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Reconceptualizing the Labor Process: Review of
*Satanic Mills or Silicon Islands? The Politics of High-
Tech Production in the Philippines* by Steven C.
McKay

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Michael A. McCarthy was affiliated with New York University at the time of publication.

in the 1930s now convey advantages over former CIO affiliates, allowing the former to better weather the challenges of a deregulated, deindustrialized and casualized employment system by mobilizing immigrant workers. Deft comparisons of successful and unsuccessful union campaigns show compellingly that, to succeed, bottom-up, immigrant-worker organizing must be complemented by extensive legal, research, and financial resources and leadership commitment by established unions. Along the way, Milkman debunks many facile clichés—immigrants are unorganizable; immigration leads to union decline; global off-shoring undermines workers' collective capacity. This book is extraordinarily rich in a wide range of empirical data: aggregate statistics, vivid first-person interviews, and industry history. Written with great clarity and insight, this book is an exemplary piece of scholarship.

The section's best graduate student paper award for 2007 went to Cesar Rodriguez-Garavito at the University of Wisconsin at Madison for his paper, "Sewing Resistance: Transnational Organizing, Anti-Sweatshop Activism, and Labor Rights in the US-Caribbean Basin Apparel Industry (1990-2005)." The author provides an excellent synthesis of current work on transnational labor activism, framing, and dynamics of contention, and then analyzes anti-sweatshop Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs), using both ethnographic research and a data set the author compiled of 93 campaigns. It analyzes the tensions between unions and NGOs, and offers new insight into the growing efforts to build a transnational labor movement.

Honorable mention for the best graduate student paper goes to Denise Roca-Servat of Arizona State University for her paper, "The Case of Latino Construction Workers in Arizona: Implementing a Comprehensive Union Organizing Campaign." This is a participant-observation study of the "Justice for Roofers" union organizing campaign in Arizona, a case study situated in the larger literature on labor organizing among undocumented immigrants.

Book Review

Reconceptualizing the Labor Process

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Steven C. McKay, Satanic Mills or Silicon Islands? The Politics of High-Tech Production in the Philippines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). 253 pages. \$49.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Has high-tech production in the Philippines led to the formation of "satanic mills" or "silicon islands"? While critics of neoliberalism argue for the former and proponents the latter, Steven C. McKay says that the real answer is neither.

In this innovative research, McKay utilizes a range of concepts and rich ethnographic data to expand upon Burawoy's approach to the politics of work and the reproduction of capitalism more generally. He identifies distinct types of work regimes that are found in the EPZs in the Philippines, which don't neatly fall into the rough categories of "satanic mills" (i.e. isolating and coercive work environments) or "silicon islands" (i.e. innovative and fulfilling work environments). McKay distinguishes these regimes from one another by identifying the unique practices that the firms engaged in, in order to suppress or obvert unionization efforts and to secure varying levels of workers' commitment.

McKay begins to complicate the conclusions of Burawoy's earlier research by demonstrating that the skill level required for tasks, the level of autonomy, and how workers are organized on the shop floor (i.e., whether into teams or alone on a factory line), together create contradictory logics in the labor process that help to form distinct work regimes. He suggests that these logics are largely constrained by the nature of the product that the firm manufactures (i.e. capital-intensive or labor-intensive), the nature of production (i.e.,

complex or deskilled), and the competitive character of the market that the firm is in. On the one hand, when wages and market competition are low and the labor process is un-complex management will extract worker effort with simple direct and coercive control. On the other hand, in firms with acute technical and market demands, the disciplinary strategy that a firm utilizes will rely on softer forms of control. Given these divergent potentials, McKay argues that a complete explanation of how workers' commitment to a firm is secured requires an analysis that augments Burawoy's exclusive focus on the shop floor with an investigation of firm practices in the various localities that they draw their labor supply from.

In this sense, the author identifies an important additional area where the politics of high-tech production are formed: variation in localization strategies – taking advantage of uneven development and preexisting differences across localities in ways that correspond to production requirements. In order to successfully garner workers' commitment and effort, the internal strategy that a firm pursues will have to correspond to an external localization strategy that both reinforces and creates constraints on workers. According to McKay, "strategic localization" in the firms in his study, involves unique combinations of three components: selective and gendered recruitment, preempting union organizing, and conspiring with state officers. Coupled with dynamics located at the point of production, the particular ways in which firms localize their production completes the causal explanation for variation in workers' commitment to the firm.

McKay's prediction that firms exploit existing differences and intervene in the labor supply in labor markets to enhance various forms of factory discipline played out in the cases of the study. Each firm manipulated power differentials caused by gender ideologies and labor market segmentation. In doing so, they were able to employ highly skilled workers while at the same time garnering various levels of commitment.

However, such an intervention requires regulatory stability of labor market institutions, and general conditions that are favorable to firms. In order to satisfy these conditions, the firm becomes reliant on local and/or national state actors who act in ways that help reproduce the social relations of production. For instance, state enforcement of EPZs, the non-enforcement of labor laws, the dismantling of workers' rights, labor management committees, and state coordination of employee recruitment all contribute to circumscribe bargaining power of well-educated Filipino workers.

A potential flaw in the book is that we don't know if the ideal-typical work regimes that McKay identifies are exhaustive or how representative they are of other firms in the Philippines' high tech sector. Additionally, McKay says very little about the possible connections between the multinational firm's nation of origin and its particular work regime. His argument clearly claims that there is a minimal connection, with more technical factors taking precedent. However, in terms of empirical trends, there does seem to be a relationship. For instance, the European firm relied on collective bargaining, the American firm relied on a "human resources" strategy, and the Korean firm relied on coercion. Each seems rather predictable. While this could be a matter of case selection, the author failed to show that work regimes were not influenced by "best practices" in home countries.

In sum, this research is a very rich theoretical step forward in relation to how workers commitment is manufactured by firms. The work adroitly identifies the positive and negative incentives inside and outside of firms that are used to influence workers' attachment, effort, and loyalty. If they haven't already, our membership will likely find *Satanic Mills or Silicon Islands?* very useful. This is a must read for anyone interested in the labor process.