper examines security through the lens of psychological security, understood as a state in which individuals do not feel insecure. Psychological security is an emotional condition shaped more by perceptions of safety than by physical threats alone. It differs from rationality, as manipulated imaginations can create insecurity even in the absence of tangible threats. Risks only transform into psychological insecurities when cultural, social, or political leaders publicise and frame them as threats. Therefore, security extends beyond traditional concerns. (Bonansinga 2020). Following Discourse Theory by Laclau and Mouffe, the thesis

conceptualises security as a floating signifier- a central concept contested across various discourses. Consequently, people's insecurities are influenced by complex social processes rather than being determined solely by objective circumstances.

Emotions and Populism's Role in Shaping (In)security

This thesis argues that a nuanced understanding of populism is crucial for comprehending contemporary security threats. Bonansinga (2021) observes that rising perceptions of insecurity create fertile ground for populist movements, which, in turn, perpetuate these insecurities through their rhetorical practices. While populism is a contested and multifaceted concept, this thesis follows Laclau's definition of it as a political discourse (Eklundh, 2019, pp. 72-74), a concept that will be further developed in Chapter 3.

Populism became a major political force in the early 21st century, fuelled by movements addressing political- and economic uncertainties in dissatisfied populations. Its emotional political rhetoric is argued as central to its electoral victories in today's "post-truth" world (Nai, 2018; Widmann, 2020). The 2024 EU elections show that populism has transformed the political landscape as these movements gain mainstream traction. Rising influence pressures established parties to adopt similar strategies, amplifying populist rhetoric in domestic and European politics (European Centre for Populism Studies, 2024). Rumelili (2018) highlights the EU as a consolidator of a European democratic security community. Analysing populist discourse is vital for understanding how these actors shape European political security discussions. Emotions significantly impact how individuals experience and respond to insecurity, influencing their interpretations of political messages (Homolar and Löfflmann, 2021). This emotional aspect is essential to understanding how populist actors communicate security concerns (Bonansinga, 2020).

1.2 Aim and research questions

This study aims to challenge the dominant understanding of political populists' EU-security discourse by comparing existing knowledge in the field with insights from the underexplored phenomenon of Radical Left Populist Parties' EU-security discourse. Specifically, this thesis focuses on Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse in the lead-up to the 2024 EU EP elections.

The thesis also aims to refine prevailing understandings of both populism and security by examining the emotional underpinnings of EU-security discourse. This investigation seeks to contribute to the broader academic conversation by adding nuance to the theoretical understanding of populism. To achieve this, the study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. *How is the meaning of security, as a floating signifier, stabilised and contested in the Radical Left Populist Party Sinn Féin's political EU-Security discourse, and what emotional expressions underpin this articulation?*
2. *How are Sinn Féin's discursive articulations similar and/or different from how previous scholarship has conceptualised political populist security discourses and their emotional expressions?*
3. *How does this thesis contribute to the theoretical understanding of Populism?*

The first question operates at an empirical level and will shape the primary analysis of Sinn Féin's discourse. The second question, adopting a comparative stance, juxtaposes the findings from the empirical research with existing literature. Since the articulation of meaning is a political act, prior research's conceptualisation of populist security influences societal understandings of these concepts. The third question extends the study's contributions by situating its findings within broader theoretical frameworks.

1.3 Contributions

This section will outline how the thesis contributes to the existing body of research in two primary ways: first, by addressing the gap in scholarly attention to left-wing populism; second, by engaging with and advancing the current momentum of the “emotional turn” in IR and political science, making a methodological contribution to this ongoing yet underdeveloped debate.

The Left-Wing Gap

Populist communication's emotional basis has been widely studied, as the upcoming literature review will show. However, a notable gap in research is on how (in)security is expressed in

left-wing populist discourse on the EU. While right-wing populism is extensively covered, left-wing populism is relatively underexplored. This is surprising since populism covers a broad spectrum in Europe, from exclusionary radical right ideologies to inclusionary radical left perspectives. This focus has led to a limited understanding of left-wing populism's engagement with insecurities. While populism's success often stems from addressing crisis perceptions, insecurity, and alienation, this is mostly analysed through right-wing populists' rhetoric, which emphasises fears of external threats and identity loss. Conversely, limited studies on left-wing populism suggest they manage insecurities differently. Exploring these differences enriches our understanding of populist communication and broadens how (in)security is conceptualised across the political spectrum. This study situates itself in the EU context, expanding the understanding of populism's interaction with security beyond the typical right-wing view of Euroscepticism and identity. It examines how left-wing populism, rooted in different values, contests dominant security concepts and redefines the discourse through an alternative lens. By employing EDA alongside discourse theory, the study views security as a "floating signifier" shaped by emotional expressions, exploring how radical left-wing populism addresses insecurity, otherwise often neglected.

This research analyses Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse ahead of the 2024 EP elections, examining how Sinn Féin uniquely addresses insecurity compared to other populist movements. It contributes to populism theory by highlighting different security approaches and the importance of emotional expressions in these discourses. This thesis deepens the understanding of populism's complex relationship with security, moving past simplistic binaries and offering insights into how current populist movements redefine insecurity across the political spectrum.

IR's Emotional Turn

The "emotional turn" in IR highlights emotions' influence on political behaviour. This research contributes in two ways. First, it critiques the rational-emotion hierarchy in IR through Laclau's perspective, incorporating affect into identity formation and emphasising that emotions are crucial for understanding political behaviour. Second, it addresses the lack of practical analytical tools in studying emotions in IR, which has largely focused on theory. To overcome this, the study applies Emotional Discourse Analysis (EDA) as its primary method, demonstrating how to systematically analyse emotions in political discourse. EDA enhances

methodological rigour in emotional analysis, enriching IR's toolkit and facilitating future research on emotions and politics. Overall, the research promotes the integration of emotional dynamics in IR, challenges rationalist views, and provides a solid framework for emotional analysis, enhancing understanding of the intersubjective psychological aspects of political discourse and encouraging innovations in this area.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis comprises six chapters. After the introduction, which presents the research puzzle, aim, and questions, Chapter 2 reviews existing research on European populism and ontological security, including emotional expressions in political discourse. Chapter 3 establishes a theoretical framework grounded in a poststructuralist perspective, utilising Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory. Chapter 4 details the methodology, framing the research within an interpretive paradigm and creating an analytical model. Chapter 5 applies this model to analyse Sinn Féin's discourse and answer research question one. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesises findings, addressing research questions two and three at a broader level. The thesis concludes with a discussion that connects overarching arguments and revisits the introductory chapter for a cohesive ending.

2. Literature review

This chapter will examine the current state of populism studies, focusing primarily on Europe. It will then explore the “emotional turn” in research, where a significant portion of the IR literature on populism analyses the globalisation of security issues through the lens of ontological security theory (OST), with the concept of existential anxiety playing a central role. To provide a foundation for understanding the relevant body of literature, the review will briefly outline perspectives from ontological security studies regarding populism. This discussion sets the stage for understanding anxiety as a key emotional component of this thesis. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a section on literature addressing emotions beyond anxiety and fear. This body of “emotion” literature will serve as an emotional point of reference and comparison for thesis analysis.

2.1 Defining Populism

Populism is understood in various ways; for example, it can be viewed as a style (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), a political strategy (Weyland, 2001), or a performance (Ostiguy et al., 2020). This thesis will draw on Laclau’s (2005) work, conceptualising populism as a political discourse, which will be further explored in Chapter 3. Mudde’s (2000) widely accepted definition describes populism as a “thin-centred ideology” that views society as divided into antagonistic groups: “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.” Populism asserts that politics should represent the “general will” of the people, advocating for the common man against a perceived self-serving political elite. Building on Mudde, Stanley (2008) notes that populism’s “thin” nature means it lacks a comprehensive ideology and must attach itself to other worldviews. Consequently, populism is often categorised based on inclusivity versus exclusivity. Inclusionary populism advocates for a broad definition of “the people,” incorporating various subgroups entitled to resource redistribution and political participation and is associated with radical left ideologies. In contrast, exclusionary populism restricts these entitlements to specific groups, particularly the native population, and aligns with radical right ideologies (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). These theoretical definitions and categorisations put forth by previous literature are fundamental to this thesis, as they will be challenged as the thesis develops its contributions.

This thesis cites Damiani's (2020) concept of Radical Left Populist Parties (RLPP). In his thorough analysis of RLPP in Western Europe, Damiani evaluates the members of the leftist European parliamentary group The Left. He determines that a total of seven parties- Syriza (Greece), Podemos (Spain), La France Insoumise (France), Die Linke (Germany), Parti du Travail de Belgique (Belgium), the Dutch Socialist Party (Netherlands), and Sinn Féin (Ireland)- can be clearly identified as RLPPs (Damiani, 2020, pp 8-9).

2.2 European populism studies

Kneuer (2018) describes Euroscepticism as a unifying element of "all successful populist parties in Europe" (p. 23). The literature suggests differences exist between left- and right-wing Euroscepticism. Katsambekis and Kioupiolis (2019) note that left-wing populists oppose the EU due to its neoliberal agenda and austerity measures, while right-wing populists oppose it primarily over issues of migration and multiculturalism. Furthermore, Eklund (2021) critiques existing scholarship on European populism for disproportionately focusing on right-wing populism while neglecting left-wing Euroscepticism in empirical research. She identifies three key constructions of the political community discussed in the literature: (1) the post-national EU, (2) the populist right's emphasis on "national sovereignty," defined as the authority of a nation-state to govern independently, and (3) the populist left's focus on "popular sovereignty," which prioritises the authority of the people within a political system. Despite these conceptual distinctions, Eklund highlights a notable gap in empirical research on the actual relationship between left-wing populists and the EU.

While research on the European populist radical left is growing, it remains under-researched compared to its right-wing counterpart. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014) examined Syriza's electoral success in the 2012 Greek general elections through a discursive lens, identifying it as a distinctive manifestation of left-wing populism. They highlighted how populism in Europe is often narrowly framed as far-right, anti-European, economically irresponsible, or extremist movements. Their study challenges these reductive stereotypes, positioning Syriza's rhetoric as a counter-narrative rooted in inclusionary values and crisis-driven identity construction. Stoeckel (2016) analysed the Spanish party Podemos, focusing on its aesthetic and discursive strategies during its rapid rise. Drawing on the work of Errejón and Mouffe, the study emphasised the importance of creating collective identities and mobilising effect. It argued that Podemos' success lay in its ability to articulate a new political grammar, where the "popular

majority" could see themselves as subjects united against an adversarial "other." This approach enabled Podemos to construct "the people" as a cohesive political culture, particularly in times of crisis, when traditional political structures were questioned.

Bonansinga's (2021) research on populisms in France indicated that insecurity is central to far right and left-wing populist narratives. Her findings revealed that rhetoric transcends ideological boundaries by addressing citizens' fears of dangers posed by elites. Through emotional analysis, Bonansinga demonstrated that populist narratives are diverse; while fear and anger prevail, leaders also evoke hope and pride, resonating with supporters' future desires. This strategy- exploiting insecurity while offering hope- crucially sustains populist movements. In a 2022 study, she examined the rhetoric of left leader Mélenchon and La France Insoumise, identifying three elite-driven insecurity dimensions: (1) threats from elites, (2) generated uncertainty, and (3) failure to protect citizens. This framing positions elites as a core source of insecurity across contexts. Her research shows the strategic use of narratives to unify supporters by labelling elites as a common enemy, combining emotional resonance with ideology critique (Bonansinga, 2022).

2.2 Ontological Security Studies and Leadership

Ontological security, grounded in the need for stability and continuity in one's sense of self and environment, is a vital concept for understanding the dynamics of globalisation and populist politics. Kinnvall (2004) emphasises how disruptions to ontological security generate existential anxiety stemming from perceived threats to the traditional social order. These disruptions are worsened by globalisation, which destabilises routines and undermines the "stabilising anchor" of identity. The cross-border crises and interconnected challenges of globalisation add to feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness, heightening ontological insecurity. This dynamic reflects broader changes in the contemporary security landscape, where the interplay between global and local spheres intensifies instability. Building on this foundation, Kinnvall and Svensson (2022) examine the appeal of far-right populism by linking individuals' everyday concerns, or "vernacular insecurities," to global challenges. They emphasise the role of collective emotions- such as fear, hatred, and contempt- not merely as psychological reactions but as integral to identity-making processes rooted in idealised visions of the past. These emotions are shaped by ontological insecurities stemming from economic, social, and cultural deprivation, underscoring the interconnectedness of local realities and

broader power dynamics. Metten and Bayerlein (2023) further elaborate on this, addressing why voters unaffected by the negative effects of globalisation continue to support right-wing populist parties. Their study introduces an “index of existential anxieties” at the individual level, revealing that such anxieties predispose voters to embrace crisis narratives and securitisation agendas. Crucially, this susceptibility does not necessarily correlate with socioeconomic vulnerability or overt opposition to globalisation. Instead, it reflects deeper psychological insecurities that populist narratives exploit, highlighting the crucial role of ontological insecurity in shaping political behaviour, even in the absence of tangible threats.

Linking ontological security to crisis

Ontological security is deeply intertwined with the use of crisis narratives in populist politics. Homolar and Scholz (2019) examine Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, demonstrating how emotionally charged “crisis talk” fostered ontological insecurity among voters. By framing his audience as experiencing loss and fear, Trump created a sense of urgency, presenting himself as the solution to their grievances. Their analysis underscores how populist rhetoric manipulates ontological insecurities, transforming voter anxiety into confidence in the leader’s agenda. By framing issues around threats and loss, such narratives heighten insecurity and foster a sense of belonging among supporters, exploiting cognitive biases to build loyalty. In the European context, Macmillan (2022) examines the Rassemblement National’s (RN) employment of dystopian narratives that amplify anxieties regarding the EU. These narratives portray the EU as a direct threat to national identity and security, exploiting the tension between EU-wide and national identity constructions. Macmillan contends that RN’s rhetoric addresses ontological insecurities and exacerbates them by creating a binary “people vs. elites” framework. The EU is depicted as an antagonist threatening the “innocent” people, heightening a sense of crisis. This fear-based narrative engenders a psychological need for cognitive closure, as disruptions to ontological security compel individuals to seek predictability and control.

The Role of Leadership

Leadership is central to the relationship between ontological insecurity and populism. Mols and Jetten (2016) explore how populist leaders act as “identity entrepreneurs,” transforming perceptions of relative gratification into feelings of relative deprivation. Even during periods of economic prosperity, leaders exploit perceived threats to amplify insecurity, demonstrating

their influence on public perceptions of psychological insecurity. Similarly, Bar-Tal (2020) highlights the pivotal role leaders play in interpreting and disseminating information about security. Citizens often rely on leaders to make sense of their environment, shaping public responses to perceived threats. Leaders articulate contemporary challenges in ways that resonate emotionally, fostering a sense of urgency or reassurance as needed. Expanding on this, Nordensvard and Ketola (2021) describe populist leadership as a "storytelling performance," with charismatic leaders positioned as "truth-tellers." They contend that populism is less about advancing comprehensive ideologies and more about weaving compelling narratives to connect with the public. Macmillan (2022) emphasises that populist leaders are particularly effective at mitigating psychological insecurity through persuasion and reassurance, presenting themselves as capable of calming fears and asserting control. Finally, the literature highlights that populist leaders exploit ontological insecurity as both creators and mitigators of existential anxieties. By generating crisis narratives and then positioning themselves as the solution, they foster loyalty and advance political agendas. This interplay between insecurity, leadership, and emotional narratives is central to contemporary studies of ontological security, providing crucial insights into the success of populist political movements (Macmillan, 2022).

2.3 Emotions

Emotions are central to political persuasion by capturing attention and influencing attitudes. Albertson, Dun, and Gadarian (2019, pp. 169–183) argue that feelings like anxiety, anger, shame, and enthusiasm motivate political participation. Extreme emotions, such as hate, can incite violence. Positive emotions reinforce existing beliefs, while negative emotions, especially anxiety, increase openness to new information, enhancing receptivity to political messages. Existential anxiety is, therefore, an enhancer of voters' perceptiveness to the content of political rhetoric. Bonansinga (2020) emphasises the complexity of populist emotional appeals and their diverse effects on politics.

This final section reviews the literature on how emotions, particularly anger, shame, humiliation, nostalgia, pride, and hope, are expressed in populist rhetoric and their implications for political persuasion mobilisation.

Anger & Shame

Salmela and von Scheve (2017) link anger in advanced societies to intimate insecurities arising from job competition, cultural identity, and social status. Instead of confronting personal vulnerabilities, individuals externalise these insecurities, channelling anger toward perceived “others.” Populist rhetoric heightens this anger by portraying specific groups as threats. Additionally, the authors differentiate between right- and left-wing populist uses of shame: right-wing populism exploits “repressed shame,” converting fear into anger and hatred, while left-wing populism relies on “acknowledged shame” to foster solidarity among victims of neoliberal policies. This distinction highlights the dual roles of anger and shame in either isolating or uniting individuals, influencing their engagement with populist movements.

Humiliation & Nostalgia

Homolar and Löffmann (2021) argue that humiliation serves as a potent instrument in populist discourse, linking existential anxieties to grievances regarding immigration, globalisation, and integration. Populist narratives evoke selective memories of national greatness, fostering feelings of relative deprivation and collective victimhood. Drawing on Volkan’s (1988) concept of “chosen traumas”, i.e. historically significant events injected with emotional meaning, populist rhetoric conjures a duality of emotions: pride and hope alongside anxiety and anger. This emotional interplay reinforces the connection between individual grievances and collective sociopolitical goals, facilitating shifts from collaborative policies to confrontational stances.

Nostalgia also holds a crucial role in populist narratives. Browning (2019) and Kinnvall (2019) highlight how nostalgia stirs a longing for an idealised past, which populist leaders selectively articulate to present political objectives. Stanley (2018) describes this as the “weaponisation” of nostalgia, where leaders exploit it to create emotional resonance. Steenvoorden and Harteveld (2017) identify the “nostalgia effect” as a cognitive mechanism that alleviates anxiety by recalling a comforting and stable past. Leaders who promise to restore this past provide ontological security, reassuring individuals of their position in an uncertain world (Kinnvall 2004).

Pride & Hope

As Bonansinga (2019) and Homolar and Scholz (2019) note, pride shifts the focus from vulnerability to empowerment, fostering a sense of dignity within the in-group. Wirz et al. (2018) highlight how populist rhetoric celebrates the virtues of “the people,” contrasting collective pride with feelings of insecurity. Pride motivates individuals to confront challenges, building resilience and a sense of triumph (Taş, 2020; Brader & Marcus, 2013). Moreover, hope complements pride by addressing present insecurities while offering visions of a stable and optimistic future. Lazarus (2006) emphasises the role of hope in bridging current struggles with aspirations for a better future. Taş (2020) highlights the “politics of hope,” which populist leaders use to inspire confidence and sustain emotional loyalty. By promising stability and control, leaders mobilise hope to mitigate uncertainty and reinforce political commitment.

3. Discourse Theory

This chapter outlines the theory guiding this thesis, which is rooted in discourse theory as developed by Laclau and Mouffe. Discourse theory provides tools for analysing the construction of meaning and identity in social and political contexts, particularly the dynamics of populism and security in political discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.24). By emphasising the fluidity and contested nature of meaning, this framework will inform the thesis's exploration of Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse, focusing on how security is articulated within left-wing populism.

The framework combines Discourse Theory rooted in Poststructuralist theory with Laclau's subsequent work, particularly focusing on Populism and Affect.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Discourse theory conceptualises the social world as constructed through discourse. Discourses represent temporary closures of meaning as they aim to stabilise the interpretation of signs within an otherwise fluid and contested terrain. However, these closures are never fully successful; meanings remain vulnerable to contestation and reinterpretation (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 29-30). Discourses achieve temporary stability by organising signs around nodal points, which serve as privileged anchors of meaning. Nodal points give meaning to surrounding signs through their relationships (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 26-28). While nodal points crystallise meaning within a particular discourse, floating signifiers highlight the broader struggle among competing discourses to define key terms. Floating signifiers are sites of contestation, bearing multiple potential meanings that different discourses seek to fix in alignment with their priorities. For instance, in populist discourse, "security" may be articulated as national defence in right-wing populism or as economic stability in left-wing populism. This competition reveals how meaning-making is inherently political (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.28).

Laclau and Mouffe argue that both individual and collective identities are constructed through discourse. The formation of identity relies on chains of equivalence, where diverse elements are linked in opposition to a common "other." These processes are politically charged, determining which identities and possibilities are included and which are excluded, as groups

are formed by defining "the other." Thus, group formation is, in turn, a discursive process that outlines the boundaries of the ingroup. Laclau and Mouffe's concepts illustrate how identities and groups are formed through relational processes of inclusion and exclusion (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 40-41).

When struggles arise between competing discourses, it becomes clear that different actors are striving to promote distinct ways of organising society. At other times, social practices may appear so natural and unquestioned that alternative discourses regarding ways of organising society become invisible. In discourse theory, discourses that become so entrenched that their contingent nature is forgotten are referred to as "objective" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 37-38). For instance, as demonstrated earlier, dominant understandings of populism and security often align with right-wing, exclusionary interpretations. These dominant articulations thus marginalise left-wing (often inclusionary) populist perspectives, narrowing the scope of public debate and analysis. However, the boundary between what is perceived as objective and what is contested is fluid and historically contingent, meaning that once-settled discourses can be re-examined through new political interventions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 37-38). In a reflexive manner, I must acknowledge the thesis's potential as a political intervention.

This thesis investigates the interplay between exclusionary and inclusionary articulations in populist discourses to uncover how meaning is contested and reconfigured, particularly in relation to the concept of security. This approach highlights the inherently political nature of ascribing meaning and its implications for shaping social and political orders (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 37-38).

3.2 Laclau's Populism

Laclau (2005) elaborates on the role of affect (understood as emotions and desires) in populist discourse, emphasising its centrality in shaping collective identities. Populism entails the emotional investment in a shared symbol, such as "the people," which signifies the desire for a more just or complete social order. This emotional attachment brings together diverse groups and amplifies their collective grievances. Individuals do not align with political causes or demands solely through rational deliberation; they are emotionally compelled, driven by a shared sense of desire or collective frustration (Eklundh, 2019, p.72-74).

Laclau argues that affect is essential for understanding hegemony, i.e., the mechanisms through which power structures and social orders are established. Emotions are finely woven into political processes, including populism, and should not be dismissed as irrational or secondary. Instead, they are recognised as a vital force shaping political life and influencing social dynamics (Laclau, 2005, p.117-124).

Understanding populism requires examining the affective dimension, which explains how collective identities are constructed, how emotions are harnessed, and how populist movements resonate across diverse social groups. Consequently, politics inherently possesses an emotional foundation, as collective identities are not merely intellectual constructs but are deeply rooted in emotional investments. By engaging with the emotional undercurrents of society, populism articulates grievances and aspirations effectively, cultivating a sense of unity and shared purpose among its adherents (Laclau, 2005, p.117-124). For this thesis, the affective dimension, as articulated by Laclau (and drawing on previous literature on emotions), provides a critical lens through which to analyse the discursive communication of populism.

Populist discourse employs the logic of equivalence, linking disparate demands under a common banner. Empty signifiers play a critical role in this process. These terms are intentionally vague, accommodating diverse interpretations while serving as rallying points for collective identity (Laclau, 2005, p.117-124). Laclau argues that individual and collective identities are inherently incomplete, marked by what he terms “lack.” This shared incompleteness forms the foundation for commonality across diverse groups, enabling them to unite despite their differences. The logic of equivalence thus allows disparate identities to connect through shared experiences of “lack,” such as a “lack of security,” which can unify and contrast social groups (Eklundh, 2019, p.72-74). This lack is not only cognitive but also deeply emotional. The affective dimension strengthens identification with the empty signifier, intertwining emotional and symbolic processes in identity formation. The unifying power lies not in their specific content but in their shared emotional resonance, channelling common dissatisfaction (Eklundh, 2019, p.72-74). For instance, “the fight against the elite’s inability to ensure security” symbolises collective opposition while remaining open to reinterpretation. This inherent openness enables populist movements to remain adaptable, addressing new demands while maintaining unity (Eklundh, 2019, p.72-74).

3.3 Understanding security

Security is a multifaceted and context-dependent concept with diverse meanings shaped by social, cultural, and political environments. This thesis conceptualises security as a floating signifier, a term whose meaning is fluid. Traditional IR theories articulate security as state survival and national interests anchored as fixed nodal points. Critical IR perspectives challenge this view by broadening the concept to include notions such as human security. This critique underscores security's subjective and contested nature, further solidifying its status as a floating signifier.

The conceptualisation of security in populist discourse varies significantly, reflecting either inclusionary or exclusionary interpretations. As the literature review discusses, exclusionary articulations associated with right-wing populism dominate contemporary understandings of populist security discourse. Within the EU context, security emerges as a battleground for competing conceptualisations. This thesis seeks to challenge the overrepresentation of exclusionary security discourses by examining Sinn Féin's EU-security rhetoric. Sinn Féin's discourse contests the hegemonic and exclusionary interpretations, offering an alternative perspective that broadens the understanding of security and who should be protected within populist EU politics. This research highlights security's pluralistic and contested nature, demonstrating how it remains an open, dynamic field of political articulation. Finally, the struggle to define security reflects broader political conflicts over how society is organised. The dominant discourse sets the agenda based on its articulations. Therefore, it is important to challenge dominant discourses by contrasting them with alternative conceptualisations, broadening the understanding of societal perceptions of "reality."

4. Research design

4.1 Case Selection

This study conducts a qualitative, in-depth analysis of Sinn Féin, an Irish Radical Left Populist Party in Europe that challenges conventional categorisations of populism. Sinn Féin presents an opportunity to provide fresh empirical insights by focusing on a less-studied RLPP, in contrast to the extensive research on Syriza (Greece), Podemos (Spain), and La France Insoumise (France). Additionally, Sinn Féin's unique position within the Western European context, influenced by its history of anti-colonial struggle and a discourse shaped by both Irish nationalism and global solidarity, offers an intriguing case for examining tensions between nationalism and internationalism. These dynamics, related to the security puzzle outlined earlier, challenge traditional populist models and provide a nuanced perspective on inclusive versus exclusive constructions of identity within populist contexts.

4.2 Methodology

This thesis operates within the interpretive paradigm, aligning with its methodological and epistemological principles to explore contextualised meaning-making to address the research questions. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) argue that for research to be trustworthy and convincing, methodological choices must align with the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions about the subject. By adopting an interpretive approach following Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013, p.45-48), I view humans as active agents constructing their "realities" through language and action while recognising that these realities are influenced by broader social, cultural, and political contexts.

Furthermore, following Laclau and Mouffe, both society and identity are fluid, constructed through discursive meaning-making rather than merely reflecting an objective reality. "Objectivity" is seen as a product of political and discursive processes that shape our perceptions and actions within society (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, pp. 33-34). Laclau and Mouffe argue that social practices are entirely discursive, with meaning assigned to social and physical objects through discourse instead of by inherent qualities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 36). This framework is central to the thesis as it connects discourse to perceived insecurities, stressing the presence of psychological insecurities even in the absence of physical threats.

4.2.1 Addressing Methodological Limitations

Laclau and Mouffe argue that discourse analysts are embedded in the discursive structures they study, making complete detachment impossible. Therefore, discourse analysis does not seek an "objective" truth; it examines how truth is constructed discursively (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.49). This perspective differs from positivist methods, which deem the researcher's presence a threat to objectivity. In contrast, interpretive research views the researcher's involvement as essential to knowledge creation.

In this thesis, I acknowledge my role as a researcher and the impact of my insights, positionality, prior knowledge, and emotions on the research process. Reflexivity, a core principle of interpretive research, requires me to examine these influences on my interpretations and claims. By reflecting on how my perspectives shape my analysis, I aim to maintain transparency and trustworthiness in my findings (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013, pp. 95-96). This self-reflection is essential for honest and balanced interpretation data.

My academic background, shaped by a centrist orientation and adherence to Western liberal democratic principles, contrasts with the populist rhetoric I analyse. Populism is often viewed with concern, especially because it challenges established democratic norms and elite expertise, which I contend should be highly valued. Furthermore, the dominant academic focus on right-wing populism has influenced broader societal discourses, affecting my understanding of populism. In recognition of this, I have actively sought to contest these pervasive perspectives to maintain an open and balanced approach in my research. This requires continuous self-reflection to critically engage with the discursive structures of which I am inherently a part and to ensure that my analysis remains balanced and receptive to alternative interpretations. At the same time, this critical lens may differ from that of the average Irish voter who resonates with Sinn Féin's discourse. However, I contend that this has enhanced my analysis, encouraging a deeper deconstruction of the discursive frameworks involved, as my positionality has facilitated a critical stance towards the messages.

Emotional engagement has significantly influenced this research. Instead of seeing emotions as a limitation, I incorporated my own responses to analyse emotional expressions in the material. This approach allows me to explore the affective dimensions of the discourse, adding depth without speculating on others' emotions. My research aims to highlight potential emotional expressions in texts, not to assert the actual emotions of individuals.

The theoretical framework guiding this thesis balances flexibility with challenges. While it offers nuanced interpretations of security, it also complicates the task of identifying specific security themes. My background in traditional security studies, combined with an interest in feminist and human security perspectives, has influenced my approach, enabling me to view security as a multifaceted and dynamic concept. However, this also means that defining and pinpointing security issues is not always straightforward. To improve the quality of research, I have attempted to remain as transparent as possible.

As a non-Irish researcher, I recognise the limitations of my external perspective on Ireland's unique social and cultural context. While I have extensively engaged with academic literature, media, and historical resources to contextualise my analysis, I know these sources are also situated within specific discourses. Lacking direct experience of Irish society, I have drawn on diverse perspectives for a well-balanced understanding.

Discourse theory highlights that the act of ascribing meaning is inherently political. Meaning is not fixed but is continually constructed and contested through language. In this way, research is also a political act, requiring the researcher to reflect on their role in producing knowledge. By deconstructing discourses, I engage in the process of meaning-making, attributing significance to various signifiers while deprioritising others. The theory and literature I reference reinforce the idea that threats are not "real" until articulated; similarly, my analysis contributes to the constitution of what security is. In this respect, I participate in and observe the discourse I aim to analyse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.37-38).

Another methodological concern lies in the challenge of assessing the emotional potential of messages when I am not the intended audience nor have insight into the emotional state of the messenger/receiver. While it is essential to distinguish between identifying emotional expressions within a text and claiming to know the emotions of the individuals involved, this research focuses on the potential emotional expressions embedded in the discourse, not on speculative claims about personal emotions. Instead, the focus is on the intersubjective, textual aspects of emotionality, which can be analysed within the broader context of the discursive framework.

In conclusion, I acknowledge and address the methodological limitations inherent in this research through a commitment to reflexivity, transparency, and ongoing self-critique. By

reflecting on my own positionality and emotions, I strive to present a nuanced and balanced analysis while being aware of the political and discursive nature following the research design.

4.2 Method

Emotion, as an analytical concept, is complex and contested. In this analysis, "emotion" serves as an umbrella term and is treated as synonymous with affect and feelings, reflecting its common usage in the literary field within which the thesis is situated.

Emotion permeates all linguistic description levels, promoting the importance of examining emotions via a discursive approach (Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benítez-Castro, 2021). As demonstrated, populist rhetoric spans a wide range of emotions- anxiety, fear, shame, anger, humiliation, nostalgia, pride and hope. Grasping this complexity is essential for understanding how populist movements can engage diverse audiences under one banner, as stressed by Laclau, by simultaneously addressing multiple emotional needs (Bonansinga, 2020). Therefore, the thesis needs an emotional framework that is dynamic enough to grasp the emotional complexity to able a limitless exploration of emotional expressions in the material.

Discourse theory is not a method alone. Therefore, it is important to accompany it with another, more concrete discursive method. This thesis will apply “Emotional Discourse Analysis” (EDA) for that purpose.

4.2.1 Emotional Discourse Analysis

Bleiker and Hutchison (2014) note that IR scholarship provides few systematic approaches to analysing the emotional potential and effects of emotionalization in texts. Driven by this methodological lack, Koschut (2018) argues for the need to “develop specific methodological criteria for the empirical study of emotions via speech acts” and proposes a three-step methodological framework for conducting an emotional discourse analysis. Koschut examines emotions in discourse through a poststructuralist lens, emphasising language's role in shaping reality, identity, and power, aligning with the study's theoretical foundation. The method suggests discourses contain affective content, focusing on how individuals discuss emotions and use emotion-related categories to describe subjects, events, or relationships. Drawing on Laclau, this approach views emotions as socially constructed meanings associated with identity and power, making the thesis's different components ontologically combinable

Studying emotions through discourse provides a means to make them empirically accessible, addressing the challenge of their inherently subjective nature. Unlike direct access to internal emotional states, analysing how emotions are articulated and communicated within social contexts enables researchers to grasp their intersubjective social meanings. Researchers can investigate emotions as shared representations by concentrating on discourses, understood here as frameworks of meaning and interpretation, thus exploring their role and significance within social interactions (Koschut, 2018).

To ensure a transparent and trustworthy analysis, it is essential to clarify how I will conduct the analysis and interpret the material using the tools provided by EDA:

Step 1: Selecting relevant texts

Researchers must recognise that different text types or genres express emotions in diverse ways. For this study, materials specifically aimed at followers and voters regarding the EU are the most suitable. Campaign materials for the EU Parliament elections stand out as clear choices, as they are designed to capture voters' interest and convey the parties' EU policies. The analysis will focus on materials produced between 28 April 2024 (the launch of Sinn Féin's election campaign) and 7 June 2024 (Ireland's EU election day). By concentrating on these materials, I will capture the party's visionary discourse on the EU, particularly the articulations of the EU's notion as an (in)security community. Selecting materials relevant to the research questions requires carefully balancing diverse sources to ensure a robust foundation for analysis and facilitate intertextuality, enhancing the research quality (Koschut, 2018). I will engage with a variety of perspectives from different texts to grasp the complexities of meaning. As a researcher, I seek to expose myself to multiple viewpoints, fostering a more comprehensive understanding rather than merely confirming a preconceived answer (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013, p.110).

Following these principles, the texts for this study will include:

- Posts on Sinn Féin's social media channels (Facebook and YouTube) addressing the EU during the timeframe.
- EU campaigning videos featuring Sinn Féin's six MEP candidates (Daithi Doolan, Paul Gavan, Chris MacManus, Michelle Gildernew, Lynn Boylan, Kathleen Funchion)
- Lynn Boylan's and Kathleen Funchion's (MEP electees) Facebook during the timeframe.

- Sections addressing the EU in party leader Mary Lou McDonald’s speech and MEP candidate Michelle Gildernew’s speech at the election- campaign launch.
- Sinn Féin's EU election manifesto

This diverse dataset, which includes social media content, traditional TV debates, interviews, written materials, and video footage, as well as contributions from various leaders and the official party body, facilitates an intertextual analysis of Sinn Féin’s discourse on the EU.

From this broader pool of EU-related content, I will further refine the selection derived from examining the EU manifesto and identifying articulations of threats, risks, and dangers. I will also examine when and how things are described as needing protection (and subsequently from what) to identify the security themes.

Step 2: Mapping emotional expression

Studying emotional discourse necessitates strategies to identify emotional expressions within texts. These strategies revolve around analysing the micro-structure of texts (such as specific words, metaphors, or euphemisms) to interpret their meanings in context and to identify broader patterns or structures at the macro level that reveal systems of meaning. By integrating these micro- and macro dimensions, researchers can clarify how specific textual elements or structures convey emotional meanings (Koschut, 2018). Derived from Koschut, I will track emotional expressions by examining how:

1) **Emotional meaning is conveyed explicitly through emotion-related terms,**

- nouns (e.g., fear, anger),
- verbs (e.g., to fear, to love),
- adjectives (e.g., angry, loving),
- adverbs (e.g., sadly, regrettably).

Koschut stresses the importance of being mindful of cultural and historical differences in these terms, requiring the researcher to engage in contextualisation. Furthermore, it has been fundamental that the texts I am examining are the original texts so that nuances do not get lost in translation.

2) **Emotional meaning is conveyed implicitly through connotations and euphemisms,**

- "Emotionally loaded" words that evoke specific negative- & positive feelings
- Markers that heighten or diminish emotional intensity, e.g. "endless" or "very"

Emotional connotations and euphemisms are often shaped by sociocultural contexts and can vary across cultures; therefore, it is important to consider which emotions are avoided in different situations.

3) **Affective language is highly figurative,**

- Metaphors symbolise emotional states and are especially useful for expressing difficult-to-articulate feelings.
- Emotional comparisons & analogies create categories that evoke shared emotional responses, i.e. historical figures or using mental imagery.

Table 2: Summary of “step two’s” indicators of “emotional language” guiding the analysis

Explicit expressions	Implicit expressions	Figurative language
Emotion-related terms	Connotations, euphemisms,	Metaphors, comparisons, analogies
<u>e.g.</u> "Fear," "Hope," "Pride"	<u>e.g.</u> "Genocide," "Change-maker."	<u>e.g.</u> "Break the glass ceilings," "The teacher's pet"

Step 3: Interpreting political implications

In line with discourse theory and an interpretive methodology, meaning is seen as flexible and open to multiple interpretations, as symbols and signs are inherently ambiguous. The thesis does not aim to resolve these ambiguities but seeks to understand their sources. A key aspect of this approach is the importance of intertextuality and contextualisation (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013, p.107). Ambiguity allows individuals to construct diverse interpretations of events, actions, and environments, making context essential to understanding meaning. Thus, both the design and execution of interpretive research must consider the specific contexts in which meanings emerge. This thesis follows Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2013, p.47) argument that research must be "sufficiently contextualised" so that interpretations are grounded in, rather than abstracted from, the settings of the actors studied.

Koschut (2018) builds on this by examining the broader, interconnected structures within texts, emphasising that emotions not only represent individual expression but also impact social outcomes. Discourse analysis, therefore, transcends the meaning of individual emotion words to investigate their intersubjective effects. One approach to achieving this is by exploring instances of emotional "othering" in identity formation, a process that is guided by Laclau's theoretical framework in this thesis. Social identity encompasses not just cognitive recognition of group belonging but also emotional attachment, along with sensitivity to the feelings and expectations of others. Analysing emotional expressions referring to "the other" in discourse reveals how certain words or concepts evoke emotional connotations, frequently through polarising language, which relates back to the populist discourse's articulation of inclusionary versus exclusionary dynamics. Finally, Koschut emphasises that intertextuality, i.e. the way emotional meanings are connected across different texts, is crucial for interpreting the political implications of emotional expressions in discourse.

4.3 The Analytical Framework

In addition to the three steps of EDA, discourse theory emphasises the analysis of specific expressions as articulations, exploring how they establish meaning by organising elements in particular relationships while excluding alternative possibilities for interpretation. This thesis examines left-wing populism and its articulation of security, focusing on the emotional dimensions interwoven in these processes. Through this lens, emotional articulations of security are analysed in relation to Sinn Féin's EU-Security discourse. To analyse articulations,

it is essential to identify nodal points. This involves investigating which signs hold a privileged status in the discursive structure and how they are defined in relation to other signs within the discourse (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.29-30). Going through the material, four components (Change, Neutrality, Sovereignty and Justice) are recurring themes structuring the meaning of the discourse. These “signs” are identified as nodal points of the EU-security discourse and will serve as the backbone of the analysis, structuring chapter 5.

Rooted in the theoretical foundation, the analysis will additionally visualise discursive ambiguities within the analysis. These are crucial for highlighting the nuances of the discursive structure and the power struggles integral to meaning-making. This analytical approach creates a cohesive yet dynamic framework, encapsulating both the stability provided by nodal points and the contestation present in discourse, while placing emotions at the core of the analysis.

5. Analysis

Sovereignty, justice, neutrality and change are nodal points in Sinn Féin’s EU-security discourse, anchoring the discourse, and particularly the meaning of security. Each nodal point plays a distinct role: sovereignty emphasises the security issue of giving away power and control to the EU, change embodies the party’s transformative vision and articulates lack of change as a direct security threat, losing Ireland’s longstanding neutrality is a security issue of ontological proportions, and justice highlights fairness and solidarity while equalising injustice with human insecurity. These nodal points are reinforced by emotional expressions such as pride and nostalgia for neutrality and sovereignty, anger at injustice, and hope for change. This analysis will explore how nodal points and their emotional expressions stabilise and contest the meaning surrounding EU and security. The analysis seeks to answer the first research question by addressing these dimensions.

5.1 Sovereignty

In Sinn Féin’s EU-security discourse, sovereignty emerges as a central nodal point, anchoring discussions of security through the themes of local control and self-determination. For example, Sinn Féin’s EU manifesto advocates for an EU that respects its member states’ sovereignty:

“We are for a European Union that supports its Member States, listens to what those States need, and understands that most decisions are better taken by Member States” (Sinn Féin’s EU-manifesto, 2024, p.3).

This vision underscores Sinn Féin’s commitment to an EU that supports, rather than overrides, national sovereignty. Sovereignty is articulated as a response to the insecurity arising from political globalisation and supranational governance, particularly by the EU. This articulation reflects concerns about the erosion of national decision-making power, formulating sovereignty as both a political and emotional issue derived from mistrust of government. Sinn Féin intertwines sovereignty with government critique, highlighting Ireland’s (in)ability to shape its policies independently due to government submission, which indicates national weakness. This critique targets the Irish government and its Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), accusing them of failing to protect Ireland’s interests within the EU. As exemplified by Sinn Féin MEP candidate Doolan’s critique:

“We need MEPs that are not pushed around by bureaucrats and Brussels”
(YouTube, 26/05/2024).

Furthermore, candidate Gavan’s statement presents Sinn Féin as defenders of Irish interests, contrasting with the current administration, which is uncritical of the Union. He highlights the need for change while also being the main opposition party:

“We’ve had enough of the yes man in Europe- we need change.” (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 26/05/2024).

These statements convey a sense of resistance against perceived EU overreach, using metaphors like “yes man” and “being pushed around” to emphasise the current government’s submission and naivete. Additionally, candidate Gildernew employs negative metaphors such as “teacher’s pet” and “northern’s dog” (referring to Britain) to heighten her critique of government representatives while advancing Sinn Féin.

I believe everything should be viewed through the lens of what is best for us- what is best for Ireland, what’s best for our people, what’s best for our communities, rather than the northern’s dog approach taken by the government parties to date. Government MEPs praise themselves on being the teacher's pet, being the best pupils of the class among their European colleagues. We are offering voters an alternative way of doing politics at the EU level. And while we recognise the importance of the institutions, we are not afraid to stand up for Ireland’s best interest (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 05/05/2024).

These statements contain emotionally charged language, depicting government officials as weak and manipulated, while Sinn Féin presents itself as a champion of Irish sovereignty and representatives unafraid to fight for their constituents' needs. Furthermore, in Sinn Féin’s discourse, security is expressed as reclaiming control over sovereignty and “localising” policy priorities to address community needs. The party highlights that its MEPs will amplify local voices within European institutions, as evidenced in the statement:

“Sinn Féin MEPs will work hard for you and your community. We will make sure your voice is heard in Ireland and in Europe.” (Sinn Féin’s EU-manifesto, 2024, p.4).

This use of inclusive language, such as “your voice” and “your community,” underscores Sinn Féin’s populist positioning as representatives of “the people” against detached EU elites. This localised focus links sovereignty to security, portraying supranationalism as alienating and disconnected from the concerns of ordinary citizens. By critiquing the displacement of national interests, Sinn Féin taps into a populist articulation that emphasises the need to reclaim political agency.

As noted previously, the emotional implications of counteracting globalisation are significant. In Sinn Féin’s discourse, global forces are depicted as disconnected from the everyday realities of local communities. By positioning itself as a guardian of local interests, Sinn Féin evokes a sense of nostalgia for a time when politics were more closely tied to communities and their immediate needs. This emotional expression stirs feelings of loss and urgency as citizens are urged to “reclaim” their political agency from distant, global structures. Furthermore, this process helps to alleviate existential anxieties. Additionally, Sinn Féin’s portrayal of sovereignty is infused with emotional expressions that humanise its candidates and nurture a collective identity. For instance, MEP Funchion highlights her empathy with ordinary people:

“This election is about electing people with the right political priorities. I will put families, workers, children, and communities at the heart of my work in Europe” (Kathleen Funchion, Facebook, 28/05/2024).

Here, the emotional expressions are clear. Funchion positions herself as deeply empathetic, emphasising her commitment to “families” and “workers,” groups often associated with vulnerability in the context of economic globalisation. The phrase “the heart of my work” (in comparison to a formulation like “the core of my work”) humanises her political approach, suggesting a compassionate focus on people’s well-being rather than abstract policies or impersonal institutions. The language evokes care, compassion, and even references to love (i.e. working with her heart), which helps cultivate an image of Funchion as not just a politician but a devoted advocate for ordinary citizens. Similarly, Gildernew draws on personal and familial themes to connect with voters:

Everyday single day, I’m talking to people in Midlands-Northwest who have children and grandchildren who are in other countries. You can’t give a hug over Skype. Women my age want their children and grandchildren around them. Thirteen years of Fine Gael has failed all of the people of the country (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 23/05/2024).

This statement uses emotional imagery to critique the government, highlighting the personal costs of economic and political decisions. Gildernew's focus on family separation resonates with existential anxieties, fostering nostalgia for a more connected, localised political framework. This contrasts with the globalisation of politics and taps into the human desire for connection and proximity to family as anchors of stability. She emphasises the failure of the current government, which reinforces her message that Sinn Féin, as a political force, offers an alternative that values empathy and human connection.

Drawing on Laclau, Sinn Féin effectively employs emotional language to humanize its candidates and solidify a collective identity. By expressing empathy, politicians like Funchion and Gildernew align themselves with "the people," contrasting this group with the "political elite." Gildernew's critique of the government as having "failed all of the people of the country" reinforces this dichotomy, utilising a chain of equivalence to unite ordinary citizens against a detached political establishment. However, it is crucial to note that her phrase "women my age" introduces a potential limitation of inclusivity, as it risks creating a homogeneous image of women that may not reflect diverse realities. While aiming to build solidarity, this approach may alienate individuals outside this articulated demographic, much in contrast to applying an empty signifier to create a collective identity.

In sum, Sinn Féin's discourse integrates sovereignty and security into a populist framework, using emotional expressions of both positive (e.g., compassion and empathy) and negative (e.g., mistrust, submission, fear, loss, urgency, anxiety) character to construct a collective identity that opposes globalisation and supranational overreach. By emphasising local control, the party appeals to voters' feelings of loss and nostalgia, positioning itself as a defender of Irish sovereignty and community well-being. This emotionalised populism positions Sinn Féin as capable of addressing existential anxieties and fostering a sense of agency among its supporters' electorate.

5.2 Justice

Justice occupies a central role in Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse, acting as a nodal point that stabilises the meaning of security around fairness, equality, and resistance to systemic injustices. In Sinn Féin's framework, security entails more than physical protection; it involves the creation of a just society. This conceptualisation positions justice as essential for addressing

social, economic, and political inequalities, broadening the notion of security to encompass an inclusionary vision.

Sinn Féin's discourse identifies injustice as a key source of insecurity, highlighting social inequality, economic disparity, and failures in accountability within EU policies. Injustice reflects a sense of loss and mistreatment, which can further fuel feelings of anger towards those identified as "other." For example, the manifesto emphasises the protection of workers and consumers from exploitative practices, contrasting these values with the interests of financial elites:

"The protection of workers and consumers' rights over the interests of vultures and banks" (Sinn Féin's EU-manifesto, 2024, p.14).

The metaphor "vultures" highlights exploitation and predation, portraying systemic inequality as a threat to societal stability. By focusing on the struggles of the "ordinary man," Sinn Féin presents the EU's current economic framework as unjust. This is evident in the party's critique:

"The European Union is a rich world region, yet much of this wealth is divided unequally, and an ever-greater share is concentrated in profits and assets, while less and less is found in workers' wage packets" (Sinn Féin's EU-manifesto, 2024, p.15).

The statement is underpinned by emotional expression, highlighting the unjust gap between the EU's prosperity and the lived experiences of its workers. Injustice incites feelings of anger due to being wronged. Furthermore, Sinn Féin connects justice to solidarity, extending this value across domestic and international spheres. McDonald affirms voters' frustrations by juxtaposing the ideal of fairness with the failures of the political establishment:

"If you work hard, you should be able to build your life, pursue your dreams. But that's no longer the case because of wrong choices by the political establishment." (Sinn Féin's Facebook, 02/06/2024).

This articulation distances Sinn Féin from existing power structures while fostering an emotional connection with voters. As described here, justice becomes a rallying cry for systemic change driven by anger toward the system. The party also addresses broader injustices, such as LGBTQI+ safety and disability rights (Sinn Féin's EU manifesto, 2024,

p.25), integrating them into a comprehensive inclusionary security framework encompassing various vulnerable groups. Another significant aspect of Sinn Féin's justice discourse is its solidarity with Palestine. The party parallels Ireland's history and evokes a shared sense of injustice. Sinn Féin, through McDonald, explicitly connects Irish identity with that of Palestinians:

“We stand with the people of Palestine in their struggle for freedom, for statehood, for peace, for the end of apartheid and an end to the occupation. That's who we are” (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

McDonald continues to deepen this connection by invoking Ireland's collective trauma:

“Conscious of our own history of colonisation and oppression, dispossession, famine, and partition. A history that has ingrained in the collective consciousness the impetus to confront injustice and inequality and human rights abuse across the world” (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

McDonald situates Ireland's historical experience within a global context, using “chosen trauma” à Volkan to foster solidarity. This is further strengthened through emotionally charged language, as example:

76 years the story of Palestine has been one of colonisation, occupation, apartheid, violent brutal human rights atrocities at the hand of the Israeli state and its ferocious military. [...] Palestine is a nation threatened by annihilation [...] [Sinn Féin] is appalled by the EU establishment's approach to the ongoing genocide and apartheid carried out by the Israeli state (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

The terms "colonisation," "apartheid," "atrocities," and “annihilation” are deeply evocative, carrying strong moral condemnation. "Genocide" and "apartheid" also evoke historical parallels, intensifying the discourse surrounding the emotional underpinning of injustice. McDonald's vivid imagery of children affected by conflict and parents' grief elicits human empathy and outrage, strengthening the call for justice and action through emotional resonance. To illustrate, McDonald stated:

“Heartbroken Palestinian mothers, inconsolably weeping over their dead children, their entire world collapsed forever into tiny white sheets [...] Fathers desperately digging their children out of rubble, knowing that they have breathed their last “ (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

She further highlights the injustice and the vulnerability of children in Gaza:

“The life of a Palestinian child is worth the same as a child anywhere else in the world [...] For eight months, Netanyahu has conducted a war on children, and the world has looked the other way” (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

The depiction of “war against children,” a symbol of innocence requiring protection from adults, conveys moral outrage and underscores the urgency to act. Sinn Féin articulates a call for global solidarity against injustice and emphasises the moral imperative to protect the vulnerable. Justice also anchors Sinn Féin’s generational struggle for Irish unification, intertwining nationalism with broader EU solidarity. The party’s dual presence in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland highlights justice as central to overcoming historic divisions, as emphasised by Gildernew at the EU campaign launch:

2024 has already been a historic year because we’ve seen Michelle O’Neill [Sin Féin party leader in Northern Ireland] rewrite history in becoming the First Minister against the backdrop of a system that was designed to prevent exactly that [...] We all know how glass ceilings are there to be smashed (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

Her language highlights the party’s role as “history-makers,” infused with strong emotional overtones of triumph over systemic oppression and imbued with pride. The metaphor of “glass ceilings” heightens this emotional impact and symbolises victory against systemic barriers, reinforcing the party’s position as powerful agents of change.

Social media posts connect justice and Irish nationalism to historical continuity, invoking past sacrifices to motivate contemporary action. For instance, McDonald's states:

For generations, Irish patriots struggled for independence, equality, and liberty. That work is ours to continue. We carry them with us in everything we do- their dreams, their sacrifices, their strength. They are with us today, in this moment, in this place (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 19/05/2024).

The party’s vision for justice and change encompasses the EU’s role in promoting Irish unity, as articulated in their manifesto:

“It’s time for the EU to play its part in advocating for and planning for Irish unity” (Sinn Féin’s EU manifesto, 2024, p.3).

The phrase “play its part” suggests that the EU should engage more actively. This position is notable, as Sinn Féin simultaneously champions Irish sovereignty and neutrality, distancing itself from EU integration while seeking EU involvement in advancing unification. In this context, the discourse links the fight for Irish unity with broader EU principles, articulated as justice and solidarity. Sinn Féin presents Brexit as an opportunity to further this goal, emphasising the EU’s potential role:

“The departure of Britain from the EU has brought the debate about a United Ireland to the fore” (Sinn Féin’s EU manifesto, 2024, p.7).

Hope connects with seizing transformative opportunities, as illustrated in this articulation. Furthermore, Sinn Féin’s discourse on justice employs emotional expressions to resonate with its audience. Nostalgia, frustration, outrage, and hope are interwoven throughout its discourse, validating the experiences of voters while inspiring action. McDonald’s speeches and Sinn Féin’s manifesto combine pragmatic critiques with emotionally charged language, presenting justice as both a tangible objective and a moral ideal. Hope serves as the recurring theme linked to opportunities, intertwining the nodal points of justice and change; by portraying justice as attainable, Sinn Féin cultivates a sense of empowerment and urgency.

In sum, Sinn Féin’s EU-security discourse positions justice as a central pillar, linking social, economic, and political equity to broader security concerns. By intertwining historical memory with contemporary struggles, the party bridges national and international dimensions of justice. Emotional expressions- grounded in chosen trauma, moral outrage, and hope- reinforce systemic change’s urgency and moral imperative. Through this discourse, Sinn Féin offers a vision of security rooted in solidarity, inclusivity, and resistance to systemic oppression.

5.2.1 Justice as an Empty Signifier

As observed, justice serves as a central nodal point; however, its meaning is fluid and often contradictory. Drawing on Laclau’s concept of “empty signifiers,” justice is articulated in various ways, either emphasising international solidarity and global justice or national justice rooted in sovereignty and nationalism. This duality reflects inherent tensions in Sinn Féin’s

rhetoric as it navigates between global humanitarian values and domestic concerns, as illustrated by the two policy examples of migration and climate.

Migration and the Justice-Sovereignty Nexus

The tensions within Sinn Féin’s discourse are most apparent in its opposition to the EU Migration and Asylum Pact. While the EU depicts the Pact as a means of solidarity and shared responsibility, Sinn Féin criticises it as a threat to Irish sovereignty. Gildernew encapsulated this sentiment during her speech at the EU campaign launch, stating that:

“The migration pact is an excellent example of where governments are happy to be led by the nose and sell out on Irish sovereignty” (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

The emotionally charged metaphor "led by the nose" highlights Sinn Féin’s view of manipulation by the EU, positioning the Pact as a violation of national autonomy. In this context, sovereignty emerges as the primary focus, relegating justice to a secondary role (as solidarity). While Sinn Féin advocates for an immigration policy that is "fair, efficient, and enforced," its focus on upholding human rights seems secondary to its concerns about national interests. This prioritisation prompts questions about whom the party’s vision of justice ultimately serves. For instance:

“Sinn Féin believes that we need an immigration policy that is fair, efficient and enforced. It must also respect the human rights of all those fleeing conflict and persecution” (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 01/05/2024).

The conjunction “also” suggests that fairness and efficiency for Irish nationals take precedence, with migrants' rights treated as a secondary concern. This articulation exposes a tension between Sinn Féin’s commitments to domestic (economic) justice and its broader advocacy for justice as international solidarity.

Ireland’s historical experience of emigration complicates matters. Generations of Irish people escaped hardship, shaping a national empathy towards refugees as characterising of Irish identity. However, recent increases in immigration have led to a polarised domestic climate marked by protests and rising anti-immigrant sentiment. Sinn Féin must balance its historical advocacy for solidarity with growing pressures to address domestic concerns, particularly

during what is claimed as an ongoing “cost-of-living crisis.” Laclau’s empty signifiers could explain Sinn Féin’s position as a form of strategic ambiguity. By maintaining flexibility in its articulation of justice, Sinn Féin appeals to diverse constituencies, constructing a collective identity while accommodating conflicting policy demands.

Sinn Féin’s commitment to “justice” becomes increasingly pronounced when addressing human rights violations beyond Ireland’s borders, indicating that the national context may be too sensitive for them to clearly articulate their stance, benefiting instead from ambiguous notions of justice. The contradictions in Sinn Féin’s discourse are further illustrated by its critique of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. The party condemns Frontex for systemic failures and human rights abuses, as noted in its statement:

[...] Frontex has been a symptom of the approach to date of the EU to the migration issue. It should ensure that the European Union’s approach is based on humanitarianism and upholding international law while protecting Europe’s borders. However, there have been too many instances of human rights abuses and violence against migrants at Europe’s borders [...] (Sinn Féin’s EU-manifesto, 2024, p.26).

This critique illustrates Sinn Féin’s willingness to challenge EU institutions on ethical grounds, particularly regarding human rights, which aligns with the party’s positions on “justice”, “neutrality”, and “change”. However, this stance contrasts with their rhetoric on the current domestic migration policy, where the emphasis on “sovereignty” and “economic justice” limits their inclusivity solidarity.

As an empty signifier, justice allows Sinn Féin to navigate these tensions, constructing a flexible discourse that appeals to diverse voters while vaguely articulating unresolved questions concerning inclusion and exclusion. This duality reflects deeper ambiguities in Sinn Féin’s conception of “the people.” This tension raises critical inquiries about the boundaries of Sinn Féin’s populism and the inclusivity of its vision of justice within the security discourse.

Climate change: embedded in justice, in sovereignty or a floating signifier?

In Sinn Féin’s discourse, climate change emerges as a contested concept that can be understood as a floating signifier, articulated through overlapping and, at times, conflicting frameworks.

The party's rhetoric positions climate change at the intersection of justice, sovereignty, and crisis, reflecting a dynamic and sometimes contradictory engagement with the issue.

One dominant articulation expresses climate change within a broader context of justice, emphasising the need for fairness during climate transitions. This justice-oriented discourse prioritises the protection of marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as farmers, by linking climate policies to socioeconomic equity:

We need to see the opportunities as well as the challenges in dealing with climate change. As we adapt to these challenges, we must do so with the intention of making people's lives better and easier- tackling poverty and inequality, protecting incomes, reducing energy costs, delivering good quality jobs, and investing in public services and infrastructure. Above all, fairness must be at the heart of the EU and Member States' approach to tackling climate change (Sinn Féin's EU manifesto, 2024, p.18-19).

By formulating climate change as an opportunity rather than a crisis while emphasising that fairness is paramount in climate policy. The focus on fairness and empathy links climate action with real benefits for ordinary Irish citizens, indicating a preference for domestic over global justice. This viewpoint is particularly evident in the party's critique of policies such as the Mercosur Trade Agreement:

The Mercosur Trade Agreement could see the European market flooded with upwards of 100,000 tonnes of South American beef, potentially produced at the cost of deforestation and with a significantly increased carbon footprint, while farmers in Europe fear culls. Irish farmers should not have to endure competition from States who produce food with techniques banned within the EU (Sinn Féin's EU-manifesto, 2024, p.11).

This articulation constructs "global trade" as a threat not only to the climate but also to Irish farmers, employing emotionally charged language such as "fear of culls." By stressing protectionist policies and portraying Irish farmers as a vulnerable group, Sinn Féin shapes a collective identity that is primarily national and exclusionary. This identity marginalises global solidarity, omitting the voices of those most affected by climate change in other parts of the world to benefit from justice attached to the "ingroup".

At other times, Sinn Féin’s discourse raises climate change to the status of a “crisis” or “emergency,” emphasising the need for immediate action:

“Collaboration and partnership across Europe are, of course, essential; look no further than the climate emergency. The clock is ticking, but if we work together, we can achieve a just transition in a race that we must win“ (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

Through phrases like "the clock is ticking" and “a race we must win,” Sinn Féin conveys a sense of collective urgency and agency. While these formulations align with justice-oriented principles, the language shifts to address large-scale global impacts. The idea of a “just transition” reconciles the tension between immediate crisis response and long-term equitable transformation. Sinn Féin’s discourse exposes internal tensions, particularly when sovereignty intertwines with climate formulations.

Michelle Gildernew’s statement highlights the contested articulation around Irish farmers:

“Our farmers are the endangered species; they are the biggest endangered species in this country. We need to protect farmers [...]” (Sinn Féin’s Facebook, 30/05/2024).

Here, the juxtaposition of “endangered species” with “biodiversity” (the terms "biodiversity crisis/challenge” are articulated five times in the EU manifesto, pp. 11-12, 21-23) underscores a nationalist and protectionist approach, prioritising Irish farmers over global ecological concerns. This reflects a trade-off within Sinn Féin’s discourse: while McDonald emphasises the urgency of addressing a global climate “emergency,” Gildernew focuses on safeguarding the livelihoods of domestic farmers, critiquing EU climate regulations as unjust. These conflicting articulations- justice, crisis, and sovereignty- highlight the fluid and contested nature of climate change within Sinn Féin’s discourse. This approach reveals a tension within Sinn Féin’s EU-security discourse regarding the articulation of climate, suggesting that climate perhaps is a floating signifier.

5.3 Neutrality

Neutrality, deeply ingrained in Irish identity due to the nation’s historical stance on military non-alignment, serves as a nodal point in Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse, stabilising

Ireland's foreign policy. Sinn Féin perceives the EU's move toward militarisation as a direct threat to this principle and, by extension, to Ireland's identity and stability. Insecurity in Sinn Féin's discourse is represented as the erosion of neutrality. The emotional significance of this issue is evident in Sinn Féin's repeated calls to "defend" neutrality, as demonstrated in Doolan's statement:

"The EU should be focused on housing, peace, prosperity and justice, not the erosion of our neutrality" (Sinn Féin's, Facebook, 02/06/2024).

The term "erosion" is highly emotive, evoking a sense of decay and irreversible loss. This negative portrayal of the EU positions it as a force that undermines Ireland's traditional values. Sinn Féin contrasts this threat with positive terms such as "peace," "prosperity," and "justice," embedding their argument within a vision of a more inclusive and stable Europe. McDonald elaborates further:

There are key decisions that must only be taken in Ireland. Look no further than our military neutrality and the independence of our foreign policy. The government and the European Commission may seek to dismantle Ireland's neutrality, but we will defend it (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

McDonald's statement highlights Sinn Féin's opposition to both the Irish government and the EU, depicting them as challenges to Ireland's neutral position. Neutrality is presented not merely as a policy but as a cornerstone of national identity, essential to Ireland's independence in foreign affairs. MEP candidate Gavan strengthens this emotional connection:

"Irish people have a strong attachment to neutrality. We're very proud of our own history of overcoming colonialism and establishing peace, and we want to see neutrality defended" (Facebook Sinn Féin's, 31/05/2024).

This statement connects neutrality to national pride and historical struggles. These sentiments cultivate a sense of ontological insecurity and profound existential anxiety about losing a vital component of the nation's core identity. Sinn Féin's critique of the EU's militarisation agenda, particularly under the leadership of President von der Leyen, further underscores this threat.

Similarly, MacManus critiques the EU's priorities:

What we need is not a neo-liberal, pro-militarisation agenda [...] You [Von Der Leyen] also say you want an EU defence commissioner. We are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, a climate crisis, and yet you prioritise a defence commissioner? (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

Militarisation is seen as a misplaced priority, with economic inequality and the climate crisis argued to be more pressing concerns. In Sinn Féin's discourse, militarisation serves as a counterpoint to neutrality, functioning as another significant aspect of articulating insecurity. MEP Funchion reinforces this, stating:

"Ursula Von der Leyen has been an unmitigated disaster [...]" (Kathleen Funchion, Facebook, 29/05/2024).

Her condemnation, describing Von Der Leyen's actions as an "unmitigated disaster," conveys a sense of catastrophic failure and the government's and MEPs' inability to counteract or manage the situation. This reinforces Sinn Féin's argument that EU militarisation undermines Ireland's values of peace and sustainability. It further positions neutrality as a vital aspect of Irish identity and highlights the government's failure to uphold this fundamental value at the EU level.

Sinn Féin also connects neutrality to Ireland's historical commitment to human rights and peacekeeping, highlighting a profound contrast with the EU's militarisation. For Sinn Féin, militarisation endangers Ireland's role as a neutral participant in international peace efforts. Likewise, McDonald criticises Von der Leyen's position on Israel:

Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen showed her hand when she stood shoulder to shoulder with Israelis when they committed slaughter and war crimes against the people of Gaza. She did not stand for us, she did not speak for us, she never ever will (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

The emotionally charged terms "slaughter" and "war crimes" contrast with Ireland's self-image as a champion of peace and justice, further positioning EU militarisation as morally incompatible with Irish values and identity.

Finally, Sinn Féin connects the protection of neutrality to the protection of sovereignty:

“An independent foreign policy and military neutrality are crucial to allow Ireland to play a constructive role in the wider world. Sinn Féin is committed to protecting Ireland’s position of military neutrality” (Sinn Féin’s EU manifesto, 2024, p.4).

For Sinn Féin, sovereignty and neutrality are interdependent. Neutrality enables Ireland to remain independent of military alliances, while sovereignty ensures that Ireland retains the ability to define and act on its vision of neutrality.

5.3.1 Neutrality as an Empty Signifier

While neutrality serves as a nodal point in Sinn Féin’s discourse on EU-security, particularly in contrast to militarisation, its position on Russia presents an intriguing contradiction. This suggests that Sinn Féin’s interpretation of neutrality may depend on specific political contexts. The party has been less vocal about the EU’s response to Russian aggression in Europe compared to its outspoken criticism of Israel’s actions. For instance, despite the ongoing war in Europe, the term “Russia(n)” appears only four times in the EU manifesto, while “Ukraine”/ “Ukrainian(s)” is mentioned only five times. In contrast, “Israel(i)” is cited 17 times, “Palestine”/ “Palestinian(s)” is referenced 15 times, and “Gaza” appears twice.

One explanation is that sanctions are imposed on Russia, but not on Israel. However, Sinn Féin’s interpretation of neutrality is particularly inconsistent when comparing its response to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, when its MEPs voted against a European Parliament resolution condemning Russia’s aggression, arguing at that time that actions against Russia would undermine Ireland’s neutrality. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sinn Féin revised its position, removing previous posts that were “sympathetic” to Russia. In the case of Israel, Sinn Féin advocates for actions it previously opposed regarding Russia, this time stating that the lack of action poses a threat to neutrality.

This inconsistency highlights neutrality as an empty signifier, lacking inherent meaning and shaped by political context. While Sinn Féin consistently emphasises neutrality and regards it as a fundamental nodal point in its EU-security discourse, its actual meaning seems fluid, adapting to geopolitical circumstances. This indicates that neutrality may be strategically invoked to align Sinn Féin with specific political goals, rather than serving as a consistent,

unchanging principle. Given that neutrality is embedded in identity, alarming rhetoric about the erosion of neutrality is effective in fostering ontological insecurity concerns.

Sinn Féin's ideological connections to socialist and communist movements and its historical ties to the IRA (Irish Republican Army), which received support from the Soviet Union during *The Troubles*, could perhaps clarify its "softer" stance on Russia compared to Israel, which is seen as an extension of the neoliberal Western agenda that Sinn Féin opposes. This historical alliance and ideological standpoint may have shaped Sinn Féin's different stances.

However, in the EU 2024 campaign, Sinn Féin's vision of neutrality is linked to justice, not merely passive but rather connected to an active and values-driven international agenda. The party's vision for Ireland's role on the global stage highlights diplomacy, humanitarianism, peacebuilding, and cooperation in tackling global challenges. Sinn Féin outlines:

"Sinn Féin's vision is for Ireland to play a constructive role in the wider world, committed to diplomacy, humanitarianism, peacebuilding and cooperation with other States on global challenges, including poverty, world hunger, climate change, conflict resolution and migration" (Sinn Féin's EU-manifesto, 2024, p.8).

This vision raises an additional question: can such a proactive approach to global issues be genuinely considered "neutral", or is it rather "normative"? Critics might contend that these values indicate an ethically and morally aligned position on the international arena, rather than a stance of detachment or impartiality. Moral superiority is emotionally attached to pride. Sinn Féin's advocacy for neutrality aligns with the broader ethos of inclusionary populism, which aims to ethically and morally resonate with voters' feelings. For example, Doolan states:

"The EU project is about peace, prosperity, equality and justice. And our neutrality has served us really really well and is upholding human rights on the global stage [...]" (Sinn Féin's, Facebook, 02/06/2024).

This exemplifies how the party articulates neutrality as an ethical stance. This stance enables Sinn Féin to connect emotionally with its followers through pride and moral superiority while mitigating existential anxieties by emphasising the importance of Ireland's neutrality as a stabilising anchor of Irish identity.

In conclusion, Sinn Féin's shifting positions on neutrality in the cases of Russia and Israel reveal the fluidity of the concept within the party's discourse. Neutrality, while central to Sinn Féin's vision of Irish foreign policy, is not always applied consistently. Instead, it seems to be invoked in different ways to support various political objectives, ultimately exemplified by the case of the Russian annexation of Crimea, where actions were perceived as threatening neutrality. Conversely, in the case of Palestine, inaction against Israel is viewed as a threat to neutrality, indicating the fluidity of its meaning.

5.4 Change

Change, or rather, the absence of it, along with the prevailing status quo of political power, acts as a nodal point that anchors Sinn Féin's discourse on insecurity. This articulation underscores the importance of systemic reforms to tackle security challenges and alleviate crises. By associating "security" with the need for transformation to prevent various crises from escalating, Sinn Féin strengthens its opposition to the current order, which is a beneficial stance for a party aiming to contest the establishment. In Sinn Féin's EU-security discourse, "change" serves as a key organising concept expressed across local, national, and European levels. At each level, "the establishment" is identified as the main barrier to progress. Sinn Féin positions itself as the representative of "ordinary people," contrasting its priorities with those of elites seen as detached from voters. This opposition nurtures a collective identity among Sinn Féin supporters, stressed by the interconnectedness of crises and the urgent need for change.

Change indirectly serves as an intensifier of emotional expressions within the discourse. By articulating change as both urgent and necessary, it highlights the interconnectedness between crisis and the perceived inadequacies of the current system. The urgency related to change following these issues acts as an intensifier of emotional expression. By emphasising this urgency, Sinn Féin highlights the interconnectedness between crisis and the perceived shortcomings of the existing system. This emotional expression evokes both frustration with the status quo and hope stemming from the prospect of a better future embedded in the articulation of change, amplifying the sense of instability while positioning Sinn Féin as the catalyst for a new political direction paradigm.

The urgent need for change encompasses dual emotional dimensions: negative feelings, such as fear and frustration with the current situation, alongside positive ones, like hope and pride

for the future and the attached agency. This duality is essential to Sinn Féin’s discourse on EU-security, where emotional expressions reinforce the necessity for transformation. For instance, the campaign’s slogan was “Change starts here, change starts now” (Sinn Féin EU manifesto, 2024, p. 1ff), which underscores both the urgency and the transformative potential of change. Speakers referred to members as “change-makers” (YouTube, 05/05/2024), infusing the term with optimism and anticipatory pride. McDonald articulated the urgency by stating:

“This is the most important local and European election in generations [...] The future must be different.” (YouTube, 05/05/2024).

“I feel the urgency for change everywhere I go when people share their stories with me- their hopes, their fears. These moments of connection drive me” (Facebook Sinn Féin’s, 02/06/2024).

These statements validate voters’ emotions, aligning McDonald with voters’ sentiments. This dual articulation creates a compelling urgency, with fear highlighting systemic insecurity and hope offering a vision of a better future.

Furthermore, Sinn Féin’s discourse connects local grievances regarding housing, healthcare, and the cost-of-living crises to European policymaking, underscoring the failures of the current order in addressing crises at all levels. MEP Boylan articulates the link between the local and European levels:

Families are doing everything that’s asked of them in terms of the social contract [...], but what they’re not seeing in return is where the state is stepping up in the provision of public services [...], for example, the cost-of-living crisis. It’s really important that you have MEPs who will actually stand up for the people of Dublin [Boylan is Dublin’s candidate] and the people of Ireland and put Ireland’s interests first at the European Parliament, but also MEPs who care about the real issues that matter to people, like housing, like the cost of living crisis, climate action and workers’ rights. We need MEPs who will go out there and fight for the best deal for the Irish people (YouTube, 21/05/2024).

This critique fosters feelings of distrust and injustice, calling for systemic change. Similarly, Doolan’s statement, “I’m very angry at the housing situation” (YouTube, 26/05/2024), aligns his outrage with voters’ anger, amplifying the demand for change.

Moreover, change intertwines with Ireland's historical experiences, especially emigration.

McDonald links current youth emigration to the failures of the establishment:

[...] quite apart from being an elected person, as a mother of young adults, I believe five more years of Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, there'll be no living here. And a lot of our young people will be gone. Quite aside from being a political figure, as a mother, that is not acceptable to me. I don't think that's acceptable to parents and grandparents and to young people themselves the length and breadth of the land. So, give change a chance (Facebook, Sinn Féin's, 24/05/2024).

This statement escalates the discourse to an existential level, portraying continued inaction as a threat to Ireland's survival. Referencing emigration as a historically significant issue amplifies the call for political change, linking personal, national and international crises. This connection between security and historical memory is further highlighted in Sinn Féin's rhetoric regarding housing and economic inequality. For instance, MEP Boylan's campaign video evokes a nostalgic critique of contemporary Ireland:

I grew up in a city where it was possible for some family on a single income to actually go out and buy a house and to provide for their family. That's no longer the case in this city and I think it's really sad to young people, some of your brightest, having to leave the island because they just don't see any future for themselves here (YouTube, (21/05/2024).

This comparison of past stability with present decline evokes feelings of sadness and nostalgia, highlighting the urgent need for reform. Similarly, Funchion's campaign video presents security as a pivotal issue for Ireland's future, stressing the immediacy of action:

"Ireland's future will be determined by the decisions we make today. But you have the chance to change that by voting for strong Sinn Féin MEPs who will not be afraid to stand up for Ireland!" (Facebook, Sinn Féin's, 27/05/2024).

Funchion's articulation positions security not only as protection from economic and social crises but also as freedom from governmental inaction. By portraying the political establishment as "afraid" to act, Sinn Féin challenges the definition of security, reinterpreting insecurity as proactive and transformative governance. The emotional shift from fear to hope reinforces this articulation, providing voters with a pathway to reclaim security through political change.

Additionally, Sinn Féin's emotional expressions are deeply rooted in an intergenerational commitment to security. McDonald frequently invokes her identity as a mother to highlight the urgency for change:

“As a mother myself, I know that if we don't break the grip of the parties of the past, our children won't have the future they deserve [...]” (Facebook, Sinn Féin's, 02/06/2024).

Through such appeals, motherhood transcends a familial role; it represents a broader obligation to nurture and protect the nation. This emotional expression links private concerns to public action, solidifying security as a collective endeavour associated with fairness and intergenerational continuity. Security, viewed as a floating signifier, is further reinforced through Sinn Féin's discourse on intergenerational care. Funchion articulates this connection:

“This election is about the future. What I want for my children is what I want for yours-hope, opportunity, and a better life for all.” (Facebook, Kathleen Funchion-Sinn Féin, 07/06/2024).

This election is about the future- your future. It's about giving hope to the next generation. [...] As a mother, I work every day to build something better for our children and ensure they have a place to call home in Ireland (Facebook, Kathleen Funchion-Sinn Féin, 14/05/2024).

The discourse consistently leverages the emotional weight of familial ties, particularly portraying motherhood as a personal and political motivation. Sinn Féin harnesses familial bonds and parental responsibility to create an inclusive vision of hope and opportunity by articulating security as the protection and provision for future generations. This formulation broadens the party's appeal, embedding security within a collective identity that transcends individual struggles. This appeal to shared parental concerns strengthens the emotional connection between voters and the party's vision. Sinn Féin's leaders frequently invoke their identities as parents to symbolise care and foresight, grounding their call for change in personal and moral values.

The positive emotional component of hope, combined with a sense of responsibility in Sinn Féin's discourse, is particularly evident when the party and its supporters express themselves as active agents of transformation- "change-makers" capable of delivering a brighter future. Hope and collective responsibility are central to Sinn Féin's vision of change. McDonald's

statement, “Change is not only possible- it has to start now” (Facebook Sinn Féin’s, 02/06/2024), conveys a sense of urgency and optimism. Moreover, embedded within Sinn Féin’s discourse regarding the future, articulated around the theme of change, is an acknowledgement of the transformative potential of young people as both activists and agents of change. To illustrate, McDonald emphasises this dynamic in a speech concerning the topic of Gaza:

“Young people in particular, have stepped forward, standing for the cause of Palestinian freedom [...], and world leaders must now listen to the voice of the young because this generation is right” (YouTube, 28/05/2024).

This acknowledgement not only praises youth activism but also positions young people at the core of the party’s vision for a hopeful future. It implicitly contrasts the energy and morality of the younger generation with the stagnation and perceived failures of the political establishment.

In summary, Sinn Féin’s discourse on change exemplifies the party’s ability to intertwine emotional resonance with political messaging. By positioning change as both a moral imperative and a practical necessity, Sinn Féin effectively critiques the status quo while offering a hopeful vision for the future. The party’s emphasis on intergenerational responsibility, particularly communicated through motherhood, local grievances, and European interconnectedness, reinforces its articulation of transformation, linking personal experiences to broader systemic challenges. Ultimately, the articulation of change serves as a unifying framework, expressing collective emotions and aspirations to challenge the existing political order and advocate for a new paradigm of governance rooted in fairness, opportunity, and security for “*all*”.

5.5 Conclusion

How is the meaning of security, as a floating signifier, stabilised and contested in the Radical Left Populist party Sinn Féin’s political EU discourse, and what emotional expressions underpin this articulation?

The EU-security discourse is stabilised via four nodal points: sovereignty, justice, neutrality, and change, which interact to stabilise, and sometimes contest, the meaning of security. The party ultimately presents voters with an articulation of two discursive contrasting futures: a

militarised, privatised union dominated by corporate interests, or a humanitarian, egalitarian project rooted in peace, justice, and sustainability. By uplifting justice and promising to counteract the erosion of sovereignty and neutrality, Sinn Féin constructs a vision of the EU that aligns with messages of hope, change, and resistance to entrenched power structures. This articulation not only critiques current political establishments but also envisions a Europe that prioritises the needs and values of its people, providing a compelling alternative shaped by empathy and compassion in contrast to the crisis-filled current.

The study highlights the multifaceted nature of security. Even within a party's discourse, security emerges as a fluid concept, emphasising its status as a floating signifier. Discourses are inherently power struggles, continuously contested and reshaped. The agendas of different agents influence what becomes policy priorities and how the political discourse is temporarily fixed. This study has illustrated how articulations of insecurity are stabilised to varying degrees. More recent concepts like climate change remain more contested than older, deeply entrenched articulations, such as neutrality tied to Irish tradition and identity, thus holding a very fixed position as a nodal point. However, this significance allows neutrality to be utilised effectively as an empty signifier to unify individuals around the lack of ontological security that follows from the articulation.

In the EU-security discourse, various values and topics compete for prominence, sometimes prioritising justice over sovereignty and, at other times, sovereignty over justice. This competition often becomes apparent through contrasting nodal points or empty signifiers that reflect diverse demands depending on the audience and the issue at hand, as demonstrated in the analysis.

Summary and conclusion of emotional expressions

Sovereignty is emotionally underpinned by the following expressions:

Mistrust, submission, and weakness: These emotions are often directed towards the government, reflecting a lack of stability and fostering widespread anxiety and fear.

Bravery and pride: Conversely, Sinn Féin conveys an emotional expression of bravery, presenting themselves as “not afraid.” This positive expression evokes pride and nurtures a sense of resilience.

Loss and nostalgia: The discourse surrounding sovereignty communicates a profound sense of loss and an urgency to reclaim “popular sovereignty.” It emphasises agendas prioritising vernacular and local demands, invoking nostalgic sentiments.

Existential anxiety: Disruptions to traditional political orders are articulated as threats to stability, generating existential anxiety among the population.

Empathy and compassion: Sinn Féin counters this anxiety by underpinning its self-image with empathy and compassion. Its discourse humanises politics, drawing on family, parental responsibility, and protection imagery to establish an emotional connection with its audience.

These emotional dynamics reveal that sovereignty is not merely a political or legal concept but one profoundly underpinned by emotional resonance.

Justice is emotionally underpinned by the following expressions:

Feelings of mistreatment, shame, and anger: The loss of inherent rights highlights an unjust system that places ordinary people against elites. This generates a sense of mistreatment and, in a way, “humiliation,” leading to feelings of relative deprivation and collective victimhood, which evoke both shame and anger. These emotions, in turn, foster solidarity among those who see themselves as victims of injustice.

Solidarity and unification: Solidarity arises on multiple levels and in various spheres, bringing together diverse groups wronged by commonly identified oppressors. This shared solidarity inspires both empathy and outrage, propelling a collective expression of global unity against injustices.

Historical analogies and moral obligations: References to historical struggles for justice and resilience are coupled with promoting moral responsibilities and expressing moral superiority. These expressions evoke pride, nurturing an inclusive and robust sense of identity and a collective “we” around the cause. The sentiment is further amplified by participants'

descriptions as “change-makers,” “history-makers,” and, in a sense, “justice-fighters.” These descriptions are infused with agency, conveying hope linked to transformative opportunities.

Agency and control: The discourse of justice underscores the reclaiming of agency, which alleviates feelings of helplessness and diminishes anxiety. By articulating justice as a means of regaining control, it fosters hope and encourages proactive engagement.

These emotional expressions reveal that justice is not only articulated as a legal or moral concept but a deeply emotional one.

Neutrality is emotionally underpinned by the following expressions:

National pride and historical analogies: Irish neutrality is a source of national pride, further heightened by historical references that underscore its significance as a defining feature of Irish identity.

Existential anxiety: The perceived “dismantling” of neutrality undermines the essence of Irish identity, creating existential anxiety among those who consider it a vital part of the nation’s character.

Fear and militarisation: The dismantling of neutrality is emotionally charged due to its perceived counter-relationship to militarisation, a term laden with fearful connotations such as war, violence, death, and danger. As an emotionally loaded concept, militarisation evokes profound concern about the risks associated with abandoning neutrality.

Identity and security concerns: In the Irish context, neutrality goes beyond identity politics. It is interwoven with Ireland’s diplomatic aspirations and peacekeeping missions on the international stage. Furthermore, it reflects traditional notions of security, especially considering Ireland’s weak and diminishing defence forces. Thus, neutrality acts as both a safeguard for Ireland’s international reputation and a pragmatic response to its limited defence capabilities.

These emotional foundations emphasise the complex role of neutrality in shaping Irish identity, security, and diplomacy. Its dismantling invokes profound fears, not only regarding

militarisation and war but also concerning the loss of a valued national identity and the erosion of Ireland's standing on the global stage.

Change is emotionally underpinned by the following expressions:

Fear and hope: Within the EU-security discourse, the current lack of change is expressed as a source of insecurity, generating anxiety and fear. Conversely, the potential for change, represented by Sinn Féin, is supported by hope and optimism, providing a pathway out of fear.

Identity through "change-makers": Sinn Féin's identity creation revolves around the articulation of being "change-makers." This identity is expressed through positive emotions such as pride, optimism, and agency, offering a hopeful response to widespread mistrust and perceived injustices.

Anger and outrage: On the "negative" side, the discourse surrounding change also expresses outrage and anger, reflecting frustration with existing systems and injustices.

Nostalgia and sadness: The need for change is further articulated through a sense of relative loss compared to an idealised past. This emotional dynamic introduces dimensions of nostalgia and sadness into the discourse.

Paralysis versus action: The government, depicted as "afraid" and "pushed around," is linked to fear-induced paralysis. In contrast, Sinn Féin's emotional expressions, rooted in anger and hope, drive proactive action, creating momentum for change and reinforcing their self-image.

Symbols of care and responsibility: Sinn Féin's articulation of change is further enhanced by symbols associated with motherhood and parenthood. These symbols evoke emotional expressions of care, responsibility, and foresight, underscoring the party's dedication to the well-being of future generations.

Through these emotional expressions, Sinn Féin harnesses positive emotions (pride, hope, and care) and negative emotions (anger and nostalgia) to create a compelling vision of transformation, sharply contrasting with the perceived inertia and fear associated with the current government.

6. Discussion

While the analysis chapter addressed the research questions on an empirical level, this discussion broadened the perspective by exploring the wider implications of the findings. It engages with a higher level of abstraction to examine the thesis's contribution to existing and future research and its relevance to theoretical understandings. The discussion is organised around answering the final two research questions of the thesis. The final section will also conclude the thesis by connecting back to the thesis' introduction.

6.1 Comparison to previous scholarship

How are Sinn Féin's discursive articulations similar and/or different from how previous scholarship has conceptualised political populist security discourses and their emotional expressions?

This chapter examines how Sinn Féin's discursive articulations align with or differ from established conceptualisations of political populist security discourses and their emotional expressions, addressing the second research question. Drawing on findings from earlier chapters and engaging with prior scholarship, the chapter situates Sinn Féin's discourse within broader debates on Euroscepticism, sovereignty, identity, and ontological security. It highlights Sinn Féin's unique navigation of populist tensions- balancing inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies, national and popular sovereignty, and emotions of repressed shame, hope and empathy.

European populism studies

Previous research links populist parties to varying degrees of Euroscepticism, often critiquing the EU's supranational governance and its intrusion on national sovereignty. Sinn Féin, however, presents a more complex relationship with the EU, diverging from earlier literature. While critical of the establishment at both national and European levels, Sinn Féin does not outright reject the EU. Instead, it highlights Ireland's dual identity as both an independent nation and a historical European state, even leveraging EU frameworks to advance Irish unification while critiquing policies that threaten Irish neutrality and sovereignty. Unlike the stark Euroscepticism often associated with populist nationalism, Sinn Féin positions the EU as both a potential ally and a source of threat, utilising it for Irish nationalism and republicanism.

This duality contrasts with right-wing populist portrayals of the EU as a danger to nationalism and diverges from left-wing populism, given the limited focus of such literature on nationalism. Sinn Féin critiques the EU's neoliberal policies and the limited Irish influence but also embraces a positive European identity. Sinn Féin's rhetoric on migration further complicates its EU-security discourse. The party promotes multiculturalism yet opposes the EU's Asylum and Migration Pact, prioritising Irish sovereignty. This tension reflects elements of both left and right-wing populism, challenging binary categorisations in the literature.

Sovereignty is central to Sinn Féin's discourse, articulated in both "popular" and "national" terms, as categorised in the literature review. Consistent with left-wing populist traditions, Sinn Féin invokes popular sovereignty, amplifying grievances against systemic inequities. However, on issues such as migration, the party emphasises national sovereignty, constructing boundaries around who constitutes "the people." This dual articulation mirrors broader populist patterns while reflecting Sinn Féin's strategic navigation of competing demands. Ultimately, Sinn Féin's discourse offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between nationalism, solidarity, and insecurity. Unlike the exclusionary nationalism of many right-wing populist movements, Sinn Féin's nationalism integrates a strong commitment to multiculturalism and global solidarity, demonstrating how Radical Left Populist Parties can adopt inclusive formulations while engaging with traditionally exclusionary themes in a traditional exclusionary sense. This suggests that populist nationalism is not inherently tied to sole exclusion but can reflect a broader range of values. Furthermore, Sinn Féin's discourse reflects multiple emotional expressions, directing negative emotions (fear, anger, and mistrust) at elites while fostering hope, solidarity, and empowerment among supporters. This interplay parallels strategies observed in Radical Left Populist Parties like Syriza, Podemos and France Insoumise, where crises are formulated as both urgent and solvable. Unlike the fear-dominant rhetoric of right-wing "crisis-talk," Sinn Féin rather stresses transformative opportunities, expressing hope and collective action as the prime emotional expressions tied to crisis.

Ontological Security Studies & Other Emotions

Sinn Féin's rhetoric addresses ontological security by linking change to stability, invoking nostalgia for Ireland's past while envisioning the potential of a hopeful future. Sovereignty and neutrality are articulated as essential to Irish identity, with threats to these values portrayed as existential anxieties. Sinn Féin counters these anxieties by articulating change as a restoration

of dignity and traditional values, resonating with supporters' emotional and psychological needs for cognitive closure. This strategy leverages "acknowledged shame" associated with left populism, such as the "erosion" of Ireland's agricultural legacy, alongside anger directed at elites, fostering solidarity and a collective desire for justice, which are crucial components for collective identity formation. By coupling nostalgia with a progressive vision, Sinn Féin reconciles its call for disruptive change with the ontological need for stability.

In accordance with the literature review, the emotional expressions of anger, shame, humiliation, nostalgia, pride, and hope were all identified in the analysis. However, interestingly, in the thesis' analytical findings, "bravery" or "fearlessness" is equally present alongside fear. In contrast to the literature's focus on crisis and fear-driven narratives that amplify existential anxieties, bravery is instead employed to foster a collective identity, empowering the "ingroup" through a positive perspective of collective pride and strength. This represents an intriguing contribution that has not been afforded adequate analytical space in previous literature. I contend this serves as a valuable entry point for future research. Another significant component that has been less visible in prior literature is empathy and compassion, even in relation to security issues. This expansion of the emotional toolbox of the study results from the broadening of the security concept, primarily because of incorporating justice as a nodal point. Therefore, discussions around solidarity and morality are also introduced within this discursive framework, as these emotional expressions are essential for the justice dimension.

Conclusion: Toward a Nuanced Understanding of Populism

Sinn Féin's discourse challenges existing conceptualisations of populism by demonstrating a selective critique of the EU. The party leverages EU structures for national goals while contesting specific policies and remaining "constructively critical" to the EU, as stated by Gildernew at the campaign launch (YouTube, 05/05/2024). By combining elements previously ascribed to either left- or right-wing populism, Sinn Féin exemplifies the fluidity of populist rhetoric. Its emotional expressions balance anxiety with hope, and its nuanced articulation of sovereignty and identity highlights the adaptability of populist frameworks. The party also introduces a partially new emotional toolbox due to the broadening of security's conceptualisation. Sinn Féin's case invites future scholars to adopt more nuanced approaches in analysing the intersections of populism, security, and emotional expression.

6.2 Nuancing Populism

How does the thesis contribute to the theoretical understanding of populism?

This final section broadens the scope of analysis to evaluate the thesis's contributions to the theoretical understanding of populism, particularly its utilisation of emotional expressions. It highlights areas that require further scholarly exploration. By integrating an emotional approach to discursive structures and emphasising emotional expressions' role in collective identity construction, the thesis challenges conventional categorisations and enriches the study of populism.

To begin, the thesis reveals that populist discourses employ a diverse set of emotional expressions, both positive and negative. It broadens the emotional toolbox beyond the current focus in literature by allowing the radical left populist discourse to shape the concept of security more freely. The varied emotional expressions underpinning populist discourse work to create both inclusionary and exclusionary identities simultaneously. This complexity challenges the traditional dichotomous framework that associates Radical Right Populist Parties (RRPP) with exclusionary practices and Radical Left Populist Parties (RLPP) with inclusionary ones. Instead, the findings illustrate that populist discourse operates along a continuum of insecurity articulations, where a single actor may adopt different positions depending on the issue. For instance, Sinn Féin's discourse showcases fluidity between inclusionary articulations, such as global solidarity and multiculturalism, and exclusionary tendencies, particularly regarding migration policies and domestic economic justice. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how populist actors engage in "othering," a crucial practice in identity formation; how their position on the inclusionary-exclusionary spectrum evolves with various contexts and how these contexts affect the emotional meaning of security as a floating signifier.

Furthermore, the thesis addresses the limited research on the discursive dynamics of the populist left. Much of the existing scholarship has primarily approached RLPPs through their opposition to neoliberalism and austerity, neglecting their engagement with themes typically associated with RRPPs, such as migration, sovereignty, and national identity. By examining the case of Sinn Féin, the thesis highlights the necessity of studying left populism beyond

preconceptions tied to ideological binaries. Future research should continue to explore how RLPPs navigate issues traditionally regarded as exclusionary to offer a more comprehensive understanding of populism's ideological and emotional dimensions.

Ultimately, the thesis challenges the hegemonic understanding of populism that aligns themes of insecurity with RRPPs while presenting RLPPs as their ideological opposites. By demonstrating that RLPPs engage with security themes in diverse and context-dependent ways, the study prompts a rethinking of populism as a continuum of discursive practices rather than a binary categorisation defined by ideological orientations, therefore encouraging future research to move beyond the contrastive articulation of left- and right-wing populism to explore RLPPs from fresh perspectives, particularly regarding their approach to themes like migration, and climate. Such studies could further illuminate how emotional expressions, ranging from fear and anger to hope, solidarity and empathy, mediate the construction of collective identities and shape populist discourses, providing insight into the dynamics of populism beyond its position as a “thin-centred ideology”.

In conclusion, this thesis has broadened the understanding of populist EU-security discourse by examining it through the lens of populist radical left perspectives. By challenging the dominant interpretations of populist EU-security discourse, the study has nuanced the understanding of populism, particularly regarding the interplay between inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics and its emotional toolbox, particularly by including dimensions of empathy and “love” underpinning security. The insights gained from this case demonstrate the limitations of binary divisions between populist forms and reveal the complex fabric of populist identity construction. While this study represents an initial step, it underscores the importance of continuing to explore populism beyond simplistic categorisations. Future research should investigate populism across diverse contexts, examining how left-, right-, and centrist populist movements interact with themes of insecurity beyond constraining categorisations. Key areas of focus include the construction of inclusionary and exclusionary identities and the role of positive and negative emotional expressions in these processes. Given the global prevalence of populism, applying this framework to cases outside Europe- such as populist left movements in Latin America- could offer additional insights into the theoretical dimensions of populism and its emotional expressions.

6.3 Final words

Following Laclau and Mouffe, this thesis visualises how politics is fundamentally infused with power dynamics. An intriguing dimension to consider is the interplay between the supply- and demand sides of populism in shaping discourse. The political psychology literature included in the literature review emphasises the crucial role of leaders in articulating threats and fostering psychological insecurity among audiences. Yet, this case suggests that leaders often channel “popular” sovereignty, centring their rhetoric on the everyday struggles of ordinary people. In this sense, leaders target vernacular insecurities, giving voice to their audiences’ lived experiences. According to Laclau and Mouffe, populism signifies a healthy democracy, as it represents people reclaiming power from elites and moving towards “direct democracy”. If populist leaders are indeed a “true voice” for the people they represent, i.e. a reflection of their insecurities, can we definitively argue that leaders are the primary drivers of these insecurities or rather amplifiers of popular insecurities? The interaction appears dual and reciprocal, warranting further research to clarify the directionality of this relationship.

However, this study has focused on revealing the character of emotional expressions, identifying that empty signifiers represent a strategic attempt to unify varied demands through vague expressions of insecurity. Rather than leaders defining what (in)security means, the thesis illustrates that emotional expressions are vital in fostering an intersubjective feeling of insecurity while also offering an alternative trajectory marked by hope. This understanding is crucial for revisiting the thesis introduction and addressing the puzzling gap between objective well-being metrics and subjective feelings of insecurity. The case shows that left-wing populism employs a diverse set of emotional expressions when discussing (in)security. In this context, the findings of the UNDP report, which highlight widespread feelings of insecurity despite measurable improvements in well-being, are less surprising. Populist discourse increasingly influences broader political discussions through its emotional expressions and instances of mistrust, aligning closely with UNDP’s report indicating that mistrust is crucial to perceived insecurity. As the study demonstrates, populist discourse articulates mistrust aimed at national governments, MEPs, EU elites, and, ultimately, the ambiguous entity of “the other.” This recurring theme in populist rhetoric, even in leftist contexts, underscores the relationship between feelings of insecurity, emotional expressions, and mistrust towards “others” in contemporary populist political discourse.

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