

democracies, despite the furore over declining rates of participation in civil society in the USA and western Europe, which suggests they no longer work that way in the West. They propose an outdated notion of pluralism that is no longer regarded as applicable to explain [U.S.] American politics for reasons which undercut the notion even more seriously in Africa – particularly unequal access to state officials and problem in accomplishing collective action.

[...] What kind of a notion of civil society would serve Africa, donors and the academic community better? Certainly one that is less prescriptive, recognizes the pervasive and powerful role of the African state, does not import so many Western models and captures more of the social issues in which Africans are engaged. (Kasfir, 1998b: 17)

### 3.4 Conclusions. Linking Art with Civil Society in Contemporary Uganda

The previous two chapters introduced my research situation from a theoretical perspective. In them I elaborated upon some important developments that shaped and continue to shape perceptions of art and civil society in Uganda. While I carefully sought to discuss a wide range and at times contradictory perspectives, the literature presented here, as any literature discussion, must be considered as fragmented. However, fragmented as it may be, the preceding chapters demonstrate the linkages and interdependencies among art, society, education, politics, and economics. The questions *when* and *what* is art and *when and what* is civil society both must be answered from an empirical perspective if they are to be relevant for the African realities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Artistic expression is inherently linked to societal and political developments and therefore the analysis thereof must consider those developments if it seeks to be relevant for academia and in practice.

Because of the various considerations of socio-political developments in the study of art in Africa, I was surprised to barely find any explicit linkages with civil society (Farrell, 2015; Obadare, 2014). This is particularly noteworthy given the increasingly observed NGO-ization of both: art *and* civil society, in the Global South (Eickhof, 2019; Kamruzzaman, 2019; Kleibl, 2021; Obadare, 2014; Toukan, 2010).

In their theoretical conceptualization and in their contemporary practices art and civil society have been shaped by colonization and later by development paradigms. The *Cultural Turn* in Development increasingly positioned artistic practice into the realm of development work (and of NGOs) and of development agendas. Civil society and art – especially in form of artistic handicrafts – have become closely associated with poverty eradication which in turn is closely affiliated to the de-politization of the former and the commodification of the latter.

In spite of the paucity of explicitly interdisciplinary literature linking the two, the here presented studies often address how art and society are implicitly co-constitutive of one another and that the analysis of one must indeed consider the other as well (Wendl, 2012). At the *Royal Kasubi Tombs* for example, weaving mats and baskets for offerings and ancestral worship are directly linked with the social status of the women weavers. The shapes and products are associated with purity, neatness, and history among other things, and producing them is an honorable task (Muwanga Senoga, 2021). The meaning of the art products here cannot be separated from the highly-skilled women who produce them and who are the wives of the ruling *Kabaka*. Nor can they be separated from the place they are produced for and used. The baskets convey messages of aesthetics and cannot be understood without the complex network of social and political relationships surrounding them.

An empirical conceptualization of civil society that builds on the understanding of civil society as a political space embedded in complex and dynamic power relations allows for the consideration of artistic production processes and its products in the analysis of civic relations for both the understanding of mechanisms of power and opposition in a society. Here, artistic expression especially in everyday material cultural expression can be a space for the negotiation of consent, for the establishment of counter-hegemony in a Gramscian sense, and for the contestation of everything in between.

Against this background, an empirical analysis that specifically investigates the situatedness of artistic handicraft in civil society does not only address an important gap in academic knowledge production. It also allows for a critical assessment of co-dependent and dominating discourses on art, (sustainable) development, poverty eradication, and empowerment by investigating *who* shapes those discourses and *how* the involved actors navigate through expectations and aspirations, through questions of cultural ownership and heritage (construction), among others. In focusing on Uganda in particular, in the empirical part of my dissertation I build on the preceding two literature-based chapters and discuss handicraft artists and their activities against the backdrop of a civil society framework. Thereby I particularly consider artistic handicraft and its spaces outside the realm of institutionalized art production.

