

The Expert II - Afternoon in the Uganda Forest

2006

“We were driven by love of adventure.”

“It was really exciting to live in a culture that is so different.”

“You have to make things work under completely crazy conditions.”

“I really feel that I made a difference!”

Development workers have individual reasons for going out, individual ways of coping with the local situation and different strategies of communicating their experiences once they are back in a Danish context. The work of the Danish development NGOs and the governmental organisation for development aid DANIDA is of course focused on development work and also follow international trends. But it also includes a more or less outspoken export of “Danish” cultural values and ideas to the partner-organisations in the developing countries. “Afternoon in the Uganda Forest” describes a fragment of the Danish/African relationship and, departing from a specific site in a suburb to Copenhagen, where the streets are named after African localities, literally inscribing Africa in a Danish Geography.

Installation, 4 freestanding walls with paintings, 2 videos





Installation view

Colonialism without Colonies? Relations between Tourism, Neo-Colonialism and Migration. Chapter 3: for example S, F, N, G, L, B, C - A Matter of Demarcation
Shedhalle Zürich



1. wall; Map of the area on Vestamager.





The first video describes the history of the area on Vestamager and the development of the Danish and international development aid from 1930 til 2006, interchanging with video clips from the area.

TEXT EXCERPT FROM VIDEO:

Around 1930

There is a serious shortage of housing in Copenhagen after the first World War. The town council in Tårnby, a neighbouring town of Copenhagen, decides to parcel out farmland from the western part of Amager for summer houses and allotment gardens (*kolonihaver*), to take some pressure off the city, at least in the summer. The former wetlands are drained and roads are constructed, a process that lasts until the 50s. The plots are not very expensive.

It is decided that the new streets in the area will be named after localities in Africa.

To ensure the possibility of a future expansion of the nearby Copenhagen Airport, a major part of the area has zoning restrictions concerning year-round houses.

The district develops with homemade shacks and garden houses that are mainly inhabited in the summer by people from the dense inner-city working-class quarters. Because of the housing shortage, there is a great demand for the small plots and many are inhabited all year round in spite of the ban on year-round living and housing in the area. The inhabitants describe themselves as settlers and invest a lot of energy into establishing a basis for existence despite the precarious conditions. The houses are modest to poor, the area is humid. Installation of electricity and sewerage, as well as asphaltting of the streets, does not happen until the 50s and 60s. The area is not developed with year-round housing until the 70s and the 80s.

The area goes under derogatory names such as “Pennyless Field”, “The Border of the City”, and “Klondike”.

1937

Ugandavej, named after the British colony, later the independent state Uganda. Until 1930, the street was called Tømmerup Strandvej (Tømmerup Coast Road), from 1930 until 1937, it is called Marøkkovej, after the northwesternmost African state.

This street name is the oldest of a group of names which particularly developed around a part of Kongelundsvej in the 40s and 50s, named after a number of well-known localities in Africa. Originally a dirt road, it later became a gravel road with deep ditches on the sides until it was asphalted in the late 50s.

Kamerunvej, named after the French colonies and British Cameroun, from 1961, the independent state Republic of Cameroon in western central Africa.

1940

Denmark is occupied by Nazi Germany.

1942

The plots in the area of Western Amager sell well. People find them a welcome variation from life in the dense inner-city quarters. For many, however, it also becomes their only possible dwelling, in spite of the ban on year-round habitation.

People live in their small garden houses over the winter without water or sanitation. It is difficult to get building materials because of the war, and means are scarce. The area is humid and fuel is expensive and rationed, hence it is difficult to heat the houses.

1944

Algiervej. Named after the French colony Algier. The colony became independent in 1962 and the name Algier is now used for the capital, whereas the country is called Algeria. Until 1979, the street also included Zambievej and the north-southward part of Tunisvej and Johannesburg Allé.

Kairovej. Named after the capital of Egypt, Cairo.

Nilensvej. Named after the longest river in Africa, the Nile. Until 1979, the street also included the present Ghanavej.

Nubiensvej. Named after the region Nubia in northeastern Africa, now a part of Egypt and Sudan.

Rhodesiavej. Named after the then south African provinces Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia, now respectively Zambia and Zimbabwe. Before 1979, the name also included the present Tanavej as well as the north-southward parts of Natalvej and Sudanvej.

Sudanvej. Named after the British Egyptian colony, later the independent state Sudan. After traffic calming in the area, the name took over a part of Rhodesiavej in 1979.

Tobrukvej. Named after the seaport Tobruk in Libya.

Tripolisvej. Named after the seaport Tripolis, the capital of Libya.

Tunisvej. Named after the seaport Tunis, the capital of Tunisia.

Ægyptensvej. Named after the North African state of Egypt.

1945

Denmark is liberated by the allied troops.

The United Nations, the UN, is founded. Today, the UN has 191 member states.

The World Bank is founded.

1947

GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade is signed by 23 countries with the intention of gradually reducing barriers to trade in goods, but leaving many possibilities for trade restrictions.

Liberiavej. Named after the West African republic, Liberia.

Natalvej. Named after the province Natal in the South African republic. After traffic calming in 1979, the street is extended as a part of the former Rhodesiavej.

1948

The American president Harry Truman signs the bill for the Marshall Plan, which includes massive efficient short-term help for devastated post-war Europe. Marshall Plan aid will be the model for modern development aid.

The *Organisation for European Economic Cooperation* (OEEC), later renamed the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD), is founded. OECD distributes Marshall Plan aid and also begins to give large sums for development aid to third-world countries. The OECD countries found the *Development Assistance Committee* (DAC), which coordinates the development aid.

It is assumed that economic growth and modernisation will automatically trigger a process of development in the receiving countries, which will also include the poorest in society.

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2000

The United Nations member states agree on the Millennium Development Goals, eight goals for development that should be achieved by the year 2015. The goals address the issues of poverty and hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS

and other major diseases, environmental sustainability, and economic global partnership for development.

The effects of development, the lack of positive results, and the eurocentrism of the development industry are increasingly criticized.

2001

Denmark elects a conservative/liberal government. The constantly high level of the Danish budget for development aid, around 1% of the GNP in the year 2000, is cut down and fixed on 0.8% in 2005. With 0.8%, Denmark is still at the forefront internationally.

After September 11th, the relation between development and global security is put on the agenda in Denmark and internationally.

2002

The Vestamager metro station opens and the area in West Amager is now only a few minutes from the centre of Copenhagen. The property values rise as a result.

2005

Chinese companies invest large amounts on the African continent, getting access to its rich natural resources. Many African states welcome the Chinese activity and donations, which are not tied to demands of good governance and democratic reforms.

Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen visits Tanzania and Mozambique. During his visit he focuses not only on the possibilities of globalisation and the importance of economic growth and market access for the poorest countries, but also on the African countries' own responsibility for their development.

The Danish conservative/liberal government presents an African policy. It follows the international trends, focusing on economic development but also on human rights and democracy and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

An important issue is the so-called Regions of Origin Initiative in Africa, which intends Danish support for the local populations in regions hosting large amounts of refugees from neighbouring countries. It also entails that Denmark will work for a global repatriation fund so that the refugees can return home more quickly.

An unknown person releases two green and very poisonous snakes into the Uganda forest, a small forest on the eastern end of Ugandavej.

2006

The publication of twelve cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammed in a Danish newspaper develops into an international crisis, resulting in protests in many Islamic countries and a boycott on Danish products. In Denmark, a discussion breaks out about freedom of speech and respect for the Danish Islamic minorities.

Denmark chooses to concentrate its focus on Africa. Mali becomes the newest programme country among the sixteen existing programme countries. Ten of these are in Africa. Economic growth in Denmark means that the development aid increases, in spite of its fixed level of 0.8% of the GNP.

The annual amount of money transferred from African migrants in Europe to their relatives in their home countries exceeds the total sum of all development aid, both multi- and bilateral.

Some critics declare modern development aid to be a complete failure.



The second panel shows a world bank secondary school in Zambia, the system of paths marked with branches in front of the camp-like buildings pick up the map in the first panel.





The third panel shows a classroom situation.





On the second video, on a monitor behind the second panel, a ticker - text runs across the screen. The text contain excerpts of a blog run by a development worker currently working in northern Uganda. She writes about everyday situations aswell as about her own role as a danish davelopment worker. The text takes place in a very recent time-space, - the last parts are written shortly before the opening of the exhibition.

Text excerpt:

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Posted on Tuesday, 17 October 2006 at 15:18 - Once Again Outruled By Ugandan Masters Of Style

A certain wooden chair is highly common in Uganda. Me and my colleagues use it in particular for sitting in on our verandas. It's cheap, 2,500 UGS (about 1 dollar). It lasts as long as it lasts.

However, I like the chair without the ornamentation. But to the Ugandan chair makers it's the best part. After having put the chair together it's time to burn the patterns on the chair. It sets me back to the lessons of Wood Work at school where we all went crazy with this tool, tormenting our parents with gifts made out of wood with these extreme ornamentations.

In Arua Market today I went searching for a chair without. Only one left. And then the guy selling the chair goes: 'Why do you always want the ones without?!' I try to explain him, in a nice way, that I think it's ugly. I like the chair for the simplicity, to me this design is disturbing. But they are so boring without!', he argues and adds; 'Besides, you can tell them apart with this thing'.

Having a design issue with a wooden chair in this part of the world is possibly crazy.

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Posted on Sunday, 29 October 2006 at 15:51

No Reason For You To Believe I'm A Super Natural Development Worker...

The weekend is almost over and now all the loose ends are sort of merging into an ordinary lazy sunshined afternoon. Maybe good so, in order to get back on track of the real world starting Monday morning.

Friday night I found myself on the backseat of a crowded Toyota Corolla - private hire - in a mix of nationalities cruising downtown Kampala. The air was warm, almost electric, when we bathed in the shine of the neon lights from the night life accompanied by the vibrations from the deep base of the amplifiers. It turned out to be one of these hectic nights where I finally lost my head somewhere a little after midnight at the Rouge Night Club in Kampala drinking vodka on the rocks while staring into the eyes of a softspoken Italian male aid worker who amongst others confessed he cuts his own hair. 'Always nice to have something in common, apart from working in northern Uganda', I thought.

I have to confess that in between I need to detach from this whole sphere of work, political correctness, and the obligation of driving a car with a logo constantly reminding me that I'm implementing this Action With An Attitude. Sometimes I check out, I let my hair down, say things which don't match the vision of the NGO I work for, am ideologically incorrect, do things which in some countries are considered illegal, am myself. I would actually go as far as stating it is the only way to eliminate the frustrations which accumulate living and working where I do. I wouldn't be able to do without it, and judging from favorite topics of discussions among colleagues I am not alone.



The fourth panel depicts the official visit of the Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Tanzania and his meeting with the Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkaba.

