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

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# Photography in Uganda.

By DR. A. T. SCHOFIELD, A.R.P.S.

the many fine pictures in our recent Exhibition made one feel that there are many photographers in Uganda

I was glad recently to find that the experts in Washington of the National Geographical Society of America bought their cameras in London, built by a well-known English maker—in other words, the finest cameras made to-day are English.

Certainly in Uganda, if not everywhere, one hardly ever has occasion for a faster lens than F 4.5

Especially in the Tropics lenses get vitrified as well as dirty, while our Uganda roads are far more dusty than at home.

To begin with, I believe our altitude (4,000 feet) and the very hot air mean that there are fewer droplets of water in the air and so less blue and more yellow in the light. But I believe the reason to be the far greater contrast between light and shadow. The old-fashioned rule was: "Expose for the shadows and the rest will take care of itself". The point is that our shadows under the fierce sun of the Equator are more intense and deeper than at home and that therefore we need more exposure to get out any detail—the alternative is a "soot-and-whitewash" effect. Again and again people have come to ask my advice as to why they do not get such good results as they used to in England and in nearly all cases it is a question of under-exposure, while several professional photographers have told me that they did not get good results until they gave a more generous exposure. To get somewhat closer to conditions at home, it is better to choose a time when the sun is over half-way down—the times for the best results are from 3.30 to 4.30 p.m., or 8 to 9 a.m. The sunlight value is then about as good as an English day in June, though still the shadows are much denser.

the "filter," usually a piece of thin glass coloured a light yellow. is placed on the front of the lens, and I advise everyone who wants to get the best out of our lovely Uganda landscapes to get one.

Developing in this climate is not a big problem. Certainly without running water it is a little more troublesome, but as it is less than a month since water was laid on at my house I think I can safely say it is not a necessity.

Working at the temperature we have in this country, and perhaps running water from a tank or pipes that are out in the hot sun, before we know where we are a whole batch of plates may be spoilt. It is changes in the temperature of our solutions and washings that matter, not the actual heat.

The dark-room in this country is not a great difficulty. We only have to wait till 6.30 p.m. and the ordinary bathroom is good enough.

In our hot climate, good plates keep very well in their tins before exposure, but once they are exposed the latent image deteriorates quite soon and a good picture may be lost by waiting too long before developing it. The plate is left in the developer for the required

I am afraid my account of "photography in Uganda" has been somewhat sketchy, but I hope that some of the advice I have been enabled to give here from my own experience may be of use to amateur photographers amongst the readers of the *Journal* and will encourage them to come forward with an account of their own experiences in pursuit of this most fascinating hobby.

## Chapter 3

Photography in Uganda  
Three Producers of Photographs

In 1935, Dr. Schofield, whose 'circular letter' inspired the letter in the previous chapter, published an article on photography in Uganda.<sup>126</sup> Schofield compares conditions 'back home' in England to those in Uganda; his remarks are made from the position of an Englishman and for an audience of fellow Englishmen who reside in Uganda. In the article Schofield refers to photographs that are part of the collections from Makerere University and the Uganda Society,<sup>127</sup> and were digitised and partly shared by HIPUganda.<sup>128</sup> On these photographs we see landscapes, Ugandans who are framed within ethnic groups or as workers in colonial services, and white men traveling through Uganda.<sup>129</sup>

The first three books in the *Ebifananyi* series present photographs produced by Deo Kyakulagira, Musa Katuramu and Elly Rwakoma. These men made their photographs under the same physical conditions that Schofield described. They too had to deal with fine red dust, harsh sunlight and the absence of running water or electricity. Their photographs, however, show portraits of individuals rather than types of people, and life events such as weddings and graduations rather than rituals. These pictures were made by and for Ugandans. Prior to the presentations of these photographers within the research project, photographs by Ugandan photographers had, as far as I know, not been presented within an artistic context. As argued in the introduction, photography in Uganda had only been part of academic research to a limited extent. This chapter addresses aspects of the practices of these three men and discusses the ways in which the contextualisation of the photographs they produced in the project relates to other presentations of, as well as studies concerned with, photographs by African photographers from elsewhere on the continent.

A well-known example of an African photographer whose photographs have been presented to audiences beyond his immediate clients is Seydou Keïta (1921-2001), who produced a large amount of black and white portraits between approximately 1948 and 1963 in Bamako, Mali. These photographs have been widely exhibited in the West and have a dominant position in the discourse on African Photography.<sup>130</sup> The portraits he and other photographers from the continent made, served originally as "study documents" for Western scholars, but were from the early 1990s understood as "works of art in themselves, integral to a broader history of photography."<sup>131</sup> This conflation of practices from one geographical context, and relevant theories developed in another, raises questions about the categories of 'art' and 'photography'.

<sup>127</sup> Schofield (1935)

<sup>127</sup> The Uganda Society (anno 1928) is a membership-based society to promote Uganda's literary, scientific and cultural heritage.

<sup>128</sup> These photographs are part of the collections of Makerere University and the Uganda Society (a membership based society (anno 1928) that promotes Uganda's literary, scientific and cultural heritage). See: <http://www.hipuganda.org/collection/schofield-glassplate-negatives> and [https://www.facebook.com/pg/HIPUganda/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=643431392399377](https://www.facebook.com/pg/HIPUganda/photos/?tab=album&album_id=643431392399377) Last accessed 25-09-2018

<sup>129</sup> The pictures presented in Monti (ed.) (1987), show similar subjects as those in the links in the previous photnote. The photographs in Monti were brought together from collections in Europe (Italy in particular) and (to a lesser extent) Africa.

<sup>130</sup> Haney (2010), p. 76

<sup>131</sup> Paoletti and Biro (2016)

These questions apply to how practices of African photographers are presented to Western audiences and studied by predominantly Western scholars. In this research project these issues were continuously present, but they are most explicitly dealt with in relation to the photographic practices of Deo Kyakulagira, Musa Katuramu and Elly Rwakoma. The following letters each emphasise aspects of the three respective practices and respond to other ways in which vernacular photography by African photographers has been presented in, and outside of, the vernacular context.

The letter that addresses Deo Kyakulagira's son Denis Kalyango is concerned with questions on authorship such as, when is a photographer considered to be the author of a photograph in the West? As well as, are photographers thought of as authors in Uganda? A shift in Deo Kyakulagira's authorship that occurred through the use of his photographs in this research project is compared to developments around the presentation of Keita's portraits to Western audiences.

The second letter considers how two appropriations of Musa Katuramu's photographs changed their audiences. Musa Katuramu's son Jerry Bagonza, who is the letter's addressee, made some of his father's photographs available to the editors of a picture book on Ugandan history.<sup>132</sup> The question can be asked, how does this use of Musa Katuramu's photographs compare to their presence in this research project?

The third letter is written to Elly Rwakoma and his wife Stella. Stella Rwakoma, who has a PhD in pedagogy, corrected the texts in the book and she is quoted on the back cover. Elly Rwakoma's practice extended beyond the portraits he made in his studio. He was also commissioned to document events and had photographs published in Ugandan newspapers in the 1960s, '70s and '80s. How are the conditions in which he worked and published these photographs particularly relevant for the Ugandan context? The following letters and their introductions will address the questions as in the above in relation to the application of authorship, different uses of photographs and various working conditions experienced by photographers in Uganda.



<sup>132</sup> Tumusiime (2009)



From a conversation with Deo Kyakulagira's son, June 2011

## Introducing Deo Kyakulagira's photographic legacy

**Deo Kyakulagira's (1940-2000) photographs attest to a multifaceted photographic practice. Through the years, he not only runs several studios but also works with the Ministry of Agriculture and as a medical photographer for a referral hospital.**

*Deo Kyakulagira's son and heir Denis Kalyango invited me to make a book about his father. Several searches conducted together with Denis and his family turned up a wealth of negatives and prints. The photographs reveal a flourishing photography business and a committed father. Deo's intriguing series of self-portraits suggests that being a photographer was very important to him.*

*Deo's photographs familiarised me with his world and, to a certain extent, with Deo himself. One day, I entered a reed shack in Kisubi, not far from where Deo's first studio was located. Various sculptures stood around outside. Above the door was painted "Artist Billy".*

*I saw a small ceramic bust inside on a shelf and instantly recognised Yoweri Museveni, the president of Uganda. Billy seemed to be skilled at creating sculptures based on photographs. I asked him if he could make a bust from one of Deo's self-portraits and let him choose whether to make it of a young or an older Deo. This resulted in three sculptures. The family quickly agreed on the one that looked most like the photographer. The bust now enjoys a prominent position in Deo's widow's living room.*



Deo Kyakulagira at the first HIPUganda exhibition, Mishmash Gallery, Kampala, August 2012



Launch and exhibitions *Ebifananyi #1*, Makerere University Art Gallery & Afriart Gallery, Kampala, May 2014

Above: Makerere University Art Gallery, Kampala, May 2014, Below: Denis Kalyango, Deo's son and heir with his copy of the book



Discussion on "The Photographer" on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition, Makerere University Art Gallery, Kampala, May 2014



Ebifananyi, Fomu Antwerp, October 2017 - February 2018



## A letter about Deo Kyakulagira's photographic legacy (on authorship)

Dear Denis,

Four years have passed since we launched the first book in the *Ebifananyi* series that has your dad's name on its cover. In the mean time I worked with other collections of photographs and made seven more books that further shaped my thinking about photographs in Uganda.

In this letter I want to share my thoughts on how your dad's position as a photographer has been changed by the existence of the book. I believe that his position is different from the one he had when you first introduced his photographs to me, and I do not recall whether we ever explicitly thought about what I had in mind. What I do vividly remember is how fondly you spoke of him as a father and how much you expressed your admiration of him as a photographer for his technical and social skills.

On the cover of the book your dad is made exemplary for other Ugandan photographers by the words 'The Photographer'. The presence of his name that is printed under the title, gives him the position of an author. From the stories you and members of your family told me I understood that he was, despite the appreciation for his craft, not seen as an author. At the same time there were the self-portraits your dad made as a photographer that, to me, do make him an author. These self-portraits have a prominent place in the book, which takes its reader through photographs that show different aspects of your dad's practice. Stories that are told by you, your mum, your siblings and a few others add anecdotes about the circumstances in which he produced the pictures.

When I first saw photographs made by your dad there were two African photographers whose photographs came to mind. Both of them lived and worked in Bamako, capital city of Mali. Their names are Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé. The former was born in 1921 and died in 2001. The latter was born in 1936, four years before your dad, and passed on only recently in 2016, six years later than your dad. The portraits they made have been exhibited widely in Europe and Northern America. American art historian Erin Haney wrote about them that their "photographic portraits [...] still remain among the most recognizable of African photographs for western museum-going audiences [...] because of the flurry of exhibitions, publications, collections and marketing of [their] photographic archives".<sup>133</sup> I admire and enjoy looking at the photographs Keïta and Sidibé produced, but there is something that annoys me about the way their work was and is presented to audiences in the West. They have been positioned as artists and authors rather than as entrepreneurs, while I think that would do their practices more justice without taking away the power of their pictures.

Let me give you some background information about Keïta, who is the main focus of my argument. He operated a photo studio from 1948 till 1963 and made portraits on glass plate negatives resulting in amazingly detailed photographs. From 1963 onward Keïta worked in the service of the Malian government for more or less the same amount of time as running his own studio before retiring.<sup>134</sup> A couple of negatives produced by Keïta

<sup>133</sup> Haney (2010), p. 76

<sup>134</sup> Bigham (1999), p. 61

were sold by his family to American art historian Susan Vogel in 1974. Vogel made prints from the negatives and exhibited them in New York in 1991 in a show titled 'Africa Explores, Twentieth Century African Art'. In the years between 1974 and 1991 Vogel lost the notes with Keïta's name, and the nametag with the photographs in the exhibition said 'anonymous'. André Magnin, a French curator who worked for a collector of African art, saw the exhibition. Magnin traveled to Mali in search of the maker of the portraits.<sup>135</sup> He found and met Keïta through Sidibé, and started to work with photographs made by both of them as a curator. Magnin made selections of pictures from Keïta's and Sidibé's archives that then started to circulate in exhibitions and publications around African art and African photography. The photographs gained economic value on the European art market. Keïta's fame and the value of his portraits even culminated into a fight about "who owns him" after his death.<sup>136</sup> The photographs Keïta made while working for the government are not available and may have been destroyed. The appreciation for Keïta as a photographer is primarily based of the portraits Keïta produced in his studio and the enlargements that Magnin made in 1996.

In 2016 a big retrospective exhibition of Keïta's photographs took place in the Grand Palais in Paris. A review of the exhibition on an online platform that is popular among photographers particularly struck me as odd, "despite its age, Keïta's work remains a breath of fresh air. Too often, even today, the Western world's exposure to the African continent is in the context of war, famine and enduring symptoms of colonization and corruption. In this respect, Keïta departs from the (post-)colonial narrative, rejecting previous representations of Malians as objects to study and scrutinize on the part of the Western gaze."<sup>137</sup> The reviewer seems to claim that Keïta's photographs are responses to other photographs made by photo-journalists who "expose the context of war, famine" and ethnographers who "study and scrutinize" Malians as objects. However, those photographs were made for Europeans and not for the Malian audience that Keïta was part of and produced his portraits for. The reviewer makes Keïta the source of a message that is hers rather than his. It is the reviewer and the context she is part of that generate Keïta's authorship.<sup>138</sup>

This reminds me of a request I got while preparing for the overview exhibition of all the *Ebifananyi* books in Belgium. The set of press photographs included one of the two pictures with your mum, dad and two other ladies in the studio with beer bottles.<sup>139</sup> A big American photography magazine responded with an e-mail that included this picture and asked for more photographs like those by Malick Sidibé. I was appalled by the request because it neither does justice to your dad's or Sidibé's practice, nor to my much wider investigation into photographs in Uganda.

Part of the problem that is illustrated by this anecdote is the way in which the Western notion of authorship is applied to photographs by curators and art historians. Where the term concerns somebody who **produces** something, Keïta, to return to that example, is obviously the author of his photographs. However, when an author is understood to be someone who **creates meaning**, the author is the curator who presents his work rather than Keïta himself. I wanted to avoid this confusion when presenting your dad's photographs. This is

<sup>135</sup> Bigham (1999), p. 62. Magnin (1998), p.22. In an exhibition catalogue from the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai in 2016 Jean Pigozzi, the art collector, claims the 'discovery' himself by stating the "I asked my curator, André Magnin, to go to Bamako, Mali, and find the person who took these wonderful images".

<http://www.leilahellergallery.com/attachment/en/5570913907a72ca707c6918d/Publication/575fae90b9c0380258ed2462>

Last accessed 25-09-2018

<sup>136</sup> Rips (2006)

<sup>137</sup> Temkin (2016)

<sup>138</sup> Jedlowski (2008), p. 44. British visual culture scholar Kobena Mercer calls this 'auteurism', "the uncritical quest for museum validation without questioning the institutional habits". Mercer in Blokland & Peluppesy (2010), p. 77

<sup>139</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/14/> and previous page

done by a play on conventions of authorship in which your dad, his photographs, you and your family members and I speak about your dad's practice.

The diversity in the photographs your dad left behind made it possible to present the variety in his practice over more than three decades. The context in which your dad's photographs were made had to be part of the presentation and should not be obscured. Since 2008 I have met other photographers and their descendants and have learned that their hybrid practices generating multiple sources of income are common in the way Ugandans support themselves. I also visited numerous studios in Uganda. They all advertised their services in printed photographs that were mounted on the wall of the studio or in albums. What I heard from photographers and saw in the studios and on the photographs suggests that your dad's studio practice is exemplary within the Ugandan context.<sup>140</sup> A significant difference between the Ugandan practices and Keita's and Sidibé's is the presence of negatives with the photographer. Keita and Sidibé kept their negatives as a potential source of income, which made it possible to present their photographs in a unified way with new prints from negatives. This mode of presentation however, disconnected the photographs from their original purpose.<sup>141</sup> In your father's collection the available negatives were those of personal photographs, and photographs of customers who never came to pick up (and pay) for the portraits. I now understood this to be a general practice for Ugandan photographers to give the negatives of photographs they made to their customers. Could this have to do with a difference in the value that is attached to negatives in Mali and in Uganda? Or could it simply be explained by an inherited practice from the Indian studio owners who also gave negatives of photographs to their customers? In any case, it makes it virtually impossible to present photographic practices in the same way as Sidibé's or Keita's.

The pictures that convinced me to take up your invitation to make a book about your dad were not the photographs that were made for customers, but the set of self-portraits. I do not recall seeing photographs like these in Uganda or anywhere else. They show your dad at work in and around three different darkrooms. In two photographs your dad's left hand reaches out to an enlarger.<sup>142</sup> The lights in the room, including the red safety light, are switched on. In another photograph I can tell that a flashlight was used to properly expose the picture. A colleague, who is in the photograph with your dad, makes a gesture as if opening a box of photographic paper.<sup>143</sup> Actually opening the box would, of course, spoil the papers in the box. The gestures that can be seen on these photographs are obviously planned and the scenes were carefully staged in complicated light situations. They are a demonstration of craftsmanship and at the same time suggest a strong identification on your dad's side with the profession of photography.

Your mum identified the spaces in which the photographs were made as your dad's own darkroom behind the studio in Kisubi, the darkroom of the Department of Medical Illustration and the darkroom of the Ministry of Agriculture. She dated the photographs in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

I find it hard to imagine the audience your dad had in mind for these photographs other than family and

<sup>140</sup> Also see Behrend (2013), pp. 92-93

<sup>141</sup> Over time this has changed, see for instance the publication Malick Sidibé: Chemises, which presents contact prints mounted on sheets used by Sidibé to give potential buyers access to the photographs he made. Sidibé (2008)

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/6/> and following page

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/8/>

friends. Decades after the pictures were made, I as a photographer from the Netherlands happened to see them and identified with your dad because I was reminded of the magic of a photograph appearing in the developer, and the joy of working in a darkroom. These pictures convinced me that he was in control of, and responsible for, the photographs he produced, and that he wanted to show that to the world. Therefore, he is for me 'The Photographer', as his practice is exemplary for those of many other photographers in Uganda, while his self-portraits make him exceptional. The way in which the self-portraits and the stories I collected present your dad's practice, suggests a shared authorship of the books and exhibitions. It set an example that was pursued in different variations throughout the *Ebifananyi* series.

At the exhibition in Belgium, prints of the self-portraits were admired once again. Two of the three busts that were made by Billy were also in the show.<sup>144</sup> As already mentioned in a WhatsApp message I am preparing a film that connects all the *Ebifananyi* books, with this show as its starting point. I would like to come to your mum's house to film the third - best resemblance - bust for what hopefully will become a film about the whole *Ebifananyi* project.<sup>145</sup>

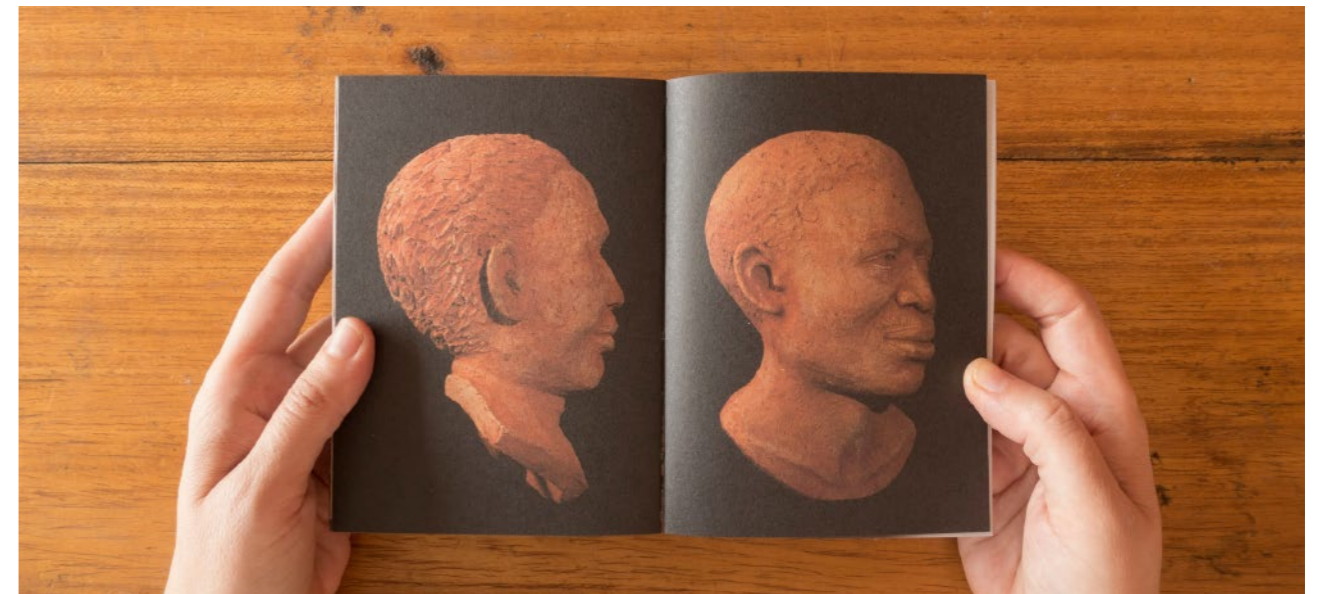
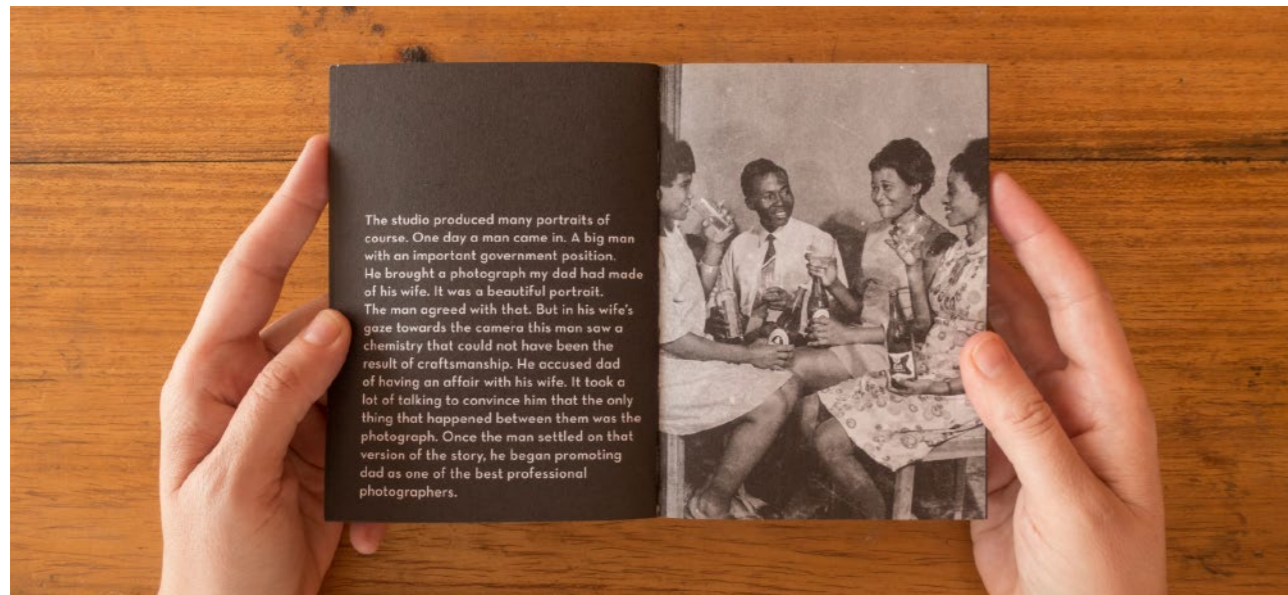
Until then I will be looking forward to seeing you and your family again.

Yours,

Andrea

<sup>144</sup> Kabande Billy is a Ugandan sculptor who Denis and I met when walking into his studio, after visiting St. Mary's College Kisubi. Billy's studio was then located on the main road near the entrance to the campus. This encounter led to the three ceramic busts of Deo Kyakulagira based on his self-portraits: <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/122/>

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/116/>



Ebifananyi #1 spreads referenced in footnotes with the letter to Denis Kalyango

See <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/1-photographer-deo-kyakulagira/> for full version





From a conversation with Musa Katuramu's son Jerry Bagonza, April 2014

## Introducing Musa Katuramu's photographic legacy

Musa Katuramu (1916-1983) trains as a carpenter in the 1930s. He then works as a teacher and contractor and also keeps cows, as many people from western Uganda do. What is unusual for the time is that Musa has a camera. Photography is mainly reserved for Western colonists and missionaries, while studios are generally owned by Goans and Indians. Musa makes portraits, sometimes on his own initiative and sometimes on commission.

In contrast to the custom of placing people in front of fantasy, painted studio backdrops, Musa photographs his subjects in front of the hilly landscape.

*Jerry Bagonza is Musa Katuramu's son. During a bus journey through Uganda, Jerry met a good friend of mine and told him about his large collection of photographs. This is how I became acquainted with Jerry. When I look at Musa's portraits, I am struck by how the people portrayed want to present themselves. Musa put his camera, knowledge of photography and gaze at the service of the subjects he photographed. His pictures move me for this reason, time after time.*

*I visited Mr. and Mrs. Kayangire together with Jerry. They were good friends of Musa and recognised many of the people in the portraits. Mrs. Kayangire suddenly began to sing. She recounted the past in a recitative style called Ekyevugo. This form of oral historiography brings the past to life in a completely different way than the photographs do.*

*Canon grew up in the same region and speaks the language. He revisited the Kayangires to make recordings. I asked him to capture one of the sung stories, which led to a scroll and a film.<sup>139</sup>*

<sup>139</sup> The scroll is appears prominently in the film and its holder can be displayed as an object itself. See <https://vimeo.com/215511587> for the film. Last accessed 25-09-2018. See the upper photo on p. 93 for the holder as part of *Ebifananyi*, FoMu Antwerp, October 2017 / February 2018



*Ebifananyi #2 at Noorderlicht Gallery, Groningen, November 2014*

*Ebifananyi #3 at Makerere University Art Gallery, May 2015*



One day exhibition of Musa Katuramu's photographs, Mbarara High School, May 2015



Ebifananyi, Fomu Antwerp, October 2017 / February 2018



## A letter about Musa Katuramu's photographic legacy (on audiences and different perspectives on the past)

Dear Jerry,

When I think about the pleasant days we spent together, working with your father's photographs, I realise there are topics which escaped our conversations. In this letter I bring up some of these topics in the hope that we will talk about them on another enjoyable day.

The words printed on the back of *Ebifananyi* #2 have fascinated me from the moment they came up in our conversation. It seems as though your father was of the opinion that a photograph is not made by the person who operates the camera, or by what or who can be seen on the picture, but by each individual person looking at it. I adopted this grounded view on photographs as a motto when making the book. The pictures are largely left on their own to speak to the 'private eye', sometimes accompanied by brief texts that present mostly facts and figures, and resist interpretation. This was not so easy to do, because I was, for reasons I will explain in a bit, fascinated by what I saw in many ways, and was eager to share my admiration for your father's photographs. First I would like to talk about the people whose 'private eye' engaged with these pictures.

Based on the records your father kept of orders that were made for prints of his photographs, it looks as though they were seen by a limited number of people.<sup>147</sup> You and I changed this, each one of us in their own way, and based on our different interests.

While digitising your father's negatives I found myself categorising them into piles in order to get a grip on the hundreds of photographs of faces and places that I could not recognise.<sup>148</sup> There were large groups of negatives with portraits that I categorised according to how many figures were in each picture. The photographs of construction sites, travel and people with cars formed the smaller stacks. These piles have nothing to do with how I heard you categorising the photographs, while commenting on the digital files. You identified places that to me were just backdrops to the portrayed people. Every time you recognised someone, your eyes sparked and you mentioned several times the possibility of connecting family members of the people on the photographs to the pictures. This difference in the way you and I relate to your father's photographs is rather obvious, but it nevertheless shaped my understanding of the different ways in which pictures can be relevant to different audiences. These audiences, to make a rough distinction, can be interested in particular pasts and realities shown on pictures, or in how photographs are exemplary for certain phenomena and practices. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but do lead to other questions. In hindsight I would place myself in the second category when we first met.

Initially your father's photographs were of interest to me as variations of other portraits either made by African photographers or by Europeans. I was thrilled because their quantity and consistency makes them into a body of work that can stand next to that of celebrated vernacular photography from another side of the

<sup>147</sup> This observation is based on the orders for duplicates on the backside of some photographs, duplicates of letters from clients and to the photographer who made prints for Katuramu, and that his photographs were most likely not printed in media during his lifetime.

<sup>148</sup> This collection is an exception to the observation made in the letter to Denis Kalyango that photographers did not keep their negatives, which might be explained by the fact that Katuramu did not run a professional photography business, or simply to an awareness of the potential value of the negatives on his side.

continent like Malick Sidibé and Seydou Keïta (I will show you their photographs the next time we meet). The first portraits made by Ugandans in the Mbarara area, have been said to be made in the late 1950s.<sup>149</sup> This confirms the impression that your father, who was active at least since the mid 1940s, was an early Ugandan photographer in this region. I read your father's photographs as statements of trust between the photographer and the people who pose for the photograph. They continue to touch me because they provide an alternative for photographs resulting from a Western outsider gaze photographing others. It is not easy to put one's finger on this, but browsing through the pictures of Dutch anthropologist Paul Julien, that I recall showing you at some point, and then looking at your father's, the difference is obvious.<sup>150</sup> Julien primarily photographs types, people who belong to and are made to represent a certain group. In your father's photographs people present themselves. The portraits show striking similarities to portraits that were made in studios in Uganda from the 1930s until the 1970s.<sup>151</sup> His outdoor portraits show, both in the poses and in the props that are used in the photographs, an awareness of conventions that are visible in photographs made in photo studios around the same time.<sup>152</sup> The studio, however, takes people out of the flow of everyday life, while your father portrayed people where they live, go to church or to school or visit friends. The control people seem to have of their poses, the connection to the landscape, and the quantity of available material is what makes, for me, this collection special from the point of view of someone who is looking for patterns that have little to do with who and what is actually depicted.

On my second or third visit to your house you showed me an album that you put together. I could tell that most of the photographs in the album were reproductions from books because some of the pictures were accompanied by captions and I could see the printing raster on most of them. You told me who the people on the photographs in the album were and why it was relevant to look at them. I remember seeing pictures of the early days of the scouting movement in Uganda, church leaders, Ankole royalty,<sup>153</sup> and politicians who operated on a local or national level. The photographs in the album in this case showed what the people you spoke about looked like. They filled in the details of the facts that were given orally and in the captions.

I purchased a copy of *Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007* long before we met.<sup>154</sup> Recently, years after the book on your father was published, I opened it again. I do not remember exactly when, but at some point you mentioned that you contributed to this book and I now found your name among the acknowledgements. I recognised several of the reproductions in your album and also noticed two photographs that were made by your father. The individuals depicted on these photographs are identified in captions that function in the same way as the comments you gave with the album. The words seem to anticipate the question 'who is this, what do I see?'<sup>155</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Vokes in Vokes (ed.) (2012), p. 215

<sup>150</sup> Paul Julien's legacy is the starting point for another part of my artistic practice: [http://collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/nl/zoeken-in-de-collectie?f\\_fotograaf\\_naam%5B0%5D=Julien%2C+Paul+Fr%C3%A9deric+Alphonse](http://collectie.nederlandsfotomuseum.nl/nl/zoeken-in-de-collectie?f_fotograaf_naam%5B0%5D=Julien%2C+Paul+Fr%C3%A9deric+Alphonse) Last accessed 08-04-2018

<sup>151</sup> An example of such a studio photograph made in 1945 can be found in *Ebifananyi* #2:

<http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/2-people-poses-places-musa-katuramu/13/>

The portrait, on which Katuramu poses himself on his wedding day, was made by Peter & Son, a famous Goan owned studio in Kampala at that time. The studio would later change its name to Central Art Studio Ltd. After the expulsion of the Asians Deo Kyakulagira (*Ebifananyi* #1) started to operate it.

<sup>152</sup> Behrend (1998) and Stultiens (2010-2)

<sup>153</sup> Ankole is the kingdom in western Uganda where Musa Katuramu lived most of his adult life. The 1900 Buganda, and 1901 Ankole agreement were important steps in the development towards the colonization of the Uganda Protectorate as part of the British Empire.

<sup>154</sup> Tumusiime (ed.) (2009)

<sup>155</sup> Scott (1998), pp. 49, 54



In *Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007*, photographs with very different appearances, including your father's, are placed next to each other. Some are full colour, others have a monochrome sepia tone or are black and white. Some of the photographs show a lot of detail, others do not. It is obvious from their appearance that the photographs come from different sources. Sam Obbo, senior journalist and editor of *Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007*, told me why these sources are not mentioned with the photographs.<sup>156</sup> James Tumusiime had been collecting photographs with the ambition to make this book but he did not know how to structure and edit the material he brought together.<sup>157</sup> A previously appointed editor also did not manage to do the job. This is when Sam Obbo was brought in and received a heap of prints. He was given a list of people and institutions that contributed to the heap, but could not connect names to pictures.

Sam Obbo brought structure to the pictures through themes that would become the chapters of the book. The selected prints were digitised. Some of the small ones, not more than the size of a stamp, had to be enlarged and now became pixelated. Sam Obbo was not familiar with this process and it was done by the designer of the book.<sup>158</sup>

British historian Richard Reid mentions *Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007*, in his book *A History of Modern Uganda* as "a brilliantly illustrated pictorial history of Uganda published in 2007 [sic]."<sup>159</sup> Next to his appreciation for the book, Reid also questions the timeframe in which the book is positioned where he writes that, "One of the fascinating aspects of this book is that it was published to commemorate '150' years' of Uganda - and yet the selection of '1857' as a starting point is difficult to explain."<sup>160</sup>

In 2007, CHOGM was organised in Kampala.<sup>161</sup> There were endless construction works in town and CHOGM was the buzzword that connected them to each other. Numerous hotels popped up and roads were repaired. The Uganda Museum opened an outdoor section with houses illustrating the different building styles from across the country.<sup>162</sup> All in all it seemed to me as if the city got a quick and superficial upgrade. *While Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007*, was actually published in 2009 I thought that the mention of 2007 in its name was related to CHOGM. Sam Obbo confirmed my hunch:

"1857 was geared at denoting an estimated 150 years of Uganda's contemporary history; before and after colonialism. The idea was that economic, cultural and political activity in Uganda did not start at the advent of British Colonialism. CHOGM was just a clincher; an appropriate marketing entry point, an entry point that would excite a global audience. More so because one can never adequately understand the country's history, without factoring in Britain, which had a huge positive and negative impact."

<sup>156</sup> Sam Obbo has worked for national newspapers in Uganda for decades. The conversation and a subsequent chat that this paragraph is based upon took place in December 2017.

<sup>157</sup> James Tumusiime is a friend of Jerry Bagonza's. He is also the director of the biggest publishing house in Uganda and a cultural entrepreneur who runs a private museum not far from Jerry Bagonza's home in western Uganda.

<sup>158</sup> The photographs in the book give another impression. It looks like they were placed straight in there from digital files that were used bigger than their pixel ratio permitted without showing itself. Maybe Sam Obbo's memory is off, maybe the designers searched for the pictures online and used what they found.

<sup>159</sup> Reid (2017), pp. 6-7

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> CHOGM was and still is part of the general vocabulary in urban Uganda and is an abbreviation referring to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

<sup>162</sup> The houses in the open-air section of The Uganda Museum could be thought of as exemplary for the superficiality of the upgrade. For some time after 2007 the houses were open to the public. But "maintenance is a problem" and the houses are currently not an active part of the museum displays.

From Sam Obbo's words it looks as though Reid is right when he sees a connection between 1857 and Europeans coming to Uganda "around this time, although it is a rather imprecise temporal hook on which to hang the argument [...]."<sup>163</sup> In relation to the dates in the book's title Reid asks "when is Uganda".<sup>164</sup> I would say that the answer to this question depends on who formulates it, and which purpose it is meant to serve. Reid, a historian, looks for an answer in the past. The answer *Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007* gives is now. It approaches the past from the present.

*Uganda, A Picture History, 1857-2007* was much more relevant to me now that it was possible to make connections between what I learned over the years and the content of the book. This may seem to be a commonplace observation, but it is at the same time a constant struggle when outsiders like myself try to project their own understanding onto realities encountered in Uganda.

The imagined audiences when making the book with your father's photographs were both Ugandan and European. I tried to stay true to your father as I got to know him through your stories, his photographs and the documents you own. He was an enterprising man, starting up his own school as a Ugandan in a time when schools were almost exclusively run by missionary institutions. He had a no nonsense attitude, was straight to the point in his communication, precise and conscientious as illustrated by his handwritten autograph that looks as if it is printed. The sections in the book are loosely structured in topics such as Mbarara high school, scouting, St. James Cathedral, travel and Ankole royalty. The book starts and ends with your father visible in the pictures. In the opening sequence we see him as a young man (how remarkable that there are no photographs at all of him beyond [..] the 1950s...). In the closing sequence we only see his shadow. An abbreviated version of a conversation between you and I that signals the different perspectives we have on your father's photographs is placed on the last page of the book.

My perspective on your father's photographs changed both during and after making the book. Initially the photographs, and how they introduced me to moments in the lives of anonymous people, mesmerised me. However your conversations with Uncle Tom about the photographs, confronted me with the realities the photographs connected to. This made me understand your wonder about my fascination with some of the photographs on which the person posing could not be recognised. In addition, listening to Uncle Tom's wife Mereal reciting her version of history<sup>165</sup> made me aware of a form of narrating the past that made the potential of photographs not obsolete but at least relative.

The exhibitions in the Netherlands,<sup>166</sup> Uganda<sup>167</sup> and Belgium showed about one thousand small prints of portraits. The audience in Europe looked for general patterns in the sea of photographs, they were, like me charmed by the aesthetics of the photographs and sometimes struck by details that French philosopher Roland Barthes calls the photograph's punctum; a detail, an "accident which pricks [...] bruises [...] is poignant".<sup>168</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Reid (2017), p. 7

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., italics from source

<sup>165</sup> Mereal Kayangire sang in a style called *ekyevugo*, a recitative form of oral history, practiced in western Uganda. For recording of a performance by Mereal Kayangire, in a video piece by Canon Griffin commissioned for this research project see footnote 139

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/exhibition/musa-katuramu/>

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/exhibition/ebifananyi-2-3-at-makerere-university-art-gallery/> and

<http://www.andreastultiens.nl/exhibition/musa-katuramu-at-mbarara-high-school/>

<sup>168</sup> Barthes (1981), p. 43, p. 27

In Uganda the collection turned out to be a resource for members of the audience who were looking for particular details of what a certain milk pot or other culturally significant details looked like.<sup>169</sup>

I was particularly impressed by the responses of students at Mbarara High School where we installed a selection of photographs for a day. To me this experience, again, showed the relevance and relativity of the photographs as points of identification for different groups of people.<sup>170</sup> The students stared for significant amounts of time at the portraits your father made of their predecessors, while their teachers showed no interest in the photographs whatsoever.

I have always been interested in how photographs are exemplary for certain phenomena and practices. However, through your father's photographs I was introduced to the particular pasts and realities shown on his pictures and as a result I think I understand your relation with those pictures better. I hope that we will be able to have a drink soon. On that occasion I would like to hear whether the *Ebifananyi* book changed your view on your father's photographs at all, as it has for me.

Looking forward to that day,  
Andrea

<sup>169</sup> Milk is a culturally important product in western Uganda attached historically to the life of cattle herders.  
<sup>170</sup> See footnote 167 for documentation of the event.



*Ebifananyi* #2 spread referenced in footnotes with the letter to Jerry Bagonza

See <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/2-people-poses-places-musa-katuramu/> for full version





From a conversation with Elly Rwakoma's wife Stella. August 2014

## Introducing Elly Rwakoma's photographic legacy

**Elly Rwakoma (ca. 1938) fortuitously receives a camera when he is a teenager. He sets out to learn how to use it and how to earn money from taking photographs. Alongside his job as a social worker, he has a photo studio and occasionally sells photographs to local news outlets.**

**In the 1960s, Elly photographs President Obote during an official visit and he is the first of the photographers present to offer his pictures to the president. From then on, he is hired intermittently by successive regimes as a presidential photographer.**

*Elly Rwakoma is the father of a friend of a friend. He talks passionately about his time as a photographer. His stories are closely linked with troubling political periods in history. The versions espoused by the country's rulers, the international press and the people who personally lived through the events, often contradict each other.*

*I came across a set of negatives in Elly's collection in which a political rally appears to descend into chaos. As I was putting the finishing touches to the book of his work, Elly's wife Stella told me about the time her husband came home with bullet holes in his trousers. The negatives belonged to this story. At last I could understand what I was looking at: her husband had photographed an incident that he described as an attack on the former Ugandan president, Godfrey Binaisa.*

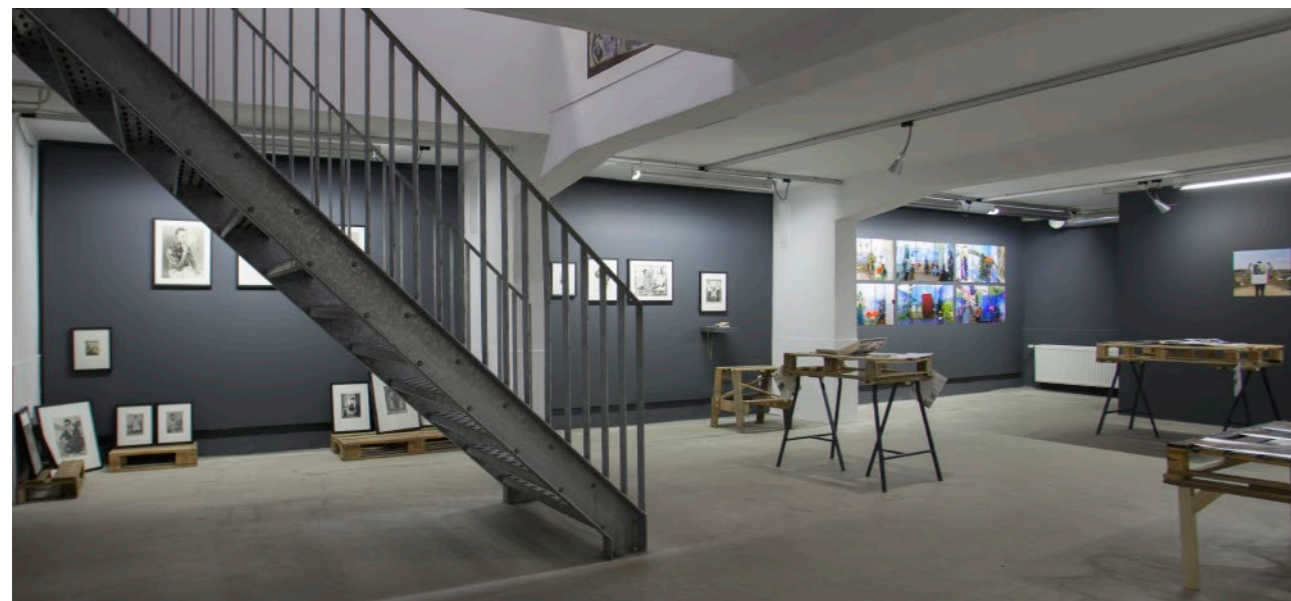
*I wondered why I had not heard of this attack before and why there was so little information available about it. So I began to search through newspaper archives in Uganda and Kenya and found several articles. The reports contradicted each other given that those who control the media also control to a large extent how history is written.*



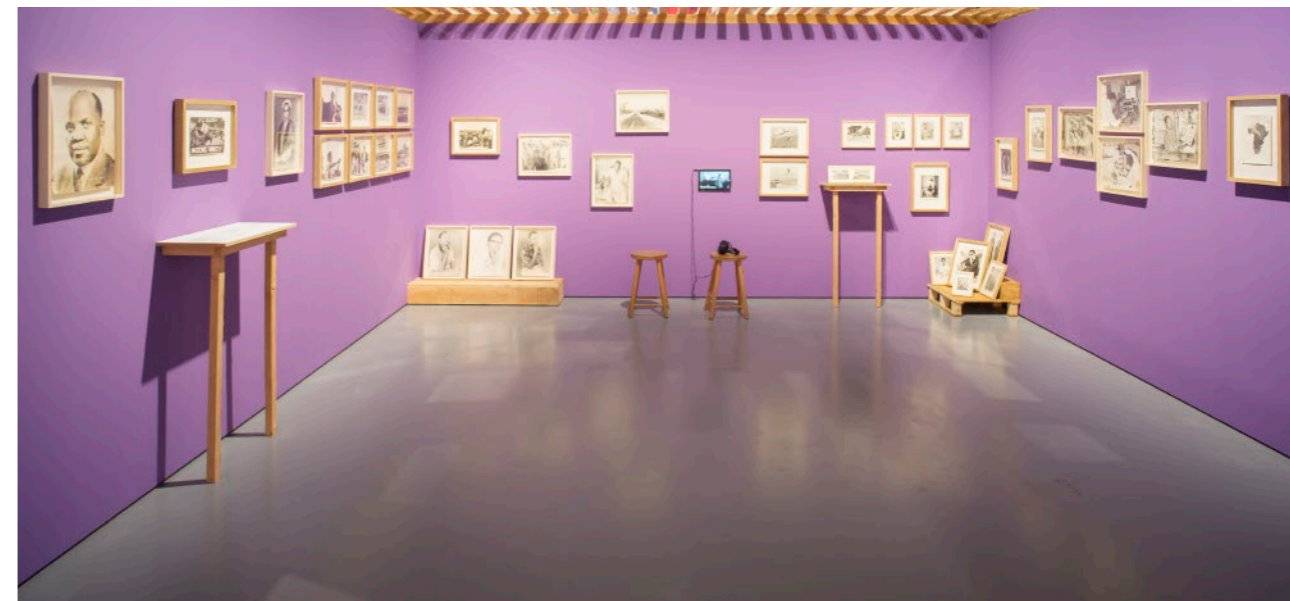
Elly Rwakoma during an interview with Uganda Radio Network, Makerere Univeristy Art Gallery, April 2015



Ebifananyi #3 at Makerere University Art Gallery, May 2015



Elly Rwakoma's photographs at group show "Keep the Best of Your Life", Noorderlicht Photo Festival, Groningen, September 2016



Ebifananyi, Fomu Antwerp, October 2017 / February 2018

## A Letter on Elly Rwakoma's photographic legacy (on photojournalism in Uganda)

Dear Stella and Elly,

How have you been since we last, accidentally, saw each other at your daughter's wedding? While I talked to Elly on the phone since then, we have not had a chance to catch up properly, and therefore I was not able to share with you what I have been doing, following the publication of the book on Elly's photographs.

I followed up on the photographs Elly made on the 21st of September 1979 and would like to discuss them further here.<sup>171</sup> The story has become increasingly complex and as a result I am gaining a better understanding of the conditions in which photographers in Uganda have their work published in newspapers. Elly occasionally contributed photographs to the state newspaper. I did not understand why this newspaper refused to publish pictures of, in Elly's words, an attempted assassination on the president.

After *Ebifananyi* #3 was published I started to search for more information about the events that took place in Iganga almost forty years ago. I found three newspapers that reported about it<sup>172</sup> and the first article I saw was on the front page of the Uganda Times.<sup>173</sup> Three days after the event the paper's headline basically claims that this is a case of 'fake news'. The feature is accompanied by a photograph captioned "President Binaisa

[...] during the weekend rally at Mbale".<sup>174</sup> This rally took place on the day after the shooting. The article was written by a reporter "who travelled with the president". The text claims that Kenyan newspapers spread

rumours about an attack on Binaisa's life, but that this was propaganda fuelled by economic motives.

What actually happened was that "one policeman, on seeing a snake in the crowd, shot it dead."<sup>175</sup>

This sounded unlikely to me. Why would a snake be among a mass of people?

The Kenyan Daily Nation and The Standard published about the rally on the 20th of September. Neither one of their articles is accompanied by photographs of the event. The Standard mentions "a flying object trailing smoke"<sup>176</sup> and the Daily Nation speaks of "a shot", and that it was President Binaisa himself who told the Ugandans who stayed after the shot was fired that "it was a snake that had been spotted among the crowd".<sup>177</sup>

The findings related to the story on Idi Amin and the photographs of the rally made me wonder how photojournalism, as I understood it, relates to photojournalism in Uganda. I thought of a photojournalist as someone who uses his camera to report on events that are news worthy. The editor who works for news media decides which photographs have enough news value to publish. I knew that reporting, in words or in pictures, could not be objective. It is always done from a particular vantage point. I nevertheless thought

<sup>171</sup> From <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/3-tricks-elly-rwakoma/71/>

<sup>172</sup> The newspaper articles are accessible in this blog post: <http://www.hipuganda.org/blog/president-binaisa-and-the-snake>

<sup>173</sup> The Uganda Times was the state newspaper after the fall of Idi Amin regime in 1979. It was preceded by the Voice of Uganda (1971-1979) and the Uganda Argus that was, up to 1971, a continuation of a colonial gazette.

<sup>174</sup> Binaisa was the president of Uganda after the coup on Idi Amin's regime between June 1979 and May 1980. Tumusiime (2012), pp. 221-297

<sup>175</sup> Front page article of the Uganda Times, September 24th 1979, collection Makerere University main library, Africana section, accessed July 2015

<sup>176</sup> Newspaper in McMillan Library, Nairobi, accessed April 2017

<sup>177</sup> Digital copy of a newspaper from Daily Nation Archives, Nairobi, accessed April 2017

that photographs in news media contribute to the communication of significant events that happened on both a global and local scale. This did not add up with the differences between Elly's story, the refusal by the Uganda Times to publish the photographs, and the difference between the newspaper reports. I therefore approached photographers and newspaper editors, and had a long conversation with them,<sup>178</sup> and what they told me was rather distressing. The content and appearance of newspapers in Uganda, I was told, is first and foremost anticipating potential sales since there are no subscribers that guarantee a certain amount of income. On top of that, press freedom is limited by funders of the papers as well as by ideological concerns pushed by authorities.<sup>179</sup> I came to understand that photographers are rarely seen as providers of content.

In an additional attempt to understand the choices newspapers made, a workshop was organised by the Uganda Press Photography Award. Five Ugandan photographers were asked to choose a remarkable news event and research how it was reported in newspapers. While browsing newspapers for this workshop I stumbled upon a surprisingly topical article by Kenyan Scholar Ali Mazrui. He writes that,

"the genesis of African journalism lay in dry official publications of colonial governments [and, ironically,] the medium which had been used by colonial governments was adopted and adapted by African nationalistic forces and directed against those governments themselves. [The] printed word in Africa [faced] the basic dilemma [...] whether it should be used to create a nation or used to create an intellectual heritage. [These two uses are] not necessarily compatible. The immediate problem of creating a nation might demand self-censorship, and involve a policy of trying to avoid dissensions between groups and protecting the legitimacy of government from the dangers of reckless public criticism. But the task of creating an intellectual heritage might demand exactly opposite requirements."<sup>180</sup>

Is it too cynical when I, based on a combination of Mazrui's argument and the publications in which Elly's photographs did not feature, think that nothing changed since the article was published? It seems to me that the readers of newspapers are still not considered to be able to make up their own minds when confronted with information that comes from an authoritative rather than an investigative position.

This now leads me to the other story featuring in *Ebifananyi* #3 that is relevant to not just the functioning of the press on a regional level, but takes it beyond this, to an international context. In response to Elly's mention of Kenyan photographer Mohamed Amin I visited his archive in Nairobi twice, once before and once after the book was published.<sup>181</sup> Neither one of those visits led to a positive identification of the photograph that pushed Elly into exile.<sup>182</sup> During the second visit, however, I asked Amin's son Salim what he thought about Stella's remark on Elly being "too brave" sometimes as a photographer. Salim replied that his father used to say that the local photographers were the ones who ran the real risk because they were at the mercy of local circumstances and governments while his father's fame worked as a protective shield. If those in power would harm his father, this would attract undesired attention while this was not the case for local photographers.

<sup>178</sup> <http://www.hipuganda.org/blog/on-photojournalism-in-uganda-contributions-to-a-discussion>

<sup>179</sup> Also see Lugalambi (2010), pp. 15-18, Wasswa (2013)

<sup>180</sup> Mazrui (1966). Also see Lugalambi (2010), pp. 4-8

<sup>181</sup> Mohamed Amin (1944-1996) was an internationally well-known 'cameraman' whose photographs and film footage was published world wide through his own company Camerapix. Tetley (1988), Smith (2013)

<sup>182</sup> See opening and closing sequences of *Ebifananyi* #3 for Rwakoma's mention of Mohamed Amin (From <http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/3-tricks-elly-rwakoma/5/>) and my initial research at his archive in Nairobi (<http://www.andreastultiens.nl/ebifananyi/3-tricks-elly-rwakoma/122/>)

In Uganda there was Jimmy Parma, who was supposedly killed for making a photograph of the body of one of the hostages of the Entebbe raid in 1976.<sup>183</sup> The irony is here that Elly did not have access to the international network that protected Amin, yet ended up in exile partly because of it.<sup>184</sup>

The two stories, involving Mohamed Amin and the events in Iganga, both have loose ends. In the case of the former there is a story and no photograph, in the case of the latter there are photographs yet no clarity about what happened. I spoke to several people who either heard an eyewitness account or were present at the event. This did lead to more details, but not to a clear view on what caused the chaos.<sup>185</sup> Was it indeed an assassination? Or was it simply an outcome of the chaos in Uganda at the time?<sup>186</sup>

One of the people I spoke to said that the snake must have been a metaphor for a person meaning harm and not actually an animal.<sup>187</sup> This shook, again, my naïve ideas on how news is narrated in newspapers. I was under the impression that the language used would avoid metaphors to be as neutral as possible in informing the readers of what happened. If a traitor is called a snake in a main newspaper feature, then what else is hard to understand without a certain cultural insiders position? This additional remark made all the stories I heard in relation to photographs with a political implication relative: "I have to be careful with what I remember. I do not want to cause trouble for people."

It is not new that photographs have been used to spread what is now often called 'fake news', or tell partial truths. Similarly it is not a revolutionary insight that censorship is present in Uganda and elsewhere. I hope that the book about you, and the exhibitions that resulted from it, make these issues tangible, as they did for me, beyond their theoretical implications for audiences both in and outside of Uganda.

I also hope we will be able to talk about all this soon with a cup of tea in your house in Bwera that I have not yet seen in the finished state I assume it is now in.

Warm regards,  
Andrea

<sup>183</sup> Kasozi (1994), p. 121, Lugalmbe (2010), p. 9, Wasswa (2013), p. 12

<sup>184</sup> See, again, opening sequence of *Ebifananyi* #3, first link in footnote 174.

<sup>185</sup> I got in touch with these people by sharing details from Rwakoma's photographs on the HIPUGanda Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/HIPUGanda/photos/a.1464890616920113.1073741988.154821697927018/1463810807028094/?type=3&theater> Last accessed 25-09-2018

<sup>186</sup> The Kenyan newspapers Daily Nation and The Standard mention the murders and other violent acts unfolding in neighboring Uganda on regular basis during the weeks leading up to this event.

<sup>187</sup> The snake is a figure that reappears in myths from Buganda. See Baskerville (1922), Kizza (2010), p. 26



*Ebifananyi* #3 spreads referenced in footnotes with the letter to Elly Rwakoma

See <http://www.andreastulstiens.nl/ebifananyi/2-people-poses-places-musa-katuramu/> for full version

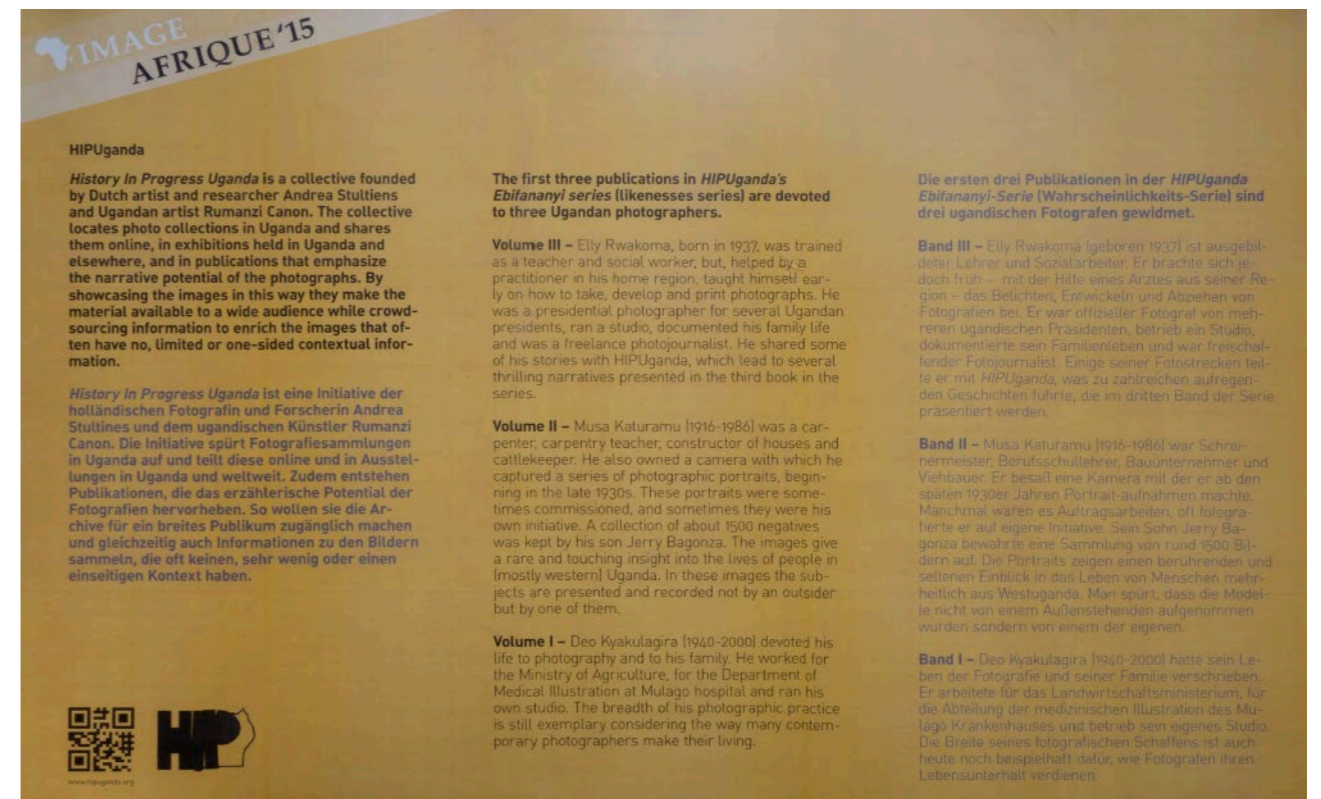


## Epilogue to chapter 3: Keeping and Finding Connections

My original research proposal, upon entering the PhD research trajectory, mentioned only two collections of photographs: Deo Kyakulagira's and Elly Rwakoma's. I had not yet encountered Musa Katuramu's photographs and did not yet see how I could engage with the other digitised collections in my artistic practice. The proposal assumed that working with these two collections, while identifying with Deo Kyakulagira and Elly Rwakoma as photographers based on my educational background, would be an opportunity to reflect on the way photography in Africa had been presented to audiences in the West.

Photographic practices from West-Africa have dominated the discourse on African photography since the early 1990s.<sup>188</sup> The vantage point from which historical materials are presented to an audience, and the attention that members of this audience are willing and able to pay to what they see, often only remain an implicit part of considerations concerning the presentation and appreciation of these photographs.

*Ebifananyi* #1, #2 and #3 provide examples of how vernacular photographs can be presented while keeping vital connections to the contexts in which they were made and function accessible. This is done in a multi- vocal mode of storytelling, which allows different versions of the visualised and narrated past to exist next to each other, whilst also generating multiple points of entry to, and identification with, the respective practices and their protagonists for both Ugandan and non-Ugandan audiences. In this way, the books serve as alternatives for the still prevailing reductive mode in which historical vernacular photographs are appropriated for contemporary audiences.



<sup>188</sup> Haney (2010), Schneider (2011), Schneider in Sheehan (2015)