Full Length Article

Not "proper" foreign national prisoners: Irish ex-prisoner reflections on imprisonment in England and Wales

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Abstract
Irish prisoners are one of the oldest minority groups and one of the most represented foreign national groups in the prison system, yet little is known about their experiences of imprisonment in England and Wales. This article presents findings from 29 semi-structured interviews with Irish ex-prisoners who were asked to reflect on their time in prison in England and Wales. It utilises Ugelvik and Damsa's findings on foreign national prisoner experiences in Norway as related to discrimination, long-distance relationships, and deportability as a point of analysis. This paper shows that Irish prisoners suffer the pains of discrimination through racism, bullying, and discrimination from prisoners and prison officers, and there are concerns over mistreatment by prison officers who are ex-military. There are also difficulties associated with family contact. As Irish prisoners are not subject to deportation, except in the most exceptional circumstances, and since there is no language barrier, this paper suggests that Irish prisoners might not seen as "proper" foreign nationals in the prison system. This may result in Irish prisoners being somewhat invisible in the prison system in England and Wales and in some cases having their nationality and national identity denied.

Keywords
ethnicity, identity, prisoners, offender management, discrimination

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Introduction

Irish prisoners are one of the oldest and most represented foreign national prisoner (FNP) groups within the prison system in England and Wales, yet they are a very under-researched proportion of the prisoner population (Gavin, 2014). Most of the research on Irish prisoners in England and Wales is dominated by that on Irish Travellers (Gavin, 2019; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP), 2020; MacGabhann, 2011, 2013) or historical accounts of Irish Republican prisoners (O'Donnell, 2012, 2015). FNPs were once referred to as the forgotten prisoners in England and Wales (Cheney, 1993; Prison Reform Trust, 2004) and Irish prisoners were described as the invisible minority (Murphy, 1994). Like all prisoners, Irish prisoners are subject to a series of deprivations, or more colloquially, pains, which are associated specifically with prison life (Sykes, 1958). Crewe (2011: 509) has noted that these pains can be divided, both conceptually and historically, "into those deriving from the inherent features of incarceration, those resulting from deliberate abuses and derelictions of duty, and those that are consequences of systemic policies and institutional practices."

   The findings in this paper are taken from the author's doctoral research (Gavin, 2017). Publications which arose from this have found that the official number of Irish prisoners in England and Wales is generally inaccurate as they are undercounted. Irish prisoners tend to suffer from depression, paranoia, isolation, and fear. Some also struggle with resettlement when they return to Ireland. It also found that Irish Travellers experience racism, discrimination and bullying from prisoners and prison staff (Gavin, 2014, 2015, 2019, 2020). This paper builds on the research undertaken by the author and others (Borland et al., 1995; Flood, 2007; Murphy, 1994) on Irish prisoners in England and Wales. It begins by reviewing the literature on FNPs and how the pains of imprisonment impact upon this group. It considers the literature on Irish prisoners in England and Wales before discussing the methodology. The findings are presented and analysed through the lens of Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) findings on the pains of "crimmigration imprisonment" in a Norwegian prison. This paper shows that Irish prisoners share some similar experiences to other FNPs, such as racism, discrimination, and separation from family. They do not, however, share uncertainty over their deportation status or suffer from a language barrier. It is argued that this has rendered them as a somewhat invisible group and not being viewed as "proper" FNPs in the prison system, in a similar fashion to Irish migrants in Britain not being seen as "proper" migrants (Hickman and Ryan, 2020).

The pains of being a foreign national prisoner

Sykes' (1958) deprivations of imprisonment are the deprivation of liberty; goods and services; heterosexual relationships; autonomy; and security. It has been suggested that these pains are an "innate, universal characteristic of imprisonment" (Shammas, 2017: 2) and the pains of imprisonment are best understood through categories of depth, weight, tightness, and breadth (Crewe, 2011).

Deep imprisonment refers to the experience of being far away from the surface of freedom. The weight of imprisonment refers to the psychological onerousness of the prison experiences. In heavy prisons, everyday life feels like a burden on prisoners' shoulders. Where prisoners feel they are treated more humanely and fairly, the experience is lighter. The tightness of a prison is associated with the changes in it as well as the softening of modern penal power. Finally, the breadth of imprisonment describes the dispersal of disciplinary mechanisms within civil society, including the rate of recall to prison and the level of post-release surveillance by penal agents. The pains, weight, depth, tightness, and breadth of imprisonment are typically experienced by all prisoners, whether they are an FNP or not.

FNPs in England and Wales are generally considered to be prisoners who have no absolute right to remain in the country and who do not hold a UK passport (Parole Board, 2020; Prison Reform Trust, 2021). On 30 June 2021, there were 9815 FNPs held in custody and Immigration Removal Centres, representing 13% of the total prison population of England and Wales (Sturge, 2021). In recent years the position of the FNP is one which has become "doubly damned, as an ungrateful, "bad" migrant, whose very existence threatens the community of value" (Griffiths, 2017, cited in O'Nions, 2020: 2). They are regularly disregarded within the criminal justice system (Barnoux and Wood, 2013; Bhui, 2009), despite having been cast as scapegoats to take a great deal of blame for crime and other social ills in England and Wales (Canton and Hammond, 2012), and according to Griffiths (2017: 531, in O'Nions, 2020) foreign national offenders are punished more severely than their British counterparts. FNPs are classed as a vulnerable group in need of protection (Cooney, 2013) and contemporary discussions on the pains of imprisonment are "shaped by prisoners' mobility, identity and nationality" (Bosworth et al., 2016: 701). FNPs suffer multiple pains of imprisonment beyond the traditional Sykesian perspective. These are exacerbated by issues relating to language, family contact, concerns of over immigration and deportation, as well as different cultural tastes, religious and ethnic needs, healthcare, and discrimination (Bhui, 2009; Croux et al., 2021; Harris, 2015; HMIP, 2006, 2007; Martynowicz, 2018; Richards et al., 1995a, 1995b; Sen et al., 2021, Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018).

The language barrier has been described as the one problem which exacerbates all others faced by FNPs (Bhui, 2009), and for many this has resulted in them being in a prison within a prison (Richards et al., 1995a). Language difficulties are linked with isolation, information about the prison, legal services, food, immigration, health, respect, culture, and ethnicity (Croux et al., 2021; HMIP, 2006), and may result in FNPs missing out on basic provisions such as showering, canteen and visitation, as they may not understand staff instructions. According to Croux et al. (2021) the language barrier can create a pain of non-participation in areas such as education, work, sport activities and worship. Warr (2016) found that the language barrier contributed to a deprivation of certitude, where prisoners must contend with the criminal justice system as well as complex immigration policy and law. Forms must be completed in English and returned within a short period of time, and with access to formal translation services limited, many are forced to

rely on informal peer translators, who often have little more knowledge of the systems in place than those they are trying to help (Warr, 2016). FNPs are likely to receive fewer family visits than domestic prisoners (Richards et al., 1995a) and HMIP (2006) found that when compared to the general prisoner population, twice as many foreign nationals did not know what their visit entitlement was. Difficulties associated with family visits can include the distance and cost of travelling from abroad, issues over obtaining visas, elderly or infirm members of family being unable to travel, and the language barrier. Isolation, through a lack of communication or through a lack of family contact, can impact negatively on a FNPs mental health (Gavin, 2020). Language barriers can also impact on a prisoner's mental health as prison staff will often rely on information from a FNP when it comes to mental health assessments. This may result in some issues getting lost in translation which could be detrimental, as many FNPs have mental health needs that go beyond, and are different from, those experienced by the general population. A lack of mental health provision for FNPs may also be linked with what Warr (2016) referred to as the deprivation of hope. When a person loses control over their environment, such as when they are in prison, this can result in feelings of hopelessness which can result in self-harming, suicide, and suicide ideation (Gavin, 2020; Rivlin et al., 2013).

An additional punishment often experienced by FNPs is that of deportation. Under section 32 of the UK Borders Act (2007) FNPs who have received a sentence of at least 12 months can face deportation at the end of their sentence, unless they can show that their deportation would constitute a breach of their human rights (Parole Board, 2020). This decision can be made either at sentencing or by the Home Secretary at any time during sentence. The Immigration Act (2014) established that deportation was in the public interest in the case of FNPs, and it removed any need for the deporting authority to pay specific attention to the nature of the offence, the history of offending or current assessment of risk (O'Nions, 2020). Once a sentence has been completed, a foreign national can still be detained as an immigration detainee under administrative powers pending deportation. However, immigration and prison systems generally work on very different timeframes, and deportation can occur immediately or months after the prison sentence is completed. A lack of certainty in this area can prove problematic for FNPs (HMIP, 2006, 2007). At the end of March 2021, 941 people were still held in prison under immigration powers, despite having completed their custodial sentence (Prison Reform Trust, 2021).

Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) study on FNPs in Norway found many who felt they suffered pains of imprisonment related to discrimination, long-distance relationships, and deportability. In the context of discrimination, they identified four connected concerns raised by prisoners: the first was that prisoners viewed the practice of being placed in an all-foreign national prison as illegitimate. Secondly, officers at the foreign national prison were sometimes said to be racist. Third, prisoners claimed that the prison and welfare system decision-making processes were biased against them, and fourth, some saw their detention as involving an additional deprivation of rights, which went beyond the traditional deprivations associated

with imprisonment. FNPs also found maintaining long-distance relationships next to impossible. They were worried about the financial situation that their family was in, and many wanted to simply get home as quickly as possible. Finally, they examined the impact that deportation had on prisoners. Some were more than willing to serve the remainder of their sentence in their home country so they could be nearer to family. Many were frustrated due to the uncertainty surrounding their deportation, while others tried to ignore the world outside of prison as best they could.

Irish prisoners in England and Wales

Irish prisoners are perhaps the oldest minority group likely to be found in the prison system (Borland et al., 1995; Gavin, 2014) and they are the fourth most represented foreign nationality in the prison system, after Albanians, Poles and Romanians (Sturge, 2021). On 30 June 2021 the prison population in England and Wales stood at 78,324. Of this figure, there were 617 prisoners whose nationality was recorded as Irish and Irish prisoners represent 6% of the FNP population (Sturge, 2021). Any quantification of Irish prisoners is likely to be an underestimate, as Northern Irish prisoners are not counted as Irish by prison authorities and second-generation Irish may not identify as Irish to avoid anti-Irish racism (Tilki et al., 2009). Traditionally, the Irish have been ignored in the context of studies of ethnic minorities and the criminal justice system (Cheney, 1993; Hickman and Walter, 1997). This was demonstrated in research on FNPs in England and Wales undertaken by Richards et al. (1995a; 1995b) in which one of the criteria for inclusion in their study was that prisoners were not from the Republic of Ireland. This raises an interesting question: why would research on FNP not include prisoners from Ireland? Reasons for the omission were not provided in either paper, but if an FNP is a person who has no absolute right to remain in the country and who does not hold a UK passport (as stated earlier), we should consider how these factors impact upon Irish prisoners.

There is a Common Travel Area in place between Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man which facilitates the ability of Irish and British citizens to move freely between jurisdictions. Flowing from this right are associated reciprocal rights and privileges that are enjoyed by British citizens in Ireland, and Irish citizens in the UK. These include access to employment, healthcare, all levels of education, and social benefits on the same basis as citizens of the other State, as well as the right to vote in local and national parliamentary elections. As a result of the Common Travel Area, it is reasonable to state that Irish citizens have an absolute right to remain in England and Wales. Consequently, Irish prisoners can only be deported from England and Wales in very exceptional circumstances (The Parole Board, 2020) and they are typically treated as a special case to reflect the close historical and social ties between the United Kingdom and Ireland (Harvey, 2007).

The issue of passports relates closely with nationality. There may be prisoners who hold dual nationality from the UK and Ireland. This is relevant for those prisoners who are first or second generation Irish, who have at least one parent or

grandparent who is Irish and are entitled to both Irish citizenship and an Irish pass-port. When prisoners arrive at prison reception, for counting and registration pur-poses they are asked their place of birth, and this is used to list their nationality. For example, if a person's place of birth is Belfast, their nationality will be listed as British. This may be despite their desire to identify and be recognised as an Irish national. The issue of nationality and identity is especially relevant for prisoners who are from Northern Ireland, where nationality and identity have been increas-ingly conflated (Garry and McNicholl, 2015). Many of this group may identify as being Irish, yet for counting purposes they are British. Under Article 1 (iv) of the Good Friday Agreement, it is "the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose."

Unless prisoners arrive at prison reception with a passport, such matters might not always be straightforward, and prison officers sometimes rely upon questionable racialized markers such as accent and appearance (Bosworth, 2017) to determine nationality. Prison Service Instruction 21/2007 (2007, cited in MacGabhann, 2011: 79) states that "it is important for the effective management of foreign national prisoners that the correct nationality of a prisoner is established as early as possible." However, simply reducing a person's sense of identity to their place of birth can be counter-productive and "there are dangers in inferring that a country of birth gives valid reflection of how people choose to describe themselves" (Pearson et al., 1991, cited in Garrett, 2004: 9). This was reiterated in a report by the Taskforce on Policy Regarding Emigrants (2002), which stated that for many second and subsequent generation Irish there is a desire to have their Irish identity properly acknowledged in Ireland and where they have grown up. Given these com-plexities it should be noted that a person's place of birth is not the only way in which to define Irish populations (Walter et al., 2002) and to perceive only Irish born as possessing a real or authentic Irish identity is simply wrong.

Methodology

The overall research sample was made up of 29 Irish non-Travellers and 8 Irish Travellers, 34 male and 3 female, all of whom were ex-prisoners. Irish Traveller experiences are omitted from this paper for the simple reason that to include them as a subgroup of Irish prisoners is to do them a great injustice. They are a distinct group within the prison system and their experiences should be documented as such. The findings on Irish Travellers from this research included allegations of racism, discrimination and bullying from both prison staff and other prisoners and can be found in Gavin (2019). The sample number considered in this paper is there-fore 29.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken between 2015 and 2016 with 29 Irish ex-prisoners within two years of their release from prison in England and Wales. Prior to the commencement of the research, ethical approval was sought and approved by the relevant ethics committees. Purposeful and convenience sam-pling was used to identify and select participants. To select potential participants,

charities and advocacy groups who work with Irish prisoners and ex-prisoners were contacted and asked to act as intermediaries. The research project was explained in detail to them, and this allowed these groups to be satisfied of my legitimacy as a researcher. These groups then contacted clients who they felt might be interested in participating and if they would be happy for me to contact them. The aims of the research were explained to participants in detail and there was constant emphasis on the voluntary nature and the potential to withdraw from the research at any time. The importance of these initial conversations cannot be overstated, as they allowed me to build a sense of rapport with participants and allowed them to place me within what has been described as "a localised Irish context" (Ryan and Golden, 2006: 1191). Upon reflection I have no doubt that being Irish greatly assisted with many people agreeing to participate in this research.

Interviews took place at the convenience of participants, in locations which they selected and felt safe in. A participant-led interview style was used and non-directive probing questions were used to encourage respondents to provide clarifying information without influencing their answers. Interviews could be said to have adopted a Bourdieusien approach, whereby each interview was based on "*active and methodical listening*" whereby the interviewer, "through *forgetfulness of self*, aims at a true conversion of the way we look at other people in the ordinary circumstances of their lives" (Bourdieu, 1999: 609–614; emphasis in original). It is important to note that interviews may result in a blurring of the lines between perception and reality and while it is impossible to "stuff a real live person between two covers of a text" (Denzin, 1991, cited in Schmitt, 1993: 130), segments of people's lives can be described truthfully and honestly, and by doing so we may get closer to peoples actual lived experience (Miller and Glassner, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as it is generally suitable for analysing any type of qualitative data (Caulfield and Hill, 2014). It should however be noted that the findings in this paper come from a small sample (n = 29) and should not, therefore, be considered as representative of the Irish prisoner population in England and Wales.

Participants were not asked specifically about the pains of imprisonment or about discrimination in the interviews. Rather they were asked to talk about their experiences of being Irish in prison in England and Wales. Allegations of discrimination, along with bullying and racism, emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Family contact was an issue that was referred to specifically in the interviews. These findings are now presented and discussed through the lens of Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) findings on the pains of crimmigration imprisonment in Norway, where FNPs were found to experience pains related to discrimination, long-distance relationships, and deportation.

The pains of discrimination

Name calling and racist bullying were referred to by several participants in this research. Some stated that while they may not have liked it, they were able to

ignore it. For others, it was a point of contention. One participant spoke about the discrimination that he witnessed, claiming that most victims "*tended to be those with obvious Irish accents*".

I never really had any major issues except once when one screw called me Mick. I stood up for myself and said "don't you ever fucking call me Mick. Call me by my name". He never called me Mick again. (Male, 45–49)

I only had bullying once when I was called Paddy. A screw called me Paddy. She was a Senior Officer in Belmarsh. Some of the lads called me Paddy and that was grand. But she had a real attitude when she said, "what do you want Paddy?" (Male, 35–39)

Some participants noted that they were also called names by other prisoners, but this seemed to be taken more lightly.

Mostly it's the English lads calling you Paddy if they don't know your name…but not a whole lot of trouble. (Male 45–49)

Steers and jeers. Nothing major. Everyone calls you Paddy when you're Irish but this never bothered me. But its kids' stuff. Very childish. (Male, 30–34)

One participant stated that most of the name calling from other prisoners was generally "*good natured banter…but nothing I felt was offensive or discriminatory. When it came from Prison Officers, I felt it wasn't good natured but a way of belittling me*". The more serious nature of name calling by Prison Officers was a common theme. One participant alleged he was called "*an Irish bastard*" while another claimed he was called "*a Fenian bastard*". Another recalled an incident with an alcoholic "*who was frequently in and out of prison on short sentences. He was referred to as The Filthy Irish Cunt*".

I've been referred to as an Irish bastard and told to "fuck off to your own country" by some senior staff. (Male, 50+)

I've been called a Fenian bastard. They thought it was a big joke. But just "'cos it's a bit of fun for someone doesn't make it ok". (Male, 24–29)

I was denied access to a book on the history of the IRA and when I asked the PO about it he just said "I don't like fucking Fenians". I made a complaint to the governor and 12 o'clock the next day I went back and to get the book and he just threw it at me. (Male, 50+)

Borland et al. (1995) found that Irish prisoners often felt that they were victims of racism through bullying and name-calling, and this was also an issue raised by Flood (2007). This typically involves traditional English stereotyping of the Irish as "Micks" or "Paddys" who are seen to be stupid, drunk, violent, and Catholic (Garrett, 2004). The use of the word Fenian suggests that there may have been political connotations to the name calling. This is a derogatory term used to describe Irish nationalists or Catholics. Several participants referred to this and believed that it often served as a contentious issue for prison officers, given the political violence that occurred in Northern Ireland. One participant provided an interesting insight when he suggested that there is conflation between three separate groups of Irish prisoners: Irish Traveller prisoners, Irish non-Traveller prisoners, and Irish political prisoners.

You can't just be an Irish person; you have to be either a Traveller or part of the IRA. There is no such thing as just being Irish. (Male, 40–44)

Borland et al. (1995) claimed that prison authorities often incorrectly viewed Irish identity to be closely mixed up with being sympathetic to Irish Republicanism. They found that Irish prisoners often felt that they were regarded with suspicion and were more likely to see themselves as subject to tight security and close supervision. Many Irish prisoners, who could be categorised as an "ordinary decent criminal", were often treated as either being a terrorist or having terrorist sympathies. In some cases, Borland et al. (1995) suggested that "to be Irish and to be in prison was tantamount to being a potential terrorist or aider and abetter of terrorists" (382) irrespective of the offence for which that person was serving a sentence for. They also found that Irish prisoners were identified and treated as a particularly troublesome group whilst in prison, and as a result they occupied "a place within the prison culture which, deservedly or undeservedly, makes them more likely to see themselves as subject to tight security and close supervision" (391).

Allegations of racism and discrimination were made by several participants against prison officers who were ex-soldiers. They claimed this impacted on how they viewed and treated Irish prisoners. This was referred to as a "*hangover from the Troubles*" by one participant, while incidents of intimidation, mockery and being denied access to work and to books were also mentioned.

I think that a lot of screws can have a coloured view of Irish prisoners. I think a lot are former Army who've done time in Northern Ireland. They can use this to intimidate you. A lot of them thought I was in the IRA just 'cos I was Irish. I think being Irish creates its own issues. There's a hangover from the Troubles with some of the screws. (Male, 45–49)

There were also some comments from groups of officers that were ex-military, generally things that they saw as a joke, but I felt they were laughing at me, rather than with me. (Male, 24–29)

I was messed around for a job I applied for. I was told to start on Monday and then when I showed up, I was told that it went to someone else. I felt it was down to being from Belfast as the guy was ex-military. (Male, 24–29)

In 2007 the Governor of Brixton Prison admitted that he was aware of allegations of anti-Irish bias on the part of ex-soldiers but denied that it was a significant problem (Flood, 2007). According to Crawley and Crawley (2008) ex-soldiers are often lack the flexibility and are too focussed on discipline to engage with the role of the modern prison officer (also see Moran et al., 2019).

Several participants in this research alleged that their nationality and national identity were denied. The category "White Irish" has ethnic minority status on the UK census (Jivraj and Simpson, 2015), yet participants in this research noted that there were occasions where Irish prisoners were registered as British. One participant, when asking about phone credit to call his family in Ireland, claimed that a Prison Officer told him "*Ireland doesn't count because it's not a real country.*"

I've been to 8 prisons in 10 years and in that time, I've met many Irish who are actually listed as W1 prisoners or "White British". (Male, 40–44)

I found that the Irish in British prisons aren't recognised as a different cultural group with different needs. Some Irish people are classified as "White British". (Male, 40–44)

It should also be noted that not all participants viewed being Irish as a problem in prison. Some took a very pragmatic approach to how they were treated by prison officers. One participant stated:

There are plenty that will help you if you ask for it. Prison is what you make of it. Be a dummy and you will get treated as one, be normal and you will be let get on with it. (Male, 35–39)

Another noted that:

Generally being Irish wasn't an overwhelming problem in prison. (Male, 50+)

Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) finding concerning discrimination is applicable to Irish prisoners in England and Wales. Anti-Irish racism remains a cause for concern through the United Kingdom and this has been highlighted in the media (Booth, 2021; Flaherty, 2019; McGreevy, 2019; Patterson, 2020; Paul, 2019). It is not unreasonable to assume that such behaviour could be demonstrated by prisoners and prison officers. Participants in Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) study also claimed that the prison and welfare system decision making processes were biased against them. A similar issue was highlighted by some participants in this research who claimed that their applications for work or access to books in the prison was interfered with by prison officers due to their nationality. This could also be described as a form of non-participation (Croux et al., 2021). Anti-Irish discrimination amongst ex-soldiers is most likely a generational issue. As the years progress there will be fewer and fewer ex-solider prison officers who served a tour of duty in Northern Ireland (Kearney, 2014). Furthermore, given that this fieldwork was conducted between 2015 and 2016, it is likely that several hundred prison officers may have left the prison service since then. It is therefore likely that these attitudes from ex-military will dissipate quickly. However, while such attitudes are present, and whether they are racially or politically motivated, they are likely to add to the pains and weight of imprisonment as experienced by Irish prisoners in England and Wales.

Some participants in Ugelvik and Damsa's (2018) study saw their detention as involving an additional deprivation of rights, which went beyond the traditional pains associated with imprisonment. This could be similar to some Irish prisoners claiming that their status as a distinct ethnic group was not recognised. Taylor (1997: 75) argued that identity "designates something like a person's understanding of who they are … non-recognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted or reduced mode of being." Failure to recognise a person's identity can therefore be considered as being both harmful and oppressive. The Irish population in Britain have, historically, been rendered as an invisible group (Mac an Ghaill, 2001) and have often been neglected in consideration of race and cultural diversity (Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, 2000). The Irish in Britain "have not and are not seen as "proper" migrants … due to whiteness and cultural homogeneity" (Hickman and Ryan, 2020: 99). This is what Garrett (2004) refers to as "non-recognition or denial" whereby Irish people in Britain are simply perceived as part of the dominant "white" group. According to Fraser (2001) such non- or misrecognition constitutes "a form of institutionalised subordination and thus a serious violation of justice" (26).

While the introduction of the category "White Irish" in the 2001 Census was a significant development which acknowledged that "Irish identities are not simply confined to a migrant generation" (Hickman et al., 2001: 1) there were still concerns that the Irish community would be under-reported, as the term "White Irish" simply did not, and still does not, capture the complexities of Irish identities in Britain. This is even more relevant today as statistics reveal that from 2011–2016 there were increases in the numbers or Irish nationals who were Black or Black Irish, Asian or Asian Irish and Chinese or Chinese Irish (Central Statistics Office, 2021). The point is that classifying the Irish in Britain under the heading "White Irish" is unlikely to provide an accurate picture of that group. Garrett (2004) refers to this as bureaucratic or tick box recognition. This approach, while recording the ethnicity of service users, fails to allow the data generated to "impact on policy formation, practice and the manner of engagement with the Irish community" (Garrett, 2004: 135–136). Nor does it "engage with the complexity associated with personal accounts of Irish identity" (Garrett, 2004: 136). Currently, however, it is the only classification that is in place.

Historically in prisons in England and Wales, Black and Asian prisoners were the most likely victims of racism (Cheliotis and Liebling, 2006). Power (2004) notes that such attitudes are now often concealed in the case of Black and Asian prisoners due to various attempts by the Prison Service to tackle colour-based racism and discrimination. Such attitudes would have re-enforced the argument that Irish prisoners are somewhat invisible in British prisons and may even slip under the radar to some degree when it comes to racism and discrimination. Racism can also be based on nationality and is closely linked with xenophobia (United Nations, 2001) and prison officers should be made fully aware of this. While some may dismiss calling an Irish prisoner Paddy or Mick as harmless banter, the person on the receiving end of such treatment may find this deeply offensive. Gavin (2019) has noted that prison officers and prisoners now see Irish Travellers (possibly Gypsies and Roma also) as the remaining target for racist behaviour. Irish Travellers are often perceived as a criminogenic group rather than an ethnic minority and mistreatment of this group has been widely recorded (HMIP, 2020; MacGabhann, 2011; Power, 2004).

The pains of long-distance relationships

Participants had varied levels of contact with their friends and families throughout their time in prison. Some were very grateful that they had family support throughout their sentence. Maintaining contact was important for several participants, even if it was not in the form of visits. Several referred to the value of receiving letters and making telephone calls to their family. One was even able to use email while in prison. Some participants also referred to their family as a motivating factor when it came to staying out of prison in the future.

I was getting a visit nearly every other week. These are important. They give you something to look forward to. Another visit, another week over. (Female, 35–39)

I had that email a prisoner system which was great. I would get one a day from my wife. It was great to hear about what was happening every day. Even just the boring stuff. (Male, 30–34)

I would talk on the phone with them…the phone calls became like visits and I'd call at the same time every evening. (Female, 35–39)

I've worked too hard to go back. My focus is my son. I want to get to know him and have a relationship with him. That's what's keeping me clean and keeping me out. (Male, 18–23)

Others spoke about the guilt that they felt due to the strain that their incarceration placed on their family, especially in terms of the high cost of travelling from Ireland for visits. One participant expressed a great deal of guilt over his incarceration and the impact he believed it had on his children. Participants also referred to the relief that they felt when their family did not visit, as they would have felt guilty due to the logistical difficulties associated with travel, as well as having their children exposed to the prison environment.

The effect on my family weighed heavy. There was a huge financial cost and there was the guilt of what I was putting them through. (Male, 30–34)

The impact on my family was massive. My kids ended up committing crime and there is a direct link with me being inside. That haunts me. (Male, 50+)

I didn't want the kids to be in the environment of prison for visits … I didn't want prison leaking into their lives. (Male, 50+)

Some participants stated that they had little or no family contact. This was either the result of a conscious decision made by them not to have any family contact, or one associated with the logistical difficulties of travelling to see a relative in prison, especially if the family had to travel from Ireland. Such a conscious decision not to have any family contact while in prison was referred to as a "*coping mechanism*" by one participant, and another, while not using that specific term, explained this in greater detail when referring to the differences between the being inside and outside of prison, stating that "*you can't live inside and outside at the same time.*"

I didn't have a visit for five and a half years. It was simply too far for my family to travel and I was glad they weren't going though that kind of hassle. (Male, 50+)

I didn't want family to visit me in prison. I tried to cut myself off from them. I didn't want to see them or know what was going on. That was just a coping mechanism. (Female, 45–49)

I didn't like visits. I normally cut off the outside world. I've always been of the opinion that you can't live inside and outside at the same time. You can't keep your head on the outside. (Male, 50+)

Ugelvik and Damsa (2018) found that many FNPs faced increasing difficulty when it came to staying in touch with family. For many, "the pains of frustrated or failing long-distance relationships added considerable weight to the prison experience" (1033). While some participants in this research were delighted to have the support of their family, many felt a sense of guilt over their incarceration, and some wanted no family contact at all. The significance of strong family ties should not be underestimated in terms of how they can help a prisoner get through their sentence (Farmer, 2017). Several participants referred to this, explaining that the

support that they received from their family while in prison made it easier to do their time. Imprisonment can have a detrimental effect on a prisoner's family and there are many reasons why a prisoner may feel guilty about what their family is going through. A lack of family contact while in prison has been found to cause "profound guilt and [may] be another source of poor mental health and badly managed anger" (Farmer, 2017: 29). Reasons for guilt may include there being a reduction in household income due to an exit from paid work, as well as new expenses associated with subsidising the imprisonment. Imprisonment also threatens family and childhood development (Smith et al., 2007). Children are affected through "separation, stigma, loss of family income, reduced quality of care, poor explanation and children modelling adult behaviour" and parental imprisonment increases the risk of youth crime (Murray and Farrington, 2005: 1276).

A lack of family contact in prison is sometimes linked with a prison culture of masculinity: "some men do have family on the outside but choose to do "hard time" by refusing to let them visit, believing this is how "tough" men cope with a sentence" (Farmer, 2017: 72). Those who do not have active family support during their imprisonment are between two and six times more likely to reoffend in the first year after release, when compared to those who have family support (Mills and Codd, 2008). This support may help deal with offending behaviour by providing guidance, advice, and encouragement. It may involve building up confidence and giving ex-prisoners a reason not to go back to prison. Families also play a vital role in the resettlement process for FNPs who wish to return to their home country after their sentence. Research has found that families can often be the strand that links together all the other resettlement pathways (Gavin, 2015) and an offender's family can often prove to be the most effective resettlement agency (HMIP et al., 2014).

Another issue that needs to be considered, and which was raised by some participants, is that of "Ghosting". This is when a prisoner is transferred to another prison with little or no notice (Gill, 2016; O'Donnell, 2012). Participants stated that this often happened on the day of a scheduled family visit. This would often result in family members arriving at the prison at the scheduled time, only to be told that their loved one has been transferred to another institution. When this happens, the visiting order is lost, and the entire process of arranging a visit must be restarted. This can cause considerable stress to family members, who may have travelled from abroad at considerable cost and stress, as well as to the prisoner in question. There is no reason why a prisoner needs to be transferred to another institution on the day of a scheduled visit. Decency on the part of the prison authorities should prevail here.

The pains of deportation

Ugelvik and Damsa (2018) considered the pains of deportation and the impact that has on FNPs. They found that for many prisoners, "the uncertainty, unpredictability and lack of information they experienced, as a result, added considerable "weight" to their everyday life in prison, making everything more difficult" (Ugelvik and Damsa, 2018: 1034). This pain, however, does not apply to Irish prisoners in

England and Wales. Irish prisoners in the UK are exempt from deportation, save in exceptional circumstances due to the close historical, social and political ties between the UK and Ireland. As such, it is highly unlikely that an Irish citizen would be deported from the UK.

A number of cases have, however, come before the UK courts in the past three years challenging the Home Office's position on the deportation of Irish prisoners. These include *Doherty's (Edmund) Application* [2016] NI QB 62 in 2016, *Connell, R (on the application of) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* in 2018 and *Foley, R (On the Application Of) v Secretary of State for the Home Department* in 2019. The Courts dismissed each of these cases and the current policy of deporting Irish nationals only in exceptional circumstances remains in place. It would not, therefore, be unreasonable to state that Irish prisoners do not suffer the great uncertainty surrounding their deportation status as other FNPs do. This may contribute to their being seen as somewhat invisible and to their not being viewed as proper FNPs.

Some prisoners may want to investigate the possibility of repatriation to Ireland to serve their sentence. Recent case law has had a particularly negative impact on applicants from the UK and according to the ICPO (2021) there remains "a lack of clarity regarding how applications from non-EU countries particularly the UK will be dealt with." Between 1995 and 2020 there were 456 transfer applications made by Irish prisoners seeking to serve their sentence in Ireland. 133 of those applications were successful (Department of Justice, 2020). Until the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Act (1995) is amended to address the differences between the UK and Irish sentencing regimes, the overwhelming majority of applications will be refused. One avenue that could be further explored, however, is the possibility of returning to Ireland on licence under Council Framework Decision 2008/947/JHA (D/947). The process can take a number of months to complete, but it is possible to have a licence from England and Wales supervised by the Irish Probation Service. Many Probation Officers in England and Wales seem to be unaware of the possibility of Irish prisoners returning to Ireland under the supervision of the Irish Probation Service, which would allow them to "resettle" in Ireland with the support of family and friends (Gavin, 2015). This should be rectified as soon as possible.

Given that some of the areas in which FNPs experience difficulties when serving their sentence include the language barrier, maintaining family ties and concerns over immigration and deportation, it is worth reviewing how these concerns impacts upon the Irish prisoner population. Irish prisoners all speak English, and therefore the language barrier experienced by many foreign national prisoners is a redundant issue for Irish prisoners. Secondly, the maintenance of family ties is a concern for all prisoners, not just foreign nationals. It is not unreasonable to assume that if a prisoner's family is in a foreign country, it is more difficult to keep in contact with them, than if they are in the same country. On that note, it can be said that Irish prisoners whose family are in Ireland do share a common experience with foreign national prisoners. It should, however, be noted that there is probably a large percentage of Irish prisoners whose families are also living in England and

Wales. This leads into the third issue: immigration and deportation. Irish nationals are considered for deportation only in the most exceptional circumstances and are typically treated as a special case to reflect the close historical, community and political ties between the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the existence of the Common Travel Area. These issues may contribute to prisoners and prison staff not viewing Irish prisoners as "proper" FNPs and may also contribute to making Irish prisoners culturally invisible as a foreign national group in English and Welsh prisons.

Conclusion

The Irish are one of Britain's largest and oldest ethnic minority groups, and the term "White Irish" has been recognised as an ethnic minority category in the UK since 2001. Yet according to Hickman and Ryan (2020) they have not, and are still not, seen as "proper" migrants and Mac an Ghaill (2001) has claimed that they are culturally invisible. If this is still true of the Irish population in Britain, then it should come as no surprise that the Irish prisoners are also culturally invisible, and it may go some way to explaining why they are not seen as "proper" FNPs in the prison system. Irish prisoners are FNPs but do not seem to suffer the pains of imprisonment in the same manner as many other FNPs. This is primarily because there is no language barrier, and it is highly unlikely that an Irish citizen would be deported from England and Wales. It is therefore reasonable to state that Irish prisoners do not suffer from issues relating to language and deportation as in the same was as other FNPs do.

This does not, however, mean that they are not impacted upon by issues which are common to the entire FNP population such as racism, bullying, discrimination, and a lack of family contact, all of which may add to the pains and the weight of imprisonment. This paper has shown that many Irish prisoners suffer from racism, bullying and discrimination in the prison system, most commonly through name calling. Bullying and racist name calling was referred to by several participants and this is generally considered to be the most common form of discrimination directed at minority groups from both prisoners and prison officers (Ireland, 2000). Secondly, the maintenance of family ties is a concern for all prisoners, not just foreign nationals. It is not unreasonable to assume that if a prisoner's family is in a foreign country, it is more difficult to keep in contact with them, than if they are in the same country. While those Irish prisoners whose family are in Ireland do share a common experience with FNPs it should, however, be noted that there is probably a large percentage of Irish prisoners whose families are also living in England and Wales.

There remains a certain degree of ignorance about Ireland in Britain which is both persistent and enduring (Hickman and Ryan, 2020). Recent examples include when the Prime Minister Boris Johnson, while serving as Foreign Secretary, likened the border between the Republic and Northern Ireland as something resembling the border between the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, and when the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, admitted not understanding why Nationalists in Northern Ireland would not vote for

Loyalists, and vice versa. This degree of ignorance shows not only a lack of under-
standing of Irish people, but also a lack of understanding about serious issues affect-
ing Northern Ireland, in terms of its politics, its society and its history. We should not
then be surprised when such ignorance can also be found in the prison system or when
Irish prisoners report allegations of bullying, racism, and discrimination. Hickman and
Ryan (2020) contend that this is a result of British sociology generally ignoring
Northern Ireland during the 1970's–1990's as this resulted in "little challenge to dis-
courses about the Irish as inherently violent and as a community likely to be harbouring
the IRA" (103). Such conflation has resulted in some Irish prisoners who feel as though
they are not seen as "proper" FNPs, and this has resulted in a form of cultural invisi-
bility in the prison system. Or perhaps it is more to do with a different type of invisibil-
ity, whereby Ireland, its history and its people, concepts of Irishness and issues
affecting Ireland always have and remain "invisible to England in a way that
Britain / England can never be invisible to Ireland" (Hickman and Ryan, 2020: 96).

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