

Chapter 6: The NACCAU

Art as Crafts, Crafts as Art, and All as Cultural Heritage?

6.1 Introduction. The Cultural Turn in International Development Revisited

NACCAU and the Question of Sustainable Development

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter 5, in the art-academics sub-world, artistic handicraft products are sometimes constituted as indigenous art forms and hence considered equivalent to western(ized) concepts of art, while at other times they are regarded as belonging to a separate crafts category, namely as artistic or cultural handicrafts. Linking material cultural heritage with contemporary artistic practices in general is a contested topic in Uganda (Kasozi, 2019; Kyeyune, 2003; Siegenthaler, 2019). The debate becomes particularly heated when spiritual or economic interests are at play. In the following chapter, I continue to dwell on the debate around what makes art, what makes craft, how this everlasting debate is addressed, and some of its parameters co-constituted by civil society actors in post-independence Uganda. I do so by focusing on the NACCAU as a case study. This allows me to demonstrate the political, social, and economic interests involved in artistic expression in an association that is neither a western-style (non-governmental) organization nor can be clearly differentiated from one. An association that understands itself as non-governmental yet remains affiliated to the government, and an association that seeks to (economically) empower and, at times, struggles with its own survival in ideological and in economic terms. This, with Clarke et al. (2018), process of segmentation allows to get a close-up shot into the situation that helps understand how the elements and dynamics at play shape the situatedness of artistic handicraft products and their production in contemporary Uganda.

One of the strategies the NACCAU applies is to seek alliances in governmental, non-governmental, and private business structures. Moreover, while this could be considered a liberation process from dependencies on (foreign) customers and their assumptions about Ugandan/ African aesthetics, it creates new dependencies in terms of content creation and limits the possibilities of self-positioning as an independent artistic actor with political agency.