Chapter 4: Constructing Postcolonial Situational Analysis

Grounded Epistemologies, Non-Human Agency, and Visibilizing Overseen Positions

The following chapter is dedicated to the introduction of the methodological underpinnings that informed, structured, and guided my research process as well as to the elaborations as to how they are appropriate and suitable for the research project at hand. Here, I further elaborate on methodical decisions with regard to methods of gathering data and sampling strategy applied, methods of analysis as well as the process of validating the findings.

I do so by first situating myself as researcher into the research project (chapter 4.1) to address relationalities between researcher and researched, inquiry in conditions of inequalities that (re-)produce epistemic violence and how they shape the data gathering processes through theoretical sampling.

In the succeeding sub-chapter (chapter 4.2), I introduce Situational Analysis as a research methodology. I do so by first situating Situational Analysis into postcolonial thoughts. Next, I dwell on the possibilities of Situational Analysis for the analysis of visual material culture and nonhuman agency (chapter 4.3), before I elaborate on how I used Situational Analysis in my research (chapter 4.4). Thereby, I introduce mapping as an analytical strategy and describe how I maneuvered through the analysis of my empirical material with mapping, memoing, and accompanying coding or sequential analysis. In closing this chapter, I address several important limitations of my research (chapter 4.5) before I then proceed to the second part of this study and the findings from my empirical study.

4.1 Introduction
About Situated Subjectivities

In the contemporary scientific discourse, conducting research in a foreign country, especially when it is composed in a North-South dyad and hence frequently embed-

ded in structural inequalities, is not considered an innocent endeavor. Much has been published in more recent years about its implications for academic knowledge production, ethics, and the positionality especially of the researcher from the Global North (e.g. Torres Edejer, 1999; Zhang, 2016; Walsh et al., 2016; Iphofen and Tolich, 2018; Green, 2019; Brasher, 2020; de Sousa Santos and Meneses, 2020; Bendix et al., 2020; Phiri, 2021; Iroulo et al., 2022).

Prior to embarking on this research trajectory, I had been sensitized to power imbalances through my work with minoritized people and my studies. Yet, I had thought of myself as critical and self-reflective enough, and hence *well equipped*, for conducting research in a foreign country. Not in any foreign country, but in a country whose borders exist as the result of European colonization – in a country where the pre-colonial indigenous infrastructures, social, and juridical systems were first destroyed and later half-heartedly replaced by European 'civilizing' missions and concepts of progress, labor, welfare, military, and governance (Clapham, 2020). This is in a country where first German and later British colonial governments installed western education, imported western political theory, and spread their faith and ideas about the meaning of life, purpose, and society, and where to this day many NGOs, investors, donors, and policy makers continue to believe in this notion of progress, which – from their perspectives – is universal, without considering the coloniality of this thinking. For it was in the process of colonization that Europeans and later also North Americans turned *their* forms of knowing into *universal* ideas (Clapham, 2020; Errington, 1998).

The criticism of this notion of white, male Anglo-European superiority is as almost as old as Hegel's social theory (see also chapter 3.2) which was so foundational for the development of Eurocentrism and the racialization of people (Dussel, 1993). It can be found for example Sojourner Truth's (now) famous speech from 1851 *"Ain't I a Woman?"* which she delivered at the Women's Rights Convention at the Old Stone Church in Akron Ohio, USA:

> [T]hey talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] – That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' [sic] rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full? (Truth, 1851: n.p.)

Truth, who freed herself from slavery and later became a traveling preacher, was a human rights activist and opposed the notion that women were of lesser intelligence than men; furthermore, she rallied for women of color. In doing so, she connected women's rights with the rights of people in slavery. With *Ain't I a Woman?*, Truth juxtaposed Hegel's social theory at a time when it was widely used to justify colonization, racialization, and exploitation. This is only one example, but it demonstrates

how universal claims were always already merely one among several ontologies and epistemologies, and illustrates the importance of highlighting pluriversality in conceptualizing knowledge.

About a century later (in 1951) under entirely different circumstances in late colonial Uganda, an elderly man, Paulo Lukongwa, was interviewed by anthropologist Martin Southwold. The latter could not believe Lukongwa, who insisted that "more than half a century of colonial development policies had brought almost nothing to his country" (Summers, 2014: 21). In his field notes, Southwold noted down the conversation, which went about as the following:

> Writing was new wonderful, he [Lukongwa] admired, and he gave European colonizers credit for cars and bicycles that made travel faster. But otherwise, nothing was new. Martin Southwold [...] suggested that clocks were new, and Lukongwa pointed out that they'd had roosters to wake them up. Surely the gramophone was progress, Southwold asserted, and Lukongwa responded that when they had wanted music, they called people to play – and what was more, those people had danced. No gramophone – or radio – did that. Reaching, Southwold noted that the radio also brought news. Once, Lukongwa asserted, they had all had spirits living in their houses that passed on local gossip. Thus people then had plenty of news. [...] Lukongwa completed his explanation that 'God … has given us all the things we need; and he gave the Europeans cleverness so that they could make things for themselves … But you Europeans disobeyed him and came here to Africa to take away our land. You are … robbers! Look at that Governor (Andrew Cohen), what a bad man he is, always trying to take away the people's land.'" (Martin Southwold, visit with Paulo Lukongwa, 31 August 1955, as cited in Summers, 2014: 21)

As it turns out, Martin Southwold had not only wrongly assumed that the *progress* Europeans had brought would have been highly appreciated by Ugandans, but in this conversation with Paulo Lukongwa, he further learned how concepts of land ownership and governance were defined rather differently locally than what he had known and assumed to be right.

Research, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues in her widely recognized essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), is deeply embedded in structural power manifestations established by both: prevailing Anglo-American epistemologies and patriarchy. According to Spivak, it is impossible to omit to reproduce epistemic violence[1] in research even if one is aware of it. After all, she writes, all scholars today are educated in a western or westernized academic system and thus cannot overcome the prevailing structural frameworks in their thinking entirely.

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1   For more detailed information on the mechanisms and the genealogy of epistemic violence but also on constructive notions how to constructively work with it, I refer to Claudia Brunner (2020).

Epistemic violence occurs on micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Brunner, 2020). It ranges from the *Colonialidad del ser* – coloniality of being – (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), which considers concrete experiences of exclusion because of outer, often visible markers on the micro-level. It further includes what Walter D. Mignolo calls the *geopolitics of knowledge* (Mignolo, 2002) which considers the ways knowledge is constructed, legitimized, and delegitimized on the meso-level and, on its far end, it includes the macro-level into which both mechanisms feed. Anibal Quijano calls this the *Coloniality of power*, a power, control, and hegemonic structure that reinforces the epistemic violence on micro- and meso-levels (Quijano, 2000).

A (by-)product of colonialism, epistemic violence is thus embedded epistemologically and methodologically into the methods of scientific knowledge production. While it may not be possible to overcome epistemic violence in its entirety from within the academic system (Spivak,1988), it *can* be made visible (Neureither and Klages, 2023). Since Situational Analysis methodologically – through both its theoretical framework as wells as its methodical instruments – addresses structures, relationalities, and processes of injustices (Gauditz et al., 2023), it was chosen for the analysis of empirical data (see chapters 4.2 and 4.4.1).

During the development of Situational Analysis – initially introduced as an extension of (Constructivist) Grounded Theory – Adele Clarke specifically considers how epistemic violence renders certain positions and peoples invisible in academic research (Clarke et al., 2018). Clarke et al. propose eight dimensions for the methodological reflection and consideration of epistemic violence with the aim of promoting epistemic diversity grounded in empirical situations and in their particular spatial, historical, philosophical, social, political, economic, and ecologic conditions (ibid). This includes (1) the empirical construction of the situation of inquiry, (2) the consideration of the situatedness of any phenomenon in research, (3) resisting oversimplification by focusing on differences and complexities. They further highlight the importance of (4) analyzing power (relations), (5) reflexivity, (6) the consideration of discourses and how they shape subjectivity, (7) the promotion of epistemic diversity through the acknowledgment that there are multiple ways of knowing, and lastly, (8) the interdependencies between "concrete experiences of suffering and social structure, culture, and social practices or policies" (Charmaz, 2011: 362, as cited in Clarke et al., 2018: 359). I will further elaborate on them in the subsequent chapter 4.2.

One central tool for the integration of epistemic diversity is reflexivity. It is a necessity for decolonizing and post-colonial strategies in research, because "it acknowledges the embodiment and situatedness of researchers and their positional grounding in the research" (Clarke et al., 2018: 358). Clarke et al. further state that "you, individually or as a team, matter in infinite ways in your research, and the more you are aware of this the better" (ibid: 354). Any researcher in any study – empirical or not – is, with Clarke, *co-constitutor* throughout the entire research process. They are

"designer, actor, interviewer, observer, interpreter, co-constructor of data, writer, ultimate arbiter of the accounts proffered, and to be held accountable for those accounts" (35). For Clarke, Friese, and Washburn, considering one's own positionality in research also includes addressing the privilege behind well-meant attempts to speak "on behalf of" (Clarke et al., 2015: 139) or of "giving unmediated 'voice' to the unheard – from 'their own' perspective(s)" (Clarke et al., 2018: 37). Being able to speak on behalf of others means that I, the researcher, am listened to, which not only positions me as a mediator and interpreter but also demonstrates how my own positionality is powerful enough to be heard.

Furthermore, *giving voice to the unheard* frequently results in narrow accounts. Clarke et al. point out how important it is to ask ourselves as researchers whose perspectives matter in our research. "What is sanitized and dressed up?" (ibid: 37), Clarke et al. ask, and, importantly, "who/what is omitted or silenced by researchers themselves? Wittingly or not?". To overcome such simplifications that run the risk of reproducing our *a priori* assumptions (see also Kassimir on *a priori* assumptions about civil society actors in chapter 3.3), researchers are urged to "grasp variation **within** data categories, the range of variation within data, complexities, contradictions, multiplicities, and ambivalences that manifest individually, collectively, and discursively" (Clarke et al., 2015: 138, emphasis as in original). With Situational Analysis, Adele Clarke proposes a theory/methods package that explicitly takes power asymmetries, heterogeneity, and complexity into account. It considers a plentitude of actors, non-human actants, as well as elements, artefacts, and discourses as pivotal for the analysis of any 'research phenomenon' she refers to as 'research situation', building on Donna Haraway's concept of situated knowledges (1988). It acknowledges that everything is always situated in the particularities of its conditions, and as such is also always incomplete and processual.

While she, Washburn, and Friese propose a set of well-thought-through theories and methods, they also emphasize that everything is always partial and situated, and hence they invite researchers to 'add' theoretical roots to the package or to adapt methods if needed (Clarke et al., 2022). It demands for the method(s) to be adapted to the situation of inquiry rather than making the situation fit into a methodological framework. Their theory/methods package builds on epistemological assumptions that are explicitly feminist, and implicitly postcolonial (Neureither and Klages, 2023). Hence, working with Clarke also means acknowledging that research is always political and a site of power, making it a suitable approach for the empirical study at hand.

The Process of Gathering Data and Sample

As I previously stated, in a Situational Analysis research project, the situation of inquiry is both: the starting and the, analytically saturated, ending point of inquiry.

Early versions of a conceptualization of a situation in the sense of SitA are frequently informed by coursework and/or literature reviews (Clarke et al., 2018) or by personal engagement in or with the situation. Since my motivation to conduct an empirical study on the situatedness of artistic handicraft production in civil society derived from my working experiences with an NGO in international development, my initial understanding of my research situation was based on literature reviews, project reports, and my anecdotal empirical glimpses. To ground my research interest more into the empirical situation and to focus on elements and dynamics considered relevant for the local discourse by local actors, I conducted six expert interviews and one focus group discussion during an explorative field stay, and a brief, two-day archive search at the Africana section of the Makerere University main library.

All interviews I conducted during this explorative field stay were conducted in English, audio recorded and transcribed by myself. I then turned to initial coding strategies (Charmaz, 2014) and wrote early memos as I coded. Both strategies helped me to get to "know the data" and to "digest" it (Clarke et al., 2018: 106), which is considered an important prerequisite for mapping (ibid) and more in-depth analysis.

Throughout the course of the trajectory of the research at hand, I worked abductively in an iterative process of gathering new data through theoretical sampling and analysis (Strübing, 2007) through mapping, memoing, and at times coding or sequencing, until no new elements, issues, major discursive positions, or social worlds and sub-worlds emerged. At this stage the empirical data was considered saturated or sufficient (Dey, 1999; Charmaz, 2014).

Overall, the sample comprises of 24 interviews which are audio recorded and transcribed either by myself or Barbra Khoba Loyce, one of the two research assistants who worked with me. It further includes four audio recorded round table discussions held in English with a few excurses into Luganda, transcribed by Comfort Akunda, the second research assistant. In addition, I conducted and audio recorded five group discussions out of which four were conducted in Lugisu/English with simultaneous translations by Barbra Khoba Loyce and Dorothy Wanyamba, and one exclusively in English. All of them were audio recorded and transcribed by Barbra Khoba Loyce. In addition, I wrote 33 field protocols, recorded 8 ethnographic audio memos of interviews that were not audio recorded (generally because they emerged spontaneously during observation sessions, over coffee or joint meals) out of which I transcribed 3. Barbra Khoba Loyce, too, wrote 8 field notes.

The visual material included 3 posters I photographed as well as 76 photographs of the NACCAU crafts village, taken at the 2020 *Pearl of Africa* Tourism Expo, at the Banana Boat handicraft store and during the field stay in the Mbale region. I also included website screenshots out of which 12 were screenshots of visual website material, 4 of YouTube videos and 6 press releases (see also chapter 4.4.).

Through theoretical sampling, the following reports or policy documents and one project proposal were included into the sample as well: the Uganda 2040 Vision,

the 2006 Uganda National Culture Policy, the Uganda Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2006), the Uganda Handicrafts Export Strategy (2006), the 2005 UNESCO convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, or the successful project proposal by the NACCAU and the UTA. All press releases and visual material available online which was produced for the UNESCO *Strengthening the Sustainability of the Creative Industries in Uganda* project was also included into the sample.

Lastly, I conducted 5 follow-up interviews via WhatsApp. Those include 3 audio-call interviews which were not transcribed and 2 written interviews. The WhatsApp interviews were shorter and more focused with the purpose of discussing and validating (preliminary) results of my analysis, closing gaps in the data, or clarifying and situating findings (e.g. on the role of the *kumusoola* tree, see also chapter 7.3).

4.2 Research Paradigm and Epistemological Parameters
Postcolonial Thoughts in Situational Analysis

> Knowledge is never impartial, removed, or objective, but always **situated**, produced by actors who are positioned in specific locations and shaped by numerous cultural and other influences. (McEwan, 2019: 47, emphasis as in original)

Postcolonial theorists argue that contemporary realities are a palimpsest of the colonial era, with relationalities between and among collective actors, organizations, or human-environment-interaction being shaped by the colonial experience of all involved. Empirical inquiry informed by postcolonial thoughts seeks to decode this palimpsest to understand the underpinning structures of the contemporary, postcolonial realities, and specifically address mechanisms that reproduce structural inequalities. Through its analytical focus on power dynamics, situated relationalities as well as discursively negotiated knowledge production, Situational Analysis proposes various methodological avenues to pursue qualitative research from postcolonial perspectives (Clarke et al., 2018; Neureither and Klages, 2023).

Postcolonial theory is not a clear-cut theoretical concept. Rather, it is a construct of numerous, at times conflicting positions and theoretical assumptions. Unlike other theories, postcolonial theory has no clear origin – contrary to the name's suggestion – and there is no consensus on whether postcolonial theory should be referred to in the singular or the plural, either (Castro Varela and Dhawan, 2020). Many scholars trace its origins back to the critical work of the *Subaltern Studies Group*