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Ebifananyi : a study of photographs in Uganda in and through an artistic practice

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Ebifananyi

**A study of photographs in Uganda
in and through an artistic practice**

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Andrea Gerarda Elisabeth Stultiens
geboren te Roermond
in 1974

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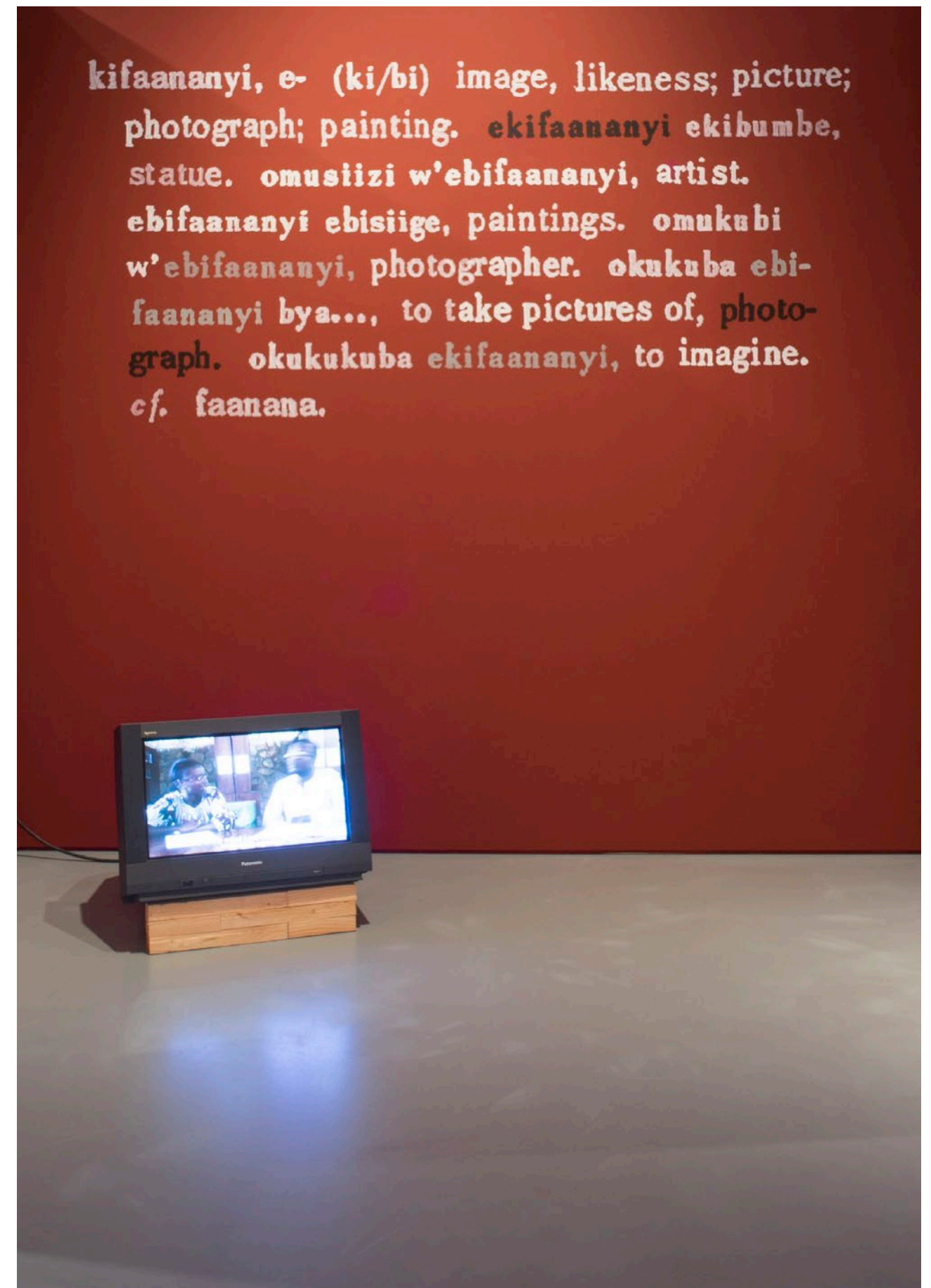
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- R:** I am confused about this word *Ekifananyi* because the translation here says picture but what is image in Luganda?
- N:** Image... is... it is actually *Ekifananyi* too.
- R:** And photo?
- N:** *Ekifananyi*.
- R:** And picture?
- N:** *Ekifananyi*.
- R:** So we have three words, meaning just one word. *Ekifananyi*.¹

¹ Fragment of a conversation between curator Robinah Nansubuga and artist/lecturer Nathan Omiel, Uganda Society, Kampala, October 2014. Full conversation: <https://vimeo.com/244005305> Last accessed 25-09-2018. Fragment on 2:35. N.b. footnote 67 explains the use of hyperlinks in this dissertation.



Ebifananyi exhibition, FoMu, 26-10 2017 / 18-02-2018

Dictionary lemma from Murphy, 1972, p.184. As is the often the case with Luganda, there are different spellings of ekifa(a)nanyi.



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Glossary

Abstract

In Luganda, the widest spoken minority language in East African country Uganda, the word for photographs is *Ebifananyi*. However, ebifananyi does not, contrary to the etymology of the word photographs, relate to light writings. *Ebifananyi* instead means things that look like something else. *Ebifananyi* are likenesses.

My research project explores the historical context of this particular conceptualisation of photographs as well as its consequences for present day visual culture in Uganda. It also discusses my artistic practice as research method, which led to the digitisation of numerous collections of photographs which were previously unavailable to the public. This resulted in eight books and in exhibitions that took place in Uganda and in Europe.

The research was conducted in collaboration with both human and non-human actors. These actors included photographs, their owners, Ugandan picture makers as well as visitors to the exhibitions that were organised in Uganda and Western Europe. This methodology led to insights into differences in the production and uses of, and into meanings given to, photographs in both Ugandan and Dutch contexts.

Understanding differences between ebifananyi and photographs shapes the communication about photographs between Luganda and English speakers. Reflection on the conceptualisations languages offer for objects and for sensible aspects of the surrounding world will help prevent misunderstandings in communication in general.

Definitions

Notions referring to visual material:

Images: Mental constructs that refer to imagined or existing realities without a material form.

Image objects: Material objects containing a picture.²

Pictures: Depictions that refer to imagined or existing realities.

Likenesses: Pictures that are primarily appreciated because they look like something else.

Photographs: Pictures captured on light sensitive surfaces with the use of a camera.

Photographic pictures: Visual responses to photographs in other media and materials.

Photography: A broad and encompassing word that includes the act of making photographs as well as the “means of production, reproduction and distribution”³ resulting from that act.

Notions central to the research as a whole:

Based on a definition by French philosopher Jacques Rancière, artistic practices are thought of as “‘**ways of doing and making**’ that intervene in [and respond to other] generally distributed ways of doing and making as well as the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility”.⁴ The interventions and responses that acknowledge the constant ebb and flow of mutual influence are part of the artistic practices that are based on encounters and correspondences with and around photographs in Uganda.

A photograph is considered “the product of an **encounter** between several protagonists”, as proposed by scholar of comparative literature Ariella Azoulay.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold uses the word **correspondence** to refer to “the dynamic of lives going along with one another. [...] Correspondence is a joining with; it is not additive but contrapuntal, not ‘and...and...and’ but ‘with...with...with’”.⁶ In this dissertation correspondences unfold between non-human and human actors who share a connection with a particular narrative and history, in and with photographs as material in an artistic practice. These particular correspondences have resulted in the artistic outcomes of this research project. The outcomes themselves are experiments that serve as starting points for new correspondences.

² On photographs as image objects, see Edwards and Heart (ed.) (2004)

³ Zaatari (2014), p. 1

⁴ Rancière (2004), p. 13. The notion of intervention is used by Rancière in his definition, the notion of response is added by AS.

⁵ Azoulay (2010), p. 11

⁶ Other terms, such as intersubjectivity, have been taken into consideration. However, Ingold’s correspondence affords agency to both human and non-human actors (i.e. photographs) which best facilitates the related discussions here, and is therefore the most suitable to use in this context. Ingold (2017-3), p. 9, 13

On Uganda:

Uganda: The word ‘Uganda’ originally was used to refer to the land of the **Ganda** people in Swahili; it was later adopted by the British who claimed terrain extending to the east, west and north of the kingdom of **Buganda**.⁷ In present day terms, Uganda refers to a country in Eastern Africa that was colonised by the British Empire from 1894 until 1962.⁸

Buganda: One of several kingdoms in present day Uganda (being of particular relevance as a basis of identification to the Baganda and as the region in which the majority of the collections of photographs in this study were encountered). Other kingdoms in Uganda mentioned in this dissertation include **Ankole** (South-Western Uganda) and **Tooro** (Western Uganda). These kingdoms and ‘traditional chieftaincies’ in other parts of the country play an important role in the construction of identity for many Ugandans.⁹

Luganda: One of many vernaculars in use in Uganda,¹⁰ the primary language in South-Central Uganda belonging to the Bantu languages that are spoken in a large part of Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas English is the official language in the country; historically it is the language of the Baganda (subjects of the kingdom of Buganda).

The words on the spines of the *Ebifananyi* books:

Ebifananyi, Ebishushani: The words used to signify photographs and other two-dimensional pictures that look similar to something else in, respectively, **Luganda**, and **Runyakitara** (the language that is used in a large part of western Uganda). *Eki* and *ebi* are prefixes with a function similar to the English article ‘a’ or ‘the’, while also signifying the singular or plural forms of the noun.

Picha: Kiswahili word used for photographs, derived from the English word picture. Similarly to *ebifananyi* and *ebishushani*, *picha* refers to photographs, drawings and paintings. Kiswahili is not widely spoken in Uganda,¹¹ but played an important role in the 1960s when the colonised countries in the Great Lakes Region were gaining their independence.

Diversity of signifiers and key players in the research project.

The diversity in the languages that were relevant to key players in the research project is made apparent in the words on the spines of the eight photobooks that were produced as part of it. Below, I list the variation in these words and key players. The names used in the sections of this dissertation written as letters are referenced between brackets.

Traditionally, Ugandan names are not constructed with a first name and a surname. Names are connected to a clan rather than to the paternal lineage and often accompanied by a title or a nickname acquired during a lifetime.¹² Nowadays, names usually have a Christian (or Muslim) component.

Ebifananyi #1: **Deo Kyakulagira** (1940-2000, Deo), dad of **Denis Kalyango** (1969, Denis).
Deo is short for Deogratias and only used by Catholics in Uganda.

Ebishushani #2: **Musa Katuramu** (1916- 1983, Musa), father of **Jerry Bagonza** (1946, Jerry).
The name Musa is derived from Moses.

Ebishushani #3: **Elly Rwakoma** (1938, Elly), husband of **Stella Rwakoma** (Stella).

Ebifananyi #4: **Ham Mukasa** (ca. 1870-1959) had a prominent place in late 19th till mid 20th century society in Buganda. He is generally referred to using both names while sometimes his Christian name is adapted to the ‘Ugandan’ Hamu and often Sekibobo, his title as a chief, is added.

Picha #5: **Engineer Martin Wangutusi Wambwa** (1928, Engineer Wambwa) always includes his title when signing his correspondence. **Mary Khisa** (Mary) is his lastborn daughter.

Ebifananyi #6: **Brother Anthony Kyemwa** (1930-2017, Brother Anthony), former headmaster of **St. Mary’s College Kisubi** (SMACK).

Ebifananyi #7: **Kitizo Paul** (Ca. 1960-unknown, Kizito), former patient of the Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI).

Ekifananyi #8: **Kabaka Muteesa I** (1837-1884, Kabaka Muteesa I). *Kabaka* is the title of the king of Buganda. The name Muteesa is spelled in different ways. I adopted the spelling that is currently used by the Buganda Kingdom. The double e signifies the stretching of the vowel in the pronunciation of the name. In most academic literature and writing from or about the colonial era the name is spelled with one e, while early explorers and missionaries sometimes used other variations such as M’tesa. When quoting sources the spelling in the source is used.¹³

Individuals, other than the key players, who made important contributions to the research project are acknowledged in the dissertation using their full names, taking into account how they refer to themselves, which means that the Christian or Muslim name is sometimes mentioned first, and sometimes mentioned after the Ugandan name.

Artist **Rumanzi Canon Griffin** (1991, Canon) has been of utmost importance throughout the research project. Canon grew up in Western Uganda speaking Runyakitara, and since 2010 lives in Kampala, where he mainly speaks English and Luganda. He was my partner in the digitisation of collections of photographs, which formed the basis of this research project, and the production of exhibitions resulting from it. Canon made me aware of customs, conventions and their contexts that otherwise would have escaped my notice. He produced photographs for the 2nd, 3rd, 6th and 7th volume of the books series and contributed as an artist to the 5th and 8th volume.

⁷ See Uganda: Reflections Around the Name, by Manuel Muranga, in Okoth (ed.) (1995), Uganda a Century of Existence. Reid (2017), p. 2
⁸ 1894 is the year in which the Uganda Protectorate was declared, albeit its terrain was limited to Buganda and later expanded to what is now Uganda. See Mutibwa (2016), pp. 1-31

⁹ Reid (2016), pp. 284-346
¹⁰ Pawliková-Volhanová (1996), p. 163

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See the discussion between Nathan Omiel and Robinah Nansubuga in *Ebifananyi* #4 on “Luganda [being] famous for giving names”: <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/4-simuda-nyuma-forward-ever-backward-never-based-images-ham-mukasa/59/>

¹³ Further musings on the spelling of the name can be found in this blog post: <http://www.hipuganda.org/blog/ekifananyi-kya-muteesa-the-show-is-on-week-2>. The great grandson of Muteesa I, Muteesa II was the *Kabaka* of Buganda from 1938 until his death in exile in Britain in 1969. When Ugandans mention Kabaka Muteesa they usually refer to Muteesa II.