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Security, Emotions and Radical Right Populism: Beyond a 'Flaunting of the Low'?

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The rise of exclusionary populism is widely regarded as one of the most significant phenomena in today's political world. Despite this, the relationship between populism and security remains under-explored in the literature, including the affective power of populist security narratives. Against this background, this paper conducts a comparative analysis of radical right populist discourse in response to two recent shocking crimes in France and Ireland. The different expression given to security concerns in the two countries, such as a much less antagonistic 'flaunting of the low' in France, is suggestive of a more contingent and institutionally mediated relationship between security and populism than the existing literature would suggest.

KEY WORDS: security, populism, emotion, affect, Ireland, France

INTRODUCTION

Criminology is a relative latecomer to the revival of interest in the emotions, part of the broader 'affective turn' in the social sciences and the humanities that has become more prominent since the 2000s (Clough and Halley, 2007; for notable exceptions, see Karstedt *et al.* 2011; Jacobsen and Walklate, 2019). The paucity of criminological research in this field is particularly disquieting given the times in which we live. While we are not more emotional than we used to be, few would deny that technology has afforded us an infinite variety of ways to express those feelings in real time. Moreover, and relatedly, a rash of electoral successes for far-right populist parties in Europe has refocussed scholarly attention on the emotional underpinnings of contemporary politics where 'feelings replace facts' (Davies 2018: 131) and the far-right frame issues like crime and immigration in terms of fear, anger and resentment (Laclau, 2005; Wodak 2020; Moffitt 2016; Hameleers *et al.* 2017).

In light of the above, the aim of this paper is to examine the affective appeal of radical right or 'exclusionary populism' (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017) through the critical, yet relatively overlooked, lens of security. As a number of scholars have noted, while some element of endangerment or threat to security is central to the populist claim to defend 'the people', the issue remains under-explored in the literature (Béland 2020; Hamilton 2023; Kurylo 2022). This

is particularly the case for the emotions[1] which have long been considered an integral part of the crime and security sphere and which may help us unravel the meanings and experiences of security among supporters of the radical right (Van Rythoven 2015; Chamberlen and Carvalho 2019). Questions that should hold criminological interest in this regard include: what emotions are carried within certain message components of right-wing populist security discourse; are we correct to think of anger and fear as master emotions in this context (Wodak 2015, 2020); and how does the affective dimension of security discourse and style differ across national contexts?

This article seeks to address these questions through a comparative analysis of radical right populist discourse in response to two recent shocking crimes committed in France and Ireland. Their similarities – both incidents involved young women who were allegedly killed by recent migrants to Ireland/France – and their closeness in time lend themselves particularly well to comparison and allow us to examine how populist appeals play out in two, very different security contexts. As such, it provides an opportunity to sharpen beliefs about the emotional content and style adopted by populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in Europe, including suggestions that there are certain emotions common to PRRP discourse (Demertzis 2019) and a type of 'populist aesthetic' in matters of security (Kurylo 2022). It proceeds as follows. Part 1 discusses the literature on the emotions and populism together with the relative neglect of security issues in understanding and interpreting this phenomenon. The second part details the methodological approach taken to the two case studies and the type of data analysed. Part 3 presents the findings from the comparative analysis on both affective discourse and style. The different expression given to security concerns in the two countries, such as a much less antagonistic 'flaunting of the low'[2] in France, are suggestive of a more contingent and institutionally mediated relationship between security and populism than the existing literature would suggest. In the concluding section, the paper argues for greater criminological attention to the affective appeal of security issues for parties on the radical right, but also to the intersection of narratives on security, gender and emotion, and the mediating effect of institutions in managing emotional practices.

THE AFFECTIVE APPEAL OF 'SECURITY POPULISM'

While notoriously elusive and often described as an 'essentially contested' concept, in recent years a consensus of sorts has emerged on populism's defining characteristic: a political discourse that posits a struggle between a reified 'will of the people' and a conspiring elite, and which seeks to privilege the sovereign will of the majority (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 2018). One problem with this, ideational, definition, however, is that it conceives of populism as a binary, either a political leader or party is populist, or they are not. This may be a problem for politicians who are more inconsistent in their use of populist rhetoric, particularly in light of the growing consensus that we are witnessing the 'normalisation' or 'mainstreaming' of populist politics (Mudde 2019; Wodak 2020). It also fails to take account of newer definitions of populism which focus on their style, their 'ways of being and acting in politics' (Ostiguy 2009, 2017), and which are clearly important for those interested in the more relational and affective aspects of populism. In light of this, and acknowledging the similarities between these two approaches, I follow Wiesehomeier's (2018) 'bundled approach' to the definition of populism which conceives of populism as a combination of populist characteristics (privileging of the interest of the people/usage of informal language and slang) but which exists on a continuum, with populism being on one end of the scale and the opposite being pluralism. The focus here is

1 A 'mild' constructionist approach to emotion is adopted here that 'mediate[s] between physiological reactions and cultural norms' (Demertzis 2019: 36).

2 As discussed below, this is defined as 'the antagonistic, mobilizational flaunting in politics of the culturally popular and native, and of personalism as a mode of decision-making' (Ostiguy 2017).

on populism in its mainstream or 'exclusionary' form – one which sees threat to the people from 'below' (from a range of 'others') as well as above (from elites) – since the complexity of 'left populism' merits separate, more detailed consideration and is beyond the scope of this article (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015).

The contemporary populist wave holds important implications for the cognate, though distinct, concept of 'penal populism' which, as Bell (2022: 1077) has recently observed, has returned 'with a vengeance' in this context. Writing elsewhere, I have argued, following the security/preventative justice literature (Ashworth and Zedner 2014) and Pratt's (2020) recent work on the 'security sanction', that, in contemporary times, the political focus has shifted to security over crime (Hamilton, 2023). Certainly, it is undeniable that in a number of western jurisdictions security features prominently in the discursive repertoire of populist parties, with anti-migrant sentiments frequently packaged in the language of national security, 'law and order' and fighting crime (Hogg 2023). Indeed, Alston (2017: 4) goes so far as to say that 'much of the problem [of populism] is linked to post-9/11 era security concerns', including through restrictive measures on migration (see also, Huq 2018). This is often made explicit in the self-branding of radical right parties, as in the Polish 'Law and Justice' party (named after the American right-wing ideology of Law and Order) (Woźniakowska-Fajst and Witkowska-Rozpara 2022) and, in France, Rassemblement National's description of itself as the 'party of justice and order'. Reflecting these developments, Lazarus and Goold (2019) have even coined a term, 'security populism' to describe the ways in which populist politics and state-craft recognise and stoke public fear of, for example, the 'dangerous' foreign Other, with important consequences for rights and the rule of law (Effrat *et al.* 2021). Outside of this (legal) work, and the work of certain international relations scholars discussed below, however, the relationship between populism and security remains critically under-researched (Hamilton, 2023; see also Béland 2020; Kurylo 2022), with the focus mainly on economically-driven explanations (Rooduijn 2015).

Drawing on this idea of 'security populism', the aim is to explore another vital, but 'under-laboured' (Demertzis 2019), aspect of contemporary populism, namely, the 'emotional roots' of right-wing populism (Salmela and von Scheve 2017). Emotions have long been considered an integral part of both populist discourse (Canovan 1984) and the experience of insecurity (Van Rythoven 2015), although it is only more recently that scholars of sociology, political science and political communication have recognised the affective appeal of right-wing groups as a key area of narrative inquiry (Wodak 2015; Hochschild 2016; Ebner 2017; Breeze 2019; Demertzis 2019). In terms of the political affects involved, the literature's main focus has been on 'dangerous and powerful passions' (Billig 1995: 7), with much of the attention given to emotions such as: anger (Ebner 2017); fear (Wodak 2015); hate (Ahmed 2001; Garland and Treadwell 2012); shame/humiliation (Homolar and Löfflmann 2021); and nostalgia (Hochschild 2016). The danger with this approach, as I have argued elsewhere (Hamilton, 2023), is that it comprehends the new right as a largely pathological force or seeks to 'psychologise' (Müller 2017) those who engage in backlash politics (see also Busher *et al.* 2018; Bonansinga 2022). Similar problems pertain to writing on the emotional 'style' of PRRPs, which goes beyond discourse to 'include issues of accents, level of language, body language, gestures, ways of dressing, etc' (Ostiguy 2009: 5) and which tends towards the near-exclusive use of negatively connotated words such as 'vulgar', 'coarse' or 'violent'. In his well-known analysis of political style, Ostiguy (2009, 2017), following Weber (1978), describes populism's 'affectual narrative' as an antagonistic 'flaunting of the low'. By this he meant that 'high' politicians, perceived as educated and polite, tend to use a rationalist, emotionally restrained discourse, while 'low' politicians are more emotional, use 'localist traits' and bad language, and rely more on personal charisma (Breeze 2020). Drawing on Ostiguy's (2017) work, Kurylo (2022) has examined the 'securitisation style' of radical right populist parties and how it fosters an emotional bond with their audiences. As with Ostiguy, she compares the populist emotional 'aesthetic', namely, '"poor taste", sentimental ordinariness and

deliberate defiance of the norms of the security "establishment"', unfavourably with the 'high' aesthetic with which security is traditionally associated.

Kurylo's work aside, few have attempted to bring the two literatures discussed above together, and relatively little academic attention has been paid to date to the critical relationship between populism, the emotions and security (but see: Carvalho and Chamberlen 2018; Chamberlen and Carvalho 2019; Bonangsinga 2019, 2022). Building on the work of these authors, but adopting a post-dualist or functionalist understanding of political affects that seeks to move beyond unhelpful binaries such as rational/emotional, positive/negative emotions, this paper examines how representations of in/security, emotion, and communicative practices interlink in processes of populist political mobilisation in two, very different political contexts. The next section provides some further information on the data collected and methods employed.

METHODS

Based on a 'most-different-cases design' (Pakes 2019), the study examines the reaction of the French *Rassemblement National* (National Rally or RN) to the (alleged) murder of Lola Daviet in October 2022, and compares it with discourse emanating from two Irish PRRP parties, the National Party (NP) and the Irish Freedom Party (IFP), in response to the killing of Ashling Murphy in January 2022. These two case studies represent highly contrasting cases of exclusionary populism, occupying different positions on the sliding scale or continuum discussed above. The *RN* (formerly *Front National*) enjoys significant electoral success, gaining an unprecedented 41.5 per cent of the vote in the 2022 Presidential election, and is now regarded as having, at least partially, 'mainstreamed' (altering its position to become more like mainstream parties) (Paxton and Peace 2021).[3] The Irish parties, on the other hand, remain fringe actors: none of the candidates for the Irish NP and the IFP—the largest PRRPs in Ireland—polled high enough in the 2020 general election to get even their expenses back.[4] The demographic and socio-cultural contexts in which these parties operate are also strikingly different. France is one of the most ethnically diverse societies in Europe, with Muslim immigrants coming to the country in large numbers since the 1960s, while Ireland only began to experience inward flows of migration from the mid-1990s (Fitzgerald 2020). Moreover, while Ireland, like the United Kingdom and United States, has largely adopted an approach that tends to promote multiculturalism, France has adopted a more assimilationist model (Marliere 2023).

As De Lange and Mudde (2005) argue, however, comparative research on populism must include so-called 'negative cases' where far-right parties have been relatively unsuccessful in order to generate counterfactual evidence and new explanations for the success of populism. Given that a key feature of populism is its contextual sensitivity (Mackert 2019), a 'most-different' design is useful in terms of identifying both context-specific drivers of populism and empirical findings that hold true across different national contexts.

The radical right populist response to the recent killings of Ashling Murphy and Lola Daviet in Ireland and France respectively provide two infamous, and very recent, examples of the salience of security in populist political discourse. Both incidents involved young women who were allegedly killed by migrants to Ireland/France, allowing for analysis of 'protective masculinity discourse' and the way in which populist discourse can help supporters feel more protected and secure (Johnson 2022). Moreover, their relative closeness in time—the killings occurred

3 While there are other radical right parties in France, owing to their poor electoral performance, attention will be focussed on the RN as the dominant PRRP.

4 *Siol na hÉirean* was excluded from this analysis owing to (1) the fact that it is not a political party and (2) due to its small size and social media following.

within nine months of one another—allows for more effective comparison of the emotional politics surrounding these events.

In order to analyse the PRRP discourse on security in these two contexts I examined the social media posts of the NP, the IFP and the RN on Twitter. Given that populists are drawn to social media as an ideal opportunity to control their own voice (Engesser *et al.* 2017) the aim was to capture populist messages that reach citizens unfiltered and directly. Twitter has become an important platform for politicians, and particularly PRR politicians, as illustrated by Donald Trump's phenomenal Twitter following (Spierings and Jacobs 2014; Muis *et al.* 2020). While this (largely gatekeeper-free) environment presents a number of advantages over other units of analysis, such as manifestos and more traditional media sources, it also suffers from a number of limitations. First, the cap on the number of characters (280) means that there may not be enough context for reliable analysis. Secondly, and more fundamentally, this type of research tends to focus on the 'input' from the 'supply side' of politics, or the frame that political actors prepare for uptake, rather than how these messages are received (Maly 2018). While the absence of any analysis of users' reactions to these messages is therefore a limitation of the current research, it is noteworthy that previous studies in the area suggest that radical right populist campaigns can strongly influence audiences, potentially changing consensual 'feeling rules' within mainstream culture (Breeze 2019; Sakki and Martikainen 2020).[5]

Within the @NationalPartyIE (NP) and @IrexitFreedom (IFP) datasets, historical tweets were examined over a three-month period from 12 January (the date of Murphy's death) to 12 April 2023. A total of 89 tweets that referred (explicitly or implicitly) to the killing were extracted for analysis, drawn from the Twitter handles of the NP (n = 34), IFP (n = 29) and Herman Kelly, leader of the IFP (n = 26).[6] Retweets, likes, comments and replies to others were excluded from the analysis. For the RN, in addition to the party's official Twitter account the search included the Twitter pages of Marine le Pen and Jordan Bardella as President of the RN in the National Assembly (French parliament) and Interim President of the RN respectively. This resulted in a total of 47 tweets being extracted for analysis that referred to the killing of Lola and spanned the time period 14 October 2022 to 14 January 2023. Beyond the three-month sampling frame, however, in both countries regard was had to newspaper reports, blogs, speeches on You Tube and posts on Facebook relating to the killings in order to gain a more rounded appreciation of the context in which the discourse was produced. Consistent with the emphasis on emotion and in order to access the full gamut of affective appeals, a multi-modal discourse analysis was carried out that focuses on text that is both verbal and non-verbal. The inclusion of non-verbal content such as posters, memes and images allows for analysis of messages that have been shown by political communication scholars to be capable of stirring strong emotions and impacting long-term memory (Van Leeuwen 2008; Graber and Holyk 2012).

Within these corpora, affects were analysed from a post-dualist or functionalist perspective. This meant that, rather than viewing emotions normatively, that is, as either criticising or celebrating affect, I analysed the *functionality* of the affects or 'what affects do in far-right politics and how they constitute an affective offer that is perceived as appealing' (Leser and Spissinger 2020: 327). The range of emotions examined also went beyond the emotions usually associated with right-wing populism such as fear or humiliation to include, for example, more positive feelings such as pride, hope and humour (Freistein *et al.* 2022). A qualitative rather than quantitative approach was preferred given the fundamentally interpersonal dimension of emotional discourse; the focus on socio-cultural variation; and the likelihood that implicit expressions of

5 A notable example in recent months is the co-option of the IFP hashtag 'IrelandIsFull' by anti-migrant protestors in Dublin (Carroll, 2023).

6 I did not analyse the tweets of Justin Barret, leader of the NP, as this account has been suspended.

emotion (i.e. irony or sarcasm) may be involved (Ekström *et al.* 2018; Bonansinga 2022). Data were analysed manually with reference to the core features of populist security *discourse* and *aesthetic* as identified in the above literature. With regard to discourse, drawing on the literature cited above, hierarchical, deductive coding frames were created examining, on the one hand, negative emotions such as fear, anger, shame, humiliation and, on the other, positive emotions such as pride, nostalgia, 'feeling protected', humour and hope. Codes used for emotional aesthetic were also deductive, incorporating: sentimental ordinariness; accessible, common-sense language; authenticity; and anti-intellectualism.

PRRP REACTION TO THE KILLING OF ASHLING MURPHY

Ashling Murphy, a 23-year-old Irish primary school teacher, was attacked and killed while jogging along a canal just outside Tullamore, County Offaly in Ireland on the afternoon of 12 January 2022. Jozef Puška, a Slovakian national who had recently moved to Ireland, was charged with her murder some days following the event and has since been convicted of her murder. There was a national outpouring of grief for Murphy in Ireland, with vigils held across Ireland and the world to remember her and to call for change in tackling gender-based violence. The London *Times* described the reaction to her death as Ireland's 'Sarah Everard moment' (Al-Othman et al, 2022).[7]

This interpretation of her death—as a watershed moment to end violence against women—was largely accepted by the mainstream political parties, yet rejected in the strongest possible terms by the NP and the IFP. The day following the killing, the NP, referring to an article in the *Irish Examiner* on men's violence against women, opined: 'It's difficult to imagine an article which shows less respect for the very personal atrocity committed against Ashling Murphy than to generalise it into an idiot pseudo-feminist talking point' (Twitter, 13 January 2022). Similarly, in a speech posted on Facebook, IFP leader, Hermann Kelly, stated: 'Immediately after her death, I was a bit saddened to see the immediate jumping of politicians on her death to make it suddenly … the radical loony left feminists made it all about men, all men. This isn't true' (19 January 2022). According to the Far-Right Observatory, this animus extended to the trolling of women's advocates in the days after Murphy's death, with suggestions in some media reports that the IFP had accused the Women's Council of having 'blood on its hands' (Irish Examiner, 2022).

In the days and weeks that followed, the killing featured prominently on the Twitter pages of the Irish NP. In the immediate aftermath of Murphy's death, the party used it to platform its justice policies calling for 'complete reform' of the justice system, including the reintroduction of the death penalty (Twitter, 13 January 2022, Figure 1). A blog on the subject, published on the website on 2nd February, pinned the blame firmly on multiculturalism: 'It is hard to see how on current trajectory, we are not all being led towards a society ever more dangerous' (NP 2022). Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, a few weeks after Murphy's killing the party launched a membership drive under the Twitter handles: #DefendMná [Defend Women] #DefendIreland. The core messages ('Irish men, man up, make Ireland safe for women and children!') were retweeted several times on Twitter, accompanied by pictures of women and children holding up the fliers (Twitter, 2 February 2022, 5 February 2022, 13 February 2022, 8 April 2022). These fliers were distributed at various locations around Ireland in the weeks and months following Murphy's death right up until May (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Athlone). As late as June 2022, newspaper reports of crimes allegedly committed by ethnic minorities were regularly featured on Twitter with the taglines 'Irish women

7 Sarah Everard was kidnapped, raped and murdered by police officer Wayne Couzens as she was walking home in London on 3 March 2021. Her death, like Ashling's, led to marches for women affected by and lost to violence.

are not safe in multicultural Ireland' (8 April 2022) and 'Man Up. Join the NP' (3 June 2022). The IFP also strongly politicised the issue by connecting it with freedom of movement within Europe and—its formative aim—the need to leave the European Union (see Figure 3, Twitter, 20 January 2022). For example, on 13 January, the day following the killing, the IFP tweeted: 'EU open borders means migrants come to Ireland unchecked and not vetted… Criminals can come and go as they please. #Irishfreedom want strong border control for a safer country. #Tullamore' (Twitter, 19 January 2022). This message has been repeated many times on social media, including on the one-year anniversary of her death when Figure 4 appeared on Twitter, along with a video explaining 'how the Government's reckless immigration policies makes Ireland more dangerous for women' (Hermann Kelly, Twitter, 12 January 2023).

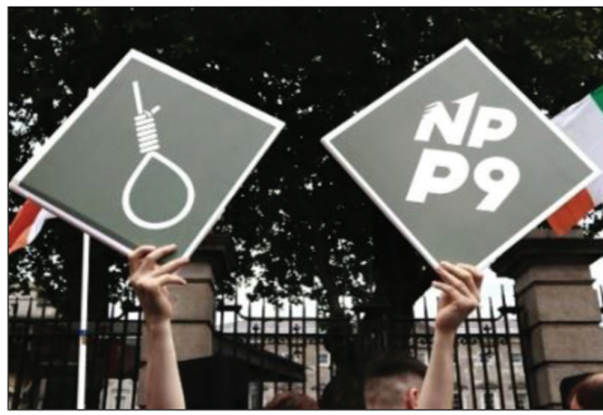

Fig. 1 NP Principle 9 on the Restoration of the Death Penalty: Image on Twitter shared by the National Party on 13 January 2022

Fig. 2 Flyers distributed by the NP: Image on Twitter shared by the National Party on 25 January 2022

Emotional discourse

In terms of the emotions invoked, it is clear from the above that, predictably enough, *fear* forms a key part of the emotional messaging of the Irish PRRPs (Wodak 2015). Irish women and children are 'not safe', we are on a 'dangerous trajectory', and freedom of movement policies are 'reckless' and 'dangerous'. These narratives combined with blaming and affective appeals to *anger*, whose appraisal pattern aligns strongly with the Manichaean and antagonistic view of PRPPs (Rico *et al.* 2017), through the argument that, not only has Mr. Puška been wrongfully admitted to the country, but the Irish taxpayer is paying for Mr. Puška's accommodation (he is

Fig. 3 Image from IFP Twitter shared on 20 January 2022.

Fig. 4 Image of Aislinn Murphy extracted from a video shared by Hermann Kelly on Twitter on 12 January 2023.

Fig. 5 #Subsidised Crime Image shared on IFP Twitter on 20 January 2022.

in receipt of disability benefit) (IFP, Twitter, 20 January 2022) (Figure 5; '#subsidisedcrime'). This was similarly reflected in the nationalist trope of elite politicians as traitors who, through their policies on immigration, are 'putting our people in danger for monetary gain' (NP, Twitter, 8 April 2022) (Figure 6, Twitter, 14 April 2022). Indeed, in May the IFP began using the hashtag 'Helen's Felons' in reference to recent migrants who had allegedly committed crimes, laying the blame firmly at the door of the current Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee. Beyond *fear* and *anger* – the emotions most frequently connected to the spread of populism – corpora analysed also bore out recent scholarship on the significance of *shame* and *humiliation* narratives in populist messaging (Homolar and Löfflmann 2021). This can be seen in a speech uploaded to You Tube by Hermann Kelly on 7 May 2022 where he explicitly linked Ashling Murphy's death with a news story about a sex offender from Eastern Europe, also a Slovakian Roma: 'Roman Krok … He was allowed out after 2 and a half years, and where did Mr. Krok come to? Guess? Yes. He came to Ireland. The soft touch of Europe and criminal dumping ground.' It is interesting to observe how these humiliation or disempowerment narratives play out in different national contexts. While PRRP leaders in larger jurisdictions such as the United States and United Kingdom talk of the greatness of the country and restoring former glory, Irish leaders appealed instead to a historical, possibly postcolonial, sense of inferiority (Lee 1994; Hegarty 2012): 'Irish people must be the idiots of the world'; 'Irish people, we are being taken for a ride' (ibid).

Consistent with the aim of achieving a less pejorative understanding of the emotional dynamics of backlash politics, it is worth observing the presence of appeals to positive as well as negative affects. One such emotion, combining issues of identity, gender and security, is described by Johnson (2022) as '*feeling protected, secure and proud*', usually evoked by a strong alpha male leader such as Trump. Having incited citizens to feel scared, anxious and angry, Irish PRRPs then offered citizens ways to 'feel protected' in the form of safety and security through vetted immigration policies, tough criminal justice measures and, of course, through joining the parties themselves. For male audiences in particular, populist discourses also revolved around efforts to

Fig. 6 Image from IFP Twitter shared on 14 April 2022.

convert the emotion of *shame* (allegedly being looked down upon by a liberal elite) into feelings of *self-approval*, *pride*, *love of homeland* and *hope* for a better future (Jasper 2011; Pilkington 2016). In this regard, the recruitment campaign urging Irish men to 'man up' in order to protect Irish women and children may also be construed as an effort at 'remasculinising' (Katz 2016) supporters or potential supporters, particularly in a context where PRRPs were accusing 'radical looney left' or 'pseudo-feminists' of blaming and emasculating Irish men. This is clear from the blog on the Ashling Murphy killing published on the NP's website and circulated on Twitter: '[NGOs] are using this dire situation to pathologise our whole society. What can result from this? Other than a country of traumatised Irish women and emasculated Irish men?' (1 February 2022). These narratives meet and mingle with appeals to the *pride* and *dignity* of the Irish people and their ancestors. Thus, a blog which appeared on the website of the NP opened with the first few lines of the Irish Proclamation of Independence: 'IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom' (2 February 2022). This call to patriotic pride was not directed against the British, however, but against the 'NGO complex' which was viewed as jeopardising the safety of Irish women, reflecting a type of 'restorative nostalgia' in which the past rescues the present and allows people to 'keep their heads up' (Taş 2020: 131). Similarly, other Tweets juxtaposed diagnosis of the source of the people's insecurity (internationalism) with pride appeals to fight back and resist it: 'Our streets are becoming unsafe for Irish women. It is unfortunately a symptom of a disease (internationalism) that has crept its way across #Europe and to our shores putting our people

in danger for monetary gain. *Here, only the Irish can and should stamp it out.* #LawAndOrder' (emphasis added).

Emotional aesthetic

Moving away now from PRRP discourse to look at the emotional 'aesthetic' in their response to Murphy's death, it is clear they have, per Kurylo (2022: 141), a 'highly emotionally charged' dimension, including securitising performances that 'are easily digestible, visually arresting and thrilling in their tendency to say the unsayable'. The figures above provide good illustrations of the ways in which PRRPs use simplified, emotional messages ('man up', 'these people died because …', 'unvetted immigration = more violent crime') to portray the 'virtuous' people damaged by the elite. Imagery is also important here: the use of images of victims' faces, a hangman's noose, and an affluent four-bedroom home, along with minimal use of text, enhance audience recall and, with their lower cognitive load, lend themselves particularly well to be processed heuristically (Rodriguez and Dimitrova 2011). Moreover, the use of a picture of a (migrant) man attacking an (Irish) woman (Figure 2) allows PRRPs to portray immigrants and minorities in a negative and highly stereotypical emotionalising way that would not be acceptable in purely textual form (Grabe and Bucy 2009). Finally, antagonism to expertise and conventional wisdom in terms of the 'causes' of the killing is also highly evident, through PRRP characterisation of gender-based narratives as 'looney', 'radical' and 'idiot'. This is accompanied by a combative and personalised rhetorical style ('Helen's Felons'; 'these people died *because these people* …') that sits largely outside of established norms and expectations of political behaviour in Ireland. This is particularly the case when it came to civil society, where IFP allegations that the Women's Council had 'blood on its hands' demonstrate its antagonistic distance from mainstream security discourses (Ostiguy 2017).

RN REACTION TO THE KILLING OF LOLA DAVIET

On 14 October 2022, 12-year-old Lola Daviet was found dead in a travel trunk in the 19th arrondissement of Paris. According to the press release from the prosecutor's office Daviet was raped and tortured prior to her death (Willsher 2022). A 24-year-old Algerian woman, Dahbia B., was charged with her murder, among other crimes, and has been remanded in custody pending trial. Following leaks in the press that the suspect was Algerian and had been subject to an expulsion order (an obligation to leave the French territory or 'OQTF') the RN featured a photo of the young girl on their social media networks and sought to link the (alleged) murder to what it saw as government laxity on immigration (Figure 7, 'Little Lola, it's France that has murdered you', Twitter, 17 October 2022). In the days following the killing, right and far-right politicians launched strong attacks on the government of President Emmanuel Macron for the crime (Guillou and Trippenbach 2022). For example, on 17 October, the day the investigation was launched, Marine le Pen described the case on Twitter as 'a textbook case on the uncontrolled nature of illegal immigration in our country'. The next day right-wing and far-right representatives questioned the government about its handling of the situation during government question time in the National Assembly. In an impassioned speech, Marine Le Pen described the death of Lola as 'one time too many', arguing that 'too much crime and felony is committed by illegal aliens' (Twitter, 18 October 2022). In response, the Minister of Justice, Eric Dupond-Moretti, accused Marine Le Pen and her party of 'indecency' and using 'the coffin of a 12-year-old girl as one uses a step' (Guillou and Trippenbach 2022). However controversial the RN's response, it paled in comparison to its far-right rival, *Reconquête!*. As soon as the suspect's Algerian nationality was revealed on October 16th, party executives in *Reconquête!* began promoting the hashtags #ManifpourLola and #JusticepourLola on social media (Guillou 2022). The party's founder, Eric Zemmour, also controversially coined the term 'francocide' to

Fig. 7 Photo of Lola Daviet shared on RN Twitter on 17 October 2022.

describe the murder of a French person in the wake of Daviet's murder. This activism culminated in a far-right rally under the hashtag 'ManifpourLola' ('demonstration for Lola') organised in 'homage to all victims of crime' and held on the streets of Paris on 20 October. Notably, the RN, which had initially expressed enthusiasm for the rally, decided not to participate and instead held a 'modest' tribute to Lola in front of the National Assembly, a picture of which was posted on Twitter (Figure 8).

Emotional discourse

From the beginning, the debate on Daviet's death – described in dramatic terms by Jordan Bardella as, 'a new French life cut down by savagery and immigration' (Twitter, 16 October 2022) – took on a highly charged affective dimension. In the National Assembly Marine Le Pen gave voice to the full range of emotions experienced by 'the people': 'On Friday, time stood still, France frozen, stupefied, horrified, and in pain on learning of the torture of little Lola' (Marine Le Pen, Twitter, 18 October 2022). As with the Irish PRPP discourse, appeals to *fear* and *humiliation*, in turn entwined with a perceived lowering of status and respect, were also present. Fear narratives, for example, may be implied from social media references to a growing 'savagery' in France, assertions that a 'gratuitous' aggression is committed in France every 44 seconds, and statements such as 'today, in France, you can die from looking at someone the wrong way' (Jordan Bardella, Twitter, 21 October 2022). Humiliation narratives, on the other hand, were mobilised in the context of discussion on Algeria and its refusal to grant the administrative approvals which are required by the Ministry of the Interior to deport illegal Algerian immigrants. In the debate in the National Assembly, Marine le Pen called for 'respect for the country's laws', and similarly on Twitter, Jordan Bardella spoke of the need to 're-establish the authority of the State' (24 October 2022), claiming 'we don't get respect from people who have an aggressive relationship with France, as is the case with Algeria' (20 October 2022). As far-right discourse on the killing unfolded, however, the overwhelming

Fig. 8 Photo of RN Deputies observing a minute's silence outside the National Assembly shared on RN Twitter on 20 October 2022.

emotion discernible was *anger*, fuelled by what Bonansinga (2022: 98) terms 'the central elicitors of anger: the unfair character of the danger and the dismissive, negligent or even irresponsible behaviour of those who are to blame'. One RN deputy described the actions of the Minister for Justice as 'shameful' and argued that 'France had become a cut-throat' (RN Twitter, 20 October 2022). Indeed, in line with her previous strategy of attacking Macron as 'power without empathy' (Trippenbach 2022: np), Le Pen pointed to Macron's late statement and 4-day delay in meeting Daviet's family as evidence of its cold, uncaring and arrogant attitude. On several occasions, she accused the government of not understanding the 'indignation', 'anger' and 'immense, deep emotion that this tragedy has aroused in the hearts of the French people' (Twitter, 20 October 2022). This expression of righteous anger against the government who have '[left] the executioners of the French people on national territory' (Jordan Bardella, Twitter, 24 October 2022) was a recurring motif in subsequent narratives that focussed on the tragic and avoidable nature of her death: 'the French feel an emotion that is all the more cruel since we have the feeling that this horror could have been avoided' (Marine le Pen, Twitter, 21 October 2022).

Another similarity with the Irish PRRP security discourse is the presence of appeals to positive emotionality, most notably, the emotion of *hope* in relation to actions to address insecurity. Thus, RN promises such as: 'I will condition the obtaining of visas for Algerians to the absolute respect of the OQTF' and, 'with us, delinquents and foreign criminals will be systematically expelled.' Such a 'politics of reassurance' (Homolar and Scholz 2019) offers a positive outlook for the future, grounded in a state of crisis: 'Because France cannot wait any longer' (Marine le Pen, Twitter, 7 November 2022). While the fact that both the victim and the offender in this case were female undoubtedly added affective potency to the debate (one RN Tweet read: 'She could be your daughter, my daughter, our child and every parent thought so upon learning of this appalling crime', RN, 18 October 2022), gendered narratives around the need to 'feel protected' were not so much in evidence in the political discourse following Lola's killing, no doubt because the accused person was a woman.

Emotional aesthetic

It is perhaps in the emotional aesthetic or presentation of the RN that we see the greatest differences between it and the Irish PRRPs. On the one hand, both Irish and French parties adopt a rhetorical style that is highly accessible and which emphasises common-sensical knowledge (Holland and Fermor 2020). Thus, the RN messages on Twitter focussed on simple moral truths: 'If the State had done its job—it's a fact, whatever one says—the presumed murderer of young Lola would not have been on French soil' (Jordan Bardella/RN, Twitter, 24 October 2022) and 'If we don't make the link between immigration and insecurity, it's because we don't see the elephant in the middle of the corridor and medicine can no longer do anything for you!' (RN, 18 October 2022). Their use of dramatic, emotionalised language, such as 'savagery', 'barbarism', 'massacre', 'assassination', 'cut-throat' and 'executioners', and use of Lola's image to mobilise emotion also speaks to the 'sentimental ordinariness' (Kurylo 2022) of the populist aesthetic of security. Congruently, the RN discourse provides a good illustration of the way in which PRRPs seek to establish a connection their audience by responding to 'its desire for authenticity' (Kurylo 2022: 139). Several of the RN Tweets following Daviet's killing reflect this idea of sincerity or, 'saying it like it is' (Lacatus and Meibauer 2022: 437). Thus, Jordan Bardella wrote on 20 October, 'The State has failed in its role of protecting the French: *our responsibility is to say so and to act*' (emphasis added). The 'courage' of the RN to 'name things' (RN, 21 October 2022) is contrasted with the inauthenticity of the current government which is accused of hiding behind claims of 'récupération' (recovery) from the shock of the killing, thereby 'stifling' legitimate questions that 'need to be asked' about immigration. It is also depicted as insincere in its assurances to the public around illegal immigration: 'Gerald Darmanin [Minister of the Interior] promises to expel "any foreigner who has committed a crime or an offence". There is only one misfortune: this promise has already been made 10 times' (Marine le Pen, Twitter, 21 October 2022).

On the other hand, the use of provocative and controversial messages and images 'in poor taste' is notable only by its absence in the RN's social media pages. In contrast to the Irish slogans ('Helon's Felons', 'man up'), there is a restraint evident here, perhaps best exemplified in the RN decision to distance themselves from inflammatory rhetoric promoted at the far-right rallies attended by their rival, *Reconquête*!, and other far-right groups (Guillou 2022). Instead, the decision, strongly influenced by le Pen, was to observe a respectful and 'modest' minute's silence in the National Assembly in memory of Daviet. Nor is there much evidence of a flaunting of the 'low' emotional style described by Kurylo (2022: 142) as: 'a taste for unprofessionalism, anti-intellectualism' and 'alternative facts'. Despite affective appeals to anger, humiliation and hope, and on occasion a wry sense of humour, the social media pages of key figures associated with the RN are replete with references to crime statistics together with notions of 'responsibility' (RN, Twitter, 18 October 2022) and the 'duty of the opposition' (Marine le Pen, Twitter, 24 October 2022). This sense of gravitas and performance of knowledge, competence and credentials is more commonly associated with the 'technocratic' or 'high', rather than the 'low' aesthetic in security matters (Cohn 1987), perhaps reflecting a desire to 'play the game' of security competently and still be perceived as 'just like' their voters (Lacatus and Meibauer 2022).

DISCUSSION: POPULIST SECURITY DISCOURSE AND AESTHETIC: BEYOND A 'FLAUNTING OF THE LOW'?

Given the programmatic association between crime, law and order and the radical right (Mudde 2010; Loader 2020), it is perhaps unsurprising that all three parties sought to politicise the tragic deaths of these two young women. Yet, this process of politicisation played out very differently in the two national contexts, challenging various aspects of the received wisdom on populism.

First, while PRRPs and the politics of insecurity frequently mesh, this is somewhat more contingent and less 'internally embedded in populism' than Kurylo (2022: 131) suggests. Thus, while the NP transformed the death of Ashling Murphy into a national recruitment campaign, and the IFP used (and continues to use) the issue to spotlight freedom of movement in the EU, the RN's initial enthusiasm for the topic and for the '#ManifpourLola' rallies quickly waned, in order to avoid 'taking a hit to its reputation' (Guillou 2022: np). These differences were perhaps the most stark in relation to their stylistic or aesthetic representations of security. While both displayed Kurylo's (2022) constituent features of 'sentimental ordinariness' in the way that they responded to the crimes, the personalised, antagonistic and crude style of politics described by Ostiguy (2017) as a 'flaunting of the low' was not so much in evidence in the French discourse. Overall, the RN adopted what may be termed a much less 'transgressive' (ibid) political style in the field of security than the Irish parties, preferring instead an approach that emphasised sincerity, shared understandings and authenticity.

In interpreting these findings, it is worth remembering that populist security aesthetic or style is always 'put to work' and 'made meaningful' within a certain socio-cultural and political context (Ekström *et al.* 2018: 2). In this regard, the relatively sober political style adopted by the RN in comparison to the Irish parties in security matters, combined with references to its 'duty' and 'responsibility', reflects its 'mainstreaming' (see above) and long but consistent turn towards a more moderate position under Marine Le Pen, the so-called strategy of *dédiabolisation* (de-demonisation). This shift, with a strategic emphasis on 'the projection of an image of competence in government and closeness to citizens' (Paxton and Peace 2021: 557), has seen a change in its programmatic profile, away from socio-cultural issues such as crime to economic issues (Beauzamy 2013; Ivaldi 2014). Moreover, it is a strategy which has paid handsomely in electoral dividends: with 41.5 per cent of the vote, the RN has much more to lose from alienating more moderate voters than Irish PRRPs with no elected representatives (Fanning 2021). The incumbency status of the PRRPs (as elected representatives) is not the only difference between the two case studies. The Irish culture of security, with its postcolonial emphasis on informality and due process, is also markedly different to the French with its, rather striking, 'normative consensus on security issues' (Foley 2013: 63: Hamilton, 2019). Added to this is the contrast between French (corporatist) and Irish (pragmatic) political culture which may well have conditioned the PRRP response to diagnosis of the crisis and subsequent recommendations (Cavadino and Dignan 2005).

Secondly, *contra* canonical research on populist affectivity (Wodak 2015), negative emotions such as fear, anger and humiliation were often accompanied by affective appeals to more positive emotions such as pride and hope (Pilkington 2016; Bonansinga 2022). Indeed, as Jasper (2011) argues, these types of emotions can act as a type of 'moral battery', with fear of the criminal 'other' combined with hope for a safe and secure future. A similar combination of negative/positive emotions, this time involving shame and pride, was evident in the quiet identity work carried out by the NP. Calls for Irish men to 'man up' can be construed as an attempt to transform shame (at one's sex), supposedly engendered by mainstream discourses on gender-based violence, into emotional narratives of pride, love for the nation and lost masculinity (Kimmell 2018). This gender aspect was not so prominent in RN discourse on Daviet's death, which was committed by a woman, although that is not to say that gender performativity is not an important part of RN affective discourses (see further Geva 2020). Linked with appeals to restore lost masculinity, moreover, are colonialist fantasies of the shared humiliation of the state (Kinnvall 2018; Homolar and Löfflmann 2021). Thus, French narratives spoke of the need for 'respect' from former colonies, such as Algeria, while Irish PRRPs, unable to draw on the colonial past 'to humiliate the present' (Koestenbaum 2011), instead referenced a postcolonial inferiority complex.

More broadly, the findings reflect arguments in both the political science and criminological literature that we should resist the temptation to define populist discourse and style in terms of one single set of emotions or features (Melossi 2001; Hamilton, 2013; Ekström *et al.* 2018). As the evolving criminological literature on penal populism has shown, conceiving of populism 'as a ubiquitous, mechanistic characteristic' (Guiney and Farrall 2023: 147) of the contemporary zeitgeist is not particularly helpful in analysing its conditions of emergence. Many scholars of penality now prefer a more 'agonistic' perspective developed by Goodman *et al.* (2015, 2017) which regards populism as an institutionally mediated, structured process that has, and will continue to be, shaped by political conflict. In this process political parties occupy a prominent position, including an important mediating role around which emotions are deemed adequate and how they should be expressed (see further Guiney 2022). Indeed, the 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 2011) developed by parties in this regard may form important 'emotional templates' to convey, in an ongoing process, 'the emotional mode that an institution expects and invites from its members' (Frevert and Pahl 2022: 9).

CONCLUSION

As the above discussion shows, the contemporary political climate, including the politics of crime and security, is 'buzzing with emotion' (ibid: 1). In this context, the instant research into the affective dimension of PRRP reaction to two recent, high-profile crimes that gripped French and Irish society respectively represents one effort at comparative discourse analysis that may contribute to our understanding of the recent rise of authoritarian politics. Beyond the two case studies, and the 'supply side' focus on the research which necessarily limits the conclusions that can be drawn from it, it opens three main avenues for an emergent criminology in this area. First, canonical research has tended to focus on negative, rather than positive, emotions in a way that can give rise to stereotyping or caricature. In line with research on the affective dynamics of social movements (Jasper 2011), I argue that emotions in PRRP communications are more often experienced in relation to one another, so that aversive emotions are often accompanied by positive affects (fear-hope; shame-pride) in a way that is understudied in the populist literature (including the mobilising role played by gender politics in transforming negative into positive affectivity, Dietze and Roth 2020). Secondly, as with its criminological cousin, penal populism, radical right populism is far from a monolithic concept, with procrustean characteristics, but a dynamic process produced in distinct socio-cultural contexts. Emotions, as Fattah and Fierke (2009: 70) have argued, 'have a history'. This is not to dismiss the possibility of some commonalities across cultures, such as an emphasis on authenticity, but to proffer a more fine-grained understanding of the emotional aesthetic of security populism, one which affords space for national culture and the situated performance of security matters. Finally, and relatedly, future comparative studies into the affective dimension of 'security populism' would do well to remember, in line with the 'agonistic perspective' on penality, that emotions on security are continually negotiated through a mosaic of institutional structures such as political parties.

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