

Philippa Tomczak, *The Penal Voluntary Sector*, Routledge: London, 2018/17; 188pp.: 9781138189829, £120 (hbk), 9781138500051, £37.99 (pbk)

**Reviewed by:** Jamie Buchan, Edinburgh Napier University.

Although they have occupied a range of important roles in criminal justice, voluntary sector organisations have rarely been studied rigorously by criminologists. What research there has been has tended to focus on larger charities in close service-provider relationships with the state. This refreshing and important book addresses that insufficiency, and challenges an emergent 'critical' tendency to implicate the sector in 'net-widening' and position it as the passive object of marketization and co-optation by neoliberal criminal justice (e.g. Corcoran, 2011).

After an introductory chapter highlighting the gap in knowledge, Chapter 2 provides historical context, beginning with the role of charities in Victorian punishment and moving through the 'net-widening' critique of the 1960s-80s. It concludes with a review of present-day concerns over marketization, particularly relevant in the context of reforms in England and Wales which followed *Breaking the Cycle* (Ministry of Justice, 2010): Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) and the part-privatisation of probation, the extension of mandatory throughcare to short-sentenced former prisoners, and the implementation of Payment by Results (PbR) in criminal justice.

Chapter 3 introduces Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a solution to the macro/micro dilemma which has characterised much recent criminological work, and focuses on two key features of it – the principle of generalised symmetry and the process of translation. The first of these – “the crucial analytical move of ANT” – states that all entities under analysis should be analysed 'symmetrically', in equal terms. The second describes a multi-stage process by which individual entities may be integrated (or fail to be integrated) into a network. This chapter's lucid explanations will be useful to anyone interested in ANT, regardless of topic. Subsequent chapters are structured, as well as informed, by Tomczak's eloquent use of this framework.

Generalised symmetry (traditionally used in ANT to include non-humans in actor-networks) is used in this study to analyse organisations on the same terms, whether they are large or small, weak or powerful. Chapter 4 scopes the full variation of the sector, also including differences in function, funding and relationships with state criminal justice. There is arguably more variation *within* the penal voluntary sector than between sectors, and this is the starting point for critique and qualification of the marketization thesis.

Chapter 5 applies the phases of translation to innovations in punishment, emphasising charities' agency; they are not simply subordinates to the state, and many are affected only minimally and indirectly by marketization. The focus is on smaller-scale, informal and non-contractual relationships which allow charities some flexibility to scope and develop new prospects, especially in prisons. The book then considers more problematic translations, returning to the context of *Breaking the Cycle* and TR. Chapter 6 focuses on the pilots at Peterborough and Doncaster prisons, which aimed to test both PbR itself and the extension of throughcare to short-sentenced prisoners. At this macro level, some charities *did* become co-opted in extending carceral control; in these translations the state was more powerful, able not only to “seduce” some charities but also repeatedly to alter the terms of the pilots, culminating in the premature rollout of PbR and extended throughcare despite limited evidence. However, the chapter retains a nuanced position in relation to this supporting evidence for net-widening and marketization.

Chapter 7 analyses the effects of charitable work, and particularly on the difference between intermediaries and mediators in processes of translation. Tomczak advocates the hybrid concept of

“inclusionary control” – charities, and their relationships with the statutory sector, may both extend carceral control *and* ‘filter’ punishment through inclusionary, non-judgemental and strengths-based approaches rooted in the sector’s position outside the state.

The concluding eighth chapter summarises the key arguments about the diversity of the sector, the inadequacy of the marketization critique and the varied effects of charitable work. This chapter also sounds an important note of hope. Against the dystopian tendency of much critical criminology – which, as well as doing the sector some disservices, has real political impact and may produce self-fulfilling prophecies – Tomczak calls for a pluralist and nuanced theoretical approach, not just for academic reasons but because this may provide charities with tools to resist marketization.

The book draws our gaze away from the ‘big players’ and towards smaller, more independent and often more valuable organisations which have tended to be overlooked. This is done not only by the argument itself, but by providing ample examples of specific organisations and projects, showing *how* translation is used and grounding the argument in empirical reality. However, it is an exploration of diversity, not a ‘map’ of the sector. It is perhaps tempting to imagine mapping the sector as the next step, but Tomczak sensibly notes the ethical implications of drawing attention to the work of smaller, less formal projects which may rely on operating ‘under the radar’ of the Ministry of Justice.

These compelling arguments are grounded in an analysis of financial accounts from over 40 organisations, policy documents and interviews, though in varying proportions across the different chapters. Some of the data are nearly a decade old, and the book is focused entirely on England and Wales. This gives weight to the discussion of *Breaking the Cycle* and TR, but it would be interesting to test Tomczak’s insights elsewhere and with more recent developments.

Overall, the book is not only deeply and rigorously theoretical, but also written clearly and accessibly enough for non-specialists. Practitioners with concerns about marketization and co-optation may find comfort and inspiration in its ‘politically enabling’ conclusions. Anybody studying the structures of punishment, or voluntary sector organisations generally, should take note of Tomczak’s corrective to the longstanding neglect by mainstream criminology of the complexity and diversity of charitable work in criminal justice. This ground-breaking book will surely inspire much further study.

## References

Corcoran M (2011) Dilemmas of institutionalization in the penal voluntary sector. *Critical Social Policy* 31(1): 30-52.

Ministry of Justice (2010) *Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders*. London: Ministry of Justice.