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2. Everybody Gives: Gifts and the Global Factory

Jamie Cross

Sitting on the floor of his rented two-roomed house one Sunday afternoon in November 2009 thirty two year old Prakash, Worldwide Diamonds' oldest employee, played with his six month old daughter and reflected on thirteen years of factory labour. Prakash had joined the company in its first batch of 75 new recruits in September 1997. I had known him since my first day on the A Shift, when I had been told to sit alongside him and learn how to hold, touch and look at a rough diamond. During that time he had never been slow to criticize the company, to lambast its wage regimes, its systems of control or the intensity with which it required people to work. But when I now asked why he had never left the factory, he put the factory's shop floor gift economy squarely at the heart of his explanation.

Prakash: Worldwide Diamonds' workers are really good: everybody gives! People will always bring you little things at work and if there is some event, no matter if is something small or something big, if somebody gets married or somebody has died, everybody will give something. Whether it is one hundred rupees or thirty rupees, they will give whatever they can, but everybody will give something. You can't find those kind of relationships everywhere. I've been thinking of

leaving that factory for so long, so why am I still there? My relations keep me there, that's why.

'Everybody gives!' It was an exacting phrase and the conclusion Prakash drew from it, 'my relations keep me there' suggested that he understood these exchanges to have powerful social effects and that these effects bound him to the workplace. As Prakash recognised, gift giving did not just reveal ties and relationships on the factory floor but constituted the very mechanism through which these relationships were created.

This paper asks what we should make of the gifts that were given between workers and their managers on the floor of a massive offshore manufacturing unit in South India. Such exchanges appear anomalous in the ethnography of global manufacturing yet here they underpinned the organization of hyper-intensive or post-fordist production processes. Following diverse acts of giving, this paper explores how these transactions constituted the performative and relational grounds on which workers came to know themselves and sought to shape the world around them. Like other papers in this volume it extends our anthropology of capitalism by examining the multiple modalities of exchange through which flexibility is achieved.

The Hidden Abodes Of Global Manufacturing

At the end of 2004 I was granted open ethnographic access to a large subcontracting unit for the global diamond industry in Andhra Pradesh, South India. The factory in question, Worldwide Diamonds, occupied several thousand square feet inside the state's first free trade zone. The zone itself was spread across 350 acres of flat scrubland and was surrounded by an eight-foot high perimeter wall topped with

broken glass. Since the 1970s zones like this one have played a crucial role in the globalisation of production, creating capitalist enclaves across South and South East Asia that are free from state regulation. These have become vital spaces for the diffusion of just-in-time inventory systems, total-quality control mechanisms and hyper-efficient models of workspace organisation, which David Harvey identified as the cornerstones of flexibility in large-scale capitalist production processes (Harvey, 2005; Harvey, 1990) and have made informality and precariousness an integral part of many global commodity chains (Burawoy, 1985; Ross, 2009; Tsing, 2009; Cross, 2010).

The zone in which Worldwide Diamonds operates is located midway between Andhra Pradesh's industrial port of Vizag (Visakhapatnam), a heavily polluted and densely populated city of over 1.5 million people, and the rural sugar trading town of Annakapalle. In 2005 Worldwide Diamond's company employed a Telugu-speaking workforce of approximately 1200 people. Most of these workers were aged between eighteen and twenty-four, roughly seventy per cent of them were men, and all were native to this region of coastal Andhra Pradesh. The zone offered no accommodation and factory workers lived with their families in caste segregated villages across a semi-rural, peri-urban, hinterland or in housing colonies along the busy highway that cuts through the region. On the factory floor this labour force was managed by a group of young Indians, recent graduates with degrees in engineering, business, or human resources. They, in turn, were overseen by a small number of European expatriates, English, Belgian and Israeli men, who had been posted here to oversee production processes to train workers in specialised diamond cutting and polishing techniques. Some of these men had worked in the diamond industry since they were young apprentices and had witnessed the industry's transformation as production

shifted from European workshops to sites of low cost sub-contracted manufacturing in South and South East Asia.

Work in Worldwide Diamonds was poorly paid and chronically insecure. For their first year, a new recruit was expected to work for a stipend of 1200 rupees (\$US15) per month, after which they entered a piece rate wage regime that might earn them up to \$40 per month, equivalent to the rates of day-labour in the local construction industry. The formal employment contracts that workers' signed with the company were rendered essentially meaningless by the company's hire and fire policy. Workers who were deemed unproductive could be summarily expelled from the workplace and those who attempted to organise colleagues in protest at working conditions with the support of a local communist trade union were either blacklisted or sacked. In 2002 the intimidation of union organisers here had made the factory a cause celebre for Indian unionists and, in a test case, saw it investigated by the UN's International Labour Organisation.

In January 2005 I joined 120 other people on the 6am-2pm 'A Shift' in the Preparation Department, where rough diamonds began their transformation into polished gemstones. In a tradition of industrial ethnography (Burawoy 1982; Blim 1992; Prentice 2008; Yelvington 1995) I secured the permission of managers to become a participant in rather than just an observer of labour processes. As I have described in more detail elsewhere (Cross 2011) over the course of 2005 I was trained to become a competent and productive machine operator, learning to handle single spindle machines, semi-automatic bruiting machines, rotating scaifes and handheld tangs, and eventually able to cut and polish rough diamonds into a basic round shape, give them eight basic facets, a smooth, flat table and their sharp pointed culet.

As I was taught to corner, bruit and block rough diamonds I came to understand that a complex economy of non-monetary and non-monetised transactions was flourishing on the shop floor. The ‘underlife’ (Goffman 1961) of this global factory involved a host of transactions that were not encompassed by what we might call the wage-labour economy or commodity exchange. Workers gave away items of homemade food, brand name sweets and chocolates, hand crafted art-pieces, blessed temple food and decorative or ornamental consumer goods to other workers and to their monitors, supervisors and managers, and they spoke of giving their labour to the company.

These acts of giving crisscrossed the factory floor, with different aims and effects. Like those transactions described by Woods (this volume) this were ambivalent exchanges. Some transactions took place without any immediate expectation of a return or any explicit agreement about one, in ways that created, transformed, cultivated and nourished relationships of friendship and care, solidarity and mutual aid. Other transactions were more transparently interested or instrumental attempts to gain favour or foster relations of patronage, clientage and service. In some exchanges we might discern what Garsten (this volume) calls the economy of connection but in others we can discern might be called an economy of ‘detachment’, with the gift establishing a separation or division of giver from receiver (Strathern, 1991: 588; Cross 2011a, 2013).

Some exchanges took place between people who identified themselves as members of the same caste community, while others took place between members of caste communities that have, historically, maintained prohibitions on exchange. Some took place between co-workers, people who occupied positions of equality in the factory hierarchy, while other exchanges took place between workers and their

managers, people who occupied differential positions of power, control and authority. Such transactions offer a vivid illustration that what anthropologists call 'the gift' is never a unitary category and that gifts can be animated by what David Graeber (2011) calls different moral or transactional logics, significantly 'co-operation', 'reciprocal exchange' and 'hierarchy'.

What should we make of such transactions on the floor of today's global sweatshops? The 'hidden abode of production' into which Karl Marx (1990) descended to examine exchanges between the owners of capital and the bearers of labour power still lies beneath the surface of anthropological theorising about gift exchange. Marcel Mauss's (Mauss, 1966) essay on the gift was written partially in response to Marxist political economy, the anthropologist deploying ethnological material in a tone that was nostalgic and utopian to describe societies in which the market was not the main medium of human relations and in which the objects of exchange did not inevitably become alienable, quantifiable commodities (Coleman, 2004; Graeber, 2001). Chris Gregory's (Gregory, 1982; Gregory, 1997) influential post-Maussian approach distilled the essence of gift and commodity exchange into separate, analytically distinct and seemingly incompatible regimes of value (Caliskan and Callon, 2009) and many anthropologies and geographies of labour in the global factory have perpetuated this sharp distinction between spheres of commodity and gift exchange.

The kinds of transactions that I encountered on the floor of Worldwide Diamonds, however, appear anomalous in ethnographic accounts of industrial work at similar sites of global manufacturing in China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Mexico and Sri-Lanka (Hewamanne, 2003; Lynch, 1999; Mills, 1999; Ong, 1987; Salzinger, 2003; Wolf, 1992; Wright, 2006). In this literature the precarious labour contracts

between workers and supply chain capitalists in the world's economic zones epitomize the short-term transactional orders that Gregory described as belonging to the sphere of commodity exchange (Gregory, 1982; Gregory, 1997). Indeed most discussions of exchange in export manufacturing zones are primarily concerned with the commodification of labour, which is often understood to reach some kind of contemporary apotheosis in these spaces. In China's economic zones, for example, Pun Ngai (Ngai, 2005, p163) has written how rural labour migrants or *dagonmei* transform their bodies into objects for consumption and are forced to confront themselves as something hostile and alien. Aihwa Ong's (Ong, 2006) writings present a similarly dystopian portrait, showing offshore zones in China as carceral work camps in which men and women are valued for their labour alone and are condemned in perpetuity to live the bare life of a commodity.

Yet many different 'economic and moral possibilities' exist on the floor of the global factory (Graeber 2010, p1-2) and the diversity of economic transactions that take place here are not limited to commodity exchange or to the terms of the labour-capital relation. In other discussions and bodies of literature anthropologists have consistently pointed to the blurring and overlapping of exchange categories in the modern industrial workplace (Parry, Mollona, and de Neve, 2009; Prentice, 2008). As Mayfair Yang has shown, for example, the organisation of labour in contemporary China's manufacturing and service sectors depends on *guanxi* - social ties, networks or connectedness – and mechanisms for producing relatedness through gift giving (Yang, 1989, 1994, 2002, 2009). Meanwhile, Mao Mollona's (2009) ethnography of labour in contemporary Sheffield's small machine workshops reminds us how opaque the theoretical distinctions between gift and commodity economies, alienated and non-alienated labour actually are for the subjective, experiential and symbolic ways

that manual workers conceive of and shape their relationships of production (Mollona, 2009).

The ethnography of work at an outpost of large scale export-manufacturing in contemporary India that I present here makes a contribution to these debates by exploring how different acts of giving on the global shop floor shape the labour process in different ways. Examining the transactions that took place on the floor of Worldwide Diamonds, I explore how they were premised on different transactional logics, underpinned by principals of co-operation, exchange and hierarchy, in ways that performed different kinds of social action. As I show acts of giving constituted the performative and relational grounds on which people came to know themselves and sought to shape the world around them.

Co-Operation (Or Capital's Free Gift)

During my first few visits Worldwide Diamonds Preparation Department conformed to my expectations of a global sweatshop. The dusty, poorly ventilated open plan space was divided into work sections by hardboard dividers. Rows of workers wore identical blue uniforms and stood or sat to operate machines beneath fluorescent strip lights. In each section workers were directly overseen check by a section monitors who wore a maroon coloured uniform. Off the factory floor a department supervisor and a department manager oversaw the quality and rate of production. Wages here were paid at a piece rate, which was subject to constant adjustment as the company's management sought to extract ever greater value from their labour. Work on the shift was hyper-intensive, and each work section was required to meet daily, weekly and

monthly production targets. Eight-hour shifts frequently become twelve and six day weeks sometimes became seven as the factory struggled to meet client orders on time.

Each work section was monitored by a closed circuit television camera that relayed real-time images of the factory to banks of screens in a central control room. Here the factory employed a surveillance manager to keep watch for slowdowns in productivity, for attempted thefts and for any sign of political action. Any sluggishness or sleepiness that was caught on camera prompted a telephone call to the shop floor. Alarms rang if a diamond got lost, and several hours of video would be reviewed to check anybody could have palmed or secreted the missing stone. The movements of people who had been singled out as ‘trouble makers’ were closely tracked, and their gatherings or conversations raised immediate concern about some imminent labour action, a downing of tools or an organised ‘go-slow’.

Beneath this complex surveillance apparatus, however, existed a complex economy of gifts and gift transactions. The earliest transactions that a new trainee here became a party to involved the transmission of skilled knowledge; as a learned technical competency with machines, tools and raw materials was passed down to them from more experienced co-workers (Cross 2011). Piece rate work in a factory like this one depended upon a whole host of similar micro-interactions with other people; from those who give the novice hints and tips, offering guidance, support and initiation onto the shift to those interactions with co-workers upon whom each individual is dependent if they are to maintain minimum rates of productivity and to guarantee their wage. In the cornering, hand blocking and bruising sections where I learned to cut and polish rough diamonds in 2005, acts of giving between co-workers frequently proceeded according to what David Graeber has called a principal of ‘from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs’; these were

transactions in which individuals recognised each other's mutual interdependence and in which the taking of accounts would have been considered inappropriate, offensive or bizarre (Graeber 2011, p94-99). Cornering workers, for example, shared the hammers that they used to adjust their spindle machines and small pieces of fabric to mop up machine oil. Meanwhile in the blocking section, where rudimentary hand tools were used to push rough diamonds backwards and forwards on a rotating scaife, workers shared pieces of torn cloth to prevent blistering. Across the department people shared black marker pens, variously used to mark the surface of rough diamonds, to sketch cutting edges and angles on the white table surfaces, and to record production tallies on scraps of paper.

Cooperation, Marx wrote in the first volume of *Capital* (1990), is the 'necessary concomitant of all production on a large scale' and a 'free gift offered up to the capitalist'. Marx saw cooperation as a natural, integral part of any economic system, a social phenomenon that takes place spontaneously and naturally with the simultaneous employment of large numbers of people in one place, along with a concentrated mass of machines and tools for production. In his example, a dozen masons passing stones from the bottom to the top of a ladder might each be said to perform the same movements and actions but taken together these separate actions form connected parts of one single operation. This kind of cooperation takes a distinct form, Marx argued, when people are brought together by capital for the purposes of waged labour. In the capitalist factory cooperation served both to increase the productive power of the individual and also to create a kind of collective power that capitalists sought to harness, manage and control for the purposes of profitable exploitation and expansion (Marx 1992, p.453). For Marx, this cooperation is usually hidden from view or invisible because it appears to us as the social effect of having

brought people together in one place and puts them to work. For Graeber this principal of cooperation, mutual aid and solidarity exists in many different kinds of social contexts, not just work groups, and it is one of the ironies of contemporary capitalism that the internal organisation of some of today's largest corporations comes to hinge upon it (Graeber 2011, p100).

A global subcontracting company like Worldwide Diamonds could not function without the raft of transactions that took place as people involved in the common project of production collaborated by establishing certain things that could be shared or made freely available to others. As workers passed tools or materials between each other on the factory floor, and shared knowledge and skills, they established their mutuality and interdependence, offering us a reminder of how central mutual aid, assistance, and cooperation are to global commodity production.

One phenomena in particular, the redistribution of blessed or sacred food or *prasadam* on the factory floor offered a particular insight into the principal of cooperation. As Arjun Appadurai (1981) has written, food in South India can be used to signal, indicate and construct social relations characterised by equality, intimacy or solidarity, as much as rank or difference (p507); and the 'gastro-politics' of holy food as it was redistributed by factory workers returning from a pilgrimage might be said to hinge on the principal of 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need.'

In coastal Andhra Pradesh a pilgrimage to the state's most holy site, the temple to Lord Venkateshwara (Vishnu) at Tirupati, is considered by Hindu's of all castes and ages a necessary trip. People make the pilgrimage at times of wealth as well as ill health. For some a pilgrimage to Tirupati is considered one of the only opportunities to travel outside the district and pilgrims invariably bring home with

them large quantities of sanctified food or *prasadam* [Hindi. *prasada*] to distribute. When one of Worldwide Diamond's Hindu factory workers returned from a pilgrimage to Andhra's most important holy site they invariably brought with them a large quantity of *prasadam* to distribute amongst their work colleagues.

Prasadam is a collective noun for substances – often items of food but also water, flowers, ash and powder - that have been offered to a deity during worship and which are subsequently distributed to priests, devotees, relatives and friends. When these substances are offered to and symbolically consumed by a deity (in its image form) they undergo a transmutation, becoming *prasada*, potent substances that are imbued with a divine power and grace and which can be absorbed into the human body (Fuller, 2004, pp.74-75). In the ritual symbolism of everyday Hinduism, the adornment of the body with *prasada* substances like ash or flowers or the swallowing of *prasada* food marks the absorption of divine grace and power into the body, effecting a merger between deity and worshipper. But, like all Hindu rituals and substances, the distribution of *prasadam* is about relationships between people as much as between the worshiper and a deity. As Appadurai wrote (1981), 'the consumption of divine leftovers' is the central sacramental feature of divine worship in South Indian temples' (p505).

Over the course of a year I watched several of the Preparation Department's workers make the pilgrimage to Tirupati. When they returned to work they brought with them carrier bags full of *prasadam*, usually a mixture of puffed rice, groundnuts, gram, and jaggery. On their first day back at work they asked permission to walk around the department from section to section, enabling their colleagues and work mates to share the blessed food. These acts of giving took place in public and en-mass, with the donor making a point to offer food to every one of the Department's 150

strong workforce, including cleaners and security guards as well as co-workers, monitors, supervisors and department managers, irrespective of caste or religion. This distribution and consumption of *prasadam*, the highest form of leftovers, on the floor of Worldwide Diamonds gave real, material form to the workforce as a collective body or organic entity. It was a process of co-substantiation through which, as Marx put, people as co-operators' become members of a 'total productive organism'.

As I will show, however, the shop floor relationships between workers involved other kinds of transactions, premised not upon principals of mutuality, but upon principals of reciprocity and hierarchy.

Reciprocity And Recognition

Everyday people arrived at the entrance to the Preparation Department carrying small items of food that by the end of the day they would have given to somebody else.

These things were carried past the security guards posted at the doors to the department under people's regulation blue uniforms, wedged into their trouser pockets, tied into the corner of their *saris*, or tucked inside their *churidars* (tightly fitting trouser pants). An incredible range of foodstuffs were smuggled onto the factory floor in this way to be passed from hand-to-hand, underneath a table surface or in a subtle brush of fingers, that sought not to draw attention from managers.

The things circulating in the cornering, blocking and bruited sections included the ubiquitous one-rupee boiled sweets, lozenges, éclairs and toffees, that are found in the smallest of street side trade stores across India, as well as brand name chocolates, like five rupee bars of Cadbury Five Star or ten rupee bars of Dairy Milk. They also included seasonal fruits and nuts, lemons and gooseberries, handfuls of

aniseed, sultanas, cashews, fried potato chips, Bombay mix and popcorn, even entire cobs of maize. Alongside foodstuffs were other kinds of things. Some of the most popular non-food gift items were images, playing cards or stickers with colour pictures of deities and saints or matinee film star heroes and heroines. Alongside these were handmade things. All manner of origami paper objects circulated around the Preparation Department, including boxes, animals, and flowers, tiny pieces of folded artistry that were made at home, or during lunch breaks from scraps of paper, including the computerised diamond labels or production charts, that had been picked up or lifted off the factory floor.

At first these exchanges seemed so petty that I overlooked them as insignificant or insubstantial. They took place with such frequency as to be part of the factory's social fabric – as normal as conversation. Yet during the months I spent on the factory floor it became apparent that what appeared to be mundane or spontaneous gifts between workers could be mapped onto more complex shop floor relationships between people with different levels of experience or different workloads, and between people whose tasks tied them into workplace relationships with each other. While the intimate knowledge of machines and materials that passed between workers appeared to be transacted according to a principle of solidarity and mutual aid, these acts of giving appeared more clearly animated by a reciprocal logic of gift exchange and equivalence. Gifts objects – things and foodstuffs were exchanged for favours, preferential treatment and even labour from co-workers – as people struggled to meet their daily production targets and complete their own work tasks. These gifts were passed backwards and forwards in such a way that each gift appeared to cancel the other out, and in such a way that each party appeared to be keeping account, motivated by the ways that the exchange reflected upon and rearranged their

relationship. As Graeber puts it (2011, p103) the principle of equivalence between the objects of exchange also implies an equivalence or parity between the parties to an exchange, and these transactions marked the floor of the factory out as a particular kind of social space, one that differed in important ways from the caste landscape beyond its walls.

Cornering section workers collected stones from the fixers, who cemented each and every rough diamond onto a cylindrical rod that could be inserted into a spindle machine. As they ground the angular corners away, rough stones invariably broke off their holdings, sometimes flicking onto the floor or falling onto the work surface.

Cornering workers were allowed to walk these diamonds over to the fixing table themselves and if they wanted to get back to work and finish the stone they needed a fixer who would give them priority, dipping the stone in concrete over a heater while they waited. On the A shift cornering section workers like Appala Raju and Condom Rao went out of their way to build good relationships with the three women fixers by giving them small gifts of chocolate, handed over in the mornings to coincide with the small stainless steel beaker of milk tea that the company granted each worker.

These exchanges continued off the factory floor during the half hour lunch break when more substantial foodstuffs, rice and curries, were shared between co-workers out in the open, beneath a line of palm trees or beneath a corrugated shelter. Everyday people came to the factory carrying portions of home-cooked food - prepared by themselves, or by sisters or mothers – which they shared with colleagues. Many of these exchanges of boiled rice and curries took place against the grain of local caste hierarchies, with the parents and extended families of many factory workers still recognising symbolic and social restrictions on inter-caste contact. Exchanges that took place between people from farming or landowning castes and

Dalit communities, then, marked the factory as a space of transgression from widely accepted and observed social prohibitions on inter-caste exchange and commensality.

Like all of the factory's units, the Preparation Department was broadly representative of coastal Andhra Pradesh's caste demographics. Recruited into the factory as entry level workers and thrown together on the shift were the higher ranking *Velamas*, *Gavaras* and *Kapus*, who are the district's major landowners, as well as a cross-section of occupation castes, *Mallas*, *Palles* and *Vadabaliyas*. In north coastal Andhra inter-caste relationships between these communities has been tightly regulated, marked by endogamy and restrictions on contact. Yet references to each others' caste was studiously erased from everyday interactions between workers. Thrown together on the A Shift, the young men and women here chose to represent the factory as a caste-less place that marked a distinctive break from the adult social worlds they inhabited in rural villages and peri-urban neighbourhoods. Here, as in the small power plant in nearby Southern Orissa where Christian Struempell (2008) conducted fieldwork, young workers recognised the industrial workplace as a uniquely commensurable space, a space of inter-caste contact and inter-commensurability, that marked a distinct break with those spaces places where they had been born and brought up. In many sections, people who had worked closely alongside each other for several years claimed disinterest in the caste identities of their co-workers. And, over several years the factory had given rise to numerous inter-caste relationships between workers, several of which had ended in elopement and marriage. Many of the transactions that took place between workers on the factory floor fitted into this broader pattern, violating and erasing historical restrictions on inter-caste contact.

Some of these exchanges were quietly libidinal. For many workers the factory was experienced as a space of comparative freedom from adult social mores and the relatively strict prohibitions on sexual contact that are imposed by families in provincial Andhra Pradesh. On Worldwide Diamonds' mixed sex A shift, petty gift exchanges could be flirtatious and suggestive. Young adolescent men could frequently be found giving small gifts to the unmarried girls and young mothers whom they worked alongside. For their part, many young women appeared to see these as strategic exchanges that enabled them to cope with the intensity of the factory's production regime. Many married women on the A shift exchanged a little extra home-cooked food, spiced with some lascivious talk and sexual innuendo, for a little help with production from their unmarried male co-workers. And some unmarried young men, wracked with sexual desire, found themselves cutting and polishing a few extra stones to help them reach production targets or took responsibility for cutting problem 'stones' those with minor flaws, gluts and fractures that were easier to break or overcut.

In the preparation department's table section, for example, I spent eight weeks working alongside Rama Laxshmi, a married woman with two children who had worked here for several years, and Durga Rao a lanky young trainee with a wispy beard and a gangly gait. As the older, married woman Rama Laxshmi enjoyed a position of sexual authority over Durga Rao and as the two of them pushed rough stones backwards and forwards across a rotating *scaife*, blocking facets into hard or delicate diamonds, they played footsie under the table or sang romantic songs to each other over the machine noise. During lunch-breaks the two of them sat together in the shade under a palm tree in the factory car park. Rama Laxshmi brought Durga homemade curries with egg or chicken or portions of curd. During the shift these

exchanges were also translated into the labour process, as Laxshmi asked Durga to help her meet production targets. She passed the biggest or most difficult stones onto him, and after he had finished them they were passed back and counted under her own name. When her young suitor began to lobby for a transfer to a different work section where he would be paid per stone, Laxshmi tried to persuade him to stay.

These everyday, inter-personal exchanges on the factory floor were accompanied by ostentatious and very public acts of giving, as individual workers pooled money together in order to buy gifts for each other. Workers were regularly asked to make contributions to a pool or pot of money that could be used to purchase a gift for colleagues on important occasions, including birthdays, marriages, births and the occasion of a new child's *annaprasana*, celebrated when they first consume solid food. On these occasions someone on the shift would take responsibility for collecting contributions and a cohort of people would be deputised to buy an ornamental object from one of the many gift shops or 'fancy shops' that flourish in the towns of Anakappalle, or around the highway's junctions. These gifts might cost anywhere between 100 and 500 rupees and were selected specifically for their utility as an object of household display; the options invariably included vases of plastic flowers coated in bright paints and sparkling glitter, imitation wooden clocks, glitzy lampstands, fake silver picture frames, and photo albums.

These collective acts of giving were accompanied by expectations of reciprocity and they were accompanied by a subtle taking of account as people noted who gave what, to whom and on what occasion. Givers expected that their gifts would be met with a counter gift at the appropriate moment, whilst recipients were concerned to give back. This taking of account was most apparent when new trainees appeared on the factory floor. Oblivious to the significance of this gift economy for

the social life of the shop floor these newcomers were frequently criticised for failing to participate in these gift exchanges. ‘Newcomers don’t know how to give,’ and ‘newcomers don’t give money for weddings,’ were common complaints among the Preparation Department’s more established workers.

This gift economy, based on reciprocal exchange and mutual recognition, was an integral part of the factory’s social life. These transactions proved essential as workers struggled to meet their work targets and vital for maintaining social ties across the factory floor. As I will show, however, these acts of giving between workers differed in important ways from those that took place between workers and their managers, that is between people who occupied positions of differential status, power and authority in social and workplace hierarchies.

‘Soap’ And The ‘Gift Of Labour’

Workers like Prakash, who I quoted earlier in this paper, did not have a phrase for the acts of giving that I have just described but they took place between people who occupied broadly equivalent positions of status and power in the factory’s formal hierarchy, and were distinguished by the ambiguity of their intentions. These exchanges, however, were clearly differentiated from other kinds of gifts that took place between people in unequal positions of power and authority. The exchanges that took place between workers and their shop floor monitors, managers and supervisors were distinguished from those that took place between workers by the intentionality of the giver and the meanings attached to the gift. These exchanges were premised on an explicit difference in the social position of giver and recipient, and while they invoked the language of reciprocity they hinged primarily on what Graeber calls a

‘logic of precedent’, or a ‘web of habit and custom’ (2011, p109). Gifts to managers both recognised and appealed to the recipient as a person of higher social rank and status. They were gifts that were intended to broker a pathway to patronage, protection and security and to make a recipient feel disposed to respond or act in this way (see also, Graeber, 2001, p.225).

In north coastal Andhra the English word gift serves as a basic translation for over thirty different Telugu words, each referring to a different exchange category, denoting different contexts of exchange, different degrees of instrumentality on the part of the giver, different relationships to a recipient, and different kinds of gift. Some of the most important vernacular categories for practicing Hindu’s describe gifts to priests and to deities that are part of everyday temple rituals. These include *kanuka*, offerings of food objects and cash that are said to be made with homage, courtesy or reverence; and *mokku*, a collective noun for offerings which are said to have been given to God with a more explicit or directed purpose and intent, as in when people pray for divine intervention to bring about a change in fortune or health, to bring wisdom in decision making, or to bring about a particularly desirable course of events, for example in matters of the heart.

In the Worldwide Diamonds factory young Telugu workers described gifts that are given in order to have specific effects as *soap*. This is a deliberate and witty vernacular play on the English word, to *soap* someone is to try to smooth or lubricate your relationship in the pursuit of specific ends. But underlying the joke was a distinction between acts of giving that served to maintain social relations and acts of giving that served a more narrowly defined instrumental purpose. Jonathan Parry (2000) observed a similar distinction between the etiquette and practice associated with ‘gifts’, ‘commissions’ and ‘bribes’ among people seeking access to public sector

employment in the central Indian steel town of Bhilai. In popular discourse, ‘gifts’ ‘gifts’ were given to maintain social relations rather than for any specific favours; ‘commissions’ were given in ‘gratitude’ for servicing contracts, while ‘bribes’ are given for a narrowly defined instrumental purpose.

In Worldwide Diamonds 'there was considerable ambiguity and ambivalence around what constituted ‘soap’. Debates about real or imagined exchanges lay at the heart of many of the intrigues and squabbles that animated daily life on the factory floor. In every section of Preparation Department machine workers presented their monitors with small gifts that were explicitly intended to win their favourable treatment on the factory floor. Gifts that soaped might range from the ubiquitous items of home-cooked food, to cinema tickets for the latest Telugu films, to invitations to family homes for Sunday dinners. In the cornering section, for example, senior blue uniformed machine workers regularly brought extra portions of food which they pushed onto the plate of Laxman, their section monitor, during the lunch break. Laxman was the only labour migrant in the work section. He rented a small room in a highway township with a group of other workers from the northern coastal district of Srikakulam and, consequently, was the only male worker in the section who did not live in a domestic environment attended by mothers, daughters or sisters in law. The cheap rice that Laxman burnt each night over his gas stove was supplemented during the factory lunch break with homemade delicacies, curries with chicken, fish, brinjal and okra, prepared by the wives, mothers and sisters of some of his male colleagues. In turn, Laxman ensured that these workers enjoyed a favourable supply of stock on the factory floor, giving them preferential access to rough stones when the stock was low and ensuring that they had access to the larger stones with a higher piece rate when stock was full.

Every one of the factory's departments were overseen by managers who were responsible for its organisation and productivity, control and discipline. While the caste background of blue-collar workers was studiously erased from everyday conversation or talk on the factory floor, the high caste backgrounds of these managers elicited malicious anti-Brahminical comments and critique. But as individual workers struggled to secure personal advantage or promotion in the workplace, their ability to 'soap' these managers was pivotal. Over the year I spent in Preparations I watched several monitors present small gift items and objects up the factory hierarchy to their high caste managers. The most striking of these were the handmade pieces of diamond related art. Laxman once spent several weeks developing a portfolio of pencil sketches, showing diamonds in their various stages of production, which he eventually presented to one of the factory managers. Patnaik, the blocking section monitor, went a step further. Patnaik had a side hobby making scale models from discarded pieces of polystyrene, and the fruits of his creative labour included cars, planes, spacecraft, and a Japanese bullet train. In mid 2005 Patnaik brought his latest piece, an intricate diamond cut from a single lump of polystyrene and engraved with detailed facets, into the factory and formally presented it to the department manager who had it installed on her desk in a glass box as a 'learning tool'. Such objects were unique gifts. By materialising the skill and technical prowess of their creators they spoke of an individual's craft pride. And, as visible demonstrations of an individual's practical competencies and capabilities, they made a public expression of desire for mobility in the factory's internal labour market.

Those workers who secured promotions to monitor or supervisor were regularly fingered by shop floor gossip for having 'soaped' or 'polished' their way up the ladder with gifts. What such commentaries obliquely acknowledged was that

‘soaping’ required skill and etiquette; not just material things but also demonstrations of deference and subservience. ‘Some people will get opportunities and promotions here,’ people like Appala Raju complained to me. ‘Not everyone – only some people. Those kind of people who go to their department manager or their head monitor and ask about everything and say, ‘Yes, Sir!’ or ‘What about this, Sir?’ or ‘What about that?’ They are the people who polish, you know. Polish. Soap’ There are many people who know how to do that around here.’

In conversations in their homes outside the factory, people nourished private bitterness against co-workers who they felt had outdone them for a promotion, by lathering up and soaping a superior. Hari, the preparation department’s senior monitor, who had worked his way up from an entry level position on the factory floor put it bluntly. ‘*If* one person gets something, someone else will look at them and shout Soap! or Polish! And if goes the other way around, the other person will say the same thing. Everyone talks about soap around here. They don't think, ‘If I work harder, if I work very hard, then I might get something too’. No. Instead that person says, ‘Oh! Look! That person is soaping or polishing to get something. But things don’t work like that. Well...maybe they work like that in ten per cent or fifteen per cent of cases but not every time.’

Many of Worldwide Diamonds’ white collar Brahmin managers sought to explicitly position themselves outside of this exchange economy. Worldwide Diamonds’ management trainees were aged between twenty-two and twenty six and had graduate masters degrees in engineering or management from provincial English medium colleges in South India. 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 clamoured away from relationships with the factory's workforce, and often struggled to avoid or refuse these kind of gifts, 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. The art pieces described above, for example, were never accepted on a personal basis. Instead managers accepted them 'on behalf of the department' and left them on public view inside the factory. Vikram described the dilemma as he reflected on his experiences on the shop floor. 'People would invite us to their home. 'They'll say, come, bring your wife, bring your children, you can eat with us, there is a very nice temple close by. Or they will say, come to my village for the festival. And a few days later they'll say, sir' please pass these stones, or they'll ask me about a promotion, or they'll try to get me to ask someone higher to push their salary.'

In response many young managers chose to cultivate an ethic of detachment, carefully managing and limiting their exchanges with workers (Cross, 2011). 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. Managers like Vikram put these problems succinctly during interviews with me on and off the factory floor. '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.' Such managerial anxieties stand testament to the

constant work or effort involved in successfully achieving a degree of ‘distance’ from workers.

The hierarchical exchanges taking place on the floor of Worldwide Diamonds exhibited considerable continuity with those documented by anthropologists in South India’s agricultural economy. Here, as Filippo and Caroline Osella (1996) have written, agricultural labourers can be found constantly manoeuvring to bring reciprocity into the sphere of non-reciprocity while landowners and employers constantly struggle to deny them, or to set the terms of the exchange. The same struggles took place over the idea of labour itself.

In their struggle to build relationships with their employers, Telugu workers all sought to establish an idea of their labour as a gift that was being given between related individuals, whether friends or kin. The Telugu men and women employed in the Preparation Department appeared deeply committed to the idea that their labour was being ‘given’ to their company (personified in the figure of the CEO, the general manager, or their department managers) rather than sold. No-one spoke of their work in the same terms used locally to describe daily waged labour (*koolipani*) contract work in local public sector industries (*udyogamu*) or employment (*gujurani*). Of course, factory work was to toil or to exert oneself in a task (*kastapadu*), and Worldwide Diamonds’ workers invariably referred to themselves collectively as those who push themselves (*kastapadivallu*). But the terms with which people described this transaction constantly played down or denied the commercial or commodity aspect of their relationship to the company. Instead, they emphasised the idea that their physical and mental exertions was being given rather than sold, and they invoked the personal, intimate and familial aspects of this exchange (see also, Mollona 2005).

The stock expression in the Preparation Department when workers described their relationship to the company explicitly used the Telugu verb, to give. As in, ‘we’re giving our hard work and they are giving money’ (*manam kastapadu instunavu vullu dubulu instunadu*). Workers spoke variously of ‘giving production’, giving their life (*jivitamistunannu*) and, once or twice, giving their blood (*raktamistunannu*) to the company. Some spoke of work as a constant stream or continuous flow, *dharamu*, a word that also connotes acts of giving in everyday Hindu ritual practice, such as when a ceremonial gift is preceded by the pouring of water into the hand of a recipient. Some spoke of their attachment or devotion (*asangam*) to the company. Workers frequently invoked the idiom of kinship to describe their relationship, and sometimes appealed to their managers in these terms.

What emerged here is an idea of labour as an expression of commitment to a relationship. Or, as David Graeber (2001, p.41) has written, a medium of practical or creative action through which relationships can be made. Labour was not a gift object but was an activity through which workers could constitute a sphere of exchange; a sphere in which long term reciprocal ties, moral and social bonds could become important or significant relations; and within which people can expect to be reciprocated over time with forms of protection, security and patronage (Munn, 1977; Graeber, 2001). This conceptualisation is rooted in the particularities of place and the idioms, language and moral economy of rural South India. Despite a history of political radicalisation by Maoists and Marxists, labour relationships in this northeast corner of coastal Andhra Pradesh have remained rooted in a moral economy of patronage and clientage. This is an economy in which allegiance and obedience bring rewards, in which deference reaps favour, and in which service garners protection. On the floor of the Preparation Department, however, workers’ also recognised the failure

of this exchange relationship and that attempts to elicit the company's patronage through hard work were met with a refusal to reciprocate appropriately. The problem, as workers often said, was simple: 'we are giving production but we're not getting anything back'.

Sweatshop Exchanges

If anthropologists have rarely explored the diversity of economic transactions that take place in the global factory it is because, in a critical or Marxist tradition, we have been primed to see these institutions primarily as arenas of commodity exchange, spaces in which labour is alienated from the body of the worker and commodified. For many anthropologists the world's economic zones and offshore factories are socially and politically important because they are spaces in which the commodification and alienation of labour reaches some kind of contemporary apotheosis. Yet such a position can blind us to other kinds of economic transactions that might take place on these factory floors, to the ways in which 'the gift' may manifest itself in global production networks, or the ways that relationships of co-operation, exchange and hierarchy between a global labour force and their employers are constituted through acts of giving.

As I have shown the gift is integral to the operation of a low cost global subcontracting unit like Worldwide Diamonds and, on the shop floor, acts of giving constantly shift between different kinds of transactional logic. Workers in the global factory, like people anywhere, as Graeber would argue (2011, p114), are constantly shifting between 'modalities' of giving, moving backwards and forwards between different kinds of moral accounting. Just as acts of giving could express and underpin

relations of cooperation and equality between workers so to they could express and underpin relations of inequality and hierarchy between workers and their managers. On the factory floor, like any other social context, these principals often became entangled, leaving it difficult for the observer to understand, as Graeber puts it, ‘which predominates’ (ibid, p115).

As Marx wrote, the fusing together of many forces into a single collective force in the modern factory could give rise to co-operation but it could also begat a fierce rivalry between individuals, a ‘stimulation of the animal spirits’, which factory owners could carefully manage in ways their heightened their efficiency (ibid, p.443). In the wake of Foucauldian social theory (Rose 1989, 1995) anthropologists of work, labour and industry in the global economy have frequently chosen to focus their analytical attention on the latter, revealing the individuating technologies of the self that have emerged out of Taylorist management practices and market oriented calculations. Yet this problematic overlooks how gifts and acts of giving perform relatedness and relational social action in ways that are pivotal to the organisation of labour and capital in the global economy. As I have shown here, on the floor of a global sweatshop like Worldwide Diamonds the moral logics of cooperation, reciprocity and hierarchy that underpinned transactions between workers and their managers were vital to its success as a hyper-efficient, low cost, and competitive subcontractor. They serve as a reminder that gifts and gift giving are both something more than just ‘relationships in production’ and yet constitute the very fabric of commodity production; the personalised, localised and contextual economic relations they articulate are key to the organisation of contemporary capitalism.

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