

Lin Zhibin

Lin Zhibin is a writer, researcher, and trainer working for the grassroots nongovernmental organization (NGO) Beijing Migrant Workers' Home, Beijing. She met Matthijs de Bruijne when they were both invited to participate in the Potosí Principle exhibition that toured Berlin, La Paz, and Madrid (2010–2011). She was invited to contextualize some of his works.

You are so nice! Could you work two more hours today?, 2011

Though it may seem uncomplicated to some, domestic work is more complex than other types of work. Matthijs de Bruijne's work has helped me better understand that. Domestic workers hold the keys to employers' houses or apartments, hold their babies and children, cook their food, prepare their beds, etc. Domestic work is rather personal, emotional, and intimate. Reading the notes written by members of the Migrant Domestic Workers network of the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV) in *You are so nice! Could you work two more hours today?*, we often find friendly relationships between employers and employees, which makes me question why. Friendly behavior on the part of an employer may reflect a sense of guilt for taking advantage of the system's victims as much as it may reflect their appreciation for the work being done or mutual respect.

It is estimated that 150,000 people work as domestic workers in the Netherlands. Even though the demand is obvious, prevalent social institutions and structures work to deprive domestic workers of their social rights and normal social protections. How can we interpret this employer friendliness on a personal level but the hostility on a structural level? I do not have a clear answer. The demand for domestic services and the struggle for domestic workers' rights are important to consider in tandem for a thorough reflection on the current system. In any case, it is somehow always fortunate to have a friendly employer.

It seems rather difficult, even futile, to struggle as an individual stuck at the bottom, especially as an undocumented worker. But this is where an effective struggle may possibly begin. It is said in the 2017 booklet *Werk Woorden – Words of Labour*, written by the FNV Migrant Domestic Workers network, that “one in five people from the Philippines live and work outside of the country... according to the Filipino mentality, going abroad is the only solution to have a better life” (p. 31). But there are others who disagree, who are trying to break this logic. I see the sorrows in this, but for once, I also see hope. What kind of society do we want? Would a society that treats domestic workers badly likely treat other workers better? “Of course we have problems,” writes a worker, “but we're not depressed. It is the system here that makes people depressed” (p. 71).

It is estimated that in China there are 300 million women from the countryside who work as domestic workers for the middle and higher income families in the cities. Systems of exploitation change form and style in different parts of the world, but, essentially, subscribe to the same logic—even if using simpler means.

Dependance Buenos Aires, 2004

The Dutch ING Insurance Company opened in Argentina in 1996 using images of “seriousness and reliability” and “Dutch Excellence” to generate local trust and wealth, only to close down and run away

after the crisis in 2004. During its short life, ING Insurance opened 23 branches in Argentina, occupied close to 6% of the local life insurance market, and sold around 60,000 policies.

The image of the files piled on shelves in an office in the Servicio de Conciliación Laboral Obligatoria (SECCLO, Obligatory Labor Conciliation Service) at the Ministry of Labor is quite astonishing. Filing a case gave people hope that their problems might be dealt with, but the review process could take years. This stark image shows the untouched files. The video elaborates further through storytelling. It casts an interesting light on the whole story, provoking questions. Who are the players? In this case, ING Insurance, the government of Argentina, higher level local agents within ING Insurance, and its Argentinian clients.

Who are the winners and losers? The losers are the Argentinian clients and the majority of ING Insurance's local employees. One interviewee in the video, a former ING worker, knows this very well. He says that by the December 2001 riots "there was no money in any bank, all the money had gone to Holland... they knew about it. And do you know why they knew about it? Because ING Bank was one of the banks that participated in [then Minister of Economy Domingo] Cavallo's 'megacanje' [global bond exchange, debt swap] and that bought debt bonds from Argentina, lots of coloured papers they bought and someone must have picked up the phone and told them 'get it all out of here guys.'" So, this is a game in which winners and losers were predetermined. Such games have been repeated for more than a century. It is more appropriate to call it a conspiracy than a game.

After hearing an interviewee in the video make a clear judgment about an ING conspiracy, I am shocked to hear that his view of the Netherlands did not change because "that's what capitalism is, it's a thing that's a jungle... you either adapt yourself or you get eaten... maybe my image of Dutch companies changed a little, but that's a different story." I disagree. I think that Dutch companies grow from the soil of Dutch society. It is not logical to say that the society is not to be blamed but the company is.

The ING lion, a symbol of the Netherlands, was used in advertisements to generate trust among the public. It is misleading and deceitful. The image of the files in the office is behind the scenes, which tells the truth, but can normally not be seen by the public. Art is an open-ended exercise, which embeds the beauty and the depth of art in its social context.

1000 Dreams, 2010

Dreams are a common phenomenon. But Matthijs de Bruijne's artwork turns them into a powerful vehicle. He recorded the dreams of Chinese workers, both women and men. Listening to and visualizing them, several things strike me.

Dreams are a mixture of dream and reality; and mixed in different ways. Gu Jun Yue once dreamed of a work injury suffered by his fellow worker. Yet he himself was seriously injured three days after the dream. That dream was clearly a warning. Unfortunately, Gu refused to heed the warning even though he was surrounded by dangerous, poorly maintained machinery.

In Lin Xiao Ping's dream, which can be found on 1000dreams.org, she gets everything she ever wanted, things she would never be able to get in reality. I believe that dreams tend to tell us something, but not because I am superstitious. Rather, I believe that because we have dreams when our minds are not in control of our hearts and feelings. Dreams try to lead us to realizing our truths. If I had a chance to meet Lin, I would ask her: Are those things what you truly want or need? Why do you want them or need them? Could you ever get them? Would you be truly happy if you were to get them?

The belief that ING Insurance could provide any security in Argentina is a daydream. To believe in a promising life abroad in the Netherlands as a domestic worker is also a daydream. Life will go on. Let us end daydreaming. Let us take a little break, close our eyes, and reflect what our night dreams try to tell us.