Introduction

> *"A sense of security can be considered as one of the primary necessities of life… but what does security mean?* (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2735-2736).

As modern cities have developed and evolved real concerns have been generated among city dwellers about (in)security; concerns which have often become focused on public spaces, or particular "dangerous neighbourhoods" within the city environs (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2736). Indeed, we are increasingly noticing that marginalised / excluded neighbourhoods (and the residents of these neighbourhoods) are becoming the "focal point for the feelings of insecurity for the entire city" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2740).

Existing research on the role neighbourhoods play in fear of crime / community safety tend to support one of two explanations. Some researchers emphasise the role of social disorganisation which is understood to undermine community-level informal social control mechanisms within neighbourhoods characterised by rapid population change and low socio-economic status (see for example Eck et al., 2005; Ray 2011). Much of this work focuses on "the ability of local residents to control deviancy" (Eck et al., 2005, p.8) with the "active ingredients" of high crime rates being explained in terms of structural disadvantage" and reduced levels of "collective efficacy"[1]. In the context of limited legitimate routes into formal employment, "illegal activities become more widespread… and violence becomes a major currency of social interaction" (Parker 2008, p.85 cited in Ray 2011, p.76). Parental – child relationships, supervision & discipline, family conflict, and parental underpinning of

unacceptable behaviour and attitudes are all cited by Ray (2011, p.79) as key influences on the behaviour of perpetrators of violence in neighbourhoods, reflecting perceptions of reduced levels of "collective efficacy".

In contrast, another body of research emphasises the role played by visible signs of disorder or deviance (see for example Wilson and Kelling 1982; Aalbers and Rancati 2008; Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011; Hourigan 2011a). These "visual displays" demonstrate that the neighbourhood no longer exerts "social control" over crime and anti-social behaviour (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011), which in turn suggests to residents that they face a greater risk of becoming a victim of crime. Such signifiers "are considered signs of abandonment by the police and public institutions", which in turn create fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). Significantly, such visual signs of disorder may have a greater impact on residents fear of crime than the actual crime rates in that locality (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011).

Internationally, "from an institutional point of view, security seems to be perceived as an autonomous issue" which is disconnected from economic, social and physical policies of urban regeneration. In effect, such a strategy sees security primarily as "a question of order and control (safety), while ignoring the social conditions which produce deviant behaviour" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2746-2747). Accordingly, there is a strong argument that in order to be effective in addressing community (un)safety and (in)security, it is important to simultaneously implement policies which tackle unsafety – in "the immediate environment in which the fearful reside" (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011), with policies which seek to create and sustain

"social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). In this context, the infrastructure of deprived neighbourhoods is important because it fulfils vital functional and social roles, through the provision of "Third Spaces"; "key recreational facilities, services, amenities, and "'public'' social space" where residents interact with each other (Hickman 2013, p.222).

Our research draws upon Aalbers and Rancati's (2008) operationalisation of Bauman's (2001) concept of sicherheit to discuss residents "perceptions of the influence of incivilities" upon their day to day lives (Airey 2003) and how these issues are intrinsic elements in the production and reproduction of their urban territories.

> "*(Un)safety concerns the safety of ourselves, our families and property, (un)certainty concerns the control over the future and being able to make risk free choices; (in)security deals with the capability of facing up to the risks of existence and the values and principles determining participation in society*" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2737).

Baumans (2001) describes his concept of security in the context of a critical discussion of the inherent tensions between community and individuality, security and freedom. For Bauman, it is in the construct of community that we find the comfort of security. Safety, once the promise of an interventionist state has, like much else, become the responsibility of the individual. With the rolling back of the state (also referenced by Wacquant (1999) as state retrenchment), Bauman argues that we look to territorially demarcated in-groups – local community – to share the burden of securing our safety. Traditional communities' networks of strong ties lend themselves

to personal safety: the certainty of iterated interaction guarantees that one must encounter the consequences of one's behaviour toward others living within the same geographic and demographic bounds. The known character of shared values provide certainty as to the manner in which those actions will be received. In elaborating Gemeinshaft as a source of certainty, safety, and security however, Bauman warns us that its protective boundaries and homogeneity can be oppressive - for those for whom they are perceived as equally impenetrable from the inside as out.

Nonetheless, Bauman asserts the relative merits of community. He depicts political movements which prioritise difference as ceding position to self-interested global elites who are empowered by the disunification of potential sources of resistance under the guise of advancing individual freedom. One consequence of that fragmentation is a failure to resist what Wacquant (1999) referred to as the retrenchment of the state, and thus the enfeeblement of a source of communal protection. In the vacuum left by the state, individuals look to the local. For the affluent, safety is sought through the creation of artificial communities, which focus on the shared defence of the boundaries of occupied space, rather than mutual interdependence within. The permeability of these boundaries is unilateral; residents may leave and re-enter, outsiders are excluded. This exclusionary dynamic contributes to the creation of a stigmatised communities of others – whose residents are unable to leave, temporarily or otherwise. Although exclusion serves to corral people with similar socio-economic characteristics, Bauman argues that territorial stigmatisation undermines the potential for community:

> *"Sharing stigma and public humiliation does not make the*
>
> *sufferers into brothers; it feeds mutual derision, contempt and*

hatred. ... one thing they are unlikely to do is to develop mutual respect. 'The others like me' means the others as unworthy as I myself have been repeatedly told that I am and been shown to be; 'to be more like them' means to be more unworthy than I already am. ...ghetto means the impossibility of community."

Aalbers and Rancati (2008) operationalise the concepts of insecurity, unsafety and uncertainty at a different level of orientation. While Bauman also references fragmentation - which he associates with the reification of difference - in underscoring sources of uncertainty, Aalbers and Rancati (p.2737) concentrate on his references to risk society in operationalising the concept to refer to the fears associated with "precarious employment or long-term unemployment". At a macro level, Bauman depicts fears for our safety as the product of individual responsibilisation and anonymising universalism, which Aalbers and Rancati pragmatically operationalise with reference to the resultant fear of becoming a victim of crime. Finally, they operationalise Bauman's conception of insecurity as rooted in the advancing neo-liberalism and retraction of the state, through reference to concerns about a lack of access to formal and/or informal supports.

It is worth noting, finally, that Bauman's proposed solutions to the contemporary malaise - redistribution and social protection - are located at the level of the state. He is not hopeful for a revival of traditional community. Although they concur with Bauman's assessment of the challenges presented by the macro-level context, Aalbers and Rancati (2008) in contrast see the potential for effective action at the local level

and for the reinvigoration of community, including in stigmatised neighbourhoods.

Thus, we use Aalbers and Rancati's (2008) interpretation of sicherheit for its applicability to examining the difference between "objective and subjective safety", which is related to crime levels, and "objective and subjective fear", which is related to people's perception of how safe they actually are. Researchers like Aalbers and Rancati (2008) have demonstrated how residents perceptions / fear of crime, and feeling unsafe, is not always related to actual levels of crime in their locality: people may perceive that they are unsafe as a consequence of how they "label their mixed experience of unsafety, insecurity and uncertainty" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2738). Indeed, such perceptions (people's subjective fear of crime) can be even more pronounced in large housing estates because many inhabitants themselves stereotype their estate as unsafe (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2738-2739). Brunton-Smith & Jackson's (2011) findings from work undertaken in England and Wales demonstrates that people draw on more than their experience of life in the neighbourhood when evaluating their personal risk of crime. Elevated levels of fear of being a victim of crime were found in women and younger residents, those who had previously been a victim of crime, those with lower educational credentials, and those who read tabloid newspapers. Interestingly, they also found that fear of crime declines with age. Brunton-Smith & Jackson's (2011) work suggests that the crime rate in a particular neighbourhood becomes of increased importance after a residents' first experience as a victim of crime. They argue that residents in areas which have low levels of crime are likely to view their first experience of crime victimisation as "an isolated incident", but in contrast residents in areas with high rates (or perceived high rates) of crime may interpret their experience in a totally different way, with the

experience serving to "bring home the real and present danger" they must live with on a day to day basis, "in a particularly vivid way".

Our article interrogates the determinants of subjective safety in two housing estates in Limerick, a peripheral Irish city[2]. In focusing on these estates which are currently 'undergoing' the largest urban Regeneration project in the history of the Irish State, our analysis provides insights into the intersections between regeneration processes and (Un)sicherheit.

We begin by describing the site of the study and outline the Irish State's (failed) attempts at regeneration. Given our focus on capturing the perceptions of neighbourhood safety and crime amongst residents and others, we then explain our metholodological approach. A combination of qualitative research methods (focus groups, interviews and content analysis of print media coverage) was employed in order to examine perceptions of safety and crime as well as their representations in a media setting. In presenting our main findings we place a particular focus on the themes of (un)certainty and (in)security in the context of state attempts at regeneration.

The article contributes towards a deeper understanding of regeneration processes. In applying the concept of 'Sicherheit', our case study evidences how regeneration programmes which are routinely represented (through a positive lens within state discourse) as enhancing community safety, can in fact contribute to destabilising the triumvirate of safety, certainty and security. In doing so our article adds to the research literature which has critically engaged with regeneration processes in Ireland

(see for example Bissett, 2008; Hourigan 2011a; Power et al. 2012; Haynes et al. 2013) and beyond (see for example O' Brien and Matthews 2016; Jones and Evans 2016; Uitermark and Loopmans 2013; Blokland 2008), and to wider international debates concerning how crime and safety can be best understood at street level in the most marginalized neighbourhoods and communities (see for example Aalbers and Rancati, 2008; Brown-Luthango, 2016; Brunton-Smith and Jackson 2011).

Location of the Study and Research Methods

This study examined experiences and concerns related to community safety in two public housing estates in Limerick; Southill, and Ballinacurra Weston. These two neighbourhoods have some of the highest levels of extreme disadvantage in Ireland. When Southill was completed in 1972 there were 1,201 houses containing 6,500 inhabitants in four residential parks. Yet one of those areas, O' Malley Park, experienced a decline of 69% in its population between 1981 and 2006. This population collapse was a significant indicator of "the problems experienced in the area and the failure of the City's housing programme" (McCafferty 2011, pp.18-19). Ballinacurra Weston for the purposes of Regeneration consists of 300 houses and is the smallest of the four areas in the city which are to be regenerated. In parts of these neighbourhoods there are strong community ties and levels of social capital, but in the parts where the "disadvantaged of the disadvantaged" (Hourigan 2011c, p.77) live community violence and intimidation are more prevalent.

We chose to employ a qualitative methodology for this study, as we felt it would enable invaluable insights into our participants' perceptions of what community safety means to different people and ultimately how communities can take control of their

own safety. This research was not only concerned with the experiences of the participants, but also with the subjective meanings that these experiences have for them (see Flick 2006, p.16). Thus it was understood that the participants taking part in this research might attribute different meanings to things and have different perspectives than people who have not experienced 'unsafe' living arrangements.

Most qualitative research is guided by purposive sampling (Lindlof 1995) with the sample chosen to provide conceptual richness. Our sample consisted of individuals who were theoretically meaningful and information rich, and reflected important aspects of our research questions. Working in collaboration with the Southside Regeneration Agency, community and youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders, a purposive selection strategy was deployed in order to convene and run a series of five focus groups with residents (young men aged between 19 - 30, young women aged between 19 - 30, parents, & elderly) in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. Morgan (1993, p.15) argues that focus groups are useful when working with categories of people who have traditionally had limited power and influence, (in our case residents of the Southside Regeneration estates) as it allows groups of peers to express their perspective with the security of being among others who share many of their feelings and experiences. As such, we conducted the focus groups with the intention of giving the (resident) participants as much control over the process as possible. Additionally, three focus groups were conducted with officials from the Regeneration Agencies, estate management groups, the Health Service Executive, Gardaí, Probation Services, community workers /activists and local authority workers. All of the focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes. Eight in-depth interviews were also conducted with individual residents and informants from the various state

and community organizations mentioned above, in order to examine and expand on issues emerging from the focus groups. As a result of this sampling strategy a total of sixty five individuals participated in the research[3]. As our sample represented numerous positions[4] we argue that we could produce true to life explanations of the phenomenon under investigation.

Our analysis was based on data reduction and interpretation of that interview data. We subjected the data to thematic analysis, which provided a procedure for developing categories (open coding), interlocking these categories (axial coding), building a story that joins the categories (selective coding) and ending with a set of discursive proposals (Creswell 1998, p.150; Flick 2006, pp.296-303).

We also undertook a qualitative content analysis of two years[5] of print media texts, which were sampled from four newspapers, chosen for their diversity of audiences and styles. Specifically, we selected our sample from two national Broadsheets (Irish Times and Irish Independent[6]), a national tabloid (Irish Mirror) and a local imprint (Limerick Leader)[7]. The articles were then subjected to qualitative content analysis[8].

(Un)safety

In 2007 the Irish government established two new special purpose Regeneration Agencies for the Southside and Northside of Limerick City, in response to fears regarding a perceived increase in social disorder and criminality, and a particular incident in September 2006 in which two young children were very seriously injured in an arson attack (see Fitzgerald 2007). In 2008, the Limerick Regeneration Agencies[9] launched their Master Plan which envisaged investment of €3.1 billion to

regenerate the 4 areas which had been designated for this purpose.

Limerick is a low-crime city with an organised crime problem (McCullagh 2011, p.23), which has led to its undeserved reputation as a high crime city. Indeed, what McCullagh's analysis of victim surveys confirms is that in many respects Limerick is not distinctively different from the national picture in terms of its "level of victimisation", or the "associated problems of fear and non-reporting to the Gardaí". The Gardai are the police service in the Republic of Ireland. Its official name is An Garda Síochána[10]. Our research found that despite significant reductions in the crime rate in Limerick City (Hurley 2011)[11] during this period, there were elevated fears amongst our resident respondents that they would experience some form of crime in their neighbourhood.

Low level anti-social behaviour and petty crime by young children and teenagers (below the age of criminal responsibility) were an objective reality for most participants and many residents feared challenging even very young children because of who their parents might be.

> "…*you can't, you don't know the kids whereas everybody used to know all the kids before* (Female Parent – Southill resident)

This is a well-founded fear which has arisen in a number of studies focused on these estates (Griffin and Kelleher 2010, p.32) and is indicative of a breakdown in community relations between young and old and often between long term and more recent residents who tend to reside in the neighbourhoods for shorter periods of time. Residents, perceiving that the police cannot arrest or caution younger children, instead

blamed the council for not punishing parents whose children misbehave, for not vetting families and for moving large young families with histories of anti-social behaviour into quiet cul-de-sacs etc.

Their sense of unsafety was bolstered by their perceived abandonment by estate governance and the police services. A sense of being under siege was reported by residents. The presence of burned out houses and cars, rubbish, and vandalised public spaces, manifesting "incivilities and carelessness" added to their sense of unsafety.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Feeding the perception of lawlessness, some residents believed that this dilapidation was purposely driven by criminal gangs (and the state) to maintain a sense of hopelessness in the neighbourhoods in which they operate. They argue that the encouragement of such behaviour was designed to ensure that residents remain silent about criminal activity and in turn has led to the loss of the street as a public space, in essence leaving it for criminality. Young women reported being unwilling / unable to use their front or back gardens or stand on their front steps to watch their children play, and of feeling unsafe in the passages behind their houses. Reflecting their life stage, they were mostly concerned for their young children, particularly in relation to the highly visible level of substance misuse in the estates.

> "*I dread the summer…. Now I love the house, if I could just pick it up and move somewhere else but to leave my young one out, she watches everything, and they do be out in the fields stoned off their heads asleep and they're asleep in the garden next door… and she's taking everything in, she comes in at night then and I get a hundred*

more questions. Why were his eyes like that? Why was she asleep in the garden? What am I supposed to tell her like?" (Female Parent – Southill resident)

Some of the elderly residents that we spoke to were so afraid to even be seen looking at groups of young people who may be causing trouble, that no longer even open their curtains. The reality for many of these elderly residents was a life spent primarily in the back rooms of their houses, only venturing out after dark if in a group or if they were being collected, never intervening, and feeling as though there is no one they can call upon to enforce law and order. This is in contrast to the findings of Brunton-Smith and Jackson (2011).

"*If you hear a noise you're jumping*

You can't sleep

I just cover my head at night

Jumping out of your skin at the same time saying is that someone trying to break in.

I used to look out the window if I'd hear something before but I don't even go near the window now". (3 females – Elderly Focus Group Ballinacurra Weston)

The loss of street life as a consequence of objective and subjective unsafety further feeds a vicious downward spiral of unsicherheit. All of our respondents related to us stories of how these streets used to be central to the life of the communities with mothers talking, kids playing, daily interactions with neighbours etc. This mirrors the findings of Hickman (2013, p.232) who argues that the removal of such "Third places" is perceived by residents as being a noticeable symbol of decline, with the

"closure of shops being particularly significant" in this regard. As public street life is lost there are fewer chances to interact with neighbours and get to know children, and thus the cycle continues. The loss of this sense of community is seen to feed back into housing tenancies, creating a cycle of a high turnover of residents, vacated houses, rising anti-social behaviour etc, which in turn create elevated levels of feeling unsafe. We would argue that the States' approach to regeneration which has focussed on de-populating the estates has contributed to this.

It is important to note that the residents' perceptions were impossible to fully disentangle from external sources of stigma. International research literature (Greer and Jewkes, 2005; Bauder 2002; Blokland, 2008; Hastings, 2004) demonstrate that "negative reputations of place can, in themselves, have a profound effect upon the life chances, experiences and self-image of those who live in neighbourhoods which carry a stigma" (Permentier et al. 2007; 2008; 2009 cited in Devereux et al. 2011, p.125). International research also identifies that the media reporting of crime, particularly violent crime, is "consistently over-reported" in comparison to the official crime rates, which sometimes creates a heightened "fear of a crime surge" (Jewkes 2011, p.155). Our sample of print media coverage of these two housing estates provided insights into the manner in which the public understanding of these estates and official actions towards them are shaped. We found that the parameters of media coverage of the estates was very weak in terms of providing the public with an understanding of what the regeneration process was meant to be about, and in many instances served to further stigmatise the communities as unsafe places.

At both a local and national level the newsworthiness of these estates emanates not from the shocking levels of poverty, deprivation, unemployment or educational disadvantage experienced by their residents, nor from the prospects for change in the form of Ireland's largest ever regeneration process, but rather from the symbolic association of the estates with criminality. Crime was the primary theme in 393 of the 550 articles[12] published about these estates within the 2 year period examined. Even within a stratified sample of 100 of the articles which had crime as a primary theme there was 629 individual references to crime. The following are indicative examples of headlines that appeared – 'City teen admits to nightclub petrol bombing' (Limerick Leader 23/02/09), 'FRESHLY-DUG GRAVE FIND SPARKS EXECUTION FEARS; CITY ON EDGE AS GANGS FACE-OFF' (Irish Mirror 30/03/10) 'Brothers jailed after girl (6) shot in garden' (Irish Independent 11/02/2009) and 'Theft of Army training weaponry 'worrying' (Irish Times 25/06/2009).

It is noticeable that media coverage of the areas, as a rule, does not provide much by the way of explanation as to why crime, social exclusion and marginalization exist here. With some notable exceptions, we found that media coverage is focused on the factual reporting of episodic events, rather than providing any analysis, context or critique which are reserved in the main for editorials and features. Structural explanations are largely confined to brief excerpts from sources whose comments are regularly presented as lists of causal factors. In stark contrast there were only 6 articles (with 11 references) in this two-year period which had Community Spirit as their primary theme.

From previous interviews conducted with media professionals we know that the profit

orientation of media outlets and the marketisation of news in particular drive the reporting of crime and its relative newsworthiness. We were repeatedly told that stories about criminality were more likely to be accepted by editors and sub-editors than positive news stories. Our participant-journalists acknowledged the newsworthiness of negative stories. There was general agreement that bad news is perceived as more commercially viable and thus that negative stories are more likely to be published and to receive prominent coverage (see Devereux et al. 2012)

Residents that we spoke to perceived (justifiably so in light of our analysis of media content) that the media has played a prominent role in the stigmatised construction of their localities through unbalanced / sensationalised stories about the estates and their residents.

> "*I think they love seeing things happening, you'd notice if nothing happens for a few weeks, they'd re-run a story that happened two or three months ago. They have the same pictures but the words different about people*". (Young Male – Ballinacurra Weston resident)

> "*They only make up their own lines cause they get money off it… media… that Donal McIntyre…what he said about Southill…there were pictures in that that weren't even Limerick, there were in Dublin like, that will just show you, Trying to build the publicity up..*" (Young Female – Southill resident)

Additionally, almost all of our eighteen non-resident interviewees cited the media as having a major role to play in the negative portrayal of these estates. These

representations are perceived as heightening the sense of fear experienced by residents <u>in</u> and <u>of</u> the estate.

> "*If you're looking at the paper and you see where you live on the news as the main headline you're going to be more cautious*" (Male – Garda)

> "*Media coverage ... heightening the sense of fear in those areas...it's not helping the situation, its making it worse, it panics people*" (Male – Outreach Worker)

> "*It really is portrayed an awful lot by the media, like you have murders more frequently in Dublin I mean whatever it is about Limerick they just seem to love the coverage of I don't know the gangs and stuff down here like, ...and they are selective in what they are showing*" (Female – Garda)

Moreover, it is significant that our teenage group saw the media as playing a role in the empowerment of criminals.

> "*Half of them scumbags only love seeing their name in the paper....it glorifies them like, they feel like hard men when they see it....like if they were getting out in six months' time they'd say it in the paper and they'd show a picture where they live, oh he is out in six months' time and where he is from, oh limerick gang is getting out and stuff*" (Young Female – Ballinacurra Weston resident)

We argue that this process may actively contribute to feelings of unsafety in the estates. Indeed, "if the media notoriety of Limerick gang leaders is reinforcing their

fear based status, then media coverage which heightens this status is actively contributing to the crime problem in the city[13]" (Hourigan 2011d, p.248). Moreover, an exclusive focus on the estates as a locus of criminal activity acts to disappear social inequalities, which are essential to understanding why involvement in organised crime may appear to be the only "visible route out of poverty" for the "disadvantaged of the disadvantaged", who in such circumstances will continue to provide "the reservoir of new members for Limerick's criminal gangs" (Hourigan 2011b, p.70) and in the context of community safety it should be urgently addressed.

(Un)certainty, (in)security and regeneration

Ironically, our estates of interest have at various times in their history been places of acknowledged social capital. While other estates have been more highly regarded in this respect than those which are the focus of this study, these areas have nonetheless active resident and community groups and developed youth and community services. In the face of challenges associated with anti-social behaviour and a perception of limited options within the criminal justice system, these are the kinds of resources which Aalbers and Rancati (2008) identify as providing possibilities for mediation and resolution. Beyond the question of safety, co-location of a stable network of family and friends within the same estate provides individual residents with access to social supports, which mitigates the effects of uncertainty and insecurity. Such informal supports are essential to safeguarding against the material and emotional effects of poverty and precarity, particularly in the context of a receding welfare state. Yet the regeneration process has to date destabilised these networks.

Overall we found that the regeneration process itself was linked to a general sense of uncertainty among residents participating in our study. Reflecting international research findings (Briggs et al. 2010; Manzo et al. 2008; Smith 2002 cited in Posthumus and Kleinhans 2014), our study shows that residents are semi-active agents who make different decisions in their relocation process based on several factors, such as whether they own their house or not. Although initially conceived as a 'rebuild', the regeneration process has manifested as 'depopulation' and 'relocation'. In the process, former neighbours were separated, sometimes willingly, and sometimes with great reluctance. Residents did not know whether they would be staying in their homes – some feared being 'driven out', others thought they would be moved to new homes as their current houses were in line for demolition, while others still were actively trying to move out. Fewer than half of those we spoke to wanted to move, but felt uncertainty about their situation, as while demolition and de-tenanting in the area was actively ongoing, rebuilding was (and remains) very slow[14]. Residents who had remained in the estates (particularly the elderly respondents, many of whom had lived in the area for more than 40 years) reported feeling invisible / marginalised and of being 'left in limbo'. Compounding this was their belief that neither the City Council nor Regeneration Agency officials told them when to expect change. Symbolically this had a very detrimental impact on people's quality of life:

> "*We're trying to hold on to it (the house) .. we don't want to go anyplace either, we want to stay there. But they're telling us that our place is not being touched until there are houses being built, but we'll be up in Mount St. Oliver's[15] by the time we get it*". (Elderly Female – Southill Resident)

The bulk of the respondents in these groups noted that they do not want to leave their

homes[16] and the places that they grew up in and that they would prefer if the problems they had identified were addressed, the regeneration process was progressed more rapidly, and some sense of security and stability returned to what were previously very solid, stable working class communities. There are stable areas remaining within these neighbourhoods the residents living in those areas are extremely anxious that they be maintained and protected. The uncertainty however contributed to a sense of temporariness in these estates, which was particularly evident among the younger residents, who have little desire to, or expectations of, staying and putting down roots, or investing in relationships with their neighbours. This obviously has implications for building community and is manifest most strongly in the sense that very few of the younger people know their neighbours or feel they could call on them for help (See Brown-Luthango 2016 for similar findings from South Africa). Arguably it also makes it less likely that the local council will invest in these neighbourhoods going into the future.

The highly visible physical degradation and neglect of areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities, all of whom note the presence of rubbish and graffiti alongside vandalised houses, playgrounds and open areas. The issue of boarding up houses which are then stripped of anything of value by thieves, and sometimes burned out, often by younger teenagers, also has implications beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. There are very real health and safety concerns relating to the abandoned houses. These include the moving of horses into abandoned gardens; the proliferation of rats and mice; utilising the vacant houses for drinking and drug use; and the general vulnerability which comes from being "*the house on the prairie*"; the one inhabited house in a row of boarded up properties or an

isolated property as a consequence of demolition.

> "*I have only one neighbour across the road and [name removed] down the block from me and [name removed] but really if they knock down the houses I think I'll go, I really don't want to be the house on the prairie because I think you're ... standing out... you're more vulnerable you know and I'd hate to go now because I love O'Malley Park I love it, I never had an ounce of trouble and I would hate to go but I don't want to stay either*". (Female Parent – Southill Resident)

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

In contrast, a number of the Gardaí that took part in the research believe that the demolition process has resulted in estates which are easier to police, and therefore this process has contributed to the establishment of what are seen as safer communities.

> "*Well, half the houses are gone. There is not as many people living there anymore so, it's quieter now there are not as many problems up there any more*". (Male – Garda)

> "*Well you go in there now you can see pretty much all around it, before it was all you know cul-de-sacs and there was lots of places they could hide out, it's a lot more open now like so it has made a difference alright like, so the physical difference has made a big difference*". (Male – Garda)

Critically, residents perceived that their concerns and voices were ignored / rarely heard in the public sphere. A large number of the residents that spoke to us had asked

in particular that vacated houses would be reallocated immediately to prevent damage and further deterioration of the physical environment. In the context of a major housing crisis in Ireland this would seem like a far request.

> "*Every house that has been burnt the young fellas are just going to take out the copper tanks to sell them… but it's been said so many times at meetings you would wonder how is it practical for the council not to take notice of people when they can be told by the residents that this is going to happen if you don't turn off the water or do this, this and this.... There are houses there that have been boarded up which could have been allocated. There are thousands on the housing list. There are loads of people in this area looking for houses and the houses are boarded up… instead now you have the case where there is thousands of pounds worth of damage being done to every single house the minute they are boarded up. As I said, four hours last Friday that resident was barely moved out like and her house is now gutted*". (Female Parent – Ballinacurra Weston resident)

They perceived that they have not been listened to (rightly in this instance as the policy of boarding up houses has continued unabated) and this has led to them getting disillusioned with meetings, residents committees and associations. Such meetings are viewed by many of the individuals we spoke with as mere 'talking shops' where misunderstandings multiply and voices on the ground are routinely discounted.

There was a strong perception that arson, joyriding, burglary; vandalism etc. when it occurs in regeneration estates is not taken as seriously as it would be in middle class

neighbourhoods in the city. There was a sense that these issues were seen as 'natural' and regular occurrences in these communities, and therefore there was not the same sense of urgency related to addressing them. This is strongly echoed in the following quote from a female parent in Ballinacurra Weston

"...for the resident or the person that has to deal with that anti-social behaviour it's the biggest part of their life at that time or moment and I do feel that enough has never been done to combat anti-social behaviour ... I think it's because of the area we live in that some of the anti-social behaviour that happens here would not be put up with in different areas because I think the Guards and the City Council would have different viewpoints on that..."

The loss of regular Garda foot patrols on the estates have de-normalised the relationship between the Gardaí and residents, despite the best efforts of community Gardaí. To be seen talking to a Guard, is to risk being identified as a "rat", with residents fearing they would then be targeted.

"*All you get is you ratted on us, what did you do that for? I'll come back and get you, watch your back and all this... No. Stay at home and mind your own business or they'll knock on your front door and your back door and all your windows...*" (Young Female – Southill resident)

Accordingly, some respondents reported an unwillingness to report incidents, leading to a sense of dislocation from local law enforcement, who noted that visiting residents to follow up on complaints can take an extremely long time as you cannot simply call to one house, but must visit all nearby houses in order to avoid singling out one

family or resident as a 'snitch'.

The enhanced levels of insecurity amongst residents have obvious implications for community safety, as ostensibly, subjective safety is shaped not just by real or perceived crime levels, but also by residents' perceptions of the authorities' responses to those threats, echoing Wacquants' (1999) work on state retrenchment. The response of the Gardaí to <u>all</u> incidents is seen as being of crucial importance given that the failure to do so is seen as further 'proof' of the desertion of these locations by "the police and public institutions", which in turn creates fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). For residents (and particularly young residents) to feel safe in making complaints or passing on information about criminal and anti-social activity there needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused.

Finally, almost everybody that took part in this research strongly believed that it is everyone's responsibility to keep their community safe. This view was particularly strongly expressed by the residents taking part in the research.

> "*I think its everyone's* [responsibility] *first of all I think it's the residents that live here second of all I think it's the Guards definitely, the city council definitely have a part to play as well in it, I think all the agencies who work here you know provide services in the area, you know everyone has a part to play in it. I think, parents definitely have a huge part within it they need to be more aware of where their kids are and what they are at and whatever and that's a huge part of it again*" (Female Parent – Ballinacurra Weston

resident)

It was particularly encouraging to find the majority of the non-residents groups and key individuals speaking of the necessity for a multi-agency approach (which also involves the communities themselves) to tackling community safety.

> "*It's planning of an area, it's policing of an area, housing you know, mixing with the residents I suppose and everything you know, and facilities as well play a big part*" (Male – Garda)

However, it is very noteworthy that some of the non-residents expressed a strong feeling that some are more responsible than others when it comes to ensuring the safety of any given community.

> "*Community Safety? Garda Siochána. Beginning, middle and end. The community can have a role, of course it can, but one has to be very very careful because ...it is very very presumptive indeed to ask a civil authority like us or community people to take on board the most difficult task... Some of the people living in these estates, they don't fear the law... So in what circumstances would you ask communities, to take on this role?*" (Female – City Council Official)

Conclusions

The literature examining fear and insecurity among residents of large housing estates has tended to focus on either the role of reduced levels of "collective efficacy" amongst residents (Eck et al., 2005, p.8) or on the role played by visible signs of disorder or deviance (see for example Wilson and Kelling 1982; Aalbers and Rancati

2008; Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011; Hourigan 2011a), which are considered to be signs of state retrenchment (see Wacquant 1999; Aalbers and Rancati 2008). The case analysed in this paper demonstrates that both schools of thought are equally applicable to the enhanced levels of insecurity amongst residents of the estates in our study. Utilising Aalbers and Rancati's (2008) operationalisation of Bauman's (2001) concept of sicherheit, this paper shows that in the face of declining objective levels of crime, residents' fears for their safety, as well of that of their families and property, are primarily shaped by uncertainty and insecurity.

While Aalbers and Rancati's (2008) research focused positively on a range of initiatives conceived to intervene positively in residents' sense of certainty and security, the narratives of the residents taking part in our study led us to problematize the effects of such actions in Limerick. We find that the Irish State's most ambitious regeneration project, born out of a concern to enhance the safety of residents in Limerick city, has in some instances had the opposite impact; contributing to destabilising the triumvirate of *safety* (through de-populating the estates, the loss of regular Garda foot patrols on the estates etc), *certainty* (through the slow pace of progress of the regeneration process, which created uncertainty among residents and contributed to a sense of temporariness in these estates), and *security* (through state retrenchment (Wacquant 1999) creating situations whereby residents perceived that they have not been listened to, leading them to further narrow their participation in society).

Our case underpins Hourigan's (2011d) finding that the media may be playing a role in the empowerment of criminals in Limerick. Moreover, it suggests that media

coverage with an almost exclusive focus on these estates as a locus of criminal activity is presenting a disproportionate picture, which heightens the subjective fear of crime experienced by residents <u>in</u> and <u>of</u> these estates.

In conclusion, we argue that any future interventions must move beyond seeing community safety as being "a question of order and control" and which ignore the social factors that produce subjective fear (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2746-2747). Following Aalbers and Rancati (2008), we argue that policy makers must be aware that the communities in which they seek to intervene may already have significant stocks of social capital which provide residents with a safety net, protecting against uncertainty and insecurity. In this context, the infrastructure of deprived neighbourhoods is important because it fulfils vital functional and social roles, through the provision of "Third Spaces"; "key recreational facilities, services, amenities, and "'public'' social space" where residents interact with each other (Hickman 2013, p.222). In this paper we have shown how the operationalization of the Irish states' regeneration policy has destabilised these networks / which are essential in safeguarding against the material and emotional effects of poverty and precarity, particularly in the context of a receding welfare state. In designing interventions, it is therefore imperative that we consider how residents' existing stock of social capital might be impacted upon. Ultimately we argue that actions which threaten existing social resources, through for example the gradual depopulation of an estate, may in fact have the opposite effect on community perceptions of safety to that intended.

Figure captions/legends

Figure 1: Eight years of 'Regeneration' - O' Malley Park, Southill, June 2015. Image courtesy of Martin Power.

Figure 2: A 'House on the Prairie'. O' Malley Park, Southill, June 2015. Image courtesy of Martin Power.

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[1] Collective efficacy is the level of communal trust and solidity among a particular community's residents. North American research highlights that collective efficacy has a "significant bearing on levels of violence and crime and impacts on the ability of a community to regulate antisocial behaviour" (Brown-Luthango 2016, p.123)

[2] Although Limerick City Metropolitan District is the third largest city in the Republic of Ireland, it is quite small in international terms, with a population of 102,161 people according to the 2011 census.

[3] Of the 65 participants in this study 47 were residents of the two case study estates, and a further 3 were former residents. All of the young men and women (aged 19 – 30) taking part in this research had lived on the estates their entire lives. In the parents focus groups one of the participants had lived in the estate for 5 years and all of the others had lived there for at least 15 years. In the elderly focus groups nobody had lived in the estates for less than 25 years.

[4] We hold that the 65 individuals that participated in the study were representative of their groups. Of the 47 residents participating only 5 were community activists. Additionally both community workers could be described as community activists. There were no discernible differences in the views of these community participants on these issues.

[5] The time period within which we selected articles was 1/3/2009 to 31/03/2011.

[6] The Irish Times is owned by a trust, and does not pay dividends to shareholders. The Irish Times is also unique in an Irish context in maintaining the position of a social affairs correspondent on staff. The more widely circulated Irish Independent and Sunday Independent are owned by the Independent News Media (a global multimedia conglomerate controlled by the controversial billionaire businessman Denis O'Brien).

[7] In order to select a complete sample we began by searching both Nexis Lexis and the newspapers proprietary archives for the terms 'Southill' and 'Ballinacurra Weston'. We later searched for the names of the residential parks within Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. Our sampling strategy returned a final total of 550 articles. (Irish Independent – 84; Irish Times – 87; Limerick Leader – 146; Irish Mirror - 75).

[8] We employed previous research to develop a series of analytical constructs which we investigated through theory-driven coding. However, we specifically sought to look for other themes that might provide alternative findings to those suggested by the literature.

[9] The Northside and Southside Regeneration Agencies were closed down in 2012, and their work transferred to the Office of Regeneration within the newly combined Limerick City and County Council. In September 2013 the new body launched a new *Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan*. Regeneration of the estates was now reframed in terms of the overall economic development of the city with a revised budget of €300 million over 10 years.

[10] It is also referred to as the Guards. Individual police officers are referred to as Garda or Guard.

[11] We acknowledge that police recorded crime data is problematic and there may well be issues with underreporting.

[12] The Irish Independent published 84 stories, the Irish Times published 87 stories, the Irish Mirror published 75 stories and the Limerick Leader published 146 stories about crime. Other themes identified in our media sample included the Regeneration project (only one of the 3 national publications published more than one article on regeneration), the physical infrastructure of the estates, social issues (excluding crime) and sport.

[13] The Limerick Regeneration Agencies would appear to have been cogniscent of such processes. Chief Executive Officer Brendan Kenny was quoted in a Limerick Chronicle article entitled 'Anger at 'unfair' portrayal of city' (7/12/2010) as saying that they had concerns about an RTE Primetime programme because "some of the people they gave a platform to… have caused havoc in these estates".

[14] In the original Master plan 3,000 homes were to be demolished and 2,500 constructed (since reduced to 549 as part of the review of the Demolition and Retention Strategy in 2015). 241 units have been completed or are currently under construction (Gillece 2017).

[15] Mount Saint Oliver's is a municipal graveyard in Limerick City.

[16] See Uitermark and Loopmansfor (2013) for an interesting discussion of the 'housing contract' programme in Belgium, which is underpinned by the notion that housing policies should improve deprived urban neighbourhoods without displacing the residents who live in these areas.