

in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, had quickly spread across the world and developed into a global pandemic with national lockdowns. By mid-year 2021, I had been vaccinated against Covid, and it had become possible to travel internationally again. However, being vaccinated did not mean that I could not still spread the virus; therefore, meeting with members of the handicraft groups and possibly spreading the virus that would not affect me severely but possibly threaten the lives of others without the possibility of receiving immediate and affordable health care was not an option. As a result, I decided not to return to Uganda to gather more data for ethical reasons (which, naturally, impacted my analysis and my findings. See also chapter 4.5).

In consequence, it became impossible for me to get in touch with the members of the handicraft groups I had met. Most of them did not have a phone at the time I met them and did not have access to the internet. Furthermore, we did not speak a common language, either. As a result of the changed circumstances, and while I was not able to spend more time with the artisans themselves, I was able to situate information they had already provided into the local conditions and validate my findings through messages and online calls. This helped me to reconstruct the meaning of artistic creation and production among the two groups on which I decided to focus on in greater detail. Empirically, this allowed me to situate answers to my research question: how is contemporary artistic handicraft production situated in Ugandan civil society? I will present the answers in chapters 5 through 7.

After my return to Germany in 2020, I began with intensive analysis. In addition to my regular active participation in Ph.D. colloquiums, methodology workshops, conferences, and a large SitA interpretation group, I began attending small interpretation groups that met regularly – ranging from once a week to once a month.

At this point in my analysis, I began to work with positional maps, whereby I focused on the discursive construction and negotiation of the boundary object in my research situation. In doing so, I also experimented with what I called ‘micro-situational mapping’ whereby I mapped the particular situatedness of the two handicraft groups based on my empirical material vis-à-vis one another and a situational map I had created for the *Strengthening the Sustainability of Creative Industries in Uganda* project some of their members had participated in.

## 4.5 Limitations

“When I close my eyes and listen to you speak, it all seems to make sense. But then I open my eyes and I see: you.” (Private conversation with Suzanne Crowley at ICQI 2019)

The statement was made by Suzanne Crowley at the International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign in 2019, where I attended a SitA research workshop. Suzanne and I spoke about critical, social justice-oriented research through and with art. After a workshop on arts-based research, our conversation began over a cup of coffee, and eventually, I spoke about my dissertation research project, postcolonial critique, marginalization, and social injustice. It was then when Suzanne stated the above – that to her, my words and my physical appearance did not match. There was no offense in her statement, but an important reference to my own positionality in my research, especially because, of course, she only articulated what others were possibly thinking, too.

Thus far, I have reflected on my own positionality mainly by focusing on what I brought to my research situation: *a priori* assumptions, values, worldviews, and ideas about the prevailing relationalities. Of course, they limit my research in that I needed to become aware of them first before I could deconstruct their impact on my analysis (Neureither and Klages, 2023). Suzanne's statement, however, addresses a different subject matter. Namely, every person I met and worked with throughout my research, and especially during my field stays in Uganda, also projected their ideas of who I am upon me. This projection is structural and mutual (Chilisa, 2012), and in my research situation, it must be considered under the historical tokens of colonialism and contemporary development aid. I cannot assess the impact the positional dynamics may have had on the information that was shared with me and with how it was shared. However, there were several moments, especially during my meetings with some independent handicraft groups, when I was directly asked whether I could support their work, whether I could grant them access to an international market for their products, or if I could lobby on their behalf for policy changes that would re-legalize hunting the Colobus monkey (see also chapter 7.3). At the same time, I was also an honored guest and several groups sent me home with a trunk full of gifts, such as bananas, matoke, and rice, which I perceived as a very powerful gesture.

These dynamics and the prevailing structural imbalance between me and the people who dedicated their time to my research and shared their knowledge with me, linked with historical and current hegemonic relations between the Global South and the Global North, are to be considered an important limitation in my research.

In following Clifford Geertz, who, with Max Weber, believed that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz, 1973: 5), analyzing culture means that cultural codes can easily misinterpreted, leading to false conclusions. Culture, for Geertz, is those webs, and its analysis is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (ibid: 5). It is by the means of thick description, he further argues, that analysis is directed towards a form of knowledge. Furthermore, it is through culture that behavior, words,

and objects are attached to meanings that determine whether a rapidly moving eyelid is a twitch, a sign of conspiracy, or a parodic mockery. It is through *thick description* in describing a particular moment, Geertz argues, that actions can be analytically reconstructed in their situatedness. Norman Denzin (2001) further highlights that “social scientists write culture; they create culture through the process of writing. [...] Researchers do not describe culture; rather, they *inscribe* it” (Denzin, 2001: 98). In the logic of Geertz and Denzin, then, during the process of translation group conversations in English and Lugisu, both my questions and the answers provided were interpreted by Barbra Khoba Loyce and Dorothy Wayamba, who simultaneously interpreted and thus facilitated my conversation with the handicraft groups. This came not without challenges, for at times the directions of the answers I received did not respond to the questions asked. Bearing in mind these limitations, I sought to address them by making use of thick description in my field notes, observation protocols, and memos whenever possible, and asked my research assistant, too, to write protocols during the field stay in rural Eastern Uganda.

### **The Nexus between Creative Industries, Civil Society, and Artistic Handicraft Products**

In the second part of this book, I present and critically discuss the empirical findings of my research. They are presented in three chapters. Chapter 5 provides a general overview of the situation of inquiry and the most important social worlds I reconstructed through my analysis. This first results chapter finds orientation in the concept of boundary objects (see also chapter 4.4.1). In the analysis of social worlds and arenas, boundary objects are a mutual point of reference for the social worlds involved.

In chapter 6 (the second results chapter), I focus on the NACCAU, the first case study of this research, and its positions in the research situation. In my understanding, the NACCAU is an association that struggles for financial stability and – at times – survival while seeking ways to advocate for arts and crafts production as a form of sustainable development and economic growth in Uganda. In addition, it has a strong desire to raise its voice for the interests of individuals, groups, and collectives involved in artistic handicraft production. Furthermore, the association understands itself as (and is understood to be) safeguarding local cultural heritage, and as a culture bearer with expertise in local forms of material culture. In doing so, I discuss how NACCAU members and practitioners situate themselves, their work, and their products, and elaborate on the in-between-ness of the association – in-between the art world and the NGO world, in-between the Arts and Crafts debate, in-between a national and an internationalized association, and in-between members who seek to bring about social and political change and course of development and those whose interest lays in wanting to make a living.

Chapter 7 (the third results chapter) focuses on the artists and artisans in the East Ugandan periphery around Mbale. In the dominant, internationalized discourses, they are often constructed as ‘project beneficiaries’ – ‘underprivileged’, ‘marginalized’ people in need of being economically empowered so they can ‘work their way out of poverty’ and become business owners rather than job seekers. Nevertheless, they are also ‘master craftspeople’ whose skills need to be strengthened. In most sites of the situation, they could be reconstructed with Clarke (2005) as implicated actors – spoken about and for rather than spoken with or consulted. In this chapter, I elaborate on their positions, and on how they organize, use their agency, and work towards changing their status quo through and with artistic handicraft objects based on the analysis of my empirical data. To avoid the reproduction of othering processes and to decrease epistemic violence, I cease to refer to these groups as implicated actors and use the term ‘marginalized social worlds’ instead. With Spivak (1988), they can here be understood as *subaltern others* who oftentimes are not given an opportunity to speak, and whose perspectives, if they do speak, tend to be discarded and drowned out in the dominant discourses and more vocal actors. By conceptualizing them as a marginalized social world, I aim to visibilize their perspectives, which at times concur with the dominant positions taken. At other times they vary significantly and propose different logics of reasoning, e.g. in reference to the meaning and functions of copying from others.

I do not separate the presentation and discussion of my findings in the chapters, for it is through situating the empirical findings into the overall situation of inquiry and the scientific debate associated with it that they become meaningful according to their own conditions and relevance. Every chapter of the second part of this study closes with a brief concluding summary. In doing so, I pave the path to the conclusion, in which I extend the discussion across the scope of the individual results chapter by contextualizing them. In this concluding chapter 8, I return to my research question “How is contemporary artistic handicraft production situated in Ugandan civil society?” and the sub-questions:

- Who are the collective actors and social worlds who construct and negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft production and products in Ugandan civil society?
- Which discourses impact the meaning-making processes of artistic handicraft production and products, and how?
- What are the articulation possibilities of artistic handicraft artists in Ugandan civil society?
- What is the agency of their products?