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

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Citation

Stultiens, A. (2018, November 20). *Ebifananyi : a study of photographs in Uganda in and through an artistic practice*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/67951>

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



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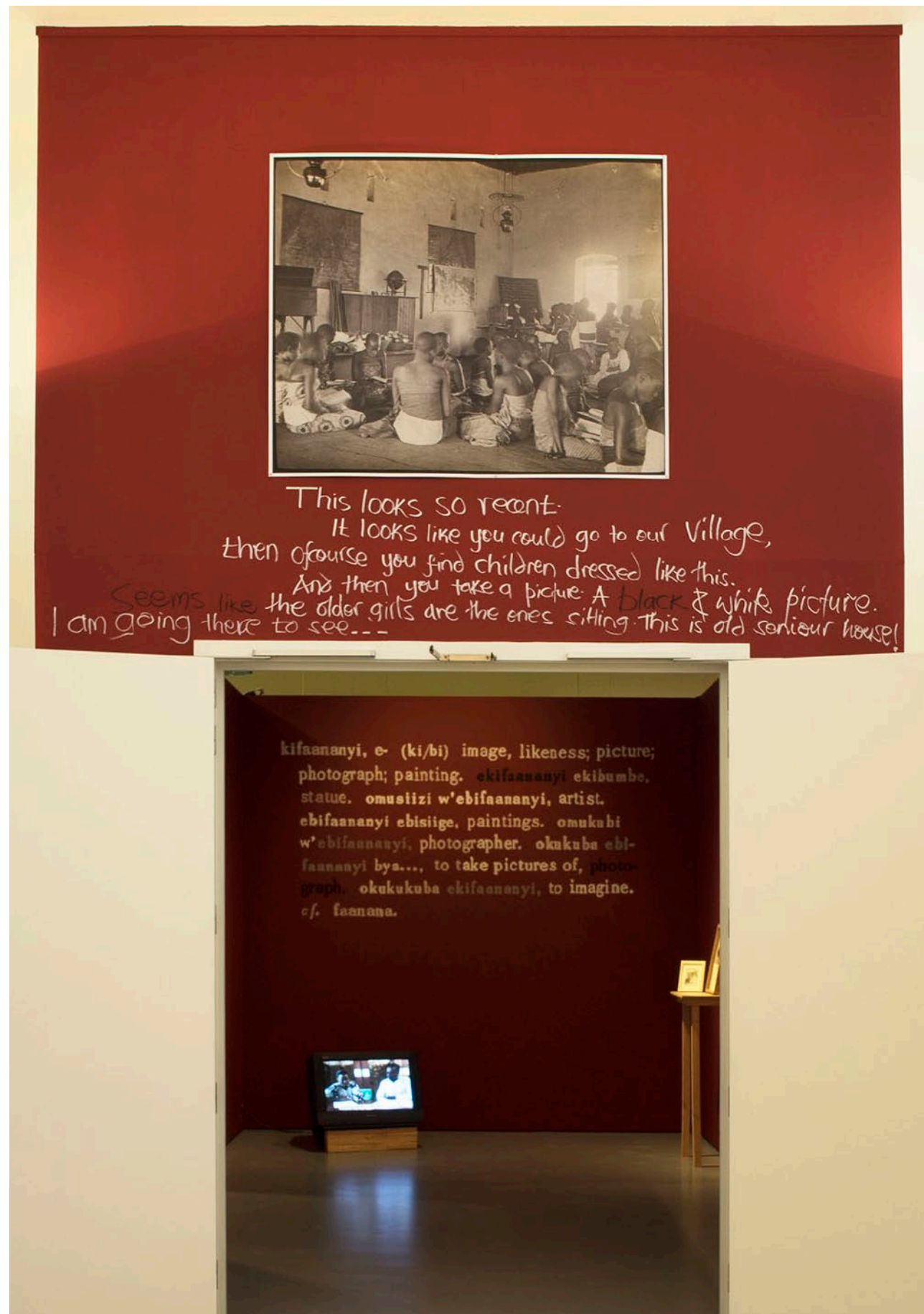


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Title: Ebifananyi : a study of photographs in Uganda in and through an artistic practice

Issue Date: 2018-11-20



Entrance to *Ebifananyi*, Fomu Antwerp, October 2017 / February 2018

Print above the door: lanternslide from the collection of Gayaza High School, digitised 2012.

Quote with print, from conversation with Gayaza High School student, 2013

Chapter 2

Letter Writing and Correspondence

The pictures following this introduction constitute a small selection of documented letters that were encountered during this research project. The letters put the photographs in context and taught me about when, where and under which circumstances they were produced. The selection offers different materialities, ranging from original handwritten documents, to typed carbon duplicates, to publications in books, and also interpretations or translations.

The purpose of the sequenced letters is to illustrate how the multi-vocality that is practiced in the Ebifananyi books is present in the encountered documents. The letter writing in the following chapters supports the purpose of this project to use correspondences with photographs and documents as a research method.

I began to consider writing letters for this purpose after the rejection of *Ebifananyi #5* by Engineer Wambwa, whose photographs and writing are presented in the book. His response made it necessary for me to explain to him why and how the book was made, which created an instant and interpersonal urgency to reflect on my actions. More will be said about this in the letter to Engineer Wambwa in chapter 4.

British sociologist Liz Stanley states that “the epistolary or letter form can be easily recognized and distinguished from other kinds of writing, because of existing in a social context with shared and largely stable conventions governing its form.”¹¹³ Letters have “dialogical”, “perspectival” and “emergent properties”.¹¹⁴ They are part of an exchange between particular individuals who both affect the perspective from which the letter is written. The particular context and moment in time in which letters are written is part of their relevance and influence the way in which certain topics are addressed. These conventions and characteristics of letter writing allow the analysis of my artistic practice to be shaped by individuals who have a direct relationship with the photographs in the books and thus keep writing connected to the realities in which the photographs were produced, used, and preserved.

In the context of the dissertation, readers may understand the letters in relation to one another, yet they may not be familiar with certain particularities that are mentioned in individual letters. The letters position the reader of the dissertation outside of the correspondences that unfolded up to the moment the text was written. This is an attempt to include the people I worked with in Uganda and their photographs as experts, rather than to exclude the reader. At the same time it serves to keep the reader aware of her or his outside position in relation to the material discussed and introduces a voyeuristic element that has been part of the research project - both as a factor that brings excitement as well one that

¹¹³ Stanley (2004), p. 207

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 203

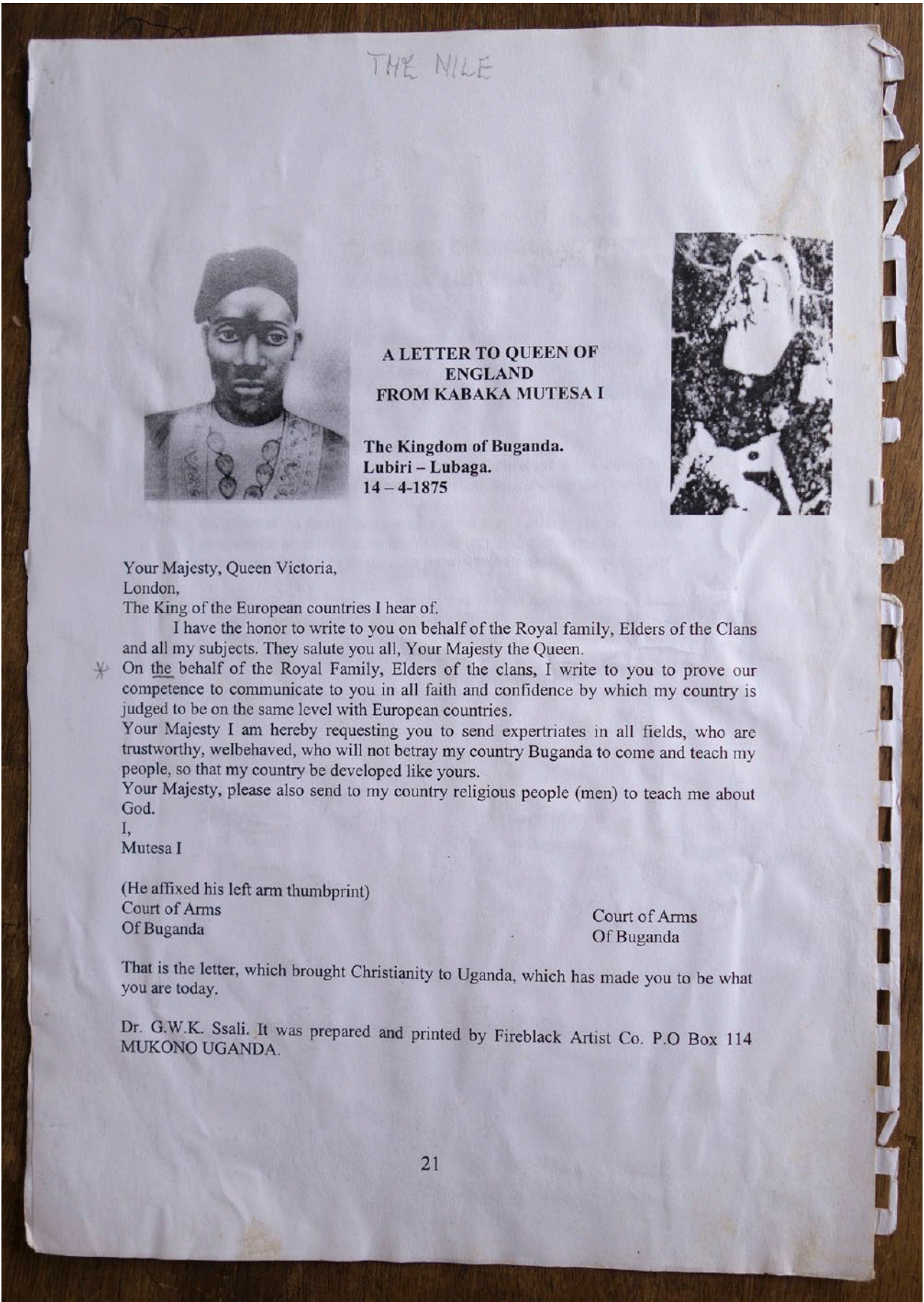
continuously raises questions of legitimacy. Why am I, and why is the reader of the dissertation, in a position to look at and discuss these photographs? Rather than saying we should not look at these photographs, I use letters as a form that does not universalise the positions of the different agents in the encounter generated by my artistic practice and research.

Footnotes are not part of the conventions of epistolary texts. They do however appear in the letters I wrote to Ugandans who I worked with, or whose materials were used in the *Ebifananyi* books as there are things that I can assume they know while the reader of the dissertation does not. The addressees of the letters and the reader of the dissertation are part of different “generally distributed ways of doing and making”. Just as footnotes are used with the readers of the dissertation in mind, other elements such as an additional pre-amble or postscript, have been considered, but I decided that these would unnecessarily complicate the structure of the dissertation. The footnotes also connect statements to relevant literature and provide links to particular pages in the *Ebifananyi* books and other primary sources generated as part of the research project.

The relationship between the addressees of the letters and myself differs, and is addressed in the introductions to each chapter. The letters related to *Ebifananyi* #1, #2, #3, #5 and #6 are written to people who I worked with in person, while the addressees of the letters related to *Ebifananyi* 4 and 8 died long before I embarked on this research project and I do not know whether Kitizo Paul (*Ebifananyi* #7) is still alive.

At the particular moment in time in which my letters are written it is possible to look back and relate collections of photographs to each other, notice outcomes of my actions that were not obvious before, and anticipate what is still to come with an exhibition presenting the whole project in The Uganda Museum as a primary concern.

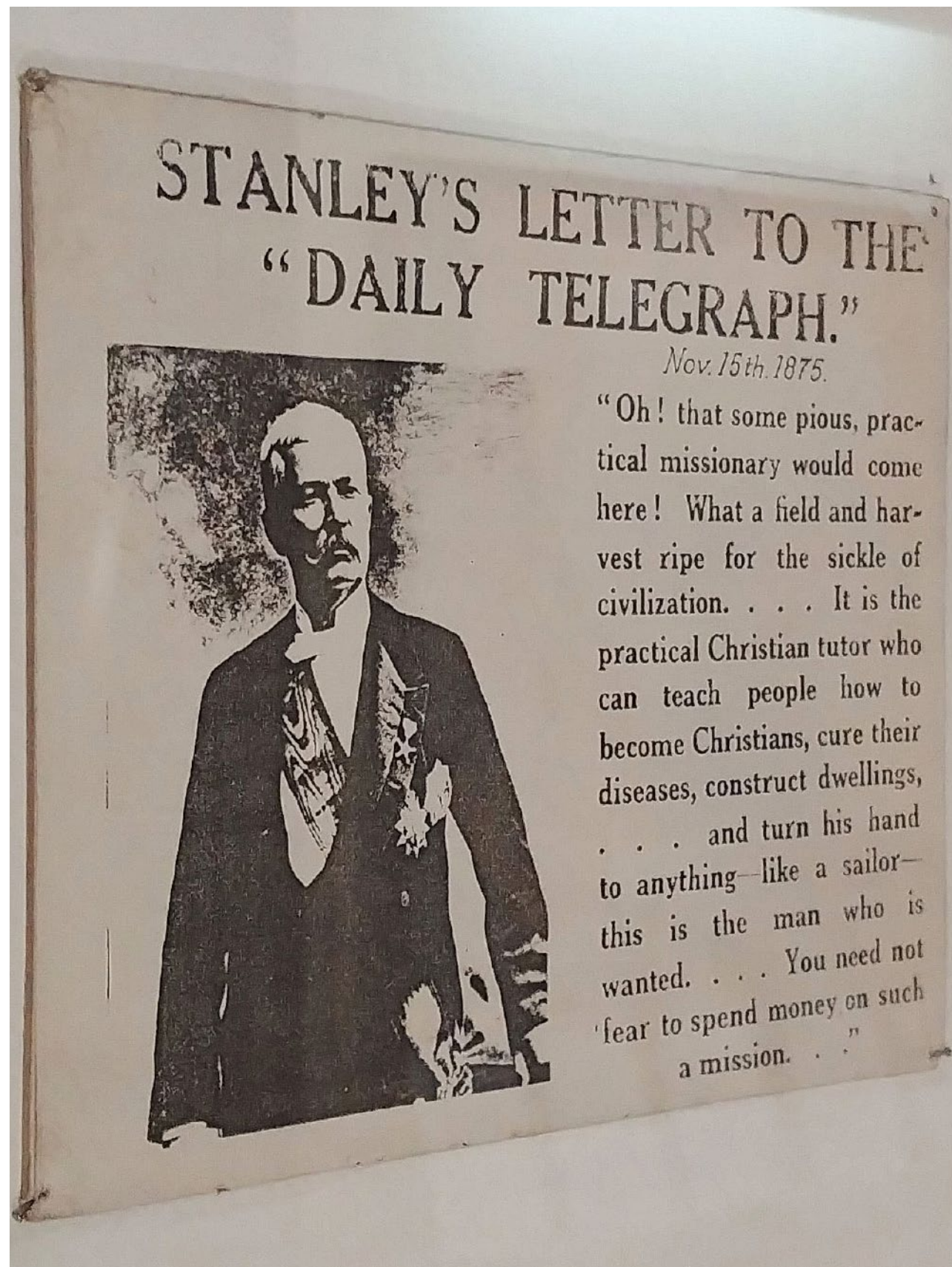
The length and complexity of the eight letters is affected by how and to what extent I got to know their individual addressees through personal interactions, photographs and various other documents. The letter in this chapter addresses all of them and constructs a common ground as I introduce myself and the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions, and address the privileges that are connected to my background. The reproduced circular letter on p. 61, written by missionary doctor Schofield and his wife in 1929, informed the way the letter in this chapter was written. A digitised version of the letter was shared to the HIPUganda Facebook page by one of their granddaughters after I started to post some of Schofield’s photographs. Its presence in and influence on this dissertation is a result of the first stage in the research method described in the previous chapter.



Letter encountered in personal documents that were made available to HIPUganda, with portrait by Prince Joseph Walugembe Musanje (*Ebifananyi* #8)

The documents were presented as part of a manuscript on Buganda hiostry with working title The Nile

Another version of this letter, including the two photographs, can be found framed on the walls of the tourist information centre at the Lubiri, the palace grounds of the Kabaka of Buganda in Mengo.



Fragment of a letter by Henry Morton Stanley. The letter is here dated in November as published in the "Daily Telegraph".

In Stanley (1875), it is dated in April of the same year and written for the members of the Royal Geographical Society.

This fragment was photographed as part of a display in the history room of the Uganda Museum, December 2017

3. KABAKA MUTESA I, COLONEL GORDON AND THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES, 1876-7

Kabaka Mutesa I to Colonel Gordon, 6 February 1876.*

To Sir Canell Gorlden February 6th, 1876.

My Dear Freind Gorden hear this my word be not angry with Kaver-ega* Sultan of unyoro. I been head that you been brought two manwar ships but I pray you fight not with these Wanyoro for they know not what is good and what is bad. I am, Mtesa king of uganda for if you fight with governour if you fight with governour you fight with the king. I will ask you one thing but let it may please you all ye Europeion for I say if I want to go to Bommbey if the Governour and if the Governour of Bommbey refuse me to past will I not find the orther road therefor I pray you my friends hear this my letter stop for a moment if you want to fight put ships in the river Nile take west and north and I will take east and south and let us put wanyoro in to the middle and fight against them but first send me answer from this letter. Because I want to be a freind of the English. I am Mtesa son of Suna king of uganda let God be with your Majesty even you all Amen.

Mtesa king of uganda.
February 6th, 1876.

Kabaka Mutesa I and Dallington to Gordon, 24 March 1876.

To Sir Colonel Gordon, My dear Friend, I wish you good day. It is I M'tesa, King of Uganda who sends you this letter. I wish to be the friend of the white men, Therefore, hear my words which I say.

1. I want a priest who will show me the way of God.
2. I want gold, silver, iron and bronze.
3. I want clothing for my people and myself to wear.
4. I want excellent guns and good cannons.
5. I want to cause to be built good houses for my country.
6. I want my people to know God.

Kabaka Mutesa I to Gordon, 3 April 1876.

From King M'tesa, the greatest King of the interior of Africa, 3 April 1876.

This letter is from M'tesa, the greatest King in Africa. It is I M'tesa, King of Uganda, Usoga* and Karagwe. Listen then to my word which I

King's Co
15th,

Dear beloved Father.

First of all I want you to excuse me for writing this letter in English, it is simply because this letter would be rather long, had it to be in Luganda.

Before I congratulate you sir from that dreadful case which was just like a criminal on our side, let me thank the Almighty God maker of all things, "Almighty and most Merciful". He who sees on all calling great things small and small things great. We did not know that we were in that case, what so ever would have happened. We did not know that they could have a sum of a thousand shillings big still yet it was not what people expected over ten thousand. Others said that he must be outside of Buganda just as so.

This is very funny
as very much
cars will

Musa_letter.txt
Private Carpentry Shop
Luharo, MBARARA.
9th November 1950.

Ya Rubambansi* Ch. G. Gasyonga II
Omugabe w'Ankole*
Kamukuzi - MBARARA.

**[NOTES: Rubambansi is like a praise title, like your majesty, in this case praising the king's unimaginable dominion over the world. Omugabe w'Ankole is :), King of Ankole.]

My King,

I am so happy to write to you replying your letter to me from 7/11/50 with your

that I send the large photographs I took on the baptism anniversary of your lady the younger. (* Direct translation would be - The younger Muhinda lady. Bahinda are a group of clans in Ankole who were the contemporary dynasty. So, this is the king's second wife's baptism day.)

2. The photographs, I sent you many samples mounted on two cards, and requested that you let your private secretary let us know which ones you need enlarged. But unfortunately, since then up to now, I have not received any notification. When you return the samples I sent, I will promptly send them to Kampala so they can make us the big ones.

3. I have sent you the photographs from Prince* Katanga's wedding.

*[NOTES: 'Omurangira' is borrowed from the Buganda court style, where it's 'Omurangira', it's not exactly prince all the time, it's something like prince or some kind of royal. The female one is called 'Omumbejja']

3 Big copies @ 6/- each	18/-
1 Half Size Copy @ 2/50 each	2/50
1 Small Print @ /50 each	/50
	21/=

You may make your desired selection.

Your Beloved Son,
MM ... Katuramu.

10th November 1975.

The Chief Engineer,
Uganda Electricity Board,
P.O. Box 7059,
Kampala.

Dear Sir,

For quite some time I have been meaning to write and express my dissatisfaction resulting from frequent disconnections of power to Uganda Cancer Institute. I am aware that a lot of maintenance has been carried out along the main line supplying this Institute. However, the frequency with which power is disconnected and no prior warning is given to us the consumers, disturbs me considerably.

I would like to point out that Uganda Cancer Institute is a hospital and as such we find it extremely difficult to render efficient services to our patients when power is disconnected for long periods without prior notice. Furthermore, we have a walk-in cold room where drugs are kept at -20° and a Revco refrigerator where valuable medical drugs, specimens and chemicals are stored, and it is now becoming virtually impossible to keep these drugs at the temperature recommended by the manufacturers. We have in the past relied on your prior notice and transferred some materials to other buildings, but of late no notice has been given to us and recently our patients even went without food as we had not made prior arrangements. I would be appreciative if you would help to rectify the above situation.

I am sincerely yours,

Charles L.M. Olweny,
Director,
Uganda Cancer Institute.

Miss
Dr.A.T.Schofield's Circular Letter.

August 30th, 1929.

C.M.S. Hospital,
P.O. Box 161,
Kampala,
Uganda.

Dear Friends,

I must first of all apologise for keeping you so long for another "Circular". We arrived back in Uganda some ten weeks ago, but have been so busy that a lot of things seem still waiting to be done.

As most of you will know, we are located to Mengo Hospital, at any rate till Dr. Stones' return here in a year's time. All of you who have followed the wonderful history of this Hospital will know that this big work needs at least two male doctors, and certainly, at present, should have more. We have to put on double shifts of operating days, and so on, as it is, to get through the work.

It was a very great privilege again to be associated in their work with Dr. & Mrs. A.R. Cook, and I was very glad to be able to take a 'relief' in the operating theatre when we had been only fourteen hours back in Uganda. Dr. Cook was far from well, and badly needed relief. He quite soon took a holiday up at his lovely 'rest cottage' overlooking the lake (Victoria Nyanza) at Makindye, and we are all very pleased to see him looking fit once more. But all this, coupled with getting our things from Toro and settling into our house, has meant that you have had to wait for this letter till now.

We reached Uganda late in the evening of June 13th, and it would seem to me that this first 'circular' might well be an account of our impressions of the great advances which we have noticed in Kenya and Uganda in the year we have been away. We have really been astounded at some of the changes, particularly in Kenya, and I doubt whether any place in the world can show such rapid strides. It is almost bewildering the pace made along the road of Progress made by these 'Younger Sons' of the British Commonwealth during the last few years.

The word 'strides' hardly describes it. Rather must we turn to motoring terms of speed not only as an illustration but because the key-note is just motors - and motors by the thousand. The railway advances - and has nearly reached Kampala - but it is the vast number of motors and better roads which have chiefly impressed us. And with the ~~land~~ already made under the Loan of the Colonial Development Act for even more and finer roads especially in the west and north of Uganda we shall soon be fully linked up with almost every part of the Protectorate and with the nearer Congo.

As we landed at Mombasa we met the sight of that week's rivals of cars from the factories of Detroit - 250 cars in their cases lying in a long line on the quay - and instead of the old rickshaws we were besieged by the drivers of countless luxurious 'taxis'. Then again Nairobi and other towns it was the great number of cars and lorries which impressed us most, with large parking areas filled with cars in all business parts. Unfortunately almost all the cars one sees are

Introductions in a circular letter

Dear all,

I must first of all apologise if the tone and content of this letter strikes you as too informal or otherwise inappropriate. I am aware of your respective societal positions and, to some extent, familiar with the conventions attached to these positions. The people of the Netherlands, my country of birth, are known for their directness, bluntness even. If I come across as rude or ask questions that are impertinent from your perspective, please keep in mind that these questions are the result of a combination of ignorance and genuine interest in your lives and the pictures they are connected to. Based on that interest and a more general curiosity concerning photographs in Uganda I made books and exhibitions with those pictures.

This circular letter serves as an introduction to letters written to each one of you individually. These letters explain what I have done with your photographs and why. When this is relevant they will also include how people responded to the books and exhibitions that present your pictures.

It feels as though I have gotten to know each one of you through your pictures and stories connected to them. To make sure we are on somewhat common ground I thought it might be a good idea to introduce myself to all of you at once, and to tell you about the way in which your photographs are presented in the books and exhibitions in general terms.

I was born in 1974 and grew up in a village in the predominantly Catholic south of the Netherlands. My parents moved to this village from elsewhere in the region after their marriage. The village is not considered to be ancestral ground. I grew up speaking Dutch and ‘Limburgs’, a local dialect related to German. My father is now retired but worked a middle class job in a post office and my mother is a housewife. My (only) sister and I were regularly taken to museums, theatre performances and concerts. A primary school in the village and a secondary school in the nearest town took care of my initial education, which was continued in a city further up north in the Netherlands. After some deviations with programs left unfinished, I finally realised that I wanted to be a photographer which led to further studies at three different universities in my country and ended up with a bachelor and two master degrees in photography.

When visiting a Dutch friend living in Uganda the experience of feeling both connected to and alienated from the people I met made a big impression on me. This led to an attempt to use something supposedly known - photography - to familiarise myself with something unknown to me - Ugandan culture. Over time this turned out to be a naive and problematic position that I will return to later.

I found that there were, compared to the Netherlands, few historical photographs in Uganda. Not long after graduating as a photographer I became aware of the limitations of my particular gaze. I am a woman and my eyes are positioned five foot two above the ground when I stand. These are among many other factors that

influence, and to some extent limit, the way I see the world. My interest also extended beyond the here and now that I was able to picture. I therefore placed my photographs alongside pictures made by others. This happened for instance in books I made about two villages in the Netherlands, one being the place I grew up in, the other one situated on the other side of the country. Juxtaposing these two villages was an attempt to discuss through pictures how people organise themselves in small communities with the help of both old and more recent traditions. The photographs kept in municipal archives and albums of people living in the villages were necessary to reflect on the similarities and differences my photographs showed.¹¹⁵

The first thing I did as a photographer in Uganda was to invite primary school children from a Dutch and from a Ugandan village to make photographs of the things that mattered in their lives to show them to each other. These photographs made it possible to compare life in these villages from insider perspectives. This juxtaposing of different contexts has taken on different forms in the books I made with your photographs, but I still take it to be necessary to develop an understanding of things outside of what is already known.¹¹⁶ Before I became acquainted with your photographs I met Kaddu Wasswa, an elder who documented his life extensively in photographs. While we worked on a biography about his life¹¹⁷ I continued to search for, and therefore encountered, other collections of photographs. These collections were not easily accessible, and therefore I developed strategies to contribute to a diverse and critical documentation of Uganda’s past by making the outcomes of my search publicly available.

Searching for and encountering collections of photographs in Uganda led to numerous experiences and observations that complicated my point of departure. I learned that historical photographs would mainly provide information about the lives of Ugandans that were in relative privileged positions, because having and making photographs was for most of the 20th century, and to some extent still is, connected to particular societal positions and financial resources. I was also confronted with differences between the Netherlands and Uganda in the educational systems in order to become a photographer. It was and still is not possible to be trained as a photographer in Uganda through vocational or university education. Photography courses are included in programs in mass communication and art, but the classes mainly teach the theory of how to make photographs and do not offer hands on practice or reflection on the medium.

All the photographers who I met and heard about in Uganda were either self-taught, travelled abroad for their education, participated in workshops that were usually facilitated by foreigners, or were informally trained by other photographers.¹¹⁸

After searching for collections of photographs for several years I learned that the words *ekifananyi* in Luganda and *ebishushani* in Runyakitara do not only signify a photograph but any kind of likeness. From this moment on I started to take into consideration that the distinctions that were made in my education between photographs and likenesses made in paint or pencil had to be reconsidered in the Ugandan context. While I intended to learn **about** Uganda through photographs, it became apparent that I had to learn **from** them. I needed to widen the categories of pictures that were relevant in order to understand them in your context.

¹¹⁵ Stultiens, 2002

¹¹⁶ The exhibition Things That Matter took place in the Uganda Museum, Kampala, August 2008, and the Africa Museum in Cadier en Keer October 2010. A video of the opening in of the exhibition can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/147171679> Last accessed 25-09-2018

¹¹⁷ Kaddu Wasswa was born in 1933. Our initial work led to The Kaddu Wasswa, a visual biography (Stultiens 2010-a). Kaddu Wasswa and I are currently working on a follow up to this publication. Two other publications (Stultiens 2010-a and 2013) show, respectively, photo studios in Uganda and how the visualisation of Uganda in the Tourism industry relates to aspects of everyday life.

¹¹⁸ Vokes (2012), pp. 214-215 and Behrend (2001), p. 303 confirm these stories.

In addition to the pre-conceived ideas of what a photograph is, my skin colour and the geographical, political and economical background I came from were important factors while working with your photographs. The differences between the choices and opportunities the Ugandans, who try to earn a living by making photographs, and I have, are striking. Most of these Ugandans cannot afford to travel to the Netherlands. Getting a visa to enter Europe can be a complicated and costly process these days, without guarantee of success while it is possible for me to simply pay an amount of money at the border and enter Uganda. My privileged position has historical roots that can be traced back to the colonial history connecting Europe and Africa to each other. The books written by early European explorers who came to the area that is present-day Uganda are based on the ambitions of European countries to build empires, and these explorers seemed to take their (privileged) positions for granted.¹¹⁹ Speke, Stanley and other early European visitors to Buganda were received in person by the *Kabaka*,¹²⁰ and they were given accommodation and food. Instead of showing surprise about the honour of being received by a local ruler, the visitors mention at length the whims of their host.¹²¹ Times have changed. It is no longer unusual to meet white people in Uganda, particularly in urban areas. I am nevertheless often still first a white person when meeting new people. This feels uncomfortable but, ironically, my work might have been a lot harder without the trust I was given because of my skin colour. The first time someone told me that this was the case it was hard to believe, but the remark was repeated over and over. I grew increasingly aware that it was impossible to escape the privileges attached to skin colour, both the discomfort it caused and the benefits it gave. I decided that the access to collections of photographs gave me the responsibility to make your photographs available to audiences in appropriate ways.

The English noun ‘appropriation’ stems from the verb to **appropriate** and the Latin *appropriatus*, to make one’s own. When used as an adjective, the meaning of the word shifts. To **appropriate** becomes **appropriate**, as in suitable, or proper. You could say that your photographs were **appropriated** for my particular interest in how photographs are used and function. I, however, tried to develop **appropriate** ways to present your pictures. Whether the books that were made with your photographs indeed are appropriate ways to present them, and when and for whom they might actually become misplaced appropriation is part of what is addressed in the next letter you will receive from me. The efforts in working with your photographs serve two purposes. The first one is, as already mentioned, to make more photographs that relate to Uganda’s past available to audiences with an interest in that past. Members of this audience are mostly found in Uganda. But there is also quite a following among the Ugandan diaspora in the United Kingdom, Northern America and among scholars with an interest in Uganda’s past.¹²² The second purpose is to reconsider what photographs can be, taking their particular uses in Uganda into account. A recurring issue in this respect is what we can know through these photographs beyond the *ebifananyi* or likenesses they show. The audience for this second purpose is not necessarily interested in photographs of the Ugandan past, but in photographs in general. Members of this audience can be found for instance at conferences and at the exhibitions of your photographs that took place in spaces that are dedicated to art and photography.

¹¹⁹ See Speke (1864), Grant (1864), Chaillé-Long (1877), (Stanley) 1878
¹²⁰ The *Kabaka* in the words of Ugandan artist Violet Nantume: “is elevated above all and everything else”: <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/4-simuda-nyuma-forward-ever-backward-never-based-images-ham-mukasa/78/>
¹²¹ e.g. Speke (1864), p. 286, Stanley (1878), p. 336
¹²² Based on statistics provided by Facebook and Wordpress in relation to the HIPUganda Facebook page and website, and personal exchanges with researchers working on topics related to Uganda’s past.

While designing the books, selecting photographs, sequencing them and then placing them on the pages, two rules were developed. The first rule is that the materiality of your photographs had to be visible in the re-productions in the books. This materiality is found in the paper that carries the picture, in the frame or album a photograph is placed in. These objects tell us about whether and how pictures were protected against dust and insects, how photographs were valued and where they were kept. A date, a name or an anecdote written on the back of a photograph tells us which information someone, at some point in the picture’s existence, thought should be preserved with it. These and other marks are traces that can be read as witnesses to the passing of time between the moment the picture was produced and the moment in which it was reproduced in the book. Not only the picture is considered to be worth sharing, these traces are too.¹²³ The second rule was that there always had to be at least two views or voices present alongside each other to avoid the suggestion that the book delivers a conclusive history.¹²⁴ There are, for instance, on several occasions in the books different people who comment on or interpret the same photograph, either in words or in pictures.

History is thought of as a version of the lived past that is communicated in one way or another. While working with your photographs people responded and connected them to pasts in different ways. This made it possible to compare what I heard and saw myself to what I read in books that were written by explorers and other authors who rarely reflect on their own positions. Sometimes stories that related to photographs seemed to contradict each other or claims made in these books. Since there was no reason to distrust the people who told me the stories they were treated as the results of different perspectives on the same past and are presented in the books without a hierarchical order.

The books themselves are small and may remind you of pocket Bibles or Qurans. They are bulky, which is meant to suggest that their content is substantial. The covers are made of plain paper in one colour. Each book has a title and a subtitle on its front cover, one word on its spine, and a quote on its back. The books have a slightly rough and sturdy look due to their binding that is not covered as is usually seen. The threads that hold the pages of the book together can be seen. The pages of the books are mostly filled with pictures. These pictures either fill the page or bleed off it. There are also texts, but they are meant to complement the pictures and not the other way around. The pictures are placed in sequences. Their meaning is partly formed by the way in which they complement or contradict the pictures on the previous and following pages. The texts provide facts or otherwise create a context, which helps the reader of the pictures to understand what can be seen on them. The cut of the pages shows when a page has content that bleeds off it, which makes it instantly clear that these are not textbooks. The books are made to be objects that not only carry meaning in the sequenced pictures **on** their pages, but also **in** their materiality.

With the hope that this informs your reading of the book that presents your photographs, I look forward to further correspondences with you and others interested in your photographs.¹²⁵

With best regards,
Andrea

¹²³ Edwards (2002). Also see Geissler (ed.) (2016)
¹²⁴ This rule leads to what anthropologist Jay Ruby (US) calls “a multi-vocal documentary. Ruby (1991)
¹²⁵ Correspondences is here used ambiguously. It refers directly to the other letters written, but also to the concept as used by and adopted from Ingold.

