

## Dreamfactory - the other weaving mill 2020

Drömfabriken

Location: Väveriet, Uddebo and online event via Zoom

Date: 20/09/12 10 am - 12:30 pm (Actual time of the morning activity 10 am - 1:15 pm)

Notes by Hanna Larsson

Attending

Linnéa M.F. Larsson - organizing the event

Jesper Nordahl - artist

Caroline Ugglå - taking screenshots

Hanna Larsson - taking notes

Anton Marcus - representing FTZ & GSE Union in, Katunayake Free Trade Zone Sri Lanka

Padmini Weerasooriya - representing Women's Centre Sri Lanka

Ayomi Jayanthi Wickremasekara - unionist FTZ & GSE Union Sri Lanka and translates for Padmini in this seminar

Alke Schmidt - artist

Christin Wahlström Eriksson - artist

Christina Shearer - curator

Gunilla Ander - journalist and writer, Den lilla svarta, modeindustrins mörka baksida.

Bomull, en solig historia.

Maja Gecic - artist

Sara Östebro and Maja Östebro - artistic directors

Clara Larsson - reporter

Marie Hållander - writer

Berglind Hlynsdottir - artist

Stina Östberg - artist

Pia Mauno - artist

Linnea Rosenqvist - artist

Henrik Hellman - photographer

Pre-talk 10 am to 10:30 am

Gunilla Ander tries to enter Zoom. Caroline will help save screenshots from today. Hanna Larsson is participating by taking notes. Linnéa is testing the video and audio. Some of the participants have trouble with their internet connection. Sound is partly not working. Linnéa will moderate the discussion, but wants the conversation to flow and wants it to be spontaneous. Gunilla will explain how the garments can be so cheap, and it is a “race to the bottom” in the free trade zones. She says she will ask maximum three questions to Anton and Ayomi/Padmini. Jesper thinks those questions are central and the most important. He says covid-19 is also a part of/used by employers to change conditions. Jesper will talk about outer circumstances and has seen his role as suggesting who Linnéa will invite to this current event.

Linnéa wants Anton, Padmini etc to have their voices heard, in this event even though this is happening via Zoom. Linnéa intends to intervene only when time is short. Jesper wants Gunilla to explain all of the books which she has written, and underlines that her contribution is important. Gunilla responds that the books are in Swedish and starts from a Swedish context. Ayomi and Padmini enter the event. Linnéa starts to allow people into the event. Gunilla, Jesper, Ayomi and Padmini greet each other. All seems happy to meet again. Ayomi works with Anton now.

10:42 am

Linnéa: Let's start. Welcome to this two day event. First edition was last year. Now we wanted to invite people from where the clothes are produced. We are proud to welcome these experts in cheap and fast fashion. We are starting by explaining what a free trade zone is and how it came to be.

Jesper: Just before the video I want to say a few things. I am working as an artist. The video, the music is made by the Women's Centre, and the factory workers are singing. The footage is from factories. (Jesper has produce the music video)

We watched a music video made by Jesper and the Women's Center music group. 3 mins.

Jesper: All the links to the music video will be on the website, he clarifies.

Anton Marcus: Introducing himself. The video we saw is from 2005. Some of the free trade zones are in the pictures. 1978 the first free trade zone established in Sri lanka. Free trade zone is a union free zone. This is part of an agenda to attract more investors to the area. The concept restricts workers in the factories. In 1978 there were 60 000 employees, many so called investors came and started factories in Sri lanka. 2004 many investors disappeared, and found other places. Now in Sri lanka there are 13 zones (300 000 workers). The whole country is declared a free trade zone, by the government. The investors are protected, no one can enter these areas. The government prevents organizing unions. (All of the listening participants look concerned and focused. Anton's voice is central to being heard as he is also presented as one of the experts). The employees conciles allowed employees to elect their members, but it had nothing to do with the unions. The Government's agenda is to attract investors. They eventually succeeded in transferring the organisation to a union called "Free trade zone workers". (Anton seems engaged and very well prepared and well-educated in his area, which all comes from long experience). (Hannas thoughts are marked with brackets).

Jesper: So from 1978 to 2000 there were no unions? Anton explains that he worked for this for 22 years. (I am personally amazed...)

Alke: I am a german living in London. Visual artist. Focusing on environmental questions. Next year she has an exhibition in Rydal, Sweden, in the area close to Uddebo, showing

stories from the textile industry. She describes herself as being more focused on Bangladesh, and happy to hear and learn more from and about Sri Lanka.

Marie Hållander: I am from Uddebo/Tranemo kommun. Writer, researcher within education and also working with the textile history in Sjuhärad and the local history of this textile area. She is also doing a reading during the following afternoon.

Stina Östberg and Pia Mauno: Introduce themselves as artists. Tailor as Rebel (a network of artists coming from family backgrounds connected to textile). Painters, but has worked in many mediums. Stina has worked with Jesper Nordahl.

Maja Gecic: Visual textile artist from Serbia. Ex-Yugoslavia had a big textile area before. I am an educated textile designer. There is a lot of low force in Europe. My interest is what is happening (And has happened?) in Serbia and former Yugoslavia.

Linnea Rosenqvist: Lives in Uddebo, neighbour of Linnéa. She introduces herself as educated as a textile artist. And she has also worked with other mediums. Involved in the free shop of Uddebo. All things in the free shop are for free.

Linnéa L explains what a free shop is. (Great initiative, my personal opinion! The participants seem to already be familiar with the concept).

Berglind: Work with art in public spaces. Works a lot in Lithuania Latvia. The art touches upon labour and the issues connected to labour, maintenance.

Christin: From Egnared, Halland. Artist based in Gothenburg and Egnared. Teacher of art and craft, weaving, spinning, making, also growing flax. Has made her own canvas. Is now in the growing phase (of art). Making the material using old methods, old tools, old knowledge. I do not think knowledge is lost. And will be kept by continuing being used. (She underlines that old techniques are kept in today's society by being used in everyday life).

Christina Shearer: Works as the curator in the old spinning mill in Rydal, Marks kommun, in Sjuhärad, the "textile region" of Sweden. Works for a historical understanding. Looking forward to the exhibition of Alke Schmidt in 2021. Covid-19 might make physical meetings difficult, and even the exhibition. (She seems concerned and is hoping to being able to meet)

Caroline Ugglå: Also an artist. Sculpturing. Studying together with Linnéa. Is here to document the event during these days.

Hanna L has no microphone and is therefore introduced by Linnéa L.

Sara Östebro and Maja Östebro: Works with contemporary art in a rural area, runs Boy konsthall, Bollebygd in Sweden. (Their internet connection is a bit bad, and Linnéa L clarifies that they cooperate through a network called Art Center Sjuhärad).

Clara is unable to introduce herself since she is having technical problems with Zoom.

Padmini: Is from Sri Lanka, is the director of Women's Centre in Katunayake Free Trade Zone (FTZ) outside Colombo. They do many things, leadership training etc.

Ayomi: 30 yrs of experience in human resources. She is a non-violent communicator. Since 1998 she has been in contact with the Women's Centre, supporting their work. Speak Out is a project for the female workers facing violence. (I did not understand which specific kinds of violence.) Women just suppress, it is difficult to express (their problems/feelings). They do not even get a day of leave to see their dying father, she (one worker) was not granted permission. Ayomi says this is one example of so many. It is human torture, mental torture, she underlines. But this female worker kept saying that she needed to get back to the factory. So she did not want to take any legal action. Fear of losing her job was huge, and is by many workers generally. Padmini has a passion to serve these female workers. Padmini is glad to know Speak Out is able to do something for change.

Linnéa L: Tells everyone that links will be posted on the website to all the projects, within a few days. (Information is a powerful tool)

11:32 am

We are watching the video of Padmini's speech of rights of workers in Sri Lanka. The video speech is 9 minutes.

11:49 am

Gunilla is speaking: Gunilla is also in the same region in Sweden as Uddebo, she is from Vårgårda. Fast fashion is the main theme (of her engagement). Has written two books. How can a t-shirt cost 3 dollars? With so many stops (along the production line), with such a long production chain. The first book Bomull. Method to follow the tracks of the fashion. Burkina Faso, where poor farmers grow the white gold, but are suffering from an unfair trade situation. Price dumping is one big problem, Gunilla states. Second book is a black story (double meaning!), from Tamil Nadu in southern India. Huge hub for the denim industry and big pollution. The black river is the result of all the colors mixing together and the environment takes all the cost. The story (of the book) continues in Sri Lanka in the free trade zone, and I (Gunilla) talk to Anton and Padmini who give good examples. I found important pieces of information during dialogue with Padmini and Anton. Immediate export, low or no tax. All results in social dumping. The competition is fierce (key point). All costs are lowered (a consequence). The "race to the bottom". A free global market makes it easy for investors

to choose to produce where the prices are the lowest. Raises questions: are the workers receiving living wages. Has anything improved? Gunillas' question is directed to Anton.

Anton answers: Compared to 2005, and before the pandemic of Covid-19, the wages have been reached. The situation has not been so bad as earlier. The international campaigns and publicity has helped. There has been a little bit improvement of the living conditions. The willingness to work in free trade zones has been reduced (Antons sees this as a positive change). People want to go to the middle east to work instead. Workers get an (maybe glorified or unrealistic positive) image (idea) of foreign country labour to be positive. But actually the workers conditions in the middle east are terrible. Still the workers are treated very badly. The workers are not willing to come to work in the free trade zone, therefore the factories have to pay more than minimum wage. So a shift has been made, Anton clarifies. Due to Covid-19 300 000 workers will be dismissed. Most of the factories have stopped providing transport (which is a kind of service for the workers), to serve breakfast, and reduced the lunches (Does Anton mean timewise? Or is the food not served at all? I did not get this), and are discouraging workers not to come to work. Because of the social distance of Covid-19, the factory tells the workers that they will only employ 50 % of the workers when re-opening after covid. Some factories want the same production with 50 % workers (as with a 100 % staff). 80 000 to 200 000 workers will be dismissed due to less orders. Anton makes the Clean clothes campaign and argues the brands must take responsibility for the workers to be paid and says this is the campaign we are now pushing. We are planning to demand payment from the brands.

Gunilla: Gradually have you been able to increase (improve) the conditions of the workers. But the Covid crisis made it possible for the factories to take the opportunity to decrease the conditions again.

Anton: We will not find the covid solution nationally. The International Labor Organization is part of the global campaign. But the campaign has limitations. We see that the brand can pay a major role. This is not the time to limit orders. The livelihood of the workers must be protected. Workers have lost so much, and we fight for them getting social protection. Unemployment social protection scheme. This time must be an opportunity. (Anton seems hopeful)

Gunilla: This is my last question. The fashion industry is obsessed with making a better world. But this is of course branding. Some major brands dig into the discussion that we maybe should not consume so much. Do you see this in the Sri Lanka Free Trade Zones?

Anton: Yes, some brands are willing to pay us more. American brands are not ready to pay more. They are still sticking to their position.

Gunilla: Do you have any good examples of brands willing to raise salaries?

Anton: Yes, Primark (brand well known in Great Britain, typical fast/cheap fashion shops). There was a dispute with the management, finally the factory was re-opened and the agreement was they needed to recognize the union. The campaign name is demanding payment for the wages that were lost. Campaign is led by Clean Clothes campaign.

Jesper: Maybe Padmini can tell us about the relationship between the FTZ & GSE Union and the women, how the covid situation has affected the women's situation.

Padmini: We collaborate in a project on gender based violence. Since last year we have been a board member of the Clean clothes campaign. We have found a legal aid group choosing women workers as activists, and the Clean clothes campaign has supported this. There are many members now. The judges that are involved do the judgement and the support in the issues. At the moment, the free trade zone, we join hands in 25 districts in all of Sri Lanka to collect the impact of the covid-19, it is an ongoing research. Padmini is willing to answer more questions. (Ayomi is translating)

Stina: Question to Anton, Ayomi and Padmini. Swedish private people, how can we support your work, the Women's Centers work, the unions, the rights and conditions of the workers? In what way can we support you?

Padmini and Ayomi: When there are issues, we make protests. You must voice out internationally. In solidarity. Raise awareness of conditions. The most important is human rights, and work against gender based violence, also smaller campaigns, and demonstrations. There are incidents when factories close, and then the workers protest. We follow, but we have no strength as a union. We need support to resolve these issues. The unions can handle this, like Antons work.

Jesper: Where to find the campaigns that are currently on-going?

Anton: Clean clothes campaign is based in Holland. We are working very close with them. One of the ways to support, is information of the women (female) workers. Spread the information of the conditions in your country. The workers have lost their income. Today we are donating to workers that are out of work (He says by handing out parcels, but I did not get what these parcels contain). The near future situation will be serious if the companies do not get their orders. (key point)

Jesper: You also have the newsletters from your campaign. That one can sign up for. What about boycotting brands? Or is it better to support the campaign? Or send money to the campaigns?

Anton: The boycott is the last resort. Before that we need to convince the brands to change. We know the boycott campaign has two sides, and will have effects on the workers. Campaign to raise the living wage, and to respect the workers. We can demand the brands to take action. We still believe the brands are very worried about their image. Therefore we can make them take action. (Anton means negotiation is possible due to this)

Alke: I was thinking of the questions of what we can do and how we can get out of the covid situation. Consume, is back to the (new) normal after covid. What kind of orders are needed? (She has a great point) The consumers must be willing to pay more though, she says.

Anton: There are two sides of this. You can pay more, but the brands are making huge profits, and they need to be willing to share these profits. How can we push the brands to share their profit? Their profit margin is so so huge, 98%. Consumers in Europe and the US are willing to support the workers by paying more if it will improve the conditions of the worker. (But how can we be sure profit is shared by the brand to the workers?).

Stina: Why do not Sweden work for an international taxing system? It is a huge question of course. But it can be worked with.

Stina's question is not really answered.

Linnea L: wants a conclusion to be made.

Jesper: To reconnect to the music video; the Women's Centre is using culture to speak out.

Padmini: The torture is wide-spread. The workers need free time for simple things such as having time for a boyfriend. All the drama and poems are combined with their day to day life. The issue, the problem in the houses, factories. They use songs too. The strategy is for the women to absorb and express their situation.

Linnea L: We are now over time. We return at 2 pm.

Anton: Is thanking everybody for their time.

Linnea L shows a 4 minute video. The time is 12:50 pm.

Stina is sending her links to Linnea L. Linnea encourages the participants to write feedback and send to her, also all links of interest on this theme. The chat is open another half an hour for discussion.

Ayomi, Jesper and Linnea L agree and are hoping to see each other next year. Ayomi wants to/offers to organize a great program (when they all meet in Sri Lanka) and talks about the nice beaches, smiles and friendly small talk.

1:05 pm Last participants are leaving the Zoom meeting.