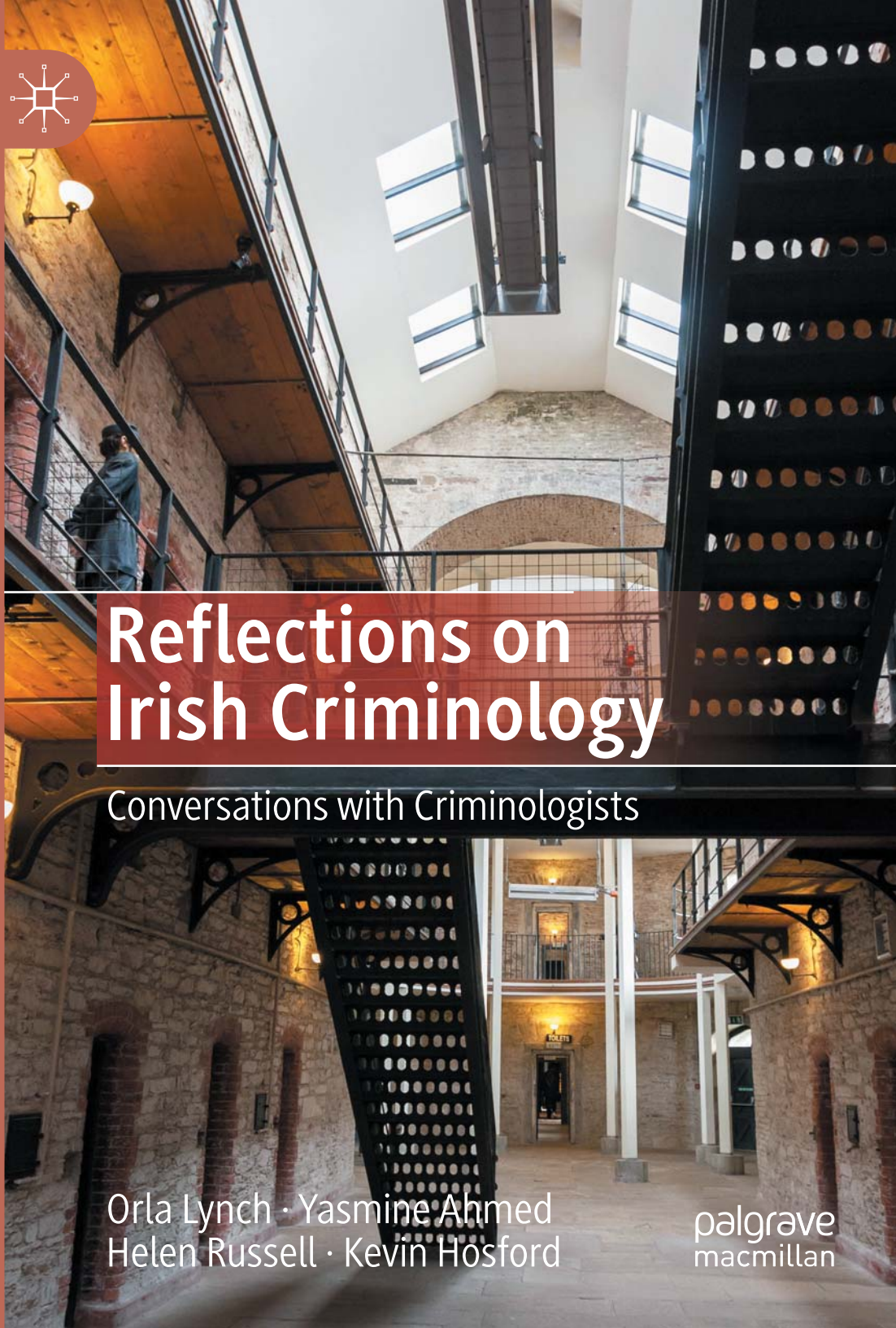


# Reflections on Irish Criminology

## Conversations with Criminologists

Orla Lynch · Yasmine Ahmed
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ISBN 978-3-030-60592-6 ISBN 978-3-030-60593-3 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60593-3



Cover illustration: Contributor: Zoonar GmbH/Alamy Stock Photo

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Acknowledgments

Thank you to all the participants who gave so generously of their time to participate in these conversations.

The original transcripts have been edited for clarity and brevity. All mistakes and omissions and (mis)interpretations are solely the fault of the authors.

# Contents

# About the Authors

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**Helen Russell** holds a B.Sc. Government and an M.A. Criminology from University College Cork. Helen has worked as a research assistant and part time lecturer in UCC over the past five years where she teaches modules on Women, Coercive Confinement and Social Control in Ireland, Trauma, and Political Violence. She has experience working on research topics such as prisons, terrorism, radicalisation, politics and non-political offending. Helen is currently a tutor with WAVE Trauma Centre Belfast where she teaches on the Post Graduate Diploma in Trauma Studies. In 2016 Helen was awarded the CACSSS Excellence Scholarship for her M.A. in Criminology.

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and motivational dimensions of internet-based activism, understandings and constructions of the Darknet, and proactive approaches to digital-criminality & Information Security.


CHAPTER 1

# Criminology in Ireland, the Rise of a Discipline

**Abstract** The rise and rise of criminology in Ireland cannot be understood by focusing only on the traditional disciplinary boundaries of the field. As Prof. Maruna points out in this volume, we are all academic magpies and criminology is our rendezvous discipline; it is this eclecticism that gives Irish criminology its uniqueness. Most importantly, and a belief that is shared by all the participants in this book, is that criminology in Ireland is what it is and where it is because of the people; the researchers, the teachers, the service users, the practitioners and the students. In this volume we trace the *lineage* of some of Ireland's criminologists, magpies and purists alike, from their undergraduate studies to their appointment as Chairs and Professors, we document their influences and their partnerships, their innovations and their ideologies. Through understanding where the contributors are coming from we understand better how and why they are where they are.

**Keywords** Discipline · Criminology · Absentee · Ireland · Boundaries

The uniqueness of Irish criminology is best summed up by reference to the opening statement in one of the founding texts of the discipline (Brewer et al. 1997b).



O. Lynch et al., *Reflections on Irish Criminology*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60593-3_1

> References to Ireland, even when it is to ordinary crime, are best to begin with political history. (p. 1).

In the nearly twenty five years since this recommendation was made, it has become a reality and captures what Maruna and McEvoy (2015) call the intellectual ambitiousness that defines Irish criminology. Criminology in Ireland has grown from what was once termed Ireland's absentee discipline (Kearns, 2020) to a multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary undertaking that re-imagines the work of international criminology from an Irish perspective.

Speaking at a conference in Mount Joy Prison in 2020, Prof. Ian O'Donnell described criminology in Ireland as buoyant, having long thrown off the label of Ireland's absentee discipline (Kearns, 2020). Having come a long way since its roots in the early 1970s where attempts to stimulate research in the area were rejected by statutory organisations, Ireland's criminal justice agencies are now active creators and consumers of research albeit some more ardent than others. Similarly, Hamilton, Healy et al. (2015) in their seminal volume on criminology in Ireland point out it is time to reconsider the Cinderella status of Irish criminology, that as a discipline we have come of age.

However, criminology if not in name, then certainly in intellectual spirit, has a long history on the island of Ireland. In 1993 Paul O'Mahony pointed out that there was no strong tradition of criminological or penological research in Ireland, namely because there was no university department of criminology at that time. However, despite this a diversity of individuals and disciplines contributed to and continue to contribute to what has become the discipline of criminology and this legacy uniquely defines the current scope and form of the field. To say there is an *Irish criminology* is perhaps inaccurate, but criminology in Ireland as a discipline is certainly unique. The field is very much informed by the history of the Island, defined by the violence and the politics of the Troubles, informed by our history of coercive confinement, and couched in an interdisciplinary tradition.

However, until recently, Irish criminology as a disciplinary speciality rarely featured in the international criminology literature despite a rich and vibrant criminology community developing on the island (O'Donnell 2005). For example, according to a review of the European Journal of Criminology (Smith 2013) between 2004 and 2012 there were no

contributions by Irish authors.[1] However, given where we started from, we are not that far behind the curve. The first issue of the European Journal of Criminology was published in 2004 and it is reasonable to suggest that Ireland's criminological awakening only occurred the 1990's so we are quite similar to our European neighbours (Smith 2013). But unlike our European neighbours, criminology in Ireland was not seen as a resource by the state and was not funded as such, and so its developmental trajectory is both slower and more critical.

Despite the total absence of state funding (O'Donnell 2005) or perhaps as a result of it, criminology in Ireland emerged thanks to the work of a few key individuals and a persistence that has led to the development of a vibrant and diverse academic criminology community on the island. The early work of Paul O'Mahony (1993), Ciaran McCullagh (1996), Ivana Bacik et al. (1998), Ian O'Donnell (1997), Caroline Fennell (1993), and John Brewer et al. (1997a) can reasonably be said to be the foundation stones for what was to come and more recently the work of Hamilton, Healy et al. (2015) cemented the discipline as a key part of Irish intellectual activity. In parallel to the research and theoretical outputs that propelled the field forward, a parallel growth in academic criminology programs and the emergence of criminology as a department or discipline in a number of Irish higher education institutions embedded criminology as a mainstay of Irish academia.

A key moment for criminology in the Republic of Ireland was the development of the Institute of Criminology in 2000. Situated in the Faculty of Law at University College Dublin (UCD) the Institute had an emphasis on research and doctoral training and remains the only such research centre in the south of the country. It is important to recognise however, that the trajectory of the development of criminology in Ireland was not uniform. In 2005 O'Donnell pointed out that criminology in Northern Ireland has long had a presence with the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice in existence since 1995 and a number

[1] This appears to be inaccurate, but the numbers contributing to the journal are still low. In 2005 Ian O'Donnell submitted Crime and justice in the Republic of Ireland. *European Journal of Criminology*, *2*(1), 99–131 and in the same year Aodhan Mulcahy published The other lessons from Ireland, *29*(2), 195–209 and in 2007 Barry Vaughan and Shane Kilcommins published The Europeanization of human rights: An obstacle to Authoritarian policing in Ireland? *4*(4), 437–460. Of course, author based in Northern Ireland drawing on data from that region would have been categorised as British in this data analysis.

of academic programmes being offered in both Queens University and the University of Ulster. However, Northern Ireland was still somewhat trailing criminology in Great Britain. Maruna and McEvoy (2015) point out that when Ken Pease was commissioned to review the *criminological landscape* of the region in 1992, he called it 'quite bleak' (p. 593), however, not as bleak as the Republic of Ireland. The impact of the Troubles was of course highly relevant for the emergence of criminology and the way in which criminal justice research developed in Northern Ireland, but this too was the case in the South— albeit somewhat less obvious, or at least less recognised. The fact that the 1988 Victimological survey of Northern Ireland stated the province had the lowest rate of victimisation of all European countries surveyed tells you something about the state of criminological research in the region. In the south, the impact of civil unrest on crime and punishment was largely overlooked. Brewer et al. (1997b) point out that in McCullough's 1996 book on Crime in Ireland, one of the key foundational texts for Irish criminology, the North and the Troubles are hardly mentioned. In spite of both these issues, Maruna and McEvoy (2015) have jubilantly declared that things have now *utterly changed* (p. 593) for the better.

Since 2000, there has been a significant growth in criminology modules and programmes in both Northern Ireland and the republic. In 2015 Hamilton, Healy et al. pointed out that globally, criminology was booming and Ireland was slowly increasing its programme offerings. At the time, the authors counted over thirty programmes with criminological components, today that has increased to 18 programmes at level 8 QQI[2] and above primarily focused on criminology (see appendix one) and 36 programmes with a criminology component at level 8 and above. In the Institutes of Technology (IRE) and Further Education Colleges (NI) there are approximately 20 programmes with a criminology component (level 7 or lower). These courses do not take into account the programmes (level 7 or lower, special purpose or CDP programmes) on offer by private, independent and not-for-profit colleges, nor do they account for adult or continuing education programmes on offer by Universities, nor Open University options. It is difficult to quantify the number of graduates, but based on average figures provided by the institutions themselves both North and South, there are between 900

[2] see https://www.qqi.ie/.

and 1000 students who enrol each year on criminology and criminology related (level 8 and above) programmes (see appendix one for details).

While this progress represents a very positive development for the discipline of criminology, it does present the field with a dilemma; the need to balance the needs of an ever increasing student population with the limited research funding that is available and the limited opportunities that exist within academic to pursue research and teaching careers. In this volume O'Donnell (chapter two) points out that the burden of managing ever increasing numbers of programmes and students may well serve to stifle the opportunities for researchers to progress knowledge and critique of and in the field.

## Situating Irish Criminology

More in step with our European colleagues (as opposed to our American colleagues), criminology emerged in Ireland from a rich variety of disciplines and concerns; politics, sociology, history, psychology, human rights and philosophy. But importantly, Irish criminology is also about the practitioners, institutions and social practices that define this small and bounded field. This however is an issue discussed at length in this volume and one that sharply divides the discipline, both due to the highly contested issue of academic involvement in and with institutions of the state but also due to the politicisation of criminological output for the purpose of political legitimacy. On the other hand, and as witnessed in the contribution of Irish criminologists to various state institutions, having a voice is seen as vital, and many academics see their role as public intellectuals and their duty to bring evidence and best practice to the institutions and practitioners, both state and non-state, who are involved in criminal justice on the island.

If we were to crudely define Irish criminology, its reliance on critical theory, qualitative methods and social theory are perhaps the most highly featured characteristics. Due in no small part to the absence of data, but also due to the etiological origins of social science in Ireland more generally (O'Donnell et al. 2008), this unique landscape here has moulded criminology in a particular fashion. Forms of imprisonment, the treatment of women, the role of the church in social censure, the Troubles and preceding periods of political violence and the dual system of administration on the island have all contributed to how we think about and write about criminology. In addition, issues of data management, data sharing

and research funding have all had an impact on how we do criminological research in Ireland. However, despite political and ideological vagaries of the dual criminal justice system on the island of Ireland, the institutions and the instruments do not define this emerging academic field (Mulcahy 2005). There is a rich tradition of diversity of academic thought on the Island and this has emerged in the Irish criminological literature. Nowhere has this played out more than in the debates around the need for an *official* criminology and warnings against mirroring the criminology of the UK and the USA. Related to these warnings is the question of any relationship between criminology and practice; academic involvement in the doing of criminal justice is hotly contested. The diversity of ideas and positions on the island that range from abolitionist to positivist and Foucauldian to agentic theories, as might be expected, do not lend themselves to a coherent criminology, but these frameworks ensure Irish criminology is neither reactionary, simplistic, nor self-justifying (Smith 2013).

However engagement with the institutions of the state, an activity that is seen by some as a duty in their role as criminologists and by others as a betrayal, does not necessarily mean the emergence of an *official* criminology. As demonstrated in the case of Scotland, a critical tradition can and has emerged *within* the state apparatus. For example according to McAra (2008) the Central Research Unit (CRU) created groundbreaking work in its own right, supported critical scholars, and enabled early career academics to access, critique and analyse data. This debate will no doubt continue and develop in Ireland as calls for funding and the long term support of criminological research heightens.

## An Irish Criminology?

When we ask if there is a distinctly Irish criminology, we should perhaps first ask is there a distinctly Irish system of and interpretation of justice. Going back to the nineteenth century, of course many elements of the Irish system of justice were in line with the English approach, but there has always been something distinctly *Irish* in the approach (Howlin 2013). This was in part due to perceptions of the *savagery* of the population and the ongoing and persistent political unrest in the jurisdiction (ibid.). Researchers point out that despite the role of the British in the development of the Irish Criminal Justice system, Ireland's position as one of influence on British systems of Criminal Justice is sometimes unseen. Whether this relates to the early emergence of a centralised police force,

the pioneering use of permanent paid magistrates or centralised public prosecutions process there was a distinctly *Irish* flavour to the emerging system of justice on the Island defined by centralisation and professionalisation (ibid.). More important perhaps than asking if there is an *Irish* criminology is to focus on what criminology from Ireland can offer to a wider audience. What lessons have we learnt, how have our influences played out and what can we offer to our academic neighbours in this field.

Perhaps we might offer the lessons on policing in a state emerging from a post-colonial environment (Conway 2013), how rejection of centralised criminal justice systems was an active of anti-colonial resistance or how civil war and conflict impacted the institutions of the state, particularly around justice and policing (Brewer et al. 1997b). Of course we can talk about how state power was operationalised and controlled and how this impacted upon what was and was not deemed criminality, but also how parallel systems of control emerged, thereby *saving* the state from having to engage in those spaces (O'Mahony 1993). Importantly we can talk about how the Troubles and the dual system of administration impacted on criminology and criminal justice research on the island. The *Irish and Northern Irish* criminal justice system emerged as a result of the social conditions unique to Ireland and responses to that system, and broader social circumstances are of course a reaction to this uniqueness and these are the lessons we can export.

We know of course that while we have exported our ideas and our experiences, we have also exported our people; a significant number of Irish criminology graduates go onto careers in UK institutions. In addition, practitioners have long been exported from the island. Expatriates who were former Royal Irish Constabulary police officers joined the ranks of police forces around the world and took up positions as civil servants, magistrates etc. in their new homes. Today, there remains significant Irish influence in international criminal justice (and related) organisations. For example Former Garda Commissioner Noirin O Sullivan served as Director of Strategic Partnerships for Europe at the International Association of Chiefs of Police and is currently UN assistant secretary general for the department of safety and security. Chief Supt Stephen Fanning, retired, was the first UN police commissioner and the architect of UN policing policy (Cusack 1996), hundreds of former Royal Ulster Constabulary took up positions in Iraq and Afghanistan (Clarke 2006). Gerry NcNally, the deputy director of the probation service is President of the Confederation of European Probation, Caron McCaffrey the Director