

of passage for so many community members. After all, although they are not at the center of attention during the festivities, their work, their communication with the ancestors, and their knowledge regarding how to receive ancestral blessings are pivotal for the successful rite of passage of up to 400 boys per year.

The boundary object here is a means to make the participants of the ritual stand out – through both dress and sound. Making them stand out is conceptualized as necessary means for good communication with the ancestors. Therefore, it is both a privilege and a burden to the group members, who carry a lot of responsibility for the community and to maintain *Imbalu* as, with Nannyonga-Tamusuza, an *intimate and vital aspect of living* among the Gisu. Consequently, then, one of the most important reasons for members to have joined the group is the sense of belonging and of ‘generational cultural responsibility’ that was referred to as “the spirit of circumcision” (522) or as “generational heritage spirit” (528) during my meeting with the group, as summarized by Abdul Malukhu with the following words:

We found our great grandparents doing it, they died and left our fathers trained, from them, we also learnt [the] crafts. They learnt from – it’s a generational skill. One generation teaches the other and it goes on like that from generation to generation. [...] It is compulsory to every son that is born in the family. It is like a spirit or a taboo. [...] So, with this culture, even when the son went to school, they are still convicted by the spirit of circumcision and driven back home to learn these things. (ibid: 512–523)

When considering the perceptions of the boundary object in the minoritized social world it becomes clear that, while all groups also engaged with artistic handicraft production, it is one of many aspects of meaning making in this social world. At the same time, their positions remain widely unconsidered in the overall discourse on artistic handicraft objects, the sites of their production, and the artisans who make them as they importantly contribute to both the acknowledgment of artistic handicraft objects and their various functions for handicraft artists and an empirically grounded notion of civil society (see also chapter 7).

5.3 Conclusions

Social Worlds, Boundary Objects, and Hegemonic Power

In this chapter, I introduced the empirical situation of my research alongside and the collective actors I found to be significant in shaping and negotiating the meanings of artistic handicraft production in the arena of the cultural crafts industry in civil society in present-day Uganda. In doing so, I elaborate how social worlds perceive and conceptualize the boundary object artistic handicraft products. Although I do

not introduce all social worlds independently, it becomes apparent that the meanings of the boundary objects are by and large negotiated alongside the borders where social worlds meet, interact with, and refer to one another.

Among the collective actors introduced in this chapter, the associated meanings of the boundary object diverge into three major strands: one highlighting the economic potential for artisans and the national economy alike, provided the right kind of investments. The second one emphasizes on the social benefits of engaging with the boundary objects, ranging from empowerment strategies of structurally marginalized groups, negotiating co-ownership of public spaces, and building conviviality. In the third strand, cultural linkages are being made, either to frame the boundary object with narratives on eco- and culturally sensitive development, with creative inspiration for contemporary artistic expression, or with political agency through cultural authenticity. As I demonstrated, the strands are often interlinked, frequently complemented, and at times contradicting one another. While those who highlight the economic potential linked with the boundary object emphasize the need for professionalization (e.g. the NACCAU, the UTA, the UNESCO, or socially-engaged artists), those who consider the boundary object as art products (mainly artists-academics) highlight the uniqueness of every item produced. NGOs tend to highlight the ecological sustainability and gender empowerment potential of the boundary object. For handicraft groups themselves it is a source of income, but it is also a space to discuss and share (highlighting the social component), and to establish culturally-linked political authority.

The analysis of the available empirical data indicates that especially the UNESCO and its affiliations, the tourism world, and its associated sub-world of international (and mostly foreign-based) NGOs are particularly powerful collective actors, as they are closely interlinked with the customers' world and with the creative industries funding arena. Taken together, they are social worlds and organizations that are (1) discursively powerful – the UNESCO for example – and (co-)determine the vocabulary with its own concepts, e.g., of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Alongside those concepts, discourses exist regarding the need to safeguard and promote cultural heritage by means of supporting the creative industries for sustainable (economic) development. Alternatively, the social worlds and organizations have (2) monetary power – international and foreign-based NGOs, for example – that, jointly with the social world of foreign governments, are the actors most present in the funding arena. Because of their financial weight, they enable creative activities by granting project funds, through Fair(er) Trade, online and analogue marketing and sales of artistic handicraft products. However, they can also determine designs, end projects, and use their financial weight in co-framing the discourse on the question of authenticity in as culturally and ethnically marked artistic handicraft products. Linked with these worlds is the social world of cus-

tomers, whose assumptions about authentic African art further co-determine the pictorial and design boundaries of the boundary object.

At first sight, one might conclude that the negotiated meanings of artistic handicraft objects are dominated by foreign, mostly Anglo-European ideas about African cultural heritage and indigenous art. Foreign-based private NGOs, though exclusively well-meaning, ultimately sell stories of white charity rather than those of post-colonial aesthetic liberations and artistic agency or of the explorative paths taken by artists and artisans in finding locally situated approaches to development (Okereke and Agupusi, 2015). As an organization, the UNESCO has a particular perspective on the boundary object, framed by the theoretical constructs of cultural heritage as manifested in important conventions. In the situation of inquiry, the UNESCO understands the creative industries to be responsible for cultural heritage management (in collaboration with the national government) and hence finds immense potential for turning cultural products into financial capital – in form of economic empowerment through sustainable development. In doing so, it leans on the 2005 *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*, which will be subject of my analysis in chapter 6.

The social world of tourism, too, approaches the boundary object from a clearly economic perspective. It is a means for visitors to ‘remember their Ugandan experience’ which is associated with safari tours, untouched nature, and the imagination of local ethnic groups living in sync with nature. Consequently, most paintings for sale at crafts markets or in souvenir shops sell stories about ‘traditional’ and untouched rural life. The boundary objects and their display are meant to sell emotions linked to a unique cultural experience engrained into a souvenir. “[T]he more nodes of heritage that can be tastefully invested in the souvenir by the maker, and recognized by the consumer, the better” (Hume, 2013:2-3). This process, according to Hume, positions artists and their products somewhere between art history and anthropology. This is true for the negotiations of the boundary object artistic handicraft objects as well, especially in the art world. At times hand-crafted artefacts are considered indigenous art forms lacking recognition in the art discourse. In my research situation, this debate is important both for the sub-world of art academia and in the sub-world of art-activists. My empirical material does not allow me to draw any conclusions whether, and to which extent, this process includes handicraft artists and artisans, too.

Importantly, in this previous chapter I not only present the conceptualizations of the boundary objects (and the discursive constructions of the artists and artisans who make them) by international or internationalized social worlds but also briefly introduce some of the positions taken by the minoritized social world of independent handicraft groups. I further address the positions of one association that brings together various social worlds and is simultaneously involved with reaffirming *and* deconstructing prevailing conceptualizations of the boundary object. The

NACCAU applies and reproduces some of the major positions by international social worlds as a strategy for marketing itself and its work – and ultimately also as a strategy for survival. At the same time, it seeks to create support networks, for instance through joining the UTA, which led towards a successful application for a project grant determined to strengthen the marketing of East African crafts. The project hence reinforces a particular agenda with regard to the boundary object in particular and ‘sustainable development’ in general, thereby pushing other conceptualizations that exist within the association further into the periphery. Some argue that associations operating under western-style NGO structures in former colonized countries are often co-opted by colonial continuities and dependencies (Kasfir, 2017; Kleibl, 2021; Obadare, 2014) – a notion that is supported in part by the findings in this chapter. Kleibl (2021) finds that social actors outside the norms of formalized associations are frequently excluded in dominant conceptualizations of development which may lead towards development ideas, projects, and funds disregarding local realities, visions, and imaginaries (Musila, 2018).

The analysis of the positions taken by the social worlds in my research situation led towards the finding of three major positions taken among the minoritized social world of handicraft groups that hardly appeared elsewhere in the empirical data. Taking into consideration that my empirical material from encounters with the independently organized groups, as different as they may be, was brief and remained short due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, these findings are even more relevant, as the information was shared openly in a first conversation. They provoke further questions regarding all the things that remained unsaid because of time, the power dynamics at play in our encounters (see also chapters 4.2 and 4.5).

Ultimately, it is especially the strategies of formalized and informal socio-artistic groups and collective actors I met, in spite of and with the particular situated conditions, that guided my research and became the focus of my study. Therefore, in the next chapters I first follow the NACCAU and then selected artistic handicraft groups as they maneuver through, find meaning in, and reproduce narrations – but who also creatively engage in shaping society and art according to their needs and aesthetic preferences.