in the capitalist social formation" (ibid: 275), while the latter is based on values that include individual rights of independence, equality, and towards owning property. Marxism forwarded a vocabulary for vocalizing economic inequality and the struggle against it. Because of its vocabulary, it became an influential concept in national liberation movements in the Global South and the fight of the *periphery* against the *center* (Kohn and McBride, 2011). However, its groundedness in the belief of historical progress and its omittance of the consideration of race limited the impact and significance. In consequence, civil society vocabulary widely disappeared until development actors (re-)discovered it and its potential for the democratization of post-colonial African nation states in the 1980s (Ehrenberg, 2011; Obadare, 2011; 2014; Hammet and Jackson, 2018; Kansiime, 2019).

Summary

In this chapter I demonstrate how the reflections regarding some important meanings associated with civil society, strengths, and weaknesses resonated with the socio-political developments they referred to. As such it becomes apparent why a mere integration of those notions into the development and democratization efforts in contemporary particularities, especially in countries of the Global South remain unsituated. The conceptualizations respond rather specifically to the conditions under which they prevail(ed), and thus become inapplicable when reapplied elsewhere. In addition, they largely ignore racial and/or cultural particularities of the (post-)colonial era at best, and justify colonial crimes at worst. In this research project, I conceptualize civil society with Hickey (2005) and Neil Webster and Lars Engberg-Pedersen (2002) as political space embedded in power relations and complex relations that are formed by historical, structural, and discursive particularities. Therefore, on what follows, I will elaborate on some of the particularities of Uganda. In doing so, I draw on empirical findings as well as on more theory-oriented publications.

3.3 Contemporary Debates about Civil Society in Uganda

In Uganda, the 1980s were overshadowed by the heritage of Idi Amin's "reign of terror [, which had] triggered and sustained the flight of many key leaders of CSOs, particularly those that challenged the state [which] resulted in a regression of CSOs' role in shaping the governance and development trajectory" (Mugisha et al., 2019: 1). When Yoweri Museveni took over power (from Milton Obote) in 1986, he turned towards the international community in search for support for the rebuilding of the country. His government submitted to structural adjustment reforms (SAPs) and poverty eradication plans (PEAPs) which was well in – albeit challenged – line with the economic liberalization paradigm in development at the time (ibid). Non-gov-

ernmental organizations (NGOs) became agents in "closing the gap in service provision" (ibid: 1). In the process, they "increasingly compensat[ed] for inadequate government provision in such sectors as social welfare, education, or health" (Cannon, 1996: 262). Service delivery dedicated to the eradication of poverty became the predominant value of CSOs over "advocacy work or holding Government [sic] and private corporations accountable" (DENIVA, 2006: 3; Omona and Mukuye, 2013). Rather than opposing government, many CSOs developed "the desire […] to complement the work of Government [sic] […], either because it corresponds to their worldview and social make-up or because they find a measure of benefit in this positioning, such as contracts for service delivery work" (DENIVA, 2006: 4).

In addition to their focus on service provision, the financial structure of most NGOs keeps them dependent on (foreign) donors (Cannon, 1996; Mugisha et al., 2019). In consequence, NGOs in Uganda have little impact in mobilizing citizen participation (King, 2015; Mugisha et al., 2019) and in promoting socio-political change (Isgren, 2018). This leads to a common assumption that civil society in Africa in general, and in Uganda in particular, is *weak* or *thin* (e.g., Carbone, 2005; Hutchful, 1995; Kasfir, 1998b; 2017; Omona and Mukuye, 2013; Smidt, 2018).

The question of mobilization capacities of NGOs has received additional urgence in 2018, when the Ugandan government withdrew more than 12.000 licenses of the hitherto 14.207 registered NGOs in the country (Mwesigwa, 2019). Especially small, local NGOs were affected by a law which had been passed in 2016 and tightened the operational and legal rules for NGOs. This phenomenon is understood as a governmental strategy to limit the space for civic activism. It is also referred to as 'shrinking civic space' or 'shrinking spaces' for society structures, especially for NGO-based actors (Anheier et al., 2019; Smidt, 2018). Indeed, it adds urgence to the question of civic action and political articulation beyond the realm of NGOs.

The criticism of the narrow and foreign-grounded notion of civil society dominating the discourse in Africa is almost as old as the hopes associated with democratization through NGO-ization (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Ekeh, 1992; Mamdani, 1995; Fowler, 2012; Hutchful, 1995; Kasfir, 1998a). In Uganda, especially the 1990s and early 2000s saw an immense influx of registered NGOs from less than 2000 in the late 1980s to 12.5000 in 2013 (Hammet and Jackson, 2018), with the vast majority providing services and basic welfare. With NGO-ization, it has been argued, "[organization] members received charity rather than rights" (Isgren, 2018: 182). While the analysis of NGOs and CSOs provide relevant insights to how they operate, whom they account to (Kontinen and Ndidde, 2023), and how their relationships evolve vis-à-vis the government (Springman 2020; 2022), such approaches are simultaneously criticized as insufficient for the analysis of civil society, as they exclude most "familiar African organisations and social movements" (Kasfir, 1998b: 2).

Building on Peter Ekeh's concept of two publics in Africa (1975), he argues for the consideration of the primordial public realm in civil society, where he locates most public, associational life to occur. Kasfir argues for a need to widen the understandings of civil society and to empirically ground them in the realities of the African postcolony. Thus, the lessons taken from the previous chapters which include the need to (1) deconstruct conventional notions of civil society as culturally bound to the socio-political and historical situatedness of their origins. Deconstruction, however, is not an end to itself, but a necessary step towards the (2) establishment of situated concepts of civil society, based on the particularities of the local, historical, socio-economic, and cultural situations.

Grounding Civil Society in Local Histories

In what follows, I demonstrate why I consider both processes, the deconstruction and the locally grounded (re-)construction of analytical and theoretical frameworks, as essential for an understanding of civil society that addresses the realities in post-colonial Uganda beyond imaginations and ideals. In doing so, I present two alternative approaches to situating civil society into Ugandan political history. I show how the approach taken influences the perception of civil society as either foreign or as indigenous and discuss its consequences for the analysis of contemporary civil society and its implications for practice. For, as Stephen Orvis (2001) reminds:

> To provide a more realistic analysis [of civil society], we must focus on the broad array of collective activity and norms, whether 'democratic' or not, that constitute actual existing African civil society. This approach leads to an analysis of patron-client networks, ethnic associations, and some 'traditional' authorities as part of civil society, demonstrating that African civil society is more rooted in and representative of African society as a whole than the pessimists have admitted, but also less internally democratic and less likely to support liberal democracy than the optimists assert. (Orvis, 2001: 17)

Civil Society as an Imported Concept During Colonial Rule

In 2019, the German Konrad Adenauer Foundation[2] financially supported a research project of the *Center for Development Alternatives* (Kampala). The research project, exe-

2 The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is an internationally active political foundation with close political affiliations to with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a conservative political party in Germany. It was founded in 1954 and named after West Germany's first chancellor Konrad Adenauer. It is mostly financed through German public funds (meaning taxes), and, according to its website, works to promote "liberal democracy and a social market economy, […] peace and freedom, transatlantic relations and European unification" (KAS, 2023: n.p.).

cuted by two of the center's co-directors Michael Mugisha and Yusuf Kiranda jointly with Michael Mbate, who is a researcher at ODI (an international think tank), seeks to broaden the understanding of the civil society ecosystem in Uganda. Ultimately, the study aims to "support the development of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Uganda as a third pillar of inclusive development" (Mugisha et al., 2019: 2).

The authors conceptualize civil society as "an organised structure that has the core objective of enhancing collective action to improve engagement with the government as a means of influencing and driving inclusive development" (ibid: 9). In doing so, they build on mainstream assumptions about civil society as occupying a space outside state and family. They further assume that the aim of civil society is always inclusive development, which is achieved in negotiation with government. As such, this concept reflects a Tocquevillian understanding of a civil society of free and voluntary associations as discussed in the previous chapter. Associations are free in the sense that they are not part of the government, and voluntary insofar as participation in civil society occurs out of the personal desire to push forward a particular (political) interest. It further understands CSOs as "play[ing] a key role in promoting inclusive social, economic and political development by acting as alternatives to a state apparatus" (ibid: 11). In this assumption, then, civil society becomes the motor to sustainable and inclusive development, which ensures the civic participation and simultaneously controls or even replaces governmental power.

For example, the authors find that "the historical foundation of any civil society in Uganda is traceable to the colonial period, mainly through the work of trade unions, youth organisations, women's organisations and ethnic associations" (Mugisha et al., 2019: 16). They then proceed to focus on trade unions exclusively, a concept that had been introduced by the British colonial government in the 1930s. According to the authors, the colonial policy "encourage[ed] the development of viable trade unions" (ibid: 16), but the interest in becoming a member remained low. In Mugisha et al.'s historical reconstructions, trade unions and, interlinked, civil society remain theoretical concepts of the west which were introduced to the Ugandan Protectorate through its colonial government. It rests on the idea that civil society needs the state in form of a government.

Civil society, as conceptualized by Mugisha and colleagues, causally links the origins of civil society in Uganda with British colonial rule. Consequently, their analysis of contemporary civil society remains limited to those organizational conceptually compatible with predetermined parameters criticized of falling short to grasp the empirical complexities of current realities (Kasfir, 2017; 1998b; Isgren, 2018). While Mugisha, Kiranda and Mbate do criticize the NGO-ization and economization of civil society during the 1990s, their conclusions remain within the realm of associational civil society that more critical voices, such as Kasfir (2017; 1998b), Kleibl (2021), Obadare (2011; 2014), Orvis (2011) or Tripp (1998; 2000), consider incomplete at best, and, more often, as irrelevant.

Grounding Civil Society in Local Political History. The Bataka Movement

However, by looking beyond colonial governance and analyzing Ugandan political history beyond colonial structures, my attention was quickly drawn to the *grandfathers and grandsons* of the *Bataka Movement* (Summers, 2005). I have already introduced the *Bataka Movement*[3] in Buganda as one of the more influential anti-colonial movements in late colonial Uganda (see also chapter 2.3.1). It was established in 1921, and according to historian Richard J. Reid, it was the "first recognisable political movement in Uganda in the colonial era" (Reid, 2017: 304). Its objectives were multifold and changed over the course of time into the anti-colonial movement I previously referred to. However, during its initial years, it

> represented, on one level, the latest stage in a long history as resistance to overmighty monarchy and the over-privileged establishment which surrounded it. Now, the clan, such a critical element in the early political and social construction of the Buganda kingdom, became emblematic of a lost glorious past, a moral as well as political order rooted in the rightful access to ancestral land which had been demolished by the Protestant oligarchy's [meaning the Kabaka] with the British. (ibid: 304)

Before the *Bataka* began to identify as *grandfathers and grandsons*, their major concern was to defend their lands against the immense power of Buganda's chiefs. The *Bataka* were clan chefs and as such they considered themselves the righteous landowners of Buganda. Under the *1900 Buganda Agreement,* however, they were deprived of the land their ancestors had settled on since the sixteenth century (Peterson, 2012). Not only did the *1900 Buganda Agreement* restructure power by favoring converted Buganda's chiefs over the *Bataka* and providing them with fertile lands previously owned by the *Bataka*. In addition, "[o]n their productive gardens – called *butaka* – farmers [here meaning the *Bataka*] buried their ancestors, establishing a lineal claim to the long-lived banana trees" (ibid: 86). For the *Bataka* the case was clear: they were the only rightful owners of *butaka* and the converted chiefs had taken it away from them by means of co-option with the British through the *1900 Buganda Agreement.*

In order to regain what they considered rightfully theirs, two clan leaders, Joswa Kate and Jemusi Miti, founded an organization they called the *Bataka Federation* (Peterson, 2012). In the following years they politicized religion: since the powerful chiefs were members of the Protestant Anglican church, the *Bataka* promoted Catholicism to be the "true and real church that has stood loyally and uprightly up to date" (Reuben Spartas to Archbishop of Canterbury on September 26th, 1936, as cited

3 The literature refers to the *Bataka Movement* also as association and/or party (Peterson, 2012; Summers, 2005) For the purposes of clarity, I will use the term movement only.

in Peterson 2012: 86). They politicized history as well: by claiming to be the founders of Ganda polity, and by writing about Buganda's history from their perspective, they established what Antonio Gramsci referred to as counter-hegemony: resistance to the social and political order the ruling classes had established with the aim to reform or replace it (Buttigieg, 1995).

By the 1940s, the *Bataka Movement* had grown into an anti-colonial movement, whereby *grandfathers and grandsons* opposed Buganda's chiefs, its *Kabaka,* and the British colonial government (Reid, 2017). Their self-understanding allowed for the members of the movement to address corruption and immorality, and to break with customary social structures they did not consider adequate anymore (Peterson, 2012).

While the *Bataka Movement* began as an ethnic movement, by the 1940s its objectives had moved far beyond the issues of the *Bataka* clan heads. The party members specifically invited members of the Indian minority in Uganda to its meetings, as well as African clergy and white scholars from Makerere College (ibid). In London, they rallied against the abuse of Mau Mau hostages. They became involved with diplomatic work, demonstrating "that commoners – and Africans more generally – could play a part in the theater of international politics" (ibid: 91). They wore barkcloth to identify themselves as belonging to the *Bataka* until it was prohibited (Nakazibwe, 2005) and established a vision of life beyond British colonial rule in Uganda.

Ethnicity, Gender, and Faith – Implications for Contemporary Notions of Empirically Grounded Civil Society in Uganda

The two briefly presented case studies on the history of Ugandan civil society show how theoretical concepts applied determine the (empirical) findings and conclusions drawn. Mugisha et al. (2019) conceptualize civil society within the realm of free, parochial organizations that are supposed to be democratic within and mobilize citizens for joint action to bring about socio-political change. However, precisely because frequently they are not internally democratic, fail to mobilize and bind citizens to their causes, and have very limited impact on policy making, their effectiveness remains heavily constrained (Mugisha et al., 2019).

If, however, as Kasfir (2017; 1998b) requests, civil society is empirically conceptualized and takes ethnic activity and non-formalized organizations as the departure point of its theoretical framework, scholars and practitioners alike can detach themselves from the idealized NGO-concept that cannot live up to its expectations. It creates a different image of civil society. One which Stephen Orvis considers "more rooted in and representative of African society as a whole […], but also less internally democratic and less likely to support liberal democracy" (Orvis, 2011: 17) as politicians, development workers and scholars might have hoped for.

Alongside Nelson Kasfir (2017) and Derek Peterson (2012), who both studied ethnic associations and movements in civil society in Uganda (or rather in Buganda), Sophie King, who studied civic engagement among farmers in rural areas (2015), too, concludes that

> in contexts like Uganda, 'working with the grain' of existing agency for collective action, on the basis of shared identity for example (whether clan, gender or livelihood-based), may be a more effective approach than donor-driven strategies aimed at fostering collaboration among heterogenous communities on the basis of residence alone. (King, 2015: 754)

She further observes that associational activity can merge out of a shared experience of marginalization. As such, it is frequently members from savings and production groups that establish well-functioning systems of accountability and representation and succeeding begin to lobby more actively in support of their political interests.

In particularly focusing on gender in civil society dynamics, Aili Mari Tripp (2000; 1998) further argues for more inclusive concepts of the political to "fully appreciate the importance of struggles in which the protagonists are members of non-dominant sectors of society" (1998: 84). In feminist scholarship, the dichotomy between the 'public' and the 'private' – which prevails in most notions of civil society – is considered highly problematic (Eto, 2012). For many women, the public-private division remains artificial and at odds with their lived realities. Tripp elaborates: "For example, family relations that prevent women from participating in associations and in politics have repercussions for the broader polity. Even when women engage in politics, they may face discrimination" (Tripp, 1998: 84). If we truly aim to empirically understand civil society, she argues, we need to pay particular attention to those seemingly apolitical and 'unimportant' organizations. Because it is here, on a local, micro level, where women challenge structures and formulate – verbally or practically – their own narratives. The public spaces where women, especially in conservative, patriarchal communities, are allowed to participate fully are limited. Because artistic handicraft production is considered – especially in the areas of wickerwork and jewelry production – a female activity, joining an (artistic) handicraft group has become one of the avenues women use to participate fully and visibly in the public realm (Kasozi, 2019; Tripp, 1998).

Members of the *Bataka Movement* purposefully instrumentalized religion in their establishment of a counter-hegemony against the British colonialists and their local allies, Buganda's chiefs (Peterson, 2012). One of the *Bataka* leaders, Reuben Spartas Mukasa was also the founder of the *African Hellenic Catholic Orthodox Church*[4]. He

4 Reuben Spartas Mukasa began to study church history in the 1910s. Quickly, he sought to establish what he considered the "true and real church" (Reuben Spartas in correspondence

sought to establish (Orthodox) Catholicism over Anglican Protestantism. For him it was the *only true and real* Christian faith (ibid). The emphasis on Catholicism as the only real Christian faith also served as an allegory and self-positioned the *Bataka* as bearers of the true faith alongside their being the true landowners of Buganda.

In British colonial Uganda, the Catholic Church was politically important outside the *Bataka Movement* as well. Carol Summers notes that during the early 20th century, "Ugandans made Christianity their own" (Summers, 2009: 60). By the 1930s, Catholics had formed several political associations, such as the *Catholic Teacher's Association* or the *Catholic Action* organization (ibid). Throughout the colonial and well into the post-colonial era, the relationship between Christian churches and politics remained interlinked and at times even foundational in the establishment of political parties, especially the Democratic Party (DP). This "rather unusual phenomenon in African politics" (Kassimir, 1998: 61), thereby meaning churches being foundational for the establishment and development of political parties, has indeed impacted Uganda's political history throughout the past century.

Post-colonial scholarship on civil society largely agrees that a more nuanced analytical framework is to also consider religious organizations (e.g., Kamruzzaman, 2019; Kasfir, 2017; 2019; Kassimir, 1998; Obadare, 2014), but Ronald Kassimir (1998) reminds that it is not only the *a priori* assumption of churches' (and other religious organizations') potential for citizen mobilization which are of relevance, but also that many church officials have had and continue to have close ties into the political government. For Kassimir, *a priori* assumptions define civil society organizations according to categories frequently taken from western theorization. Those consider assumed foci of the organizational capacities of religious organizations on the ground, including service provision and development projects (ibid). Kassimir further notes how most mobilization of church officials occurs outside of official church activities (with the exception of Pentecostal churches, but that is a topic in and for itself), and how church officials, in part because of their multiple roles, "have played a strikingly ambiguous role in Ugandan civil society" (ibid: 60), for instance when they opposed a new tax law only because it also affected the taxation of foreign donations. He thus stretches the need to "first view organizations through the lens of social power to grasp their political influence, rather than an *a priori* determination to place them under the rubric of civil society" (ibid: 76). Kassimir's analysis brings two issues to the foreground: (1) it highlights the agency and importance of

with Archbishop of Canterbury, 26th of September 1936, as cited in Peterson 2012: 86). However, because he believed that the African Orthodox Church led by bishop David William Alexander was not *real and true* in its worship practices and interpretations, he turned towards the Greek Orthodox Church instead, and sent three of his students to Alexandria to study Greek and theology (Peterson, 2012).

individual people, their shifting roles and engagements with multiple bodies, and (2) the importance of social power relations in civil society.

Summary

This chapter situates the discourse on theoretical and analytical frameworks of civil society in Uganda. In doing so, it zooms in on two alternative approaches to conceptualize the history of Ugandan civil society. The two examples provided demonstrate how the historical accounts shape contemporary understandings that, depending on whether they apply more normative or rather empirically grounded frameworks, come to diametrically opposed conclusions about the scope, the strength as well as the impact of civil society.

In the second part of the chapter, I then focus on the second approach by specifically discussing available critical literature that reconstructs Ugandan civil society from an abductive and empirical perspective. Much of the presented literature addresses – although at times implicitly – power imbalances and hegemonic structures which impact and limit the articulation possibilities of certain groups in public and political debates. At times, members of those groups found production-based formalized or informal associations and gain a voice in part through the material agency of their production. At other times, actors like the Catholic church which are generally known to be a rather powerful actor with interest in maintaining the social order, become allies in formulating counter narratives and providing a stage for collective action.

The examples provided clearly demonstrate the importance of not applying *a priori* ideas to the empirical situation, but to carefully analyze the mediums, institutions and processes of coercion, the local actors, and discourses, including hegemonic structures, instead. It further introduces the civil society perspective taken in this research project – whereby civil society is roughly defined as political space embedded in complex power relations formed by historical, structural, and discursive particularities. In this understanding of civil society, it can promote progressive ideas. However, it can also promote fundamentalist ideals or anti-democratic notions.

I close this chapter with a quote from Nelson Kasfir, whose work has been invaluable for my understandings of situated civil society dynamics in Uganda:

> Perhaps the most contention in the civil society literature is that civil society is a significant, possibly essential, factor in achieving and consolidating democracy. […] I suggest that proponents of the conventional view have greatly over-stated the strength of this relationship – both in how they think it should work and in how it would work if civil society organisations did what they want them to do. Scholars and donors import into Africa their notion of how civil society works in Western

> 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 21st 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.