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Citation:

Moran, J (2024) Book Review L. McKeown, Time Shadows: A Prison Memoir, reviewed by Jade Moran. State Crime Journal, 13 (1). pp. 111-112. ISSN 2046-6056 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13169/statecrime.13.1.0111>

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Document Version:

Article (Published Version)

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L. McKeown, *Time Shadows: A Prison Memoir*. Belfast, Northern Ireland: Beyond the Pale, 2021, 272pp., GBP 15.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by Jade Moran

Time Shadows is a remarkable memoir of imprisonment. It is a beautiful elegy to lost comrades and a searing indictment of British state violence against Irish Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh. The 13 chapters focus on the prison protest years of 1976 to 1981. These were Dr Laurence McKeown's first five years in prison, and they capture Britain's brutal attempt to criminalize Irish political prisoners during the blanket protest, the no-wash protest, and the battle ground of the 1981 Hunger Strikes.

Laurence was walled up naked for 1621 days, and it is truly astonishing that he emerged alive. It is a book about endurance, comradeship, belief, and hope. Chapter 1 sets the scene of the British policy of criminalization. We learn that Laurence has been sentenced to five life sentences plus 230 years following a trial that lasted a day and a half in a Diplock Court with a single judge. In Chapter 2, he arrives in the H-Blocks on 27 April 1977 and refuses to wear a prison uniform. What follows is a deeply personal account of the relentless brutality experienced by political prisoners as they try to navigate a system that labels them as common criminals. Laurence McKeown spent four and half years on the blanket protest. He endured 1079 days on a no-wash protest and 70 agonizing days on hunger strike. He did not know how long he would serve in prison. As he recalls, it is the uncertainty of imprisonment that "compounds the brutality of the moment" (viii). Laurence would eventually serve 16 years in the H-Blocks. It remains astonishing that after surviving the hunger strikes, he still had to endure a further 11 years of imprisonment, "extremely exhausted" (239) and too weak to walk across the Circle without holding on to a wall for support. It is a gigantic moment of endurance and fortitude after ten weeks without food. He makes his way back to his comrades alive. The prison officers deride him as "Another failed hunger striker..." (238), however, it is Laurence's strength and dignity that are proclaimed by this battle of endurance.

The memoir contains 14 original illustrations by Gabrielle Williams. These sketches are beautifully realized because of their poignant simplicity. Gabrielle's illustrations help the reader to visualize the prison space, the brutality of the regime, and imaginative means of communication between prisoners. The black and white sketches offer a fine contrast with the 16 pages of colour photographs and facsimiles that are featured in the book. The photographs are important

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because they feature Laurence McKeown's parents, his sister, and brother, and best of all his laughing children as they run across the empty yard of the prison hospital in 2005. This image holds so much significance because Bobby Sands, prior to his death on hunger strike, had written, "Let our revenge be the laughter of our children" (260). Such words and images offer genuine hope in a place that had previously contained "the sounds of death" (213).

While *Time Shadows* is a prison memoir about the tortuous years inside the H-Blocks, it is also a book about prisoners' families on the outside. They carry the violence of imprisonment in their greying hair and tired, worn faces. The memoir perfectly captures the jagged edges of family relationships, and the bewilderment of finding themselves in the crosshairs of a British war against their sons. More than anything, the book is also flooded with immense and enduring love.

The book is written from the perspective of a prisoner, walled up, naked, brutalized. It has an amazing level of detail. The reader stands beside the prisoners feeling each kick and punch from the prison guards. We hear the squeak of naked flesh being dragged on shiny prison floors (102). It is an extremely cellular account in every sense of the word. The Republican prisoners were absolute survivalists making use of every thread of a blanket, every cigarette paper, every page of a Bible, every strand of tobacco. We become acquainted with how the belly button is a good hidey-hole for contraband and how to "bangle" parcels "where the sun never shines" (91). It is also a book about humanity and the kindness of fellow prisoners. It celebrates a mother's love for her son. There is recognition of the night guard who brings a record player onto the wing to let the Republican prisoners listen to music. The memoir is also suffused with the loveliness of the Irish language, the one precious and beautiful thing that belonged to the prisoners as they battled for their right to political status.

Time Shadows is a remarkable memoir. It will be particularly beneficial to those who share an interest in Irish Republican prison protests and the British policy of criminalization. Indeed, it is a book that powerfully contributes to state crime scholarship because it catalogues the use and expansion of the prison estate as a significant part of a colonial project maintained by state-sponsored violence and degrading treatment of prisoners. Laurence McKeown's book bears witness to and documents the organized brutality that defined his first five years in prison. It was a prison literally designed to break his political beliefs.