The "Soul-Destroying" Release from Prison into the Void: A "Walking Map" Highlighting Some of the Systemic Drivers of the Prison-Homelessness "Swinging Door" in the Republic of Ireland

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> It was clear to me on my first night out of prison that they really don't care or believe in rehabilitation! If they do, it's a funny set up they have.
>
> – O'Rourke (2022, p. 4)

INTRODUCTION

In response to the special call for papers issued by the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons* on incarceration and homelessness, our contribution from Ireland seeks to highlight through Paul's recent lived experience of homelessness after prison some of the structural drivers which fuel the mechanism of the 'swinging door' (Carey et al., 2022) in Ireland. We, the three co-authors of this article, are a small group of collaborators with vastly different experiences, yet shared interests in the feedback loop between prison and homelessness in the Irish, as well as other, contexts.

Paul was released from prison in Ireland at the age of 39 in February 2021 after serving a 45-month sentence for heroin possession. In prison, Paul managed to get completely clean from all substances for the first time in his life and also gained an education. In the middle of a housing crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, Paul was released from prison into a homeless hostel with drug use all around him. Paul managed to avoid relapse and secure housing after 10 months of being homeless, yet this spell of homelessness after prison has made him question the rehabilitative aims of Irish penal policy. Paul and Katharina, a criminologist at University College Cork, met as co-researchers on the Clean Slate project – a participatory action research project which sought to better understand life after prison in Cork City. As part of this project, which used "mobile criminology" (O'Neill et al., 2020) as part of its research methods, Paul designed a walking tour through Cork City, entitled "Walk of Hopelessness and Happiness". The stops of Paul's walking map take us on the walks which Paul would usually take while staying in the homeless hostel after prison and his observations made along the route help us to better understand some of the structural drivers of homelessness after prison in Ireland. Ute, a soon to be PhD Criminology

student returned to education as a mature student and for her undergraduate research looked at how vastly differently housing after prison is organized in Cork City compared to Hamburg, Germany.

Combining all of our interests and experiences, we are presenting this article through a discussion of Paul's walking map, not only to capture his personal experiences of homelessness after prison, but to understand how his experience of homelessness is situated in the context of broader structural and systemic drivers. In addition, Paul's observations of street life while being homeless after prison allow us to get a better understanding of some of the underlying drivers of the prison-homelessness link in the Irish context.

We begin our article by providing the international reader with some context on the challenges of homelessness after incarceration in Ireland. Then, we take the reader through Paul's walking map and in particular focus on the following three themes which we argue are deeper systematic drivers in fuelling the prison-homelessness swinging door in Ireland: rehabilitation as an imaginary (Carlen, 2008) in the absence of a right to housing; neo-liberal neglect (De Giorgi, 2017) in a European context; and the changing faces of homelessness and the disposability of bodies through the invisibility of data. These three themes might seem overly pessimistic, yet as the readers will see, Paul also describes moments of joy and hope when walking the streets after being released into homelessness after prison. This not only shows Paul's personal strength in overcoming the adversity of being homeless after prison, but is also a testament to the hopefulness underpinning our motivation to jointly write this contribution. In Paul's own words, we are offering this contribution "in a hope to open people's minds and make them more aware of the challenges that people face when released from prison and no place to go only homelessness and homeless shelters" (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 6).

The reader will notice that throughout this article, just as here, we quote Paul's words directly. The three authors of this article have selected these quotes from Paul's longer digital essay which he has written as part of his work on the Clean Slate Cork project and which accompanied the walking tour he designed around Cork City. We decided to leave these quotes in, rather than re-write them for the purpose of this publication, as they emerged in the process of walking and in conversations with our research group.

HOMELESSNESS AFTER IMPRISONMENT IN IRELAND

At the time of writing this article, Ireland is facing a severe housing crisis, with an official record of 11,754 people being homeless or in emergency accommodation as of January 2023 (Bowers, 2023). Making matters worse, those facing 'houselessness', insecure or inadequate living arrangements are not included in these official homelessness statistics (White, 2023). Compared to some other European countries such as Finland, Germany, Portugal, or Sweden, Ireland does not have a "constitutional or legally established right to housing" (Housing Rights Watch, 2013). Ireland's contentious relationship with housing can be traced back to right-wing neoliberal thinking of the 1980s (Hearne, 2022, p. 33), which to the present day prioritizes private investors and markets over public investment in housing and housing as a human right. As a result, rental prices in the private market have been driven up by a chronic undersupply of housing, a temporary COVID-19 related eviction ban was lifted in March 2023 in favour of property owners and a derelict housing stock remains underregulated, all further exacerbating the current wave of Irish homelessness.

Coupled with a patchworked approach to reintegration supports after prison (IPRT, 2019), it is not difficult to see how this chronic lack of housing fuels competition between people in need of a home (Caden, 2023). People with limited financial resources, no stable employment and/or a criminal record cannot compete in this race of securing accommodation. As Carey and colleagues (2022, p. 47) explain when talking about their housing experiences after incarceration in Australia and the United States, "the 'scarlet letter' of a criminal conviction was enough to override an application that was already approved, the security of 6 months' rent in advance, and the fact that we may need to move my mother-in-law to another complex; all this even though the conviction was over 27 years old!". In Ireland, local authorities in charge of social housing lists, are known to routinely use the reason of 'estate management' to defer applications of persons with criminal convictions, particularly drug-related offences (Clean Slate Cork, 2023; Mercy Law Resource Centre, 2017; University College Cork, 2022), in addition to the lack of "responsive(ness) to the needs of members of the public" (FLAC Free Legal Advice Centres, 2020).

The experience of homelessness after prison cannot be understood without considering the overall profile of who ends up behind bars in Ireland. The Irish prison population, especially compared to the North American context appears to be very small at approximately 4,500 incarcerated persons. However, historically, these figures were much lower and have more than quadrupled since the 1970s (IPRT, 2022a, 2022c). At the time of writing, and despite decades of calls by reformers to reduce the use of prisons other than as an option of last resort (Department of Justice, 2022, p. 6), Irish prisons are faced with overcrowding, resulting in prisoner cell-sharing and stretched rehabilitative services (IPRT, 2022b). Readers might not be surprised that just as in other countries, persons from poor neighbourhoods, disproportionate levels of early adversity in their lives and ethnic minorities are disproportionately found in Irish prisons (for a discussion on who the people in Irish prisons are, see Lonergan, 2011). For example, the IPRT noted in 2018 that persons in prison presented with a very high degree of educational disadvantage with over three quarters (80%) being early school leavers. Despite Irish penality often being described as "welfarist" (Rogan, 2011, p. 210) or "pastoral" (Brangan, 2021), Irish prisons function as holding places of social problems of largely poor people who have tried to numb their socially situated traumas with drugs and addiction (Cambridge et al., 2022; Cannon *et al.,* 2019). In the absence of a strong welfare state, Irish prisons are implicitly expected to deal with unresolved societal challenges including poverty (CSO, 2023), mental health (Mental Health Commission, 2022), homelessness (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2022), and addiction (Health Research Board, 2022).

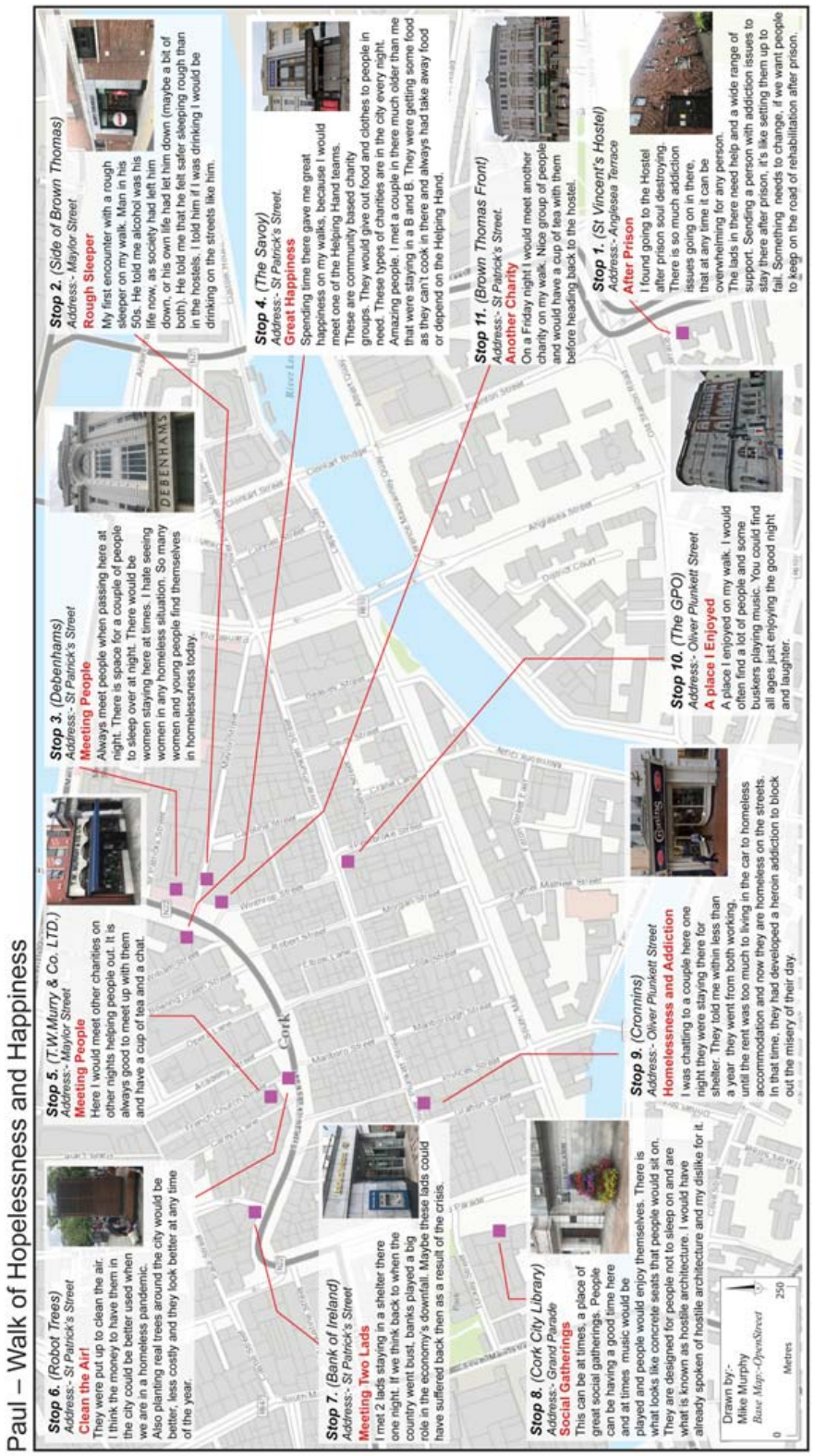
Officially, 'rehabilitation' (the term used routinely by policy makers), is at the centre of Irish prison policy, including a variety of offerings around psychological and educational services, addiction counselling and work training to name a few (IPS, 2023). Relatively recent reforms such as the introduction of Integrated Sentence Management, a so-called Community Return Scheme, and a variety of resettlement services delivered in collaboration with the Probation Services and voluntary sector organizations further aim to support reintegration after prison. Nevertheless, we know from research that the professed rehabilitative ideals of Irish prisons often fall short of their stated goals due to being under-resourced, overstretched and not transparently organized and communicated (Conroy, 2023; Mountjoy Visiting Committee, 2020; O'Donnell, 2020). Also, rehabilitative interventions can by design

not be sufficient when one has to return "to an environment characterised by unstable housing, negligible employment prospects, poor family and community ties, and antisocial peers" (O'Donnell, 2020, p. 87). Recidivism rates of around 50% within one year after release from prison (CSO, 2022) and an even higher rate after three years upon release (60%), are evidence of the challenges of 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration'.

Despite the lack of precise evidence as to the "bi-directional association between homelessness and imprisonment" (Bashir et al., 2021, p. 459) the contribution of the lack of housing to the ominous 'revolving door' has long been acknowledged in Irish civil society (McCann, 2003) and by Irish policymakers more recently as well (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 26). Carey and colleagues' (2022, p. 38) term "swinging door" outlined in this journal in 2022 might in fact be more apt, as it emphasizes the force and helplessness of rotating between homelessness and prison.

In 2021, the Interagency Group for a Fairer and Safer Ireland noted that post-release access to housing and shortage of accommodation were concerning, stating that: "the housing option is only identified within days or hours of release and the accommodation option offered is temporary accommodation or the Housing Assistance Payment for the prisoner to self-accommodate" (IPRT, 2021). This means that without having an address (in advance), supports and payments such as healthcare or addiction treatment cannot be organized. In addition, we know from some older Irish data that just under 70% of people imprisoned have already been homeless at a young age, but that just under 40% of people being released without pre-arranged accommodation never experienced homelessness preceding incarceration (Seymour & Costello 2005, cited in Bashir et al., 2021, p. 457; 459), making imprisonment a further risk factor for homelessness.

Access to housing after prison is constrained by the lack of an overall statutory right to housing and the endemic shortage of housing in Ireland described earlier (Housing Rights Watch, 2013). Transitional housing opportunities in Ireland are scarce to non-existent. So far, it is only available on a pilot basis and persons leaving prison are in strong competition with other homeless persons for access to transitional housing (Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, JCFJ, 2012). The most recent Housing Strategy, the so-called "Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022 – 2026", dedicates a section specifically to "Housing First and the Criminal Justice System"


Paul – Walk of Hopelessness and Happiness
Stop 6. (Robot Trees)
Address:- St Patrick's Street
Clean the Air!
They were put up to clean the air. I think the money to have them in the city could be better used when we are in a homeless pandemic. Also planting real trees around the city would be better, less costly and they look better at any time of the year.
Stop 7. (Bank of Ireland)
Address:- St Patrick's Street
Meeting Two Lads
I met 2 lads staying in a shelter there one night. If we think back to when the country went bust, banks played a big role in the economy's downfall. Maybe these lads could have suffered back then as a result of the crisis.
Stop 8. (Cork City Library)
Address:- Grand Parade
Social Gatherings
This can be at times, a place of great social gatherings. People can be having a good time here and at times music would be played and people would enjoy themselves. There is what looks like concrete seats that people would sit on. They are designed for people not to sleep on and are what is known as hostile architecture. I would have already spoken of hostile architecture and my dislike for it.
Stop 5. (T.W.Murry & Co. LTD.)
Address:- Maylor Street
Meeting People
Here I would meet other charities on other nights helping people out. It is always good to meet up with them and have a cup of tea and a chat.
Stop 3. (Debenhams)
Address:- St Patrick's Street
Meeting People
Always meet people when passing here at night. There is space for a couple of people to sleep over at night. There would be women staying here at times. I hate seeing women in any homeless situation. So many women and young people find themselves in homelessness today.
Stop 9. (Cronins)
Address:- Oliver Plunkett Street
Homelessness and Addiction
I was chatting to a couple here one night they were staying there for shelter. They told me within less than a year they went from both working, until the rent was too much to living in the car to homeless accommodation and now they are homeless on the streets. In that time, they had developed a heroin addiction to block out the misery of their day.
Stop 10. (The GPO)
Address:- Oliver Plunkett Street
A place I Enjoyed
A place I enjoyed on my walk. I would often find a lot of people and some buskers playing music. You could find all ages just enjoying the good night and laughter.
Stop 2. (Side of Brown Thomas)
Address:- Maylor Street
Rough Sleeper
My first encounter with a rough sleeper on my walk. Man in his 50s. He told me alcohol was his life now, as society had left him down, or his own life had let him down (maybe a bit of both). He told me that he felt safer sleeping rough than in the hostels. I told him if I was drinking I would be drinking on the streets like him.
Stop 4. (The Savoy)
Address:- St Patrick's Street.
Great Happiness
Spending time there gave me great happiness on my walks, because I would meet one of the Helping Hand teams. These are community based charity groups. They would give out food and clothes to people in need. These types of charities are in the city every night. Amazing people. I met a couple in there much older than me that were staying in a B and B. They were getting some food as they can't cook in there and always had take away food or depend on the Helping Hand.
Stop 11. (Brown Thomas Front)
Address:- St Patrick's Street.
Another Charity
On a Friday night I would meet another charity on my walk. Nice group of people and would have a cup of tea with them before heading back to the hostel.
Stop 1. (St Vincent's Hostel)
Address:- Anglesea Terrace
After Prison
I found going to the Hostel after prison soul destroying. There is so much addiction issues going on in there, that at any time it can be overwhelming for any person. The lads in there need help and a wide range of support. Sending a person with addiction issues to stay there after prison, it's like setting them up to fail. Something needs to change, if we want people to keep on the road of rehabilitation after prison.
DEBENHAMS
Cork
Drawn by:-
Mike Murphy
Base Map:-OpenStreet
0
Metres
250

(Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 9; 26). The policy commits to shifting from a "treatment-first" approach, which expects individuals to engage in substance abuse and addiction treatment in order to be declared "ready" for housing to a "housing-led" approach at first sight (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2021, p. 10). Despite these good intentions, it remains to be seen whether they are effectively resourced and will make a difference to persons upon their release from prison.

Having outlined the context of homelessness and incarceration in the Irish context, we now turn to Paul's "walk of hopelessness and happiness", which he designed based on his experience of being released into a homeless shelter in 2021, with the hope of raising awareness on the lived experience of homelessness after prison. Paul's insights, while impactful in its own right, have much broader resonance. We have selected three larger themes under which some of his observations can be summarized and which connect the lived experience of homelessness after prison with underlying systemic drivers.

REINTEGRATION AS AN IMAGINARY: RELEASED INTO THE VOID

Paul's first stop on his walking tour of "hopelessness and happiness", starts with his memory of being released into a homeless hostel after prison: "Sending a person with addiction issues to stay there (in a homeless hostel) after prison, it's like setting them up to fail. Something needs to change, if we want people to keep on the road of rehabilitation after prison" (O'Rourke, 2022, p.1).

Paul's struggle with drugs and alcohol and being homeless for many years led to engagement with crime in order to survive on the street. This meant that he was stigmatized for sleeping rough by local authorities and "processed for offences that may otherwise have been ignored" (McGinley, 2014). I, Paul, recall that not having a 'fixed abode' and being unable to provide an address, I was "now classed as homeless, so you get no social welfare payment (see also: Citizens Information Board, 2019). No cash leads to the only way you know how to get money, this is through crime!" (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 1).

After a sentence of 45 months in prison for heroin possession, I got released in February 2021. It was a blessing to be sent to prison, as I do not think I would have lasted much longer on the outside. I got into education in prison and it did me the world of good. I never did any growing up and I always struggled in school. Education in prison was great, and the education unit and teachers in Portlaoise prison were fantastic to me. I wanted to carry on with my learning and education when I got out. As I spoke with the probation service while in prison, I was assured that on my release I would be put in a place of my own or in a sober living environment. I was relieved as I thought that this would help me carry on with my education. I knew that homeless hostels are overflowing with every drug on the planet and I did have a fetish for all types of substances.

However, just before I was released, I was told that I had to stay in the St. Vincent's Hostel, one of the largest male homeless hostels in the country, located in Cork City. To me, a recovering addict, this was soul destroying! My chances of relapsing and reoffending suddenly increased. I did not want to leave prison. On my last night when I was packing up my belongings, I just broke down and cried. People do not realize how bad these hostels are. It just did not make sense to me (it still does not!) that this is all that is available to me and others getting out of prison. I remember my first night in St. Vincent's Hostel stepping over a person lying on the floor, high on drugs. From my own experience, I knew that that person had probably suffered unforgiving trauma in life and was using heroin to help him ease the pain. The help was not there for him. The staff in the hostel are not trained to deal with the many complex issues people have and I do understand that they can only do so much. They need help and the staff is equally suffering. Everyone is set up to fail. In the cubicle of the toilet, there was tinfoil with heroin ready to use (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 3). This place is an "addict's heaven", I thought to myself. The shower areas, well maybe it's safer just not to use them, and when you do use them, a lot of the times the water was cold. Fellas in there would break the showers. Many of them had serious mental health problems and needed help that was not given to them. At that time, I was thinking:

> This is the plan and blueprint from the Government, probation service and housing service for a person to stay sober and not re-offend. I understand we are all adults and have to take responsibility for ourselves, but surely there can and must be another plan in place for people. The system that is currently in place is broken! (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 3).

That was my first night and for the next ten months while I was there, it got a lot worse. It was clear to me on my first night out of prison that our government and society really do not care or believe in rehabilitation! If they do, it is a funny set up they have. When I was released from prison, I was 39 years old with a desire to change my path in life. I got accepted into a College of Further Education for a course in social studies, but I had to delay my start date since a hostel environment did not provide a calm study space. I was aware at the time that I had to study harder than others and needed a high level of concentration, which the living arrangements did not supply (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 5).

Pat Carlen (2012) reminds us that if terms such as reintegration remain nothing less than an empty signifier, they might as well be termed 'imaginary'. Importantly, according to Carlen (2012), reintegration remains imaginary if it cannot specify what prisoners are reintegrating into. Paul's recollections of his release experience from prison in 2021 are prime examples of how such imaginary reintegration reverberates in a person's very being. Releasing people into homelessness and not offering people a safe place to live means that abstaining from crime can be difficult, marked by obstacles, hindrances and a return to the prison environment. Can you blame people if they return to drinking and drugs to numb the pain of the day and the pain of the life they find themselves in?

THE LEGACY OF NEOLIBERAL NEGLECT

Current Irish responses to homelessness are underpinned by a minimal understanding of structural inequalities (Adshead & Millar, 2003). As in other areas of Irish social policy, weight is placed upon the responsibility of the individual or a "hegemonic construction of social deservingness and un-deservingness" (De Giorgi, 2018, p. 20). De Giorgi noted during his study of previously incarcerated persons in Oakland, California that "widespread public neglect, institutional indifference, and programmatic abandonment of these marginalized populations by both the social and the penal arm of the state" (De Giorgi, 2017, p. 92) is used as a form of inexpensive 'management strategy'. A lack of investment by the State in the "lower regions of social space" (Wacquant, 2010, p. 197) such as homeless provision after prison or investing in a right to housing for all, means that poor people are left to fend for themselves.

We often think that with Ireland being part of the European Union, things might be better here than in other, often poorer parts of the world, but when I, Paul, reflect on my release into homelessness after prison, I am not so sure. It links back to my thoughts on my first night away from prison in a homeless shelter "they really don't care or believe in rehabilitation!" (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 4). I question whether Ireland is giving up trying to eradicate or reduce poverty and whether much of the suffering can be linked to a governmental neoliberal mindset that prioritises markets over people (Lima et al., 2022) and which reconfigures "governmental strategies of social regulation—such as … the ongoing commodification of public resources like health care, housing, education, and even punishment", splintering societal solidarity according to "class, race, ethnicity, and national origin" (De Giorgi, 2018, p. 20).

If you look closely at stop 7 of my map, the Bank of Ireland entrance in Cork's St. Patrick's Street (the main street going through Cork City) symbolizes the financialization of the Irish housing market and the profiteering of capital owners that eventually led to the collapse of the so-called Celtic Tiger in 2007. The Celtic Tiger refers to the time of a rapid economic boom from the early 1990s onwards, when Ireland left behind its position as "a relatively poor and peripheral state" and experienced a "housing and property boom" (Kitchin et al., 2012, p. 1). Concurrent with the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, the Celtic Tiger collapsed and revealed a dysfunctional banking and housing sector, which still impacts the country today. On the walks I went on while homeless after prison, I met two people outside the Bank of Ireland entrance, who explained to me how to "book a place for the night". I could not stop wondering whether maybe these lads could have suffered back then as a result of the crisis and could not recover. While banks played a big role in the economy's downfall with little punishment for bankers and other capital owners, ordinary and especially poor people have been exposed to untold damage over generations, keeping people locked in cycles of poverty. This is why I chose this walking stop, to make us think about the contrast and ongoing inequality which underlies the continuation of homelessness generally, but especially homelessness after prison. From stop 3 of my walking map, you can see that the shopfront of Debenham's lends itself to sheltered rough-sleeping. Here, I always met people when passing at night. Often, there would be homeless women staying there, which I hate to see. The steady increase in women's

homelessness over the past years in Ireland has been noted as a concern by homeless campaigners and researchers, and I am not surprised (Bretherton & Mayock, 2021; Mayock et al., 2015). Debenham's, a department store, was in the news in Ireland because it went into liquidation in 2020 and laid off thousands of workers with minimal redundancy payments. Although the homeless women sleeping rough outside Debenham's have it worse than former Debenham's workers, I could not help to think that they have both been affected by neoliberalism's thirst for profit and growth at the expense of workers and the poorest in society.

In one of the doorways, where I would stop and talk to other homeless persons, I recall talking to two men explaining to me how to "book a place" for the night or stay at shop fronts, which were regarded as very appealing or safe. One person would go and organize food from a charity, while the other person would mind the found 'space'. They explained how such arrangements avoid belongings being taken or someone else moving into that place. I have since learned that these have long been common survival practices of homeless persons in cities across the world (Hagan & McCarthy, 1998), but when you experience this first-hand, you wonder how such marginal practices can still be necessary today in a rich country such as Ireland.

Another destination on my map, stop 6, also symbolizes state neglect of poor people and I could not stop thinking about this, every time I walked past the 'robot trees', similar to city-centre-wide air purifiers, on St. Patrick's Street. These robot trees were installed in 2021 at a cost of 350,000 Euros (maintenance not included), quite ironically the same year I was released into homelessness. The trees are said to "clean the air" for citizens and there was much controversy when they were put up, because a lot of people like me thought it was a waste of money. However, I thought there was quite another symbolic displacement of homeless people going on through the installation of the robot trees. They were put up, exactly where the 'Helping Hand' charity used to supply clothes and food to people in need (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 13). As I explain below, the interaction with volunteers from the 'Helping Hand' was one of the real highlights of my days while staying in the homeless shelter for 10 months after prison. I thought it was quite harsh that they had to move on and make room for these fake trees. I saw this as harassment of the homeless population and people who offer help, and I could not help but associate the fake trees with the fakeness of today's

society. Real trees should have been planted here. Apart from visually being more appealing, robot trees are wasting money on the wrong things when pressing issues such as housing could be tackled instead.

Paul's observations on his walks that he would undertake while homeless after prison for 10 months offer important insights and reposition Paul from being a victim of a malfunctioning housing sector in Ireland upon his release from prison (and no assurances of post-release housing provision), to an astute observer and critic of homelessness in Cork City. Interweaving his own experiences of walking the city when homeless after prison, he contrasts individual incidences of homelessness with symbols of capitalist greed. We can also see from Paul's observations how the transformation of "'welfare' from a potential 'equaliser' to a regressive weapon of control with strong similarities to the nineteenth-century industrial poor law" (Hart et al., 2020, p. 104) has affected Ireland the same as many other countries, further entrenching the difference between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving'.

CHANGING FACES OF HOMELESSNESS: DISPOSABLE BODIES OR "THE LIVING DEAD"

When I, Paul, was homeless earlier back in 2003-2004, my observations of how homelessness looks were different. This was at the height of the Celtic Tiger, economically the country seemed to be doing well and there were not many of us on the streets. After being released from prison into homelessness in February 2021, however, I observed how the face of homelessness in Ireland had changed. In addition to the "feminisation of homelessness", which I have mentioned above and having spoken to people directly affected by homelessness, I tend to agree with those who call for the expansion of the definition of homelessness in Ireland (White, 2023), so that we also know about instances of couch-surfing or staying with family members, the working poor and in fact what happens with people released into homelessness after prison.

To illustrate this, consider stop 9 on my walking map, which tells the story of a couple having found shelter in the doorway of Cronin's (a menswear shop) on Oliver Plunkett Street, another busy shopping street in the centre of Cork City. The two explained to me that within less than a year they went from both working, until the steadily increasing rent became too much to afford, to living in the car to homeless accommodation and

now they are homeless on the streets. During that time, they had developed a heroin addiction to block out the misery of their day, a story that too often repeats itself in Ireland. Statistics show that in 2022 there was a 40% increase in the number of 'working poor', that is people who are working but cannot make ends meet in Ireland, confirming my observations (Social Justice Ireland, 2023). I would sometimes chat with these 'working poor', while they were queuing to receive food from the 'Helping Hand' charity.

The same goes for couples living together who have been separated for years, but who cannot afford to live apart or rent another place, especially when there are children involved. I call them, the "separated homeless". It is not difficult to imagine how such living arrangements can create anger and frustration in a household, and can lead to trauma for future generations. One might not think this has anything to do with prison, but the trauma that is created in the household, is creating future prisoners, in my view!

I also observed different age profiles when homeless after prison in 2021 compared to my earlier spell of homelessness, more teenagers and young people, as well as the older generation now presenting as homeless, always having to worry about how long they still can afford to pay for their accommodation. I recall meeting a couple in their mid-sixties living in a B&B and not being able to cook a meal. Their meals consisted of takeaways or convenience food. While they may officially count as 'housed', living in a situation where one cannot prepare one's own food reaffirms the point that there are many challenges which go beyond what official homelessness statistics show (Güntner & Harner, 2021).

Some of the people released from prison at the same time as me were also sent to the men's homeless hostel and are dead by now. In 2021, the Irish Minister of Justice and Equality confirmed in a parliamentary question session that no data is collected on people's housing pathways after prison. In the same question session, the Minister stated that incarcerated persons with no housing could apply for social housing waiting lists before being released (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022). Given the year long waiting lists for social housing and the often poorly communicated release dates, this statement beggars belief. The fact that we don't know what happens to those released from prison into homelessness, means that we are invisible. They just disappear without a trace, without having received support or after-care. Others are close to being dead and are "like something from a zombie apocalypse that I call "the living dead" (O'Rourke, 2022, p. 6). These

people never had a chance when being released into homeless shelters. The fact that no one traces what happens to people released into homelessness after prison, feels like "we don't count".

As you can see from some other stops on my map, I also recollect happy moments and memories when released from prison into homelessness. Stop 4 on the map, outside the Savoy building on St. Patrick's Street, gave me great happiness on my walks because I would meet one of the 'Helping Hand' teams. As a community-based charity, the organization would supply persons in need with clothes and meals every night. I would always have nice chats with the volunteers and others using their support. Also, stop 8 on my map is the Cork City Library on Grand Parade, which is a place with cheerful memories for me, meeting people from different walks of life, playing and listening to music, and socializing together. Despite some of these personal positive memories, the experience of being released into homelessness was very harsh and I am lucky that I managed to withstand this unnecessary adversity. But as we now consider in the concluding section, aren't better options available to us as a society?

A RIGHT TO HOUSING AFTER PRISON?

We know that life after prison and desistance from crime are complex processes with many moving parts, but housing is essential to offer "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991), in addition to basic physical security offering the space to mentally adapt to life after prison. But it is not *any* type of housing that provides this sense of security (Michels, 2019, p. 18), but one where personal living space can provide 'atmospheric' *Geborgenheit* (Marquardt, 2015, as cited in Michels, 2019, p. 18). More than just a 'feeling of security', *Geborgenheit* implies a feeling of trust, warmth or comfort, only possible to achieve without the constant pressures of 'performing' and proving the worthiness of accommodation, as sometimes associated with supervised accommodation (Michels, 2019, p. 18).

The feeling of safety and a home to call your own, is important in supporting the road to desistance. It seems therefore useful to consider whether there are better alternatives in other contexts available upon release from prison. Warner (2011, p. 106) for example praises the 'inclusive' nature of Nordic European countries where justice-involved people are

not othered, but treated as citizens with rights and where social rights, social security and solidarity are of the utmost importance. Such values model support, rather than obstruct reintegration and housing availability, which is one of the main areas receiving state investment after release from prison. In Norway, for example, a "reintegration guarantee" states that "all prisoners shall upon release, if relevant, be offered employment, further education, suitable housing accommodation, medical services, additional treatment services and debt counselling" (Ugelvik, 2016, as cited in Kiely & Swirak, 2021, p. 152). The choice of the word "guarantee", indicating unconditional support, is quite a radical departure from the "popular belief that ex-prisoners and ex-offenders should always be last in the queue for any available welfare goods whatsoever" (Carlen, 2012, p. 6). Although the Norwegian welfare guarantee is not of a legal, but of a political nature, it nevertheless "represents the intention of all the various welfare state agencies to cooperate on the common objective that is prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration" (Ugelvik, 2016, as cited in Kiely & Swirak, 2021, p. 152). In the German context, in 2019 the city-state of Hamburg introduced a legal provision called the "Hamburg Resocialisation and Victim Support Law", which provides a statutory foundation for reintegration after prison. At the centre of the law is a detailed system of integrated transition management, drawing on support from an interdisciplinary team of different public and community-based agencies and services that are coordinated by a case manager, addressing the different housing, health, employment, resident status, family support, social services, addiction supports as well as financial planning. Importantly, however, when it comes to housing, the right to housing is enshrined in German Social Law (OHCHR, 2020, p. 2), meaning that persons released from prison are legally entitled to housing. The constitutionally enshrined right to housing means that persons after prison are not recipients of 'charity', but of a right. In contrast, when the Irish Prison Service announced in 2016 that prisoners would be issued a 'medical card' that facilitates access to health services upon release from prison, this caused a huge public uproar (Armstrong, 2016). Nevertheless, the scheme is still in operation today, but prison authorities have since handled public communication more carefully. This offers a prime example of 'welfare envy', where hollowed out welfare states and neoliberal ideology more generally, set different groups of people in need of scarce resources up in competition against each other (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2018, p. 294). Because

justice-involved persons are often perceived as the least deserving in terms of entitlements to social rights, only a rights-based approach to housing and housing after prison could rectify the challenges associated with homelessness after prison. When trying to understand the 'swinging door' between incarceration and homelessness, we therefore must consider the ideologies, shape and resourcing of particular welfare state constellations.

We hope that in this essay we have shown several things. Firstly, Paul's experience of being released into homelessness after prison is a prime example of how 'post-carceral denizens' (McNeill, 2020) experience "processes of stigmatization and degradation due to their social status" (Arnall & McNeill, 2023, p. 16). Paul's reaction and emotional despair to being released not only into the void of homelessness after prison, but into a homeless hostel with known drug problems, risking his years of hard work and his future, shows how deeply the lack of housing rights provision affects people. Policy makers and society as a whole should understand and not allow themselves to live in a "state of denial" (Cohen, 2001) as to how the lack of institutional and legal frameworks, as well as the lack of resources, have personally devastating effects. Paul's lived experience of homelessness after prison, is also completely contradictory to any officially stated goals of rehabilitation and sets individuals up for failure.

Secondly, Paul's walking map offers recognition of his adversity and pain, but also of joy and resilience, and therefore glimpses of hope even in desperate situations. But more than that, we hope to have shown that persons who experience homelessness after prison can at the same time be astute observers and critical analysts of the deeper forces at play driving the lived experience of homelessness after prison. Paul repositions himself from a victim of a malfunctioning housing sector in Ireland to an insightful observer and critic of homelessness in Cork City. Interweaving his own experiences of walking the city when homeless after prison, he contrasts individual incidences of homelessness with symbols of late capitalist greediness.

In our contemporary supposedly 'meritocratic' cultures, undue responsibility is often placed on the individual and blame is attributed more easily to individual failure, rather than more systemic issues (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2022; Ward, 2021). Sometimes, people with 'lived experience' of having overcome challenges, such as being homeless after prison, are used as 'proof' of extraordinary resilience and that 'everything is possible, if one only tries hard enough'. Yet, Paul's reflections on homelessness after prison

refuse to fall into this trap, as he uses his personal experiences to highlight some of the systemic drivers of homelessness, rather than to emphasize the luck or resilience of a chosen few who were able to overcome and withstand what are fundamentally structural injustices.

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