Chapter 8: Conclusions

Art and its Relational Dimensions in Grounded Conceptualizations of Civil Society

So, at the end of it all, what is to conclude?

Upon embarking on this research trajectory, I wanted to understand empirically how art could be a catalyst for social change and development as it is proclaimed in practice as well as in emergent literature (Clammer, 2015; Stupples, 2011; Stupples & Teaiwwa, 2017). My initial aim was to understand in order to improve artistically oriented development practice, to learn about the meeting grounds of art, civil society, and development. However, early insights from the literature study and explorative interviews quickly lured me to take a more critical, postcolonial perspective. Instead of focusing on how the practice could be improved based on empirical findings, I now began to question the prevailing notions of appropriating artistic practices in favor of alleged sustainable economic development altogether. In addition, the postcolonial perspective taken meant to critically assess "this word 'art'" (Wolukau-Wanambwa, 2019: 27) and its conceptional and analytical underpinnings. The terminology in African languages that conceptualize art and design are frequently related to terms that evolve around "knowing", "imagination", 'unwrapping of (encoded) knowledge", or "imitation" (Preston Blier, 2022: 91). The art objects and artefacts "merge a range of values – among these, aesthetic choices, need (functionality), and both individual and social identity" (ibid: 87). In addition, I learned that the term 'art' was not always favored, because it could indicate that cultural practices ceased to be vital and relevant and became to be culturally detached and symbolically insignificant (Nannyonga-Tamusuuza, 2014).

The analysis of art practices and the symbolic meanings of art objects, I began to understand, is "territorially mined" (my notes from research workshop with Andreas Wernet, 25/06/2021) in the contemporary Ugandan realities. Having been sensitized for Anglo-European dominance in theorization and practice, I now wanted to reconstruct the impact of those very western concepts of development on the empowerment and disempowerment of the artistic potential and the definition of art in postcolonial Uganda.

What is more, many actors involved with the promotion of art as well as the production of arts and artistic handicrafts, were NGOs, whose approaches of 'help for self-help' by-and-large follow ideas of neo-liberal theory considered to be 'culturally appropriate' because of the indigeneity of the objects of production. In the current scientific and practice discourses, NGOs are associated as important civil society actors and believed to bear great potential for democratization (e.g., Edwards, 2011; Kamruzzaman, 2019). Art, and especially art objects marked as indigenous, cultural, and ethnical, was thus negotiated by actors whose primary concern is the promotion of democracy through economic development. As such, I understood that the associated meanings of the art objects are a constant negotiation process shaped by prevailing power-asymmetries, and deeply political. The question what and when is art is negotiated here, and in addition questions of history (writing), owner- and authorship, and sovereignty. From my perspective, art production and art objects both were object as well as subject in civil society, if civil society is considered as the space of negotiating power through the exercise of hegemony, consent, and the development of counter-hegemony (Buttigieg, 1995; Forgacs, 2000; Gramsci, 2015, 2011 [1992]; see also chapter 3.2).

Consequently, I moved away from asking about causal relationships between colonialism and its heritages upon understandings of art-sites prevailing today, and instead turned towards focusing on the situatedness of art production, specifically, on artistic handicraft production. Artistic handicraft objects, their meanings, and the agency of artisans, I found, are frequently negotiated within the discursive realms of development and among several collective actors. They include NGO-actors commonly associated as civil society, but significantly move beyond a narrow notion of civil society as the space of free and voluntary associations (Edwards, 2011a; Ehrenberg, 2011; Woldring, 1998).

The findings I presented in this dissertation, however, move beyond my original interest in reconstructing how the artistic potential in Uganda and definition of art are negotiated in civil society. Rather, they indicate that a conceptualization of civil society empirically grounded in the local particularities should consider sites of artistic handicraft production also *as* civil society, and especially artisans organized in formalized and informal co-working groups as civil society actors.

The answer to my main research question, **how is contemporary artistic handicraft production situated in Ugandan civil society?**, in brief, is that workshops are important sites of civil society in an empirically conceptualized notion thereof. Yet, both sites and artists and artisans who move and operate here remain frequently overseen and hence are minoritized by international(ized) and foreign actors alike. The minoritization leads towards handicraft artists, their knowledges, and perspectives to remain overheard in the dominant discourses in the research situation. Actors such as the NACCAU, who might have cultural, verbal, and social access to those

positions cannot fulfil intermediate positions because they are in part dependent on foreign allies and hence submit to their agendas.

Yet, as Pinther (2022) articulated, considering artefacts and art objects exclusively through the lenses of colonial injustices (and neo-colonial exploitations) cannot do justice to the functions, meanings, and agency of historical as well as contemporary handicraft art (Pinther mainly focuses on historical art pieces that have become subject to restitution and provenance debates, but I find her observations highly relevant here as well). Especially when considering the perspectives of the artisans who make them, artistic handicraft objects cannot be limited to being mere objects of ongoing (neo-)colonial injustices or interests. Nor are they simply artefacts on the border between anthropology and art history whose meanings are negotiated between the purchasing tourist and the producing artisan, as Hume (2013) argues. For the handicraft artisans I met with, craft-making can be a demonstration of self-determination and of conviviality, of community leadership and cultural responsibility, of creating visibility, or of 'me-time', but also as a means to make a living. In my interviews, the value of artefacts was frequently associated with their usability in people's homesteads. In addition, pictorial and material references to regions, customs, and purposes inform the form and composition of the products.

The products can position handicraft groups as bearers of cultural knowledge. Among the *imbalu* initiation uniform designers, the knowledge of making uniforms is linked with the responsibility of ensuring a successful rite of passage into adulthood of teenage boys. The uniforms are a visible manifestation of this knowledge and justify the positionality of their designers as important members of the community who hold the right to articulate and promote (assumed) communal interests.

The women wickerwork group from Supa around Suzan and Isaiah's hat-maker group focus on self-determination and conviviality. Through their work they render themselves visible in their communities. While their co-working space may be an important site of production and thus a site of economic interests, it also, and importantly, creates a space to meet and share even in the absence of raw material (group conversation with hat-maker collective from Ishibira, 27/02/2020). Furthermore, working together and working in public may negotiate gender roles whereby the similarities in form, material, and design emphasizes the importance of advancing together and mutual learning of the women who are determined to demonstrate that they are not idle women (group conversation with women-wickerwork group from Supa, 28/02/2020). Unlike the initiation uniform designers, who explicitly articulate their socio-political positions, the members of the wickerwork group express themselves primarily through their actions. Though not articulated as a political claim, their emphasis on conviviality – through togetherness, sharing, and mutual learning – opposes many notions rendered important among most collective actors in the research situation.

Artistic handicraft production facilitates the organization of people in groups who share a common (set of) interest(s) which manifests in the objects they create. If civil society is understood as the arena of the execution of hegemony but also as the site of formation of counter-hegemony or "cultural preparation" (Buttigieg, 1995: 14), then formalized and loosely organized artistic handicraft groups are important yet minoritized actors in civil society. Civil society, here, means combining economic interests with creative work and with the interest of being visible and perceived as agentic and self-determined. It also combines economic interests with a "generational heritage spirit" (Abdul Malukhu, group elder, group conversation with members of the *Imbalu* Initiation ceremony costume designers from Bubyangu, 27/02/2020: 526), a cultural responsibility among the *Bagisu* (Were, 1982). The generational responsibility allows them to position themselves as important leaders who have the right to determine how their material culture which manifests, among others, in the uniforms, can be altered and how. This does not mean, however, that all positions promoted by the group members enhance or strengthen democratic notions or that circumcision rituals or the extensive haunt of an endangered animal should not be critically addressed. Quite the contrary appears to be the case. For, taken together, the previous elaborations exemplify the complex situatedness of artistic handicraft production in civil society, as it includes cultural, aesthetic, social, and economic dimensions.

Actors, Discourses, and Agency

However, to fully grasp their situatedness, it is not sufficient to locate the sites and spaces of production in the wider arena of artistic and cultural practices. Instead, it is pivotal to return to the wider web of relations between and among actors, the co-constitutive discourses as well as to the artefacts themselves. The sub-questions I introduced in chapter 1.2 each focus on one aspect of the situatedness. Taken together, they provide differentiated and elaborated answers to the question of the situatedness of handicraft production in civil society. They are:

- 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?

In what follows, I will address every question separately, before I draw some overall conclusions and implications for the scientific discourse on the situatedness of artistic handicraft production in civil society.

Meeting Grounds of Civil Society and Artistic Handicrafts (Production)

- Who are the collective actors and social worlds who construct and negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft production and products in Ugandan civil society?

Chapter 5 introduces the collective actors, referred to as social worlds, who are, based on the findings of this study, most relevant in the contemporary negotiations regarding the meaning of artistic handicraft production and products. In addition, chapter 2 takes a historical perspective and considers how artistic handicraft products were conceptualized, beginning with Margaret Trowell's innovative and simultaneously ambivalent understandings of craft as aesthetically, symbolically, and culturally relevant art objects on the one hand, and as a strategy for teaching Ugandans European manners and values as well as a stimulus to enhance market activity and economic development on the other hand (Trowell, 1937; 1957; 1966). While any attempts to make causal connections between Trowell's understandings with contemporary understandings should be avoided for the lack of empirical references and the superficiality of seemingly mono-causal relations, her work and her writings continue to remain relevant for contemporary art education at Makerere University and the teaching staff. This is particularly true in terms of the conceptualization of certain artistic handicraft objects as indigenous art, and even more so regarding the question of archive. For it was Margaret Trowell who documented techniques and design patterns, and who collected and archived artefacts that were frequently regarded as ahistorical everyday objects at the time (Trowell, 1966).

Although Trowell did not emphasize the teaching of artistic handicraft techniques at the Makerere art school, it was her successor Cecil Todd who finally favored teaching art according to western standards, inclusive of color theory, drawing, painting, and sculpting techniques as well as world art history (Kyeyune, 2003). Indigenous art, in the form of handicraft objects made from locally available materials, and their design patterns disappeared from the Makerere art school.

At the same time, the first prime minister of independent Uganda, Milton Obote, promoted handicraft production through the *Uganda Crafts Emporium*. For the first time, artistic handicrafts were widely promoted as an income-generating activity, particularly for women (Miller, 1975). In addition, the idea of the *Uganda Crafts Emporium* sought to enhance a common Ugandan national identity founded

upon the material culture of its ethnic groups (ibid). This notion was not unique to Uganda but practiced, for example, in newly independent Ghana as well (Hess and Quarcoopome, 2006). The idea of visually creating a national identity by merging components of material culture remains relevant for some scholars and practitioners, as the roundtable discussion on 'Art in Intl. Development' (27/02/2019) showed.

Historically, government actors (the British colonial government and later the Ugandan national government) and actors of the art education sub-world were important collective actors who negotiated the meanings associated with artistic handicraft production and products. However, also socio-political movements such as the *Bataka Union* shaped the meanings of certain objects negotiated within the craft-realm, alongside with their roles and functions at sites of worship such as at the *Royal Kasubi Tombs* or during *kwanjula* or *imbalu* ceremonies.

From a historical perspective, then, and at least since the colonial era, artistic handicraft production and handicraft objects in Uganda were used to negotiate hegemony and consent, and subject of questions regarding identity, development, and education.

In the contemporary debates, notions of sustainable development through economic empowerment have become central. Most social worlds in the arena of the cultural crafts industry in civil society move around this meta-discourse which was established and heavily promoted by major development actors and their agendas since the 1990s (see also chapter 3.2). In addition, the 2005 *UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* promotes the Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) as motor of development and as a pivotal ally for the protection of culturally and ethnically marked artistic expressions (De Beukelaer and Vlassis, 2020; Labadi, 2017, 2020a). The UNESCO has emerged as an important actor that has established a vocabulary for framing handicraft products in the heritage realm and industry. Currently, collective actors such as organizations, groups, and individuals in the social world of international NGOs frame artistic handicraft products by combining the notions of economic development with the protection of cultural heritage and eco-sustainability. In the art-activists sub-world, economic gains, too, are considered important. While socially-engaged artists such as Sanaa Gateja adapted historically and culturally relevant art materials such as glass beads with contemporary materials and techniques resulting in new products such as rolled paper beads which can be manufactured locally and then turned into art (Kasozi, 2019), artists like Fred Mutebi emphasize the relevance of protecting the historical knowledge of making barkcloth beyond economic interests (Siegenthaler, 2019). Lastly, Fred Batale, founder of Disability Art, links economic development with raising awareness about people living with disabilities in Uganda (Castellano, 2018).

Here, the use of artistic handicraft methods is chosen because of the affiliation of artistic handicraft objects to the primordial structures, techniques, and training methods interlinked with the social functions and practical uses for the objects made. While socially-engaged artists like Sanaa Gateja, Fred Mutebi, or Acaye Kerunen are discussed and receive recognition in the art world, their work remains surprisingly overlooked and disregarded in other, development-focused social worlds. In the arena of the cultural crafts industry in civil society, this form of artistic co-production of artisans working in groups and for artists who further manipulate their products into installations, fashion designs, or painting that visibilize handicraft products in exhibitions and biennales is considered neither as socially engaged art co-creation nor for its potential for homegrown development (see also, Okereke and Agupusi, 2015).

In recent years, tourism actors increasingly have begun to tap into the arena of the cultural crafts industry in civil society. Handicraft objects here are framed as souvenir art. They are ethnically marked and disseminated as representatives of authentic local material culture (see also, Hume, 2013). At the intersection between the tourism world and social world of international NGOs, economic empowerment is particularly emphasized upon, framing handicraft objects as authentic cultural products that 'do good' in terms of changing lives of people classified as vulnerable: women, children, refugees, or people with disabilities.

The hegemonic meta-discourse of economic empowerment appears to dominate the research situation insofar that countering positions become visible primarily at the minoritized sites or, with bell hooks, at the margins – the sole space she finds it possible to articulate without speaking in the language of the oppressors (hooks, 1989). At the NACCAU for example, this articulation occurs primarily in the association's inward orientation (see also chapters 6.2 and 6.4). Besides, it primarily occurs outside the framework of mainstream civil society, at the *Royal Kasubi Tombs* for example (Muwanga Senoga, 2021), around ceremonies and rituals (see also chapter 7.3), or at production sites of independently organized handicraft groups.

Their perspectives and associated meanings of artistic handicraft production too often remain unseen among the major social worlds in the situation of inquiry, because they are considered as beneficiaries rather than as fully agentic actors. In consequence, their perspectives on artistic handicraft production are only considered partially relevant in the empirical situation. Indeed, those perspectives include notions of economic growth. Importantly, though, their perspectives derive meaning not only and not necessarily primarily through selling their products, but also as practices capable of organizing community and identity within, fostering conviviality, or as enhancing political subjectivity.

Artisans value the durability of synthetic raw materials over the logic of biodegradability for bags and baskets. In addition, the handicraft artists I met prefer colors and symbols associated with the function of the artefact – for *imbalu*

that could mean colorful tinsel decorations on the hat, many colorful (plastic) beads around the neck and the fur of the Colobus monkey that highlight the dancing of the candidate. Tinsel makes the boy 'look smart' (conversation with *imbalu* ritual costume designers' group, 26/02/2020), the beads are a symbolic cultural reference although imported and made from plastic, the bells around his thighs and ankles witness of the bravery of the candidates.

For *kwanjula* baskets this could mean the use of wrapping paper in glossy white, gold, and rosé to express the fusion of a white wedding (and the social status associated with it) and the local wedding ceremony (Erlank, 2014). Both emphasize the self-determination and aesthetic visions of the designing artists and exemplify some of the major difference between the aesthetic references of souvenir products vis-à-vis art objects made for a local market. For the artisans and in local use they are ever evolving, considered to bear historical knowledge which is creatively combined and assembled with contemporary material and aesthetic preferences. They are frequently ephemeral and their frequent adaptions a manifestation to ongoing change which, overlooked by most collective actors and social worlds that consider artistic handicraft production primarily from a socio-economic perspective, co-constitutes their meanings as vital elements in everyday life as well as in ceremony (Kaduuli, 2010; Makwa, 2021; Nakazibwe, 2005; Nannygona-Taumsuza, 2014).

The Development Narrative. Artistic Handicraft as (no) Tool for Development

- Which discourses impact the meaning making processes of artistic handicraft production and products, and how?

In his closing remarks on the round-table discussion workshop in 2019, Kizito Maria Kasule highlights his understanding of art which considers the importance of people needing to survive, especially in the current globalized era that proceeds the colonial era yet feeds on liberal market theory. To him, conceptualizations of art need to acknowledge that art, too, is a profession for those artists and artisans who do not exhibit in biennales and important galleries. "I am not interested only to have people who will produce art here and then, after they have died, we say 'Oh, doctor so-and-so was a great ceramist!'", he proclaims. Then, he continues "I would like to see a great doctor also surviving on his art, let us not lose focus on that" (Kizito Maria Kasule, then Dean of MTSIFA, round-table discussion on 'Art and Economy', 01/03/2019: 400–402).

Kasule himself is the founder of a private art academy, the Naggenda International Academy of Art and Design (NIAAD), one of the new art spaces in Uganda that are beginning to decentralize MTSIFA of Makerere University (Nagawa and Siegen-

thaler, 2022). At NIAAD, students are educated as art entrepreneurs – job-creators rather than job-seekers. In Uganda, where funding for the arts is limited and usually originates from funds from abroad, surviving on art is a major challenge. Many people who work in the arts are part-time artists, this is especially true for handicraft artisans who create whenever they are free to do so. Kasule warns not to forget that artists need to live and that especially the academic discourse must not lose focus on the economic dimension of art making.

As I have demonstrated throughout the results chapters, especially artistic handicraft production is heavily influenced by what I am referring to as a meta-discourse of sustainable development through economic empowerment. Every actor, every organization, every association, every agenda, every website, and every document I considered for my analysis referred to this discourse that originates in neo-liberal theory. My analysis further shows how web of intersecting discourses at play co-constitute artistic handicraft products as tools for development: culturally sensitive, appropriate, with a low threshold, as eco-sustainable, as promoting cultural diversity and cultural heritage as well as gender equality, and as contributing to the economic development of a nation state by "up to 11% of a country's total employment" (Uganda National Commission for UNESCO, 2020: n.p.).

In spite of the premises made, the findings of my research add to a growing body of empirical studies that question whether the creative industries indeed contribute to economic development in a way the UNESCO narratives, international and national development agendas as well as development actors wish to believe. Those studies question whether enhanced CCIs are not the result, rather than the driver, of economic development (De Beukelaer 2014, 2017; De Beukelaer and Vlassis, 2020), whether the conceptualization of CCIs is too heavily empirically embedded in the Global North where most research on the CCIs was conducted (De Beukelaer, 2017; Kangas et al., 2017), and whether *culture* – in spite of an acclaimed Cultural Turn to have occurred – in its complexity is, besides claims easily articulated, actually considered in the realm of (international) development efforts (Labadi, 2020a).

As I could demonstrate, international(ized) actors primarily turn to western theoretical concepts of civil society as 'those foreign NGOs that fund projects' and instrumentalize artistic handicraft production as a tool for a greater objective. My findings also question the scope of a Cultural Turn in international development. The social worlds/arenas map and analysis show that social worlds, organizations, and association need to submit (or discipline themselves) to the dominating discourses to be conceptualized as agentic in the research situation. The hegemonic power dynamics render those positions that do not follow the logics of the prevailing discourses invisible. As such, many initiatives are not culturally nor socially embedded into the lived and perceived realities, and hence reproduce their own *a priori* assumptions (Kassimir, 1998).

However, in moving beyond De Beukelaer, De Beukelaer and Vlassis, and Labadi, my research findings also indicate how, when considering the overlooked positions in the research situation, different discourses around the associated meanings of artistic handicraft production and art objects are rendered visible and become important. With regard to future research, the findings of my study indicate a need for ethnographic inquiry in rural regions for and empirically grounded reconstruction of the various meanings of the boundary objects in question in everyday situations and civic engagement. Such studies could address several prevailing representation biases, e.g. urban versus rural, English spoken versus spoken in local languages (e.g. Bantu or Nilotic languages) alongside the intersections of urban and rural areas, of formal and informal education, foreign funded versus locally embedded into economic activities etc.

Politics at Work. (Im-)Possibilities of Homegrown Answers

- What are the articulation possibilities of artistic handicraft artists in Ugandan civil society? What is the agency of their products?

The discourses on togetherness, conviviality, self-determination, or parochial generational responsibilities emphasize the socio-cultural meanings of artistic handicraft production. The associated meanings of the art objects depend on the discourses prevailing at the production site. In other words, a wickerwork group with assembled members working for a foreign NGO will likely have a different group dynamic than groups that have formed independently and organically. The reasons are plenty and not necessarily specific to the local conditions. However, in the first scenario the purpose is mainly economic development so that the members can start *their own businesses* eventually, which may or may not include working in the creative industries. The second group will likely be more permanent and provide a space for discussion and togetherness even when raw material is sparse (see also chapter 7.2). Among the wickerwork groups I have met, the group formation process was organic and evolved over time. The groups had an initiator, an individual or two who possess the knowledge and skills to make artistic products from more or less locally available materials. Teaching others also means trusting them, and gaining more members to join the group was associated with wanting to support others. According to Chukwumerije Okereke and Patricia Agupusi (2015), this approach to development, although it might have "serious flaws and produce[s] mixed results […] [is] widely characterized by a determined effort towards self-reliant development" (2), and may lead towards a sense of pride and self-determination.

In this sense, sites of artistic handicraft production negotiate the meaning of development and the parameters to measure it. For women, they can be important

spaces to articulate their perspectives in public (see also, Kasozi, 2019; Tripp, 1998; 2000). In other moments, the socio-cultural significance of the artistic work provides artisans with political agency to counterweight policy making. In both cases, it is the artistic engagement, albeit in very different ways, that allows the handicraft groups to make themselves seen. From a Gramscian perspective, in combination with Kasfir's emphasis on the importance of empirically grounded understandings, both artistic handicraft group case studies should be considered as civil society actors (Prison Notebook 27, §1, as cited in Frogacs, 2000; Kasfir, 1998b; 2017). While they generally passively consent to the prevailing socio-political order (Buttigieg, 1995), they simultaneously question it by promoting other narratives with regard to the meanings of artistic handicraft production in contemporary Uganda. What is more, because of the cultural relevance of the rite of passage called *imbalu* among the *Bagisu*, the positions of the *imbalu* initiation ceremony costume designers, embedded into the costumes they make, are broadcasted nationwide.

Taking the handicraft groups as a departure point and conceptualizing their perspectives according to their own conditions, provides strong arguments to question the notions of sustainable economic development as the single major associated meaning of artistic handicraft objects. Rather, they can become meaningful for their practicability in everyday activities around the house, through (ancestral) worship, as a facilitator of conviviality that promotes togetherness, as agent that facilitates communication with ancestors, or as controlling institution in the rite of passage into adulthood.

The organizational structures among the artistic handicraft groups are not necessarily democratic nor do they inevitably promote democratic values. Artistic handicraft objects outside the co-constructions of international(ized) discourses often are not purposefully recycled nor are they designed to be eco-sustainable. Poaching an endangered animal for the use of its fur for the *imbalu* costume, for example, shows how ceremonies and cultural customs framed as 'traditional' and/or 'indigenous' are not necessarily protective of flora and fauna. In addition, most products based on synthetic materials used in wickerwork are not recycled but specifically purchased anew. Colorful paper-beads, too, may very well also be made from colored paper bought specifically rather than from old magazines.

While these strategies may not be eco-sustainable, they are first and foremost a response to the prevailing local conditions and (aesthetic) preferences, and can thus be considered homegrown. Homegrown development or solutions do "not automatically equal 'good' development" (Okereke and Agupusi, 2015: 6), but they are part of the contemporary realities of the Ugandan creative industries. In a similar manner, associations like the NACCAU, who seek to overcome market-based concepts of socio-economic development through enhancing the 'cultural crafts' industry are simultaneously dependent on the very actors – foreign and local – that promote those notions. The maneuverings of the NACCAUs most visible intellectuals,

Bruno Sserunkuuma and Nuwa Nnyanzi, must be considered in this light of searching for a strategy to strengthen the political and economic agency of the association, while still submitting to the interests of collective actors perceived more powerful. My analysis demonstrates how this in-between-ness limits the scope of action and agency of the NACCAU and similar associations which impacts the possibilities of homegrown ideas, concepts, and developments for artistic handicraft production and the meanings associated with handcrafted artefacts. Instead, it risks being absorbed by a narrative of Ugandan indigenous material culture that reproduces a western gaze onto art objects, and disregards their "complex histories with specific biographies […] [which] must be considered as created works, as art, as archive and memory, as example of locally situated aesthetics and cultural practices" (Pinther, 2022: 32, my translation). In addition, they are materialized evidence of a vital and dynamic society, a space for (collective) articulation, for exploration, and for gathering.

Moving Beyond this Research. Handicraft Art in the Sphere(s) of Civil Society

Upon embarking on this research trajectory, my prevailing research interest was to reconstruct the linkages between artistic handicraft (production) and civil society in Uganda. The iterative-abductive approach I chose as a research design allowed for the exploration of different avenues, and to focus on those aspects that allowed for rich theoretical sampling and thick analysis, displayed contestation and complexity as well as new insights that enrich the scientific discourse on reciprocities between civil society and artistic expression in form of artistic handicraft production.

The findings of the study at hand indicate that artistic handicraft production and dissemination sites can be pivotal spaces of an empirically grounded notion of civil society. By Doing so extends the negotiated meanings of artistic handicraft products beyond the dichotomy of producer-artisan vis-à-vis customer relations, and shows how historical developments, contemporary development agendas, governments, tourism actors, foreign-based development agencies, foreign governments, private NGOs, art professionals, UN agencies and organizations, customers, marketing strategies, and others constantly co-constitute and negotiate the meanings of artistic handicraft objects.

Although artistic articulation has always also been considered as being political, and civil society actors have always also used art, very limited attention has thus far been paid to the interplay of art production sites especially of what has been referred to as "folklore" (Gramsci, Prison Notebook 27, §1, as cited in Frogacs, 2000: 360) and their relevance for the analysis of civil society. The findings of my research indicate for artistic handicraft production sites to be highly relevant for a locally conceptu-

alized understanding of civil society as they are major negotiation sites for power dynamics, hegemony, and ownership.

My study is but an introduction to the palimpsest of meanings associated with artistic handicraft production in Uganda's civil society, but it provides a pivotal conceptual foundation for future research. For example, gender roles and relations, though seldomly specifically addressed, emerged as re-occurring relevant theme in my empirical data. A finding that is in-line with Dorah Kasozi's (2019) study about women working with paper beads. Womanhood and manhood can and are co-constituted through art-making in various moments throughout my research, providing strong arguments for further inquiry specifically dwelling on the matter. In addition, ethnographic research on the linkages between artistic production and civil society dynamics would deepen the understandings of the complex relationalities and could provide relevant answers to the question of what the Cultural and Creative Industries in an international web of power-dynamics at play could entail and how it could be conceptualized. A comparative analysis of organically established and assembled handicraft groups would further enhance the understandings of the associated meanings of production sites and products, as would an analysis of the display of artistic handicraft products in shops, galleries, museums, and online websites.

Artistic handicraft production, as the study at hand demonstrates, can be a friend, a companion, a sister. The artefacts can be a symbol and witness of the rite of passage into adulthood. They can establish social security nets, they can be local material culture. Artistic handicrafts can be a souvenir, a tool for economic development, a bearer of information, a facilitator of worship. They are art, and they are craft. They represent the history of (neo-)colonization and exploitation, and they are subject of resistance and self-determination. In the spheres of civil society and for the social worlds that co-constitute their meaning, they are all of that. They are complex subjects and objects in the spheres of art, development, and civil society, and it is high time that artistic handicraft production and products are recognized in and with their historical and contemporary complexities.