



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Detachment as a Corporate Ethic

Citation for published version:

Cross, J 2016, Detachment as a Corporate Ethic: Materialising CSR in the Diamond Supply Chain. in C Dolan & D Rajak (eds), The anthropology of corporate social responsibility.. Dislocations, vol. 18, Berghahn Books.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

The anthropology of corporate social responsibility.

Publisher Rights Statement:

This chapter appears in a larger collection published by Berghahn Books
<http://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/DolanAnthropology>. Cross, Jamie. 2016. "Detachment as a Corporate Ethic: Materialising CSR in the Diamond Supply Chain" In The Anthropology of Corporate Social Responsibility, eds. Catherine Dolan and Dinah Rajak. New York: Berghahn Books.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Detachment as a corporate ethic: Materializing CSR in the diamond supply chain

Jamie Cross

Abstract: This article examines efforts by De Beers, the world's largest supplier of rough diamonds, to better regulate the conditions under which its stones are cut and polished across a global network of buyers, contractors, and subcontractors. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork at an offshore processing unit in South India that was built to service De Beers' buyers, this article explores how ethical accounting regimes are materialized on the floor of a global factory and how they are grounded in an industrial bureaucracy. In a global supply chain like this one, I argue, codes of practice and audit checklists demand to be understood as material technologies that afford companies and individuals new purchase on an ethic of detachment.

Keywords: CSR, materiality, diamonds, India, detachment

From hard rock to diamond ring

By the end of the twentieth century the global trade in diamond gemstones—one of the world's most iconic luxury commodities—had become an important focus for campaigns by international human- and labor-rights organizations. In 2000 the De Beers Group, whose monopolistic business practices saw it control the global supply of rough diamonds during the twentieth century, responded to these campaigns with two regulatory interventions. The first was the “Kimberly Process Certification Scheme,” a UN-backed mechanism intended to certify the origin of all diamond

gemstones and curtail the trade in conflict diamonds. The second intervention was the “Best Practice Principles” (BPP) program that introduced a new set of voluntary regulations into what De Beers calls its “diamond pipeline.”

Rough diamonds that are dug out of the ground in mines owned by De Beers in Africa and North America are sorted, valued, and distributed by a daughter company, the Diamond Trading Company (DTC). The DTC sells rough stones to a tightly controlled number of buyers, called “Sightholders.” Sightholders either process rough stones in their own facilities, or contract rough stones out to specialized manufacturers who cut and polish them into consumer-quality diamonds. De Beers’ code of practice, developed without the participation of any other industry stakeholders, introduced a new set of standards into this complex global web of traders and manufacturers.

When it was launched, the BPP program was heralded as a new commitment to self-regulation at all levels of De Beers’ diamond pipeline, “from hard rock to diamond ring” as publicity materials put it. Under the program, all cutting and polishing facilities fully or partially owned by De Beers and its Sightholders (as well as facilities they subcontracted work to) were required to become fully compliant with a set of minimum business standards. Their compliance would be guaranteed through what De Beers described as a “systematic assurance program” that involved a series of documentary procedures and a third-party financial, social, and environmental audit. The new initiative, it was announced, would ensure “that the De Beers Family of companies, Sightholders and applicable third parties operate to an ethical, legal professional, social and environmental standard,” and that the exploration, extraction, sorting, cutting, and polishing of diamonds took place in ways that did not “endanger the health or welfare of individuals” or the environment. The BPP would, De Beers

claimed, “lead to a general improvement in responsible business practices” across the diamond industry.

Detachment as a corporate ethic

De Beers’ best-practices program presents anthropology with a classic example of “corporate ethicizing” at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Responding to civil society concerns, the scope of its corporate responsibility program encompassed a complex and diverse global supply chain to include the buyers of its stones and their subcontractors. Valorizing the willingness and the capacity of market actors to safeguard and guarantee business practices, De Beers deployed what is now a familiar array of tools, including a code of practice and a set of performance indicators against which a diverse chain of diamond sorting, processing, cutting and polishing facilities could be audited, evaluated, and reported.

There is now an established social scientific critique of corporate social responsibility. A growing body of literature shows how CSR advances and entrenches neoliberal capitalism by “embedding social relations in economic processes” (Shamir 2004, 2008), naturalizing the role of market actors as the stewards and arbiters of justice (Blowfield and Dolan 2008) and reproducing North-South relationships of dependency and subordination (Rajak 2008). In this critique, corporate codes of conduct and systems of inspection are agents of abstraction and virtualism (Carrier and Miller 1998; Miller 1998; Strathern 2000, 2002). They produce “decontextualized” relationships and knowledge, by collapsing the everyday politics of work and the complexity of located personal relationships, questions of procedure

and norms, outcomes and indicators, and by translating complicated and messy social worlds into standardized concepts and categories (Dolan 2008).

In this article I extend the anthropology of “corporate ethicizing” by examining the introduction of De Beers’ BPP program at an offshore diamond manufacturing facility in India. Like other articles in this special issue, I explore “corporate ethicizing” as a process rooted in the mundane, quotidian work of doing business. The offshore manufacturing zone is a unique space of contemporary global production, one that is marked by the near total removal of controls and regulations on corporate practices. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I show how ethical accounting regimes feed into the ongoing efforts by supply-chain capitalists and factory managers within this space to separate themselves legally, morally, and socially from binding obligations and responsibility to producers. Codes of conduct and social audits are materialized in global supply chains in ways that provide executive and manager new purchase on what we might call an “ethic of detachment.”

What do I mean by “detachment”? Current trends in economic sociology approach the bracketing and ending of relationships between two parties in a transaction as crucial acts in the performance of a market, and seek to grasp how the terms of this “detachment” are established and coordinated (Callon 1998; MacKenzie et al. 2007). Anthropologists have responded to this discussion by arguing that “detachment” is a fiction of economics, one that can never really be achieved in real-world transactions, and emphasize the constant, complex nature of attachments linking people in market transactions (Holm 2007; Miller 2002). One route through this debate is to see detachment as a relationship, or as relational. There is emerging interest among anthropologists in “disconnection, distance, and detachment” as meaningful frameworks for action and forms of virtue (Candea et al. 2009). In this

light the bracketing, limiting, and ending of economic relationships, like those between actors in a market transaction, are always still relationships; and, to the extent that detachment is a guide to conduct, it is an ethic.

One way to think through detachment as a corporate ethic is to see it as the antithesis of an ethic of attachment or reconnection like that promulgated by the Fair Trade movement. Fair Trade initiatives construct, convey, and manage a set of ethical values through the commodity chain, inscribing the relationship between consumer and producer with notions of sociality, respect, obligation, long term attachment, and the possibility for intimacy (Dolan 2008: 274–80). This ethic of attachment is what makes Fair Trade unique, and why ethical accounting regimes are at their most prominent and vociferous in the commodity chains for Fair Trade goods.

The supply chains of many consumer goods in the Euro-American world, however, stand in direct contrast. The actions of many corporate entities and managerial subjects continue to be guided by the principle that successful, globally competitive business demands finite limits on and the possibility of closure from relationships with producers. Beyond the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility, companies and managers continue to be deeply invested in the creation of short-term, nonbinding attachments to producers. They are constantly engaged in establishing limits and endpoints to relationships in their supply chain, ensuring that contracts are time-bound and spatially defined, resisting proximity and intimacy, and framing relationships around difference and distance.

Capitalist modernity has given rise to diverse spatial formations (Thrift 1996), devices (Callon 2007) and disciplines (Rose 1999) that might be said to produce “detachment.” These are brought together in a productive synthesis inside the free-trade zones that have proliferated across the global South. Ostensibly built to

encourage foreign investment and promote rapid industrialization, economic zones create unique territorial, judicial, and discursive spaces (see, e.g., Cross 2010b; Ong 2006). Detachment is instantiated in the zone: built into its physical design, its legal constitution, the political economy of its investments, and the social architecture of relations between manufacturing companies that locate inside them and the people they employ. Little surprise perhaps that zones have gained such notoriety as the gray areas in global supply chains (Tsing 2009).

Detachment is different from what Anthony Giddens meant by “disembedding” (Giddens 1990). Where disembedding described a historical dynamic of ever-increasing separation between society and the market that was symptomatic of capitalist modernity (see also Thrift 1998), detachment describes a relationship that has to be constantly made as such. It is in this sense that Nigel Thrift describes capitalism as a “practical order that is constantly in motion” (ibid.: 78). Detachment as a corporate ethic is one that must be constantly performed in the everyday operations of management. In this, I suggest, codes of practice and audit technologies emerge as unique material technologies that enable transnational corporations and individual managers to establish limits and endpoints in their relationships to producers.

Worldwide diamonds

Between 2004 and 2006 there were eighty-four companies on De Beers’ list of Sightholders. Twelve of these companies subcontracted the cutting and polishing of diamonds sourced from De Beers to an offshore manufacturer based in South India. This factory, called Worldwide Diamonds, was located in a nondescript whitewashed

building inside a secure and gated offshore manufacturing enclave in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Established in 1997, Worldwide Diamonds applied modern assembly-line technologies and hyper-efficient work processes to the diamond industry. Work here was casual, insecure, low-waged, and labor-intensive, and by 2005 the factory had undercut all its major competitors to emerge as one of the world's premier low-cost, high-volume producers of small-sized, medium-quality diamonds. At its peak it employed 1200 people and processed 14,000 carats of rough diamond each month, with an export value of approximately \$4 million.

Between January and December 2005, I was given open access to the Worldwide Diamonds factory as part of a wider research project on industrial life and work in India's new economic zones. My research drew on a tradition of ethnographic research in which anthropologists of work "learn by doing." For twelve months I trained as a diamond polisher in the factory's cornering, blocking, and bruiting sections, and carried out repeated and extended interviews with the factory's managers, sitting in on meetings and planning sessions. The gatekeepers who made this research possible made no demands on my data and no requests that I conceal the factory's identity. The names of companies that appear in this paper are all real, but the names and identities of individuals have all been changed.

In the second half of the twentieth century diamond manufacturers were engaged in a struggle to remain globally competitive, by detaching their cutting and polishing operations from forms of state and social regulation. Since the 1970s, increased global demand had seen diamond manufacturing shift from long established cutting and polishing workshops in Belgium to international locations with cheaper labor costs and more relaxed industrial legislation. Gemstone dealers in the Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra captured a high proportion of this global trade. But

in the 1990s India's new economic zones, which offered a raft of exemptions from tax and labor regimes, promised new opportunities for international investors.

Worldwide Diamonds was the international diamond industry's first direct investment in India's new offshore economy. The investment was a joint venture between Bettonville, a Belgian company that is the world's largest manufacturer of tools and equipment for the diamond industry, and Hennig, a British company that is the UK's largest diamond broker. Their factory was conceived of as an "in-house" processing facility that would provide access to India's low-cost labor market for De Beers' European and North American Sightholders. The social organization of production here reproduced historic relationships of power and domination, with a labor force comprised of Telugu men and women who were differentiated by caste, class, and language from the factory's Indian managers and its white European executives (Cross 2009).

Because they have been such notorious sites of labor abuse in global supply chains, free-trade zones have also emerged as political sites in which companies that aspire to be good corporate citizens must seek to limit or manage potential damage to their reputations. Economic zones have become increasingly significant as spaces in which companies seek to establish, enact or perform themselves as "ethical." Sure enough, in 2004, one of Worldwide Diamonds twelve clients decided that its offshore contractor fell within the remit of De Beers' new ethical accounting regime.

Best practices

At the end of 2004, the Millennium Group's chief financial officer travelled to London, and Worldwide Diamonds' senior managers travelled to Mumbai, for

training workshops on the BPP program run by the Diamond Trading Company. The framework for implementing De Beers' BPP program created a spatial-temporal map of responsibility across a global network of traders and suppliers. The need for "action" was determined on the basis of an agent's proximity to or distance from De Beers. Companies in which De Beers or its Sightholders held a stake had to demonstrate their compliance with the BPPs within two years, while facilities like Worldwide Diamonds' that had written or oral contracts with De Beers' Sightholders were required to become compliant by June 2005.

Becoming compliant was a two-stage process. First, a manufacturer had to commission an independent on-site audit by the Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), a Geneva-based company that offers third-party inspection, testing, certification, and verification services to a wide range of major corporate clients, and which was the certified auditor for the BPP process. This audit would take place once. Secondly, a manufacturer had to complete a self-assessment process and provide written evidence that the factory recognized De Beers' practices and principles. This self-assessment was to be submitted for independent monitoring, verification, and peer review and was due to be repeated on an annual basis.

Worldwide Diamonds' senior executives returned to their factory largely unfazed by the implications of its new accounting regime. As they saw it, transnational corporations like De Beers had to perform a delicate balancing act. On one hand they had to make the kind of regulatory performance demanded of a good corporate citizen. On the other, they had to reaffirm their commitment to market freedoms as demanded by their own Sightholders. From their perspective, the BPP was a device that allowed the industry's dominant actor to limit its future exposure to negative publicity, while ensuring that business practices in the supply chain

remained “competitive.” Adam, the Millennium Group’s chief financial officer, described the rationale to me:

Adam: “For De Beers it is essential to safeguard the industry. If there are any accusations about the diamond industry in the future ... Any accusations that the industry is doing something bad.... Well now, before any negative publicity has a chance to come out De Beers can say: ‘We have our codes of conduct. We are strictly implementing them. If someone is found to have done something wrong, we will take action against them. You can’t blame the diamond industry....’”

At the same time, he explained, regulatory interventions had to be bracketed, confined to specific areas of business. Ambiguity was essential:

Adam: “Their code has to be ambiguous. It cannot control all aspects of business behavior. There are some things it can check, like whether or not we are employing child labor, if we have fire exits or if we provide drinking water. But the moment they try to control the business environment ... the moment that they try to put restrictions on salary structures or on incentive systems, well ... See: there is a line and De Beers have to ensure that they don’t cross it to interfere with the business environment.”

The Millennium Group hired a Hong Kong-based consultancy firm, “Best Practice Consultants,” to guide them through the BPP program. Two Israeli entrepreneurs had established the consultancy firm specifically for this purpose. “Without the right navigation,” the company’s sales brochure states,

“the journey towards compliance with the Best Practice Principles can be frustrating and time-consuming.... Dealing with all aspects of BPP compliance is a complex process that requires specialized knowledge. Our rich knowledge of all current BPP legislation and procedures ensures that our clients take the fastest and most cost-effective track towards complying with BPP requirements....”

At the end of 2004 these two consultants travelled to Hyderabad, the state capital of Andhra Pradesh, and ran a workshop for Worldwide Diamonds’ managers. The participants included two senior European executives and twelve young Indian management trainees, to whom the task of actually bringing Worldwide Diamonds into line with the BPP program was delegated.

Walking the line

Worldwide Diamonds’ management trainees were aged between 22 and 26, and had graduate master’s degrees in engineering or management from provincial English medium colleges in South India. With salaries of 8000 rupees (approximately USD 200) a month, their earnings were more than double that of the factory’s production workers, but still represented the bottom of India’s white-collar graduate labor market. These young managers all dreamt of moving upwards into the higher ranks of business professionals, or of travelling overseas to pursue further educational qualifications.

As they saw it, the biggest everyday challenge of modern factory management was to avoid becoming embroiled in a web of close, binding, personal relationships with the people they were employed to manage and control. They clamored away

from relationships with the factory's workforce, afraid that any intimation of closeness, friendship, or intimacy with individuals might offer them some kind of leverage in requests for a promotion, a wage increase, extra leave, extra overtime, or a reduction in workload. Managers like Vikram, Jeet, and Chiru put these problems succinctly during interviews with me on and off the factory floor. Their anxieties stand testament to the difficulties of imposing a high-intensity production regime on people with whom you enjoy close relations, and to the constant work or effort involved in successfully achieving a degree of "distance" from workers. Detachment was seen as a precondition for the rational, market-oriented calculations and impartial decisions required of a modern professional, essential for achieving control and productivity. Achieving detachment meant purging oneself of sentiment, foreclosing any affective ties of obligation or reciprocity.

Vikram: "Relations with workers can't be avoided. They're necessary, they're a must. Without them you can't get the required outputs on the shop floor. But at the same time you can't try to build good relations with workers here. You'll never be successful like that. If you want them to meet targets and to keep the quality up then you have to be strict, you have to be disciplined. You can't go with your sentiments. You can't get production with sentiments."

Understanding, finding, and maintaining this fine line was a preeminent day-to-day concern and was a repeated motif in my conversational interviews.

Jeet: "You can't be friends or enemies with the workers here.... There will be some situations when I have to compel workers to do certain things. And if I am

maintaining a friendship with them I just won't be able to do that. But you also just can't get things done by being authoritative! I'm talking about being on the shop floor where you spend eight hours a day. When you're there you have to get personal with workers so that you can create a good atmosphere for work. But there are always some limitations. Because when there is a managerial gap between you and them—and there should be a gap—you must not show it. You should not show the gap physically or allow others to feel it. But you have to maintain it. You have to maintain it for yourselves. How to maintain the line, though ... well that varies from time to time ... I can't draw the line straight away. If I immediately and stubbornly draw a line then it's sure that I'll lose the workers, and I don't want to lose them. These are the things that show our competencies.”

Reciprocal social ties are sometimes described in Telugu as *tapana*: actions that provoke a sense of compulsion in the recipient to do something in return. The accounts of young managers describe a keen aversion to *tapana* relations with workers, and to the obligations and responsibilities they bring. Chiru explained how these bonds worked in the context of his family.

Chiru: “Say I am at my house, with my two brothers. If I help my brother in one situation, he will help in another. If I do something for him then he will think to do something for me too. He will get some sense that he should help me. He will be feeling *tapana*. And some delay will be there. And that delay is useful. If I support someone at one time, later they will feel that they can come to me.”

In the context of a manufacturing unit in which there was pressure to increase the quantity and quality of production, *tapana* relations and their expectations of delayed reciprocity were precisely what managers like Chiru sought to avoid.

Chiru: “I have not been touching the personal aspects up til now. No. I’ve just been going to a superficial level. If we go into the deep personal aspects it means touching a deep sensitive part of them. Am I right? If you go twenty to thirty percent deep into personal aspects it won’t affect them much. If I go deep it increases my responsibility also. I feel there would be some responsibility on my shoulders ...”

Such strategies of avoidance were tightly bound up with the creation and performance of a professional managerial self, a stable normative identity that was frequently associated with the figure of the engineer.

Vikram: “When I came here, I learned from the workers. I used to be friendly with them so that I could manage problems that came up. But I maintained those relations in a smooth and cool manner. I behaved as an engineer.”

So while managers observed and profiled workers, they resisted any efforts by workers to collect information about them. They worked to maintain a distance from workers.

Jeet: “The workers should not know me. I should only know them. They should not be able to guess me, because they can use that. But I should be able to guess them. I should be able to know their strong points and their weak points. From the first, I

didn't bring personal relations into the job. According to me, the job is entirely different and personal is entirely different. Managers are not interested in personal matters. So I won't allow people to ask me about myself. That is my way of living style. My father used to say 'don't bring personals into job profile' because if you bring any one of the personal reasons into the job people will start to ask you: 'Sir will you help me in this manner or that manner.'”

It was against the backdrop of these managerial struggles to establish and maintain limits and boundaries on relationships with workers that De Beers' BPP program was introduced to Worldwide Diamonds. For the factory's management trainees, this was to be their first exposure to the language of CSR, to codes of conduct and social audits. What is today an important feature of graduate education at business schools in Europe and North America has yet to enter the curricula of provincial colleges in South India. As I will show, their efforts to bring the factory into compliance with De Beers' BPP program become inseparable from their efforts to become management professionals. The specific form in which the program was materialized on the factory floor presented new tools with which to further their detachment from workplace relationships.

Materializing CSR

At their workshop in Hyderabad, Worldwide Diamonds' management trainees were presented with a large, glossy lever-arch folder. Inside were three documents: 1) a “BPP Requirements Book,” an annotated bibliography of the international laws, covenants, regulations, and agreements that were used as the basis for the BPP's

performance indicators; 2) a BPP manual, which provided a detailed description of the program, including a timetable for its implementation; and 3) a workbook, a series of tables with the specific BPP performance indicators against which a company's compliance would be audited. The folder was carried back into the factory, where it was dumped on a shelf in a rickety steel cabinet in a corner of the laser cutting room. It was the sheer physicality of the BPP program and the written tasks that these documents created that presented managers with their most immediate problems. "This thing is really a big headache," said Vikram. "Don't get me wrong. But I just don't like very clumsy, very bureaucratic things. I had so many other things to do and now, on top of everything, I've got that huge, great clunky folder and all that paper."

Like all ethical accounting regimes, De Beers' BPP program is primarily constituted not as a process or a practice but as a material object: a set of written documents. Since 2004 these documents have been distributed, downloaded, and emailed along De Beers' diamond pipeline, gradually finding their way to contractors.

Documents are central to the performance of corporate social responsibility. Yet the material significance of documents and the work involved in their production, circulation, and dissemination has been overlooked by recent anthropology. As the work of Annelise Riles (1998, 2006a, 2006b) reminds us, the document is the "paradigmatic material artefact of modern knowledge practices," the artifact that materializes them all. Ethical accounting regimes hinge on the performance and enactment of proper bureaucratic rituals, procedures, and practices, all of which require an engagement with the document as a material technology. Indeed codes of practice and auditing, monitoring, and verification mechanisms can all be described as "calls to documentation" (Riles 2006a: 6). De Beers' BPP program is a case in point.

The successful implementation of the program required documents to beget more documents.

In 2005, each facility being submitted for auditing and verification under De Beers' new ethical accounting regime was required to complete an audit workbook and write separate, substantive replies to each question. In addition, they were required to maintain an up-to-date series of policy statements. These documents were collated and uploaded via an electronic submission system to a central database run by the BPP team. The BPP database sent out an automatic email notification that the documents had been received, and sent an email alerting De Beers' external auditor, SGS, that they were ready for inspection. At one of SGS's regional offices in India, the documents would be downloaded and proofread: checked for any missing answers or missing policies. The documents would then be passed on to SGS's head office in Geneva, where they were "monitored for global consistency." Any infringements, what are called major or minor breaches of the BPP, would be made visible in the database. A factory that was in breach of the code was notified in writing, and its response was made in the same way.

The problem facing anthropologists is how, as Annelise Riles puts it (1998), to bring into view the creative work involved in this work of documentation, and in the production of "convincing, effective documents"—that is, to reveal the material significance of documents rather than just their discursive power. Attention to the materiality of CSR and the work of creating or using documents is a different point of entry into current debates than that taken by anthropologists writing in the Foucauldian tradition. In this tradition, the key instruments used to implement an ethical accounting regime (like the codes of practice and the audit checklist) are discursive technologies that encode different levels, genres, and expressions of

governmentality. The focus here is on the “hidden politics of meaning” contained within a burgeoning library of international codes, protocols, guidelines, and standards, and their power as “instruments of political or ideological control” that produce selves, persons, and society (Riles 1998, 2006). In this vein, accounting tools can appear to install, as Dolan evocatively puts it, “new metrics of governance” (Dolan 2010: 34).

A document like De Beers’ BPP Workbook is particularly conducive to this kind of analysis. The workbook was effectively a checklist that translated the key clauses of internationally recognized protocols into a series of standardized and verifiable questions about financial and business procedures, employment and working conditions (including health and safety), and environmental practices. Among those on “employment,” for example, was question number 23: “Are all workers aware of and clearly understand the terms and conditions of their employment including working hours, wage structure and standing orders?” And under “health and safety” was question number 30: “Are all workers advised of their duties, responsibilities and rights with regard to health and safety and are they made aware of the entity’s health and safety procedures?” By erasing the ways that power and political economy are transcribed on the working body, such questions and categories made individual workers the sole bearers of responsibility for health and well-being. Like other attempts to codify health and safety risks in the modern industrial workplace, they removed from consideration all other factors that affected the individual’s well-being at work, and they produced the worker as an autonomous and flexible laboring subject (Cross 2010a; Martin 1994).

Yet in this Foucauldian tradition of analysis, as Riles argues (2006a), texts and categories can come to exert an unduly hegemonic and overdetermining influence.

Documents, she writes, both “anticipate and enable certain actions,” “they are both open and closed.” While this BPP Workbook may demand certain kinds of responses from Worldwide Diamonds’ managers, it could not complete itself, and the work of completing it, of producing appropriate documentary responses, was also a pathway for action. To think about codes and checklists as material artifacts is to ask how they are being used, and what actors may be doing with them (ibid.: 10–12). As I will show, the power of De Beers’ BPP program was not simply that it crafted new managerial subjects, but rather that it offered people new purchase in their ongoing struggles to extricate themselves from ties and obligations.

Technologies of detachment

Vikram, Jeet, and Chiru threw themselves into the task of completing the BPP documents with considerable zeal. They organized meetings with each other to discuss the precise wording of the workbook questions, and they drafted multiple replies. As they formulated these responses, Vikram, Jeet, and Chiru turned to the original texts, borrowing sentences, phrases, and categories for quotation and repetition. The BPP documents were a vital resource and appear to have been designed precisely for this purpose. The BPP Manual, for example, gives detailed instructions on what company policies should look like, even offering generic sentences or statements that can be cut and pasted into a company’s written responses. A section on employment, for example, states that: “Key elements in a policy on freedom of association and collective bargaining might include: a statement that worker representatives must have access to their members in the workplace, and that the employer does not interfere with the activities of worker organizations.” Making

Worldwide Diamonds' documents convincing was, as Riles argues (1998: 386), "less about transparent meaning than about the aesthetics of logic and language," and Vikram, Jeet, and Chiru's job was to make the documents look right.

In their own accounts, the practical task of implementing De Beers' new accounting regime begins to emerge as a creative rather than a subjectifying task: a task through which they could perform themselves as modern professionals and derive a reflexive satisfaction.

Jeet: "I've learnt a lot from working in this factory, especially the qualities of a professional leader, a manager. He should be smart, professional, very formal. He should know the rules and regulations systems, like ISO and BPP. All of it."

Vikram: "Some factories are like football. They're rough, they don't have many rules, you push and you shove. But our company is like cricket, it's full of rules and regulations. And being here, you have to come to how to play the game. You have to know how to handle the rules, how to deal with the paperwork, and like that you move from being amateur to going pro."

As they reflected on what they had learned over the first year of their management training, their understanding of how to organize, manage, and control the factory's labor force was inextricably bound up with the bureaucratic systems and procedures associated with the BPP program. The task of creating effective BPP documents seemed to have helped them legitimize or formalize the fine line between what they called the personal and the professional, and extricate themselves from binding ties or

obligations to workers. As Jeet told me after the BPP documents had been submitted in 2005:

Jeet: “These systematic procedures are necessary if we want to make this company professional. What is written has to be done.”

Similarly, Vikram described the BPP documents as “step by step guides, so there would be no confusion about what to do.” Chiru put the efficacy of the documents most bluntly:

Chiru: “No one can complain now. What we do here, what happens here is the company’s will. The will of the company. Not of any one person.”

As they filled out the audit workbook and finalized their written responses, the work of documentation permeated their everyday interactions on the factory floor.

Confronted with small requests for personal favors or special treatment by workers, they used the documents to justify or explain a refusal to enter into what they understood as close or personal relationships.

Chiru: “I’ve learnt a different management style in this factory.... Now I know the predetermined parameters that you should keep in mind. I learnt how a professional manager should go.... There is no partiality in him. That’s the philosophy that a professional manager should follow. People should not create disparity by liking one person more than another. The rule for one is the rule for all.”

Vikram: “A professional manager should not spend time listening to the words of workers. A professional person is never sentimental. They’re experts. If they are to be professional then they have to think about quality and production, and not get distracted by conditions and salaries. If we have all these systems in place, we don’t have to get distracted by workers complaining to us that the conditions are not good, that the toilet facilities are bad, that the production is too heavy, that the seats are uncomfortable, that the dust is there, that the salaries are not good.”

The same effect was visible higher up the management hierarchy. Worldwide Diamonds’ senior management executives used the code to define and delineate what was meant by terms and conditions of work, bracketing or separating from them the actual costs of labor. “I think we mostly comply with the BPP,” Adam concluded, after the company had submitted the audit workbook.

Adam: “There are a few problems with fire escapes and things like that here but codes like this are basically for diamond workshops where there are really bad working conditions, like those on the other side of India, in Surat and Mumbai. The real problem is with sweatshops. Not factories like this where people work in humanitarian conditions.”

The power of audit documents in a low-waged, hyper-efficient manufacturing unit comes in the combination of their discursive and material qualities. Inside Worldwide Diamonds, De Beers’ code of conduct and audit workbook were never just ideologically loaded texts that abstracted and decontextualized relationships between transnational capital, managerial subjects, and a global labor force. Instead it was

precisely the discursive power of these texts—the power to abstract and decontextualize, to extract relationships from local contexts of interaction, to codify and standardize relationships—that resonated most with managers. The work of filling out and completing the documentation opened up new paths of action that extended, deepened, and entrenched an ethic of “detachment.” They delineated specific terms to the relationships between employer and employee, manager and worker. They limited these relationships both temporally (to the period of the working day) and spatially (to the borders of the workplace). And they ensured that any commitments or obligations that might have arisen out of everyday relationships with workers were “encompassed” by global institutions and accountability regimes that aggregated moral authority (Strathern 2005).

Conclusion

Since 2005 and my original fieldwork for this paper, the scope of De Beers’ BPP program has been significantly adjusted, as a result of what industry insiders call “pushback” from Sightholders. Confronted with the implications and costs of monitoring their diverse trading, mining, and manufacturing facilities, Sightholders have lobbied De Beers to limit the scope of the BPP program. Some time between 2007 and 2008, a significant clause was introduced into the small print. Today only a Sightholder’s “significant contractors” - —those to whom it provides seventy-five percent or more of their annual turnover—are required to comply with the terms of De Beers’ BPP program. A major diamond manufacturing company like Worldwide Diamonds that offers services to a number of Sightholders—none of whom individually accounted for seventy-five percent or more of its business—is no longer

required to submit itself for inspection. Indeed, after the events described in this article, Worldwide Diamonds ended its participation in the BPP program.

Empirical accounts of corporate social responsibility at sites of offshore manufacturing have often chosen to emphasize the deliberate efforts of corporations or factory managers to subvert or bend an inspection process. In such cases “an imperative for transparency and accountability can produce instead opacity and deception” (Dolan 2008: 287). In this article I have taken a different tack, showing how codes of conduct and social audits can segue perfectly into the efforts of companies and managers to organize complex global supply chains, and of offshore manufacturers to organize cost-efficient and competitive systems of mass production. My argument rests on a paradox, that ethical accounting regimes which are premised on the creation of closer ties, attachments, or relationships between global corporations and producers actually allow companies and managers new tools with which to delineate the ends and limits to these relationships, fostering what I have called an ethic of detachment.

The real success of corporate social responsibility in a global supply chain is that it redistributes responsibility and obligation across a network of actors, rather than concentrating and focusing it upon one (Crook 2000; Strathern 1996). This would appear to hold true both for large corporate entities as well as for individuals. In the diamond industry, De Beers’ attempt to manage its relationships with Sightholders and subcontractors through a corporate social responsibility program is folded into managerial relationships with labor. The BPP program enabled De Beers to distribute responsibilities through a global network of Sightholders and subcontractors, allowing particular kinds of risks to be isolated and quarantined before they can spread. Meanwhile, on the factory floor of a global subcontracting

company, De Beers' BPP initiative presents managerial subjects with new tools to bracket themselves from personal obligations and ties to workers. The language of CSR and the array of auditing, monitoring, and verification tools present transnational corporations and managerial subjects alike with new ways to manage, define, control, and limit their attachments to producers.

Much current anthropology has chosen to follow the kinds of attachments that are being created by discourses of corporate social responsibility. Yet much strategic and personal decision-making in today's global supply chains appears to be underpinned by an ethic of detachment. If anthropology is to examine how ethical accounting regimes are grounded in the everyday work of doing business, then perhaps we need to think about the material technologies that facilitate this work.

Jamie Cross is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, UK. E-mail: jamiejcross@gmail.com

References

- Blowfield, Michael E., and Catherine S. Dolan. 2008. Stewards of virtue? The ethical dilemma of CSR in African agriculture. *Development and Change* 39 (1): 1–23.
- Callon, Michel. 1998. An essay on framing and overflowing: economic externalities revisited by sociology. In *Laws of the markets*, ed. Michel Callon, 244–69. London: Blackwell.
- . 2007. *Market devices*. London: Blackwell.
- Candea, Matei, Joanna Cook, Catherine Trundle, and Tom Yarrow. 2009. Reconsidering detachment,

http://detachmentcollaboratory.org/?page_id=528 (last accessed December 2010).

Carrier, James G., and Daniel Miller, eds. 1998. *Virtualism: A new political economy*.

London: Berg.

Crook, Tony. 2000. Length matters: A note on the GM debate. *Anthropology Today*

16 (1): 8–11.

Cross, Jamie. 2009. From dreams to discontent: Educated men and the everyday

politics of labour in a Special Economic Zone in South India. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 43 (3): 351–79.

———. 2010a. Occupational health, risk and science in India's global factories.

South Asian History and Culture 1 (2): 224–38.

———. 2010b. Neoliberalism as unexceptional: Economic zones and the everyday

precariousness of working lives in South India. *Critique of Anthropology* 30 (4): 355–73.

Dolan, Catherine. 2008. Arbitrating risk through moral values: The case of Kenyan

fairtrade. *Research in Economic Anthropology* 28:1–30.

———. 2010. Virtual moralities: The mainstreaming of fairtrade in Kenyan tea fields.

Geoforum 41: 33–43.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The consequences of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Holm, Peter. 2007. Which way is up on Callon? In MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu

2007: 225–43.

MacKenzie, Donald. A., Muniesa, Fabian., & Siu, L. 2007. Introduction. In *Do*

economists make markets? On the performativity of economics, eds. D. A.

MacKenzie, F. Muniesa, and L. Siu, 1–19. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton

University Press.

- Martin, Emily. 1994. *Flexible bodies: Tracking immunity in American culture from the days of polio to the age of AIDS*. London: Beacon Press.
- Miller, Daniel. 1998. Conclusion: A theory of virtualism. In *Virtualism: A new political economy*, eds. James G. Carrier and Daniel Miller, 187–217. London: Berg.
- . 2002. Turning Callon the right way up. *Economy and Society* 31 (2): 218–33.
- Ong, Aihwa. 2006. *Neoliberalism as exception*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Riles, Annelise. 1998. Infinity within the brackets. *American Ethnologist* 25 (3): 378–98.
- . 2006a. Introduction: In response. In *Documents: Artifacts of modern knowledge*, ed. Annelise Riles, 1–39. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- . 2006b. [Deadlines]: Removing the brackets on politics in bureaucratic and anthropological analysis. In *Documents: Artifacts of modern knowledge*, 71–94. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Rajak, Dinah. 2008. “Uplift and empower”: The market, the gift and corporate social responsibility on South Africa’s platinum belt. *Research in Economic Anthropology* 28: 297–324.
- Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Governing the soul*. London: Free Association Books.
- Shamir, Ronen. 2004. The de-radicalization of corporate social responsibility. *Critical Sociology* 30 (3): 669–89
- . 2008. The age of responsabilization: On market-embedded morality. *Economy and Society* 37 (1): 1–19.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1996. Cutting the network. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 2: 517–35.

- . 2002. Abstraction and decontextualization: An anthropological comment. In *Virtual society?: Technology, cyberbole, reality*, ed. Steve Woolgar, 302–313. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2005. Robust knowledge and fragile futures. In *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, eds. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier, 464–82. London: Blackwell.
- Strathern, Marilyn, ed. 2000. *Audit cultures: Anthropological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy*. London: Routledge.
- Thrift, Nigel. 1996. *Spatial formations*. London: Sage Publications.
- . 1998. Virtual capitalism: The globalisation of reflexive business knowledge. In *Virtualism: A new political economy*, eds. James G. Carrier and Daniel Miller, 161–86. Oxford: Berg.
- Tsing, Anna. 2009. Supply chains and the human condition. *Rethinking Marxism* 21 (2): 148–76.