

BOOK REVIEW

Diarmuid Griffin, *Killing Time: Life Imprisonment and Parole in Ireland* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018), ISBN 9783319726663, xv+251p.

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Killing Time is a comprehensive empirical examination of the legal and policy frameworks surrounding life imprisonment and parole in Ireland. While it is acknowledged that there may be global differences in terms of length of time served and a lack of consensus regarding the appropriate process of release, what is evident is that life does not always mean life. In Ireland, it has been observed that 'there has been a significant increase in the life sentence prisoner population' [p.4] over the past number of decades. This book seeks to explore the reason for this trend, along with the relevant factors affecting parole decisions. As the author notes, the requirement that life sentence prisoners serve lengthier periods in prison may be 'reflective of the global shift towards punitivism' [p.11] or there may be other factors at play in parole board decision making.

In Chapter 1, the author coherently acquaints us with the premise of the book and introduces us to essential themes underpinning the monograph. The trajectory of life sentence committals in Ireland is explored, along with issues pertaining to risk and actuarialism in managerial processes, the 'punitive streak' [p.22] in the approach to parole and the 'vagaries of politics' [p.25] as a relevant factor influencing outcomes. These themes are further explored throughout the subsequent chapters of the book. In Chapter 2, the author explores the rise of life imprisonment in Ireland as a significant 'penological' issue. The legal framework and procedures for sentencing an offender to life imprisonment are comprehensively examined. A comparative component complements the set up of the chapter and neatly contextualises the Irish situation. Chapter 3 extends the analysis of the life sentence by exploring the parole process, an 'anomalous term' [p.65] as the author astutely points out, given that parole is not a legal concept but rather the exercise of ministerial power. Key issues in the development of the parole process along with parole decision-making are impressively synthesised into a detailed and thoroughly informative chapter.

Chapter 4 reacquaints us with the concept of risk, which is acknowledged as being visible in the Irish context, even if the same 'paradigmatic shift evident in other jurisdictions has not been replicated here' [p.103]. The theoretical examination in this chapter effectively contextualises the role of public protection in parole decisions. Interestingly the author documents a 'culture of cautiousness' [p.116] with regard to the approach of the Parole Board members in decision-making. The role of politics and public opinion are the framework for Chapter 5. Factors other than risk-related factors are analysed, and the politicisation of parole decisions is a key theme that underscores the narration of the chapter. The parole process is effectively explained as 'symbolically significant' [p.147] insofar as the parole authority is in essence 'engaged in the appearance of condoning or condemning criminal behaviour' [p.147]. The impact of public opinion and politics on the intensification of punishment in relation to life term prisoners is explored in interesting depth. In Chapter 6, the author introduces us to the human rights dimension and the impact of decisions from the European Court of Human Rights in this area of law. The chapter unfolds with an examination of the 'legal and practical realities of life imprisonment' [p.190]. Finally, in Chapter 7, the author reflects upon the lessons learned from previous chapters, as well as considering the impact of the Parole Bill 2016.

This book offers a valuable insight into the rationales behind parole decisions. The author skilfully maps the penal landscape and commendably contextualises the various factors impacting upon parole decisions in Ireland today. The narrative tone of the book adds to its appeal. While dealing with a difficult and often complex subject matter, the author manages to present each chapter in a comprehensive and coherent manner, linking each theme and concept into the overall framework of the book. This book will prove a fascinating read for anyone interested in criminal justice policy. It is a welcome and original contribution to the study of punishment and society, not just in Ireland but globally as well.