Book Review/Compte rendu

Michel Anteby, *Moral Gray Zones: Side Productions, Identity, and Regulation in an Aeronautic Plant*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008, 248 pp. $US 35.00 hardcover (978-0-691-13524-3)

Moral Gray Zones is an innovative text based on an empirically rich study of organizational practices in an Aeronautic plant in Pierreville, France. Anteby defines gray zones as work settings where workers and their supervisors together engage in practices that are officially forbidden, yet tolerated by the organization. Gray zones challenge the distinction between right and wrong and are moral pursuits "in their own right — pursuits with which some bystanders might disagree, but that participants deem morally worthy" (p. 123). One such gray zone-related practice, homer-making, is a worker's use of company materials or tools in his or her workplace, during work hours, to manufacture or transform artifacts that are not part of the official production of the organization. Homer-making is deceiving as it is meant to look like work, when in fact it is not. Anteby traces the historical record of homer-making, the polysemy of terms applied to homer-making cross-culturally, and the artistic iterations of and legal responses to homer-making. Homer-making in the Pierreville plant was frequently given to retirees and was granted at the time of retirement, often signifying the occupational position of the recipient.

The book consists of eleven chapters broken up into three parts: motivations and setting, findings, and implications. Anteby utilizes a systems theory approach to organizations to attend to the formal and informal interdependencies individuals take part in at work, as well as the sentiments attached to these interdependencies that constitute the work social systems. These social systems extend beyond the work organizations into the family and community contexts. In addition to the formal and informal interactions that constitute work systems, he focuses on the more clandestine forms of interaction (in this case homer-making), that, in part, comprise social systems. Anteby then shows that when clandestine informal interdependencies involve workers and supervisors who mutually engage in officially forbidden organizational practices, they can be considered gray zones.

A particularly interesting aspect of this study is that the aeronautical company barred Anteby from officially doing research within the plant. Undeterred, Anteby pursued the study of homer-making by other means. Interviews with Pierreville retirees, observations at locales where retirees were known to frequent, a survey on retirement homers with retirees, and company and union archives were the main sources of data. Many noteworthy findings developed from this indirect approach, showing that shadowing in organizations and interviews with current employees are not the only useful methods in organizational studies.

Gray zones emerge in Anteby's study as a prime setting for identity enactment before peers and other coworkers. One of Anteby's more significant findings is that by permitting craftsmen to gain respect and recognition in gray zones, supervisors who tolerate homer-making engage in a form of reciprocity with their workers. Supervisors and managers who ignore homer-making, in whole or in part, offer hidden identity incentives to those engaging in homer-making. In allowing homer-making, managers and supervisors acquire a greater level of control than what workers gain in terms of occupational identity. From this finding, Anteby contends that gray zones represent a form of control that he labels "identity incentives control" which relies on the select positive arousal of occupational identity feelings to induce actions or efforts.

In the face of new technologies that contributed to the diminution of craftsmanship, homer-making and homer receiving were prime indicators of belonging to a distinct and revered community of craftsmen in the plant. But, as Anteby shows, there were four additional meanings related to homer production: respect and recognition; collegiality; jobs or regular work; and exchanges. The occupational backgrounds of the participants, including recipients, were shown to inform much of the observed patters of meaning. Another important finding is that gray zones provide a captive audience: unlike open settings where one can choose to not pay attention, gray zones force participants to become active observers in the construction of identities.

A third salient finding is the impact of moral boundaries, outside of official work, on occupational identity formation and maintenance. Anteby argues that "whereas occupations are most often defined in terms of the tasks in which members engage, or by the formal requirements (such as education and credentials) necessary to belong in the occupation, moral boundaries also define occupations" (p. 11). In addition to knowledge gained through formal training, craftsmen were also cognizant of when not to cross the line. That is, producing homers with scrap materials rather than new company material was deemed appropriate.

While *Moral Gray Zones* is thought-provoking and insightful, two criticisms are in order. First, while Anteby uses a systems theory approach to organizations for conceptual guidance, he completely eschews or ignores recent developments in systems-based theories. Consideration of more recent discussions of complexity theory and complex systems would have added many dimensions to his analysis, particularly understandings of emergence in organizations (in this case, gray zones). Second, objects and emotions remain insufficiently treated in Anteby's analysis. Discussions of objects in actor network theory and recent developments in the sociology of emotions would have analytically enriched this study. Despite these criticisms, *Moral Gray Zones* is a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in the sociology of work and organizations. As it is the first text to singularly treat gray zones and homer-making in organizations, scholars interested in work and organizations will find this book invaluable. Scholars of organizational deviance will also find it to be particularly illuminating. *Moral Gray Zones* would be apposite for a senior, undergraduate level course as it makes both substantive and theoretical contributions to our understanding of gray zones in organizations.

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