The colonial binary of far-right representation of Irish identity on X

A thematic analysis of posts during three key voting periods in 2024

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Abstract

This study investigates how contemporary Irish far-right actors construct ideas of Irishness on X. It focuses on three voting periods of Irish politics in the year 2024. Amidst intensifying debates around national identity, migration, and care, Irish far-right actors have become increasingly visible and influential in diffusing nationalist discourses online. These discourses have resulted in some of the most violent manifestations in contemporary Irish history. With the exponential increase of support for candidates in promoting exclusionary ideologies, this thesis seeks to address a gap in literature focusing on how far-right actors represent meaning around Irishness online. Specifically, the central research question will explore: How do Irish far-right nationalist parties and their leaders construct Irish identity on X in the context of the 2024 Family and Care Referendum, the European Parliament and Local Elections, and the National General Elections? The study employs a qualitative thematic analysis on 573 posts from official X accounts of the National Party and the Irish Freedom Party, and three-party leaders. The findings reveal that far-right actors construct national identity on X by reworking colonial frameworks and representing Irishness as a nation rooted in a traditional societal order and oppression. Gender essentialism, the family, and cultural and ideological boundaries act as anchors for Irish national identity in the posts. They contrast representations of Irishness with 'Others' which are cast with the qualities of queerness, urban-ness, racial and religious difference. Irishness is thus defined as heterosexual, white, rural and Catholic by the far-right actors on X.

Keywords: far-right, Irish nationalism, gender, post-colonial, X

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List of Abbreviations

IFP: Irish Freedom Party

NP: The National Party

RTÉ: Raidió Teilifís Éireann

1. Introduction

Debates about Irish identity, intensifying public dissatisfaction with migration policies, and growing distrust of its management by the government have become key markers of contemporary Irish political life (O'Malley, 2024, p.235). Far-right parties in Ireland have capitalized on these insecurities to increase their political support. The increase is evident with far-right parties polling "less than 1% in most constituencies" during the 33rd Dáil [Irish Parliament] elections in 2020 to parties and candidates collectively securing 7% of the national vote during the European Parliament Elections in 2024 (McDermott, 2020, para 4; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.1). This is marked as a notable escalation in populist support with anti-immigrant candidates receiving at "least 40% of the first preference" vote, a record high in Irish history for support of exclusionary ideologies (O'Malley, 2024, pp. 230-231). Although the Irish public do not consider the far-right to be "a very severe threat to Irish democracy", there are fears for the future of Irish politics (Cannon et al., 2022, p.11).

Social media has been identified as the primary arena which tolerates far-right parties and actors spreading exclusionary content among the Irish electorate (Cannon et al., 2022, p.62; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.5). For instance, far-right parties such as the National Party (NP) and the Irish Freedom Party (IFP), use social media like X (formerly Twitter) before and during crucial political events to diffuse anti-establishment, anti-immigration and historical evocation discourse (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.7). The implications, however, go beyond an increase in political support for these parties (Craig et al, 2023, p.3). Political parties have a pivotal role in their ability to maintain support and mobilize the public to protect the imagined national identity from threats (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p. 36; Mudde, 2019, p. 105). For instance, in 2023 far-right posts on X, blaming an Algerian immigrant for an attack in Dublin contributed to the most violent riots in modern Irish history (The Irish Times, 2023, para 3). Furthermore, the mainstreaming of anti-immigrant narratives on social media has been linked to the violent manifestations over the sexual assault of a teenage girl by two Romanian youths in Ballymena in June 2025 (Reilly, 2025, para 1). These discourses represent a radical shift from notions of postcolonial Irish nationalism, which was characterized by inclusiveness and a civic rather than ethnic conception of Irish identity (O'Malley, 2024, p. 222). The evocation of Irish history has been predominately limited to its use to unify rather than act as an exclusive boundary of the nation. Moreover, the framing of such shifts has hinged upon a pro-women justification of

violence by far-right actors involved (Phillips, 2025, para 1). Such justification efforts are indicative of far-right movements claiming to promote "feiminonationalism", a pro-gender equality nationalism (Cannon et al., 2022, p.24). Thus, it is essential to analyze representation of gender in the far-right's content to establish how the constructed national identities essentialize gender roles or promote pro-gender equality in their representation.

The international context gives momentum for this uprising as far-right parties have garnered mainstream support over the past ten years across Europe. In 2014, a record number of far-right seats were secured in the European Parliament (Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014, p.1). The Trump presidency is argued to have had a "ripple effect" (Cannon et al., 2022, p.49) on European politics, giving license to political leaders to voice unprecedented exclusionary narratives. Furthermore, in the height of Europe's 2016 migrant crisis a decision was made, in return for EU funding, to return migrants arriving to Greece back to Turkey (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024). Another key event was the Brexit vote in 2016, when 51.9% of British voters decided for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in the political climate heavily polluted with anti-immigration discourse (Durrheim et al, 2018, p.386). The evidence of this "new right-wing populism" entailed the infusion of exclusionary messages of national identity that link belonging to racial, ethnic or cultural homogeneity into mainstream narratives of Western liberal democratic states via social media (Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1347; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.3; Wodak, 2021, p.42; Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mráľ, 2013, p. 46). These events had direct and indirect impacts on the rise of the far-right in Ireland. The amplification of social media discourse around these political moments enabled a borderless exchange of ideas, strengthening far-right support and fostering unprecedented exclusionary nationalist narratives in Ireland (Cannon et al., 2022, p.49; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.7). In view of this background, this thesis aims to explore how far-right actors on X represent the meaning of Irishness during three political voting periods in 2024. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research question:

How do Irish far-right parties and their leaders construct Irish identity on X in the context of the 2024 Family and Care Referendum, and the 2024 European Parliament, Local and General Elections in Ireland?

The central RQ is organized into three sub-questions.

How do Irish far-right parties construct Irish identity through familial discourse on X?

How are minorities and "the Other" represented in the discourse of Irish far-right parties' X?

How do Irish far-right parties draw on Irish history to construct Irish identity on X?

1.1 Irish far-right nationalism political context and social media

Postcolonial national identity in Ireland has often been grounded in narratives of resistance, positioning the Catholic majority as a historically oppressed people (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.242). This framing informs how populist nationalist parties in Ireland have presented themselves as inclusive and anti-xenophobic (O'Malley, 2024, p. 222). Sinn Féin is Ireland's most prominent nationalist party established in 1905. During the 1919 war of independence from British rule, Sinn Féin became the political wing of the Irish Republican Army and its narratives became saturated in republican and anti-colonial discourse (Maillot, 2024, p.1) Today, Sinn Féin draws strength from Ireland's anti-colonial history and support for minority rights, particularly in the context of Irish island unification debates (O'Malley, 2008, p. 973). The party supports civic nationalism and offers a populist economic alternative to the mainstream parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Sinn Féin's positioning on migration and minority rights reflects its need to reconcile domestic policy with its defense of Irish minorities abroad, particularly Irish communities in Britain who faced exclusion and prejudice (O'Malley, 2008, p. 973). Thus, anti-colonial imaginaries of Irishness have, up until 2020, been predominately adapted to advocate a pro-minority stance as anything else would appear as contradictory to the emancipation of the Irish people (O'Malley, 2008, p.973). Until recently, this approach has effectively funneled the support that might otherwise be directed towards more conservative or far-right movements into the pro-minority party.

Nonetheless, far-right movements have intermittently emerged throughout Ireland's history, from the fascist party Ailtirí na hAiséirghe in the 1940s (Ó'Drisceiol, 1996, p.5) to attempts by Identity Ireland and the Immigrant Control Platform to restrict migration and assert an exclusionary Irishness (Phelan and Kerrigan, 2024, p. 4). However, while such examples were once marginal and exceptional, today the Irish far-right have capitalized on shifting political dynamics among nationalist support. For instance, Sinn Féin experienced significant internal tensions and strategic contradictions in the lead-up to the 2024 elections (O'Malley, 2024, p.229). Its attempt to broaden its electoral appeal by moderating its policy positions, most

notably its economic program and migration stance, created dissonance within its support base. In the face of rising anti-migrant protests and an increasingly salient migration debate, Sinn Féin's equivocal messaging on migration alienated both progressive and nationalist sections of its coalition. This tension contributed to its inability to respond clearly to the surge in far-right mobilizations within Ireland during the 2024 European Parliament elections (O'Malley, 2024, pp. 222–231).

Moreover, Sinn Féin's decision to support the 2018 legalization of abortion rights fractured its support. Many parties have emerged over disagreements on abortion since the pro-life movement (O'Malley, 2024, p.224). Aontú, a party that emerged from Sinn Féin, capitalized on this moment by positioning itself as the true defender of traditional Irish values, campaigning against the referendum and taking a clear stance on migration control, thereby drawing support from voters disillusioned with Sinn Féin's shift (O'Malley, 2024, pp. 228–230).

Consequently, Sinn Féin lost its ability to unify different factions against a shared elite 'Other', leaving space for smaller, exclusionary nationalist parties to fill the vacuum. These shifts reveal not only a changing political opportunity structure for far-right actors but also the fragility of left populism as a bulwark against exclusionary nationalism in times of heightened migration concern (O'Malley, 2024, pp. 230–233). Two parties which rose during the pro-life period to fill the vacuum are The Irish Freedom Party and The National Party. Both parties are classified as far-right nationalist parties (Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, 2022, para 10).

The NP, founded in 2016 by Justin Barrett and James Reynolds, is a prominent far-right party in Ireland with no current representation at local, national, or European levels (O'Malley, 2024, p.222; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). It proclaims an anti-immigration, anti-abortion, and pro-death penalty stance (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Its core narrative revolves around defending Irish sovereignty from what it portrays as a corrupt establishment and "replacement-level immigration," which it claims will destroy Irish nationality (O'Malley, 2024, p. 225; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). The party's slogan, "Ireland belongs to the Irish," reinforces this nativist message (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Social media is a significant part of its outreach, with NP joining X in 2016 and growing its following to over 10,700 by November 2023 (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Its Twitter presence during the 2020 General Election focused on themes of anti-establishment sentiment, anti-immigration rhetoric, and an evocation

of Irish history, framing mainstream parties and the media as traitors to the Irish nation (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, pp. 10-16).

The IFP, founded in 2018 and initially called the Irexit Freedom to Prosper Party, was strongly influenced by the Brexit movement and European far-right politics (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Its leader, Hermann Kelly, previously worked for Nigel Farage in the European Parliament, further linking the party to broader European far-right networks (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). IFP identifies itself as a Eurosceptic and nationalist party committed to "strengthening Irishness" through a so-called "2nd Gaelic Revival" (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Their social media discourse promotes narratives of "taking back control" in the face of mass immigration, echoing Brexit campaign rhetoric (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8). Like NP, IFP's X presence during the 2020 General Election was marked by a populist style. It positioned itself as the true nationalist voice against an establishment portrayed as complicit in replacing Irish people with immigrants, linking immigration to Ireland's housing crisis to stoke fear and anger among voters (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, pp. 12-16).

At that time, these parties were still [and are still] electorally marginal, with NP receiving between 0.49% and 1.74% of first preference votes across 10 candidates, and IFP achieving between 0.19% and 2.06% across 11 candidates. However, record high support in the 2024 elections underscores the growing resonance and relevance of these exclusionary ideologies (O'Malley, 2024, pp. 230-231.) Furthermore, the rejection of the 2024 Family and Care Referendum highlights public skepticism towards government-led efforts to redefine Irish identity. The referendum sought to make amendments to the 1937 constitutional text which confines women to the home and defines family through marriage. Concerns about shifting the burden of care away from the state was a prominent reason for its rejection (The Irish Times, 2024, para 4). These concerns were attached to fears of vague wording of the term "durable relationships" (The Irish Times, 2024, para 4). This was attached to an unease about how these changes might affect the protection of the Irish family and the effects this would have on migrant family reunification policies.

1.2 Academic significance

Both parties focus their predominate messaging on X. This is relevant to the study because X has been recognized for its instrumental role in disseminating nationalist ideas

(Yadlin-Segal, 2017, p. 2762) and has become a prominent site for far-right, nativist constructions of the nation (Froio & Ganesh, 2019, p. 519). Furthermore, earlier concerns about far-right accounts being banned on X, which had led many far-right actors to leave the platform, may no longer be relevant (Rogers, 2020, p. 213). Under Musk's ownership, his visible support and interaction with the X accounts of the IFP and NP may signal a growing tolerance for exclusionary content on the platform (The Journal, 2024, para 1). This makes it particularly relevant to analyze X for how these parties represent meanings around the idea of Irishness.

Despite the growing strength of the Irish far-right and strong presence on social media, research has yet to comprehensively examine how Irish far-right actors represent these meanings. Existing research builds on the understanding of the rise of the far-right in Ireland, each contributing unique insights to the field. Studies examine online far-right activism (Fattibene et al., 2024, p. 21) and the "Ireland is full" campaign (Craig et al., 2023, p. 6), focusing on general online activism but not delving into the discourse of official party accounts. Earlier studies analyze more specificity, by exploring how digital racism took shape on Twitter and Facebook in response to a stabbing in a small Irish town that online accounts sought to link to terrorism (Siapera, 2019, p.41). Furthermore, studies have examined populist currents in Irish mainstream media coverage of the 2016 General Election, pointing to how these narratives interact with broader populist currents (Suiter et al., 2018, p.396). Building on these perspectives, research addresses the gap left by earlier studies by examining how far-right actors use X to spread anti-immigration and anti-establishment narratives, focusing on official party accounts as vehicles for nationalist messaging in 2020 (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 11).

Evidently, there is a significant gap in understanding how Irish identity is represented by the far-right on digital platforms. Since 2020, there has been an exponential increase in support for the far-right, electorally and through violent manifestations (O'Malley, 2024, p.4). This research examines content from the most recent election period in 2024, thus offering a fresh perspective into meaning making of Irish identity online. While gender, family and abortion debates have historically shaped the construction of Irish identity (O'Malley, 2020, p.222) and have clearly been instrumental in the split for nationalist support, how these concepts are instrumentalized by the far-right in constructing meanings of Irishness remains unexplored. Furthermore, despite Irish colonial history as a prominent feature of far-right discourse (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 14), a post-colonial perspective in analyzing how these narratives have

been reappropriated in new contexts is lacking. By adapting these strategies, this research uniquely foregrounds itself in a gendered and post-colonial critical poststructuralist perspective into the meaning-making of national identity online.

This research is structured in the following way. The next chapter will elaborate on the post-structuralist theoretical framework that informs this thesis. It will focus on how theories of Irish nationalism and online far-right discourses intersect with feminist, postcolonial and communication and cultural studies to help interpret the ways in which meanings of Irishness are represented and constructed on X. Chapter 3 will describe the research methodology in detail, explaining how the thematic analysis, informed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.84), was used to analyze posts from the IFP and NP. Chapter 4 will present the findings of this analysis, organized into two main themes that reveal how colonial and heteronormative structures shape exclusionary constructions of Irish identity online. The thesis will conclude in Chapter 5 by discussing the implications and limitations of these findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the following chapter is to provide the theoretical framework which guides the analysis of this study. The chapter critically engages with key debates in Irish nationalism and far-right discourses, exploring the intersections of how these debates relate to one another through a feminist, postcolonial and communication framework. The chapter begins with establishing the concepts of nations and national identity as socially constructed phenomena that can be reimagined and challenged. It then extends this perspective to a discussion on how nationalist movements such as the far-right leverage these discourses for exclusionary purposes. Nevertheless, it offers an exploration of the space where nationalism can operate as an inclusive and progressive ideology. This will then lead to a discussion of the Irish context of national identity through exploring anti-colonial resistance. The final section will tie these ideas to the field of media, which will provide the study with an academically rigorous foundation for analyzing how far-right actors leverage gendered, familial, racial and class discourses to represent meanings of Irishness on X.

2.1 Nations and national identity

Nations are not simply reflections of pre-existing communities; they are imagined constructions that create a sense of horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 2020, p.106). These imaginative processes are historically embedded and deeply gendered, revealing how nationalism constructs belonging through both symbolic and material practices (McClintock, 1993, p. 61). Rather than reducing the existence of nations to mere fabrication, as Gellner (2008, p.46) risks, it should be seen as a historically situated and power-laden project (McClintock, 1993, p. 61). Some scholars frame national belonging as a civic will and democratic choice (Renan, 1995, p.6). However, this perspective negates how women, for example, have often been positioned as indirect members of the nation, their belonging mediated through their ties to men (McClintock, 1993, p. 65). Likewise, it neglects that immigrants and minorities have been discursively cast as antithetical to constructions of the nation (Eriksen, 2007, p. 4). Such exclusions reveal that national identity is not a neutral expression of community, but a hegemonic project shaped by social hierarchies and boundaries (McClintock, 1993, p. 65).

Thus, national identity is not static or predetermined; it is an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012, p.1) that is contested, rearticulated, and performed in "banal" everyday practices (Billig, 2010, p.37; Kadry, 2014, p.200). Thus, national social order and national identity are naturalized through the lived practice of routines and mundane signs of national belonging embedded in daily life. Shared origin myths, rituals, symbols, language and heroic histories offer collective belonging in nation building (Anderson, 2020, p. 104; Fuchs, 2019, p. 5; Hall, 1996, p. 613). These symbolic resources are the very means through which identity becomes intelligible and emotionally resonant (Adriani, 2019, p. 4; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 205; Wodak et al., 2009, p. 16-22). In this way, national identity functions as both a collective reference point and a symbolic and cultural mechanism that enables individuals to imagine themselves as part of a unified collective (Al-Ali, 2000, p. 631; Wodak et al., 2009, p. 16). However, this collective construction often masks contradictions, creating illusions of cultural homogeneity and rootedness that can obscure material inequalities (Anderson, 2020, p. 104, Fuchs, 2019, p. 5; Hall, 1996, p. 613). National identity involves powerful emotional attachments to the nation, which helps understand why they can be so persuasive, enduring, and used to mobilize populations and cause cultural change (Schmidt & Quandt, 2018, p.349; Singh, 2010, p.46).

Nationalism functions as a discursive project that defines who belongs and, crucially, who does not (Fuchs, 2019, p.8), a process that is both symbolic and ideological (Adriani, 2019, p.4). Yet, distinctions between nationalism, political patriotism, and cultural patriotism complicate the idea that processes of exclusion are inevitable. They reveal that not all nationalist invocations, especially online, construct rigid boundaries or rely on the figure of the 'Other' (Schmidt & Quandt, 2018, p. 359). However, these discursive practices can be adopted by exclusionary movements in ways that emphasize racial, gendered and cultural boundaries to the nation. For example, the far-right is argued to combine ethnic nationalism with authoritarianism, populist anti-elitism, and hostility to globalism (Mudde, 1996, p. 230; Sotiris, 2015, p. 173). While some scholars treat populism, nationalism, and the far-right as distinct (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019, p. 409), others emphasize their convergence as a defining feature of contemporary far-right parties (Golder, 2016, p. 478).

2.2 The far-right and nationalist discursive practices

The ideologies underpinning the far-right are diverse across different contexts, however many would agree on two foundational cores; authoritarianism and familialism (Cannon et al., 2022, p.24). Gender has been instrumentalized as a discursive tool in nationalism to define cultural and racial boundaries through patriarchal frameworks (McClintock,1993, p. 63). Specifically, discourse surrounding gendered bodies and behaviors cast women as the cultural transmitters, biological reproducers and timeless bearers of values and tradition (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 7). For example, in post-colonial Egyptian nationalist discourse, representations of women's unveiled bodies were used tie expectations of women's physical modesty to the Egyptian nation and foreign provocativeness to the West (Khatib, 2004, p. 72). Men on the other hand are positioned as the protectors of women, leaders of the nation and political agents of modernizing progress (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 7; McClintock, 1993, p. 62; Nagel, 2001, p.95; Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 24). These discursive strategies have been employed by far-right movements. The far-right promotes gender essentialism through rigid gender roles and an elevation of hyper-masculinity and femininity as the moral core of the nation (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.4). Thus, the rejection of gender equality, diversity and queerness naturalizes patriarchal power (Cannon et al., 2022, p.24; Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.4).

In nationalist narratives, the family is portrayed as a natural and organic unit that sustains social and moral order (McClintock, 1993, p. 63). It serves as a key site for reproducing national identity through childbirth, socialization, and the reinforcement of patriarchal norms (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 7; McClintock, 1993, p. 63; Mostov, 1998, p. 376). The nation is constructed as a "domestic genealogy," drawing on familial images to anchor national identity in a seemingly timeless social order **(**Baron, 2005, p.135; McClintock, 2016, p.409). For example, national anthems call the nation the "motherland," reinforcing the idea that women's value lies in their role as nurturers of the nation (Lauenstein et al., 2015, p. 309). These metaphors forge an intimate connection between the private sphere of kinship and the public sphere of national belonging, presenting the nation as an extension of family (Bhandari & Mueller, 2019, p. 299). Simultaneously, however, these discourses treat family as a private domain removed from history. This rhetorical tension obscures how domestic gender roles and hierarchies are politically instrumental in nationalism, not merely natural. The far-right's familial approach positions gender and cultural diversity as a threat to the family and nation (Cannon et al., 2022,

p.24). Thus, domestic roles are transformed into sites of symbolic resistance of the nation to multiculturalism, feminism, LGBT and liberalism (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.5).

At the intersection sexuo-gendered ideals of national belonging, women are politically instrumental in an exclusionary practice to define the "Other" or the outsider (Boni, 2017, p.345). Women are cast as subordinate and inessential, defined only in relation to the masculine "One" (Boni, 2017, p. 345). This alienation is not private, but a pervasive social logic that restricts women's participation in public and political life (Bonikowski, 2017, p. 175). Class and racial differences serve as another arena for defining the 'Other'. The perspective that nationalism and racism are inseparable (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991, p. 53), risks flattening the historical specificity of nationalist movements that have also been framed as emancipatory and anti-colonial (Fernando, 1993, p. 9; Mustafa, 1998, p. 49; Wodak, 2021, p. 101). However, far-right nationalist discourse relies on constructing national identity through a nativist logic that fuses nationalism with xenophobia, defining belonging in ethnic and cultural terms rather than civic ones (Golder, 2016, p. 480). This logic prioritizes ancestry, religion, language, and tradition, depicting the nation as a bounded, homogenous community (Bar-On, 2018, pp. 18–26; Wodak, 2021, p. 100). This "culturalization of racism" (Wodak, 2021, p. 100) frames the moral and biological health of the nation as being threatened by migrant invaders or parasites (Bar-On, 2016, pp. 18–26).

Specifically, constructions of migrants in nationalist discourse as both external threat and internal danger rely on images of deviance and criminality that naturalize exclusion and fortify national boundaries (Fuchs, 2019, p. 5; Fürsich, 2010, p. 1166). Such portrayals draw on fears of demographic and cultural change, casting migrants as existential threats to social stability, economic security, and moral order (Bieber, 2018, p. 521; KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2012, p. 291). In the US, this dynamic criminalizes immigrants and repositions nationalist supporters, such as Trump's base, as moral guardians of the nation (Dawood & Abbas, 2020, p. 1). In the UK, the persistence of migrants' marginal status even after cultural assimilation highlights how exclusion is politically produced and racially contingent (Eriksen, 2007, p. 4). This logic flattens complex migrant identities into uniform threats, sustaining a racialized view of national boundaries (KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2012, p. 291). Moreover, it legitimizes exclusionary policies and populist agendas, redirecting attention away

from structures of exploitation and the economic and political roots of social inequality (Fuchs, 2019, p. 5).

While recognizing gender's centrality is a step forward from classical nationalism theories that ignored it (Anderson, 2020, p.102; Gellner, 2008, p.46), many perspectives essentialize women as passive subjects and negate women's agency in shaping nationalist discourse (Ahmetbeyzade, 2012, p. 194; Weldon, 2008, p.28). Yuval-Davis (1998, p.25) himself noted that his earlier framework risked oversimplifying these roles, emphasizing that gendered national identities are relational and historically contingent. Contemporary feminist critiques argue that women actively negotiate, contest, and even reinforce these gendered national roles (Al-Ali, 2000, p. 631; Al-Ali & Tas, 2018, p. 453; Lazarus, 2004, p. 190). Women's role in nationalism is both as symbols and participants (Kadry, 2014, p.8).

Existing scholarship has robustly documented how women in the far-right are active political agents, challenging the idea that women cannot be included in far-right movements or that they are merely passive supporters (Campion, 2020, p. 149; Mattheis, 2018, p. 128). Nevertheless, these studies risk overstating the ability of far-right movements to adopt a gender equality perspective or "feminonationalim" (Cannon et al, 2022, p.24). Far-right parties that position themselves as progressive or even have LGBTQI+ representation within their party face inherent contradictions in their embrace of gender and familial norms. While they claim inclusivity, their stances remain constrained when these ideals challenge entrenched gender hierarchies and traditional family structures (Cannon et al., 2022, p. 24). Therefore, while this study adopts the perspective that women are active agents in political movements, it stresses the importance of gender and family discourses that are instrumentalized as powerful tools to shape national boundaries and naturalize gender roles. For example, these gendered logics linger even when women are overtly presented as political agents (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 422). Media coverage of female politicians tends to focus on their appearance, personal lives, and roles as mothers, while framing them as outsiders to a masculine political sphere (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). This process constructs them as "women first, and then, maybe, as politicians," effectively perpetuating a gendered mediation that positions them as symbolic figures rather than legitimate political actors (Ross, 2002, p. 81, as cited in Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). These posts illustrate how the representation of women in nationalist discourse is often limited by the "double bind" (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-

Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). Women are either lauded as maternal nationalists or demonized as incompetent, with no neutral ground.

Complicating this landscape is the far-right's ability to co-opt post-colonial nationalism to justify exclusionary, reactionary, and anti-democratic politics (Zhang, 2023, p. 1). In these contexts, conservative nationalists replicate rather than reject colonial structures, reversing the moral hierarchy of liberal internationalism while sustaining its racialized, gendered, and progress-based essentialisms (Zhang, 2023, p. 1). Cultural representation remains constrained by "the contradictions of the binary structure", reproducing the very ideologies that are sought to be escaped (Hall, 2013, p.261). This reproduction is referred to as the limitations of transcoding. In India, for example, far-right Hindu nationalist movements reconfigure colonial-era gender ideologies, positioning Muslim minorities as threats to the purity of Hindu women and thus to the nation itself (Zhang, 2023, p.2). This contradiction is deepened by the way gender equality itself is spatially and temporally coded. It is often mapped to a progressive Western narrative that situates non-Western or illiberal societies as "behind" (Zhang, 2023, p. 1). Such narratives create a linear developmental vision that racializes and hierarchizes societies in the name of progress. Such post-colonial perspectives on the global far-right are useful in examining Irish identity.

2.3 Irish national identity: Division, religion, gender and colonialism

Under British control, English constructions of Irish identity relied heavily on visual culture. Caricatures of Irish women, with red hair, freckles, and "excessive whiteness" (Third & Negra, 2006, p. 220), marked them as deviant or unruly (O'Malley, 2018, p. 3). Cartoons like Opper's 1883 "The Irish Declaration of Independence" depicted Irish women as grotesque and masculinized, perpetuating tropes of moral and racial excess (Meaney, 2007, p. 3; O'Malley, 2018, p. 90). These images reinforced gendered national boundaries between Irish and English, casting Irish as dangerous and tied national identity to the female body. Furthermore, during the revolutionary period in the early 1900's, religious division acted as a central axis of Irish national identity (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.400). Irish Catholicism and English Protestantism was a colonially constructed binary framework of difference in the absence skin colour and the depleted use of the Irish language (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.400). British and American media narratives frequently reduced the cause of the Northern Irish conflict to a purely sectarian clash. This perspective obscures the political and economic colonial structures that underpinned the

conflict (McCaffrey, 1973, p. 525). Historical revisionists suggest that Irish nationalism could have been more inclusive by dethatching from Catholic symbols (Lyons, 1982, p. 7). However, postcolonial critiques remind that these gendered, moral, and racial codes were actively produced under colonial rule (Meaney, 2007, p. 3; Mustafa, 1998, pp. 49–51). Catholicism, while often seen as an organic expression of cultural resistance to British colonialism, was in fact strategically mobilized within nationalist discourse as a unifying force (Mustafa, 1998, p. 49). Furthermore, Northern Irish Protestant rhetoric reinforced exclusions during the revolutionary period by framing Catholicism as a threat to liberty, encapsulated in slogans like "Home Rule is Rome Rule" (McCaffrey, 1973, pp. 525–526).

In effort to reclaim these stereotypes, Irish Catholic nationalism played an essential role in the unifying a nation of colonized people. De Valera's 1943 St. Patrick's Day speech offered a pastoral, gendered vision of national identity, where "frugal comfort" and "cozy homesteads" were populated by "comely maidens", "sturdy children" and "athletic youths" (Keogh, 2005, pp. 133–134). Catholicism and the restoration of the Irish language provided a moral language for this heteronormative and patriarchal vision (Conrad, 2004, pp. 8–11; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.336). Rural Catholic family life became the dominant expression of Irish nationalism and positioned women as moral anchors of the nation (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Conrad, 2004, pp. 8–11; Mustafa, 1998, p. 49; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.245). Rural life was invoked through symbolic constructions. The symbol of the family farm functioned as an "economic unit" and "a patriarchal site of cultural and gendered continuity" (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Mustafa, 1998, p. 49; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.245;). The construction of Irish as an underclass was invoked through the rural figure of "The Irish peasant". The figure was "deeply encoded with social, political, and literary meaning" and to discuss the Irish peasant during particular periods of Irish history was to "participate in a special kind of cultural discourse" (Mustafa, 1998, p. 40). Though deeply intertwined with rural life, discourse relating to the peasant extended beyond a discussion of actual rural life. It represents resistance and endurance against the odds of hardship. Revivalist movements later feminized Irish peasantry while asserting cultural sovereignty over morality and tradition (Mustafa, 1998, p. 40; Valente, 1994, p. 194).

Femininity was reserved for domestic roles, like the socialization of the nation's children (O'Leary & Negra, 2016, p. 128; Tovey & Share, 2003, pp. 233-242). The symbol of the passive and self-sacrificing "Irish mother" or "mammy" (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.260; Vaughan &

Moriarty, 2020, p. 3) continues to be a site of convergence for the representation of these Irish national values (Conrad, 2004, p. 8). The 1937 Irish Constitution's Article 41.2 explicitly codified women's domestic role, institutionalizing gendered inequality as a cornerstone of national stability (Lentin, 1998, p. 14; Tovey & Share, 2003, p. 242). Masculinity on the other hand was mapped onto the "Paddy archetype", which framed men as guardians and agents of the social sphere (O'Donovan, 2009, p. 97–106; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.233-242). Catholic religious myths of the masculine hero of St. Patrick banishing snakes from Ireland were drawn upon in the revolutionary period to mimic freeing the country from colonial rule (Williams, 1983, p. 310). These functionalist perspectives cast gender roles as essential to Irish society (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.233).

Certain denominations of Irish nationalism promoted more pluralistic approaches to Irish identity. Constitutional nationalists and civil rights leaders such as Daniel O'Connell prioritized the promotion of such pluralism and democratic ideals (McCaffrey, 1973, pp. 525–527). Nevertheless, the convergence of Catholic morality, ruralism, and patriarchal familialism in most dominant forms of Irish nationalism, once a tool of cultural assertion, also marginalised those who did not conform, such as unmarried mothers, Traveller women, and ethnic minorities (Lentin, 1998, p. 9). Even Irish feminist discourses have sometimes replicated these logics by overlooking race, migration, and intersectionality (Lentin, 1998, p. 10).

Ireland's exceptional postcolonial identity has been framed as the "first modern post-colonial society" that privileges narratives of liberation (Eagleton, 2000, p. 130). Yet these inclusive claims have coexisted with the racialization turn of Irish identity (Lentin, 2001, p.68). This is evident in moments like the 2004 citizenship referendum that replaced birthright citizenship with blood-based citizenship (Kuhling & Keohane, 2007, p. 58). On the other hand, others note that 'jus sanguinis' had long been a constitutional feature, and the racialization of Irishness did not appear out of thin air in 2004 (O'Malley, 2008, p. 967). Furthermore, postcolonial feminist approaches critique Irish identities "fixation" since the nineteenth century with constructing identity in "a national public sphere and thus on masculinity as a norm" (Nolan, 2007, p.338). Thus, there is a caution against overstating Irish nationalism's "exceptionalism" (Foster & King, 2024, p.5; Malešević, 2014, p. 130). While distinct in its historical trajectory, Irish nationalism also echoes European patterns of normalization, banality and patriarchal authority (Eagleton, 2000, p.131; Nolan, 2007, p.338; O'Malley, 2008, p. 967). It

is thus at risk of being injected with the same exclusionary narratives dominating Europe today (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.1). While far-right nationalism has yet to make a lasting appearance in the Irish political system, it is already evident in contemporary Irish society which remains marked by practices that reproduce racial inequality, such as labor market exclusions (Joseph, 2020, p.6) and racially motivated violence (Michael, 2015, p.9), and by the circulation of racialized discourses in political and social life (Fanning, 2021, p.200). Moreover, the rise of the Irish far-right on digital platforms demonstrates how the unifying logics that underpin Irish nationalism's "exceptionalism" are not set in stone and can mold and shift over time (Foster & King, 2024, p.1; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.1).

2.4 Media and nationalist identity

Media serves as a central institution for ideological production within modern liberal-democratic states, shaping the narratives that underpin national identities (Antias & Yuval-Davis, 1998, p. 5). Their role is now complemented by digital and social media. While the internet has often been theorized as a force for creating global identity, it can equally function to sustain national ties and strengthen a sense of shared belonging (Eriksen, 2007, pp. 1–6). In fact, the internet emerges as one of the most potent tools for the dissemination and reinforcement of nationalist ideas (Palmer, 2012, p. 115), enabling the everyday, mundane expressions of nationalism (Szulc, 2017, p. 58). National identities can be reworked within these digital environments (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213). At the same time, digital platforms foster a complex, pluralistic landscape of nationalism. Rather than consolidating a singular narrative, they allow multiple, competing national identities to emerge, articulated by individuals who become "self-publishers" of nationalist ideas (Adriani, 2019, p. 2). These multiple national identities, always discursively constructed and reconfigured (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213), highlight social media's role as both a national identity amplifier and site of contestation (Khatib, 2004, p. 80).

Nevertheless, growing evidence suggests that digital platforms frequently reinforce exclusionary and restrictive ideologies, rather than serving as democratic arenas, as was once thought (Fuchs, 2019, p. 13). These environments have been particularly welcoming to far-right actors that distrust mainstream media and seek new online spaces that bypass traditional media gatekeepers (Mudde, 2019, p. 54-99). Social media thus emerges not as an inherently democratic

tool, but as a vehicle for the global far-right strategy and the articulation of exclusionary nationalisms giving rise to what has been termed “new right-wing populism” (Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1347; Mihálik & Walter, 2018, p.4). Furthermore, social media platforms weave together disparate far-right movements into transnational ecosystems of ideas and actors (Baele, Brace, & Coan 2023, p. 1600). These digital spaces enable the strengthening and diversification of international far-right communication, allowing movements to adapt and align with each other online. They also facilitate a shared narrative of exclusion that transcends national boundaries, fostering a sense of belonging and ideological closeness even among disconnected groups (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 207; Zhang, 2023, p. 4). These narratives can reconfigure the boundaries of national belonging and exclusion. This process often reinforces an imagined “global whiteness” (Zhang, 2023, p. 4).

Crucially, the architecture of social media does not merely host but actively shapes these far-right discourses. Social media’s affinity for emotionally charged content further amplifies nationalist expressions, as the nation itself becomes a powerful source of collective emotion and belonging (Adriani, 2019, p. 2; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213). These spaces reinforce a diverse range of stereotypes and attitudes that resonate with far-right nationalist discourse through memes, emotionally charged content, and humor (Fuchs, 2019, p. 4; Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.5; Köttig, Bitzan & Petö, 2017, p.56; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2019, p.302; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013;). For example, images, and hashtags can become tools for racializing migrants and producing a sense of crisis around their presence (Avraamidou & Eftychiou, 2022, p. 245; Avraamidou, Ioannou, & Eftychiou, 2021, p.2849). Furthermore, online spaces like the “manosphere” illustrate how misogynistic violence and fantasies intensify in digital subcultures (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.4). This emotional and affective dimension of nationalism makes social media an ideal platform for nationalist organizations to articulate their visions of the nation, often framed as a resistance to globalism (Adriani, 2019, p. 11). It makes sense, then, that since the early 1990s, far-right movements, groups, parties, and individuals have increasingly diversified and expanded how they communicate (Baele, Brace, & Coan 2023, p. 1600). By establishing their discourse as “mainstream political narratives” (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 3), these actors have become some of the most widely followed profiles on social media, normalising their discourse (Fuchs, 2019, p. 13). The mainstreaming of exclusionary messages of the far-right via social media does more than shape national identities through overt hot

nationalism (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.3; Wodak & KhosraviNik, 2013, p.; Wodak, 2021, p.42). It normalizes these discourses of belonging through mundane expressions of national identity, shaping people's real life understanding of themselves and broader cultural dynamics (Çöteli, 2019, p. 1). This impact is particularly pronounced for young people, as new media environments have become central to their self-definition and engagement with nationalist discourses (Zemmels, 2012, p. 5). These national identities can further be activated to mobilize citizens during political crises (Billig, 2010, p.45). In Ireland for example, surges of 'Great Replacement' conspiracy content on X have not only fueled exclusionary nationalism but were the catalyst for offline attacks (Craig et al., 2023, p. 3).

The ability of digital platforms to amplify far-right nationalist discourses has fundamentally changed how citizens access and interpret political information, directly shaping their attitudes towards nationalism (Adriani, 2019, p. 6). Although the dynamics have transformed the ways of consumption and do influence interpretation, it remains unclear in which political direction this influence leans. Some studies, for instance, suggest that social media use does not directly cause polarization and even find that older adults who do and do not use social media show more polarized views than younger users (Barberá et al., 2015, p.1531). Others stress that online platforms do have implications for polarising individuals political views (Jiang, Ren & Ferrara, 2021, p.1).

Studies from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, and across Eastern and Central Europe, demonstrate how social media platforms enable right-wing populist discourse to thrive (Caiani, 2019, p.918; Jacobs & Spierings, 2018, p.1; Mihálik & Walter, 2018, p.4;). However, X, in particular, has been singled out for its role in knitting together far-right actors within Europe and globally (Ahmed & Pisoiu, 2019, p. 1; Froio & Ganesh, 2019, p. 513;). X provides a "technosocial arena" for the performance of national identity (Shahin, 2019, p. 5100) and can be conceptualized as a dynamic space where meanings are actively shaped and negotiated (Lindgren, 2017, p. 1). However, right-wing groups have increasingly migrated to loosely moderated platforms to evade restrictions (Rogers, 2020, p. 213). Studies illustrate that while alternative platforms like Parler temporarily sustain banned communities, they struggle to match the mainstream reach of X (Baele, Brace, & Coan 2023, p. 1607). Despite fears of deplatforming, X's algorithms, mainstream user base, and hashtag dynamics remain crucial in amplifying far-right content, advancing its agendas, and increasing its influence (Oxford

Analytica, 2025, para 1). These dynamics on X have been shown to shape populist discourse during elections, illustrating how the platform actively fosters populist expression (Vázquez-Barrio, 2021, p. 134).

X has been crucial for circulating Irish nationalist and racist narratives (Siapera, 2019, p.41; Siapera, Moreo, & Zhou, 2018, p.5, 2018). Irish figures like Verona Murphy, Noel Grealish, and Michael Collins have mainstreamed racist and anti-immigrant narratives in electoral politics, portraying migrants as terrorists or economic burdens, despite the far-right's lack of sustained electoral success (Burns, 2020, para 2; McQuinn, 2019, para 4; O'Connell, 2019, para 3). The weaponization of non-white bodies as a hyper visible symbol of Irish national exclusion has become more evident on digital platforms since 2020 (Gallagher, 2020, para 6). For example, Gemma O'Doherty, a former journalist who ran in the 2020 General Election as a far-right candidate for the unregistered political party, Anti-Corruption illustrates this. O'Doherty used X to publicly attack a mixed-race couple featured in a supermarket advertisement and by sharing images of dark-skinned schoolchildren on social media. She claimed the images illustrated the growing displacement of racially white Irish people in their own towns (Gallagher, 2020, para 6).

The Irish political system and culture is furthermore well suited to digital platforms like X (O'Malley, 2024, p.221). The algorithmic amplification and direct voter-to-candidate communication resonates with the hyperlocal, personalist nature of Irish politics. The proportional representation system in Ireland and the tradition of independent, personality-driven campaigns mean that social media's affordance for self-publishing aligns with Irish political norms (O'Malley, 2024, p.221). X allows for Irish candidates and parties to bypass RTÉ, Ireland's public broadcasting agency, enabling them to communicate boundaries of Irishness. Two of Ireland's primary far-right political parties have constructed exclusionary "geopolitical imaginaries" on X through discourses of anti-establishment, anti-immigration, and historical evocation (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 11). These discourses portray migrants as diseased, criminal outsiders and undeserving elites in a Covid-19 context, reinforcing nationalist claims that present them as threats to both moral order and state resources (Lucek & Phelan, 2024, p. 17).

In light of these relevant theoretical debates, this study will adopt a critical poststructuralist (Hall, 1996, p. 613) framework that is grounded in feminist (McClintock, 1993,

p.63), postcolonial (Zhang, 2024, p.1), and communication and cultural studies (Triandafyllidou and Wodak, 2003, p. 213) to analyze Irish far-right discourse online This framework views nationalism as a mediated cultural practice (Szulc, 2017, p. 58).

3. Methodology

The following chapter outlines the qualitative methodological approach taken to address the research question and sub-research questions. It presents a purposive sampling strategy used to gather 573 posts including 120 text only posts, 292 images and 161 videos from the X accounts of the leading far-right nationalist parties, The Irish Freedom Party and The National Party and their leaders. Subsequently, it elaborates on the thematic analysis employed and provides a comprehensive evaluation of the study's methodological integrity, addressing issues of credibility, validity and reliability.

3.1 Research design

Qualitative research provides a valuable means to examine how meaning is discursively produced and circulated in mediated texts. This is particularly relevant when analyzing identity, ideology, and representation in digital environments. Given this thesis's focus on how Irish far-right parties construct national identity on social media, a qualitative approach is especially apt for unpacking the symbolic, affective, and ideological work in posts on X (Brennen, 2021, p. 5).

This research design is rooted in critical poststructuralist paradigms, which emphasize the contested nature of meaning and identity. This is crucial for analyzing how Irishness is discursively produced by far-right actors on X. Such an approach foregrounds the situatedness of meaning and allows for close reading of how identity, difference, and belonging are articulated in these online spaces (Boeije, 2010, p. 12).

The study employs Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning across textual and visual content. A theme is understood here as something significant in relation to the research questions, reflecting a patterned response or meaning that contributes to understanding the ideological construction of identity (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Thematic analysis offers the flexibility to account for both manifest and latent meanings in the data, which is essential given the multimodal nature of social media where visual and textual elements frequently coexist (Walters, 2016, pp. 107–108). This makes it well suited for analyzing how nationalist narratives are constructed through the interplay of images, captions, hashtags, and videos. Furthermore, this approach attends to the intertextual dynamics between

text and image and situates them within the broader sociopolitical context in which these tweets are embedded.

By engaging with these patterns and meanings, thematic analysis enables an exploration of how far-right parties negotiate gender, family, history, and minority representation in constructing Irish national identity. This analysis adopts an inductive approach, remaining responsive to emergent themes in the data rather than imposing a predefined coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). To ensure analytical rigor, the coding process included systematic checks to promote reliability. This thesis also draws on scholarship emphasizing the importance of analyzing both explicit statements and implicit ideological subtexts in nationalist discourse (Ďurinová & Malová, 2017, p.3). It is inspired by previous studies of far-right Irish actors on X (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 9), which employed thematic analysis of both textual and visual elements of posts.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This research aims to provide insights into how Irish identity is constructed on X during three key voting events in 2024. To achieve this, purposive sampling was employed, as it allows for the selection of content most relevant to the research questions (Babbie, 2020, p. 193). This approach aligns with criterion sampling, which focuses on information-rich cases that provide in-depth insights into the phenomena under investigation (Suri, 2011, p.63).

The dataset consists of posts from two Irish far-right nationalist parties and three of their candidates: NP and IFP. These parties are the only officially registered political parties in Ireland identified by the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (2022, para 10) as far-right extremist hate groups. They were selected because of their explicit alignment with the “Great Replacement” (O’Malley, 2024, p. 224) rhetoric and their participation in the broader pan-European, ethno-nationalist identitarian movement. Both parties share strong anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQ+ stances, with the IFP particularly associated with conspiracy-driven narratives and the NP with white nationalist ideology. Other nationalist parties, such as Ireland First and The Irish People, were excluded due to their minimal social media presence, while Aontú was excluded because its focus on economic justice is outside the far-right focus of this study (O’Malley, 2024, p. 224).

X was chosen due to its highest relevance in disseminating far-right narratives in Ireland (Craig et al., 2023, p. 6; Fattibene et al., 2024, p.28). Furthermore, Musk's visible support and engagement with IFP's and NP's X content, make it particularly relevant to examine how national identity is articulated on X (The Journal, 2024, para 1). Musk's connection to worsening polarization in Europe through X indicates that fears of banning far-right profiles on X which caused far-right actors to migrate from the platform, may no longer be relevant (Oxford Analytica, 2025, para 1; Rogers, 2020, p. 213). Moreover, previous studies (e.g., Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 8) have shown that IFP and NP maintain the most significant following and output on X, making it an ideal site to analyze their online identity constructions. Although alternative platforms like Telegram exist, they lack the same visibility and volume of Irish far-right content.

To ensure a rich dataset, a similar size and type of data was selected from the two parties. Data was drawn from the NP's official account, its leader Patrick Quinlan, and its youth leader Yan Mac Oireachtaigh. While Quinlan posted more frequently, Mac Oireachtaigh's posts were generally longer and included more video content, particularly during the election periods. Including both accounts ensured comprehensive coverage across all three events. For IFP, only the official account and the president's account, Hermann Kelly, were analyzed. Kelly consistently posted extensively on X, and the IFP does not have a comparable youth leader. These two accounts are sufficient to capture the party's discourse during periods of analysis. In total, the official X accounts analyzed include NP (@NationalPartyIE, ~16k followers, 7,000+ posts) and IFP (@IrexitFreedom, ~48.4k followers, 28.5k+ posts), along with the accounts of Patrick Quinlan (@PQuinlanNP, ~7.3k, 3,748+ posts), Yan Mac Oireachtaigh (@YanMacNP, ~8.6k, 2,282+ posts), and Hermann Kelly (@hermannkelly, ~25.3k, 27.3k+ posts) (see Appendix A). A roughly similar amount of data from each party on each of the three events were collected. This balance ensures that one party's messaging does not disproportionately dominate the dataset.

Data collection followed an event-driven sampling method, focused on three key political moments in 2024 that are particularly relevant to gender, minority representation, and historical narratives in nationalist discourse. These events include the Family and Care Referendum (March 8), the European Parliament Elections and Local Elections (June 7), and the Irish General Election (November 29). Posts were collected during the 30-day campaign period preceding each

event: February 8–March 8 for the Referendum, May 7–June 7 for the European Election, and October 29–November 29 for the General Election.

A manual search on each X account was conducted using the date filters previously outlined. This yielded a total of 573 posts which fit the inclusion criteria, and these were collected for analysis. To reflect the multimodal nature of digital identity construction in new media, both textual and visual elements were included (Çöteli, 2019, p. 1). Eligible posts consisted of original tweets or reposts authored by the account holder, featuring text, images, and/or videos that directly referenced the relevant event, used associated hashtags, or engaged with related campaign themes (e.g., family values during the referendum period). Exclusion criteria removed duplicated posts across accounts, repeated visual elements unless reframed with new commentary or context, generic calls for voter participation or party membership, external video links (e.g., YouTube), GIF-only posts, and videos longer than four minutes to ensure the feasibility of the study and data consistency.

Of the 573 posts, 341 came from @IrexitFreedom and @hermannkelly, including 53 text-only posts, 199 containing at least one image, and 89 featuring at least one video. Then, 232 posts were gathered from @NationalPartyIE, @PQuinlanNP, and @YanMacNP, comprising 67 text-only posts, 93 with images, and 72 with videos. A breakdown of the source of each of the posts is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Data set per account, type and event

Account	**@IrexitFreedom**	**@hermannkelly**	**@NationalPartyIE**	**@PQuinlanNP**	**@YanMacNP**	**Total**
Family and Care						
Referendum period:						
Text only	3	2	2	4	1	12
At least one image	26	42	20	10	-	98

At least one video	9	18	2	8	2	39
Total data: Family and Care Referendum period	38	62	24	22	3	149
European Parliament and Local Election period:						
Text only	9	7	5	7	3	31
At least one image	22	56	12	14	10	114
At least one video	10	18	8	6	14	56
Total data: European Parliament & Local Election period	41	81	25	27	27	201
Irish General Election period:						
Text only	17	15	21	17	7	77
At least one image	13	40	17	5	5	80
At least one video	14	20	9	10	13	66
Total data: Irish General Election period	44	75	47	32	25	223
Total	123	218	96	81	55	573

3.3 Operationalizing Concepts

This study employed an inductive thematic analysis approach, allowing context-specific findings and themes to emerge organically while being guided by key sensitizing concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). These concepts, refined through a pilot study, offered a flexible lens to trace the symbolic work of Irish identity construction across social media posts. They were not used to predetermine codes but rather to highlight recurrent modes of meaning-making relevant to the construction of Irish identity by far-right actors on X. The complete coding frame is provided in Appendix B.

Irish nationalism refers to the symbolic processes by which national identity is constructed through appeals to shared culture, language, religion, and landscape. In the Irish context, nationalism is deeply rooted in legacies of colonial resistance and revivalism, often romanticizing pre-modern, rural life as the authentic heart of Irishness (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Malešević, 2014, p. 136). In the dataset, this concept was operationalized through markers such as the Irish language, Celtic and Catholic iconography (e.g. religious statues), and references to farming, GAA sports, Irish music, and traditional clothing like Aran sweaters and flat tweed caps[1]. Attention was also paid to national colors (especially green and gold), symbolic place names, and rural backdrops and contrasting representations of modernity, secularism, or multiculturalism. Historical glories and mythmaking captured the invocation of Irish national history and mythology. Indicators of this concept included references to figures such as Michael Collins, anti-colonial slogans (e.g., “Get the Brits out”), and visual symbols like the Irish tricolour, the harp, and the Proclamation of the Republic. Audio-visual data, such as the repurposing of rebel songs or the invocation of mythic figures like Fionn Mac Cumhaill, reinforce a collective memory of moral struggle and national destiny (O’Donovan, 2009, p. 97). The “Us” versus “Them” narratives draw on populist and securitization discourses, framing migrants as both symbolic and material disruptors. Visual elements included footage of protests outside asylum centers and slogans such as “Ireland is full”. It also refers to memes and posts

[1] The Aran jumper, originally worn by rural fishermen and farmers, and the flat cap are clothing pieces associated with people who do agricultural work in Ireland (Malešević, 2014, p.130).

that warn of demographic replacement. Feminized national identity explores how posts depict Irish women mothers ("the Irish Mammy") or vulnerable figures needing protection. Visual elements included red-haired, pale-skinned women in modest clothing or Catholic settings (e.g., church, home, with children). Calls on "Irish men" to defend "our women and children" was also accounted for under this concept. This concept was operationalized by identifying these gendered portrayals and examining how they legitimize broader nationalist aims, linking women's roles and bodies to the survival of the nation.

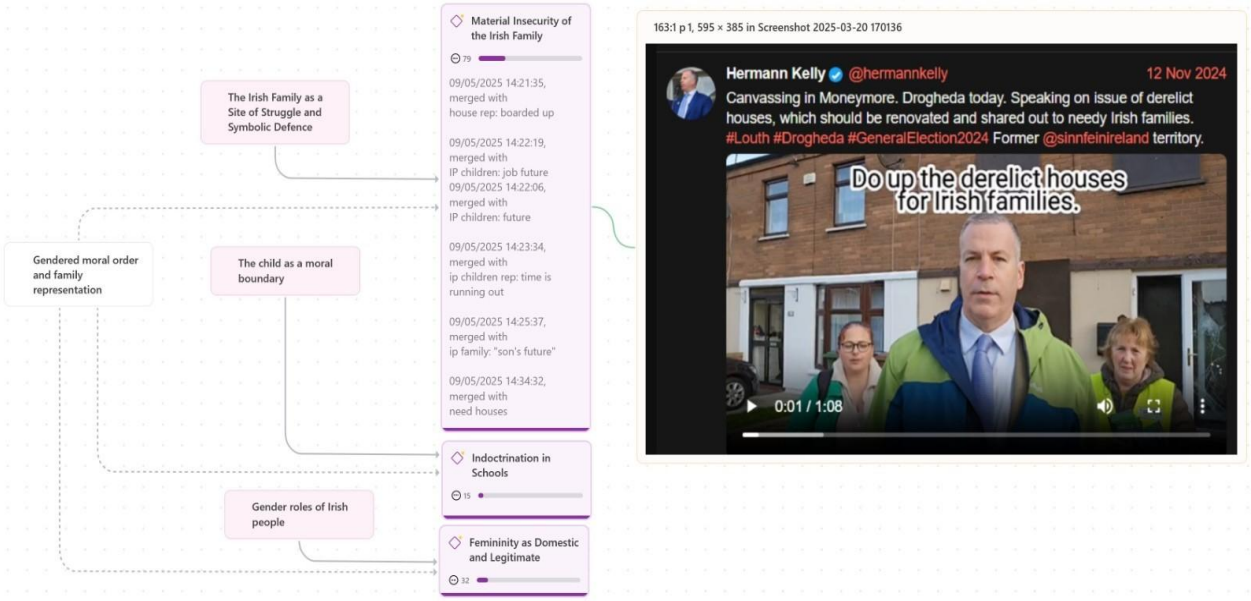
Throughout this process, operationalization involved identifying how these sensitizing concepts appeared in the dataset as observable, recurring discursive patterns. For each concept, explicit indicators, such as visual imagery, textual slogans, and narrative strategies, were used to determine what was considered evidence. This approach aligns with the principles of transparency and accountability in qualitative research (Suri, 2011, p.58), ensuring that each interpretation was firmly grounded in the data.

3.4 Data analysis

The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.80) six-phase thematic analysis framework to systematically identify, refine, and report patterns within the dataset. Textual and visual posts were treated as units of analysis, with multiple codes applied to different segments to capture both surface-level and latent content (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). All posts were captured via screenshots and processed with OCR tools for accurate transcription, while videos were downloaded using the app XDown (see Appendix C) and uploaded to Atlas.ti. Data was organized in Atlas.ti by document group (account, media format, and time period) to maintain traceability and support clear analytical decisions. Atlas.ti's capacity to handle multimodal data and enable visual mapping of thematic relationships (Butel & Owen, 2024, p. 4; Silverman, 2011, p. 361) was particularly useful for this project's focus on symbolic interplay between images and text (see fig 3.1. and Appendix D for illustrations of how Atlas.ti was used).

Figure 3.1.

Example of Atlas.ti visual mapping of thematic relationships



A pilot study was conducted 52 posts (9% of the dataset, n = 573) to refine the coding framework and test inclusion and exclusion criteria. This phase also helped assess the feasibility of analyzing multimodal posts and ensure that emerging themes addressed the research questions (Aziz & Khan, 2020, p.750). It highlighted overlooked intersections, such as the recurring link between Irish nationalism and Catholicism, which were integrated into the full analysis.

The main analysis began with familiarization including multiple close readings of textual data and repeated viewings of visual materials. Visuals were reviewed twice without annotation to document compositional elements, followed by a third viewing with systematic documentation of gestures, expressions, settings, and sound (Butel & Owen, 2024, p. 4). Transcripts generated in Atlas.ti were manually checked to ensure they captured relevant verbal and non-verbal cues (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). In the second phase, 1,894 initial codes were generated to capture both explicit descriptions (e.g., “green fields”) and more abstract, ideological patterns (e.g., “purity myth”). Coding was conducted at the sentence level for text and using annotated descriptions for visuals, with special attention to how meaning was co-constructed across

modalities (Walters, 2016, pp. 107–108). Analytical memos were maintained throughout to document emerging insights, refine coding decisions, and maintain an audit trail.

The iterative nature of the process supported the consolidation of 1,894 initial codes into 73 codes. Atlas.ti's comment function was used to track these consolidations, ensuring transparency in how meaning was constructed (see Appendix E for an example). The third phase involved grouping these refined codes into 5 sub-themes based on similarity. For example, codes such as 'colonizers' and 'demographic replacement' were grouped into the same broader theme of 'Physical colonization and threat to Irishness'. Sub-themes were rigorously reviewed in the fourth phase for coherence and distinctiveness, using Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 91) criteria for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Sub-themes that lacked sufficient evidence or conceptual clarity, such as "far-right pro democratic", were discarded. In the fifth phase, two final overarching themes were refined and directly aligned with the research questions. In the final phase, the themes were reported alongside illustrative posts in the results chapter (see complete coding tree in Appendix F). This systematic approach ensured analytical rigor, grounded in transparent coding practices and guided by the study's conceptual framework (Silverman, 2011, p. 362).

Table 3.2

Overview of four themes and their subthemes

Theme	Subthemes
4.1 Traditional Irish order of society	4.1.1 Gender essentialism as national prosperity 4.1.2 Heteronormative white family as microcosmos of the nation 4.2.3 Ideological and cultural national boundaries
4.2 Oppression of Irish people	4.2.1 Physical colonization and threat to the Irish 4.2.2 Institutional discrimination of the Irish

3.5 Credibility and ethical considerations

To ensure the credibility and integrity of this study, a rigorous and transparent qualitative research approach was adopted. Interpretative claims were consistently grounded in the dataset and informed by an extensive understanding of far-right digital discourse and Irish nationalism. The analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti, combining inductive theme development with theory-driven sensitizing concepts drawn from critical poststructuralist theories of identity (Hall, 1996, p.613; Wodak et al., 2009, p.16) and feminist critiques of nationalism (McClintock, 1993, p.63) and the post-colonial far-right (Zhang, 2023, p. 4). These frameworks shaped the interpretation of language, audio, and visuals throughout the process. Analytical rigor was strengthened through repeated engagement with the data, iterative coding, and constant comparison across posts and events. Reflexive memos were maintained to document interpretive decisions and challenge assumptions, while attention to deviant cases ensured that exceptions and complexities in the data were not overlooked. Data verification involves cross-checking OCR-processed posts against raw screenshots and X post archives to minimize transcription errors and ensure accuracy, particularly for deleted or modified posts. These strategies align with qualitative research best practices, emphasizing transparency, credibility, and transferability (Silverman, 2011, p. 367).

The researcher's reflexivity was an integral part of the analysis. Adopting a critical post-structuralist feminist perspective foreground how gender and nationalism are negotiated in online far-right discourse. This positionality, shaped by the researcher's cultural proximity of being Irish and anti-racist, influenced the selection of sensitizing concepts and the sensitivity to particular patterns during coding. However, reflexivity was always situated within a transparent methodological framework, ensuring that personal assumptions did not overshadow the systematic and evidence-based nature of the analysis. Ethically, this study used publicly accessible political content. No personal or private data was collected, and as such, informed consent was not required. Nevertheless, privacy and anonymity standards were respected: for instance, screenshots used in illustrative examples were carefully chosen to avoid including sensitive personal information or third-party data where possible. Methodological transparency also included the systematic application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, ensuring that the dataset was coherent and directly relevant to the research questions. Finally, credibility was

further enhanced using analytic induction, systematic application of Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 80) reflexive framework, and explicit attention to deviant cases as a form of negative case analysis (Silverman, 2011, p. 369). These practices ensured that the findings presented in this thesis are robust, trustworthy, and grounded in a transparent and ethically responsible analytical process.

4. Results

The following chapter presents the results, divided into two themes about how Irish far-right actors represent Irish identity on X in the context of the 2024 Family and Care Referendum and the European, Local and National General elections. The chapter starts with a discussion of the first theme on traditional Irish order of society. This theme is broken into three subthemes which discuss gender essentialism as national order, heteronormative family as a microcosmos of the nation and ideological and cultural national boundaries. This is then followed by the second theme which centers around the oppression of the Irish people. This theme is divided into two subthemes. The first subtheme refers to posts meaning the physical colonization and threat Irishness. The second subtheme is the institutional discrimination of the Irish. Each theme provides examples from the posts analyzed and interprets them using the theoretical framework outlined.

4.1 Traditional Irish order of society

This theme discusses how Irish far-right actors on X construct Irish identity through a traditional framework of Irish societal order. The theme reveals how gender, family and ideological posts diffuse meaning into national identity. The first subtheme discusses how gender essentialism is framed as national order and patriarchal hierarchy contrasting with gender essentialist perspectives on 'Others'. The second subtheme portrays the heteronormative and white Irish family as a micro-cosmos of the nation. The Irish family, and specifically young red-haired Irish girls are symbolically used to represent national future and boundaries. The family is constructed by the far-right as threatened by the undermining of the nuclear family structure. In the posts, these threats are represented by 'Other' queer, black and Muslim families. The final subtheme discusses how Irish cultural and ideological values are presented in contrast with the

'Other'. Irish culture is represented as Catholic, rural and pastoral contrasting to the Muslim, Arabic and globalized 'Other's.

4.1.1 Gender essentialism as national order

In the far-right posts examined, rigid heteronormative gender roles underpin constructions of Irish identity. Heteronormative masculinity is constructed as a crucial vehicle for articulating Irish men's belonging and rightful leadership. The construction of "heroic masculinity" reinforces a vision of Irish identity centered on patriarchal authority (McClintock, 1993, p.63; Nagel, 2001, p.95). The posts depict masculinity through references to competence and rational leadership. Posts reference Quinlan and Kelly (the leaders of NP and IFP) as men who work "tirelessly" (D472) to "get the job done" (D55) and possess insider knowledge and experience of how political systems operate. These references serve to legitimize their political authority by framing the men as the embodiment of national competence, insider belonging, and rightful leaders of the national community (McClintock, 1993, p.63).

National leadership is thus masculinized. Violent, militant, and confrontational defense in honor of protecting the nation is constructed as a righteous act in the posts. A video ironically labeled "Paddy: The Problem" (see fig 4.1) starts with a clip of an Irish person saying, "We've got a very bad far-right problem." This clip is followed by a montage of Quinlan engaged in hyper-masculine activities, sparing with a man with boxing gloves on, confronting a group of Irish riot police, swinging a hurley[2], and lifting heavy weights (D629). The juxtaposition between the Irish person concerned about the far-right with Quinlan's embrace of confrontation, inverts the script that the far-right is a problem. It constructs far-right violence as an expression of authentic Irish masculinity which is rooted in strength, confrontation and the embrace of traditional Irish sports. Furthermore, Quinlan positions physical confrontation as central to leadership, naturalizing a gender essentialist vision of Irishness rooted in traditional masculine

[2] Hurling is a traditional Irish sport organized by the Gaelic Athletic Association which has controversially remained a male centric organization despite variations of the sport existing for women (Dolan & Connolly, 2009, p.196). The hurley is a wooden stick which is used during the game to hit the ball.

athleticism. The colonial trope of the “Paddy archetype” is constructed by the far-right as Quinlan physically embodies the guardian and protecter through physical power and athleticism represented in the posts (O’Donovan, 2009, p. 97–106; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.242).

Figure 4.1.

Images from the video “Paddy the Problem “illustrating engagement in hyper masculine action

The far-right construct Irish sexuality as a binary construct. Deviations from hegemonic masculinity are framed as outside Irishness. A post captioned “Men with balls vote Irish Freedom Party. Women with balls vote Fine Gael,” constructs traditional Irish masculinity as the standard for national belonging. An image of Kelly as a hurler in front of the Irish flag symbolizes strong, athletic manhood, while a flamboyant, gender-nonconforming person in rainbow attire is positioned as its deviant opposite (see fig 4.2). The phrase “balls” functions as a gendered test of political legitimacy, celebrating heteronormative aggression and mocking queer masculinity as alien. GAA symbolism again is weaponized to naturalize a vision of Irishness that is male, heterosexual, and combative. Gender diversity aligns with elitist parties and is cast as un-Irish. This reaffirms hegemonic masculinity as the moral core of the nation (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.301) and positions the far-right as embracers of this masculinity, as the true inheritors of the nation (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.4). The posts reimagine Irish national identity as the communal identity of the far-right.

Figure 4.2

Contrasting gender sexuality image of Hermann Kelly and gender non-conforming person

Irish mythological and historical figures are reworked in the posts to frame Irish masculinity as heroic in tackling foreign domination. In one campaign image, Kelly re-enacts the Irish legend of Setanta slaying the watchdog, casting himself as the heroic defender of the nation against an invading "EU Lapdog" (see fig 4.3). The retelling of Setanta's battle reframes the European Union as a foreign beast, while recoding ancient Irish bravery and masculinity as uniquely embodied by the far-right. Furthermore, "Bloody Sunday", "Michael Collins", and "De Valera" (D111; D583) appear in posts as historical invocations of revolutionary masculine protection (Conrad, 2004, pp. 8–11; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.336). Far-right Irish men are constructed as protectors of the nation that possess the rational and physical fortitude to defend the nation (McClintock, 1993, p.63). The posts illustrate how far-right movements valorize hypermasculine aggression to legitimize force to lead and defend the national community appropriately (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p.5). The posts craft a national identity through their representation of far-right men as embodying authentic Irishness, illustrating the power of digital media to craft, challenge or reinforce national identity (Kadry, 2014, p.200).

Figure 4.3.

Mythic representation of masculinity

Irish women are similarly constructed through an essentialist gendered perspective on femininity which celebrates selflessness, passivity, domestic legitimacy and vulnerability (Tovey & Share, 2003, p. 240). In the posts Irish women are situated in the background of videos, behind male leaders, visually reinforcing their construction as selfless supporters rather than active participants (see fig. 4.4). In a video, Kelly canvasses with Patrice Johnson and discusses voter concerns as they go door to door. He then turns to her and asks, "What do you think, Patrice?", but the video cuts to a three-second shot of them smiling before returning to Kelly, who continues speaking. The far-right construct Irish women as silent, passive and self-sacrificial. Furthermore, the far-right representation of Irish women's role as victims of crime constructs them as vulnerable. For example, a post with an image of a woman who is labelled as a "victim" outline that "12 women were murdered in Ireland" in 2022. The far-right's digital construction of Irish women as vulnerable and in need of protection places them in a position where they need to be saved from foreign invaders by the heroic masculine Irish man (Nagel, 2001, p.95).

Figure 4.4.

Irish women visual representation in background

Irish women are legitimized through their domestic roles, primarily as mothers in the posts analyzed, positioning them as the moral bedrock of the nation (Iamamoto, Mano, &

Summa, 2023, p. 784; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.260; Vaughan & Moriarty, 2020, p. 3). In posts introducing female political candidates from NP or IFP, the candidates' domestic roles was a core aspect of legitimacy. This contrasted with how male politicians' legitimacy relied on their political credentials, experience and knowledge. This constructs women as legitimate when domestic, while simultaneously framing women as outsiders to a masculine political sphere (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). Irish women politicians' legitimacy is contingent of their ability to be a "caring mother" (D9), "grandmother" (D521), someone who "cares passionately about her family" (D505) or at least be "married" (D521). The 'Irish Mammy' serves as a symbol of the nation and her use in posts by the far-right reinvokes strategies used by Irish revolutionary figures to establish the Irish nation (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.364). The far-right challenge Irish national identity by assuming the representation of domestic women to be an authentic representation of Irishness, using media as a vessel to craft national identity (Kadry, 2014, p.200; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 205).

Though domestic femininity emerges as a central force of legitimacy, naturalizing patriarchal hierarchies (McClintock, 1993, p.67; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.242), it is simultaneously presented as a threatened symbol in the posts on X. During the Family and Care referendum, posts urged voters to "recognize the Irish Mammy" and "not delete her" (D366), constructing her as a vanishing figure under threat by constitutional changes. In the posts, women are depicted as worth protecting not in their own right, but because of their reproductive function. This is evident in a post that features an image of a woman holding a baby captioned "protect the nature of a woman & nurture of mothers" (see fig 4.9). This aligns with Anthias and Yuval-Davis's (1989, p.7) and Mostov's (1998, p. 376) arguments that women's inclusion in nationalist projects is conditional, dependent on their performance of maternal virtue. The conditionality of this protection is further underscored by how women's national relevance is framed entirely in relation to their connection to men. Posts urge voters to protect "your daughter, mother, sister or partner" (D287), collapsing women's identities into male relationships. This echoes similar observations that women are only incorporated into the national community indirectly, as an extension of male relations (McClintock, 1993, p.65). The far-right use X to tie Irish women's identity and value to their embodiment of the nation's values through essentialist gendered framework (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 205).

Figure 4.5.

Irish women representation as mother with baby

Gender diversity is rejected through historical nationalist narratives. In a post, the far-right calls for "32 county unification" with disdain for "32 genders" (D705). The post juxtaposes the Republican objective of unifying Ireland's 32 counties[3] with the concept of "32 genders". Gender diversity and progressive ideals are portrayed as a repudiation of revolutionary nationalist objectives. Migrants and elites are represented in support of gender diversity and constructed as acting outside the essentialist binary of gender thus casting them as 'Other' and reinforcing the importance of the gender binary for Irishness. This is seen evident in how heroic masculine violence is celebrated as Irish when performed by natives but framed as excessive and

[3] The Republican objective of unifying Ireland's 32 counties was a postcolonial ambition stemming from opposition to British governance (Bruton, 2022, p.418). Ireland remains divided today with six counties in the North of Ireland still under British rule.

threatening when enacted by non-Irish men against vulnerable Irish figures. The far-right frame migrant men as disproportional threats to women and girls and thus national security (Bauder, 2005, p.44). One post blames "open borders" and "imported crime" for the presence of "a rapists" in Ireland (D314). Men play a unique role in representing meanings of Irish identity in being the only capable figures of being aggressors and violent. For the Irish man it is a justifiable violence whereas for the migrant man it is excessive and threatening. These framings of migrant men as sexually aggressive toward women is also evident in media discourses in Germany and elsewhere and is not an exclusive quality of far-right discourse (Wigger, 2019, p.248).

Female elites are constructed as incompetent, unserious and physically different also following trends from media narratives (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). Posts use gendered and dismissive language, calling women "nutcases," "incompetent,", "not at the races[4]" or less educated (D36; D211; D324). In one post, an image of Maria Walsh, a female politician from Fine Gael, is mocked for her "BA in Journalism" and for describing Irish men as "pale, male and stale" (D35), casting her as shallow and divisive. Women are mocked for clothing and appearance, such as wearing hijabs illustrating how female politicians are often evaluated through hyper-visible markers of femininity and personal aspects of their lives (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). These posts illustrate how the representation of women in nationalist discourse is often limited by the "double bind" (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012, p. 425). Women are either represented as domestic or as incompetent in nationalism. These examples illustrate that the essentialist binary of gender does not only define Irish people, but crucially it defines the 'Other' (Fuchs, 2019, p.8; McClintock, 1996, p.75).

4.1.2 Heteronormative, white family as a micro-cosmos of the nation

The Irish heteronormative white family is presented as the microcosmos of the nation. The posts analyzed closely intertwine the concepts of the Irish family and the Irish nation, presenting the family as a fortress of cultural, ideological, and physical belonging to the nation (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9). This close relationship is made explicit in posts that invoke the values of Irish revolutionary figures, such as one stating that "Pearse said the nation is the

[4] Not at the races is an Irish expression to say that a person is not intelligent.

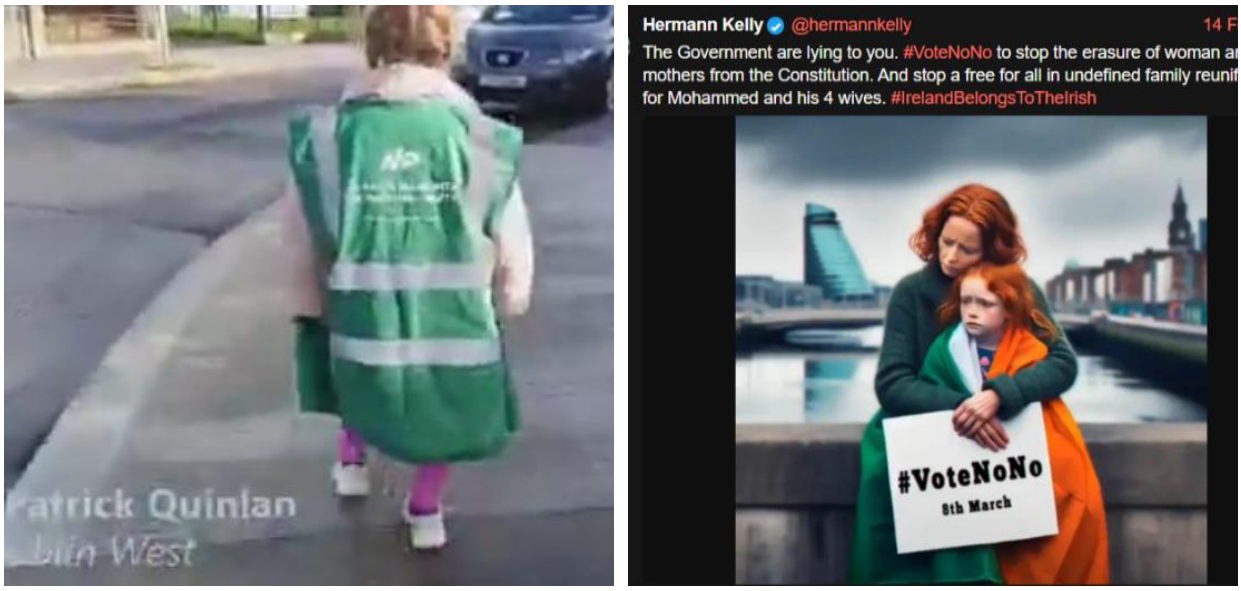
family grown large" (D536) echoing McClintock's (2016, p.409) concept of "domestic genealogy". The heterosexual Irish family is symbolically linked to the nation's future in a post that states: "man and woman and baby and babies, a family, a future" (D114).

The Irish child represents a hopeful symbol of national freedom and rebirth. In a video, a young Irish girl with red hair and white skin canvasses in NP colors as a voiceover states to "rebelieve in Ireland" (D621, see fig 4.6). The red-haired child also becomes a symbol of Irishness that "must be protected" (D521). A post, features the upset child, wrapped in the Irish flag by her red-haired mother, holding a "#VoteNoNo" placard (fig 4.6), with the text on the post linking the image to fears of "family reunification for Mohammed and his 4 wives" (D85). The posts cast children as symbols of Irishness whose future is threatened by 'Other' family structures. The red-haired child becomes a literal boundary of belonging echoing Yuval-Davis's (1998, p.27) insight that the family, particularly through the figure of the child, serves as the site of gendered and racialized nationalism (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.261). Irishness is racialized through these images. The ginger hair and pale skin representations of the mother and child reclaim and invert colonial tropes of "excessive whiteness" once used to ridicule the Irish (Third & Negra, 2006, p. 220), instead casting them as markers of national boundaries. Furthermore, the child's gaze of fear mimics colonization symbolism, where the upset white child is cast in contrast with the Black stereotype. The fear on the child's face renders the black individual as 'Other' (Fanon, 2008, Foreword, p.x). The social media site becomes the platform to craft Irish identity through representations of the innocence of the nation (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213).

Furthermore, the Irish education system, historically controlled by the Catholic church, serves as a site to critique undermining the Irish family (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.263). Pro-queer education is framed in the posts as the sexualisation and grooming of children "to be two men together or two women together" (D526). Posts cast queerness as imposed and by contrast heteronormativity as natural to Irishness. The Irish family is cast as a timeless structure that is separate from history; naturally heteronormative and ideologically threatened (Baron, 2005, p. 135; McClintock, 1993, p.63). The education and socialisation of Irish children through a heteronormative framework is framed as natural and safe by contrast (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.263).

Figure 4.6

Young red-haired Irish girl representation



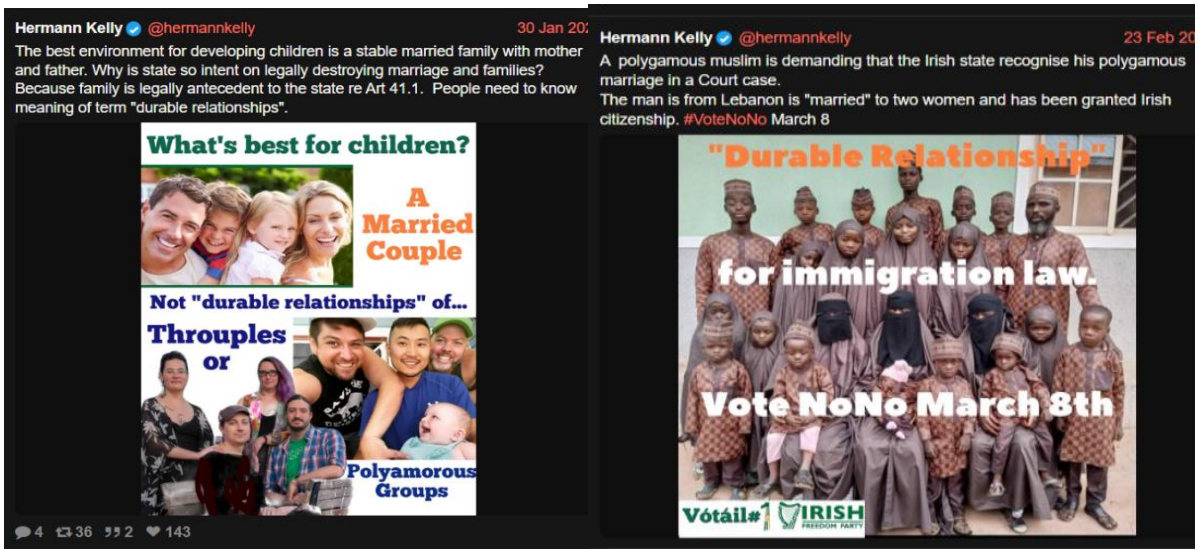
Polygamous and throuple families are portrayed as inferior to the heterosexual nuclear family in their ability to care for children. One post visually contrasts a white nuclear family of a man, woman, girl and boy with two groups of non-heteronormative family structures. In one group two men and two women are presented together and in the other group, three men are smiling and holding a baby. The image is captioned "What's best for children? A Married Couple. Not 'durable relationships' of… Throuples or Polygamous Groups" (see fig 4.7). The emphasis of the post is on the importance of marriage and stability for children's upbringing. This illustrates Tovey and Share's (2007, p. 344) argument that the ideal Irish family has been crafted as heterosexual and patriarchal and it functions as a moral cornerstone of national identity, framing deviations as both symbolic and material threats.

Furthermore, the far-right craft migrant families, especially black and Muslim ones, to adopt the quality of excessiveness and difference in their representation. The far-right claims that replacing the bond of marriage in Irish families with the term "durable relationships" in the Irish Constitution will lead to a "migrant free-for-all" and the eventual "replacement" of the Irish population (D98). In the image, three women in burkas are accompanied by 19 children and one man dressed in traditional Lebanese clothing. The post is captioned as "A polygamous Muslim is demanding that the Irish state recognise his polygamous marriage in a Court case. The man is

from Lebanon is “married” to two women and has been granted Irish citizenship. #VoteNoNo”. The quotation marks around married imply that the Irish family should not only be defined by marriage, but specifically by a heteronormative form of it. Thus, familial discourse constructs Irish identity through its rejection of alternative expressions of family and narrowly defines the idea of the Irish family (Baron, 2005, p. 135; McClintock, 1993, p.63).

Figure 4.7.

Visual representation of ‘Other’ families physically contrasting with Irish families



4.1.3 Ideological and cultural national boundaries

Irish culture is portrayed by the far-right as rural, Catholic and unifying. In contrast, ‘Other’ culture is portrayed as urban, Islamic, divisive and uncivilized. These contrasting depictions inform meanings of Irishness as culturally and ideologically defined.

The Irish attachment to rural culture is juxtaposed with globalised and environmental ideologies. These ideologies are represented to be led predominately by EU, enabled by the Irish government and resulting in the pollution of Irish green landscapes with urbanism brought by anti-farming policies and migrant labour. A post shows two contrasting images, one showing fields of solar panels with the overlay caption of “We want less of this” and the other a field of cows with the caption “more of this in Dromin” (see fig 4.8). The contrast between two images

visually reinforces the narrative that green and globalised policies, symbolised by solar panels, threaten traditional Irish rural life and pastoral traditions, represented by cattle farming**.** Here, a rural vision of Ireland, once used by the English to depict the Irish as backward in contrast to modern, urban England, is reclaimed as a symbol of resistance to globalised ideologies, marking cultural difference on new terms (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Malešević, 2014, p. 136; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.245).

Figure 4.8.

Contrasting images of globalized versus rural Ireland

Rural work of farmers and Irish traditions contrast with urban representations of migrants and elites. These digital constructions successfully merge the romantic vision of rural and premodern Irish identity with far-right discourses of anti-globalisation (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Malešević, 2014, p. 136; Mudde, 1996, p. 230; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.7; Sotiris, 2015, p.

173). Posts with images of Irish men in Aran jumpers and wearing farmers' caps visually assert rural work as symbols of traditional Irish labor and identity (see fig 4.9). Furthermore, a campaign video for politician James Reynolds, features footage of him working on the farm with the slogan "Put a farmer in Brussel" (see fig 4.9). These Irish labor depictions contrast with posts describing migrant's "cheap labour" (D173). Posts explicitly draw on rural symbolism to frame the expulsion of migrants as justified to protect Irish rural life. The phrase "turf them out" (D478) combines the imagery of turf, a traditional symbol of Irish farming and rural life, with the verb 'to turf,' meaning to forcibly remove. This wordplay reinforces the idea that removing migrants is an instinctive act of protecting local communities and preserving rural Irish tradition.

Figure 4.9.

Irish farmer representation wearing farmers cap and on the field

The far-right craft a vision of Irish identity rooted in the land and nature, tying national belonging to origin myths (Hall, 1996, p.613). In a post the "Hill of Tara" is described as the "birthplace of [Irish] culture" (D76). Posts depict images of the sea, green fields, mountains (see fig 4.10) and forests. One video depicts waves in the ocean and is captioned: "We could do with a clean and green Ireland: Irish people, salmon at the falls, mackerel crowded seas, forests full of native trees". The image crafted is a pastoral and lively image of Ireland, mimicking De Valera's "colorful" construction of Ireland during the revolutionary period (Malešević, 2014, p. 136; O'Donohue, 2009, p. 1). The far-right recontextualize Irish revolutionary nationalist visions as

the authentic heart of Irishness (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3; Malešević, 2014, p. 136). The far-right representation of migrants visually contrasts with this colourful scenery. In posts portraying migrants, non-white migrant bodies are tasked with the specific role of symbolising racial difference, dominance, and deviance Specifically, constructions of migrants in nationalist discourse as both external threat and internal danger rely on images of deviance and criminality that naturalize exclusion and fortify national boundaries (Fuchs, 2019, p. 5; Fürsich, 2010, p. 1166). Migrants' bodies are shown in large groups or masked. A post illustrates a group of men in an urban setting dressed in dark clothing and face coverings (see fig 4.10). The contrast between a vibrant, De Valera-era vision of rural Ireland and the dark, urban imagery of the latter post casts migrants as threats to the very ideal of Irishness that colonizers once sought to erase during the colonial period (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3).

Figure 4.10.

Irish landscapes of nature versus urban streets of polluted with many people and trash

The far-right portray migrants as unknown, backwards, and uncivilized in the posts analyzed. One post describes members of an asylum center people "of unknown name, origin and criminal history" (D138). This anonymous portrayal positions them as fundamentally incompatible with rural Irish values, where familiarity, neighborliness, and local rootedness are held as essential aspects of community life (Keogh, 2005, pp. 130). These figures are cast as inherently untrustworthy and opaque as they are said to be "hiding their faces" (D20). The posts likened migrants to "third worlders" (D622) and suggest that Somali migrants are a demographic known for having one of the "highest crime rates" and "an average IQ of 69" (D169). A post of a newspaper clipping with the heading "I've no regrets on immigration" appears alongside an image of a white smiling political elite and a nude non-white man (see fig 4.11). The irony of the post lies in the juxtaposition of a white political elite expressing no remorse over immigration policy with the dehumanizing image of a nude non-white man, implicitly framing the latter as the visible consequence of elite decisions. Here, the non-white body is cast as both hyper visible and out of place, saturating public space in ways framed as unnatural and racially threatening (Gallagher, 2020, para 6). The framing of migrant as racially hyper visible dangers resonates with McClintock's (1993, p.63) argument that the nation constructs its moral purity through the exclusion of racialized 'Others.' These posts construct migrants through an Orientalist perspective positioning them as less intelligent, unfamiliar, savage and less assimilated to first world living than Irish cultural norms (Fanon, 2008, Foreward, p.x; Neilson, 1999, p.1).

Figure 4.11.

Deviant immigrant pictured naked in contrast to smiling Irish politician

Religious boundaries are also drawn between Islam and Irish Christian culture. Irish symbols of the Catholic church and murals of mythological figures Setanta and St.Brigid (see fig 4.12) feature in a video. These symbols are juxtaposed with visuals of a 'Marhaba' Arabic food store (see fig 4.13) and Kelly's description of hijabed women on the streets and "boys getting dressed up for the mosque". The Irish symbols are associated with Irish Christian culture and contrast to the symbols of Arabic and Islamic culture of the mosque, hijab and food store. Kelly's statement that "It's getting less and less like Ireland everyday" (D72) frames the cultural 'Otherness' as a national boundary. The far-right reignite the same religious binary logics used to differentiate Irishness from "Protestant England" to 'Other' Muslim communities (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.400). The historical attachment of religious segregation and emancipation is reimagined in this new context. This represents a form of sectarian essentialism, where religious difference is treated as innate and irreconcilable (Mustafa, 1998, p. 49).

Figure 4.12

Murals of Setanta and Saint Brigid in Irish town

Figure 4.13.

Visual representation of Irish church contrasting with Marhaba food store

The far-right posts analyzed often blend religious and gender representations of the national boundaries. Specifically, elites are portrayed as ‘alien’ supporters of queer ideology and

Islam. In a post, a collage of images of Mary Lou McDonald, leader of the Sinn Fein political party, one of her wearing a hijab is accompanied by LGBT and Palestinian flags (see fig 4.14). The post urges voters to "Reject the traitors of SF today". Support for Islam, Palestine or LGBTQI+ rights is framed as a traitorous act, making those values and culture incompatible with the far-right vision of Irishness. Thus, the representation of elites embracing these values, casts elites as 'Other'. The far-right posts also use language as a national boundary. A post featuring a German campaign poster in Arabic script (see fig 4.15) links the language to the "plantation" of Ireland. In contrast, other posts use the Irish language as a unifying tool. "Dia dhaoibh a chairde" [Hi friends], "Ar dheis ar adhaigh" [Right forward] and "Is linne an todhchaí" [We are the future] cast Irish as a collective and future-oriented language (D522; D697; D725). Language in posts on X is a key marker of national difference. Irish language's role as a unifying force during the colonial period contrasts with marking Arabic as divisive and a colonizing tool like the English language was (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.400). By portraying migrants and elites as ideologically and culturally corrupt, these posts mobilize what Wodak (2021, p.100) calls the 'culturalization of racism', transforming biological racism into a moral panic about cultural purity. The far-right narratives of religious, linguistic, and cultural difference are used to construct Irish national boundaries as rural, Catholic and unifying (Golder, 2016, p. 480).

Figure 4.14

Sinn Fein leader represented in a hijab and as a Palestinian and LGBTQI+ supporter

Figure 4.15.

Arabic script on campaign poster for Christian Democratic Union of Germany

4.2 Oppression of Irish people

This theme discusses how far-right actors on X construct Irish identity as being physically invaded and institutionally undermined. This is achieved through posts representing internal and external national enemies, namely perceived migrants and elites. The first subtheme discusses how migrants and Irish elites are portrayed in posts as colonising and invading actors who pose a physical threat to Irishness. The following subtheme discusses the ways that specific Irish groups are instrumentalized in posts to illustrate structural discrimination Irishness. It elaborates on this by contrasting with posts on the structural and political privilege of migrants and elites. Thus, this theme illustrates that the construction of Irish identity on X by far-right actors hinges not only on Irishness as a framework of traditional ideals but also on their identity as an oppressed nation.

4.2.1 Physical invasion and danger to Irishness

The far-right construct elites and migrants as a physical and racial threat to Irish demographics and land. Irish people are represented as the rightful owners of the Irish land. Migrants are constructed as physically threatening to the Irish and as driving demographic "replacement" (D98). The posts analyzed portrays 'Others' as violent criminals that are threatening to Irish. Posts tie the presence of migrants to crime and demographic danger. In a video, a woman opposes an asylum centre in Ireland and states: "13,000 men less than two miles from my door… we know the crime aspect that goes along with it" (D630). Their proximity to Irishness is interpreted as a threat and tied to anticipated criminal activity. Another post contains a screenshot of a newspaper headline that reads "Killer given two life sentences for unspeakable murders" along with an image of a non-white man (see fig. 4.16). Migrants are central figures in contemporary 'Othering' (Schenk, 2021, p.397), serving the purpose of constructing a criminal and deviant threat towards Irishness, in line with previous studies on the representation of migrants in Irish far-right discourse online (Lucek & Phelan, 2024, p. 17).

Figure 4.16.

Non-white immigrant pictured in News post screenshot as a "killer"

Elites are cast as implicated in enabling danger in society. In a post, two images appear side by side. One of a group of a governmental Irish political party Fine Gael representatives pointing to the sky. In the other image, three members of the radical Islamistic and terrorist organization group, ISIS, do the same pose. The image contains the text “Fine Gael will fill the country with ISIS” (see fig 4.17). Political elites visually mimicking a terrorist organisation construct them as aligned with a violent ideology, echoing anti-establishment discourses (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.9). The caption of the post that “mass immigration of the unvetted” will “make Ireland more dangerous” entangles migrants in this narrative. Here, migrants are associated not just with violence as criminals, but as terrorist threats towards Irish people (Burns, 2020, para 2; McQuinn, 2019, para 4; O’Connell, 2019, para 3; Siapera, 2019, p.41).

Figure 4.17.

Fine Gael party visually likened to ISIS

Beyond representation as enablers of crime and terrorism, elites are portrayed as powerful and controlling authorities in the posts. The Gardaí are represented as powerful agents of restriction and excessive control. In a video a large number of Gardai form a barricade, restricting Irish people access to attack an asylum center (see fig 4.18). The physical representation of elites as a boundary for the Irish people mimics symbolic boundaries between Irishness and the 'Other' and casts elites as powerful and oppressive forces. This follows how far-right global discourses cast authority figures as elites that hold 'the' power (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 11). Furthermore, the far-right online label political elites as "rulers" (D582) and migrants and political elites as "planters" (D671; D699) and are accused of "colonisation" (D169).

Figure 4.18.

Irish Gardai creating a visual boundary between the Irish people and asylum center

Posts contain images of Oliver Cromwell and the British and European Union flags alongside Irish political party leaders with the caption “Oppose the colonisation of Ireland. Say no to the new plantation of Ireland which is supported by #SinnFein” (see fig 4.18). These images and terms resonate with the Irish history of being colonised by the British empire and being demographically replaced under Cromwell’s rule (Tovey & Share, 2003, p.245). Historical references fuse older colonial grievances with present-day fears of displacement by migrants enabled by political elites. By re-coding historical trauma into present fears about migrants and political betrayal, these posts illustrate how nationalist discourse produces an emotionally coherent identity by masking contradictions of far-right narratives (Wodak et al., 2009, p.17).

Another post features an image of Kelly with three men, two of whom are dressed as St. Patrick and Jesus, figures of deep religious and cultural significance in Ireland (see fig 4.19). As politicians did during the revolutionary period in Ireland (Williams, 1983, p. 310), the post invokes the myth of St. Patrick banishing snakes to draw on Christian symbolism. Migrants and corrupt politicians are framed as impure forces that must be expelled. This religious imagery reinforces the portrayal of Kelly and his allies as saviors protecting a threatened Christian nation, mimicking to civil war nationalist tactics (O’Donohue, 2000, p.1). By portraying migrants and elites as aggressors, colonisers and invaders of the Irish, the far-right frame their fight to preserve Irishness as a legitimate cause.

Figure 4.19.

Cromwell and political elites; Hermann Kelly, Saint Patrick and Jesus image

4.2.2 Institutional discrimination of the Irish

Institutional resources, welfare and political privilege of 'Others' construct a vision of Irishness as being discriminated against. The far-right cast the Irish as the underclass and refer to them as "Paddy last[5]" (D6) "second-class citizens" (D156) that experience "anti-Irish racism" (D157) by the government. Specific groups of people in Irish society are cast as exemplifiers of the institutional discrimination of Irish people. Emigrated professionals, the homeless and Irish travelers are instrumentalized in posts to reveal how the Irish people are structurally undermined.

As victims of a government that puts others before its own citizens, Irish emigrated professionals are used in posts as examples of systemic discrimination. Despite their wish to return, the phrase "bring them home" conveys a sense of national neglect by implying that systemic failings drive Irish residents to depart (D304). "Home" turns into a metaphor for a sense of departed Irishness, reaffirming the notion that these groups have been unjustly uprooted and denied access to housing and employment in Ireland. These discourses connect to an Irish attachment to their diaspora abroad (O'Leary & Negra, 2016, p.128; Tovey & Share, 2003,

[5] An Irish expression used to describe someone put in last place or priority

p.246). By suggesting that the government are causing the displacement of Irish emigrants, the far-right evoke the rooted and historical Irish connection to overseas heritage.

Homeless people are represented in posts to extremify the representation of Irish people's struggle to find housing. For example, in a post that contains the hashtag #housetheIrish, it states that "13,500 people homeless, at least 5,299 (56%) are Irish citizens" (D562). Another post contrasts migrant's privileged access to social housing with an Irish woman who was supposedly "fucked into a homeless shelter" (see fig 4.20). The image depicts a non-white smiling "African woman" contrasted with the white and upset "Irish woman". These posts use the precarious situation of homeless people in Ireland to illustrate that Irish people are being structurally discriminated against while simultaneously continuing the far-right trend of visually constructing racial boundaries of Irishness in media posts (Gallagher 2020, para 6).

Figure 4.20.

Contrasting images of privileged "African women" and neglected "Irish woman"

Another group used to illustrate Irish discrimination is the Travelling community. Posts express solidarity with Travellers to amplify claims of broader Irish marginalisation. For example, in one video, Kelly recalls with a slight smile meeting a well-known Traveller boxing family who support his candidacy (see fig 4.21). This endorsement is used to equate the generalised oppression of Irish people with the very real, systemic discrimination faced by Travellers, described in the post as being treated like "2nd or even 3rd class citizens" (D44). The irony lies in the fact that the same far-right actors who instrumentalise this solidarity oppose the referendum aimed at revising constitutional articles, such as those on the family and the role of women in the home, that have historically excluded Travellers from dominant definitions of Irishness (Lentin, 1999, p. 9; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.242). While claiming to represent the marginalised, they reinforce the very frameworks that have long denied recognition to groups like the Travelling community. Nevertheless, the travelling community, though neglected from dominant conceptions of post-colonial Irish nationalism are instrumentalised in the posts by the far-right to craft Irish oppression.

The idea of the "Irish peasant" is revitalized and reconceptualised through depictions of the Irish underclass. Similarly to how Hirsch (1991, p.1116) asserts that "to speak about the 'peasant' was always to speak about something beyond actual rural life", the symbolic meaning of the imaginary of the Irish peasant is invoked by the far-right through representing Irish identity as an underclass.

Figure 4.21.

Hermann Kelly pictured with support promoting Traveller support

The depictions of neglected Irish groups contrast with terms like “economic migrants,” (D39), “welfare tourists,” and “fake asylum seekers” (D289). In the posts, migrants are constructed as having privileged access to resources such as welfare, housing, education and healthcare, which cause strain on services and increases “scarcity” (D350) for “Irish people” (D522). For example, one video post’s thumbnail is captioned “Irish people kicked out of apartments to be replaced by foreigners” (D254). A video by Quinlan outlines the apparent process that asylum seekers go through stating that they arrive by train into Dublin, walk into the IPAS center and ask for asylum. He states:

“the Irish state is like ‘we’ll give you somewhere to stay, we’ll give ya a medical card, we’ll give ya give ya a bank account . . . we’ll give you third level education.’ Eventually they’ll end up in a social house, acquiring our living space”. (D582)

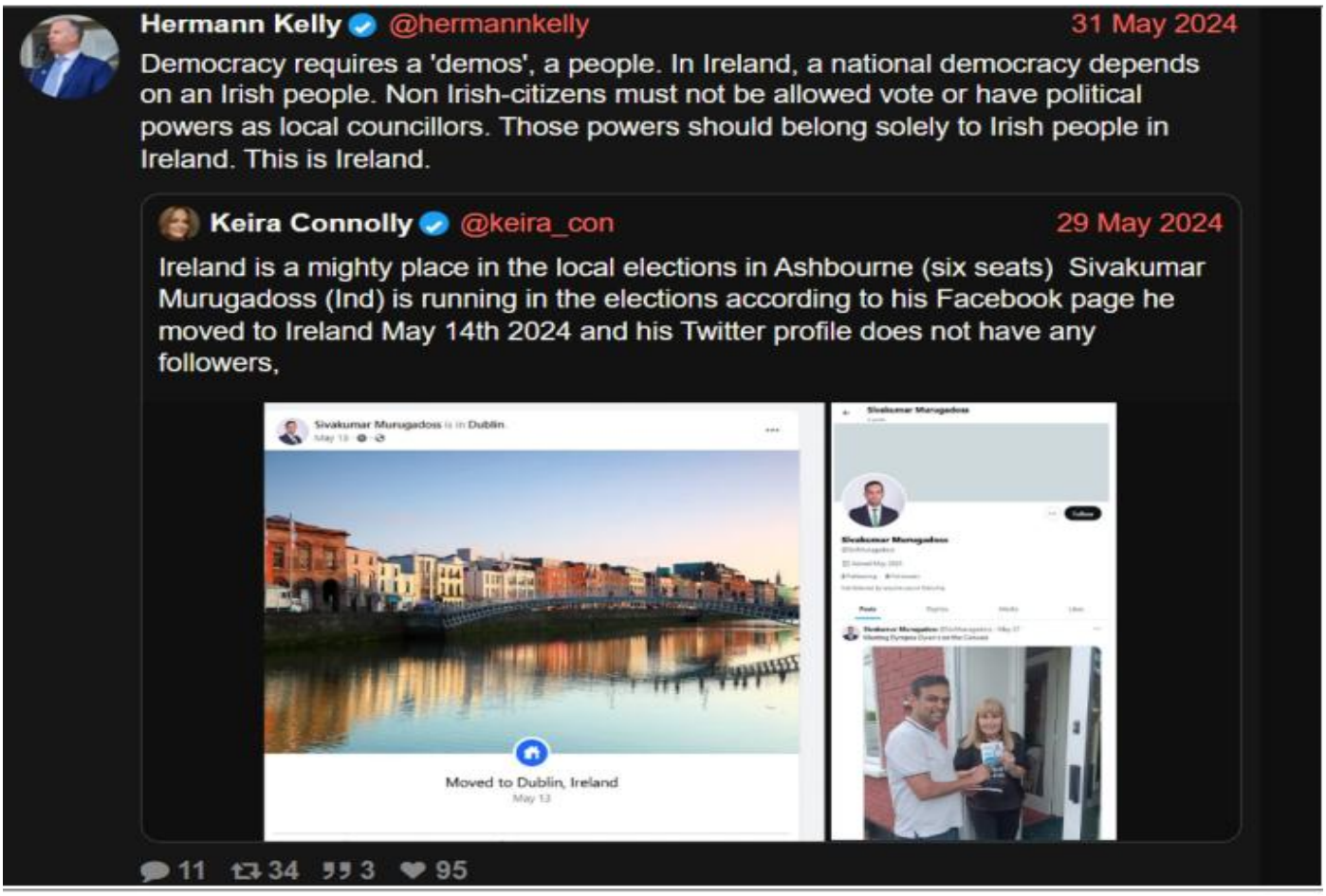
These posts frame migrants as unfair beneficiaries of resources and the Irish political elite are implicated in the failure as they “throw money and accommodation at non-Irish nationals” (D44). Furthermore, they underline the ‘Irish peasant’ narrative as Irishness is constructed as needing to have access to institutional and social supports such as a medical card and social housing (Hirsch, 1991, p.1116). Moreover, posts share stories that depict undeserving migrants that take more than they contribute. In a video Kelly shares a story of a migrant man who made “ridiculous demands” such as halal food, private chefs, or better accommodation at an Airbnb (D48). These depictions follow KhosraviNik, Krzyżanowski and Wodak’s (2012, p.291) argument that migrants are often constructed as economic burdens and illustrate a continuation of the trend of Irish far-right actors constructing migrants as “spongers” (Burns, 2020, para. 4).

A novel observation, that previous studies conducted in 2020 (i.e. Phelan and Kerrigan, 2024, p. 4) did not reveal, is migrants are framed as politically privileged by the far-right. One post mocked the idea that “even asylum seekers can vote,” claiming it “dilutes and distorts our democracy” (D419), while another described such political inclusion as “import(ing) voters” (D207). Migrants’ participation in democratic systems is framed by the far-right as illiberal, representing their presence through a racialized Orientalist framework (Gani, 2021, p.546). A post showing a screenshot of a non-white man canvassing in Ireland and his Facebook status update stating he had moved to Ireland that same year was captioned with outrage that “non Irish-citizens ... have political powers as local councilors” (see fig 4.22). Migrants are portrayed as taking over the political system, with elites blamed for enabling this shift through their

policies. These policies are framed as evidence that political elites have abandoned the needs of the Irish people and now rely on external support to maintain power.

Figure 4.22.

Migrant running as political candidate in Irish local elections



The far-right frames individuals as less deserving of elitist positions in Irish society because of their race and political alignment. In a post an image of a campaign poster of an NP candidate is hung on a pole above a campaign poster of a non-white Fine Gael man. The image is captioned “Put me in. GET HIM OUT!!” (see fig 4.23). The use of a variation of the “Get them out” slogan, commonly associated with anti-migrant rhetoric in Ireland, blends the rejection of Fine Gael political party with a racialized call for removal, framing non-white candidates as both politically and ethnically out of place (County Local News, 2025, para.1). These juxtapositions

subtly reinforce the message that Irishness is visually white, and that migrants, even those in democratic positions, are undeserving political intruders that oppress Irish people.

Figure 4.23.

Contrasting campaign posters of non-white Fine Gael representative with white National Party representative

5. Conclusion

The current research analyses how far-right actors on X represents meanings around the idea of Irish identity. The specific aspect of far-right discourse investigated was voting event-based content from 2024 chosen for their relevance in discourses of gender and familialism, representations of migrants and elites and historical dimensions of the construction of Irishness. The relevance of these specific aspects lies in the framing of the far-right as anti-colonial and pro-women in combination with taking an anti-minority stance (Cannon et al., 2022, p.24; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.1; Phillips, 2025, para 1). Despite news coverage challenging these framings (Phillips, 2025, para 1), a gap in academic research which provided a gendered and post-colonial perspective to Irish far-right actors online was identified. The purpose of the following chapter is to answer the research question based on the findings. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the theoretical implications of these findings along with some limitations of the study and proposed areas for further research.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that far-right actors represent meanings of Irishness on X through the reproduction of colonial binaries and the "culturalization of racism" (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 207; Wodak, 2021, p. 100; Zhang, 2023, p. 4). Far-right actors rework Irish national identity online through the representation of a traditional Irish order of society which is rooted in gender essentialism, familialism and racial, ideological and cultural boundaries (Kadry, 2014, p.200; Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213). This order seamlessly blends with the far-right framework of national identity resulting in an online expression of "new right-wing populism" (Cannon et al., 2022, p.24; Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1347). The message attaches colonial narratives of Irish's "excessive whiteness" (Third & Negra, 2006, p. 220) with the far-right digitally imagined "global whiteness" (Zhang, 2023, p. 4). Crucially however is the anti-colonial perspective on Irish identity, which casts Irishness as an underclass; impoverished, discriminated against, and oppressed.

The result is that far-right actors represent meanings of Irishness by reproducing the same logics and categorisations once used by colonisers to 'Other' and justify colonisation of the Irish. This binary reproduction emulates what Hall (2013, p.261) refers to as the limitations of transcoding. In attempting to reappropriate Irish colonial narratives in their online construction of national identity, the Irish far-right take the order of Irish society for granted. The far-right's culturalization of racism suggests that there is an inherent cultural incompatibility between Irish

and the ‘Others’. By remembering Irish identity through “romantic nostalgia”, it naturalises and essentialises Irish culture (Mustafa, 1998, p.49). The far-right simultaneously forgets, or actively erases, that Irish nationalism was a strategic response to colonialism, shaped by resistance to colonial narratives. Specifically, it forgets the role of the American and English media in reinforcing, especially, religious binaries of Protestant/Catholic (McCaffrey, 1973, p. 525). It forgets how Irish racial boundaries of “excessive whiteness” is a concept that was crafted by colonial powers to represent Irishness as ‘Other’ (Meaney, 2007, p. 3; O’Malley, 2018, p. 90; Third & Negra, 2006, p. 220). It forgets how the Irish ‘peasant’ was a symbol of impoverishment that was crafted in literature under colonial rule, rather than an essential element of Irishness (Mustafa, 1998, p.49).

Not only this, but the binaries that the far-right adopts were not universal binaries adopted by all Irish revolutionaries (McCaffrey, 1973, pp. 525–527). In this forgetting, the logics taken by the far-right party in constructing Irishness on X reproduces the binaries that the colonial system actively produced to divide and manage Ireland. Thus, whiteness, heterosexuality, rurality, and Irishness as ‘peasant identity’ is assumed by the Irish far-right in their construction of Irish identity (Mustafa, 1998, p.49). The unifying logics, once framed as Irish nationalism’s exceptional quality, are not relics of the past (Foster & King, 2024, p.5). They are reframed by the far-right in digital contexts to redefine national boundaries and to claim themselves to be the rightful inheritors of Ireland’s cultural and national legacy (Phelan and Kerrigan, 2024, p.1).

These findings are relevant for understanding how to resist the Irish far-right. In the wake of far-right movements in Ireland attempting to position themselves as pro-woman, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms by which the movement seeks to naturalise gendered hierarchies through digital mainstreaming such narratives (Ernst et al., 2017, p. 1347; Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.3; Phillips, 2025, para 1; Wodak, 2021, p.42; Wodak, KhosraviNik & Mráľ, 2013, p. 46). It is in this understanding and uprooting their banality that the narrative remains exposed as anti-gender equality and anti-minority. Moreover, given that social media platforms host the existence of multiple competing identities, these findings illuminate the narratives which may be challenged (Triandafyllidou & Wodak, 2003, p. 213). Finally, the findings are relevant because of the supportive interaction between Musk and Irish far-right actors on X (Oxford Analytica,

2025, para 1; The Journal, 2024, para 1). The results further indicate a continuing tolerance of exclusionary narratives on X since Musk's takeover of the platform.

These findings are in line with studies that observe how the global far-right uses digital platforms to cast themselves as oppressed by reinvoking post-colonial narratives (Zhang, 2023, p.1). Furthermore, this research adds a critical perspective to studies which analyse the digital landscape of the far-right in Ireland (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p. 11; Siapera, Moreo, & Zhou, 2018, p.5; Siapera, 2019, p.41). The theoretical framework proved suitable in examining how meaning is constructed online and how national identity is constructed through symbolic and material practices (McClintock, 1993, p. 61). Employing a critical poststructuralist communication perspective to national identity allowed for the consideration of the variety of ways in which national identity is given meaning online and justified the relevance of this type of study. Furthermore, it enabled a critical analysis of the underlying meanings of the posts. The global far-right/post-colonial framework was suitable in the context of Ireland and enabled the study to identify how post-colonial narratives are reworked in far-right settings online (Zhang, 2023, p.1). Finally, the critical gender perspective of nationalist discourse offered a consideration to how women can be both active agents and symbolize the nation (Ahmetbeyzade, 2012, p. 194; Kadry, 2014, p.8; Weldon, 2008, p.28).

There were however some unexpected findings regarding how the Irish far-right represent Irishness. The study led to the finding that definitions of Irishness incorporate the minority Irish Travelling community. Although the Irish far-right advocate against policies that historically excluded Travellers from access to Irish identity (Lentin, 1999, p. 9; Tovey & Share, 2003, p.242), the far-right nonetheless use Irish Travellers as nationalist tools to construct this vision of Ireland as an oppressed nation. While promoting Traveller inclusivity and exploiting Traveller discrimination for narrative purposes are entirely different, the finding that the Irish far-right incorporates this community into their discourse is theoretically unexpected. The second finding which was revealing of the limits of the theoretical framework in the Irish context was the discrepancy for how Irish women are predominately constructed. Although theory suggests that women's role in nationalism as "symbols of tradition and virtue" is prominent, Irish women's role was confined to their maternal nature (McClintock, 1993, p.61). While there were some notable exceptions [for example Saint Brigid], the study revealed that men's representation played a more central role in the embodiment of cultural boundaries such as men speaking the

Irish language, farming or playing Irish sports. While this finding could suggest that Irish culture is masculine dominant, it could also be due to three of the five accounts analysed being male candidates for the elections that were focused on.

The inductive thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006, p.80), was essential in identifying recurrent patterns in the multimodal content on X. It's flexibility in allowing the analysis to be led by the data enabled themes to emerge organically. This was necessary as the Irish far-right identity online has not been comprehensively examined before and thus some flexibility was needed. Furthermore, it provided the crucial analytical framework in investigating far-right representation of identity with each theme and subtheme representing a distinct yet interconnected dimension of Irish identity. These themes were essential to drawing the final conclusions. Although thematic analysis results in the loss of some nuance during the clustering of themes, the themes presented offer a coherent and comprehensive understanding of how meaning is represented around ideas of Irishness.

5.1 Limitations

The scope of the study is limited to the analysis of five Irish far-right accounts on X before three voting events in 2024. Firstly, the far-right movement in Ireland is not isolated to political actors. Citizens are extremely active far-right actors and rework Irish identity on X in more meaningful ways than some of the far-right actors analysed (Phillips, 2025, para 1). Furthermore, X was chosen as the platform of analysis although there are many other platforms which far-right actors in Ireland are active on and an incorporation of that content may reveal even more rich or nuanced results (Phelan & Kerrigan, 2024, p.7). In addition, the events chosen to limit the data collection period may limit the variety of the content analyzed. During these event periods, campaign tailored content may influence how far-right represents meanings around Irishness, which may overlook more mainstream and banal expressions. Finally, while it is unclear who controls content curation on the official party accounts, three of the five accounts analysed belong to male politicians. Although content featuring female politicians does appear on official accounts, and women-produced content would not imply content in support of gender equality (Campion, 2020, p. 149; Mattheis, 2018, p. 128), the study's findings may be limited by the male-dominated nature of the content analysed. Beyond the scope of the study, data

accessibility on X was difficult as filtering tools proved temperamental to gather data during specific time periods.

5.2 Future research

In light of these limitations, future research could perform a similar analysis on the accounts of female politicians from far-right parties in Ireland to identify any differences in the themes that emerge. Furthermore, research could be conducted on content following the violent far-right protests in Ireland as this may reveal interesting or contradictory findings. Specifically, the protests in Dublin in November 2023 and the protests in Ballymena in 2025 would be two revealing events to analyse the right far construction of Irish identity on X. In line with this suggestion, further research could explore the Northern Irish context of the digital far-right, given the increase support for the movement since the 2025 protests (Phillips, 2025, para 1). Studies may also attempt to explore how Irish identity online is reworked by upcoming Irish parties which are not classified as far-right but promote a socially conservative perspective such as Aontú (O'Malley, 2024, p.224). Finally, in the interest of the observation that far-right actors use the Travelling community as a political tool, performing a more in-depth analysis of content specifically analysing this representation would be beneficial.

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Appendix A

X account sources

Yan Mac Oireachtaigh https://x.com/YanMacNP

Paddy Quinlan: https://x.com/PQuinlanNP

Hermann Kelly: https://x.com/hermannkelly

National Party: https://x.com/NationalPartyIE

Irish Freedom Party: https://x.com/IrexitFreedom.

Appendix B

Coding frame

Concept	Open Code	Description
Irish Nationalism	Mythology and Foclóir	Text, audio, or visual references to Irish mythology and folklore (e.g., Fionn Mac Cumhaill; ancestral symbols).
	Attachment to Place	References to rural landscapes, rivers, forests, or place names evoking rootedness and cultural belonging.
	Cultural Practices	Representations of Irish sports (GAA), music, language, religious rituals, or traditional clothing (e.g., Aran sweaters, farmer's caps).
	Anti-modernity	Glorification of rural life and tradition; rejection of modernity and multiculturalism as threats to Irish authenticity.
Historical Glories & Myth-Making	Colonial References	Allusions to British rule, the 1916 Rising, Famine, or colonial trauma to frame current grievances as historical oppression.
	Revolutionary Figures	Visual/textual references to historical figures (e.g., Michael Collins) to validate contemporary nationalism.
	Republican Imagery	Use of rebel songs, tricolours, the Proclamation, murals, or slogans (e.g., "Tiocfaidh ár lá") to evoke militant national pride.
	Mythic Time and Destiny	Ireland as spiritually unique; blending Catholic and Celtic myths for symbolic continuity.
"Us" vs. "Them" Framing	Racialized Framing	Depictions of non-white migrants as culturally/religiously incompatible or criminal; constructing them as racial outsiders.
	Threat to Women	Posts suggesting migrants endanger Irish women, contrasting them with pale, feminine Irish figures.

	Resource Competition	Claims that migrants take housing, healthcare, or benefits from Irish people, linked to “Ireland First” rhetoric.
Feminized National Identity	Woman as Nation	Women depicted as embodiments of the Irish nation; symbolic “daughters” or “mothers” of Ireland.
	Irish Mammy	Women shown as nurturing, moral, Catholic caregivers; domestic and maternal imagery supporting traditional roles.
	Women Needing Protection	Framing Irish women as passive victims in need of male defense, reinforcing nationalist masculinity and protectionism.
	Anti-Feminism	Rejection of feminism, gender diversity, and modern sexual politics in favor of “real Irish women” conforming to tradition.

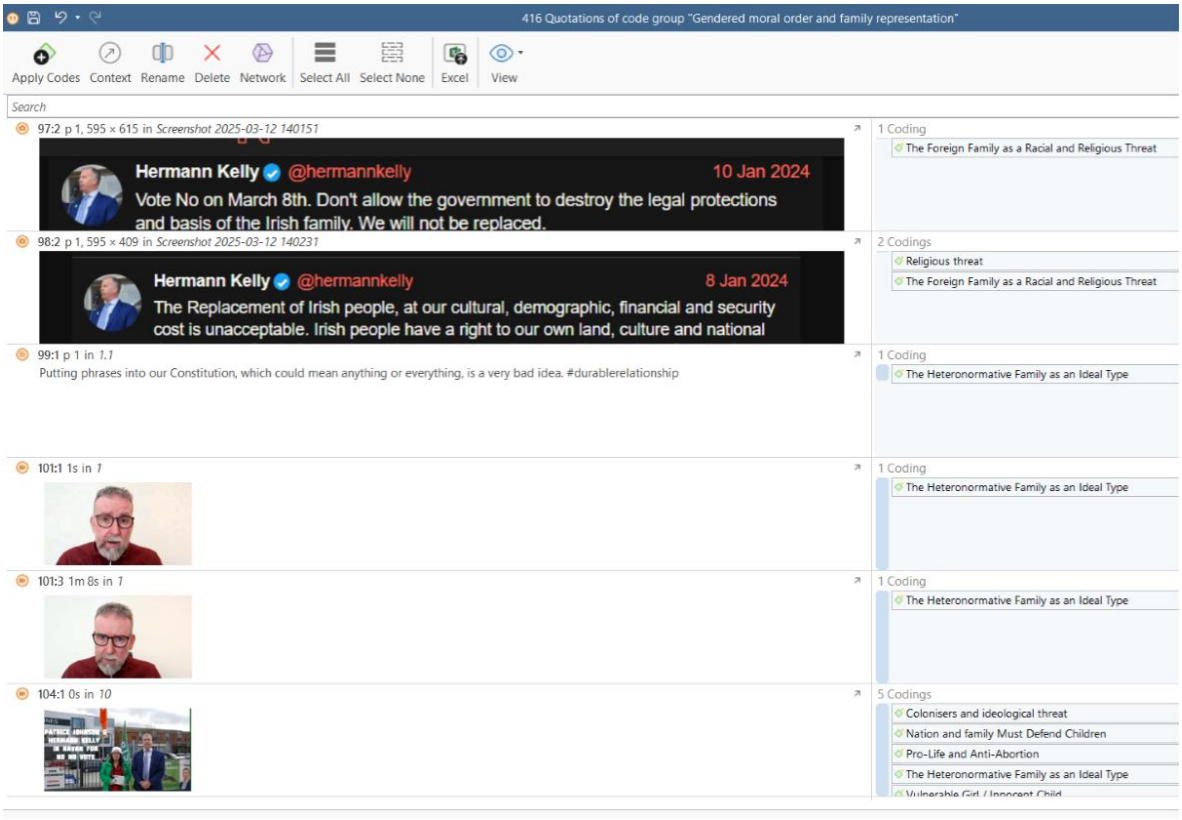
Appendix C

Application for video download

XDown Application: https://xdown.app/en

Appendix D

Atlas.ti coding across different modalities



Appendix E

Merged initial codes of open code "Women as incompetent"

16/05/2025 18:03:03, merged with
drain on system

16/05/2025 18:07:45, merged with
crazy

16/05/2025 18:08:08, merged with
dumb
09/05/2025 17:10:26, merged with
Pol woman rep: not at the races

09/05/2025 17:10:41, merged with
Pol woman rep: minor celeb

16/05/2025 18:01:20, merged with
Pol woman rep: incompetent less educated
04/05/2025 15:16:26, merged with
Pol woman rep: less competent

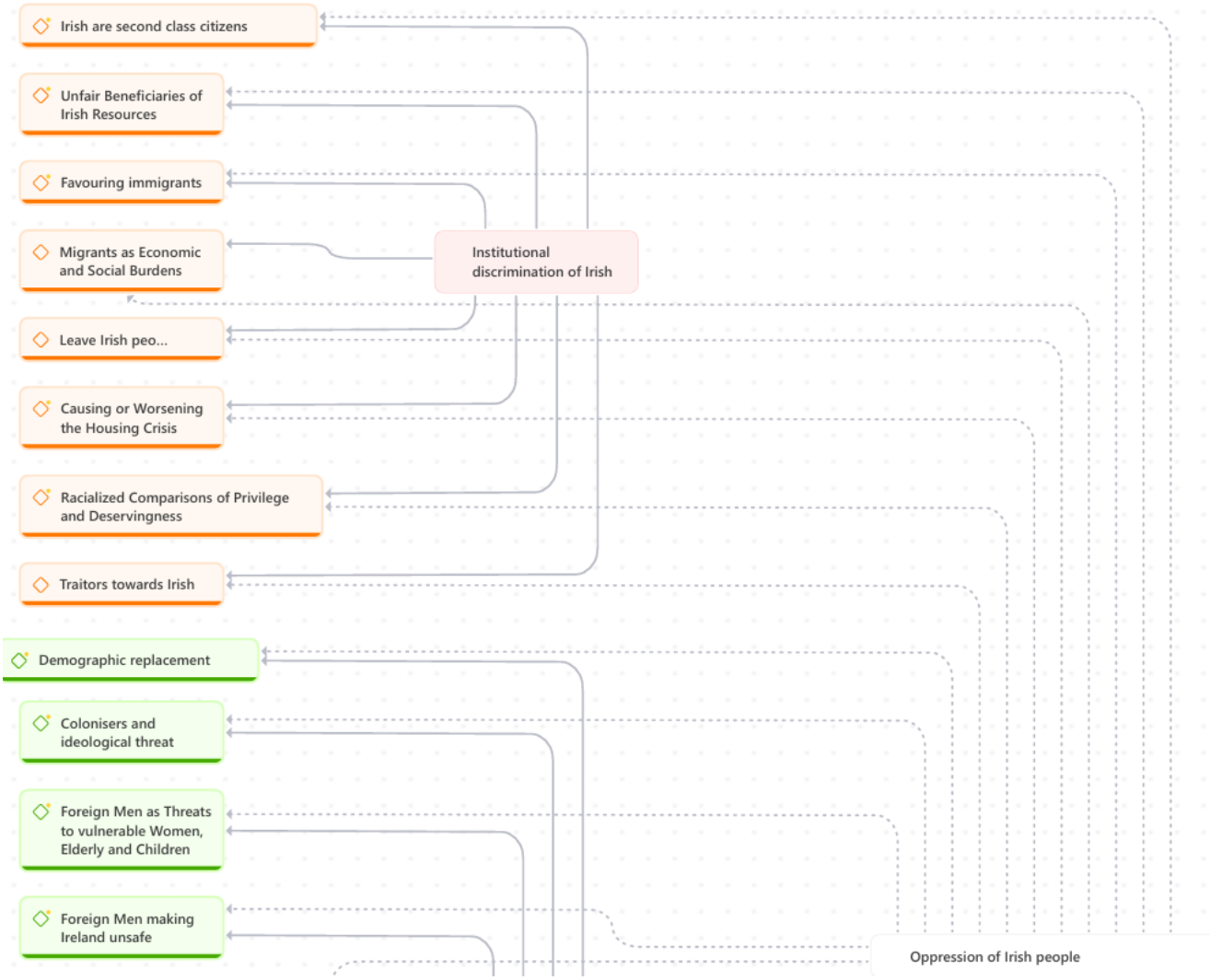
08/05/2025 18:51:34, merged with
Pol woman rep: less educated
08/05/2025 18:23:38, merged with
Pol woman rep: female polician : stupid

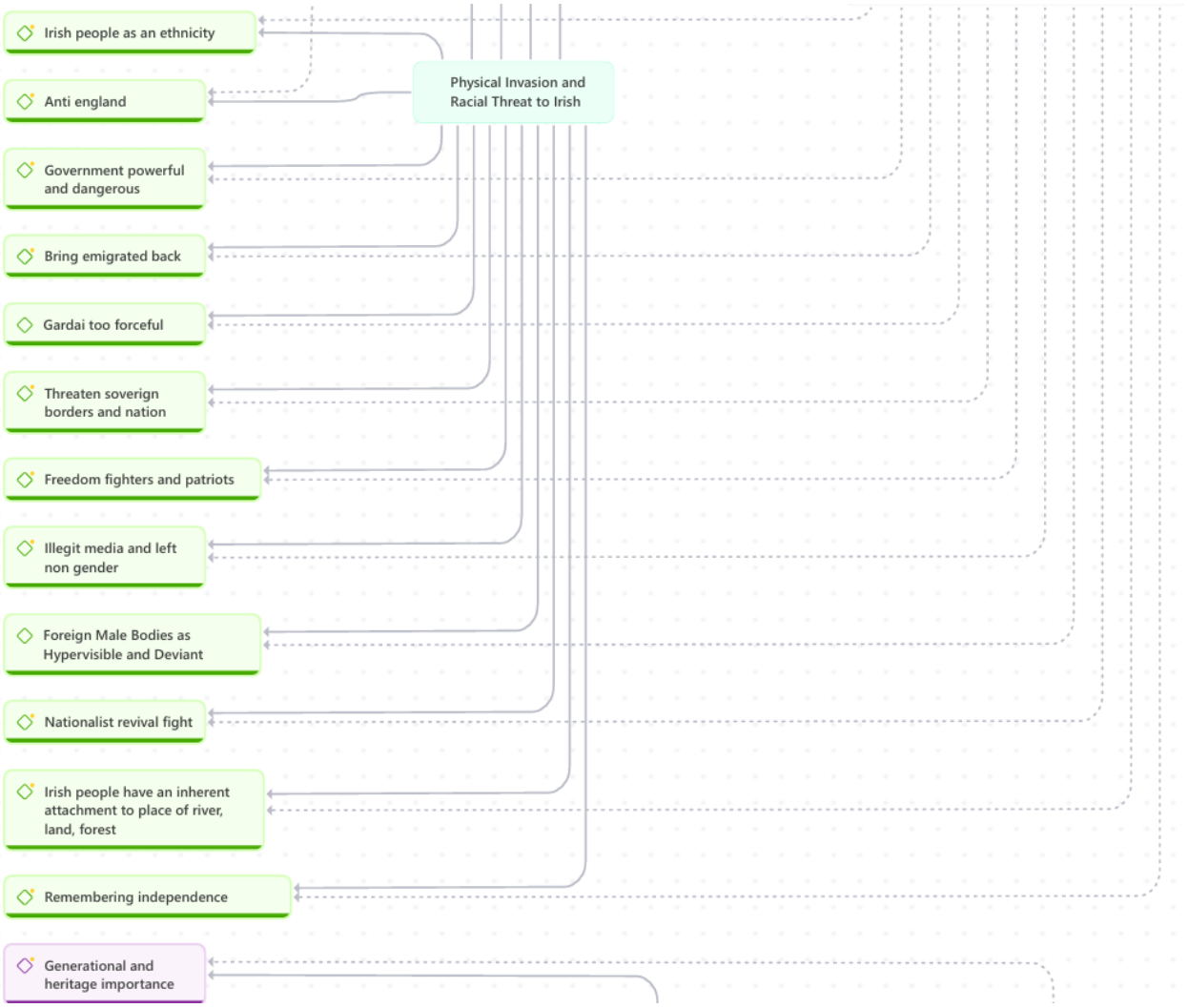
16/05/2025 18:07:16, merged with
make fun of with music

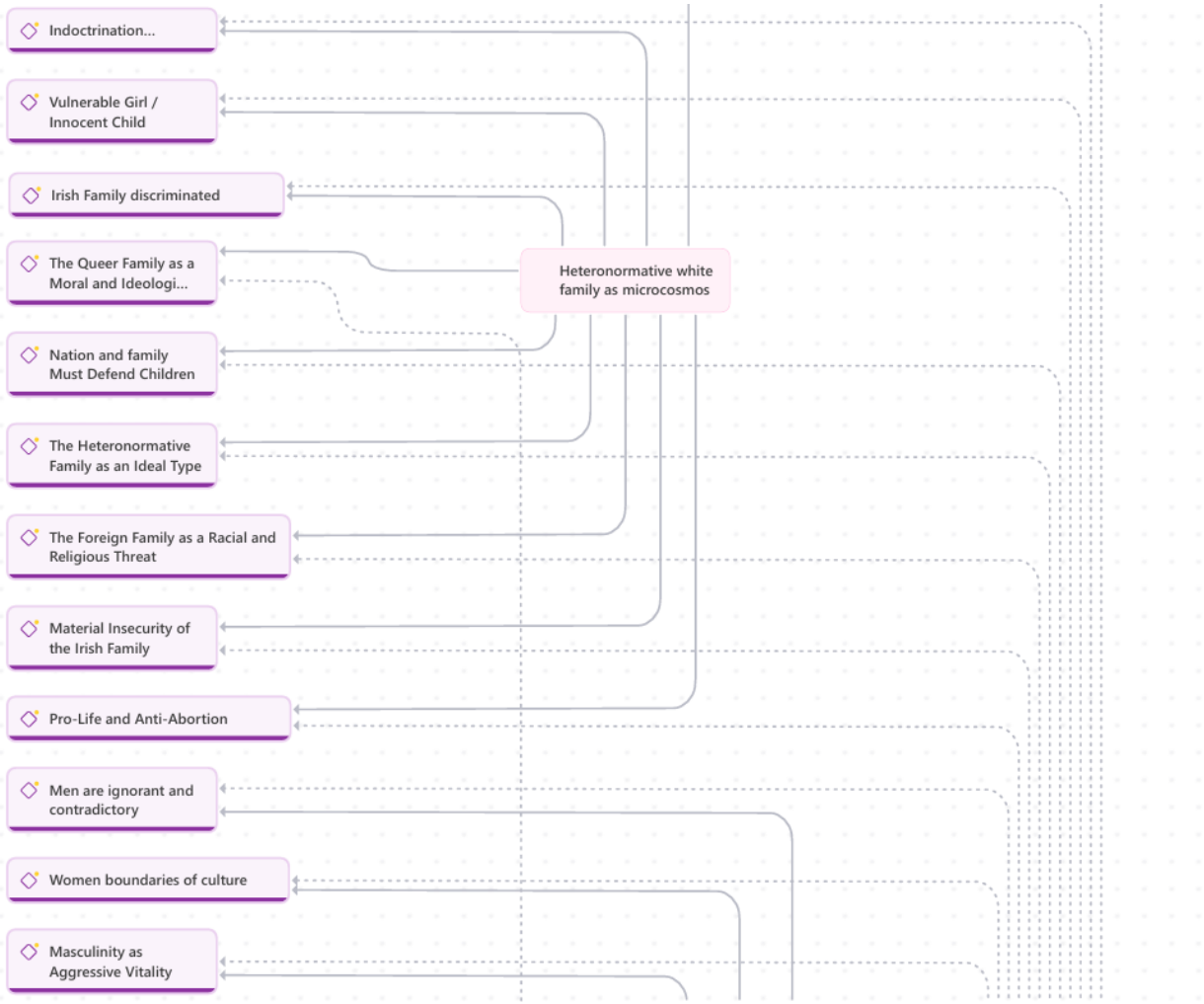
16/05/2025 18:07:27, merged with
worried

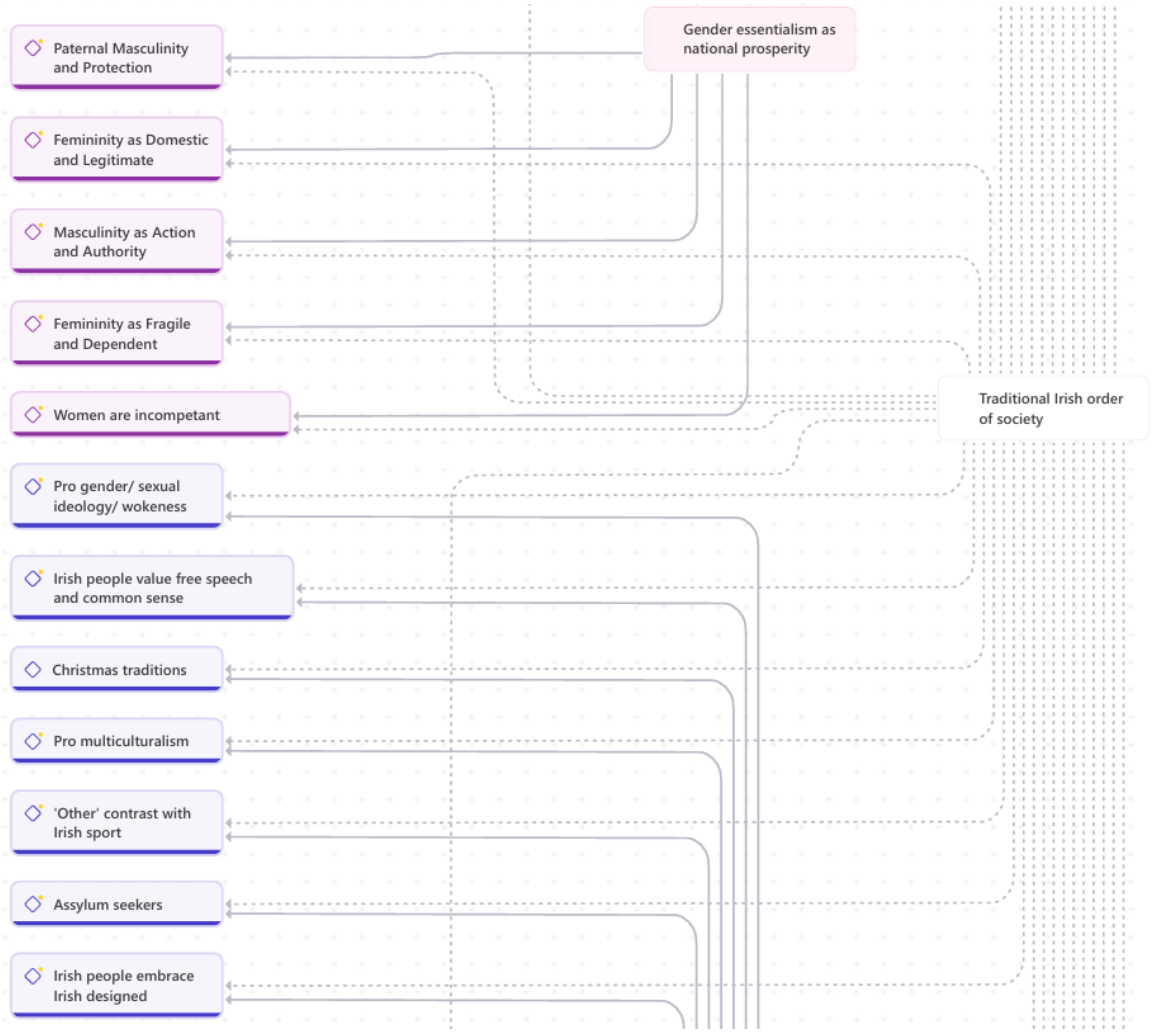
Appendix F

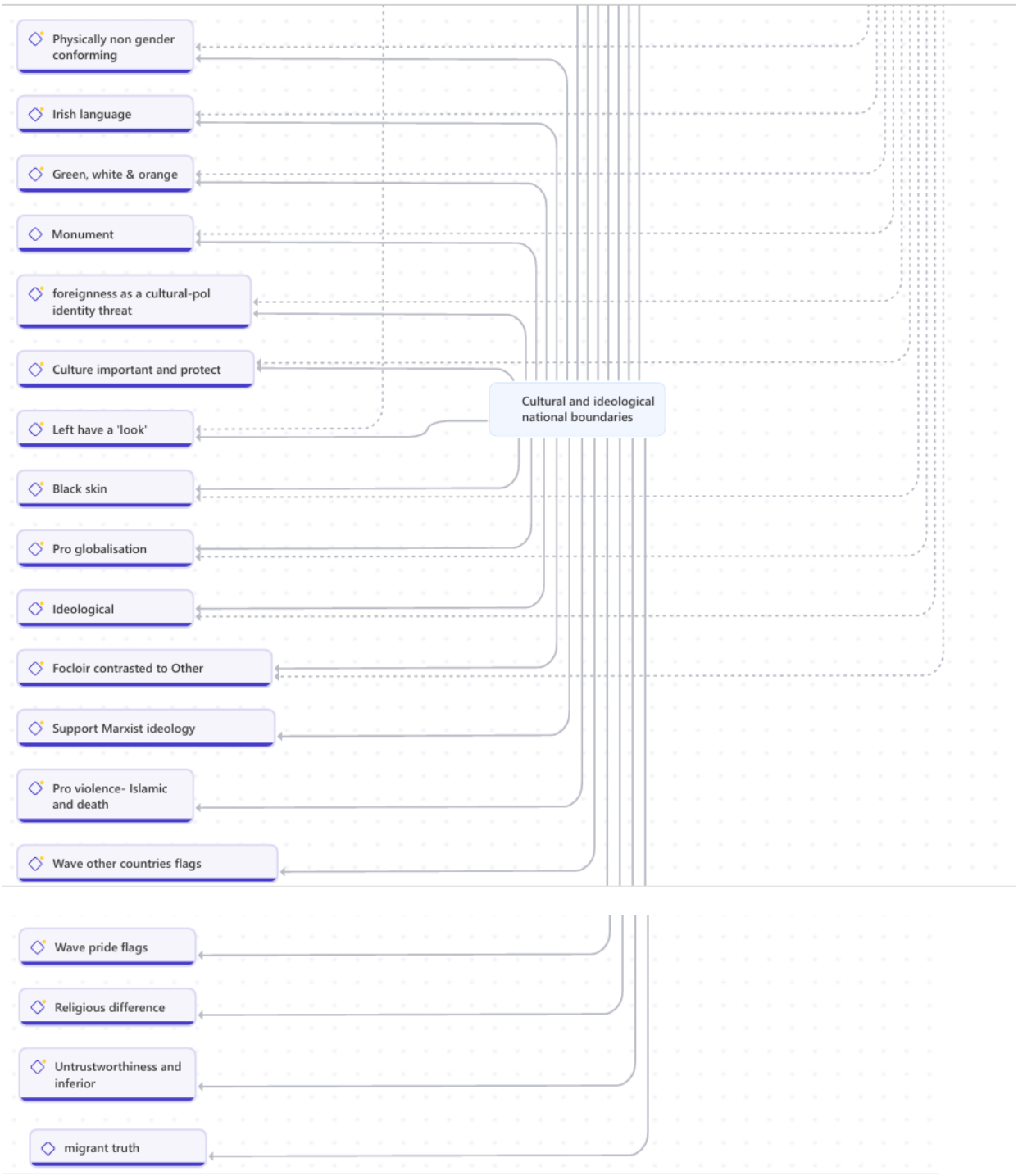
Complete coding tree




Physical Invasion and Racial Threat to Irish
Irish people as an ethnicity
Anti england
Government powerful and dangerous
Bring emigrated back
Gardai too forceful
Threaten soverign borders and nation
Freedom fighters and patriots
Illegit media and left non gender
Foreign Male Bodies as Hypervisible and Deviant
Nationalist revival fight
Irish people have an inherent attachment to place of river, land, forest
Remembering independence
Generational and heritage importance


Heteronormative white family as microcosmos
Indoctrination...
Vulnerable Girl / Innocent Child
Irish Family discriminated
The Queer Family as a Moral and Ideologi...
Nation and family Must Defend Children
The Heteronormative Family as an Ideal Type
The Foreign Family as a Racial and Religious Threat
Material Insecurity of the Irish Family
Pro-Life and Anti-Abortion
Men are ignorant and contradictory
Women boundaries of culture
Masculinity as Aggressive Vitality


Gender essentialism as national prosperity
Traditional Irish order of society
Paternal Masculinity and Protection
Femininity as Domestic and Legitimate
Masculinity as Action and Authority
Femininity as Fragile and Dependent
Women are incompetant
Pro gender/ sexual ideology/ wokeness
Irish people value free speech and common sense
Christmas traditions
Pro multiculturalism
'Other' contrast with Irish sport
Assylum seekers
Irish people embrace Irish designed


Physically non gender conforming
Irish language
Green, white & orange
Monument
foreignness as a cultural-pol identity threat
Culture important and protect
Left have a 'look'
Black skin
Pro globalisation
Ideological
Focloir contrasted to Other
Support Marxist ideology
Pro violence- Islamic and death
Wave other countries flags
Cultural and ideological national boundaries
Wave pride flags
Religious difference
Untrustworthiness and inferior
migrant truth