In this introduction chapter, I first dwell (chapter 1.2) on the linkages between the arts and culture on the one hand, and development and progress as discussed in the literature. In doing so, I pay particular attention to the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial era, before I introduce what is at times referred to the cultural turn in international development. By applying the concept to the *Uganda Crafts Emporium*, I situate the debate around the cultural turn to the Ugandan post-independence particularities. In chapter 1.3 I then proceed to the research questions and aim(s) of research and briefly address the development of the research question over the course of time. With the closing chapter 1.4, I provide an outline of this dissertation in which I briefly describe the contents of the chapters two to eight to follow.

## 1.1  Background
### The Coming of Art in Development and Civil Society

One of the notable tragedies of much of African development efforts is that for far too long they have been based on externally invented strategies that are not compatible with the local conditions and realities. [...] What is hardly contested is that, regardless of where the bulk of the blame lies, a fundamental shift in the approach to 'doing development' is required for political independence in Africa to translate to economic freedom and self-reliance. (Okereke and Agupusi, 2015: 1)

In the catalogue of the inaugural Uganda National Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale, it takes curator Shaheen Merali exactly until page two of his introduction to the exhibition titled *Radiance, They Dream in Time (Rearranged)* to address development in its "variety of humanitarian, educational, and 'development' projects [...], comprising a veritable library of experts and expertise [...], still remain[ing] somewhere between a goal and an inquiry" (Merali, 2022: 11). How did *development* find its way into the inaugural Uganda pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and what are the implications of art? Especially, when in her greetings in the same catalogue, Juliana Akoryo Naumo, Commissioner from the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, uses the opportunity to invite spectators not only to visit the Uganda National Pavilion in Venice, but also "our beautiful Uganda as a tourism and arts destination of the world" (Naumo, 2022: n.p.)? When and how did development actors become convinced that the arts as cultural expression could be substantial for development to the extent that culture is at times even considered the 4th pillar of development by actors such as the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and others (Angya, 2013; Clammer, 2005; Clammer, 2015; Robinson, 2015; UCLG, 2010; Waits, 2012)? Why development? And, how does this relate to the situatedness of

handicraft artists and their products in the relational triangle of economic, epistemic, and discursive power in Uganda today?

## From Colonialism to Development

The post-independence era on the African continent was marked by enthusiasm, ideology, pan-Africanist thoughts, and the idea to establish a so-called *Third World:* a third world power that would add counterweight to the dichotomy of the Cold War era with two world powers – the Soviet Union and the USA –, and the competing political and ideological systems they presented. Although assumed to have been coined by Alfred Sauvy in France in 1952 (or possibly slightly earlier), the term *tiers monde* was picked up by the leaders of newly independent African nation-states such as Kwame Nkrumah in the 1950s, who "called for the establishment of a bloc of uncommitted nations as a 'non-nuclear Third Force' between the East-West confrontation of the 'Cold War' period" (Wolf-Phillips, 1987: 1313). In the years to follow, however, the term became less about non-alignment with one of the two world powers at the time, but increasingly associated with "neglect, exploitation and revolutionary potential" (ibid: 1313). The term *Third World* quickly evolved into a term to categorize countries based on factors such as the gross national product (GNP) per capita. Actors such as the World Bank began to classify them as *least developed*, *underdeveloped* or *developing*. Among those countries marked as being part of the *Third World*, many were former colonies of so-called *First World* countries, as if the former was a consequence of the latter. This, of course, is correct, although more complex and multidimensional, and will be of concern in chapters two and three.

It was this *underdevelopedness* of post-independence nation states in Africa which permitted the establishment of a new diplomatic discipline: development. Given the birth of development aid in former offices of colonial administration, the latent geopolitical interests of aid, and the ongoing epistemological dominance of western liberal thinking regarding the conceptualizations of development and its objectives, it is no wonder that after almost six decades of development aid, Chukwumerije Okereke and Patricia Agupusi conclude it has been "far too long that [development efforts] have been based on externally invented strategies" (2015: 1), which remain incompatible with the local conditions and realities of contemporary Africa. For, had not Europeans, but, say, Australian Aboriginals defined – frequently considered the predecessor of development and at times used interchangeably (Du Pisani, 2006) – the conceptualization of development/progress might look very differently, as Sherry Errington states:

> [If Australian Aboriginals had invented the idea of progress/development,] complexity in kinship might have been at the top of the evolutionary ladder, while Euro-America would have been at the bottom. If Javanese nobles had invented

the idea of progress, a developed sense of shame and status would have been at the peak of creation, whereas the arrogant, demanding demeanor of Europeans would put them with madmen and infants at its undeveloped beginning. But Europeans invented the idea of progress, hence technological power and the ability to extract resources were put at the top, while Australian Aboriginals became nineteenth-century writers' favourite example of the primitive, and the Javanese (had they come to museum curators' attention) would have exemplified a medial stage (as did the East Indians and the Chinese). (Errington, 1998: 20)

As Okereke and Agupusi (2015) further write, there have been many attempts to deconstruct why exactly imposed development efforts on the African continent continue not to produce the outputs and outcomes hoped for. One of those attempts considers the cultural underpinnings of the alleged universal concept of development as liberal and western[3]. Turning towards culture, then, became one of the strategies to improve the effectiveness of development aid, the term most commonly used at the time, which was brought forward through the so-called *Cultural Turn in Development* in the 1990s and early 2000s (see also chapter 2.3.3). Although it is not undisputed whether the turn actually occurred (Labadi, 2020b), and if so, to what extent it impacted international development agendas and practice (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995, 2010), Polly Stupples and Katerina Teaiwa closely associate the *Cultural Turn* with the emergence of art in the arena of international development (Stupples, 2011; Stupples and Teaiwa, 2017).

## The Cultural Turn as Point of Departure?

Of course, the association of the emergence of art in international development through the cultural turn does not remain as undisputed as Stupples (2011) makes us want to believe (although she does elaborate on the role of the UNESCO for what she calls endogenous development even prior to the Cultural Turn). For the work of the UNESCO has, at least since the adoption of the *1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,* explicitly sought to protect cultural and artistic monuments and sites, and has worked with state as well as non-state actors that shared its interests. Years prior to the adoption of the *World*

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3    The term western is highly conflicted in the academic discourse, as it subsumes many nation states, cultures, and people under a single umbrella and cannot do justice to the complexities and heterogeneity of ideas, positions, knowledge, and beliefs (e.g. Klages et al. 2024). However, postcolonial inquiry draws attention to the structural inequalities associated with coloniality which results in people who are perceived as white-skinned to receive privileges over people of color, independently of their behavior. By referring to western, I seek to draw attention to those structural dimensions of privilege.

*Heritage Convention*, the Bolivian government and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies criticized its draft versions as Eurocentric – unable to recognize the cultural heritage of many ethnic groups outside the western normative conceptions of cultural sites and -heritage (see also chapter 5.3). This example indicates that cultural practices and heritage were indeed an arena of power struggle in development associated organizations, policy making and development practices prior to the Turn as well as thereafter (Neverdeen Pieterse, 2010).

Furthermore, during the early post-independent years of the 1960s in Uganda, then president Milton Obote (who had risen to power through a military coup which I will address in chapter 2) promoted and supported the establishment of artistic handicraft enterprises and markets through the *Uganda Crafts Emporium* (Nakazibwe, 2005). It specifically addressed women who were encouraged to engage with income-generating artistic handicraft activities. The Uganda Crafts Emporium (established by the no longer existing Ministry of Culture and Community Development) even developed and promoted a catalogue of the handicrafts products which were distributed among Ugandan high commissions and in embassies abroad (Miller, 1975; National Handicrafts Emporium, n.d.). Alongside economic interests, it further sought to help (newly independent) Ugandans develop a sense of national identity through the collection of a variety of cultural and artistic artefacts meaningful to its diverse ethnic groups. Finally, Miller (1975) argues that the crafts emporium should be understood as an approach to women empowerment in the Ugandan postcolony. Women here were framed as artists, entrepreneurs, business people, and subjects in public life. The *Uganda Crafts Emporium*, then, is what most individuals involved with development would consider as a development initiative. And yet, for reasons to yet be understood, it did not find recognition as such.

This leaves me wondering about the conceptualization of development work and its parameters and simultaneously brings me back to Okereke and Agupusi's critique on development efforts that remain alien to the situated conditions of the postcolonial realities in countries such as Uganda and the study at hand. It leaves me equally wondering about development workers and organizations' contribution to the decolonization of the development concepts and the premises of a true *Cultural Turn*, which, with Sophia Labadi (2020a) would focus not merely on the adaptations of foreign concepts to local conditions, but to situated perspectives of development – perspectives that Okereke and Agupusi would understand to be *homegrown* (2015).

Could the *Uganda Crafts Emporium* be considered a homegrown development initiative, though? And, what would be the consequences? Can such initiatives be considered international development? If so, how, and if not, why not? Must a state-led enterprise such as the crafts emporium be considered a governmental, and thus political, actor, and what happens to artistic and cultural articulation if steered by a governmental body with its particular interests? Where is the border between the state, the public sphere and the private, and is there such a divide in Uganda real-

ities? Is a crafts emporium too much of an enterprise to be considered as a space for civic engagement, critique or even resistance? And what are the consequences of conceptualizing it one way or the other, what does justice to the lived realities at the time? And further, how do those questions inform contemporary practices and discourses on the subject matter? What are the current linkages between the state, development initiatives and handicraft work, and do those spaces allow for political articulation, both implicit and explicit? Are there contemporary actors similar to the *Ugandan Crafts Emporium*, what is their role, how do they perceive themselves and how are they perceived by handicraft artists? Are they capable of representing the interests of their members, even if such interests may oppose current governmental development agendas? What is the role of foreign actors, both as collective, organizational actors and as individuals in search of *authentic African souvenir art*? What are the lessons learnt from subsuming artistic practices to development agendas and how does it inform creative articulation beyond the frameworks of development?

## The Cultural Situatedness of Concepts

The provided examples and long list of questions provided here demonstrate how difficult it is to do justice to local conditions when conceptually framing both, art and (international) development, and the linkages between the two (for a more detailed discussion on the framing of terms and concepts, see also McEwan, 2019). No matter its conceptualization, however, artistic articulation (and the critical dialogue about it) remains closely related to and important for cultural meaning-making. In this manner, Stupples (2011) assumes for "the arts as both 'factories and repositories of cultural meaning' (Smiers 2003, p.150). As such, they are neither neutral nor simply decorative, but comprise (like culture) an 'arena of struggle'" (32). To further complicate matters, Sarah Radcliffe (2006) and Christiaan de Beukelaer (2017) remind us that there is no singular understanding of the relationship between culture and development, either. When Radcliffe writes that "culture has always been in development thinking and practice" (Radcliffe, 2006: 1), and further explains how

> [I]n the past cultural norms and assumptions might have informed powerful development actors in their interaction with beneficiaries, culture is now being discovered **among** those very beneficiaries. Development practitioners and development thinkers alike are puzzling over the implication of culture for the participation of beneficiaries, for the successes of projects and how culture contributes to non-economic goals of development. (ibid: 1–2, emphasis as in original),

she does not refer to cultural practices in form of artefacts or performative cultural expression. Her conceptualization of culture in international development resonates much more with Jan Neverdeen Pieterse, who found that the "Western

ethnocentrism as the *implicit* culture of developmentalism" to be "no longer adequate in the age of 'polycentrism in a context of high interaction' or of globalization" (Neverdeen Pieterse, 1995: 176). For him, by the mid-1990s the paradigm of modernization and westernization could no longer be considered valid, particularly under the advent of the postmodern, with global concerns such as ecological questions on the rise (ibid). This understanding of culture which addresses more the cosmological, ontological and epistemological underpinnings of theoretical frameworks, De Beukelaer (2017) emphasizes, is quite different from the understanding of culture in the cultural industries whereby culture is materialized through creative and artistic engagement. The differentiation might appear to be a simple equation. However, it has led to tensions between the consideration of culture *in* development and cultures *of* development (Pratt, 2015). The creative industries, under which De Beukelaer also subsumes visual arts, need both cultures of development based on locally situated principles. For De Beukelaer, they are the foundations onto which artistic and cultural practices can then be grounded in development for the latter to be responding to the former.

Stupples (2011) associates the *Cultural Turn* with development actors other than the UNESCO starting to understand that culture, as a means to organize and make sense of life, is important for development, which led towards the *World Decade for Cultural Development* between 1988–1997 under the auspices of the UNESCO. In the UNESCO Courier edition on the world decade for cultural development, then director-general of the UNESCO, Frederico Mayor, wrote:

> Culture is an intrinsic part of the life and awareness – conscious and unconscious – of individuals and communities. It is a living fund of the creativity activity, past and present, which has shaped over centuries the system of values, traditions and tastes which defines the distinctive genius of a people. Thus culture is bound to make an imprint on economic activity and define the strengths and weaknesses of a society's productive processes. (Mayor, 1988: 5)

In the quote, Mayor emphasizes the economic potential of culture and its implications for economic productivity, which is what Pratt (2015) would refer to as cultures of development. In the 1990s, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began to support the notion of culture and development (Stupples, 2011). Besides their financial weight and potency, those organizations have, much like the UNESCO, discursive power in the development arena (Labadi, 2017). Polly Stupples was able to reconstruct how, indeed, much of the albeit little funding that became available for the arts in international development has its roots in this time period (2011). This may be correct when considering North-South money flows, and when looking at development from the perspectives of development studies and related disciplines. However, it also bears important limitations.

For in her research, Polly Stupples overlooks two important, if not essential, elements regarding the arts in international development. First, her definition of development actors by and large focuses on non-governmental actors such as NGO and other organizations (local and foreign) commonly referred to as civil society actors who have, during the postcolonial era, become more and more associated with being *the* development actors (Kleibl, 2021). This approach disregards the plentitude of dedicated individuals, from within as well as from the diaspora, religious groups and ritual associations as well as loosely organized collective actors engaged in artistic production and their myriad ways to finance their artistic activities – some of which are income generating oriented, others not (or not primarily). Sidney Littlefield Kasfir (1999), for example, writes about the importance of formal and informal workshops for art education and -practice derived from a pre-colonial system of apprenticeship in African societies (see also Förster and Littlefield Kasfir, 2013). She reconstructs how Etiki Yoruba sculptor Lawrence Alaye was among those

> first postcolonial generation of Yoruba carvers who bridged the gap between the old apprenticeships system and the new. [...] Both of his apprentices, then in their early teens, had been to primary school and spoke English. The several kinds of patronage Alaye received [he had learned from his uncle, but then also sent off to learn to carve Christian objects and was supported by the academic community at the then University of Ife] illustrate the beginnings of the modern workshop or cooperative which, although given over to new genres, was still faithful to the master-apprentice model. It is these continuities in practice, and not just a particular mix on genres, that help define twentieth-century African Art. (Littlefield Kasfir, 1999: 48–49)

That leads me to the second major element I already touched upon at the end of the last paragraph: conceptualizing and reconstructing the role of art in international perspective from the perspective of development studies only may lead to preliminary saturation and disconnected conclusions. Especially in the complex realities of the twenty-first century, looking beyond disciplinary borders towards the acknowledgement of pluridisciplinarity might help us to extend the scope of our understanding, the depth of our analysis, and ultimately the significance of our findings in research (Clammer, 2005; Mbembe, 2021).

## Research as a Site of Pluridisciplinary Messiness

Pluridisciplinarity comes at a price: complexity and messiness. This price is, according to Adele Clarke, Carrie Friese, and Rachel Washburn (2018), essential to inquiry, as it prevents us (researchers) from oversimplification that may lead to important aspects going missing, most likely "commitments, processes, work, and relation-

ships that went into the research" (38). Importantly, though, for Clarke et al. it is not only their absence, but also "the absence of researchers' reflexivity, [which] allow[s] for science to appear objective, inevitable, or as the 'culture of no culture' (e.g., Haraway, 1997; Traweek, 1999). This is why simplification is so dangerous" (ibid: 38). Clarke, Friese, and Washburn argue for a need of making the "downright messiness of the empirical world part of our representational practices" (ibid).

Theoretically, this has led towards the pluridisciplinarity of my dissertation unfolding in front of you. While it certainly could be addressed from an art historical, anthropological, sociological, political scientific and social work perspective only, the mono-disciplinarity of such an approach could not do justice to the complexities of the situated realities of my research. A pluridisciplinary approach allowed me to draw on theoretical fragments of various academic disciplines, which enriched my analysis and simultaneously extended the scope of meaning making of my findings. Jointly, I used them to approach and analyze the empirical situation of handicraft production in Uganda, while constantly reflecting the limitations of their particular gaze. Achille Mbembe, Cameroonian historian and political theorist, too, requests for research to cut across disciplines to "gauge the limits of our epistemological imagination or to pose new questions about how we know what we know" (Mbembe, 2021: 12). He further informs how much research in countries of the Global South has favored large data sets which, according to Mbembe, leads to "the production of quantitative indicators over critical analyses" (ibid: 11). This is problematized as lacking thick description and contextualization and resulting in research findings detached from lived realities. Mbembe proceeds to lament how "nowhere have we witnessed the kind of cultural ferment and intellectual innovation that would have allowed scholars, critics, and artists to cut across the customary boundaries" (ibid), which separate disciplines and do not allow for philosophy to be thought alongside history, political theory and aesthetic criticism, to name but a few.

Epistemologically, my research is situated in symbolic interactionism and postcolonial thoughts that emphasize the subjectiveness and partiality of knowledges. As such, it is informed by the Thomas theorem (1928, as cited by Chowdhury, 2014: 432) which states that "if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences". It further acknowledges all forms of thinking and knowing to be always partial and situated in their unique temporalities (Clarke et al., 2018), shaped by hegemony (Spivak, 1988), (colonial) history (Mignolo, 2002), and constant negotiations. Methodologically it uses the approaches to data analysis initially developed by Adele Clarke as an extension to Grounded Theory *After* the Postmodern Turn (2005) that, over the years, was developed into its own research program called Situational Analysis (SitA) that has recently been positioned by Clarke, Carrie Friese and Rachel Washburn (2022) as independent from whilst still rooted in GT-thought and its iterative, empirically grounded theorization (Clarke et al., 2015; 2018; 2022; Gauditz et al., 2023) (for further elaborations, see chapter 4).

## Turning to the Situatedness of Inquiry

In resonance with my research question, with which I ask about the situatedness of artistic handicraft production in contemporary Ugandan civil society, my dissertation project takes the "situation of inquiry" (Clarke et al., 2018: 24) roughly defined as the empirical starting and, theoretically saturated, as the (temporal) ending point of analysis. It thus uses the research methodology Situational Analysis (SitA), as conceptualized by Adele E. Clarke. With SitA, Clarke (2005) moves empirical research away from "action-centered 'basic social process[es]'" (Clarke et al., 2018: 24), and focuses on the research *situation* in its entirety as the key unit of analysis. The main objective in research is to understand the elements – both human and non-human – of a particular situation and their relations. SitA "thus allows researchers to draw together studies of discourses and agency, action and structure, image, text, and context, history and present moment" (ibid: xxvi), and as such is a suitable methodology for my research project.

Furthermore, it allows for the inclusion of a social justice perspective to research by particularly focusing on power relations, marginalized discourses, or overheard positions. In my empirical research situation, the colonial past and the postcolonial present remain entangled as the former co-constitutes the latter. As such, the reconstruction of continuities as well as ruptures are of analytical interest in my research. Embedded into the question of how artistic handicraft production is situated in contemporary Ugandan civil society, is thus the question how it came to be. Thus, what is the situation of inquiry at hand, and why is it important to analytically reconstruct the associated meanings of artistic articulation in civil society?

As I have already briefly discussed, over the course of the past decennia development work has been dominated by the aim to democratize life in societies outside of what is frequently referred to as the Global North (Kamruzzaman, 2019; Obadare, 2014). As a consequence, social and political actors outside the realm of the state, frequently organized in associations or non-governmental organizations, have become to be understood as *the* promoters of democracy and hence, development (Kleibl, 2021). These collective actors are considered to be key players in civil society, who, because of their independence from the state, can control state power (Edwards, 2011b). Following this logic, democracy becomes dependent on a vital civil society. The assumption is that only a civil society which is granted the right to freedom of speech and of assembly, can be a strong civil society, which fulfils its role of controlling the political society. In this paradox, civil society needs democracy in order to be able to protect democracy; only where freedom of speech is granted, civil society can flourish (Ehrenberg, 2011; Fowler, 2011; Rathgeb Smith, 2011).

In many African countries in the early twenties of the twenty-first century this is not the case, and therefore, development workers, researchers and other experts frequently attest African societies to have weak civil societies (Obadare, 2011; 2014).

Much like researchers, who find art to have emerged in international development first and foremost through the *Cultural Turn* (see, for example Stupples, 2011), the important question here is whether this is true; or whether we – as a society of researchers educated in western(ized) educational systems that favor well-known theorizations, conceptualizations and meaning-making[4] – are rather unable to understand and analyze African takes on civil society in its multiplicities, and according to its own terms, and thus unable to consider the particular conditions of both: civil society and art.

With critical approaches on the rise and related growing demands for epistemological decolonization, the past decades have brought forward a number of projects, studies and publications that sought to contribute to the decolonization and/or endogenization of civil society into contemporary African realities (Akínrìnádé, 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006a; Ferguson, 2006; Fowler, 2012; Hearn; Ilal et al., 2019; Kasfir, 1998a, 2017; Kleibl, 2021; Mbembe, 2001; Mukute and Taylor, 2013; Obadare, 2004, 2011, 2014; Orvis, 2001). And while such attempts include the consideration of ritual societies and religious associations (Obadare 2011; 2014), political movements for the re-establishment of monarchial systems (Kasfir, 2017), and witchcraft (Kleibl, 2021) – practices (collective) art making processes – whether in workshops, informally organized groups, or formalized associations – within the realm of civil society have to-date barely been considered. This, to me, was interesting *and* relevant because of three reasons:

First, historically, artistic articulation in African societies is "associated as an aesthetic experience with objects, which have particular character traits" (Pinther, 2022: 9–10, my translation). In referring to Suzanne Preston Blier, Kerstin Pinther explains how many African societies have developed and established a number of terms and concepts that refer to special objects, creative individuals, power of imagination, standards of designing or artists themselves. Preston Blier herself emphasizes on the historicity of the importance of design in many pre-colonial African societies, something that was quickly noted by European manufacturers of fabrics,

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4    I favor this slightly lengthy but more nuanced description of the situatedness of researchers and their educational backgrounds over terms such as Eurocentrism or Anglo-European-Centric. While I acknowledge that the term plays an important role in the debates on decolonization, is well placed many times and hence will find its use throughout this dissertation, the developments in western philosophical thought and qualitative inquiry over the past century (e.g. through the works of George Herbert Mead, Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, Michel Foucault, Simone de Beauvoir or Judith Butler, to name but a few) questioned and deconstructed the notions of research as a process of dissecting the universal, objective truth from within Anglo-European knowledge production. In addition, Eurocentrism as such does not center Europe as a whole, but rather knowledge making of a minority of well-educated, white, heterosexual western European men, who, because of their positionality in history and society were, for a long time, able to turn *their* stories into the *only* story.

textiles and beads, who quickly began to develop new products for African markets (2018). She further emphasizes how

> core design features of African forms, be they clothing, jewelry, furniture, housing, or religious paraphernalia are imbued with larger sociopolitical features, such that they merge a range of values – among these, aesthetic choices, need (functionality), and both individual and social identity. (Preston Blier, 2018: 87)

For example: for the regions that comprise what today is known as Uganda, Richard J. Reid (2017) closely associates blacksmithing designs and forged metal with political leadership; a connection that can be traced back to the earliest nineteenth-century descriptions of artefacts in the royal palaces at the time. Drums not only carried important messages about warfare, military campaigns or meeting points, but also manifested power and political leadership (ibid). Until this day, particular drums and musicking as well as associated dances are used in political rallies and campaigns, especially where drums, musicking and dancing continue to be important actors in social and public life (Makwa, 2021; Odutsa et al., 2019).

Working in wood and the process of making barkcloth were activities associated with spiritual power, in case of the latter it was also the cloth of the *kabaka* – the monarch of the Baganda –, and working in barkcloth thus a prestigious position to hold. The materiality in addition to the designs thus framed the function and sociopolitical meanings of everyday and functional objects, as well as the positions those artists and artisans who had made them. Reid understands that there was "a reasonably clear relationship between gender, power and art or craftsmanship" (Reid, 2017: 42), and while meanings of textiles, materials and artefacts changed over the years through foreign as well as internal influences and developments (Nakazibwe, 2005), until present-day they frequently continue to bear important symbolic social and political meanings.

In the situation of inquiry, art making and art objects have been historically associated with individual and social identity. More recently, Aili Mari Tripp found that many women's groups and associations that had formed themselves with the purposes of joint artistic handicraft production frequently became politically active under particular circumstances (Tripp, 1998). During joint art-making sessions, women exchanged and shared, became allies, and began to promote their interests; not formally organized and registered as an organization or association, but structured through their artistic activities instead.

Taken together, these findings provoke questions that address the linkages between art and civil society, and the contributions to understanding both, the dynamics of civil society and the role and agency of artefacts therein (or even, as I argue, as a facilitator of civic activity) on the one hand. On the other hand, it emphasizes on the actorship of art objects that by means of their aesthetics and function are capable of

assigning roles and establish status of those who produce and use them. They can be important in conveying (cultural) hegemony as well as the deconstructions thereof and in creating consent through which individuals and groups submit to the status quo of political and social order (Lamont, 1989).

Second, several political leaders of newly independent African countries started their careers as artists or were strongly influenced by the *Négritude* – a literary-philosophical political anticolonial movement art, which has produced important political leaders – and Pan-Africanist thinking (Rabaka, 2015). The most famous example of an artist gone politician is probably Léopold Sédar Senghor, who was a poet long before he became the first president of independent Senegal in 1960. Jointly with Aimé Fernand David Césaire, a poet, author and politician who founded the anticolonial *Parti Progressiste Martiniquais* and coined the term Négritude, and with Léon-Gontran Damas, he was also the founder of the *Négritude* movement, which became essential for the anticolonial movements in the French colonies and Pan-Africanist theorization (ibid). Their work inspired many other politicians across the African continent in their surge for independence and Pan-Africanism, such as Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected president of the Republic Congo and Kwame Nkrumah, who became the first president of independent Ghana (Rampazzo, 2012).

After having led Ghana to its independence from British Colonial Rule, Nkrumah's administration encouraged a number exhibitions, documentations and representations with the aim of constricting a sense of nationalism (Hess and Quarcoopome, 2006). By "[promoting] an art conceptualized as 'traditional'", conforming to an aesthetic that Janet Hess and Nii Quarcoopome consider as "essentially homogenous", the Nkrumah administration "[employed] art in the establishment of Nkruhmahist political hegemony" (16). Nkrumah used art to communicate his political ideas of nation state, cultural belonging within newly formed Ghana, and the establishment of hegemony. Uganda's current opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu (whose artist name is Bobi Wine), commonly also referred to as "ghetto president" because he grew up in one of the slum neighborhoods of Kampala and relates to the difficulties many people face daily, was a political singer and songwriter before he became a member of parliament. In this case he became a *de facto* public figure involved in political opposition and a person who articulated resistance to the political hegemony, before he also became a *de jure* politician according to the Ugandan constitution. Artists and art-activists I spoke to for the purposes of this research emphasized on the importance of Wine's accessories, for example in form of a red bonnet or paper bead necklaces in his music videos (Kasozi, 2019) that visualize his political objectives.

The third and last reason for why the paucity of available literature linking artistic articulation with civil society and political engagement is striking is because of the ways in which artistic forms are and have been used in organizing protest, mobi-

lizing, or steering people and in challenging the status quo of the social and political order. During the political uprisings of the *Arab Spring*, which had started in Tunisia in December 2010 and quickly spread among many countries of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region for example, artists and their art played an important role, as they (1) enabled discussions among people and provided mediums to do so, (2) brought people together for collaborations and co-operations, and (3) encouraged individuals who had been foreign to politics to find their voices (Farrell, 2015). To do so many different art forms were used: rap music, street theater, poetry, and graffiti art, to name a few. In addition to enabling the expression of resistance, here art was also used to inform people about rallies and events concerning the protest, to encourage them to continue in spite of a slow pace of change and in organizing the formation of protest groups (ibid).

While in above art was used spontaneously, and its forms were based on emotions, needs for communication and relatively independent from art programs and foreign funding, Hanan Toukan observes a different form of instrumentalizing art for political purposes. In her article *On being the Other in Post-Civil War Lebanon: Aid and the Politics of Art in Processes of Contemporary Cultural Production* (2010), she discusses the spaces granted to Lebanese artists for artistic articulation in post-civil war Lebanon by culturally oriented NGOs and other art funding institutions. Those 'alternative' art spaces that, prior to the *Arab Spring* not only existed in Beirut, the Lebanese capital, but also in other urban centers of the MENA region, essentialized

> the notion of the 'other' art [...]. Implicit in such essentialism is the understanding that independent processes of production and the works they give rise to necessarily entail all that being 'the other' could potentially represent in contemporary Arab societies, from subversion and dissidence in the face of established orders to marginality in the market and counter-cultural stands. (Toukan, 2010: 122)

According to her argumentation, the spaces provided by foreign art supporters and funders discount the possibilities of artistic articulation beyond the reflection and deconstruction of the status-quo. While this approach supports the notion of art bearing the potential to be political, it steers the politicalness of art into a particular direction within the scopes of imagination of those who finance art projects and exhibitions rather than of those artists and cultural practitioners living in and affected by the status quo of the social order.

Taken together, and considered under recent and current developments in Uganda, the literature study and the empirical situation suggest that it is high time to bring civil society and art together in order to dwell on the questions how, when, and where artistic articulation can or should even be considered as civic political articulation, whether such an articulation must by all means be explicitly political, and whether the artefacts and objects that are part of these dynamics are mere ex-

pressions of directed thoughts and ideas to convey particular messages, or whether they are also agents capable of acting, facilitating and negotiating meaning. This becomes particularly important considering tendencies such as the so-called NGO-ization of art, whereby culturally or artistically oriented NGOs, cultural institutes, embassies and private foundations – usually from countries of the Global North – are important actors for the local discourses on artistic articulation, the topics they address as well as the meaning making associated with it (Labadi, 2020b; Stupples, 2011; Toukan, 2010).

Particularly when linked with development initiatives and agendas, artistic handicraft making and art objects in Uganda are frequently ethnically marked as being 'traditional' or 'indigenous' art with associated expectations regarding their design. In addition, they are simultaneously co-opted by notions of poverty eradication and women empowerment, and their meanings and purposes submitted to the commodification of cultural expression – a process that led towards Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer critically referring to cultural production as "culture industry" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002 [1944]), and which has, after the adoption of the *2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* resulted in a plentitude of programs and initiatives that seek to "harvest" the economic potential of the creative industries for economic growth, especially in countries of the Global South (Abisuga Oyekunle and Sirayi, 2018; De Beukelaer, 2014; De Beukelaer, 2015; De Beukelaer, 2017; De Beukelaer and Vlassis, 2020; Jones et al., 2015; Oakley and O'Connor, 2015a; O'Connor, 2010 [2007], 2011).

This complex juncture of multiple discourses and collective actors that compete for their way of making sense of artistic handicraft production mark the departure point of my research and the situation of inquiry broadly defined. They have led towards the development of a set of research questions I will introduce in the following sub-chapter. They guided me through the messy process of meandering through and making sense of the research situation that empirically unfolded in front of me, and whose results I am presenting and discussing on the pages and throughout the chapters to come.

## 1.2   Research Question and Aim of Research

Based on my own observations of the use of artistic handicraft in (international) development work and by collectives actors such as foreign and local NGOs, associations and socially-oriented artists, and the literature study on Art in International Development as well as on conceptualizations of African Art History(ies), I became interested in understanding how the associated meanings of artistic handicraft production are constructed, an which discourses, elements and human as well as non-human actors and actants partake in this construction. At the same time, I wanted